

Chapter I: Against All Odds Rises the Creator

Jhamak Ghimire was born with cerebral palsy in 1980. She started writing with her toes from the day she first wrote “Ka”, the first Nepali alphabet in the sand with a twig. But now as a poet, she has won many awards for her writings in literature. It has been mentioned that Jhamak Ghimire is equal to Hellen Keller of the West. “A Flower in the Midst of Thorns” is an epoch making collection of autobiographical essays written by this very disabled women writer. The original book in Nepali *Jeevan Kadhaki Phool* was first published in the year 2010 which won the prestigious Madan Puruskar in the same year. Likewise, the translators, Nagendra Sharma and Safal Sharma after two years, globalized the book by translating the essays from Nepali to the language known by the world (English).

"I have now come to interpret Life as the most beautiful Flower of Creation. But I'm not sure whether my own life also comes within the purview of this interpretation or not" (Preface). Jhamak Ghimire writes this philosophical line in the beginning of the first chapter of the book. She defines life as the most beautiful flower of creation but she doubts if her own life falls in the category she herself defines. Jhamak, being a physically disabled, no voice to speak, no mobility, no strength to hold her own body, definitely does not come in this definition because of the socially and culturally constructed ideology of ability. People with disabilities (PWDs) are always taken as the matter of incapable, unable, weak, ugly, disabled and are discriminated, outcaste, and segregated. Similarly the case has also been the same with Jhamak. She was not only discouraged, abandoned and outcast by the society but also abused and exploited with her family member even with the parents. When she saw her sister and brother going to school, she too wanted to go to school. She could not move her legs. The family and community members thought that it was useless for

her to go to school. She was avoided, mistreated, demoralized. Her book reveals that people around her always wished for death for her. Amongst all these social, cultural evils, thorns, Jhamak however became successful to prove that life is a flower in the midst of thorns.

The book also reveals that she struggled a lot, but she found a lot of joy within those bitter reality of experience. With her experience, she lived with the source of creativity. The sufferings she experienced provided her ways to carve out her own identity. Though the society and the family she lives now are the same, the ways she is being taken has changed. Her journey through the conventional/traditional thoughts, ideologies, concepts, views and dogmas has made her stronger and more creative. This is the way she has redefined her identity, she has deconstructed the then existing assumptions about her life. Now she is a metaphor of hope and creativity.

Jhamak struggled a lot, desperately disregarded in family and society, went through a most grim experience of life, experienced a heart-breaking and misdoing of the people around. Thus she says:

"Time had only showered misfortunes on my lap. A girl 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 a human being's that I was pursuing. The only difference, perhaps, was that even as an animal I was lucky to get cooked rice to eat—that's all! I lived a life devoid of sensitivity; a life that feels no pain, no colour, and there is no love for the world—I am sure, hardly would any human being experience such a life. Some poets may be interested to write poems about such a plight; some sensitive hearts may love such a story. At the time, I was so much laden with pain that it was almost beyond tolerance"(Jhamak 2012, p. 2).

This is the expression of Jhamak when she was small and everybody hated her and no one sees an essence of living of her in such condition.

Jhamak had to learn reading and writing entirely on her own, and words fail to describe the story of the ordeal and suffering she underwent while learning them.

Gobinda Raj Bhattarai in his paper presented at the first international conference of HK Semiosis Research Center, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea, on homo sensus: perception, emotion and semiosis (June 8 – June 9, 201) writes:

From her childhood, she was treated as a non-entity. Her family and other people called her “serpent” because she crawled on the ground. Everyone who saw her pitied her, because she was no more than a vegetable that ate what was provided to her by her family, and did nothing else. People just wished for her death, because that might be easier for her than to live. (Seminar Paper)

Life was a curse in hell. But all the time, Jhamak hated these outpourings of pity, and longed to reach out to the world. The determination to make her way out of her shell of silence grew every day.

The most important event in her life is her incessant love for words and her struggle to learn them. She learnt words simply by hearing other people speak, and only after reading her accounts do we realize that it is so hard to learn when one is just listening and not speaking:

My younger sister used to pronounce vowel sounds with father, but I had no voice to utter those letters, although I had powers of hearing.

As a result, I would silently and inwardly try to pronounce what I had heard and repeat them twice, thrice or more. He used to hold my younger sister’s hand and teach her how to write those letters, that is

(ka), v (kha), u (ga), etc. on my part, I would collect the dew drops falling from the eaves of the roof in a crucible, crawl up to a little distance, dip my toes in that crucible and, with the dew, attempt to scribble some letters at random on a nearby rock stone. When there was no dew collected, I used to break little bamboo twig, make a 'pencil' out of that and try to scrawl letters, using the flat earth as my 'exercise book'. As I would scrawl with dew-dipped foot-finger (toe) on a rock, the force of scrubbing would peel off my soft skin many times without number. But, nothing ever deterred me from learning. Whether my toes be bleeding or I mastered writing or not was immaterial to me. (Ghimire 2012, 29)

These are tremendously powerful lines, because they shed light on the plight of Jhamak, and all other people in her situation. She realized that her sister's schoolbooks could be the key to her escape from her lonely world. Through her own effort and determination, she sneaked looks into her sister's books, and the way her father taught her sister Mina, she learnt to write the first letter secretly, on her own without being noticed by others, writing them on the ground or dusty floor, sometimes with the help of charcoal when they were away. Thrilled with achievement, she wrote the first letter down on the mud, and waited for her family to recognize her achievement. Instead, no one even realized that she had written a letter on the ground, and life went on as usual for them. Her triumph was in vain, known only to her.

