I. Experience of Disability: Creative Writing as Resistance

Disability is a human reality. People of all ages and from all walks of life undergo difficulties in one way or the other. These difficulties are worsened by the society. While some disabilities are congenital, it is that reality that every person stands the risk of being disabled in the course of life. For instance, with the increase in age, all human beings are subjected to disability. But people forget this reality of life. Though the term “impairment” is often exchanged with “disability”, their meanings are different. “Impairment” has been defined as the lack of all part of limb or having defective mechanism of the body. But “disability” experience is different which simply means a lack of ability relative to personal or group standard or spectrum. It may include physical, sensory, cognitive or intellectual impairment, mental disorder, or various types of chronic diseases.

The disability model has taken hold as the disability rights and independent living movements have gained strength. This model regards disability as a normal aspect of life, not as a deviance, and rejects the notion that persons with disabilities are in some inherent way "defective". As Professor David Pfeiffer puts it that paralyzed limbs may not particularly limit a person's mobility as much as attitudinal and physical barriers. The question centers on 'normality'. What, it is asked, is the normal way to be mobile over a distance of a mile? Is it to walk, drive one's own car, take a taxicab, ride a bicycle, use a wheelchair, roller skate, or use a skate board, or some other means? What is the normal way to earn a living? Most people will experience some form of disability, either permanent or temporary, over the course of their lives. Given this reality, if disability were more commonly recognized and expected in the way that we design our environments or our systems, it would not seem so abnormal.

But these days, the scope of disability experience has been widened. It operates in culture. At present disability is also a reading of the body that is inflected by race, ethnicity, gender, caste, class, social positioning etc. As it is culture bound, it varies with society and culture.

Stairs and printed information create a functional impairment for the wheel chair users and the people without sight. Similarly, deafness doesn't make a person disable in a community where people communicate by using both sign language and words. Black people in America may feel disabled because they cannot meet the criteria of whiteness which is considered the normal standard skin in America. But they may feel normal when they are back at home in Africa or in their own community. When a person from the so called lower caste goes to the casteless society, his/her identity as so called lower caste dissolves. A person with lower economic status may experience disability in a capitalist society. But he/she may be at ease in socialist society.

In a patriarchal culture, feminity and disability are linked inextricably. Aristotle's comparison of women with disabled men illustrates this fact. So, if viewed with the gendered lens, the identity called female itself becomes another category for disability. Moreover, society in which physical appearance is the primary standard, the women with disabilities are doubly discriminated. In such case, the beautification practices normalize the female body and disability. Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies* writes, "The cultural other and cultural self operate together as opposing twin figure that legitimatize a system of social, economic and political empowerment justified by physiological difference" (8). A disability's degree of visibility too affects social relation. If it is more visible like birth marks, disfigurement, scars, etc. they are highly stigmatized. But the invisible disability like homosexual identity etc presents the dilemma of whether or when to come out or to pass. He further says:

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

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

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

> The concept of a norm [. . .] implies that the majority of the population must or should be part of the norm. The norm pins down the majority of the population that [. . .] will always have at its extremities these characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of

> bodies in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. (13)

Davis clarifies as how the term disability functions to define what normalcy actually means. Those who do not meet the parameters of normalcy are viewed as the people with disability. To have disability is to be an abnormal, to be the part of "other". So the problem is not with disabilities rather the problem lies in the way that normalcy is constructed to create the "Problem" of the disabled person. Asha Hans in *Women, Disability and Identity* asks "who lays these standards of what is normal? Do the disabled have any say in establishment of standards"? (33) The answer to Hans question is obviously negative. The disabled have no say in the construction of such standard. They never act rather they are always acted upon.

This construction of the normalcy however results in the stigmatization of the person with disability. The stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting yet that is rooted within the people with disability. So, stigma reflects a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. The stigmatized person responds differently to his/her own situation. Sometimes, she takes her disability as a curse and tries to correct it or use it as an excuse for ill success. At other times, she takes it as a boon, and uses it as guideline to her life, thus, stigma leads a person to lose her true 'self' and ability.

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

The stigmatized person coveys his/her inferiority through two different factors as social rejection or isolation and lowered expectations.

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

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

This socially authorized group then tries to represent the cultural other by creating difference, discourse and images in literature, electronic and print media. These discourse and the images are more based on the received attitude than on people’s actual experience of disability. Thus, the disability experience is flattened and modeled in a freakish manner which is distanced off the normalizing contents and is engulfed by a single stigmatic trait.

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

The discursive practice of “othering” the people with disability and the study of disability has now been countered in the present time by a new field of study called disability studies. It has been developed both as an academic discipline and as an area of political struggle. It is not just the product of one day and one head. Rather political factors like the formation of Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA) of 1990 and other factors like the unification of the people with the disabilities and the contribution of various scholars to this field of study are all groundbreaking in the establishment of disability studies. Lennard J. Davis in his introduction to the *Disabilities Studies Reader* clarifies the goal of the disability studies. He says that the disability studies “shuns this unequal power transaction in favor of advocacy, investigation, injury, archaeology, genecology, dialetic and deconstruction” (15).

However a change has appeared in this scenario. A lot of writers with disabilities are themselves producing the literature with the firsthand experience of what it meant to be a person with disability. *Staring Back* by Kenny Fries is the collection of the literary pieces written by the writers with disabilities. People with disability are often gazed by the non-disabled world. The title of the book suggests that the people with disability are now meeting our gaze by staring back at us. Thus this collection gives us a new lens to look at the disability experiences. “Pony Party” by Lucy Grealy, “Carnal Acts” by Nancy Mairs, “Bells” by Ved Mehta, “Living in an Unstable Body” by Barbara Rosenblum are some of the non-fictions collected in this book. The writers of these non-fictions have presented the firsthand experience of disability and thus have countered misrepresentation of the people like them and their experiences by the so called “normal”.

Lucy Grealy in “Pony Party” shares her experience of being triply discriminated due to various forms of disability. She is a female whose half of the jaw is missing and also belongs to a family with poor economic condition. The only identity of her life was her face, the symbol of abnormality, ugliness. All other realities of her life are shrinked and she becomes the object to be stared and scared. She becomes a stigmatized subject and chooses a job in a stable called Diamond D which is a haven to her to hide her disability. She is alienated from the human circle and thus chooses to be with animals. She feels that animals bear higher truth and are capable of understanding her circumstances. The other forms of disability, poverty adds problem in her life. Thus, due to all these forms of disability she is highly stigmatized and all of her abilities are overshadowed and downgraded.

