

REPRESENTATION OF SOCIETAL BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS DISABILITY IN SUSHMITA BAGCHI'S *CHILDREN OF A BETTER GOD*

SUNITA CHATTANI

PhD Research Scholar, Department of English
Banasthali University, Rajasthan

Dr. TAMISHRA SWAIN

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Banasthali University, Rajasthan

Abstract

Views of people with disabilities in society have evolved over time. A number of variables contribute to these shifting viewpoints. Diversity, nationality, occupation, income, gender, education, and religion are just a few of the many variables that can have a big impact on someone's awareness of disabilities. This study illustrates the severe consequences of poverty and lack of education on the treatment of individuals with disabilities. It calls for a multi-faceted approach to address the root causes of such exploitation, promote dignity and respect, and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can lead fulfilling and autonomous lives. The purpose of this study is to examine the various ways in which Indian English fiction addresses the topic of disability and how its characters are attentive of it. In ancient cultures, disability was often seen as a divine punishment for the deeds of one's past or present lifetime. This belief has endured to this day and has played a part in the mistreatment of individuals with disabilities. By examining a few Hindu myths from ancient India, this essay seeks to illustrate the karmic understanding of disability. The psychological and sociological dialectics that emerge in the life of an individual with a disability will be better understood in this paper. Additionally, the paper examines stigmatization, discrimination, and public discourse surrounding disability in Indian society, shedding light on the lived experiences of diverse stakeholders. Through comprehensive analysis, the paper aims to foster a deeper understanding of disability-selective abortion as a major ethical concern in India while also identifying avenues for promoting equity, dignity, and respect for all individuals.

Keywords: disability, begging bowl, karma, hindu mythology, ableism, indian fiction in english

Introduction

People with disabilities are frequently said to share a common experience. There are not many Indian English novels that tell the tale of children with disabilities. Readers can become more aware of disability issues by reading fiction that expresses thoughts about disabilities and people with disabilities. But we find that utilization of English fiction in India to raise public awareness regarding disabilities remains untapped. Sushmita Bagchi's novel *Children of a Better God* features children with disabilities. The book provides a very emotional glimpse into the lives of children with disabilities and their families.

According to Simi Linton's book *Introduction to Disability Studies*, "setting off disability studies as a socio political-cultural examination of disability from the interventionist approaches that characterize the dominant

traditions in the study of disability" (132). When pointing out the pervasive social prejudice against women with disabilities, Anita Ghai (2003) notes that "for poor families with a hand-to-mouth existence the birth of a disabled child or the onset of significant impairment in childhood is a fate worse than death". Quoting a Hindi phrase „ek to ladki oopar se apaahij" ("one, a girl and that too disabled") In order to draw attention to the unfairness against women, Ghai argues that in a society where having a daughter is perceived as a disaster, having a disabled daughter is seen as a fate worse than death. Making an effort to dispel the social misconceptions that discriminate against women with disabilities Ghai uses her own words to depict the suffering of a mother of a girl with a disability. She lamented, "Wasn't it enough that we have a hand to mouth

existence? Why did God have to add to punish us further by giving a Langri (crippled) daughter"? (Ghai 2001,29)

Karma

For individuals with disabilities, karma is acknowledged as one of the primary beliefs guiding Indian culture. Karma refers to actions or conduct. According to Indian mythology, doing bad things usually results in a curse, and the suffering one feels is usually equal to what they have caused someone else. Karmic consequences are referred to as karma phala. Disability, therefore, is a person's karma phala. In the same way, Uma's parents in *Children of a Better God* believed that her disability was an outcome of their own misconduct in the past. While Speaking with Anupurbha about Uma's life, Ranjana informs Anupurbha about Uma's parents' hard work in caring for her. She says, "They think it's some sin of theirs that is responsible for Uma's suffering and so they must serve her all their lives" (38). Similarly, rather than showing concern for Radhika, her parents came to see her disability as a curse and disregard for her. The locals said "she was plain cursed, had no legs"(31). She turned into a thing to fulfill their everyday need. Another character Arundhati, mother of a cerebral palsy child named Abhay, believes that her son's troubles and misfortunes are due to his past actions since "God had punished me for robbing another person of her happiness" (107).

