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**Autism Unveiled: A Comprehensive Analysis of Mark Haddon’s Masterpiece *The Curious Incident of the Dog In the Night Time* through the lens of Asperger's Syndrome**

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**Abstract**

Using Christopher Boone as the main character, this paper examines the triads connected to Asperger's Syndrome in Mark Haddon's book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. The analysis delves into the character's struggles and experiences in socialization, communication, and imagination, offering valuable perspectives on the novel's complex depiction of Asperger's syndrome. The research attempts to shed light on how the novel both reflects and contradicts popular conceptions of neurodiversity by analyzing significant scenes and character interactions.

Keywords: Asperger’s Syndrome, socialization, communication, imagination.

**Introduction**

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* deals with the protagonist*.* Christopher Boone, who is a fifteen-year-old boy with Asperger's Syndrome. He has exceptional mathematical skills but finds it difficult to communicate with others and comprehend emotions. The story starts with the discovery of Wellington, a neighbor's dog, dead in the middle of the night. Against his father's objections, self-described detective Christopher chooses to look into the incident. Investigating the mystery further reveals shocking details about Christopher's family, which sets off a journey of self-awareness and overcomes obstacles in his life. The book is acclaimed for its distinctive narrative viewpoint, which explores themes of family, truth, and resiliency while providing readers with a deep look at the protagonist's mind.

Life is a divine blessing bestowed upon all living beings by God. It is indeed a precious gift, but it can become a formidable journey for those with Neurodevelopmental disorders.

Neurodevelopmental disorders are conditions that affect how one’s brain functions (Dignity Health). These disorders are a group of conditions that typically emerge in childhood and affect the development and functioning of the nervous system. Examples of neurodevelopmental disorders include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), intellectual disability, and specific learning disorders, among others. An individual's everyday functioning, capacity for learning, ability to communicate with others, and general quality of life can all be significantly impacted by these conditions.

Asperger's syndrome (AS) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is classified as Autism Spectrum Disorder. It is often referred to as Asperger's disorder or just Asperger's. It is characterized by confined and repetitive patterns of interest and behavior, as well as impairment in social interaction and nonverbal communication skills. Asperger's syndrome sufferers frequently struggle to read and comprehend social cues, which can make it difficult for them to form and sustain friendships and other social bonds. They might have trouble interpreting body language, reading facial expressions, and comprehending social expectations and norms. To put it briefly, social relationships are challenging for those with ASD. They typically exhibit repetitive behaviors, follow extremely strict routines, and have limited interests *(Asperger's syndrome: Symptoms, causes, and treatment)*.

In the book titled *How to Be Yourself in a World That's Different: An Asperger Syndrome Study Guide for Adolescents* by the author Yuko Yoshida, she has elaborated on the characteristics of Asperger's syndrome as follows:

The triad – three sets of characteristics shared by everyone who has AS:

* Characteristics of Socialization (interpersonal relations)
* Characteristics of Communication
* Characteristics of Imagination (which includes mental shifting and generalizing about ideas and information).

In the novel "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," Christopher Boone, the adolescent protagonist, exhibits the triads of characteristics associated with Asperger's syndrome. The challenges of the mentioned triads are at times the source for difficulties but they are also considered as positive human attributes.

**Socialization**

The process of socialization involves individuals learning to adapt and adhere to the norms and expectations of a particular group or society (*Britannica*). The process by which people pick up and assimilate the customs, beliefs, ways of behaving, and social expectations of their specific community or culture is known as socialization. It is a continuous process that starts in childhood and lasts the entirety of a person's life. During this time, they engage in social interactions, pick up knowledge, values, and skills, and form their sense of self and social roles. Socialization is a process that shapes people's attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions. It can take place through a variety of agents, including family, friends, school, the media, and other social institutions.

The first element of the triad of AS is difficulties in socialization. Christopher has significant challenges in understanding social cues, emotions, and facial expressions. He struggles to comprehend metaphors and sarcasm, often taking things too literally. As a result, Christopher finds it challenging to establish and maintain close relationships with others. It is evident when Siobhan's teacher advised him to write something he would personally want to read. For which, he added that he dislikes proper novels as he cannot understand most of the sentences in them.

Mostly I read books about science and maths. I do not like proper novels. In proper novels people say things like, “I am veined with iron, with silver and with streaks of common mud. I cannot contract into the firm fist which those clench who do not depend on stimulus.” What does this mean? I do not know. Nor does Father. Nor does Siobhan or Mr. Jeavons. I have asked them. (Haddon)

He stated the reason for his dislike of proper novels. Apart from this, he also added that his teacher and his father cannot understand those works like Christopher.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of social traits. Some advantages of it are the person with AS may have strong inclination to take rules seriously and also possess the determination to follow one’s plans to completion and to do things in one’s own way. Both these advantages are explicit in Christopher as he liked things to be in a nice order. It is also evident with his timetable.

