International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences
Vol-11, Issue-2; Mar-Apr, 2026

Peer-Reviewed Journal
Journal Home Page Available: https://ijels.com/
Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Undoing Discriminations and Integrating Differences: Non-normative Paradigms of Disabled Women's Life Writings in India

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Received: 10 Mar 2026; Received in revised form: 07 Apr 2026; Accepted: 11 Apr 2026; Available online: 14 Apr 2026

Abstract**—** *Dominant discourses have often projected disability as a state of corporeal lack or a sentimental spectacle in desperate need of cure or at least, concealment. It is actually founded on certain social dichotomies which try to negate the scope of any enigmatic diversion of the body. The subcontinent's literary and imaginative archive had frequently framed physical deformities as easy metaphors to exhibit moral frailty, karmic fate or romanticized inspiration, rather than as a lived reality and a political identity. However, recent developments in the field of life writings have paved broader avenues for disabled Indians to portray their unique selfhoods along with sustained attention on issues of infrastructural barriers, attitudinal biases and legal rights. This paper will critically examine two such significant contemporary productions, namely One Little Finger (2011) by Malini Chib and The Other Senses (2012) by Preeti Monga. The authors not only diversify the paradigms of modern, neoliberal lives but also place disability in cultural alignment with other marginalized identities on analogous grounds of vulnerability and dependency- the most crucial being with femininity. They neither euphemistically deny the material pain of disabled people, nor resort to the overly deterministic techniques to represent them as heroic super-crips. This paper will attempt to place the prevalent models of disability studies within the Indian cultural context and assess how the aforesaid narratives navigate through the connected facets between gender and disability, promoting inclusivity and offering revaluation without collapsing into policy pamphlets.*

Keywords**— *Disabled bodies, patriarchal principles, self-representation, socio-cultural inequalities.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Disability, as an epistemic category, has always confounded scholars with it's multifaceted manifestations which persistently change with scientific and social developments. This thereby impedes any unambiguous or uniform definition. The United Nations convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD), a crucial human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, identified disability as a complex concept referring to "long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (United Nations, 2006, p. 3). The formally sanctioned benchmarks of disability vary over time and place, as do the allowances or concessions associated with them.

Disability is intricately entwined with the construction of 'normalcy', which means that majority of the population must or should adhere to it (quantitatively to be placed within the standard bell-shaped curve). This concomitantly brings forth the concept of deviation; and people with disabilities are classified under this non-conforming category. Propagating a generalized idea of the physically 'normal' in fact, overlooks the exceeding varieties exhibited by human bodies in actuality- whether in terms of size or shape, gesture or posture, habit or health. Setting a certain standard as an imperative may pass unnoticed for those who are able-bodied, but becomes immensely disadvantageous for those who are chronically ill or disabled.

II. DISABILITY LIFE WRITING AS AN EMERGING CORPUS FACILITATING INCLUSION

During the last three decades, activist campaigns and academic investigations much expanded the periphery of disability studies and sought to promote impactful political, philosophical and literary frameworks in relation to it. It thus contributed to the popularization of disability life writing, aiming to produce alternative emancipatory spaces for such people hitherto subjugated. As an overarching domain, life-writing blurs the traditional generic boundaries between diverse modes of self-representation; encompassing a purposeful documentation of one's ethos, emotions, observations and introspections. It exhibits subjectivity as a complicated phenomenon marked by fragmentation and flux. Disabled masses are increasingly espousing this compositional method as a way of preserving their lived realities, of revamping their identities through more minute, meaningful and empowering textual orientations than the existing ones. They offer opportunities of creative re-imagining and construct reciprocal connections with the normative readers who usually tend to have a limited and linear understanding of their non-normative counterparts due to a dormant fear. Hence, "To represent disability is to engage oneself in an encounter with that which is believed to be off the map of 'recognizable' human experiences. Making comprehensible that which appears to be inherently unknowable situates narrative in the powerful position of mediator between two separate worlds."(Mitchell & Snyder, 2001, p. 6)

