TEXTING LIMINALITY: RECONFIGURING DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF FIRDAUS KANGA

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH (PhD)

Submitted by

Deepak Basumatary
PhD Research Scholar, Department of English,
Bodoland University
(Registration No.: FINAL/07ENG/0017 of 2015-2016)

Under the supervision of
Prof. Pradip Kr. Patra

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BODOLAND UNIVERSITY
DEBARGAON, KOKRAJHAR, ASSAM, INDIA

2018

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BODOLAND UNIVERSITY
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Certificate

This is to certify that the work embodied in the thesis entitled "TEXTING LIMINALITY: RECONFIGURING DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF FIRDAUS KANGA" is a bonafide record of the research work done by DEEPAK BASUMATARY, Research Scholar, Department of English, Bodoland University, Registration No.: FINAL/07ENG/0017 of 2015-2016 and that this thesis has not previously formed the basis (in full or in part) for the award of any other diploma or degree of this or any other University.

The thesis represents independent and original research work carried out by the candidate under my supervision and the candidate has fulfilled the UGC Regulations, July 2016 mentioned in the University Ordinance for submission of the thesis.

Bodoland University
Kokrajhar
Date: 26/06/18

(Prof. Pradip Kr. Patra)
Supervisor
Professor, Department of English,
Bodoland University

DR. P.K. PATRA
Professor of English
Bodoland University
Kokrajhar, B.T.C. (Assam)
Pin- 783370, India

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BODOLAND UNIVERSITY
DEBARGAON, KOKRAJHAR, ASSAM, INDIA

Declaration

I, Deepak Basumatary, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis entitled "TEXTING LIMINALITY: RECONFIGURING DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF FIRDAUS KANGA" is a bonafide record of the research work done by myself. The contents of this thesis have not previously formed the basis (in full or in part) for the award of any other diploma or degree of this or any other University/Institute.

This thesis has been submitted to Bodoland University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English (PhD) after fulfilling the requirements of the UGC Regulations, July 2016 mentioned in the University Ordinance for submission of the thesis.

Deepak Basumatary

(Deepak Basumatary)
Research Scholar
(FINAL/07ENG/0017 of 2015-2016)

Bodoland University
Kokrajhar
Date: 26/6/2018

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Research is a herculean task and an onerous responsibility. Every effort has been made to do justice while pursuing the present research work. I am thankful for the generous advice and support of people with knowledge and expertise in different areas which I received in sumptuous amounts. Although it is not possible to mention each and every one, I am particularly grateful and indebted to my supervisor Prof. Pradip Kr. Patra, Prof. Department of English, Bodoland University for his constant guide and support, Dr. Dwijen Sharma, Associate Professor, Deptt. of English, NEHU, Tura Campus, Tura for his words of wisdom and inspiration, Dr. Shickna John Wary, Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Kokrajhar Govt. College for his generous amount of advice, and Mr. Omkar Sharma, Associate Professor, Department of English, Kokrajhar Govt. College for his help in fine tuning the draft thesis.

I wish to thank my colleagues and friends of the Department of English, Bodoland University for their warmth, generosity and encouragements from time to time.

I am very grateful to my colleagues from the Department of English, Kokrajhar Govt. College for your help, support, and most importantly, for bearing with me all this while.

I thank my parents Shri Kholen Basumatary and Smt. Rombha Basumatary, my sisters Anjumoni and Mohima, and my wife Bonita all of whom are my pillars of support and strength.

Last but not the least; I give thanks to Lord Almighty Jesus for the abundant love and blessings.

THANK YOU ALL

Deepak Basumatary

Preface

Disability studies remain a comparatively grey and unexplored area in India in spite of the fact that it has evolved as a separate new critical discipline of study in the West. It has not gained importance and legitimacy as a separate discipline of study as there is a lack of adequate attention on the issue from inter-disciplinary paradigms. This has resulted in the tendency to study disability merely as an offshoot of other specific disciplines such as medical science, biotechnology, psychology, engineering, social work, special education, community health, rehabilitation medicine, labour economics, sociology, humanities and the arts (including literature) and that, too, in a rather piecemeal and parochial fashion. Particularly disability remains unexplored in literary representations.

In the West (America), the rise of disability rights movement in the 1960s brought about a consciousness and a change in the understanding of the disabled in the society. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990 is a reflection of the winds of change. In academia, disability studies began to be appropriated as a critical discipline of reading/interpreting literary texts. Particularly, it focussed on the stereotyping and literary representation of disabled characters. An important aspect of disability is that it is a universal and cross-cultural phenomenon. Disability is an issue which has universal and timeless ramifications across the spectrum. The exploration of the theme of disability in literary creations began to emerge in the light of the disability rights movement of the 1960s/70s in America. The theories enunciated by the likes of Lennard J. Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Tobin Siebers, Tom Shakespeare, etc. began to be appropriated into the field of literary studies as a critical method. Presently, it has become an established critical parameter with a sound philosophical footing.

In the Indian novels/writings in English, disability is yet to gain currency in academia as a critical method/parameter. Disability has so far remained a relatively less significant area of study and research as compared to other modern approaches like feminism, Marxism, post-colonialism, gender studies, subaltern studies and women studies. Until the 1990s, the Indian novels/writings in English remain

preoccupied with the ideas of nation and nation building and had little scope for other 'personal' issues. The exploration of the disability phenomena in the literary creations of the Indian novels/writings in English appeared quite lately in the postcolonial literary creations of notable Indian writers in English such as Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day* [1980]), Salman Rushdie (*Shame* [1983]), Firdaus Kanga (*Trying to Grow* [1990]), Rohinton Mistry (*Family Matters* [2002]), Pramila Balasundaram (*Sunny's Story* [2005]), to name a few. Interestingly, in the cannon of Indian novels/writings in English, except Kanga, the other novelists do not deal with disability as an issue per se and their works are representational, based on observations and they use disability as a trope or a literary device to convey other ideas.

Under the circumstances, Firdaus Kanga is an important figure in the literary scene of Indian Writings in English in so far as the exploration of the subject and theme of disability in literary works is concerned. He is a severely disabled individual suffering from a crippling disease called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* (brittle bones disease) who has written a series of critically acclaimed books such as, *Trying to Grow* (1990), *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), *The Godmen* (1995), and *The Surprise Ending* (1996). Kanga's first literary creation *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a narrative of his disabled and queer existence. Therefore, his writings present a first-hand account of the lived experiences of disability in the society. Particularly his writings/works articulates in crisp language and nonchalance his choice of alternate/queer sexuality. He narrates his sexual encounters, desires and sexual appetite showing that the disabled are NOT asexual or sexless (which is the popular notion) beings. Firdaus Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) moves beyond the conventional and traditional discourses on disability which is centred on the 'medical model' on disability and breaks several taboos—portraying 'disabled' people with healthy and rich sexual desires and appetites.

With the saturation of the theories of disability, foremost of them being the theory of the social construction of disability, the understanding of the disability phenomenon has gained a humane and nuanced perspective. In large measure in the study of disability in literary texts, the ideas/concept of social construction offers a

critical parameter or perspective to deconstruct several myths that have been historically ascribed to the disabled in the society. In most of the literary texts with disabled characters it is observed that they are mostly peripheral characters and are subject of ridicule and stereotyping. Instead of re/presenting reality literatures have historically aided in the social constructionism of disability phenomena.

The aims and objectives of the research are to decode the socio-cultural construction of disability, to deconstruct the myth of asexuality of the disabled people, to understand the play of power in the social hierarchy, to understand the marginalization of the disabled people, and most importantly the literary representations of the disabled. In particular the research critically examines the following points:

- Normal/ abnormal bodies — personal vs. Political
- Socio-cultural construction of disability — practices & prejudices
- Sexuality and the 'disabled' individual — Intersection of disability and Sexuality
- Queer Sexuality and the disabled
- Disabled Sexuality and the Indian novels/writings in English
- Marginalization of the 'disabled'

The areas of the research are disability and sexuality studies. These two are fundamental a sphere of social science but is an emerging interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary field that covers vast subjects straddling across medical science, anthropology, sociology, political science, sociology, gender studies, culture studies, folklore and literature. However, the research focuses on literary representations of the disabled by analyzing the major works of Firdaus Kanga. The intersection of disability and sexuality has been explored by making a textual, contextual, discourse and thematic analysis of the literary re/presentation of disability.

As disability and sexuality are cross-cultural and universal phenomenon a study of the same contributes directly to the general welfare of the 'disabled' people in the society. The understanding of the same in a holistic manner has the potential to change the lived experiences of the disabled individuals which will be beneficial

for the common good of the society. The main hypothesis of the research posits that the body is fluid which constantly changes with time and varies across time and cultures. In reality disability is actually a manifestation of the possible diversity of the polymorphous body which occurs in diverse forms, shapes, and sizes. As the disabled constantly shifts and violates the established boundaries of norms and normality it is found to occupy spaces that lie beyond which can be called liminality. The disabled are in continuous struggle and contestation in terms of multiple and continuous change of identities. It is argued that Kanga, under the circumstances, unequivocally accepts his crippled condition as he sees it as being in a state of liminality which is a transient and a shifting condition, and discovers liminality as a liberating experience.

Critical disability and sexuality theories have been aligned with—

- Auto/ Biographical analysis,
- Textual/ contextual analysis,
- Thematic/ topical analysis, and
- Discourse analysis,

Relevant critical theories have been applied judiciously so as to understand the issues in a holistic and in-depth manner. Further, the concepts of post-modernism and post-historicism have been applied to put things into perspective. Particularly, the ideas and concepts of “spatiality” enunciated by Edward W Soja have been employed to understand the social construction of disability.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is a universal but rarely admitted fact that people with normal/abled bodies look (down) upon those who do not possess equally abled bodies. In literature, the disabled people have always been (and continue to be) the stereotypical 'Other'. In Western literature, Richard III, Tiny Tim, and Captain Ahab, to name a few, are some of the major stereotypical literary villains and these characters provide a sneak-peek into the ways of literary representation of the disabled. The disabled are equated and associated with the nocuous. Therefore, it is observed that it has become a kind of convention to associate negativities such as deviance, evil, ugly, vengefulness, lame, etc. with disabled bodies in literary representations. Historically, literary representations have used the body, especially the disabled body as a metaphor, which is responsible for creating several myths surrounding the disabled people; one prime example being the myth of asexuality or sexlessness of the disabled people. Under the circumstances, body-shaming has become a part of the popular lore and culture in the contemporary societies around the world. It has become a kind of a norm to criticize and pass judgements on disabled people just because they are different or look different.

The disabled people began to organize themselves politically to fight for their rights and privileges in the 1960s in America. This was in tune with the increasing awareness of their 'disabled' status in the society as it dawned upon them that their predicament is largely caused by discrimination, oppression and marginalization by the larger society, not because of the materiality of their divergent/deviant bodies and abilities. They began to articulate their personal experiences as 'disabled' people—the difficulties, the partiality and the general apathy of the society in which they live that largely happen to be indifferent to their living environment with a number of creative writings that sought to deconstruct the whole phenomena of 'disability' as a curious case of socio-cultural and socio-political stereotyping. In other words, it emerged that disability is not a case of biological determinism per se but a curious case of social and cultural constructionism. In the light of these developments the prevailing positions began to be revised accordingly.

Consequently, disability studies have been appropriated as a critical method of interpretation/reading literary texts in the West. Since the 1990s, literary disability studies gradually gained recognition in the academic discourses of the West as a new subject area in the immediate aftermath of the disability rights movement with an inter-disciplinary stance that seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the issue with a sound philosophical and theoretical foundation. In this regard Lennard J Davis' *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) laid the groundwork for the new critical subject area and "....brought analytical tools from literary studies and critical and cultural theory to bear on disability representation" (Barker & Murray 2018).

In the Indian novels/writings in English the critical exploration of the disability phenomena appears quite lately in the literary creations of notable Indian writers in English such as Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day,* 1980), Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children,* 1981 and *Shame* 1983), Firdaus Kanga (*Trying to Grow,* 1990 and *Heaven on Wheels* 1991), Rohinton Mistry (*Family Matters,* 2002), Pramila Balasundaram (*Sunny's Story,* 2005), to name a few. They are some of the writers who made pioneering effort in situating the disability experience as the pivotal subject and theme in some of their writings. Among these writers, Firdaus Kanga is an odd figure in the literary world of the Indian novels/writings in English. Kanga departs from tradition and situates disability and sexuality as the major subject and theme in his literary works. Unlike the other writers, Firdaus Kanga, born in a Parsi family in 1960 in Bombay (now Mumbai), is a writer and actor who is also a severely disabled individual suffering from a crippling disease called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* (brittle bones disease) who has written a series of critically acclaimed books such as, *Trying to Grow* (1990), *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), *The Godmen* (1995), and *The Surprise Ending* (1996). Kanga's first literary creation *Trying to Grow* (1990), a semi-autobiographical novel has been adapted into a critically acclaimed movie titled 'Sixth Happiness' in which he has acted his own character. *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a novel that explores society, culture, disability and sexuality from the perspective of the lived experiences of a 'disabled' individual in the society. Because of his lived experiences the literary creations of Firdaus Kanga gain an added resonance in the exploration of the theme of disability in literature.

Firdaus Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) moves beyond the conventional and traditional discourses on disability which is centred on the 'medical model' on disability and breaks several taboos, portraying 'disabled' people with healthy and rich sexual desires and appetites. *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a novel which raises a strong voice of dissent and protest against the stereotyping and objectification of the 'disabled' people by the larger society which generally treats them with apathy as asexual beings or without sexuality. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, the subject of sexuality is a contested topic in the general context of the Indian novels/writings in English that has so far failed to address the same in a broad and holistic manner from the standpoint of Indian cultural milieu. Firdaus Kanga's major works therefore present a rich and varied area of exploration on the intersection of disability and sexuality from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that includes gender studies, cultural theory, and sociology in addition to disability and sexuality theories.

Disability manifests in a variety of ways, it may be physical and/or intellectual. At the same time some disabilities are visible while some are invisible. In all the cases, however in some way or the other, it has much to do with the corporality or materiality of the body. The body, therefore, occupies centre-stage in the identity formation, either as abled or its opposite disabled. The body is not a given or a neutral term but an embodiment of several loaded cultural connotations and meanings. For this reason, the sight of a disabled body usually causes consternation to the people and it easily catches the eyes of the beholder. Yet disability is actually not seen although it is everywhere in the society. The disabled are stigmatized and vanished from the mainstream society and this reflects in the literary representations of the disabled who are almost always the despised other. Historically, the disabled have been predominantly represented as the stereotypical villains in literature.

Disability theorists Lennard J Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Robert McRuer, Tobin Siebers, Tom Shakespeare, to name a few, have elaborated at length on the causes of disability phenomena, particularly interesting is the fundamental shift they have brought about through their insightful analysis of the disability

condition from the medical model to the social model. They have located disability as a condition caused in large measure by the society which does not accept them as equal members of the society, in large part the disabled are regarded as incomplete or not fully developed humans. This shift has been a kind of a revolution and a liberating experience for the disabled people.

Disability is a reality and a truth of life which at all times dangles as a Damocles sword in the face of the people. It is because of this harsh reality that disability becomes repulsive and causes abomination in the hearts, minds and psyche of the people. The disabled (physical and intellectual) are usually the butt of all jokes in the society, in everyday conversations as well as in literary narratives. Consequently, disability has come to mean different things to different people because it is a condition which exposes the fears, anxieties, and preoccupations of the people, and the literary representations of the disabled people remain mostly negative.

Disability is a condition which occurs across time and societies and pervades literatures across the ages. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray asserts "[d]isability is everywhere in literature" (2018: 1). It needs mention here that inspite of its ubiquitousness disability remains invisible. Barker and Murray say—"[b]ut if it is true that disability pervades literature across ages; it is also true that it is frequently not seen" (20018: 2). The "ableist society" prefers to look the other way as far as the disabled people are concerned. They are the stereotypical 'Others' and therefore non-entities in the society. However, in literature their invisibility has "less to do with the texts themselves than the reading practices that have been brought to them" (2018: 2). Therefore, there is a need to re/read literary representations of disabled characters or disability which has the potential to unravel the genesis of stereotyping and the causes of oppressions in its evolution through the ages as well as its occurrence and variance across societies. Particularly, there is a need to understand the perception of disability, and how the literary representations have come to reinforce the prejudices and stereotypes in the society.

As societies differ from one another it becomes pertinent to find out the nuances, variations and similarities of the socio-cultural constructions of disability

across time and societies. Particularly in this present research an effort has been made to understand the socio-cultural con/texts of disability construction in the cultural narratives of India. In the aftermath of the disability rights movement and the growth of disability studies as a new critical discipline, it is now widely accepted that disability is largely a case of socio-cultural constructionism. However, there is a vast difference between the West and the East in their perceptions/outlook of the disabled people due to social and cultural gulf. As such, effort has been made to locate the circumstances of disability in its cultural specificity while reading Kanga's works.

It needs to be borne in mind, that although "enforcing normalcy" (Davis) and the creation of the "normates" (Garland-Thomson) are the common causes of the disability predicament in both the Western and Indian societies, there is a variation between the two as the West looks at it from a pragmatic prism as compared to the Indian perspectives which are predisposed to look at it from the view-point of metaphysics. The purpose of the research work is to bring out the nuances of the socio-cultural and socio-political undertones/overtones of disability construction in the society. Further, it examines the literary representations and looks at the possible ways of reintegrating the disabled in the mainstream society. For this reason, the major works of Firdaus Kanga have been re/interpreted through interdisciplinary critical theories that and goes beyond the two theories of disability and sexuality. This is crucial for understanding disability as an oppressive regime which virtually goes unnoticed and it can go a long way in changing the prejudiced perceptions of the disabled people.

In Indian novels in English, literary disability studies have so far remained relatively less significant as compared to other established critical parameters. In India, disability remains mysterious and a subject of derision as literary representations and narratives continue to reinforce the prevalent myths surrounding the disabled person. It remains a comparatively grey and unexplored subject inspite of the fact that disability studies has evolved as a critical parameter in literary studies in the West. It has not yet gained much currency in India where there is lack of adequate attention on the issue from inter-disciplinary paradigms. Significantly,

modernism's totalizing narratives and the "either/or" binary have been the root cause of discrimination and "Othering" of the disabled. The existence of social hierarchy on the basis of difference and norms emerges from this aspect. But, postmodernism's incredulity towards metanarrative and its open discourse of plurality through "either/or, and also" logic has loosened the strict boundaries.

Theoretical positions of gender studies, particularly, Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality", and Judith Butler's "Bodies that Matter" have been appropriated in the present context to re/read and interpret the literary representations of the disabled which have opened new vistas on the mechanism of oppression that operates in the society. Disability theorist Robert McRuer seized upon the concept of "Compulsory Heterosexuality" to posit the theory that there exists a similar structure and mechanism in the society as far as the disabled are concerned, what he calls "Compulsory Able-bodiedness" in his essay "Compulsory Able-bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence". Similarly, Butler's concepts enunciated in "Bodies that Matter" is another theoretical tool which has come in handy as a means to understand the stigmatization of disabled bodies.

In a similar vein, cultural theorist Michel Foucault's ideas and concepts of power and sexuality have been appropriated as a tool of critical analysis in the reading of disability phenomena in the society and its literary representations which have shed light on the complexities of metaphors and the prejudices that colour popular understanding of disability and sexuality. Further, Pierre Bourdieu's enumerations of his formulations of capital in "Forms of Capital" have been an enormous critical tool in the in-depth analysis of disability, the causes and reasons of rejection and stigmatization of the disabled bodies which have led to the marginalization of the disabled bodies. Agamben's theorizes the rationale and mechanism of marginalization as a matter of "exception" which he terms it as a "state of exception". The lack of what is called "cultural and social capital" is the primary reason for the same. The disabled become non-entities in the society and consequently 'invisible' in literary representations as well because of the lack of "cultural and social capital". In this regard, Henri Lefebvre's formulation of the concept of 'space' makes it clear that space (social & geographical) is of paramount

importance for an individual to have a presence and gain ascendancy in the society. This leads us to Edward W Soja's ideas of the "Thirdspace" by which he means the actual lived spaces or spatiality. He argues that geography or spatiality, i.e. the actual lived space plays a crucial role in the lived experiences of an individual and this becomes more pronounced for the disabled individuals. But, this aspect has remained neglected in the existing dialectics which have given more importance to time and historicity. Therefore, in addition to the theories from different disciplines such as gender studies, cultural studies, sociology, medical science, and many more, the postmodern and post-historicist ideas have been adopted as the basic framework to interpret/read the disability phenomena so as to understand disability in real time and space (spatiality).

From the interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary critical theoretical parameters it emerges that the human body is essentially transient and polymorphous in nature. The occurrence of the body in diverse forms, shapes, and sizes (which constantly change) exhibit a characteristic liminality. As it constantly shifts and violates the established boundaries of norms and normality it is found to occupy socio-cultural and geographical spaces that are beyond the norms/normal. The disabled are in continuous struggle and contestation in terms of multiple and continuous change of identities. Therefore, there is some form of ambiguity as far as their identities are concerned. For this reason, the disabled body has become a kind of enigma as it refuses to be codified and categorized under the norms. The body, particularly the disabled bodies are encrypted with numerous information and cultural connotations. As a result, the disabled bodies become "texts" and these needs to be explicated. The embodiment of the (disabled) body as socio-cultural "text", its transience, and polymorphism testifies to the liminality of the disabled bodies. The continuous struggle and contestation of the (disabled) body with its fluid identity is a rite to passage into the "Thirdspace", a space that is liminal, betwixt and between the normal. Firdaus Kanga reconfigures his disabled and queer identity vis-à-vis the ableist society so as to find a meaning and a reason to live in the chaotic world of multiple meanings and fluid identities. It is in this context that the phrase "texting liminality" has been used to mean adding of a discourse and an alternative narrative into the reading of the disability phenomena.

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CHAPTER - II

Theorizing Body and Disability: Discursive Practices in India

The body is a metaphor. A cursory survey of contemporary socio-cultural and political praxes reveals that the "body" is not a simple neutral term which signifies just the human biological physique. The term 'body' is a loaded expression because it is classified into different categories across time and spaces. It has metamorphosed into an embodiment of socio-culturally imbibed meaning. Different variations of the body carry different connotations. For this reason, some categories of the body matter, at the same time there are some other variants that do not. Across time and spaces the appearances, traits, and abilities of the body has had profound impact on the psyche and outlook of the people which is reflected in the fact that it has become a site of multiple discourses. The materiality of the body, particularly the politics of its lived experiences and its relation to subjectivity and identity are tempered by varying historical and cross-cultural practices.

Different traits, abilities, looks, colours of the skin, etc. have socio-culturally assigned meanings, values, connotations, and significance which are arbitrary in nature. It is usually seen that the colour 'black' is traditionally associated with the inauspicious and the ominous. The different traits, abilities, colours of the skin (that diverge from the 'normal') are considered deviant, imperfect, disabled, and even cursed one in societies, a phenomenon which is cross-cultural and universal. These prejudicial notions, beliefs, and practices are abusive in nature and is a detriment to the society. In recent years, scholarship on Disability Studies severely critiques the ahistorical notion of disability, there is a holistic attempt to understand disability phenomenon which has opened a multi-tiered inter-disciplinary ken that theorizes disability as social, organisational, environmental, and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with impairments/ different bodily traits, and configurations from being included in the mainstream society.

Over a considerable period of time, diverse socio-cultural and political discourses in the mainstream society have imbibed and nurtured a culture of *norms*. There prevails an overwhelming culture of norms where conformity of the body to a

set of perceived standards of a notional ideal body becomes a benchmark of acceptability in the society at large. Those who conform to the norms are considered normates[1] as the ability to perform certain tasks with a measure of efficiency are taken as a sign/measure of normalcy. Socio-cultural and political discourses institutionalizes these norms of preferences, constituting what is called normalcy by subjecting the body to discipline and performativity. Michel Foucault terms this process as 'subjection' in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction* (1978 {1976}: 140-41, 143-44) where corporality is subjected to intense discourses in an attempt to rigorously discipline[2] the body to kowtow to a structure of representation and classification according to a set of socio-culturally predetermined *norms*. Since the time Michel Foucault theorized that societies, not natural laws, invent the "normal" disability studies have gathered traction and momentum. Lennard J. Davis, one of the pioneering authorities in the field of disability studies, says:

> We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above-average. We consume a minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume. Our children are ranked in school and tested to determine where they fit into a normal curve of learning, of intelligence. Doctors measure and weigh them to see if they are above or below average on the height and weight curves. There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated." (2006: 4)

Socio-cultural discourses and practices have moved along the above quoted lines succinctly put forward by Lennard J. Davis. These discourses and practices have arbitrarily discriminated the different bodily configurations and have come to be perceived as normal–abject and abled–disabled bodies. There is a continuous process of normalizing so as to fit into a pre-determined structure of norms in which bodies that fail to conform to this set of norms are bracketed variously as disabled, deviant, abnormal, freakish, etc. They are not treated with equal measure it deserves and pushes them to the periphery of the mainstream society by labelling them as

abnormal/disabled bodies. Bodies that do not conform to these norms do not matter, and are stereotyped as suffering from disability[3] which is metaphorized as queerness. Queerness is an experience of the *Other*[4] which is much detested. Michael Warner writes:

> Nearly everyone, wants to be normal. And who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us? Put in those terms, there doesn't seem to be a choice at all. Especially in America where [being] normal probably outranks all other social aspirations. (2000: 53)

Queerness endows the body with multiple discourses through which the concept of *normalcy*[5] is created by *Othering*[6] bodies that appear divergent. Corporalities with different manifestations are regarded as the *Other*. Various dimensions and abilities of the body are associated with diverse connotations and meanings leading to the categorization of the materiality of the body into the binary opposites of normal–abject and abled–disabled bodies, which is a process of *Othering*. It stereotypes the 'Other' bodies as 'abnormal' and is abhorred as abject which disables them socially. This reduces them into a unique social, cultural and political entity creating a category of persons called 'disabled' or 'suffering from disability'. The problem of understanding disability is that often different abilities are confused with inability or impairment, and the different traits of the body as 'bizarre' and 'deviant' from the norm. It conflates diverse manifestations of the body along with disability.

The body and disability, viewed purely from the prism of medical science (which has been the prevalent case thus far), situates disability solely as an individual case that merits medical attention or intervention. It does not place any scope for interpreting disability as a matter of culture, rather it scorns at the very idea itself and places disability as a subject of science not culture. Rigid attitudes to body and disability persisted until as recent as 1999 which proves that deeply embedded notions have influenced the understanding of disability phenomenon for a very long period of time. In this context, the issues of "norms", "normal" and "normalcy" are the pivotal matrices in the construction of disability. In 1999 in an article "Enabling Disabled Scholarship" in *Salon* Norah Vincent wrote:

> It's hard to deny that something called normalcy exists. The human body is a machine, after all—one that has evolved functional parts: lungs for breathing, legs for walking, eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, a tongue for speaking and most crucially for all the academics concerned, a brain for thinking. This is science, not culture. (http://www.salon.com/books/it/1999/08/18/disability)

However, a paradigm shift occurred in the immediate aftermath of the politically oriented disability rights movement towards the late 1960s and early 1970s America (and which has continued to expand in the 21st century), with the emergence of a steady stream of writings that came out of the disabled people themselves. As the disabled people began to articulate their personal experiences, the perceptions of people towards the differently-abled have been re-oriented in the direction of a new social paradigm. There is a growing awareness that the disabled bodies are "socially constructed."[7] The social construction of disability is parochial and artificially encodes cultural meanings and interpretations to diverse bodily traits and configurations. In the process, there occurs a privileging of one form over the other which is a cross-cultural and a universal phenomenon. Across cultures and generations, disability has been misconstrued and treated with disdain by the society. In reality, disability goes beyond the medical paradigm, it is more of a social construct whose repercussions is found in every society and time in varying degrees and formations that stigmatizes diverse forms of the body as 'Other-ness'. It takes a relook at the concept of "biological determinism" in order to understand the social construction of disability. The social model has systematically deconstructed the notion of "biological determinism" of the disabled by showing the (social) mechanisms through which the category of disabled comes into being in the society.

In a number of ways, human beings through their actions, gestures and behaviours generate meanings. The socio-cultural practices are a cumulative account of these generated meanings that speak about the dynamics of the social matrices at work which give birth to 'norming' and 'Othering' of the body. Disability metaphorized as queerness by the society is not a product of biological determinism, but a result of the process of 'Othering' of various corporalities through socio-cultural practices; it creates disabling social space for individuals with different

appearances and abilities which is the root cause of the problem of disability. The society is indifferent to individuals with different dimensions of the body, added to it is the fact that the society is unequal to those with different abilities and traits of the body. They are perceived as the *Other,* they are non-entities or the insignificant *Other* in their perceptions. In the words of Tobin Siebers "..... people easily perceive when someone is different from them but rarely acknowledge the violence of their perceptions" (2001: 739). Literary works across time and spaces bear testimony to this truth. It is a reality that the sight of a disabled body immediately changes the process of perception, as people can easily perceive when someone is different from them (Siebers: 2001). There is violence in the gaze of the normates which affects the process of understanding the disabled body and their representation. Further, he adds, ".....the disabled body changes the process of representation itself" (2001: 738).

Literary representations of the disabled characters derive this process of perception of the disabled body, for the most part focusing on the differences of the body, a representation that becomes a kind of 'freak show'[8] as it fails to accommodate different experiences of reality pertaining to people with diverse bodily traits and configurations as normal human beings. Disability is a socially created problem; there is a huge attitudinal problem with regard to the perception of disabled person. The anthropical body has metamorphosed into a political entity. The socio-cultural constructionism of disability phenomena is therefore political as the body which is essentially personal becomes political. Disability studies echoes the slogan "personal is political"[9] as disability is found to be basically a misplaced idea and a socio-cultural construct that conflates the personal and the political in the anthropical body. In this regard, the prevalence of the normalcy narrative plays a pivotal role. Lennard J. Davis says, ".....the "problem" is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the "problem" of the disabled person" (2006: 3).

Socio-cultural discourses have conflated body with normalcy and has transformed the personal into political, a tradition which traces its roots to the much cherished figure of the ideal. This precedes the concept of the norm[10] that has been in

existence since the seventeenth century. There is an instinctive urge in humans to strive for the ideal body and to belong to a category that is seen as the perfect entity, an archetype exemplified by nude Venuses of the ancient European myths. This mytho-poetic body is held as an example of the ideal body (and beauty), but this ideal body cannot be realised by humans. The *homo sapiens* constantly seeks to acquire this status through "subjection" of the body to the rigours of the norms which can be taken as a kind of refinement or acculturation of the body. This is a legacy that has been inherited from the historical past. The urge or desire to achieve the cherished figure of the ideal body has developed into the concept of norms as the ideal is impossible to achieve. Its ancestry dating back to the time of Aristotelian taxonomy partly explains the deep rootedness of this phenomenon globally. Brooke Holmes has observed ".....[t]he association of corporeal difference with norms and abnormality is the legacy of Aristotelian taxonomy" (2014: 162).

Therefore, contemporary societies which live in an age of virtual reality and *Online* culture have been influenced tremendously by the rise of social media. The constantly evolving popular cultures are bombarded by images of models.[11] The body of a model is taken as an ideal and desirable which have come to endorse a particular form of the human body, with certain configurations of the physique, creating cultural stereotypes that cause attitudinal as well as psychological problems in the minds of the people, especially the young. These images are circulated unabashedly abrasively suggesting that conformity to these configurations of the physique is 'fitness'. Social constructionism of disability presently, has built on these popular images advertised/circulated for consumption through the media, particularly the social media which has complicated the perception of disability that ascribe certain looks of the body as fit, good, and desirable while at the same time stigmatizing and despising others (which appear to be divergent, freak and bizarre). Literary representations have failed to appropriate people with disability as the main characters as the socially and culturally accepted category of 'normal' human beings excludes those with different bodily traits and configurations. In the words of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson:

> Disability is an overarching and in some ways artificial category that encompasses congenital and acquired physical differences,

> mental illness and retardation, chronic and acute illnesses, fatal and progressive diseases, temporary and permanent injuries, and a wide range of bodily characteristics considered disfiguring, such as scars, birthmarks, unusual proportions, or obesity. (1997: 13)

In addition, disability is not a static condition or a clearly defined and demarcated category unlike racism, ethnicity, class, and gender. It is dynamic and changes with time and conditions that cuts across cultures and time, basically a cross-cultural and universal phenomenon. In the contemporary societies, the prevailing popular cultures are preoccupied with the looks of the body and this obsession to look beautiful and the desire to have the perfect configurations of the body arises out of the socio-cultural pressure to conform to norms, and the urge to transcend the limitations of the body.

Influential as he is in shaping the direction of the nature of discourses and cultural norms in Western thought, Aristotle's taxonomy of bodies is a significant point of reference in understanding the discourses on norms and normality in the Western thought since the ancient times. In *Problemata Physica*, for example, difference is deterioration for Aristotle, and bodies are interchangeable. Perhaps the most striking instance of Aristotle's application of this idea is his statement (775 a 15) in *Generation of Animals* that femaleness is, "as it were a natural deformity."[12] For example Aristotle's definition of women as "mutilated males", "improper form", and "monstrosity[ties]" in Western thought conflates "female-ness" with "disability", and both are seen as departures from valued standards.[13] Whimsical and prejudicial as it is yet Aristotle's views have cast a definitive influence on the later socio-cultural traditions which have largely shaped the way people look at different aspects and dimensions of the body and have contributed to the formation of norms.

Norms are arbitrary and political, but what can be deduced is that there is an attempt to standardize the body according to a set of commonalities, similarities and likenesses. Thereafter, identity such as *normates* (Garland-Thomson) is derived and framed based on the body's adherence to the standards. Queerness is seen as an indecent assault on the will to perfection, a transgression from the boundaries. It fails to take into account that the materiality of the body occurs in a multiplicity of forms.

In these ways and means, the body is socially constructed and carries socio-cultural meanings (Siebers: 2001). In most cases, there is a comprehensive failure on the part of the society to accommodate plurality of the human body, to accept the reality of the existence of multiple or diverse forms of the human body. This plays an important role in the social construction of disability and the disablement phenomena. In the literary representations of the disabled, the traits of the body become the central framework of the disability narrative. This is a narrative based on socially prejudiced assumptions and perceives the disabled from a jaundiced eye.

It is necessary to point out that literary representations of disability have generally caricatured disabled bodies and misrepresented them. Often looked upon as the 'Other', as freakish and human oddity, the disabled people have become a subject of spectacle and laughter in the society. On many occasions the disabled are ridiculed for their 'abnormal' bodies. Thus, having been stripped of all basic identity and dignity as humans the disabled are denied the reality of their bodies because they appear different and are perceived to be at odds with the accepted norms in the society. They seem queer and exotic in the perceptions of the society, and are stigmatised by the dominant normates which is prejudicial. Literary representations of the 'disabled' through ages and generations stand testimony to the negative stereotyping of the 'disabled' people as freaks in the normalized societies (Davis: 2013). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states, "[f]rom folktales and classical myths to modern and postmodern 'grotesques', the disabled body is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice" (1997: 10). Throughout history, the disabled literary characters have mainly been represented in stark contrast to people with 'abled' bodies, where the society recognizes only these "able-bodied" people and a system of "compulsory ablebodiedness"[14] exists predominantly. As Paul Robinson notes, "the disabled, like all minorities, have ..... existed not as subjects of art, but merely as its occasions" (1982: 78). It points towards the reality extant in our society; a society which treasures able-bodiedness and treats the disabled bodies with disdain. In her famous essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) Adrienne Rich has critiqued the structures through which lesbianism have been "simply rendered invisible"[15] in the society, a structure which ignores or pretends that it doesn't exist

at all. Taking this concept a step ahead, in disability studies, Robert McRuer in his essay, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/ Disabled Existence" (2006) argues that the socio-cultural practices of the society *simply renders invisible* 'queer and disabled existence' as it imposes a system of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' similar to 'compulsory heterosexuality' which the society has come to accept as *the* normal order of things. He writes:

> Through a reading of compulsory heterosexuality, I want to put forward a theory of what I call compulsory able-bodiedness. The Latin root for *contextualize* denotes the act of weaving together, interweaving, joining together, or composing. This chapter thus contextualizes disability in the root sense of the word, because I argue that the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness, that—in fact—compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness and vice versa. (McRuer 2006: 301)

As literature is an embodiment of culture and society, literary writings bear testimony to the ways through which queer and disabled existence have been "simply rendered invisible." The relative absence of disabled characters reveals the fact that they have been "simply rendered invisible"; banished and obliterated from collective memory and popular imaginations of the masses as they are reduced to non-entities. Their absence as the main characters and marginalization as fringe characters in a number of famous literary texts substantiate this view. The absence of prominent disabled characters speaks volumes of the lived experiences of people with different physical abilities who are not only disabled socially but, have been effectively silenced as well in literary representations. Famous literary texts such as — "Dickens' pathetic and romanticized Tiny Tim of *A Christmas Carol*, J. M. Barrie's villainous Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*, Victor Hugo's Gothic Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, D.H. Lawrence's impotent Clifford Chatterley in *Lady Chatterleys's Lover*, and Tennessee Williams' long-suffering Laura Wingfield from *The Glass Managerie*" (Garland-Thomson 1997: 10) are some of the stereotypical literary representations of the disabled characters in Western literatures coloured by social stereotypes and assumptions.

In *Poetics* Aristotle suggests, "literary representation depends more on probability—what people take to be accurate—than on reality" [cited in Titchkosky, Tanya & Rod Michalko (eds.) *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.: Toronto, 2009, pp. 67]. This has been the common recurrence and the norm. The literary representations of the disabled people have relied on probabilities and assumptions that are far removed from reality. It is evident that disabled characters have existed in literature since ages and the representations of the disabled in the society have been shaped by one kind of assumptions or the other. Unfortunately, most of the literary representations represent the disabled as peripheral characters. The main characters have never been a disabled person or have been represented with disability. The most common prejudiced assumptions entertained by the normates against the disabled is that their disability cancels out other attributes like sexuality and considers them as 'objects' without the need for love, affection and friendship. This is a biased and a parochial prejudice without any basis on reality but assumptions. The prevalent social prejudice against the disabled marginalizes the disabled. Furthermore, cultural expressions like literature with its biased and parochial literary representations dehumanize the disabled and accentuate the perceived disability.

Society places a premium on the beauty and fitness of the body, as a result of this people with visible variations and traits are *gazed* with a discriminatory eye. Although an individual with 'disability' in many cases is able to transcend his/her bodily limitations, it is the negative aspects of their bodies which get attention and their different abilities or qualities are often ignored. Popular cultures have further accentuated this in the 21st century. With the rise of the social media it has come to discriminate the visible variations and traits of the body even more. Cultural expressions such as literature and films promote an image of a 'perfect' body which have negative repercussions on the society, people become gullible to stereotyping and begin to chase a mirage as the ideal or 'perfect' body is a myth. It is an illusion every society chase with disastrous consequences because it constitutes body-image as the sole criterion of identity, position, power and influence. Needless to say, it is based on a misplaced notion. An individual's understanding of the self begins with the body. Any negative image of the body of the self has a direct bearing on the

psyche as it affects self worth, respect, and confidence. Society's constitution of an individual's identity begins with the same prism; the body occupies the centre stage. Any variations from the norm are viewed violently and are stigmatised as less worthy and inferiors. Body and disability therefore imbricate as variations of the body are transformed into 'disability' as a result of socio-cultural discursive practices. The beauty and fitness of the body becomes an object of gaze and gratification so is disability, but vice-versa.

