

## *Chapter II*

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### Understanding Realities of Disability

A study on the representation of various human predicaments such as impairments categorized physically or psychologically is an emerging genre finding its space in the vast ocean of literature. Disability studies in literature provide a comprehensive analysis to the various types of disabilities and the issues that are associated with it, that are prevailing across the globe. It is a formal area of academic enquiry that enlightens how individuals who have impairments are designated as 'disabled' and treated in a way that diminishes their psychological, economical, and physical well-being. Disability refers to the assorted impairments and limitations endured by individuals restricting them from participating actively in their daily life. This condition can be experienced by any individual during various phases of life. Though tales on disability envision positive affirmation regarding acceptance and inclusion; the reality is often intruded by the influence of corruption and discrimination that the individuals with impairments have to endure on a daily basis. The study on disability is not based on how to cure the condition but to analyse and overcome the social stigmas and oppression that are enforced on them delimiting their progression. It is an initiative to expose and address the mental tyranny that they experience as a result to the social exclusion.

The genre of Disability literature tends to concentrate more on the hideous facts of individual victimization based on how society views them with pity and fear. Narratives addressing the socio-cultural constructions on disability projects the internal and external pain endured by many with reference to their medical condition. Despite projecting it as a health predicament, it should be considered as an intricate

phenomenon focusing on the environmental and societal constraints experienced by children with impairments and their families. When a child is born to the world filled with possibilities; they should be facilitated with a desirable living space that encourages them to stay inspired and motivated. A child stepping out to the field of life is like a bird spreading its tiny wings to take its first flight. They are to be trained and nurtured in such a way that no obstacle that comes their way can pull them down.

Discourses analysing the inconsiderate attitudes faced by the marginalised community enhances one's knowledge regarding the subject, thus moulding their perceptions and decisions. This chapter recognises the complicated and surviving beliefs revolving around disability by projecting the dominant prejudices and harsh realities experienced by children with impairments by birth or accident. It focuses on the discrimination, usage of disrespectful terminologies, and architectural barriers that are the most pervasive yet least acknowledged form of inequity followed in the contemporary scenario against individuals with physical impairments. *Disability Theory* propounded by Tobin Siebers is used as the theoretical framework to get a better understanding regarding the issues in connection with disability. The sociological environment that humiliates the existence of the physically impaired individuals brings to the forefront the importance of their need to escape from the bondages of subjugation. The chapter elucidates the critical notions on living with a disability as manifested in the selected novels for analysis.

*Disability Theory* by Siebers published in 2008 provides a detailed research of the underlying issues faced by individuals, with various impairments, along with their families. The study contributes a thorough knowledge about disability studies and its beliefs. Supporting people who are marginalised for their medical condition could resist the conventional ideas about body and defy statements that misrepresent their

reality. Focusing on disability studies moulds one's perception to take a chance to change and transform the existing discrimination and prejudices that are forced upon them. In his book *Disability Theory*, Siebers has skilfully crafted and explained the factors that helps individuals with impairments gain social acceptance, overruling the reigning ideologies that subjugates them. The chapter "Understanding Realities of Disability" is analysed using the two main objectives that Siebers has introduced in his text. Firstly, he visualised a society where the negative notions of disability is eradicated by implementing the concept of normalcy among people. Siebers wanted to eliminate the elements of disgust that viewed individuals with impairments as weak and vulnerable. Later, he also addresses the issues in connection with the accessibility as the current environmental settings are unfavourable for the physically impaired individuals to gain access. Such hindrances restrict them from the benefits of equality as they are sources of humiliation that limits them from leading their life in a comfortable manner.

The primary objective raised by Siebers aims at transforming the basic ideologies and assumptions held by individuals regarding disabled identity, social injustice, politics, and the body. His revelatory observations raise awareness about the lived in experiences where the realities of physically impaired is misrepresented by the society. Certain people often exhibit discrimination by considering an individual with impairment as undesirable, flawed, or incomplete. The devaluation of impaired bodies in every domain of life projects how disability structures their existence. Siebers through his findings sought to draw attention to the problems of this marginalised community, and the complicated life undergone by them. He mentions that inclusion strategy should be practiced to transform the existing ideas revolving around disability through proper information and guidance.

. . . disability has been described more recently in disability studies as a minority identity that must be addressed not as personal misfortune or individual defect but as the product of a disabling social and built environment. Tired of discrimination and claiming disability as a positive identity, people with disabilities insist on the pertinence of disability to the human condition, on the value of disability as a form of diversity, and on the power of disability as a critical concept for thinking about human identity in general. (Siebers 3)

Siebers questions the authority by which people are discriminated and mentioned as the 'other' due to an impairment that he/she possesses by birth or accident. He believed that enhanced information about disability studies and identity will revolutionise the socially constructed attitudes and ideologies. His theory is a cogent proposal initiated to transform the basic assumptions about the medical and social models of disability. Enforcing normalcy among the anomalous predictions laid by the society was the crucial agenda behind his writings. "Undoubtedly, the central purpose of disability studies is to reverse the negative connotations of disability, but this pursuit tends to involve disability as an identity formation rather than as a physical or mental characteristic" (Siebers 4). Siebers along with many theorists who lend their voice for the betterment of the community of physically impaired proclaims that the identity of the individuals with impairments should never be projected negatively. Ridiculing individuals based on their impairments reveals the inequality they experience in a democratic nation. This attitude speaks of the cultural interventions and the social flaws that could have a negative impact in the lives of many.

Siebers states that the concept of an able and perfect body has the power to induce fear while one thinks of the ideology of disability. A human body is subject to change at any point of their existence and disability should be regarded as an unexpected visitor during the time. A perfect body with no defect or illness is a temporary identity that can change over the course of time. The image of disability depicts a different version of identity that is less stable than the others. They are often regarded as the 'other' and their position in the society is uncertain and questionable. Prejudices based on one's physical condition are similar to devaluing the existence of individuals with impairments. His narrative explains the disruptive environment that constantly threatens physically impaired individuals by projecting their differences as a source of weakness. Siebers quotes, "My practice of reading here strives to reverse the influence of this strange symbolism by purposefully interpreting disability as itself, while attending to its value for intersecting identities" (6). He draws attention to the need to understand disability and the importance of inclusivity by reversing the existing inhibitions and perceptions that the society holds towards it.

Siebers has categorised the ideology of ability under two sections. He primarily focuses on enlightening the society about the disabled experience. Siebers considers, "At best, the body is a vehicle, the means by which we convey who we are from place to place. At worst, the body is a fashion accessory" (7). While the modern scenario have preferences to have a perfect body with no defects, Siebers specifies that every individual is flawless and different in their own way. The society should learn to embrace and accept individuals without any special preferences or biased attitudes based on their physical abilities. Secondly, he defines "The point is simply that history reveals one unavoidable truth about human beings—whatever our destiny as a species, we are as individuals feeble and finite" (Siebers 7). When history

provides information about the stereotypes forced upon individuals who have impairments, the future should hold records that reflect the practice of equality among people. The future generations should know how to value an individual regardless of their age, condition, gender, caste, religion, or any other position.

“People with disabilities usually realize that they must learn to live with their disability, if they are to live life as a human being. The challenge is not to adapt their disability into an extraordinary power or an alternative image of ability. The challenge is to function” (Siebers 68). People with impairments do not prefer to be dominated by individuals whom they rely upon for help. They wish to lead a life without experiencing shame and embarrassment. All they need is to feel independent without being ashamed of their condition and position. Human bodies are subjected to change and the difficulties experienced by them due to the social repression are real. Facing obstacles everyday due to their limitations added with social humiliation results in more pain to their physical suffering. Here, Siebers questions the logic behind categorising and viewing individuals with impairments as a different group where their self-esteem is disregarded. He tries to tackle the situation by educating the readers that considering people with impairments, inferior is a form of social oppression that imposes restrictions on them by undermining their emotional well-being. Not everyone can bear the pain and pressure of shame that are imposed upon them due to a medical condition that have created limitations to their bodily movements.