Life-writings lend critical insights on the rampant socio-economic inequalities associated with any physical aberration and also analyze strategies of redressal. For disabled women, these questions are again laden with patriarchal regulations of desirability, marriage and reproduction. Already marginalized on gendered grounds, their actual discomforts were much more aggravated by others' reluctant or repulsive behaviors. Foundational critic of this field, Garland-Thomson argues, "Disability life-writing repeatedly attests that adjusting to an acquired impairment is not as difficult as adjusting to the stigmatization and lowered social status that comes from moving into the community of the disabled. Virulent biases and negative associations discourage one from identifying as disabled. Accomplished women who have physical, mental or psychological impairments not infrequently flee the category, sometimes proclaiming proudly that they are not "disabled". Nevertheless, a positive identity politics for women with disabilities is nascent, even though not as developed as the early black-is-beautiful racial politics, cultural feminism, or more recent queer pride movement."(2005, p. 1567)

III. DISABILITY AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT IN INDIA

Disability is a cross-cultural phenomenon, meaning that it can be seen everywhere. Nonetheless, its representational parameters and repressive regimentations may differ according to the contextual specifications- "What varies between societies are the individual characteristics by which a person is identified as disabled, and how these characteristics affect the possibility of playing a certain social role."(Siri, 2020, p. 4) In India, since ancient times, the prevalent response towards disabled or crippled people had not been much favorable. Several ideologies were promulgated to justify maltreatment against them. In a caste-ridden set-up fueled by superstitious dogmas, disability was often reified as a detrimental punishment meted out to counterbalance one's misdeeds committed in previous birth. "The theory of Karma was instrumental in depriving the disabled of their inherent right to lead an independent life. It was believed that the disabled were reaping what they had sowed (sic) in lives bygone and any attempt to ameliorate their lot would, therefore, interfere with this divine justice."(Bhatt, 1963, p. 96) Narrativizing disability as a form of retribution tended to transmit a stoic acceptance of 'cursed' destinies of the concerned people. They were held liable for their reincarnated afflictions, deemed as useless, unsightly beings and often debarred from participating in auspicious events. Sometimes the blame was also foisted onto the parents. Their fate was considered to be beyond redemptive possibility except any spiritual miracle. This pre-determined reference of past sins as remotely shaping their present experiences also closed down the ways of interpreting external factors like underage motherhood, deficient healthcare facilities or lasting impoverishment as substantial reasons directly or indirectly leading to a disability. "Historically in India as elsewhere in the world, there has been a deep-rooted cultural antipathy to persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages the disabled have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they are sub-human. They have been portrayed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden on family and society"(Addlakha, 2011, p. 9).

Numerous mythological and literary characters, who harbored some wicked dispositions or moral corruptions, were shown to be with some kind of different bodily appearance. Consequently, any deformity came to be seen as shameful embarrassment, as a disruption of purity.

However, as gradually the modern era hurled in, these currents of moral/religious model were changed and disabilities began to be viewed as problematic conditions requiring mandatory corrections or remedies. This approach led to the formulation of the medical model which equated disability with self-deficiency and focused solely on the predicaments faced at personal level, taking no account of the deep-rooted social discrimination. This model located both the roots and solutions of the disability within the body of the individual, basically aiming to detect the issue using factors emerging from the socially mediated archetype of normativity. Not surprising therefore, like any other minority category, disabled people also incorporate negative perceptions about themselves to varied degrees. They are, as Anita Ghai opines, "constantly in a mental state of deferral, awaiting the day the body will not just be mended but cured. Until then, the disabled tend to impersonate the able-bodied" (2015, p. 2). She proceeds with affirming that obsessive pursuits of complete cure, which the medical model preaches, nonetheless often turn out to be futile even after costly processes consuming an unwarranted amount of effort and time (p.3). This model came under sustained scrutiny as the activist dimensions grew and began to be criticized for incorrectly representing disability as a fixed condition. The affected people were viewed solely through a lens of patienthood, and rendered "as passive and powerless targets of intervention through non-disabled expertise. For the DRM (Disability Rights Movement), this reduces the person and his or her experience to an essentially 'abnormal' and 'lesser-than' medical condition" (Smith, 2010, p. 16). On the other hand, the more recent social model redefined disability as an arrangement of collective oppression which is a deterrence of scopes spawned by complex social functioning using stereotypical behaviors and structural hindrances. This model has been very effective to intelligibly put forward the agendas of social change associated with disability.

