

Discourse on Disability in The Bible and in Major Christian Literature

Dr. Smriti Singh , Mr. Shobhan Singh

Associate Professor, Department of English, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Zakir Husain Delhi College (Evening), University of Delhi

As studies in social sciences show, religion plays a significant role in deconstructing and reconstructing the ideas on disability. In Christianity, the ideology marked by the Christian Church signalled out disabilities, thinking it as menace to the community even when state institutions did not acknowledge such human treatment. The Prince of a region, mentions Martin Luther, once got offended by a young boy of twelve years, who had a learning disability. Luther says, “If I were the Prince, I should take this child to the Moldau River which flows near Dessau and drown him.” However, the advice was refused but Luther further suggested that, “Well then, the Christians shall order the Lord’s prayer to be said in

Church and pray that the dear Lord take the Devil away.” This was performed every day and the child died in the following year.

Referring to the above-mentioned story, in the Old Testament of the sacred book Bible, disabled people were excluded from the society. For instance, Leviticus 21 commands that only one who does not have an imperfection can be a priest. Sin and punishment is viewed as the prime source of manifestation of any disability. However, in the New Testament, a huge amount of social acceptance of impaired individuals has been witnessed. For instance, at the time when Jesus was asked about a man whose blindness he healed that whether he was blind because of his parents’ sins or his own sins, to this Jesus replied that he was visually impaired because God needed to demonstrate his magnificence through his disability. However, it was apparent that disability was a result of one’s transgression. For instance, in the story in Luke 5, the disabled man who was conveyed to Jesus meets him and gets to know from him that his transgressions would be pardoned. Other legendary sources and religious writings assume this part to be significant in terms of propagating observations like these about disabilities. An elaborate list of physical deformities is mentioned in Leviticus 21:16:23 which are not found in any other biblical text. Any priest who is afflicted with any of the deformities mentioned in the list was not allowed to offer gifts to Yhwh. In the list, deformities vary from ailments to general deformities which afflict the entire bodily appearance. Considering the diverse character of deformities mentioned, the reason behind the prohibition seemed unclear

which is why certain investigations have been brought out to analyse the possible motivations behind the prohibition of priests with physical deformities and its implications for the priests. Leviticus 21-22 specifically mentions one of the many regulations concerning priesthood in general that no physically deformed priest may come forward as the official at the altar. However, many of the disabilities listed in Lev. are also mentioned in the Hebrew Bible which are hard to define, which is why twelve physical blemishes that do not allow priests from officiating are also precisely mentioned in Lev 21:18-20. Lev. 21:18:19 incorporates the only list with physical blemishes which are popularly known in biblical literature and most of the defects are mentioned in this verse are hard to define in terms of their exact meaning. But the rule that a man who has a disability cannot approach to offer food to his God is one of the things which is explicitly mentioned in these verses.

If you say, 'Show me your God', I reply, 'Show me the man that you are and I will show you my God.' You must show me that the eyes of your soul can see and that the ears of your heart can hear. Those who see with bodily eyes... distinguish things that differ, such as light from darkness, white from black, ugly from beautiful, the excessive from the defective, what is well-proportioned and shapely from what is irregular and distorted... For God is seen by those who are capable of seeing him, once they have the eyes of the soul opened. All men have eyes, but some have eyes which...do not see the light of the sun. But the light of the sun does not fail to shine because the blind do not see; the blind must blame themselves and their eyes.

Physical blemishes which occur more frequently in the Hebrew Bible are mentioned in this list and that includes blindness and lameness specifically, a combination of adjectives which is used both for animals¹ and humans². It is apparent that these blemishes are the main deformities that were seen as a disqualification. It is seen that the frequently attested juxtaposition of the visually disabled and the lame persons came into being very spontaneously in the classical and biblical literature. However, it is impossible to look for the first literary work in which these two were combined, and the connection of lameness and blindness became a literary motive in a secondary stage. With other blemishes, blindness and lameness are seen to be emblematic for every bodily defect.³ Therefore, the list implies strict

¹ Deut 15:21 and Mal 1:8

² 2 Sam 5:6:8; Job 29:15; Jer 31:8

³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Das Dritte Buch Mose. Leviticus* (ATD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 290; Milgrom, *Leviticus* (2000), 1826.^[1]

conduct of rules for a priest with any kind of blemish which is not even mentioned in the list, in terms of not conducting any sacrificial ritual.

However, Julius Preuss, in his work on medicine in Biblical and Talmudic times, mentions how blind persons in the Ancient Near East were taken into consideration.⁴ Whereas, blindness frequently appears in the Hebrew Bible, it also suggests the phase where one's ability to see starts to fade, a situation every person of age has to face. Deut 34:7 provides an exception to this rule by stating, "Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor did his vital strength deteriorate." The common root to blindness occurs almost thirty-one times in the Hebrew Bible which is used both in figurative and literal sense and applies to both cases of total blindness and blindness in one eye.⁵

"You shall not ... put a stumbling block before the blind" and "Cursed be he who makes the blind go out of the way" are verses that suggest that because of blind individuals' vulnerable and dependent position, they are exposed to the risk of being led astray and can be hindered in any way, and they always need a support. This interpretation can be derived from Job 29:15, which states, "I was eyes to the blind." Not only this, especially in the book of Isaiah, blindness is considered equal with spiritual insensitivity or confusion. According to Deut and other references, blindness is considered as the consequence of divine wrath or punishment, and YHWH alone has the power to decide who is to be born blind, made blind, and also the power of healing one's blindness. Instances which convey that blindness disqualifies priests from any official duties, portray that blind individuals and blindness are not seen in a positive light because blindness denotes serious association with stumbling, stupidity, dependency, moving in a wrong direction and not being qualified to perform any kind of offering.

However, the Hebrew Bible also incorporates various example of how blind persons are not always pictured in a negative way and the reference of five biblical role models who lost their sight are well known. These biblical role models include Isaac, Jacob, Eli and Ahijah who

⁴ Julius Preuss, *Biblich-talmudische Medizin. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heilkunde und der Kultur überhaupt* (Berlin: Verlag von S. Karger, 1911), 313.

⁵ Levine, *Leviticus* (1989), 145.^{לֵוִי}_{שֶׁפִּי}

became blind due their old age.⁶ Apart from these the fifth role model and famous biblical figure is Samson, who lost his vision when Philistines captivated him.