Jhamak further expresses her joy of learning:

I remember now that at the time I first learnt to write the letters of the alphabet, I could not share the joy with anyone. I had, nevertheless, mastered the art of scrawling letters even if it was on the bare earth and

had learnt to pronounce them although only within my mind. The first day I had been able to scribble the first letter of the consonant s (ka), I had sprayed a cloud of dust in the air out of sheer happiness because I had broken innumerable twigs time and again in order to learn writing this letter and I bruised the tender skin rubbing against the soil.

Moreover, my toes bled when I practiced writing by dipping them on the dew drops collected on the bowl. (Jhamak 2012, 42)

After much struggle, Jhamak was finally able to convince her family that she had started writing. Even then, nobody saw any point in her education, and she had to beg and plead to get a single notebook to write on. Inspired only by her strong determination, Jhamak continued to struggle until she began to mastery of writing and creation. As a result she has already published more than a dozen of books and shined in the literary world of Nepal and beyond. Her autobiographical work *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* is her most powerful book that not only introduce Jhamak to the outer world but popularized her all over the world.

Despite all these achievement and success by her own self-motivation and determination, Jhamak went through a toughest and probably hardest time and circumstances in her life. "Due to her weak hands and legs, she spent many hungry days. She silently swallowed her tears when people called her a walking corpse. When people blessed her at Dashain to die soon instead of having to endure such a crippled life, she spoke not a word. She never even knew what school was. When she indicated that she wanted to study, people discouraged by saying "what use did she have for studies? (Preface)

Hasta Gautam has written in the preface of the books that describes Jhamak's woes and distresses. But Jhamak did not give up, and learned to write the alphabet

with her feet.

She has gone through every kind of abuse that society is capable of flinging at a person. How hard must it have been for her to wash her face and use the toilet in her childhood! She gained knowledge just by listening to others reading.

“I did not get the support to live from anyone. My feelings were bottled up until I learnt to write with my toes. I had neither paper nor pen to write; I learnt to write with bits of charcoal,” (Preface) she says. She was very hurt when people would say “You don’t know anything, why do you want to see a book? What use would letters be to you anyway?” She knew hunger, but had no voice to ask for food. She was thirsty, but had no words for water. Neither did she have a language. She knew neither the wonders of nature nor human feelings. She could feel the sun shining over the hilltop, but could only wonder what it was. She did not know when night fell. She wanted to roam freely like other children, but never got the chance. She began getting around the house by crawling.

When she saw a new world at the back of her house, she was quite glad. She got very wet when it rained. Only now did she understand the meaning of rain. When she touched fire, it burned her, and that is how she knew what fire is. Thus she collected meanings from all around and began storing them in the vaults of her heart. She increased her knowledge and wisdom solely through her own efforts. Through several such hardships she understood the meaning of each word, the feelings and expression behind each word. By stringing those words together in a necklace, she made sentences and entered the world of education. She began writing with dew drops on the ground. She tried to write with her toes on the plate she ate from. There is no telling of the efforts that she put in. By collecting words won through so much hard work, she gradually began shining like a star in the society. She was short, but still

she carved a niche for herself that was higher than any fully able person. She is a source of power for any person with a weak heart. She is the hope for the hopeless. She is the full moon for those who only see the darkness in life. She is the very life for those who wallow in misery and listlessly wait for death. She has worked very hard to turn the impossible into the possible.

The image of god carved in her soul is her life. She is worthy of worship. She is the only able person who, though being weak physically, is actually ahead of those more able. She is a source of inspiration in the society. Every skill, symbol and metaphor that she has used has become inspiration for everyone. She does not have bookish knowledge, and yet she can serve the most thoughtful philosophy. Her determination has become much greater than theories of political sycophancy. She is very curious, and is eager to know about other people and society as well. Though people dismissed her, she has begun a life much more precious than theirs. By challenging her handicapped body, she has become an inspiration to live with dignity. Time bows down to her and the society is grateful to her.

Though people may think of her as a walking corpse, she has actually challenged society. Many people are overwhelmed with feelings at her handicap, because it is surely among the severest in the world.

In general disabled people are viewed as a matter of pity and are considered as passive, unproductive, uncreative, incapable and also disabled in society. Religious and cultural values generally known as attitudinal barriers create even greater disadvantages for women who are physically disabled. Challenging these cultural stigmas, Jhamak Ghimire celebrates sexuality, beauty and disability as sources of creativity, agency, and identity in narratives that deconstruct cultural or social models of ability, motherhood, and beauty.

“Whatever I am or however I may be, I have got life, and there is no need for anyone to pity me. When I have not given up on my life, why should anyone say anything about it? I know how to move on and progress in my life” (Preface)Jhamak can write these words in beautiful handwriting and express herself. She already ensured a remarkable space in the literature of Nepal.

She has proved that the impossible is possible, and shines like a candle in a dark night. She has asked people to think of her life as a gift, not a burden, even though she is born in a society that evaluates lives based solely on the body. She has opened the door to wisdom. Throughout this research project the researcher has explored that Jhamak demonstrates her extraordinary talent and ability to expose herself in the society and how she manufactures different ideologies particularly the ideology of "ability and Beauty" by deconstructing the socially, culturally, and traditionally produced dogmas, thoughts, concepts and ideology.

Chapter II: Deconstructing the Societal Ideology of Disability

In this research project, it is theorized that the idea that disability/ability and beauty is a culturally specific complex embodiment. JhamakGimire in her autobiographical book *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* deconstructs the conventional understanding of the ideology of ability and beauty by celebrating her sexuality and disability as sources of creativity, agency, and identity in narratives that deconstruct social and cultural models of ability, sexuality, motherhood and beauty.

