

I. Disability as a Universal Metaphor

Barbara Kingsolver, in an attempt to split from the exploitative tradition, offers realistic, complex disabled characters. She does not simply regard characters as metaphors. Kingsolver has a highly politicized agenda in *The Poisonwood Bible*: she critiques European and American imperialist policies toward Africa, oppressive patriarchal attitudes toward women, racial oppression in the American South, and alienating cultural assumptions about disabled people. Nonetheless, she gives us full characterizations and complete subjective experiences. Her characters, including Adah, who is disabled, are not symbolic pawns. They live on their own.

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* is written in 1998. In the novel, Nathan Price, a Southern preacher, drags his wife and four daughters to the Congo to fulfill his messianic visions. He is the only one in the novel not granted a subjective voice. The result is that he appears to be a stock character, a wild-eyed religious fanatic. Eventually his motivation is revealed to be a hellish World War II experience that left him with an overwhelming sense of evil and guilt that now compel him to confront the world and remold it, a prime situation for displaying a series of major and minor oppressions and alienations, through complex flesh-and-blood people. At the same time, denying voice to Nathan Price novelist seems to present the pervasiveness of cultural assumptions through him. He is, in a sense, an elusive character. He becomes pivotal for the actions and reactions of other characters in the novel.

The overriding theme of alienated "Otherness" and the cultural rejection of it manifests in the issue of disability. It dramatically uses disability to depict cultural fear of the Other and the necessity of having the Other to define normality. The twin sisters Leah and Adah Price are the novel's examples of physical otherness.

Leah's fetus is supposed to have consumed half of the brain of Adah's fetus while the two were still in the womb, thus marking both as abnormal almost from conception. The two children are assumed to be retarded and are treated as such until a sympathetic educator discovers that, on the contrary, both are geniuses. Adah with her half-brain has an extraordinary talent for languages, one quirk of which is a preference for creating, thinking, and writing in palindromes: a preference to write and read words and phrase backward and forward. It is her extraordinary possession that she examines life from all angles. Suspension of disbelief is strained here because medical opinion finds the coupling of hemiplegia with high-end intelligence to be extremely unlikely. The irony of their situation foregrounds the fact that retardation and genius are not simply facts of nature or of medical opinion, but are culturally defined. Society uses the extremes, the nonaverages, to define what is to be called normal. Suspicion of the disabled and the superabled provides an opposing cohesion that unifies the majority as standard. Unity comes from exclusion so society must mark some individuals for exclusion. Alienation by definition is a requirement for maintaining the social fabric.

Adah is also electively mute. She chooses not to speak because she accepts her role as outsider. That is, she will not communicate with a society that does not see her as a person. Later, when she chooses her own path in life (college and medical school), instead of acquiescing to social definition, she achieves selfhood and begins to talk. She discovers that her extreme lameness had been only a cultural marking, an unconscious manifestation of her acceptance of her social monstrosity. She begins to walk almost normally.

Adah is perceived by her family as how society marks her. Like all the female Prices, her wishes count as nothing against the monomania of her father, who

is obsessive and unrelenting that, against the advice of the villagers, he refuses to stop pulling up poisonwood shrubs even when their sap causes his skin to erupt painfully.

Even Adah's mother Orleanna, faced with having to decide which child to save during a devastating invasion of army ants, hesitates, then chooses the nondisabled child, Ruth May, leaving slow-moving Adah to probable death. Adah's family marginalizes her, she is doubly oppressed, as a woman and as a disabled person.

Nathan Price comes originally from the lowest level of Southern white society but gains some limited status through becoming a religious figure. He transports his Southern racism to the Congo and, at least in his own mind, translates the African villagers into another social stratum below himself. His attempts to impose his will on the villagers can be seen as efforts to manufacture and sustain his own classist and racial superiority, and from the angle of disability studies, he puts his daughters on the same inferior level as the Africans. In Price's hierarchy, African males, American females, and the disabled all occupy a lower social rung. His refusal to have any dealings with village women puts them on an even lower rung. The villagers, however, politely but firmly reject Nathan Price's constant assertions, seeing them as weirdly inappropriate. By their rejections they script their own selfhood and their equality to him. Price's extreme obsession, which leads eventually to his abandoning his family, to insanity or at least insane behaviour, and death, is the outcome of his desperate need to maintain his social, gendered, and nationalistic supremacy.

Rural Georgians see Adah, whether retarded or genius, as an atypical horror and reject her, and her physical difference identifies her alien nature. But in the Congo Adah finds that disability, in a sense, does not exist, it is so prevalent that it is seen as

a normal, integrated part of life. Because disability is inevitable, people accept it and get on with their lives, like Mama Mwanza in the hut next door who continues as an enthusiastic wife and mother despite a lack of legs. It is assumed that given the harshness of this life, everyone will be disabled in some way, sooner or later.

Disability studies is an emerging field, still defining its theories and parameters and borrowing much of its methodology from gender, racial, postcolonial, and queer studies, which often derive from theorists such as Foucault and Derrida, but with an important difference. Whereas other studies may overlap lesbian writing in India could conceivably be studied by all four of the above methodologies- only disability studies is universal in its application.

In other words, disability has been seen as eccentric, therapeutically oriented, out-of-the-mainstream, and certainly not representative of that condition- not as race, class, or gender seem representative of that condition. This is a reader that places disability in a political, social, and cultural context, that theorizes and historicizes deafness or blindness or disability in similarly complex ways to the way race, class, and gender have been theorized.

Another concept which is inter-related with the construction of normalcy under the disability studies is the concept of 'stigma'. Stigmatization and construction of 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 medium of the base through which something or somebody is stigmatized in any society. Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or a person. In other words, stigma is a response to the social stimuli based upon the perception of undesired differentness. It is not that all the attributes in human beings are accepted by society. But they are categorized, and those attributes which

conform to the social anticipation are thought to be normal or the desired one. And, other attributes, not desired by the society, are subjected to criticism and relegated to the margin. So, stigma is the response of the person to social perception of him or her. Therefore, it is a social, cultural and psychological construct which is understood as a kind of negative value and attribute created by the society. Stigma is any condition, attributes or behavior that symbolically marks off the bearer as culturally unacceptable or inferior with the consequent feelings of shame, guilt and disgrace. In other words, it is the social process related to personal experience characterized by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation that results from experience of anticipation of an adverse social judgment about a person or a group. In any society, stigma has negative connotation and its discrediting effect is very adverse.

Barbara Kingsolver was born on April 8, 1955, in Annapolis, Maryland, to Virginia Henry and Wendell Kingsolver, a physician. The family moved to eastern Kentucky in order to be close to family, and Kingsolver's father worked there as the only doctor in rural Nicholas County. This was a depressed country- oddly situated between the poverty of coal fields and the affluence of horse farms - and most people living there were not well off. They earned enough money to ensure their survival through tobacco farming, but were dependent on neighbors for everything else. Nicholas County did not have a swimming pool, and Kingsolver never laid eyes on so much as a tennis court until she went away to college.

In 1962, Kingsolver's father chose to practice medicine where he felt he could make a significant difference in the lives of others, so he took his family to St. Lucia, where they lived in a convent hospital, and then to Central Africa. While living in Africa, Kingsolver experienced what it were like to be a minority and an outsider. She was the only white child in the village. At the time, her hair was long enough to

sit on, and, never having seen hair like hers, the village children tried to pull it off as though it was some sort of headpiece. Kingsolver's experiences in Africa opened her eyes to the world, provoked her curiosity about people from other cultures, and served as a model for the setting of *The Poisonwood Bible*.

After receiving her Master of Science degree in 1981 from the University of Arizona, Kingsolver accepted a job at the university and began writing science articles. She also pursued additional graduate studies and took a writing class with author Francine Prose. It was then that Kingsolver realized she did not want a career in academics, she wanted to write. She began working as a freelance scientific writer and journalist, with articles appearing in *The Progressive*, *Smithsonian*, and *The Sonoran Review*. Kingsolver also began writing short stories that were published in *Redbook* and *Mademoiselle*, and anthologies such as *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best, 1988*, *Florilegia, an Anthology of Art and Literature by Women*, and *Rebirth of Power*.

On April 15, 1985, Kingsolver married University of Arizona chemistry professor, Joseph Hoffmann. She soon found herself pregnant and unable to sleep at night, and although her doctor suggested that she scrub bathroom tiles with a toothbrush to battle her insomnia, she sat in a closet instead and began writing her first novel, *The Bean Trees*. If her daughter Camille had not been born three weeks late, Kingsolver might never have finished *The Bean Trees*, which was published in 1988.

All of Kingsolver's writing has received much acclaim, including the American Library Association awards for *The Bean Trees*, in 1988 and *Homeland* in 1990, the citation of accomplishment from the United Nations National Council of Women in 1989, the PEN fiction prize and Edward Abbey Ecofiction award, both in

1991, for *Animal Dreams*, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for Fiction in 1993 for *Pigs in Heaven*, and the feature-writing award from the Arizona Press Club (1996). *The Bean Trees* has been published in more than 65 countries through the world and was released in 1998 in a mass-market edition. In 1995, Kingsolver was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters degree from her alma mater, DePauw University.

Barbara Kingsolver is not only a contemporary American author of best-selling novels, nonfiction, and poetry, but also a freelance journalist and political activist. Kingsolver cares deeply about the world in which she lives and the people in it, and her writing attempts to change the world- to make the world a better place in which to live. Thus, Kingsolver writes about current social issues such as the environment, human rights, and social injustice. Her protagonists tend to be resilient, sensitive females, who are successfully surviving the typical day-to-day struggles found in America. Although Kingsolver's characters tend to find themselves facing traumatic dilemmas, Kingsolver is able to interject humor, which lightens the tone and communicate the love, hope, and strength that is evident in the lives of people from all cultures and walks of life. Kingsolver's personal experiences and passions, as well as her love of the southwestern United States, deeply influence her writing.

