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Disability and Selfhood in Jhamak Ghimire's *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled " Disability and Selfhood in Jhamak Ghimire's *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns*" submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mrs. Lalita Joshi has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

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## Disability and Selfhood in Jhamak Ghimire's *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns*

*This thesis studies how Jhamak Ghimire's autobiographical work *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* brings various ideas and feelings related to the life of differently able people. The book presents author's own vulnerability caused by her physical limitations as a 'disabled' person when growing as a child. Not only that she also highlights the discriminations of society towards physically challenged people. She has shown that a physically challenged person is regarded as a lesser human being, a burden and unworthy entity. This research explores Jhamak's rebels and resistance toward pejorative attitude of society for the physically challenged people. She reveals by using her toes instead of hand to write, she reveals by proving herself mentally capable of academic performance. She reveals discarding the humiliations and proving herself someone worthy to honour by country's best literary award. This research tries to bring toward the most important but often ignored issue that physical disability should not be only criteria to judge people.*

**Keywords:** Disability, Selfhood Nepali Literature, Autobiography, Self-perception.

This study analyzes *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* from the perspective of disability studies. Construction of the identity of a disabled person is the main issue of this study. Through this autobiography Jhamak brings the issue of disability and constructs disabled identity. Disability is the issue which raises the voice of people who are different from the normal or who are physically and mentally challenged. In this text, Jhamak Ghimire expresses the voice of disabled one and searches the identity of a female with disability through literary writing. Issues of disability are expressed for the first time by Jhamak in this autobiographical work which brings new insight in the field of Nepali literary writing. This literary writing not only expresses the reality of the person with disability who are spending life in the bed but also brings new vision to disability movement and proves that a person with disability can be like able people and live a respectful life if s/he struggles. The autobiography portrays the world and human life in different angles and asks whether life is thorn or flower. The plot of the text revolves around this philosophical theme. Most parts of the autobiography are based on her own experiences as a disabled child. The study concentrates on the research question: how does the narrator project a disabled self in this autobiography and the situation of disable people in contemporary society.

Due to the ongoing attitude of normalcy and disability a person faces various problems in life and this disgraces a person to live with dignity. Narrator of this autobiography shares the concept of normalcy and disability and asserts a disabled self. The text raises the issue of Nepalese society. Main narrator of the text is completely disabled and asserts her disabled self in her society. She raises the problems of disability on the basis of her own experiences. As a disabled, she faces many problems in her life.

The autobiography analyzes the overall life of a disabled young girl. This is a nostalgic memoir which projects the scenario of Nepalese society and life of disabled persons. Society treated that disability is a kind of punishment and disabled person is sinner of previous life. In this cultural background, it is difficult to do anything in life. Mostly disability is taken as the burden of community. Sometimes family avoids disabled and they spend merciless life without getting any help. Traditional assumption of disability discourages disabled to do anything in life. In this context, Jhamak was born as a disabled child in a poor family. Initially she faces many problems in life. She rebels from the bed and commits to be a public person in life. Her rebel was her continuous efforts through her writing, which finally changed public opinion about disability. She is finally able to project herself as an important literary figure of the nation though she is still physically weak. Her struggle proves that if someone struggles, he/she can get success in life. In this regard, she says, "I struggle in life" (23). Whole parts of the text are concentrated on pain and pleasure of life which inspires the readers for doing something.

Jhamak was awarded Madan Puraskar, the biggest literary prize of Nepal, in 2009. She was born in 1980 in Dhankuta as the daughter of Krishna Bahadur Ghimire and Asha Devi Ghimire. She is by-birth disabled. Though she could not get school education in her childhood age, she learned at home from her own father and started to read and write. She is unable to talk to other people by speaking though she can talk by writing. Her hands are so weak to hold pen so she uses legs for writing literary texts. *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* is only the book written by toes that won prize Madan Puraskar. She is disabled one. She resists the traditional assumption of disability. Traditional definition is related to physical and mental condition. In this regard, Simi Linton argues:

To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study. Just as the study of race has focused on the person of color. But as with recent scholarship on race, which has turned its attention to whiteness, I would like to focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. I do this because the "problem" is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person. (5).

Normalcy, like pathology, consists of a summation of various parts, that when viewed as a whole indicates that all is as it should be with no exceptions. Normal therefore is often defined as the complete absence of abnormal.

*A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* is a powerful writing of Nepali literature which resists traditional concept of disability, and asserts that a physically challenged person can be useful and worthy like the 'normal' people. There are the problems of disabled people because of the traditional perception of society about disability. Traditional social values discourage disabled people to involve in mainstream progress. Jhamak's autobiography shows power of a disabled girl who struggle in life and establishes herself as public figure of nation. Though she could not speak, walk or even pickup food from the plate, she struggled in life to change the perception of society and succeed to transform her life. She projects her life as beautiful flower rather than a worthless thorn. Nepalese society behaves the disabled person as the worthless thorn which Jhamak has also experienced in her early life. She changes these values and becomes the public figure of the society. She becomes the role model of disabled and proves that disability cannot block any one to achieve victory in life.

In the same manner, Hasta Gautam describes her physical disability: "Her body does not move, and nor does she speak, but she holds a pen and paper in her feet. Her hands and feet are disabled since birth, she cannot stand, but she can stare intentionally, can crawl around and can collect many experiences in short journey" (xi). Gautam describes her physical situation which is pathetic and miserable. She could not walk herself though she can collect the experiences better than the so-called ordinary people. In this context, he further claims:

Though she may be looked disabled or slow from the outside, she is actually very fast and energetic from within. And yet, society has made fun of her on the basis of her looks. She is able to conduct that life is flowers, not a thorn. She is the courage to draw the lines of her own destiny by holding the wonderful feelings of her heart in her delicate feet. (xi)

Jhamak has extra genius than other ordinary person which encourages her to come out from her situation. She resists the traditional concept of disability and succeeds to convert her life from thorn into flower. This powerful creation highlights the philosophy of life and compares ordinary life with this philosophy. This idea is well reflected in the title of her book.