Disability gathers different negative cultural constructs or “ideologicalcategories,” such as ugly, old, aberrant, deformed, derailed, debilitated or feebleminded, and all of them devalue the human body. In her book *Extraordinary Bodies*, Garland Thompson, a prominent theorist of disability and feminism, explains this prevalent cultural paradigm when she writes, “Culturally generated and perpetuated standards as beauty, independence, fitness, competence, normalcy exclude and disable many human bodies while validating and affirming others” (Garland-Thomson 1997). The disabled are deemed to fall under the category of “aberrant human beings” (Garland-Thomson 1997) who fail to confirm the cultural embodiment of a normal body. As bodies interact with socially built environments and social expectations, they expose and proliferate ideologies of varied degrees of disabilityas GayatriChakravorty Spivak, "In a Word," interview with Ellen Rooney mentions: "If one really thinks about the body as such, there is no possible out-line of the body as such. There are thinkings of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body. The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it" (Butler 1993, 12).

This research deals specifically with the very famous autobiographical book, *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* written by a powerful female writer, Jhamak Ghimire

being herself a physically disabled and unfolds how the writer, Ghimire dismantles the culturally constructed ideology of ability and beauty and defines them in her own experience and perception as being herself a post-modern writer and believing that there is not only one ideology of ability, there are many ideologies of ability. To borrow from post-modern theory, there is not only one signified concept of ability, but rather many signifiers to define ability. Thus so are the concepts of ability when one is stripped of one's social and cultural biases of what it means to be beautiful and able bodied. Ghimire in all the chapters of the book gathers ideas and experience of how she was stigmatized, discriminated, and looked upon in her family and by the community members. She explains the views of the people around her that she was nothing for her. She was disabled, incapable, deformed, ugly and probably the most cursed human being in the world. However, through her writing it has already been clearly understood that Jhamak Ghimire though she was physically disabled, is one of the most famous and well respected personality not only in Nepal but all over the world.

Hasta Gautam Mridul who financially supported in translation and publication of the English version of the book *A Flower in the Mist of Thorns* describes about the talent and beauty of Jhamak Ghimire and further compares with other so called able/capable people in Nepalese society. He writes "Only a few people have the ability to light up their lives by expressing such beautiful feelings in creative form even after going through such hardships. I pity our inefficient government and politicians; there can never be anyone more disabled than them. By mugging up irrelevant theories, wasting the people's money, and maiming many, they have proved themselves to be the most disabled of all. I pity them a lot" (Preface). Hasta Gautam himself is a writer and physically disabled but he rather sees the leaders and

politicians are disabled as they have disabled our country. They have gradually made the country more and more dependent on others and frustrated us all. In contrary Jhamak has been able to give back to her society and nation at large. She has been the ideal hero of Nepal. The mother Nepal is proud of having such daughter who has sung the songs of nationalism all over the world and now Jhamak is known as the star of Nepal.

Hasta Gautam who helped introduce Jhamak's book all over the world by providing financial assistance in publishing it further writes in the preface of the book, "Work is accomplished through intellect, while the body is just a medium. Disability is a beauty of life, not a disfigurement. The one sees disability as ugly is himself ugly from within." (Preface). No one can call Jhamak's life a burden any more; in fact she is one of the nation's treasured talents, and can answer anyone who says she cannot do anything. For her disability has come as a gift which helps herself to become one of the most beautiful person.

In Nepal, many cultural/religious factors play a crucial role in forming an ideology of ability and beauty such as patriarchy, caste, color, class, sex, and gender discrimination. Going further, each of these social and cultural factors are embedded in religious discourse and further ideologically strengthened. The deep-rooted Nepali prevailing conceptual understanding regards disability as a punishment by the God resulting of sinful act in the previous life according to the karmic law. Disability has always been defined and viewed according to religiously and culturally established norms and values. People define the ability and beauty on the basis of what is perceived through the senses. Beauty is taken only a matter of color/race, skin, bone, and physical structure. Moreover, disability is a broad term within which generally in our society cluster ideological categories as varied as sick, deformed, crazy, ugly, old,

maimed, afflicted, mad, abnormal, or debilitated and all of which disadvantage people by devaluing bodies that do not conform to cultural standards. So this research poses a big question that conventional meaning and ideology of Beauty and Ability" based on social, cultural construction defining as outer beauty based on skin, flesh, bones, physical structure is the final understanding? can not the people with disabilities be able? Such Donna Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* questions: "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (Butler 1993, 12). Thus, this research surveys on how this powerful writer, Ghimire being herself not only a physically challenged but lacks communication skills functions to deconstruct such privileged designations and how she redefines and validates as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent, able in *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns*.

Jhamak Kumari Ghimire, suffered from cerebral palsy, "a disorder of movement and posture due to a defect or lesion of the immature brain" at birth" (Disability Journal 2009, Vol. 49). She became the object of social criticism and was seen as her family's burden. Cerebral palsy caused severe challenges to Ghimire, so much so that she did not have control of her arms, her speech, or have free bodily movement. As a result of her cerebral palsy, Jhamak Ghimire started writing with her foot. In her article "Of Poverty and Poems: Jhamak Kumari Ghimire" Manjushree Thapa writes, "she explores hard political, intellectual, feminist and social issues, without shying away from emotional expressions of love, regret, joy and sadness" (Aug 08, 2002). In her autobiography, Ghimire writes about her disability with the utmost forthrightness, including how she faced forced menstrual seclusion, and how she was molested by an odd-jobs man when she was alone at home. One may interpret this incident as her becoming an object of desire in the eyes of the man, who probably

first stared at her because of her disabilities. Garland-Thomson writes, “feminization prompts the gaze; disability prompts the stare” (Ghimire 2012, 28). Ghimire was molested by the odd- jobs man. This may be interpreted as her becoming a victim of not only her disability, which prompted his stare, but also her femininity which prompted his gaze. A stare signifies distraction, but a gaze signifies attraction. Ghimire’s disability did not distract and repel the man, but instead it attracted him. Here Ghimire deconstructs the ideology of ability that emphasizes that only on the able body is gaze possible.