Kingsolver cares deeply about the world in which she lives and the people in it, and her writing attempts to change the world- to make the world a better place in which to live. Thus, Kingsolver writes about current social issues such as the environment, human rights, and social injustice. Ever since the publication, Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* has drawn a lot critical attentions. This text has been variously critiqued and interpreted by different critics. The extend body of criticism on this text has done much to highlight the significance of Kingsolver as an author.

J.U. Jacobs finds this novel self-reflexive and misses its politics altogether and says: "*The Poisonwood Bible* is finally more concerned with its own discursive constructedness than with the history and the political material reality of the Congo" (116). It is the cultural assumptions that percolate from Nathan which tends to undermine the idea of co-existence and mutual respect between and among race, gender, class, religion, and people with 'abnormal' physical attributes. It is more than a reality, which points out towards its own "discursive constructedness."

The novel *The Poisonwood Bible* unravels the attitude towards disability and ways people are drilled to perceive world through specific viewpoints. The world is received by people in terms of polarities or distinction, which has not naturally befall on them, but passed from earlier generation to the next. The tradition that establishes the distinction between white and black, Christian and non-christian, saved and damned, male and female, rich and poor, normal and abnormal, etc. The distinction becomes unalienable part of everyday existence as it provides a sense of superiority to that race of people who create such assumptions. As Critic Thomas Pynchon analyzes it:

With origins in the Puritan view of the world as divided between saved and damned, it permeates the secular thought of the Price children and leads them to read experience as a set of polar oppositions. They are conditioned to think of alternatives in binary polarities that function to minimize choices and discourage the imagination of complex middle terms. He tries to indicate his standpoint by presenting characters: Ruth May, for example, ponders racial differences and struggles to understand relationship between whites and blacks. Her thinking leads to the erasure of middle grounds and ambiguities, as black and white

are ranked by law: "The man in church said they're different from us and needs ought to keep to their own. Jimmy Crow says that, and he makes the laws." (20)

The concept of what is normal and just operates, even, in the different ideological stances. There are multiple ideologies floating in the sky of this planet. But a person following one ideology likes to abhor the other. In the same manner, The United States interferes into the internal politics of Congo for the fear that Communist regime might prevail there easily. For United States, it is a great disaster, which can demolish and destroy American made institutions in Africa. As critic Diane Kunz argues:

The United States acted on "credible" fears that Lumumba would be "easy prey" for as assault by "Communist agents" who "actively subverted liberal institutions in the United States and elsewhere. [...] Equally clearly we can understand that for Africa. Communist domination would have been at least as great a disaster as what eventually befell the continent." (295)

It is the fear that if Russia prevails in Congo it will swept all over the African continent which ultimately do away with the U.S. dominance in the continent. The popular leader Patrice Lumumba, who has just claimed the office of Prime minister, is ordered to be killed at the hand of C.I.A. owing to the fear of communism and losing dominance. It is a ruthless act ever committed by the United States which springs from the exceptional felling of being just and right. Thus, from Kingsolver's perspective, the president and his administration acted from positions much like that of Nathan: arrogant, persuaded they spoke for God and godness, they pursued a course founded on America's exceptionalist identity as the world's chosen people.

The central character of the novel, Nathan Price, tells the villagers how to live the life. Eventhough villagers are well aware to live and accommodate themselves in peculiar climate of Africa. He has come to save the damned soul. Quite contrary to his misconception, people of Kilanga already do have their religion. But Nathan is not ready to accept. For Nathan, Christianity is the only religion that has to be followed and worth following. With this extreme imposition he is maintaining his sense of superiority and authority. He fails to consider that Kikongo people already have their religion which is akin to the nature. Barbara Jane Downy argues in "Nature Religion":

Nature religion refers to any form of spirituality that takes nature as its sacred center. What distinguishes it from other types of religion, she adds, is its understanding of transcendence. Nature religion, she says, can be constructed as a type of religion in which nature is the milieu of the sacred, and in which the idea of transcendence . . . is unimportant or irrelevant to religious practice. If there is any consciousness of transcendence, it tends to be lateral, rather than vertical. Spirits and deities are of this world rather than beyond it, and can be contacted through the natural world. (27)

Nobody can really know whether any religious idea is actually true. Therefore nobody knows whether one belief is closer to the truth than another. They are all guess work, therefore all equal.

The critical response to this novel has divided along political lines. Readers with left-of-center convictions have been far less approving. A similar pattern can be seen among those readers more directly concerned with the religious aspects of the novel as well. For instance, writing for the *National Catholic Reporter* Judith Bromberg is sufficiently impressed by the novel's political and moral message to

make it required summer reading for her high school students. Elsewhere, in *Commonweal* Robin Antepara calls it a "wondrous epic" whose characters allegorically explore "different aspects of the American mindset," and *Soujourners* Liane Norman likens Kingsolver to "George Eliot, Tolstoy, and Dickens." At the other extreme, writing in the *Alberta Report* Ted Byfield and Virginia Byfield scathe Kingsolver as yet another in a long line of agnostics peddling worn stereotypes of the "evil missionary." Less myopic (but with greater reason to criticize), in *Chritianity Today* Tim Stafford questions the veracity of Kingsolver's portrayal of Nathan Price, wondering if she in fact "has ever known a fundamentalist missionary."

Likewise, in similar fashion, Alan Neeley of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* similarly points to the many incongruities of Price and his situation, lamenting that the uninformed reader is likely to miss and therefore not question them. Oddly, though these latter critics in particular (rightly) raise concerns regarding the legitimacy of Kingsolver's representation of evangelical fundamentalism, none questions the authenticity of the implicit Franciscan roots of Fowles's spirituality. Yet it seems that among an increasingly secular and spiritually eclectic readership the highly admirable Fowles presents potentially the greater risk as a source for confusion regarding the nature of both Chritianity and Franciscan spirituality than does the wholly unsympathetic Price, who is too obviously a stick figure to be taken seriously.

In this way, different critiques have given their view about Kingsolver's different aspect of writing where technique, theme, style, motive and many other sides are observed. But none of them have explored the theme of disability. So, this thesis, in this regard, raises the issue of politics of the treatment of disability to give the new height for Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. That is why; this attempt is

made to solve the foresaid aspect of novel. The text has been used as a primary source of study for the research. In addition to this, both online and critical writings available on text and internet are consulted.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the novel's raising issue, its problem and a short introduction of Barbara Kingsolver with a short literature review. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work. The second chapter discusses to the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It discusses about the disability studies. On the basis of the theoretical frame work established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyses the text as a considerable length. It analyzes how the novel, *The Poisonwood Bible* raises the disabled condition of the characters. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study- The overriding theme of alienated "Otherness" and rejection of it manifests in the issue of disability. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sumps up the main points of the present research and the findings of the researcher.

II. Disability as a social construct

Disability Studies is a newly emerging field of study. It is concerned with the inter-disciplinary development of an increasing body of knowledge and practice, which has arisen from the activities of the disabled people's movement, and which has come to be known as the social model of disability locates the changing character of disability, which is viewed as the social model of disability. The social model of disability locates the changing character of disability, which is viewed as an important dimension of inequality, in the social and economic structure and culture of the society in which it is found, rather than in individual limitations.

The society has a peculiar tendency to survive and perpetuate itself through forming the distinction among them on the basis of class, gender, race, religion, culture, etc. to name few of the labels. And, as human being as such, we have a preference to be viewed ourselves as "normal" being, well-accepted by society, and well-adopted to its systems. The strange tendency to act in a "normal" way pulls us towards the way this "normal," "normalcy," "average," or "norm" was constructed.

Lennard J. Davis argues:

A common assumption would be that some concept of the norms must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. There always existed a concept of ideal body on which every comparison is based. What we have is the ideal body, as exemplified in the tradition of nude Venuses, for example. This idea presents a mytho-poetic body that is linked to the gods. This divine body is an ideal body. (10)

People adopt particular perspective to pass judgments over different areas of activities of their life, which is supposed to be "normal," and which is not. And, each

of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We don't want to seem deviated from social norms and standard. Every effort of us is directed towards maintaining that state the society desires or anticipates. As Lennard J. Davis argues:

We live in the world of norms. All of us attempt to be normal. We consider what the average person does. Norms are such that categorize us in different ranks. Everywhere norms are functioning as the vital aspect to determine one's position. Whether it is society, education, or politics everywhere norms are becoming crucial part to position of us. The matter of 'able' and 'disable' also moves around the concept of normalcy. (9)

A disability study is an umbrella term to those entire largest minority groups of global scenario. It centers neither to the western field nor eastern or non-western but all. So, it is a new discourse with universal applications. It claims its space in contested area traces its existence and justifies its assertions in the form of discipline.

People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled from mainstream society. This study looks for the space of such people relating it with the issues of the basic formation of disability. The concept, the outcome and reality are rebelling, and they interfere the grounds of other studies in diverse ways. It is a questioning tendency towards the marginalized group of people. It interrogates whether there is anything to be achieved by all people from exploring the ways that the body in this variations is metaphorized, disbursed. Disability studies, like any other discourse demands a base of knowledge and a familiarity with discursive terms and methodologies, as well as, most often, some personal

involvement. The apparent ease of intuitive knowledge is really another aspect of discrimination against people with disabilities. The very first and essential aspect under disability study is the study of normalcy and its socio-cultural construction. Disability Studies questions the social formation of normalcy and the way of taking somebody or something as disabled. The critics of disability studies go very far from “pity” and “empathy” and seek the social, political, individual and intellectual space for the so called abnormal people in the society. So, the construction of normalcy and the issue of stigma are the most striking aspects under the field of disability studies.