“Limping” is rendered for when lameness in one leg is used and “lame” is preferred as an interpretation mostly for people when there is deformity in both legs.⁷ These terms are also used for animals that stresses the significance of sacrificial animals which have to be blemish free. Overall in the Hebrew Bible, in parallel to the status of blind persons, the role of lame persons is not projected in a positive light. However, a notable lame literary character in the Hebrew Bible is the son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who is the best-known lame literary figure and one can see even Job’s willingness to serve and help not only blind individuals but the lame as well, for he also says that he “was feel to the lame.” Mephibosheth became lame when his nurse accidentally threw him on the ground at the age of five. Although David felt extreme hatred towards disabled individuals, he returns to Mephibosheth at the land of Saul and invited him to eat with him regularly.⁸

In the list, the third blemish is “to perforate, break through,” which represents the Arabic “Arama” meaning, “to split, pierce.” The blemish attested could mean “disfigured in any way” which is considered as the safest option.⁹ Scholars have given an interpretation for the defect in the nose, probably a harelip¹⁰ which is explained as “one whose nose is so flattened as to show its holes, flat-nosed.”¹¹ The reference to the nose is given in the LXX, which states

⁶ The blindness of these persons is never described with the root symbol. This leads to the suggestion that the root symbol in the Hebrew bible is not used for blind persons who function as positive role models. The reason for the avoidance of the symbol in these cases is that the root symbol may have negative connotations. Because it sometimes refers to persons who lack insight in making right decisions, it cannot be used in relation to these righteous people. As a result, other vocabulary is used to show that these men were incapable of seeing.

⁷ Levine, *Leviticus* (1989), 145.

⁸ 2 Sam 4:4; 9:1-13; 19:24-30; 21:1-14. Mephibosheth is also called Merib-baal in 1 Chron 8:34; 9:40.

⁹ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 342; Milgrom, *Leviticus* (2000), 1792.1827.^[LXX]

¹⁰ Martin Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose. Leviticus* (ATD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1962), 132; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT 3; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 289; Gerstenberger, *Das Dritte Buch Mose* (1993), 279 Cf. Alfred Bertholet, *Leviticus*, (KHCAT 3; Tübingen/Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901), 75.^[LXX]

¹¹ Marcus Jastrow (ed.), s.v. “ar.ama-” , in: *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. Volume I* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1996), 503; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (eds.), s.v. “arama”, in: *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Study Edition. Volume I* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill: 2001), 354.^[LXX]

that the word could infer the adjective “disfigured”. In case of any reference to harelip in the text, it indicates the defect which also does affect the ability to speak because it gives the voice a nasal sound. The term can also be synonymous to the noun “skin” which is also linked to the Akkadian verb “armu” that means, “to cover, stretch over”.¹² Therefore, not referring directly to the harelip, the term could also suggest “one whose skin was stretched over an unnaturally short limb.”

However, the second explanation is considered to be less convincing than the first. Thus, there are various ways to interpret different terms and Lev 21:18 provides the only attestation of the terms in biblical writings. Firstly, the interpretation is taken as ‘abnormally long’ or “one that had one hip longer than the other.”¹³ If it is to be understood in this way, the phrase signifies a reference to a person who has a limb which is either too short or too long.¹⁴

LXX has different interpretations attested to it which indicate that even the LXX translators have faced difficulties while interpreting these terms. In the translation, it has been added that the body parts nose, skin or ears can be seen linked to deformity. However, in the Hebrew text, these body parts are not mentioned which ultimately makes our interpretation likely that the LXX rendering can be secondary. Furthermore, this study completely agrees with interpretations that Hartley and Milgrom hold, rendering the terms as “disfigured” and “deformed” and there is a possibility that the author of Leviticus may have chosen these two very general terms in order to stress on the idea that a priest would be excluded from officiating if he had any kind of deformity which further implies that the deformities which are mentioned in the list are just few examples from all the imaginable deformities that would eventually lead to the disqualification.

And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to YHWH to fulfil a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to YHWH or give them to YHWH as a food offering on the altar.

¹² CAD, s.v. *ar_mu*^[LXX]_[SEF]

¹³ Jastrow, s.v., 1632; *Sifra* Emor 3:9; *b. Bekh.*, 45a.

¹⁴ This is the interpretation preferred by Elliger, *Leviticus*; J. R. Porter, *Leviticus* [CBC; Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 170; Levine, *Leviticus* (1989), 145- 146.^[LXX]_[SEF]

You may present a bull or a lamb that has a part too long or too short for a freewill offering, but for a vow offering it cannot be accepted.

Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut you shall not offer to YHWH; you shall not do it within your land, neither shall you offer as the bread of your God any such animals gotten from a foreigner. Since there is a blemish in them, because of their mutilation, they will not be accepted for you.

It is more obvious which of the body parts are taken into consideration when blemishes in Lev 21:19 are discussed. The adjective “broken” is related only with the noun “hand or arm” and “foot or leg”¹⁵ and such injuries were permanent in ancient times because they were not set properly, and fractures that could not manage to heal properly, left an evident disfigurement or functional limitation in the arm or leg.

Moreover, there is an explanation of a bodily deformity which refers to crushed testicles and is viewed as an ailment called testicular torsion.¹⁶ It is considered to be a painful affliction that occurs in males who are below thirty years of age, and suffer from an affliction where there is a twist in their spermatic tube that obstructs the blood supply to the testicles. Along with excruciating pain, an enlargement of the testicle is caused and it also results in swelling of the scrotum. In adolescent males, the most frequent cause of testicle loss is testicular torsion because if it is not cured within six to eight hours (which was not feasible in the Biblical times) the testicular torsion can lead to the loss of that particular affected testicle. However, the explicitness of the loss of one testicle is not as much obvious as compared to other deformities listed. The lack of one testicle would never be noticed unless a priest who is suffering from this deformity is naked. Apparently, it was not considered holy to carry out offerings by men who did not have unblemished sexual organs because the power of procreation was very significant to Leviticus. However, the motive behind the exclusion of physically blemished priests was completely based on aesthetic motivations, or that a priest’s physical appearance should be free from deformities and should be flawless. Although, this

¹⁵ Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose* (1962), 291, explains that: “der Bruch von_und _ nicht nur Fuß und Hand im engeren Sinne betrifft.” See also Koehler-Baumgartner, s.v._0_0, 1184- 1186; *Idem*, s.v. -, 386-388.