In his M.A. thesis entitled "Gender, Disability, and Literature in the Global South: Nepali Writers Jhamak Ghimire and BishnuKumariWaiwa, Parijat:" in Florida Atlantic University, Tulasi Acharya referring to her autobiography, *Jivan Kanda Ki Ful* (Whether *Life is a Thorn or a Flower*, 2010) writes that Jhamak Ghimire explains about the topic of kinship and the sex discrimination by addressing her grandmother: “My dear grandmother, why was it wrong to give birth to a daughter? You were sad just because you had no son to start you on your journey to heaven after your death (Ghimire 39). This reflection encompasses the power of religion in the lives of people and the preference of sons over daughters in Nepalese society. In a sense, a daughter is already disabled whether or not she is physically disabled because a daughter is unable to perform funeral rites. Without these religious rituals which only a son can perform, parents who die will not have peace in paradise. Hence, a daughter is less religiously important to parents than a son. This ideology marks a daughter as a person less than human (Siebers 2010). In Nepali culture, even the inability of a woman to bear a son robs her of personhood.

Patriarchy in Nepal makes the situation of women with disabilities there worse. Ghimire writes how her father treated her badly in a chapter titled “ ThinString

to Hang on to”.

"If I failed to obey him, I would get rebuked with words like “you fallen girl, a *saapey*” meaning unfortunate bad creature, (Jhamak 2012, 32) and he would begin cursing me. He thought I was dumb and that only he was clever and had a right to laughter and happiness, but I didn’t have that right. Furthermore, so called intelligent people wished I could die early so that I would not be a burden to society. (Ghimire 55)

This statement clearly speaks about people’s attitudes toward women with disabilities in contexts where patriarchal culture is more dominant and people often see the death of the disabled as the only solution to the challenges they face. What people think and what they wish for disabled people is an outcome of this ideology of ability that guides human interaction in a society and their perception of disabled people (Siebers 2010).

Ghimire questions to the society "But can crippledness be defined as a mere state of bodily infirmity and incapability? If that was so, how is it that the world did not treat people like Homer, Nikolai Ostrovsky and Helen Keller as incomplete? They were also bodily incapacitated as I am now" (Ghimire, 2012, 3). But they also created history, left their marks and established the meaning of being human and established themselves far more able and beautiful than many of so called normal/non-disabled people.

Under the section "Grandmother and gender discrimination" Ghimire writes "I thank to the life of a woman, it will be considered meaningful only when she gives birth to an heir (son) otherwise it is meaningless. A woman will be regarded auspicious and ominous and great only when she produces an heir who will give

continuity to her (husband's) lineage" (Ghimire 2012, 9).

This statement clearly defines how Jhamak understand the gender discrimination in our society and depicts the bitter reality of Hindu tradition which regards a male-child as a hidden treasure; and which Hindu woman wouldn't be happy and contented when she could lay hands on such a treasure. Ghimire brings a reference of her grandmother that she was extremely happy when her mother gave birth to a baby son. Grandmother thought that a man can only continue the lineage of the family. In contrary, grandmother was very sorry about Jhamak that she will not be able to earn her life on her own and was even worried about her feeding and clothing. She used to say that "I'm afraid this kid would also die when I'm no more," she used to tell persons close to her, adding, "She will get nothing to eat after I'm gone" (Ghimire 2012, 10.). But Jhamak feels pity on her grandmother's thoughts and what she used to think about Jhamak. Jhamak writes "But, grandma, I have somehow been surviving even in your absence—in the company of my parents and siblings. I must keep on surviving even if all of them are gone; they must likewise survive even if I'm gone. This is philosophy of life" (Ghimire 2012, 10).

There are so many of social paradoxes which made by so-called able/beautiful and great people are of course not good and beautiful for the rest of the members of the same society. Generally what one thinks is a beautiful person can do and think beautiful for other. But Jhamak finds a lot of misdoings, mistreatment in the same society she lives in. In the section where she explains about the death of her grandmother she found that flowers were collected, garlands were woven and placed over the dead body of grandmother, and with red vermilion powder sprinkled over it. It appeared somewhat odd because, till that time, she had never even pill a red-colored paste on her forehead. Jhamak questions to the Hindu society - What was the sense in

covering her body with red abir powder now that she was dead? This kind of paradox in the life of Nepalese women—once they are widowed, they are forbidden to wear anything red—be they bangles, potay beads, necklaces, garments, shoes, powderwhatever. They are denied participation in any kind of celebration either. But once dead, they are free to wear red—what a mockery of a tradition! Jhamak's freedom of voice and thought aligned with the practical living philosophy of life is beautiful which teaches the society a practical lesson where everybody is equal and enjoys freedom of life.

