

Published on 14, July-2025

ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

Conceptualizing Disability in Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* and Christy Brown's *My Left Foot*

A. Saleth Vensus Kumar

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Sri Krishna Arts and Science College,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Dr. M. Richard Robert Raa

Research Supervisor & Associate Professor,
Nehru Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The society is constructed of a group of people living as a community for a common purpose, but the society is controlled by the mainstream community of people by diminishing a group of people in terms of race, colour, caste, gender and disability. Every society views a disability as a symbol of sin, and people all over the world segregate the disabled and banish them from society. The disabled are just like human beings, interested in mingling with society, engaging in regular conversation and sharing their ideas and suggestions. The disabled are rejected from all their desires just because they are disabled. Malini Chib is one of the disabled victims from India, where she was not accepted by the mainstream society of India. The present research paper will investigate the level of consciousness of mainstream society towards disability. This research paper will also examine two literary works *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib and *My Left Foot* (1954) by Christy Brown and discusses the themes of love, desire and longing.

Keywords: Disability, Society, Marginalization, Love, Relationship

1. Introduction

The society is an enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another, but the society is controlled by the mainstream community of people by diminishing a group of people in terms of race, colour, caste, gender and disability. World Health Organization quotes Disability as...

A physical, mental, sensory, intellectual, or developmental problem that substantially limits an individual's capacity to carry out everyday tasks is referred to as a disability. Inheritable or acquired disabilities can impact self-care, mobility, communication, and other daily living domains. (WHO 2001)

1.1 Social Structures

Durkheim argued that "these social facts are crucial for maintaining social order and cohesion" (Durkheim 1895). According to Marx, social structures and institutions serve the interests of the ruling class, which causes tensions between various social groupings. He stressed that these conflicts- especially those resulting from economic exploitation- are what propel society change (Marx & Engels 1848). Blumer emphasized that "individual's act based on the meanings things have for them, which are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation." (1969) E.B. Tylor describes culture

as: "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (1871)

1.2 Social Hierarchy vs Culture

A culture is the construct of several components commencing from a society's people, beliefs, ideologies and principles to the conduct of the values emerging out of them. "Social hierarchies are embedded within the fabric of culture, influencing and being influenced by cultural practices and norms." (Giddens 1984) The social order or hierarchy created by society relegates certain sections of the society to the extent that they are considered beyond the periphery of the society.

1.3 What is Disability?

World Health Organisation Defines "Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations." (2021)

Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness. Every society views disability as a symbol of sin, particularly in India, disability is regarded as a result of sin, bad karma and retribution to some kind.

From one generation to the other, there has been a progression in the way people perceive the disabled. The latter have been thought as outcaste, as people different from the mainstream people; and were subjected to biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes; were looked upon (down) as pitiful individuals who were unfit and unable to contribute to society, or the family; they were ridiculed and for some, they were objects of entertainment. (Kedia)

People always look at the people with disabilities with sympathy, suspicion and disgust, the disabled people are often excluded from the society to segregate them from being included with the society. Human society is fond of connecting with people of the same colour, race, gender and caste, whereas the disabled are not an exception as they are different from the normal. Though the disabled people are different from the mainstream society, they are interested to mingle with the society, engage in regular conversation and share their ideas

and suggestions. But they are perceived as lacking in desire and broken or damaged.

However, in recent years, disabled people have begun to challenge their victimization and marginalization and inscribe themselves in the cultural mainstream through their voluntary inclusion and some renowned achievements in their areas of knowledge. "I am a million, million silences". (Kamala Das 1981) Despite the disabled people having attained success, they are not systematically included into the society and their feelings towards success, relationship and inclusion are not understood by the mainstream through the perspectives of the disabled. As Kamala Das states in her poem *Someone Else's Song*, some of the disabled voices are being heard and understood through the writings of the disabled.

