

## **Dissociative Identity Disorder in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde***

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### **Abstract**

*Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is also known as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). It is one kind of psychiatrist disorder. The first case of DID was found in Europe in the nineteenth century. Pierre Janet, a philosopher and psychologist is known to have dealt with the first patient of DID. DID can be closely analyzed by Freud's theory of repression of Id. Lots of literary works have also projected DID like Flora Rheta Schreiber's Sybil, Trudi Chase's When Rabbit Howls etc. One of the most talked-about works is Robert Louis Stevenson's novel THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE. This paper aims to focus on the protagonist of this novel suffering from DID. Here, Dr. Jekyll is suffering from DID and he assumed an entirely different persona called Mr. Hyde. So, through the references from the novel and through close observation of the symptoms of the real cases of DID and by looking at the biography of the author the aforementioned statement has been made.*

**Keywords:** Dissociative, Disorder, Psychiatrist, Terminology

**Understanding DID:** DID is a mental disorder which was earlier known to be Multiple Personality Disorder. An individual assumes several personalities by turn without being conscious of this. According to American Psychiatric Association, “**dissociative disorders** involve problems with memory, identity, emotion, perception, behavior and sense of self. Dissociative symptoms can potentially disrupt every area of mental functioning” (www.webmd.com). So, this dissociative identity disorder is “a severe form of dissociation, a mental process which produces a lack of connection in a person's thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. Dissociative identity disorder is thought to stem from a combination of factors that may include trauma experienced by the person with the disorder. The dissociative aspect is thought to be a coping mechanism -- the person literally dissociates himself from a situation or experience that's too violent, traumatic, or painful to assimilate with his conscious self” (www.webmd.com). Therefore, the individuals suffering from DID actually lack control over themselves. By coming out of the real self; the different persona it assumes works as the driving force of the action it performs. The symptoms of DID varies from person to person. Still, some commonly observed symptoms are –“two or more distinct personalities exist in one individual; one personality is always present” (www.healthypalace.com). It is also observed that “a loss of identity as related to individual distinct personality states, and loss referring to time, sense of self and consciousness” (www.wikipedia.com). On the other hand, “The ‘alters’ or different identities have their own age, sex, or race. Each has his or her own postures, gestures, and distinct way of talking. Sometimes alters are imaginary people; sometimes they are animals” (www.webmd.com). Other symptoms of dissociative identity disorder are ‘headache, amnesia, time loss, trances, and “out of body

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experiences" ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)). Some people with dissociative disorders have a tendency toward self-persecution, self-sabotage, and even violence (both self-inflicted and outwardly directed) ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)). So, the person starts doing things which might be totally impossible for them to do in the normal circumstances. Some other commonly observed sign of DID are loss of appetite, auditory and visual hallucination, compulsion, drug abuse etc.

### **Origin of DID**

By tracing the origin it has come out that the first patient of DID is Léonie. She was a 45-year-old woman. Pierre Janet, a psychiatrist in the year 1883 diagnosed her. She assumed three separate identities. And she did not acknowledge her different personalities. American psychological theoretician William James in his 1896 Lowell Lectures talked about Janet.

Alfred Binet also published *On Double-Consciousness* (1890) and *Alterations of Personality* (1896) which deal with the issue of Multiple Personalities.

Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud published their book *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) based on their observation on some of the patients of DID. The patient they had dealt with was Anna O. suffering from Multiple Personalities. She too like Léonie assumed completely different personalities and used to forget everything they did in their changed state of mind.

Morton Prince, another American in his work *The Dissociation of a Personality* (1905) examined the case of Miss Beauchamp who had four separate identities.

