I. The Socio-cultural Discourse of Disability and Helen Keller

Helen Keller's autobiography *The Story of My Life* (1903), one of the bestselling books of twentieth century translated into more than fifty languages, is about the masterful portrayal of herself—a "deaf- blind" but successful, accomplished, and world-famous personality who challenges and defeats the exclusive discourse of disability fabricated by the so-called "normal" majority. The society and culture interprets disability in all negative ways. That is, it is a buzz word defined as "the lack of ability" to do something. Disability is defined as an umbrella term covering impairments and handicaps. But their meanings are different: a person can be impaired and not necessarily be disabled, and a person can be disabled without being handicapped or impaired. Human bodies are exceedingly diverse in—size, shape, color, texture, structure, function, development, and so on—and they are constantly changing. So, human bodies cannot be essentialized. But the society and culture essentializes or idealizes the body, generates certain "standards of normalcy", and those who do not meet the parameters or desired traits are negatively imputed or stigmatized as "disabled". The single trait of stigma or disability becomes so much overwhelming that it overshadows all the abilities and helps to form the discourse that disability is almost an inborn trait—lack which cannot be avoided. In this way, the people with disabilities are socially unaccepted and a kind of social or psychological death is given to them. Hence, they are excluded from every spheres of life and marginalized.

As Keller challenges and defeats the discourse of disability by renouncing its interpellation and by constructing counter discourse through living and being engaged in strong struggle, resistance, and determination; she involves herself in numerous industrious and tremendous activities which are thought to be the "unusual" performances for the people with disabilities: violating “the normalcy parameters”, speaking, reading printed texts, earning graduation with honors, campaigning for women’s rights, workers’ rights, disables’ rights, touring and travelling throughout the world, raising funds for the people with disabilities, speaking in opposition to war, poverty, prostitution, becoming a world-famous speaker, author, political activist, radical socialist, lecturer, peace activist, and so on. Showing indifference towards the outward consequences, Keller involves herself in numerous tremendous activities, such as throwing herself in the public life, rescuing the ill-treated, “disabled”, poor, nigger boy—Tommy Stringer challenging the society and culture, urging people to use their money for Tommy’s education and to help make his life as bright and joyous as her own, touring and travelling throughout the world in order to aware people about disabilities, prostitution, racial discrimination, slavery, advocating for equality and justices for everyone, and so on. In this way, she shows her rebellious attitudes towards all cultural abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, dyadic oppositions, hierarchic schematizations, stigmas, stereotypes, low expectations, and negative attitudes that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities.

The story is Helen Keller’s inspiring account of how she discovers the world through her fingertips, through the magic of learning to reach out and conquer all the hardships caused by blindness, deafness, and dumbness. The world is not structured for the people with any weaknesses. The society’s negative attitudes and its formation of “disability” excludes the people with disabilities from the category of “normality” or from every spheres of life enslaving the concept that they are fundamentally “inferior”. People run after Keller shouting and jeering when she goes to the public places. They ridicule, mock, and laugh at Keller and her teacher—Anne Sullivan as if they were non- humans. At the beginning, Keller and Sullivan were rejected from social, cultural, as well as educational spheres of life thinking that they cannot do anything; they are the cause of shame, misfortune, and so forth. Keller, her sister—Mildred, and Sullivan's withdrawal from the Cambridge school and the refusal of Radcliffe College's administration to admit them only because of the blindness and deafness visualizes the socio-cultural attitudes towards the people with disabilities. But, Keller labors so hard—night and day as a restless creature in the field of spelling, communicating, speaking, reading, and writing through finger spelling, sign language, manual alphabet, lip reading, embossed print, and so forth. In this way, in the very absence of sight and hearing how could she communicate, speak, read and write printed books, go everywhere, mix actively in life, aware people for their rights, and become a beloved personality is no other than the miracle accomplished by optimism, courage, perseverance, strong determination, and resistance against "normality". Hence, Keller proves that the people who are reduced to the category of "disabled" are not in fact "disable" rather they are disabled by the society and culture which failed to accommodate them equally, therefore the society and culture is in fact disable.

Keller, though she is not born "deaf-blind" (1880), a little girl of nineteen months is fated never to see this world visually and never to hear a single aural sound because of her childhood illness—an acute congestion of stomach and brain. She loses her eyesight and hearing for her life time. However, irrespective of all difficulties throughout her life surrounded by "mute-silence and darkness" her spirit reaches out triumphantly. And, all her life has been a series of attempts to be like "normal" people, to do what so ever they do, and to do it as well. So, she describes things not as they appear to her but as they appear to one with hearing and seeing, such as “I see”, “I hear”, “I notice”, “I look”, “I listen”, and so forth. With the help of a great and dedicated teacher, Anne Sullivan she breaks through the isolation imposed by a near complete lack of language. She discovers the world through her fingertips—as a world-famous speaker, author, lecturer, political activist, radical socialist, suffragette, pacifist, peace activist, birth control supporter, crusader for the people with disabilities, an erudite, an advocate for equality and justice for everyone, and so on. A prolific author, Keller well travels worldwide to over thirty nine countries, raises funds for the blindness and other disabilities, speaks in opposition to war, poverty, and prostitution as the leading causes of disabilities, campaigns for women’s rights, workers’ rights, disables’ rights, and socialism as well as many other progressive causes. Becoming a member of the socialist party, she actively writes, speaks, and campaigns in support of working class and people with color. She joins the International Workers of the world (IWW) in 1912 saying that “parliamentary socialism is sinking in the political bog” (13). And, Keller writes for the IWW for two years (1916-1918). Newspaper columnists praise her courage, intelligence, and rebellious nature. In “Why I became an IWW” she explains that her motivation for activism came in part from her concern about blindness and other disabilities: “For the first time I, who had thought blindness—a misfortune, divine punishment of sin, beyond human control, found that too much of it was traceable to the society and the attitudes of the so-called ‘normal’ people” (xx).

She is defined as a daughter of hope. Her success has been complete for in trying to be like “able-bodied” people, she has come most fully to be herself. Her unwillingness to be beaten has developed her courage, perseverance, physical bravery, optimism, strong determination, and the spirit of resistance which led her where another can go, what another can do, and to win in any test. She founds several institutions and organizations American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) in 1915, Helen Keller International (HKI) in 1925, Helen Keller Services for the Blind, and so on devoting to unite and help the people with disabilities and to research on vision, health, nutrition, and other disabilities. Keller crusades for the people with disabilities. Making several trips to Japan she becomes a favorite of the Japanese people. She meets every U.S. president from Grower Cleveland to Lyndon B. Johnson and befriends with many famous figures including Alexander Graham Bell, Charlie Chaplin, Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, and so on. Keller and her friend Mark Twain are both considered as the radicals at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her voice and views have been fore grounded and glossed in popular perception. She has written a total of twelve published books and several articles. Her famous books are *The Story of My Life* (1903) Keller's autobiography—a widely admired and bestselling book of the twentieth century, *The World I Live In* (1908), *Out of the Dark* (1913), *Optimism*, *Light in My Darkness* (1927), *To Love This Life*, *The Teacher*, and so forth. Furthermore, she is awarded with various honors and posthumous honors: on September 14, 1964, president Lyndon B. Johnson awards Helen Keller the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the United States' highest two civilian honors; she is elected to the National Women's Hall of Fame at the New York World's Fair in 1965; in 1999, Keller is listed in Gallup's Most Widely Admired People of the twentieth century; in 2003, Alabama honored its native daughter onits state quarter; on October 7, 2009, a bronze statue of Helen Keller is unveiled at the United States Capitol building; and there are many hospitals, schools, and streets dedicated to her and named after Helen Keller. Hence, all these incidences prove her courage, perseverance, strong struggle, and determination to challenge and defy the exclusive discourse of disability which avoids “disabled” people as “inferior”, “weak”, “lack”, “passive”, “misfortune”, “other”, and “inhuman”; imposing undesired attributes which are devalued and deeply discrediting, stigmas, stereotypes, and negative connotations.

Keller never thinks she has disabilities. Overcoming the life of unmitigated difficulties and miseries surrounded by “mute-silence and darkness”, she becomes the educated and an erudite personality. The world is structured for the people who have no weaknesses and the negative attitudes of the so-called “normals” towards the people with disabilities are the two great devastating problems which exclude and marginalize the people with disabilities. Irrespective of all difficulties, Keller is strongly determined to her goal to be like seeing and hearing. We can easily imagine how hard and torturing her life is. Keller, a person who has lost her sight and hearing as well as speaking, struggles so hard throughout her life to speak or to articulate the utterances and breaks through the isolation imposed by a near complete lack of language. She learns to communicate by making crude signs, gestures, and imitations. When Anne Sullivan, a great dedicated teacher comes into her life her education begins. Sullivan begins to teach Keller spelling into her hand through finger play with a great deal of dedication and determination. In this way, Keller learns to spell a great many words and communicate.

The natural exchange of ideas is denied to the deaf child; realizing this, her teacher, Anne Sullivan is determined to supply the kinds of stimulus Keller lacked. The next important step in her education is learning to read. As soon as Keller learns to spell the words her teacher gives her slips of cardboard on which were printed words in raised letters—embossed letters; it is a step to the printed book from the printed slip, thus she begins to read. She is a restless, excitable little creature. She learns from the life itself. Her life is as full of motion as those little insects which crowd a whole existence into one brief day. And, people who talk with her by spelling into her hand think in joyous symphony, leap up to meet thought, and behold; a miracle has been wrought! The impulse to utter audible sounds is always strong within her which rise and beats up like birds against the wind; and she persists in using her lips and voice. When she hears the story of two successful girls—Laura Bridgman and Ragnhild Kaata, both blind and deaf had actually been taught to speak, she burns on fire with eagerness and resolves to learn to speak. She labors night and day and sometimes for hours in her efforts to articulate each sound clearly. Keller's untiring perseverance and devotion, her work of practice, practice, and practice enables her to fulfill her ambition to speak like other people by producing audible sounds; and understand others through lip reading. Here, she says: "I am not dumb now. I could pronounce the words so well. It was my ambition to speak like other people" (140). That is, she claims that a person is not dumb but he / she is dumbed by the society and culture because the voice and views are unheard or muted. Our firsthand experience of our own body is invalidated; other people are the authorities on the reality of the experiences of our body.