Nancy Mairs in “Carnal Acts” too shares her experiences of being a crippled woman. Her essay counters the traditional presumptions about disability. The people with disability are supposed to be a non-person, without a voice. She gives the firsthand experience of a woman suffering form MS (Multiple Sclerosis). Generally, it is thought that the disabled body lacks the sexuality. The people with disability are not supposed to want sex, much less does it. And they are supposed to be shameful creature. But Mairs subverts the power of shame and turns it into the productive power. Though she suffers as a crippled woman who even tried to commit suicide once, she finally discovers her ability- her voice as a writer. She says that when she began to write presenting herself as how she is, and asking others as how they are, she heard the resonance of the similar voice like her own. Thus she overcomes her stigmatized self and successfully builds up her identity as a writer by shattering the traditional notion about the crippled woman.

Ved Mehta is a man without sight and has written about his own blindness.He in his essay “Bells” shares his own childhood experience of living in a school for blinds and writes how he learned to read and write and also learned the world around him with the help of teachers. He describes how he desired to write on paper with an ink like his sister Umi. However, he learned to use the Braille Script. Traditionally, it is thought that blind people do not dream nor can they figure out what world outside them is like. But Mehta proves all such statement fallacious. He writes that he too used to have dream and described things in the outside world. Though he is a man without sight, finally he became a writer like other so called “normal”.

“Living in an Unstable Body” explores the experience which is at flux due to the unpredictable result that a body suffering from cancer is likely to produce. Barbara Rosenblum mentions about different situations in which she gets stigmatized and simultaneously overcomes all such stigmas and discovers a different knowledge about her own body. When she started the treatment of the cancer, various side effects could be observed. She began to lose her hair, she had menopause, her body grew larger and larger, and she lost her breast, her sexual urges and her appetite. Her body seemed to be unstable after every treatment. In such stigmatized situation also she overcame all those side effects by different sorts of life force which came in different forms, that is, in the form of passion to learn everything, to feel everything, to live every movement with presence and intensity, to study new things and to master new areas of knowledge. Thus, finally she learned a new language of the body which was the language of symptoms but not of sexuality. It was hard for her to rely on the stability or the truth of her own body. So, there was crisis of meaning and of her own existential status. Despite such stigmatized situation, the writer has well articulated how it is like to live in an unstable body those changes often without predictability. Thus, she discovered her ability as a writer despite her crippled existence.

All these different writers show that though they live in a crippled body, they are differently abled. Their ability is overshadowed by the single trait of stigma or disability. Their writings have countered the presumed notion about disability which is often distorted. It is not easy to live in a crippled body but it is also not impossible to discover ability within disability.

Disability is, thus, produced not by birth but by the way of legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse. Disabled body is constructed as the embodiment of physical insufficiency and deviance and becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity. Language incompatibility is another form of disability. In the modern world the people with language create discourses that are represented as truths or so called truths that exclude the people, class and society which do not have the reach on language.

II. Disability and Stigma

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

The sad reality is that people with disabilities have been isolated, observed, and marginalized from mainstream society. This study looks for the space of such people relating it with the issues of the basic formation of disability. The concept, the outcome and reality are rebelling, and they interfere the grounds of other studies in diverse ways. It is a questioning tendency towards the marginalized group of people. It questions whether there is anything to be gained by all people from exploring the ways that the body in this variations is metaphorized, disbursed. It requires a base of knowledge and familiarity with discursive terms and methodologies. The very first and essential aspect under disability study is the study of normalcy and its socio-cultural construction. Disability Studies questions the social formation of normalcy and the way of taking somebody or something as disabled. The critics of disability studies go very far from "pity" or "empathy" and seek the social, political, individual and intellectual space for the so called abnormal people in the society. So, the construction of normalcy and the issue of stigma are the most striking aspects under the field of disability studies.

All of us are living in the world of norms. Norms are such aspects that categorize us in different ranks. Everywhere norms are functioning as the vital aspect to determine one's position. Whether it is society, education or politics everywhere norms are becoming crucial part to give the position of us. The matter of 'able' and ‘disable’ also moves around the concept of construction of normalcy. Disability studies has emerged as a new phenomenon or a new form of study among various discursive practices. People with disabilities are treated as the "Other" and sometimes as a non-human. Though they are the largest minority throughout the world, Lennard J. Davis in his introduction to *The Disability Studies Reader* states that the people with disabilities have been subjected to the discrimination and prejudice "leading finally to their marginalization as well as the marginalization of the study on disability" (1).

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

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

> A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to other. But, the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature that it is a feature of a certain kind of society. (9)

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

Another concept which is inter-related with the construction of normalcy under the disability studies is the concept of ‘stigma’. Stigmatization and construction of normalcy exist associatively between each other. But both of these terminologies are different in their position. The former is a kind of mark of disgrace whereas the later is a medium of the base through which something or somebody is stigmatized in any society.

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

> Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between vital and actual social identity. […] the kind that causes us a reclassify and individual from one socially anticipated category to a different but equally well-anticipated one, and the kind that causes us to alter our estimation of the individual upward. Note, too, that both all undesirable attributes are

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

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

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

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

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

However, it is necessary to understand the concept of the norm in the prevalent society because anyone can be stigmatized at any time. The concept of normalcy is again a social construct; it is fixed and shaped by cultural, historical and social forces. Goeffman adds “Normality becomes the supreme goal for many stigmatized individuals until they realize that there is no precise definition of normality except what they would be without their stigma” (206). A man is stigmatized because he fails to represent the majority of the population. That is why Lennard J. Davis says, “The concept of the norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm” (13).

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

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

> Stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility. Part of the power of stigmatization lies in the realization that people who are stigmatized or acquire to stigma lose their place in the social hierarchy. Consequently, most people want to ensure that that they are counted in the non stigmatized" majority". This, of course, leads to more stigmatization. (218)

In this way, stigmatization appears to be uncontrollable because any human difference serves as the basis for stigma. Moreover, it also manifests the underlying fear of being stigmatized as anyone can be stigmatized at any time. Stigma is therefore non stigmatized people’s necessity in order to feel good about themselves. They posses false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that stigmatized people is fundamentally inferior. Likewise, non-stigmatized people convey a sense of inferiority to stigmatized people as invisible, non existent or dead through social avoidance and social rejection.