Ghimire's disabilities were productive for her because they forced her to learn to circumvent her disabilities and to seek answers to fundamental questions of life and death. Siebers points out that the ideology of ability reproduces different feelings toward people with disabilities. One of them, Siebers stresses, is that "it is better to be dead than to be disabled" (Sieber, 1993, 10). In that context, Ghimire questions, "Is death a solution?" by challenging and deconstructing this ideology of ability. She writes:

When I heard people wishing my death, I was too tortured. I was lonely. I had feelings, but I could not speak. Nobody would like to hear me. I could feel the pain inside my heart. I had no words, nor sign or symbols with which I could communicate. I had to keep listening to what others kept saying and I had to keep tolerating, and I could not do anything else more than that. I could not understand these people who wished my death sooner rather than later. (Ghimire 55-56)

Disability was a forceful matter of pain and human sentiment in Ghimire's life. She never found a person who could fully understand disability. This ties in with Siebers' idea of disability in which he talks about how one's ideology of ability

guides his/her understanding of what it means to be able or disabled. Because of the cultural factors that shape one's ideology of ability, one would not be able to fully understand so called disabled people. Ghimire instead all those childhood days sufferings and bitter experiences positively and takes as the largest schooling in the world as she says, "They say all stones are not mere stones. They are shaligrams too. So these childhood memories are precious shaligrams for me" (Ghimire 2012, 22). She learned from those Shaligrams through which she comprehended the society and the gap between herself and other around her, found her own identity in the society, deconstructed them and created her own ideology.

Under the topic "Shaman and Doctors" in her autobiography, Ghimire writes how a shaman was called to treat her cerebral palsy. The cultural belief that people are disabled because of supernatural forces and can be healed by a shaman is not new. Ghimire's parents thought that the shaman could cure their daughter and make her a normal person. The shaman, of course, could not, and even foreign doctors escaped their medical responsibilities by telling her parents that Ghimire was suffering from weak bones. Ghimire's body became an object, a ground about which people discoursed, interpreted, and created their own truths. All this was against Ghimire's wishes. She could do nothing about these attitudes because she could not speak or move. She explains further how society looked at her under the title "I am Inside the Beauty of Society." Ghimire writes that society thought of her as a woman with a weak body, soulless, without desires or feelings, void of emotions, and ugly. Society only looked at her outward appearance and judged her according to a conception of beauty that Ghimire lacked. "People laughed at me," (Ghimire, 2012, 15). she writes. Ghimire questions her society, asking, "Why does not the society see the inner beauty that lies beyond the outer beauty?" and comparing herself with the Greek poet Homer,

the English poet Shelley, and another famous disabled woman, Helen Keller. They were beautiful even if they were disabled because their ideas were beautiful. This is how she defines the concept of beauty, by subverting the beautiful / ugly dichotomy and the subsequent stigmas attached to disabled people as ugly, aberrant, and strange.

As Jhamak understood and described the meaning of beauty, was poles apart from the meaning imparted by the society to that word. The society would look merely at the outer surface of things and characterize some persons as handsome, beautiful or good-looking, while, at the same time, describing some others as ugly or unattractive. But Jhamak never differentiated some persons as attractive and others as the reverse merely on the strength of their facial appearance. She in another section of the book recollect that "there was the house of an old man adjacent to ours; people would address him as LaatoSaarki, the dumb shoe-maker. He had a great liking for me, would address me as SaaniMukhini, the little mistress, and would take me in his lap; I would also quietly move to his loving lap and sit there" She further describes, "I considered that old man as good-looking, beautiful".(Ghimire 2012, 66).

Of what use is internal beauty if the outer appearance is not good-looking, people argue. She brings another reference that "There is another woman who lives near our house, but who is devoid of morals. Normally, one's first impression of her is that of a charming and youthful lady. As I look at her, I ponder internally over the question—after all, what is the meaning of beauty?" (Ghimire 2012, 66).

But, of course, everyone is free to think and feel as he or she would like to. Though Jhamak was born with a frail body; which meant, to some others, that she had no soul, no desires and sentiments either, nor any beauty. As people would see her outwardly for the first time, they would perhaps find her to be extremely ugly. It was but natural, since the society would look only at the body-frame—in other words,

only at the bones, skin and flesh. Naturally, it was valuable for them. It is of course true that a person should be physically strong and able-bodied. Jhamak argued that "But if one were to look at it from slightly different perspective, would it be enough if a person was able-bodied merely from the outside? No, a person must be mentally strong—that's all. Can the society disagree with this view"? (Ghimire 2012, 66).

Finally Jhamak has successfully established her ideology that the internal/inner beauty is more important than the outer surficial beauty.

Ghimire's writing challenges the notion of how non-disabled people look at women's bodies and corrects how they should be looked at. She deconstructs the sex culture that defines an able body because the culture is lodged in a healthy body and mind that only able body can perform. For example, when Ghimire looks at herself in the mirror, she defines her beauty, sex, growth, and eroticism. In "Consciousness and Curiosity in My Adolescent Phase," another section from her autobiography, Ghimire writes, "I started looking at myself growing up. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I found myself so beautiful. When I looked at my vagina I became amazed and overjoyed" (2010, 110). Similarly, she experienced her menstruation as a normal cycle of life in her body, but society put her away, saying that she was impure. She questions why her society prefers males who are grown up and developed out of the same blood and its cycle that society thinks is impure (Ghimire 2010,120).Ghimire therefore strongly complains to society about its prejudiced perception of disabled people or what here refers as an "ideology of ability". However, Ghimire challenges the stereotypes that "the disabled people do not have or want to have sex—in short, that they do not have a sexual culture" (Siebers 2010, 138). Thus she breaks the normative assumption about what a sex life is. Ghimire is aware of her body and its growth. She writes, describing her youth in her autobiography:

I had everything on me that a female has, such as breasts, buttocks, and vagina, and they were developing. Along with them, my life was being colorful. To be a woman is also to have menstruation, although it is considered impure in our culture. I bloomed like pear and guava plants in full bloom, like the blossoms of rhododendrons and marigolds. My cheeks bloomed with color of youth. My reproductive organ matured. And I menstruated... When I menstruated the first time, my mother shut me in a room, preventing me from seeing my brother because she said I should not see him, touch him, and contaminate him. She didn't let me sleep where I usually sleep. I cried a lot. I didn't know where the blood was coming from. (Ghimire 119)

Jhamak says " Occasionally, as I looked at the mirror, I would look fairly pretty too! I would minutely examine my various limbs and would myself be astonished" (Ghimire 200).