IV. GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF DISABILITY

Although it is indubitable that a disabled individual, whether man or woman, has to go through bureaucratic harassment, professional discrimination and financial sufferings, it is often perceived that the dual oppression unevenly impacts the second one. Many interdisciplinary scholars have extensively corroborated this opinion. As Wendell puts it, "I want to say that having a disability usually gives a person experiences of a world different from that of people without disabilities, and that being a woman with a disability usually gives a person different experiences from those of people who are not female and disabled"(1996, p. 73) . The principles of normality, chiefly those which are associated with feminine aspects, are actually extrinsically imposed and perpetually regulated, but most often presented as natural and any slippage from these standards contributes to the the status of otherness and hinders social acceptability. Thus, disabled women are accorded minimal scopes, hurled back to domestic sphere and more often seen as objects of pity or charity than a male going through analogous feebleness of body or mind. Precisely, it is from the birth of a baby that cultural ascriptions of gender come into operation. "What this means for a female infant is that from the first moments of life she is ushered into and assigned a place in a system of rules, roles and meanings. This system is perhaps better thought of as a code with one overriding, relentless feature: a woman's position is denigrated, undervalued and organized around absence or lack" (Harris & Wideman, 2009, p. 115). Femininity, like disability, is thus customarily made synonymous with conceptions of defect, defenselessness and ineptitude. Contemporary Indian disability scholars like Renu Addlakha, Anita Ghai, Asha Hans, Nandini Ghosh and Bhargavi Davar have used feminist principles to demonstrate types of similar oppression in both the groups. This method of finding complex causes of discriminatory practices which cast some minority groups to relentlessly unpleasant conditions, is noted as 'intersectionality' in academic domain. First developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s, this approach has since then been practiced in formulation of anti-racist and feminist policies. She employed this idea to reflect on the layers of disadvantage faced by black women; but the theorists above-mentioned endeavored to trace its relevance in the context of disabled women. Since turn of the century, a primary preoccupation of the feminist discourses has been to extensively illustrate the layered significance of relationships in women's lives. Following this line, such engagements steer through the unmapped ways of how disabled women proceed with their relationships.

According to the 2011 census report, there are approximately 2.68 crore people with disabilities in India, amongst which 1.18 crore (amounts to 44%) are women. It also indicates that 23% of this disabled female population are employed, whereas for males, the corresponding data is cited to be nearly double - 47%. Lesser working opportunities for women are caused chiefly due to lack of sufficient academic or vocational eligibility. A social scenario wherein patriarchal rules are persistently at work to justify subjugation of girls, having a disability further causes limitations in several domains, especially in the case of education. This thorough deprivation curtails their chances to nurture and to be nurtured, to desire and to be desired. Even traditional positions fade-out as far-fetched wishes for them; because they are considered unfit to take on both the reproductive roles assigned to a wife and the caregiving functions assigned to a mother. Additionally, there is a common misbelief that they will possibly pollute the genetic stock by producing weak offsprings. In Indian context, it is often seen that poor parents marry their disabled daughter off without revealing the truth. However, as soon as her condition gets exposed; the girl has to endure traumatic torture or in worst cases, abandoned or killed.

V. DISCUSSION OF THE TEXTS

Preeti Monga's *The Other Senses* (2012) records the struggles confronted by a blind woman. She opens the narrative with vividly cheerful reminiscences of her infancy that was spent in a picturesque hill-town nestled amidst Himalayas. As an exceptionally perceptive child, her memories brimmed with evocative visuals of the natural world, perhaps ironically reflecting on the fact that these vibrant landscapes were not to be seen by her for long. She continued to grow up as the adorned first-born of her parents, "frisking and frolicking like a stream flowing through green meadows under the crystal blue sky; joy, love and freedom was all mine." (Monga, 2012, p. 22) However, this blissful exuberance came to an end at barely six years of age when her constantly failing sight led to the detection of an unusual optic atrophy. After innumerable consultations with skilled doctors and unfruitful attempts of restoring the vision with trial glasses, her parents were left with no choice but to accept this condition to be medically untreatable. This disheartening discovery made her yet fascinating life to crumble down. She witnessed an abruptly altered behavior of mostly all her close or casual acquaintances. They, with dismal abjection and apathy, seemed to have transformed her into an oddly pitiful object. She was perplexed and tormented with this sudden change and felt culpable for committing some unspecified crime. Numerous exclusions that she faced thereafter, exhibit how 'normative' social order keeps on hindering a disabled person's endeavors of mainstream integration- either covertly or by adhering to thoroughly overt approaches. Commenting on the bigoted deprecations attributed to blindness in the cultural milieu, Ved Mehta, another acclaimed visually-challenged author, mentions- "Blindness was a fate reserved for beggars, certainly not something that the child of a well-to-do family would suffer."(1979, p. 319)