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

> If a stigma is a social construct, constructed by cultured, by social groups, and by individual to designate some human difference a discrediting, then the stigmatization process is indeed a powerful and pernicious social tool. The inferiority/ superiority issue is a most interesting way of understanding how and why people continue to stigmatize. (218)

Therefore, stigma is an open-ended synthesis that continues from one generation to the next.

First, any human difference serves as the preliminary requisite to be stigmatized. Secondarily, to be stigmatized is an inescapable fate as this process depends upon cultural and historical background. Coleman defines that stigma is a product of socio-cultural context. He says:

> People are concerned with stigma because they are fearful of its unpredictable and uncontrollable nature. Stigmatization appears

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

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

The various extremes of human traits as tallness, shortness, intelligence, ambitiousness, strength etc would have been seen as errors. Such differences are therefore stigmatized in the long-run. In a way, the construction of normalcy divides the total population into standard and non-standard sub-population as well as conceiving norm and non-norms.

Disability is a socially constructed form of the biological reality because our culture idealizes the body and demands that we must have control upon it. Able bodies thus dictate upon the disabled body and their knowledge always silences individual’s capabilities and true characteristics. The stigma and stereotypes are the cause of discrimination, much more than the disability itself. Hence, it could be argued that the disability is not the cause at all, that the social reaction to disability is the cause, Susan Wendell says;

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

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

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

> The personal tragedy model posits a "better dead than disabled" approach and reinforces the stereotypes that the disabled cannot be Gappy or enjoy an adequate quality of life. The disabled person's problems are perceived to result from bodily impairment and a troubled mind, rather than a failure of society to meet that the person's need in terms of appropriate human help and accessibility. This understating places specific burdens on disabled to reconstruct themselves as normal people as they contend with both implicit and explicit assumption about their reluctance to acknowledge their

> disabled existence. Consequently, disabled people are subjected to many disabling expectations by the able bodied society. (37)

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

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

> We ascertain that the barrier in disabled women's lives fundamentally related to images affect their very being and reinforce the 'triple discriminations' (of being discriminated because they are women, are disabled, and are women with disabilities). The present imaging of

> women with disabilities […] produce social inequality. […] We acknowledge gender to be a societal norm and the images, which we reflect, are far from reality and require not only analyses but also deconstruction and reconstruction. (19)

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

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

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

Women disability is taken as stigmatization because it appears lack of bodily appearance which the society seldom desires. Prejudice and discrimination are based on the appearance. People are judged not by their ability but by the way they look and disabled people are marginalized because they look different. The difference is caused by disability. Discrimination results when this difference triggers off the negative attitudes towards disability that are held by the other person. Most importantly, the attitude towards disability is formed accidentally. These are the obvious outcome of society that values competition between people. People are judged according to their success in education, work, marriage, the ability to produce (healthy) offspring creativity, and beauty. As a result of segregation, disabled people have fewer opportunities to acquire the skills necessary for a good job, and their education is substandard.

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

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

Society thus exhibits a structural amnesia about a particular category of people, who, because they do not fit into the hegemonic discourses of ‘normality’ are excluded, separated and socially disempowered. The social disregard coupled with experiences of social, economic and political subjugation deny the disabled a voice, a space, and even power to disrupt these deeply entrenched normative that deprives them of their social presence and any resemblance of identity.

In order to understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm because society desires for the hegemony of normalcy. Unable to perform any social function due to the lack of physical appearance is perceived to be an error or fault in the prevalent social circumstances. In other words, disability is stereotyped with negative attitudes. Again, the concept of disability is a social construction thus, disability is a powerful social construct within most existing societies and because we are presented with conflicting images of it, disabled people have been placed into the role of abnormal outsider whose lives and experiences are consoled from the ‘normal’ majority.

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

> […] “Discipline” may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a “physics” or an “anatomy’ of power, a technology. […] an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by preexisting authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power or by apparatuses that have made discipline their principle of internal

> functioning or finally by the state apparatuses whose major, if not excusive, function is to assure that discipline. (206)

The conception of a subject as central to a specific age involves locating the body as a site for the operations of power. It is primarily through sex and the establishment of ‘normal’ behaviors by society that the notion of bio-power arises. Deviations from ‘the norm’ established by either society or cyber community then can be disciplined. The mechanisms for judging both deviations and extent of deviation are embedded in the very core of our society: teachers, psychiatrists, social workers etc. It is through the process of problematisation that the illusion of ‘normality’ is created. In this light normalisation becomes the great strategy of power. The disciplinary pyramid constituted the “small cell of power within which the separation, coordination, and supervision of tasks were imposed and made efficient; and analytical partitioning of time, gestures, and bodily forces constituted an operational schema that could easily be subjected to the mechanisms of production” (210).

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

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

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

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

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

What generalizes the power to punish, then, is not the universal consciousness of the law in each juridical subject; it is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques. As disabled’s potential contributions to society is ignored or denied, a disabled person is often seen as a burden, as useless and essentially a non-person.

Although activists have increased their efforts to redefine disability as a social phenomenon and the negative reactions, disability is still viewed, for the most part, as a flaw that somehow reflects the lesser value of that person.

Disability is thus, simply unacceptable and therefore, makes the disabled themselves negate their existence. It is seen as public enigma and public threat. To be disabled is be an “other” in the social group. Furthermore, disabled personalities are not treated on equal grounds. They are marginalized in every sector as in health, education, economy and others. In short, disabled people are socially unacceptable in one or the other way, it is measured in terms of the social conceptual framework of norms.

The present researcher with intensive study of the relevant texts which are written by the writers with disabilities as "Bells" by Ved Mehta, "Carnal Acts" by Nancy Mairs,"Pony Party" by Lucy Grealy and "Living in an Unstable Body" by Barbara Rosenblum which are collected in *Staring Back*, will be the focus on disability as the stigmatization of the human ability.