Keller graduates from Radcliffe College with honors becoming the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. The thought of going to college impels her to enter into competition for a degree with seeing and hearing. The instructors in college have no experience in teaching any but "normal" pupils, she could not follow with her eyes on the blackboard, it is very difficult to have textbooks embossed or in Braille, and lacks some of the important apparatus for some studies which are the serious drawbacks to her progress. She is of course practically alone. The professors are as remote as if they were speaking from miles' distance. The words rush through her hand like hounds in pursuit of a hare. The administrative board of Radcliffe did not realize how difficult they were making her education, nor did they understand the peculiar difficulties Keller had to surmount. But they placed obstacles in her way: not providing Braille, embossed print, sign language, manual alphabet, important apparatus, translator—proctor, and so forth. But she overcomes them all. Keller, fraught with so many difficulties but could not be discouraged. She is so skilled in using Braille and typewriter. She writes with fair speed and absolute sureness. Her manuscripts seldom contain typographical errors. She writes unusually fine English with fair accuracy and without errors in syntax or in the choice of words. Though she is confronting with unforeseen difficulties, she is full of hope and determination to succeed. During her academic years Keller studies the subjects: geography, physical, arithmetic, English, French, German, Greek, Latin, Roman, history, literature, philosophy, economics, physics, mathematics, astronomy, algebra, geometry, and so forth. Although she cannot make notes or write exercises in class and writes at home on typewriter, she passes everything with honors. In much more cases she throws herself into the work—speaking, reading, writing, communicating, preparing meal, going outside, and so on. She works too hard surmounting the difficulties to turn the drudgery into pleasure. She says: "My work was practice, practice, and practice. I labored night and day. And I spent hours pouring into the pages of books, speaking, lip-reading, communicating which resulted in the breaking down of great barriers" (61). She depends much on books not only for pleasure and wisdom they bring to all who read but also for that knowledge which comes to others through their eyes and ears. Indeed, books have meant so much more in her life than in that of others. Their thoughtfulness has been more of a help and encouragement to her. She prefers reading herself pouring over the pages as much as possible. Everyone wonders at the richness of her vocabulary. She prefers reading poetry, history, stories of heroes, heroism, bravery, courage, and so on. There are rare books untouched by her fingertips. A single reading is sufficient to stamp every detail of the text upon her memory forever. She is one of the well educated and an erudite personality of her time. All the activities of human life actively pass under her fingertips. She regards books as her friends, literature as her utopia, and knowledge as happiness. For her, to have knowledge—broad, deep knowledge—is to know true ends from false and lofty things from low. She writes: “Literature is my utopia. Here, I am not disenfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourse of my book friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness” (ix).

Keller displays sportsmanlike determination to win in any test. She is also fond of sports. She plays the game of chess, cards, and solitaire with a friend. She is very fond of rowing, swimming, sailing, going to the theater, and boating and canoeing especially in moonlight nights. Likewise, she goes to museums and art stores and derives genuine pleasure from touching great works of art and discovers the thought and emotion which the artist has portrayed. She has a tactile recognition of sound. Her enjoyment of music is very genuine. Though she does not see with her external eyes, she sees through the inner faculty to serve which eyes are given to us. When she returns from a walk and tells someone about it, her descriptions are accurate and vivid. There is no error in her use of terms of sound and vision. Her dexterity is not notable either in comparison with the so-called “normal person” whose movements are guided by the eyes and ears.

Of the real world she knows more of the good and less of the evil than most people seem to know. She sees more with her fingers than we do with our eyes. She is an optimist or an idealist. Keller is well drilled in English, French, German, and speaks other languages. Her pronunciation is excellent, since her heart is set upon learning to talk. Her courage, perseverance, determination, enthusiasm, earnestness, patience, optimism, dedication, devotion, and struggle never diminish for a moment in her eagerness to overcome the difficulties and discouragements in order to defeat the social discourse of disability. Keller never thinks she has disabilities.

Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* (1903) has been interpreted several times in many ways. She becomes the subject of documentaries, films, TV serials, dramatic works, and so on. Keller appears in a silent film, *Deliverance* (1919). *The Miracle Worker,* a Broadway play (1959-1961); *The Miracle Continues,* a TV movie produced by Hearst Entertainment; *Black,* the Bollywood movie (2005); *Shining Soul,* a documentary produced by the Swedenborg Foundation, and so on are derived from her autobiography *The Story of My Life*. Likewise, different critics have studied the text in diverse angles and point of views, such as in terms of feminism, as a miracle, as an inspiring story, and as an ever written autobiography.

Laura Berger interprets Keller's *The Story of My Life* in respect to the stand point of feminist uprising. That is, Keller campaigns for women's rights, women's suffrage, workers' rights, women education, condition of women and their works, speaks in opposition to war, poverty, and prostitution as the leading causes of disability, and works for equality and justice for everyone. She argues:

> Helen Keller is more than just an advocate for the 'disabled'. She is also an early feminist, speaking out for the rights of women to get an education, work, right to vote, birth control, and so forth. Keller is one of the first to decry horrors of the Holocaust. She campaigns for women's rights, speaks in opposition to war, poverty, prostitution, and works to improve the living conditions of women. Underscoring her

> self-determination throughout the story Keller places her text within a masculine tradition of American autobiography depicting herself as a self-made individual. Constructing a public self she thrusts herself into the public sphere, a space dominated by men, and she refuses to be relegated to the domestic sphere. Keller dismantles the social discourse which valorizes masculine ‘superiority’ over feminine ‘inferiority’. While many authors draw clear lines between men and women segregating the two groups and reestablishing the male social hegemony, Keller clearly rejects the artificial gender divisions of patriarchal society and blurs these boundaries, subverts the patriarchal ideologies and discourses that sustain systems of social control, discrimination, domination, and exploitation over women through love, pity, and sympathy. And, envisions a truly democratic—inclusive world devoid of class, gender, and racial hierarchies. (15-16)

That is, Keller is not only the crusader for the people with disabilities but she is the person who struggles for equality and justice for everyone. She equally speaks out for the rights of women, workers, slaves, poor, people with color, people with disabilities and works to improve their living conditions. She is also a birth control supporter. She is appointed on a commission to investigate the conditions of disabled people and finds that poverty, prostitution, war, and high fertility as the leading causes of disabling conditions.

By the same token, Katharine Cornel reviews Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My Life* as a miracle. According to him this is something unexpected in her life which is amazing and very much surprising. In this context, he writes:

> I was totally flabbergasted after reading this book. A ‘deaf-dumb and blind’ child, Keller is much more successful than the ‘normal’ ones. There is a war throughout her life. She is a restless, courageous, and strongly determined person who born out of problems. I suppose this is something unexpected in her life, quite miraculous, whose success is unlike any other, how Sullivan educates and transforms her from a wild child to an ideal one. She is an eloquent having amazing mind which does not let physical barriers to stop her. (45)

The above lines clarify that how amazing the story is. Though her life is a ceaseless war full of difficulties, discouragements, hardships, and flaunting vagaries, she triumphantly transforms the socially expected impossibility into possibility and disability into ability.

Likewise, Joseph P. Lash analyzes the text as an ever written autobiography. He emphasizes Keller’s education presenting Anne Sullivan as a great and dedicated teacher who risks her own life throwing into the chamber house of strenuous life in order to brighten the life of Helen Keller. In this respect, he says:

> Keller’s *The Story of My Life* is not only the most extraordinary autobiography ever written, but the amazing, incredibly insightful, real, and truly inspiring story because of the account of Sullivan’s teaching of Helen Keller and her progress. This reading is a detail about her education. That is, it visualizes how the teacher, Anne Sullivan leads Keller from the state of mute-silence and darkness into the world of light, speech, education, activism, and an intellectual celebrity. Any teacher can take a child to the classroom, but not every teacher can make him learn. There is, then, a good deal that Miss

> Sullivan has done for Keller which no other teacher can do in just the same way for anyone else. (41)

Here, Keller keeps her teacher in a breathless race. At the beginning Keller is only a little mass of possibilities and it is her teacher, Sullivan who unfolds and develops them. Miss Sullivan, the only person of all who could make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth for Keller. Miss Sullivan, with strong perseverance and devotion makes it a practice to speak to Keller as she would to any other hearing child. That is, Miss Sullivan brings her devotion, intelligence, and fearless willingness to experiment.

Furthermore, Kaushal Goyal writes that scholarly personalities of that time: Alexander Graham Bell, Winston Churchill, Mark Twain, and others have defined Helen Keller in diverse manners. Winston Churchill has defined her as “The greatest woman of our age” (i). Mark Twain says: “The two greatest characters in the nineteenth century are Napoleon and Helen Keller. Napoleon tried to conquer the world by physical force and failed. Helen tried to conquer the world by power of mind—and succeeded” (i). Likewise, Alexander Graham Bell writes: “You are a wonderful creature—the most wonderful in the world. In you I have seen more of the divine than has been manifest in anyone I met before” (i). Moreover, Theodor Zeldin opines: “No history of the world can be complete which does not mention Helen Keller… whose overcoming of her blindness and deafness were arguably victories more important than those of Alexander the Great, because they have implications still for every living person” (i). The above statements clarify that Helen Keller is an inspiration to everyone. She will always be remembered as a hero to many people throughout the world bringing light and hope to everyone by proving—there are no boundaries to courage, faith, and determination.

Hence, in overall reviews of Helen Keller's autobiography *The Story of My Life*, different critics and scholars have analyzed and interpreted in diverse perspectives. Laura Berger interprets Keller's autobiography from feminist point of view. She shows Helen Keller as an early feminist and a rebellious figure. And, she analyzes Keller's sufferings as the result of male social hegemony which promotes the patriarchal ideologies and those discourses that sustain the systems of social control, discrimination, domination, and exploitation through love, pity, and sympathy. Berger evaluates each and every attempt of Keller as the challenge or the rebellion against the patriarchal society to blur the male supremacy. Likewise, Joseph P. Lash views the text from the perspective of Keller's education. He regards it not only as the most extraordinary autobiography ever written, but also as the amazing, insightful, real, and truly inspiring story. Katharine Cornel, by the same logic, analyzes Keller's autobiography as a miracle. According to him, this is something unexpected in her life.

In this way, Keller's autobiography *The Story of My Life* has been approached from above mentioned different perspectives by various critics, but it has not been studied from the perspective of disability studies or what Rosemarie Garland Thomson says universalizing disability discourse. She argues:

> Such a conceptualization attempts to dislodge the persistent assumption that disability is a self-evident condition of bodily 'inadequacy', 'lack', and private 'misfortune' whose politics concern only a limited minority—just as femaleness so easily seemed before feminism. Disability studies draws on feminism's confrontation with the gender system requires asserting the body as a cultural text which is interpreted, inscribed with meaning, indeed made within social

> relations of power. Such a perspective denaturalizes normalcy, locates difference relationally, challenges appearance hierarchies, destigmatizes the disabled body, and advocates political equality by denaturalizing disability's assumed inferiority and casting its configurations and functions as difference rather than lack. Both feminism and the interrogation of disability challenge existing social relations; resist interpretations of certain bodily configurations and functioning as deviant; question the ways that particularity or difference is invested with meaning; examine the enforcement of universalizing norms; interrogate the politics of appearance; explore the politics of naming; and participate in positive identity politics. (182-83)

Thus, the logic is that, it destabilizes identity, potentially frees marginalized people from the narrative of essential inadequacy, and deconstructs oppressive oppositional categories as Keller in her autobiography *The Story of My Life*. Hence, disability studies explores "disability" as a mere socio-cultural construction. And, questions the social formation of "normalcy" or "ability" and the way of taking somebody or something as "disabled" or "disability".

So, this research focuses on Helen Keller's strong determination and resistance against the society and culture which is sustaining negative attitudes towards disability and the people with disabilities. The society and culture treats the people with disabilities as "other", "deviant", "lack", "weak", "passive", "inferior", and even "less than human". The body in its variations is negatively imputed, stigmatized, stereotyped, and metaphorized. The people with disabilities are regarded as the burden, misfortune, and the cause of same even for the family and the society.

Hence, the so-called “normal majority” or the society and culture promotes the discourses and ideologies to control and rule over the people with disabilities through pity and sympathy. Disability studies or the universalizing disability discourse is only the suitable literary theory to study Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My Life*. Therefore, the main concern of this project is to study Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My Life* through disability studies.