DID has thus revealed something distinct about the human mind which is prone to have various individual identities. And thus DID has been identified as one of the most talked about psychological disorders. ([www.legiontheory.com](http://www.legiontheory.com))

### **About Robert Louis Stevenson's Split Personality**

Claire Harman is a teacher of Columbia University's School of Arts and an acclaimed biographer. She is mostly known for the biographies of novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner, Fanny Burney etc. She has written the most distinct biography of Robert Louis Stevenson entitled as *Myself and the Other Fellow: a life of Robert Louis Stevenson*. In this biography she has given breathtaking information about Stevenson. When in an interview at National Public Radio (USA) in November 2005 which was heard on Weekend Edition Sunday; Claire was asked about the title of the biography, and her reply was:

‘This is a phrase that Stevenson used to describe two states of consciousness that he experienced, in particular, when he was having a fever one time, you know, to do with his lung problems and his illness. And he wrote to a friend that when he was in a high fever, he felt that his mind split off into ‘myself’ and what he called ‘the other fellow.’ ‘Myself’ was the rational side, and ‘the other fellow’ was the sort of dark side, the creative, difficult, seething side of his subconscious. And he loved it. He loved the fact that he had these simultaneous and slightly conflicting states of

mind going on. And obviously, he used it very much in his work. And it animated a lot of his ideas. You know, that you could be two people at the same time" (www.npr.org).

The host Sheila Kast later asked her:

"KAST: Is that where "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" came from?

Ms. HARMAN: Yes, that duality and the idea of the double self is all through Stevenson's work. I mean, he was really obsessed with the notion that there's really no part of the self that you can contain within one individual". (www.npr.org)

From this statement it's quite evident that Stevenson himself was troubled by psychiatric problems. His parents were Hypochondriacs thus Stevenson had to be under close observation. From this interview some other fact about Stevenson came out like how because of his illness he used to write in short forms like short novels, short stories due to his apprehension of losing interest of that work or to become sick. He wrote the novel *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* only within three days. It might be said that his real life traumatic experiences lead him end up creating the agonized character of Dr. Jekyll.

### **Dr. Jekyll's Case of DID**

In Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Dr. Henry Jekyll is a prosperous physician. He is well known for his decent manner. But deep inside he, "stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life" (2011: 72). But, being a part of Victorian society which greatly emphasized on reputation and social value; he didn't have enough courage to dispose his thoughts. Thus Jekyll "regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame" (2011: 72).

This repression under the pressure of Victorian society, were growing stronger. His consciousness of "man's dual nature" (2011: 72) was growing severe. If we focus on Freud's psychoanalysis we can say that his super ego was actually controlling his Id. He was focusing on his experimentation on this duality of human nature and came upon a conclusion "that man is not truly one, but truly two" (2011: 73). He then deliberately tried to assume two characters one is good and the other one is purely bad devoid of positive human emotions and feelings. The purely evil identity assumed by Dr. Jekyll is named as Hyde in the novel. Just like the cases of Léonie, Jekyll is completely lost in the identity of Hyde. It is created in such a way that the readers will be bound to believe it to be a distinct one. Greg Buzwell said, "By literally splitting the consciousness of Dr Jekyll into two – the decent side that attempts, and largely succeeds, in suppressing desires that run contrary to the dictates of society; and the amoral side that runs riot in an attempt to gratify animal desire – Stevenson explores in a heightened fashion the battles played out in every one of us" (www. bl.uk).

Jekyll can be examined as the superego, or the part of the human consciousness that happens to control the physical instincts of the id and strain them through socially acceptable behavior. Whereas in terms of Id's being repressed rather than being incorporated into a running consciousness, the entity's actions will produce increasingly inconsistent activities. So, the

repressed being will afresh become visible. These things are marked by the psychologists as the return of the repressed. In the novel, Dr. Jekyll repeatedly fails to control his alter ego and thus his identity becomes fragmented into Jekyll and Hyde. Afterwards, Hyde starts to execute his actions. The id or the characteristics of Hyde needs ever more intense forms of repression. But, we find Jekyll fails to control the evil instincts (www.enotes.com)

The character of Hyde has been viewed by different characters of the novel in various ways. Mr. Richard Enfield, gave a description of Hyde to his friend Mr. Utterson, a lawyer, “He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable” (2011: 8) Earlier, he also described him unlike a man rather “like some damned Juggernaut” (2011: 6) when he saw Hyde trampled on a child in the street. The action of hitting a child is surely an evil deed and it can’t be regarded a normal action rather downright madness. Later when Utterson himself encountered Hyde; he described him as something like “troglodytic” (2011: 20). The face of Hyde evoked hatred and disgust and fear to both the men. Like the people suffering from DID, Jekyll has not only changed his appearance but also his tone. Hyde appears to be speaking in a “husky, whispering, and somewhat broken voice” (2011: 19). This demonic and animal like figure has been connected to the Darwinian evolution by a number of critiques. “Jekyll represents the pinnacle of evolution, while Hyde approaches its nadir” (Stiles, 2006: 884).