III. Disability as a Socio-cultural Construct

This study tries to reexamine literary and cultural representation of disability studies in literary criticisms. It is concerned with disability approach in a broader and wider, more critical and revolutionary sense, venturing into unexplored territories such as caste, class, gender, position at office, ethnicity and the color of skin etc. It tries to situate disability as a social construction and a product of cultural rules and people in privileged position. It frames disability as a minority discourse and provides complex answers to the puzzle of issues concerned with disability. It tries to reveal new insight into the position of the disabled. The discourses created by the non-disabled is questioned and vehemently criticized as it is biased and distanced from the reality. The existing discrepancies between the able and the disable people exist because of the social discourses which are constructed and implemented. The concern of the research therefore is to recognize the voice of the disable and to subvert the former notion of disability which reflects sham picture of the disabled world. The researcher situates her studies in the text *Staring Back.* The so called disable writers, in these collections enumerates their experiences of disability. Their essays reveal how does society, culture, politics and various other institutions try to establish the idea of disability as natural, fixed and stable category.

Lucy Grealy in “Pony Party”, Nancy Mairs in “Carnal Acts”, Barbara Rosenblum in “Living in an Unstable Body”, and Ved Mehta in “Bells” frankly recount their experiences of what it means for them to be disabled. Setting their memoirs against the background of (mis)representation produced by non-disabled people, these texts seek to show how the writers with disability while privileging the view point of their respective disabled narrators claim an often denied agency in actual socio-cultural encounters.

Lucy Grealy in “Pony Party” presents herself as a person with disabilities so as to counter the established discourse that the so called disabled person is a victim of stigma which makes him/her hide his/her identity in crisis. She has recounted her triply discriminated state due to various forms of disability inflicted upon her personalities. Her half of the jaw is missing and also belongs to a family with poor economic condition. Her identity is restricted to her face, the symbol of abnormality, ugliness. All other realities and her abilities are overshadowed and she becomes an object to be stared and scared. As she suffers from stigma, she chooses a job at a stable called Diamond D which is a haven for her to hide her disability. All these forms of disability she is highly stigmatized and all of her abilities are overshadowed and downgraded.

Based on Goffman’s perception, the disability in our society is stigmatized that results in the dehumanization of the person. This process of stigmatization, a kind of misrepresentation, takes place because of the inconsistency between what he says “virtual social identity” and “actual social identity” (204). Further such misrepresentations are supported by generating discourses in order to give permanence and to actualize the stereotype. Goffman further states “the person with stigma is not quite human. On this assumption, we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances” (205).

In everyday socio-political encounter, people with disability are always reduced to stigmas and represented as non-desired and it risks the erasure of the disabled self. The important thing in both Davis and Goffman is that both of them view disability as social construct in which the disabled body accrues social and cultural meanings and imagined as ‘other’. In this regard Kenny Fries’ ideas are instrumental, as she comments:

> Viewed form this perspective, it is clear that it is the barriers both physical and attitudinal that need to be changed, not the impairments of the bodies with which we live. I have asked many able people what causes them difficulty, the disability itself or the discriminatory barriers put in their way, and the answer is overwhelmingly latter. (7-8)

This illustration drawn from the text tries to lampoon the society which does not mark any space to the disabled people. It shows how society is the major source of discrimination which shuns them, curses them and behaves them as stranger. It deprives them of opportunities and sees them as incapable and incompetent. Disability thus becomes a source of exclusion. Fries further adds “I knew I was not alone in my struggle to give voice to the disability experience, an experience which throughout history has been marginalized or cooped, if not ignored (9)”.

The essayist in this text tries to develop a new literary model of disability theory that is more critical and more inclusive because a false form of interpretations and understanding governs our world. In this regard Lucy Grealy in the essay “Pony Party” remarks:

> They were uncomfortable because of my face. I ignored the deep hurt by allowing the side of me that was desperate for any kind of definition to staunchly act out, if not exactly relish, this macabre status. I was in deep pain and my pain keeps me in silence. My condition became the cause of shame for my family as well. (19)

Here the idea of stigmatization is brought into surface that disability of a person becomes the cause of moral and psychological disturbance. When the essayist talks about family shame, narrates the outlook of society toward people who do not meet social criteria to be judged or assigned able. They label someone who does not meet certain criteria as disable. This act of society established from the perspective of normalcy is nothing but a social biasness.

The questions of the definition of "person with a disability" and how persons with disabilities perceive themselves are knotty and complex. It is no accident that these questions are emerging at the same time that the status of persons with disabilities in society is changing dramatically. In this ground the ideas of David Herman is seminal, as he recalls:

> I used to dream about being in a world where being disabled was no big deal, where no one considered it a tragedy. No one thought you were inspiring or felt sorry for you. No one stared at you. I imagined what a relief it would be to be seen every day as perfectly ordinary. I deserve change and I must challenge the world of able to do so. (27)

The disability under which the problem is defined as a dominating attitude by professionals and others, inadequate support services when compared with society generally, as well as attitudinal, architectural, sensory, cognitive, and economic barriers, and the strong tendency for people to generalize about all persons with disabilities overlooking the large variations within the disability community. We can gauge at the fact that the disabled world is longing for equality and to be seen as ordinary and equal as they are showing their agitation for all they have been up to so far. They are ready to literary resistance as well.

However, there are many cultures that associate disability with sin and shame, and disability is often associated with feelings of guilt, even if such feelings are not overtly based on religious doctrine. For the individual with a disability, this model is particularly burdensome. This model has been associated with shame on the entire family with a member with disability. Families have hidden away the disabled family member, keeping them out of school and have excluded from any chance at having a meaningful role in society. Even in less extreme circumstances, this model has resulted in general social ostracism and self-hatred: “The rhetorical thrust of this book, then, is to critique the politics of appearance that governs our interpretation of physical difference (137)”. In this view Lucy Grealy comments:

> When our trailer pulled into the driveway for a pony party, I would briefly remember my own excitement at being around ponies for the first time. But, I also knew that these children lived apart from me. Through them I learned the language of paranoia: every whisper I heard was a comment about the way I looked every laugh a joke at my expense. (16)

Disability of a person becomes a source of fun. This practice is criticized and mocked by the essayist when she relates her own experiences with the experiences of the people living with disability. However, the experiences of a disabled person in the society they live are extremely painful. When Lucy identifies herself with the experience of paranoia she blames the world of so called able that stigmatizes the people who does not meet their ascribed criteria as outcast or abnormal.

Many disabilities have medical origins; people with disabilities were expected to benefit from coming under the direction of the medical profession. The problems that are associated with disability are deemed to reside within the individual. In other words, if the individual is "cured" then these problems will not exist. Society has no underlying responsibility to make a "place" for persons with disabilities, since they live as outsiders waiting to be cured.