Helen Keller, a world-famous twentieth century writer, explores the tyranny of the “norm”—control, domination, exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization of the people with disabilities. To analyze the discrimination, domination, exploitation, stigmatization, and marginalization of the people with disabilities and their resistance or revolt, critics of disability are needed. So as to study Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My Life* which incorporates the rebellious deeds of Keller to challenge and defeat the discourse of disability by renouncing its interpellation and by constructing counter discourse through living and being engaged in strong struggle, resistance, and determination, such as speaking; mastering the languages like English, French, and German; earning graduation with honors; campaigning for the rights of women, workers, people with color, and disabilities; becoming a world-famous speaker, author, lecturer, political activist, radical socialist, peace activist, pacifist; travelling and touring throughout the world; raising funds for the people with disabilities; speaking in opposition to war, poverty, and prostitution; advocating equality and justice for everyone; going everywhere—mixing actively in life and becoming a beloved personality; being awarded with numerous honors and posthumous honors, and so on unlike the expectation of the society and culture for what the so-called “normals” themselves are failed to do. Hence, shattering down the low-expectations and the deep-rooted negative attitudes that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities, Keller reverses the social discourse of disability.

Disability studies is a more inclusive field of inquiry that structures a wide range of thought and perception not explicitly articulated as “disability”. Susan Wendell writes:

> It places disability in a political, social, and cultural context that theorizes and historicizes disability in similarly complex ways to the way race, class, and gender have been theorized. And, it goes very far from pity and sympathy in order to seek equal space for the people with disabilities to accommodate them equally in every spheres of life, such as social, political, economic, individual, educational, intellectual, and so forth in the society. Moreover, disability studies questions the value system which distrusts and devalues dependence on other people, and vulnerability in general; to take full integration into the society seeking equal power with the so-called “normal” people in that society. The people with disabilities are cast within cultural discourses as ‘deviant’, ‘other’, ‘lack’, ‘weak’, ‘passive’, and ‘inferior’; excluded from the public world relegating to the private; and defined in opposition to a valued ‘norm’ which is assumed to possess natural corporeal ‘superiority’. The public world is the world of strength, the positive (valued) body, performance and production, and the able-bodied. Whereas, illness, rest and recovery, pain, death, limitation, dependency, and negative (devalued) body are private, generally hidden, and often neglected. This discrimination and prejudice against the people with disabilities is leading to their marginalization as well

> as the marginalization of the study of disability. So, disability studies, furthermore, attempts to change the normative way we conceive of the world, of literature, of cultural production, of voice, of sight, of language, and so on. (266-67)

It comes vehemently upon the control, discrimination, domination, and exploitation of the people with disabilities, and challenges and defies the low-expectations and the negative attitudes that the society and culture has historically had of disability and the people with disabilities. Hence, disability studies turns upside down the social discourse of disability fabricated by the so-called "normal majority". And, it questions "the construction of normalcy" as the seed of problem because real human bodies are exceedingly diverse; since we can no longer essentialize the body, its differences, its eccentricities, and its transgressions. That is, the fact that not one of us is, or can be, "normal", nor can anyone describe what a "normal person" is. Hence, disability studies reverses the hegemony of "normalcy" and institutes alternative ways of thinking about "disability" as visualized in Keller's autobiography *The Story of My Life*. It is neither "the lack of ability" nor "misfortune" or "different ability" rather it is the diversity of human.

The primary objective of this study is to point out the control, discrimination, domination, exploitation, low-expectation, and the negative attitudes that the society and culture has historically had of disability and the people with disabilities, and question against it not only in the nineteenth and twentieth century America but also in the whole world which is still existed in our society and culture. This research attempts to reveal the reality of our society and culture which always turns the falcon eyes, others, stigmatizes, stereotypes, excludes, and marginalizes the people with disabilities (undesired differentness) and thinks they are "the cause of same", "misfortune", "burden", "passive", "inferior", "weak", "savage", "awkward" "less than human", and so on therefore they cannot do anything. Hence, the disabled are made "the other" "the deviant" who symbolize failure of control and the threat of pain, limitation, lack, dependency, and death. Thus, a kind of social and psychological death is given to them. So, the critics of disability reject such discourses fabricated by the society and the culture or the power holders—the so-called "normal majority", and come vehemently upon them shattering down the negative attitudes and low-expectations as Keller comes in her autobiography *The Story of My Life*. In this way, this research aims to dislodge the persistent assumptions of disability.

This study is divided into three different chapters: the first chapter includes general introduction of the study. In the same way, the second chapter is the methodology along with textual analysis which provides the theoretical modality of disability studies that explores at the same time resists the politics of socio-cultural discourses of disability fabricated by the so-called "normal" majority. And, it also presents Keller's industrious actions, revolutionary thoughts, courage, perseverance, strong struggle, resistance, and determination to challenge and defeat the social discourse of disability. The final chapter concludes the entire study with the revelation of radical thoughts and actions of Helen Keller that question "normalcy", "disability", and reverses the negative attitudes and the low-expectations that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities (undesired differences).

II. Keller’s Resistance in Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life*

Helen Keller, in her autobiography *The Story of My Life*, portrays herself as an industrious exemplar of self-made individual, challenges and defeats the discourse of disability by renouncing its interpellation and by constituting counter-discourse through living and being engaged in strong struggle, resistance, and determination. Her strong struggle and resistance begins from her early childhood days after the childhood illness which leaves her out of sight and hearing at the age of nineteen months, but manifestation of resistance against the social discourse of disability comes at the fore as she becomes physically and mentally mature. Challenging the general concepts and assumptions of “disability” Keller, a “deaf-dumb-blind” girl, irrespective of all difficulties surrounded by “mute-silence and darkness”; her spirit reaches out. And, all her life has been a series of successful attempts to be like the so-called “normal” people, to do what so ever they do, and to do it as well. So, she describes things not as they appear to her but as they appear to one with sight and hearing. That is, she does everything more than an “able-bodied” one; she becomes a world-famous author, speaker, political activist, lecturer, suffragette, pacifist, peace activist, radical socialist, an advocate for the people with disabilities, and so forth. And, she is awarded with numerous posthumous honors.

Keller defies the low expectations and the negative representations that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities. The sufferings of the physically challenged people are more from the social attitudes towards disability than from their individual condition. Keller throws herself in numerous tremendous activities which are thought to be an unusual performance for disabled in the society. Refuting the “normalcy parameters” which are fabricated by the “normal” majority; Keller earns a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors from Radcliffe college, breaks through the mute-silence (speaks), campaigns for the rights of women, workers, slaves, people with color, people with disabilities, tours and travels throughout the world, raises funds for the people with disabilities, women education, speaks in opposition to war, poverty, and so on. By doing such miraculous and strenuous activities she shows her strong resistance towards all socio-cultural abnormalities of the body, hierarchic schematizations, blemishes of individual character, dyadic oppositions, stigmas, stereotypes, and negative—devalued, discrediting attributes imposed by the so-called “normals” to the “abnormals” to justify their abilities as well as false superiority.

Keller reverses the “normalcy paradigms” constructed by the society and culture which marginalizes disable people as: “other”, “deviant”, “inferior”, “lack”, “weak”, “docile”, and less important who cannot perform the task in comparison to “normal”. Here, her act of crossing the social demarcations threatens the society. Her rebellious action or resistance can be seen in these lines:

> The day is ours, and what the day has shown. I was strong, active, and indifferent to consequences: I knew my own mind well enough and always had my own way, even if I had to fight tooth and nail for it. I felt as if invisible hands were holding me, and I made frantic efforts to free myself. I struggled—not that struggling helped matters, but the spirit of resistance was strong within me. (17)

These lines show that the “normative society” which is holding the power and controlling over the “abnormals” is countered. Keller makes frantic efforts to free herself from such boundaries constructed by the so-called “normals” to rule over the physically challenged people. Her self-reliance which made her strong, active, and indifferent to the consequences; what so ever the prejudicial society and culture is she encounters because of her spirit of resistance. Keller echoes the voice against the biased and prejudicial society which fabricates several discourses about the category called “disability” and controls and manipulates the people with disabilities in its own way as “other” and “deviant”.

Similarly, Keller’s resistance against the exclusive, monolithic, and pigheaded society can be seen in her treatment to the helpless industrial workers especially women, war soldiers, people with color, people with disabilities, and so on. The discriminatory society does not behave humanly to the people with disabilities. They are treated as inhuman “freak” and “monster” which leads to alienation, disjunction, and fragmentation often for a life time, and is more profound. The so-called “normal” people stare and mock at the people with disabilities. Keller challenges and defies all inhuman treatments upon the people with disabilities through strenuous efforts claiming her physical limitations as the source of her prophetic authority. The society refuses the public affairs, such as education, health, economy, communication, equal opportunities, and so on to the people with disabilities, but Keller crosses all boundaries and acts as the able-bodied. Some people refuse to treat a poor, deaf-blind, nigger boy—Tommy stringer when he is knocked down by a wild animal in an almshouse. They neglect even remain untouched with the boy and stare at him giggling. At the same time, Keller, with the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan takes the boy to her family nurse and saves his life. Challenging such beastly attitudes of “able-bodied” people towards disability and the people with disabilities, Keller, outraged in anger threatens them to learn the lesson of humanity. And, she urges her admirers to help her to raise money for Tommy’s education and to help make his life as bright and successful as her own. Here, she says: “such beastiality is difficult to find even in the beasts. You are the monsters, not human beings. If you are real human, learn the lesson of humanity. Disabled people are humans. So, we should not be stared and pitied but we should be treated as human beings" (34). In the above lines, Keller comes vehemently upon the so-called "normal" people's attitudes towards the people with disabilities. This is because the so-called "normal" majority defines the disabled people in all negative terms, devalued or discredited attributes, stereotypical images, and stigmas as if they are second-class citizens or non-human beings. The society and culture excludes disabled individuals or neglects them in social, educational, legal, religious, and political spheres. That is, they are deprived of their unalienable rights. But, Keller refuting all the fragile and cobweb like "normalcy parameters" involves herself in every aspects of life (public or private) with much more ability, vitality, energy, and stamina than the so-called "normal" ones.

Keller portrays herself as a self made individual who, through industry and self-reliance, conquers the personal hardships, sufferings, discouragements, and socio-cultural attitudes towards disability and the people with disabilities and becomes an international celebrity. Underscoring her self-determination throughout the story, she constructs a public "self" and thrusts herself into the public sphere—a space dominated by the so-called "normals", specially men, and she refuses to be relegated to the domestic sphere. Keller does not advocate the with-drawl of the individual from the society; rather she offers a vision of forging new society, a truly democratic and more inclusive space where every individual sees each other as brother and sister. That is, there remains no gulf of rich-poor, able-disable, normal-abnormal, men-women, and so forth; all hierarchic schematizations and binary oppositions will be dismantled. Keller goes on to serve as a peace activist during world war I, speaks in opposition to war, campaigns for women's rights, disables' rights, women education, workers' rights, and works towards equality and justice for everyone. Keller is also a radical personality; the seeds of radicalism blossomed into her political militancy in the years following her graduation from Radcliffe, when she joined the U.S. Socialist Party and the International Workers of the World (IWW). From this vantage point, she identifies the discriminatory practices of the society, and her autobiography like the novels of Hopkins, Chesnutt, Bonner and others challenges these practices to re-envision the more inclusive society. Hence, Keller ruptures the socio-cultural dogmas constructed by the “ables” to discriminate the disables as “other”, “deviant” and “defective”. People with disabilities are taken as the burden, misfortune, and the cause of shame for the families and even for the society. That is, it is constructed that they cannot do anything, they are lacking an ability to do something, and they are fully dependent upon others. And, they are represented as animalistic, awkward, wild, fool, moron, furious, savage, primitive, and all in negatively defined terms. Keller not only reverses such hegemonies of normalcy but also institutes the alternative ways of thinking about disability.