The Indian society is not ready to change and also to accept the changes. The society has been pampered and taught about the system and the structure, when the structure is altered, changed or missed, they are not accepted. All human wishes to attain perfection, the perfection is not through being perfect, but by the words from others as 'perfect', as we are all greatly addicted to the opinion of others. When someone wishes to change or to accept the changes, they are really afraid of the society, as they have been connected with the system. The perspective of society towards the changes is because of their limitation of knowledge. As Alexander Pope has said, little learning is a dangerous thing, here, the society is not ready to learn even a little, they restrict themselves with that knowledge that they possess.

Socially acknowledged people always care about their lifestyle and live for the society, but the deprived or the deceased people always care about their livelihood for the day. Being part of the society is always a dream for the people, rather they have always thought of excluding themselves from the society. Self-exclusion is more dangerous than forced exclusion, as it leads to psychological trauma rather than physical trauma. Individual person always cares for himself. Whatever will be his problem, he will consider and imagine himself as a hero always, they too have their own love and relationship too, but the society always raises a question: do they also love? and how can they love? Society always treats the disabled people as an object, not as an ordinary human being. Society wants disabled people to rely on someone, not to stand on their own.

1.4 Marginalization

Marginalization is comprehensively defined and discussed in the context of social justice and inequality. As stated by sociologist Peter Leonard "Marginality is the condition of being on the margins of social, economic, and political life, resulting from structural forces in society which act to keep certain groups in a subordinate position." (1984) J. Smith declares, "Marginalization is the process by which individuals or groups are relegated to the fringe of society, reducing their opportunities for economic and social advancement." (2015)

As Young states, "The marginalized are often rendered invisible and voiceless within the dominant social structures, their needs and rights overlooked." (1990) Because marginalized individuals find it difficult to make their voices heard and to stand out for their rights in a system that regularly ignores them, their invisibility feeds a vicious cycle of disadvantage. The effects of marginalization are extensive and wide-ranging, impacting people's growth and well-being. Unequal access to jobs, healthcare, education, and other necessities is a result of marginalization. Fraser notes that "The persistence of marginalization reveals the limitations of mainstream economic and social policies in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable." (2008) Thus, addressing marginalization requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that considers the intersecting dimensions of social exclusion.

2. One Little Finger

The love towards one person always makes the people risk themselves at any point to satisfy the other. In the sense of personality, the disabled people are being loved by someone, and they are ready to sacrifice even their happiness to make the loved one happy.

Zubin was always perfectly comfortable with me. It is because he understood my speech completely and was one of those few human beings who did not need another person to escort me when we spent time together. (Chib, 2011, p. 90)

Malini was a handicapped person with the added disability of poor speech. When the person is unable to walk, he could ask for some help from the people, but for Malini, she needed the help of someone to ask for help too. In such a situation Zubin, friend of Malini understood her completely, not the words she speaks, but what she thinks and feels. Human beings are always attributed with

negative thoughts, and negativity attracts more than positivity. The society doesn't care about the people and their feelings, rather it looks into the people with their own perspective, rather than the individuals. The individual is obsessed with their own problems, identification, and personification but the society looks into the character as how they like to view upon.

The society doesn't even treat the people in an equal way, the people are split into many groups based on various reasons, such as, nation, religion, region, colour, caste and gender. Absolutely there is a difference based on these categories, but the common ideas of human beings are rejected comparing with the other ideas. "I hated being on a wheelchair because I felt disabled." (Chib, 2011, p. 38) The people with disability have never been trying to create sympathy and grab the attention of the public, rather, the society shows the sympathy not because of the love, care and affection on the disabled people, but rather on the society. The people have started to live for the society not for themselves.

Chib, in the beginning, is talking more on the society as how she wished to be treated and included in all the occasions, but in the later part of her book, "As I grew older, I naturally desired sex and a relationship." (Chib, 2011, p. 146) talks about the relationship, both emotional and physical, she was in need of. A human being will be alive when he or she is properly living in this society, but when there is a restriction in any aspect, the life will become miserable, whatsoever the person is willing for, must be accomplished in any one of days with their struggle, but, if the chance is not provided with the reason of disability, the fundamental rights are not shared equally by the society.