Disability Studies has emerged as a new phenomenon or a new form of study among various discursive practices. People with disabilities are treated as “Other” and sometimes as a non-human. The discursive practice of “othering” the people with disability and the study of disability has now been countered in the present time by a new field of study called disability studies. It has been developed both as an academic discipline and as an area of political struggle. Though they are the largest minority throughout the world, Lennard J. Davis in his introduction to *The Disability Studies Reader* states that the people with disabilities have been subjected to the discrimination and prejudice "leading finally to their marginalization as well as the marginalization of the study on disability" (1).

The disability model has taken hold as the disability rights and independent living movements have gained strength. This model regards disability as a normal aspect of life, not as a deviance, and rejects the notion that persons with disabilities are in some inherent way “defective.” It is rather a psychological predisposition to judge certain events with a particular concept. To a critically rigorous mind it appears ridiculous and redundant, and tend to question the very notion of normality. As Professor David Pfeiffer argues:

The paralyzed limbs may not particularly limit a person's mobility as much as attitudinal and physical barriers. The question centers on 'normality'. What, it is asked, is the normal way to be mobile over a distance of a mile? Is it to walk, drive one's own car, take a taxicab, ride a bicycle, use a skate board, or some other means? What is the normal way to earn a living? (14)

Given this reality, if disability were more commonly recognized and expected in the way that we design our environments or our systems, it would not seem so abnormal. The difference among people and tendency to work out variation among them is not the unusual phenomena. Every individual is unique, because they are different to each other. This difference makes them unique individual, offers them a particular existence.

Scholars on Disability Studies argue that the constellation of words describing this concept of "normal," "normalcy," "normality," "norm," "average," "abnormal"- all entered the European languages rather late in the human history. The word "normal" as 'constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular or usual' only enters the English language around 1840" (Davis 12). It is given an impetus to proliferate along with the development of statistics, which works invariably to find the average, mean and median. It is furthermore contributed by the great philosophers as Marx and others. Marx is very much in step with the movement of normalizing the body and the individual. In addition, Marxist thought encourages us toward an enforcing of normalcy in the sense that the deviation in the society, in the sense of distributing the wealth for example, must be minimized. As Davis puts it: "we tend not to think of progressive like that of Marx as tied up with the movement led up by the businessmen, but it is equally

unimaginable without a tendency to contemplate average humans and think about their abstract relation to work, wages, and so on” (12).

The tendency to establish ‘normalcy’ gets further motivated by the development of thoughts such as ‘eugenics.’ The aim of the eugenics is to make world a better place by wiping out deficiencies in human, in terms of health, intelligence and body. The tendency to look at the disable people with aversion begins with the development of such movement as eugenics. “The problem for people with disabilities was that eugenicists tended to group together all allegedly undesirable traits; so, for example, criminals, the poor, and the people with disabilities might be mentioned in the same breath” (Davis 19). One of the central foci of the eugenics was what was broadly called feeble-mindedness. Very famous personalities like Charles Davenport, Galton, Alexander Graham Bell, contributed in this movement. In England, bills were introduced in Parliament to control mentally disable people, and “in 1933 the prestigious scientific magazine *Nature* approved the Nazi proposal of a bill for the avoidance of inherited disease and posterity by sterilizing the disable” (Davis 24). Thus, the scientific study and the thoughts of the great and renowned thinkers of the past helped shaping attitude towards disable people in terms of race, religion, colour, and diseases.

But these days, the scope of disability experience has been widened. It operates in culture. At present disability is also a reading of the body that is inflected by race, ethnicity, gender, caste, class, social positioning etc. As it is culture bound, it varies with society and culture. Stairs and printed information create a functional impairment for the wheel chair users and the people without sight. Similarly, deafness does not make a person disable in a community where people communicate by using both sign language and words. Black people in America may feel disabled because

they can not meet the criteria of whiteness which is considered the normal standard skin in America. But they may feel normal when they are back at home in Africa or in their own community. When a person from the so called lower caste goes to the casteless society, his or her identity as so called lower caste dissolves. A person with lower economic status may experience disability in a capitalist society. But he/she may be at ease in socialist society. In a patriarchal culture, feminity and disability are linked inextricably. Aristotle's comparison of women with disabled men illustrates this fact. So, if viewed with the gendered lens, the identity called female itself becomes another category for disability. Moreover, society in which physical appearance is the primary standard, the women with disabilities are doubly discriminated. In such case, the beautification practices normalize the female body and disability. Rosemarie Garland Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies* writes: "The cultural other and cultural self operate together as opposing twin figure that legitimize a system of social, economic and political empowerment justified by physiological difference" (8). A disability's degree of visibility too affects social relation. If it is more visible like birth marks, disfigurement, scars, etc. they are highly stigmatized. But the invisible disability like homosexual identity etc presents the dilemma of whether or when to come out or to pass. He further elaborates:

The figure of the disabled women [...] is a product of a conceptual triangulation. She is a cultural third term, defined by the original pair of masculine figure and feminine figure. Seen as the opposite of the masculine figure but also imagined as the antithesis of the normal women, the figure of the disabled female is thus ambiguously positioned both inside and outside the category of women. (29)

Thomson, thus, clarifies how female body is never considered normal in a patriarchal culture. The culturally generated and perpetuated standards as “beauty”, “independence”, “fitness”, “competence”, “boldness”, “normalcy” etc. exclude and disable many human bodies while validating and affirming others. So, these standards, especially the standard of normal, are thought to make a definitive human being. This representative human being is a constructed social figure who gets into the authoritative position and gets hold of all the power in the society.

No man on the earth is similar to his fellow beings nor are their experiences same. But some are considered “normal” and other as disable. Before understanding what disability actually means one should understand what the other category of the binary called normal means? Lennard J. Davis in “Constructing Normalcy” explains:

The concept to a norm [...] implies that the majority of the population must or should be part of the norm. The norm pins down the majority of population that [...] will always have at its extremities these characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of 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)

Davis clarifies as how the term disability functions to define what normalcy actually means. Those who do not meet the parameters of normalcy are viewed as the people with disability. To have disability is to be an abnormal, to be the part of “other”. So, the problem is not with disabilities rather the problem lies in the way that normalcy is constructed to create the “Problem” of the disabled person. Asha Hans in *Women, Disability and Identity* asks “Who lays these standards of what is normal? Do the disabled have any say in establishment of standards?” (33). The answer to Hans

question is obviously negative. The disabled have no say in the construction of such standard. They never act rather they are always acted upon.

There is a trend in the discursive practice that the so called "normals" are supposed to be the power holders who form a discourse creating hierarchy between themselves and the people with the disabilities, putting themselves on the crest and using the other category of this binarism to define and describe themselves.

It appears that, the problem disability studies foregrounds is not the person with disabilities but the way normalcy is constructed to create the problems of the disabled person. So what are the actual norms and who and how they are constructed has a discursive aspect. Davis further says:

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 other. But, the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature that it is a feature of a certain kind of society. (9)

Thus some of concepts of norm must have existed in every society. By taking the demarcation line with the privileged norms or any specific society people are categorized into the groups of 'able' and 'disable'. People try to compare with other and form an idea about it. The role is played by the society rather than an individual in the formation of norms.

In order to understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm because society desires for the hegemony of normalcy. Unable to perform any social function due to the lack of physical appearance is perceived to be an error or fault in the prevalent social circumstances. In other words, disability is stereotyped with negative attitudes. Again, the concept of disability is a social construction. Thus,

disability is a powerful social construct within most existing societies and because we are presented with conflicting images of it, disabled people have been placed into the role of abnormal outsider whose lives and experiences are consoled from the 'normal' majority.

Foucault's concept of discourse is an important one for understanding much of his thinking on power. According to Foucault discourses are historically situated truths or means of specifying knowledge. Power and knowledge are intimately linked together through multiplicity of discursive elements, and ultimately bound in the formation of discourse. Foucault claims:

[...] "Discipline" may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power a modality for exercise comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology. [...] an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by preexisting authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power or by apparatuses that have made discipline their principle of internal functioning or finally by the state apparatuses whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline. (206)

The conception of the subject as central to a specific age involves locating the body as a site for the operations of power. It is primarily through sex and the establishment of 'normal' behaviors by society that the notion of bio-power arises. Deviations from 'the norm' established by either society or cyber community then can be disciplined. The mechanisms for judging both deviations and extent of deviation are embedded in the very core of our society: teachers, psychiatrists, social workers etc. It is through the

process of problematisation that the illusion of 'normality' is created. In this light normalization becomes the great strategy of power. The disciplinary pyramid constituted the "small cell of power within which the separation, coordination, and supervision of tasks were imposed and made efficient; and analytical partitioning of time, gestures, and bodily forces constituted an operational schema that could easily be subjected to the mechanisms of production" (210).

The panoptical modality of power, however technical, but merely physical level at which it is situated, is not under the immediate dependence or a direct extension of the great juridico-political structures of a society; it is nonetheless not absolutely independent. The disciplines provide at the base. The corporal disciplines "constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties" (211).

Disability is again a cultural and historical construction fabricated by the socio-cultural factors. It is therefore a broad term that clusters ideological categories as sick, deformed, ugly, old, afflicted, abnormal etc. which disadvantages people by devaluating bodies that do not confirm to certain cultural standards. Disability therefore refused to be normalized, neutralized or homogenized. In this sense, disability functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent all of which can claim such status and reside within these social identifies. Foucault further adds:

The universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law. (212)

It is, then, the various interactions between bodies and world that create disability from the human variation and instability. In this regard, disability is shaped by history, defined by particularity, and negates the stable physical state of being. In short, the concept of disability writes a heterogeneous group of people whose commonality is being considered as abnormal. It is a social reality than a biological reality. Foucault further comments:

To return to the problem of legal punishments, the prison with all the corrective technology at its disposal is to be resituated at the point where the codified power to observe; at the point where the universal punishments of the law are applied selectively to certain individuals and always the same ones, at the point where the redefinition of the juridical subject by the penalty becomes a useful training of the criminal; at the point where the law is inverted and passes outside itself, and where the counter law becomes the effective and institutionalized content of the juridical forms. (213)

What generalizes the power to punish, then, is not the universal consciousness of the law in each juridical subject; it is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques. As disabled's potential contributions to society is ignored or denied, a disabled person is often seen as a burden, as useless and essentially a non-person. Although activists have increased their efforts to redefine disability as a social phenomenon and the negative reactions, disability is still viewed, for the most part, as a flaw that somehow reflects the lesser value of that person.