Commenting on the book Gopal Guragain claims, "this book contains miraculous story of a child who was crushed to death right from the time of birth and has seen the worst life since then" (287). He further describes the book as the source of inspiration and says:

This book will be an inspiration to thousands of such children in the future. How did a girl, who had the cruel destiny of being handicapped from birth, struggle with a thousand challenges? How did a girl



deprived of speech, motion and hands, spend her days fighting the terrible blows of death? How did she wish to express her happiness, sorrow, laughter and tears. (287)

Jhamak was never hesitant to face the troubles. She continuously struggles in life and establishes herself as a young and an energetic literary figure of Nepal. She has become a role model not only for people with disability but for everyone. Gopal Guragain further claims, "This book raises the voice for the fair treatment of children born in unusual situations. In a society where humanism has not developed fully, thousands of children with biological defects are neglected. Children's right is being discussed today" (2). From the beginning of her writing, Jhamak was determined to use her intelligence, talent and creativity to the benefit of the people who were determined to use her intelligence, talent and creativity to the benefit of the people who understand the source of creation, culture and power. She decided to dedicate her entire life to the cause of justice, equality, peace, progress and nationalism of the people. She assimilates the universal principle of human rights and freedom.

Commenting on the power of Jhamak's writing, Govind Raj Bhattarai argues that her autobiographical work has helped to undo the social prejudices against 'disabled' people. He claims:

This is one of the powerful literary creations which brings emotion, feelings and experiences of Jhamak as the form of book. This book has a storm that sweeps away all the humiliation of human life. This book shows the power of human life and omits the jealous, humiliation and other unnecessary things of life. She projects her as humanist more than only female writer. (1)

Bhattarai seems to believe that this work has given the author a tremendous chance to revise people's opinion about disability.

*A Flower in The Midst of Thorns* resists the traditional norms and values of disability, and projects Jhamak as active as normal people. She struggles in her life without proper physical facilities and appropriate human behaviors though she succeeds to erase the attitude of disability from her life. She changes her life from useless thorn into attractive flower, "though the society regards her to be a useless thorn, she is able to conclude that life is a flower, not a thorn" (xi). These lines show how Jhamak resists traditional concept of disability. Society takes disable one as useless thorn and always looks negatively. Ups and down of Jhamak resists the past disabled identity and portrays her as an eminent Nepali literary figure. People hardly believe that she is disabled though her physical situation is same till now. The following lines show her situation which she describes in her autobiography:

A girl is cheated all the time by destiny: I had neither any sweetness in life nor any jest for it. Life is not what one expects to be I only survived because I was destined to live. I couldn't tell whether it was an animal's life or human being's that I was pursuing. (2)

Jhamak's autobiography has drawn attention of various critics and scholars. They have sympathized her achievement as a writer. But they have hardly discussed on how this agency of writing has given her a chance to redefine her own identity.

Jhamak Ghimire in her work resists the traditional assumption of disability and introduces her as renounced women writer of the nation. Disability is related to both socio cultural and clinical issue. Clinical issues resolve for each subject to assure they fit a profile of clinical normalcy that is acceptable on observation and examination, perhaps by more than one observer. In the case of children, this must

include an adequate assessment of childhood development and achievement. William S. Bell defines the idea of clinical normalcy in the following way:

The first assumption recognized by imaging is to be considered normal if the child is clinically determined to be normal. The second is to accept minimal criteria for normalcy based on imaging corroborated by normal clinical assessment. While these two approaches at first sound similar, their outcome and the way subjects are recruited may be quite different. In the first approach, minor abnormalities revealed by imaging often may be found even if the child is considered clinically normal. (21).

A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed in every society. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves with others. But the ideas of norm are less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. Recent work on the ancient Greeks, on preindustrial Europe, and on tribal people for example, shows that disability was once regarded very different from the way it is now. The social process of disabling arrived with industrialization with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation, and so on.

For centuries, people with disabilities have lived as oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. They were more like 'objects' who were acted upon. A rough estimate shows that almost ten percent of the Nepali population lives with disability. But there are very less literature

produced about the situation of such people except some developmental reports produced by international agencies or other non-governmental organizations.

Since Nepal largely constitutes religious societies, there are many myths about disability. Some believe that disability is the result of the past life's *karma*. Disability has been an issue of fate. But Jhamak's writing has helped intervene into those traditional views on disability.

In the context, when we think that our bodies are divinely constituted as normal or disabled, it does not accept the human role. You live with what you are provided with. Yachting Stall discusses how the idea of disability was conceived as the 'other' in European societies:

It is possible to think people with disabilities now being used as architectural decorations as the grotesque were on the facades cathedrals through Europe. The grotesque permeated culture and signified common humanity, whereas the disabled body, after concept, was formulated by definition excluded from culture, society, the norm.

(11)

The above quotation reinforces the constructive notion of disability. Disability is a social construction. What we consider 'disabled' is not essentially disabled. And no one is completely 'able' in that essentialist sense. People feel easy doing something and uncomfortable for doing other things. Similar to Jhamak Ghimire's story there is another Irish writer Christy Brown the write of *My Left Foot* who too was physically challenged and could only move his left foot. Like Jhamak's autobiography, his book too got publicity and awards. He too transformed his narrated self as disabled to differently abled by becoming a writer and painter. Both Jhamak Ghimire and Christy Brown subverted the notion of disability through their writing.