¹⁶ P. Günther and J.-P. Schenk, “Hodentorsion: Diagnose, Differenzialdiagnose und Therapie im Kindesalter,” *Der Radiologe* 46.7 (2006), 590-595; J. Sun *et al.*, “Long-Term Influence of Prepubertal Testicular Torsion on Spermatogenesis,” *Urologia internationalis* 77.3 (2006), 275-278.

seems to be a very reasonable explanation which makes the last blemish in the list not actually matching the criterion where it is important to diagnose a missing testicle just by looking at a person and especially when the person has clothes on which is why this last blemish perhaps can be regarded as an exception to the rule.

Although priests with blemishes were excluded from officiating, there is prescribed a special provision in Lev 21: 22 where they were allowed to partake in the division of the priestly emoluments which is why this verse carries importance, in order to have a correct understanding of the social position of the disabled priests. Because it could only be consumed in the state of ritual purity, sharing in the holy food implies that the disabled priests were seen as unclean. This can be the possible interpretation of every blemish that has been discussed so far, where it can be asked whether there is a denominator which is common between all of these blemishes. Some of the blemishes cause practical difficulties such as blindness and lameness which is why it is understandable that priests who suffered from these blemishes were not able to perform the sacrificial rituals properly which ultimately would have been the reason for their exclusion. Whereas, another denominator which can be possible amongst the listed blemishes are the ones which are mostly visible.¹⁷

Take away your scourge from me. I am crushed by the blows of your hand. You punish man's sins and correct him...O Lord, turn your ear to my cry. Do not be deaf to my tears.¹⁸

This Psalm tells how God makes use of deafness to punish the sinner for his sin and how He chooses to decline every request or prayer offered by the sinner.

...Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his son's death on the cross, and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven...And now I am happy about my sufferings for you. For by means of my physical sufferings I complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church...¹⁹

¹⁷ Admittedly, it is hard to observe every kind of fracture in arms or legs without an X-ray photograph. Yet, as was discussed above, it is likely that the terms refer to broken limbs that did not heal properly.^[17]

¹⁸ Psalm 38 (39)

¹⁹ Colossians 1:15-2:3

This Psalm in Christian theology, represents how personal suffering is redemptive in nature.

‘I form the light and create the darkness’: for when the darkness of pain is created by blows received from outside ourselves, the light of the mind is kindled by instruction within... We have grown at variance with God through sin. Therefore, it is fitting that we should be brought back to peace with him by the scourge...²⁰

The verse represents how God penalizes a sinner for his sin, and emphasises on the metaphors of darkness and light to understand spiritual insight.

God tested the patience of Frances not only in the external events that happened to her, but it was also his will to try her in her body by many illnesses. It is a well-known fact that she was tried by long and serious illnesses. Yet she was never seen to show the slightest impatience, or the slightest dissatisfaction with any service done for her no matter how clumsily it was done... There were frequent epidemics in Rome, some of them thought to be moral and contagious. At those times the saint ignored the risk of contagion and did not hesitate to let her heart go out to the suffering and those in need of another’s help. When she found them, and that was easy to do, she first led them by her compassion to confess their sins, then she busied herself taking care of them. She would lovingly encourage them to accept willingly whatever sickness they had from the hand of God, and to bear it for love of him who first bore so much for their sake.²¹

The above verse demonstrates a doctrine of suffering which is redemptive, St. Frances of Rome gives a reference to Christian aid supporting the people who are suffering.

...if the human form is changed into some shape that is not of its own kind, or at least something is added or taken away from the full complement of its members, then the whole body must perish or become a monster or at least be weakened in some way.²²

The passage above demonstrates a disfigured individual who is disabled, maimed as a monster and he/she is considered as weak. Therefore, it further suggests that their death could

²⁰ Pope St. Gregory The Great’s ‘Moralia on Job’, Book 3:15-16

²¹ The life of St. Frances of Rome

²² The first notebook of St. Vincent of Lerius (c.434 CE)

have brought betterment to the society. The examples above show how theological doctrines from New and Old Testaments regard disability, disease and sickness as a retribution for disobedience and suffering is considered equal to Christ's suffering towards redemption. According to Christian theology, Jesus helped in restoring humanity and in the healing of the effects of human waywardness. In order to break the barriers between man and God, Lord Jesus, therefore reached out to the marginalised people.

Terms like 'lame', 'deaf', 'mute', 'crippled' or 'leprous', for which the Gospels have related accounts of their miraculous healing, have been put into use throughout history to ostracise, discriminate and condemn people. Jesus, therefore, recounts the healing narratives both physically and spiritually and touched the lives of those who were marginalised. Although, miracles are dismissed as pure myth by certain theologians, they are also attributed as the psychological phenomena said to be brought by the powerful personality of Lord Jesus. Therefore, this acts as the underlined viewpoint which tells us that Gospel miracles do demonstrate the eternal will of God over the trivial things in the world and hence, it bears significant references to God's work through Lord Jesus.

In some literary manner, the stories of remedy are more or less similar to Hellenistic 'miracle-narratives' which does not suggest that Jesus should be considered as another "wonder-worker".²³ However, it implicates more profoundness in the nature, questioning how the afflictions and remedies vary in different cultures. As per theology, the only thing which is significant is to know in what manner people with disabilities get affected by such miracles and how the entire narrative is viewed, keeping in mind the clear link which is made between the birth and healing or between a wrongdoing and illness while looking at disability in a metaphorical sense for the lack of understanding and faith. The extraordinary compassion of Jesus states the importance of how the perspective of disability shows the significance of the healing accounts as well: the manner in which Jesus moved beyond social distinctions, especially to those who are considered unclean and how he helped the people who were ostracized by restoring their dignity. Therefore, even today it spreads the message of compassion and is often the voice of the 'lepers' today.

²³ Alan Richardson, *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels* (SCM Press, Ltd., London, 1975), p.23.

According to modern references, many Catholic teachings specify issues like social justice from the year 1891 till the culmination of John Paul II's papacy. We find such compassionate behaviour for people in need only mentioned in the background with lesser significance. Though compassion is evidently there, one has to perceive where to search for it since in almost the whole of this entire century of the Church and its social documents, one cannot find any specific mention about individuals with disabilities. The only area of reading one can encounter which can be regarded as "the official pronouncements of the Church's concerns" is the reading into space, erasures, lacunae.²⁴

The aforementioned scenario can be taken into the context of development in terms of comprehending the complications of disability in the structure of society. A clear representation of the Church's doctrine on the topic of rights for disabled people was brought under consideration by the rise of a powerful voice of the disabled community through disabled rights movement. During 1981, the International year of the Disabled, the Church's decision to fair wage policy and job opportunities among the disabled people was announced.