Disability is a socially constructed form of the biological reality because our culture idealizes the body and demands that we must have control upon it. Able bodies thus dictate upon the disabled body and their knowledge always silences

individual's capabilities and true characteristics. The stigma and stereotypes are the cause of discrimination, much more than the disability itself. Hence, it could be argued that the disability is not the cause at all, that the social reaction to disability is the cause, Susan Wendell says:

The power of culture along to construct a disability is revealed when we consider bodily differences- deviations from a society's conception of a "normal" or acceptable body- that, although they cause little or no function or physical difficulty for the person who has them, constitute major social disabilities. (44)

Social structure therefore draws the artificial line that separates disabled people from others. Disability is therefore, seen as otherness and discriminated from the majority of the society.

The attitude that a disabled child is not significant effort, required to advance his/her personal or social development leads to emotional abuse and feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and worthlessness for the disabled child as well as the disabled personality. Sometimes, parental neglect is compounded by others in the community who encourage the family to ignore the disabled child by reinforcing prevalent ideas of disabled person's worthlessness. Anita Ghai in this context asserts:

The personal tragedy model posits a "better dead than disabled" approach and reinforces the stereotypes that the disabled cannot be happy or enjoy an adequate quality of life. The disabled personal problems are perceived to result from bodily impairment and a troubled mind, rather than a failure of society to meet that the person's need in terms of appropriate human help and accessibility. This understating places specific burdens on disabled to reconstruct

themselves as normal people as they contend with both implicit and explicit assumption about their reluctance to acknowledge their disabled existence. Consequently, disabled people are subjected to many disabling expectations by the able bodied society. (37)

Stigma often inhabits or makes impossible healthy social or familial relationships, which thereby adversely affect the full integration of disabled people into social structures and institutions. In addition, a deep seated belief in most cultures that disabled child shames the child, as a result of embodiment of some kind of former sin of the family. This stigma attaches both to the child and the parents in the form of guilt about whom and what they are and often leads to parental abandonment, neglect, or abuse. As for instance, in Zambia, large children are seen as future security, so a family will not put effort or hope into a child who is disabled. So, the parents blame their child and they see disability as a burden. Therefore, disabled has no future, likewise, disabled people are often deliberately denied education, insurance, health care, and employment. In short, they are deprived of the fundamental right to life and development.

Disability is shaped by history, defined by particularity, and negates the stable physical state of being. It is needed to discover the socially disabled women who have hardly found a place in any existing theory. Even non-disabled women never understand the problems of disabled women. The disabled felt that they could put forth their problems in a better way themselves, and though they did not mind support they would have to fight their battles themselves. Asha Hans, in *Women, Disability and Identity*, argues:

We ascertain that the barrier in disabled women's lives fundamentally related to images affect their very being and reinforce the 'triple

discriminations' (of being discriminated because they are women, are disabled, and are women with disabilities). The present imaging of women with disabilities[...] produce social inequality. [...] We acknowledge gender to be a societal norm and the images, which we reflect, are far from reality and require not only analyses but also deconstruction and reconstruction. (19)

The imagery of 'perfect bodies' has always existed and continues to exist, and one of the reasons for this is the misuse of the most powerful visual medium in creating illusory images, which affect women with disabilities. Women having disability from non-English-speaking background, a smaller minority within the minority group of disabled women, suffer from "triple discrimination" (23).

The concept of disability defines heterogeneous group of people whose commonality is being considered as abnormal. It is a social reality than a biological reality. Hans further writes:

Women in the space have no weapon to protect themselves, as most, unlike women without disabilities, are dependent on this space. Discriminatory social and political policies emerge from this private space. Many disabled inside this space are kept invisible by their families, to be hidden from the outside gaze, because they are ashamed of their disability. As they are usually invisible to the outside world, governments and movements find it easy to overlook, as they do not see. (28)

Women disability is taken as stigmatization because it appears lack of bodily appearance which the society seldom desires. Prejudice and discrimination are based on the appearance. People are judged not by their ability but by the way they look and

disabled people are marginalized because they look different. The difference is caused by disability. Discrimination results when this difference triggers off the negative attitudes towards disability that are held by the other person. Most importantly, the attitude towards disability is formed accidentally. These are the obvious outcome of society that values competition between people. People are judged according to their success in education, work, marriage, the ability to produce (healthy) offspring creativity, and beauty. As a result of segregation, disabled people have fewer opportunities to acquire the skills necessary for a good job, and their education is substandard.

Not all persons are born with equal 'capabilities' in the existing meaning of the term. Being disabled is being different. A mentally retarded person might not be considered capable, but "do such a person's rights shrink because his/her contribution to society may be considered less than that of a 'normal person'? Who lays these standards of what is normal? Do the disabled have any say in this establishment of standards" (33)? There are layers of injustices, which are hierarchically placed, and by removing injustice simply at one level, does not make things better for all. Hans says:

The right to work plays the most crucial role in women's life, in disabled women's lives it is more so. Women subdued by tradition and physical and mental problems find it very difficult to overcome the double blind. We chose to focus on this right, as keeping women out of the workforce is the most important form of victimization faced by women. (33)

Society thus exhibits a structural amnesia about a particular category of people, who, because they do not fit into the hegemonic discourses of 'normality' are excluded, separated and socially disempowered. The social disregard coupled with experiences

of social, economic and political subjugation deny the disabled a voice, a space, and even to disrupt these deeply entrenched normative that deprives them of their social presence and any resemblance of identity.

Another concept which is inter-related with the construction of normalcy under the disability studies is the concept of 'stigma'. Stigmatization and construction of 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 medium of the base through which something or somebody is stigmatized in any society.

Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or a person. It is a social, cultural and psychological construct which is understood as a kind of negative value and attribute created by the society. Stigma is any condition, attributes or behavior that symbolically marks off the bearer as culturally unacceptable or inferior with the consequent feelings of shame, guilt and disgrace. In other words, it is a social process related to personal experience characterized by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation that results from experience of anticipation of an adverse social judgment about a person or a group. In any society, stigma has negative connotation and its discrediting effects are very adverse. Erving Goffman, in his essay "Selections from Stigma" defines stigma as:

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 vital 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 both 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)

Individuals with disabilities may experience an existential crisis that may be triggered by the stigma related to having a disability, as well as by conditions created by disability itself. It is a social categorization that legitimates the negative attributes because differences are highlighted than similarity.

Consequently, stigmatized people accept themselves as "other" in the society. They accept their derogatory, self-hate and devalued status as the puppets of the social system. This kind of social and psychological death is given to them. Stigmatized people thus become dependent, passive, helpless and childlike because that is what is expected from them. In fact, they internalize what theoretical norm desires them to be and "to agree that he does indeed fall sort of what he really thought to be" (206). Social rejection or avoidance affects not only the stigmatized individual but also everyone who is socially involved with them as family, friends, and relatives. A kind of permanent social rejection forces people to limit their relationship to other stigmatized people and to those whom social bond outweigh the stigma further lies such as family members. Therefore, paradoxical societal norms establish a subordinate and dependent position for stigmatized people. Stigma is in fact, the need of non-stigmatized people to maintain a sense of supremacy. It is thus seen as a social taboo.

This construction of the normalcy however results in the stigmatization of the person with disability. The stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting yet that is rooted within the people with disability. So, stigma reflects a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. The stigmatized person responds

differently to his/her own situation. Sometimes, she takes her disability as a curse and tries to correct it or use it as an excuse for ill success. At other times, she takes it as a boon, and uses it as guideline to her life, thus, stigma leads a person to lose her true 'self' and ability.

As stigma is a social disapproval of the difference, it is a social construct. A single attribute may be stigmatized in one society whereas the same attribute may be desirable in another society. Also, the degree of stigmatization might depend on how undesired the difference is in a particular social group. So, nearly every person stands the risk of being stigmatized at some point in life either temporarily or permanently.

The stigmatized person conveys his/her inferiority through two different factors as social rejection or isolation and lowered expectations. Fear is one of the instrumental factors in the perpetuation of stigma and in maintaining such social relations. This fear acts in two ways: First, the stigmatized person fears the revelation of his/her stigmatized attribute. Second, the non-stigmatized person fears he/she may lose his/her superiority if the stigmatized people are allowed to have equal share in all resources. Fear is a force that gives stigma its intensity and reality. It is this fear that helps to perpetuate this binary of normalcy and disability.

The identity called disability that is attributed to 'extraordinary bodies' does not reside in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships. In such relationships, one group is legitimated by attributing the standards of the definitive human beings. This group maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or physical inferiority on others.

This socially authorized group then tries to represent the cultural other by creating difference, discourse and images in literature, electronic and print media. These discourse and the images are more based on the received attitude than on

people's actual experience of disability. Thus, the disability experience is flattened and modeled in a freakish manner which is distanced off the normalizing contents and is engulfed by a single stigmatic trait.

The tendency to misrepresent the disability experience by the so called normal is very much destructive. Such tendency gives power to the disability that it cancels out other qualities in human reducing the complex person to a single attribute and a stigmatized subject.