Though medical sciences have long talked about disability and its consequences, but this was not discussed in the domain of literary studies until very recent decades when disability studies began getting some prominence. The main model to understand disability was to look at the “deviation”. The deviation of the body was considered as a fault or weakness.

In *A Flower in the Midst of Thorn* the traditional norms and values of disability are reconstructed and Jhamak is projected as an active person. Disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Jhamak struggles in her life without proper physical facilities and appropriate human behaviours though she succeeds to erase the attitude of disability from her life. She makes a history of receiving Madan Puraskar in a young age. She changes her life from useless 'thorn' into attractive 'flower': "though the society regards her to be a useless thorn, she is able to conclude that life is a flower, not a thorn" (xi).

Here, her life without action is regarded as a thorn which is useless and her life as a writer as a flower. It is with her own effort that she was able to transform her life from thorn into flower. Society has viewed disabled people as useless thorns and always despised them. Jhamak is an established literary personality now. People hardly believe that she is disabled though her physical situation is same till now. She explains her situation in the following way: "A girl is cheated all the time by destiny; I had neither any sweetness in life nor any jest for it. Life is not what one expects to be I only survived because I was destined to live. I couldn't tell whether it was an animal's life or human being's that I was pursuing" (2). In the chapter entitled "My Life's Beginning", she writes on her destiny. Her voice signifies the rise of disabled voice. Disability is the condition of difficulty in carrying out daily activities normally

in taking part in social life due to problems in parts of the body and the physical system as well as obstacles created by physical, social, cultural environment and by communication.

Jhamak Ghimire has faced the problem of physical disability. Her weak body always challenges her to be active in her life. She becomes victim of cruel destiny though she struggles and changes the situation. She describes the situation in this way:

In fact, I had so much been cheated by destiny that I couldn't even raise myself from the bed. It was perhaps my grandmother, a grey-haired old lady almost like a moon disappearing beyond a mountain, who would lift me from the bed and take me in her lap. (4)

Childhood of Jhamak was not so different from ordinary disabled people. Her grandmother looked after her. Her situation is only related to physical disability.

Common people live in a world of norms which endeavors to be normal. Thus, considers what the average person does, thinks, earns or consumes. Thus rank our intelligence, the cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions among some conceptual line from abnormal to above average. It consumes a minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume. Children are ranked in school and tested to determine where they fit into a normal curve of learning of intelligence. Doctors measure and weight them to see if they are above or below average on the height and weight curves. There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated. In this regard, Lennard J. Davis argues:

To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study, just as the study

of race has focused on the person of color. But as with recent scholarship on race, which has turned its attention to whiteness, I would like to focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. I do this because the "problem" is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the "problem" of the disabled person. (5)

Normalcy is related to the pathology that consists of a outline of various parts.

Normal therefore is often defined as the complete absence of abnormal. In dealing with pathological process on across-sectional imaging, nobody takes interest on JhamakGhimire. In this regard, Jhamak writes, "Grandmother loved me so much, but then I had only one fuss over all the irreplaceable love you have showered on me. How could you forget my own sister? What ....." (6). Grandmother loves her though she also feels burden and curses the fate. Grandmother knows that being disabled is neither a fault of Jhamak nor of her parents. She says, "It was, however, neither her fault nor ours. The blame lies squarely on the shoulders of the man who could not fertilize appropriate semen as he would have liked it. A mother is simply the earth, she only conceives, that's all" (8). Jhamak's disability creates problems on family though her parents show mercy like other children. Jhamak writes on her childhood age, " As it is, it is perhaps natural for a child to be jealous on such situation. I was the eldest sisters of two. And how could I remain unaffected by a similar feeling of jealousy because, following my younger brother's birth, my grandmother had cased loving me as much as she used to". (9)

In her life she experienced other normal people behaving her as an unable person. She is mentally normal and strong though her physical situation made her relatively weak. A common assumption would be that some concepts of the norm must

have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the ideas of a norm are less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. The social process of disabling arrived with industrialization and with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation and so on. Disabilities have been as oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, observed, written about, and operated on. Instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group.

When Jhamak learns to read she gains knowledge about disability and the situation of disabled people in her society. More than that, she has her own experiences of how society behaves toward disabled person. One would never know this to be the case by looking at the literature on minorities and discrimination. She has one younger brother and one sister who are able. They used to go to school and relatives house. Jhamak also wanted to go but mother could not take together while she is outside. She describes such situation in the following way: "Even my mother had gone to our maternal uncle's house alone with my younger siblings. Nor had father returned even that late from the town towards which he had headed at daytime itself" (11). During her childhood she was badly affected by physical disability. She could only observe the world but she could not share her feeling with other family members. Sometimes she was afraid with her situation and she feared about her future. She writes, "Terrorized, I attached myself as closely as possible to grandma's body and slept even as I had kept crying. Something like a strong winds it till howling outside. After a while, however, the bare earth emitted so much cold that there was no way I could beat it" (14).



Jhamak observes outside world and feel, humiliated. She observes the outside world and tries to get information from outside world and recognizes the level of oppression both overt and by marginalization, is being organized by the people with disabilities and other interested parties. As the so called normal people has created discourse about the physically challenged people as a disabled people which literary means those who aren't able to do anything and the same discourse is internalized by the physically challenged people. The existing thing about disability studies is that it is both an academic field of inquiry and an area of political activities as it is a discourse made by the so- called able people about the physically challenged ones and it creates a binary putting physically challenged people in margin.