Disability is defined as the inability to work. It is also the source of enormous problems for persons with disabilities who want to work as society does not correspond to their genuine spirit or ability. They can perform much better and act more rationally. But, the society does not believe in their ability so they are also stigmatized in the profession or work related areas as well. In this regard Grealy asserts:

> Partly I was honing my self-consciousness into a torture device, sharp and efficient enough to last me the rest of my life. Partly I was right: they were staring at me, laughing at me. The cruelty of children is immense, almost startling in its precision. The kids at the parties were fairly young and, surrounded by adults: they rarely made cruel remarks outright. But their open, uncensored stares were more painful than the deliberate taunts of my peers at school, were insecurities drove everything and everyone like some looming, evil presence in a haunted machine. (16-17)

These lines clarify the pain with which the disable are living. A smaller minority within the minority group, disabled women suffer from multiple discriminations- a group culturally different yet with similar issues of access to resources and understandings, who needed to be made visible and would force us to question dominant cultures. Sometimes, she takes her disability as a curse and tries to correct it or use it as an excuse for ill success. They try to resort to medicine but it does not help them to erase their disability. They have to accept it and live in spite of the discrimination and hate that the world showers upon them. Today, the disability rights and independent living movements have gained strength. They regard disability as a normal aspect of life, not as a deviance and reject the notion that persons with disabilities are in some inherent way "defective".

Most people will experience some form of disability, either permanent or temporary, over the course of their lives. Given this reality, if disability were more commonly recognized and expected in the way that we design our environments or our systems, it would not seem so abnormal.

The disabled people recognize social discrimination as the most significant problem experienced since the problem persons with disabilities face are more painful and touchy than others. In this context the ideas of Nancy Mairs are noteworthy:

> I'll just go on telling what it's like to be a crippled woman, trusting that, since we're fellow creatures who've been living together for some thousands of years now, much of my experience will resonate with their. I was never a beautiful woman, and for that reason I've spent most of my life suffering from the shame of falling short of unattainable standard. (54-56)

The cultural habit regarding the condition of the person, not the built environment or the social organization of activities, as the source of the problem, runs deep. For example, it took several years of struggling for the writer with the heavy door to her building of self-esteem and confidence, sometimes having to wait until a person can realize that the door was an accessibility problem, not only for her, but for others as well.

This reflects the idea that to a large extent, disability is a social construct. Most people believe they know what is and is not a disability. If one imagines "the disabled" at one end of a spectrum and people who are extremely physically and mentally capable at the other, the distinction appears to be clear. However, there is a tremendous amount of middle ground in this construct, and it's in the middle that the scheme falls apart. What distinguishes a socially "invisible" impairment - such as the need for corrective eyeglasses - from a less acceptable one - such as the need for a corrective hearing aid, or the need for a walker? Functionally, there may be little difference. Socially, some impairment creates great disadvantage or social stigma for the individual, while others do not. Some are considered disabilities and some are not. So the social perception must change. In this ground Kenny Fries' ideas open up new avenues:

> The experiences of those with disabilities prove there are countless different and effective ways of moving through the world. But old models die hard. Literature, which reflects the richness of the different ways we conceptualize how we live within the world and the ways the world lives within us, thankfully does not and should not conform to the dictates of current political and social discourses. In *Staring Back*, […] habits of thinking in ourselves as much as we actually come up against them in our daily lives. (8)

She illustrates the difficulty of defining disability without considering new models, the theory of disability and the experiences of the disabled. It is likely that different people could have different responses to the question of whether disability is a trait which should receive disparate treatment from the society or not. But, the major concern here now is whether or not the disabled define disability according to their models or not? And the answer is easy they must have the access.

All these essays are the result of personal experiences, feelings, and the problems faced during daily life having the marked body. Thus these are attempts to construct a self through the narrative of past events for the recognition with visible differences and disability and cultural meanings assigned to the marked bodies. All these writers run the risk of being misidentified on the daily basis with their cultural meaning and value of differences.

"Carnal Acts", reflection of stigma written by disabled writer, Nancy Mairs, expresses her pains and sufferings as well as struggles against the discrimination. She writes:

> In effect, living with this mysterious mechanism feels like having your present self, and the past selves it embodies, haunted by a capricious and meanspirited ghost, unseen except for its footprints, which trips you even when you're watching where you're going, knocks glassware out of your hand, squeezes the urine out of your bladder before you reach the bathroom, and weight your whole body with a weariness no amount of rest can relieve. An alien invader must be at work. But of course it's not. It's your body. That is, it's you. (53)

Her task was diverged in nature and she had to yoke both disability and creativity. Though it is difficult to present such inner and outer pain of being disable, she strongly claims her identity and existence against the 'able'. Mairs' memoir begins like an analysis of her life as an attempt to 'cope with' her disability and authorship.

Her disability can be defined as "abomination of the body" (because she has sclerosis) and "blemishes of the individual character" (because she attempt at suicide). In course of her meditation, she criticizes "western tradition of distinguishing the body from the mind and the soul” (53). This distinction between body and soul becomes more problematic if the body is marked:

> We impose upon infants from birth, in much the same we inculcate, without reflection, the gender distinctions “female” and “male.” I *have* a body, you are likely to say if you talk about embodiment at all; you don’t say, I am a body. A body is a separate entity possessable by the “I”; the “I” and the body aren’t, as the copula would make them, grammatically indistinguishable. (53)

In order to provide an appropriate remedy to the full range of individuals who experience discrimination based on disability, it is necessary to explicitly recognize that there are people who would not consider themselves "disabled", nor would they be considered so. The problem becomes more complex if the body is of a woman because even without disability “woman’s body” is stigmatized as “hidden, dark and secret” (54). Mairs sees the situation as “doubly other(ed).” This body is not only stereotype in the patriarchal discourses but it makes such body suffer from desexualisation “by the standards of physical desirability erected for everybody in our world” (54). The disabled woman may be more negatively viewed by men using wheelchairs become disabled; the non-disabled college students attributed male disability to external situations such as war, work injury, or accident whereas female disability to internal causes as diseases.

Mairs “goes on telling what it’s like to be crippled woman” and by the use of collective pronoun “we” makes her powerful. She says, she tells this story “trusting that, we’re fellow creatures who have been living together for some thousands of years now, much of my experience will resonate with theirs” (54). The ambiguity inherent in it is that being a writer, she is not unaware of the fact of having attention even in the world of non-disabled. Such as awareness disrupts the act of misperceiving a disabled body that is displaced by an ‘idea’ about disability.