In Monga's case, the series of segregations began when her playmates contrived silly reasons to avoid taking her in and probably culminated when she was expelled from a prominent convent school on account of her impairment; irrespective of the fact that she was not performing poorly. This incident marked the end of her academic life. Already much encumbered with feelings of self-doubt, she shrieked under the gloomy glances and distressing misgivings from all quarters, familiar or unfamiliar. Her brother went on to school following his usual routine, however she could not. At nights, she used to weep profusely to disburden her wrenching pain. The opportunity of getting admitted to a special institution for blinds also slipped away, as her mother was staunchly unwilling to leave her girl in the school hostel; either due to safety issues or assuming that a disabled individual could not manage daily activities alone. Monga's rising anticipations of rejoining school and of making new friends were thus badly jeopardized: "I never had the courage to voice my feelings and thus diminished the ray of hope that had momentarily illuminated the darkness that engulfed my soul." (2012, p. 47) If disabled masses, especially those who are young women are deprived of the right to practice free will and are compelled to follow the decisions imposed by others partaking to inflexible surrounding situations, then it is to be asked whether they possess any individual autonomy of choices or not.

With the dreams of formal education shattered forever, Monga was instead persuaded to be trained in music. Although not greatly inclined towards this career choice, she had to diffidently comply as no convenient alternative was available. She embarked upon the way to become a performing artist and practiced for almost eight hours per day. Despite following such a rigorous routine for the next five years, she garnered the capacity to recognize the basic notations only; complicated compositions kept on befuddling her. Eventually her guru declared that she didn't have a natural ear for music, and hence it was highly unlikely that she could succeed much in this field. Her dreams were once again scattered into nothingness. Quivering with exasperation; she dropped down ideas of further courses and decided to marry instead. She became conscious of her blooming womanhood and fancied to have a handsome suitor but the blunt reminders of her impairment, coupled with the perturbation of having not so a 'slender figure' froze her with miserable indignation. She applied cosmetics, tried new hairdressing styles and spent hours to drape saris neatly- all with the aim of becoming a bit more appealing or perhaps to compensate for her bodily imperfections. In her first 'love affair', which consisted of merely two dull and depressing coffee-dates, it was she who mostly continued the conversation one-sidedly, with no sincere response from the man. Though this charade ended soon and endowed her with a broader perspective of courtship, it consumed her heart with an amplified longing for a doting partner. Her parents didn't seem to be very eager about finding a match for her: "There was no sign of husband-hunting for me. This was a bit strange, as it was a trend to marry off the daughters of the family as soon as possible. I wondered why was my turn not coming?" (Monga, 2012, p. 72). A wedding proposal arrived, offering her renewed optimism of finding love. The prospective bridegroom was an air force officer whose first wife had forsaken him for some undisclosed cause. Yet this information, which might have led to an uproar if the girl was able-bodied, didn't arouse any significant skepticism in Monga's case. Rather he was certified, without even one meeting, as being a truly generous man who despite being aware of her physical limitation, agreed to tie the knot. Although it was later revealed that he had married someone else all of a sudden without even informing them, this instance clearly signaled the cultural cliche of valorizing a male as almost a self-sacrificing saint who willingly gives his hand in matrimonial bond to a disabled girl. Monga was crestfallen, but there were further adversities ahead. She soon became smitten with her brother's acquaintance, an ebullient Anglo-Indian youth, who inundated her with affectionate assurances and unswerving commitments. He apparently displayed all the traits which Monga yearned for so long; and she finally married him with vivacious hopes. However, from the wedding night onwards her ecstasy changed into misery as her yet incredible and loving partner is revealed to be nothing but an insolent drunkard who spent his entire day vainly. He mercilessly assaulted her, threatened her and gradually hurled every possible mode of atrocity. Though she dared not to express any displeasure or even utter a word that might provoke his fury, the trail of torture continued, with an abominable mockery of her disability. Monga recounted how her tyrant husband used to pass stinging taunts and gave her "..an empty plate after rattling an empty serving spoon on it, then urge me to eat, saying with sarcastic mirth 'Here eat!' and when I put my hand on the plate searching for the food, he would have a hearty laugh…Hey you blind bat, he would yell, 'what do you think of yourself? You should thank your stars I married you…don't you all ever forget it', would be his favorite monologue." (2012, p. 105) She expected that his abuses would come to a pause after the birth of their two children, and of course, nothing of that sort ever happened. Her physical health also deteriorated and she began to suffer from repetitive panic attacks. For all economic expenses, her parents were held responsible and "He came and went as pleased, did exactly what he wished, regardless of how it might affect any one of us. Just to maintain peace at home, none of us dared to raise objections to anything he did or said." (Monga, 2012, p. 113) However, despite wrecking the family's life with horrible imprudence, Monga's snarling spouse seamlessly maintained the image of an absolutely ideal man; people outside their four walls adulated his wonderful propriety and advised Monga- "you can depend upon him with your life." (2012, p. 114)