According to the "sin-disability conflation", where problem between the wrongdoing and sickness is addressed, it is viewed to be the most relevant topic of the literature discourse.²⁵ To this day, the opinions of the Church and people on sin and sickness are affected by the ideas represented in the Bible. The issue of suffering seen as a virtue is the second most significant theme which is described as "bearing my cross without question." Therefore, suffering is seen more as "for my own good" which will "help me to be more Christ-like."²⁶

The legacy of segregated charity for disabled people in institutions was another issue that made an impact. Although, dehumanizing people with disabilities can be correlated to the Stigma Theory given by Goffman, but such charity helped in the rise of self-affirmation of "a buzz from doing good works and being seen to do so" in those who care about people with

²⁴ Elizabeth J Browne, *The Disabled Disciple. Ministering in a Church without Barriers*. (Liguori Publications, Liguori, MO, 1997), p.42.

²⁵ Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994), p.72.

²⁶ See 'Fran's Story' in Christopher Newell and Fran Gillespie, "Psychiatric Disability and Pastoral Care: Towards a Richer Theology of Disability", in *Contact The Interdisciplinary Journal of Pastoral Studies* 136 (2001):5-13.

disabilities.²⁷ According to narratives mentioned in the Gospel, such pessimistic themes should be in appropriate balance with Jesus' concern and compassion for disabled people. However, it has also been commented that to witness how less attention was given to disabled people earlier is miserable. Critics have pointed out how "among the clergy as well as the laity, there exists much prejudice, ignorance, indifference, rejection and misunderstanding of disability."²⁸ They identify a doctrine that deals with victimizing people with disabilities where they are made to feel accountable for lacking faith, they are accused of being possessed by demons, often questioned regarding who punished them that made them disabled, and they are made to realise that their pain and suffering is God's will, and that they can never reach God because they are disabled.²⁹

Looking from a protestant perspective, opinions generated from misconceptions in the Catholic doctrine about suffering, also draw out criticism. Hope and consolation are generated when one knows about the risen and crucified Christ, yet there are some disabled people who have seen and found this as an ill-thought where the cross-bearing idea reflects less about God's compassion. From a Christian point of view, suffering is marked with evilness that can only be solved by Christ's hardship. Therefore, the world where pain and hardship reflects reality, any affliction is seen as redemption, associated with the hardship and pain of Christ. The meaning behind the piousness of the cross reveals that God carried weak humanity on his shoulders, and through his resurrection, he transformed the world by bringing hope and eminence in human lives. He has restored the definition of relationship which was sabotaged by evilness, where we get to experience our eternal association with God. For a suffering's sake, God is not someone who inflicts suffering. Suffering should be considered as attesting or a trial, and discipline is believed as a part of Church teachings. However, it is important to understand this in the respect to how people commit sin and lack glory of the God.³⁰ For people, suffering is a mystery of life and not only for those who live with disabilities, suggesting that diseases, sickness or ageing is a natural, fundamental part of the mortal nature and hence, we are independent bodies.

²⁷ Harrison, 57.

²⁸ Nancy Lane. "Changing Attitudes, Creating Awareness." http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/Changing_Attitudes.doc. 25.02.2002.

²⁹ Nancy Lane. "Victim Theology." http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/VICTIM_THEOLOGY.doc. 25.02.2002.

³⁰ Romans 3:23.

The fact that Christ carried our frail humanity upon himself, and to restore humanity, he experienced rejections, is counter to the way society despises and rejects disabled people. The resurrected Jesus is considered to be a disabled God for presenting his impaired feet and hands to his friends. He asks his companions to recognise their own salvation and connection with God in those marks of impairment and in doing so, this disabled God is also seen as the “revealer of new humanity”. The God with disability represents not the One who resides in heaven but as the epitome of true compassion, the One who underscores the real facts about disabled individuals’ life experiences, and who is truly compatible with personhood.³¹

The subject of Disability is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. It covers David’s feigned madness or Jacob’s limp post his wrestling fight with God or the strict restrictions over leadership and the ritual participation of the priests, and the healing of lame and blind people. In the biblical texts, on the account of mental or physical state, different marginal positions are assigned including to people who have physical “defects” (mumim) such as the lame, the blind, people who are mentally disabled, or are deaf and mute, and people with skin diseases, who are cast as polluting. These people are devalued by being given personal characteristics such as vulnerability, weakness, ineffectuality, dependence, bad judgment and ignorance followed by the ideas of divine rejection and contempt and ultimately made subjects of stigmatization and marginalization in the Biblical texts. Job (29:12-16) gives illustrations of some of the aforementioned associations where the blind and lame people are seen as poor or afflicted, who are weak, dependent, vulnerable, and who are vigorously and autonomously helped by Job before he is incapacitated by his own suffering.

I was eyes for the blind, feet for the lame was I.

I was a father for the poor, And the lawsuit of the stranger I researched. (vv. 15–16)

As the blind and lame people are considered poor or dependent, Job (29:12-16) also implicitly terms them as marginal, stating that they all share similar devalued characteristics like weakness or dependency and hence, these people are nothing but just failures according to Job, who is a supreme man with autonomy, strength and agency. Psalm (146:5-9) is somewhat similar, where Yhwh is witnessed helping the blind and vulnerable people. Yhwh

³¹ Eiesland, 100.

helps the hungry with food, fights against oppression, provides sight to the blind, helps parentless children and widows, and he subverts the perspective of wickedness.

In other biblical texts, disabilities such as blindness and deafness are linked with ineffectuality and ignorance. In Isa (56:10), the dysfunctional Judean watchmen who were prophets of the Judah are described as “His watchmen are blind, all of them, knowing nothing,” “All of them are mute dogs, unable to bark.” Here, blindness suggests ignorance and muteness as a dysfunction in any communication. Blindness is related with two legal formulations which is bad judgment and corruption saying that, “A bribe you shall not take, for the bribe blinds (*ye’awwer*) the sighted, and twists (*yesallep*) the cause of the innocent” (Exod 23:8; cf. Deut 16:19). Even in non-biblical West Asian texts, such associations are present, like in the Babylonian Kudurru (boundary), the inscriptions which suggest that on account of lack of judgement and ignorance, any blind or deaf and mentally disabled individual can be manipulated into offences. Moreover, mental and physical disabilities are termed as ‘aku’ and ‘lillu’ respectively, and are synonymised for “poor”, which suggests a very close association between impoverishment and disability.