Disability is a part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. No one can claim to be perfect, because, everything is not possible by everyone. "I was left alone with my thoughts. The realization that I would be disabled all my life dawned upon me, I had always imagined that when I grew up, I would be normal." (Chib, 2011, p. 66).

The perspectives towards the life decides the life in most of the situations, if one person is different from others, the society either glorifies them or throws them out of the society, not even given the chance to explain. Sometimes, the people with disabilities have begun to live for the others. "I began to verbalize my pain of being and copying

in a normal world.” (Chib, 2011, p. 72) They are forced to imagine that the other people are always correct, the way they walk, talk and mingle with the society. When they are not able to make it in the very same way, they are not included into the society, sometimes they are forced for voluntary exclusion out of the inferior feeling.

3. My Left Foot

Human mind is always occupied with the preconceived notions before learning it, starts with the expectation and imagination towards it. The eagerness and love towards, creates the image, but when it is unravelled, the love and eager starts to fade away as it does not meet with the imagination. Christy Brown was a born victim of cerebral palsy, he was not able to move on himself, he was left alone in the corner of the house, but he was pampered, given hope by his family members, the more support he gained from his mother. “She refused to accept this truth, the inevitable truth – as it then seemed – that I was beyond cure, beyond saving, even beyond hope. She could not and would not believe that I was imbecile, as the doctors told her.” (Brown, 1998, p. 10) Always, there will be a driving force which leads the soul in the direction of good or bad, in the case of Brown, it is his mother, who had been the advocate of Brown.

“Meeting my dream-girl was an event which for me had a unique chain of consequences. I was too young to know if my heart misbehaved itself in any way, and too young to notice it if it did, for at that age I centred my interest more in my left foot than in any other part of me - my heart included.” (Brown, 1998, p. 61) He was always worried about himself, than the reality. He was not excluded in anyway by his friends and family members, but he was preoccupied with the notions that he will be. His parents and himself, more worked on the left foot, never gave importance to the other parts of the body.

“I was always melodramatic and in those early attempts, not being content merely to ‘murder’ my characters, I murdered them in the stickiest way possible. Shooting them wasn’t enough, I sliced them up into little pieces and scattered their remains about. It was very gory.” (Brown, 1998, p. 86) He is not merely excluded from the society, rather he is left alone to think in perspective. It leads him to create the stories, in which he was speaking the unfulfilled desires and also murders the character in a cruel way possible to showcase the anger on himself and the body by slicing into pieces. It replicates the inner feelings of Brown, he

always craved to lead a life of a human being, but he was looked down by the other characters, though, he was included, but out of pity.

“I wanted friends, unsympathetic people of my own age to go about with.” (Brown, 1998, p. 86) He was expecting friends, the real friends, who mingle with him in all the occasions, treating in a usual way, but he only got the sympathizers on his disability, they only pitied on him rather than treating as a comrade. He belongs to a large family consisting of brothers and sisters, they cared for Brown, until they were to meet with their needs.

“I was in the midst of my great family, I felt outside of them, an ‘odd-man-out’. I couldn’t reach them; I couldn’t enter into the spirit that animated them. They may not have changed in reality, but in my eyes they had become more inaccessible and further beyond my reach. (Brown, 1998, p. 88). He felt like an ‘odd-man-out’, but in reality, it is not so, the inferiority in himself as he lost the confidence when he lost the dream girls from his life. His siblings never treated him in a different manner, but, when they live the life of their own, he cannot accept that he is not able to live in the way. He is imprisoned by his own ideas and thoughts as a disabled, he is longing to come out of the boundaries but he is not aware of his own life. He wishes to taste the freedom but he doesn’t know the way out. Every human being is having a purpose of living, Brown is always thinking of the purpose, though he is trying to accept the reality and make himself comfortable with the painting, writing and listening to the music, he could never overcome the thought of his disability and bounded within the limits. “Like a bird that had been set free for a while I felt as if I was about to be locked in my cage again.” (Brown, 1998, p. 103) The people always find the comfortableness only with their own set of people, that can be categorized by the gender, race, language, etc. Christy Brown also finds the cosiness only with people of afflicted, not with the normal people, he is not ready to mingle with his own family members as he did with the people in Lourdes. He doesn’t wish to part away from them, he feels that he will be put in prison, when he will be in home again.