The idea about disability arises from a misrepresentation that persists because of the very social gap between disabled people and non-disabled people. The social gap allows stereotypical images of the disabled people to go largely unchallenged. It puts a psychological pressure on the disable to repress any marked difference in the body. Mairs writes:

> All the experience have passed by […] I’ve born two children. Milk tricking out of my breast […] you don’t want to hear bout it […] Sometimes, I am to scare to leave my house […] no one could possibly desire a body like this. It’s not your fault. It’s mine. I didn’t mean to start crying. I am sorry… sorry… sorry. (60)

This construction of the normalcy however results in the stigmatization of the person with disability. The stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting yet that is rooted within the people with disability. So, stigma reflects a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. Here she responds differently to her own situation. The apologetic voice of the writer on the surface level seems to acquitting of the society for the suffering that she undergoes due to restrictions put on her as a disable, especially her experience of child bearing like other non-disabled. Though she is perfect in her act society can’t take it as normal. Hence disability becomes stigmatization of human ability.

Likewise, to oppose the social discourse about disability she often uses the anxiety of speaking aloud in society and about “the waves of shame”, and to lay stress on “a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence” (60). Mairs’ speaking aloud at the cultural othering of the disabled body that consists of a process that takes place at the cost of subjectivity and seeks to give them voice: “… (In) the weeks I’ve had the themes ‘disability’ and ‘voice’ sitting around in my head; they seem to have coverage on their own…” (52). Her expression allows her to subvert the power of misrepresentations that “cracks and stifles (her) voice” and to discover herself: “I have found, by acknowledging who I am, shame and all, and, in doing so, raising what was hidden, dark and secret about my life into the plain light of shared human experience” (58). She further writes:

> I’ve “found” my voice, then, just where it ought to have been, in the body-warmed breath escaping my lungs and throat. Forced by the exigencies of physical disease to embrace my self in the fresh, I couldn’t write bodiless prose. The voice is the creature of the body that produces it. I speak as a crippled woman. At the same time, in the utterance I redeem both “cripple” and “woman” from the shameful silences by which I have often felt surrounded, contained, set apart; I give myself permission to live openly among others, to reach out for them, stroke them with fingers and sighs. No body, no voice; no voice, no body. That’s what I know in my bones. (61)

However, it is ascertained that the barriers in disabled women’s lives fundamentally related to images affect their very being and reinforce the “triple discrimination” of being discriminated because they are women, are disabled, and are women with disabilities (Hans 19). A smaller minority within the minority group of disabled women faced with a triple discrimination; a group culturally different yet with similar issues of access to resources and understandings, who needed to be made visible and would force us to question dominant cultures. Sometimes, she takes her disability as a curse and tries to correct it or use it as an excuse for ill success. At other times, she takes it as a boon, and uses it as guideline to her life, thus, stigma leads a person to lose her true ‘self’ and ability. So disability becomes stigmatization of human ability.

In “Living in an Unstable Body” by Barbara Rosenblum shares her experience of living in an unstable body which is at flux due to the unpredictable result that a body suffering from cancer is likely to produce. She becomes subjected to stigma due to such body. But she simultaneously overcomes all such stigmas and regains a different voice within herself, and also gets a new life force which came in different form, that is, in the form of passion to learn everything, to feel everything, to live every movement with presence and intensity, to study new things and to master new areas of knowledge. Finally she shows her own victory over her own crippled body and understands that her stigma is not the result of her so called disability but her failure to cope with her own body which is at flux.

Barbara Rosenblum, a lesbian, suffers from an internal cause because she acquires an unstable marked body because of breast cancer. But the problem is of a hasty generalization. Rosenblum draws the attention of readers to the fears of the female with marked bodies. All the women she is in contact with have lost their breasts because of cancer and it comes as a nightmare to all of them because the discursive interpretation of the female body puts breast at the centre as an important “aesthetic criteria” to evaluate the beauty of the body. Besides it, breasts are supposed to be important parts in the sexual intercourse and husband “[can’t] bear the sight of his wife [without breast]” (94).

The idea of disability arises from a misrepresentation that persists because of the very social gap between disabled people and non-disabled people. This social disconnection allows stereotypical images of the disabled people to go largely unchallenged which puts psychological pressure on the disabled people. This type of pressure is registered by Rosenblum who tells what she felt after losing her hair – one of the side effects of chemotherapy:

> I am still aware that people look at me. A vital aspect of my social identity has been taken away. In the last six months, I have lost my hair twice. And before that, three times. Practice does not make it easier. Losing my hair has been much harder than losing my breast. No one can see underneath my clothes. But everyone can see my hair. I never thought my hair was beautiful […]. It was mine. (94)

To acquire baldness, no matter whatsoever the reason might be, is to acquire a visible "differentness" which opens up a person to the stigmatization. This brings the gap between the ideal image of woman with long hair and woman with the bald head. But she claims an authority over the agency and the self in performance in the essay as in drama bridges the gap between the disabled person and society.

The power of culture alone to construct a disability is revealed when we consider bodily differences - deviations from a society's conception of a "normal" or acceptable body - that, although they cause little or no functional or physical difficulty for the person who has them, constitute major social disabilities. It is an important example which is a disability of appearance only, a disability constructed totally by stigma and cultural meanings. Stigma, stereotypes, and cultural meanings are also the primary components of other disabilities, and not having a 'normal' or acceptable body size.

The disabled narrator in this essay through the self in performance achieves two important effects out of it: first, the specificity of the body in performance creates a representation of living person, which works against the displacement and second, the voice and the presence of the real person speaking from disabled point of view presents a radical alternative to stereotypical images of the disabled: “Now it is clear that I will never have a full head of hair again […] I will always look like a Buddhist monk until the day I die” (95). Rosenblum’s comparison of her after losing the hair with a Buddhist monk is in fact her attempt to do away with the stereotypes and stigmas. To render stigma in terms of religion is a vital alternative that she achieves privileging her viewpoint. Such effects which the writer exerts through the self in performance empower her self to release it in all of its complexity and to stare back to the social discourses that so often silence the people with disability. As she narrates:

> My life energy comes in another form, in the passion to learn everything, to feel everything, to live every moment with presence and intensity. To study new things.To master new areas of knowledge. To write- alone and with Sandy. Together we have developed a new form that can accommodate our individual and unique voices into a dialogue. We write about things that are important to us. We make love at the typewriter, not in the bedroom […] losing a breast did alter my body image, as well as my body, but I never felt a diminishment of my feminity. My breasts were never the centre of my womanness. (97)

Such expression indicates that the writer has courage to live as a normal human being. She not only criticizes the women who are concerned about reconstructive surgery in order to please their husbands but also comes up with a frank celebration of her being a lesbian – an identity which is already stigmatized in heterosexual discourses that are dominant in our culture. It reveals that the problem is not the person with disabilities: but the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problems of the disabled person. So what are the actual norms and who and how they are constructed is a discursive category.