Although these texts do not directly mention disabled persons, but they draw a careful attention which tells us about the authors’ thoughts over issues such as stigmatization of a variety of disabilities, weakness and dependency. By bringing some relief to their lack of agency and disablement, Jer (10:5) is one primary example of the attack on the “idols” by stating, “Like a scarecrow in a cucumber patch are they. They cannot speak; they must be carried for they cannot walk. Do not fear them, for they can do no harm. Nor is it in their power to do good.” Apart from the attack, it also speaks of Yhwh’s incomparability, might and greatness. According to the writer, the “idols” which are being attacked are the false Gods who lack significant qualities of a real God and the scarecrow with which they are compared is a human being in the form of an artificial substitute who lack basic human characteristics. According to this text, the quintessential qualities that every deity or a human should have are the capacity to speak, walk and function as an independent agent which further implies that people who lack these abilities, the “idols” and scarecrow, lack fundamental human and divine characteristics.

The attack in Psalm 115 gives a contrast between the agency of Yhwh (v. 3, “all that he desires he does”) and the nations which have disabled “idols”, saying:

They have mouths but cannot speak,
they have eyes but cannot see,
they have ears, but cannot hear,
they have a nose but cannot smell,
their hands cannot feel,
their feet cannot walk,
they utter no sound in their throat.
Like them are those who made them,
all who trust in them.

On the contrary, Yhwh is the one who is powerful, and has the strength to do anything (V. 3). False Gods get reduced in their own status when they have an association with ineffectuality. They also become a target of mockery, who share their ineffectuality themselves only. We find an evident reference of weakness and ineffectuality in relation with ancient audiences which gives the biblical authors an opportunity to use disabled characters to complicate and develop a plot, more often to bring relief in a favourite theme which is Israel's God Yhwh's magnificent agency and power.

In the story where Samson loses his vision after getting seized, losing his strength, the Philistines were relieved that he is no more a threat to them. Here, the narrative focuses on Samson's loss of vision, which is seen as an emblem of his ineffectuality and weakness. His inability allows Philistines to forget about his earlier God-given physical strength which was linked to his hair growth. They do not survive when Samson grasps the pillars of the Dagon and pulls them on the Philistines and on himself. (Judg 16:25-30) The havoc that Samson created where he killed many, does not suggest any positive implication about his blindness (Judg 16:30) but it is only understood as the will of the deity, his acceptance of Samson's appeal for revenge, and to pay the Philistines for their foolish overconfidence. Yhwh intervenes on his behalf, and Samson, even though he couldn't see, was able to defeat the Philistines.

The story of King Jeroboam's wife visiting the Prophet Ahijah of Shiloh is another reference that reveals Yhwh's extraordinary agency and ability. When Jeroboam's son falls ill, he sends his wife in disguise to consult the blind prophet. Before the wife's visit, Yhwh tells the

prophet that the wife would be visiting him in disguise to learn about her ill son's destiny. (v.5) As Jeroboam's wife enters the place, the prophet says, "come in wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be someone else? As for me, I am sent with hard (news) for you" (v. 6) Ahijah would never have noticed the wife's disguise and her mission due to his blindness, but Yhwh's extraordinary capability of knowing everything and to use his privilege in the right manner is something to be acknowledged. Ahijah's blindness, which could have led him into a disadvantaged situation if he was not a prophet of Yhwh, can also be understood to be insignificant in the light of the supreme knowledge of Yhwh and his wish to save his representatives.

There are other Biblical narratives in which the main characters have disabilities which are similar to the stories of Samson or Ahijah. Where these narratives help to carry Yhwh's outstanding agency, power and knowledge, the protest by Moses that he is "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue," gives the writer an opportunity to bring significance to the contrasting ability of the Deity and the complete dependence of Moses: "Who gives a human a mouth, or who makes (someone) mute, deaf, sentient, or blind? Is it not I, Yhwh? Now then, go, and I myself shall be with your mouth, and shall teach you what you will say" (Exod 4:11-12).

The disability of Moses or Samson and Ahijah does not pose any sign of disability stigmatization within the larger biblical narrative, it rather reinforces it. Disability somehow does remain associated with the idea of insufficiency or inadequacy or dependence but it also functions to provide the writers with the opportunity to emphasize the strength of Yhwh and his contrasting ability, agency and knowledge. Even during Jacob's fight with Yhwh in Genesis 32:25-33 (Eng. 24-32), Jacob gets a limp, which ultimately signals the unequal strength and unmatched ability of the deity.

From the perspective of margins, there has been an attempt to extend the theological representation of disability to the issues of disability in the academia to bring out ethical arguments. In the New Testament, the narratives of healing constitute one such endeavour. These healing narratives in the Gospels are considered traditionally as the act of liberation which resulted in the marginalisation and discrimination faced by the majority of disabled people leading to liberation theology and ethics. The constructions include similar scriptures where Jesus is not only shown as a miracle worker but as a boundary crosser. His ministry involves mainly the outcasts of the society who are sick or rejected, and moreover, he lived

with people having disabilities. His belief in fighting for the disabled people's justice, self-determination and reconciliation and the Liberation ethics reveals that God always gives strength to those who struggle. And Christ is the one who struggles more to spread humanness and help the disabled. Healing doesn't include the removal of impaired body parts but the approach is more holistic towards health, which further includes physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of an individual. Critics have emphasised the significance of "maintaining or improving quality of life" in negation to the eradication of an illness. In today's time Jesus' healing of physical impairments is seen as a positive act towards social consequences, spreading the experience of loving a community and bringing around social acceptance in the form of a healing ministry.

According to the traditional Christian view, disabilities have been seen denoting unusual association with God and community. The Bible states that disability was generated when Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were tempted by the serpent to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. This particular sin generated evil on Earth that included diseases, disabilities and death. (Yong 2007, 162). And to redeem mankind of its own sin, God sent his son Jesus Christ to sacrifice himself, which ultimately covers both the sin and disability.

