

“REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY IN FIRDAUS KANGA’S “TRYING TO GLOW”**Chitrashekhar S.Nagur**

Assistant Professor of English, Government First Grade College, Kalagi Dist: Kalaburagi
(Karnataka), India.

Abstract:

Literature exposes new realities about ourselves, disabilities, and different conceivable outcomes of how to arrange the world around us. Disabled people survive on the margins of society due to inequality, discrimination and oppression. They are always treated in different way in the society. They suffer from social exclusion as they do not fit into the social norms of what it represents to be able-bodied. Disability is now considered as one of the marginalizing factors besides Race, Class, and Gender. According to scholars in the field of Disability Studies, disability is everywhere, be it literature or life. So, discrimination and marginalization of the disabled is evident in both the places. Societal attitudes towards persons with disability have changed from time to time. Various factors contribute to these changing attitudes. Gender, education, religion, occupation, income, nationality have a significant impact on the level of disability consciousness. Firdaus Kanga's novel, trying to Grow, tells the story of Brit Kotwal, a young Parsi boy with ontogenesis imperfect, negotiating his life in the Bombay of the 1970s. From the beginning, this semi-autobiographical work draws our attention to the common religious and medical perceptions of disability in Indian society. This paper proposes to study how the novel focuses on several aspects of the lived reality of a person with “brittle bones” who does not grow more than four feet tall. Brit presents the reader with this modern, emancipatory rhetoric of disability because of the privileges of his gender and class status in the Indian context.

Keywords: Disabled, Society, alienation, struggle, able – bodied, literature etc.

Introduction:

‘Disability’ is the term applied by people to mean and address an impaired person. Impairment or impairments are lack of something that can range from a missing body part to neurological disorder, means from physical to mental disorders. A normal person has to conform to some norms and perform social duties expected from him or her, if not, they are termed as disabled. A communal approach towards person with disability has changed from time to time and the different features contribute to these varying attitudes. Religion, caste, gender, culture, work, income, nationality have an important impact on the level of disability realization. As Garrison states, “disability studies conceptualize the concept of disability as a category for critical analysis that crosses social, cultural, moral, political, economic, sexual, historical, and literary boundaries” (9).

In Indian English Literature, people with disabilities are portrayed as poor, helpless, inhuman, pity and evil monsters. The disabled people appearance in literature is to permit able-bodied people to deal with their own terrors and become more conscious of their own discriminations. People with disabilities across the world suffer due to human apathy and cultural aversion. Disability Studies is an inventive area with sound intellectual and professional foundation in social sciences, humanities and rehabilitation sciences. Disability can be defined as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Disabled and abnormal individuals have historically received positions of alienation. The disabled people are always treated in different way, either people go out of the way in being nasty towards the people with disability or go out of the way to be nice to them.

Historically in India as elsewhere in the world, there has been a deep rooted cultural antipathy to persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages, the disabled have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they were subhuman. They have been portrayed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden on family and society. Even in religion and mythology, negative characters often had some form of deformity, be it Manthara, the hunchback in The Ramayana or Shakuni, the lame of The Mahabharata (Ghai 2002).

The essential basis of Disability Studies is that disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies. In contrast, the social model points to a difference between impairment and disability. It defines impairment as “lacking part or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body.” On the other hand, disability is “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities” (TARSHI 12).

The WHO definition of this concept summarizes the most common understanding of the social model: Disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment. Hence the management of the problem requires social action, and it is the collective responsibility of society at large to make the changes necessary for full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of social life. (WHO 2001, 28).

The disability has four aspects: first, it is a system for interpreting bodily variations; second, it is a relationship between bodies and their environments; third, it is a set of practices that produce both the able-bodied and the disabled; and fourth, it is a way of describing the inherent instability of the embodied self. The so called society that uses the term ‘special’ for the people with the imperfectness at one hand, assume their role in society as a waste on the other. It’s not the imperfectness of the people that create problems to them in adopting the world as

their own or to the world that belongs to them but the society that snatches its hand of help when they are needed for a disable person.

