

A Portrayal of Disabled in Selected Novels of Firdaus Kanga, Indra Sinha

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Abstract

Disability is not a curse but it's a challenge to the physically and mentally challenged people of the society chosen by almighty. Disability means physical or mental limitation of people what keeps them away from mainstream of life. It might be by fatal or accidental. However one should have the capacity to accept the challenge and fight for it. But society has biased norms and perspectives about disabled who do not easily accept them. Here the thesis doesn't attempts to gain the sympathy from the readers but it centers on empathy what would change the prejudiced social attributes and voice for inner freedom of voiceless people. Disability studies majorly focuses on the themes such as identity struggle, isolation, alienation, physical limitation, fear and inner freedom etc. Disability has remained a relatively less significant area of study and research as compared to other modern approaches like feminism, Marxism, post colonialism, gender studies and women studies etc. Many literary texts which talks on disability written at local, national and global level. This thesis focuses on disabilities portrayed in Indian literature with the help of some literary texts Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*, and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*,

Keywords: disabled, depression, society, identity, able-bodied, marginalization, emotional & mental disability etc.

There are some research papers and articles on the selected topic, but there is neither any specific study on the topic nor research project. Therefore it is one of the prime thoughts to pay attention on untouched sphere of the literature. Here are some literary texts of some writers what lights on disability.

In the play "Adhe Adhure" by Mohan Rakesh, various disabilities are depicted, both physical and psychological. These disabilities reflect the characters' struggles and the complexities of human relationships. The characters often grapple with feelings of isolation, insecurity, and existential angst. Their emotional struggles can be seen as a form of psychological disability, impacting

their relationships and sense of self. There are various literary texts including poems, dramas novels and short stories what talks on disabilities. Here are some poems written by Arun Koltakar, Kamala Das, Nissiem Ezekiel, comments on societal neglect and marginalization towards disabled people. In Arun Kolatkar's poem, *Old Women* the poet portrays an elderly, disabled woman begging at a temple. Kolatkar uses this character to comment on social indifference and the marginalization of the elderly and disabled. It reflects on the life of a disabled beggar, using the character to highlight societal neglect, indifference, and the human suffering that often goes unseen in busy urban life. Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*

is a landmark novel in the portrayal of disability in Indian literature. It is both a personal and fictionalized exploration of growing up with a rare bone condition (osteogenesis imperfect). In 2010, Jayanti Prakash from university of Delhi has completed her Ph.D thesis titled a study of inclusive education practices for children with disabilities in selected states of India, focuses on learning disabilities of children.

Firdaus Kanga is an Indian author, journalist, actor, and disability rights activist known for his work that explores themes of disability, identity, and resilience. He was born with osteogenesis imperfect a genetic disorder commonly known as brittle bone disease. This condition made his bones fragile and prone to fractures. Despite the physical challenges posed by his condition, Kanga pursued his education in Mumbai later moved to London for further studies. Kanga's *Trying to Grow* is a semi-autobiographical novel written in 1990 which was later adapted into the film *Sixth Happiness* (1997), in which he also played the lead role.

Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* is a milestone novel in the portrayal of disability in Indian literature. It is both a personal as well as fictionalized exploration of growing up with a rare bone condition (osteogenesis imperfecta). Here sheds light on the portrayal of disability engages with themes of identity, societal stigma, emotional struggle. The novel revolves around the protagonist Brit Kotwal who experiences an immense of disability in his life. Rather than treating Brit's disability as a marginal or incidental characteristic, the novel emphasizes how it fundamentally shapes his life.

Brit's physical vulnerability and frequent fractures are a constant presence in the narrative, It confronts the readers with the harsh realities of the life experiences of Brit of his day today life.

The protagonist of the novel, Trying to Grow, in his early years are marked by physical challenges and the societal prejudices related with the disabilities. He has to suffer a lot of harsh comments by the social members. However, he ignores at and just focuses on his life. He never blames to the destiny for the disability but accepted it as a challenge. He convinced himself to fight against of it. Though people criticize at him many times, he never get demotivated by instead he motivates himself and become always ready to attend criticism. In the nutshell, protagonist accepted his disability in positive manner.