Disability studies is a radical field of study that claims its space in contested areas, traces its existence, and justifies its assertions in the form of discipline. It is very inclusive term that to all the largest minority groups of global scenario. For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, metaphorized, stigmatized, stereotyped, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. The discrimination and prejudices against the people with disabilities leading to their marginalization as well as the marginalization of the study of disability. People with disabilities make up the largest minority throughout the world. The disabled have been rendered more invisible than other groups. The body in its variations is metaphorized, disbursed, promulgated, commodified, stigmatized, stereotyped, cathected, and de-cathected, normalized, and abnormalized. Disability studies explore "disability" as a mere socio-cultural construct. And, questions the social formation of "normalcy" or "ability" and the way of taking somebody or something as "disabled" or "disability".

Moreover, this study questions a value system which distrusts and de-values dependence on other people and vulnerability in general; to take full integration into "able-bodied" society, seeking equal power with the so-called "normal" people in that society, or to preserve some degree of separate culture in which the abilities, knowledge, and value of the disabled are separately honored and developed. Disability studies, furthermore, attempts to change the normative way we conceive of the world, of literature, of cultural production, of voice, of sight, of language, and so on. In broadest application, disability studies aims to challenge the received in its most simplest form—the body, and in its most complex form—the construction of the body. Since we can no longer essentialize the body, its differences, its eccentricities, and its transgressions. The critics of disability: Lennard J. Davis, Erving Goffman, Lerita M. Coleman, Susan Wendell, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, and others go very far from "pity" and "empathy" and seek equal space for the people with disabilities to accommodate them equally in every aspects of life: social, political, individual, economic, educational, health, intellectual, and so on in the society.

Critics of disability express their radical ideas about the othering and ill-treatment of the people with disabilities and dismantle the established notions of disability that the society and culture has historically had. With their strong voices and views, they revolt to overthrow the society's deep-rooted negative attitudes towards disability and the people with disabilities. It is obvious that the problem disability studies foregrounds is not the person with disabilities but the negative mind-set that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities, and the way normalcy is constructed to create the problems of the disabled person. No one on the earth is similar, our real human bodies are exceedingly diverse—in size, shape, skin, color, texture, structure, function, range and habits of movements, and development—and they are constantly changing. So, human body cannot be essentialized or idealized. Yet we do not absorb or reflect this simple fact in our society and culture. Instead we idealize the human body. Our physical ideals change from time to time, but we always have ideals. These ideals are not just about appearance; they are also ideals of strength, energy, proper control of the body, and so on. We are perpetually bombarded with images of these ideals. And, some are considered “normal” and other as “disable”. Hence, constructing normalcy is the seed of problems. In this sense, Lennard J. Davis says:

> The ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person. There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated. A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. (9)

Thus, some concept of norm must have existed in every society. By taking the demarcation line with the privileged norms (ideals) people are categorized into the groups of “able” and “disable”/ standard and non-standard. People try to compare with other and form an idea about it. By this logic, the mark of physical differentness becomes the identity of the people. And, the undesired differences are negatively imputed and defined as “disability”, “disable”, “abnormal”; or “deviant” which deviate from the “norm”—the desired trait.

According to Davis: “The word ‘normal’ as constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual”. That is, deviating from the “normal” is to be an “abnormal”. The demarcating line between the so-called normal people and the people with disabilities became the tool for oppressing the disabled. He further says:

> The concept of a norm […] implies that the majority of the population must or should some-how be part of the norm. The norm pins down the majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve. […] ‘the bell curve’, became in its own way a symbol of the tyranny of the norm. Any bell curve will always have at its extremities those characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. (13)

Hence, Davis defines how the term normalcy functions to define what disability actually means. People those who do not meet the criterion of normalcy paradigm viewed as the people with disabilities. To have disability is to be an abnormal, to be the part of “other”. So, the problem is not with disabilities but the problem lies in the way normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person. Here, it is clear that the psychological aspect of disability is more severe or destructive than the particular condition of disability. That is, it is more easy to cope with the physical conditions of disability than to deal with the attitudes of normal people towards disability and the people with disabilities.

Hence, the problem lies in the construction of “normalcy paradigm” which labels the desired differentness as “normal”, “able”, “average” and undesired differences as “abnormal”, “disable”, “deviant”. And ignores the undesired differences as “defectives”, or “other”. These undesired attributes—differences are stigmatized, stereotyped, and defined all with negative connotations by the so-called “normal” majority. People with disabilities are hegemonized and rulled by the “normals” enslaving the concepts of “lack”, “inferiority”, “passivity”, and so on. Here, not to be the part of the “normal” is to be the “other”, “non-human”. Adolphe Quetelet opines, “the concept of the generalized notion of the ‘normal’ is a law of error: since we can no longer essentialize the body, its differences, its eccentricities, its transgressions, and so forth” (123). The hegemony of normalcy divides the world into two extremes: normal and abnormal, as the hegemony of white color raises the racial problem between white and non-white.

People are disabled not because they are functionally incapable, but because they are not offered access to equal chances. They are othered and marginalized in every aspects of life such as social, educational, health, economic, and so on. People with disabilities are discriminated from the “norm”, and the lack of access to equal chances cuts them off from their unalienable rights. They are patronized, subordinated, and the metaphors of disability are abound. This is no other than the result of the hegemony of normalcy. Davis writes:

> One can nevertheless try to imagine a world in which the hegemony of normalcy does not exist. So, one of the tasks for a developing

> consciousness of disability issues is the attempt then, to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal. (26)

We live in the world of norms. There is no place in the world where the idea of a norm or average does not exist. Everyone tries to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. Any culture or tradition assumes that a person must meet certain criteria / standards to be able physically, mentally, and functionally. Whole world is hegemonized by the utopia “norm”. These standards are merely the ideological or socio-cultural construct fabricated by the normal majority to rule over the others. So, a kind of utopia of the “norm” must be eliminated. For this reason, disability issues attempt to reverse the hegemony of the normal and attempt to institute alternative / positive ways of thinking about the abnormal.

Keller endeavors to challenge the traditional mentality towards disability and the people with disabilities as “lack”, “inferior”, “passive”, “docile”, “weak”, and so on. And, she establishes herself as a successful and vital person to institute alternative ways of thinking about disability. Keller revolts against the social discourse of disability through her activities. Unlike the intention of the so-called “normal” majority she performs the actions in bold manner which is unexpected and miraculous. She throws herself into strong-struggle, resistance and determination to perform the tasks which are not expected to be done by the disables. Every attempt she makes is an attempt to challenge and defeat the tyranny of normalcy. Crossing all the parameters or the boundaries fabricated by the so-called normals Keller reaches out where so ever the normals go, what so ever they do, and to win in any test. She presents herself as a self-made individual and she has come most fully to be herself. Though she does not see and hear she describes things not as they appear to her but as they appear to one with eyes and ears. Her dexterity is not notable either in comparison with the normal person, whose movements are guided by the eyes and ears. Keller reverses the hegemony of the normalcy involving herself and her teacher Anne Sulivan (a visually impaired but successful) in numerous strenuous activities which the norm restricts for abnormal, such as education, public life, politics, and so on. Keller, a restless creature displays sportsmanlike determination in order to counter the normal culture that is mentioned in the following lines:

> I was full of hope and determination to succeed. I lived myself into all things. I learned from life itself. I was never still a moment; my life was as full of motion as those little insects which crowd a whole existence into one brief day. And, my forward-reaching thoughts would often rise and beat up like birds against the wind; and I persisted in using my lips and voice, which resulted in the breaking down of this great barrier. (51)

Her act of describing things not as they appear to her but as they appear to one with sight and hearing threatens the normative society and culture which believes in disables' inabilities to do things in normal way. Though she is a blind and deaf person, Keller uses the sense expressions like "I see, I hear, I look, I listen, I notice", and so on as if she is hearing and seeing. When she returns from a walk or visit she tells about it naturally. Her descriptions are accurate and vivid. Keller's such activities fears "the normals". She persists in using her lips and voice, she is strongly determined to succeed as those little insects which crowd a whole existence into one brief day, and the birds which rise and beat up against the wind. Ultimately, she speaks with clear voice. "My cup of happiness overflowed. I lost all sense of pain and the happiest of happy moments arrived, when I had made speech my own" (63). Here, this incident pierces the narrow mindset that disables are inferior, weak, docile, passive, and irrational. Keller's speaking also shatters the deep-rooted pejorative attitudes towards disabled individuals, and proves that—they are not disable rather they are disabled, they are not mute rather they are muted, they are not voiceless rather they are unheard, they are not silent rather they are silenced, and they are not inferior rather they are reduced to an inferior status.

Furthermore, at this point, it is a distinct idea for a deaf person to speak. It is not only miraculous but also a groundbreaking incident. Keller, in fact, is determined to speak in order to resist for the justification of disables' rights, and her need to change the unjust rule that has snatched their rights. Keller resists throughout her life as a restless creature who keeps her teacher in a breathless race. Her resistance begins from her early childhood days; these lines prove how rebellious she is:

> I was on fire with eagerness. I had noticed that my mother and my friends did not use signs as I did when they wanted anything done, but talked with their mouths. Sometimes I stood between two persons who were conversing and touched their lips. I could not understand, and was vexed. I moved my lips and gesticulated frantically without result which began to agitate me with a vexing, forward-reaching sense of a lack. This made me so angry at times that I kicked myself into the mouth, broke the vases, glasswares, tea cups, and screamed until I was exhausted. (10)

These lines show that how rebellious Keller is towards the vocal culture in particular and normal culture in general, which othered, oppressed, repressed, and marginalized the people with disabilities for centuries. The so-called normal society and culture treats the people with disabilities as second-class citizens and even non-human beings.

In this sense, Keller says “we should not be pitied rather we should be treated as human beings” (12). Here, she comes vehemently upon the so-called vocal culture / normal culture which misreads the feelings, sentiments, and emotions of millions of disabled people, and misinterprets their sign language, manual language, manual alphabet, brailles, and the ways of life as uncultured, primitive, savage, wild, non-human, awkward, and irrational. Keller’s rebellion attempts to blow the bugle of equality and justice for everyone. Her frantic efforts: breaking down of the tea cups, vases, and glasswares symbolizes her attempts to dismantle the hegemonic normal culture that stares, ridicules, mocks, and laughs at the people with disabilities and their ways of life with wheelchair, white can, magnifiers, glasses, and crutches; and avoids them from every aspects of life reducing to the domestic chamber house as if everything is normals’ turf.