The term ‘ableism’ coined by activists is a reference to the prejudices forced upon the disabled community. Even in progressive areas, an individual with impairment is treated differently. “. . . words like *blind*, *crippled*, *stupid*, *fat*, *deaf*, or *dumb* carry social meanings having an interpretation, history, and politics well beyond

the particularities of one human body” (Siebers 81). He persists that the main purpose of his theory is to produce disability as a subject to be studied; to create consciousness, and to fight the disrespectful stereotypes against individuals with impairments. The society should take into consideration the psychological impact of an individual who hears terminologies that belittle, based on their physical conditions. It is the society that should be held responsible for the pain of rejection that they experience due to the hostile environment that surrounds them. It produces an emotional conflict which adversely affects their confidence to survive in this world with dignity and recognition.

Secondly, Siebers focuses on the constraints imposed on the physically impaired individuals that restrict them from moving freely without any limitations. The social design and architecture does not always match the physique of the mobility impaired individuals. Unable to get easy access to buildings, vehicles, restrooms, furniture, elevators, and other public platforms is an important issue that needs political intervention and social support. Such difficulties expose the tangled maze that they manage to live through each day. When a public space does not satisfy the basic needs of every individual, it depicts the negligence of the society towards the people who cannot get access to those places. Each building that is inaccessible is the representation of oppression existing in the society. Here, Siebers projects the lack of consideration given to individuals with physical impairments. He hopes that every citizen irrespective of their physical condition, get full access to the environment in which they live in. Proper acknowledgement of their condition is the primary criterion put forward by him. His writings specify the need to develop an ethics that promotes care giving. Siebers believes that physically impaired individuals are unable to stay independent because of the political, economical, and social forces which keeps them dependent.

Siebers wanted to bring out the concept of disability identity from the shadow of complex embodiment of ability. The main motive of this concept is to educate people about the social environment and the disabled experience. He wanted to accumulate narratives of stereotypical descriptions and ideologies regarding the concepts of ability and disability to reflect the social influence and its impacts on individuals with impairments. If identities are sketched by the dominant culture, they are nevertheless significant or valid. Stories of disabled experiences narrated by individuals with impairments can enlighten everyone of the idea of pain that is inflicted on them regularly. “Now disabled people need to introduce the reality of disability identity into the public imagination. And the only way to accomplish this task is to tell stories in a way that allows people without disabilities to recognize our reality and theirs as a common one” (Siebers 48).

Historically, notable stories narrated by individuals with impairments were not widely perceived until the publication of Helen Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My life* published in 1903. Recently authors with physical impairments like Ved Mehta, Malini Chib, Firdaus Kanga, and Shivani Gupta through their own narratives have attempted to voice the challenges that they deal with regularly while trying to lead a normal life. Siebers states that narrating one’s memories and experiences is a self-reflexive tool to educate the readers about disability through his/her personal experiences. It projects their life situations and difficulties. Readers can witness an antagonistic approach when disability is viewed as a personal tragedy by the society. These writings describe how the look of an individual makes the other feel evaluated, objectified, or embarrassed about their appearances and identity. No actions are taken against this where an individual is made to feel ‘different’ or as the ‘other’. It is also reasonable that some might not find it easy to narrate their life experiences due to the

trauma, vulnerability, and confusion that are associated with their lives due to their physical condition.

Siebers being affected with poliomyelitis at the age of two has personally experienced the aforementioned details of seclusion and mockery. He recalls being the victim of social injustices and that led him to voice out the troubles experienced by the disabled community. He believed this strategy could help them gain recognition and free them from the bonds of subjugation. Spreading awareness about the concept of disability, to showcase their plight, and to have their sufferings mitigated is the main intention behind his writings. *Disability Theory* by Siebers provides an insight to the world of diversities and the socially constructed ideologies experienced by the physically impaired individuals. It focuses on the underpinning notions that will help to eradicate the social exclusion, derogatory attitudes, or social encounters that are experienced by the individuals with physical impairments along with providing an environment where they do not need any physical guidance or assistance for their survival.

This chapter analyses the novel *A Time to Dance* by Padma Venkatraman that features the life of Veda who was a skilled dancer specialised in bharatanatyam, the most important form of Indian classical dance and the accident that follows which resulted in amputation of her leg. The accident is cited as a result of driver's negligence where he lost control over the van in which Veda was travelling. All that Veda could remember during the time of accident was that blood was oozing out of her right knee and the smell of burnt rubber. When Veda regained consciousness, her emotional state was shattered due to the traumatic memories of the accident.

I see an ugly bulge under the sheet covering my legs.

Yank off the sheet with what's left

of my strength.

My right leg ends

in a bandage.

Foot, ankle, and nearly half of my calf,

gone.

Chopped

right off. (Venkatraman 37)

Veda was not able to handle the pressure of what she was experiencing then and was totally filled with agony and confusion. She was later provided with the truthful yet distressing information regarding the accident and her physical condition by a health professional who tried to console her. She then learnt the painful truth of how Veda's surgeon, Dr. Murali was able to save her life but had to amputate her leg as it was half gone while she was admitted to the hospital. Veda felt devastated on understanding the reality and pleaded her father to tell her that the grievous disaster was just a part of a bad dream. Even the darkness of night could not hide the sight of her amputated leg. "It is a good thing to feel comfortable in one's skin, and when one does, it is not easy to imagine being different" (Siebers 5). An individual subjected to bodily changes as a result of an accident requires time and space to heal and recover from the trauma. Veda felt furious that God had snatched away the dreams to become a renowned dancer which was the most integral reason for her existence along with her leg. It was

extremely difficult for her to accept and embrace what her body had become after the accident. Dr. Murali then introduced Mr. James, an American who collaborated with the Indian research team to introduce and create a prosthesis that would be budget friendly. She was partially relieved when the doctors discussed with her the possibilities of being able to walk again.

Siebers states that it is the concept of ability that makes a person dread disability. He mentions that an individual with any sort of impairments can definitely find happiness if they start to acknowledge and accept their condition. Though altering the destiny of life is not possible, erasing the thoughts about them can be achieved through strong will power and determination. The environment in which an individual with physical impairments resides has the ability to attract or repel their attitude towards their physical condition. Veda being a dancer from a young age, valued her body and was obsessed with perfection. The society categorised her as 'disabled' and interpreted her to be 'incomplete' in terms of her physical appearance and productive capabilities. Venkatraman has documented the impact of stigma and oppression that had affected the psyche of Veda. Girls like Veda are pushed into the margins of society and their impaired bodies are devalued. The invalidation levied upon the disabled community should be identified to redress the social inequalities that they experience regularly. People should concentrate on advancing the rights of individuals with impairments and Siebers intends to challenge the power structure and hegemonic functioning of the society.

Positive confirmation provided by the doctors and Mr. James inspired Veda to accept the reality and wait eagerly for the prosthetic limb that they had promised to give her. Her lost dreams blossomed again and she mentions that what she really needed to regain was her ability to dance. Siebers asserts that an individual should

flee from their past and step into the future by defeating the unforgettable realities experienced by them. Moving away from the clutches of the past or dark memories can evoke hope in humankind. While working towards success an individual must be prepared to fight the battles that appear on their way. On the road towards healing, it was James who made Veda understand that she is not a handicapped person but an individual with impairment. He also reminds that this condition is not going to be an obstacle to her dreams. These words of solace induced positive vibrations to dispel her fears. Disability is inherent to the human condition but acceptance depends on perspectives. The term 'disability' is often associated with suffering due to the oppressive social structures. One should gradually overcome the constrained inhibitions and refashion their living environment by making it compatible according to his/her ability.

A critical assessment of the novel highlights the unflinching growth of social exclusion and marginalisation experienced by a large mass or community who are physically impaired. Veda was disturbed when she realised the fact that her dance master Uday, who was once proud of her did not make an effort to visit her after the accident. His absence made Veda feel weak and dejected as her primary goal in life prior to the accident was to gain applause and recognition from him. Being praised by Uday as the gifted dancer of his institution for the past ten years, she could not believe that her absence had not affected her teacher. Veda with a sorrowful heart started to believe, "His absence shows / he thinks I'm too crippled to dance again" (Venkatraman 60). This cultivated in her a rage to prove to the world that one day she will dance to the rhythm of music effortlessly. Diversity is an evident factor and each diverse community represent unique issues and challenges. Here, diversity resonates the heterogeneity of disability. The dominant social structure can influence the mental

functioning of an individual along with their behavioural patterns. A radical change should be initiated by the society to improve the quality of their life by recognising and taking into consideration their hardships and troubles. Individuals irrespective of their physical condition, and nature of marginalisation should have the right to belong to their educational institutions, work spaces, and their residential areas with the respect and support they deserve so that they could be a part of this society without feeling embarrassed or prejudiced.