As we witness in Hebrew Scriptures, physical disability followed with moral impurity acts as a common theme in the text (Leviticus 21:17-23). And the text talks about serving before God. On the other hand, New Testament also draws a similar kind of link between disability and sin (Luke 5:18-26). According to the New Testament, the association between disability and sin is wholly supported by Jesus. Virtual Suffering "Thorn in the Flesh" by St. Paul is another view of Biblical translation (2 Cor 12:7-10). The Bible and the themes demonstrate how people with disabilities seek justice, social acceptance with a Christian society.

Christ's resurrection demarcates the ignorance of the rabbinic norms and traditions. By prophesizing, he poses himself as the Messiah that ultimately leads to the basis of Christian doctrine. The resurrected Christ is recognised as a superhuman, marks on whose feet and hands demonstrate physical disability. An icebreaking theological precept that interprets Jesus as disabled God says, "the resurrected Christ of Christian tradition is a disabled God", where the resurrected Christ is represented as "a human-God, who not only knows injustice and experiences the possibility of human life, but also reconceives perfection as unself-pitying, painstaking survival."

The New Testament lays emphasis on the Dominant Christianity where Jesus' lessons and promises are used to understand disability and blindness. However, it also gives birth to various different ideas. In his ministry where he heals a large number of blind people, in John 9, Jesus affirms that a blind man and his blindness are not the result of his sin or his parents' sin, but it is the result of works of God that manifested inside him. Luke 14:14 mentions blind people's economic situations and suggests how investing them to a feast can be a noble task because it is difficult for them to repay you.

The challenge posed by Jesus to a society that discriminates and condemns disabilities is remarkable. His support to the disabled has been discussed in many Biblical texts. His ministry involved healing and restoring people back to their regular health. In John 5:1-15, there is the story of a man who waited for several years to have a communion with Jesus so that he can heal his legs and make him able again. Also in John 9:1-6, the story is about a man who waited for Jesus all his life to heal him and get his vision back, and his wish was fulfilled. Jesus confronted the religious culture and language of his era and used blindness as the symbol of spiritual inability that could help him see himself as the Messiah (John 9:39; Isaiah 42:16-19). He declared that "those who do not see may see" as his prime purpose of coming to Earth, which meant that those who are blind, Jesus met and cured them.

However, Jesus never drew any connection between sin and disabilities. The leper, who did not consider himself as a sinner, cried out to Jesus for healing, not for forgiving his sin (Matthew 8:14). Similarly, two blind men asked Jesus to bring their vision back and not for forgiving their sins. (Matthew 9:27-31). Jesus rebuked the ones who said that disabled people are sinners. He accepted, healed the disabled and protected them from the stigmatization. He covered the gap between the abled and the disabled in every walk of his life. He surrendered himself to humanity, and his sacrificial death draws three interpretations. First, Jesus' own intention and love that was derived from God, gave him immense strength to sacrifice for the eternal humanity. Second, his death was plotted because he was seen as God. Third, the conspiracy to kill Jesus was triggered due to his magical healing abilities. Jesus did not stop his healing practices, knowing the fact that his life was at risk. He also raises Lazarus to life and heals the blind. Therefore, Jesus is seen as a life-giver and a sufferer for people having disabilities because he was a loving God who revealed the acts of restoring physical lives to the disabled people and sacrificed his own life to a dead person.

Proclaiming the good news of salvation, the church as the herald commission advocates and decides to act as a mouthpiece which would help the world in darkness to be finally illuminated. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus talks about needy people being the light of the world, and this proclamation carries joy, hope, and liberation to the ones who are marginalised in society as well. The Church is seen as a server to the society. It is not only the messenger of God but a worker of God who does the healing on God's behalf. Humans weaknesses are synced with God's strength, and The God anticipates that the Church should not only be compassionate towards people but help them to empower themselves and those who are needy. The Church should be accepting towards disabled people, make them realise that they are unique and that God loves them. It should motivate them to become valuable members of the Church, society and their family.

We shape our ethics through the category of power and there are two images in the New Testament which are contrasting to each other, namely Demon and Servant. In Mark 6:7-13, Jesus asks his disciple to bring happy news to needy people, heal the ones who are afflicted, and cast out the residing demons. It is problematic to witness when Jesus asks the disciple to cast out the demon which conveys the idea that demons possess some uncontrollable powers which can lead to the destruction of others and the environment. Abraham states that demons are always with us, especially during those times when we are highly self-oriented. They can lead to massive destruction when power is used or abused in order to assert control over others, and rather, the ideal use of power is to heal and to build up others.

The Old Testament text is traditionally read as supporting an Ableist perspective. It negatively portrays the disabled people including the Biblical patriarch Jacob, who gets a limp after his encounter with God. In Genesis 32:22-32, as Jacob was travelling with his family, he faces an encounter with God near the Jabbok River resulting in Jacob being left alone as his family crosses the river and later Jacob encounters someone divine in the form a man. He wrestles with the man all night long and gains victory. In the process of their fight, the divine man permanently impairs him by touching his hip socket. Jacob denies to move on and continues till the time God blesses him. God blesses Jacob in the form of giving him a new name 'Israel', which means 'God rules' or 'God protects' (Brueggemann 1982, 268). This brings an end to the story, evoking a biblical motive that Israelites do not consume the thigh muscle on the hip socket as it signifies that which has the Divine touch.

Looking at the surface reading of this narrative, it clearly reveals a scenario of a tragic hero or as it is sometimes considered a “a cripple with a blessing” (Wynn 2007, 96). Such views end up marking Jacob’s disability as a sign of weakness (Wynn 2007, 96; Yong 2011, 31), but reading it from another perspective, the limp is actually much more than just a disability; it is his sign of strength and valour to fight. It was a feat that no human has ever done before of wrestling with the “divine assailant” till the sun rises and ultimately becoming the patriarchal leader of Israel. (Yong 2011, 31). On the other hand, traditional reading can also lead to various negative connotations towards people with disabilities but a contemporary reading allows one to look at disability in a more positive light where it suggests that “disability is not a reason for loss of status and can indeed be a mark of status” (Wynn 2007, 101). Witnessing Jacob’s story, and his encounter with The God, gives a hope to disabled people that they too can surpass their suffering and reach heights.