Disability becomes a more than acceptable modality from which to theorize on the basis of current political situation. It has continued to be relegated to hospital hallways physical therapy table, and remedial classrooms. The civil rights movement brings new lights on the concept of disability and ensure right of disable people. Jhamak could not go far from bed and crawling here and faces various problems. Some time she could not get drink and food. She could not understand the fact what was going outside. She writes about her situation in this way:

I did not understand what people were talking about. Some spoke despite being so many members in the family, the old woman has none to give her some water on her death, bed; others said how urgently did Death grabbed her, she could not utter her wishes before she died, still sleep. (16)

People have considered her as weak and worthless character of the society. There is dark night and great silence before her. She could not find humanity in outside world. She searches compassion inside her and shares experiences with herself. She

describes this situation in the following way: "By the time darkness was overtaken by light and the day dawned. I observed that grandma was lying peacefully on the ground by the side of a mound with a hilly tulsi, bail plant. She was deep in her sleep; a great silence prevailed there". (16)

One day she finds her grandmother in a deep sleep. Nobody tells the truth about the grandmother. She guesses that she may have been died but she could not be sure of it. She takes the events as tragic events.

JhamakGhimire is only the person who lives near the grandmother. In this regard, she writes, "My life experienced such tragic events in a tender age before I could understand its meaning. In fact I was the only person with her, she had her last breathe in my presence" (18). All are busy in household activities; nobody has time for support her in death bed after long time of grandmother's death. She learns to read and write by using her legs and eyes. Her hand could not work properly. She further explains, "Both of my hands were non-functional and could not even hold of anything. Even if I did so they would tremble and things would fall. It is also impossible for me to pick up grains of cooked rice of a plate and put it into my mouth" (18). She faces various difficulties in her life after the death of her grandmother. Her hands are so weak for pickup food from plate. Similarly, she is unable to go to toilet herself. She describes her vulnerable situation in the following way:

My legs did not have the capacity to support my body-weight either. As it gradually dawned on me that the limbs of my body-frame were dysfunctional, I felt extremely helpless and succourless, as also watched. I had also nurtured, like all children in general, desires to

walk around and reach place near and far. But my legs did not support me, thus compelling me to drag and haul myself around. (21)

Due to physical disability, she found her as helpless child of universe and thought about the way come out from the situation. The concept of norm, unlike that of an ideal implies that the majority of the population should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down the majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell shaped curve. In the novel, Jhamak Ghimire expresses her feeling though she could not speak. At that time her life remains in silence and indulge in a peculiar state of mind. In this regard she writes, "I thus also savored the taste of life within that dumbness and silence. I cannot tell whether that taste was sweet or bitter; but, all said and have done, even a life within such dumbness and quiet hard, I felt, a peculiar flavor of its own!" (23). She prepares for fighting against the traditional concept of disability as well as cruelty of time and destiny though she struggles in life and tries to use some sense for getting knowledge of outside world.

In the autography, there is nostalgia of past life. In Nepali literature, trend of autobiographical writing is not new. *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* brings references of historical context while telling author's personal story. Her creation is different from traditional form of autobiography. She in her initial phase of her life was 'nobody', 'unworthy', but she took the agency of her own writing to assert herself and rose as an example diverting the previous myth of disability as fake. She at last proved herself as 'somebody' and not only somebody as other normal people but as a recognized writer.

There are many limitations of life which is impossible to breakout within a short time. Jhamak realizes that this unnecessary burden creates problem in life of disable people. When she was a little child she was beaten by her grandmother many times in the name of violation of social norms. It coincides with its essence and

cannot be altered by normal, artistic, or human will. This inability of corporal identity marks place on the body. By this logic, the person enters into an identical relationship with the body, the forms of the identity and the identity is unchangeable and indelible as one's place on the normal curve.

The situation she describes projects the treatment of the society and family members to the physically challenged people. In the sense, she writes: "My grandma used to beat me many times whenever I wanted to play with it. Now I was no longer worried and did not care about this. I wanted to play freely. There's none to control me" (29). Jhamak dislikes blind belief and wanted throw out this belief out from the social life. Her mother and grandmother dislike her behaviors and request to be honest and silence child like other disable children. But she wanted to struggle and become a modern one. In this context, she says:

Whatever it was and however difficult, I never gave up scribbling on the earth with a bamboo twig. They had a superstitious belief that scribbling the surface with a twig (or charcoal) leads one to incur debt. My mother scolded me to see doing this. (30)

Her mother dislikes her behaviors and punishes her. Jhamak understands all the circumstances and situation of the society which is guided by superstition and blind belief. In this regard, she says, "He would just scold me, "Why do you disturb your younger sister; she is reading and writing. You get out," and then I stayed away but I never sat idle; I tried to learn something" (31). Jhamak gets education from her father at her home. She learnt reading and writing faster than ordinary children. In this meaning, she says, "If failed to obey him, I would get rebuked with words like "You fallen girl, a spy," My father is quite clever; he only was chosen to laugh" (32). She forgets her situation while she plays with her father. She feels shock when her family

and friends humiliates her by laughing. In this term, she says, "What a traumatic shock would she experience when the clever ones do demand death for her? The clever ones did never think; they spoke without thinking of a tender mind" (33).