The asymmetric and dominative representation of cultural interventions has always repressed the disabled community. Siebers mentions that an individual who prefers a perfect body finds it difficult to embrace people with impairments. Impairments may cause bodily limitations but the obstacles experienced by them due to the social interferences should be removed. Disability is often considered as a nonexistent phenomenon which holds no place for discussion. In a developing nation like India, a social change is necessary to accommodate the needs of the physically impaired individuals. The commonly seen attitude of pitying them for their physical condition will not help in improving their living circumstances. There is also an assumption that a physically impaired individual is considered as a liability to the family and society. The contemporary era should chronicle positive outcomes by overruling such stigmatized notions on disability.

Rehabilitation done under the supervision of James enabled Veda to improve her mental and physical abilities. James supported and provided her the confidence to use crutches as a substitute until she received her prosthesis. While returning home after all those painful sessions, what frightened her was the pitiful looks of her neighbours. The whole apartment was inquisitive and eagerly pried over Veda on her arrival to analyse her present condition. Veda was infuriated by the constant queries

that were raised by the neighbours to her parents in her presence. She often felt like yelling at them by stating that, “. . . *Ask me. The accident didn't damage my ears*” (Venkatraman 72). Veda's first trial of facing public was done with great confidence until few people in the bus that she was travelling started to question her condition. When Veda tried to avoid all the questions imposed upon her, she was labelled as rude for not responding to her elders.

“Girl? How did you lose your leg?

An accident? Or a disease?”

“She's not telling,” the man says.

“So rude she is being. In our days we always

answered our elders”. (Venkatraman 82)

Such derogatory attitudes encountered by children can affect their social, mental, and general well-being. Siebers claims, “The use of disability to disparage a person has no place in progressive, democratic society, although it happens at present all the time” (4). Judging or mistreating an individual on the basis of his/her physical condition reveals the pathetic state of the society in which one lives. Veda, when ridiculed by some of her classmates stated, “I'm sick of being cripple” (Venkatraman 86). Veda grieving over the accounts of humiliation she felt while treated with contempt by her classmates sheds light over the brutal experiences directed towards the disabled community. Their laughter echoed loudly in her young mind, thus disturbing her happiness. Veda also expressed her desire to drop her studies as she was not able to tolerate the disgrace imposed on her. Veda tried hard to give wings to her dreams but these external intrusions made her feel low and miserable. There were times when she

wished everyone around her were visually impaired so that they would not see her pathetic condition. Life depends on a mutual understanding between an individual and the environmental settings where he/she resides. Every action in this universe is reciprocal and theories mention how external influences can affect the behavioural and developmental patterns in a growing child. Such crucial incidents can limit their abilities as they might consider themselves as incompetent and unworthy.

Siebers states that disability is not a defect but the result of social injustices endured by the victims. Social attitudes that are virtuous or vicious are linked with equal importance in the developmental stages of an individual. The oppression raised by the society could depress young minds by confusing their thoughts from further progress. Rather than trying to cure the illness, there should be a social progression withholding them from defying individuals with impairments.

Disability is not a physical or mental defect but a cultural and minority identity. To call disability an identity is to recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to social control and capable of effecting social change. (Siebers 4)

Life is a series of social constructions and the pain inflicted on the physically impaired individuals by the dominant culture can make their lives extremely difficult. Here, they are denied of their equal rights to live in this world in a dignified manner. Rigid or biased thoughts are expressions of limited knowledge regarding disability and if the society becomes more accommodative to differences, it can partially resolve the conflicts that are experienced by them. A humane approach towards everything could pave way for harmony where the physically impaired individuals are treated with equality. An emancipatory revolution can reform the existing negative

attitudes by assimilating individuals with impairments into a normative social structure that liberates them from their vulnerable situations.

The pain of being ridiculed and questioned faded when she received her artificial limb as guaranteed by Mr. James. Highly motivated Veda decided to continue her dance classes but what awaited her there was more depressing. Her dance master Uday had lost his confidence in Veda and declined her request to readmit her in his dance institution. He also mentioned that even people blessed with able and perfect bodies found it difficult to be a professional dancer. He suggested that Veda find a new dream that matched her physique. Veda wanted to prove that his statements were wrong and decided to make her first step in dance with her artificial limbs. Unfortunately, she fell down losing her balance and Uday was reluctant to help her handle the situation. Even when Veda realises her ability to dance again, she felt dejected when her dance master neglected her wish to admit her in his dance school. James was furious when she passed this information to him and his words acted as a solace to her ears when he stated, “His loss, not yours, kiddo” (Venkatraman 129). Dealing with such situations successfully facilitates inner strength and confidence. Siebers explains that people with impairments may not consider their condition as a defect but it is the onlookers who injure their healed wounds. It is their lack of consideration that distresses individuals with physical difficulties along with their families. Every creature in this world is unique and precious and they definitely have the right to live in this beautiful world with equal facilities.

Siebers states that a person with impairment should be taught to have control over their bodies and reject the social oppression that hinders their thoughts. Perhaps, prejudices prevail everywhere and categorising people based on colour, class, caste, creed, sexual preferences, and disability is a universal factor. Such discriminations

cannot be eradicated in a day or two. These environmental factors play the most powerful role in shaping the psychological growth in an individual. Hence, one should recognize their ability to overcome the physical and psychological wounds with the passage of time. The next generation should be taught to take up social responsibilities which can bring affirmative changes that are beneficial for the society. Complete eradication of social injustice and negative attitudes towards disability can be accomplished only with proper education. The disabled community has the right to lead their life in a dignified manner and this can be achieved if the society contributes constructively for their growth and development.

Architectural barriers due to careless social construction, limit the accessibility of individuals who have bodily impairments. The limitations and difficulties imposed on bodies expose the failures in the social designing of public spaces. Restraints hovering around the architectural designs can restrict them from leading a comfortable life. Each inaccessible public platform or buildings are responsible for this. It is the right of every citizen irrespective of their physical condition to gain access into public spaces according to their wish. Veda was anxious and worried as she reached her apartment after the painful days at the hospital.

Our apartment building looks unwelcoming as I enter.

Clutching my crutches, I stand at the bottom step,

thinking through the motions of climbing on crutches.

Feeling alone. Frightened. (Venkatraman 72)

Veda was not able to express her feelings as she was in a state of dilemma. She needed more time to navigate through her difficulties to accept and adapt to her new

physical self. Disability studies projects the constraints enforced upon individuals with impairments with respect to the social rules and designs. Society should be able to construct an environment that is barrier free for the individuals with impairments to get easy access to buildings without causing any panic. The architects and designers should take into consideration the condition of the physically impaired individuals while constructing a new building. Equal opportunity is a fundamental right that should be made available to everyone responsibly. Accessibility is a key element that guarantees a dignified, empowered, and independent life to individuals who are mobility impaired.

The novel also depicts Veda's resistance towards her father's desire to escort her to school after the accident. He was worried that the drivers may not stop long enough for Veda to step into the bus. To escape from the eyes of onlookers and considering the difficulty to mount a bus, her father considered arranging a taxi for Veda to go to school. But the financial barriers restricted them from proceeding with this idea. Veda was also persistent in continuing her journey to school by bus. She wanted to gain confidence and get used to her new self and identity. As Veda was trying to get into the bus, she felt that the steps look steeper than she remembered. Though she hesitated for a moment, a fire of passion ignited in her reminding the cheerful voice of James who taught her how to use the crutches while climbing stairs. Public transportations are not always friendly for passengers who use wheelchairs, crutches or any other devices that matters. ". . . the emerging field of disability studies defines disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social injustice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment" (Siebers 3).