Disability is a condition which pervades across cultures and time. Irrespective of caste, creed, race, social position, colour, age, gender, etc. every human being is susceptible to this phenomenon. In the Indian milieu too, the socio-cultural and political discourses holds sway over the people's mindset and treatment of people with diverse manifestations of the body and their different abilities. This can be deduced from its myths, legends, epics, and literatures.

India is a land of diversity, the sheer expanse of its geographical landmass and the humongous variety of its cultures, languages and socio-religious practices is a manifestation of its composite culture that has evolved across time and cultures with a rich tapestry of traditions and belief systems. The mighty Himalayas in the north, the great Gangetic plains on its foothills, the enormous length of its coastal regions, the tropical rainforests in the northeast, the Deccan plateau in the south, the hinterlands of central India, the great Thar dessert in the west, the Eastern and Western Ghats, not only present the opposite extremes of the geographical and climactic conditions, at the same time they are also chroniclers of the ways through which the Indians have nurtured diverse socio-cultural traditions, practices, beliefs and folklore across its geographical length and breadth in a vast expanse of space and time. As such, these geographical configurations have been instrumental in determining the demography of the land and its socio-cultural practices. In its villages and cities live countless people speaking myriad languages, and practising an assortment of diverse cultural traditions. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, cultural historian and prominent Indian novelist writing in English brings out the core content and principles of Indian life and philosophy in his book *The Continent of Circe: Essays on the People of India* (1965). The core thesis of the book states that the predominant

Hindu population of India is of European stock or Aryan ancestry deriving from them their racial arrogance and superiority as well as the structure of their social organisation with a threefold hierarchical structure which has survived to this day in the form of casteism.

Since the ancient times the predominant Hindu populace of India has faced incursions. The Greeks, Persians, Moguls, and later Europeans have left lasting impressions on the landscape, history and socio-cultural traditions on the lives of the people. Nevertheless, in spite of enormous odds, the Indians have been able to resist cultural onslaught and assimilation by the marauding invaders. Quite assiduously the Indians have retained much of its cultural ethos which is based on the ancient texts, i.e. the Vedas and the Puranas. Two great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have played a colossal role in shaping the general philosophy of Indian socio-cultural life and have determined its politics. It is interesting to note that in India unlike in the West, philosophy does not determine life but, life determines the philosophy (Chaudhuri 1965: 144). Perhaps this is because of the Vedic influences which emphasise on *dharma*, in other words, the principles of human existence and natural justice. It depends on the performances of certain acts or rituals which are seen as the process of practical application of the *dharma* in real life to make it meaningful. In this context, the human body become integral to the realisation of the experience of spirituality, the feeling of the presence of the divine in the self. Purity of the body is a premium in *dharma*; the pollution of the body is frowned at and looked (down) upon. In this context, the disabled body is considered a sacrilege. The presumed purity of certain archetypes of the body is zealously guarded in the hierarchical caste structure. Unlike in other religions, for example Judaism, Islam and Christianity which are monotheistic and have a doctrine based on the revealed Will of god in the scriptures, the Hindu religion has no such doctrine or Will of god. There are multitudes of Gods and Goddesses in the Hindu pantheon and no limits to the number of its possible avatars. In its core belief system the divine spirit may reveal itself in any form, anywhere and any moment. This Hindu life and philosophy is grounded on ‘doing’ and ‘performing’ rather than ‘believing in’ places a premium on the body, it’s supposed purity and its ability to ‘do and perform’ the act or rigours of *dharma*. Judith M. Brown writes:

> .....in the Hindu context religion is not basically 'something to be believed' but 'to be done'. There is no central revelation of the nature of God to which each individual must respond, and on which response his temporal and eternal destiny depends. Rather, religion is concerned with *dharma*; the fundamental laws of existence, to which men and women must conform through performance of their own *dharma* or religious duty. The precise prescriptions of personal *dharma* are known to the individuals through the norms of their particular caste's behaviour. (1985: 23)

The caste based Indian hierarchical society emerged from these praxes which makes divisions of the people according to birth and assigns them particular labour or work that is unique to that particular caste. The notion of purity of the body becomes conflated with the soul which is seen as the stepping-stone towards attaining *moksha* or nirvana, i.e. freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth. One of the principles of casteism is the division of labour on the basis of nobility of birth or the presumed purity of the body of certain caste. The Brahmans at the top of the hierarchy appropriate for themselves with things spiritual and intellectual, an act of 'doing' and 'performing' that does not need physical exertion as they believe that they are the purest in body and soul, and therefore, closer to the divine spirits that be. Any act of 'doing' and 'performing' that needs physical exertion are considered that of the lesser mortals. In this caste based hierarchy the Kshatriyas are assigned with administration and politics, Vaishyas with trade, commerce, agriculture, farming, etc. The last of the lot, i.e. the Indras or Sudras, are the most exploited and are assigned with the task of scavenging and other deplorable manual work reduces them to sub-humans (it is a category which cannot be justified under any circumstances political, economic or spiritual). Under the circumstances, they stand at the bottom of the hierarchy. William Walsh writes:

> As in the cluster of ideas which compose the notion of 'caste', there is a biological connection with purity and pollution, so in the Hindu conception of existence and destiny there is an organic parallel with creation and destruction. Existence is constituted by cycles of creation and decay. Just, as in nature, forms and substances decay and are transformed into other forms and other

> substances, so the bodies and souls of men decay and are reborn in other modes of existence. (1990: 7)

In the Indian context, culture and religion are two sides of the same coin, unlike other monotheistic faiths based on doctrines where religion is a personal affair and is clearly distinguishable from culture and traditions. But Hinduism as a religion is all about 'doing' and 'performing' which entail that every activity, social and cultural is *dharma* or religion in itself. In this context, the contextualization of a socio-cultural practice becomes the other side of *dharma* or religion. *Dharma* or religion therefore, is regarded as enfolding the body from conception to dissolution. The body and soul are intrinsically imbricated or conflated with each other and their existence depends on each other. Therefore, the purity of the body itself is seen as the purity of the soul itself, everything human becomes part of the divine. Disability and variations in bodily traits are for that reason regarded as bad *karma.* The disabled body is considered a manifestation of divine curse, retribution and/or punishment. Thus, the disabled are rendered unfit for the soul in the Indian socio-cultural and religious contexts. Furthermore, they are assumed to be a deterioration and mutilation of the ideal body. These assumptions are rooted in the dominant Hindu mythology. The two most popular epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, represent a discourse on disability and bodily variations/deformity through Manthara, the 'hunchback' in *Ramayana* and Shakuni, the 'lame' man, in *Mahabharata*. Without a doubt, Manthara and Shakuni are attributed with negative characteristics in these two epics, yet there are other discourses and narratives which regard disabled people as children of God. Anita Ghai writes:

> At the same time, historically there are also narratives to highlight the belief that people with disabilities are children of God. This positioning provided spaces, in spheres of religion and knowledge, where the ability to transcend the body was a distinct possibility. Even though the implicit meaning of such possibilities may be disturbing within our present understanding of disability, it does indicate a dignified negotiation of difference. Thus, the renowned scholar Ashtavakra who had eight deformities, and the great poet Surdas, who was visually impaired, are illustrations of strength and ability to fight oppression. However within these constructions, disability is

> something that can be overcome. All the same, the predominant cultural construction of disability is largely negative. (2003: 7)

It is a paradox because in spite of the presence of other alternate narratives that represents the disabled as children of God, the predominant prejudice against the disabled persists. The human beings are wont to see only the negative aspects, even a small deformity, minor variations or disability is quickly noticed while other qualities are overlooked and generally not seen. The deep-rooted socio-cultural antipathy towards people with disability or disabilities influences the ways of seeing the disabled. Renu Addlakha says:

> 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. (2007: 1)

These philosophies of life based on Hindu mythology have been internalized by the diverse populace of India (irrespective of different faiths, although other religions and philosophies exist in India), where the lifestyle and philosophy of life of the predominant Hindu majority has had a cataclysmic effect on others. Disability in India, as elsewhere in the world, is seen through the lens of norms and normalcy. In *Sexuality and Disability in the Indian Context* (2010) Anita Ghai states:

> Disability in the Indian context is often understood as a 'lack' or 'deficit' as well as a 'difference'. Very few people accept the fact that disability is as much a social construct as, say, gender. Since the normative culture in India and the world over carries existential and aesthetic anxieties about differences of any kind, be it caste, class, gender, race or disability, people who are impaired in any way have to live with markers such as 'disabled', 'handicapped', 'crippled', 'differently-abled' and 'special'. This results in an existence marked by acute marginalisation, discrimination and stigmatisation, and disability appears more as a personal quest and tragedy to be borne alone. Even those of us who have lived and studied in apparently inclusive educational institutions, have felt the intolerant attitude of Indian society towards disability. (www.tarshi.net)

The socio-cultural practices in India are in many ways influenced by myths and legends as it has been largely internalized by the masses. Therefore, Indians see every aspect of life through the prism of *dharma.* The 'doing' and 'performing' of the rituals represents the unquestioned acceptance of the supposed 'naturalness' of the order of things. Disability is transformed into a kind of 'natural' phenomena in India.

The variations of the body or deformity are seen as deviations from the set norms of the society. The divergences, in most of the Indian socio-cultural and religious context, are regarded as divine retribution of bad *karma.* Therefore, it is seen as a natural or divinely ordained outcome or occurrence, ubiquitous as the rising and setting of the Sun. It is implied that the disability is a punishment of past sins or inability to perform the *dharma*. This interpolation of religious (and for that matter socio-cultural) orthodoxy with the biological physique or body is a kind of *deus ex machina* in the whole narrative of disability complicating the understanding of disability further as this discourse makes it an inconclusive and an unfathomable phenomenon.

Disability viewed as atonement for past acts of omissions and commissions in the cycle of birth and rebirth deprives the person of the basic human attributes, dignity, and compassion. Further, as it is seen as deserving of his/ her predicament, individuals with disability are left with a sense of guilt forever. When issues and problems are seen from this perspective, it becomes difficult to demystify the matter. In India, there is much mystification in every aspect of life and its socio-cultural practices. As elsewhere in the world, disability in India is seen from the lens of norms and normalcy, however the same has been complicated because it has been interpolated with *dharma* and *karma*. There's an element of *dues ex machina* in the discourse on disability in India, a narrative which takes a mystic form.

Stigmatization of disability on the basis of religious interpretation reinforces the traditional misconceptions of the disabled persona, placing guilt on the disabled person add insult to injury and represents the violent nature of socio-cultural practices as it *others* and disowns an individual simply because they appear different.

The predominantly able-bodied society tends to see everything from the perspective of able-bodied-*ness* and is unable to accept difference and plurality of the multiple forms of the body.

In India, adding religious (socio-cultural) orthodoxy to justify an essentially social construct mystifies the whole problem. Instead of opening up the issue for an objective assessment it serves to obliterate it under the rubric of spiritual determinism as it is generally taken as a matter of personal transgressions or bad *karma*. Disability is considered a personal matter, not a political one where the society has no stake or role to play. But, in this case the personal is very much political. It ignores or plays down the important role society plays in creating disabled category. In India, the socio-cultural narratives tempered by the notion of *dharma* and *karma* create a discourse of the debilitating experience of deformity of the body and disability as a process of personal atonement and is taken as 'natural' or seen as divinely ordained.

In the Indian socio-cultural milieu disability is considered 'natural' because of the deeply embedded socio-cultural discourses rooted in mythology. This aspect obliterates the underlying undertones/overtones, and cross-currents of socio-cultural forces that are at work which have institutionalized disabled identities. Since ages, as is evident from mythology and literary representations of the disabled, the same has never been questioned. Until as recent as 1960s and 70s (the spurt in disability rights movements and disability studies thereafter) disability was assumed as 'natural'. Traditional socio-cultural notions and practices took it as a 'natural' order of things as it occurs in nature, determined in large measure by one's *dharma* and *karma*.

Postmodernism's love affair with plurality and difference has ultimately served to deconstruct the myth of disability. It subtracts norms, mythology, and naturalness from the equation of understanding disability that has coloured it thus far and squarely places the body as a site of metaphors; the materiality of the body as a socio-cultural continuum between the medical and the spiritual. In a casteist society relations between groups of people are based on relations of power, the same is true with patriarchy, where the relations between the sexes depend on power. In the case

of the relationships between the able-bodied and disabled-bodied it is basically the question of power that is at work and which takes centre-stage. In reality, it is the casteist and patriarchal notions of power and dominance that has served to constitute disabled identities in India. Sanctioned by religion (socio-cultural practices) or *dharma*, and systematically justified as 'natural' collaterals of one's *karma*, the onus of disability is suitably placed on the doorstep of the disabled individuals themselves. This has filled the minds of the disabled individuals (and their families) with guilt and shame alienating them from the mainstream. Care givers and activists opine that the actual number of people with disability in India is much more than the official statistics as many are driven underground with a sense of guilt and shame. Families and individuals concerned are loathe to disclose it and attempts to hide it from the prying eyes of the society which at times are offensive in nature.

A postmodernist approach in critiquing the disability phenomenon in the society has opened the doors to *deconstruct* disability by identifying the core mechanism through which it works, constitutes, and institutionalises disability as a 'natural' phenomenon in the society. Postmodernism's emphasis on plurality has opened up an avenue which sees the different traits of the body and (dis)abilities not as deformities, disabilities or impure form but as multiplicity or plurality of forms. Because like 'meaning' of a word, which is not fixed or given but which keeps on *differ*-ing and *defer*-ring, the body too is fluid and slippery matter whose form differs and defers continuously, something which is not fixed or given for eternity. Therefore, the variations of the body are a case of multiplicity of forms or plurality. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the idea or concept of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' as put forward by Robert McRuer held sway over the common people's minds. A systematic institutionalization of the same prevailed over much of the socio-cultural practices in the society. Locution is an indicator to these observable facts in circulation that has reinforced disability in common parlance. For example, terms such as norms, normal, normalcy, normality, abnormal, able-bodied, disabled, deformity, normates, natural, etc. violently *disciplines* the body to conform to the idea of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' with its constant focus on beauty and fitness of the body as 'healthy' amelioration.

The issue of disability in India is fraught with caste consciousness and patriarchal social structure which regulates the psychological and cultural behaviour. The origin of casteism in India is lost in millennial obscurity so is that of patriarchy, both of which are very much pronounced in India. These two facets of Indian society have an affinity with Western mores of racial prejudices which despises the coloured people with a sense of racial superiority bordering on paranoia and extreme exploitation of the blacks and other coloured people. It operates on the matrices of power and dominance embedded in the psyche and cultural behaviour. Nirad C. Chauduri in *The Continent of Circe: Essays on the People of India* (1965) has opined that the predominant Hindu populace of India traces its ancestry to the Europeans or the Aryan race. For that reason, it can be argued with a little bit of reductionism that casteism in India is a derivative of the European or Aryan prejudices on race, and gender relations of patriarchy; casteism being a derivative form of racism, and the predominance of the male in the Indian social customs that of the Western patriarchy.

The predominant caste system in India is tied up with the Hindu philosophy or principles of existence which classifies people into four hierarchically ranked castes called *varnas*, i.e. Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Indras/ Sudras (untouchables) respectively (from top to bottom of the social hierarchy). Along with these main castes there are numerous other sub-castes called *Jatis* that socially distinguishes people according to the distribution of labour or occupation. (The Hindu Holy Scriptures recognises only four *varnas* and therefore, the tribes are not even a part of this caste system rather they are considered uncouth or uncivilized sub-humans.) This classification of people according to hierarchical caste structure determines access to resources, knowledge, power, and privilege in the Indian society. The positions of power and influence in the society are dominated or monopolized by a few dominant castes (Pintane 2010). Generally, the two upper castes, Brahmans and Kshatriyas are ritually considered as superior to the lower castes due to the nobility of their birth (Smith 43). The Brahmans, usually priests and scholars, are at the top, consider themselves to be pure in body and soul and therefore, closer to the divine. They appropriate knowledge and control wealth as exclusive access to knowledge gives them the upper hand to devise the discourses of

the social narratives. Brian K. Smith, the author of *Classifying the Universe*: *The Ancient Indian* '*Varna*' *System and the Origins of Caste* (1994), explained his definition of the Brahman caste thus:

> The Brahmin class is essentially defined by its supposed priority (as the class created first by the creator god), by knowledge of the Veda, and by the monopoly this class holds on the operation of sacrifice. These traits justify the social position of the class vis-à-vis others: they are predominant because they are prior, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate "weapons," sacrificial techniques. (1994: 48)

The logic behind the classification of people on the basis of caste in India is not to devolve power, rather to control power and access to all form of resources. Racism which has been of critical concern in Western societies springs from the same principle of power relations in social order and thought as per the Aryan sense of superiority and its domineering attitude over other races (eg. blacks and browns) whom they regard as inferiors. In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2001) Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic says:

> A third theme of critical race theory, the "social construction" thesis, holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory. (2001: 8-9)

There are a number of social constructs in place in the society that has shaped the outlook of social thought, and social relations; Casteism and Racism being the

two widespread practices, with Casteism being the predominant practice in India, and the other, Racism in the Western societies. Along with these two predominant practices, there is another widespread socio-cultural tradition that springs from social practices which are common to both, India as well as the West, i.e. *Patriarchy*. Although the ways through which this is practiced or implemented in the society subtly differ from one another, there exist some similarities in the dogma of male dominance and precedence of men over women in the social order. Here, it is noteworthy to quote Bell Hooks:

> Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (2010: 1)

Gerda Lerner who studied the origin of patriarchy in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987) in Western societies has opined that the gradual changes in the economic system were responsible for the beginning of patriarchy. She remarks that (in the ancient times) a change from 'hunter gatherers' to 'farming and agriculture' began to divide labour between men and women and instilled the tradition of private ownership of property. Lerner contends that it is the division of labour which is primarily responsible for 'domesticating' women by assigning them with 'less-arduous' tasks on the basis of gender. A beginning was made in defining and assigning roles on the basis of gender. Consequently, the women folk was considered less abled to attend to arduous tasks and that only men are capable to attend to it with their "superior" physical, mental, and intellectual prowess. This is a practice which has gradually metamorphosed into a tradition, a system, and its institutionalization. This has come to be known as patriarchy. The undercurrent of this 'structuring' is the issue of 'ability' to *perform* or *do* work efficiently leading to productivity and economic gain. Patriarchy considers women as less abled compared to men. Therefore, patriarchy subjugates women in the social order and thought. Similarly, casteism operates on similar principles of power and dominance by a group over the less privileged. There is a presumption of superiority by the dominant group over the less privileged.

In the three major dimensions of the organisation of social order and thought there is a particular common interest, i.e. the issue of power. The distribution of power by classification in casteism, differentiation/discrimination in racism, and domination in patriarchy, enables it to exert influence and dominance by a group/ class, race or sex over another as they control power and assume a position of superiority in physical and intellectual spheres. The social order and thought (psychological and cultural behaviour) of the generic Indian man towards the disabled individual oscillates between casteism and patriarchy, these two are the main structural strands of Indian culture. It needs mention here that casteism is an exclusive Indian phenomenon, whereas racism is an exclusive phenomenon of the West. But patriarchy is a common phenomenon of both the Indian and the Western societies where power is the predominant coordinate that regulate socio-cultural life and the corresponding political responses.

As the disabled individuals are seen through the perspectives of power, the interpolation of Marxist dialectics of materialism complicates the problem of disability further. Considered useless and a burden on the economy, individuals with different traits of the bodies and different range of abilities are rendered 'disabled' and powerless. They are then dominated by the able-bodied or normal people because of the different manifestations of their bodies and different range of abilities. In Marxist dialectics, a premium is placed on the utility of the body, its fitness and beauty is a source of income and wealth in this analysis and perspective. This plays a pivotal role in the structuring of socio-cultural representation of the disabled identities. The disabled bodies having been considered of comparatively less value economically and as a burden on the economy in the scheme of things, the disabled are thus disempowered and marginalized. Very often they are stigmatized by the able-bodied in the mainstream society. People with disabilities have long been viewed as burdens on society. The disabled people are regarded as having less utility value or usefulness because of the limitations of their bodies, deformity, impurity of the bodies, and mental/ intellectual weaknesses. Like women and the lower castes the disabled are marginalized by the able-bodied because socio-economic system plays a powerful role in determining the shape of the social hierarchy.

The practice of casteism in India with its hierarchical structure is based on a similar strand, the exercise of power and dominance of the high castes over lower castes where there is a strict distribution of labour. The distribution of labour among the different castes is simply not a normal division of labour but a control of power and domination. The top rung in the hierarchy, the Brahmans, appropriate for themselves the 'knowledge and skill'. The monopoly over knowledge and skill enables them to exercise power and dominance. In his book *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972), cultural historian and theorist Michel Foucault has made a scathing observation on the intrinsic relationship between knowledge and power. In short, Foucault contends that knowledge is power (where the two are related to each other from the opposite ends), and the denial of knowledge is, therefore, a denial of power. By denying knowledge to other 'lower' castes, the top echelons of the caste hierarchy control the levers of power and exert dominance in a systematic 'disabling' exercise.

Racism survives on the same basis, the assumed superiority of the Whites over the coloured people by assuming and appropriating a superior knowledge, culture or for that matter civilization itself; denying knowledge and skill to others so as to exercise power and exert dominance. Critical race studies has revealed that the denial of history to the Blacks is a concerted exercise in obliterating cultural memory and any remnants of it so as to render them 'invisible' and powerless. In literary representations of *Racism* Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* (1952) is one of those writings which captures the pain and anger of a race rendered 'invisible' because the majoritarian Whites simply choose to ignore him and his coloured race. They become non-entities in the society. Their presence is not even acknowledged and in such a situation they are marginalized to a point of hopelessness. This novel is a beautiful narrative of the exercise of power in the hierarchical social structures.

Similarly, feminist and gender studies have pointed out the systematic exercise of power and dominance by the patriarchal society. There is a systematic and methodical control of the flow of knowledge. The knowledge that is circulated systematically reformulates ideas and prejudices to make it look as though it is the reality and the 'truth'. In actuality, it is designed to reinforce certain strategic

methods of male dominance and power. The oft quoted line in feminist movements, "one is not born a woman, but becomes one"[16] succinctly highlights the gravity of the issue which is responsible for the social construction of the female subject. Perhaps, this less quoted statement by Beauvoir will serve to make the point clearer in the present context of the discussions surrounding the issue of power and dominance of women in a patriarchal social structure. Beauvoir writes in the same book:

> Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior; she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority. (1989: 754)

The categorization of people into various groups and identities through differentiation/discrimination of the body are apparent in the dynamics of casteism, racism, patriarchy and disability. They are occasioned by power and the concomitant privileges that trickle from it. Power is the chief factor which drives the social order and thought of the society. In the same vein, Foucault adds a different vibe to this idea of power dynamics by bringing in the paraphernalia of *Sexuality* in the equations surrounding body and disability. The disability phenomenon too, emerges as a case of exercise of power and dominance over the differently abled by the predominantly able-bodied society. Firstly, there is a systematic denial of knowledge and skill by the able-bodied or 'normal' people because of their indifferent abilities and so in most cases knowledge is withheld/ denied from them which make them doubly disabled. Secondly, the 'disabled' and the 'deformed' bodies are denied their basic human attributes like sexuality which obliterates their human attributes leading to their stigmatization and marginalization in the society. Crucially, the same has been justified in India through the curious interpolation of myths and religious sanctity in the disability narrative.

With Casteism and Patriarchy already operating as the two predominant paradigms (considering Casteism and Racism to be of similar nature) of social order and thought (the exercise of power and dominance over the less powerful and less privileged classes, people or sex) in the socio-cultural and political discourses of the Indian cultural milieu, the discourses on disability add the third paradigm in the

existing socio-cultural praxes in India. The matrix of society which depends on a large measure on the economic factors places a premium on the body. Its ability to contribute towards the economic system, its particular abilities/ capabilities becomes a primary asset. According to Goffman (1963), people who are poor, ugly, crippled or unsuccessful are viewed as failures; they have a spoiled identity and are stigmatized. As such the disabled individual falls at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder as it has no economic value.

Disability is an identity formed by discourses that revolve around the question of power and dominance, a condition which is cross-cultural and universal. It can happen to anyone at any moment regardless of one's social position, power or status. No one is immune to this condition, but susceptible anywhere and any moment due to various factors like sickness, accident, age, etc. Therefore, this condition has had a psychological effect on the human thought processes. Disability makes people anxious (Watermeyer 2013). The sight of the disabled figure disturbs the psychological equilibrium of human beings. Disability of the body instils a sense of fear in the psyche of the people which they try to deny or ignore unconsciously. Deborah Marks in her influential work on psychoanalytic approaches to the study of disability emphasises the influence of intra-psychic states of the disability experience (Marks 1999). There is an emotional quotient in the understanding of disability. Disability fascinates and intrigues us; it draws us closer, but also repels us (Sinason 1992). It is a state of being of the human condition which everyone despises. Disabled people have in many societies come to symbolize the most damaged, undesirable, shameful and unwanted parts of our humanity which we all bear within us (Marks 1999; Murphy 1995; Shakespeare 1994). The psychoanalytical dialectic in the understanding of disability, on a subconscious level, shows that the able-bodied people see a reflection of their alter-ego in the disabled persona. In the Indian socio-cultural milieu, disability is seen as an aberration or an exception occasioned by bad *karma* and brushed aside under the rubric of mythological narratives.

Mythology, in the Indian social order and thought, is a discourse that 'normalizes' the disability experience. It is a discourse which confers power over anxiety and fear as every person on earth is susceptible to disability. Thus far in the

discussion of disability a parallel has been drawn between disability and other paradigms like Casteism, Racism and Patriarchy that operate on the dynamics of power relations. Even the psychological approach to disability betrays the same issue of power as regards the psychic state of the mind, the anxiety to control or have power over the disability condition. In all these, the issue of power is universal and cross-cultural; it is the common denominator that runs through the structure of social order and thought of the society like Caste, Race, Patriarchy, and Disability in varying degrees. This paradigmatic approach based on power relations has thus far played a significant role in determining *normalcy* in every aspect of the society. The legitimacy and primacy that power can confer became magnetic for people for social control and repression. Similarly, in India, *dharma* or the basic principles of existence in the world revolves around this same logic, i.e. the appropriation of knowledge and power.

However, Michel Foucault opines that power is neither a given nor an end in itself. In his landmark work on sexuality, viz. the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1978 {1976}) Foucault deconstructs the concept of power which produces an ideology of the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' in the society through discourse. His thought provoking ideas in "The Will to Knowledge", the introductory volume in the landmark book on sexuality, i.e. *The History of Sexuality* (1978 {1976}) debunks the existing theoretical positions on social control and repression based on raw power (Bristow 168). Foucault presents an additional paradigm redirecting the focus from raw power towards sexuality in the regulation of social order (Bristow 169). This emphasis on power places sexuality at the strategic point of "dense transfer point for relations of power" between different categories of the body based on discourses circulated in the society. Foucault states his views on sexuality explicitly:

> Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity obedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those

> endowed with the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.
>
> There is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all the manifestations of sex. For example, the idea that there have been repeated attempts, by various means, to reduce all of sex to its reproductive function, its heterosexual and adult form, and its matrimonial legitimacy fails to take into account the manifold objectives aimed for, the manifold means employed in the different sexual politics concerned with the two sexes, the different age groups and social classes. (*The History of Sexuality Vol. I.* 1978: 103)

In the above quoted statements Foucault has articulated in very clear language that the term *sexuality* is heavy and loaded with multiple and wide range of meanings and signification that throw light on the hitherto unknown aspects of the body in determining social order and thought. This brings out *sexuality* from the narrow confine of the conventional definitions to which it has been subjected to thus far in the common parlance to mean much more than sexual drive, sexual preferences, sexual orientation, sexual identity, etc. to include, among other things, a larger and wider range of issues involving not only sexual behaviour, but also sexual identity, gender identity, personality, attitudes, thought, feelings, etc. It is an umbrella term which includes other socio-cultural aspects of human behaviour and concern like ethics, morality, and spirituality of an individual. For an individual, being human depends on and revolves around the question of sexuality throughout life, which performs according to the circulation of power by employing discourse, discursive formation, and discursive regime (Foucault 1978 {1976}). It speaks of historical narratives that have been used to legitimize certain modes of behaviour, thought, feeling, doing, etc. in the society; a discursive practice that produces docile bodies.

For Foucault, the body is neither ahistorical nor prediscursive but essentially historical and cultural artefact whose identity changes with time and discourse. He identifies locution, the historically variable ways of speaking, talking and writing etc. as discursive practices to "articulate what is desirable and undesirable, legitimate and

illegitimate, within a culture" (Bristow 2007: 170) iterating his view that the body is not self-evident or a given but subject to discourse in a given time, which can be both an instrument and effect of power. In the chapter titled "The Deployment of Sexuality" in the book *The History of Sexuality* (1978 {1976}), Foucault says:

> There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and sub-species of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturally' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. I.* 1978: 101)

In the above quoted lines Foucault elaborates the nineteenth-century system and practices of stigmatization, categorization, and classification of the body. Foucault brings to light the surveillance of sexual perversion and the legitimizing discourses that circulated in the society. He identifies sexuality as the locus of power with the presumption that sexuality shapes and determines all other relations of power. For Foucault, sexuality is an intense gravitational force or centre that determines all patterns of power as well as relations of power between people. Multiple factors are influenced by, and in turn influence an individual's sexuality. "Sex" is generally taken to be a self-evident fact of nature and biology. However, Foucault contends that "sex" is the most speculative, most ideal and most internal element in the dynamics of power as its grip on bodies, materiality, forces, energies, sensations and pleasures is a systematic deployment of sexuality (Foucault 1978: 155). Foucault argues that the modern relations of power, largely determined by sexuality produce different identities and categories of the body, i.e. its form and shapes. It defines bodies by putting in place limits to their possible/acceptable avatars which lead to the formation of identities/categories such as disablement and disability among a host of others (Shelley Tremain 192). So far as the disability theorists, activists and researchers are concerned they continue to read disability identity and disablement phenomena within Foucault's "juridico-discursive"[17] dialectics of power. The

interpolation of sexuality with power germinates a method of classification, identification and control of different bodies. Foucault uses the term "dividing practices"[18] to refer to this aspect and contends that it is an attempt to *normalize* different bodies. Foucault writes:

> [A] power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms.....Such power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendour; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign form his obedient subjects;....it effects distribution around the norm.....[T]he law operates more and more as a norm, and.....the juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are on the most part regulatory. (*The History of Sexuality Vol. I.* 1978: 144)

Under the circumstances it is contingent to approach disability identity and disablement phenomena within Foucault's "juridico-discursive" dialectics of power in the society. Disability emerges as a larger narrative of the extant socio-cultural system deeply embedded in the society centred on the locus of power in the body's sexuality.

Therefore, the understanding of disability has to take into account the question of sexuality in its myriad connotations that it signifies. In India, the term sexuality has been much misunderstood and tabooed. There is a strict regulation of the same in the Indian socio-cultural milieu as it was the case in Victorian England. Socio-cultural discourses regulate the lives of people with strict moral dictum where 'sex' and 'sexuality' are hush-hush matter and are not to be spoken in polite conversation. It is observed that, as much as sexuality is regulated in the society, sexuality in turn regulates the behaviour and identity of the individuals. People with disability in India as elsewhere in the world are considered as lacking in 'sexuality' or incapable of having sexuality or in some cases assumed as being 'oversexed' due to the different conditions of their bodies. This treatment of people with diverse manifestations of the body deprives them of basic human attributes. Socio-cultural discourses are attuned or designed for the needs and comfort of the able-bodied

where the disabled are kept out of the entire picture. Considered unequal, the disable-bodied is excluded from the mainstream society by the so called normates. The structure of the society is such that they cannot take part in its socio-cultural and economic activities.

Literary writings of India, if one takes Indian writings in English, particularly its novels reveal the widespread attitude and treatment of people with disability/disabilities. The Indian writing in English which is now widely acknowledged as a distinct genre of its own, representing the unique cultural heritage of India has so far failed to appropriate in its realm the issue of disability in its writings. Disabled characters have little or no space in the literary representations, and the few that do are caricatured and are objects of ridicule. Disabled characters have never been cast as the main characters, which is the same with Western literatures too. In Indian novels/writings in English, the literary representation of the disabled person appears quite lately in the literary creations of notable Indian writers in English such as, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002), and Pramila Balasundaram's *Sunny's Story* (2005), to name a few. These works reveal the socio-cultural stereotyping of the disabled body and the existence of disability phenomenon across time and cultural spaces. Among these hosts of writers, Firdaus Kanga is an important figure in the literary world of Indian novels/writings in English. So far as the exploration of the subject and theme of disability in literary works is concerned it is noteworthy to explore the literary works of Kanga. He was born in a Parsi family in 1960 at Bombay (now Mumbai) and is a writer as well as an actor, a severely disabled individual caused by a crippling disease called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* (brittle bones disease). He has written a series of critically acclaimed books such as—*Trying to Grow* (1990), *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), *The Godmen* (1995), and *The Surprise Ending* (1996). Kanga's first literary creation *Trying to Grow* (1990), a semi-autobiographical novel, has been adapted into a critically acclaimed movie titled 'Sixth Happiness' in which he has acted his own self. *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a novel that explores society, culture, disability and sexuality from the perspective of the lived experiences of a 'disabled' individual in

the society. Because of his lived experiences the literary creations of Firdaus Kanga gain an added resonance in the exploration of the theme of disability in literature.

Firdaus Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) moves beyond the conventional and traditional discourses on disability which is centred on the 'medical model' on disability and breaks several taboos portraying 'disabled' people with healthy and rich sexual desires and appetites. *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a novel which raises a strong voice of dissent and protest against the stereotyping and objectification of the 'disabled' people by the larger 'compulsory able-bodied' society which generally treats them with apathy as asexual beings, without any sexuality. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, the subject of sexuality itself is a contested topic in the general context of the Indian Writings in English that has so far failed to address the same in a broad and holistic manner from the standpoint of Indian cultural milieu. Firdaus Kanga's major works present a rich and varied area for exploration on the intersection of disability and sexuality.

Most of the Indian writings in English seldom talk about 'sexuality' and 'disability' as a major agenda in the literary representations where the major topics have mainly revolved around politics, identity, cultural conflict, post-colonialism, etc. Topics like 'sexuality' and 'disability' in the Indian cultural ethos appear quite radical for the comfort of its sensibilities. It was as late as the 1990s with the emergence of a disabled writer viz. Firdaus Kanga who unabashedly brought 'sexuality' and 'disability' from the closet to the cultural mainstream.

Firdaus Kanga's writings have opened up the hitherto unexplored area in Indian socio-cultural contexts which have so far remained neglected, cast aside from the mainstream literary discourses. Being a 'disabled' person himself Kanga in his semi-autobiographical work *Trying to Grow* (1990) talks of his 'disability' and sexual desires, making it clear that disabled individuals are not asexual. He has a robust appetite for life and an active sexual imagination ad desire as any 'normal' able-bodied person, displaying the same amount of energy and rigour. He has been able to change the discursive practices surrounding the issues of disability and sexuality as he speaks about his personal experiences and desire for same sex relationship or urges. Homo-sexuality which is a much tabooed aspect of the social

reality in India is a much despised and stigmatized issue, and the homosexuals are marginalized and stigmatized people in India. Being a disabled individual himself, the writings by Kanga represent a realistic picture of the issue of disability and its relation to sexuality in the Indian context. The close association of the problem of disability with sexuality, the way they affect each other through power relations gets a concrete representation in his writings. Through the life of the protagonist it can be seen how disability is influenced by, and in turn influences sexuality.

Conflating each other, disability and sexuality emerges as a locus of power. Foucault's enumeration of the concept 'juridico-discursive' dialectics of power in *The History of Sexuality* (1978 {1976}) finds a succinct literary expression in Kanga's works. Whereas the writings by other prominent writers handle disability with nonchalance and from a position of superiority and distance, the writings by Kanga have a personal touch to it and exhibit a firsthand account of the lived experiences of disability and a disabled body's tryst with sexuality in a public domain. Although the writings by Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Pramila Balasundaram deal with disability they are found to shy away from the question of sexuality. The intersection of disability and sexuality are not dealt with as they fail to see the interconnectedness between the two extremes. It can be discerned that due to his lived experiences Kanga was able to identify the inter-connectedness of both. The inability on the part of the able-bodied writers to see the fine line between disability and sexuality and their relationship brings into focus the ways through which the disabled experiences have been 'rendered invisible'. The ways through which the 'juridico-discursive' practices have stigmatized, obliterated, and marginalized them from the normalized society. Kanga's works are significant departures from the conventional writings that dominated the Indian writings in English. While narrativizing disability and sexuality Kanga breaks the shackles of the prevalent 'Victorian prudery'[19] in the Indian socio-cultural milieu towards the much despised (and tabooed) issues of disability and sexuality.

Endnotes:

[1]Normates: In her argument in "Extraordinary Bodies", Garland-Thomson, coins a particularly useful term, "the normate" to talk about "disabled figures". The *normate* is the composite identity position held by those unmarked by stigmatized identifiers of disability (or race or gender for that matter). The *normate* is the imagined everyman whose self-determination, independence, rational thinking ability, and physical sturdiness makes American democracy philosophically possible. The disabled figure–the cripple, the invalid, the idiot–comes to represent everything that the *normate* is not. While Garland Thomson identifies this dynamic as the driving constitutive force of disability identity in American culture, she acknowledges that ability/disability distinctions have meant different things within different times and cultural contexts; in theory, this assertion opens the possibility that by resisting oppressive representations of disability, the culture of abelism might be changed.

[2]From Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Meaning a kind of taming of the body by subjecting it through the rigours of rules and norms.

[3]According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations."
[WHO. Disabilities. Available at http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/]

[4]Other**:** a historically and culturally specific process of differentiating. It is important to recognize, however, that the other is not, in any simple way, the direct opposite of the self. Rather, the two exist in a complex relation that undermines any simplistic conception of self/other, inside/outside or centre/margin. Nor is the other a stable or unchanging entity. Rather, it is best thought of as a site or location upon which we project all the qualities that we – as individual subjects, social groups or even nations – most fear, or dislike, about ourselves. In other words, the other is a construct.

[5]That which conforms to the 'norm', the state of being 'normal'.

[6]Othering: the process of differentiating in a historical and cultural context, construction of the Other.

[7]Susan Wendell in the book *The Rejected Body* (1996) said proposed the idea/ concept of social construction of disability just like Gender is a social construction. She said "I claim that disability, like Gender, is socially constructed." (p. 57)

[8]Term used by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997) to refer to the ways the disabled bodies are looked at.

[9]The slogan "The Personal is Political" is largely considered a mantra of the 70s feminist movement, the second-wave of feminism. The saying actually comes directly from an essay of the same title written by a feminist by the name of Carol Hanisch in 1969.

[10]Lennard J. Davis in "Introduction: Normality, Power, and Culture" Davis, Lennard J. (ed.); *The Disability Studies Reader*, (Fourth edition), states that the term *norm* came into currency in the seventeenth century with practices and discourses surrounding a certain set of notions of the human body.

[11]Referring to those who is employed to display clothes or other merchandise; in this context, people with certain configurations of the body who are considered as the ideal body.

[12]Aristotle in *Generation of Animals* assumes that the male body is the natural (and perfected) prototype whereas that of a woman as digressions from the natural order and as such is "as it were a natural deformity." (trans. A. L. Peck).

[13]Rosemarie Garland-Thomson "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory", Feminist Disability Studies, 2002, pp. 6.