Mephibosheth, who is a crippled man, and the great leader David are characters in the final old testament. Their stories are told in different passages of 2 Samuel. Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan and the grandson of Saul who was the king of Israel before David’s reign. Jonathan was a good friend of David. The story says that when Mephibosheth was five years old, his nurse accidentally dropped him, which made his legs crippled for life. (2 Samuel 4:4). The surface reading of this text tells that Mephibosheth referred to himself as a “dead dog” while he addressed David and his compassion towards him (2 Samuel 9:8). The reading draws out attention on David’s kindness towards a disabled person because in the ancient times, it was likely of the ruling king to eradicate any possible threat from a previous ruling family, but David kept his oath to Jonathan while seeking to spare the lineage of Saul and Jonathan, which was an unusual act in those times. Not only this, David also restores the entire wealth and land to Mephibosheth and provides him Saul’s servant Ziba to work on Mephibosheth’s land. David’s act of kindness is unmatched when he invites Mephibosheth to eat at the king’s table (2 Samuel 9:1-13). However, David giving a share of wealth to Mephibosheth can be interpreted as David’s own desire to keep a possible heir of the Saul’s lineage in close proximity while also keeping the oath which he made with Jonathan intact.

Although many theologians agree that Mephibosheth was never seen as a threat by David in terms of taking his crown because of his impairment, however there was also a possibility of him taking his throne. For instance, in Mahabharata the blind king Dhritarashtra, reigned for

a very long time and his subjects completely accepted him and obeyed him despite his disability. However, witnessing a physically disabled person being treated as royalty was something that was rare in those times. Furthermore, in a closer reading to the text, we also find Mephibosheth making way on his own to see David without any help, which signifies his independence (Arnold 2003,33). Further analysis suggests that Mephibosheth's disability is brought into profound consideration in order to get an insight into David's inner life (Schipper 2006) but his disability was not seen as his essence or his defining characteristic (p.60). The least understanding this reading provides, which the ableist readings don't, is that disabled people can also possibly reach royal positions, and spread the message that while in the Old Testament, disabled people are considered as charity, however, in actuality they are seen with valuable personages with huge abilities to prosper in society.

Texts do mention the concept of disability being associated with parents' sins, but Jesus in John 9:1-41, totally negates this idea, and performs healing and preaching which was revealed in a story where a man who was born blind, and Jesus gave him the ability to see both physically and spiritually while he was travelling through Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples asked him before healing the old man whether his blindness was the result of his own sin or the parents' sin. To this, Jesus answered in the most beautiful manner saying that neither were the causes but the reason behind his blindness was the glorification of the good works of God. Jesus rubbed mud over the old man's eyes and asked him to wash them in the pool of Siloam and after that the old man goes home with complete vision. The local people who were very sceptical about Jesus' divine power and popularity asked the man about the miracle behind getting his sight restored. The man who was excited about getting vision, refers to Jesus first as a man and then as a prophet which eventually revealed his spiritual knowledge of Jesus from God (John 9:11-19). The end of the narrative explains that the man born blind had complete faith in Jesus while the local people, who had the privilege of having vision, were actually spiritually blind because of their lack of faith in Jesus.

The healing narratives in the New Testament focus mainly on the healer, that is Jesus Christ, and less on those who were being healed and this Christological perspective emphasises more on the characteristics and compassion of Jesus rather than those impaired individuals and their personal histories. However, if we are reading through a disability lens, it is important to touch upon the personal aspects of the healings as well. For instance, the story of Zacchaeus in Luke, who worked as a tax collector, an occupation which was not considered respectful.

Zacchaeus, a follower of Christ, gave half of his wealth to show devotion and repentance (Luke 19:1-10). According to a close reading, it is suggested that Zacchaeus was “short and could not see over the crowd,” and it revealed his “diminutive physical stature” which was considered a physical defect in the then world (Luke 19:1-10; Parsons 2006, 105). Jesus decided to stay at Zacchaeus’ place and allowed him a chance to right all his wrongs and receive salvation. Zacchaeus however, was never healed by Jesus which suggests that there are certain people with disabilities who are included in God’s will as they are (p. 67). Therefore, this signifies the idea that it is extremely important for people with disabilities to realise that God loves them, and their salvation can supersede any physical healing.

For a disabled person, the encouragement for living every day is also received from Paul who was formerly named as Saul until he got converted on the road to Damascus. Paul is said to have had more influence on the Christian world than Jesus Christ himself. He wrote thirteen books of the New Testament, providing the knowledge about Godly living and the structure of the Church among the subjects (Brown 1997, 409). Before his conversion, Paul terribly criticised the Christians but his perspective changed completely after his encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus. After his conversion, Paul travelled and went on to mission trips, spreading the good will of Jesus Christ and writing letters to the Churches, describing his sacrifices and sufferings. We learn about Paul’s inabilities in speech, his fear and trembling and his physical illnesses. His imprisonment where he was beaten, flogged, made to starve and threatened for his life (Albl 2007, 156) signifies that Paul persevered through all these trials and challenges and succeeded in setting an example for people with or without disabilities.

Paul continuously pleaded that the Lord would definitely “take it [his weakness] away”. But the lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) and to this Paul replied that he will now “boast all the more gladly about [his] weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on [him],” and that is why, “for Christ’s sake, [Paul] delight[s] in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:8–10). As we see, Paul receives his strength from Christ and looking from a disability lens, the passage suggests that Christ shares in the disability and limitations of humans,” and through Christ’s sharing of sufferers with disabilities, they are “opened to a completely new way of life, free of disability, sin, and even [spiritual] death itself” (Albl 2007, 158). “Grace” is said to be not defined as something

which denotes “the unmerited favor that saves us,” but rather as “a force that sustains us throughout our lives” (Garland 1999, 524). Through Grace, God deals with our weaknesses and overshadows physical disability. A contrast given to the Ableist perspective, Paul suggests that disability should be seen as an opportunity to allow a person to show the power of Christ as the manifestation of his or her life, rather than considering it as a social stigma. (Albl 2007, 158). And through Christ’s power, people with disabilities may not only be released from their conditions, but can also be profoundly blessed spiritually.