Her initial years were of subdued silence and endurance. She undertook every effort within her power to maintain peace. However, her distress prolonged and it concomitantly brought out scopes of exercising agency. Her aching mind began to retaliate. She thought of earning on her own; but employment opportunities for unsighted people were much limited. It took almost a year of deliberate search to find a viable profession; and then she became fixated on the idea of running aerobic classes. It went with surprising success but her marital bond further deteriorated as her alcoholic and able-bodied husband could not stand with a disabled woman's newfound autonomy. His ruthless aggressions escalated beyond tolerance and Monga was accused of flying too high. She finally left him and came in contact with other blind people who unfurled a whole set of new possibilities for her. She is currently an empowerment coach, a fitness instructor and owner of a successful non-profit organization named Silver Linings. It provides blind girls with thorough guidance, works for their educational development and equips them with adequate skill-based training. As a transformative entrepreneur, she has been awarded many distinguished fellowships and national awards.

It is undeniable that Monga was emotionally much more harassed due to her disability; she was made fun of and even after gaining financial freedom, her husband unfalteringly continued with his bitter mistreatment, perhaps clinging on the same stereotyped belief that a disabled female is meant to be eternally subservient and dependent. Society creates further impediments for such women to survive with dignity alongside "non-defective" humans. She notes an incident to illustrate the terrible anxiety endured by a blind girl when placed under expectations of performance, especially under the scrutinizing stare of people who will right away bombard her with inessential sympathies at the demonstration of minutest incompetence. During a formal dining at an elite clubhouse, she trembled with the fear of not being able to deftly handle the cutlery and crockery. "I was no poor little thing and I would not allow any situation to evoke that feeling in anyone. I therefore gathered my senses together with a tremendous effort and managed to sit at the table looking quite composed."(Monga, 2012, p. 71) In such multifarious manners, disabled bodies are made to feel inferior, and society derogatorily stares at the human beings inhabiting those bodies; rejecting them full community memberships. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has theorized 'staring' as an ocular response or as an interrogative impulse towards the unusual. First-person testimonies and memoirs, through their intimate reflections and retort, reverse the stare. These works engage the readers in a circuit of dynamic, counter-hegemonic communication enabling a mimetic and reflexive substitution which shifts disability from images of fragility to discourses of power.

It is also to be observed that though disabled people may undergo isolation or insecurity in situations where they are the only ones with certain functional deficiency, they feel more comfortable, confident and competent in company of other similarly impaired fellows. This is indeed true for both men and women, but since women, whether adolescent or adult, tend to go through more restrictions and hindrances while encountering the outside world, such associations are of more pivotal importance for them. Hence Monga's exposure to other blind people boosted her dormant self-esteem and helped her much to move from reticence to resilience. Life writings thus assert the necessity of long-range objectives that may actively bring together disabled people for their empowerment, as happened in case of other marginalized communities.

Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* (2011), an iconic production in the field of life-writing, not only humorously challenges the stereotyped perceptions but puts disabled ambition at the center. It narrates the trials and tribulations of a spastic girl groping towards inclusivity in a society oblivious of her special needs. During a traumatic birth, her umbilical cord was strangulated, causing few seconds of oxygen depletion and this mishap left her with a lasting neurological condition called cerebral palsy. Following diagnosis, the infant's anxious parents were informed that her motor cells were irreversibly damaged and that she was destined to be nothing but a 'vegetable'- a labelling that Chib repeatedly refers to assert the mortifying vocabularies used and the grim misfortunes imagined for a disabled woman. While growing up, Chib was weak and suffered shortage of co-ordination in doing activities that needed physical skills like walking or playing, but she proved herself to be mentally competent, "an intelligent mind with a disobedient body." (2011, p. 9). People often treated her as a non-thinking individual, though she understood everything and her intelligence quotient came out to be better than average in a formal testing. Still, as a child intensely distraught with her physical differences, she mostly abstained from meeting outsiders and tried to pass unnoticed in order to avoid their apprehensive shuffles.

On numerous occasions, at college or workplace, Chib was denied participation, humiliated and ignored by peer groups. Friends often considered her as a problem, and hence tended to make plans of watching movies or going out for other enjoyable activities leaving her out. She was told, in a rather condescending manner, not to dance at the prom night- generally a much- awaited event involving fun and frisk; but the organizers somehow could not bear the visual of a girl with crutches twirling with the musical tunes. With dumbfounded embarrassment, she sat down quietly and watched her friends dancing with their male partners. Tears trickled down her face and a terrible feeling of dejection and doubt, which she rarely allowed to surface, weighed upon her: "I wondered if there would ever be a man in my life. Would a man see beyond my body?...would I always be regarded as a burden for someone to take care of?"(Chib, 2011, p. 65) Desires of companionship thus seemed to be unattainable to her, like many other females whose bodily comportment could not accord with conventional notions of beauty.

In the everyday interactive domain, especially during the teenage years, it is often seen that the disabled ones who tries more to establish familiar bonds or relations. For Chib, this process of integration was further complicated because of her severe speech deterioration. She could speak, but slowly and strenuously. So, she felt flustered for not contributing satisfactorily to the conversations like her classmates did, especially during the lectures. Tempo of life, which is usually not much noted by those who are able-bodied, turns out to be a vastly important issue for people like Chib. Previously being taught in special schools where adequate time was offered to express herself, it now became incredibly difficult for her to cope with the faster flow of lessons. Her initial set of exams went awfully bad, nonetheless, she soon secured higher grades and was exuberantly happy to be on par with others. Gradually she progressed and efficiently finished two master's courses. With great expectations she started applying for jobs but met with repeated rejections. "The actual fact is that employers could see only my disability, not my capability ... It was the worst period in my life. I felt like a loser…I had come a full circle. I was faced with this again. So, being the Indian rubber ball I am, I bounced back."(Chib, 2011, p. 175) She enrolled herself in writing courses, obtained professional training in the publishing industry and developed new techniques of exchanging ideas. Eventually, she got employed as a senior event's manager at a very prominent bookstore. Though initially tensed about how to execute the designated tasks, she steadily tried to fit in, coordinated successful events and became popular among the intelligentsia. No longer invisible or incapacitated, she got assiduously involved with disability activism; calling for more structural and systematic changes. She penned articles, delivered lectures, endeavored to create global platforms for sharing issues related to disability. While chronicling the lack of sensitization she faces in the public sphere, Chib tells how outsiders still gawk at her as if they have seen some unknown creature. This is related to an inner normative urge to interpret, classify or regulate any unfamiliar physical disposition; an inclination which has stayed steady throughout history irrespective of other changes. People often torment a disabled person with a flurry of questions like how come he/she had the 'problem', whether it was inherent or acquired, whether the parents were not careful enough, whether clinical assistance is required and finally, whether there are still some chances of becoming 'normal' again. Sometimes, when Chib used to travel alone or went to supermarkets or canteens on her own, she was intimidated by others who implied that she should always be accompanied by someone able-bodied. "One of the social burdens of disability, then, is that it exposes affected individuals to inspection, interrogation, interpretation and violation of privacy. The more visible the difference, the more this is the case." (Couser, 2009, p. 16)

