

# Self-Versus The Social Milieu

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**Abstract:** Discrimination against people with special needs is dehumanising and humiliating in today's society. There is no caste, class, or religion-specific discrimination here. Regardless of their social standing, people with disabilities are subjected to the worst forms of discrimination, stigma, and mockery. These individuals make up around 3% of our entire population, which is undoubtedly a sizable portion. In circumstances when their differences are obvious, people with disabilities are frequently stigmatised. People frequently react to the presence of people with disabilities with dread, pity, condescension, invasive looks, disgust, or apathy.

**Keywords:** *discrimination, disability, autobiographies, memoirs*

In today's world, the discrimination faced by the specially-abled is humiliating and dehumanizing. This discrimination is not religion-specific, or caste-specific or class-specific. The specially-abled face the brunt of ridicule, stigma and discrimination irrespective of which strata of society they belong to. Such people constitute about three per cent of our total population and it is definitely a significant number. People with disabilities are often stigmatized in situations where their differences are evident. People often respond with fear, sympathy, patronization, intrusive gazes, revulsion, or indifference to the disabled presence. Such reactions, along with the advantages and services offered by these places, may and sometimes exclude people with disabilities from accessing social spaces says disabled writer/researcher Jenny Morris in her book on "Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability" explains how stigma works to marginalize people with disabilities:

"Going out in public requires bravery too much. How many of us find that day after day, week after week, year after year, a lifetime of rejection and revulsion, we cannot dredge up the power to do it? It is not just physical restrictions that restrict us to our homes and those we know. It is the awareness that stares, condescension, sympathy, and animosity will dominate each entrance into the public world."

Further, the alarming reality is that the contribution of specially-abled persons towards English or regional literature is deprived of its due recognition. Like Dalit and Holocaust Literature, the Literature of the Specially-abled needs to be constituted in order to hear their voices of ability- rejecting the segregation, discrimination, prejudice and struggle, that prevents them from living a meaningful life. The specially-abled people would like to be viewed as people with challenges and not as some 'human rejection defect'. They are not ashamed of their disabilities and they do not want to be looked down with pity. The narratives which express their struggle for human connections are candid and honest narrations which provide an eye-opening experience to the readers making them know what it is like to have grown up with disability.

The literature which unfolds the struggle and proves the ability in first person narration as first-hand experience of the specially-abled persons can be classified under 'autobiographies' and 'memoirs'. Both autobiographies and memoirs are first-person accounts of any writer's life. This means the writer is describing her or his life using 'I' and 'me'. Both are about writers telling the readers about their lives in their own voice. Yet both are different. Auto biographers set out to tell the story of their life, and while some parts will get more detail than others, they usually cover most or all of it, however, memoirists will often choose a particularly important or interesting part of their life to write about and ignore or briefly summarize the rest.

Due to its more personalised expression, memoirs of the specially-abled people are selected for the study. The struggle of specially-abled persons against the social stigma and the limitations of physical body will be considered for the study. Selected memoirs of the physically-challenged, the visually-challenged and the victims of autism.

## Texts selected for study

### 1. *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence* by Matthew Sanford

Matt Sanford's life and body were irrevocably changed at age 13 on a snowy Iowa road. On that day, his family's car skidded off an overpass, killing Matt's father and sister and left him paralyzed from the chest down, confining him to a wheelchair. His paralysis led him to a profound understanding of suffering, silence in the body and the mind-body connection/disconnection. The author offers a powerful message about the endurance of the human spirit, and the body that houses it.

### 2. *Planet of the Blind A Memoir* by Karino S

In this memoir, the author writes about his parent's denial of his blindness and his struggles to read and learn in a public school. The author describes his long-standing reluctance to accept his disability because he did not want to feel dependent, recounting his attempts to 'pass' as sighted throughout childhood and adulthood.

### 3. *Nobody, nowhere* by Williams. D

Donna Williams, who was diagnosed with autism when in her mid-20s, wrote *Nobody, nowhere* in an attempt to understand herself and to explore how she fit into the world around her. She candidly describes the teasing and mistreatment she experienced at the hands of her family and her ability to use role-playing to interact with others. Williams said of her book, "This is a story of two battles, a battle to keep out 'the world' and a battle to join it. I have, throughout my private war, been a she, a you, a Donna, and finally, an I".

## Methodology and Technique

The research would present a thematic analysis of each work selected for study. The study first analyses the primary sources for the themes delineated in them, from the point of personal, social and cultural milieu, then refer to the secondary sources, books and critical articles as well as reviews that have appeared in journals and e-sources.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the study is that a close reading and analysis of themes presented can bring awareness about our responsibility towards inclusive society and a hope that more works on these memoirs would unravel the struggle of these people whose voices go unheard. Injustices that have occurred and continue to occur towards people with disability are not merely stories but harsh realities. Hence the study will also have pedagogical importance from the point of view of the struggles of the disabled. This research will also bring awareness about every individual's responsibility in making the society inclusive.

## Primary Sources

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