Different ideologies are constructed by the society to prove that the stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior to the so called normal beings. Nevertheless, they were even regarded as less than humans-the "other". Thus, stigmatized groups are not treated on equal grounds. As Goffman writes:

We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on the differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning.(205)

However, it is necessary to understand the concept of the norm in the prevalent society because anyone can be stigmatized at any time. The concept of normalcy is again a social construct; it is fixed and shaped by cultural, historical and social forces. Goeffman adds "Normality becomes the supreme goal for many stigmatized individuals until they realize that there is no precise definition of normality except what they would be without their stigma" (206). A man is stigmatized because he fails to represent the majority of the population. That is why Lennard J. Davis says, "The

concept of the norm, unlike that of an idea, implies the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm" (13).

What is most poignant about Goffman's description of stigma is that it suggests that all human differences are potentially stigmatizable. As we move out of one social context where a difference is desired into another context where the difference is undesired, we begin to feel the effect of stigma. No people in this world are exactly alike. The variations in shape, size, skin, color, gender, cultural background etc can be stigmatized at any time. That's why Erving Goffman says, "stigma is equivalent to understand differentness" (207).

Stigma is a human construction, which legitimizes the negative attributes to the human differences. The process of stigmatization occurs only when the social contact compounds are imposed or the undesired differentness leads to some restriction in physical and social mobility. Besides, it also restricts access to the opportunities that allow an individual to develop his/her potential. In addition, stigmatized people are segregated, ignored, neglected, and isolated from social participation. Negative attributes related to stigma of the people are thus cast down from the societal periphery for instance, the dwarf people in every human society are marginalized simply because they do not meet the pre-requisite for being normal. As they lack their height they are stigmatized in every social-factor. Though they are used in movies they are not portrayed as the main protagonist; they simply partake in the role of idiots, and the foolish people. In this way, they are used as the objects of the entertainment rather than the subjects, and their contribution is seen as inferior. They are not given priority in other jobs as well. People do not suspect their ability to work but they judge them on the basis of difference, as they do not meet the criteria ascribed to the majority of people. So, they are deprived and marginalized in every

walk of life. These practices are critically lambasted by this theory of stigmatization.

As Lerita M. Coleman defines:

Stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility. Part of the power of stigmatization lies in the realization that people who are stigmatized or acquire to stigma loss their place in hierarchy.

Consequently, most people want to ensure that they are counted in the non stigmatized "majority". This, of course, leads to more stigmatization. (218)

In this way, stigmatization appears to be uncontrollable because any human difference serves as the basis for stigma. Moreover, it also manifests the underlying fear of being stigmatized as anyone can be stigmatized at any time. Stigma is therefore non stigmatized people's necessity in order to feel good about themselves. They possess false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that stigmatized people is 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.

On the whole, stigma is a complex phenomenon of the society and it is ambiguous and arbitrarily defined. Basically, any human differences, different cultural background, or any other undesired attributes qualify to be stigmatized. The dominant group of the society judges the other groups. In part, stigma reflects the whole value judgment of other groups thereby creating a sense of supremacy. On this account stigma is a dynamic and powerful social tool. According to Coleman:

If a stigma is a social construct, constructed by culture, by social groups, and by individual to designate some human difference a discrediting, then the stigmatization process is indeed a powerful and

pernicious social tool. The inferiority/superiority issue is a most interesting way of understanding how and why people continue to stigmatize. (218)

Therefore, stigma is an open-ended synthesis that continues from one generation to the next. First, any human difference serves as the preliminary requisite to be stigmatized. Secondly, to be stigmatized is an inescapable fate as this process depends upon cultural and historical background. Coleman defines that stigma is a product of socio-cultural context. He further argues:

People are concerned with stigma because they are fearful of its unpredictable and uncontrollable nature. Stigmatization appears uncontrollable because human differences serve as the basis for stigmas. No one really ever knows when if he/she will acquire a stigma or when societal norms might change to stigmatize a trait he or she already possesses. To deny this truth by attempting to isolate stigmatized people or escape from stigma is a manifestation of the underlying fear. (226)

In this sense stigma is the social factor and it becomes necessary for non-stigmatized groups. Those possessing power of dominant group in society determine the concept of stigmas, which human differences are desired and which are not. So, the stigmatized people are always marginalized from the mainstream of the community simply because they do not relate to the norm of a specific culture and thus possess an undesired difference from what the norm anticipates.

The various extremes of human traits as tallness, shortness, intelligence, ambitiousness, strength etc would have been seen as errors. Such differences are therefore stigmatized in the long-run. In a way, the construction of normalcy divides

the total population into standard and non-standard sub-population as well as conceiving norm and non-norms.

Disability is thus, simply unacceptable and therefore, makes the disabled themselves negate their existence. It is seen as public enigma and public treat. To be disabled is to be an “Other” in the social group. It is produced not by birth but by the way of legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse. Disabled body is constructed as the embodiment of physical insufficiency and deviance and becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity. Language incompatibility is another form of disability. In the modern world the people with language create discourses that are represented as truth or so called truths that exclude the people, class and society which do not have the reach on language. It is seen as public enigma and public treat. To be disabled is to be an “Other” in the social group. Furthermore, disabled personalities are not treated on equal grounds. They are marginalized in every sector as in health, education, economy and others. In short, disabled people are socially unacceptable in one or the other way, it is measured in terms of social conceptual framework of norms.

III. The Politics of Treatment of Disability and Rejection of It in

The Poisonwood Bible

The Poisonwood Bible, by Barbara Kingsolver, unravels the politics of treatment of disability in society, and rejects the very conception of disability as alienated otherness. The disability is a social fabrication of body and negative connotation adhered to it, on the basis of pigmentation, body, culture and religion. She vociferously attempts to alter the perception of people with disabilities by giving them full voice in the process of evolution, rather than presenting them with the traditional role of laughing stock, archetype for abnormality and stock characters. Usually, they are shown to the representative figure against 'normal'. The people with disabilities are not disabled in a real sense disabled, but differently able, in reality. It is assumed that given the harshness of life, everyone will be disabled in some way, sooner or later. Thus, disability is accepted here as alternate ability. Thus the literary structures of Kingsolver's novel deconstruct traditional exploitations and traditional cultural attitudes towards disabled characters.

Disability is a social construct. The society creates dichotomy between self and the other. In the binary self is always privileged and other is relegated to margin and absence. This proves one's superiority over the other. The major character of the novel Nathan Price, white-middle class Christian preacher, father to Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May, and husband to Orleanna Price, represents the normality. Every event, every definition, every interpretation etc, revolves around him. To every event and every situation he has a final say. The most significant aspect of Nathan's presence in the novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, is the fact that he has no individual voice of his own. Every one in the novel has individual voice, perception, and judgments, even Ruth May, a five year old child. So he does not evolve as the novel

proceeds and seems much as a stock character. Yet he remains dominant in the narration of all the characters. He plays a pivotal role in every event that unfolds. He remains unalterable, adamant, and obsessive with his self-righteous zeal and cultural arrogance.

Society creates normality on the basis of abstraction. It designates certain social codes as normal or 'standard' and certain as abnormal. The abnormal traits are undesired and unappreciated. Nathan Price stands at the core of defining standard values, codes and conduct. He is the perfect illustration of religious zealot and male dominance. Orleanna, Nathan's wife, remembers her position not to be equal with her husband, rather than something different, less than human. She feels that she has been denied voice, treated animal like, who simply follow what others say without any volition. Yet her desire to be treated as human being and desire to become true wife to her husband is shattered when she learns the opposite fact.

Until that moment I'd thought I could have it both ways: to be one of them, and also my husband's wife. What conceit! I was his instrument, his animal. Nothing more. How we wives and mothers do perish at the hands of our own righteousness. I was just one more of those women who clamp their mouth shut and wave the flag as their nation rolls off to conquer another war. Guilty or innocent, they have everything to lose. They are what there is to lose. A wife is the earth in itself, changing hands, bearing scars. (89)

The position of women is revealed from this excerpt in the European and American mindset. She is placed at the position of animal who needs to be obedient and submissive towards their husband. The animalism of Orleanna defines the superiority of Nathan's position in society. She is defined to be the evil cause of every

consequences. Trying to make sense of Nathan's transformation onto a tyrant, Orleanna correctly identifies the turning point to world war second and Nathan's escape from the Death March from Batan that kills the rest of his company. Returning home a man who blamed others for his own sense of "sin," Nathan refuses her touch. When she jokes, Nathan hits her when she listens to stories about the war on the radio, he tells her not to "gloat before Christ" about her "undeserved blessings." "When they have sex, he blames her for her "wantonness." When she stands still, he condemns her "idleness." When she or one of the girls swears, he accuses them of "failure of virtue" (198-201). She and her daughters have become the safe heaven to hide his excessive sense of guilt of the past. He blames them just to show his moral and religious flawlessness and ethical virtue. He is the origin of everything that happens, and others are just the harbinger of evils and troubles in the society. It shows that he is perfect in his duty towards his family. Nathan has already at his disposal the "other" to hide his mistakes and secure his superior position in the hierarchy created in the society.

Nathan's attitude toward women follow from his patriarchal faith in the God's masculinity and his contempt for those who are not identical with himself. He believes that women's purpose in life is to marry and support the males: "My father says that a girl who fails to marry is veering from God's plan," Leah writes (149). As a result, when Leah and Adah are declared "exceptional children" by their elementary school principal. Nathan "warned Mother not to flout God's Will by expecting too much for us. Sending a girl to school is like pouring water in your shoes. It is hard to say which is worse, seeing it out and waste the water, seeing it hold in and wreck the shoes" (56). Women's ideas and voices annoy Nathan, who complains about the "blabber" of his family and who "often says he views himself as the captain of a sinking mess of female minds" (34). His attitudes reduce women to bodies, but he

abhors the female body as well for its temptation to sin. He rejects sexuality, hates and fears nakedness, and feels embarrassed by Orleanna's pregnancies. Nathan's character does not write his own sections of *The Poisonwood Bible*, but he dominates his wife and daughters to such an extent that he remains central to the novel. He serves as a negative portrait, not of the Christian missionary or the masculine head of house hold, but rather of the American exceptionalist convinced of his own righteousness. Nathan believes in God. The novel takes care to root Nathan's religion in American Puritanism, buttressed by his confidence in the providential history of his nation. American are god's chosen people, he holds, and, his family was not ordinary. The puritan faith he holds is key stone to determine the rightness of the events and activities that occurs around him, and activities and behaviour of his family members. Therefore, Puritanism in American society is the constructed standard and plays pivotal to define and determine the behaviour, understanding and perception of people. It serves to distinguish what is acceptable from what is not, and exhorts people to follow the former. Like Orleanna, the highly intelligent fourteen year old twins, Leah and Adah, stand still and silent under their father's autocratic rule for much of their time in the Congo. They stand, however, at different ends of Nathan's continuum.