Siebers felt that the society considers people who climb stairs as able-bodied individuals and the rest as disabled. He states, that while equipments such as elevators, grinders, washing machines, egg beaters, oven, et cetera, are considered to make livelihood easier; technologies that could assist the physical performance of the physically impaired individuals are treated as expensive and unnecessary additions. It will not take much time to reverse these acts of social negligence but someone should be ready to initialise the change. Every individual deserves to experience their independence without any obstruction that is caused due to the socially constructed imbalances. Interdependence is an important element and ignoring the issues and needs of individuals with physical impairments are unjust actions that need rectification. To get barrier free access to public spaces including restrooms, buildings, vehicles, shopping complexes, or any other locations should be regarded as social responsibility that need actions put into effect.

*A Time to Dance* is a novel that can be dedicated to all the dancers who have endured physical trauma and pain at any moment of their lives. The life of Veda can be taken as an example to understand the social injustice that the physically impaired individuals face regularly. Justice should be served by keeping aside the pernicious and denigrated attitudes that are meted out to the disabled community. A negative connotation with respect to disability is a sensitive issue along with the pain silently suffered by individuals who are physically impaired. It is the duty of society to practise equality and leave behind attitudes of oppression and prejudice. They are not to be considered as a minority group isolated from the common space. Their differences do not create any indifferences and acceptance is a small initiative that should be invested from the side of society. Barrier free public spaces and

transportation, a safe living environment, and a supportive social structure can pave way to a wonderful functioning system.

*Family Life* by Akhil Sharma reflects the tragic realities faced by the Mishra family due to an accident that affected their eldest son, Birju. The novel deals with a set of fictionalised events experienced personally by the author. Narrated by Ajay, brother of Birju, the novel features the details of the accident which resulted in his brain damage. A detailed account of events regarding the fall and recovery of the Mishra family is painfully projected through the character Ajay. The novel begins by picturing Birju as the ideal child in the family who is looked upon with respect by neighbours and friends. He was regarded as a child with a promising future as he always ranked first in every endeavour he takes part in. Birju was given complete freedom by his parents as his actions and conduct were always considered perfect.

The family later shifted to the U.S. as his father was appointed as a clerk in a government agency. Being an intelligent student, Birju managed to get an admission at the Bronx High School, a reputed institution in Arlington.

We began being invited to people's houses for lunch, for dinner, for tea. This was so Birju could be introduced to these people's children. Back then, because immigrants tended to be young and the Indian immigration to America had only recently begun, there were few Indians who could serve as role models. (Sharma 38)

Such invitations induced a sense of pride within Birju, whereas Ajay had developed a trickle of jealousy within him. Birju was categorised as the outstanding one, appreciated for all his deeds. His parents were highly ambitious in respect to Birju's future endeavours. But, a dark phase embraced Birju through the accident that flipped

his fate. He was taken to the hospital before his family could reach the accident spot. “BIRJU HAD DIVED into the swimming pool. He had struck his head on the pool’s cement bottom and lain there stunned for three minutes. Water had surged down his throat, been dragged into his lungs as he tried to breathe. His lungs had peeled away from the insides of his chest” (Sharma 45). The Mishra family was shattered by this incident and lost their stability and were unable to move forward in life. Sharma projects how the family perceives the condition of their child and highlights the strategies initiated by them to cope up with the situation.

Only 15 percent of people with disabilities are born with their impairments. Most people become disabled over the course of their life. This truth has been accepted only with difficulty by mainstream society; it prefers to think of people with disabilities as a small population, a stable population, that nevertheless makes enormous and selfish claims on the resources of everyone else. Most people do not want to consider that life’s passage will lead them from ability to disability. (Siebers 59-60)

A perfect body is a temporary status and everyone is moving towards old age or illness by eventually crossing the boundary line of ability or disability. Impairments can be inherited by birth or over the course of an individual’s life. It is not possible to prevent accidents that can cause temporary or permanent impairments. Siebers states, pain is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has the capability to steer one’s life and dreams. Fortunate are the people who have not been a victim of any serious illness or accident. He stresses about the intensity of pain not because of the synonymous connection of pain with disability but to expose the ignorance experienced by them due to the social constructions. The physical pain suffered by an individual with impairments along with the mental and financial barriers faced by the family is an important factor to be

analysed. Siebers mentions how such social repressions can increase the intensity of pain. Only few families consider their children with impairments as a valued member of the family and take full responsibility of protecting them with humanness.

Unconditional support rendered by the members of family is a crucial aspect as they resist the pejorative attitudes that are imposed upon their children.

The novel documents the unconditional love and support provided for him by the members of family. The family constantly wished and prayed for Birju to regain his consciousness. Ajay decided to spend his time wisely by staying besides Birju, chanting the *Ramayana* to him. "Time passed. One afternoon, I watched my mother cut Birju's finger nails. She looked scared as she did this. She had his hand forced open and was trying to keep it from clenching. "Is it all right?" she asked him" (Sharma 47). Physical pain and its reality is an unpredictable phenomenon. Birju's mother was extremely careful while handling him as he could not express his pain. Her help and support, documents the excruciating description of events that the mother had to face while protecting her ailing son. As far as the family was concerned, Birju had difficulty in expressing his sufferings but they treated him as a person who has the ability to understand and feel. They believed that his mind would be battling with his own inner speech. The cruel realities of disability experience are well portrayed by Sharma through his novel *Family Life*.

The family was later informed by the doctors that Birju was visually impaired because of the deprivation of oxygen at the time of the accident that had caused damage to his corneas. He could yawn, cough, and occasionally turn his head to the direction where a noise arises. There were also times when he would experience seizures. Ajay grew more detached and worried because of the void created in his brother's space. He struggled to remain calm as he could not accept this renewed

reality of Birju's current condition. Ajay was concerned about Birju's body and his future that they had dreamt together. The earnest desire of the Mishra family was the speedy recovery of Birju. Instead of blaming their child for his present physical condition, the Mishras considered it is their responsibility to take care of Birju by offering constant care and support. Siebers argues for strong cohesion among the members who are the primary caregivers to the individual with impairments. To take a strong deviation from the socially constructed norms and rude comments of the society is a major challenge experienced by the family members.

Birju was always conscious to present himself in the most dignified manner until the tragic accident changed his fate. The loss of mobility restricted him to remain in bed and a rubber tube was used for feeding purpose. To see Birju lying on the hospital bed with his eyes wide open and rashes on his penis due to the urinary catheter was an unpleasant experience for Ajay. Though the doctors certified his condition to be stable, the family could not savour the moment when he had to be shifted to a nursing home. They were completely devastated as the insurance company denied to manage their expenses at nursing home. These incidents led to heated arguments and quarrels between his parents. However, they decided to stay together while taking care of Birju. What bothered them the most was the thought that Birju who was supposed to be at Bronx High School was now lying on a hospital bed with his brain damaged.

Siebers states, the society is inconsiderate while isolating people with impairments as victims categorised by their misfortune. Sooner or later the family needs to adapt to their child's condition and function according to his/her needs. "The disabled represent a minority that potentially includes anyone at anytime" (Siebers 71). Accidents or illness are to be considered as a part of life that has the

ability to make an unexpected visit. Society worsens one's condition by labelling their misfortune as instability in their identity. Here, a family should be ready to challenge the societal pressures forced upon them. Family should serve as the anchor that stays strong for their suffering child. Confronting difficulties is a commonly seen criterion but rebuilding inclusion enables the disabled community to be more resilient.

The society should be resolute in its commitment towards creating a social environment that follows justice by eradicating discrimination.

The novel reflects how the Mishra family was treated differently after the accident. A change in the attitude of their relatives by excluding them from the family gatherings surprised them. Ajay contemplates over the reason on why they were not invited by their aunt for her grandson's birthday celebration. "When we came home from the hospital the night of the party and saw people sitting in the living room eating cake from paper plates, my aunt led us back into the kitchen. She said, 'I thought it would depress you, seeing other people's happiness'" (Sharma 60-61). This approach questions the dignity of the family. Siebers wants the society to be considerate enough to follow the strategy of including families that have members with impairments rather than blaming their fate. Avoiding or abandoning a family over disability is a challenging phase that the members of family experience along with their daily struggles. A liberal stance is an ultimate need to be practiced in the contemporary scenario during such situations. The society should aim to transform the concept of disability from a minority discourse to a universal one and respect families who have physically impaired individuals instead of neglecting them from leading a normal social life.