The people with disabilities undergo with two major problems: the fact that the world is not made for the people with any weaknesses but for super men (normals), and the attitudes of normal people towards disability and the people with disabilities. It is more easy to deal with the physical conditions of disability than to cope with the attitudes of normal people. Physical conditions exclude the people with disabilities from the physical environment—public services, buildings, roads, transportations, and so on are not designed with access for them. Social avoidance of the people with disabilities by the attitudes of fear and hatred on the part of normals alienates them often for a lifetime. They are socially rejected or neglected in educational, legal, social, religious, and political institutions by the so-called ables (normals). Non-disabled are considered essential, disabled inessential; able-bodied are the subjects, disabled (an object to be explored) “the other”. Disables’ experience of the body is more likely to be invalidated. The common assumption of the society and culture is that disabled lives are not worth living or preserving. The so-called able-bodied people use negative and pejorative language as well as devalued or discredited attributes about the people with disabilities. Thus, the anatomical condition is in one place, the difficulty to adopt in daily life resulting from the disabilities is in the other; but the social attitudes towards the people with disabilities are more severe and profound.

The demarcating line or the differentness between the so-called normal people and the people with disabilities is the root cause for oppressing and repressing the people with disabilities. And, this difference is negatively imputed and linked to the marks of disgrace, shame, hatred, and guilt which spoils the normal identity, lowers the self-esteem, and the worth of life during this blemish what Erving Goffman calls "stigma" or "spoiled identity". Stigma is not only related to disability, rather all human differences are potentially stigmatizable. That is, nearly everyone at some point in life experiences stigma either temporarily or permanently. Given that human differences serve as the basis for stigmas. It is heavily dependent on the social context and to some extent arbitrarily linked. Stigma, on the other hand, is an undesired differentness, undesirable attribute, or an unwanted trait that is negatively imputed and deeply discrediting. In this context, Goffman asserts:

> Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity. […] the kind that causes us to reclassify an individual from one socially anticipated category to a different but equally well-anticipated one, and the kind that causes us to alter our estimation of the individual upward. Note, too, that not all undesirable

> attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be. (204)

Here, it is clear that stigma is inextricably a socio-cultural construction therefore contingent. Disability is one of the stigmatizing conditions fabricated by the dominant group—the able-bodied (normal) majority, those possessing power. Therefore, stigma reflects the value judgment of a dominant group that determines the desired and undesired differences of the zeitgeist. The stigmas of disability and the people with disabilities are the abominations of the body and the blemishes of individual character— inextricably intertwined with disgrace and embarrassment. As “disability” in itself is an ideological construct, stigma is a psychological one and both oscillate.

The concept of stigma and normalcy exist associatively between each other. But both of these terminologies are different in their position. The former is a kind of mark of disgrace whereas the later is a measuring-rod, the parameter or the base or medium through which somebody or something is stigmatized in any society. That is, there is a established notion of the social “norms” in the society which iterates and reiterates these marks of disgrace as natural ones. And, this process of imputation and repetition of such undesirable, devalued, discrediting, and negative traits plays a vital role in the continuous internalization of such feelings as guilt, shame, lack, weak, inferior, and so forth in the lives of disabled people. Consequently the people with disabilities or the stigmatized people accept themselves as “other” in the society. They internalize and accept the derogatory, stereotypical, devalued, discredited, and negative status imposed by the so-called normals or the non-stigmatized majority. Hence, the people with disabilities are the puppets of the social system which is one-sidedly dominated and ruled by the so-called normal majority. That is to say, a kind of social and psychological death is given to them marking-off as “unacceptable”, “defective”, “other”, “deviant”, and “inferior”. The so-called normal people do not really accept and are not ready to make contact with the people with disabilities on equal grounds. In fact, this leads to self-hatred, self-derogation, humiliation, embarrassment, inferiority complex, low self-esteem, worthlessness of life, identity crisis, existential crisis, and so on. Thus, the people with disabilities or stigmatized people become dependent, passive, weak, inferior, helpless, and fundamentally dis-able that is what is expected from the non-stigmatized people.

The social rejection or avoidance affects not only the disabled or stigmatized individual but also everyone who is socially involved with them as family, friends, and relatives. Disabled individual is believed to be the cause of shame or moral and psychological disturbance for the family as well as for the society. In other words, this kind of permanent social rejection, avoidance, blame, and exclusion forces disabled people to limit their relationship to other stigmatized people and to those whom society and culture outweigh the stigma further lies such as family members. Hence, discrediting effects of stigma are very diverse. As it is a socio-cultural, ideological construct related to personal experience characterized by avoidance, rejection, and exclusion that results from the experience of anticipation of an adverse social judgment about a person or a group. That is to say, the attitudes of non-stigmatized people, stigmas imputed to body, and abominations of the body are psychologically oriented and its aspects are more severe than the physical aspects. Stigma, in fact, is a need or a weapon of non-stigmatized / normal people to justify their false superiority and rule over the people with disabilities or stigmatized people thereby legitimizing the negative attributes to the human differences, such as variations in shape, size, color, skin, gender, structure, function, and so on.

Likewise, the society and culture characterizes an individual inextricably depending upon the corporealities or outward physical appearances irrespective of inward ability and stamina. That is, the society and culture imputes certain attributes or character to an individual made in effect what Goffman calls “virtual social identity”, which is merely an imputation made in potential retrospect—a characterization “in effect” or first appearance. But, the attributes and character that the individual could in fact be proved to possess what Goffman calls “actual social identity”, the attributes or character actually possessing by the individual. Hence, the virtual social identity is an attribute which is ideologically constructed, fabricated by others, and those holding power imposed to an individual whether he / she possesses it or not. Whereas the actual social identity is an attribute that is real and proved to possess. Here, virtual social identity is prone to stigmatization. The people with disabilities and stigmatized individuals are characterized by the society only with their virtual social identity undermining their actual social identity. They are severely discriminated and the psychological effect of such discriminatory practices is destructive and more profound which leads to the loss of self-esteem, humiliation, self-hatred, lowers the worth of life, and even leads to commit suicide. Hence, the psychological aspect of disability is more severe than the physical ones.

Helen Keller, a “deaf-blind” girl who never feels that she has disabilities. Though the physical and psychological difficulties, sufferings, and discouragements are in their own place, she always shows her sportsmanlike determination and perseverance to overcome all. The society and culture constructs negative images, different stereotypes, and stigmas regarding blindness, deafness and dumbness. The so-called “normal” people fabricate different stigmas, stare, mock, and laugh at her, but irrespective of all discouragements Keller is determined in her goal to defeat all cultural abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and undesirable traits imputed to disability; her virtual social identity. It is imposed forcefully by the non-disabled majority to patronize disabled people. Keller, by the same token, to some extent feels the effects of stigmatization, which the following lines exhibit:

> How hard and humiliating it is to bear the mark of disability. When I began to walk out alone in the streets people stared at me, mocked and even laughed at me; that everybody was pointing at me with his finger. The children shouted at me […] sometimes they even ran after me shouting and jeering. This was something I did not know how to face and it seemed as if I could not bear it […]. For while those enormous in the streets filled me with a cold dread. I was afraid. I felt myself wholly inferior—that I could not be compared with an average citizen. The door had been shut on my life. (73)

The above lines prove that how the society and culture shows an animosity towards the people with disabilities. The non-stigmatized people believe that the disabled (stigmatized) people are not quite human. The stereotypes, undesired traits, devalued and discredited attributes all lead to feelings of stigmatization which results in a definite alteration in the way of life or daily living, such as preferring to remain in the room, shrinking, self-humiliation, dread, self-hatred, low self-esteem, fearing the others and so on.

The stigmatized people are considered to be of a less desirable kind—in the extreme, quite thoroughly bad or dangerous or weak or passive. And, reduced in the mind from a whole and usual (normal) person to a tainted, discounted one. They are treated as if they are non-humans. In this context, Goffman says:

> By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, rejection, avoidance, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority, weakness, lack, and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms, such as cripple, handicap, bastard, moron, dumb, buffoon, and so on in our daily discourses as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning. We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections and undesired attributes. (205)

The traits of disability or specific stigma terms are metaphorized in the daily discourses. The society and culture fabricates different discourses and ideologies to prove that the stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior and weak to the so-called normal beings. Moreover, they are even regarded and treated as animals or less than human beings. An individual or a group of people is stigmatized because of the failure to represent the majority of the population. But, the fact is that no human being is similar in the world. That is, real human bodies are exceedingly diverse—in size, shape, color, texture, range, structure, function, habit, and development—and they are constantly changing. Nevertheless, the society and culture or the people those possessing power, the dominant group determines the majority as the “normal”, “norm”, “normalcy”, “normality”, “average”; and the minority as the “abnormal”, “disable”. They also construct certain parameters of the “norm” and determine which human differences / traits / attributes are desired and undesired or stigmatizable or not. That is why, Lennard J. Davis says: “The concept of the norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm” (13).

Keller, by the same logic, endeavors to become a normal person like other people. Her life has been a series of attempts to do whatever other people do, and to do it as well. Her success has been complete, for in trying to be like other people she has come most fully to be herself. Her unwillingness to be beaten has developed her courage and perseverance which leads her to the peak of success. Where others can go, she can go. Her respect for physical bravery and determination gears her up to the position of a successful, accomplished, and world-famous personality. Keller involves herself in an endless struggle throughout her life. It is not so easy for a person having blindness and deafness to master all the problems, crusade for all the normal ways of life—to communicate, to read, to write, to speak, to campaign for women’s rights, workers’ rights, disables’ rights, to travel and raise funds for the people with disabilities, to become a radical socialist, political activist, pacifist, and a peace activist. Keller devotes herself in defeating unmitigated hardships, difficulties, sufferings, discouragements, stigmas, and all negative attitudes towards disability and the people with disabilities. That is, she struggles for being a normal person like others. But consequently she becomes more than the normal ones. Keller becomes a world famous speaker, author, crusader and an advocate for the people with disabilities, a suffragette, an erudite, and a lecturer. It is added that the stigmatized person sometimes vacillates between cowering and bravado, racing from one to the other. Keller, instead of cowering attempts to approach the masquerading bravado; in some ways the feelings of stigmatization appears within her, which the following lines show:

> Silence sits immense upon my soul. Sometimes, it is true a sense of isolation enfolds me like a cold mist as I sit alone and wait at life's shut gate. Beyond there is light, and music, and sweet companionship; but I may not enter. Fate, silent, pitiless bars the way. Something hostile and menacing, a sense of lack agitates me with a vexing, and chills my heart with a hopeless pong. (135)

Though Keller devotes herself for in trying to be like other people, the feelings of stigmatization appear and lower the self-esteem, reduces the life chances, worth of life, increases self-hatred, shame, embarrassment, self-humiliation, self-derogation, inferiority complex, and so forth that is what is expected from the society and culture or from the non-stigmatized majority. The feeling of hopelessness enfolds Keller. Here, the feelings of stigmatization appear only because of the social stigmas which are fabricated by the normal majority (power holders); forcefully imposed on the abnormal minority, and iterated and reiterated in the daily discourses. That is, it forces them to internalize or to accept what theoretical norm desires them to be.