The great biblical patriarch Moses was the most famous person with a speech disability (which was likely stuttering) and he, like many other who stutter, lacked self-confidence while speaking, Exodus 4:10 proclaims that: “Moses said to the Lord, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.’” Moses was reluctant towards God when he was asked to face the Pharaoh and help the Israelites out of the Egypt. Furthermore, Moses being a common shepherd, he knows his speech limitations which further lowers his confidence in becoming a messenger of God. But God tells Moses that he would be with him (Moses) in this journey and he helps Moses speak. God further gives assistance to Moses by giving him a brother, Aaron. (Exodus 3:12) Aaron accompanied Moses on every assignment and spoke for him while confronting the Pharaoh which according to the critics, “is more of a concession to Moses’ lack of faith than anything else” (Enns, 2000, 123).

Subsequently as the story starts to unfold, the assistance of and reliance on Aaron start to diminish. The more Moses encounters God, the more his role and self-confidence increased. In verse 7:1, God functions through Moses by making him “like God to Pharaoh” causing him to “function with divine authority before Pharaoh” (Childs 1974, 118). In the book Exodus, Aaron is considered as someone appointed by God to assist Moses while speaking, and later in verse 7:1, Aaron is shown as the prophet to Moses. Portraying Moses as a God-like figure in the God-Prophet relationship, Aaron becomes the “organ of the message” instead of simply speaking for Moses, and this elevated Moses to a position which was much greater than that of a shepherd with a speech disability (1974, 118). His self-confidence is seen to rise where he is seen speaking God’s commands to Aaron in the Pharaoh’s presence. Furthermore, his real independence is revealed when the role of Aaron is completely diminished. Moses later addresses the Pharaoh directly which is seen as a departure from previous communication between God and Moses, which ultimately makes it clear that Aaron

was present to be a spokesman to the Pharaoh. However, “God nudges Moses into the very situation he fears most,” as He bestows strength and courage into the Prophet and allows him to overcome his speech inhibitions by confronting the Pharaoh personally and ultimately leading the Israelites out of Egypt (Enns 2000, 207).

Taking the aforementioned story as a reference to discuss how The Bible, like contemporary Islamic studies, encourages people having disabilities to live an illuminating, prosperous life by bringing in some very important aspects of human nature like people who are suffering from disabilities or calamities can offer prayers with thanksgiving and for one’s anxieties, one should acknowledge reverence to God and receive a “calm serenity that characterizes [God’s] very nature” (Hawthorne 1983, 184).

People with disabilities see attaining self-confidence as an impossible goal. Living in a society and seeing those without disabilities being favoured for everything can lead to repeated disappointments and development of a low opinion about oneself. Paul in Phillipians 4:13 tells us that by keeping faith in Jesus, “[he] can do all things through [Christ] who gives [him] strength.” This does not prove to be boastful on Paul’s part, but the statement suggests that he receives the power from Christ to manage obstacles that he encounters every day. (Hawthorne 1983, 203). When Paul connects with two Corinthians, he shares his delight in his weaknesses and how he has grown strong through them and from this we see that Paul never focuses on his weaknesses, or sees his weakness as an excuse for inactivity, or a reason to fail in a task (Hawthorne 1983, 202). We find a similar narrative in the chapter on Islamic studies where a companion, Imrān ibn Husayn, had a physical disease, and when his relatives came to see him and said, “We feel sorry for what you suffer”, to this Husayn replies, “Do not feel sorry. This all happens because of a sin but what Allah pardons is much more”. (Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al- (1993), vol. 7, p. 355.)

People with Disabilities “worry about concerning what other people think about their personal identity and self-worth”. The Bible tells us in Thessalonians 2:4 to not to make any sort of comparison with other people but seek God’s approval: “We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.” Paul, while referring to his work of spreading the Gospel in two Corinthians states that, “it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”, and it is only God’s approval that matters on the Day of Judgement (Walvoord and Zuck, 1983, 578).

If a person accepts his or her disability, it does not mean that he or she is surrendering to the condition or allowing the fact of disability to control their life. It means that they are acknowledging themselves that he or she is made in God's image for a purpose. Genesis 1:27 states that "so God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Furthermore, Psalm 139:13-14 states that, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

One can receive deep wounds from negative experiences of disability but there is a possibility to be healed through the healing power of God. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 147 about the people of Jerusalem who were distressed while returning from the Babylonian exile and faced multiple challenges while rebuilding Jerusalem (Goldingway 2008, 720). In Verse 3, we see the Psalmist proclaiming that "[God] heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds." In this context, people with disabilities can be seen metaphorically living in their own exile for society but they can keep the goodness intact in their hearts by having faith in God who will help them to heal their old wounds or the weaknesses they may have faced from their negative life experiences. (Goldingway 2008, 726)

Another aspect that helps people with disabilities to transform is the resolving of bitterness and anger by forgiving those who have hurt them in the past. Anger or bitterness which is unresolved can result in extreme emotional pain that can remain buried inside the hearts and rob happiness from our lives. People with disabilities are often led to bitterness which remains unresolved because of experiencing ridicule and discrimination. The act of forgiving can be a challenge but it carries utmost significance as it is a step to free oneself from unresolved animosity towards the people who caused it. Paul in Ephesians (4:32) teaches to "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." It is to be linked with God's gracious act of sending his son Jesus to sacrifice his life for our sins, similarly we should forgive others as well (Hoehner 2002, 641). A Christian becomes free from "resentment, bitterness, anger, and depression," by choosing forgiveness and assuming the "emotional debt for the pain" others have caused and this allows God's truth to heal the pain which is residing inside their hearts (Regier 1999, 25). Disabled people can easily get rid of the unnecessary bitterness caused from the past and lead enjoyable, prosperous lives just by following the path of forgiveness.

Healing and forgiveness include the significant act of loving oneself, not in a conceited manner, but in having adequate self-respect and self-worth. Jesus also spreads the great commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22: 37-39) which signifies that loving oneself comes from loving another and hence it is “the secret of happiness and freedom in our lives” (Moltmann 1998, 106). Loving oneself regardless of the disabilities helps in removing the negative connotations that have been attached and allows us to move forward in life with dignity and self-respect.

As we witness, Christianity, unlike Hinduism but like Islam, does not follow the idea of rebirth which is one aspect that makes these religions alike. However, in The Old Testament and The New Testament, we learn that not much significance or empowerment is given to people having disabilities, but through bringing out references and sharing histories of its superhuman heroes, Christianity as a religion tries to eliminate the hierarchy residing in the society and works towards keeping the social harmony intact by giving due attention to people who are physically or mentally disadvantaged so that a new perspective is born which allows the marginalised people to be viewed with right dignity and value in society.

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