When a newborn infant is born, in Hindu tradition, the child is named during the naming ceremony, which is usually attended by family and friends, based on astrology or family custom

Because of her disability, Saumya's birth was not a time for her family to celebrate or feel proud

Her severe illness prohibited the family from carrying out the traditional rites at that time, but when Ranjana, her mother, later organized a modest pooja for Saumya's naming ceremony, she received no support from her family, including her husband, who rather became enraged and remarked, "What respect will I have in society? If only we could have terminated the pregnancy in time!" (66).

Families, those are experiencing poverty suffer from dehumanization and exploitation, and for them, disability serves as a means of obtaining money. Radhika represented a "begging bowl" (46) in human form for her

family, at the traffic signals, asking for pity money. So when someone suggested, they use her impairment as a tool for begging and they turned her into the family's "begging bowl." Her disability adds to their already extreme financial hardship. They turned her into the "begging bowl" of the family when someone recommended they utilize her infirmity as a tool for begging. They never considered the fact that Radhika is a human being and shouldn't be treated like an object. Against her wishes and wants, her family exploited her.

A person's humanity and individuality are taken away when their disability is used as an excuse for begging. This type of exploitation has a negative impact on one's mental and physical health. Being regarded like a "begging bowl" can cause serious psychological and emotional suffering, as well as feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and depression.

Radhika faces Identity crises. She wasn't given a name at birth because of her impairment. She is yet used as a "begging bowl" to supplement the family's income. While attending Asha Jyoti School, Ranjana gave her the name "Radhika".

Exploitation

Disabled children, particularly females, are more vulnerable to abuse because of their dependence on caregivers, communication issues, and social neglect. The voices of disabled children are often muted by cultural and societal conventions, which prevents them from reporting abuse and seeking justice. This silence is intolerable because of the fear of shame and disgrace. Even in cases when abuse has been recognized, social forces often prevent initiating steps towards justice. Rather than offering

A big part of the children's exploitation is caused by the caregivers' careless attitude and lack of concern for them, but they are also negatively impacted by their obsession with protection. Reena, a wealthy, upper-class mother, was portrayed by Sushmita Bagchi as an overly cautious mother who deprives her children of experiences and knowledge that may have been obtained through exposure to educational institutions, healthcare providers, and other services. She did not let her children to be away from her sight for even a minute in order to shield them

from further degradation, and she refused to let them attend any school, despite her husband's repeated attempts to get them enrolled "she does nothing all day but keep watch over her two children like a hawk. There are trained nurses to look after them but she won't trust anyone" (134)

Ranjana and her family were unaware that Saumya could have been molested in their own home by their servant and they would be unable to hold him accountable through the legal system. Ranjana was prevented from filing a police report against the molester by her parents. They claimed that the family's honor and izzat had already suffered enough humiliation due to Saumya's stigmatized situation, and they could not afford to further damage it with the help of the police. In addition, Ranjana was blamed for the incident stating that she was unable to balance her responsibilities at work and home.

In traditional Indian society, children become their mothers' entire duty. Mothers who care for a disabled child may experience physical and mental exhaustion particularly if they are not receiving assistance from other family members or the community and may experience social isolation, which lessens their opportunities for social interaction and support. The costs of raising a disabled child can be high and include costly medical care, specialized equipment, and therapy. Mothers frequently have to balance these costs, occasionally putting their personal needs last with their household budgets. Furthermore, they find it difficult to continue in their careers also because of the time and energy needed for caring for others. This may have an adverse effect on their long-term financial security and professional development by forcing them to take on part-time work, interrupt their career, or quit their job entirely.