Society confirms what is normal, and what is not normal. Nathan is key figure presented in the novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, to represent this fact. Leah begins with stories about Nathan's arrogance and abuse. Watching Nathan corrects Orleanna's mistaken notions about the items to take to the Congo, she sees his disdain: "His tone implied that mother failed to grasp our mission, and that her concern for Betty Crocker confederated her with the coin-jingling sinners who vexed Jesus till he pitched a fit and threw them out of church" (13). Leah next observes Rachel fall

victim to a strap thrashing when she paints her fingernails, records the rude remark made by father:

Sitting next to me on the plane, she kept batting her white-rabbit eyelashes and adjusting her bright pink hairband, trying to get me to notice she had secretly painted her fingernails bubble-gum pink to match. I glanced over father, who had the other window seat at the opposite end of our entire row of Prices [. . .] inflaming his red eyes[. . .]makeup and nail polish and are warning signals of prostitution, the same as pierced ears. (15-6)

The terrifying image of father is revealed here as an imposer and autocrats concurrently. He determines the limitations and demarcation line up to where his children and wife can enjoy freedom. Everything is dictated by him, either that be behavioral or personal interest, that has to be censored. They can not do anything of their own. “Our Father speaks for all of us as far as I can see” (32). Despite the facts Leah prefers to work with the father. She prefers to work with father in the garden than with mother in the kitchen. She has faith in her father. Nathan plans his garden to be his “first African miracle” and instructs his daughter while they work with moral paradigm about the balance of God’s “world of work and rewards” (37). When Mama Tataba cautions Nathan about both his method and the poisonwood plant, he cites scripture and ignores her words. Next morning, with a “horrible rash” and swollen eyes caused by the red dust from the tree, Nathan, one of “God’s own,” fells unjustly cursed. Denying his responsibility at his foolish acts he screams at his family. It is likely to disillusion his child. It shows his limited knowledge about Africa and paucity of truth value in his statements.

The female characters in the novel feel marginalization and suppression, so far discussed, being female. But, Adah, who is physically disabled, is “doubly oppressed.” On the one hand, she is a female, and on the other hand, she is physically impaired. As a female she is oppressed by father, and as physically deformed she gets the treatment of indifference from her family members, including her mother. Adah has faced the most difficult situation in the novel. The perception of mother about Adah’s lameness is illustrated by Ruth May with her conversation with mother: [. . .] Adah was the only one of us in our family with something wrong with her” (52-3). This is the perception of family members towards one of their own members. There was something wrong with her. Not that Adah alone is treated in such fashion; Leah also gets the similar treatment. Leah and Adah Price are the novel’s examples of physical otherness. Leah’s fetus is supposed to have consumed half of the brain of Adah’s fetus while the two were still in the womb, thus marking both as abnormal almost from conception. The two children are assumed to be retarded and are treated as such. One night, the village is overrun by ants that covers everything “like black flowing lava.” The ants try to devour everything they come into contact with, including plants, animals and people. Everyone in the village runs to the boats in the river to escape the ants’ stinging bites. In the midst of tumult, Adah and the mother face each other in the house. Adah knows that her disability will hinder her moving fast enough to save herself from the ants, so although she has been in self-imposed silence, she breaks it to plead with her mother, “Help me. Please.” Even Adah’s mother Orleanna, faced with having to decide which child to save during a devastating invasion of army ants, hesitates, then chooses, the nondisabled child, Ruth May, leaving slow-moving Adah to probable death. Adah’s family marginalizes her; she is doubly oppressed, as a woman and as a disabled person. Adah is also electively mute.

She chooses not to speak because she accepts her role as an outsider. That is, she will not communicate with a society that does not see her as a person. She is really troubled by this event, feeling that her mother has shown that the values of Ruth May's more than hers. Her family also marks her. Like all the female Prices, her wishes count as nothing against the monomania of her father, who is obsessive and unrelenting that against the advice of the villagers, he refuses to stop pulling up poisonwood shrubs even when their saps causes his skin to erupt painfully. He must impose his will on nature and on human kind, no matter what the consequences. In fact, his insistent imposition of his will puts both the villagers and the women in his family in the position of the colonially oppressed.

In the terms of postcolonial scholarship, Nathan Price is a "dominant discourse." The dominant discourse constructs "Otherness" in such a way that it always contains a trace of ambivalence or anxiety about its own authority. In order to maintain authority over the "Other" in colonial situation, imperial discourse strives to delineate the other as radically different from the self. The other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of the self, yet they must articulate the other as inescapably different. As evident in the self righteous zeal of Nathan to convert native people to Christian religion, his sense of otherness is revealed. He thinks his culture is superior. This is the concept of himself. It comes from the presence of Congolese culture at his disposal which is treated as the other. The other is marginalized and insignificant which is in the want to be ruled by others. At the feast organized by locals to welcome Price's family, Rachel observes "half-naked, bare-chested and unashamed women" (18). It is Nathan's legacy which continues to posterity through indoctrination giving it a natural flair. Ruth May perceives Africans as the "children of Ham," one of the Noah's' three sons, who was cursed by Noah to

suffer perdition being black in pigmentation and slaves. Her perception has come from the learning of the Bible. She, then ,says, “My name is Ruth May and I hate the Devil” (21). This perception, which continues through generations and has become natural, establishes her “masterly position” against that “Devil” in her psychological sphere. She thinks about colored children of Georgia, who are “not gifted” and heard a man in church say, [. . .] different from us and needs ought to keep their own” (20-1).

Perception of external events and its understanding with meanings comes from cultural upbringing of the person concerned. The Godly stature of Nathan Price is perceived by Rachel against the crowd of local people. He is distinct and embellished in godly robes and words to mark difference out of him. On the request of the villagers for Nathan to make speech, he gets up and slowly “raised one arm above his head like one of those gods they had in Roman times” and speaks with utter confidence as if “fixing to send down the thnunderbolts and the lightning”. He speaks not as a preacher is expected to speak before the willing souls but like a threatening roar “as a thunder storm” (19). He makes tirade on the way Africans are living their life: “Nakedness,” he repeats, “darkness of the soul! For we shall destroy this place where the loud clamor of sinners is waxen before the face of the lord” (27). Kilangan people are different from white Americans, without any misgivings, Price family. But this difference has become the source of Nathan’s showing his cultural superiority over the Africans, which is unjustifiable. This difference is worked out to exercise domination over the other in order to maintain and justify the discourse created in society and perpetuate it giving it a natural tinge. The persistent and consistent occurrences of any idea provides it with naturalness and truth. “They are living in darkness. Broken body and soul, and don’t even see how they could be healed.”

Nathan argues with his wife, Orleanna, that “body is the temple” and , “the human body is a sight more precious than a pair of khaki trousers from sears and resebuck.” He further exhorts Orleanna to “comprehend the difference” (53-4). This constant reference to the darkness of the body thereby correlating its nearness with the soul is the weapon with which Nathan’s missionary executes its work. His arrogance, self-righteous zeal, and overconfidence is the product of long standing tradition of perusing difference in terms of defect and depravity. So, quite disillusioned, Orleanna remembers her life while living with husband in Congolese village of Kilanga that she was not his wife but an “instrument”. He simply rejects any ideas, opinions and thoughts of her, rather imposes his own in every matter. He has his own sense of rewards and punishments.

“Leah,” he inquired at last, “why do you think the Lord gave us seeds to grow, instead of having our dinner just spring up out there on the ground like a bunch of field rocks?”

Now that was an arresting picture. I confessed I didn’t know the answer.

“Because Lord helps those who helps themselves.”

He continues, “God created a world of work and rewards,” and elaborated, “on a big balanced scale. Small works of goodness over here, small rewards over here.”

“Great sacrifice, great rewards.” (37)

The eloquence and confidence with which he makes the remarks is reminder of his personal interpretation of the world. He construes the world in his own way. It is no harm in having one’s personal understanding of the events and phenomena of the world, and makes the sense of it. But the problem emerges from the fact that he tries

to impose his understanding, belief and faith upon others with force. And, he rejects any findings, faith or understanding that goes contrary to him. As Leah and Nathan plant their garden, Mama Tataba- their house keeper- informs them that they need to make hills for the seeds rather than simply planting them in the flat earth. Nathan takes offense to her advice and also ignores her comment that the poisonwood plant that he is holding will hurt him. One is not always right in his or her judgment.

Each and every understanding is not applicable to all the events that unfold in one's life. Therefore, the next day, Nathan wakes up with painful rash on his hands, arms, and eye, where the poisonwood sap touched him. A few weeks later, a heavy rainfall washes out the garden. After the rains cease, Nathan replants the garden, this time shaping the garden into the flood-proof hills that Mama Tataba suggested. Yet he does not realize his mistake, rather puts blame on his family: "I ask you, how did I earn this?" and continues, "Ow! Great God almighty, Orleanna. How did the curse come to me, when it's God's own will to cultivate the soil!" (41). Denying responsibility for his own foolish acts, he screams at his family. The evidences reveal different aspects of Nathan's character: Nathan cares only his view of the world, and takes his family to hide his mistakes. He has sensitivity neither to villagers' cultural norms and feelings nor towards his family. Rather than taking opportunity of a welcome festive to establish friendship with the villagers, however, Nathan fixates on the sinfulness and berates the villagers for their display of their nakedness, thus displaying his own ignorance and arrogance. It is Nathan's inflexibility and arrogance that makes his character typical.