Despite the nursing home being an expensive one, Birju was not given proper care or attention. The nursing aide often forgot to feed him and he was seen lying in his own pool of sweat. They never bothered to change his clothes on time nor took

any measures to avoid bed sores. This action of negligence and denial of immediate attention was witnessed by the family members. “Tears were streaming down Birju’s face. He was propped up by pillows. Every two hours an aide was supposed to enter Birju’s room and turn him from one side to the other. The night aide must have forgotten to do so” (Sharma 81). The physical needs including feeding food, bathing, dealing with their skin rashes should be handled with utmost care and safety. These primary needs if left neglected can affect the personal hygiene of the child. Such careless attitudes from the side of caregivers could even endanger the life of the suffering individual. Dilemma arose as financial restrictions did not allow them to reconsider changing the nursing home. Siebers remarks that tracing societal and financial pressure associated with disability reflects the pathetic condition of a struggling family. Unable to provide the child with his/her needs can also induce a fear that they were a failure as parents.

Healthcare professionals who lack determination towards the physically impaired individuals can endanger the patient’s life. Individuals suffering from brain damage are less likely to receive attention as they cannot communicate their pain. Meanwhile, the doctors examining Birju’s body found that his ribs were broken a while ago. This could be the result of some aide dropping him off the bed and remaining silent without informing anyone. With no knowledge about this condition, the family continued giving him exercises with his broken ribs. There were also occasions where the healthcare members forget to feed him on time. Birju’s face would turn purple when the aide feeds him with one bottle of ‘Isocal formula’ (Sharma 82) which is supposed to be provided to him in a time gap of three hours. This provides a vivid illustration of the rough realities of disabled experiences.

The author has tried to create awareness about disability by outlining the challenges experienced by them.

After considering the safety of their ailing son, Birju was brought home under the guidance of his parents. He was carefully shifted to a stretcher from the ambulance by the orderlies who helped him to get inside the house. The family had arranged a hospital bed in which he could lie at ease. They travelled through the odds to give Birju all the comfort he deserved but his health deteriorated with the passage of time. “Earlier Birju had been able to sit mostly straight in his wheelchair. Now, when we sat him up, he began slumping. To keep him upright, we had to put his arms through a vest of sorts. The vest was missing a back but had long straps on the sides. We used these to tie Birju to his wheelchair” (Sharma 164). The family still tried hard to find ways that could improve Birju’s conditions, though they were drained financially and physically on their way to accomplish the wish.

Ajay along with his father would carry and transfer Birju to the wheelchair whenever necessary. While giving bath, his father would stand inside the bathtub which had a bathing chair and they would place Birju carefully in it on the count of three. Manually transferring an individual who is physically impaired is a hazardous task, to be done with utmost care and attention. Handrail is a necessity for the parents to get support while shifting and bathing the child. To create a space that could accommodate the needs of an individual with impairment requires financial flexibility to design the area barrier-free. Every individual is accustomed to structural obstacles but the influence of the same on the physically impaired individuals are comparatively high. Siebers mentions, “Every inaccessible building is a closet representing the oppression of people with disabilities by able-bodied society” (100). The Mishra family was in debt while managing the medical expenses and arrangements that were

not covered by the insurance company. So, providing all the benefits for Birju was not a luxury that the family could afford.

*Family Life* depicts the importance of how families of children with impairments have to learn to embrace the complexities of their child's condition and their perspectives pave way to better understanding of the situation. In the novel, the Mishra family never considered Birju to be a burden, but to manage and deal with the external stigmatising attitudes was an exhausting experience. Disability is multifaceted and a positive attitude of parents in handling children with impairments is highly essential. Breaking the social barriers to support these children can help in eradicating the cultural norms of disability. Proper understanding of disability can lead to the practice of inclusive strategy and a child should be valued with consideration by providing them with equal privileges and protection. It is the duty and responsibility of every individual to provide the maximum facility that could help the physically impaired individuals to live their life without experiencing much hurdles.

*Simply Nanju* by Zainab Sulaiman depicts the life of Nanjegowda who is often referred as Nanju throughout the novel. Nanju being born with damage in his spinal cord is also a victim to incontinence. It is a condition when an individual has no physical control over his/her urination or defecation. He also had to wear, “. . . the plastic encasings for his bent legs that gave him additional support when he walked” (Sulaiman 2). To pursue analysing the issues in connection with disability, the novel is set in a school that is specially designed for children with physical impairments. Hence, *Simply Nanju* draws attention to the lives of Nanju and his schoolmates who have different kinds of impairments acquired either by birth or accident. The narrative signifies and focuses on the impacts and difficulties faced by children who lack

flexibility and how their personal healthcare needs are not well taken care of by the non-teaching staff of the school.

The challenges faced by children at an educational institution are highlighted through the characters who are introduced as friends of Nanju. “Mahesh had an enormous head and a small torso, with small twisted limbs. He always used a wheelchair in school – though he could crawl to get around – and he was also about quarter the size of his classmates” (Sulaiman 5). Mahesh who was a friend to Nanju was exceptionally clever but his condition had restricted him from attending classes regularly. He could not sit upright even for a short period of time and Nanju was ready to help him always despite of his own troubles. When Mahesh found it difficult to tie his shoelace, Nanju would immediately take responsibility and slide down to complete the task. He was proud to be a friend who could be relied upon for help by Mahesh at any point of his hardships.

Sulaiman further provides a vivid description about the physical impairments and conditions endured by Nanju’s classmates. The plot presents Zafar who has a condition where his eyes are extremely sensitive to the sun. Nanju’s class monitor has a brother who studies in the same school. “The brother had bones as fragile as eggshells. His last fracture had happened when he had turned over in his sleep. This brother was, however, also the acknowledged champion of wheelchair racing” (Sulaiman 46). Despite their physical conditions, each child in the school seemed to live happily with their limitations. It is the society that disabled and de-motivated these children by reminding them about their condition as differences. Predetermined concepts about identity influence people to feel impairments as a sign for disabled bodies. Siebers argues, though there are certain notions that devalues people with

impairments; it does not mean that such ideologies cannot be rectified. He propagates that this social behaviour is a result of political unconsciousness. Siebers mentions,

Disability studies has, of course, already developed a critical perspective that reveals the workings of ideology and oppression in the social and built environment. It claims that the ideology of ability favors one particular social body for which all spaces have been designed, and rarely is this body conceived as disabled. (84)

When the novel opens, Nanju is seen peeping through the bathroom stalls, trying to hide his soiled shorts which he could take home when the school disperses. He was never worried about wearing a diaper because he considers it normal as wearing his socks or shorts. “. . . many disabled people do not consider their disability a flaw or personal defect—and with good reason. They are comfortable with who they are, and they do not wish to be fixed or cured” (Siebers 4). Realising their personal crisis and challenging the socially applied notions creates new dimensions to their existential frailty. Social exclusion based on biological differences in the contemporary scenario is a serious subject that needs to be eradicated. Each child in that school had different tales to narrate depending on the various phases of difficulties they experience. What makes them unique is their potential to actively participate in each task assigned by the teachers despite their difficulties. They were ready to challenge their own identities which gave them liberty and individuality. Impairments that categorise children to lead a peripheral existence need divergence from the parameters that consider them different or disabled. Siebers mentions, narratives that include the experiences faced by individuals with impairments exposes the barriers promoting their differences through unnatural treatment. Negative attitudes deserve strong opposition and reformation.

The school maids did not appreciate finding the soiled shorts that Nanju hides among the mops, brooms, or cleaning detergents near the lavatory. Siebers believes, rather than medical treatment, what an individual with impairments needs is a change in the social atmosphere that treats them as different. Implementing rules that provide equal justice and acceptance is an essential step to be practiced. The child should feel included to overcome the pejorative attitudes forced upon him/her as a developing child is not familiar with the concepts of social exclusion. Educational institutions and its members can be considered as an extended family that should treat each child with equal importance. It assures them safety to overcome the vulnerable and serious distortions they experience. Providing sufficient pedagogic skills to the working members of an educational institution that has students with impairments is essential to make them overcome their negative attitudes towards taking care of these children.