According to Lerita M. Coleman, stigma is not primarily a property of individuals as many have conceptualized it to be, but a humanly constructed perception, constantly in flux and legitimizing our negative responses to human differences. In part, stigmas reflect the value judgment of a dominant group or those possessing power. Stigmatization often occurs within the confines of a psychologically constructed or virtual social identity. When we make relative comparisons we can feel different. No people in this world are exactly alike. As we move out of one socio-cultural context where a difference is desired into another context where the difference is undesired the contrasting of desired and undesired difference occurs and we begin to feel the effect of stigma. That is, the undesired differences are stigmatizable. Therefore everyone at some point in life will experience stigma either temporarily or permanently. Human differences—the variations in shape, size, skin, color, texture, gender, culture, structure, function, range, habits, etc serve as the basis for stigma. That is to say, these variations are the stigmatizing conditions and can be stigmatized at any time. Hence, stigma represents a continuum of undesired differences / attributes / traits which are deeply discrediting and devaluing. The degree of stigmatization depends on how undesired the difference is or how devalued / discredited the trait is. The physical abnormalities are the most severely stigmatized differences because they are physically salient; represent some deficiency or distortion in the bodily form. Hence, disability is one of the most severely stigmatizing conditions. Other physically salient differences, such as skin, color, nationality are considered very stigmatizing. It is true that flawless people do not exist but the relative comparisons give rise to a feeling of superiority in some contexts (where one possesses a desired trait that another person is locking) but perhaps a feeling of inferiority in other contexts (where one lacks a desired trait that another person possesses). The power of stigmatization lies not only in the stigmatizers (non-stigmatized / normal majority) but also in the realization that people who are stigmatized or acquire a stigma. Moreover, many stigmatized people internalize the stigmas that is what is imputed by the so-called normals, and feel inferior and concede that other persons are superior to them because they possess certain desired attributes. Hence, they lose their place in the social hierarchy. Then the non-stigmatized majority denigrates and subjugates stigmatized people on the basis of these differences. Stigma, in this way, becomes the necessity of non-stigmatized people in order to establish a position of false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that stigmatized people are fundamentally “inferior”. Non-stigmatized people convey a sense of fundamental inferiority to stigmatized people through social isolation, rejection, and lowered expectations.

Social rejection or avoidance affects not only the stigmatized individual but everyone who is socially involved, such as family, friends, and relatives. In this way, avoidance or social rejection also acts as a form of social control or containment. Stigmatized people are not encouraged to develop or grow, to have aspirations or to be successful. They lose their friendships and receive special lenient treatment from teachers and patronized by others. They are not expected to do and achieve something in the same manner as others do. So, they are banned from many activities. Social exclusion as well as over protection leads to decreased performance. Lowered expectations also lead to decreased self-esteem, self-hatred, and self-derogation. Social rejection, hence, is the most severe to cope than to deal with the physical difficulties. It seems that the paradoxical societal norms that establish a subordinate and dependent position for stigmatized people while ostracizing them for it may stem from the need of non-stigmatized people to maintain a sense of superiority. Their position is supported and reinforced by their perceptions that stigmatized people are fundamentally “inferior”, “passive”, “weak”, helpless, and childlike. A stigma then is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. Thus, in the case of stigma, role expectations are often the same as the stereotypes. In this sense, Coleman says:

> Perceptually, stigma becomes the master status, the attribute that colors the perception of the entire person. All other aspects of the person are ignored except those that fit the stereotypes associated with the stigma. Stigma is a form of negative stereotyping, has a way of neutralizing

> positive qualities and undermining the identity of stigmatized individuals. (222)

This is what Davis calls “a discordance with personal attributes”. Here, stereotyping is frequently tied to the need for self-enhancement for so-called “normal” people. Stigmatized people are identified with all negative stereotypes in order to lower their self-esteem. And, one explanation offered by many theorists is that stereotypes about stigmatized groups help to maintain the exploitation of such groups and preserve the existing hierarchical social structure. Hence, stigma is a perceptual tool to enslave and rule over the abnormal (undesired differences). It is a means of maintaining the status-quo through social control for “normal” people. Thus, stigmatized people are not expected to be active, intelligent, attractive, strong, and so forth.

By the same token, fear is instrumental in the perpetuation of stigma and in maintaining its original social functions by establishing greater psychological and social distance. The stigmatized individuals are forced to be limited within the domestic chamber house because of the permanent form of social quarantine. That is, they are rejected or avoided for the public life or for the social life. It seems clear that what gives stigma its intensity and reality is fear. Social rejection or social isolation elicits fear in stigmatized people. This fear is no other than the fear of the negative imputations of non-stigmatized majority and their oppression and repression. But, the stigmatized individuals cower to resist against their stigmas, ignore the norms, and disobey the existing laws based on stigma because of the fear of more stigmatization. And, accept the society’s negative perceptions of their stigma. The most pernicious consequence is that they develop the same perception that the non-stigmatized people have. Hence, they begin to see themselves and their lives through the stigma, or they allow themselves to be poisoned by the stereotypes and live in fear that they will correspond to it. In this sense, stigma represents a kind of death—a social death. Non-stigmatized people through exclusion and segregation often treat stigmatized people as if they were invisible, non-existent or dead. Fear can be applied to the acquisition of other stigmas and help to intensity and perpetuate the negative responses to most stigmatized categories. Thus, irrational fears may help stigmatization to be self-perpetuating. These fears are grounded in a realistic assessment of the negative social consequences of stigmatization and reflect the long-term social and psychological damage to individuals resulting from stigma.

Though the core of the problem lies with the so-called “normal” (non-stigmatized) people, stigmatized people can play an important role in destigmatization process. According to Coleman, some stigmatizing conditions appear escapable but the stigmatized people’s effort to relinquish them is a most must. For her, the physically salient differences, such as skin, color, physical abnormalities—represent some deficiency or distortion in the bodily form, in most cases are considered unalterable and severely stigmatizing. Nevertheless, some people are more capable of defeating their stigmas and escaping from the negative social consequences of being stigmatized. Stigma, thus, is a tool to empowering the stigmatizer and stripping the stigmatized of power. Yet a personal awakening is a most must to discover that the responsibility for being stigmatized does not lie with oneself. Understanding that the rationale for discrimination and segregation based on stigma lies in the minds of so-called normals leads to ignore the norms (normalcy) and to disobey the existing laws based on stigma. In this context, Coleman writes:

> People with disabilities, women, blacks, gays, lesbians, unemployed, elderly adults, and many other stigmatized people begin to understand that the stigmatizer, having established a position of false superiority

> and consequently the need to maintain it, is enslaved to the concept that stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior. In fact, some stigmatized individuals question the norms (normality) and often come away with greater inner strength to challenge the monolithic social discourses although the process can be fraught with pain and difficulty. (223-25)

It becomes clear that the primary problem lies with the stigmatizer (normals) not with the stigmatized (abnormals). Out of this state of social isolation and lowered expectations though, can arise some positive consequences. Although the process can be fraught with pain and difficulty, stigmatized people who begin to question the bases for defining normality (normalcy parameters), they learn to depend on their own resources. And, they often come away with greater inner strength and manage to reject the perceptions of themselves as “inferior”, “weak”, “lack”, “passive”, and so forth.

Similarly, Keller comes up with greater inner strength rejecting the perceptions of the people with disabilities as inferior, lack, weak, passive, petty, and incompetent; and piercing the negative mind-set towards disability and the people with disabilities. Irrespective of all difficulties, sufferings, and discouragements she fights for the equality and justice for everyone with courage, perseverance, and strong determination. Ignoring the norms and disobeying the existing laws based on stigma she campaigns for disables’ rights, women’s rights, workers’ rights, as well as many other progressive causes. Keller attempts to challenge the traditional society and culture in which the people with disabilities are lonely, isolated, and victims of violence and coercion; and the so-called able-bodied people ridicule, avoid, pity, stereotype, stigmatize, and patronize them. Though she is a doubly impaired woman—visually as well as hearing, she never thinks that she has disabilities. The society and culture treats women as “mutilated” and “deformed”. The femaleness is defined in equation with disability. Hence, we can easily imagine how a woman with disabilities is treated. Keller, a women having double disabilities—blindness and deafness strongly struggles with the unmitigated hardships, severe stigmas, and the pejorative attitudes of the society. In this way, how hard the life she is living becomes clear. Regardless of all these difficulties, Keller is determined to study, speak, and advocating equality and justice for everyone—disables, women, workers, soldiers in war, slaves, and other minorities. Here, she says:

> A soul-sense, which sees, hears, feels, all in one that lifts me above the narrow, cramping circumstances of my life. My physical limitations are forgotten. I feel that there are invisible lines stretched between my spirit and the spirits of others. I try to make the light in others’ eyes my sun, the music in others’ ears my symphony, and the smile in others’ lips my happiness. (135)

Though Keller neither can hear nor see, she does everything more competently, actively, and accurately than any other able-bodied ones. Keller, keeping up with the pace of the so-called normals comes away with strong determination and greater inner strength, which the following lines prove:

> Indeed, nothing can stop the impulse to fly. One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar. There were so many difficulties along the way; so many discouragements; but I kept on trying, knowing that patience and perseverance would win in the end. And while I worked, I built the most beautiful air-castles, and dreamed dreams, the pleasantest of which was of the time when I should talk

> like other people. The thought of pleasure sweetened every effort and made every failure an incentive to try harder next time. Be of good cheer. Do not think of to-day's failures; but of the success that may come to-morrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere, and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles—a delight in climbing rugged paths, which you would perhaps never know if you did not sometime slip backward—if the road was always smooth and pleasant. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost. Sometime, somewhere, somehow we shall find that which we seek. We shall speak, yes, and we should be determined. (382)

Though she is with the very absence of sight and hearing, Keller miraculously acts as if she is hearing and seeing. She transforms the physical limitations (blindness and deafness) into the source of success. Although the process is fraught with pain, sufferings, and difficulties, her courage and enthusiasm never diminished for a moment in her eagerness to challenge and defeat the social discourse of disability. Her heart is set upon learning to talk or speak like other people. She, at once resolves to learn to speak, and has never wavered in that resolution. Hence, all the disadvantages of being "deaf-blind" are overcome and only the advantages remain because of her iron like determination.

No individual is similar in this world. And stigma stems from the differences. So, stigmatization is difficult to resist. Relative comparison is made between the individuals on the basis of differences rather than the similarities. That is, similarities between the individuals are undermined and the differentness is fore grounded, since the undesired differentness / attribute is negatively imputed or stigmatized. But, a personal awakening or understanding can de-stigmatize / normalize an individual. Many stigmatized people attempt to "pass", conceal or disguise the stigmas in order to appear "normal". In this context, Coleman states:

> For stigmatized people, the idea of normality takes on an exaggerated importance. Normality becomes the supreme goal for many stigmatized or abnormal individuals until they realize that there is no precise definition of normality except what they would be without their stigma. So, normalization or destigmatization is an attempt to be 'not different' and to appear 'normal'. Such strategies include 'passing' or disguising the stigma and acting 'normal' by covering up—keeping up with the pace of non-stigmatized individuals. A pivotal fact is that, their sense of being a 'normal person' a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore, who deserves a fair chance and a fair break. (224-25)

No one in this world likes to be perceived as different or "abnormal". So, everyone attempts to be "normal" by covering up the stigmas and keeping up with the pace of the so-called 'normals'. Thus, here remains a fair chance of break from stigmatization or from the stigmatized group.