And this was my timetable when I lived at home with Father…

7:20 a.m. Wake up

7:25 a.m. Clean teeth and wash face

………………………………

9:00 p.m. Watch television or a video

9:20 p.m. Have juice and a snack

9:30 p.m. Go to bed. (Haddon)

The disadvantages of people with AS in socialization are the trouble related to the inability to understand what people are thinking or feeling, difficulty making friends and getting along with people and many more. These disadvantages are noticeable with the following incident of Christopher where he cannot decipher people, their feelings and words as well.

This is because I do not always do what I am told.

And this is because when people tell you what to do it is usually confusing and does not make sense.

For example, people often say “Be quiet,” but they don’t tell you how long to be quiet for. . . .

Also I don’t know what Father means when he says “Stay out of other people’s business” because I do not know what he means by “other people’s business” because I do lots of things with other people, at school and in the shop and on the bus . . .

Siobhan understands. When she tells me not to do something she tells me exactly what it is that I am not allowed to do. And I like this.

. . .

But when other people tell you what you can’t do they don’t do it like this. So I decide for myself what I am going to do and what I am not going to do. (Haddon)

Christopher states that he never does what he’s told to do always because people don't make it clear to him and he finds their words to be confusing as he cannot make sense out of them. He has mentioned some examples of it and further claimed that his teacher, Siobhan understands Christopher and explains exactly what Christopher is allowed and not allowed to do. And when other people don't explain clearly, he decides for himself.

**Communication**

Communication refers to the exchange of information between people through a shared system of symbols, signs, or patterns of behavior (*Merriam-Webster*). It is, in general, the process of communicating ideas, thoughts, feelings, and information between people or groups by using a variety of cues, including written or spoken words, gestures, body language, facial expressions, and symbols. It entails encoding a message and sending it to a recipient via a selected channel so they can decode it and comprehend its intended meaning. The second component of the triad is difficulties in communication. Christopher has limited understanding of social communication rules, such as turn-taking or maintaining appropriate eye contact. He often speaks in a literal and precise manner, showing an obsession with factual accuracy. Christopher has difficulty interpreting subtle or abstract language and instead relies on the logic and concrete details he sees in front of him.

I find people confusing.

. . . The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words. Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. . . . Siobhan also says that if you close your mouth and breathe out loudly through your nose, it can mean that you are relaxed, or that you are bored, or that you are angry, and it all depends on how much air comes out of your nose and how fast and what shape your mouth is when you do it and how you are sitting and what you said just before and hundreds of other things which are too complicated to work out in a few seconds. (Haddon)

The mentioned quote explains why Christopher finds people confusing. He states non-verbal communication to be more confusing that people use as he cannot heed to each non-verbal clues and work it out within seconds.

Some advantages of communication as a trait in a person with AS are the pleasure for them in using words accurately, pleasure in conveying facts, such as dates and numerical information, accurately. They will be precise and accurate. This trait was witnessed in Christopher as well through his act of refusing Mr. Jeavons, the psychologist at the school who said that Christopher was a clever boy but Christopher refused it saying that he was not clever and was only observant. “I was just noticing how things were, and that wasn’t clever. That was just being observant.” One another incident where he was accurate was at the police station when Christopher was arrested for assaulting a police officer. His answer when he was enquired for his father’s phone number and his description of the police cell are as follows:

It was nice in the police cell. It was almost a perfect cube, 2 meters long by 2 meters wide by 2 meters high. It contained approximately 8 cubic meters of air. It had a small window with bars and, on the opposite side, a metal door with a long, thin hatch near the floor for sliding trays of food into the cell and a sliding hatch higher up so that policemen could look in and check that prisoners hadn’t escaped or committed suicide. There was also a padded bench. (Haddon)

He had given the police two numbers of his father and gave a vivid description of the police cell mentioning precisely the size of the cell along with other descriptions of the window, the metal door, bench and likewise. He was accurate and provided a clear picture of the cell to the readers.

Some disadvantages of communication in people with AS are the occasional difficulty understanding what the person with AS hears during a conversation; understanding each individual word but having trouble piecing them together, the perplexity at the fact that everyone but oneself seems to understand idioms that contain metaphors. This is also a disadvantage faced by Christopher as he cannot decipher metaphor but only the word's literal meaning.

