



One little Finger: Beyond Body and Disability Empowerment

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Abstract: Disability is controversial term which revolves in literary discourse. It is a social as well as cultural product that certain people with mental and physical deformities are instantly identified as 'disabled'. Like the gender discrimination, the terms, 'disability' and 'ability' are the societal and attitudinal outcome. The concept of 'disability', 'ability', 'impaired', and 'retarded' is deeply rooted in human history. Since the day of The Mahabharata, The Ramayana, the discrimination and segregation between 'ability and 'disability' evokes a lot of controversy raising the question, who is able, who is disable, who decide and what are the parameters. It is the social hypocrisy that discards certain people having some physical deformities as 'disable'. They are kept beyond all kinds of social, educational and professional privileges. Disabled people are supposed to be the curse of society and are thought as the retribution of their sin in past life. This paper aims to explore the relevance of One Little Finger by Malini as a pioneering work to look estimate life beyond body and empower the disabled class.

Keywords; Disability, discourse, deformities, impaired, hypocrisy, empower.

Received 23 Feb., 2024; Revised 02 Mar., 2024; Accepted 04 Mar., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

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I. Introduction:

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 'disability is defined as 'a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions'. Disability is an umbrella term that covers all kinds of mental and physical deformities. It is not the current phenomena that make us think but along with the human history, the prevalence of disability and its inherent pain and suffering makes us stunned. Since pre-historic era or with the wake of human civilization, people with ability and disability are seen in every strata of society. The body politics remain inherent in society's psychic domain. Body draws politics and causes discrimination in attitude and behaviour. 'Every individual is a complex mixture o characteristics. One attribute cannot describe teh entire person but accentuating problems and deficits can create a subtle negative web o expectations about that individual (Saleebey). The differentiation of black bodies and white bodies, crippled bodies and straight bodies, small bodies and tall bodies, well-formed bodies and deformed bodies is the social discrimination that causes segregation from the social, political and cultural and academic privileges.

Malini Chib is one of the pioneering female figure with spastic disability from her birth. Despite her disability, she surmounts all the obstacles of her life being disabled and establishes herself as an independent one in the so-called abled world.

Born in 1966 in Kolkata in an Indian family, Malini Chib suffered from the insufficient supply of oxygen in her brain during her birth. Later, it caused cerebral palsy and turned her into 'disabled'. Her parents took her to London to get cured of it. With least hope, she started to cope up with her physical deformities. She was admitted to Thomas Delarue School, a special school for pupils of cerebral palsy. On returning India, she got admitted to St. Xavier's College and completed her bachelor degree. She went back to England to get a master's degree in Gender Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London. At present she is a Senior Events Manager at Oxford Bookstore in Mumbai.

One Little Finger is the autobiography of Malini Chib- a woman, who defied all odds to emerge victories in spite of a crippling disability and an indifferent society; who dragged herself out of the limits of her

condition. This is the story of her search for independence and identity, and her zeal to live a full, meaningful life despite disability. As life becomes a tear and a smile for her, Malini tells us the story of her heroic battle against adversity, prejudices stigmas, and stereotypes.

After few months of her birth, doctors declared that she might not be normal as others. The very word 'handicapped' traumatized the entire family, 'thought that I was mentally handicapped. (Chib 04). Her mother was a woman with strong will did not give up hope. She met every doctor in India and but result stood the same:

'Every doctor my parents met in India told them that I would be a vegetable and nothing could be done for me. The doctors confidently told them that the damage to my brain was irreversible'" (Chib 5).

Malini gets contacted with society and she gradually started confronting the harsh realities of society that starts to treat her in a different way, 'I began to put my head down, terribly conscious of myself and the fact that i was different from others (Chib 6). Her body becomes her identity and people started treating her as 'other'. She had the incapability of speaking but she had finer knowledge of perception and comprehension to her surroundings,

'I did have irreversible brain damage but I was not mentally handicapped. In fact, i was normal and above average in intelligence (Chib 9).

She starts living as an individual with 'an intelligent mind with a disobedient body'. Admitted in children's Hospital in Bombay, she faced the indiscriminate behaviour there. She collapsed in pain and the reiterate questions stir her,

'I wonder why they were so negative about me (Chib 1).

With her contact with society, she gathers confident to come out of these social and institutional obstacles. She started valuing disability,

'And I was fixed and expected to fit in a round peg hole. If one was disabled, it was expected o him or her to overcome their disability and fit into the able world.' (Chib 3)

Malini with weak body and strong mentality started to surmount her body and determines to establish herself as an independent one. On receiving an electric wheelchair, she became unassisted,

'For the first time I could move large distances unassisted. I was not dependent on any one' (Chib 45)

On completion of Secondary and Higher Secondary education, Malini got admitted to St. Xavier's College in Mumbai. She faced the same treatment of isolation and humiliation. None could assume that she had the sense of feeling and perception. The difference between 'able' and 'disable' prevails everywhere, that hits her most, "I most certainly did. I think it was in Xavier's where the differences hit me". (Chib 51)

Societal attitude to the persons with disability stands everywhere the same irrespective of caste, creed, religion, and location. Malini has an enduring mind not to submit to her disability but learns and determines how to get out of these physical and social obstacles. She did not have the good beginning but her realisation and learning make her strong to be independent,

'It was not good beginning, but i eventually realized that I must be determined to fight. I would show them that, except for my body, I was just like them. I was not going to give up (Chib 55).

Society is culturally constructed and the discrimination between able and disable is cultural product like that of gender. The question that strikes Malini, who is normal, who is abnormal, what is the parameter, who decides and what should be the social standard. Malini introspects on all these ambiguous social issues and encourages herself to fight against all these social odds and prejudices prevalent in society. She stood first in graduation and proved her an intelligent one.

Despite her speech deformities, she has sense of feeling, perception, passion, emotion and romantic adoration. She wonders if anyone would come of her age and treats with as normal with hands of adoration.,

"I wondered if there would ever be a man in my life. Would a man see beyond my body? Would any one put their arms around me and dance with me? Would anyone kiss me passionately? Would i ever be needed by a man emotionally or would i always be regarded as a burden for someone to take care of?" (Chib 65)

On arriving Bombay on receipt of a job as a Senior Events Manager at Oxford Bookstore, Malini spreads revolutionary steps for empowerment of disable people in Mumbai. In India, the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act was passed in 1995 ensuring the equality to the disable persons. In practical, the difference remains the same. Malini along with some social activists fought against this inequality,

"We believed that both 'able and 'disable should work together to form an inclusive society where all are welcome and included (Chib 187)'.
In 2004, the disables were denied access to participate in Mumbai Marathon. The rules of the marathon states,

No wheelchair vehicles or dogs allowed on the course (Chib 188).

Unimaginable yet the issue is true. Malini formed groups and agitated for their right participate in event. They approached to Mr. Sunil Dutt, the then Sports Minister at the Centre. Rules were revised and wheelchair users were included in the event. It was the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon for the first time in Indian.

Malini Chib through journey not only exposes the unimaginable realities but also fixes her journey as inspirational one which definitely encourages the persons with disabilities. Disability should not be treated as one's burden or an obstacle rather it should be taken as challenging which one should overcome to secure identity and independence. She decodes the idea of disability. Malini Chib is a role model, who looks life beyond body and always fights against the tide of obstacles and establishes herself in a secure place in society. Her fight against the social prejudices is a landmark in empowering the disable persons.

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