4. Conclusion

Comparison is a basic instinct in all the human beings, if it has been compared in a productive manner, it would help the society to be generated but it always in an opposite manner, the negativity attracts and occupies the mind very quickly. The society comprises of many elements, the good as

well as bad, human beings and animals, etc. but the society never excludes the other in any means, but the human is always in search of reasons to discriminate and exclude the other. The exclusion causes the psychological trauma and results with the severe consequences as Brown murders his own characters in a cruellest way possible. Through an analysis of Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* and Malini Chib's *One Little Finger*, this paper provided insight into the various ways in which disability is conceived and portrayed. Both stories contradict popular assumptions and conventions while offering deep insights into the real-life realities of people with impairments.

In her autobiography, Malini Chib emphasizes the value of social inclusion and the right to self-determination while describing a compelling path of self-advocacy and empowerment. Chib's story emphasizes how important it is for people with disabilities to have supportive settings and adaptive techniques in order for them to reach their full potential. In the same way, Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* presents an inspiring picture of perseverance and creativity in the face of extreme physical constraints. Brown's narrative challenges social perceptions of handicap in addition to highlighting the value of individual perseverance and family support. Brown's story redefines what people with disabilities can achieve by showing that they can achieve remarkable things even in the face of severe physical limitations.

Together, these autobiographies contribute to a broader understanding of disability, shifting the discourse from one of limitation and deficit to one of possibility and strength. They advocate a more complex and compassionate understanding of disability, one that values the special talents and contributions of people with disabilities. Chib and Brown encourage readers to reconsider stereotypes about people with disabilities and to recognize the variety of ways people navigate and change their environments by sharing their own narratives.

Both *One Little Finger* and *My Left Foot* are groundbreaking books that powerfully critique societal conceptions of disability while simultaneously showcasing the writers' own personal victories. Their stories call for a reconsideration of how society views and deals with those who have impairments, promoting greater tolerance, compassion, and respect. Chib and Brown eventually encourage a rethinking of disability as an essential component of human variation and resilience through their gripping tales.

References

1. Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Prentice-Hall
2. Brown, Christy. (1998), *My Left Foot*, Vintage Books.
3. Chib, Malini. (2011), *One Little Finger*, Sage Publications.
4. Das, Kamala. (1981), *Someone Else's Song*. Orient Longman.
5. Deo, Tejaswini Nandkumar. (2022), Representation of Disability, Femininity and Sexual Agency in *One Little Finger* and *No Looking Back*. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol.10, Issue.3, pp.161-169.
6. Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.
7. Leonard, P. (1984). *Personality and Ideology: Towards a Materialist Understanding of the Individual*. Macmillan.
8. Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Classics.
9. Murray, Stuart. (2020), *Disability and the Posthuman: Bodies, Technology and Cultural Futures*, Liverpool University Press.
10. Slee, Roger. (2013), Meeting Some Challenges of Inclusive Education in an Age of Exclusion, *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July, pp. 3-17.
11. Smith, J. (2015), *the Marginalized: Understanding Social Exclusion*, New York: Academic Press.
12. Tylor, E.B. (1871), *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*. John Murray.
13. Vijayan, Geethu. (2021) *Disability Studies: A Path Breaking Approach in Literature*, *The Creative Launcher*, Vol.5, No.6, pp. 15-19.
14. World Health Organization. (2001), *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. World Health Organization.
15. Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.