The second main reason is that people often talk using metaphors. . . . I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone’s eye doesn’t have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about. (Haddon)

The quote details about Christopher's second most reason to find people confusing. He states that the use of metaphor by people makes it hard for him to understand them. He also pins that metaphor should be called a lie because he could not decipher and even though he tries, he fails and forgets about the topic itself.

Other disadvantages are the occasional bizarre misunderstandings that leave others flabbergasted, a frequent tendency to have trouble using body language (facial expressions, gaze, gestures, etc.) appropriately and to lack awareness of the use of body language by others, and a frequent tendency to be left out of conversations, for reasons that are difficult to discern. These disadvantages are evident when Christopher walks away when he cannot understand people’s words.“And now if I don’t know what someone is saying, I ask them what they mean or I walk away” (Haddon).

**Imagination**

Imagination is the ability to create images, ideas, concepts, or experiences in the mind that are not present in reality. It entails having the ability to creatively imagine and produce mental images independent of instantaneous sensory input. People with imagination are able to think beyond the boundaries of what they have personally experienced, which opens up new possibilities for them to consider, as well as solve issues and produce artistic works.

Imagination problems are the third component of the Asperger's syndrome triad. Asperger's syndrome sufferers might find it difficult to comprehend metaphors and figurative language, and they might struggle to conjure up scenarios or stories that are not grounded in reality. Their inability to imagine can affect how they interact with others because they may find it difficult to understand their viewpoints or to pick up on cues or irony. Asperger's sufferers may also prefer to think in concrete terms and rely primarily on factual information, which can result in a more rigid and literal interpretation of the world around them. Christopher demonstrates this by providing accurate information and always remaining true to the facts. The following are his opinions and experiences about lies.

A lie is when you say something happened which didn’t happen. But there is only ever one thing which happened at a particular time and a particular place. And there are an infinite number of things which didn’t happen at that time and that place. And if I think about something which didn’t happen I start thinking about all the other things which didn’t happen. (Haddon)

Christopher opines that lies are things that never happened and many things happened at a time and if he were to think about the lies that never happened, he begins to think about all the infinite things that never happened. Therefore, he always abides by the truth.

People with AS have certain advantages with their imagination. They have a great thirst for knowledge and a talent for researching and learning new things. Christopher proves it with his spirit for knowledge and intelligence. **“**I am going to prove that I’m not stupid. Next month I’m going to take my A level in maths and I’m going to get an A grade. No one has ever taken an A level at our school before…”(Haddon). Nearing the climax of the novel, after he takes up the levels in Maths, he further proves his intelligence by passing them. Other advantages are the ability to get absorbed in reading books on subjects of personal interest, even when they are reference books such as atlases or dictionaries, an appreciation for the value of following rules, possessing a very good memory for things or processes of interest and this is evident from the following lines,

My memory is like a film. That is why I am really good at remembering things, like the conversations I have written down in this book, and what people were wearing, and what they smelled like, because my memory has a smelltrack which is like a soundtrack.

And when people ask me to remember something I can simply press Rewind and Fast Forward and Pause like on a video recorder, but more like a DVD player because I don’t have to Rewind through everything in between to get to a memory of something a long time ago. And there are no buttons, either, because it is happening in my head. (Haddon)

The quote praises Christopher's memory. Christopher relates his memory with the smell. When he is asked to remember something, he can easily and quickly compare himself with a DVD player.

The disadvantages are the problems resulting from a strong need to do certain

things or have things done a certain way, the trouble switching from one activity or thought

pattern to another, the difficulty in generalizing, and many more. One example of Christopher struggling to switch over to another thought pattern is as follows:

“What else did I say, Christopher?”

I thought that this might be another rhetorical question, but I wasn’t sure. I found it hard to work out what to say because I was starting to get scared and confused.

Then Father repeated the question, “What else did I say, Christopher?”

I said, “I don’t know.” (Haddon)

Christopher was warned by his father to stop investigating the death of the dog and to not investigate and mention Mrs. Alexander at home. But despite this, Mrs. Alexander chatted with Christopher though Christopher did not investigate her. When this incident was brought to the knowledge of Christopher's father, both the father and the son reacted as in the mentioned way where the father poured out his anger and Christopher found himself to be scared and confused.

Overall, Christopher's portrayal in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* encapsulates the triads of Asperger's syndrome, illustrating the challenges individuals with this condition face in socialization, communication, and their imagination. Through Christopher's perspective, the novel offers readers a glimpse into the complex world of a person on the autism spectrum, shedding light on both his struggles and unique strengths.