Disability in Firdaus Kanga's "Trying to Glow": Firdaus Kanga's novel, *Trying to Grow* (1991) is the story of a young man named Daryus Kotwal, who grew up in more ways than one, and did not allow his debilitating disease to overcome him. Set in an endearing idiosyncratic Parsi family, the story recreates his struggle with life. Its first-person protagonist is born with Osteogenesis imperfect, a Latin euphemism for brittle bones. Before he has turned five, Brit (short for 'brittle' and 'British'). has cracked his legs as many as eleven times. But Brit's spine compensates for his breakable bones - it neither bends nor cracks. It is a portrait of the handicapped man as an artist.

In *Trying to Grow*, Firdaus Kanga demonstrates the survival of disabled people in India. It is a fictional portrayal of disability. It is a semi-autobiographical novel. The novelist himself is suffering from a bone disease that leaped him to the bounded mobility of his wheelchair. He expresses his attitude towards the people of disability. Brit is the protagonist of the novel, suffering from orthogenesis imperfect, a brittle bone disease. The novel describes the story of Brit's appearance and his struggles against his father's anti-disability prejudice.

Brit's father Sam takes continual efforts to find a cure for his son fail to produce the desired result. Brit wants to be independent and he rebels because his mother continues to treat him like a child. He is a brave and courageous boy who learns to smile in difficulty. He does not like to lose his identity. Brit realizes that he is bisexual in a deeply homophobic society, and his fight for economic freedom. He is a failed person who leads a life which does not involve his self. He confesses, "I felt as if all my life I'd been bundled up against the wind, and now one by one my woolies were being taken from me" (*Trying to Grow* 169). He declares that he is a sex maniac therefore he gets it difficult to sleep during nights and goes to a level of cursing his own parents. He declares, "I want to be what I really am, no more acts, no more reaching for things I'm too short to reach" (*Trying to Grow* 235). His efforts and struggle for growth, development is part of his search for identity in which he understands his creative potential. The whole narration of the novel is by a handicapped young man, Brit who is 'trying to grow.'

Autobiographical in nature, it brings a whole new and refreshing perspective to the world of human disability, eliminating any kind of 'mush'. There is a lot of honesty and energy in the way the story has been told. Brit Kotwal, so called because he suffers from a brittle bone condition, lives near Bombay in India. He feels that sometimes it is fun being different, drinking powdered pearls in his milk or having almond oil rubbed into his legs. He thinks he knows the answer to how he can grow. Enragement and warmth shove for space in Brit's relationships with Dolly and with his parents Sam and Sera. From his part-time teacher Madame Manek Shaw he learns the valuable lesson that it's what you learn that counts, not what you study and also that precious thing is brittle.

The road to understanding what it means to grow up. This is appropriate, for a major theme here is lack of development, the overall effect that of a lengthy sequence of events blurring into each other. Brit in his wheelchair, motionless, while all around him his family and friends grow up, marry, move elsewhere, get exciting jobs, travel the world, grow old, die. Consequently, the process of growing is more complex for Brit – and the yardsticks much less defined – than for ‘normal’ people whose bodies undergo obvious changes with time and whose lives precede in orderly stages from school to college to office and so on. Like the author, Brit is a boy with orthogenesis imperfect, who, his doctor confirmed, would break his bones often, would never walk, would never have teeth and if he survived at all, would grow to be only four feet tall. The novel opens with Brit’s father taking him to a holy man called Wagh Baba in the hope that he would be able to cure him. While from the beginning Sera, Brit’s mother, perceives him as a normal person with a “problem,” Brit’s father, Sam is unable to do the same. He looks rueful and sad when he talks about Brit and tries every possible “remedy” for Brit’s orthogenesis imperfecta. These include not only frequent visits to doctors but also ingestion of pulverized pearls and bone marrow of goat, the rubbing of almond oil on the legs, Parsi prayers, the services of a woman who claimed she could cure Brit with electricity generated from her body, and finally, the blessings of the dubious Wagh Baba.