[14]Term coined by Robert McRuer (1999), an extension of the idea of Adrienne Rich's famous analysis of "Compulsory Heterosexuality" (1986).

[15]In her famous critique of compulsory heterosexuality Adrienne Rich opens the essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" with the suggestion that lesbian existence has often been "simply rendered invisible". She says, "The bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or *simply rendered invisible*, could be illustrated from many other texts than the two just preceding." Suggesting that the society which harps on norms have come to accept 'heterosexuality' as normal and in the process it overrides the possibility/ presence of other sexualities.

[16] A defining statement by one of feminism's key thinkers, Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (1952).

[17]Foucault's model of power enunciated in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*. He contends that there is always a negative relationship between sex and power where power's ultimate objective is to suppress sex. However, Foucault adamantly contradicts this belief throughout the book as he claims that power works to bring sex into discourse. Rather than suppressing sex, power wishes to approach it in a more controlled manner.

[18]Foucault defined three modes of objectification, which are organizing principles that explain how human beings become subjects. These modes are: (i) dividing practices**,** (ii) scientific classification and (iii) subjectification. Dividing practices involves the exclusion of people who are viewed as a threat to the community.

[19]Referring to the strict moral views of people living at the time of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) and the general moral climate of in the United Kingdom of the 19th century. These values spread to the colonies and today the phrase infers set values that espouse sexual restraint and social behaviour.

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CHAPTER - III

Intersection of Disability, Culture and Sexuality: A Study of the Cultural Narratives of India

A 'cultural turn'[1] occurred in the understanding of disability and sexuality during the 1970s. Henceforth, it began to focus on disability primarily as a case of social constructionism where the 'ab/normality' of the body is abetted by exclusionary social institutions, cultural systems and physical infrastructures that are mainly geared for the able-bodied. Bodies that are beyond the confine of 'normality' are generally seen as 'disabled' because they are different and fail to perform certain tasks with a measure of efficiency. 'Normality' and 'performativity' constitutes two important parameters through which the physicality of the body is regarded as belonging or not belonging to the category of the 'normal'. This has its roots in the historicist or cultural-materialist understanding of the body. In recent years, academia has emphasized on the social constructionism of disability because it is a cross-cultural and universal phenomenon. This paradigm shifts in the analysis of disability emerged out of a specific political context[2] in the West.

Shifting the emphasis away from biological determinism, social constructionism considers the body beyond its biological physique and appearances and seeks to decode the body of its metaphors. The social model's critiques of disability takes into account the disabling social structures and meanings construed by cultural systems which generally magnify the pronounced difference in the materiality of the body as disability. It is a cumulative summation of the differences of biomedical being and the cultural outlook and perspectives of the same. Apparently, the medical model is simplistic and technical[3] as it remains confined to technicalities of the body. It is the social attitudes and the consequent physical conduct, dealing and handling of these diverse manifestations of the body which makes a body disabled. The medical model of disability is reflected in the definition offered by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It says:

> Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a

> problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.[4]

Thereafter, there came about a paradigm shift from the medical model to social model (from about 1980s), contributed in large measure by the infusion of the field of anthropology in disability studies. Significantly, the use of ethnographic, phenomenological, and cross-cultural methods by anthropologists have contributed to the understanding of disability in a social and cultural context (McDermott 1995; Senghas 2002). The emergence of the social model has thrown light on disability as a social phenomenon where the physicality of the body is structured differently by various social structures that primarily perceives deviant bodies as not just a technical (bio-medical) problem of the individual concerned but, which involves cultural praxes of the wider society.

The definition of disability based on a medical model of interpreting the physicality of the body centres on technicalities that measure the body according to a set of parameters considered 'normal', and its subsequent classification according to the accepted set of statistics considered vital for performativity. This culture of norms has far reaching influence in the society particularly, in the way communities across cultures perceives and reacts to disabled bodies, stigmatizing and marginalizing the deviant bodies. The emergence of social model has come to offer a humane perspective of disability which took place as a result of Ablon's pioneering ethnographic approach to the study of disability. Particularly, his work with stigmatized populations helped to move medical anthropology from a disease framework of disability to an ethnographic focus (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz 2005; Shuttleworth 2001).

Taking into account various social factors, Ablon's ethnographic research on disability identifies the larger physical environment as unequal and prohibitive to individuals with different bodies and abilities which goes further from the simple 'technical' understanding of disability and in so doing shifts the onus from the individual's body to the social institutions, cultural systems and physical

infrastructures. These are found to be exclusionary, designed exclusively for a certain section of individuals considered 'normal' while at the same time making it uncomfortable and prohibitive for individuals with different abilities which hinders their equal participation in the activities of the society that come ''into play as a result of bodily differences'' (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz 2005: 142).

The society is on the whole unequal and discriminatory to those individuals with different bodies and abilities. The social model brought about a humane understanding and treatment of the individuals with different dimensions of the body and abilities, their social inclusion and equal participation considered a much needed answer to disability phenomenon. Particularly, Western cultures in the words of Patrick Devlieger have been lately, ".....focussing on the improvement of functions and activities of daily living" (1995: 104) of the disabled bearing in mind that they need to treat and approach this issue with empathy. Fixated with equality and freedom of the individual, the Western cultural mores regards the prevalence of disability in the society as symptomatic of an unjust and unequal cultural system that needs to be done away with as far as practicable. Gradually attempting to shift its focus, ".....from the clinic toward the community, where individuals and families live with deficits" (Benedicte Ingstad & Susan Reynolds Whyte 1995: 4), makes the society a more liveable space for the disabled. Social model endeavours to provide a level playing field or equality to persons with disability.

In a way, society's undue emphasis on 'abnormality' of the body imposes a kind of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2006) creating in its wake the category of disable-bodied and disability which is nothing but an intolerance of bodies that are different and which supposedly does not belong to the norm. 'Compulsory able-bodiedness', the social model makes it clear, is a myth just like 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1980). Bodies exist in different forms and configurations where there is plurality or pluralism in the manifestations of the body. Bodies of different shape and sizes are simply different versions not the *Other*. There is a cultural process of *Othering* the different versions of the body based on assumptions which problematizes the whole issue. Therefore, there is a growing perspective particularly, in the Western cultures that the "[c]ultural assumptions

about the body and personhood must be seen in the context of ordinary social interaction" (1995: 4). This change in perspective has injected a sense of objectivity in the understanding of disability and has introduced humanitarian facet into the discourse of disability at a time when the disabled individuals were largely dehumanised as mutilated bodies and even worse as 'asexual/ sexless' in the first place. Therefore, their responses to this phenomenon display a humanitarian discourse designed for social inclusion of individuals with different bodies especially with its welfare, structured for the amelioration of individuals with different abilities by making their lived experiences less painful through various social, political and legislative measures. What is of interest and importance is that contemporary cultures particularly, the Western is now compassionate towards individuals with disability. To a large extent, the social model has liberated the disabled individuals from the marginal spaces. Further, it has unravelled the cultural myths that feed the notions of 'asexual/ sexlessness' of the disabled individuals thereby, resurrecting them as 'normal' *homo sapiens* with the same human attributes as an able-bodied.

Across time and spaces, disability is a universally prevalent phenomenon. Disabled individuals are ubiquitous in every society, nevertheless, literary representation of disabled individuals and disability has remained negligible failing to represent them objectively and accurately. In the case of the disabled individuals and their literary representations Aristotle's assessment in *Poetics*, "literary representation depends more on probability—what people take to be accurate—than on reality" [cited in Titchkosky, Tanya & Rod Michalko (eds.) *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.: Toronto, 2009, pp. 67] holds true. The literary representations of disability have been speculative. Although, it is evident that disabled characters have existed in literatures since the ages the literary representation of the same was not based on reality. For a very long time, the understanding of disability has been shaped by one kind of assumption or the other, and is mostly represented as mere peripheral characters. The main characters have never been a disabled person or represented with disability. As Paul Robinson notes—"the disabled, like all minorities, have .... existed not as subjects of art, but merely as its occasions" (cited in Rosemarie Garland Thomson *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture*, 1997, p.

9). This indicates that the disabled individuals are non-entities in the society. Although the disabled hail from different backgrounds they are grouped together under one single roof without a name and a face. For that reason, they hardly merit any individual attention in the social space and literary representations.

There is a deafening silence in literary representations of disabled characters. The muddled perception of disability and muted literary representation of disabled characters can be seen as a result of historical cultural narratives surrounding disability. Traditionally, literary characters have been populated by able-bodied characters, perhaps because of the society's penchant to see the beautiful and pleasurable. It is a fact that the sight of the disabled bodies causes anxiety and fear (Garland Thomson 1997). To get rid of this, there is an active cultural process of *Othering* which reduces the deviant/ disabled bodies into an object of spectacle, laughter and ridicule stripping them of all basic identity and dignity as humans. They are denied the reality of their bodies as they are seen as an exception, as human oddities and at odds with the reality. These disabled bodies are segregated from the cultural mainstream and marginalized as the *Other* because of their physical difference. Significantly, most of the cultures are and have been ableist and in this regard Frantz Fanon has opined that *Othering* occurs on the basis of physical and verbal difference (Cindy Lacom 2011). Lack of literary representations of the disabled bodies confirms their marginalized existence in social spaces and (geographical) spatiality as they are largely 'rendered invisible' in the ableist society. As a matter of fact, the majority able-bodied distinguishes themselves from the disabled bodies because of the realization that their bodies can become one of those. *Othering* in a way brings about a temporal sense of relief from psychological anxiety caused by the sight of a disabled body (Hahn 1988).

The most common prejudice/notion entertained by the normates against the disabled people is the assumption that disability cancels out the attribute of sexuality. Therefore, the so-called normates consider the disabled as mere 'objects' and without the need for love, affection, friendship, physical intimacy and sex. The prevalence of this assumption is a kind of "dividing practices"[5] entertained by the majority able-bodied for the purpose of normalizing able-bodiedness and sexuality as an exclusive

preserve of the normates. Some of the eponymous 'asexual/sexless or sexually queer' disabled characters in literary texts are Clifford Chatterley in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterleys's Lover* and Daryus Kotwal (Brit) in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (to name a few). It is a truism to repeat the line 'literature is a representation of the society,' yet this has been repeated here to emphasize the point that the muted literary representations of the disabled characters and disability *per se* are indicative of the political nature of the literary representation and the extant cultural narratives surrounding disability and the disabled bodies. In the Indian writings in English, the literary representation of disability began to appear quite lately in the literary creations of some notable postcolonial Indian novelists/writers in English, viz. Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day*), Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children* & *Shame*), Firdaus Kanga (*Trying to Grow*), Rohinton Mistry (*Family Matters*) and Pramila Balasundaram (*Sunny's Story*). Their writings reveal the similar archetypal cultural narratives surrounding the disabled body in India.

Current social model discourses have resurrected the basic human identity and dignity of the disabled bodies as it makes a nuance analysis of the disablement phenomena in specific contexts of socio-cultural practices reflecting on the intersection of disability, culture, and sexuality. It emerges from these discourses that the disabled bodied are not, as is generally assumed to be, 'asexual'. This has resulted in the liberation of the disabled from the norms of ableist cultures which have often been at odds to accept the disabled in the 'normal' society as full or complete humans. This has led to a change of perception especially, in the Western cultural narratives, which have come to accept disability *per se* as a socially created phenomenon, and the fundamental sexual character of people which does not necessarily dissipate with disability. In contrast, the cultural narratives in India are not the same as yet. Though Indian culture is diverse and varied, these cultural narratives converge on one point, i.e. in the perception of the disabled individuals and disability, a perspective which can be called mystical and metaphysical more inclined towards the cosmology of disablement phenomena, and is preoccupied with finding an answer to the question 'why disabled?' Whereas the Western (Euro-American) cultural narratives sees disability as a condition where an individual (or a group of similar individuals) are deprived of equality, opportunity and freedom in the

society. In this context, the statement "[a] fundamental theme in the contemporary Western discourse on disability is the assumption of the desirability of equality understood as sameness or similarity" (Ingstad & Whyte 1995: 7) succinctly sums up the Western attitudes towards disability. Its cultural mores is therefore, geared towards alleviating the apparent injustices arising out of the indifferent treatment meted out to individuals with disability. Both, the Western and the Indian cultural narratives of disability acknowledge the socio-cultural processes that create disability phenomena or the social construction of disability. However, it is seen that there are subtle differences in their approaches of the same which depends on their respective cultural narratives. In its conception and approaches the Western cultural narrative of disability is pragmatic and more concerned with the unequal social space of the disabled individuals. This is in stark contrast to the Indian cultural narratives which is mystical and metaphysical for the reason that it concerns itself more with the cosmology of the disabled body.

Analyzing disability in India exclusively based on the Western theoretical concepts or for that matter any other theoretical, conceptual and critical approaches without placing into context the specific cultural narratives has the possibility of digressing from the issue as it is rooted in time and place. Thus far, much of the disability study in India seems to have merely applied the Western theoretical approaches; no doubt it has thrown light on the social processes at work that creates disability but it has the possibility of taking the matter for granted if not read from the specific socio-cultural contexts and place from which it springs. So far, it is seen that disability is a social construction but it is to be noted here that there are subtle variations in the perceptions and social construction of disability as it depends on the specific contexts of culture, time and place. An anthropological study of disability has thus far helped to ungird the cultural factors at work in many societies from which it dawns upon us that disability means different things to different cultures. In the study of disability, it is important to take into account culture as an important factor because ".....culture structures whole life worlds, imbuing individual variations of the human condition with significance more far-reaching than the simple ability to perform a given activity", and because of "..... the need for

holistic conceptualizations of persons in their cultural contexts" (Whyte & Ingstad 1995: 4-7).

A reading of disability and sexuality in the Indian novels in English reveals some similar theoretical and conceptual terrain with the Western cultural narratives as per as the marginalization of the disabled characters are concerned. Unlike the Western cultural narratives, the Indian one sees disability as an act of *dharma* and/ or *karma*. This perspective of disability invokes a mystical and metaphysical power at work (that creates the disabled bodies) and places it on a surreal level, more concerned with the cosmology or the origin of the cause. Since 'doing' and 'performing' are the two core tenets of Indian culture where religion and everyday social life are embroiled, disability is counted as a failure to 'do' or 'perform', a short-coming on the part of the disabled individual to perform or meet the physical demand for the act to practice and perform the *dharma* and/ or *karma* in the previous birth for which the particular individual supposedly pays penance for. Ironically, this narrative, to some extent again places the onus of disability on the individual. Here, the cause of disability is seen as relational, as per the individual's performativity (the act or observance of *dharma* and/ or *karma*). There is an element of sympathy rather than empathy based on a mystical understanding of the cause instead of being pragmatic, creating socio-cultural as well as religious 'meanings' out of the different body and abilities of the individuals in the society which reveals society's priorities and the crux of its cultural values.

It becomes evident that disability is culturally relative, produced and conceived by different cultures in diverse ways (Devlieger 1995, 1999; Holzer et al. 1999; Klotz 2003; Littlewood 2006; Peters 2000; Whyte 1995). In disability studies, anthropological theories have influenced the public discourse on disability as it throws light on the cultural conceptions of disability. In India, it is the Hindu concept of *dharma* and *karma* which explains disability in most of the cultures. Interestingly, Armstrong and Fitzgerald have pointed out that in some African cultures disability is related to witchcraft and curses (Armstrong & Fitzgerald 1996). This cultural relativity of disability has had a profound influence on the treatment of people with disabilities over time (Cervinkova 1996; Klotz 2003), and has posed a challenge to

the medical model. In the contemporary society, the rise of the social media has come to promote a particular kind of body-image in the popular cultures complicating the understanding of disability and the disabled body.

Discourses of disability in India as in other cultures begin with the physicality of the body. In the Indian cultural narratives the body occupies centre stage because the Hindu concept of *dharma* and/ or *karma* lays emphasis on the purity of the body. Purportedly, the purity of the body is attained by numerous births and rebirths. This ingrained philosophy or belief is practiced through the widespread and dominant hierarchical caste system that divides the bodies on cosmic ontology categorizing them on caste lines which depends on the basis of birth. However, Rohit K Dasgupta states—"[r]ebirth makes several social constructs and divides less important and love between two people of conflicting gender, class or caste seem involuntary as a result of their past life" (2015: 653).

Sanctioned by socio-religious belief and practices, the deviant/ deformed bodies are subjected to social construction in a cosmological realm in the Indian cultural narratives and are stigmatised as impure or defiled bodies. As such, disability in India is transformed into a metaphysical crisis whereas, most of the Western cultural narratives does not invoke supernatural element in deconstructing the disabled body as they treat it simply as 'mutilated' or 'desecrated' bodies that fails to meet the 'norms', and hence not the ideal or normal body as it is construed as a shortfall or lack. Although India has a diverse culture and a complex history there is enough commonality in its cultural narratives because of shared history and spatiality as regards some of the issues that confront mankind irrespective of caste, colour and creed. One of these issues is the question of disability in the society which it has struggled to fathom and confront throughout history and has tried to understand it on the Hindu concept of *dharma* and/ or *karma*. The Indian cultural narratives see the lack as arising from the failure on the part of the disabled individual to meet the requirements of the basics of the religious teachings and customs, while the Western traditions see the same as located within the physicality of the body itself and for this reason disability was treated as a medical issue that can be cured or improved with medical intervention. However, both these two traditions rise from the same issue,

i.e. the idea of lack. Here, the term ‘lack’ can be derived to mean incompleteness, dissimilarity or devoid of sameness with the majority able-bodied which share a common characteristic which are termed ‘normal’. The exclusivity of deviant or deformed bodies, in the discourses of the society, rather becomes a ‘lack of something’. This lack has been historically ascribed to the disabled individual but the rise of the social model has relocated the same in the disabling social structures not the materiality of the body of the disabled individual. On the other, the society is seen as lacking the wherewithal to provide equal space to individuals with different bodies that create disability out of the different bodily types.

Perceived in terms of lack, the disabled individuals are seen as the non-normative others. Defined and perpetuated in a multiplicity of ways by different cultural views and practices it has come to mean different things to different people across time, cultures and spaces. In the Indian cultural narratives the disabled bodies are considered impure and defiled. In contrast, the Western cultural narratives consider the disabled bodies desecrated or mutilated improper form. In both these narratives the term ‘lack’ is a common trope. Here, the term ‘lack’ implies that the deviant or deformed bodies does not have the ability to ‘do’ or ‘perform’ and this includes the basic human ‘sexual’ attributes. The disabled are generally considered ‘incomplete humans’ and marginalized by the society. They are seen as ‘asexual’ human grotesques without the need for love, affection, physical intimacy, pleasure or in other words without ‘sexuality’.

There is an intersection of disability, culture and sexuality, as these are inextricably linked to each other. Therefore, it becomes necessary to read these in conjunction with each other as a broad based analysis is better equipped to situate issues and its concomitant problems in a holistic perspective. Here, a little clarity on the term ‘sexuality’ is needed as it has come to mean different things to different people. Defining sexuality is a tricky affair as it has been evolving along with time and has come to encompass many ideas and include many facets. Many a time it is narrowly understood as sexual acts, preferences or orientation, while there are numerous definitions that cover different aspects and components of sexuality, there

is no single agreed upon definition of sexuality. The WHO draft working definition of sexuality (2002) broadly outlines sexuality as—

> Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.[6]

A discussion of disability is incomplete without taking into account the sexuality of the disabled individual. Historically, a misplaced notion of disability led to regard the disabled individuals as 'asexual', devoid of sexuality as it was singularly identified with the able-bodied as sexuality was linked to sexual attractiveness and ability to 'perform' sex. A disabled body with its 'lack', or 'improper/ incomplete form' was conceived as a lesser being and ill-equipped for sexual attractiveness and performativity. However, the evolving disability studies have helped to deconstruct the myth of asexuality of the disabled individuals. Without a discussion of sexuality of the disabled individuals the understanding of disability is devoid of meaning and tact. Disability, as has been discussed earlier is a social construct which disables individuals with deviant/ deformed bodies as the social space and physical structures disable them. Consequently, it goes on to dehumanise the deviant/ deformed bodies as 'asexual' beings. The West has liberated sexuality from the confine of narrow purviews which has helped in revolutionizing queer and disability studies. In India, sexuality remains a public battle ground, a taboo subject considered best to be left alone. Though the air is surreptitiously thick with the chatter of sexuality in popular culture, it remains out of bounds in polite conversation and seemingly in public discourses like literature. Therefore, disability and its related problem of sexuality in India are yet to gain popular discourses in the academia as well as literary representations. This is evident in the scant literary representations of the disabled individuals which have so far not been able to paint a

true picture of this marginalized section of the populace in the society. Although, this is also true in the case of literatures in English that emanate from the West per se, winds of change have occurred in the Western theoretical footing of disability studies. It has come to encompass the subject of sexuality in its discourses considering the fact that they intersect with each other.

India's colonial experience in the early 19th century is one odd event in history which has changed the course of its destiny,—its politics and cultural narratives as well. In the understanding of sexuality in the Indian cultural scenario, this colonial experience is a crucial turning point. The introduction and promotion of English language and Western knowledge by the British colonial administrators, Lord Bentinck and Lord Macaulay, provided a common medium through which the natives have come to express their collective consciousness, appropriating English as one of their own. While the jury is still out, many Indian writers and critics have argued that Indian writings in English have gained maturity and development with a distinctive creed and a soul of its own. Meenakshi Mukherjee states—"[i]nspite of the various limitations and incompatibilities, the novel in India which began under the British tutelage soon acquired its own distinctive character" (1985: 6). It is not that Indian writings in English is confined to the novelistic genre; it has developed in other two significant genres i.e., poetry and drama as well. However, it is the novel genre which has overshadowed poetry and drama in the contemporary literary scene as it has proved to be the most versatile in depicting the multitude of Indian cultures and sensibilities. Despite many bleak predictions of the future of the novelistic genre in an era of technological developments it has defied these predictions and has grown in popularity worldwide, and India is no exception to this phenomenon becoming the most powerful and popular literary genre. Over the years, the novel in its over two hundred years of evolution has become an encyclopaedia of the lived experiences of mankind providing a closer look at life as it depicts a rich and varied tale of lived experiences, the thoughts and feelings, hopes, dreams, and imaginations of the people. According to Robert Liddell it is ".....the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusion of wit and arid humour to be conveyed to the world in the most chosen language" (1969: 6). It has given voice to the voiceless, a name to the nameless, and a face to the faceless

and so a reading of this genre provides a rare glimpse of the mindset of the people in its varied hues.

From the first Indian novel in English Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) which Salman Rushdie says was, "a poor melodramatic thing" (Rushdie 1997: xiv), the novel in India has grown by leaps and bounds making a niche for its self in the world literature. From a melodramatic beginning it has over the years evolved into a mature literary genre that can be said to have successfully come to represent the reality of the 'soul of India' within a short span of time which is phenomenal considering the reality of its cultural diversity which is quite an assault on the senses to say the least. No doubt there are some fair shares of critics of English language Indian writing as Salman Rushdie recalls and shares his experiences of criticism directed against his writings. After being constantly targeted and criticised for being an elitist writer without any roots in the Indian cultural traditions, he says these criticisms are usually, "about class, power and belief" (Rushdie 1997). In his own words:

> Its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper-middle-class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques; for being less popular in India than outside India; for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of the English language, and of the ability of Western critics and publishers to impose their cultural standards on the East; for living, in many cases, outside India; for being deracinated to the point that their work lacks the spiritual dimension essential for a 'true' understanding of the soul of India; for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary traditions of India; for being the literary equivalent of MTV culture, of globalising Coca-Colonisation; even, I'm sorry to report, for suffering from a condition that one sprightly recent commentator, Pankaj Mishra, calls 'Rushdietis ..... [a] condition that has claimed Rushdie himself in his later works'. (1997: xii)

Inspite of the numerous criticisms that has come to haunt the Indian novels/writings in English, the emerging English language Indian writings have come of age with a new literary tradition. In a country like India the diversity of cultures, languages and its sheer geographical size is dazzling and amazing to say the

least. It needs to be appreciated that the "international power of the English language" has bridged the gap between these cultures and this emerging literature holds up a common mirror for the people where they can see their lives intertwined with each other. Perhaps, it is because of its origin and parentage in a colonial setting that this literary tradition was taken with a pinch of salt, a new tradition without defined cultural roots. Considering the kind of criticisms directed against it, for a long time this new literary tradition was seen as a continuation of colonialism albeit in a different way, by means of colonising the minds and tastes through literature. Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks that the Indian novels in English are "twice born fiction" because of its "double parentage", and as such it is no ordinary one (Mukherjee 1971). Her incisive analysis of the Indian novels provided a historical framework and salvaged it from disrepute. However, Salman Rushdie in his 'introduction', *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing (1947-1997)* (1997) is of the opinion that this young literature remained more or less staid for about seventy years since its inception where there are hardly any work that stands out in the crowd. He adds that it was the 'midnight generation', and thereafter, that it begins to bloom with a flavour of its own which can be noted in that fact that from here on the major themes of the novels shifts from the public/ political sphere to the personal sphere. Considering Milan Kundera's contention that the novel is first and foremost about the inner recesses of the character that holds "the world of life under a permanent light"[7] this turnaround is a crucial factor in the development of Indian novel in English (Kundera 1986).

British colonialism which left a lasting legacy in the form of a new literary tradition written in English in India is also responsible in dictating the social, cultural and judicial architecture of the country (Robins 2012). Along with an English language literary genre, the British colonial legacy has left behind some indelible changes in the cultural narratives of the nation. It needs to be remembered that the British colonialists in their colonial zeal were largely driven by Victorian 'fanatical purity campaign' and the most important impact of British colonial rule in India, apart from the introduction of English language education, was the regulation of sexuality (Bhaskaran 2002: 16). In their belief and practice the regulation of

sexuality was a part of their 'purity campaign' in tune with their self-righteous justification of colonialism as 'civilizing mission'. In this regard, Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989) has vehemently argued that the introduction of English language education was a systematic ploy and a well designed "mask of conquest". Considering the eventual impact of colonialism in the social and cultural scene of India her critiquing of the same as a "mask of conquest" holds much water as it becomes evident that hereafter, much of the cultural narratives of India underwent a sea-change. One notable change was the natives' narratives of sexuality. Contrary to the popular notion and belief that same-sex love or non-normative sexualities are of Western import, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (2000) points out that it was not regulated in ancient India and was accepted in the society with 'social sanction'. As R. K. Dasgupta, as well, has stated thus:

> Temple sculptures from Konarak and Khajuraho to the *Kamasutra* and other ancient literary materials contain enough references to evidence that ancient India accommodated a whole range of sexual behaviours. This contradicts the Hindu nationalist belief that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only form of permissible sex and all other forms of sex were introduced through the Westerners. (2011: 666)

The notion that non-normative (homo/queer) sexuality is of Western import is based on a misplaced notion. This notion has been influenced to a large extent by the colonial experience of the 19th century. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai the foremost scholars in this respect have shown that the discourses of different forms of sexuality is evidenced in the epics, texts, and other cultural expressions like sculpture in ancient India. They are of the opinion that same-sex love (homosexuality) was approved by the society through 'social sanctions' and wasn't a subject of malice, stigma and marginalisation as it is today. It is with the advent of colonialism that it became a subject of strict regulation for the British colonial administrators. Dictated by their own 'Victorian Puritanism' they began to zealously regulate sexuality and suppressed non-normative sexualities in India through the anti-sodomy law, i.e. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code 1860, the law states:

> Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine. (www.iglhrc.org)

It is to be noted here that Section 377 is not merely a law about anal sex alone; it is a way of controlling and dictating the social, cultural and judicial architecture by regulating sexuality which criminalized certain forms of sexual activity that digressed from the norm. Foucault's enumeration of the concept 'juridico-discursive' dialectics of power enunciated in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I.* argue that there is always a negative relationship between sex and power where power's ultimate objective is to suppress sex. However, Foucault steadfastly contradicts this belief throughout the book as he claims that power works to bring sex into discourse rather than suppressing sex, power wishes to approach it in a more controlled manner. The punitive measures are suggestive of the British colonial administration's overbearing regulation of sexualities in the colonies so as to change the nature of discourse and the shape of cultural discourses and narratives for the advantage of their own colonial project. Dasgupta states—"[t]he polyvalence of sexuality prevalent till pre-colonialism was disciplined through social sanctions" (2011: 664). Homosexuality is therefore, NOT a Western acquisition as Vanita and Kidwai in 2008 explains in these terms—"[a]n unbiased excavation into the ancient and modern Indian cultures and traditions surely proves that same-sex love is not alien to India; it is not a foreign import" (as cited in Singh, 2015: 29).

Colonialism brought about far reaching changes in the socio-cultural and literary narratives of the country. As the cultural narratives underwent a sea-change through this politico-juridical regulation of the same by the colonialists who were guided by vested interests of power matrix to control the cultural discourses and narratives that emanate from the colony to their advantage, it displaced sexuality from the mainstream to the margin/ periphery by forcefully manipulating the existing discourses as non-normative, and beyond to the extent of criminalizing these supposedly 'non-normative' sexualities.

The modern Indian society's intolerance of non-normative sexualities, argued as the *Other* wretched culture of the West, is in essence a legacy of British colonialism and its construct, not the other way round. Ironically, its continuation and endemic presence in post-Independent India suggests a quid pro quo as the regulation of sexuality correlates to the formation and consolidation of power in the corresponding foundation of patriarchy which the modern Indian society is fearful of losing its toehold. The continuity of this essentially colonial stigmatization of non-normative sexualities in the cultural narratives of modern India can be read as an attempt of the mainstream Indian society to persist with the deeply entrenched patriarchal social set-up as non-normative sexualities is seen as a direct existential threat to the dominant structures of power inscribed in the male body and its heterosexual orientation, in other words, the prevalence of patriarchy itself. Modern Indian critics guided by nationalist fervour were uncomfortable with the idea of a homosexual India and attacked the 'non-normative' sexuality as 'Western import' conveniently discarding the available historical and literary evidences that presented a completely different picture. In this respect, there was a convenient 'internalising of colonialism' as it suited the politico-cultural discourses of the time. Dasgupta states—"[t]hrough internalising colonialism, the new elites of post Independence India attacked non-normative sexuality as nationalist critique" (2011: 664). In a way the personal became political, and vice-versa; what is essentially a personal and individual matter became a public tool and instrument for manipulation of structures of power.

It is observed that the persecution of non-normative sexualities in India is a legacy of British colonialism. It shows affinity to the colonial power configurations. Whilst disability is a case of society's stigmatization of deviant/deformed bodies as 'disabled' and 'asexual' *Other*; similarly, the Indian society stigmatizes non-normative sexualities as 'deviant' and 'disabling' *Other*. Here, conformity to the norm is an obligation and any kind of divergence is seen as a direct threat and assault to the structures of power, i.e. patriarchy. There is an ingrained fear in the psyche of the society that sees both disability and non-normative sexualities as an existential threat, and hence, its stigmatization and marginalization as the *Other*.

The new literary tradition germinated in India by British colonialism, i.e. the Indian writings in English, across all genres; bear little or no references to this important aspect of human identity. Literature in these issues is scant. The few that exists stereotype the disabled individuals as asexuals and are dismissed as minor characters, in the same vein the scant literature that deal with sexuality have been suppressed as 'obscene' and dismissed as inferior 'pulp' literature. The much talked about Indian writings in English, a legacy of British colonialism, hailed as an emerging literature from the colonies with distinctive idiom and sensibilities have for much of its early history remained indifferent to these issues of disability and sexuality till about the year 1980s. It is from this period, when by this time the impact of women, feminist, gender, disability studies, and the post economic liberalization (1991) cultural cadence showed its effects on the subsequent critical and creative verve as well as cultural scene in India, that things began to change. As mentioned earlier, the issue of disability tentatively emerged in the aftermath of these movements (in the 1980s) in a new crop of Indian writers writing in English, particularly novels, such as Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Pramila Balasundaram and Indra Sinha. Their venture into this unchartered territory is a tectonic shift in the Indian novels in English from its early 'melodramatic' beginnings as it began to focus on the personal, centred on the corporality of the body as the essence of self identity. Yet, the issue of sexuality has taken a lot more time to become a major theme in the Indian novels in English or for that matter Indian writings in English. It has just about started creeping in the writings of a host of new writers such as Hoshang Merchant, Suniti Namjoshi, Khuswant Singh, Manju Kapur, Shobha de, Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai, R. Raj Rao, Ashwini Sukthankar, Eunice de Souza, Ashok Row Kavi, Kamaleswar, Firdaus Kanga, Indra Sinha and so on whose writings have brought disability and sexuality into the discourses and expressions of mainstream literature.

While the emerging discourses of disability have challenged the notion of able-bodied normativity and the notion of asexuality of the disabled; likewise, the emerging discourses and expressions of sexuality have challenged the dominant hetero-sexuality in the cultural narratives of India. It had appeared or was rather assumed for a long time that issues like disability and sexuality are 'biologically

determined' but studies into these areas have revealed that it is fairly a product of social construction and religious bigotry. The moot idea that the "personal is political" and "political is personal" have enabled to bring disability and sexuality out of the closet and into the public discourses. It gives the needed impetus in the study of disability and sexuality in real time, place and context in India.

During the colonial period the Indian novels in English carried a different outlook, more concerned with the sufferings of the Indians under the British colonial yoke rather than the personal concerns of the individuals, and so most of the novels of this era are political in nature dealing with themes like nation, patriotism, loss of cultural traditions, history and myth, etc. The familial and personal issues were submerged in the wave of nationalist fervour. For example, the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Nayantara Sahgal, and Kamala Markandaya—the progenitors of Indian novels in English wrote novels of social realism from the beginnings till the 1950s. In the post-Independence period the novels retained the momentum of the colonial era and became a little more broad based as the newly Independent Indian society began to encounter greater social evils and larger political upheavals. Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan continued to write in the post-Independence Nehruvian era, probing more deeply into the socio-cultural, politico-economic and religious divide or the rising communal tension in the country as fallout of partition during Independence. It is observed that—"[t]he thrill of joy at the end of a long and horrible struggle was lost into the tears and pains which emerged suddenly on the face of the nation owing to the sudden but tragic outburst of violence in the wake of the partition" (Agrawal & Sinha 2003: 4). In the same vein—"[t]he conflict between modern scientific growth and traditional rural values; religious malpractices and superstitions versus scientific progressive view-points, shook the modern [Indian] man" (Agrawal & Sinha 2003: 5). This trend in the Indian novel writing in English probing deeply the conflicting social issues of the country continued from the immediate aftermath of the partition of the country during Independence in the late fifties till about the sixties.

With the emergence of a new crop of writers in the sixties, referred to as 'Midnight's Children' by Salman Rushdie, mentionable figures like Anita Desai,

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Bhabani Bhattacharya, G.V. Desani, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar and B. Rajan changed the scenario of the Indian novels in English as the situation began to transform with the onset of stability in the country. There occurred shift in the themes of the novels from social realism or the political to the personal or individual identity, rights and issues. Many movements during this period like the feminist, gender, race, disability, sexuality and so on were influential in bringing about a change in attitude that placed the individual at the centre of the narrative. Particularly, the feminist movement was largely responsible for forcefully asserting the rights of women who were marginalized by the existing social institutions. It can be said that— "[t]he shift in attitude towards women in the wake of feminist movement generally proved a boon to the fair sex" (Agrawal & Sinha 2003: 5). And so there was gradual shift from social realism to the rights of the individual. In this regard, Anita Desai emerged as a significant women's voice in the Indian novels who has carved a niche for herself in the Indian as well as global literary map. Her fiction places a firm belief in the inviolable sanctity and dignity of the person and is concerned with the 'self' and highlights the fact that ".....without this sense of dignity and sanctity of the self, existential awakening of the self remains vulnerable and the inner space can once again become contaminated."[8]

In the annals of Indian novels in English, Anita Desai is a quintessential figure as her writings bring focus on the self by raising the issues faced by women in India. Later in one of her novels *Clear Light of Day* (1980) she brings in the figure of a disabled individual. In this regard, she can be said to have brought for the first time a major issue, i.e. disability which remained marginalized in literary representations in Indian novels in English. Subsequently, other major novelists like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Pramila Balasundaram harps on the issue concerning the self, i.e. disability in their writings. It is with the writers from the post-Independence era, beginning from the seventies that the Indian novels in English turn towards the 'self' or the personal.

The Indian novels in English took yet another turn in the 1980s and the decades that followed as novelists like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Despande, Arundhati

Roy, Shobha de and so on (to name just a few) experimented not only with the art, technique and style of writing novel but with the culturally prohibited or tabooed themes as well, incorporating hitherto untouched issues like gender, disability, sexuality, etc. In their writings the English language is sufficiently 'Indianized' and the perspectives presented in the novels get a fresh approach using Indian idioms and phrases. Moreover, as the circumstances and priorities altered with the passage of time, Indians became more aware of their rights and privileges, including the rights to their bodies. The momentum generated by the movements of the traditionally marginalized groups such as Blacks, Women, Subalterns, Disabled and Queer (LGBTQIA) groups especially in the West made a profound impact in the consciousness of people around the world; and literatures, including the Indian writings in English began to incorporate these tectonic shift.

Furthermore, the economic liberalization in India in the 1990s brought about far reaching changes in the economic and cultural sphere of the country, with 'popular culture' of the West, as some modern critics say, 'MTV culture and Coca-colonisation' intruding into the Indian homes. The Indian writers began to feel the change of times and the need to diversify the range of themes keeping in tune with the global trends. They could not afford to remain parochial and isolated as the world became inter-connected and the individual concerns became paramount. This paved the way for the rise of Diaspora literature by global Indians who sought to negotiate the cultural divide between the East and the West and to bridge the gap between the traditional and modern India in a globalised world. Consequently, as the populace gained exposure of the global affairs, they became liberal in tastes and outlook aware of their individual tastes and rights; self conscious with regard to their personal choices. The lived experiences of individuals became important in constituting the self-identity, an identity which started with the individuals' body. As such, sexuality (in its broadest definition) became the buzzword, re-fashioning the cultural narratives surrounding gender, disability and sexuality in modern Indian writings in English. The issue of disability, first timidly raised by Anita Desai and later taken up by few other writers in the Indian novels in English began to focus on the 'self', centring on the individuals' body.

Thus far, a few Indian novelists writing in English have taken up the concerns of disability as a major issue in India. In fact, it was as late as 1980 when Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980) represented a disabled character Bim, as an important character in the Indian novel in English. Yet, this novel too does not dwell on the issue of disability *per se* and its concomitant concerns like sexuality of the disabled. A few writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Pramila Balasundaram have given narrative spaces to disabled characters in their novels. However, in Anita Desai's writings neither disability nor sexuality becomes major concerns. In India disability and sexuality of people with disabilities are slowly, in fact it has just about, started to gain a little recognition and traction in peoples' consciousness. It is not that disability and sexuality are nonexistent in India but, these issues remain dormant in the mainstream discourses as the cultural narratives surrounding disability are informed by socio-cultural and religious myths which labels disability as an act of *dharma* and/ or *karma*. Moreover, the Colonial experience forced the existing narratives of sexuality in India to go secretive, which has been conveniently internalised in post-Independent cultural narratives of India.

Initially, Indian novels in English till Independence were caught in the tentacles of the struggle for Freedom. In the early decades of Independence, the Indian nation was mired in trauma of partition and the unending spectre of poverty of the masses. Therefore, these problems became the major themes in Indian writings in English. The overwhelming problems confronting the new nation-state were hard for the writers to ignore. The novels dealing with these themes seemed far nobler than the ones dealing with individual/ personal issues and so the novels of this genre are seen to be taking up the larger cause that affects the nation as a whole. For that reason, concerns that affected the individual like disability and sexuality had to wait for a little longer. The resultant transformation in the political discourses with the winds of change blowing in the 80s in the aftermath of disability as well as the queer sexuality rights movement in the West were path breaking developments in breaking stereotypes surrounding disability and sexuality which brought about a new cultural narrative. Consequently, there came about new thematic developments in the Indian novels in English as well.

