



Challenging Social Perceptions: A Study of Disability in Malini Chib's Autobiography *One Little Finger*

Sonoo Lal

Research Scholar

Department of English and MEL

University of Lucknow

Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of disability in Malini Chib's autobiography, 'One Little Finger'. The author explores personal feelings and experiences in the society and search into various ideologies in her autobiography. The study search into various societal perceptions and challenges, faced by many persons with disability in the stereotypical society. Malini Chib's autobiography captures coherently the feeling of alienation, isolation, innate desire for rejection and acceptance. The concept of 'marginalization' refers to the disabled people in which they treated as groups, discrimination, insignificantly in the society. After analyzing the emotional journey of Chib, we find the disability of cerebral palsy about her and other people who have various types of disabilities and make a challenge in social perceptions about this issue.

This research paper contributes to the women empowerment and inclusion by the experiences of persons with disabilities. It highlights a paradigm in the social attitudes and challenges about persons with disability. After thorough study of Chib's narrative, we seek to foster empathy, understanding, the creation of inclusive society, values, positivity, ability and determination for goal of persons with disability. In the genre 'One Little Finger' Malini Chib critically portrays a profound insight into the experiences of persons with disabilities. Those who are disabled, various notions in our society about them. It explores the various types of disability and its impact on the persons with disabilities in the context of hierarchical society. It focuses on the life of individuals who have critically disabled persons; one of them is Malini Chib who has disabled woman, suffers

from cerebral palsy, and her experiences of isolation, discrimination and marginalization. This paper examines challenges social perceptions of disability, struggles, and triumphs of the persons with disability. Chib's autobiography provides critically powerful images of society, cultural norms, ableism and stereotypical notions of society about disability. It highlights the ways of societal attitudes towards disability. It also portrays disability studies as a theoretical approach and analyses the ways of ongoing discourse of disability and social stigma.

Key Words: Disability, Social Challenges, Inclusion, Discrimination, Trauma, Deformation.

Introduction

Disability studies have a vital research area that focus on the experiences of various types of disability, social challenges, attitudes and contributions to society. Realistically, it is an incipient stage which is developed from the West. Apart from, "Disability histories have focused on various aspects of Western societies in their attempts to organize historical perspectives of narration" (Mahanta, 18). In this context, disability studies have recognized in the various academic phenomena which is calculated various western universities in the past. Gradually, it has become historical perspectives of narration in the whole world. Chib's autobiography 'One Little Finger' reveals mainly social perspectives on disability by exploring the struggles of Malini Chib's life and she faces various barriers in her life.

The paper explores that how despite having a complete crippling disability, she ignored the challenges by the society and moved ahead with a positive attitude by overcoming her own stage limitations. She sought independence, identity, full of positivity, and for living a full and meaningful life in the society. According to Chib, "why do I feel so small, so isolated so rejected in India? Why do I yearn after a few months to run back to where they treat me as a human being?" (Chib, 196). In this reference, it depicts the central theme of the memoir which is around to the life of Chib by struggling of persons with disability that is social constructed. Malini Chib's physical disability not only limitations but also subjects her to discriminate and social challenges. In the throughout memoir, she faces many difficulties and obstacles that prevent her from aspirations and desires and fulfilling life. After this, she gradually became free from all such negative thoughts and accepted her by the society. As Chib states, "Accepting life as it is a discipline like yoga that I practice regularly" (Chib, 172). Human bodies are discerned by different bodily appearances such as looks, colors, abilities and other limitations.

After exploring the autobiography, we discussed about the author's deformed body who is suffered from cerebral palsy. Chib expressed herself about deformed body which proved by doctor, "the umbilical cord got stuck around my neck, resulting in a lack of oxygen to my brain and a few seconds of that (known by the medical term of anoxia) eventuated in giving me a lifetime of a severe disabling condition (condition not disease!) called cerebral palsy" (Chib, 3). In fact, this research paper represents a severe disabled condition of the protagonist and contributes the disability studies as well as highlights on the social and cultural biasness that search into towards the persons with disabilities.

According to Lennard J. Davis, he argues that "disability is a complex, multifaceted experience that is socially constructed" (Davis, 3). The above reference argues that disability is a complicated term that is difficult to define in the present scenario. It is of many types such as blindness, deafness, dumbness, and physically challenges. It is also as a social constructed disability. This research paper also references the works of many disability theorists like Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and G.N. Karna to provide a comprehensive study of the theories in which they have highlighted various kinds of disabilities particularly women's disabilities. In fact, this research paper *One Little Finger* argues a powerful critique of the social and cultural norms, also highlights the importance of social challenging attitudes towards persons with disability. This paper reveals an empathetic portrayal of persons with disabilities and her experiences about society and greater understanding and inclusion. In Chib's *One Little Finger*, she depicts inclusion in society with her assistant.

Review of Literature

The idea of disability studies has been considered from the various Western universities since the mid-twentieth century. Disability is looked at as a problem from the many people in our society. According to Mahanta, "the experiences of people with disabilities are in a way similar to the experiences of people who are victims of other forms of social oppression perpetrated on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality" (Mahanta, 2). In the above context, there is a huge difference between normal and abnormal people which is created by the society. Furthermore, In Chib's autobiography, the protagonist has focused on the representation of persons with disability and how exists it social challenges, struggles and resilience. Moreover, how is she different from each other in her narrative by age, gender, sexuality, personality and cultural background as well as in higher education.