The members of his family are only too willing to “help” Brit go on with his life. They readily push his wheelchair, bring him books down from high shelves, rush him to the hospital whenever he breaks a bone. Even though it is taken for granted that Brit can never go to school or college, his middle-class family ensures he receives the best education they can afford. Brit is offered a world steeped in books, music and art—everything he needs for intellectual stimulation. Moreover, Sam’s attitude toward Brit’s disability reiterates some of the most common notions regarding disabled people in Indian society. Sam tells Brit:

. . . fractures for a few more years. Then I suppose you’ll study but you won’t get a job. . . I see the young boys who come to the bank with their applications. Some of them have their MAs and they’re healthy and good-looking; they’re trying for a job that’ll pay them eight hundred rupees a month. And they don’t even get that. Then you’re going to need girls; you’re going to get really frosty when you can’t have them. (44; emphasis added)

Thus while Sam sees Brit as intellectually capable, he feels he is a misfit in a deeply competitive world and that his disability will cause him to live a miserable life without a job or romantic love.

One particular scene in the novel details the several facets of people’s anxiety—their varied attitudes to disabled people in general and in particular, the anxiety regarding disabled people as desiring subjects or objects of desire. The scene unfolds when Brit and his girlfriend, Amy, kiss on the beach:

They were discussing us, as if we were the clouds or the sea or the rocks. ‘What does she see in him?’

‘Pity?’

‘God will reward her.’

Maybe he is rich.’ ‘I wouldn’t take him if he were rich as the Birlas.’ . . .

‘Such people,’ said someone, ‘are often God’s favourites: that is why he makes them Different.’

You are wrong, wrong. He is punished.’

‘You mustn’t laugh,’ someone said to the urchins. ‘Or the next time you are born; you will be as

Unfortunate as him.’

‘At least they should not come out, such people. Then loving in public—it’s too much.

Then the man in the dhoti said, ‘Maybe something is wrong with her inside, we can’t see it. That’s why she has to marry this cripple.

She can’t find anyone else.’ (253)

In most religions in India, disability is conceived of as a punishment for some sin committed in the previous life. The passage above shows how these religious ideas play out in the day-to-day lives of disabled people, particularly if their impairments are visible.

The growth and transformation of Brit’s comprehension of his sexuality is also painstakingly mapped in the novel and here again, one notes the devastating effects chance comments have. Brit talks of his adolescence when he and his neighbor and friend Ruby (who is the same age) used to flirt outrageously with each other. They even on one occasion tried to “French kiss” each other but Brit had stopped at the last moment. The reason for this reveals Brit’s acute sense of self: “The truth was—” records Brit, “and it was awful—I thought she didn’t deserve a kiss from me” .

In contrast to Ruby’s encounters with Brit, which make him extremely conscious and ashamed of his body, Cyrus offers Brit a refreshing change from the very beginning of their friendship. Cyrus is also the first person who, to Brit’s delight, can stimulate him intellectually and outsmart him when it comes to words. With Cyrus, he dares to experience many things for the first time—like going very close to the sea and letting a huge wave break over him, and

going out to the Cricket Club for a swim. Slowly but surely Brit falls in love with Cyrus and finds to his surprise that thoughts of Cyrus can arouse him like no fantasies involving women ever could. This results in him having what he describes as “the first atomic orgasm in history” (Kanga 142).

Conclusion:

This paper is to find out the representation of disabled persons in the novel points out that disability is a common phenomenon and locating a person with disability in the society is normal. Firdaus Kanga take disability characters in his novel and explain how they survive and thrive in the society. The novelist takes greater risks to select the people with disabilities as central characters. He explains the struggle of disabled persons and focus on the trauma of creativity and the embarrassments.

References:

1. Banik Somdev. Representation of Disabled Characters in Literature. International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation studies, vol.3, no. 2, 2016, p.199.
2. Ghai, Anita. “Disabled Women: An Excluded Agenda of Indian Feminism.”
3. Hypatia 17.3 (2002): 49-66
4. “The Women’s Movement Must Do More for Disabled Women.” Info change. Centre for Communication and Development Studies, 24 June 2009. 15 Mar.2017.
5. Garrison, H. Adolescent Perceptions of the Socio-cultural Construct of Disability When Responding to Literature of Mice and Men. Fordham University, 2007, p.9
6. Kanga, Firdaus. Trying to Grow. Bloomsbury, 1989.
7. Koppers, Petra. Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave. 2011. Print.