Keller, in the same manner, endeavors to be like other people. All her life she has been trying to be "normal" whatever she does is no other than an attempt to excel the so-called "normals". She writes unusually fine English, speaks—English, French, and German. Her pronunciation is excellent. She is more rich in vocabulary containing all words of aural and visual experiences; no errors in syntax or in choice of words. It lies in the very absence of sight and hearing, since a child of the muses cannot have such fine English unless fine English has been its nourishment. Speech, the normative society takes for granted as a necessary part like the right hand, which disables the people with linguistic minority or hard of hearing. Then sign language and manual language are stigmatized as “disable” (or lack). The people with hard of hearing cannot hear so they also cannot produce speeches. That is, they are not voiceless rather they cannot produce fine speeches. But, Keller unlike this produces the human speech. Her pronunciation is excellent. She becomes a world-famous speaker, lecturer, political activist, radical socialist, peace activist, and an advocate for the people with disabilities, women, workers, slaves, and many more. She excels the so-called normals. Keller reads the printed books, writes, speaks, plays games, tours and travels throughout the world, enjoys the music, and does everything what so ever others do. She sees more with her fingers than we do with our eyes. For all this, Keller throws herself into the strenuous life. That is, she says “a rejection of ignoble ease for the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife” (96), which can be exposed from these lines:

> Everyone who wishes to gain true knowledge must climb the Hill Difficulty alone, and since there is no royal road to the summit, I must Zigzag it in my own way. I slip back many times, I fall, I stand still, I run against the edge of hidden obstacles, I lose my temper and find it again and keep it better, I trudge on, I gain a little, I feel encouraged, I get more eager and climb higher and begin to see the widening horizon. Every struggle is a victory. One more effort and I reach the luminous cloud, the blue depths of the sky, the uplands of my desire. For, after all, life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Never bend your head; hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye. Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial

> and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved. (102)

Keller is born out of problems. Although the life is fraught with so many difficulties and sufferings, she is never embarrassed and discouraged; rather she says: “Birds and flowers and I were happy peers” (27). “Literature is my utopia, gracious discourse of my book-friends. They talk to me without embarrassment and awkwardness” (120). Underscoring her self-determination throughout the story, Keller depicts herself as a self-made individual. She is determined to oppose the restrictions and injustices in the social, cultural, educational, economic, and political as well as many other realms in order to achieve equality with the so-called normals. Presenting herself as a remarkably vigorous and spirited person, Keller subverts the traditional, monolithic, exclusive, and pig-headed socio-cultural discourse which assumes that “all sensations reach us through the eye and the ear” (126). Though she neither can see nor hear, Keller says that she can still tell the differences between walking in the city streets and in country roads. She can distinguish between the two because her “whole body is alive to the conditions around” her, allowing her to focus on sensations that sighted and hearing people often fail to notice (126). Hence, she successfully transforms her physical limitations into the sources of her prophetic authority. And, she challenges the discriminatory practices of society and envisions a more inclusive one devoid of class, gender, racial, and other hierarchies.

According to Goffman, the stigmatized individual can defeat the stigma or correct the stigmatizing conditions in two ways: directly and indirectly. In some cases it will be possible for the stigmatized individual to make a direct attempt to eliminate the stigma or to correct the stigmatizing conditions, what he / she sees as the objective basis of his / her failing. In this way, one can correct or treat or repair his / her failing—undesired differentness, such as, a physically deformed person undergoes surgery or medical treatment, a disfigured plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment, an illiterate remedial education, homosexual psychotherapy, and so on. Where such repair is possible, what often results is not fully normalization but destigmatization. Likewise, the stigmatized individual can also attempt to correct his / her condition indirectly by devoting much private effort or greater inner strength to the mastery of areas of activity ordinarily felt to be closed on incidental and physical grounds to one with his / her shortcoming, such as a lame person becomes expert in swimming, riding, playing tennis, or flying an airplane, or a blind person becomes expert in reading printed texts, touring and travelling, skiing and mountain climbing, or a person with congenital deafness becomes expert in speaking, masters the languages, or an individual confined to a wheelchair manages to dance with a girl in some kind of mimicry of dancing, and so on. Finally, the person with a shameful differentness (severe stigmas) can break or defeat the stigma with the very reality. What Goffman says: "Tortured learning may be associated, of course, with the tortured performance of what is learned" (208). This attempt employs an unconventional interpretation of the person of his social identity. Here, it shatters the conventional discrimination towards the people with disabilities—"a sound mind is possible in a sound body", that is able-body. In this context, Goffman opines:

> Both healthy minds and healthy bodies may be crippled. The fact that 'normal' people can get around, can see, can hear, it does not mean that they are seeing or hearing. They can be very 'blind and deaf' to the things which can effectively diminish satisfactions of living or the worth of life almost to the vanishing point; is far more a tragedy or a malady than blindness or deafness or any other disabilities. Perhaps in

> some ways the people with disabilities can be the means of opening the eyes of the so-called ‘normals’. Hence, life is not all smooth sailing even for those with unblemished ‘ordinary’ faces. (208-9)

That is, it ignores the norms, disobeys the existing laws based on stigma, questions the normalcy paradigm, and comes to re-assess the limitations of normals.

By the same token, Keller, a “deaf-blind” girl devoting much private effort to the mastery of areas of actively ordinarily felt to be closed on incidental as well as physical grounds because of the blindness and deafness. That is to say, she masters the areas of activity which are ordinarily felt to be closed for her by the normalcy parameters, such as speaking, reading the printed texts, playing sports, advocating for the people with disabilities, women, workers, communicating with others, earning good education, lecturing, travelling and touring throughout the world, receiving numerous posthumous honors, and so forth. Keller portrays herself as an industrious exemplar of the strenuous life devoting much private effort and labor. She relates her early struggles to communicate and to speak. Keller claims:

> My work was practice, practice, practice. I labored night and day before I could be understood. The impulse to utter audible sounds and to articulate each sound clearly had always been strong within me, which resulted in the breaking down of this great barrier. ‘Light! Give me light!’ was the soundless cry of my soul. A power divine touched my spirit and gave it sight, so that I beheld many wonders. And from the sacred mountain I heard a voice which said, ‘knowledge is love and light and vision. (61-62)

The power divine or the voice is no other than her courage, perseverance, willingness, and iron determination. She also notes that her, teachers, Anne Sullivan and Sarah

Fuller, often “forced [her] to repeat […], words and sentences, sometimes for hours” (62). As she endures such trials, Keller reveals her iron determination and her willingness to persevere through adversity. Similarly, she devotes much private effort to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her tortured learning can be seen in these lines:

> Fraught with so many difficulties, I could not be discouraged. The thought of going to college took root in my heart and became an earnest desire, which impelled me to enter into competition for a degree with seeing and hearing persons in their own standards. The administrative board of Radcliffe did not realize how difficult they were making my studies, nor did they understand the peculiar difficulties I had to surmount. But I overcame them all. A potent force within me, stronger than the persuasion of my friends, stronger even than the pleadings of my heart, had impelled me to try my strength by the standards of those who see and hear. I knew that there were obstacles in the way; but I was eager to overcome them. I began my studies with eagerness. Before me I saw a new world opening in beauty and light, and I felt within me the capacity to know all things. In the wonderland of mind I should be as free as another. (98-99)

There is her teacher, miss Sullivan to read for her but she prefers reading herself, and one reading is sufficient to stamp every detail upon her memory forever. That is, she has a tactile memory. She studies the subjects (books) which other “normal” students study by their standards, such as geography, zoology, Botany, Arithmetic, geometry, literature, philosophy, astronomy, physics, chemistry, algebra, economics history, and so on. In the very absence of sight and hearing, Keller speaks and writes unusually fine English, French, German, and many more languages without errors in syntax or in the choice of words. Her vocabulary is very rich and pronunciation is excellent. She works on the typewriter with fair speed and absolute sureness. Her manuscripts seldom contain typographical errors. She likes to be part of the company. If her company laughs at a joke, she laughs too just as if she has heard or seen it. Likewise, her enjoyment of music, however, is very genuine, for she has a tactile recognition of sound a glow with music shines in her face. She gets genuine pleasure of music from the vibration of the air, muscular thrill and contraction, and the pulsation of the air. Keller has a just and intelligent appreciation of different composers, such as Schumann and Beethoven, from having literally felt their music; Schumann being her favorite proves her genuine enjoyment of music. Her effort to reach out and meet other people on their own intellectual ground has kept her informed of daily affairs. Of the real world, she knows more of the good and less of the evil than most people seem to know. Keller loves sports too. When she is a quite little girl, she learns to row and swim. She enjoys canoeing at moonlight nights. Her favorite amusement is sailing and boating. Not only this, she is fond of playing chess, cards, game of solitaire, going to theater, museums and art stores, and so forth. These are not only the sources of pleasure but also of inspiration, courage, perseverance, and strong determination which the following lines show:

> Doubtless, it will seem strange to many that the hands unaided by sight and hearing can feel actions, feelings, sentiments, beauty, and many more in the cold marble; and yet it is true that I derive genuine pleasure from touching great works of art. As my finger tips trace line and curve, they discover the thought, feeling, and emotion which the artist has portrayed. I can feel in the faces of Gods and heroes—courage, love, hate, and anger, just as I can detect them in living faces I am

> permitted to touch. I feel in Diana's posture the grace, freedom, and passion. And in the curves of the Venus I feel repose and grace. In a medallion of Homer I know the beautiful, sad face with loving reverence, tracks of life, and bitter evidences of struggle and sorrow. (129-30)

Keller, thus, devoting much private effort or the greater inner strength or what she calls "the potent force within" to the mastery of areas of activity ordinarily felt to be closed for her defies all cultural abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, stigma, stereotypes, and the negative attitudes that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities. Finally, she reverses the social discourse of disability through reality. And proves that disability is not a "lack", "inferiority", "weakness", or "passivity" rather it is a robust individuality and the diversity of humanity.

Likewise, no one wants the stigma associated with disability. The stigma or the attitudes of able-bodied people towards disability and the people with disabilities is more severe to deal than to cope with their physical conditions. According to Susan Wendell, disabling conditions or the stigmatizing conditions change with time and place depending on such factors as social expectations, the state of technology and its availability, educational system, attitudes towards physical appearance and the pace of life and so on. More people become disabled and stigmatized simply because fewer people can keep up the "normal" pace. So, the idea that there is some universal, perhaps biologically or medically describable paradigm of human ability—"normality" is an illusion. It is because our real human bodies are exceedingly diverse—in size, shape, color, texture, structure, function, range, development, and habits of movements—and they are constantly changing. Hence, the human body cannot be essentialized or idealized. But, the society and culture essentializes and idealizes the body. And we wish for the bodies we do not have, with frustration, shame, embarrassment, self-hatred, and humiliation. Then we feel trapped in the negative body; it is our internalized oppression to feel this. These physical ideals are not “natural” or “normal”, but artificial social constructions that oppress everyone. The careful study of the lives of disabled people reveals—how artificial line is drawn between “the able” and “the disabled”. So, to fill this gulf between “the able” and “the disabled” the solution is to emphasizing similarities between the individuals rather than the differences. In this context, Wendell writes:

> Ultimately, we might eliminate the category of ‘the disabled’ altogether and simply talk about the similarities between the individuals’ physical abilities in their social context. One recent attempt to reduce the ‘otherness’ of disabled people is the introduction of the term ‘differently-abled’. But, on the whole, the term ‘differently-abled’ should be abandoned because it reinforces the able-bodied paradigm of normalcy as strong, healthy, beautiful, young, with all body parts working perfectly; and fails to acknowledge the struggles disabled people face. It says, ‘this person is not the norm or paradigm of humanity’. It also suggests a polite, patronizing, protective, and self-protective disregard of the difficulties, struggles, and sufferings disabled people face. So, it further increases the ‘otherness’ of disabled people. (263-64)

Full integration of the people with disabilities into the society emphasizing similarities between the individuals is a most must in the hope that able-bodied people will identify with the oppressed, recognize their rights, gradually give them equal opportunities, and eventually assimilate them.