Ghimire's writing about her body and sexuality helps one construct sexual identity as disabled theory. In that sense, Siebers disability theory helps us understand how sexual identity can be defined as "theory laden constructions, combining both objective and subjective values, used by individuals to make choices, to test the consequences of their actions, and to explore the possibilities and responsibilities of their sexuality" (138). Siebers further writes, "Sexual culture is designed as a concept to provide deeper, more sustained idea of how sex and identity interconnect by resisting the partitioning and privatization characteristic of a sex life" (139). It means to unleash sex, allowing it to "overflow the boundaries of secured places and to open up greater sexual access for people with disabilities" (139).

Another famous physically disabled writer in Nepalese literary world is

BishnuKumariWaibaliterarily known as (Parijat). In most of Parijat's writings/poems "spring from her physical condition and from a profound atheism and moral despair" (Hutt 113). Parijat was disabled through paralysis. She had to face many difficulties and trauma that society brought upon her. Her stories, novels, and poems became her voice and became a medium to communicate her body, health, sex and sexuality, her life cycle, her desire that challenged the male-dominant, non-disabled society.

Regarding Parijat's body and beauty, Kamala Sarup writes that there was joy, enthusiasm, and cheerfulness although various kinds of diseases had attacked her. Her body was short, quick, and active. Although she was weak, thin and disabled physically, her mind was strong (Sarup, 2006). Regarding sex and love, Parijat thinks of them as a necessity and a "natural process of human biology." According to her, to have sex is easier than to love someone, and she expresses her unfulfilled physical desire for her first love because of her lower social status (Prasai 2010). This part of her work is very revealing and outrageous, deemed to be breaking Nepali taboos by bringing out these issues in her writing which is not only a beauty of her writing but also deconstructing the ideology of sexism that was prevailing in the contemporary society.

Parijat's writings show her liberation from women's traditional roles by letting female desire and eroticism become freely mixed with the creative force of imagination. When she writes about sex, it goes beyond the boundaries of her body and becomes a creative force that gives her agency and power to fight against social stigmas and superstitious norms and values toward disabled people. Like Ghimire, her works become a matter of her sexual liberation and of her self-determination despite the fact that both of them are differently abled and their society thought of them as unable, crippled, abnormal and lacking human characteristics, or in short not being

able fit in the ideology of ability. The narrative in their creative works is their life force, making their disabled bodies into abled normal human beings with their own agency.

Taking a reference to eastern Hindu mythology, we have more or less been hearing stories about Ashtaavakra, a mythical character, who has been known as probably the most ugly person throughout the history but most appreciated personality. "I had somewhat been influenced by him too. I started appreciating the philosophy that we should not look only at the physical aspects of his life, but also at the inherent beauty that lay within him" (Ghimire 2012, 70). Jhamak writes these lines beautifully and there are several such characters presented before us by the eastern philosophy that have kept on inspiring people to survive one way or the other. Jhamak further says – "As it is, I am a person who loves life dearly. I hold the view that we should live our life by waging a battle against the circumstances that we come across, not by running away from them" (Ghimire 2012, 70.) Jhamak though there are many hindrances, obstacles in her upbringing and socializing never got away from them rather searched for new possibilities/options and alternatives not only to overcome those obstacles but also came up with lessons to teach the contemporary society and the members live.

It is said to be that Ashtaavakra as a person was physically repulsive and ugly. But how is it that the then society worshipped him reverently? Of course, there may have been people in that society also who would have laughed and poked fun at his physical deformity and skin colour. Is it that persons who look outwardly attractive are only humans, not the others? That's the way the world seems to feel. That is why pretty women keep on taking part in the competition of wearing beauty-crown year after year. And, their beauty seemingly vanishes and wilts every year, ultimately

ending up in the dust-bin as something without any value. "Ashtaavarka, to me, is more attractive than such beauties; he also unfailingly presents a beautiful aspect of life-an aspect that comes in handy to all people"(Ghimire 2012, 70.). Yes, as Jhamak stated these lines in her book and also herself being physically disabled the researcher firmly avows that Ashtaavakra had been a character to impart a lesson to us that a man should not be good-looking merely outwardly, but should also be equally beautiful internally, thus he is beautiful even today.

Lord Byron, the English poet of the Romantic era, was also a physically disabled person, but he had a streak of beauty in him. Jhamak then used to feel like posing a query to people of our society: "Aren't I good looking?" (Ghimire 2012,72). But these mute questions would always go unanswered.

Christy Brown, very famous Irish novelist and poet was born in Dublin. He was the son of a bricklayer and one of twenty-three children. A victim of cerebral palsy, he was able to write only with the aid of his left foot, which he used to operate a specially adapted typewriter. "My Left Foot" (1954), an autobiography was renowned beautiful, capable and able writer like Jhamak. Jhamak Ghimire and Christy Brown have very much similar case in term of disability; both of them suffer from cerebral palsy, however the world; society, culture, family, education, environment for Jhamak and Christy was completely different. For Christy his mother was the most supporting and contributing person behind all the success that Christy achieved. But in contrary, Jhamak's mother was always discouraging for her. The society, culture and the education system for Jhamak was completely disheartening and unwelcoming whereas the same was an opposite for Christy. Christy received all the support, love and care from his parents, family, teachers/tutors and his friends and all this became great contributing factors in developing his career but Jhamak all throughout her

childhood days. she received hatred, anger, pity, discrimination, isolation from each and every single person even from all family members through which she found her own existence and identity; she herself learned how to live in the world which she was surrounded with and slowly and gradually developed her flowery career in the midst of social, cultural, religious thorns around her which is remarkable different from Christy Brown and that makes Jhamak even far more beautiful, able and genius personality.