The nondisabled individuals historically defining themselves as normal by using disability as a universal metaphor for abnormality. That is, if people with disabilities did not exist, nondisabled people would have to invent them. It is the

undesired difference that plays dominant role to mark the others. Given the white complexion of Nathan Price, and the very cultural connotation of it as pure and sacred, he defines Africans as lacking in intellectuality unable to govern themselves. As in heated discussion with a doctor in Leopoldville about the upcoming elections, which would free Congo from the clutch of foreign rulers, he scoffs the idea of democracy and self-rule. Contrarily, he believes that “the Belgians and the American brought civilization to the Congo!” (48). Nathan becomes even more entrenched in his beliefs and his desire to “save” people of Kilanga.

It is a peculiar that Nathan defines the necessary qualifications required in a person to rule the nation. He cannot conceive his worldview being incorrect, and refuses to consider any opposing viewpoints. He demonstrates this inflexibility when doctor in Stanleyville mentions Lumumba, the popular Congolese leader. Nathan reacts with disdain, pointing to Lumumba’s lack of education as a reason he will never make a difference. Similarly, when the Underdowns, the previous priest of the village, come to warn the Prices about the impending elections and independence, Nathan again scoffs at the idea of the Congolese being able to self-rule, saying, “They don’t have the temperament or the intellect for such things” (78). This attitude reveals him the safeguard of the discourse created in the west and he is the representative of those values. Here, Nathan is seen to be blindly trying to impose the rule upon the people of Kilanga without ever taking a moment to find out what they want, need, or already know. His decision to stay in the Congo despite his family’s protest and the recommendations of the Underdowns also shows him to be incredibly selfish and single-minded. He acts without caring about what is best for those who depend on him. He is concerned only with achieving his own agenda-the puritan faith. It is the norm of society that he follows and wants desperately others to follow.

The treatment of normal people towards abnormal people varies with the cultural differences. Adah finds that people of Kilanga have different perception towards disable people. The house very close to that of Price family is Tata Mwanza. She is not treated as evil or bad amen, rather she works regularly, with all her will and passion. No one stares at her with unusual sense:

They don't care one bit about her not having any legs to speak of. To them she's just their mama and where is the dinner? To all the other Congo people, too. Why, they just don't let on, like she was a regular person. Nobody bats their eye when she scoots by on her hands and goes on down to her field or the river to wash clothes with the other ladies that work down there everyday. She carries all her things in basket on top of her head. When she scoots down the road, not a one of them falls out. All the other ladies have big baskets on their heads too, so nobody stares at Mama Mwanza one way or another. (52)

Mama Mwanza gets equal treatment from others. Similarly, Adah is not viewed by Kilangans as different. Ruth May knows that Adah has something "wrong" with her. "But nobody stares at Adah except just a little because she's white" (53). Nobody cares that she is bad on one whole side because "they have all got their own handicap children or mama with no feet, or their eye put out. When you take a look out the door, why there goes somebody with something missing off of them and not even embarrassed of it. They'll wave a stump at you if they've got one, in a friendly way" (53). But in Georgia, back home, Adah's lameness has become the source of disgrace. The physical impairment is not viewed as disgrace in Kilanga, but a consequence of living. So, the physically disabled people feel themselves rejected by the social codes

and the norms. Adah feels at ease in living in Kilanga. Adah finds that disability, in a sense, does not exist; it is so prevalent that it is seen as a normal, integrated part of life.

I didn't know many women in the Kilanga were more seriously disfigured and had husbands notwithstanding. *Standing with naught. Husbands.* Here, bodily damage is more or less considered to be a by-product of living, not a disgrace. In the way of the body and other people's judgment I enjoy a benign approval in Kilanga that I have never, ever known in Bethlehem, Georgia. (72)

The notion of establishing western humanistic ideal as a social norm through naturalizing constructed values on the unconscious level soon gets challenged from all the fronts. Nathan's belief, faith and arrogance is threatened. As people grow self-conscious of each and everyone's unique existence, the effect of Nathan's influence diminishes. The novelist has given individual voice to narrators or characters. Even five year old Ruth May has documented her experience living in Congo, people there and custom. We get an opportunity to experience the land from the consciousness of a little child. So, there are ample chances for the characters to develop, grow and progress over a period of time. Generally, characters in literature are almost always flat and static. Because they most often function as symbols, their perspectives are not developed and are unimportant to the development of the plot. Physical aberration in a literary character is indicative of mental, social, or spiritual aberration or any combination of those states. Physical difference marks the outsider or the monster, who rages or is isolated and is dying inside unseen. Adah Price is born with neurological disorder, she limps and moves slowly. Although she can speak, she chooses not to as a child and teenager. She defines herself by her disability. Adah sees

herself as a “lame gallimaufry” who is definitely not her “father’s star pupil” (34). She is analytical and cynical. As shown by her love of palindromes and reading sentences forward and backward, she examines life from all angles, sometimes seeing things that others overlook. Adah with her half-brain has an extraordinary talent for languages, one quirk of which is a preference for creating, thinking, and writing in palindromes. Suspension of disbelief is strained here because medical opinion finds the coupling of hemiplegia with high-end intelligence to be extremely unlikely.

The irony of the situation foregrounds the facts that retardation and genius are not simply facts of nature or of medical opinion, but are culturally defined. Society uses the extremes, the nonavarages, to define what is to be called normal. Suspicion of the disabled and the superabled provides an opposing cohesion that unifies the majority as a standard. Unity comes from exclusion so society must mark some individuals for exclusion. Alienation by definition is a requirement for maintaining social fabric. Adah is given a subjective perspective throughout. She is a total personality and she evolves. As a person, she evades the role of metaphor because she does not completely erase her disability. Rather, she continues to acknowledge that, although she is no longer silent and limping, her past is still her: “Tall and straight I may appear, but I will always be Ada [the palindromic name that she used to identify her disabled self] inside. A crooked little person trying to tell the truth. The power is in the balance: we are our injuries as much as we are our successes” (496). Here she offers a poignant recognition that we are all the totality in ourselves, present and past, and in doing so she transcends herself. After the death of Ruth May, Price’s family disintegrates. Nathan Price is left behind. Rachel and Leah stay in Africa, and Orleanna and Adah return back to United States. Here in the United States, Adah has decided to break her self-imposed silence and begin speaking. She enrolls at Emory

University in Atlanta, determined to eventually go to medical school. In medical school, a neurologist tells Adah he thinks she can be cured of her dragging right side and encourages her to take part in experimental program. For six months, she doesn't walk at all; instead she crawls and uses wheelchair. One day she feels a snap on her right side and is soon able to teach herself to walk again-this time without the limp.

Self-analysis serves to discover that one is not essentially disable, but a complete human being. As someone who always defined herself by her disability, Adah now wonders who she is without it. This evidence makes it clear that she is not lame in essence. When she chooses her own path in life (college and medical school), instead of acquiescing to social definitions, she achieves self-hood and begins to walk. She discovers that her extreme had been only cultural marking, an unconscious manifestation of her acceptance of her social monstrosity. She begins to work almost normally. In Africa, she learns many things that help to free herself from self-inflicted inferiority. Adah's empathy for the truths of the village enables herself to free herself from the injurious western definitions: "In the way of the body and other people's judgment I enjoy the benign approval of Kilanga that I have never, ever known in Bethlehem, Georgia" (72). Later, she adds, "In that long-ago place, America, I was a failed combination of too-weak body and overstrong will. But in Congo I am those things perfectly united: Adah. Disability is natural-literally part of the spirit of nature. Adah is normal because her nature transcends her body:

The Bantu speaks of the "self" as a vision residing inside, peering out through the eyeholes of the body, waiting for whatever happens the next. Using the body as mask, *Muntu* (self) watches and waits without fear, because *muntu* itself cannot die. The transition from the spirit to body and back to spirit again is merely a venture. (343)

Orleanna, back to the United States, engages herself in the civil rights activities, especially marches. The individuality and self- decision grows as she closes her narrative in the section of the novel, “Exodus,” on a note that is sad, insightful, and redemptive. Free of Nathan’s control, she chooses to speak and in voice comes redemption. She begins by defining the need to understand the deceptive nature of words: “Independence is a complex word in a foreign tongue. To resist occupation, whether you are nation or merely a woman, you must understand the language of your enemy. Conquest and liberation and democracy and divorce are the words [. . .] (383). Orleanna’s wisdom about the space between words moves her to change. She accepts her responsibility for her complicity and acquires the words for her story. For Orleanna, telling her story is a syncretic process, as she aims to reconcile what has gone before.

The disillusionment about Nathan is a reaction towards patriarchal dominance and general attitude he represents. It is spurred by the fact that they come to know that Nathan is exerting himself with limited knowledge and understanding. The two episodes that solidify Leah’s attitude about her father and loss of faith are the election held by the villagers in Nathan’s church and the Ruth May’s death. And even other minor events like plantation fiasco helps to some extent to the loss of faith. The election at church is a solid evidence to falsify that African lacks reason and cultural foundation, and thus treated by westerners as culturally disable. This event shows that the village of Kilanga has a solid culture that both accepts and respects the laws of surrounding jungle. The spiritual beliefs of the villagers accord with the natural forces around them. Nathan Price with strict Christian fundamentalism is utterly at odds with those forces. His insistence, against local advice, on growing western vegetables by Western farming methods leads only to humiliating failures. Perhaps the best example

of his being at odds with African natural forces is his demand that all children be baptized in the local river, ignoring the very real problem of crocodiles. That idea is politely but firmly rebuffed, and the credibility of his Western god's decline further.