Although she encounters such difficulty on days when walking was exhausting to her, she interpreted it, automatically, as a problem arising from her illness, as a problem arising from the built environment having been created for too narrow a range of people and situations. This truly engulfs the spirit of the disabled world to be treated as equals. But, now there has been much agitation and the world of disable is also aware about them. They have tried to develop new literary awakening for themselves. As Barbara Rosenblum asserts:

> Eating was a supremely aesthetic experience for me. I always tried to eat and cook well for myself. Unlike many people who don't cook for themselves when they are alone. I didn't need the company of another person to stimulate me to cook: my own pleasure was sufficient. I would cook sweetbreads in a cream sauce or chicken with lemon and tarragon. Tastes would explode on my tongue, clear and definite tastes. (99)

Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. It limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual. Because of it they encounter cultural, physical or social barriers which prevent their access to the various systems of society that are available to other citizens. Thus, handicap is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others. But, things are changing and when Rosenblum gives these ideas she consolidates on the rebellious spirit of the disable people who deserve things to alter and create more friendly and suitable environments for the disabled.

The concept of norm must have existed in any society. By taking the demarcation line with the privileged norms or any specific society people are categorized in the groups of ‘able’ and ‘disable’. People try to compare with other and form an idea about it. The society appears responsible rather than an individual in the formation of norms. Rosenblum further writes;

> One day I stopped going to department stores. It was too hard. I decide to go to a shop for larger women. While walking to it, I passed a maternity shop and though that these clothes might fit me. They did. […] my veins are too fragile and unstable. They’ve stabled me too many times and missed. They have had too many veins burst open with gushing blood. The chemo has burned my vains too many times, making them fibrotic and painfully sensitive. (100)

Against the social construction of disability, especially by including coverage for persons who are perceived by others as having a disability, even in her unstable stage she shows her essence like the able. She did not have much impairment, but was treated as though she had a substantially limiting impairment. This part of the definition protects people who are "perceived" as having disabilities from employment decisions based on stereotypes, ears, or misconceptions about disability. It applies to decisions based on unsubstantiated concerns about productivity, safety, insurance, liability, attendance, costs of accommodation, accessibility etc.

Rosenblum becomes vociferous and claims humanness inherent in her disabled body even when she is not quite sure “what miraculous shape (it) will prefer next time” (104). “Sometimes I can hardly use human language to tell how I feel […] but I am not an animal. I am a human being, an articulate one at that, who is challenged to find words to apply to sensations I’ve never had before” (103). The failure of human language to describe her feelings is related to the complexity of her being which is often denied of social privileges. At the same time, it hints at the impossibility of the representation of the disabled body by an outsider. In this essay Rosenblum appears dauntless to mediate on the disability and she strongly positions her disabled self in the memory that claims agency of the people with disability privileging her viewpoints.

Ved Mehta, in his memoir "Bells" shares his own childhood experience of living in a school for blinds and writes as how he learned to read and write and also learned the world around him with the help of teachers who were partially or fully like him.

He describes how he desired to write on paper with an ink like his sister Umi. However he learned to use the Brail Script. Traditionally, it is thought that blind people do not dream nor can they figure out what world outside them is like. But Mehta proves all such statement fallacious. He writes that he too used to have dream and described things in the outside world. Though he is a man without sight, finally he became a writer like other so called "normals". The stereotypical assumptions are internalized by most of these children that they shall always remain what they are. For that reason sometimes they even stigmatize each other:

> Mr. Ras Mohun, who was the only person in the school with a watch, was in charge of the bell. Whatever he was doing – looking after Heea upstairs or working in his office downstairs or teaching us or supervising us – he never forgot to ring the bell at the appointed times, and wherever we were in the school we heard him […] Mr. Ras Mohun had taught us, and we would sing almost in a shout, so that he, in the

> tower upstairs, and Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, sitting above him, would hear us and give us merit points. (62)

The whole scenario of the school is like a panoptic where their conduct and activities are observed by the agencies of the normalizing discourse – the Matron, the Sighted Master, Miss Mary and the bell master MY. Ras Mohun. The more they try to resist the norm and act and behave in terms of their own motivation and inner strength, and the more they become assertive and refuse the stigma of blindness and of the disabled, the more they are stigmatized and represented as threatening and aggressive.

Disability is a cultural and historical construct fabricated by the socio-cultural factors. It thus, clusters ideological categories as sick, deformed, ugly, old, afflicted, abnormal etc. which disadvantages the people by devaluating bodies that do not confirm to certain cultural standards. Disability Studies thereforeresists the normalizing gaze and standards of norms. In this regard while analyzing Ved Mehta’s “Bells,” Saroj Ghimire, in his seminar paper writes:

> A refusal to mourn the blindness, Ved Mehta’s “Bells” reveals how the different children having different physical deformities such as dumbness, deafness, partial-sightedness and blindness are kept together under the constant observation within the four walls of the special school for the blind and proposes to resist the way they are expected to behave in certain normal way. (1)

The norm has been always maintained by the bells: the “wake up bell,” “hymn bell” (62), “breakfast bell,” “class bell” (63), “lunch bell” (65), etc. that Mr.Ras Mohun, “the only person in the school with a watch,” never forgets to ring (62). The time to play, to eat, to have fun, to relax, to wake-up, to go to bed, to pray and to enter the class has been fixed by the school.

Vedi, though stigmatized, repeatedly “questions the norms of stigma” and attempts to change the condition for his peers. The discourse of normalcy “supported and promoted by the missionary school has normalized him to neutralize the initial stigma of disability so that normalcy can be sustained and deepened” (Ghimire 3). Vedi and other disabled consider being capable of things they are desirous to do, or have the dream to do, or are capable of doing. Shaped by the narrative of otherness and exclusion and represented as a spectacle of erratic singularity, the disabled figure betrays the normative expectations, for he remains with the mark of otherness. However, Vedi shouts at his sister and “flings the slate,” let the “stylus drop on the table” and sits “scratching … [his] legs” (68). A child having strong sense of determinations, Vedi instead devotes much private effort to the mastery of areas of activity like games, caning and lifting dumbbells, ordinarily considered to be forbidden, on physical grounds, for the disabled.