Jhamak struggles in life help of writing literary text. Before being writer she says, "A death like that of animals is, however, never acceptable to me. I am standing in such a time which is burning a fire of tradition on an innocent soul; she is bearing intolerable pain" (36). Actually, Jhamak rejects the animal like death and established her as the eminent writer of Nepalese's literature. More than that, she becomes source of inspiration of hundred thousand disable people who are waiting death. She proved that a person can be a successful one if he/she has commitment in life. How she decided to be a writer is very beautifully written in the introduction of her autobiography *a flower in the midst of thorns* where she writes how once one of her friend looking her diary writing encouraged her to publish her book, how at first she was confused whether to write or not, and how she later chose to write and put her emotions and experience in her writing. She writes,

My heart was attracted to writing again. After a few pages, my life imploded into me, and I stopped suddenly. I reeled with the pain of scarred life. I cried alone and lightened my heart. Then I wiped my tears and took up my pen again. . . . In this way the first draft was written in about a year.(xxi)

*A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* is one of the guidelines of children who found nothing in life except disability. In this regard, she says, "Children are, by nature, curious and fragile. As a child, may own nature wasn't any different from that of the others. The only difference being that I was physically handicapped" (37).Jhamak shows her boldness in her life though she is physically fragile child.

When she discovered the reality of world she becomes happier in life. In this context, she says, "Had I not, when I discovered that my hands could not catch anything, experimented writing with my feet, my body would have been the synonym of a living corpse and I would have been waiting my death in a lonely and dark corner" (41). In the same way she further explains, "I somehow wrote the first letter. After that, it took me a very long time to scribble all the letters. But no matter how long it may have taken, I would be patient" (44). People do not understand her and neglect her genius. Sometime she is behaved like sick children though she is young and energetic for literary writing. The following line of books clarifies the situation as:

Oh, you dumb girl, must you be so dejected and downcast in life?" but who was there to soothe me with such words? I had been a girl discarded and shunned by everybody. Although, on my face, people seemed to display sympathy by uttering words like, Poor thing. (46)

Above lines reflect the situation of disabled people in Nepalese condition. Nepalese society delimits the role of disabled people and treats him/her as patient. Jhamak is one of the examples, friends and relatives misbehave Jhamak and categorize her as fragile child. Her activities induce that she is only physically weak but mentally strong. Her sense is highly powerful than ordinary people. In this regard, she describes, "My tongue was also capable of picking up and appreciating various tastes. Even if a bit hazy, my eyes were capable of somehow seeing things, while my nerves could feel and recognize various objects as I touched them" (51). Jhamak never feels fear of disability and struggle to establish her identity as writer. She can recognize the situation, objects and events. "My sense of touch helped me recognize things that were either only, slippery, rough, hard, tender, soft and the like, whereas my eyesight came

in handy in enabling me to know and learn about the shapes and colours of various stuff" (54) She discovered a new self that challenged the notion of understanding disability solely in terms of deficits.

Disability is not intrinsic, but rather extrinsic. Disability is situated not in an individual pathology, but in society's failure to embrace diverse ways of being in the world. Disability is not a variant of human physiology, psychology or genotype, but instead the manifested outcome of social barriers and deeply entrenched patterns of discrimination. The problem is not which is related to the life of disabled people living in a social order premised in the most fundamental ways upon the assumption that everyone-or everyone who counts-does walk in that quaint biped way. The ideas upon which meaning is premised are not simple-but they can be stated quite simply.

By being a woman Jhamak faces various problem creates by patriarchal society. Some of the traditions are guided by superstition. In this regard, she says, "That was why superstitious pregnant women in our village filled with the apprehension that they might give a birth to a physically disabled child like me if they cast their eyes on me, would either avoid looking at me altogether or walk at a safe distance away from me" (57). She is able to change normative understanding about 'ability'. She realizes difficulties women life like the life of disable people. The situation Jhamak clarifies, "She would not merely harm you, but even your children and grandchildren." What else he said I cannot now recall. But even that small sentence of his had shaken me quite severely" (60). She could not express her anger in verbal though she hates the tradition by writing. In this context, she says, "I was angry on my own mind wanted to retort you have closed my feet into the shoes and how can I unbutton my dress? You demons! You gave birth to me only to punish this way"(64). In the chapter "The Society's Sense of Beauty and I" of her autobiography

she compares physical strength and mental brilliancy. She explains how she never differentiated some persons as attractive and others as the reverse merely on the strength of their facial appearance (66). According to Jhamak, commitment and continuous attempt is important in life rather than physical strength. In her own words she writes:

Naturally, it was valuable for them. It is of course true that a person should be physically strong and able-bodied. But if one were to look at it from slightly different perspective, would it be enough if a person were able-bodies merely from the outside? No, a person must be mentally strong that's all. Can the society disagree with this view? (67).

In the chapter, "Patched Pyjamas and Shame" she talks about the changing pattern of dress and criticizes the patriarchal code of dress. In this meaning, she says, "As I would keep on dragging or crewing myself on the ground for some days with the same set of pajamas on me, how long would they last? They didn't (73). She loves freedom and hates rigidity she asserts:

A little man with a little mind if you allow freedom to a little mind. If you allow freedom to a little man, he can think and do different things. Likewise if my guardians had not allowed me this kind of freedom, I would not have, I could not feel, touch and experience so many hues of life. (76)

Jhamak forgets her situations and comments on society and social values. She observes the life of normal people and feels shock because there is no freedom in life. She even writes about her suffocating life in which she thought neither she could sustain nor she wanted to die an early death. (82).