The general attitude of Westerners is critically examined by the local people of Kilanga, which endowed them with the capacity for self-assertion. During the Sunday service, in the midst of Nathan's service about the false idols from the "Apocrypha," the congregation is inattentive. Finally Tata Ndu, tribal chief, stands and cuts Nathan off to hold "an election on whether or not to accept Jesus Christ as the personal Saviour of Kilanga." Nathan shrieks that this behaviour as "blasphemy," but Ndu hoist upon his own white imperialist petard. Imperialist has the tendency to look everything from their own point of view. They tend to view others activities with disgust and apathy. The principle, if applied by those designated disable people, is supposed to be against the universal principle. For that matter, Ndu states that "white men have brought many programs to improve our thinking [. . .] Jesus and elections" are two. "You say these things are good. You cannot say now these things are not good." For Leah Ndu "sates truth" about Nathan's and other white men's ignorance: "You believe we are *mauna*, your children, who knew nothing until you came here" (333).

Self-analysis is the tool to establishing one's prominence before debilitating effect of normalizing principles created by westerners. Explaining the foolishness of such thought, Ndu clarifies the history of his learning handed down across generations, the philosophy of cultural sharing, the politics of tribal government that teaches the need to listen to each man's voice before making a choice and then to select only if the entire community agrees. And the dangers of majority vote capable of excluding up to forty-nine percent of people. The congregation votes and Jesus

loses, “eleven to fifty-six” (334). Leah sees how Nathan has no sense at all of the culture he wants to civilize; his message is as irrelevant as Kentucky seeds to the Congo environment. Here, the Christian rhetoric resounds with bigotry. The next instance that Leah loses faith she had left on her father and his god is when Ruth May dies from venomous snake bite, and her father has no words to explain the child’s death, except his youngest daughter “wasn’t baptized yet” seeing an “ugly man” who desired the personal glory of baptizing his child with all of Kilanga’s children, the daughter who had idolized her father, now could not stand to look at him. Nathan lacks the wisdom that people get from the suffering; Nathan is deaf to the truth. What is left with him is self-proclaimed truth of western countries, arrogance and self-righteousness. He seems less human being than western discourse of normal man.

The self-conscious observation of one’s unique existence is a critical response to the prevalent discourse of normality. The religious bigotry exercised by Nathan is challenged when Tata Ndu, tribal leader, expresses the serious concern over the people going to the church, forgetting their duties towards the ancestors and village gods, which, according to him, might bring natural disaster upon the villagers. Anatole, the school teacher, tells Nathan about the concern of village chief. It manifests the growing consciousness of native people towards their own culture, which undercuts the Nathan’s beliefs in his cultural and racial superiority to the Congolese. Nobody can really know whether any religious idea is actually true. Therefore, nobody knows whether one belief is closer to the truth than another. They are all guesswork, therefore all equal. How then can one religion be justified in supplanting another? The concept of “conversion” is unjust and plain wrong. It concurrently dismantles his regards Africans lacking in maturity, intellect and sophistication, and condemnation of them as pagans who worship false gods. At

dinner table in Nathan's home Anatole, the school teacher, announces about the exasperation of village chief, Tata Ndu, about the moral decline of his village people. Nathan takes this remark positively, and sees truth in it because so many people are not going to church. But the reality turns out to be different.

“No, Reverend. Because so many villagers are going to church.”

“Brother Anatole, I fail to see how the church can mean anything but joy, for the few here who choose Christianity over *ignorance* and *darkness!*” (emphasis in the original)

Anatole sighed. “I understand your difficulty, Reverend. Tata Ndu has asked me to explain this. His concern is with the important gods and ancestors of this village, who have always been honored in certain sacred ways. Tata Ndu worries that the people who go to your church are neglecting their duties.”

“Neglecting their duties to false idolatry, you mean to say.” (128)

The conversation reveals two different facts about two divergent cultures: Christianity and voodoo. It exhibits the nature centered religiosity of Congolese people, which embraces not only the romantic idealism maneuvering at the grandeur of nature, but the whole of nature, with its devastating power and cruelty as well as its tranquility. Spirits and deities are of this world rather than beyond it, and can be contacted through the natural world. Nature spirituality, then, focuses on the daily experiences of life in the natural world as the primary, if not sole, medium of encounter with the divine. What Tata Ndu suggests through Anatole is that for these people simple act of living their daily lives, of being a part of and participating in the natural order, is a religious act. Performing the daily task of planting and harvesting, of reaping the fruits of the earth, of participating in the act of procreation – in other words, of

interacting with and being a part of the natural world – is in itself a form of communion with and participation in the divine. Similarly, Brother Fowles says to Orleanna that the people of Kilanga are “very religious,” that “everything they do is with one eye to the spirit” (246).

Both the cultures have equal significance. The relation of ‘high’ and ‘low’ does not operate between them. They exist at a parallel distance to each other. Brother Fowles understands this fact. This understanding of Brother Fowles dismantles the frenzy of Nathan Price’s single minded pursuit of converting native people into Christianity. Nathan insists that native people are not religious. But they are already so. To Nathan’s consistent effort of conversion, Tata Ndu asserts himself with his own religious beliefs, and perception of the world. “The Congolese have a world of God’s grace in their lives, along with a dose of hardships that can kill a person entirely. I happen to think they already knew how to make a joyful noise unto the Lord a long time ago,” says Brother Fowles to Orleanna. He serves as a priest in Kilanga before the arrival of Price family. He was ousted from his position for his views and marrying the African women. His views make it clear that culture of Kilanga is self sufficient in itself and does not need transformation or conversion any longer. At the same time, his ousted from priesthood is the symptomatic of cultural arrogance and self-righteousness of American civilization which tends to abhor any complicity with difference. Anatole, the school teacher, reminisces his own tradition since the time immemorial when “there was no written language,” and had “their own bible” (324). He is becoming more aware of his own tradition. Furthermore, the death of Nathan, at the hand of angry villagers, in the Belgium constructed watchtower, reminds of the end to a hierarchy created by colonial masters.

The death of Ruth May serves as a catalyst to the explosion of individuality, way towards self-exploration and self-worth of each of Price's family women. It serves to break free from limitations and boundaries of Nathan's created system, which denies voice and volition to the culturally marked disable people. African culture, specifically the Congo's, liberates Adah and most of the Price women. They encountered with the natural state of life there in Africa lack of artificial "norms" and "standard." The name "Price" is itself tempting: is it the price they pay as women, or the price-the death of youngest daughter Ruth May by snake bite, the self-destruction of father-that Africa demands for freeing the others from their cultural chains? The Question is tricky. But this event serves to disillusion the Price family members about Nathan. It is Nathan's extreme obsession, which leads eventually to his abandoning his family, to insanity or at least insane behaviour, and death, is the outcome of his desperate need to maintain his social, gendered, and nationalistic supremacy. Nathan has been depicted as an uncompromising religious fanatic.

IV. Conclusion

After the meticulous discussion and analysis of Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, the researcher comes to the conclusion that the novel has questioned the representation of literary characters in fiction, with flat and static exposure, with disabilities, in terms of race, gender and physicality. Questioning historical perspectives toward disable characters, it questions the representation of 'able' or 'normal' characters. This research work argues that, despite racial, gender, physical, and religious differences, each individual, community and group is unique in itself. It further argues that the necessity to politicize the differences emerges out of desire to maintain one's superior position and dominance.

In Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, an elusively prominent character, Nathan Price serves as a cultural assumption of normality. He turns out to be a point of departure to pass judgment on whether some action, belief or behaviour is right. Since he has not been given any individual voice, we know about him from the narration of other characters. He is presented in the novel as a cultural icon of normality principle. The story of the novel revolves around the conflict between the Nathan's desire to establish full control upon African people through spreading Christianity, and drill upon his family, his own cultural assumptions, ideas and concepts. But the notion of transforming people of voodoo culture, Kilangans, refuse to be transformed as they find shortcomings, defects and weaknesses in Nathan's assumptions and impositions. The village chief, Tata Ndu, clearly mentions that Africans, or the people in the village of Kilanga, are not doing their duty properly towards their ancestors. He augurs the terrible consequences because of the negligence and disobedience. He also questions the exercise of voting in election, which is described as democratic, arguing that it is not inclusive, but exclusive. He

argues that in the western exercise of democracy through voting, there looms the danger of avoiding forty-nine percent of people to fifty-one. He then elaborates his procedures of decision making which includes the voice of all the people. Instead of yielding to Nathan's culture, Anatole, the school teacher, enjoys remembering his prehistoric past. Likewise, the female characters in the novel, like Orleanna, Rachel, Adah, and Leah, are suppressed and oppressed by Nathan's cultural assumptions and the understanding of the world. Though they narrate the events, Nathan predominates every of the events. It is ironical to assume these characters having individual voice. But the incidents are deftly weaved to show the perpetual evolution of their individuality out of Nathan's snare of cultural assumptions. Adah is doubly discriminated, as a female and a disable. She defines herself as a disable and poor creature. She prefers to remain mute. Yet she evolves. Her intelligence helps to break free out of such debilitating effects of cultural assumptions of her life. African culture liberates Price women. Adah invents herself with the African culture as she learns that she is normal because her essence transcends her body.

In short, the alternative African mystic vision of the eternal self beyond temporary physical aberration 'ables' Adah. Each of the Prices women finds their individual life deserting Nathan Price. So, he seems to be static and a wild-eyed religious fanatic. And finally, the death of Nathan Price at the hand of angry villagers, by burning him at colonial watch tower, built by the Belgians, has symbolic significance, rather than literal. It exhibits the self-assertion of Congolese people against the religious imposition of the colonial masters. It further delineates the rejection of definition of normality, represented, at best, by Nathan.

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