**Parental Support**

As mentioned earlier, socialization and communication are comparatively difficult for the victims of ASD. Understanding the nature of the child plays a key role that stimulates the child’s social interaction. They struggle in interacting and communicating with others. Simple introductory conversational tactics might help them. Parents can try involving them in the maximum amount of work. Usually, the children with autism are used to high focusing. They just get used to their routine and when something is altered, they end up panicking. This will result in an anxiety attack and might require a lot of time to make things normal. Christopher’s parents didn't understand him well and faced many difficulties in raising him. There was also a time when they started hating each other and the lines below indicate them clearly.

I used to think that Mother and Father might get divorced. That was because they had lots of arguments and sometimes they hated each other. This was because of the stress of looking after someone who has Behavioral Problems like I have. I used to have lots of Behavioral Problems, but I don’t have so many now because I’m more grown up and I can take decisions for myself and do things on my own like going out . . . buying things at the shop at the end of the road. (Haddon)

Children are hard to be handled and parents need patience and must heed to their child's mental and physical wellbeing until the child is grown. Here, Christopher's parents made it explicitly visible to Christopher itself that they were stressed looking after him. He acknowledged his Behavioral Problems and also presented that he has grown to an extent now. Throughout the novel, Haddon has touched upon the importance of parents and their patience for their children. Initially, Christopher's mother gives up and elopes with their neighbour, leaving behind her son and husband. It was after Christopher's search for her, she learnt to handle Christopher and came back to her old house. Christopher's father, though he struggles as a single parent, tries his best to look after his son, but fails as a human by venting out his anger on a dog and also gives way to lies instead of telling the truth to Christopher. Readers can also find his ways where he tries his best to reconcile with Christopher, burying his old self which was a bane and opened the doors to lead a life filled with boone.

**Educational support**

Educational support for a child with Asperger's Syndrome plays a vital role in ensuring their academic, social, and emotional development. Educators need to promote a structured and predictable learning environment, incorporating visual aids, social stories, and clear instructions to enhance their understanding. The headmistress of Christopher, Mrs. Gascoyne though she initially neglected the A levels of Christopher, after the conversation with Christopher's father and his affirmation to pay £50 to the invigilator, Mrs. Gascoyne considered it and allowed Christopher to take up the A levels. Such acts of Gascoyne and the second thoughts of her should be neglected and people like Christopher should be given opportunities to express their intelligence. Apart from people like Mrs. Gascoyne, there were also people like Siobhan who was the pillar of support to Christopher throughout the novel and his time at school. She heeded to Christopher's needs and considered his well being.

And whenever I thought about the future I couldn’t see anything clearly in my head and that made a panic start. So Siobhan said I shouldn’t think about the future. She said, “Just think about today. Think about things that have happened. Especially about good things that have happened.” (Haddon)

The quote was Siobhan’s advice to Christopher to avoid thinking about future and bad things happening and to think only about today and the good things that happened to Christopher. She was the ideal teacher and the world needs many such ideals.There is nothing impossible in this modern era. Instead of educating the people who take up positions in the schools of Special Needs, educate each and every one who is a part of the society. Let there be no discrimination even in terms of mental ability, let education be the balance needle for every human being irrespective of anything.

Educational support for Asperger’s Syndrome Disorder victims is not confined only to the teachers who make themselves engage more with the victims than others. Just because the student with such special ability is a part of a classroom for hours in a day, he/she cannot be limited only to the teacher. There are many as a part of this huge educational platform. Everyone who is directly or indirectly associated with such students in the institute holds responsibility in making these special students comfortable. Frequent development programs must be organized for each and every one who is a part of educational institutes. Rather than just focusing on the factors that bring them profit, it is high time the management takes at most care in educating the staff with moral treatments of special students. This will play an impactful role for which everyone around such special kids will gain knowledge in recognizing and comforting them.

**Summation**

To sum up, exploring the nuances of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* provides an insightful look at people with Asperger's Syndrome. This paper analyzed the Asperger’s Syndrome of Christopher Boone, the protagonist of the book, by dissecting the three triads of the syndrome as they are presented in the story. As readers delve into Christopher's mind, they are invited to examine their own assumptions and biases about social norms and neurotypical behavior. It is being said that even the prominent theoretical physicist Albert Einstein possessed qualities similar to the protagonist of the novel which Christopher Boone himself exhibited. Einstein faced difficulty in speaking until he was three years old, he was fixated and highly focused on the interests he had, it was difficult for him to master communication, he preferred to be alone, and most importantly he had a high Intelligence Quotient (Wolmark). The novel serves as a reminder that diversity in neurocognitive functioning enriches our world and should be embraced and valued rather than stigmatized. By shining a light on the triads of Asperger's syndrome, Haddon opens a window into a different way of experiencing the world, fostering empathy and understanding among readers and reminding us of the importance of embracing neurodiversity in our society.

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