As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states, “Female, disabled, and dark bodies are supposed to be dependent, incomplete, vulnerable and incompetent bodies” (20). It refers to the merits and demerits to the females disabled people who are dependent and incomplete with their bodies. On the other hand, Chib didn’t remain dependent while she went to abroad and studied there. G. N. Karna argues that ‘social attitudes towards disabled persons remained drastically unchanged’ (87). Malini Chib’s memoir reveals physical disability with trauma and emotional sufferings and she states, “I was having difficulty in performing tasks that required manual dexterity. So, activities like walking, talking, and even eating and shallowing required a lot of efforts.” (5)

Overall, the review of literature highlights the importance of understanding disability in the literature and the impact it has social perceptions along with the life of Chib and it also reveals this research paper that how relate the memoir with the life of the author, evaluating social challenges in the society.

Representing Disability in the Autobiography

The autobiography ‘One Little Finger’ explores the theme of disability through the autobiographical note of Malini Chib. This autobiography reveals the disability in her life, and she depicts the physical and emotional challenges in her autobiography life, faced challenges herself. Malini Chib is a one of the pioneer disability figures from her life, suffered from severe cerebral palsy which is a very serious illness. In spite of her disability, she faces all the difficulties in her life being disabled and depicts herself as an independent figure in whole the world who later becomes an inspiration for all disabled people. She was born in 1966 in Kolkata, West Bengal, in an Indian family. Malini Chib is a wheelchair user who is served by an assistant. In 1966, during her birth, she suffered from cerebral palsy due to insufficient supply of oxygen in her brain. At that time, she turned into disabled person.

Chib states, “the umbilical cord got stuck around my neck, resulting in a lack of oxygen to my brain and a few seconds of that eventuated in giving me a lifetime of a severe disabling condition called cerebral palsy” (3). The doctors confidently told them, damaging her brain but they refuse to believe him. Her parents knew that she is a brave girl. So, her mother remained on believing in me and began exercises with me from the age of seven months. My mother taught me that, “how to stretch my hand out and reach for a toy, as I was unable to do even that. I was taught how to balance myself when carried” (5). In this sequence, her parents went to foreign for the treatment of her illness. But she didn’t cure there so she was admitted by her parents to St.

Xavier's College and completed her bachelor degree. After that she came back to England and completed to master degree in University of London.

Malini Chib is a disabled woman who “defied all odds to emerge victories in spite of a crippling disability and an indifferent society; dragged herself out of the limits of her condition” (80). Malini tried to start contact with society but she ignored by some people. According to her mother, in a birthday party had left her alone by everyone. When all the children were going to their home, The host gave some gifts to each of them but not her. This shows discrimination with her. “I think this is the worst treatment that can be given to a handicapped child, to leave her alone and not even talk to him” (Chib, 6). She reveals the emotional struggle and hidden pain by her. She describes the difficulty by society and eruption of sentiments in controlling them, arguing, “when I am in an emotional state, I cannot figure why the tears keep rolling down; I cannot control them” (Chib, 148). The author states collapsing the tears after attending the cousin's marriage because it highlighted her longing for a connection of cousin's wedding. In this context, Malini narrates her own story as, “I collapsed into floods of tears, for no apparent reason. After an age, my uncontrollable tears stopped and I tried to verbalize my emotional outbursts of needing a partner” (Chib 148).

Search of Discrimination and Social Challenges

The autobiography portrays the author's longing to be accepted and regarded as discrimination by society. While returning home from England, the doctor told her that she will be completely mentally handicapped. In the beginning, she faced discrimination when she was admitted to the hospital, stating, “they poked and examined me as if I did not feel any pain. Well, I was just a patient and not a human being” (Chib, 16). The author wants to highlight discrimination and marginality by doctors as she cannot hold a pencil, tie her shoes laces and she cannot dress independently.

Furthermore, the protagonist points out the behavior with her by the paramedical staffs as if she did not have ears and she couldn't understand about herself. She couldn't understand why fitting in was necessary to be a normal man. Moreover, the author asserts also the experiences of kindness and sensitivity whom she was getting in Cheyne, were fresh in mind now; stating, “My experiences in Cheyne, of their kindness and sensitivity towards me were fresh in mind. I well remember that the Cheyne staff had been so nurturing, friendly, warm, sensitive and egalitarian.” (Chib, 16)

On the other hand, the author reveals social challenging by people in the memoir as they thought very negatively about her, those who feared her, were bad persons but she accepted challenges and moved forwards. “The more I thought of it, the worse I felt. These people were different. These people were rough, hierarchical, domineering, intimidating and wanted to prove that they were super professionals” (Chib, 17). Now, the provisions posited for persons with disabilities against discrimination by Government of India such as ‘The rights of persons with disability act, 2016 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment.’

Conclusion

Malini Chib’s autobiography ‘One Little Finger’ concludes for challenging social perceptions of disability. In the entire her journey, Chib depicts the important of positivity, her parents and relatives, culture, challenging social perceptions and transforming from negativity to positivity. She faces the difficulties and unveils barriers from the society. She recognizes their abilities and establishes an epitome for persons with disability. By embracing perspectives and fostering inclusivity, society can embark on a journey towards future where persons with disability are fully embarrassed, equal rights and opportunities. This autobiography culminates to challenges social perceptions and break the barriers. This memoir confines persons with disabilities’ participations in society. Chib’s autobiography exposes deny persons with disability equal opportunities and social barriers. It also labeled denying their desires. In fact, Chib’s journey focuses on the positive aspects of her life.

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