The novel not only talks on disability of the character but also individual physical pain from which he has to go through at every moment. He experienced the fracture of bones due to his fragile and delicate bones. He has to suffer the problem at sitting, eating and at doing any kind of action but still Brit was strong one. The tension between Brit's desire for autonomy and his family's protective instincts highlights how disability is understood and treated within different cultural frameworks.

Indra Sinha is a prominent British-Indian author known for his powerful narratives that often address social issues, environmental concerns, and the complexities of identity. *Animal's People* is a notable novel written in 2007 by Indra Sinha which explores disability, trauma, and resilience in the wake of an industrial disaster. Sinha's writing is characterized by a

deep empathy for marginalized voices, often blending personal and political themes.

Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* discuss a powerful representation of disability through its protagonist, Animal. Indra Sinha's *Animal* focuses on a physically deformed character named animal. He is a disaster survivor who has been left physically deformed. The reason was, when the disaster industrial disasters occur in his area where he was residing at Khaufpur, it made a great impact on the personal life of the area where the protagonist of this novel suffered a lot. He had to struggle at every phase of life. While living the life in the society, he has to face plenty of problem. Actually he looked like animal, how animal walks on their four legs likewise the protagonist is also crippled at his wrist and his two forehand just get changed into the legs like animals. He balances his whole body portion on hands and leg while walking like animal. He has accepted the challenge given by the destiny but one feels very bad the treatment which is given by the society to him as well as the political corruption which is done in the society. The ignorance shown by the society creates many questions in his mind which torture him a lot. We get to see not only physical deformity but also the representation of the disabilities. So here the protagonist is not trying to gain the sympathy or empathy from the people or readers but he expects the consideration & understanding from them.

This character not only embodies the physical consequences of a catastrophic industrial disaster but also serves as a poignant critique of societal attitudes toward disabled individuals. By examining Animal's narrative voice, agency, and the

intersectionality of his identity, Sinha crafts a multifaceted portrayal that challenges stereotypes and highlights resilience amidst adversity. At the heart of the narrative is Animal's physical disability, which results from the release of toxic waste into his community. The imagery of a young man who walks on all fours is a striking manifestation of his dislocation from societal norms. This physicality is not merely a personal affliction but symbolizes the broader environmental and social injustices that permeate his existence. Sinha uses Animal's body as a site of suffering, but also of resilience, showcasing how his very way of moving through the world serves as a constant reminder of the trauma inflicted upon his community.

With help of Animal's character, Sinha provides a biting social commentary on the attitudes toward disability prevalent in society. Through the lens of Animal's experiences, the novel critiques the tendency to view disabled individuals as burdens or objects of sympathy. Sinha shows how society marginalizes those with disabilities, often overlooking their inherent strength and resilience. Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* shows the journey of a disabled person, how he has to survive in the society. He had to struggle a lot in the society even though he never accepted the failure but continuously fought against the circumstances; he never blamed that destiny but he accepted the challenge of life. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* offers a critical representation of disability through the character of Animal, challenging stereotypes and inviting a deeper engagement with complex themes of identity, resilience, and social justice. By presenting a nuanced and

multifaceted disabled character, Sinha critiques societal norms while celebrating the strength and humanity of those often marginalized in literature and life. Through *Animal*, the novel compels readers to confront their own perceptions and recognize the rich tapestry of experiences that define the disabled community.

Here the research paper doesn't center on to get sympathy from the readers but the

empathy what help to physically and mentally challenged people to feel energetic to live the life. It also lights on the mental health awareness and need for timely intervention and support system. It shows the journey presented as the journey towards self-acceptance and healing. Additionally the it also reflects on how the societal stigma and lack of understanding about such type of people who suffer from the mental disability get ill treatment.

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