The Indian novels in English, because of its "double parentage" felt the immense pressure of contradictory pulls and pressures emanating from the diverse cultural traditions within India as well as the changes in the cultural stereotypes heralded by the West. Particularly, the Indian cultural narratives have since been at pains to deny its past, the existence and acceptance of non-normative sexuality in the society, and the banishment of disabled individuals from the eyes of the society by using religious and cultural myths. The literary representations of disability and sexuality concerns remain at the most, cautious, even to this day in the Indian novels in English. These major novelists—Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Pramila Balasundaram each produced a few literary work(s) dealing with disability which is enough to sum up the tentative nature of this theme in the Indian novels in English. Moreover, there is no major character delineation of the disabled characters in the narrative that represents or typifies the lived experiences of these individuals which show them in flesh and blood with experiences of sexuality like any other 'normal' human in the 'ableist' society. Further, the Indian novels in English are particularly extra silent with matters of sexuality. Novels articulating sexuality concerns are, even to this day, dismissed as inferior literature or pulp-fiction. Regarded as inferior in literary talent, the writers of this genre are often derided as heralding the 'wretched Western culture' and indulging in obscenity, in the process conveniently deny its own history. Time and milieu have gradually brought about changes in these dominant perspectives and attitudes towards disability and sexuality.

With the saturation of the ideas of social constructionism, the prevalent views surrounding disability and sexuality are being revisited in the Indian milieu. Consequently, a host of new writers has brought the issues of disability and sexuality as a major thematic concern in their writings. Infact many writers have dealt with these issues separately and do not see the convergence of these two issues hand in hand. Until 1990 the intersection of disability and sexuality were NOT articulated and represented in the literary creations of India. It was Firdaus Kanga with his semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990)[9] that this jinx was broken. Unlike most of the poet/writers he articulates and represents his personal experiences. His writings, a semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) and the travelogue

Heaven on Wheels (1991) presents a firsthand experience of disability and non-normative sexuality in modern Indian writing in English. His writings, therefore, present a site to decode and understand the intersection of disability and sexuality.

Firdaus Kanga is a critically disabled person who suffers from *osteogenesis imperfecta*, known as 'brittle bones disease' and hails from the Parsi community, an orthodox and culturally conservative community to say the least, ill at ease with their own culture in a rapidly changing modern world. Therefore, his writings challenges many of the established norms in the society like gender, hetero-normative sexuality and able-bodiedness presenting a site for exploring the intersection of sexuality and disability where these issues are inextricably inter-related in the socio-cultural continuum. Inspite of the limited number of works, Firdaus Kanga occupies a special place in the Indian novels in English as his works viz. *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) boldly rewrites the cultural narratives of disability and sexuality, breaking the myths of 'asexuality' of disabled individuals and of hetero-normative sexuality. Firdaus Kanga's writings moves beyond the conventional and traditional discourses on disability to highlight that it is not just "Compulsory Heterosexuality" but much more. In disability studies, Robert McRuer borrowing the idea from Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" elaborates that there exists a similar version in the form of "Compulsory Able-bodiedness"[10] (2006A, 2006b[2002]) in the society, considering the fact that social institutions, cultural systems and physical infrastructures are mainly geared and tuned for the able-bodied. Kanga's writings challenge the traditional hetero-normativity as well as able-bodied normativity in the society. It makes it clear that beyond these two normalizing narratives there exists another which can be called '**compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality'** in the society. This is an overwhelming and overbearing 'normalizing' tendency that reserves sexuality, in this case heterosexuality, as an exclusive preserve of the able-bodied or normates.

Firdaus Kanga, though constrained by the physicality of his body and the orthodox conservativeness of his society, breaks the entrenched socio-cultural norms and taboo of the cloistered Parsi society from which he hails (and by extension the Indian society), so as to deconstruct the myth of 'asexuality' of the disable-bodied

and that of hetero-normativity too. As feminists have argued all along that masculinity is all about jingoist construction of power, similarly, Kanga's writings presents disability as a product of jingoism or hostile treatment of the disable-bodied in the society and their marginalization as the 'asexual other'. Therefore, his writings is a discourse on both disability and sexuality arguing that disability and heterosexuality are myths and social constructs perpetuated by vested interests for power by subjecting bodies to "discipline" and "punish" (Foucault 1978 {1976}). His select works represent the intersection of disability and sexuality in the mainstream literary representation in India, i.e. in the genre of Indian novels in English. The writings of famous Indian writers in English Manju Kapoor, Shobha de, R. Raj Rao and Khushwant Singh sketches the emergence of LGBTQIA literature in India, with some of their select novels, such as Manju Kapoor's *A Married Woman* (2003), Shobha de's *Strange Obsession* (1992) and *Snapshots* (1995), R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* (2003), *Hostel Room No. 131* (2010) and the non-fiction work *Whistling in the Dark* (2009). Khushwant Singh's *Delhi: A Novel* (1990) creates a discourse on the non-normative sexuality in the Indian novels in English by tracing the ancient cultural realm prevalent in India but remains silent on the sexuality of the disabled. Their works do not dwell on the intersection of disability and sexuality in literary expressions and other discourses.

Tracing the evolution of Indian novels in English, it becomes clear that its growth has been contextual. Post-Independence there is a ".....a strong desire to re-discover one's roots in the ancient Indian ethos as also to examine this ethos afresh in the light of westernization, and satirical comment both on the darker side of the freedom movement and its aftermath and the decline of values in all spheres of life in the present (Naik 1982: 191-92). The introduction of English language education and the regulation of sexuality in colonial India had been paradigmatic in its evolution. The evolution of the English novel genre in the Indian literary scene can be called "a systematic study of culture contact and cultural change" (Spencer 1960: 11). The developments in the literary field, particularly, the transformation of themes and technique in the novels from the 1990s represent a change in the cultural realm.

"Actually, the writer in Independent India, whether in English or in the regional languages has, far from dwindling into a 'recorder' or an 'embellisher', has provided ample evidence of creative vigour and capacity for experimentation" (Naik 1982: 190). Amusingly, the dawn of disability and sexuality as major themes in the Indian writings in English, post-Independence, especially the novels after the 90s might seem to be a break from the traditional cultural realm of India. However, it is not so but a continuity as the ancient literary and religious texts evidences the existence and acceptance of diverse discourses on disability and sexuality in ancient India. Scholars like Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai in their edited book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (2000) present evidences from literature and history from a time-span of about two thousand years to buttress the point that 'Same-Sex Love in India' is NOT a Western import (Singh 2015).

The Indian writers representing non-normative sexuality in the novels and other writings have all along been derided for importing a 'wretched Western culture' in the cultural realm of India and dismissed as inferior literature, it is labelled as a genre which is not rooted in Indian traditions. Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai critique this stance arguing that this genre is very much in tune with the cultural traditions of India, which represents the 'soul of India' that have remained suppressed by numerous historical events and political factors. Rather, these works revisit many of the assumptions that have informed literary representations of a host of issues that afflict the Indian society which has been quick to dismiss many issues and ideas as the 'Other', especially those which it feels uncomfortable to face the reality. Disability is one such category like sexuality, which the Indian society has historically been uncomfortable to acknowledge, the existence of deviant/ deformed bodily dimensions. The Indian society emerges as a very normative society imposing '**compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality',** very much dismissive; one may add, antagonistic of diverse bodily dimensions and non-normative sexualities as it considers the disabled unable to 'perform' tasks with a measure of efficiency and are seen as an assault on the senses.

Therefore, as things stand it is important to recall the concept of "performativity" enunciated by Judith Butler in her path breaking book on gender

studies—*Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) which elaborates that 'gender' is basically a question of "performativity", where a particular sex is assigned roles that need to be performed throughout life predetermined by the society. It emerges that the inferior status assigned to women are essentially a case of 'social constructionism' as the society regards them as 'mutilated'/ 'deformed' bodies (Garland-Thompson 1997) compared to men. Likewise, disability emerges as a case of 'social construction' (Shakespeare 2006; Siebers; 2006, et al) as the different dimensions of the body are considered deviant/ deformed in the cultural narratives and dismissed/marginalized as grotesques. In many cases they are labelled as non-human *Others*. Assuming that they are an exception and not *the* [emphasis added] norm, they were regarded as individuals beyond definition and the sphere of "performativity". Here, "performativity" of the body becoming a benchmark of social recognition and acceptance. The ambiguity of deviant/deformed bodies presents a challenge in assigning 'normality' and the disable-bodied is assumed to be 'asexual' *Other* as they cannot 'perform'.

Sexuality is regarded as an exclusive preserve of the able-bodied. Further, it is heterosexuality which is the exclusive norm across cultures and societies world over. This norm of '**compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality'** can be understood by taking into account the fact that the society is fixated with procreation. The disabled are marginalized most often as asexuals because they are seen as incapable of healthy procreation. Moreover, the normalizing of heterosexuality is justified from the fact that it is the only form of sexuality which is able to procreate. Therefore, the normalising tendency has been conditioned and determined by the society's anxiety for existence. The social and cultural structures are therefore, fine-tuned for the exercise of power as it is seen as crucial for the survival of the species. Patriarchy is one such social and cultural structure fine-tuned for exercising mechanisms of power for the survival of species. The vehemence of right wing religious and cultural organisations in India in opposing the non-normative sexualities and its discourses, in the mainstream literary writings, is driven by fear factor. By putting on the mask of protecting socio-cultural and biological purity they remain adamant in their strident opposition to alternate/queer sexualities. The Indian novels in English dealing with disability and sexuality are slowly deconstructing the myths

surrounding disability and sexuality as it lays bare the presence of contrary literary and historical evidences in the Indian cultural realm.

However, contemporary Indian novels in English dealing with the themes of disability and sexuality have been accused of heralding an alien and a 'wretched Western culture' in India. In reality, disability has been historically treated with indifference and the non-normative sexualities have been an integral part of the ancient Indian cultural realm. The existentialist concerns and false sense of cultural pride and nationalism based on a misplaced reading of history problematized these themes in the Indian novels in English. The ones who do are seen as perpetuating colonialism through other means, by 'MTV culture and Coca-colonisation'. The articulation of this long tabooed subject is seen as anti-nationalist. As the eagerness to perpetuate the existing patriarchal social structure has taken the mask of cultural nationalism. Literature and other cultural expressions like cinema dealing with this issue continue to encounter resistances in the Indian society. For example, Ismat Chugtai's "Lihaaf" (The Quilt) published in 1942 became a target of attack on the charge of obscenity and was dismissed from the mainstream cultural and academic discourses as inferior pulp literature. In cinema, Deepa Mehta' lesbian themed films *Fire* and Karan Razdan's *Girlfriend* received violent hostility by the right wing political and cultural organisations that labelled it as an attempt at "ushering in a wretched culture" (sawnet.org) of the West. Some of the diatribes were personal as she was accused of being an Indian who does not have adequate grounding in India's culture and further, that she is an agent of Western attempts to impose their culture in India. The discourses of sexualities, queer as well as disabled, are treated as the *Other* culture.

Under these circumstances, Kanga's writings challenge the orthodoxy of the Indian society as regards the ideas surrounding disability, the myth of asexuality of disabled-individuals and hetero-normativity. As mentioned earlier, he articulates and questions the presence of '**compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality'** in the society in his writings. In fact, he is the first disabled and openly gay Indian author not only in English but in any language to produce a novel with a disabled gay protagonist. As Niladri R. Chatterjee has stated:

> While an explicit gay presence in Indian literature can be detected as early as 1924, in "Chocolate," a Hindi short story by Pandey Bechan Sharma, Firdaus Kanga is the first Indian author, writing in any language, to produce a novel with a gay protagonist. He is not only a pioneer in Indian gay fiction, but he has also explored the intersection of two kinds of marginality: that based on being a member of a sexual minority and that based on being a disabled person. (http://www.glbtq.com)

Yet, Firdaus Kanga hardly finds mention in the annals of Indian novels in English, as the novels that harp on this issue remains controversial in the Indian society and is essentially regarded as the 'Other', inferior pulp literature. While it is true that his contributions remain limited with only a singular semi-autobiographical work *Trying to Grow* (1990) and a few other works to his credit, he has been influential in re-directing the focus on the much neglected and stigmatized topic of disability and sexuality in the Indian novels in English. Particularly, Kanga's two works—*Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) are literary representation and discourses of lived experiences of disability and non-normative sexualities which critically presents the causality and mechanisms in the Indian culture that stigmatises and marginalises disability and sexuality. It emerges that the bane in Indian culture is because the "[d]iscussions of sexual culture in India have an almost ritualistic nature in their invocations of beliefs and practices that lie between the instructional mode of the *Kama Sutra* and the Gandhian efforts to erase desire" (Srivastava 2013: 1). The vague notions of 'Indian heritage' in the country's struggle for Independence, and the idiosyncratic application of the principles of asceticism derived from 'Gandhian efforts to erase desire' so as to overcome the self in the larger effort to fight colonialism suffused the sexual cultures of contemporary India which is reflected in the near absence of literary expressions and discourses in the contemporary Indian literatures in any language. In the words of M.K. Naik, "a strong desire to rediscover one's roots in the ancient Indian ethos as also to examine this ethos afresh in the light of westernization, and satirical comment both on the darker side of the freedom movement and its aftermath and the decline of values in all spheres of life" (Naik 191) remained limited by the contemporary society's bondage to a vague 'Indian

heritage' and the efforts to eschew personal desires, a discourse perpetuated by Gandhian nationalism.

Under the circumstances, a Post-colonial reading of Indian novels in English becomes imperative as it becomes evident that the politics of Colonialism had wide repercussions in re-structuring the country's sexual politics and culture. The simultaneous presence and absence of narratives of sexuality in the cultural mainstream shows an estrangement with sexuality that began during the British colonial era. Ancient India's cultural expressions are replete with explicit sexuality in its art/ sculptures and texts. For example, temple sculptures from Konarak and Khajuraho and texts like the *Kama Sutra* exemplify the presence of sexuality in the cultural mainstream. It is a paradox that when novels dealing primarily with non-normative sexualities are banished from the mainstream literary discourses—texts like *Kama Sutra* receive patronage and salience in the cultural narratives of the 'Indian heritage' which is contradictory with its own stance that regards the expressions of sexualities per se as a 'wretched Western culture', suggesting the prudery of Indian culture. As regards, the salience of *Kama Sutra* in Indian culture, Sanjay Srivastava states "[h]ere is a text, public discourses surrounding it suggest, that 'proves' that Indians were no less 'advanced' in such matters—indeed, even more so—than Westerners" (2013: 1), a fact contemporary India is hardly willing to accept. In fact, there is nothing *Other* or Western about the expressions of sexualities *per se*, literary or otherwise. It is colonial politics' regulation of sexuality and the subsequent colonial nationalism (Roy 1998), and post-colonial nationalism (in large measure determined by Gandhian efforts to erase desire by way of a spiritual tabooing of sexuality as a weapon) as also the quid pro quo 'internalising of colonialism' for the sustenance of socio-cultural structures of the Indian society viz. patriarchy firmly, that later efforts went into the silencing of sexualities in the cultural mainstream of India, which does not tolerates any contradictory discourses to this effect. In a way, the simultaneous presence and absence of sexuality narratives in the Indian cultural narratives can be understood when seen from what they are "unstable, contested, and in flux" (Srivastava 2013) carrying different meanings across cultures and time.

In a similar way, the reception of disabled bodies in the Indian culture has undergone a sea-change with the passage of time. In the ancient times epics like *Mahabharat* and *Krittivasa Ramayana* have presented disabled body in different light that essentially philosophises the deformed bodies. For example in *Ashtavakra Gita*, "One narrates a legend wherein when Ashtavakra meets Janaka on the road, the king feels repulsed by the sage's crooked body, whereupon the sage tells that just as the shape of a temple does not affect the space in it, so also the shape of the body does not affect the *Atman* (self)" (cited in Ruth Vanita *Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture* 1995: 39). As mentioned earlier this philosophising tendency of Indian culture with regard to disabled body reflects the larger social attitude that subsumes its understanding of many issues with mystical and metaphysical interpretations. With time the identity of the disabled has become fluid and carries different meanings across cultures. The disabled character Bim, in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) can be read from a post-colonial perspective, a silent observer of the goings-on of the freedom struggle, someone who is dispassionate unlike his sisters. He can do nothing about his circumstance but remain a silent observer of time. Programmed by time and circumstances, disability and sexuality have, thus far, maintained a silent presence in the cultural narratives of India.

The writings on disabled bodies and non-normative sexualities are in reality an attempt at remaking of 'Indian heritage', through an unbiased reading of the 'ancient' cultural expressions and texts as "representative of modern Indian realities and beliefs" (Srivastava 2013: 1). Without overtly emphasizing this, Kanga's works can be said to be a kind of representative novel that is in tune with the 'ancient' as well as the modern realities and beliefs of India. When Salman Rushdie, in his selection of the most influential works of fiction during the fifty (50) years of Independence (1947-1997) he seems to have observed the merit of Kanga's work which lay in his courageous attempt to resurrect the discourses of sexuality in the Indian cultural mainstream.

While selecting Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) in his anthology *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writings 1947-1997* (1997) Rushdie observed the

salience of the issue, particularly the intersection of disability and sexuality. It is an issue which is rooted within the cultural realm of India and not imported from without as is commonly believed. Kanga's work came at a time when the nationalist discourses perpetuated by right-wing 'nationalist' organisations in India, both political and cultural, were still hostile to the discourses of non-normative sexualities. It is a well known fact that Rushdie has been hounded by the political classes for his overt articulations of many historical facts which are uncomfortable for the established order. His concerns with the contradictions in the idea of cultural heritage that borders on jingoism have influenced many of his writings, and so in his evaluation of Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) he sees merit in its subtle questioning of the idea of 'Indian heritage'. Considering the rigour with which Rushdie has made his selection out of a vast gamut of Indian writings in English and placing Kanga alongside the established names in Indian writings in English, Kanga seems to have touched a chord that resonates in the world of literature. In his 'Introduction' Rushdie has made the point that he is looking for something different, not the usual narrative that routinely comes out in India, yet sufficiently grounded in the Indian cultural realm that represents the 'soul of India' (Rushdie 1997). What seems to have impressed Rushdie about Kanga's works is the way through which Kanga transcends physical limitations with "high style and comic brio" (Rushdie 1997); passionate and yet, not an emotional melodramatic tearjerker literary representation or discourse of his condition. Kanga's humorous narrative of his physical afflictions and the open discourse of homo-sexual desires in the novel make it a unique literary writing that places the intersection of disability and sexuality in the centre of the narrative. It is a courageous attempt by Kanga not only to transcend the limitations of his body but to break the stranglehold placed by the society on non-normative sexualities. In the process Kanga has broken many barriers (not just his brittle bones), with his literary discourses and representations as he speaks of his lived experiences of disabled existence and preference for homo-sexuality.

In *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) Kanga recounts his encounter with a young lawyer. He says:

> A young lawyer I knew had a desperately unhappy marriage. 'But in my karma,' he said. 'I have to go through this means I have to

> go through this. Something I did in my past life must be paid for. .....He had learned nothing—only that life was not his to control. How could it be, when debt from an unremembered, non-existent past could make its claim of pain at any moment? (1992 {1991}: 8-9)

Kanga opines that like this young lawyer the attitudes of the Indian society have been shaped by its abject surrender to *karma*—where life is regarded as beyond one's control. He opines, "[r]eligion, in India, seemed to me an admission of defeat, a renunciation of reality. .....For Hindu philosophy never tires of repeating that the body is but the apparel of *atma*, which changes clothes innumerable number of times in the course of its millennium-long life" (1992 {1991}: 8). Here, Kanga is expressing his desire to untangle the shackles of the social constructionism that shapes the destiny of individuals. Kanga locates his circumstances not on fate, chance or *karma* but on the defeatist attitude and the abject surrender to circumstances which he opines is not beyond but within the reach and control of the self. He tries to comprehend his own circumstances by considering himself as a 'normal' human being who simply happens to be different. The young lawyer, he cites, is an example of a person not limited or afflicted by physical attributes but is equally 'disabled' as his attitude is limited by extraneous thoughts, thus disabling in a different plane. Reading the works of Kanga helps to historicize the sexual and disability cultures in India from the perspective of the lived experiences. Atleast as far as the Indian cultural heritage is concerned the changing state or the fluidity of sexuality as well as disability can be traced in its 'ancient' cultural expressions and texts (which survive to this day), which have undergone a sea-change with its encounter with colonial cultural politics. There exists an exoticism of disability and sexuality in the contemporary Indian cultural narratives. However, the history of sexuality and the condition of disability cannot be confined to a well defined border but is a porous zone as sexuality and disability are conditions that cut across cultures and time. The history of sexuality and disability is an account of the changes of cultural matrices that is always unstable and in a state of flux. A reading of the emergence of literary expressions in this realm and its continued evolution is no less a history of the change of times and priorities of different cultures.

When many of the literary representations of disability are based on observations and imagination, Kanga's literary creations are a manifestation of lived experiences. Disability and non-normative sexuality meet and intersect in his body. Kanga uses his experiences to deconstruct the myth of 'asexuality' of the disable-bodied. A critical approach of the lived experiences of Kanga presents an insight into the intersection of disability, culture and sexuality.

Endnotes:

[1] The 'cultural turn' is a movement that began in the early 1970s among scholars in the humanities and social sciences to make culture the focus of contemporary debates; it also describes a shift in emphasis toward meaning and away from a positivist epistemology.

[2] The politically oriented movement by the disabled writers and activists in the West in the 1960s.

[3] Patrick Devliegar critiques the medical model of disability in the essay "Why disabled? The cultural understanding of physical disability in an African society."

[4] See the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of disabilities. "Disabilities." (http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/)

[5] Foucault argues that "Dividing practices" involves the exclusion of people who are viewed as a threat to the community. For example lepers were forced to live in leper colonies during the Middle Ages and criminals are placed in prisons.

[6] World Health Organization. (2006). Defining Sexual Health: A Report of a Technical Consultation on Sexual Health, 28-31 January, 2002, Geneva. Available at http:// www.who.int/reproductivehealth/ topics/gender_rights/sexual_health/en/

[7] Quoted from Milan Kundera, *The Art of Novel*, p. 5.

[8] Yasodhara Dalmia, "An Interview with Anita Desai", *The Times of India*, April 29,1979, p.13

[9] Has been adapted into a critically acclaimed movie titled 'Sixth Happiness'.

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CHAPTER - IV

Texting Liminality and Going beyond the Normative: Re/Reading Disability and Sexuality in the Major Works of Firdaus Kanga

Notwithstanding all the aura of progress and modernity, society remains trapped in a time warp, caught as it is in an archaic social classification. Across time and spaces, the social structures have not been able to organise itself sans totalizing narratives. *Othering*, the same old mechanism which distinguishes and discriminates people continues to work its way in social classifications creating groups/ identities that are seen as antithetical to each other. In a way, that is reminiscent of 'archaic societies', the contemporary society too continue to work in a similar way, i.e. through 'binary oppositions' (e.g. black/ white, masculine/ feminine, high/ low, abled/ disabled, etc.) which reveals that the ways of perception and means of structuring the social order have not evolved with time but, continues to subsist on an essentialist and materialist values. Juxtaposing one with another, binarism takes into account the difference in the materiality of the body as the basis of social classifications and structuring. In the system of binary opposition, the opposites—*similarity-difference* duality assigns socio-cultural meanings to the body in the physical as well as symbolic realm. Even to this day, this 'archaic' binarism exists as a dominant pragmatic method in the larger socio-cultural continuum which turns out as a disabling factor as it segregates and discriminates on the basis of 'either/ or' binary logic.

Disability is a harsh reality, which the society is in denial of. It is a condition which is ubiquitous and pervades classes, race, age, gender, sex, etc. but, society continues to live in denial mode quite unwilling to acknowledge its presence and ramifications in the wider social world. The society in which we live is an 'ableist society' where able-bodiedness is *the* norm (McRuer 2006). From this it can be construed that in the social space[1] there is no place for disabled-bodies, and in the social classification the 'body' is the primary component where its materiality forms the basis of perception, and for that matter the structuring of the social world into distinct categories. Society prioritizes certain forms of the body to another on the basis of material difference; while some bodies matter there are some 'Others' who

does not. Norms and normality in the society is a rationalization of the different manifestations of the material body to fit into the totalizing narrative. From this begins the social construction of disability and the rise of concomitant cultural myths associated with disabled body or persons with disabilities (PWD) like—asexual or sexlessness, ugly, evil, unattractive, cursed, unproductive, and etcetera.

Literatures across time and cultures have perpetuated the cultural myth associated with disability in its signification and representations. As Howard Margolis and Arthur Shapiro say—"[t]he sinister hump of Richard III, the evil prosthesis of Captain Hook, the fear-inducing, thumping wooden leg of Captain Ahab, and the pitiable crutch of Tiny Tim are all allegorical symbols in our culture" (1987: 18). These literary representations of disable-bodied characters are significant because it reveals the culturally ingrained way of seeing and perceiving the disabled *Other*. Disability becomes 'allegorical symbols' to infer culturally imbued meanings and represents cultural myths like—asexual or sexlessness, ugly, evil, unattractive, cursed, unproductive, useless, and so on. Very often in literature these 'allegorical symbols' have been used as literary devices to represent what can be called the "evil, lame" or "the twisted mind in the twisted body" figures. For example Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*:

> .....uses "the twisted mind in the twisted body" device by tying Philip's bitter, confused and warped personality to his clubfoot. Other examples of physical deformity given symbolic meaning include Dickens' description of the "evil, lame" dwarf Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Hugo's description of Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. (1987: 19)

The categorization of the body into abled-disabled binary opposites is a shrewd political manoeuvre of social classifications in tune with the modernist vision of grand narrative. The preoccupation with norms and normality reveals the play (and influence) of power in the determination of space to individuals based on the materiality of their bodies. In this context, it is pertinent to bear in mind Foucault's concept of biopower[2]. In *History of Sexuality, Vol. I,* Foucault says, biopower is—"an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of "biopower"

(1978 {1976}: 140). What it literally means is the play of power and its control over *Other* bodies. "Biopower" is the term he uses to refer to the intersection of power and bodies in the everyday life of human beings. The individual bodies (abled and disabled) are distinguished from one another with the help of 'either/or' binary. The dominant, which becomes the norm, exerts their influence within the society through political manoeuvrings. As the "body" become a means and an object of power, the bodies that are different come to reflect a different metaphor in the binary 'either/or' system. One of the reasons is because disability is seen as 'inadequacy' or 'incompetence', and so not fit for life. The discrimination and stigmatization of the crippled bodies arises as a consequence of this biopolitics[3] of 'either/ or' binary of modernism**.** In this aspect, literary representations have lent their prowess in furthering the cause of biopower (or biopolitics) in the "subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (1978 {1976}: 140). As noted earlier, the literary representations of the disabled-bodies as the stereotypical "evil/ lame" figure give an idea about the subjugation of bodies by subjecting it to a rigorous "discipline and punish"[4] (1977 {1975}) of the body so as to fit into the grand narrative. The bodies that remain out of the grand narrative are labelled as the *Other* and pushed to the margin/ periphery. Foucault's concept of 'biopower' underscores the connections between the body and the larger social and political structures introducing the idea that power works at a very personal and political level, where the body is personal and political at the same time. Observing that the individual bodies intermingle in the broader socio-cultural and spatial environment to produce what Grosz refers to as sites "of contestation in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles" (1994: 19).

Firdaus Kanga begins his autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) with these terse lines—"'His teeth are like windows,' said Father to the old Parsee with the droopy white moustache, sitting next to us on the bus. 'You can look through them—see?'" (2008 {1990}: 3). These words seem innocuous to the reader at first glance but, as one reads further and further through the novel, it is found interspersed with similar narratives which graphically describe his physical appearance (deformities), i.e. the body of the protagonist Daryus Kotwal (Brit). Otherwise simply called Brit, a shortened form of the word brittle, it is a condition caused by a

debilitating bone disease called *Osteoporosis Imperfecta* or generally called brittle bones disease with which he was born. The harsh reality of his crippled body becomes a decisive factor in determining the 'condition' of his 'life'. The introduction of the protagonist through such graphic description of his physical appearance (body) at the very beginning sets the tone of the narrative. The body of Brit (Kanga) becomes *political*, the centrepiece of "biopower" or "biopolitics" played out by the larger society. It is the 'different' body of Brit which gets easily noticed by the society. "Quite simply, because my disability caught the eye better than the smartest blurb or brightest jacket" says Kanga (1992 {1991}: 83).

By embodying the lived experiences of his crippled body, the life lived as the subjugated *Other,* Kanga traces the space of the *Other* in the society where boundaries of social and geo-spatial spaces are sharply demarcated for disabled individuals like him. He finds his life tenuous in the society, a life which can be referred to as "bare life"[5] (Agamben 1998) as he has no rights and privileges unlike the abled because he falls on the wrong or *Other* side of the 'either/or' binary system of thought. In the analysis of disability phenomenon it is pertinent to cite Agamben who takes up Foucault's analysis and re-establishes it on the very terrain that the latter had wanted to break from, i.e. the field of sovereignty in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). Agamben argues that sovereign power is not linked to the capacity to bear rights, nevertheless, it is covertly linked to what he calls "bare life". This "bare life" is included in the political realm by a paradoxical exclusion and inclusion by exposing it to violence and the decision of sovereign power. Agamben shifts the meaning and content of Foucault's notion of *biopower* to *sovereign power* so as to assess its relevance and effectiveness in our understanding of modernity or contemporary life conditions and situations constituted by essentialist 'either/or' binary logic.

Foucault and Agamben, both are not far from the truth as far as the subjugation of the disabled body is concerned; the 'abjected body' is a result of the play of power (politics) in an otherwise personal matter, i.e. the body which is sought to be normalised, and normalization is a step towards conformity to grand narratives of modernism. Differentiation (and discrimination) of the body into binaries like

masculine-feminine, abled-disabled, etc. is a part of the larger politics of subjugation of bodies in the society. The question of power plays a significant role in the society as the evolutionary mechanism has a stranglehold over human psyche in its quest for survival, where only the fittest survive. In the socio-spatial organization of the society therefore, power plays an important role. The way through which the society organizes its structures and responds to its immediate surroundings occurs through a systemic reaction to the different so as to appropriate power. *Othering* is not a casual segregation to identify one from another but a deeper mechanism in the society that demarcates boundaries determining the allocation, distribution, appropriation and extension of power among the different groups and individuals, in large measure determined by the dominant (able bodied) group.

The prevalence of norms and normality exemplifies society's preoccupation with grand narratives. Signification of the body makes it apparently easier for disciplining the body to achieve subjugation, and subsequently, categorization of the 'different' (manifestations of) body into distinct groups. In its very logic, categorization is a rationalization of difference into a cognizable whole or totality, which betrays the play of power. Whilst categorizing the 'different' it deconstructs the 'normal' pretensions of the social structure. The exclusion of the different as the *Other*; the refusal to categorize them under any perceptible and cognisable form or group in the cultural mainstream is an indication of the society's inability to accept difference. In this context, Agamben's re-appropriation of Foucault's *biopower* in the general framework of *sovereign power* helps in the investigation of power dynamics in the society which flows from the modernist vision of consensus, totality, homeostasis, and normativity. Categorization as a way of rationalizing difference (of the body) through modern philosophy's search for 'truth', and reliance on fact and evidences of materiality is essentially a means to justify compulsory normativity as 'truth' (Peet 1998: 194). The universalizing of the shared commonalities as normativity in the sea of difference by the dominant majority was considered as the 'truth'.

The assertion of the modernist philosophy on the theory that the world can be understood entirely, provided its energy is focussed towards a systematic unravelling

of the universal truths have contributed towards the hegemony of compulsory normativity (Kitchin & Tate 2013: 16). In the words of Rob Kitchin and Nicholas J. Tate—"Modernism concerns the search for a unified, grand theory of society and social knowledge and seeks to reveal universal truths and meanings" (2013: 16), normativity is seen as a step towards this process. Taking a cue from the normalizing and totalizing tendencies of modernist philosophy, the appreciation of the surrounding world was sought to be put into specific easily identifiable categories sharing certain commonalities which are regarded as 'truths', because its ubiquitousness is taken as a revelation of the ultimate 'truth'. Norms and normality infers specific and easily identifiable categories sharing certain commonalities.

Discrimination of people on the basis of looks and appearances, sexual orientation, gender, class, colour, race, etcetera takes place as a result of 'either/or' binary polemics, where the different which are forcefully segregated often with violence, are paradoxically grouped by identifying shared commonalities. In such a scenario, the 'different' or 'non-normative' falls outside of the centre-margin dialectic, and becomes the *Other* since it does not share commonalities across a wider range. The prevalent 'normative' social structures reliant on modernist thought with its emphasis on the belief that 'truth' can be arrived at after careful scrutiny of fact and evidences stumbles when confronted with the reality of the existence of the 'different' or 'non-normative' in the society. Exclusion of the 'non-normative' is a 'biopolitics' signifying the re/alignment of 'power' as it assigns socio-cultural meanings on the basis of groupings or identity categories. The 'abject body' and the 'sexual perverts' emerges from these re/alignments of power by a paradoxical exclusion and inclusion. The 'non-normative' becomes the *Other* in the compulsory normative social order as they are considered to be far removed and at a distance from what can be called the discernible 'truth', at its best considered a divergence from the 'truth'.

Society's fixation with norms and normality reveals its modernist predilections towards order, homogeneity, consensus, stasis, normativity, etc. Segregation which is a distinctive feature in the society is akin to 'divide and rule' policy which is a basic character of politics. The fissures that develop subsequently

keep them apart, away and at a distance from those individuals and groups that are not categorizable. The lack of fair treatment of the 'different' in the social spaces, or as Henri Lefebvre calls—"living spaces" (Lefebvre 1991) which is the actual lived environment where "people act, intersect, move and locate themselves" (Freund 2001: 694) is a systematic or a well thought plan to keep out the less powerful from access to resources with the notion that they are lesser humans and less deserving.

Under the given circumstances, it is pertinent to re/read the intersection of disability and sexuality in the major works of Firdaus Kanga, i.e. *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) which have the potential to unravel the prevalent cultural myths surrounding disability and sexuality in India, its literary signification and re/presentations of the disabled in the Indian writings in English. To begin with, Daryus Kotwal nicknamed 'Brit' in Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) like Captain Hook, Captain Ahab, and Tiny Tim is a 'different' character. Unlike these characters, however, perhaps for the first time in the literary representation of the disabled the main protagonist in the novel by Kanga is a cripple. Traditionally, the crippled characters have occupied marginal spaces in literary representations (and other cultural representations like cinema) as in real life. As things stand in real life situations, disability has remained the *Other*; evil, ugly, unattractive, unproductive, sexless, etc. in literary representations as well. Disability (or the deformed body) has been transformed into a 'allegorical symbol' to represent a negative or pejorative idea or meaning. In many instances of literary representations it has been used as a literary device to represent "inner defect" (Thurer 1980) revealing society's prevalent ways of seeing and looking at the disabled. It is this particular aspect of the society that Kanga brings out in his major works, i.e. *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991). These two works are respectively a semi-autobiographical novel and a travelogue, texts which has emerged from the lived experiences of a subjugated and marginalized *Other*. Brit is different because his body is unlike the rest of his ilk and his body doesn't fall within the accepted parameters of the 'normal' in the society. The conversation between Sam and Dolly betrays this—"He [Sam] laughed bitterly. 'You know what the doctor said? He feels pain about four times as much as normal people do.' 'Sam, Brit is a normal person. He's just got a problem. Can't you see it that way? 'Normal? You

call everything I told you normal?'" (Kanga 2008 {1991}: 30). This conversation between Brit's father (Sam) and sister (Dolly) makes it clear as to how the disabled body is perceived by the society. Brit is NOT regarded as normal (even by his own parents/family), his body does not belong to *the* category, he is the *Other*. As usual, the *Others* are always *the* 'usual suspects' in the eyes of the society and are labelled as such. Rob Kitchin says:

> *Others*, then, are a group of people who are perceived to be *different, inferior and less deserving* than another group. ..... *Others* include people from ethnic minorities, disabled people, gay people, women, homeless people, poor people, old people, and gypsies and travellers. (1999: 46-47, italics mine)

In this context, Kanga's writings which represent the complexities arising out of the intersection of disability and sexuality can be read as texting liminality of the *Other* bodies in the Indian writings in English (or Indian English literature) who live on the peripheries as they are perceived to be "different, inferior and less deserving" as non-entities. Disability and sexuality intersect as disability is conflated with sexlessness on account of the disabled body being regarded as "inferior and less deserving" creating a complex phenomenon. As the society is 'ableist' (McRuer 2006) and 'hetero-normative' (Rich 1980) the disabled and homosexuals/ queer individuals do not have a place in the social space. With a tenuous "bare life" existence they are perpetually on the threshold of constantly shifting socio-cultural environment. The crippled/ disabled body of Kanga conflates two issues—the existences of "compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality" with the notion of "asexuality/ sexlessness" of the disabled entertained by the ableist society. As the two texts of Kanga are a literary narrative based on the lived experiences of a disabled-bodied individual (Firdaus Kanga) it confirms that, "..... there are ways that the sexuality and corporeality of the subject leave their traces in the texts produced, just as ..... the processes of textual production also leave their trace or residue on the body" (Grosz 1995: 21). In the process, Kanga's body becomes a text, which is read, reacted, signified and represented in innumerable ways and means.

In the semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) Brit [Kanga], with his crippled body, represents the opposite extreme of the *Other*. Representation signifies politics, the politics of power and privilege. Brit's crippled body and preference for the 'non-normative' homosexuality marginalizes him twice over where his body is read as a cultural text with all the attributes of the *Other*. Through the character of Brit, modelled in his own image, Kanga narrates his lived experiences in the texts as the quintessential *Other* individual in the conservative (Indian) society. While the other major work *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) is technically a travelogue, it is effectively a statement of angst, pain and frustration of a disabled individual struggling to grow in a malevolent society where he expresses the socio-cultural contrasts and contradictions between two major distinctive cultures—the oriental or Eastern (Indian) and the occidental or Western (English) traditions as regards their attitudes and treatment of the disable-bodied individuals. The imaginative recapturing of his 'growing' years from childhood to adulthood in *Trying to Grow* (1990), and his critique of the spaces and spatiality in *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) provides an incisive discourse on the liminality of the disabled body which can be read as a cultural text.

Trying to Grow (1990) represents the experiences of growing up as the *Other*, discriminated and deprived of equal opportunity in the society. His 'identity' (if it can be called one) begins and ends with his disabled body, and its meaning constantly shifts from one social space and spatiality to another. He recalls the remarks directed towards him—"'[w]ho will marry you also—you cannot have children?'.....'But you can pray—some girl might take pity on you'" (Kanga 1992 {1991}: 36-37). With an essentialist binary system of perception and cognition prevalent in the society Kanga's body is read and reacted with disdain, which fails to weigh the enormity and complexity of issues involved that need higher application of the mind. Deep rooted social assumptions and stigmatization of the disable-bodied as the *Other* reveals the socio-culturally imbued meanings associated with the disable-bodied like—"evil/ugly" or "twisted mind in the twisted body"; a cultural stereotyping that engenders the cultural myths like unattractive/unproductive, sexless/asexual, etc. which is a crude form of perception and cognition that assigns cultural (and other) meanings on the basis of discernible

disparities and divergences in the body. Disavowal of Kanga in spaces and spatiality exhibits the irony of his life, which exist but is not accepted by the society.