Ghimire's autobiographical book, *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* and her writing constructs her subjects in such a way that "displaces the negative cultural images" (Garland-Thomson 1997, 103) and social stigmas that women with disabilities experience in the Nepalese society. This disability "narrative of self" authenticates who she is and what she experiences, not by offering a model to society that looks down upon the women with disabilities in the particular cultural contexts. Rather, the wonderful contribution the writer has made is to celebrate who she is and what she is by challenging the social and cultural understanding of disability. As black females are creating their selfhood (Garland- Thomson 1997, 104), JhamakGimire born in a rural village of Nepal suffered a lot of discrimination, suffer has also built her selfhood "on the narrow space between victimization and assimilation, so that neither repudiates her history nor embraces the conventional scripts of womanhood that have excluded her" (Garland-Thomson 1997, 104). Ghimire writes and creates her subjectivity and developed her own ideology of "beauty and ability" and celebrates her life. On the one hand, her body is disabled, but on the other hand her disabled body becomes a trope to communicate the message of her subjectivity, selfhood, and identity. Although her body is different from the privileged norm, writing this book *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* give her a

privileged position. Her body become the source of their freedom while at the same time existing as the source of condemnation. By claiming her body as disabled ones, she creates her own ideology by rejecting the culturally, socially, and religiously prescribed and defined ideology of beauty and ability. Ghimire is unmarried, but nonetheless claim the beautiful feminine qualities of her body. Her “validation, power, and identity derive from physical differences and resistance to cultural norms” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 105), thus allowing us to shift not only or mainly our “conception of disability from pathology to identity” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 137), but from biased cultural understanding of disability and the feminine, to identity in the context of Nepalese society.

As already said " The cultural structures of ours are of such a nature that, without first pulling them down, no new structures can possibly be constructed", (Ghimire 2012,110) Jhamak not only dismantles the social, cultural, religious and economical wall constructed against the disabled people, women, and other marginalized section, but she equally fights with with the administrative provisions made in Nepalese society. She did not like the middle name "Kumari" meaning that unmarried and represents the feminine gender rather she would like to be named as Jhamak Ghimire. " I resented the tradition of distinguishing males and females even while naming them." (Ghimire 2012, 112). Time snatched away many things from Jhamak; but it could not snatch away her self-esteem. In the course of her rebellion against her own life and times, she has rebelled against her name as well. The tradition and convention of naming by the priest, her father, mother and even the Chief District Officer (CDO) are strongly criticized, deconstructed and established her own ideology. Her pen was used to create new thoughts, ideas on freedom, labor, Man, Religion, God, choice by breaking the conventional notion of the subject

through her books/literary creation. As Jhamak said, "I cannot be restrained by the barriers placed by anyone, cannot keep myself within the lines of limitations drawn by anyone. They are to order me to write in this way or that." (Ghimire 2012, 187) But Jhamak doesn't follow any. A pen is free in itself, a writer is free in himself. What should be written and what should not lie within the discretion of the writer himself or herself. If he confines himself within the dogma of 'write this' or 'don't write this', the pen cannot write free voices; the author cannot produce free thoughts. That's the reason why Jhamak kept on wielding her pen by breaking the barriers raised by the society and by going beyond the social, cultural, economical, gender-based, class-based, casteist and communal barriers and restraints. She would do and write the same things that she had been asked not to. While doing so, Jhamak would feel the sweet sensation of becoming free and independent. She enjoyed in full freedom of the pen and aspired to enjoy even more; that's her pen kept on belching out all kinds of voices. In any case, jhamak's pen continued to run along its own independent periphery, that's all. (Ghimire, 2012, 187)

As Govinda Raj Bhattarai, the renowned literary critique, scholar and editor of this book *Jivan Kanda kiPhul*, the Nepali Version and the translated English version as well writes in the end note of the book "This book is a precious jewel of Nepali literature. Its literary worth will be established as an excellent piece of autobiographical work. This is actually a great decade for autobiographical writings", the researcher found after going through the both version, (Nepali and English) many times even listening to the audio version of the book and reviewing related literatures and books that the writer, Jhamak herself and the autobiographical essays *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* has achieved the highest pick of success. Through her writings, creativity, and novel thoughts are not only great but they are exemplary and practical

teaching for the mankind. Those societies, cultures and religions and the people born, raised and nurtured from the same culture has always seen Jhamak as ugly, misfortunate and disregarded and discriminated, but Jhamak has proved that she is one of the most beautiful figure and has created a successful history in Nepal. Those conventional social, cultural, and religious norms and values always categorize Jhamak as disabled but through her creation, beauty of thoughts philosophy, and enormous talent proofed that she is one of the most capable mentally thus she is well respected not only in Nepal but allover the world.