In the chapter, "The Moment I Received my First Paper and Pen" she expresses happiness and difficulties once at a time. She describes:

My feet are as agile as your hands are, Just imagine. Some people climbed the uphill with loads of grass on their back and I heard them comment, "See, this girl is playing the game of males,' Yes it seems, I had unknowingly taken a blood step of doing many activities like these usually thought to be done by males. (88)

Jhamak's situation of holding paper and pen shows her critical situation and keen interest of writing because she could not hold pen easily by her finger. She holds pen by using her leg. When she holds pen at the first time, she feels difficulties though she hopes to writes the matter which she thinks. This is the first step of resistance when she starts her journey in life. She has described how schooling was also a challenge to her:

They would leave for their school with dreams of becoming successful in later life; I would also have liked to, go to school with them, but my legs didn't have the strength in them to reach me there, crawling or dragging myself up to the school was impossible; as such, I could never make it to the school. (89)

In the above extract Jhamakhas explained how she never got chance to go to school. Her physical situation never allowed her to go to school. She gets informal education from her father in her bed. There is no option of getting proper guideline from teacher. She attempts own self and achieves basic skill of writing and expresses her ideas from the medium of writing. She has described how her frustrations used to result in her violent behavior. She has mentioned how she would feel when she used to be alone. In her own words: "That's why, whenever I was left alone, I would kill

small chickens by flinging stones at them. I would enjoy pelting stone at them, but when an injured chicken would convulse with pain, go down to the ground and die, I would be disturbed by a sense of guilt ....." (107).

Jhamak resists the traditional concept of disability through creating literary texts. At the first time she faces social problem. The assumption about the universality is of the concept of norm. Without making two simplistic divisions in the historical chronoscope, one can nevertheless try to imagine a world in which the hegemony of normalcy does not exist. Nobody believed her as a writer in the beginning. She hardly gets paper for writing though she continues her attempt. About this situation she says, "Whatever agony her mother had to go through while giving birth to Jhamak, and she has had to go through double that agony while giving birth to herself" (113). She further clarifies "Under whatever circumstance I did not cease to dream of a beautiful life, that's all. The dream of boys and girls just on the verge of youth are all the more colourful and lively"(120), she hopes to fulfill her dream and attempt continuously. She reads books which given by her friends and relative. In this regard, she says, "In the book from someone and I had to return it to its owner, but. I coveted the book so much that I wanted to retain it with myself. That's why I had forgotten all the pains and pangs of earlier days and had urged my father to buy a copy of that book for me" (127).

Above lines show the situation of Jhamak in initial phase of writing. She never feels tired in reading and writing. She remembers the situation, "My restless and fruitful mind would feel delighted and free in a world of imaginations. I would feel that one's adolescent days can be great restless" (130). When she attempts to write something, she faces problem because it is difficult to write long time by using feet. In this context, she says, "It appears that my intention to write had truly reached the

limits of an ardor, a yearning earnestness. To begin with I wrote about the birds and animals observed around me; but I showed them to no one and merely tore them and cast them away" (133). She expresses her desires, feelings and imaginations through portraying the picture of various animals and plant. People feel odd and surprise when Jhamak writes book by using toes. And she was being an unusual girl in the eyes of the onlookers and how her life at once took a happy turn changing her identity from 'nobody' to 'somebody' (136). When she composed poem by using toe, her friends and relatives praise her and encourage in her path. She further writes how her friends and relatives who used to neglect her at once started to praise her and started encouraging her and how their encouragement helped her (153).

During her second phase of writing she was praised by various high rank people. At that time she feels happy though her bitter experiences hunted her. People suggest her to submit appear to queen (159). She has no formal educational qualification though she can write like well- educated people. She knows that knowledge is a continuous process and it has no end. Due to lack of formal education people hardly believe her and always show unnecessary warm for her. Jhamak takes this suggestion as unnecessary traditional practice and says, "There is a traditional belief in our society that any disability or infirmity is the consequence of his sins in the past life, that it is a matter of shame for disabled persons to be brought out in public, and that they should be kept indoors all the time and the like" (168). In the chapter entitled, "Disability and Our society" she analyzes the overall situation of disable people in Nepal. There are various organizations and welfare society forms for enhancing the situation of disable people though the situation is not so improving. She writes, "I was a useless person in their eyes; in my eyes they were educated civilized, great fools. Because I had done no harm to them, why do they have negative attitude

towards me?" (169). She expresses the situation of disabled people who are facing various problems in day to day life. Society never addresses their problem. Nepalese society neglect problems of disabled people. The situation she describes, "And I might have a secret desire in me for that. And that was perhaps natural too for there was nothing unusual for a girl despised by the society itself to expect some approbation from the others and to expect a life similar to that of others" (170). In the same way, she further clarifies the situation:

I would dislike living as a burden on the others; but what difference did it make whether I would like it or not? Truly, how helpless and impotent had I been at the time? I was a more parasite that lived off the sweet of others. Yes, I also had a keen desire to survive on my own labour and sweat; but alas, I wasn't bodily capable of doing anything.  
(175)

Above lines show the socio- economic situation of disabled people. Still Nepalese society takes disability as burden of society. In some cases, disability is defined as the sin of previous life and behaves as the sinners. Jhamak also faces this situation and says:

The Christian would tell me, "Your disability will go once you lay your faith in our god." The Buddhists and Muslims would say the same thing and so did the Hindus. I was in a quandary as to whose god I should revere and shoes not to. The gods of all people looked alike before my eyes. As I looked at their shapely bodies, all were attractive and good looking. It didn't behavior me to say that good and not that of others. (180)

Jhamak resists traditional concept of disability and compel common people to redefine about disability. Above lines shows the generalized notion of normal as an imperative which is related to brilliancy of disabled people. In this meaning he says, "For the average man, all things will occur in conformity with the mean results obtained for a society. If one seeks to established in some way, the basis of a social physics, it he whom one should consider as normal" (53). His work was made especially possible by the idea of the normal. Disability has been taken as the problem of human life though Jhamak proved that it is not sin or problem rather it is the different kinds of skills. In this regard, she says:

But his family members had been subjecting him to various kinds of physical and mental tortures. Oh, what a cruelty! Some people subscribe to the Christian faith, while others subscribe either to the Islamic, the Buddhist, the Jain or the Hindu faith. (181)

Above lines show the traditional concept of disability which Jhanmak resists in her life. She rebels religious concept of disability through writing literary texts.