The memory of his sister provides the stimulus for him to learn to read and write. Rather than through the norms of the school and the fear of punishment, he is motivated by his own inner strength, “my stylus finger grew, my hand grew, my strength grew, and I learned to align the paper on the slate properly and write Braille correctly” (68). Since Vedi’s father has “high hopes” for his son, he also expects Vedi to live with the stigma. For such inner motivations and the refusal of the norms, the stigmatized child, Vedi, is perceived to be too aggressive and a threat to the normative discourse. As Vedi narrates:

> After the relaxing period, there were two other bells – the dinner bell and the sleep bell. I remember that once, after the sleep bell, Mr. Ras Mohun caught me out of my bed, and summoned me to his office the next morning. “Yes? Speak, Vedi, speak,” he said. “You have made

> me very unhappy by being out of your bed after the sleep bell." He tapped what I was sure was his ruler on his desk impatiently, as if his hand were twitching to beat me. I couldn't find my voice, even though he kept on urging me to speak […] I jumped. "I was in the boys' common bathroom and couldn't get quickly into my bell – I mean, my bed, Uncle. (71-72)

Vedi's remark reveals the horror and abuse of stigma. The disabled are differentiated from one another in terms of the rule "made to function as a minimal threshold, an average to be respected or an optimum toward which one must move." This act not only resists the norms and refuses the stigma but also "subverts the whole symbolic economy of normalcy and calls into question the very process of stigmatization"(Ghimire 5). Vedi has every gust to assert the selfhood; however, his self-reliance is undermined not only by the disciplinary institution like the school, but even by his own father. Like the institution of education, the institution of family strategically confirms the discursiveness of the disability.

The more the disabled try to resist the norm and act and behave in terms of their own motivation and inner strength, and the more they become assertive and refuse the stigma of blindness and of the disabled, the more they are stigmatized and represented as threatening and aggressive. At the bottom of such practice lies the vested interest of the disciplinary institution to classify, categorize, hierarchize exclude and moreover, to rule the disabled body.

Mehta makes it clear by revealing how the society and its norms rule the body and create truth, identity and desirability about someone:

> That afternoon, the Sighted Master called us all to the postage stamp of a front courtyard for the game. He let us feel a huge rope that was

> coiled up on the ground. It was rough and abrasive and muddy and so thick that my hands could scarcely go round it. Following the Sighted Master’s directions, we uncoiled the rope and laid it out on the ground, […] along the rope, on either side of the line. (73)

Here, to follow the master is to follow the norms or the disciplinary power exerted by the institution like school. The concept of norm implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. Once the concept of norm becomes operative, people with disability are thought of as deviants. Such categorization functions on the basis of assumptions of “uninterrupted stability and continuity of the body” which Goffman includes in “virtual social identity” (101). Though such an assumption is a discursive construct it does exert greater effect upon the disabled self.

Disability is, thus, produced not by birth but by the way of legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse. Disabled body is constructed as the embodiment of physical insufficiency and deviance and becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity. Disability is simply unacceptable and therefore, makes the disabled themselves negate their existence. It is seen as public enigma and public threat. To be disabled is to be an “other” in the social group. Furthermore, disabled personalities are not treated on equal grounds. They are marginalized in every sector as in health, education, economy and others. In short, disabled people are socially unacceptable in one or the other way, it is measured in terms of the social conceptual framework of norms.

To conclude, the hierarchical discourse of stigma and normalcy deconstructs itself by bringing the disability from the stigmatized extraordinary body into the discursive socio-cultural framing of the disabled body itself. Moreover, it reveals that physical disability of the abnormal human body is not an absolute, inferior, inferior state, or a personal misfortune but an ideological construct of the disability experience as such.

Iv. Conclusion

The questions on the definition of ‘person with a disability’ and how people with disabilities perceive themselves are knotty and complex. It is no accident that these questions are emerging at a time when the status of persons with disabilities in society is changing dramatically. Stigma is non stigmatized people’s necessity in order to feel good about themselves. They possess false superiority thereby enslaving the concept that stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior. Likewise, non-stigmatized people convey a sense of inferiority to stigmatized people as invisible, non existent or dead through social avoidance and social rejection.

Disability, however, is simply unacceptable and therefore, makes the disabled themselves negate their existence. It is seen as public enigma and public threat. To be disabled is to be an “other” in the social group. Furthermore, disabled personalities are not treated on equal grounds. They are marginalized in every sector as in health, education, economy and others. In short, disabled people are socially unacceptable in one or the other way, it is measured in terms of the social conceptual framework of norms.

In this connection, the thesis tries to situate disability as a social construct and a product of the cultural codes and norms. It frames disability as a minority discourse and provides complex answers to the puzzling issues concerning disability. It tries to reveal new insights into the position of the disabled. The discourses created by the non-disabled are questioned and vehemently criticized as they are biased and distanced from the reality. The existing discrepancies between the able and the disable people are the results of the socio-cultural discursivity of disability imposed in a vertical manner.

The selected writers through their “inside out” works show that though they live in a crippled body, they are differently able. Their ability is overshadowed by the single trait of stigma or disability. Their writings have countered the presumed notions about disability which is often distorted. Though it is not easy to live in a crippled body but it is not impossible to discover ability within either.

The concern of the research therefore is to recognize the voice of disable and to subvert the existing notion of disability. Disability is merely a socio-cultural construct which tries to put the ability of the so called disabled people into an eclipse while stigmatizing them. As a result the single trait of disability becomes so much overwhelming that it almost overshadows their abilities and helps to form the discourse that disability is almost an inborn trait which cannot be avoided. The texts selected for the research exemplify and counter the existing notions of disability and help to establish the idea that disability is simply a discourse created by the so called ‘normals’ to justify their abilities. These texts not only counter the gaze of the ‘normals’ fixed upon the so called disabled people but also offer an alternative perspective to look at the disability experience that disability is not an inborn human weakness or a misfortune but a politico-cultural construct of the disability experience as such.

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