On the other hand, Shubh M. Singh and Subho Chakrabarti (2008) have opined, “...Stevenson seems to make a comment on the theories of evolution and that he considered Hyde that is savage, uncivilized, and given to passion: poorly evolved. Edward Hyde represents a regression to an earlier, less civilized and more violent phase of human development.”

In the novel it is described as Dr. Jekyll was injecting some drugs and thus transforming to Hyde physically. It’s not only the physical metamorphosis but a mental one as well. But, close psychoanalytic case studies make it evident that he was rather assuming a separate identity. He was suffering from DID and according to the symptom of DID due to the distaste for food he was growing thin and “dwarfish” (2011: 19).

A DID patient is prone to be violent. Here we see how the renowned doctor himself becomes so violently affected by DID that he killed an innocent man addressed in the novel as Sir Denvers Carew. He is known to be a respected elderly citizen. A maid saw this murder and recognized the man behind this murder as Hyde. This account was described thus:

And then all on a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bound and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with apelike fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway (2011: 27).

Being horrified at this violent incident, the maid lost her sense. This murder is a proof of the symptom of DID because Jekyll completely lost the hold of himself. Otherwise, this attack on this old man can't be justified. Dr. Jekyll didn't have any personal rivalry or animosity with this man. Another important thing is his pushing excessive drugs or drug abuse which is another symptom of DID. Dr. Jekyll was so desperate for drugs that he wrote a letter to his fellow doctor Lanyon. After bringing the medicine, doctor Lanyon met Jekyll. Unfortunately he was so horrified to see the dual identity of Jekyll that he became seriously ill and he took a resolution "to see or hear no more of Dr. Jekyll" (2011: 40). After a while being completely disillusioned and mentally disturbed by witnessing this terrible reality of his friend; Lanyon died. He couldn't stand the ugly truth of his friend and was totally shattered before his death. His changes startled Mr. Utterson as well.

After the death of Dr. Lanyon, Jekyll confined himself in his laboratory. The servants reported to Utterson while he went to visit Jekyll about this, "he's shut up again in the cabinet; and I don't like it, sir" (2011: 45). He wasn't even having his foods. Rather he was suffering badly for the drugs. The servant was very shocked to see the metamorphosis of Jekyll. He was thinking his master was putting on a mask on his face. Jekyll ran away seeing his servant as well. All of these unstable actions are evidences of DID. Mr. Utterson had also witnessed the duality of Jekyll at the last section of the book. Finally, after suffering terribly; the doctor killed himself leaving a letter to Utterson by disclosing all his problems. A DID patient also has the tendency of making suicidal attempt as well. Thus, Jekyll could succeed committing suicide because his problem wasn't identified as a psychological disorder. Being untreated and because of the social restraint of Victorian era, it was carefully kept hidden by the patient and thus it results in taking innocent lives.

So, close examinations of the case studies of the patients of DID and through analyzing the symptoms of DID and also looking at the origin of DID, it becomes evident that, Dr. Jekyll's strange case was nothing rather than DID. Authors real life sufferings can also be connected to relate Jekyll's case of DID. Just probably one difference is found from the novel which is here Dr. Jekyll's consciousness of his split identity. He can recall almost everything that has been done by Mr. Hyde whereas the real patient of DID remain oblivious about the distinct selves. Here it might be done by the author purposefully for the plot development and to enhance the adventurous mode of the plot. Though a lot have been talked about Dual Brain and some attempts have also been taken to rationalize the fact that human brain is controlled by two hemispheres; one controls the good action and the other bad; so in this case Hyde represents the evil dual of the brain. But by accepting this theory we can't rationalize the criminal instincts being a normal part of us, rather it would be fruitful to consider this as a disorder which can be treated or at least minimized unlike the case of Dr. Jekyll. Stevenson might also had the same instinct to let his reader know about this disorder and by showing the outcome of it being untreated and undiscovered by the obliteration of Jekyll; he wanted to raise social awareness among the then people of his society about this psychological disorder. So, Jekyll's suffering is the embodiment of the suffering of DID.

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