According to her, "Voices of rebellion against disorder, defects and disharmony came to the fore. My pen bore on its shoulders the voices of equality and emancipation against all kinds of discrimination" (188). Through writing she raises the voice for so called disabled people and she has concluded that life is another name of struggle and strife (202).

In the chapter, "Caste Division and I" she expresses idea on caste hierarchy of Nepalese society which creates problem in social harmony. Caste hierarchy and disability creates problem on society which Jhamak portrays in her writing. In this regard, she explains:

I kept on gazing idly at the sky, forgetting in the meanwhile what had been going on around me. Nor did I take notice of Narendra Dai or pay attention towards him. I hardly realized that, in the meantime, he had gone to a shop nearby and fetched along with him a brush, a canvas and some paints. (213)

Above lines show literary career of Jhamak. Narendra Dai, a relative who often comes to visit her and encourages her for doing something. His encouragement and moral support help her to resist traditional concept of disability. She leads society by writing social issues although she is physically weak. After long efforts she changes herself as a social figure rather a weak disabled. In this regard, she describes:

My God! Disability wasn't something contagious or infectious so should they have been scared? Fie upon the degraded mentality even at those that was supposed to have been educated. I didn't need to meet such persons either, for my life wasn't something to be despised; it was priceless in itself. (218)

In the above extract, she condemned the attitude of so-called educated ones who misunderstood her physically challenged condition and took her condition as something contagious. She expresses that no matter even the -so called educated despised her condition her life was priceless and deprived. Breaking this misconception, at the end Jhamak, so-called physically disabled girl establishes as a world class literary figure. She erases the mythical saying about disability and constructs new identity out of it. She questions the society's thought about the physically challenged people and proves it wrong standing as an example in front of the so-called able people as the only physically challenged writer getting the highest prize of literature in Nepal.

Social, cultural and economic foundation of society discourages disabled to struggle in life. Jhamak herself also faces various problems in life. Till the time there are several injustices and discrimination practices in the society in the cases of disabled person. She further describes:

Some of any disabled friends tell me of many an injustice heaped upon them; some say they had been turned out of their homes; others complain about having been deprived even of food, water and shelter; yet others hold that their family had disowned them and deprived them of their share in family property. (220)

Jhamak is only the figure who raises the voices of disabled people through writing. She represents all kinds of physical disability. She cannot walk. Her hand cannot pick up the food from plates. She only crawls in bed. Her efforts inspire everyone in life. This line further justifies, "But, at the same time, when we would see sweat and perspiration streaming down their foreheads we used to sympathize with them poor people, how helpless they are: they were bound to obey what the higher-ups ordered them" (228). Now she appears as the powerful literary figure of the nation everybody knows Jhamak now who is somewhere else in past. Her life also nothing except pain and struggle in the past. About her life she says how she has accepted her situation and also her pain and tears which is also assertion of her selfhood in a whole. In her own words, "My life also saw nothing but pains, experience nothing but the marsh and swamp of tears. That's why I am very much fond of pains. I also love tears, perhaps because I had to go on weeping many times in the course of my life. Science confirms, weeping is wholesome" (235). It shows the past situation of Jhamak which is no different from normal disabled person which is more precious than ordinary person. She compares present and past in this way, "Her eyes hadn't dried for a long

time and she had been stunned in herself. On seeing Mother getting stunned, I said, "No more should we let her remain stunned and her eyes must be made to dry-up" (242). The following lines further clarify the situation:

I have already mentioned that I didn't have to bear the brunt of the army and police batons or wasn't sent to jail; yet I couldn't remain untouched by mental torment. Had I been a whole person, anything could have happened; I may have been spared because of my physical disability. (243)

Jhamak overcomes her so-called disability when she starts writing and reading. She compares her with her sister and other normal children. In this sense, she says, "At this moment I feel like conveying this to Sulochana sister; my life is also taking part in the celebration of cactus. I liked the celebration of life above all, that's why I denounce cowardice and have confined writing" (245). Jhamak thinks about nation and democracy and writes about the situation of national political crisis which only a critic can do. In the chapter, "When the Overcast Sky Cleared" she talks about people's struggle and democracy, "O, you villains of an unbridled regime, people are braving your gun-fire and lining up in their struggle for democracy" (247). It shows her situation and desire which is not less than a normal thinker and activist. She claims her role in this way:

The assassins of human beings must bow down their heads in front of history in a like manner. I am a person to pen down the history of life with those times. There are many gardeners to water and help the plants of democracy grow; I am one of those gardeners. (250)

Jhamak stands her as a lover of democracy and hates tyranny. She wrote for the liberation of all Nepali people rather than disabled and women. So she is the public



figure of Nepali civil society more than a representative of disabled person. The following lines highlights her love for freedom and hatred toward the tyranny where she even challenges the traditional Hindu mythical concept:

The Nepali society, which had been ruled by one dynasty for long, never had the opportunity to live and move with freedom. Pluralism for the ruler was limited to the words, it was never put in practice. . . . As it is, the Hindu tradition regards the king as an incarnation of God Vishnu; but how can a dynasty, which for ages has slaughtered human beings, be regarded as a divine incarnation? (249)