Having being denied the privilege to establish meaningful relationships with other human beings because of his physical disparity Kanga con/textualizes his condition in the broader socio-cultural and spatial milieu, re/reading the ways and means through which the larger society reads his body as a 'different' cultural text which feeds cultural myths. The prevalent literary (and cultural) signification and representations of the polymorphous body and sexuality as the *Other*—ugly, evil, unattractive, unproductive, etc. amounts to saying that they are NOT equal human beings. In the common perception of disability Kanga discovers, the disabled like him, are assumed to be sexless or asexual. Corporality and sexuality are conflated with each other. Sexual attractiveness and performance of sexual act is premised on the contortions of the body. Kanga finds these prevalent approaches towards the 'different' bodies in the social spaces exasperating and disrupts this narrative and discourses in his writings, implying that the society in which we live is essentially 'ableist' and 'hetero-normative'.

The "social model of disability", a phrase coined by the disabled academic Mike Oliver[6] in 1983 brought about a paradigm shift, which can be referred to as the 'cultural turn' in the analysis of disability. From the dominant "medical model of disability" or the biomedical centric reading of disability phenomenon which saw disability as a case of 'biological determinism'[7], the social model shifted the focus towards the disabling social structures. Absolving the crippled individuals of culpability in their crippled condition as the medical model are wont to do; the social model to some extent restored the dignity of the disabled as it identified the social structures as the 'disabling' agency. The social model argues that, in all its intents and purposes, society segregates and discriminates individuals with non-normative bodies in a socio-spatial continuum. This emerges as a systemic barrier or disabling factor hindering the equal participation of disable-bodied individuals in the society. Thus far, in various socio-cultural spaces the individuals afflicted with disability were held responsible for their predicament, accentuated by religious bigotry and cultural myths. This caused tremendous psychological and mental trauma, apart from

the physical hardships as it stripped them of social space and spatiality in everyday life. In the words of Agamben, their lived experiences turn out to as a "bare life". The "bare life" of the disable-bodied can be gauged from the fact that they were excluded from being incorporated in the society as one of its equal members, relegating them to the peripheries or margins of the society. In the process the disable-bodied individual's lives are reduced to a (perpetual) "state of exception"[8] (Agamben 2005) where the ableist society exerts unusual power over the hapless disabled individuals, which in the course of time have become a 'normal' state of affairs in the society and it cannot be justified under any logic or reason. Agamben says, ".....the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference" (Agamben 2005: 40, italics in original). In India, disability which is seen as a curse and a punishment for one's act of omission and commission in the present or previous life marks the "threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other" (Agamben 2005: 40). Kanga's literary endeavour problematizes this extant Indian ethos towards the disabled (and disability) by narrating his lived experiences where the disabled like him remain in a perpetual "state of exception".

Shifting the focus away from the materiality of the individual's crippled body to the disabling social structures; the social model sought to dispel the unusual extension of power exercised by the ableist society bringing about a nuance and a humane perspective in the understanding of disability phenomenon in the society. Reducing the disabled to a "state of exception" is, so to say an abuse of power, tantamount to using the body as a tool of exploitation and abuse. In *The Use of Bodies (Homo Sacer IV.2)* (2015) Agamben talks of bodies in 'use', he says the body of a slave is primarily to sustain the life of the master and oscillates somewhere between ***zoê*** (bare life) and ***bios*** (qualified life). This means that the body of the slave does not have an independent existence on its own but is part of the body of the master which completes it or qualifies it for life. Under similar circumstances, it can be argued that the disabled bodies do not have an independent existence of their own rather, they are constitutive '*other*' part of the larger able-bodied society, used and

abused for the benefit and amusement of the able-bodied society as they are the ones who hold the levers of 'sovereign' power as the master is to the slave.

For more than three decades since it was first enunciated in 1983, the social model held sway in disability studies as a revolutionary concept. Identifying the prevalence of 'norms' and 'normality' as the key factor of discriminatory practices in the society, the social model critiques the 'normalizing' process as a method of categorization of the different forms and manifestations of the body into an exclusive group, identity category, or in other words a "state of exception." Normalizing arbitrarily extends the reach of power, determining the extent to which it can discriminate the "non-normative" with its archaic binary logic. Brit (Kanga) occupies the other extreme of social space, or is pushed to a "state of exception" as the ableist society perceives and constitutes his body as useless or valueless. The assumed 'asexuality/sexlessness' of Brit (Kanga) is a result of ab/use of power in the sense that it uses this power to inscribe socio-cultural meanings to the crippled body like ugly, evil, "twisted mind in the twisted body", unattractive, unproductive, and etcetera. There is a distinct socio-cultural and materialist tinge in these perspectives which devalues (and dehumanizes) the life of the disabled like Brit (Kanga), meaning that disabled individuals like him has no *place* in the social space as their existence is regarded as having no value, meaning or importance whatsoever. For this reason, boundaries are drawn, and limitations are imposed for determining the power structures between the abled on the one hand, and the disabled on the other which relegates the disable-bodied individuals into a "state of exception", obliterating their existence from the consciousness of the ableist society. The extant cultural myths practiced, propagated and perpetuated in the society often through cultural expressions like literature (and cinema, advertising, etc.) arise out of these circumstances complicating the already difficult life of the disable-bodied individuals as it buttresses the widespread myth that makes monsters, freaks, 'aliens', and so on out of disabled bodies. Alienated from the mainstream society thus, the disabled individuals' lives (e.g. Kanga) are reduced to a "state of exception".

Contrary to the common perception and conception of the disabled as evil, ugly, sexless, useless, etc. or, in other words 'valueless', Edwards and Imrie argues

disability and bodies as bearers of value in the eponymously titled paper "Disability and Bodies as Bearers of Value" (2003). They argue that the question of uselessness or valuelessness of the disabled bodies is relative and a result of different 'valuations' which varies from one socio-cultural environment to another. The "disabled people's corporeal identities, feelings, and (embodied) encounters in a range of social settings" depending on "systems of signification and representation" (Edwards & Imrie 2003). It needs to be borne in mind that in the valuations of the body there are numerous variations. In the present case, while talking about Kanga's predicament it needs to be examined from the specific socio-cultural as well as spatial context. Edwards and Imrie have a point to make as disability *per se* cannot be studied or understood in a vacuum. It is produced by specific socio-cultural contexts which have its roots in geo-spatial environment cherishing different values and principles.

Susan Wendell in *The Rejected Body* (1996) asserted that, "disability, like gender, is socially constructed" (1996: 57). Since then the phrase 'Social Construction' which was coined by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*: *Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966) have gained popular currency in academia. In locating the circumstances and cause of disability in a different frame, i.e. the social structures the 'social construction' concept has transformed some of the negative attitudes towards the disabled and disability. The 'social construction' of disability is an idea that disability is constructed by the society (and supported by its institutions) as it is invested with power. Many a time the term has been used as an all encompassing and universal phrase with the notion that it means the same across time and spaces. However, it needs to be addressed as a variable concept as it depends on space and spatiality as Wendell quips, ".....not everyone who says that disability is socially constructed means the same thing by it" (1996: 57). Nevertheless, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann who opined that, "the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the *social construction* [italics mine] of reality" (1966: 15) have redefined the paradigm of disability studies as has been the case in gender studies. Reality for Henri Bergson is ever-evolving, and so it is essentially polymorphous (Bergson 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000), so is the body. The different manifestations of the body are

in essence due to its ever-evolving nature like reality; the body is mutable and polymorphous. However, the society's predilection towards modern philosophy's reliance on homoeostasis, totality and normativity has made it a prisoner of time. It has not been able to accept the reality that the body is polymorphous due to which different forms of the body are regarded as the non-normative *Other,* and reduced to a "state of exception".

In recent times the social model of disability has been critiqued as disembodied (Pinder 1995) as there is a possibility of over emphasis on the 'disabling' social structures. Further, Edwards and Imrie argues, "[b]oth conceptions", i.e. the medical and social model—"while capturing aspects of disabled people's lives, are problematical for failing to recognise that there is a dialectical relationship between the individual and society, or where intersubjective and subjective experiences are entwined" (2003: 239-256). The hermeneutics of the social model seem to be preoccupied with a cultural-materialist and historicist reading of the body structured on 'difference'. Reading the works of Kanga makes it apparent that neither the medical model nor the social model by itself has the capacity to evaluate the disability phenomenon theoretically in its entirety. Some ".....suggest that the analysis of the body should be the meeting place for sociological and disability theory" (Hughes 1999, Shilling 1993) [Cited in Edwards, Claire & Rob Imrie, "Disability and Bodies as Bearers of Value," Sociology 37(2), May 2003]. With the change of times and spaces the values and priorities differ and change. There is a need to look beyond the 'reductive' conceptions of disability, which has the danger of being too simplistic in its analysis and it cannot afford to remain frozen in time. In the context of Kanga's lived experiences as exemplified in his major works the call for "the application of the sociological imagination to the field of disability", which "directs attention to exploring the links between structural conditions and people's lived experience of the process of disablement" (Barnes, et al. 1999: 210) is another way of reading his works for as Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out, the body is an active creator of significance and the site of meaningful expression.

When Kanga says, "[f]or twenty-nine years I had been told, day after day, in the street and the cinema, at weddings and at exams, in shops and at restaurants, that I was not a person" (1992 {1991}: 36) there is a subtle irony and subterfuge in the statement which implies the discrimination and stigmatization he faces in everyday life. It reminds Kanga, that the space and spatiality is closed for individuals like him. Street, cinema, shops, restaurants and exams these are the spaces where people meet, interact and live—the social and spatial space. To be reminded "told" over and over again that he was 'not a person' implies the violent way through which power exerts itself which in this case is seen embedded in language. Every space and spatiality is closed for him. As Kanga makes it a point to mention the specific areas and places which is out of bounds for him, it becomes clear that spatiality acts as one important factor in discriminating and segregating disabled individuals like him. Spatiality turns into an active agency as it discourages or presents an unwelcome sign; designs an exclusive space for the participation of the abled. Spatiality reminds where the disabled are welcome where they are not. It is not just socio-cultural myths and practices but, importantly the geography, the physical spaces or spatiality too, which turns out as an active agency of the disablement process. Spatiality has power, by its very design and nature it can exclude or include, discriminate and segregate which gives it an extensive power to exclude disabled individuals. Kanga's crippled body transforms into a site where power is actualized by reducing his body to a "state of exception" in everyday life. His crippled body is denied a part in the social spaces; its spatiality discourages him from being a part of it. There is an unseen and unwritten sign 'written' everywhere in spaces and spatiality that he is a non-entity and a *persona non grata* that forcefully excludes him.

With his crippled body, Kanga is not welcome in many social spaces; spatiality too discourages him from being a part of it. There is an unseen, unwritten code and sign 'written' everywhere that he is a non-entity which actively excludes him as a *persona non grata*. This exclusion of the disabled from the social space as a *persona non grata,* in the words of Agamben can be termed as "state of exception". For Agamben "state of exception" is the power of the sovereign to transcend the rule of law, to extend its power in the pretext of common or public good. In this case the disabled are divested of power, where the majority able-bodied appropriates the

'sovereign' power and dictates term to the disabled *Others*, in the pretext of common or public good. In the prevalent cultural myths the disabled are "evil/ugly" and "with a twisted mind in a twisted body". Taken-for-granted thus, they are evaluated as useless/ valueless, rather harmful for the society as a whole. There is no reason or logic as to why a disabled individual like Kanga needs to be told that he is "not a person". Without any provocation society reacts to his disabled body in an offensive, violent and demeaning language. Kanga says, "I liked being different from most people. It tickled me. Though it didn't tickle me when I came into life howling with pain" (2008 {1990}: 28). These words quipped in a lighter vein show Brit (Kanga) has not lost his sense of humour and the zest of life inspite of the numerous troubles that he faces on account of his disability. But, there is disquiet and an uncomfortable feeling with the way he is treated by the society at large. It is this pain and loneliness of a "bare life" that Kanga textualizes in his works. With the realization that the ableist society and its institutions draws its power from literary signification and representations, Kanga takes it in his stride to deconstruct some of the cultural myths associated with disability. The merit of Kanga's writings is in its ability to represent the "dialectical relationship between the individual and society," and the entwined "intersubjective and subjective experiences".

A disabled person's experience differs from that of another person from a different culture, time and place. Therefore, the socio-cultural signification and its literary representations vary in scope and argument. In his works, particularly in *Trying to Grow* (1990) Kanga articulates his experiences in the Indian cultural milieu and contrasts the same with the experiences he gained in England in the travelogue *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) bringing out the contrasting ways of treatment and reception of the disabled in the social spaces of these two—Indian and Western (English) cultures. Kanga's works exemplify that, "..... disability is the body being transformed by 'living in society', or where a person with an impairment is disabled through the attitudes and norms by which society defines them" (Edwards & Imrie 2003: 239-256). In the midst of these divergent views it emerges that the materiality of the body forms the common template from which it can be construed that the 'body is a text' that is read and reacted in numerous ways.

Society is instantaneous in discriminating and categorizing; Kanga's narrative exemplifies this. His disabled body is a template of the non-normative, and the point of departure from the norm. The narrative of Kanga's writings is suffused with an air of suffocation as Brit lays bare his lived experiences as an abject individual. Brit (Kanga) is made to feel 'inadequate' in the society, being reduced as he is to a 'human oddity' simply for being different in his physique. Being different comes with a price tag, Brit (Kanga) gradually discovers; that conformity to a set of 'norms' is a privilege which opens the door of acceptability in the society. Disability is regarded as an oddity in a society programmed to run according to a set of norms. His identity and recognition in the society, he eventually discovers, begins and ends with his physical deformity (body). There is something scathing about the way abled people 'look' at him. Society generally is not able to fathom and accept his 'difference'; his 'presence' is camouflaged with denial. There is no space and place for accommodating those categories which are beyond the normative.

On many instances critics have pointed out that the medical as well as social model overemphasizes "difference" in the analysis of disability. While both have oscillated between two opposite extremes/poles it brings out the two strands in the starting point of discursive formations, i.e. body and difference. In the cultural narrative of India it combines both orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs. As Kanga says in *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), "Religion, in India, seemed to me an admission of defeat, a renunciation of reality. ..... For Hindu philosophy never tires of repeating that the body is but the apparel of *atma*, which changes clothes innumerable times in course of its millennium-long life" (1992 {1991}: 8). There is an assumption or taken-for-grantedness in the Indian cultural milieu where the discursive formations get embroiled with orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs. Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) used the term 'doxa' to denote what is taken-for-granted in any particular society. In the Hindu philosophy, as noted by Kanga there is an eerie sense that denote 'doxa' prevails in the social order where the life of the disabled are taken-for-granted. 'Doxa' is "an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1984: 471). With the predominance of the Hindu philosophy in the Indian thought processes the lines

separating the real and imagined (thought) world get blurred, it is here that doxa prevail and the understanding of disability under such a system becomes a difficult proposition.

Bodies matter, some matters more some matters less. Particularly, taken-for-grantedness emerges from the materiality of bodies. Across cultures there exists a system of prioritization of certain bodies. Prioritization of bodies reveals the values that the society holds. Categorization of bodies as abled or disabled is a practical mode of imposing values according to priorities. In everyday environment, in the common ways of seeing and understanding, the first thing that is noticed about a person is the peculiarity of the body. What catches the eye of the beholder is the 'difference' in the body, immediately forming a psychical image in the mind of the beholder. Responses and attitudes to towards the disabled person emerge from this perception of the disabled body. People with a relatively small figure or disability are taken to be timid and docile bodies. That is why Kanga in *Trying to Grow* (1990) discloses that a number of women would disclose and share their secrets and vulnerabilities with him, which under normal circumstances they would not do with a person with abled body. On the flip side, he discovers that it has essentially to do with docility of his body.

Bodies matter, because it determines power. The physicality of the body adds an element of strength and "looked-at-ness"[9] making its presence felt by imposing itself. In the archaic societies, power revolved around the ability to impose oneself, very often it had been the sheer physicality, the size and strength and the "looked-at-ness" of the body, which worked in favour of achieving power (and privilege). Consequently, bodies that can impose itself gains priority in social structure.

For Foucault power is 'ubiquitous' and beyond agency or structure therefore, although Foucault's concept of biopower introduces an interesting element in the social matrix it does not suffice in elaborating how power works in a certain method. At this point it becomes fascinating to add Bourdieu's concept of 'Capital'; he argues capital and power are one and the same thing, in his own words, ".....capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing [sic])" (1986: 16). Unlike Foucault, Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-

legitimised through interplay of agency and structure meaning that the mechanism of re/alignment of power is well within the society. In the usual ways of seeing and perceiving there is what can be called discrimination and violence, the mechanism of re/alignment of power in the social matrix. The normative ableist society arbitrarily discriminates bodies as per its politico-cultural priorities, looking at the bodies from an 'ableist gaze'[10]. The phrase 'male gaze' was coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975 to explain the way through which literature and visual arts portrayed women from a masculine point of view, presenting women as objects of male desire (Mulvey 1999: 835). She argues that there is a certain fascination with the human forms particularly, the female body as an image to be "looked-at" for pleasure; whereas, the male body are *the* [emphasis added] "bearer of the look" the ideal human form (Mulvey 1999: 833-44). Similarly, there is a manner of looking which can be called 'ableist gaze'. The disabled body is "looked at" as 'bearer of the gross'[11] (not as bearers of value) diminishing the disabled body as repulsive objects. To get rid of these repulsive objects (disabled body), out of sight and consciousness, they are considered an exception and not the rule and banished as "state of exception".

Disability is socially constructed, beginning with the ways through which the different bodies are "looked at." These ways of seeing and perceiving, what can be called 'ableist gaze' problematize the disabled body, as some forms of the different body are sought to be violently or forcefully banished from social space and geo-spatiality in everyday life, while some others are prioritized. That is why many social spaces are closed for them and an unwritten sign surreptitiously 'written' everywhere in the social as well as geo-spatial spaces that they are not a part of it. By its design and character it actively creates boundaries of exclusivity, power and privilege. Agamben argues that "state of exception" is an overreach of power by the sovereign. Observing that the disabled are forcefully (often violently) excluded by the majority ableist society, it can be argued that there is a similar overreach of power (like the sovereign) by the ableist society.

It has been argued/mentioned earlier that the literary representations of the disabled are insignificant to say the least. In a few cases, they are represented as evil,

ugly, sin, "twisted mind in a twisted body", seldom as the central character. All these emerges from the 'ableist gaze', which is filled with repulsion towards the different body, which goes on to influence the language, vocabulary, practices, popular imagination as well as the design of spatiality, which can be called "design apartheid" (Imrie 2000). Returning to the discussion of archaic societies where the physicality of the body acted as the determinant of power, there is an eerie similarity that continues to operate even to this day in contemporary 'civilized' societies. It may not be the same at present but, one cannot discount the fact that similar mechanism continues to exert pressure in an individual's life, his place and position in the society. The "looked-at-ness" of the body determines in many occasions the place of women in social and spatial spaces, so does with people afflicted by disability. However, in the case of disabled individuals it is their lack of it, the absence of "looked-at-ness" which diminishes their appeal and human qualities in the eyes of the beholder, i.e. the ableist gaze. On many occasions the "looked-at-ness", or the 'beauty' of the body has on many occasions determined the power and influence of individuals, with which they have come to occupy a larger than life image in social space, and a larger than life personality cult which increases their power in the broader socio-cultural as well as political milieu. Extending both Foucault's concept of 'biopower' (biopolitics) and Agamben's 'sovereign power', it can be inferred that the two concepts of "biopower" and "sovereign power" works at a very personal as well as political level.

Using Bourdieu's concept of 'Capital' in the reading of Firdaus Kanga's works throws light on how biopower and sovereign power work at a very personal as well as political level as the issue of 'looked-at-ness' constitute a mechanism through which the bodies are perceived, valued and assigned 'meanings' and most importantly spaces. In the Indian socio-cultural milieu, Brit's (Kanga) body with its apparent deviations from the norms obviously doesn't acquire much value in the society that prioritises certain forms of the body to another on the basis of Capital. Bourdieu extended the meaning/ connotations of Capital from the common parlance of economics to include cultural and social values as a form of capital, as he says these can be converted under certain circumstances into economic capital. Bourdieu posits that Capital constitutes power. He says:

> Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its "incorporated," embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. (1986: 15)

Accordingly, bodies have what is called cultural and social capital along with economic capital, which in turn determines the power of the body as capital is synonymous with power. In such a scenario, the disabled bodies' deformed looks and appearances, its lack of "looked-at-ness" disqualifies them from being considered as bearers of value. For that reason, they come to hold lesser 'valuations' of the capital, which significantly varies from one socio-cultural and material environment to another. The society reads the 'body as texts' by looking at it from the perspective of the ableist gaze, first and foremost as an embodiment of capital and as objects of pleasure. On many occasions it has been accentuated by cultural myths and religious bigotry like evil, ugly, sin, twisted mind in the twisted body image. On the other side of the ableist gaze, the able-bodied with its "looked-at-ness" emerge as invaluable capital— economic, cultural as well as social and are thus invested with greater power.

In "The Forms of Capital" (1986) Bourdieu posits *capital* in the following avatars economic, cultural and social adding another dimension to the traditional meaning of capital to mean more than material wealth or value. Whilst expanding the theory of capital he introduced the concept of *cultural capital* saying that, "cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications" (1986: 16). Similarly, he went on to say that, "social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility" (1986: 16). By these terms and concepts it can be inferred that the body is bestowed with value or certain material worth which may not be apparent but, under "certain conditions" can be converted into economic capital. On the whole, meaning that a body has an inherent cultural

and social value that can be exchanged for economic gains. Under the circumstances, bodies that are 'non-normative' do not possess capital because it cannot be converted into economic capital and are subsequently abjected. It is the possibility and potential for conversion (under certain conditions) Bourdieu contends, that it has what is called "symbolic power"[12] (Bourdieu 1991). From this standpoint it can be fathomed that the abjection of disabled bodies arises as a result of its lack of symbolic power, and it is symbolic power which assigns (socio-cultural) meanings to the body and determines spaces and spatiality. The term 'social space' was first coined by Emile Durkheim in the late nineteenth century to show important insights into the role of space in social processes in pre-modern societies where, ".....everything has its assigned place in *social space*" (Durkheim 2001: 337, italics mine). Public opprobrium of the disabled body and disability *per se* is invariably engendered in this social matrix and grounded in spatiality. The 'social space' can be taken as a metaphor. The metaphor of everyday social life, which is the embodiment of economic, cultural and social capital that have become deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions of individuals in the lived environment. In the words of Bourdieu, it is what is called 'habitus'[13].

The disabled bodies with its lesser symbolic power are (virtually) non-existent in social space. The different value assigned to diverse forms of the body is due to the fact that, "everything has its assigned place in social space" (Durkheim 2001: 337). These are coded in everyday language and practices which is apparent from the fact that the disabled are prefixed with adjectives like—asexual/sexless, evil, ugly, unattractive, unproductive, etc. (Bourdieu 1991). In the habitus the disabled are neither considered important nor taken into account as they do not have the power to exert influence in the society who are perceived as the *Other*. Rather the ableist society perceives them as bearers of gross and uses its power to banish them from the social spaces or which can be labelled as "state of exception". Henri Lefebvre says, "[s]pace is social: it involves assigning more or less appropriated places to the social relations of reproduction, namely, the biophysical relations between the sexes, the ages" (2009: 186-187). The disabled individuals' sexuality has always been questioned by the ableist society. With their bodies considered as repulsive and unattractive they have always been assumed to be asexual or sexless.

Particularly, the doors of social spaces have been shut by the ableist society through these assumptions. Social space is therefore not a neutral agency as it appears to be but is conditioned and constructed by numerous forces. Lefebvre quips, "[s]ocial space has thus always been a social product, but this was not recognised. Society thought that they received and transmitted natural space" (2009: 186-187). Disability, like gender is socially constructed because social space is NOT natural space as it appears from the surface. It should be noted that along with social space, human beings inhabit a physical space or geographical spatiality where the social space pans out and the habitus is engendered across its length and breadth. Many a times social spaces seem strangely familiar because the social equations among the individuals consequently determine the biophysical equation for sex, copulation and reproduction which Bourdieu calls the capital (of the body), and these capitals vary from one spatiality to another. In this regard it is noteworthy to quote Paul M. Churchland who says a social space is where:

> A human occupies a physical space of comparable complexity, but in our case it is overwhelmingly obvious that we live also in an intricate space of obligations, duties, entitlements, prohibitions, debts, affections, insults, allies, contracts, enemies, infatuations, compromises, mutual love, legitimate expectations, and collective ideals. (1995: 6)

Social space it is understood is complex, "an intricate space" of relational activities and processes. In this space each and every individual, abled or disabled, has to struggle for survival. Every individual has to carve a space for one self in an expanse of time and physical space (spatiality). It provides the context, social and physical to live but, it is not equal, least of all to the disable-bodied. Kanga remarks, "I knew that every day of my life I would have to challenge the victim inside me, the voice that said, so honestly, I haven't got a fair deal, how can I be expected to live as if I had?" (1992 {1991}: 68). What can be observed here is that there is a stress on 'capital' consequently, the social model has relied heavily on a cultural materialist reading or interpretation of the body, which have placed a heavy burden on the disabled body. The disabled find themselves at the receiving end of the society as the disabled body is regarded as a liability rather than a capital. As a cripple Brit's (Kanga) existence is caught in a quagmire of indifferent significations and cultural

representations which does not value his body and accord social space. His body, inscribed with culturally imbued meanings like—unattractive, unproductive, sin, evil, ugly, danger, etc. have its roots in the cultural-materialist reading of the body. It reads the 'body as text', which bears 'capital' values. Obviously, this does not forebode well for Brit (Kanga) or for that matter the disabled individuals as a whole. His identity is stamped in his (crippled) body. As Alan Gartner says, "..... people without disabilities have imposed their image upon people who are disabled. These images have told us not only what are beautiful and right; they have also warned us that the image of disability is ugly and evil" (1984: 3-4). In such a scenario, the deformed/ deviant/ crippled bodies is deprived of capital and consequently, symbolic power.

Cultural and social capital, both of which are "convertible, under certain conditions" into other forms of capital, i.e. economic capital plays an important role in societal power relations. At this juncture, a case in point is that of Race and Gender, Critical Race Theory and Gender/ Women Studies have pointed out that the identity of the blacks and women rely on their body just as it is with disabled individuals. In all these, the problem arises in the different valuations of the materiality of the body, i.e. the colour of the skin, the "looked-at-ness" of female body, and the 'repulsive' deformity of disabled bodies. Even to this day men or the patriarchal society have not been able to appreciate the body of women, the fact that it bleeds regularly continues to be an enigma to many societies and the worst part is, it is taken as a sign of impurity (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Issues of race, gender and disability emerge because the social (and cultural) constructions of the body see it from the perspective of capital.

Certain forms of human body are valued and preferred at the cost of others like—white over black, male over female (masculinity over feminity), abled over disabled, etc. as these are bestowed with premium. By superimposing a premium on these artificially (socially and culturally) valued categories, the society makes it clear that certain (socially sanctioned) bodies are wanted while the others are detested and stigmatised as gross. This social constructionism has a stranglehold on the habitus and the popular imagination has failed to distinguish between the myth and the

reality as it has become blurred. Literatures (and other cultural expressions like cinema, advertising, etc.) have perpetuated these cultural myths which have made it ubiquitous, making its appearance seem 'natural', and a fait accompli. Rob Kitchin argues, "[f]eeding into and from cultural representations are cultural myths. Myths take the form of malicious gossip which feeds into stereotypical representations" (1998: 351). By constantly hammering the image, thought and idea in our mind-body of the desirability or beauty of particular skin types (white over black), size and physique, sexuality, etc. it has created an inferior, and *Other* devalued status for the blacks, women and the disabled. In *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) Kanga muses:

> Racism is an unmitigated evil, a negation of mind and morality, perpetrated by those who have nothing to be proud of but the pigment of their skin. From my own life I knew what it was to be a lesser being in the outside world; how much harder it might have been if my parents had been disabled as well, and my relatives and friends. The bigger world would have receded almost out of sight, as it had for so many young black people. (Kanga 1992 {1991}: 152)

It is obvious from the way society functions that Bourdieu's "Capital" finds resonance in the psychical and pragmatic realm of human thought and habitus. This system of human thought and habitus is nothing less than a superstition perpetuated by cultural and literary representations (and expressions) in everyday life. This is dominated by the powerful and dominant, i.e. men and able-bodied. Literature and other cultural expressions, as far as the disabled are concerned, have all along relied on "probability," rather than on "reality" (Aristotle, *The Poetics* 1902). There is a well-thought out strategy of exclusion in the system of categorization which can be gauged from the fact that race, gender and disability are "state[s] of exception" earmarked by the powerful and dominant. Under the circumstances, the lived experiences of blacks, women and disabled are reduced to a "bare life".

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) Agamben says Homo Sacer is someone '*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*' (Agamben 1998: 8, italics in original), in contemporary society the disabled can be compared to Agamben's Homo Sacer (with a little twist) who are allowed to live and yet not allowed to pursue a free and equal life**.** From hindsight the line, "[t]o be open to a

plundering of your personality at almost any time lends a subtle terror to your life that lies sulking beneath the surface of your smile" (Kanga 1992 {1991}: 37), make it clear as to how the disabled are assigned their place in the social space; stripped and plundered of their personality they are 'kept in their place', i.e. the "state of exception". They exist but only in the margins of the society, shorn of the privileges and other benefits enjoyed by the non-disabled. It can be said that the disabled live a kind of exiled life (almost banned) in the eyes of the society and therefore, it is pertinent to quote again Agamben's lines, "[h]e who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable" (Agamben 1998: 28, italics in original). The disabled find themselves at the other end of the society without any social security, living on the edge of the society and law, a "bare life". When Kanga says, "[s]uccess requires the same values from the disabled or blacks or whites" he is politely reiterating the point that they are equal human beings and need the same treatment and social space (Kanga 1992 {1991}: 152). In the story of the struggle for survival, just as the non-disabled, the disabled faces the same obstructions and difficulties and when the society does not acknowledge their presence and give social space their life becomes a redundant "bare life" due to the additional burden placed on them physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Living somewhat of an exiled life, the disabled have to struggle for each and every breath (literally), recognition and survival as their bodies are not bestowed with capital (Bourdieu). Coded in everyday language, customs and practices the disabled are set apart or 'exiled', literally and metaphorically. To put it succinctly, there is a presence of what can be termed as "design apartheid"[14] (Imrie, 2000) in the social schema as well as physical realms (spatiality). No doubt each and every individual (abled or disabled) has to struggle to survive (which is the primary law of life), the fact is that the story of the struggle for survival of the disabled proves to be an onerous task compared to the able-bodied, as the social organisation and spatiality is designed in favour of the able-bodied leading to the exclusion of the disabled in its scheme of things (social space). As "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product," Henri Lefebvre says, "..... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of

action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (1991: 26). Kanga articulates this general circumstances and environment in which the disabled are forced to live a life of 'exile' and exclusion in the Indian socio-cultural milieu when he says, ".....I became the battlefield, leading a doomed revolt against my own body" (1992 {1991}: 37). Boundaries and places are marked in the social as well as physical spaces by a process of exclusion and marginalisation. Rob Kitchin says, "[s]paces are currently organised to keep disabled people 'in their place' and places written to convey to disabled people they are 'out of place'" (1998: 343).

Exclusion and marginalisation of the disabled in the social space highlights socio-spatial boundaries and margins as 'inherently geographic' (Gleeson, 199: 36). There is a growing recognition of space not only in the social realm but, geographical (physical) realm as well which stands in a dialectical relationship with the societies that inhabit them. As Soja puts it space is, "actually lived, and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices" (1989: 17-18). Created and destroyed continuously as a result of the dynamism of social life and its networked worlds of meanings it takes us beyond the idea of space as an empty container in the larger socio-geographical spatiality within which life is played out (Blundell 2016). Under the circumstances, this emerging paradigm of 'post-historicism and post-modern critical human geography' which have thus far received scant attention as a result of modernism's focus on time and temporality (Soja, 1989) is crucial in the understanding of any form of society and in any exercise of power. Therefore, "[i]n order to explain the socio-cultural contexts of disability, it is important not just to look at bodies, embodied agency, but at oppression as a 'socio-spatial phenomena' (Gleeson 1999: 36)." [Cited in Peter Freund. "Bodies, Disability and Spaces: The social model and disabling spatial organisations" in *Disability & Society*, 2001]

From the 'cultural turn' in the 1970s, it has now taken a 'spatial turn' through the work of Henri Lefebvre and geographers like Edward W. Soja. Citing Brendan Gleeson's book *Geographies of Disability* (1999), Peter Freund says, "..... first, the historical-materialist approach to disability has produced little detailed empirical

analysis. Secondly, despite its materialist approach and implicit focus on space, the social model has not fully 'grasped the importance of space to the constitution of society and human identity'" (Freund 2001: 694). For that reason, exploring the non-normatives like—disabled bodies and queer sexualities from an alternative paradigm of 'post-historicism and postmodern critical human geography' (Soja 1989: 17-19) have the capacity to unshackle the conventional social structures. This shift in approach has been made possible by postmodern philosophy which rejects the 'archaic' structuralist "binary/ binarism". In postmodern philosophy 'truth' is relative, subject to interpretations; thus postmodern philosophy critiques modern reason, ".....as a mode of social control which acts openly through disciplinary institutions, ...in more disguised forms through rational socialization and, most subtly, through rational self-discipline" (Peet & Hartwick 2015: 226). Liberation of thought processes in the postmodern philosophy opened a crucial moment in the study of disability phenomenon in the society as it paved the advent of a new paradigm which can be called a 'spatial turn'.

Postmodernism's 'dissipative structures' and 'structural dislocations' engendered a critical perspective into the analysis of how power relationships are expressed through spatiality, and how these power relationships are inverted and contested in the larger socio-cultural and spatial continuum. These poignant lines by Kanga, "[n]ot that I was defeated, beyond the moment. I fought as if, and indeed, for my life. I fought with every weapon I could fashion, because I knew that the way people looked at me was a lie. And I was not going to become what they said I was—a little monument to sorrow (1992 {1991}: 37)", and "[m]ore and more often I won the skirmishes; sometimes, with those for whom I was beginning to care, I lost. It was one to know what I was, another to convey it. And when I failed, I became the battlefield, leading a doomed revolt against my own body (Ibid)" conveys the message that valuations of the body and its biopower is contingent on spatiality. Society and its ingrained socio-cultural values emerge from the specificity of geography. It is in the concrete spaces of spatiality that social and cultural mores pans out, and are inverted and contested. There is a constant jostling for spaces both, social and geographical where biopower determines one's place and position highlighting the double hardship in everyday life and the marginalized existence of

the disabled. In this context, it becomes fascinating to quote Foucault who says, "[w]e do not live inside a void that could be colored [sic] with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable [sic] on one another" (Foucault 1967: 3).

Kanga's writings con/textualizes disability and sexuality in a broader spectrum of social and geographical space. In *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) he comments, "[l]ying at ease in a society so sensitive, so civilized, I wanted to tell all those long faces waiting for me, I wanted to tell them softly and politely, to fuck off; I wasn't going back" (1992 {1991}: 38). These lines illustrate the different ways through which socio-cultural spaces and geographical spatiality valuates and assigns space to the disabled in the society. Space, and not just time and temporality leave a mark on human form or the body. Time and temporality have thus far occupied a near total or what can be called a hegemonic dominance of critical theoretical consciousness and discourses in modernist thought. Influenced by this factor critical discourse of modern social theory have been caught in a time warp, and a prisoner of history. Soja puts it thus, "historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory. It still comprehends the world primarily through the dynamics arising from the emplacement of social being and becoming in the interpretative contexts of time" (1989: 10).

The continued emphasis on time and temporality have turned out as a historical baggage in modern critical social theory for the reason that historicism as a critical insight and interpretation of various social phenomena like disability have become staid and jaded in the postmodern world as it forecloses other critical sensibilities. The nineteenth century was fascinated by history as various political and social upheavals marked an eventful century that redefined the course of history. Time, was thus seen as "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (Foucault 1980: 70). A whole world of idioms and phrases like—*(only) time will tell*, *time will change*, *time will heal*, *time will answer*, etc. have come to signify the dialectic import that 'Time' has acquired in the theoretical consciousness. Soja describes it as "unbudgeably hegemonic", which is the—"historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility" (1989: 10-11). This dependence

on historicism has its roots in modernism's unflinching faith in structuralism; history's discourses with logic and praxes of causality provided the structuralist foundations of modern thought.

However, the rise of postmodernism sees this dialectic as a dead end because of its mechanistic and repetitive nature. Postmodernism may appear to be antagonistic to history but, it is NOT anti-history. In postmodern thought historicism is a reductionist discursive practice, which merely explicate but doesn't change the status quo. Soja argues, "[s]ocial theories which merely rationalize existing conditions and thereby serve to promote repetitive behaviour, the continuous reproduction of established social practices, do not fit the definition of social theory" (1989: 14). The hegemonic presence of historicism in modern social theory has a parallel in the dominant normativity in social classifications, while the hegemony of historicism forecloses other perspectives the dominant normativity similarly forecloses the presence of 'different' forms of the body which postmodernism argues are essentially polymorphous. Social model as a critical approach in modern critical social theory makes an implicit focus on space but do not attach much importance to space in the "constitution of society and human identity" (Freund 2001: 694).

Talking about *space* in social theory Soja says, "[s]pace still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization" (1989: 11). This is a baggage of history called 'historicism' that has occupied a near privileged status in modern critical thought particularly, in the nineteenth century and did not die in the *fin de siècle* (Foucault 1986: 22). Nevertheless, Soja has forcefully argued that:

> A distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretative significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought. Geography may not have displaced history at the heart of contemporary theory and criticism, but there is a new animating polemic on the theoretical and political agenda, one which rings significantly different ways of seeing time and space together, the interplay of history and geography, the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of being in the world of freed from the imposition of inherent categorical privilege. (1989: 11)

In the context of the 'social constructionism' theory of disability and sexuality, *post-historicism* and *postmodern critical human geography* adds a creative commingling of historical and geographical materialism which deconstructs the common concept of space as a "fixed, dead, undialectical" empty physical space to mean "living spaces" (as Henri Lefebvre puts it) and gives importance to a *post-historicist* and *postmodern critical human geography*, thereby reformulating the critical social theory in a **"**triple dialectic of space, time, and social being" (Ibid: 12). In re/reading disability and sexuality in the major works of Kanga there is a need to go beyond the traditional historicist reading and appropriate the new **"**triple dialectic of space, time, and social being." In Brit's (Kanga) disabled body and sexuality emerges a bawdy politic as his body becomes a metaphor. In his crippled body intersects disability and sexuality, which are further complicated by the fact that he hails from a quintessential minority community the Parsi, the perpetual *Other* by their own accounts in the Indian socio-cultural milieu. Kanga presents the prevalent orthodoxy and heterodoxy of the (Indian) society in his writings showing that spaces and spatiality plays a great role in creating stereotypes and the social constructionism of disability as well as sexuality. The reassertion of space in critical social theory gives greater clarity and powerful explanation of the disability phenomenon through the actually lived experiences of people's lives in concrete spaces and time.