Bhavani Amma was notorious for making the wheelchair kids rot outside the bathroom for many long minutes before she deigned to take them in – by which time many of them had already done whatever it is they were waiting to do, in their wheelchairs. This invariably brought on a fresh stream of verbal abuse and humiliation. And so the children were careful around her. (Sulaiman 28)

A child in such situations undergoes traumatic stress, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The disgust and humiliation they face sitting on a wheelchair with their soiled pants, unable to move or react is gruesome. Individuals with impairments prioritise and have concern about their lack of accessibility as it restricts them to always live under the guidance and help of family, friends, relatives, or strangers. They feel embarrassed due to their helpless situation which is neglected by the person in charge of their duties. This serves as a social evidence to prove the atrocities that a child with impairment undergoes at certain institutions. Exclusionary approaches can

make an individual feel his/her body as deviant or weak. Care is a fundamental requirement that every individual desires at certain point of his/her life. As long as children who have impairments are treated with care, they will be free from their fears and inhibitions. The non-teaching employees show their resistance because of their poor psychological understanding of disability. Their perception makes them reluctant to socialise contentedly with these children. It is the responsibility of the school authorities to provide sufficient information regarding disability so that their institution will have a cooperative environment that facilitates happiness to the students. Siebers believes considering body as subversive through imagination can make the disability or condition as immaterial. Positive thoughts can inspire an individual to move forward successfully.

The disruptive environment of the institution tends to cause a damaging effect in a growing child. Disturbing incidents that occur during childhood can result in long term consequences. A person's perception regarding life can be changed based on the negative emotional distress they undergo at any point of their life span. Sulaiman through these instances tries to foreground the shame experienced by children with impairments within the educational institutions. The sense of fear inculcated in children affects their trust which is the key foundation to successful relationships. Caring with respect and benevolence by considering the emotional stability of an individual is an essential element that should be practiced by everyone. The primary aim of the caregivers is to provide the deserved concern and attention that helps them to overcome their worries and ordeals.

Like many disabled people, Nanju and Mahesh were often at the receiving end of endless bullying and teasing. When most people first saw Mahesh-with his oversized head and pint-sized body—they tended to shrink back in horror. And

Nanju, with his sideways pendulum walk and simple open face, never failed to evoke a laugh. (Sulaiman 69)

It is the crude realities of life that later leads young adults into the pool of insecurities. Mocking or criticising individuals by exposing their differences creates a negative influence to their developmental atmosphere. Though Nanju was mocked and criticised for the way he walked, he never lent his ears to those scornful comments. Still, unjust oppression has the ability to create constraints in a growing child which compels them to think that they are inferior. Children like Nanju respect their own self and believe in creating a wonderful space around them. They take effort to forget and reprimand negative situations. Amidst all the troubles, these children can be set as an example to be followed, on how to lead a contented life. According to Siebers, the present generation should take initiatives to consider the concept of humanitarian approach by providing individuals with impairments the appropriate space and voice in both public and private platforms. The idea of considering them weak and belonging to a minority identity should not be promoted.

Sulaiman also addresses the lack of freedom experienced by the physically impaired individuals while travelling due to the architectural limitations that restricts their mobility. The children were taken to ‘The Vigneshwara Science and Technology Park’ as part of their school excursion. The space not being wheelchair friendly made it difficult for the children to enjoy their tour. The school bus drivers found it too painful to watch their struggles and assisted them in climbing the staircase. “He pushed Mahesh’s wheelchair. Babu Uncle carried two of the smallest children on his shoulders” (Sulaiman 53). Accessibility denied due to negligence in architecture defines the forgetfulness about individuals with impairments while planning the blueprint. Siebers reminds, “The testimony of disabled people includes gritty accounts of their pain and daily humiliations—a

sure sign of the rhetoric of realism” (65). Such situations project the rejection that they endure due to the socially constructed abelist hegemony.

When a disabled body moves into any space, it discloses the social body implied by that space. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the dimensions of the built environment and its preferred social body—the body invited inside as opposed to those bodies not issued an invitation. This social body determines the form of public and private buildings alike, exposing the truth that there are in fact no private bodies, only public ones, registered in the blueprints of architectural space. (Siebers 85)

The difficulties undergone by individuals with impairments due to the inflexible architectural design, displays the ignorance during the time of its construction. Siebers mentions about the importance of implementing wheelchair ramp in public spaces that can give them easy access to buildings and vehicles. The floor spacing should also focus to accommodate the circulation dimensions of a wheelchair user. Protruding objects should be carefully placed based on the average space occupied by them to avoid accidents. A smooth surface area is a necessity as obstacles can cause hindrance to their rides. “When we imagine differently abled bodies in a space, the social construction of the space is revealed to us by dint of the fact that it owes its existence and preservation to an application of political rationality that is entirely public” (Siebers 88).

Every public building needs an entrance that could accommodate the needs of a physically impaired individual. The architects must take into consideration the potential users who may need access to the buildings they construct. The design must be accessible, user-friendly, and flexible for each user. Ramps should not be slippery

to avoid the risk for those who use them for their entrance as accidents can be caused if one loses control over their wheelchair. A clear sign board is a necessity for the wheelchair users to locate their entrance. Lifts, restrooms, parking area, ramps, should follow universal and inclusive architectural designs. Such initiatives will increase safety as well as the usability. The idea of universal design was first propounded by Ronald Mace, an architect who dreamt of creating a barrier-free environment where every citizen can experience the liberty of accessibility irrespective of their age, condition, and impairments. Later, the idea was further developed by Selwyn Goldsmith who validated the importance of equal accessibility in his book *Designing for the Disabled* published in 1963. Visible changes can be seen if differences are made in construction by taking into consideration the situations of individuals with impairments. Errors of social injustice rectified at the earliest can produce a better world for future generations to lead a convenient and content life.

*Simply Nanju* introduces a school campus that is filled with noisy and boisterous children who try to adapt and overcome their fears by reminding the readers to utilise one's time on earth wisely without being fixed about their pain. They were neither worried about what awaits them in future nor what the society might provide them. Filled with entertainment and wit, the plot revolves around the sardonic realities of children with impairments. Sulaiman depicts the optimistic approach of children towards the trivial experiences they have had in their life. It also reveals how financial instability makes them strive for survival. An initiative to enlighten the society to practice inclusion and acceptance is a necessary criterion to be followed as suggested in the novel. Disability narratives like *Simply Nanju* spread awareness to create an equal space for the physically impaired children.

*Trying to Grow* by Firdaus Kanga is a novel that revolves around the life of Daryus who has a condition known as ‘Osteogenesis imperfecta’. Daryus, the protagonist of the novel can be regarded as an alter ego of Kanga himself. Suffering from osteogenesis imperfecta commonly known as brittle bone disease is a condition where the bones have a tendency to break easily. The only cure to this condition is to lead a careful and healthy life. An individual suffering from this condition can also experience complications in breathing and hearing. It can affect their growth and development due to the recurrent fractures and bone deformities which they gradually experience during their developmental stages. They could also experience dental issues due to their disordered dentine. Regular monitoring and routine checkups should be conducted to detect any problems at the earliest.

An individual who is born with osteogenesis imperfecta while breaking a bone would feel the pain four times more than other people. The teeth of Daryus gradually crumbled and became translucent as the days passed by. There are times when he goes for parties and breaks his tooth when the hostess gives him chocolates. “She would forget to tell me she’d frozen them solid before serving. My teeth would battle with the chocolate. The chocolate would win. ‘Excuse me,’ I’d say, spitting a chip of tooth into my fist and dropping it into the plate on my lap” (Kanga 32). Depiction of disability in the novel *Trying to Grow* is humorously woven as Kanga himself has successfully passed on through all these critical stages of life personally. Realities explained using wit and humour aims at spreading a strong message against the deep-rooted repressive construction of ideologies.

All through the novel Daryus is commonly referred as Brit, the short form for brittle; a name suggested by his elder sister Dolly after being aware of his condition.

When their father Sam considered it cruel to name the child after his condition, Dolly stated “His disease is nothing to feel embarrassed about. . .” (Kanga 30).