However, Rosemarie Garland Thomson talks about a “minoritizing” and a “universalizing” view of difference in disability discourse. One minoritizes difference by imagining its significance and concerns as limited to a narrow, specific arena of inquiry. In contrast, a universalizing view sees issues surrounding a particularized form of difference as having “continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of differences” (282). That is, a particular form of difference constitutes or determines the identity of the people in their lives. Hence, valorizing the universalizing disability discourse which draws on feminism’s confrontation with the gender system, Thomson argues:

> The body as a cultural text which is interpreted, inscribed with meaning, indeed made within social relations of power. Such a perspective advocates equality by destigmatizing the disabled body, locating difference relationally, denaturalizing normalcy, challenging apparent hierarchies, denaturalizing disability’s assumed inferiority, and casting its configurations and functions as difference rather than lack. (282-83)

Here, it deconstructs the assumption that disability is bodily insufficiency or misfortune to be compensated for through a pity, rather than a civil rights model (disability rights movement). For able-bodied, the disabled often symbolize failure, weakness, passivity, inferiority, lack, misfortune, and so on. But disabled people also become symbols of success and heroic control against all odds: the cripple before the stairs, the blind before the printed page, the deaf before the radio, the amputee before the typewriter, and the dwarf before the counter. They are confronting to the so-called able-bodied, and affirming the possibility of overcoming the body and the negative mentality that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities. And, they receive public attention because they accomplish things that are unusual even for the so-called normals, perform feats of physical strength and endurance, and inspire and hearten that “anyone can overcome the disability”. It is revealing that Helen Keller, and very recently, Stephen Hawking, and Jhamak Kumari Ghimire are among them.

Here, Helen Keller, irrespective of all difficulties and sufferings surrounded by mute-silence and darkness, reaches out to the public world—the world of strength, the positive (valued) body, success, performance and production, the able-bodied and youth. Though the disabled are relegated to the private world—the world of death, pain, weakness, illness, rest and recovery, and the negative (devalued) body, generally hidden and often neglected, Keller comes into the terrain of public world. Coming into this world, she counters the so-called normals who regard it as if it is their own turf. While doing so, Keller encounters the resistance in which the able-bodied people ridicule, mock, avoid, pity, stigmatize, neglect, stereotype, and patronize the people with disabilities. But, she comes vehemently upon all cultural abominations of the body with greater inner strength and defies the low expectations that the society and culture has historically had of the people with disabilities. It is her courage, perseverance, and strong determination which lead her to win in any test, that can be seen in the following lines:

> But all was not lost! After all, sight and hearing are but two of the beautiful blessings which God had given me. The most precious, the most wonderful of His gifts was still mine. My mind remained clear and active, ‘though fled forever the light’. Here I am not

> disenfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet of this world. Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it. When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us. The winds are made to blow from the four corners of the heavens, how the vapors ascend from the ends of the earth, how rivers are cut out among the rocks, and mountains overturned by the roots, and in what ways man may overcome many forces mightier than himself. (412-13)

These above lines expose how courageous and persevere Keller is. She accomplishes things that are unusual even for the able-bodied. In the very absence of sight and hearing, Keller learns to communicate, speak, reading printed texts, and using typewriter. She speaks and writes unusually fine language without any error in syntax or in the choice of words. Her pronunciation is excellent; she masters the languages like English, French, German, and so on. She graduates from Radcliffe with honors; writes a total of twelve published books and several articles. She enjoys music, goes everywhere, mixes actively in life, and becomes a beloved personality. Hence, she has come most fully to be herself; learns through the life itself, struggles so hard, and reverses the social discourse of disability. Throughout her life she advocates for equality and justice for everyone. She experiences the sufferings of women, disabled, workers, slaves, people with color, disabled women, and other minorities. She understands the pain of social exclusion and isolation. So, the seeds of radicalism blossoms into her political militancy, and joins the U.S. Socialist Party and the International Workers of the World (IWW). She becomes a world-famous speaker, author, political activist, radical socialist, lecturer, peace activist, pacifist, suffragette, and an advocate for the people with disabilities. She tours and travels throughout the world raising funds for the people with disabilities; speaks in opposition to war, poverty, and prostitution as the leading causes of disability. And, she campaigns for the rights of women, disabled, workers, slaves, people with color, and other minorities. Keller challenges the discriminatory practices of the society and culture and envisions a truly democratic nation, more inclusive society devoid of hierarchies where everyone sees each other as brother and sister. After all, she is awarded with numerous posthumous honors—the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the United States' highest two civilian honors; she is listed in Gallup's most widely admired people of the twentieth century; elected to the National Women's Hall of Fame at the New York World's Fair, and so on.

To sum up, Keller defies all cultural abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and the negative mentality that the society and culture has historically had towards disability and the people with disabilities. Irrespective of her physical limitations she comes vehemently upon the rude "normative society" which othered, repressed, and oppressed millions of disabled people through negative imputations, such as stigmatizing, stereotyping, and so forth. In the very absence of sight and hearing, she throws herself into the strenuous life—a rejection of ignoble ease for the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; and becomes a successful, accomplished, and widely admired personality of the twentieth century. Regardless of the blindness and deafness, she does everything—communicating, speaking, reading, writing, travelling, campaigning people for their rights, and so on, no less than the so-called normals. Her courage, perseverance, and iron like determination leads her where so ever others go, what so ever others do, and to win in any test. Throughout her life she opposes the exclusive social structure based on hierarchies and binary oppositions, and works towards justice and equality for everyone. In this respect, she travels and tours all over the world and campaigns for the rights of women, slaves, workers, people with color, people with disabilities, and other minorities. She is an erudite and a crusader for the people with disabilities. Shattering down the society's low-expectations of the people with disabilities, she becomes a world-famous speaker, author, political activist, radical socialist, lecturer, suffragette, pacifist, peace activist, and so on. Hence, the strong determination and her spirit of resistance turns upside down the social discourse of disability fabricated by the so-called "normal majority" to justify their "abilities" by possessing false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that the people with disabilities are fundamentally "inferior", "weak", "passive", or "lack".

III. Subversion of the Discourse of Disability in Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*

This research attempts to exhibit masterful portrayal of Helen Keller's strong determination to defeat the stigma of disability. In particular, it challenges the general concepts of "disability" which othered millions of "disabled" people by stigmatizing, stereotyping, and deviating them from the main stream society constructing a kind of utopia of the "norm". Moreover, Keller's autobiography *The Story of my life* shows her attempts to challenge and defeat the discourse of disability by renouncing its interpellation and by constructing counter-discourse through living and being engaged in strong struggle, resistance, and determination, such as establishing herself as a successful, world-famous, greatest, and most widely admired personality; campaigning for the rights of women, workers, disables, touring and raising funds for the people with disabilities, and other numerous progressive causes.

The question of disability is a hard knot to crack. It is defined as a lack of ability commensurate with the personal or socio-cultural milieu. Disables are taken for granted as "the other", "the deviant", "inferior", and "the lack" in the society. They are not treated on equal grounds. In short, they are socially unaccepted in one way or the other. Their abilities are brought into a halt in order to justify the abilities of the so-called "normals". Furthermore, they are marginalized in every aspects of life, such as social, educational, economic, and so forth. The inhuman treatment of disabled people makes their life a series of unmitigated hardships. Their abilities are overshadowed by a single trait of stigma.

Stigma reflects the value judgment of a dominant group. It is a mark of disgrace which is devalued and deeply discrediting. Any discriminatory treatment against "disabled" people is the practice of being superior to them on the part of the so-called “normal” people. Stigma is non-stigmatized people’s necessity in order to feel good about themselves. They possess false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that stigmatized people are fundamentally “inferior”. Likewise, non-stigmatized people convey a sense of inferiority to stigmatized people as invisible, non-existent or dead through social avoidance and social rejection. All other aspects of the person are ignored except those that fit for the stereotype are associated with the stigma. Thus, stigma is a form of negative stereotyping has a way of neutralizing positive qualities and undermining the identity of stigmatized individuals.

In this connection, the thesis tries to reveal new insights into the position of the disabled. The discourses created by the so-called “normals” are questioned and vehemently criticized as they are biased, exclusive, and farfetched from the reality. In reality, how the disabled people are ostracized, stigmatized, represented, and how the hegemony of normalcy is constructed is inextricably prejudicial and intertwined with the social relations of power. There is a vast gap constructed by the narcissistic standards of the normalcy regarding the firsthand experience of the body, abilities of the disabled people, and so on.

Keller, a “deaf-blind” girl fated never to see this world visually and never to hear a single sound; with the help of a great and dedicated teacher—Anne Sullivan discovers the world through her fingertips—as a world famous speaker, author, political activist, lecturer, suffragette, pacifist, radical socialist, and so on. Irrespective of all insurmountable difficulties surrounded by “mute-silence and darkness” her spirit reaches out. She is guided by strong determination and free will. All her life has been a series of attempts to be like “normal” people. She describes things not as they appear to her but as they appear to hearing and seeing. Defying all cultural abominations of the body and the blemishes of individual character, she challenges the society and culture which isolates, ignores, and marginalizes the “non-normals” through hierarchic schematizations, dyadic oppositions, stigmatization, and so forth. She has come most fully to be herself. Her unwillingness to be beaten has developed her courage, perseverance, physical bravery, optimism, and strong determination which leads her where so ever “normals” go, and to win in any test.

To conclude, Keller’s unusual and inspiring story: the way she learns to communicate, speak, read and write, earns a Bachelor of Arts degree, conquers the hardships, overcomes the stigmas, stereotypes, and so forth proves her a successful, accomplished, and vital person no-less than the “normal” ones. In this regard, this project not only presents odds but triumphantly places the flaunting vagaries of an embodiment to challenge the patronizing, monolithic, pigheaded, antiquated, and outdated “normal culture”. The concern of the research therefore is to subvert the discourse that—disability is a lack, an inborn weakness, a misfortune, a curse which cannot be avoided into a boon. Hence, stigma and disability both are no other than the discourses created by the so called “normals” or non-stigmatized to justify their abilities and false superiority over the “abnormals” or stigmatized. The attitudes that the so-called “normals” or non-stigmatized have towards the “abnormals” or stigmatized is quite negative and inhuman; so, our attitudinal reformation is a most must to fit the stigmatized and disabled individuals equally in the society. After all, to bridge the existing gulf between “the able” and “the disabled” the category of “the able/normal” and “the disabled” must be eliminated and all human differences should be treated equally as the diversity of human not only in the paper and pencil practices but also in daily life.

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