Jhamak resists traditional understanding of disability and projects her as an active writer, thinker and activist who thinks for nation. Her continuous attempt and untried efforts proved that destiny is defeated by human being and himself or herself can write fate own self not by any supernatural power in this regard, she says:

But the life's battle did not culminate anyway; that's why, life's nameless stream flowed on in a lively manner. People say that the lines of our destiny are drawn by fate: but in my case, no fate had its hand in drawing my fate-line, and even if a line had thus been, it gave me nothing. (258)

Nepalese society is prejudiced for disabled people. Many brilliant minds damaged by traditional concept of disability because society gives opportunity to the disabled person. It shows us that sexuality, long relegated to the trash heap of human instincts, was in fact normal and that preservation was simply a displacement of normal sexual interest dream, which behave in a manner of known or only permissibly in normal mental life. In this regard he says, the dreams of neurotics do not differ in any important respect from those of normal people. In fact, it is hard to imagine the

existence of body without the concept of normalcy" (33). Disability is not the fixed entities of life. Some people are known as disable in some society and behave as normal people in other society. For example, JhamakGhimire is physically challenged though she is mentally able and if we just see her physical disability we might regard her as disabled but if we look at her mental capacity she is differently able and moreover a contributor to our society and nation through her literary writing. Jhamak has already proved herself a differently able person thus; normalcy and disability both are the products of society so it is fluid and multiple in form.

Society confined her as a weak creature may be not even as a complete human seeing her physical condition. Even in this discouraging situation she held up her belief and continued her struggle to divert the the contemporary society's thought for the people like her. She about the mentality of so- called able people writes, "How prejudiced were their minds and eyes! I kept on publishing ahead with my wirings in a free and independent manner" (260).In the same way she further argues,"A person who never sought credit for herself, but, on the contrary, had to suffer many a reproach, and yet, never showed any ill-disposition towards me I have been internally expressing gratitude towards and saluting her" (265). Disabled are suffering due to the outlooks of society which Jhamak clearly mention in this text and resists the traditional concept of disability. In *A Flower in the Midst of Thorn*, she projects disability as dependent variable. When Jhamak was child she is known as disable now she is known as less disable more able though her physical situation is same. When a life crosses the thorny (difficult)situation and enters into prestigious situation society behaves him or her as able person.

In short, *A Flower in the Midst Thorns* is not only a literary creation but also source of inspiration that inspires disabled children and gives energy to resist

traditional concept of disability. Disability is a notion constructed by society because the so-called disabled person like Jhamak could forge a very different identity for herself as a very able and creative person. The autobiography projects two images of the narrator which helps to justify the fact on disability and put forward a living proof how the so-called disabled people are not disabled but in fact someone who are differently able people who can contribute the society and nation if provided chance. There might be a lot of Jhamak Ghimires still struggling with their family and society to prove their selfhood and what they need is a Narendra Dai like person who can introduce them with their abilities.

Through her autobiographical writing, Jhamak Ghimire is able to project disability in a different way than it was/is considered by the society. She acts in such a way that the earlier notion of disability is put into question. She projects herself as an able person who could attain the highest achievement in her field. Before she develops herself as a writer, Jhamak was treated as weak, disabled person but after being a writer she is known as powerful female writer of Nepal. So, disability is constructed and made by society which can be changed by a person if he/she struggles to fight against it. This autobiography not only raises the issues of disabled people but resists the traditional concept of disability. Jhamak Ghimire succeeds to win Madan Puraskar in young age which is not easily attainable to many well-known literary figure. Though can't speak, she walk and eat food from the plate, she struggles in life to change the perception of society and succeed to change her life. She projects her life as a beautiful flower rather than a worthless thorn. She becomes a role model of disabled and proves that disability cannot block any one to achieve victory in life.

The study brings various ideas and feelings related to the life of disabled people that is mentioned in the essays. This is the creation of a successful story of a disabled child who continuously struggles in life and defeats the destiny. Defeating destiny is not easy task for everyone for that there needs desire, willingness and continuity in life. In a short time Jhamak changes her life from thorn to flower, dark to light, and innocent to knowledge. Childhood age of Jhamak was not so different from the ordinary disabled child. She used to crawl around the bed and depend on her grandmother's mercy. She never goes to school in her life because of disability. She gets education from her father. Even though her narrated self is lack of ability, dependent and a burden to family and society, she subverts this notion of society through her effort through learning, reading and writing. Through her writing she narrates herself differently than her narrated self. She narrates herself from subject's position which is quite normal able and intellectual. Her strong desire and commitment encourage her to hold pen and paper in her life. When she struggles in bed, no one can support her. Only dark and loneliness discourage her. One day she holds the pen, writes something in paper and continues the process and defeats the fate or the narrated self. Her transformation from the narrated self to the narrating self is the result of strong desire, the challenges that she faced and also due to Narendradai's support and encouragement.

The research analyzes the overall life of a disabled young girl. This is a nostalgic memoir which projects the scenario of Nepalese society and life of the disabled person is sinner of previous life. In this cultural background, it is difficult to do anything in life. Most of the time disability is taken as the burden of community. Sometimes family ignores disabled member and she spends merciless life without getting any help. Traditional values of disability discourage the disabled to do

anything in life. Though Jhamak was born as a disabled child in a poor family, she could transform herself to a strong and able person. She forged a new identity for herself. And writing became a tool in that process of constructing a new identity.

She develops a personality which is recognized. She now gives her opinion on various social and political issues. And people take interest in what she says. She is successful in revising people's notion about disability. And in the true sense of the word, she proved that the "disabled" are not disabled but differently able and they can prove their worth if they get appropriate support from the society.

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