Sudha Neupane writes in her review on Internet that "I read your Autobiography *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns (Jiwan Kada Ki Phool)* Nepali version and remained stunned, spellbound and speechless. What a great challenge to the so called 'ideology of being able'." Jhamak and her creation and experience of life has won the heart of millions of people. Sudha Neupane further writes "But the realization of how a female victim of disability goes through the series of torturous challenges in our patriarchal society is totally heart rendering. An ideal definition of beauty, feminine body and secret parts of a woman by our social and cultural norms is put upside down by this courageous autobiography." The writer pulls to pieces the social, cultural belief and view and creates world wide accepted thoughts/ideology. At the same time the writer pity upon the so called normal people of the society who themselves are disabled, and enable. Jhamak has secured a place where others so-called normal people never reach there.

For Jhamak, though she has lived in her village all her life and received limited education, her vision found unlimited possibilities even in her limited surroundings, her small corner, and that frustrated space. By pouring out her soul through her feet in golden letters, she sent sparks into the society. She had no wish to

express any chauvinistic, cynical, foolish, materialized, or blank feelings. Her words were not plagiarised or sycophantic. Instead, those were words that had encountered the truth of the soul in the depth of imagination, which had flourished in the fertile land of time. They are the natural flowers, and not the artificial kind without a scent. These are the fragrant jasmines, the bookies of the Himalayas, and the lalupate of the hills through all of these mastering her talent of creativity and establishing her own self, Jhamak has proved herself to be an able and beautiful in Nepalese society and the world at large.

Chapter III: Disability is not an Inability

From the above reviews and observations of different critics, theorists, and writers, this project tries to be distinct in the case it has raised the issue of the ideology of beauty and ability. First Jhamak Ghimire through her autobiographical book, *A Flower in the Midst of Thorns* shows how society, culture, religion define disability, beauty and ability and later on writer herself fabricates and thus creates a different ideologies of ability and beauty. As post modernist believes that the margin constructs the center and there are multiple layers of meanings as Jhamak says "When will our social, political, cultural, economic and religious structures be more favourable and supportive towards womankind and people with disabilities? Howsoever much you paint, colour and decorate old houses, they will continue to remain weak. The cultural structures of ours are of such a nature that, without first pulling them down, no new structures can possibly be constructed" (Ghimire 2012, 110).

This study has outlined the grim reality of disabled women in Nepalese society, and how the disabled writer Jhamak Ghimire has been meeting such challenges. As discussed, many societies in the third world like Nepal are patriarchal and conservative, and person with disability and even a woman with any disability and their positions in these societies are often seen as having miniscule value. Disabled people are seen as ugly, incapable, unable in societies. If a woman is with any kind of disability, she then faces double discrimination and is seen as ugly, deformed and cannot participate in motherhood, she then becomes a person of derision in that society and considered not to maintain the beauty and duty of motherhood; it is as if she does not exist or does not have any identity. She is invisible. Therefore, from this viewpoint, the lives of disabled women and their lived

experiences are completely irrelevant to the mass of non-disabled people because they do not fit into the “ideology of ability and beauty”.

Thus finally, this research project recommends that we need to think, rethink and create an accessible, disable friendly, inclusive, barrier free society for all kinds of people living in this world. There might be hundreds of others born with such a defective biological frame like Jhamak. They too must have had the capacity to do something, but no one recognized that. Even today, there must be hundreds who bear such hurdles/challenges; they too might turn into Jhamaks.

More importantly, one of the remarkable findings of this study is when people finish reading Jhamak's story that she has reached this level without going to school, without learning from a tutor, but she learn through the light of her own will, then people's heads bow down in shame. When people hear of the light she has to the whole world through words, they feel that the lives of those who have working hands, legs, and voices are wasted. There can be no comparison to the indomitable courage and consciousness she possesses in all human beings. Thus the major finding of this research study is that Jhamak is one of the most extraordinary, capable, able and beautiful personalities in the world.

It is universal that in this world billions of people are born and lived. However very few people have an essence of living; few of those billions people mark their lives a worthy living; A very few people leave their footprint for the next generation through their ability and beauty, through their creation, innovation, contribution for mankind. Among those few genuine remarkable people in the world, this research project concludes that Jhamak has been successful to ensure a successful space through her creation and writing, through her ideas and thoughts, through her lessons and teaching for which the generations and generations will be proud of and will

memorize her and her beautiful creations/writings for century and centuries and has proved that she is one of the most beautiful and capable people as Jhamak herself writes: " I would find myself fairly beautiful; even as it is, I had been a well grown up girl with a newly developed youth and pink-coloured, soft cheeks—like a freshly blossomed, beautiful flower. I never saw myself ugly and unsightly; I wonder if it was because I looked at myself with good-looking eyes". (Ghimire 2012, 119). At last Jhamak is a person who would like to flower, blossom and spread on her own. As she sees the flower blooming along the edges of the courtyard, Jhamak also felt like enjoying the same freedom. On seeing them smile and laugh, she felt doing likewise too. And Jhamak tried to enjoy the same freedom and to laugh the same laughter.

We can see such talented, able, beautiful, famous and successful people in our society. Christopher Nolan was one person whose situation and talent nearly matched Jhamak's. Irish writer Nolan typed with his head using a stick. Among his half a dozen books, "Under the Eye of the Clock" was popular and award-winning. Similarly, Mary Cocks Wales, scientist Stephen Hawking, and writer Helen Keller are memorable people with disabilities. There are also many who are born whole but lost their limbs in accidents and become famous later. TikaBamjan who lost both hands in an accident is one such writer heading towards greater fame in Nepal. Many nations of the world like South Africa, Australia and Netherlands have been providing institutional and organizational support to talented people with disabilities. Nolan met his death at the age of 43 when he choked on food, and the president of Ireland himself relayed this news to the world, because Nolan was under the direct supervision of the state. Our nation should learn from such beneficial practices and take many Jhamaks under its wing as BiswasdipTigela suggested all of us in the end note of the book.

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