Chib also talked about many architectural barriers; including inaccessible toilets, crowded transports, uneven pavements and steep stairs. Reaching to libraries and canteens was a long haul for her because wheelchairs could not move easily everywhere. Restricted mobility definitely took a toll on her sense of freedom. There were multiple episodes mentioned in the memoir when she was battered by piercing reminders of her own shortcomings - "My speech was incoherent and terribly difficult to understand. It continued to depress me immensely, ever since I was confronted with well-articulated youngsters who would chatter away, albeit nonsense." (2011, p. 110) Though conscious of her vocal insufficiency, she chose to find feasible alternatives instead of bemoaning over it. With only one functional finger, she learned to use the computer adroitly- browsing through the internet and connecting through electronic mail became her primary tools of engaging with a wider world- "To be able to get any information that I wanted, really empowered me and stimulated my thought processes. I could also communicate with whoever I wanted without requiring a third party"(2011, p. 119). These cases exhibit how Chib prioritized her choices and found ways amidst adversities to become bolder in her approaches. However, it is also worth noticing that she hails from a distinctly privileged and urban, cosmopolitan background; with availability of improved technological aids and assistive amenities. Mostly all her family members studied at Cambridge and held prestigious positions. Chib herself was treated by leading pediatricians and paramedics, attended the best educational institutions, spent holidays abroad, worked with renowned media conglomerates and also had an attendant to help her with quotidian needs. Although always made aware of her anomalies and faced with issues of exclusionary set-up; a precise textual analysis would show that Chib rarely encountered outright hostility or blatant ridicule.

Additionally, she had a loving family that showered her with sincere affections. With distinctive emphasis, she records the contributions of her mother, who was herself a professionally trained special educator. Despite her own academic pressure and eventual divorce, she always came up with innovative ideas to facilitate Chib's studies, tutored her diligently and persuaded with enormous efforts whenever her daughter's enthusiasm ebbed. This instance testifies that if a disabled person, no matter how much severely disabled, is placed amidst an encouraging environment from a young age, his/ her networking skills and creative acumen can well-flourish; as happened in Chib's case. Hence her experiences cannot be fully appropriated for disabled females who reside in remote interiors of the country. They have to recurrently go through open scourges and gross indecencies - all the while being embroiled in additional problems of destitution. Often dispossessed of familial love, these girls struggle hard to move beyond even the elementary school. Without adequate education, they perhaps never get acquainted with knowledge of legal remedies, state-sponsored welfare programs or other occupational scopes. Many scholars have contended poverty to be intricately interspersed with disability. Thomas and Chandra observe- "Women who are born below poverty level are more likely to become disabled through lack of good healthcare, malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation, risky living and poor working circumstances. Women with disabilities are considered to be poorer all through their lifetime."(2019, p. 126) In India, disability life-writing as a mode of representation has been a recent phenomenon; and there is still a conspicuous void of vernacular productions which may later be useful to map regional or rural specifications, advocate a more comprehensive strategy for social justice and enhance flexibility of the genre.

VI. CONCLUSION

The writings by Monga and Chib meticulously demonstrate eclectic female subjectivities produced in context of independence and interdependence, reciprocity and hostility, suppression and expression. The authors never claimed themselves to be powerhouses of strength; rather they are much aware of their physical deterrence; hence their memoirs evoke an array of multitudinous emotions; ranging from staggering disgust to overwhelming anguish. Both acknowledged that it took them a long time to cope with their disabilities. They also argued that disability is only a component amongst many others which make up their embodied identities, yet that continues to be the singular-most or core aspect which society chooses to see and expects them to perform or achieve accordingly. However, by a better understanding of their own selves and by finding a shared matrix of belonging through supportive networks, these women have accessed wider avenues of opportunities and secured the knowledge to articulate their concerns. Their works have reached out as vital formations to subvert the ill-informed judgments which surmise a banal, bitter and bleak life for them, a future of relentless failures, a future written on their bodies.

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