The narrative of *Trying to Grow* (1990) begins from Brit's childhood until the prime of his youth. Gradually he discovers that he is not one of those 'normal' children around but is starkly different from the rest. He initially enjoys the warmth and affection of his protective parents but begins to loathe it later as it becomes suffocating in his desire to grow. Realizing that there is an exclusionary process that deprives him of many privileges that a non-disable person can enjoy without any hindrance, he makes an assessment of the world around him by examining the social and geographical spaces around him. His travelogue *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) is a travel in time and across spaces comparing and contrasting two different social and geographical spaces. In India, he spends most of his life (rather forced to), the prime of his youth within the four walls of his house in Bombay (now Mumbai), and begins to examine his life afresh which he cannot live freely in his own terms. Considering its moniker 'maximum city', Bombay (now Mumbai) doesn't quite literally live up to

its epithet as its social order and physical structures are exclusionary and intimidating, to say the least, in the sense that it is a challenge for people with a different body to navigate its spaces, both social and physical. He records his experiences of the contrasts in the cultural representation of the disabled in England after an extensive tour in that country. In particular he notices and observes the way disabled is perceived and treated in England, where in his experiences and view it is humane and the physical infrastructures are less intimidating. The social and geographical spatiality of England is reinvigorating and reassuring as it receives him as he is. In *Heaven on Wheels* he says:

> In Britain, I had found a world where I did not need to fight. Wherever I went there was safety—not only for me, but for everyone else who did not consider me a reproach and a reminder of another, unforgiving world. (Kanga 1992 {1991}: 37)

> That was what surprised me most about life in London — how the disabled were treated. With consideration — as you would treat someone whose leg was in a plaster cast — and nothing more. So that I never felt my body like a stain on myself, as I did in India, nor any desire to disown the way I looked. For the first time I knew what it was to be whole, in the world outside. (Ibid: 39)

Space matters for an individual to live and grow as Soja says, "…..'life-stories' have a geography too; they have a milieux, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought and action" (1989: 14). In *Trying to Grow* (1990) Kanga narrates his lived experiences as a disabled homosexual in India where his different body is considered 'deformed' with a "twisted mind in a twisted body", to boot his "twisted body" was assumed as asexual. Brit (Kanga) struggled to live and grow in such a constricted environment with a stereotypical image, as he tried to grow within a limited space and a well demarcated boundary for the disabled in India. He comes to terms with the ultimate reality of his body knowing full well that the prevalent cultural ethos in India is not ready to accept his presence. He discovers that people 'look at' him not only as "ugly and evil" but worse as 'asexual' being. In a painfully evocative line he says—"I wasn't male. Not to them. The magic mirror of their minds had invented a formula: Osteo = sexlessness" (2008 {1990}: 40). The

'look-at' towards his body was tempered by an ableist gaze. It was painful for him to learn that the disabled are considered as those without the need of love, kindness and relationships. The materiality of his crippled body does not bother him as much as the failure of the society to recognise his person, masculinity, and non-normative sexual orientation does. In *Handicapping America* (1978), Frank Bowe writes:

> ..... Yet one central, tragically wrong, assumption seems to pervade most of these attitudes: that disabled people are different from us more than they are like us, that their disabilities somehow set them apart from the rest of us.

There is no denying of the reality of Brit's limitations, he cannot walk and is confined to a wheel chair but, the reality is also otherwise; it does not necessarily foreclose his space in the social order. Brit is able to accept his difference, with humour and pathos he narrates his own lived experiences. However, it is the society which cannot accept him as an equal member of the society, stereotyping him so as to put him 'in his place.' It is when he finds that the society forecloses this aspect based on the assumption that a cripple bodied is an invalid Brit begins to react. Although ridiculed and discriminated by the society he desires to grow and enjoy a 'normal' life in the society like the 'normates'. Literally, he is not allowed to 'grow' as there is no space for individuals like him. As a result of the social and physical constraints that he faces in each and every step of his life, he remains crippled physically as well as socially. It is true that authors have time and again used the "deformed" outer body as a literary device to reflect "deformed" inner qualities of their characters (Baskin 1977), perpetuating the cultural myth. It is a biased cultural representation as Bowe noted, ".....impervious to any experiences we may have with disabled individuals in real life. Somewhere in the back of our minds we associate disabilities with sin, evil, and danger" (1978: 109).

At a time when it was difficult in social and geographical spaces like India for the disabled and homosexuals to find a space Kanga sailed against the wind in his literary endeavour to re/present the liminal spaces of the disabled and homosexuals/ queer people in the hegemonic presence of what can be called the *compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality and queer/ liminal existence* in the Indian society. The India of 1990s, when Kanga's works first surfaced in the literary scene of India the

Disability Rights Movement (DRM) had just about started in the 1990s and the general populace was not acquainted with the social construction of disability—the oppression, sufferings and rights of the disabled [Persons With Disabilities (PWD)] caused by the society. It took another five years for the country to recognise the oppression, sufferings, deprivation of the disabled. It was in 1995 that the first compressive law guaranteeing the rights and privileges of the disabled (PWD) was enacted by the parliament known as Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. In 2016, the same Act was repealed to make it more comprehensive and to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 13th December, 2006 and has come to be known as The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. On the whole, though the country has enacted laws to protect and guarantee the rights, privileges and non-discrimination of the disabled (PWD) the ground reality remains the same, with not much change in people's attitude towards the disabled as cultural myths persists and the literary/ cultural representations and expressions perpetuates the same.

With the rising consciousness world over as regards the social construction of disability, the law of the land has come around to support and guarantee the rights and privileges of the disabled (PWD). However, in terms of sexuality rights issues, particularly in India, the law is yet to address this issue comprehensively and as a matter that needs the same attention as disability. This is due to the fact that sexuality continues to be a taboo subject in India (as it is seen and understood from a narrow prism of sex, violence and abuse, which in religious beliefs and cultural practices are a violation of norms and etiquette) and many parts of South Asia. The Supreme Court of India's ruling against repealing Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code on 11th of December 2013, which is a colonial era law that criminalizes consensual sexual acts of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) adults in private, reflects the general atmosphere of paranoia that continues to grip the country's conscience in matters of sexuality. Under the shadow of crime and punishment, abuse and oppression newer spaces are gradually opening up to voice and address sexuality concerns in India.

Under such circumstances, the general environment in the country remains hostile to non-normativity like the disabled (PWD) and the homosexuals/ queers (LGBT) community. Articulation of disability and sexuality concerns in mainstream literary works was a taboo area when Kanga set out in his literary journey in the 1990s and even to this day nothing much has changed for the better. Whereas disability concerns remains a byword for evil, ugly, etc. in literature; re/presentations or articulations of sexuality concerns in literature is seen as a digression/divergence from mainstream literature or if it does it is regarded as inferior pulp fiction.

The unconventionality in the choice of subjects in Kanga's writings is in its flow against the current, and it is this aspect in his writings which give narrative verve and importance to his works. Kanga's works are neither a digression from mainstream literature nor inferior pulp fiction but a significant contribution to Indian Writings in English (Indian English Literature) or in general Indian literature as it brings the neglected issues of disability and sexuality into the mainstream consciousness through literary narrative and cultural discourses. Kanga makes his crippled body a site of contestation and discourses where disability and sexuality intersect. He says as a matter of fact, "[m]y first novel [*Trying to Grow*, first published 1990] was about growing up disabled; .....the only way out would have been to declare flatly that I would not talk of my disability, that it had nothing to do with my writing. That would have been a falsehood, a brave lie" (1992 {1991}: 82). It is through his writings that disability and sexuality gains a nuance and a humane perspective in Indian vovels/writings in English, and perhaps it is not a coincidence that the beginnings of disability rights movement (DRM) that began in India in the 1990s are a fallout of his works which saw the light of day in the 1990s.

Kanga hails from a miniscule minority community in India, the quintessential Parsis. History tells that their account of survival through adversities is nothing but miraculous far away from their spaces of origin and birth. In due course of time, they adjusted their social spaces in accordance with the spaces of the adopted country (like India) to survive, and not only that to make a fortune. Such have been the tenacity of their social spaces that they could re-appropriate the change in geographical spatiality too. Ironically, the Parsi community in India was more

comfortable with British India, as exemplified in Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), rather than the independent India. Post 1947 they found themselves as 'reluctant Indians'. Their uprightness in terms of practical ways of life made them more comfortable with the British way of life as it can be seen that they quickly adopted a pragmatic stance and made fortunes with the level of comfort that they established for themselves with the colonial powers in British India, and in the rapid decline in their fortunes as well as number (population) after the departure of the British from India.

One of the reasons was the fact that in everyday life, perhaps owing to their historical suffering, the Parsis were more practical and forward thinking as far as their instinct for survival was concerned. However, they remained orthodox and conservative in their socio-cultural and religious practices. One of the major conflicts between the native Indians and the British colonial administrators was the incongruities in their culture and philosophy. While religion coloured each and every aspect of life of the Indians from their culture and thinking, for the British (or West in general) religion is not a major part of life but, just another—a personal belief and not necessarily dictating each and every aspect of life. In a manner of saying, they were (and are) pragmatic with their approach to life. The Parsi community unlike the native Indians was (and are) different in this matter and finds a similarity in thoughts and attitudes with the British (or the West). That was why in *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) Kanga was eloquent in praise of the English way of life and manners. Kanga had his reasons to be eloquent in his praise of the British, one may argue he went to a point of being prudish and biased but, that is not the point as the matter is in the practical ways and means of everyday life. Kanga suffers from *Osteoporosis Imperfecta*, a brittle bones disease which confines him to the wheelchair foreclosing all his hopes and aspirations to lead a 'normal' life when looked at from an ableist gaze. To his amusement he finds it improbable to lead a 'normal' life as because he is literally not allowed to grow in the constricted spaces and spatiality. He finds the environment thick with superstition which takes him for granted or believes that the disabled like him are asexual/ sexless, which he finds the most demeaning aspect of the existing social norms and struggles to counter this myth by adopting a proactive means to show that he is not asexual or sexless. A

casual reading of *Trying to Grow* (1990) and for that matter *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) might give the impression that it is an inferior pulp fiction/ literature as he is found to go overboard in his narrative of his sexual tryst. In his writings Kanga employs a narrative technique to drive home the point that the disabled like him are not to be taken for granted or looked at from an ableist gaze as asexuals. He may be disabled in body but not spirit with an active sexual imagination and appetite.

He finds the Indian culture and philosophy not akin or proper with his idea of a life of a disabled. It should be reiterated here that unlike in the Western tradition in India philosophy does not dictate life course but the other way round, where life experiences dictate philosophy. That is why he is of the opinion that superstition becomes the basis of life in the Indian cultural milieux, where it invents reasons to live or to make sense of the incongruities. This prevalence of superstition does not forebode well for the disabled like him in the society as it does not open/ or provide spaces for him and other disabled individuals. Superstition extant in the society labels him (the disabled) with different images and connotations, which are basically myths that are demeaning and dehumanizing to say the least. In every aspect of life he finds himself at the other end of the society—tenuous with barely any rights, privileges, equal opportunity and that he is not even acknowledged as an equal member—normal human being all due to his crippled/ deformed body. The superstition he opines is all due to the presence of religious bigotry and without any basis on reality. He finds himself always at the threshold of the society as the doors of equal opportunity and recognition of the disabled closed in social spaces which he finds too much pronounced in India. For the most part of his youth he remains confined within the four walls of his house with only books as his companions and window to the outside world.

Interestingly, the books that he read within the confine of the four walls released and gave wings to his mental horizons and imagination that urged him to look at the life he was living was a lie told by a superstitious society not being able to fathom and comprehend the complexities of the world including his ‘different’ body. In one instance in *Heaven on Wheels* he narrates the story of a young man who in body is abled but crippled in mind and spirit as he is filled with superstitious beliefs

about *karma* as the ultimate destiny in life and which he can do nothing about. On hindsight, Kanga is elaborating here how disability is not only about the body but equally about mental capacities. A person with abled body can be equally disabled in the sense that when their minds become tempered by superstitious beliefs and thoughts, or for that matter vice-versa, where the disabled in body can be abled in spirit and intellect. Kanga says:

> A young lawyer I knew had a desperately unhappy marriage. 'But it is my karma,' he said. 'I have to go through this means I have to go through this. Something I did in my past life must be paid for. .....He had learned nothing—only that his life was not his to control. How could it be, when a debt from an unremembered, non-existent past could make its claim of pain at any moment? (1992 {1991}: 8-9)

Kanga is accustomed to the continuous stare and unfavourable comments passed at him. By now Kanga is quite aware of the fact that the society which invents superstitions so as to have a reason to live is equally adept in inventing superstitions to get rid of fear and anxiety of disability. Kanga demonstrates that he is disabled in body but not in thought and intellect. With the dint of his mental and intellectual prowess Kanga is able to shift himself physically from one space and spatiality to another (from India to Britain), and finds himself altogether in a new and different world to a disabled person like him. He discovers a world of difference in the spaces and spatiality of these two, the Indian and Western (British). The West, Kanga opines is polite, accommodative, and tolerant towards the disabled people and its spaces and spatiality are designed as far as practicable to accommodate the disabled. What can be deduced from these contrasting spaces is that the body and sexuality intersects in time and space, where body is looked at (gazed) from the perspective of sexuality, and vice-versa. Across spaces and spatiality the power to procreate is seen as an exclusive attribute of the able-bodied. For this reason sexuality has been reserved and "socially sanctioned" by the ableist society as an exclusive preserve of the able-bodied or normates for the purpose of procreating the "fittest" for survival. As such, sexual acts which do not lead towards procreation are seen as 'criminal,' 'against the cardinal law of nature' or perversion. As Kanga says—"[f]or sex outside of marriage, or uncontrollable love, was as shameful as shop-lifting, and much more

sinful" (1992 {1991}: 42). Contemporary Sexuality Studies (upper cases used in the initials of the terms to indicate its formal establishment as a discipline) critiques this concept as not based on reality, sex it is argued like disability is a 'social construct' as well, forcefully normalized and institutionalized for the purpose of procreation by the society, which can be called *compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality*. The fact that sexuality is reserved for the able-bodied heterosexual copulation has a hidden political agenda, designed for the survival of the fittest or powerful and dominant in the society. The myth of asexual/ sexlessness of the disabled bodies, and the non-normative sexualities as perversion is a propaganda meant to drive home this point, and to subjugate the disabled bodies and non-normative sexualities by the dominant and powerful. "As time went on," says Kanga—"I began to see the sense of all this, the existence of sex as something louder than a whisper, disdainful of furtiveness" (1992 {1991}: 43). Cultural myths and superstitions are devised and perpetuated to normalize and sustain the dominant *able-bodied heterosexual* social order. Kanga candidly articulates his sexual orientation and pursuits in his works which contravenes this dominant *able-bodied heterosexuality* by presenting an alternative subjectivity and subject position of his lived experiences as disabled homosexual in India and abroad (Britain). In *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) he says—"[t]o be gay, in India, was to surrender your claim to be a man, to slide into a self-parody of make-up and earrings, neither of which quite tempted me" (1992 {1991}: 25).

Thus the discursive formations on critical social theories like disability and sexuality is based on a binarised subject positions such as—abled-disabled, straight-gay, black-white, feminine-masculine, etc. and allows only 'either/or' choice, and most often these binaries reflect a dominant and non-dominant position where the dominant is categorized as the norm. In modernist thought historicism has played a hegemonic role in critical social theory, relying on time as richness, fecundity, life, dialectic (Foucault 1980b: 70). Nevertheless, the failure of historicism is all too familiar and significant as it has become futile in providing a comprehensive answer to the incongruities as binaries rely on a structured view which fails to incorporate incongruities beyond the 'either/or' binary. That is the reason why modernism frequently resorts to *Othering* as an answer to the incongruities that it cannot normalize through the binary opposition. Kanga illustrates the experiences and

subjectivity of being the *Othered* individual in the society and critiques the established subject positions such as abled-disabled, straight-gay, black-white, feminine-masculine, and the like as it cannot incorporate the in-between, the grey area or what can be called liminality.

The hegemonic role of historicism in critical social theory has become mechanistic, repetitive, and fails to change the status quo. Soja says—"[s]ocial theories which merely rationalize existing conditions and thereby serve to promote repetitive behaviour, the continuous reproduction of established social practices, do not fit the definition of critical theory" (1989: 14). With a structuralist perspectivism historicism is fixated in finding a grand narrative for the reason that it sees reality as fixed, reliable and easily identifiable. But, the reality is an *élan vital,* whose essence is evolution and development (Bergson 1998 {1911}; 2002). Therefore, there is a need to go beyond this historicist approach in critical social theory as far as the study of disability and sexuality is concerned to incorporate newer and broader ways of thinking about reality that goes beyond the structuralist 'either/or' choice. The binary 'either/or' choice is essentialist and archaic as it cannot incorporate the presence of innumerable incongruities in the manifestations of reality. Postmodernism's scepticism and distrust of grand narratives, universalism and totality including objective notions of reason, human nature, social progress, absolute truth, and objective reality discards modernism's binaries, the 'either/or' choice and grand narrative as limited, and as a method obsolete and imprisoned in time. Instead of 'either/or' choice offered by modernism, postmodernism offers an open-ended choice in 'both/and also', which have opened up multiple ways of looking at and analysing numerous phenomena like disability and sexuality.

In postmodernism with the centre-margin dichotomy blurred, and 'both/and also' ways of looking at and understanding deconstructs the binary logic in thinking about the incongruities and complexities of the modern world. When faced with a choice limited to the 'either/or' it persistently categorizes in a simplistic structure and there is a closure implicit in it. Postmodernism offers an alternative vision beyond the closed binary logic of 'either/or' and offers an open-ended 'both/and also' logic that incorporates incongruities and changeability which is the basic character of

reality. Soja insists that there is a need for infusing postmodernism's 'both/and also' logic in critical social sciences that would open up the reading of disability and sexuality from the narrow confines of binary system of thought. He argues that thus far in the dominant binary system in modernist thought historicism has occupied a privileged place and position as a mode of analysis. Historicism has without doubt offered a logical and explicable analysis of issues like disability and sexuality in the form of radical concept which has come to be known as 'social constructionism' bringing about a tectonic shift in the understanding of the same. However, he insists that there is a need for a post-historicist reading and infusion of postmodern critical human geography in critical social theory as it will not just "promote repetitive behaviour and continuous reproduction of established social practices" (1989: 14) as historicism is wont to do but move beyond to re-emphasize the point that "[t]the world can be changed by human action, by praxis" (Ibid). Critical social theory sans any prospect of initiating change or for that matter which just "promotes repetitive behaviour" (ibid) is not a critical theory worth its salt reiterates Soja. Therefore, the way forward is to rescue the critical thought from a fixed system of thought to imbibe a new, fresh and multiple ways of thinking that will throw light and bring about cognizable change in the system which by repetitive behaviour has become normative, for that reason staid and jaded. In the world of the disabled or for that matter the minority non-normatives like the homosexuals without doubt the social model brought about a paradigm shift in their lived experiences nevertheless the fixation with historicism has made it nothing more than a "continuous reproduction of established social practices" (ibid), in a sense it simply persists the old ways of thinking. Soja insists that abandoning the old ways of thinking, and imbibing a fresh method that co-opts spatiality along with the conventional historicism brings about a postmodernist "both/and also" perspective. With this disability and sexuality can be examined not just as products of the social processes in time but more importantly as products of spatiality.

Soja has posited that there is a need to go beyond historicism and incorporate space in critical social theory which has all along been dismissed as, "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Foucault 1980b: 70). In the hegemonic

presence of historicism time (history) has been adored as "richness, fecundity, life and dialectic" (Ibid) and this has become a kind of historical baggage. He insists that:

> The critical historical discourse thus sets itself against abstract and transhistorical universalizations (including notions of a general 'human nature' which explain everything and nothing at the same time); against naturalisms, empiricisms, and positivisms which proclaim physical determinations of history apart from social origins; against religious and ideological fatalisms which project spiritual determinations and teleologies (even when carried forward in the cloak of human consciousness); against any and all conceptualizations of the world which freeze the frangibility of time, the possibility of 'breaking' and remaking history. ..... I wish to give an additional twist to these options by defining historicism as an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory that actively submerges and peripheralizes the geographical or spatial imagination. (Soja 1989: 14-15)

Soja is of the opinion that, "[t]he ontological, epistemological, and theoretical rebalancing of spatiality, historicality, and sociality as all-embracing dimensions of human life" (Soja 1996: 10) or to use Henri Lefebvre's term "meta-philosophy" is a part of postmodernism's 'both/and also' embracing of multiplicity and pluralism. The totalizing narratives of modernism cannot take into account the mutability of the human body and its polymorphous form as there is an implicit closure in its system of thought. It is under such circumstances that disability (and its concomitant issues like sexuality) arises in the society. The human body are liminal. It is to be noted that "[l]iminality is a fluid category which belongs to neither extremes of the polarity in the centre-margin binary. It belongs to the 'in-between' spaces, the threshold which is in transition and is fluid" (Basumatary 2017: 635). The liminality of the body makes it polymorphous, which the modernist thought with its totalizing narratives that rely on 'either/or' binary system cannot accommodate the different manifestations of the body in its system of thought, the different 'un-categorizable' body then by virtue (or vice) is implicitly converted into the *Other*. On the other hand, postmodernism with its alternative 'both/and also' makes it possible to co-opt the liminal 'un-categorizable' body as an equal and invaluable member of the society

as the idea of norms, normal, normality, normalcy, normativity and the like which are an intrinsic part of modernist thought does not arise in postmodern thought.

The "theoretical rebalancing" (Soja 1996: 10) of postmodernism apart from unlocking the closed system of binarism in modern thought throws light on spatiality as a significant influence in the dis/ablement process as human beings live in an expanse of geographical spatiality which engenders the habitus according to its environment. Geographical spatiality is not just an empty and passive container but pro-active and a catalyst which influences the habitus as per its environment (Soja 1989). The 'both/and also' perspective of postmodernism enables the integration of the 'abled/disabled' body in the socio-cultural mainstream of the dominant ableist society. The different 'un-categorizable' body in modernist thought is accepted in postmodern thought as another avatar of the body. Soja's insistence on spatial turn in critical social theory has thrown light on the fact that the liminality of the body is subject to spatiality. Likewise, sexuality traditionally reserved for the privileged category of the able-bodied heterosexuals and for the primary purpose of procreation has been liberated from its historicist and materialist burden. Sexuality is now understood not just as sexual act but, has come to encompass a whole gamut of an individual's personality and its expressions. In the changed circumstances of postmodernism homosexuality has come to be regarded as another expression of the individual's sexuality, where sex has been liberated from the primary purpose of procreation and opened for pleasure. For a very long time, in the geo-spatiality of India and the West, there was what can be called an "illegitimisation of self interest" or pleasure that is why homosexuality was regarded as an illicit pleasure, sin, ugly, selfish, uncompassionate, etc. Kanga opines that—"[t]he illegitimisation of self-interest has resulted in the abolition of happiness in society after society" (1992 {1991}: 71), as disability and sexuality was illegitimatized.

With the consistent persistence of Soja who has been influenced to a great extent by Foucault and Lefebvre in his conviction that spatiality is influential in the lived experiences of individuals, a post-historicist and post-modern critical human geography emerged in the critical social theory which, "...involves a geographical rather than historical projection," as it believes that—"it is space not time which

hides consequences from us" (Soja 1989: 23). This infusion of spatiality as a critical tool has enabled the critical theoretical apparatus of disability and sexuality to move beyond mere rationalization of existing social conditions promoting repetitive behaviour and the continuous reproduction of established social practices (1989: 14).

Soja's spatial theory called Thirdspace[15], a theoretical enunciation of—"a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency" (2000: 11) opens a critical insight into an individual's lived experiences of disability and sexuality in real time and place. Thirdspace is a cumulative lived experience of life lived in the Firstspace[16] mediated through Secondspace[17] expectations. In critical social theory, the *Other*, which is a stigmatized, despised and discriminated category where the non-normatives are grouped together in the binary system can be described here as a Thirdspace, in which the liminality of the body gets a frame to be texted, enabled by the 'both/and also' pluralism of postmodernist thought. Kanga is the archetypal *Other* in the ableist and hetero-normative society, his lived experiences exemplify *Otherness*, the life lived outside of the normal (either/or), in the words of Foucault an "exteriority", the outer side. Moving beyond dualisms Thirdspace is an inclusive concept that encompasses sociality, historicity and spatiality in a continuous movement as Soja calls a "trialectics". He says, "[t]hirding produces what might best be called a cumulative trialectics that is radically *open* to additional *otherness*, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge" (1996: 61, italics mine). This "continuing expansion of spatial knowledge" appreciates *otherness* like disability and homosexuality as moving beyond dualisms. Thirdspace offers an alternative to the conventional Firstspace and Secondspace binary where the liminality of the body can be located, framed and texted.

For Kanga, the wheelchair is his constant companion and aid in navigating spatiality, which becomes a metaphor of his physical limitations. While it enables him some mobility yet, the fact remains that certain physical spaces (spatiality) remains outside his reach designed as it is for the able bodied and from the able bodied perspective. This 'design apartheid' (Imrie 2000) segregates and discriminates the differently abled like him (Kanga), not only in terms of social

spaces but physical as well. Spatiality acts in a pro-active way to change the reality of the world of the differently abled. Under usual circumstances the ableist world does not foresee how spatiality is an active collaborator in the disablement process as the physical infrastructures are designed for them and by them. Kanga observes that in India, where religious bigotry and superstition continues to colour the prism of the Indian attitudes and approaches towards the disabled it remains insensitive to the problems caused by social spaces and particularly, by spatiality as its physical infrastructures remain indifferent and closed to the differently abled. In the West, their philosophy and practical wisdom has brought about sensitivity and awareness towards the needs of the disabled. By taking into account the disabling physical infrastructures as prohibitive and alienating they have begun to incorporate changes in their social and physical spaces.

In *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) Kanga conveys the ever present desire of the Parsis to emigrate to the West, flaunting a closer cultural affinity and shared interest in their common love for openness and progress, and a general dislike of India preferring to call themselves 'reluctant Indians'. In *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) which is a travelogue, records and expresses his impression of the differences in the social spaces and geo-spatiality of the two major traditions of India and the West (Britain). The difference in space (social and spatial), was what can be called an eye-opener to him, a revelation of the actual reality of his 'crippled' existence. He was made to feel sorry and miserable for his crippled existence in India due to its religious bigotry and treatment of the disabled (in social space and spatiality). Having spent the major part of his growing years within the four walls of his apartment in Bombay, always at the mercy of his family for mobility he outgrew his disability with a strong intellect and desire to grow inspite of the limitations superimposed by the society. Reading and writing (which was the only activity he was left with to engage his mind) opened up his mental/ intellectual horizons, later the success of his first literary venture *Trying to Grow* (1990) enabled him to cross the geopolitical borders—from India to the West (Britain). The hospitality of the West towards the disabled and homosexuals as compared to India signifies spatiality as an active agency in the disablement (and enablement) process, de-sexualisation of

the disabled body and normalization of heterosexuality in the society, where it means different things to different people in different spaces. Kanga says:

> While I had always known that my disability was, in the most real sense, only as important as I allowed it to be, and that I could work my way into a life where it would be about as relevant as the colour of my hair, to most people, in Bombay, I was Cinderella. Transformed by some special blessing, bestowed in lieu of healthy bones, from 'pitiful handicapped' to 'London writer'. So that when I got back innumerable people said to me, 'How? How? I can't believe all this has happened to you.' So, doubtless, spoke the Ugly sisters, in more grammatical idiom. (1992 {1991}: 31)

Tracing his personal journey from India to England (Britain), Kanga presents a narrative of social constructionism of disability (and sexuality) which is rooted in space and spatiality—the different ways through which he is looked at (gazed) and treated in different space and spatiality makes him realise that besides historicist influences geographical spatiality plays a powerful role in the social construction of disability. He found himself at odds with the religious doctrinaire, taboos and cultural myths like evil, sin, etc. as well as the archaic laws in India while coming to terms with the reality of his body. He noticed that the West (Britain) has come to accept a humane, holistic, logical and practical way of dealing with the disabled and homosexuals like him where matters of disability and sexuality have come to be acknowledged and accepted (by the society) as an individual or personal matter. These lines by Kanga are illustrative of this point:

> .....what surprised me most about life in London—how the disabled were treated. With consideration—as you would treat someone whose leg was in a plaster cast—and nothing more. So that I never felt my body like a stain on my self, as I did in India, nor any desire to disown the way I looked. For the first time I knew what it was to be whole, in the world outside. (1992 {1991}: 39)

This shift in attitude towards the disabled (and homosexuals in the West) has been prompted by the rise of postmodernism's 'both/and also' logic which gives a multiple perspective to understand and accept reality. As it goes beyond the

'either/or' binary of modernist thought the appearance of different forms of the human body (which in reality is a mutable form) is not categorized any longer by the 'either/or' binary into 'abled/disabled' opposites. The power of the dominant over the non-dominant doesn't work as much under this logic as the lines or boundaries segregating the dominant (normal) and non-dominant (non-normal) have been blurred. With it the arbitrary valuations attached to the abled and the dominant (normal) body as the epitome of cultural and social capital gets dismantled or deconstructed and a level playing field created. Under this circumstance, the postmodernist philosophy understand the human body as liminal, in a state of threshold. From this vantage point, norms and normality fade away, the question of disability and sexuality becomes contextual and irrelevant. The *Other* emerges as a space beyond the 'either/or' binary. This space is liminal but it is clear that it is a significant space that is not to be despised but appreciated as the disabled and homosexuals belong to this liminal spaces. Postmodernism's alacrity to accept and adjust to the mutability and changeability of the body, its liminality gives a 'reality check' to the modernist binarism of abled–disabled, homo–hetero, etc. The *Other* of modernist thought can be argued as another space in the post-historicist and postmodern critical human geography engendered by postmodern 'both/and also' thought. Considering, Soja's concept of "Thirdspace" to describe "a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency" (2000: 11). What is often called the *Other* can be argued as a "Thirdspace" where the disabled and homosexuals gets a frame to be texted. As for Kanga, his lived experiences as the *Other* constitues "a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency" (ibid), a Thirdspace.

The 'both/and also' logic of postmodernism in relation to the prevalent established categories of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality disrupts the dominant discursive frameworks, defying boundaries and erasing the differences upon which regulatory frameworks depend and constitutes a new framework to read the *Other*. As Kanga navigates through the rigidity of the discursive framework based on an essentialist 'either/or' binary he struggles to rescue his own identity in a constricted space. Kanga discovers that it is the society which constructs his disability as well as

sexuality, not biological determinism. The social constructionism concept of social model has thrown light on the social genesis of disability phenomenon as well as sexuality but it has remained where it is. With a change in spatiality Kanga finds a solace, to be at peace with his own self. While the spaces of the Indian socio-cultural milieu could not appropriate his different body, the Western on the other, turns out as a pleasant surprise with its treatment and appreciation of the different body reaffirming Kanga's conviction in his otherwise crippled body.

The problem of disability or for that matter sexuality is in the squeezed spaces. The 'either/or' binary choice of modernism excludes those categories that do not come under the binary system, and are labelled as the *Other*. Traditionally, in the modern philosophy the *Others* have been less valued, despised and considered as misfits for which they have lacked an identity/social standing of their own. Kanga's lived experiences in India are comparable to a "bare life" (*zoê*) where the social space and spatiality does not accommodate his crippled body but, as he shifts from India to the West (Britain) he experiences a "qualified life" (*bios*), as the socio-spatial organization of the social structure is accommodative of his different body/ dimensions. The change of spatiality works wonders for the fortunes and improved quality of life of the disabled like Kanga. Spatiality, as is seen here is not a passive container but, its expanse and its physical infrastructures moulds and shapes the mental, psychical, emotional horizons and physical health of the disabled. A little amount of sensitivity towards the disabled made a quantum difference in the lived experiences of the *Others*. Through his writings Kanga is seeking to reclaim the space for the disabled bodies, the *Others* of the society by transforming or identifying *Otherness* as a Thirdspace.

The 'both/and also' choice that emerged with postmodernism helped to reclaim the space of the disabled as it opened a new vista of thought which is open and accommodative unlike 'either/or' choice of modernism. The undue focus on the body and the urge for normalization in a limited 'either/or' logic of modernism was the root cause of the disablement process and the abjection of disabled bodies as the *Others*. However, with a spatial turn in critical social theory the *Other* is identified

not as an antagonistic group/identity but another space which can be called "Thirdspace" (Soja).

With the rise of electronic mass media, and significantly, the social media since the second decade of the 21st century the Thirdspace has gradually become a parallel world of the real and virtual. In the parallel world of the real and virtual in postmodern era (where there is a thin line of separation between the two), the body which was the fundamental issue in modern thought and its social construction of disability has become immaterial. Reiterating the liminality of the body, the real and virtual world do not distinguish individuals on the basis of the different forms of the physique but provides a kind of level playing field in which people across class, caste, race, gender, disability, sexuality, etc. live and experience life in multiple hues. The simultaneity of real and virtual world in the postmodern era addresses the issue of "design apartheid" (Imrie 2000). People traverse both the worlds—real and virtual, where there is a seamless movement from one to the other as the physicality of the body has become immaterial. The vast expanse of space and spatiality can be traversed across its length and breadth virtually, if not physically. Spatiality has come to acquire a different meaning in the present world where the rigidity of geography in the real world is diminished in the virtual world. Fluidity of time and spatiality in the postmodern world has freed disability and sexuality from its bodily concatenation.

Soja's Thirdspace**,** a transcendent space that expands to embrace the *Other* in its fold, has enabled the contestation and re-negotiation of boundaries that segregates and discriminates people. Soja says this is, "the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also..." (1996: 60). Soja characterizes Thirdspace as an introduction of "a critical 'other than' choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness" (Ibid: 61) where the 'third-as-other' is not just a new term that stands between the two opposites but it creates a disordering, a deconstruction and a reconstruction of the opposites (Soja, 1996). In its fold the liminality of the body gets a frame, making it plausible to read and react to the different forms of the body beyond the 'either/or' binary.

Endnotes:

[1]The concept "space" often gravitates towards physical, geographical space or even "outer space." Very less with "social space", this term was apparently coined by Emile Durkheim towards the end of the nineteenth century. According to Emile Durkheim Social space is an area inhabited by a group. This definition can be contested from different ideological starting points. Social space is part of a broader spatial turn in disability research and studies.

[2]For Foucault, the main explanation is how sexuality ties together multiple "technologies of power", namely discipline on the one hand, and a newer technology, which he calls "bio-politics," on the other. In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault calls this combination of discipline and bio-politics together "biopower," though confusingly he elsewhere seems to use "bio-power" and "bio-politics" as synonyms, notably in his 1976 lecture series, *Society Must Be Defended*. He also elsewhere dispenses with the hyphens in these words, as it will in the present article hereafter.

[3]Biopolitics is a technology of power that grew up on the basis of disciplinary power. Where discipline is about the control of individual bodies, biopolitics is about the control of entire populations. Where discipline constituted individuals as such, biopolitics does this with the population.

[4]There is another technology of power in play, however, older than discipline, namely "sovereign power." This is the technology we glimpse at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, one that works essentially by violence and by taking, rather than by positively encouraging and producing as both discipline and biopolitics do. This form of power was previously the way in which governments dealt both with individual bodies and with masses of people. While it has been replaced in these two roles by discipline and biopower, it retains a role nonetheless at the limits of biopower.

[5]"Bare Life" is Giorgio Agamben's concept for life that has been exposed to what he terms the structure of exception that constitutes contemporary biopower. The term originates in Agamben's observation that the Ancient Greeks had two different words for what in contemporary European languages is simply referred to as 'life': *bios* (the form or manner in which life is lived) and *zoē* (the biological fact of life). His argument is that the loss of this distinction obscures the fact that in a political context, the word 'life' refers more or less exclusively to the biological dimension or *zoē* and implies no guarantees about the quality of the life lived. Bare life refers then to a conception of life in which the sheer biological fact of life is given priority over the way a life is lived, by which Agamben means its possibilities and potentialities.

[6]Mike Oliver's works *The Politics of Disablement* (1990), *Social Work, Disabled People and Disabling Environments* (1991), *Understanding Disability, from Theory to Practice* (1996) brought about a paradigm change in the understanding of disability. His work has centred on the social model of disability.

[7]*Biological determinism* refers to the idea that all human behaviour is innate, determined by genes, brain size, or other biological attributes. This theory stands in contrast to the notion that human behaviour is determined by culture or other social forces. Inherent to biological determinism is the denial of free will: individuals have no internal

control over their behaviour and dispositions, and thus are devoid of responsibility for their actions. Often implicit in this line of reasoning is the idea that because humans lack responsibility for determining their own lives, they are rightfully subject to the control of persons biologically determined in more socially acceptable ways. While few biologists fully believe in the idea of biological determinism, the theory has had cultural and political currency both in the shaping of human racial history and in current debates over the relative importance of our genetic qualities (i.e., nature) versus our socialization process (i.e., nurture) in determining our individual physical and behavioural characteristics.

[8]The concept of the "state of exception" has a long history, since discussion upon it can be traced back to the French Revolution (Agamben 2005: 2). It defines a special condition in which the juridical order is actually suspended due to an emergency or a serious crisis threatening the state. In such a situation, the sovereign, i.e. the executive power, prevails over the others and the basic laws and norms can be violated by the state while facing the crisis. The idea that the exception is the fundament of law has not been originally formulated by Agamben, but had been developed by Carl Schmitt (2005) and Walter Benjamin (2004) in the first decades of the twentieth century.

[9]In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* Laura Mulvey argues that traditional narrative film uses an hegemonic gaze that reflect a sort of patriarchal constructed "women' look-at-ness". Mulvey, referring to Lacanian psychoanalysis, claims that this "feminine look-at-ness" is performed by the camera, playing on three aspects of human instinct. The first one being scopophilic instinct. Secondly, the camera plays on identification (ego libido), and finally on the cleavage female's passivity/male's activity. The last one with an active gaze (performed by male characters) toward the passive woman ensures male supremacy over woman. In addition, Mulvey argues that women in movies are seen implicitly as a potential threat of castration. In order to circumvent this treat, the biased camera gaze uses voyeurism and fetishistic mechanisms. Thus, women in film are constantly put down in a position of passivity in order to ensure male' power. As a matter of fact, film narratives using male characters' gaze empowers patriarchal values and diminish the potentially dangerous "castrating woman".

[10]Term derived from the concept of male gaze. The way through which the dominant ableist society look at the disabled as valueless/ worthless, ugly/ evil, sexless, etc.

[11]Meaning the traditional way with which the disabled body is looked at, as valueless and without the element of 'looked-at-ness'.

[12]Symbolic power accounts for exercise of power against another to confirm that individual's placement in the society.

[13]'Habitus' is one of Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences.

[14]Imrie's term "design apartheid", dealing with building form and design in western culture that are inscribed with the values of an able-bodied" society.

[15]"Thirdspace" is radically different way of looking at, interpreting and acting to change the embracing spatiality of human life (Soja, 1996, p.29). It is the third aspect in a new way of thinking about space and spatiality. "Thirdspace" is based on the work of a number of social scientist, most notably Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre introduces thirdspace in slightly different form and under a different name: 'Spaces of representation and can also be seen as 'lived space'. It is not the name however that matters, it is the idea. "Thirdspace" is the space we give meaning to. A rapidly, continually changing space in which we live. It is the experience of living. Soja proposes a different way of thinking about space and spatiality. First and second spaces are two different, and possibly conflicting, spatial groupings where people interact physically and socially: such as home (everyday knowledge) and school (academic knowledge). Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces, where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space. 'Soja is anxious to avoid the common dualities of the social and the individual, culture/nature, production/reproduction, the real versus the imagined, (which pervade geographical analysis, arguing "there is always another way"' (2006) *PHG* **30**, 819).