Disability gives even greater urgency to the fears and limitations associated with the body, tempting us to believe that the body can be changed as easily as changing clothes. The ideology of ability stands ready to attack any desire to know and to accept the disabled body in its current state. (Siebers 26)

Siebers believes that disability studies should help the readers to develop a notion that considers disability as a varied form of body experience. A family should be capable enough to accept and deal with this spectrum of variation. Discrimination and prejudice acts like an entrenched practice seen among human existence. Overcoming these thought procedures paves way to equality. Disability is universal and measures should be adopted to eradicate marginalisation based on personal tragedies. The novel magnifies the intense passion of Brit who is trying to outgrow the shackles of his condition. According to Siebers, “The disabled body is no more real than the able body—and no less real” (67). Equal consideration should be initiated with transparency in opinions regarding disability. Brit consistently battles courageously with faith to perfect his imperfections. He stays focused to move forward though his body steers in the opposite direction. But it is the complex social reality that tends to confuse a child from accomplishing his/her goals.

Kanga captures the stigmatic notions and sufferings of individuals with impairment and their families experience from the time of their birth. Through the doctor who disclosed about Brit’s condition to his parents, Kanga has projected the prejudiced mind of society while dealing with the concept of disability.

‘I’m afraid I have bad news for you, Sera,’ he said, looking down at his pudgy fingers. ‘Your boy is born with bones brittle as glass. The ones in his legs are delicate as test tubes; I doubt he’ll ever walk. He’ll probably be toothless, too; his teeth will break as soon as he bites into anything hard.’ (Kanga 28)

Instead of happily announcing the arrival of the new born, Brit was referred as a ‘bad news’ (Kanga 28) by the health professionals. An infant born or diagnosed with a physical impairment is not well received by the outer world. The society had foreseen the child who is born with impairments as a burden to the family. Isolating and discriminating an individual based on their small differences is an egotistic approach that results in victimisation. “The distinction between the disabled and nondisabled is socially constructed, and it is a rather fine distinction at that” (Siebers 31). Disability could be intrinsic and requires attention that is politically right. When the doctor finished explaining the severity of the condition filled with pity and sympathy; Sera, mother of Brit just had a mysterious smile on her face. Later she tells her husband, “He’s our son, he’s a boy like any other; only his body has problems. He’ll cope with them more easily than you think; they’ll just be a way of life to him” (Kanga 29). She was aware about the upcoming difficulties that the family has to deal with, but what made her strong is her will power to face the consequences. Not every child would be blessed to have a healthy surrounding that could protect his/her emotions.

Sam wanted Brit to experience a normal childhood like any other boy of his age. As the first step to this, Brit was taken to *Campion*, a school run by Catholics. Father Ferra, Principal of *Campion* offered him free education as he was labelled as a ‘cripple’ (Kanga 50) during the time of admission. During his time at *Campion*, he was honoured with many awards at the Annual Prize Day celebration. Brit was unable to celebrate his victory as he felt that he was awarded not because he deserved it but

out of sheer sympathy. Madame Manekshaw, personal tutor of Brit rectified this misconception to make him feel better. She stated, Father Ferra had a different perception in this subject matter. She consoled Brit by stating that he was rewarded because of his strong will power and attitude in dealing with certain issues. Tutors like Madame Manekshaw can bring changes in a child's behaviour by promoting them to withdraw from the sadness and rejection that they face from the outside world. This has a therapeutic effect in children. Siebers believes in Judith Butler's concept of isolating bodies in pain as a resource to rethink the representation of physicality. Abject bodies deserve proper recognition to make their desires to be incorporated among the socially constructed norms. Their dignity deserves to be protected by treating them respectfully without any special consideration.

Brit started to doubt his strength when people asked his parents “. . . Is his brain damaged? Is he severely retarded? ‘I can't blame them,’ I said” (Kanga 68). Insecurities entwine him when society makes his physical condition look more miserable. Born with a genetic condition, Brit finds it difficult to cope up with the complex and prejudiced minds that treat him as someone with mental impairment. Studies report that individuals with physical impairments are more likely to experience mental distress while compared to other people. A social commitment is necessary for their development as their life can get affected with negative interference of the society. Fighting with both physical pain and mental agony can be a difficult task for the survivors; social cooperation can serve as a relief through their journey of life.

The family was also concerned on how to make Brit financially independent. Sera suggested, Brit to focus on his studies so that he can make good fortune being a teacher or lawyer. Sam was constantly worried about the competitive world around

him that could disapprove Brit's potentials due to his disability. They regarded his impairment as a barrier to his professional life. They never thought Brit could earn on his own until when his first book was published. Publication of his book was the evidence to the support rendered by his father who cultivated in him the habit of reading. "It got published and I got my first cheque. But I got something bigger from that story. I didn't feel alone any more. How could I? I had just talked to fifty thousand people" (Kanga 181). Brit knew the importance of independence and the feeling that he no longer needed to hide under the protection of his parents delighted him. "They do not want to feel dominated by the people on whom they depend for help, and they want to be able to imagine themselves in the world without feeling ashamed" (Siebers 69). Brit wanted to achieve goals with his own talents rather than relying on others for help. He never wanted fame or attention based on sympathy nor did he want to be dependent on his parents.

Sam suggested that Brit could get married some day to which Sera raised a strong opposition that he would remain a bachelor all through his life. Though Brit had a disagreement to his mother's statement, he decided not to expose his sexual desires in front of his family. Siebers quotes, "One of the chief stereotypes oppressing disabled people is the myth that they do not experience sexual feelings or that they do not have or want to have sex—in short, that they do not have a sexual culture" (138). Sexual shame can induce pain in the psyche of a person with impairments. Parents of children who have physical impairments should be practical and sensitive with regard to their sexual concerns as disabled sexuality face prejudices. Siebers mentions not to be judgemental but consider their sexual needs as normative. In the novel, Brit was yearning for a partner as he turned twenty-one and was waiting to get committed in a relationship. He dreamt of leading a normal life as suggested from the books he read.

“Maybe my passion was just that— sexual frustration. I mean, in every book you read the hero loses his virginity when he’s sixteen, unless he is the noble sort— then it usually happens on his twenty-first birthday. Which I had celebrated months ago. It just wasn’t normal. So this girl comes along and zing! Off I go” (Kanga 221).

Siebers has highlighted the stereotypes of sex culture linked with disability. “Social stigma would have little impact on sexual behavior if it were not for the fact that ability represents the supreme measure of human choices, actions, thoughts, and values” (Siebers 140). It is the concept of ability that degrades attitudes about sexuality. He also mentions that sexual experience in respect with physically impaired bodies can differ in ways of their expression. A strategically planned opinion is to provide and educate the readers to avoid negative stereotypes that consider the disabled community as asexual. The latter half of the novel describes how Brit’s friendship with Amy slowly turned into a romantic relationship. Sera strongly opposed this relationship as she believed his son’s condition would not meet the wedding parameters. She stated, “She’s not going to marry you— she wants a handsome wealthy man who can take her to the beach and the discotheque, chauffeur her round in a car, carry her over the threshold. Can you do any of these things? You haven’t thought of that” (Kanga 248). Brit made it clear to Sera that all he wanted was to lead a normal life like other boys of his age. Society also held the same outlook on the sexuality of the disabled community. When seen in public together, people assumed either Brit to be rich or Amy to be having any other physical issues. Individuals like Brit were not supposed to be engaged in a relationship in society’s point of view. Siebers mentions, “Illiteracy about the minds and bodies of disabled people drapes their sexual practices in deviance and perversion” (133).

Siebers believes that society does not provide justice to the sexual culture of individuals with physical difficulties. Young adults certainly have their freedom of expression in selecting their sexuality and sexual preferences. Social misconceptions that consider disabled community as asexual, projects the limitations they undergo physically and emotionally. The social negation of sexuality is visible within families and in public spaces. People who question and criticise their basic needs and urges do not realise that disability does not make any person inferior but social stigmas can negatively affect their psyche eventually leading them to seclude themselves from the outer world. *Trying to Grow* unwinds the oppositional strains inflicted on individuals with impairments where they are restricted from expressing their sexual needs in a democratic society. Disability narratives share their experiences and recounts how they are considered as abject beings by the society. Changes, in such derogatory attitudes that discard them as objects to be mourned for should be initiated.