Disabilities that affect communication, such as speech or cognitive impairments, can make it harder for victims to express what has happened to them or to be believed when they do report abuse. This happens due to lack of education and awareness. Disabled girls are less credible or that their abuse is less serious, which can result in a lack of appropriate response from authorities and the community.

Stereotypes

There are many misconceptions about people with disabilities, which frequently lead to prejudice, marginalization, and mistreatment of those who have impairments. Despite their ability and capability for independence, people with disabilities are often perceived as helpless, pitiful objects of sympathy that depend completely on others for their daily needs and survival. They possess less physical and cognitive aptitude or competence, which could result in fewer opportunities for training and employment as well as lower expectations. Since they are a burden to their family and society, they may feel guilty or ashamed.

Seeing as how everyone else at the Asha Jyoti Christmas party was dressed immaculately, except for her, Anupurbha may have felt uncomfortable or degraded. It appears that her worry arose from her conviction that appropriate clothing was necessary to honor the event and the regional customs or traditions, and she saw the neglect of this aspect as inconsiderate to the occasion and its importance. Anupurbha was surprised by what other people were wearing to the event because she normally wears bright colors and accessories to match. She had thought carefully about what to dress to honor the occasion and the individuals involved, so she felt much more self-conscious about her appearance than normal and "dressed down for a happy event in a sad place" (16). Shobha, who usually dresses elegantly and casually, looked amazing for the event. Her modest yet elegant look complemented the general mood and brought attention to the variety of ways others dressed for the event. The embroidered raw-silk sari, the big black eyes with makeup, and the gold bracelets around her thin wrists all enhanced her tall and attractive appearance. Anubprabha was thinking about a lot of questions, such as "All this for the Christmas party? But wasn't this a place for people with disabilities? How could Shobha have come so elegantly dressed with kohl in her eyes, to a place of sorrow, of disability? (17)

After recognizing her mistake, she felt embarrassed about her own stereotypes about persons with disabilities. However, the warm environment of the Asha Jyoti showed how different people, beliefs, and points of view can all work together to create a welcome environment that is

enjoyable for everyone. Even though Anupurbha was dressed inappropriately for the occasion, But she was at ease in its varied simplicity because of the nonconforming diversity of the place.

Due to deeply ingrained stereotypes and societal attitudes, people with disabilities frequently find it difficult to relate disability with fun, enjoyment, or partying because disabilities have been portrayed in media and literature primarily as sources of pity, tragedy, or inspiration rather than as part of a normal, diverse human experience. It is also common for people with disabilities to be underrepresented in situations that are linked to fun and enjoyment, such as media representations, ads, and public events; when they are featured, it is typically in contexts that are serious or inspirational rather than in regular, joyful activities. When Anupurbha saw Mrs. Mathur pleading with the special singer for the Christmas Party to perform a lively song and heard loud music playing at the school, she was shocked. She thought it was unbelievable that "Mrs Mathur began to dance, waving her arms in awkward exuberance. Everyone else seemed to have been waiting for that cue. Suddenly, it was like water being whipped into a wave. The children rose and a frenzy followed! There was no tune, no rhythm. Some feet fell in straight steps, others were crooked. Some hands were waved in deliberate gestures; others seemed to have a will of their own! Those who were strapped to wheelchairs were unable to dance, but they moved forward, heads shaking rhythmically, and they screamed and shrieked (21)."

Conclusion

This literature review aims to determine how disabled people are portrayed in society, it concludes that disabilities are widespread and that individuals with disabilities are frequently encountered in society. Additionally, the marginalization and isolation experienced by individuals with disabilities in all age groups and cultural

situations are highlighted by these portrayals. They were viewed as the "other," even whether they followed social norms, were considered normal or socially acceptable men, or were acting out a role. It is society's responsibility to accept these people and provide them a place in the culture. This acceptance will lead to an improvement in the psycho-social status of those with disabilities.

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