[16]Firstspace is the 'real' space – the urban built form of physical buildings that can be mapped and seen. The directly experienced world which is empirical, measurable and mappable. In other words, it's the geographer's primary empirical text and the materialized spatiality, the so called **objective** or **real space.** Henri Lefebvre called the first space as **Perceived Space**.

[17]Secondspace is the 'imagined' representational space – i.e. how the space is perceived, seen and argued over.

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CHAPTER V

Disability and the Dialectics of Nation: Firdaus Kanga in Relation to Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, and Pramila Balasundaram

It is a truism to say that the Indian novels in English are in a league of its own. Having carved a niche for itself in the literary map of the world with its own distinctive style and idiom it reflects the essence and spirit of the people in all its grandeur and passion. The early Indian novels in English; particularly, the novels of the formative years are a narrative of a nation in the making, and the novelists are raconteurs of history in the cusp of change. The clamour for freedom from colonial yoke interspersed with discourses and narratives of identity and nationalism in a land of diversity. Under the circumstances, the novel in English in India became an important instrument to muster dialogue and discourse in a land which spoke in numerous tongues and voices.

Along with the freedom struggle there was an effort to build a national identity. For this reason, the Indian novels in English during its formative years show a pre-occupation with nation-building and nationalist fervour betraying proclivity towards nation over domestic, political over personal, spiritual over material, and public over private issues. On the other hand, there are some pioneering works which, "..... seems to be paying direct or veiled tribute to British rule"[1] but, they have come a long way from those heady days to build a pan Indian national identity. The diversity in cultures and languages were rationalized as a speciality; a unique feature of an emerging nation called India. This went hand in hand with a political cause and the idea of India as a nation with a difference. It can be said without much reductionism that in the Indian novels in English there is a parallel project of writing the nation. In other words, it is in some ways an alternate historiography of the sub-continent which represents its history as disjointed, fragmented, and discontinuous often times challenging the 'official' history as it images the nation in alternate ways. The novels of the 1980s and since, display a war of ideas on the matter of representation of the nation. Therefore, the dialectics of nation and nation-building

hangs in the horizon of Indian novels in English, during the postcolonial (and neo-colonial) period.

The long period of colonial experience battered the history, language, and culture of the colonized subjects in the sub-continent disempowering, disabling and marginalising them. The discourses of literature, therefore, are largely centred on the idea of a 'nation' and unifying cultural traditions, and the novels became a tool for the understanding of history and the creation of a new national identity. Eulogizing the past and its myths became a way of narrativizing history so as to build a common national heritage. In this milieu, the universal got pre-eminence over the particular or the personal as the "narrative desire"[2] could not resist the urge to deliberate on the issues of nation and nation-building to tide over the chasm created by the colonial turmoil. The question of national identity formation gained a paramount magnitude in the spaces of the postcolonial literary narratives. Ironically, it is the "decolonization process" which forms the matrix of national identity formation. Frantz Fanon says— "Decolonization unifies [a] people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes a racial, basis" (1963: 45). In the construction of the postcolonial national (Indian) identity, therefore, the narrative of the novels revolves around 'centre' and 'peripheries'. Communities whose cultures were marginal, exotic, unsophisticated/not cultured, the uncategorizable or what can be called the quintessential 'Others' were deemed not fit to be represented or given a space. The disabled, women, third gender/sexual minorities, lower castes, etc. have traditionally formed or constituted these quintessential 'Others', and have been excluded from the literary realm.

However, the quest for a national (Indian) identity obliterated the heterogeneity of the Indian society and culture. The emerging concept of the nation-state in the country failed to appropriate or envision a nation that is heterogeneous, or diverse. Heterogeneity, or in other words, diversity was perceived as anathema to communal/group/common identity formation. Binarism, the age-old structuralist method of thinking and constructing meaning played an important role in the national identity formation, where differentiation (e.g., colonizer-colonized binaries) rather than synthesis prevailed in the discourses of nation and nation-building (Jean-

Paul Sartre in the "Preface" to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*). Poovey puts it thus, "[t]he process by which a national identity is consolidated and maintained is . . . one of differentiation and displacement—the differentiation of the national us from aliens within and without" (1995: 55). In this scenario, Othering became the basis and the process of defining the nation by excluding the different/deviant. Consequently, bodies and minds as well as sexualities and genders which did not fit into the newly formed nation were excluded from the national mainstream. Particularly, the disabled remain unmentioned and unrepresented in literary narratives although disability is everywhere in literature. They are invisible to the naked eye as the corporalities of the disabled, sexual minorities, etc. are deemed not fit for the overall national fitness. Norms and normality takes over as the defining criterion of the national identity. In most of the postcolonial literary texts which incorporate characters with disabilities, disability is used as a trope and a literary device, Mitchell and Snyder calls this "narrative prosthesis"[3], a "crutch" that provides an imagery of nation and national fitness.

"A nation", Ernest Renan says is "a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history, it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth" (1990: 8-21). This discourse of a nation infers that a 'nation' is fundamentally a social, cultural, and political construct. The relative absence and marginalization of the *Others* in literary texts signifies the reality of the nation-building process in India which have not been able to transcend the differences and distinctions of body, gender, sexuality, etc. Most of the postcolonial literature deals with the discourses of the nation and nation-building process and the Indian novels in English are no exception. In the Indian novels in English, Salman Rushdie's *Midnights' Children* (1981) is a prominent postcolonial literary narrative of the nation. In this novel the phenomenon of postcolonialism and disability imbricate and intersect. There is an interconnectedness of these two phenomena as both of these involve politics of power which leads to "enforcing of normalcy"[4] in the society by arbitrary differentiation and displacement. This is an exclusionary process leading to marginalization of the othered. The construction of the 'Other' is the main thesis of postcolonial studies, and the postcolonial literature deals with the resistances put forth by the colonized—fighting back and writing. Postcolonialism and disability

imbricate and intersect exactly on this issue, i.e. the construction of the Other by the powerful and the dominant. There is a metaphorical connection between postcolonialism and disability as both involve power, domination, discrimination, and exclusion. In this context, "post" in postcolonialism should not be understood as 'after the end of colonialism' but, as a continuation of the same process, albeit in different forms and means, and in different time and circumstances. Disability is another different avatar of power, domination, discrimination, and exclusion. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), Ania Loomba asserts this issue arguing that postcolonialism rather than signifying the end of colonialism signifies the emergence of new modes of colonialism.

More or less, the Indian novels in English were preoccupied with socio-political problems of the nation in its formative years. Therefore, the postcolonial Indian novels in English are primarily centred on the making/onstruction of the 'Indian' nation. However, there dawned a new era in Indian novels in English with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) in the 1980s. This novel is often read as a paradigmatic example of postcolonial national allegory of a nation in the making. Yet, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) much celebrated as a coming-of-age writing in the realm of Indian novels in English generally because of its move away from realism to magical realism in the narrative (signalling a break from tradition), "taps into freak discourses that have been widely theorized within disability studies" (Barker, 2014) to depict the Indian nation traumatised by partition at birth. In this respect, Rushdie uses disability as a literary device, and as a trope or in other words as a narrative prosthesis to take forward his discourse of the nation in trauma. Barker further observes:

> The midnight's children are described variously as "miraculous" (p.195), "fabulous beings" (p.197), "freak kids" (p.221) and "monsters" (p.434). Their (dis)abilities range from supernormative skills of time travel, flight and lycanthropy to those who are "little more than circus freaks: bearded girls, a boy with the fully-operative gills of a freshwater mahaseer trout, Siamese twins with two bodies dangling off a single head and neck" (p.198). (Barker, 2014)

Therefore, writers who dealt with the concerns of the larger 'national cause' and who belonged to the mainstream communities became pre-eminent in the annals of the Indian novels in English. In this case, writers such as Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, and to a lesser extent Pramila Balasundaram became the leading lights in the literary world of Indian novels in English in the post-Independence era. The likes of Firdaus Kanga, even to this day, remain as a marginal writer not just because of his disability and sexuality but also because his writings were rather 'radical' for the times (which continues to remain so), in the sense that they were not in tune with the traditional themes and cultural values but speaks of the personal concerns and desires. Significantly, Kanga contributed towards the further evolution and growth of the novel in English in India by placing the marginalized individual at the centre of the narrative. In the prioritisation of texts/ works and writers on the basis of national and mainstream parameters, the dialectics of nation and nation-building plays a crucial role. It is apparent that the Indian novels in English are to a large extent determined by political history which established its own power relations in the literary field.

The marginalized status of Firdaus Kanga reveals not just the bigoted literary representation and indifferent attitude towards the disabled but, goes beyond to the literary field where the disabled writers wield lesser influence and power vis-à-vis the abled writers. To write about disability was, in a way, a defiance of the existing social structures. In this case, Kanga went on to defy the dominance of the able-bodied writers in the cultural mainstream of the nation. Firdaus Kanga's writings challenged these power relations in the literary field of Indian novels in English. The subject location, i.e. ability/disability, sexuality, gender, caste, class, etc. of the writer plays an important role in the determination of this power relation. By its very nature, this particular genre when examined in relation to the development of a political culture in India during its colonial and postcolonial days throws light on the ways through which power plays an important role in the determination of space. For this reason, it rejected a formalist approach to suit the political agenda of the dominant in its initial or formative days. Consequently, the novel becomes a 'representation' which signifies the politics of power. In this aspect, it becomes evident, that the 'social, cultural and symbolic capital' forms an important criterion.

The disabled have no such thing as 'social, cultural and symbolic capital' which deprives them of 'social space', and in the opinion of Bourdieu it is 'social space' that determines the 'symbolic power'. This particular aspect disables and marginalizes Kanga as an individual and as a writer/ novelist.

Kanga represents and situates the 'different' as the 'new normal' in the Indian novels in English, thereby, bringing about a tectonic shift in the dominant power structures in the literary world as the emerging narrative and discourses sought to inject a life beyond the normative. Placing the disabled at the forefront of the literary narrative formed a direct challenge to the construction of a nation and its literary representation. Thus far binarism was the lens through which the world has been perceived and understood, those categories that fell beyond the binaries simply became the 'Other', and consequently invisible. For a very long time in history this formed a stable and settled social structure. However, the reality of the existence of the 'different' in the society was glossed over, different in terms of the body and sexuality. Across time, gender, class, cultures, etc. the disabled have been ignored and rendered invisible. They are the quintessential *persona non grata* of the nation.

As much as disability is ubiquitous in the society so is it in literatures across all periods and genres. In this context, it is noteworthy to quote Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, who says:

> Disability is everywhere in literature. Whether in the bodies that populate countless narratives containing physical disability, or in the mental difference that informs so much detail about character and psychology, disability features in literary production as a *constant presence*. (*Literature and Disability*, 2018: 1, [italics mine])

Yet, more often than not, "it is also true that" inspite of its constant presence "it is frequently not seen." (Barker & Murray, 2018: 2) This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that literary production per se is an act of 'representation'. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson asserts, ".....disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions" (1997: 6). It is overtly selective as value judgements act as an overpowering element/factor in constructing

the disabled persona. Under the circumstances, therefore, this selectiveness in the cultural interpretation complicates the process of literary production as the disabled persona lack what can be called "social and cultural capital"[5] because of which they are deprived of value that is crucial in ensuring a space in literary narratives. In the Indian novels in English it gets all the more convoluted with the discourses of the prevailing religious beliefs prejudicial to it. The cultural interpretation of the deformed body/disability through the prism of religious beliefs in the Indian context places the onus of disability on the person for assumed/supposed acts of religious/moral transgressions. This is akin to character assassination of the disabled and strips the disabled of all human dignity, and consequently, of social space.

While magical realism as mode of literary narrative has been widely celebrated for its "matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction" (Magic Realism), a deliberate narrative strategy to make sense of the seemingly fabulous and incomprehensible, Rushdie's use of the same narrative strategy in his magnum opus *Midnight's Children* (1981) where Saleem Sinai, the protagonist and narrator of the novel (and thousands of other eponymous children like him) are "handcuffed to history" (1981: 9) because of their birth on the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947 becomes a strategy of postcolonial literary narrative of the nation. These midnight's children are endowed with "telepathic ability and with various impairments of function and appearance (no sense of smell, facial birthmarks and an unusually shaped face and nose)" (Barker, 2014)**.** Seen as "grotesques" and as objects of "freakish spectacle" these deviant bodies give an insight into the "cultural interpretation" of the body. This exclusionary process provides a commentary on the way a nation is constructed, and its perception of national fitness.

As a postcolonial novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) struggles to make sense of divergent realities of the time, freedom on the one hand and destruction on the other, a nation that seems to be breaking at its seams even as it takes baby steps towards a free modern nation-state. The long sought after freedom finally arrived at the stroke of midnight on 15th August 1947, yet, this dream was marred by violence and partition of the country which left the nation scarred, traumatised and disabled.

In the novel, as the narrative progresses, the protagonist Saleem Sinai becomes progressively disabled in tandem with numerous 'disabling' national events. The disfigurement of his body— bandy legs, loss of hearing in one ear, loss of finger, baldness in childhood are read as a metaphor of loss and decay. In all these, disability is used in this magical realist narrative strategy as a trope, as a literary device and a metaphor. Here, the disabled body helps to foreground the meanings that they embody in fictional texts and encourages the reading of disabled characters in terms of agency and politics so as to understand the trauma and dilemma of a newly Independent nation disfigured, deformed, and disabled at birth. The bodies of the midnight's children described variously as "miraculous", "fabulous beings", "freak kids" and "monsters" is employed as an analogy to mean a "broken" nation (1997: 5-18) Following Garland-Thomson's argument, therefore, the midnight's children become visible no more than as "grotesques" and as objects of "freakish spectacle", those that are beyond the normal. It demonstrates the preference for the 'abled' where power and position plays an instrumental role in determining the social structures and identities. The age-old adage **"***mens sana in corpore sano***"** (a healthy mind in a healthy body) is a cultural affirmation of this reality.

The question of 'nation' has constantly occupied a large space in the narratives of the Indian novels in English during the colonial as well as post-colonial period. The publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981 promised a new era in the annals of the Indian novels in English, as it showed the possibility of the art to suit the Indian sensibilities. Rushdie suitably Indianises the English language to share the nuances of the multiplicity of voices and diversity of cultures so as to put into perspective the shared and contested politico-cultural spaces of India. Yet, in the end, this novel too continues to remain tied up with the question of nation. What is notable in this novel is the *body politic* of postcolonial (and neo-colonial) India which puts the spotlight firmly on the human biological body in the literary narrative. The disabled body of Saleem Sinai is employed as a "narrative prosthesis" to drive the narrative of the nation forward in the text. The disease, sickness, monstrosity, and/special cognitive abilities of Saleem Sinai (and thousands of other eponymous children like him) are seen as symptomatic and emblematic of the larger ills that afflicts the nation-state of India. Their bodies are 'texts' and their lives form a

metaphor of national fitness; all things considered the literary narrative becomes a national allegory. Disability is omnipresent in most of the postcolonial fictions as these two phenomena intersect. Both of these focus on constructionism. Nonetheless, *Midnight's Children* does not delve deep into the disabled characters but, on the nation. Rushdie's main concern is to explore the 'health' of the nation or national fitness.

Clare Barker in *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability* (2011) has shown the enormous potential that 'disability' as a critical tool of enquiry provides for interrogating and exploring numerous postcolonial fictions arguing that 'disability' like postcolonialism is an exclusionary and disempowering instrument of the powerful and the dominant. The exclusionary and disempowering nature of social and cultural construction of disability pervades in many postcolonial texts like *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. Both, postcolonialism and disability are exclusionary and disempowering processes. However, in the quest for a national identity, postcolonial literatures in India have used disability simply as a trope and not much as a theoretical method of analysis to interpret the disability experiences.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre writes, "Nationhood implies violence—the violence of a military state, be it feudal, bourgeois, imperialist, or some other variety" (1992: 112). The violence during Independence looms over the imagination of Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* where he sees it as a violent and grotesque dismembering of the nation. Ironically, this arose in the process of creating a nation from the remnants of British colonialism in the Indian sub-continent. By drawing analogy of the human body to describe the political upheavals of these painful historical events he looks at this phenomena as an entirely disabling process which keeps on aggravating with the passage of time as the human biological body wears out with age. In this entire narrative Rushdie engages 'magical realism', a surreal rendering of the history of the Indian nation-state putting forth a narrative of a nation by comparing it with the human biological body in trauma. Both, nation and disability involves violence in various forms. Therefore, disability becomes a convenient means to carry forward the literary narrative of the Indian nationhood which is replete with violence. In other words, it turns into a "narrative prosthesis"

which helps to portray the nation grasping for breath in the aftermath of its violent partition that left a gaping hole or impairment in the foundational structure of the Indian nationhood.

Rushdie carried forward the "narrative prosthesis" in the novel *Shame* (1983), where he problematizes the concept of 'disability' in his story of the postcolonial nation-state of Pakistan. The disability of Sufiya Zinobia is employed as a literary trope to put into perspective the body politic of Pakistan. Disability is used as a trope to gain access to the ills afflicting the Pakistani society, and obliquely critiques the nation-state of Pakistan. The narrative of the character of Sufiya Zinobia, the female protagonist, restricted by bodily and intellectual disabilities is an allegory of the disabling structures extant in the Pakistani society. Rushdie describes her in the following words:

> There was once a young woman, Sufiya Zinobia, also known as "Shame." She was of slight build … and her arms and legs were imperfectly co-ordinated when she walked. Despite this ambulatory awkwardness, however, she would not have struck a stranger as being particularly abnormal, having acquired in the first twenty-one years of life the usual complement of physical attributes, including a small severe face that made her seem unusually mature, disguising the fact that she had only managed to get hold of around seven years' worth of brains. She even had a husband … Appearances notwithstanding, however, this Sufiya Zinobia turned out to be, in reality, one of those … exterminating or avenging angels, or werewolves, or vampires, about whom we are happy to read in stories". (*Shame,* 1983: 216)

In a society in which patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, a woman like Sufiya Zinobia with disability is regarded as a burden and a matter of shame for the entire family. In the game of male honour and power, the disabled woman Sufiya Zinobia becomes a pawn, a mere plaything in the hands of the self-serving male family members. Sufiya, the "unmarriageable child" (156), is married to British-educated doctor Omar Khayyam (who is much older to her), which is nothing more than a marriage of convenience, a political and social arrangement for power and privilege. Ironically, in so doing, Omar Khayyam appears as a hero, a saviour of the disabled and unmarriageable Sufiya Zinobia in the eyes of the society. In actuality,

Omar is guilty of "attempting a shameless piece of social climbing ..... by marrying the unmarriageable child, is enabled to stay close to Hyder for years, before, during and after his Presidency" (156). Raza Hyder, father of Sufiya Zinobia has all along seen her as unmarriageable which is a question of honour and prestige for him in the society. It did not occur in Raza Hyder's mind, at any given point in time, since her childhood to give her care to develop something which she was capable of. In the words of Amrita Chhachhi, women become, "the symbols and repositories of communal/group/national identity ..... [so that] [t]hreats to or the loss of control over their women ..... are seen as direct threats to manhood/community/ family. It therefore becomes essential to ensure patriarchal controls over the labour, fertility, and sexuality of women" (1991: 163-5).

Through the dramatization of Sufiya's life and marriage Rushdie sheds light on how disabled women are twice marginalized in the society— first, as a woman and second, as a disabled. She is labelled as a "miracle-gone-wrong" (125) ostensibly for being a woman and on top of that a disabled too, to boot. In a society and culture fed on a diet of patriarchal norms of male authority, power, lineage and inheritance of the property women become invisible and non-entities. Women's place in the society and family is reduced to the purpose of child bearing and rearing. The society tells Sufiya — "babies aren't for you" (236) because babies, society believes, are for the 'normal'. She is denied an equal space in the family as well as society for being a disabled woman, and considered as "damaged-goods."[6] Ironically, it is this "damaged-goods" that men like Omar Khayyam use for social climbing. In contrast to the disabled character of Sufiya, Rushdie juxtaposes the character of the beautiful and presentable Good News whom the society is in awe of as she conforms herself to fit into the expectations and demands of the patriarchal society, she is the example of set standards of cultural norms. However, she loses her own self by internalizing and trying to conform to the cultural norms. Through the life of Sufiya Zinobia, Rushdie criticizes the Pakistani society that limits its spaces for a particular gender and norm. Sufiya's story is a universal story, of oppressive regimes and cultures across time and spaces. The literary narrative of Sufiya Zinobia's disability draws a parallel between disability and postcolonialism as they both differentiates, disempowers, and marginalizes the different/deviant. On numerous occasions—"[t]o tell a story about

colonialism or its aftermath, it is often necessary to tell a story about disability" says Clare Barker in "'Radiant Affliction' Disability Narratives in Postcolonial Literature" (2018: 106).

Midnight's Children and *Shame* explores the mechanisms of oppression that the more powerful nations employed to suppress the colonized nations. In so doing, however, Rushdie brings into critical inquiry the existence of internal colonialism, i.e. the oppression of minority groups within different cultures. The different in gender, physique and sexuality are those usual minority groups who have been at the receiving end of the oppressive regimes and social structures. In the end, Rushdie's novels remain the stereotypical postcolonial novel as it is reduced to a narrative where the body is used to gauge national fitness and put into practice the normative or ideal behaviour. Nevertheless, from *Midnight's Children* to *Shame*, there is a progression in the narrative of disability in these two literary representations. *Midnight's Children* is primarily a discourse of the nation-state of India where disability is completely sub-ordinate to the question of nation; the disabled body remain simply a metaphor to read the nation-state's politics. Nevertheless, his subsequent novel *Shame* delves deeper into the problems of disability in the society and its literary representations. Surely, the major theme in *Shame* are the politics of the nation-state of Pakistan, yet, the corpus of the literary narrative does not dwell exclusively on the *body politic* but, goes beyond to incorporate disability as an oppressive mechanism that marginalizes the bodies that are deviant (not normal). Rushdie locates the causes of both postcolonialism and disability in the disabling and disempowering nature of the dominant social structures, a phenomenon further compounded by the intersection of nation, gender, disabled body and suppressed sexuality.

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, the disabled characters are the major protagonists; it is through their disabled bodies that the nation is critiqued in these two prominent postcolonial fictions. These two novels employ the disabled body as a metaphor to convey meanings/connotations of health and fitness of the nation. Rushdie in these two fictions does not limit the use of disability as a "narrative prosthesis" but, explores the issue of disability theoretically as

fundamentally associated with power and constructionism. The disabled bodies are transformed into 'frames' to text the idea of a nation and national fitness in these postcolonial fictions. Rushdie realized the 'instability' or the fluidity of disability as a category, and therefore, goes out to give shape to the temporality and the shifting positions through the discourses in the literary representations.

In the Indian novels in English, the phenomenon of disability and postcolonialism intersects and conflates in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* in significant ways. Rushdie represents colonialism and disability as repressive regimes of dominant power structures which go on to intersect with gender and sexuality in his subsequent novel *Shame*. These two postcolonial fictions bring into the forefront the debates surrounding the literary representations of normalcy, ability, inequality, disempowerment, and marginalization which draw a parallel between colonialism and disability as common mechanisms of oppression. Yet, in the postcolonial literary representations of disability it isn't as simple as it seems to be. Clare Barker says, "[i]t is important to note, though, that even in the kinds of social realist postcolonial texts where disability is linked straightforwardly to (post)colonial injury or trauma, disabled characters also have narrative and aesthetic functions" (2018: 106). This is a noted feature in most of the postcolonial literary narratives such as that of Rushdie, and (as we shall see) in the writings of Anita Desai as well. The "metaphorical aptness"[7] of disability or disabling condition of muteness or speechlessness of the disabled character, Baba, provides a trope to deliberate on the issues of disempowerment, marginalization, and voicelessness of the disabled and the (post)colonial subjects in her novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980).

Prior to Rushdie (it may be noted), Anita Desai had made a feeble attempt to narrativize the conditions of the disabled in her novel *Clear Light of Day* which was published in 1980. This novel focuses on the marginalized status and oppressed voices of the disabled (in body and intellect) in postcolonial India. The female characters, Bim and Tara are emblematic of the countless disempowered women in the postcolonial Indian society, while their autistic brother, Baba, becomes a marginalized body through whom the women define themselves and the nation.

Baba, who is a marginalized body, is silent and impervious to the changes that unfold in front of him in the emerging post Independence period of India. Given that "voicelessness"[8] is one central theme in postcolonial theory, the mute and speechless character Baba in Desai's *Clear Light of Day* provides a convenient trope to probe the question of the importance of "voice" in resisting the power of the dominant which is responsible for disempowering, dispossessing, and marginalizing the different. Care giving is not a central issue in *Clear Light of Day* as both the sisters Bim and Tara, it is clear, are much more than willing to give time and effort towards their autistic sibling Baba. Desai does not problematize the concept of disability in her fiction but, uses the body of mute/speechless character Baba as a 'text' to delineate the oppression deeply entrenched in the social hierarchy which renders the (post)colonial subjects voiceless, marginalized, and without a space.

In *Clear Light of Day* Baba remains unaffected by the goings-on in his surroundings unlike his sisters who literally become hysterical with the large-scale changes that come along in the aftermath of decolonization. In a sense, his disability, i.e. the lack of speech insulates him from the politics and circumstances of the time. Compared to the other characters around him Baba seems to be in a better position but, it is not as simple as it seems to be. What come out are the inequalities in the social structures as the muteness/speechlessness of Baba leaves him invisible, or as a non-entity in the society and in the nation-building process. His 'presence' is of no consequence. The muteness of Baba becomes emblematic of the voicelessness of the colonized (or marginalized) subjects, and their powerlessness in the face of the dominant forces to change their fate.

In a similar vein, akin to Rushdie's writings, Anita Desai's writings are also a narrative of the nation-state of India. In her novel *Clear Light of Day*, Desai narrativized a nation in the cusp of change. In most of the postcolonial literature in English in India, the question of change in the immediate aftermath of Independence is of paramount importance, and occupies a lot of narrative spaces in its fictions. As in *Clear Light of Day*, most of the postcolonial novels in English in India problematize the question of nation (it is seen as vulnerable to the contradictory pulls and pressures of its politics); therefore, these writings generally explores the question

of national fitness (and its opposite—weakness). Under the circumstances, disabled body and disability per se becomes a convenient trope, a literary device, or in other words a metaphor to probe the 'health' of the nation. Despite of disability having a constant presence in *Clear Light of Day*, as it is in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*; it is reduced to ".....what disability theorists David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder terms "a narrative prosthesis," a "crutch" that provides the text's central patterns of imagery" (Barker, 2018: 106). Thus, the pole of the narrative moves from a discourse of "fitness" and "normalcy" of the individual towards nation. The interest of the nation occupies pole position at the expense of the individual. Desai uses a mute character as a "crutch" to help her narrative to access the theme of the "voicelessness" of the colonized.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak probes the possibilities of representing the marginalized and powerless through politics and art. She posits the question whether the marginalized and the powerless have the means and a strategy of representation in politics, art/literature, and the larger social spaces. The oppressed postcolonial subjects too are a part of this larger group that has been turned into "voiceless" people. Voice, meaning not just the speech utterance, but a representative language that is counted and heard, which cannot be ignored by the powers that be, is an important means and an instrument of empowerment. In the essay, by the term "speak" Spivak does not mean the actual muteness or lack of speech but to question the voicelessness of the marginalized, or the subalterns. Mainly the focus of Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is to recover the "voice" of the oppressed postcolonial subjects. As the history of the nation-state of India is replete with series of exploitation and oppression of the underprivileged and the marginalized from within and without, postcolonialism offers an insight into the dynamics of power relations that operate in the society. In most of the postcolonial fictions, therefore, disability is subtextual as it is another form of oppression and subjugation by the powerful which can be called "internal colonialism."[9] The mute/speechless Baba in Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is emblematic of the silent allegiance of the voiceless to the norms of the majority. The dominant majority manufactures consent by keeping the marginalized voiceless.

Michel Foucault states, "'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere'" (1998: 63), this infers that its opposite has some element of truth. As the saying goes "where there's smoke there's fire" therefore, it is equally true that—where there's power there's exploitation, and it comes in every shape and sizes. This becomes clear when one takes into consideration the institutionalization of oppression and exploitation on the basis of caste and creed in the Indian society. Most of the times there is a manufacturing of consent and silent allegiance as the marginalized are mostly voiceless. The dominant and the powerful appropriate for themselves the right, power and privilege of manufacturing "what counts as 'true'". Foucault says:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as 'true' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991).

A reading of the postcolonial novels in English in India reveals that power is ingrained in every nook and corner of the social structures. In *Midnight's Children* it comes in the guise of freedom, in *Shame* in the form of (male) honour and privilege, and in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* as a family. In a vast and diverse nation like India power lurks in different corners and comes in different forms as these fictional narrative attests. To belong to the other side of the divide in the normal-abnormal or majority-minority binary in India is in some ways a disabling experience. Very often, the abnormal and minorities are glossed over as insignificant in order to manufacture consent for the purpose of a larger national cause. An artificial 'centre' is sought to be created in the narratives of the nation wherein the powerless become the peripherals. The views of the dominant and the powerful become the 'truth'. In such a scenario, literary narratives that come from the significantly insignificant minority communities like the Parsis in India throw light on the exclusionary and disabling processes at work that rejects what seems to be discordant from the majority point-of-view.

In a vast and diverse country like India, the Parsi community has found themselves ill-at-ease with its politics and culture. Although they have worked hard to establish themselves in an adopted land and have contributed towards the growth of the nation in more ways than one, their views and philosophy have hardly mattered in the national discourses. They are not seen and heard by the majority. Often times they have found themselves on the wrong side of the debate of nation and nationalism which continue to remind them as outsiders or tag them as such. The minority Parsi community in India found themselves 'voiceless' and unable to assert themselves or take part in the nation-building process post Independence. The minuscule Parsi community became voiceless, because it is the views of the dominant and the powerful which gain sanctity as the 'truth'. This is one of the most significant and recurring theme or subject by Parsi writers in English, Rohinton Mistry being one of them. In his fictional works Mistry articulates the suffocation felt by the minority Parsi community in the constricted politico-cultural and religious spaces in India. For the handful of Parsis living in India, Bombay (now Mumbai) has been their adopted home for generations together. He says it has a heart and space for anyone wanting to make a home here. Mistry brings alive, Bombay (Mumbai), as he narrates:

> That's how people have lived in Bombay. That's why Bombay has survived floods, disease, plague, water shortage, bursting drains and sewers, all the population pressures. In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here. (*Family Matters*, 152)

However, the manner in which people live in this place is in a squeezed space, spatially as well as socially. Mistry mentions the city's electric trains, the railway stations, Marine Lines, the cricket stadiums, i.e. Wankhade and Brabourne, the road networks, e.g. Hughes Road, Dhobi Talao Junction, the Metro Cinema, Asiatic Society Library, and the Sonapur crematorium with graphic imagery, and a city always on the move. Yet, it is the imagery of dirt and filth, with its unsafe roads, dug up footpaths, the colossal traffic, the lack of space for proper accommodation (people lives in slums, eating and sleeping close to ditches and drains which is not fit even for animals) that leave a lasting impression on the readers. The difference

between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the marginalized are juxtaposed in the narrative so as to highlight the vulnerability of those who live on the other side, and the underbelly of the society. Metaphorically, this reality of people's lives speaks volumes of the numerous contradictions and challenges of the nation.

Bombay (Mumbai), for Mistry is a microcosm of India, a miniature India in itself; with its cosmopolitan character it embodies the Indian nation in all its diverse hues. His novels *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey* is a search for a home, for a space in the wide and indifferent world which is ruled by the high and mighty. In a way Rohinton Mistry is questioning and critiquing the supposedly free and democratic modern nation-state which from time to time erupts in violence. In the novel *Family Matters*, Mistry traces the hardships and fate of a minority Parsi family who are increasingly getting alienated from the larger society of India. Nariman Vakeel, a septuagenarian former Professor of English, stricken with Parkinson's disease and a broken ankle becomes nauseous with day-to-day life in his old age. The old and disabled Nariman Vakeel is not accepted by his step-children Jal and Coomy who conspires and dumps him in the house of Roxana, his real daughter who too could no longer accept and take care of him as is clear from the fact that his presence is seen as a liability and drain on the limited resources/finances of the family.

The family of Nariman is a unit of a nation, and is beset by differences. The way he is treated by his step-children Jal and Coomy is a commentary on the way the Indian nation's dominant and the powerful groups and communities treats its minorities as the Other, and as expendables as is exemplified by the politics of hate and dominance practised by political parties like the Shiv Sena. Mistry narrates this nonchalantly in his novels so as to question the concept of the nation. He questions the rising cases of intolerance in Bombay (Mumbai) and in the country as a whole on the basis of sectarian lines which created an atmosphere of fear in the minds of the minorities like the Parsis. They were forced to take a re-look at their Indianness. Mistry is pained by the brutality and violence unleashed by the religious fanatics who are hell-bent to destroy the social fabric of the nation. It speaks volumes about how a religious minority like Parsis gets trampled under the sense of insecurity, a

community devoid of a voice to raise their concerns. Mistry, through the character of Hussain utters:

> The police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim Mohallas, they were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came out to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody! And my poor wife and children…....I couldn't even recognize them. (*Family Matters*, 148)

Nariman's advancing age which is compounded by Parkinson's disease and a broken ankle renders him disabled, needing medical attention and care neither of which his step-children nor his own daughter Roxana are willing to provide. What is of concern and of greater priority for his children is money and wealth, not their father. With all its aspirations to rise up in the comity of nations, the India of 1980s is a nation at the crossroads. As depicted by Mistry in *Family Matters* the nation-state of India suffers from a fundamental rot in the nucleus of its foundation, i.e. the dysfunctional family which is symptomatic of larger ills. The family is not willing and is limited in its resources to carry along its old, infirm, and the disabled. Nariman Vakeel had been a Professor of English who worked hard in his heyday to bring up his family and contributed to the development of the nation. Yet, it is ironic that inspite of all his hard work he is made to fend for himself once he is old, infirm and disabled. Mistry is questioning the way families and society rejects those who have lost its 'productivity', it is symptomatic of the larger ills that have begun to afflict the society. He is critical of the rising materialism and selfishness of the society and the direction that the nation is moving towards, a nation torn apart by dialectical materialism. Mistry bemoans the emerging generation's alienation from tradition and spirituality which is an antithesis to the idea of nation preached, practiced and propagated by Gandhi.

Rohinton Mistry's narratives of the postcolonial Indian nation are reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's and Anita Desai's novels. By narrativizing the nation in different hues and character these postcolonial novelists sought to demystify its past and present. In *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* Rushdie employed the disabled body

as a trope to make a prognosis of two different nations India and Pakistan which emerged from the sub-continent, the violence and disruption caused by frenetic mob frenzy in the freedom struggle is read as disfiguring and disabling the nation. In the same way, Anita Desai voices the voicelessness of the marginalized through the disabled character Baba who remain mere spectator of the changes that occur in the postcolonial nation. Going forward in the narrativizing of the nation, Rohinton Mistry looks at the nation from the perspectives of the minority communities, the way its minority and powerless communities are bullied in everyday life. In his narrative of the nation, Mistry like his illustrious counterparts employed the disabled body metaphor to gain access to the idea of disease, decay, and dysfunctionality that has crept in the nation. In the novel *Family Matters*, disability thus becomes a trope in the narrative of the nation.

Mistry represents the family as the nucleus of a nation where Nariman Vakeel is a symbol of the marginalized and the disempowered within the family. Nariman Vakeel at one point of time served as a Professor of English, he is now reduced to a poor shadow of himself who has lost a space in the heart and homes of his kins as he has turned into an old man, infirm and disabled. To his children he becomes a burden physically and financially. Through this particular case Mistry infers that the emergent postcolonial Indian society had no time and concern for the needs of the old and the infirm (disabled). It is the materialist concern which guides the behaviour of the people towards their kins. Vakeel is deprived of the basic care by his children because as an old and disabled person he is seen as a liability to the family. The recurring image of death and decay comes flooding back and forth in the novel. This helps to drive home the point of the ills that has come to beset the basic structure of the Indian nation.

Postcolonialism and disability occupies a special place in the literary productions of Indian novels written in English as it provides a convenient means to critique the nation. Both these dialectics are used to compliment and supplement one another. The fiction that emerges out of this fusion is notable for its ability to trace the rudiments of cultural pomposity that time and again erupts to disturb the social fabric of the nation. As Martha Stoddard Holmes says, “[f]iction, however, is more

than a record of the demographics of time, and the representation of disability does more than one kind of cultural work" (2018: 65).

Disability makes a constant presence in the postcolonial novels of these three novelists, viz. Rushdie, Desai and Mistry. In their novels disabled individuals rely on the care offered by others for their survival and it raises an important issue of dependency and the ethics of care in the understanding of disability. In Rushdie's *Shame* Sufiya Zinobia's disability and her dependency on her family members for survival becomes a matter of concern for the family. On top of that being a woman makes her situation all the more complex as the patriarchal society in which she lives reduces women into a position of dependency (on men) in each and every aspect of life. Disabled individuals need care and concern of varying degrees in every aspect of their lives. Socially and culturally, individuals needing care are regarded as inferior because personal dignity is closely related to independence. Eva Feder Kittay says, ".....personal dignity is closely related to independence, and the care that people with disabilities receive is seen as a way for them to achieve the greatest possible autonomy" (2011: 49-58). Under this situation, the care givers have a power over the disabled who can manipulate them according to their will as they act as an intermediary between the disabled individual and the outside world. Kittay says:

> The person in need of care is in their power with respect to intimate details of life, aspects of existence we often do not share except with those closest to us. This is an imposition and intrusion which can be oppressive and, when it turns the disabled person into a supplicant, is experienced as being at odds with dignity. (Kittay, 2011: 50)

This feature is observed in the characterisation of Sufiya Zinobia who is turned into a "supplicant", completely at the mercy of her parents and relatives. It is they who decide for her eventually, they get her married to a much older person against her wishes ostensibly to absolve themselves of the sense of guilt and to get rid of the need to provide lifelong care. The question of care giving here turns out for them as an opportunity to occupy a moral high ground. In this case 'care' is not voluntary as it seems to be but they cater to it so as to absolve themselves of personal guilt.

Having a disabled kin within the family is seen as a question of dignity, or in other words a matter of 'shame'. Disability becomes synonymous with dependency, and ability transforms into a virtue rewarded with independence. It must be added here that "[t]he situation is worse still in a world where independence is the *norm* of human functioning" (Kittay, 2011: 51 [emphasis mine]). However, there is a difference between what is called independent human functioning, and in not being allowed (by the society/ culture) to act in that particular manner. In many cases, as is evident from the novel *Shame* the women and disabled aren't allowed to be independent in the first place. Sufiya's father does not at any stage in the formative stage of her life encourage her to develop any of her faculties which (if had been provided) would have helped her to grow and be less dependent. On the contrary, she is deprived of her basic rights and privileges and those around her exercise power over her as they impose their will on her.

It turns out that dependency of the disabled is more of constructionism as it is "created amongst disabled people, not because of the effects of the functional limitations on their capacities for self-care, but because their lives are shaped by a variety of economic, political, and social forces which produces this dependency" (Oliver 1989: 17). Instead of alleviating the causes of dependency, Sufiya Zinobia is made to become more and more dependent. Her father is keen to transfer the care (which he grudgingly gives) to another person by marrying her to a man which is more of a marriage of convenience. In the predicament faced by this disabled woman various factor, chief of them being economic, political, and social play an important role in making her dependent. Normalization of independence becomes an agency to exercise power over the hapless individuals. In this scenario, economic factor plays the most significant role after political and social that makes a disabled totally dependent. They are regarded as a burden and a drain on resources, and in worst cases as a curse on the family. But, it needs to be remembered at this point that political and social factors does not create conducive atmosphere for them to be economically self reliant. Sufiya Zinobia is a victim of the prevailing political, social, and economic milieu. As a woman and a disabled she does not have any leverage (in the family as well as the society) which exacerbates her dependency.

Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, in contrast, is more of a victim of political factor as his birth is tied up with the political upheaval of the times. His birth at the stroke of midnight August 15, 1947 is a narrative laden with political overtones as his life story becomes a story of the nation. His life is chained to this event in the Indian history and is dependent on it. This gives him "telepathic power" to communicate with thousands of other eponymous children like him born at the same stroke of midnight. However, this comes with hidden strings attached as it is responsible for chaining him into a state of virtual inability that gradually aggravates with the passage of time and results in the disfigurement of the body which occurs in tandem with the numerous disabling events in the (Indian) politics, eventually turning him into a grotesque disabled body in the end. In this particular case, Saleem Sinai's predicament appears to be a matter of fate but, it should be appreciated that political circumstances is also created and not a matter of chance or fate. The political atmosphere bogs down Saleem Sinai into its whirlpool virtually making him dependent on the circumstances around him.

The fate of Rohinton Mistry's Nariman Vakeel in *Family Matters* is closer to Sufiya Zinobia (rather than Saleem Sinai). Although they belong to opposite genders, yet, in both of them the economic factor plays a decisive role more than the social and political. Their problem is compounded by the fact that they belong to the *Other* marginalized group. Sufiya Zinobia as a woman in a patriarchal society is someone who is disadvantaged from her birth, and to add to her sorrows is the fact that she is disabled which diminishes whatever prospects she happened to possess. Likewise, Nariman Vakeel belongs to a marginalized community (who have been constantly made to feel as the *Other* in the Indian society inspite of their enormous contributions to the nation), and to his ill luck falls on the wrong side of age, a fate which is further complicated by a broken ankle that leaves him dependent, and consequently, a disabled. In a society built on political, social and economic factors Sufiya's and Nariman's fate is decided by the forces beyond their control. As a disabled woman Sufiya is twice dependent on her family as much as Nariman is twice dependent being a member of a marginalized Parsi community and as an old infirm man. Economic factor plays a substantial role in worsening the condition of dependency of Sufiya and Nariman who are already marginalized politically and

socially. Compared to these characters Anita Desai's Baba in *Clear Light of Day* is in a better position as he receives better care from his siblings Bim and Tara. In their crippled state Sufiya, Nariman, and Baba demands attention and care in the form of emotional and psychological support. In the silent existence of Baba, however, it is noted that he is reduced into a state of nothingness, a non-entity in the affairs of the family and the nation as well.

The bodily disabled (both visible and invisible disability) are not only physically traumatized but are emotionally and psychologically traumatized as well. This is more painful as the changed circumstances hurt vitally in a number of ways. In many cases as they are reduced to dependency (and in worst cases as vegetative states) they live at the mercy of others' care. From the aforesaid characters it becomes evident that disability is a condition aggravated by indifference (the opposite of care) as the prevailing political, social and economic factors work in conjunction to reduce them as 'objects' of ridicule. In fact, the prevailing attitudes towards them within the family and without are one of indifference. The disabled turn into diminished humans. Even in the case of Baba the care that he receives is one of sympathy rather than genuine empathy arising out of love. In a Lévinasian[10] sense, the disabled individual is "someone who is fundamentally different from you and fundamentally vulnerable" (Rosenstand, 2000: 412). However, it is a paradox that it is in this weak and vulnerable person that Bim and Tara find strength to bear the weight of chaos in a rapidly changing postcolonial (Indian) nation of the 1980s. The mute and speechless Baba is a figure of calm and serenity at a time when the abled (in body and intellect) becomes hysterical in the face of the large-scale changes, unable to fathom the goings-on around them.

In the postcolonial novels of Rushdie, Desai, and Mistry the alterity of Sinai, Sufiya, Nariman, and Baba is used to reflect on the condition of the nation. In their fictions the concept of the Indian nation is imaged not through the land but the body. Because of the various political, social, and economic upheavals encountered by the nation such as the imposition of Emergency, rising corruption and communalism, economic turmoil, etc. in the 1980s the Indian nation was at a critical and vulnerable stage of its life. Traumatized by the numerous upheavals that occurred one after the

other the writers grappled with the nuances through the metaphor of the body, as it is not just a matter of land but a combination of various socio-political and economic factors. Narration of the nation became a *cause célèbre*. The novelists devoted time and space in their literary narratives for the exploration of the various socio-political and economic issues in the history of the nation and present an alternate historiography of the nation which is imagined in terms of the body.

As one of the major concerns of the postcolonial Indian novels in English of the 1980s is to make a prognosis of the 'health' of the nation, it attempts to give a person focussed approach to the imagination of the nation. By presenting the nation as a disabled body these postcolonial literary narratives bring about an emotional dimension to the history of India that has been battered innumerable times from within and without. Representing the nation as a traumatized disabled body in these fictions lends a different perspective into the inured minds. The ethics of care is invoked through this representation of the nation as an injured body induces love and deference for it. As have been noted earlier, disability is a condition aggravated by indifference, an emotional touch and care goes a long way in alleviating the pain and suffering. These novelists— Rushdie, Desai and Mistry make the narration of the nation emotionally charged, not as a measure of "enforcing of normalcy"[11] but, to bolster the spirit of nationalism.

A parallel is drawn between the disabled bodies and traumatized postcolonial nations. Disability becomes an embodiment of the trauma experienced by individuals/communities and postcolonial nations. Since the 1980s, the creative writers drew analogy between "broken" bodies and "broken" nations and represented history as a series of trauma and disablement/disfigurement. The disabilities of the characters symbolize the growing state of dependency and hopelessness of a nation that has become fragmented and dislocated. It appears that novelists like Rushdie, Desai, and Mistry package disability for a Western audience and sees everything non-Western as diseased, deformed and disabled. A closer analysis of their writings, however, reveals that they are not abetting this idea. Instead, they introduce a new dimension in the discourses of nationalism which can be called *ethical politics*[12] in

the realm of postcolonial history of the nation, i.e. to care for the "broken" nation as one would to a "broken" body with commitment and empathy.

Disability is commonly understood as a lack. However, emotional wholeness goes a long way in substituting the physical lack of a disabled body. The lack of a disabled body can be made complete by emotional wholeness through care. As witnessed in Pramila Balasundaram's novel *Sunny's Story* (2005), a true story of Ranjan (usually called Sunny), a young boy with intellectual disability (Down Syndrome). Unlike the aforementioned novels which come from the pen of seasoned and professional novelists, this novel is by an individual who is primarily a care-giver (not a professional novelist) and has a wealth of experience and knowledge having worked with the needy disabled children for close to three decades. This novel is a straight-forward narrative of care and compassion without getting involved with the intricacies of the politics of disability and the nation. She represents the lives of children with intellectual disability in India which is a delicate and culturally sensitive issue. In a country which lacks in proper healthcare and logistics, poor disabled people lead a vulnerable life, often becoming victims of hate, crime, and derision. Within this gloomy situation, however, Balasundaram shows a ray of hope. Through proper care-giving and compassion the lack can be made emotionally whole again wherein the intellectually disabled children like Sunny can live a secured life of dignity in the society. In a departure from the norms where the disabled are looked upon with derision, little Sunny awakens compassion in the minds of people. Out of the millions of destitute disabled children wandering in the streets of India little Sunny stands out as "a gift from the Gods" (116). *Sunny's Story* is a narrative of the life and circumstances of Sunny, lost and found at a young age. It is a story of positivity in a sea of gloom. This novel shows that with proper care and compassion disabled (bodily/or intellectually) individuals often considered deviants can thrive in their own special ways and means. Pramila Balasundaram emphasises the need of sensitivity and empathy towards people with disability particularly, children. This novel shows that care, if provided with outmost concern and compassion goes a long way in alleviating disability from the society. She shows that politics can be (and should be) set aside in the discourses of disability. Balasundaram subtly emphasizes that a nation can be a lot better if it carries along its *Other* minorities with care and

compassion. She brings into the equation of the nation and disability the concept of inclusive *ethical politics*, and the need to walk the talk.

In the (postcolonial) politics of the nation, power plays a crucial role in determining the spaces of its numerous constituent groups. The majority/dominant usurps the spaces and plays a dominant role to the detriment of the minorities. As such, power comes in different forms and functions in various ways, and the powerless appear in a host of different avatars. Like women with disabilities, children with disabilities (vulnerable to anti-social elements) number into hundreds of thousands and pose a huge challenge to the nation; unfortunately, every disabled child does not have a disarming smile like Sunny. Balasundaram raises a pertinent question here, i.e. where and what is the priority of the nations? Her novel *Sunny's Story* is a novel of pragmatism where she shows that the nation-building goes hand-in-hand with a healthy body and mind. The novels of Rushdie, Desai, Mistry, and Balasundaram present an alternate historiography of the Indian nation by imaging and imagining it as a (human) body.

In the entire corpus of the discourses surrounding disability and the dialectics of nation in the Indian novels in English Firdaus Kanga belong to the far side of the moon. Refusing to conform to the norms of the society he rebels against the biased standards and ethos set by the majority able-bodied. Kanga belongs to the minority and disempowered section of the society on multiple fronts in body, culture, and sexuality which bears a heavy impression on his outlook towards life and the world. Consequently, his works are an expression of the lived experiences of a constricted life that has been limited and suffocated on multiple counts. As he has been denied a life of dignity and the right to live a life on his terms Kanga rebels against the prevalence of 'compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality in the society' through his writings. His writings, fictional as well as non-fictional, are a voice of protest which comes at a time and situation (1990s) in the history of the nation that was not yet ready to accept the disabled and sexual minorities as part of its national mainstream.

Disability in the writings of Rushdie, Desai, Mistry, and Balasundaram is a simple representation. Here, as has been noted earlier, disability has been turned into a literary device, a trope to decode the nation. It is the interests of the nation and not

the disability of the individual per se that is important to them, although, it is the body and not the land that form the dominant image of the Indian nationhood in their works. Kanga breaks the stranglehold of this tradition in the Indian writings in English and places disability at the centre of his narratives, getting rid of all the paraphernalia that has accompanied the disability narratives thus far. In Kanga's works disability is not a representation but a life narrative, a narrative of his lived experiences. He does not see it as a means to deliberate on the issues affecting external factors like the 'health' or 'fitness' of a nation, or as an alternate historiography. Kanga recuses disability from being used merely as a literary device (as it has been wont to thus far in the literary narratives), and for him it is the genesis and matrix of differentiation and discrimination which has led to untold violence, seen and unseen, against individuals like him. Through this mechanism, individuals that appear different are edged out from the mainstream, and they are forcefully conformed to the norms. Living on the edge of the society, Kanga brings into the discourse his lived experiences to deliberate on the subjection of individuals that are different and who do not seemingly conform to the norms of the dominant majority. He sees disability for what it is, a violence perpetrated on the hapless minorities. Both, nationhood and disability which Rushdie, Desai, Mistry, and Balasundaram keenly narrate in their writings implies violence, albeit in "some other variety" in the case of disability which is generally not seen.

The large-scale internalization of norms (set by the majority) in the society has blinded the eyes of people to the violence perpetrated on the disabled. It has given the appearance or the mask of 'naturalness' to what is essentially a socio-cultural construct. For that reason, the violence perpetrated on the disabled in "some other variety" is not generally seen. Kanga struggles to demonstrate the violence perpetrated on individuals like him in his writings as the society has largely internalized this phenomenon and is not able to see it as an act of violence. As a first step towards demystifying it Kanga refuses to accept the normalisation process which he sees it essentially as binarism. In *Trying to Grow*, which is a fictionalized account of his life, Brit (Kanga) is a subject of undue almost obnoxious attention. His crippled body becomes an existential dilemma—on the one hand he receives love and care from his parents yet, on the other; he is not allowed to grow by the society

at large. This strips him of his dignity which he refuses to give up. He wrote back, pointing out the various shortcomings of the ableist society he made it clear that it is a classic case of the "pot calling the kettle black". No doubt, Brit (Kanga) received much care and compassion. His mother was his care-giver (until her last breath) yet, Brit grows tired of this care which annoys him no end. Care is a different matter here as it repudiates Brit's (Kanga's) individuality, increasing and perpetuating his dependency or not allowing him to grow. At this point it is pertinent to recall Michael J. Fox who says—"One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered" (2002). Kanga refused to surrender to the arbitrary norms of the society.

The refusal to let Brit 'grow' is a denial of his individuality and a perpetration of violence in other forms that assaults, vandalizes, and mocks his crippled existence. Kanga is very particular about the denial of sexuality to the disabled. The society has been programmed to see, or has been normalised to understand the disabled as 'asexual' beings. Denial of sexuality to a person is the worst form of violence perpetrated on a person. However, the irony is that this form of violence is not seen by the society at large as the notion of 'asexuality' of the disabled has been widely internalized. Reduced as objects of ridicule, Kanga make it a point to narrativize at length his sexual nature, passion, and pursuits in his writings and the formation of the basis of his identity.

For many (even to this day), alternate sexuality is an anathema, the right to choose beyond the accepted 'normal' heterosexuality is denied through legal as well as non-legal (violent) ways. Nevertheless, Kanga not only expresses his sexuality but demonstrates a tenacity to choose an alternate sexuality for his own self. In contrast to his crippled body (which lack in strength to carry its own weight), Kanga has the strength to choose the forbidden in the society. What is of significance in the life of Kanga as is exemplified in *Trying to Grow* and *Heaven on Wheels* is his refusal to conform to the norms of the majority and live a false life. In Rushdie's *Shame*, the character of Good News is someone who goes out of her way to meet, or conform to the norms of the society. In the process she loses her own self by living according to the expectations and demands of the society. Kanga is not interested in losing his

own self for fear of violence that generally befalls those who refuse to go by the norms.

Most of the novelists/writers writing in English in India are preoccupied with identity issues and the problems of nation and nationhood. Disability is an issue which has of late gained some attention and a few narrative spaces in the works of a handful of writers like Rushdie, Desai, Mistry, Balasundaram, and Indra Sinha. Nonetheless, this did not receive much theoretical impetus in itself as a critical tool of analysis like— Race and/or Feminism but became a tool to analyse the concept of nation. But, there is silence everywhere as regards the issue of alternate sexuality is concerned in the Indian writings in English. In some ways, it is a refusal to accept the reality of the society which like disability is everywhere and is an important aspect/element of a person's identity. There is a perception prevalent in the (Indian) society which sees alternate sexuality as 'unnatural', which is "against the order of nature" and continues to criminalize it. The Indian novels in English are largely conspicuous by its silence on alternate sexuality, a silence which Kanga breaks in narratives of his disabled experience and the preference for alternate sexuality. Disability and sexuality intersect as the life of the disabled Kanga testifies. The disabled are usually regarded as sexless and aren't given a choice or freedom but are made dependent. Kanga breaks the myth of asexuality of the disabled and demystifies alternate sexuality which he shows is natural and a matter of choice.[13]

Kanga adds an important element in the discourses and narratives of the Indian nation in the Indian writings in English by bringing in the equation the need to go beyond binarism and the need to accommodate or carry along its *Other* minorities in the nation building processes. While the likes of Rushdie, Desai, Mistry, and Balasundaram remain silent on the issue of sexuality which is a kind of conformity to the norms of the society, Kanga vociferously presents his life of *Otherness* as a disabled and a sexual *Other* who incidentally belongs to minority Parsi community.

There is subtle inference in the writings of Kanga that the Indian nation continues to live in denial as regards its disabled and sexual minorities are concerned, which is contrary to its historical past that were tolerant and accommodative to its minorities—religious and cultural as well as the disabled and

the sexual minorities. As such, literatures dealing with the issues of disability and to a large extent alternate sexuality is denied recognition and dismissed as pulp fiction. Kanga's writing breaks the status quo in the existing power structures of the Indian writings in English. His writings are a voice from the margins, which speaks of three types of marginality—disability, sexual minority, and cultural minority community which finds itself alienated in the emergent postcolonial India. Brit (Kanga) refuses to adhere to the accepted norms of the society while negotiating with his sexuality and disability and gives himself the freedom to choose the kind of life he wants to live. He is not afraid of rejection by the society for the choice that he makes and ultimately refuses to be an ideal citizen of the nation-state which does not accommodate difference and accept its minorities as they are. Kanga's refusal to accede to the demands of the normalisation processes, i.e. the hegemonic power structures and discourses of "compulsory heterosexuality" and "compulsory able-bodiedness" is a subversion of the established power structures determined and enforced by the dominant abled-bodied heterosexuals.

Endnotes:

[1] See Meenakshi Mukherjee's "The Beginnings of the Indian Novel" in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.*) A Histrory of Indian Literature in English*, 2003, pp. 95.

[2] See Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It refers to the ways through which stories play on the desires of the readers, as well as the influence of readers' desire in shaping the reading. It throws light on the various forms of persuasion, inducement, yearning, pleasure, dissatisfaction, frustration and heartbreak as readers. The fundamental aspect of narrative desire is the issue of 'identity.'

[3] See Mitchell & Snyder. *Narrative prosthesis: Disability and the dependencies of discourse*, 2000.

[4] Term borrowed from Lennard J. Davis' *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body, 1995.*

[5] See Pierre Bourdieu's essay "The forms of capital" published in J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, 1986.

[6] A person who is considered to be no longer desirable or valuable because of disability.

[7] Conventionality refers to the familiarity of a **metaphor** whereas **aptness** refers to the degree to which a **metaphor** vehicle captures important features of a **metaphor** topic. In recent years it has become clear that operationalizing these two constructs is not as simple as asking naïve readers for subjective judgments.

[8] In this context it means a person/group/community "without the power or right to express an opinion".

[9] **Internal colonialism** is a notion of structural, political, and economic inequalities between regions within a nation state. Here, its scope has been extended to include communities, groups, individuals who have been disempowered and subjugated in other forms. Much of the theory of internal colonialism emerged in the wake of anti-colonial struggles in the so-called third world in the 1960s (as an aside: many scholars don't use the terminology third world any longer and prefer terms like the global south because 'third world' really came out of colonial legacy). One of the most famous theorists in this era was the French doctor and scholar Frantz Fanon. As countries in places like Latin American and Africa (such as Fanon's Algeria) decolonized, violence and the terrible conditions of colonialism didn't change. Fanon theorized that the suffering of colonization caused the colonized to internalize the violence of colonialism. Fanon noticed that the formerly colonized often committed violence against one another.

[10] Emmanuel Lévinas. See *Being and the Other: On Paul Celan*, translated by Stephen Melville, published in *Chicago Review*, 29 (3), 16-22.

[11] Term borrowed from Lennard J. Davis. See *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body,*1995.

[12] **Political ethics** (also known as **political** morality or public **ethics**) is the practice of making moral judgements about **political** action and **political** agents. It covers two areas. The first is the **ethics** of process (or the **ethics** of office), which deals with public officials and the methods they use. Ethical politics is the field constituted by the tension between redistributive justice and the struggle for recognition. Questions of redistributive justice spring from the socialist tradition, aiming to redress economic inequalities and are located under the signs of equality and liberty. Questions of cultural recognition spring especially from the new social movements of the post- 1960s era, aiming to redress the misrecognition of cultural specificity and the devaluation of difference, and are located under the signs of recognition and difference.

[13] See Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", 1980.

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CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Living in denial, literary narratives across time and cultures have brushed the phenomena of disability and queer sexuality mostly under the carpet. A majority of the literary narratives of these two interconnected issues are nothing more than mythopoeia. Instead of presenting the truth, it has created an image which is distorted or it has re/presented the lives of the disabled and homosexuals in a manner that has come to be perceived as grotesque by the society as a whole. Literature, in general has played a great role in "enforcing normalcy" in the society, the normalcy of abled-bodiedness and heterosexuality. Norms, normality, and normalcy are nothing more than a construct which plays a crucial role in the imposition of hierarchy in the social structure. Conformity to the given norms is expected from all and sundry as it has been largely internalised by the people. In actuality, it is imposed through force (often with violence), and perpetuated by performativity. The notion of norms and normality is exclusive as it *others* who do not conform, and/or which does not belong to the norm. Going beyond, it regards the *Other* as sacrilegious, or offensive to the people's (religious and cultural) tastes and sensibilities.

The prevalence of norms and normality thus expects the (human) body to be of a certain order, shape and size. Kanga's crippled body does not belong to the accepted 'normal' category, and acceptability is a crucial component of normalcy as it is exclusive in nature. There exists a preconceived notion of ideal body which forms the benchmark or standard of acceptability in the society. The body is minutely scrutinized which leads to the stereotyping of the different bodily types. Conformity to the norm is of paramount importance. Diverse forms of the body are arbitrarily discriminated and stigmatized by the prevalent socio-cultural discourses, as meanings are created out of the different forms of the body because there is violence in the mode of perception itself. In the process the body becomes a metaphor, an embodiment of socio-culturally imbibed meanings.

Appearance or the looks and traits of the body form the primary social and cultural marker. Therefore, striving for an ideal body image becomes a norm; a culture which is akin to the pursuance of a mirage because an ideal or a perfect body is a myth. As a result, the personal become political, because the body transforms into a political subject, a matter/subject of public discourse. Under the circumstances, the deformed and disabled bodies are seen as an aberration and not the norm, when in reality the opposite is true. Disability is a harsh reality which affects all across time and cultures, it is a universal phenomenon. Some disabilities are visible while some are invisible, at the same time some disabilities are severe while some are mild. But, the truth remains; it affects people's lives in a number of ways, which differs from person to person. The problem with disability is that it has always been considered a medical problem which can be solved with medical intervention alone in most of the cases, and worst as a divine retribution, and an impurity of the body in the Indian cultural narratives. Literary re/presentation of disability has contributed in the queering of disability, and the persistence of what Robert McRuer calls "compulsory able-bodiedness" and "asexuality" of the disabled.

There is a peculiarity in the Indian cultural practices as it is life which determines the philosophy and not the other way. Therefore, this dictates its social structure which is based on *karma* and *dharma* which in turn has given rise to social hierarchy called 'casteism'. Consequently, this deeply embedded socio-cultural discourses rooted in mythology perceive the disabled body as impure/sacrilege, and worst of all a divine retribution.

On a deeper analysis, however, it becomes evident that in reality it is actually a case of power, subjugation becomes a means to control the lesser mortals and extend influence. Normalisation becomes a convenient pretext to differentiate and subjugate through its overarching totalizing narrative. Lennard J. Davis critiques this particular aspect in his study of the disability phenomenon and challenges the prevalence of able-bodied normativity which he argues is a social construct, just as hetero-sexuality is a social construct (Rich 1980). Taking a cue from these arguments put forward by Davis and Rich, Robert McRuer posits that the dominance of able-bodiedness is also an imposition from without.

In India the issues of disability and sexuality is yet to gain prominence and remains a subject of debate. These issues remain dormant in the mainstream discourses as the cultural narratives surrounding disability are informed by socio-cultural and religious myths. The trauma of partition and the unending spectre of poverty of the masses or in other words the socio-economic and political problems of the nation are the major themes in the Indian writings in English. These problems confronting the new nation-state were hard for the writers to ignore. Therefore, the novels dealing with these themes took the centre-stage. For that reason, concerns that affected the individual like disability and sexuality remained pending for long.

Coloured by the interpolation of Marxist dialectics of materialism the disabled are generally deemed useless and a burden on the economy. For this reason, the disabled people were disempowered and marginalized (as was the case with women, lower castes, etc.), as they were considered of less utility value or usefulness because of the limitations of their bodies, deformity, 'impurity' of the bodies, mental/intellectual limitations and so forth. Domination and marginalisation of the disabled occurred (and continues to occur) as a result of this dynamics.

Michel Foucault opines that 'power' is not an end in itself which the Marxist or psychoanalytical dialectics suggests. The existing theoretical positions on social control and repression based on raw power in the opinion of Foucault are simplistic (Bristow 2007: 168). He presents an additional theory which redirects the focus from raw power towards 'sexuality' in the regulation of social order/structure (Bristow 2007: 169). This places sexuality at the strategic point of what is called "dense transfer point for relations of power" between different categories of the body based on discourses circulated in the society. Sexuality, Foucault maintains, is the focal point of being human. On this account, he speaks at length on the historical narratives which have been used to legitimize certain modes of behaviour, thought, feeling, doing, etc. which gave rise to discursive practices that has produced docile bodies.

Thereafter, disability and disablement phenomena began to be understood from Foucault's "juridico-discursive" dialectics of power in the society. The narratives of disability extant in the socio-cultural system were now seen as deeply

ingrained/embedded in the discursive practices centred on the locus of power in the body's sexuality. Furthermore, disability began to be understood primarily as a case of social constructionism (with the 'cultural turn' that occurred in the understanding of disability and sexuality during the 1970s) where the 'ab/normality' of the body is abetted by exclusionary social institutions, cultural systems and physical infrastructures that are mainly designed for the able-bodied.

The emergence of the 'social model' in disability studies have come to offer a humane perspective of disability which took place as a result of Ablon's pioneering ethnographic approach to the study of disability. It is noteworthy, that his work with stigmatized populations helped to move medical anthropology from a disease framework of disability to an ethnographic focus (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz 2005; Shuttleworth 2001). From these theoretical approaches it becomes evident that deformed bodies are simply different versions not the incompatible *Other* that has usually been regarded as an alien or outcastes in the society. It is the socio-cultural processes of *Othering* (which are based on assumptions) that problematizes the issue. A renewed critical focus on the *Othering* process in the discourses of disability in the social model of disability has given a new dimension into the understanding of disability.

In both the Western and the Indian cultural narratives of disability the socio-cultural processes that create disability phenomena are common with subtle variations and differences depending on their respective cultural narratives. While the Western cultural narrative of disability is pragmatic in the sense that it is concerned with the unequal social spaces, the Indian is largely metaphysical as it is found to be more concerned with the cosmology of the disabled body. The Indian novels in English dealing with disability and sexuality are a manifestation of these differences in outlook and treatment of the issue. In practice, the Indians see disability as an act of *dharma* and/or *karma* which invokes a mystical and metaphysical element. As 'doing' and 'performing' are the two core tenets of Indian culture where religion and everyday social life are embroiled—disability becomes a part of this discourse.

Socio-cultural as well as religious ‘meanings’ is created out of the diverse forms of the body which reveals society’s priorities and the crux of its cultural values. In the Indian cultural narratives, the body occupies centre-stage because the Hindu concept of *dharma* and/or *karma* lays emphasis on the purity of the body. Subsequently, this forms the basis, and the genesis of social hierarchy. For this reason, disability is seen as a metaphysical crisis in India. But, the Western cultural narratives do not invoke supernatural element instead its discursive practices treat it as ‘mutilated’ or ‘desecrated’ bodies because it apparently fails to meet the ‘norms’. In both these cultural narratives there is a common trope in the word ‘lack’. It implies an absence and incapacity to ‘do’ or ‘perform’ which extends to the basic human ‘sexual’ attributes. In short, the disabled are seen as ‘incomplete humans’ or human grotesques. However, both the Western and Indian conceptions of disability converge on the concept of ‘lack’. The term ‘lack’ can be derived to mean incomplete compared to the majority able-bodied. The social model has relocated the same in the disabling social structures and not the materiality of the body of the disabled individual. On the contrary, it reiterates that, it is the society which is lacking as it does not have the wherewithal to provide equal space and opportunity to individuals with different bodies.

In India, sexuality remains a taboo, a subject considered best to be left alone. Although, the air is surreptitiously thick with sexuality it remains out of bounds in polite conversations, and in public/cultural discourses like literature. Therefore, disability and its related problem of sexuality in India remain insignificant and out of bounds. Consequently, it has not gained much narrative spaces in literary representations as well. The Indian novels in English, which is a legacy of the British colonialism, remain relatively silent on this account owing to the cultural sensitivities. The literary representations of disability and sexuality concerns remain at the most, cautious, even to this day in the Indian novels in English. These major novelists—Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Pramila Balasundaram produced a few works dealing with disability tentatively. Moreover, there is no major character delineation of the disabled characters in the narratives that adequately represents or typifies the lived experiences of these individuals which

show them in flesh and blood with experiences of sexuality like any other 'normal' human in the 'ableist' society.

With the gradual saturation of the ideas of social constructionism the prevalent views surrounding disability and sexuality are being revisited in the Indian milieu. A host of new writers brought the issues of disability and sexuality as major thematic concerns in their writings. However, most of them did not (or could not) see the convergence of these two issues. It wasn't until 1990 when Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) appeared in the literary scene of India that the intersection of these issues were articulated and represented in its entirety and holistically. Unlike most of the poet/writers he articulates and represents his personal experiences. Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) and the travelogue *Heaven on Wheels* (1991) presents a firsthand experience of disability and non-normative sexuality in modern Indian writings in English, presenting a site to decode and understand the intersection of disability and sexuality. Furthermore, Kanga's writings challenge the orthodoxy of the Indian society as regards the ideas surrounding disability, the myth of asexuality of disabled-individuals and hetero-normativity.

Significantly, Kanga questions the norm of what can be called *compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality* in the society in his writings. As a disabled and a gay, his writings on disabled bodies/disability and non-normative sexualities are in reality an attempt to reconfigure disability and sexuality through a creative literary rendering of what it means to be as a disabled and a gay in a conservative society. Kanga's works can be said to be a kind of representative novel that is in tune with the 'ancient' as well as the modern realities and beliefs of India. His humorous narrative of his physical afflictions and the open discourse of homo-sexual desires make it a unique literary writing that places the intersection of disability and sexuality in the centre of the narrative in the mainstream cultural discourses and literary narratives.

The fact is disability is a harsh reality, and the society lives in denial of this reality. It is a condition which is ubiquitous and pervades classes, race, age, gender, sex, etc. Yet, society continues to live in denial mode quite unwilling to acknowledge

its presence and ramifications in the wider social world. As McRuer maintains, the society in which we live is an 'ableist society' where able-bodiedness is *the* norm (McRuer 2006). It becomes apparent that, in the social spaces there is no place for disabled-bodies. It is noteworthy, that in the social classifications the 'body' is judged and categorised which places a premium on certain forms of the body to another on the basis of material difference. Due to this reason, some bodies matter *others* do not.

Literary representations of disable-bodied characters are significant because it reveals the culturally ingrained way of seeing and perceiving the disabled *Other*. Disabilities, it is observed, in literary representations are 'allegorical symbols' and a trope to infer culturally imbued meanings and represent cultural myths like—asexual or sexlessness, ugly, evil, unattractive, cursed, unproductive, useless, and so on. The "body" becomes a metaphor and a site for numerous discourses. The bodies that are different become a cause of concern as it reflects the other side of the reality in the binary 'either/or' system. The subsequent exclusion of the 'non-normative' from the mainstream signifies "biopolitics" demonstrating the re/alignment of 'power' as it assigns socio-cultural meanings on the basis of groupings or identity categories. Terms like 'abject body' and 'sexual perverts' emerges from these re/alignment of power by a paradoxical exclusion and inclusion which reduce the disabled into a "state of exception".

Reducing the disabled to a "state of exception" is an abuse of power which is tantamount to using the body as a tool of exploitation and abuse. Elucidating the 'use' of bodies Agamben says the body of a slave is primarily to sustain the life of the master. The body of the slave as oscillating somewhere between ***zoê*** (bare life) and ***bios*** (qualified life), which is to say that the body of the slave does not have an independent existence but is part of the body of the master which completes it or qualifies it for life. Likewise the disabled are regarded as incomplete, and in all practical matters they do not have an independent existence.

Interestingly, Edwards and Imrie argues, *disability and bodies as bearers of value* in the eponymously titled paper "Disability and Bodies as Bearers of Value"

(2003), which is contrary to the common perception and conception of the disabled as evil, ugly, sexless, useless, etc. or, in other words as 'valueless'. Further, Edwards and Imrie argues, "[b]oth conceptions", i.e. the medical and social model—"while capturing aspects of disabled people's lives, are problematical for failing to recognise that there is a dialectical relationship between the individual and society, or where intersubjective and subjective experiences are entwined" (2003: 239-256).

Bourdieu's concept of 'Capital' goes a long way in making sense of how "biopower" and "sovereign power" work at a very personal as well as political level. The issue of 'looked-at-ness' constitutes a mechanism through which the bodies are perceived, valued and assigned 'meanings' and most importantly spaces. In the Indian socio-cultural milieu, Brit's (Kanga) body with its apparent deviations from the norms obviously doesn't acquire much 'value' in the society as it does not have what is called symbolic and/or cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) used the term 'doxa' to denote what is taken-for-granted in any particular society.

For Foucault power is 'ubiquitous' and beyond agency or structure therefore, although Foucault's concept of biopower introduces an interesting element in the social matrix it does not suffice in elaborating how power works in a certain method. As Kanga makes it a point to mention the specific areas and places which is out of bounds for him, it becomes clear that spatiality acts as another important factor in discriminating and segregating disabled individuals like him. Spatiality turns into an active agency as it discourages or presents an unwelcome sign; designs an exclusive space for the participation of the abled. It is not just socio-cultural myths and practices, but geography, i.e. the physical spaces or spatiality which is an active agency of the disablement process.

There is a growing recognition of space not only in the social realm but, geographical (physical) realm as well because the exclusion and marginalization of the disabled in the social spaces highlights socio-spatial boundaries and margins which are 'inherently geographic' (Gleeson, 199: 36). This stands in a dialectical relationship with the societies that inhabit them. As Soja puts it space is, "actually

lived, and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices" (1989: 17-18).

Therefore, from the 'cultural turn' in the 1970s, it takes a 'spatial turn' through the work of Henri Lefebvre and geographers like Edward W. Soja. The disabled and homosexuals/queer individuals do not have a place in the social spaces. As a result, the disabled live a tenuous "bare life" existence and are therefore, perpetually on the threshold of a constantly shifting socio-cultural environment. Disavowal of Kanga in spaces and spatiality exhibits not only the irony of his life but, the contradictions and complexities of the larger society as well. Soja says, "[s]pace still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization" (1989: 11). Soja maintains that it is the baggage of history called 'historicism' which has occupied a near privileged status in modern critical thought particularly, in the nineteenth century and did not die in the *fin de siècle* (Foucault 1986: 22).

With the consistent persistence of Soja (influenced to a great extent by Foucault and Lefebvre) in his conviction that spatiality is influential in the lived experiences of individuals, a post-historicist and post-modern critical human geography emerged in the critical social theory which, "...involves a geographical rather than historical projection," as it believes that—"it is space not time which hides consequences from us" (Soja 1989: 23). Soja's Thirdspace is a transcendent space that expands to embrace the *Other* in its fold. This has enabled the contestation and re-negotiation of boundaries that segregates and discriminates people. Soja says this is, "the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also..." (1996: 60). With this disability and sexuality can be examined not just as products of the social processes in time but more importantly as products of spatiality.

It can be deduced that, thus far society's predilection towards modern philosophy's reliance on homoeostasis, totality and normativity has made it a prisoner of time as far as the understanding of disability is concerned. With the emergence of postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches most of the prevailing socio-cultural narratives have been debunked as myth. The ideas of plurality and

difference have opened the doors for the understanding of disability in a holistic way by subtracting the notion of norms, mythology, and impurity of the body from the equation of disability as it emphasises the multiplicity of forms that looks beyond the either/or binary.

In his writings Kanga con/textualizes his condition in the broader socio-cultural and spatial milieu by examining the ways and means through which the larger society reads his body as a 'different' cultural text that goes on to play an instrumental role in feeding the cultural myths surrounding disability. It becomes apparent, that the prevalent literary (and cultural) signification and representations of the polymorphous body and sexuality as the *Other* is tantamount to keeping out the disabled. In the Indian socio-cultural spaces individuals afflicted with disability are held responsible for their predicaments which are accentuated by religious bigotry and cultural myths. This is responsible for the tremendous psychological and mental trauma, apart from the physical hardships as it strips them of social space and spatiality in everyday life. In the words of Agamben, their lived experience turns out to be a "bare life", reduced to a "state of exception" and not the norm.

For Kanga, life is no less a narrative lived in a "state of exception" as he tried to grow in the face of hindrances and obstacles in each and every aspect of life. His life is filled with events and anecdotes from birth (although it may sound or seem trivial to many) to his realisation of his crippled existence to his realisation of his desire and preference for alternate/queer sexuality and ultimately to his eventual realisation of his vocation and purpose. In his writings, Kanga transforms each and every events and anecdotes (however trivial or insignificant it might be) into a coherent narrative. The "narrative identity" that is created transforms into a well knit story, connecting the events and anecdotes, and establishing "a network of relations and provides him with a purpose of life" (Viljoen & Merwe 2007: 1). Kanga's story is not only about him. It is also the story of many countless and faceless marginalized people like him. In the telling of his life story he has given a voice to these numerous people living in the peripheries of the society and has created a common identity. By representing and situating the 'different', both, in body and sexuality as the 'new normal' in the society he steps into an unknown and unsettling "in-between" space

called liminality by rejecting, subverting and abandoning the accepted social structures and norms. With it he has crossed the hallowed portals of the society and has given a new sense ownership of their bodies (however crippled/deformed it may be) and pride to accept and proclaim their sexual preferences and orientations. Instead of succumbing to the demands of the social structures of the dominant majority Kanga breaks free from its stranglehold and steps into the world of the liminal for its transformative appeal. Through his writings Kanga leaves behind his crippled self, aware of the fact that there is a need to reject the identity created by the ableist society and to cross the boundary into the spaces of the in-between or liminal spaces.

In both *Trying to Grow* and *Heaven on Wheels* there is an excessive and carnivalesque nature of the grotesque body. This brings forth the idea of the "grotesque realism" which was given currency by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1984). Bakhtin formulates the carnival as a suspension of all hierarchy and reversal of social order (not just as a holiday or festivals sanctioned by government or authority), with all forms of excesses, exaggerations, and caricatures the grotesqueness of it all implies contempt and disdain for orderliness and hierarchy. In the reading of Kanga's works the Bakhtinian principle of the "grotesque realism" has the potential to shed further light on the construction of the disabled person. Based on the "material bodily principle" the excessive grotesque body of the carnival is a contempt and disdain of the norms and structures of social hierarchy. Excessiveness is a form of subversion. Kanga re/presents his disabled body as a grotesque with a language which is irreverent, and at times mocks and insults the established norms of the society. This seems to be deliberate strategy by Kanga to call the bluff of the ableist society as a whole. Bakhtin says:

> In grotesque realism.....the bodily element is deeply positive.....We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people

> who are continually growing and renewed.... This *exaggeration has a positive, assertive character*." (1984: 19 [italics mine])

It is not uncanny; therefore, that Kanga betrays no hint of self-pity or lament for being born a crippled. He does not settle for a normalised life decided by others in his attempts to grow. By accepting his crippled body as it is and consciously choosing to be a gay he assumes a liminal identity which is a deliberate strategy to disrupt the dominant social structures so as to defy boundaries and erase the differences which create disability phenomena. As liminality allows an individual "to play with the factors of socio-cultural experience" (Turner 1985: 236), this provides an opportunity to the individual to develop "a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (Turner 1974: 14). In this way, liminality breaks the stringent dichotomy of the binary system in the social arrangement and ushers in social change.

In addition to Kanga's works, the Indian novels in English particularly those of the 1980s and since, which mostly visualize the nation with the help of the body metaphor, can be further read through Bakthinian theory of grotesque realism.

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