Tragedy hit the Kotwal family in other shade through Sam's demise. Victimisation was at its peak when people started to pity his mother for the loss of her husband and her fate to look after their crippled son. "A widow with a crippled son. Helpless" (Kanga 197). His body is subjected to discrimination due to the prejudiced comments passed on by the society. Such stereotypical attitudes can influence future generations. Siebers mentions, "Clearly, the pain of disability is less bearable because people with disabilities suffer intolerance and loneliness every day. They hurt because the nondisabled often refuse to accept them as members of the human community" (62). People with disabilities tend to face more challenges from society than the disability itself. Brit wondered whether all his problems are a result of his own thoughts on how other people view him. The answers to his concerns are evident based on how he has been treated by others. Young adults often question their

existence at many points of their life and only through guidance from a proper channel can they find meaning in life.

Siebers believes that, “. . . the lives of people with disabilities will never be improved if we do not change the current political landscape.” (47) He states that disability demands a story to be shared to the world, the sufferings and hardships they endure in the name of their condition. “For human beings make lives together by sharing their stories with each other. There is no other way of being together for our kind” (Siebers 48). Their plights are accounts of biased treatment which result from dominant societal stigmas. The doctors had mentioned that Brit will have to use a wheel chair and there are possibilities that he might fracture his bone multiple times before attaining the age of five. Brit mentions, “I saw to it that the doctor was proved right. I broke my legs eleven times before I was five years old. Mysteriously, the rest of me remained virtually uncracked” (Kanga 31). His journey on the wheelchair accentuated the privileges that were denied to him.

“The great challenge every day is to manage the body’s pain, to get out of bed in the morning, to overcome the well of pain that rises in the evening, to meet the hundred daily obstacles that are not merely inconveniences but occasions for physical suffering”, says Siebers (62). Brit experienced excruciating pain each time he broke a bone. He endured indescribable pain each night and as the sun made its appearance, he had to experience the trauma of sitting in his wheel chair all day long. But through all this, he believed in himself and stated that “It made me sort of brave: knowing I could get over something so terrible and still smile” (Kanga 45). He tried not to reveal his pain to avoid the cyclone of tears, grief, and pity by others. Brit had managed to stay happy among all the adversities of life. Sam wonders whether he was pretending to smile by hiding his weeping heart like a clown who entertains his audience during

his most terrible days. Such incidents provide an insight into the complexities suffered by individuals with impairments.

The disabled community suffers when the environment in which they live is not user-friendly. Remedies to their struggles should be initiated by providing them their needs. Brit once encountered a problem that required social attention while he was at the British council library. "I realized I wanted to pee. But the toilet here would be useless. I never sat on a seat because I was too small, too terrified of falling in. At home, I had a special ring that fitted on. I wondered what would happen if my bladder went bust" (Kanga 211). Such reprehensible actions represent the obstacles of physical inaccessibility projecting discrimination. Disability experience focusing on such situations depicts the trauma of an individual who cannot get access to public toilets like others do. "Constructions are built with certain social bodies in mind, and when a different body appears, the lack of fit reveals the ideology of ability controlling the space" (Siebers 124). Architecture denying the basic needs of an individual is a social negligence that needs rectification. Public spaces should provide rest rooms that can be easily accessed independently by a wheelchair user. The toilet cubicle should facilitate the needs of individuals with impairments, so that they do not have to rely upon for assistance. The flush control system should also be levelled according to the comfort position of the users. Cubicles that provide an alarm switch will be of great help in case of emergencies.

Brit found his wheelchair to be a burden when his favourite tutor Madame Manekshaw passed away suddenly. He was not able to attend the funeral as the road to her final resting place was not maintained properly. "But I want to go,' I said loudly. 'You can't. The road's too rough and your chair can't make it'" (Kanga 91). Brit expected someone to carry him but unfortunately he had to return without having

a glimpse of his tutor. Individuals with impairments often do not have the liberty to fulfil their desires and small wishes. “In a society of wheelchair users, stairs would be nonexistent, and the fact that they are everywhere in our society seems an indication only that most of our architects are able-bodied people who think unseriously about access” (Siebers 57). Brit had always confronted such issues with the help of his parents or friends. This proves the negligence in designing a proper world that gives equal access to its inhabitants. There are still places where the social constructivism fails to manage the needs of physically impaired people.

*Trying to Grow* reveals the rejection of privileges experienced by the disabled community. It projects how the society with predetermined notions considers them as abject beings. This study also highlights how the societal approaches affect the psyche of an individual with physical impairments. Brit tries to escape from these stigmas and create a space of his own where he need not worry about the opinions of other people. The commitment of his parents to challenge any societal pressures that made Brit feel ashamed of his physical appearance was handled courageously by them. They made sure that they take him to various public spaces and helped him settle in those environments that earlier caused him troubles. The narrative provides an insight to the readers about the exclusion they survive each day along with their physical pain. An optimistic approach is needed while dealing with such subjects. Establishing hegemony should be socially just and politically right. The society needs to provide individuals with impairments the equal space and rights that they deserve.

Disability is an ever-present phenomenon throughout history. Impairments caused by birth or accident are unpredictable and the hardships endured by the individuals with impairments along with their families needs serious consideration and help. Managing their problems is a necessary criterion as they are an integral part

of the future of humanity. Their contribution to the world depends on their successful upbringing. Social justice and equality should be served to each and every individual with serious commitment and dedication. Proper education and awareness are the supreme principles that provides for an actual solution to their crisis. Disability studies provoke one to think and feel differently about the existing notions regarding disability. Any community can have people from different backgrounds, but it is important to make everyone feel accepted. The terrain of diversity should be deconstructed by embracing inclusion strategy where no one is undervalued for their physical condition.

Surviving a disability experience, demands complete eradication of prejudices held against disability. Critical emancipation from the restrained social order can be accomplished through improved attitudes towards individuals with impairments. Siebers quotes, “The social model challenges the idea of defective citizenship by situating disability in the environment, not in the body. Disability seen from this point of view requires not individual medical treatment but changes in society” (73). Considering individuals with impairments as defective citizens is not a politically correct belief. Introduction of social transformation is essential to defy the exclusionary behaviour experienced by this marginalised community. Providing equal opportunities and essential facilities can help to transform the situation. A change in attitude that is willing to break the myths about disability and to lend support for their growth through inclusive environment will dismantle the concept of diversity that is prevailing across the nation.

Narratives of disability identity in the novels *A Time to Dance*, *Family Life*, *Simply Nanju*, and *Trying to Grow* posit the record of events that reveals social stigma and oppression. These novels trace the fall, acceptance, and growth of the protagonists

from the trauma that their life has offered them. Critical decision making, facing social exclusions, and financial instability are some of the major struggles undergone by the family members. *A Time to Dance* and *Family Life* projects the challenges and struggles faced by the protagonists and their families due to the accident that occurred in their lives. The character Veda from the novel *A Time to Dance* projects the courage and determination that the young dancer possessed even when she learnt about her amputation caused due to an accident. Venkatraman through her novel offers a clear understating about the difficulties encountered by Veda and her family. While an accident can often result in pain, the character Veda inspires the readers to follow their passion despite the struggles they face. Here, she decided to cross the waves of subjugation, discrimination, and victimisation by constantly striving to attain her aim. Birju from *Family Life* highlights the devastating situation a family is placed when his brain was damaged in an accident. Sharma focuses on the importance of unity among family members to overcome the instabilities levied upon them.

The novels *Trying to Grow* and *Simply Nanju* decipher the environmental and social factors that delimit the progression of the protagonists who are physically impaired by birth. Through the application of disability theory by Siebers, a proper understanding of disability experience is projected by highlighting solutions to create a world that provides equal justice and opportunities by surpassing the unjust conventional ideologies. If these social inequalities are rectified, then having a bodily impairment is not a disaster that needs support or attention. If social, political, environmental, and infrastructural facilities accommodate everyone equally, then deformities would not be considered as a misfortune that the family has to endure privately. The social environment should be designed and organised with equality based notions, thus creating solidarity within each and every citizen of the nation without any differences.