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REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY, FEMININITY AND SEXUAL AGENCY IN *ONE LITTLE FINGER* AND *NO LOOKING BACK*

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**Abstract**

Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness. Disabled people are systematically excluded, separated and socially disempowered. However, in recent years, disabled people have begun to challenge their marginalisation and inscribe themselves in the cultural mainstream through the medium of life writing. Women with disabilities are often considered asexual and incapable of taking on reproductive and maternal roles. Whereas major texts in disability studies, considered canonical in the field, do not discuss key aspects of sexual culture, often regarding sexuality and disability as incongruent identities, the life narratives underscore the importance of the vital role played by individual sexual urges in shaping one's personality and the overall sense of emotional wellbeing. In this paper, I propose to examine two autobiographies written by disabled women in India, *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib, and *No Looking Back* (2014) by Shivani Gupta, and discuss the themes of love, longing, and desire from the perspectives of disabled women. Their sense of marginalisation, vulnerability, and assertion comes across strongly in these narratives. My paper also makes a plea for the inclusion of sexual pleasure in the disability studies agenda.

**Keywords:** Sexual agency, Disability, Inclusion, Disabled Women's Autobiographies,

**Introduction**

Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness. People often view disability with disgust, suspicion or sympathy. Disabled people are systematically excluded, separated and socially disempowered. There is very little research available on the lives of disabled women in India. There has been very little effort made to study disabled people within their socio-cultural and economic context and to

understand the experience of disablement from the perspectives of a disabled person. However, in recent years, disabled people have begun to challenge their marginalisation and inscribe themselves in the cultural mainstream through the medium of life writing. Internationally, the array of disability life writing is now vast and many types of disabilities are represented in them. However, this is still a recent development in India. Disabled women's autobiographies in India offer us a chance to move beyond definitions that often provide fixity to the life of disabled people to evaluate/

understand how people live their lives through disability.

One of the most damaging, yet pervasive, types of exclusion faced by people with disabilities is sexual exclusion. The discourse of sexuality and disability often includes themes of victimization, abuse, and exploitation of women, the pleasurable aspect and sense of well-being associated with sexuality seem to be missing. The sexuality and sexual desires of people with disabilities often remain unaddressed. It is often argued that for a disabled person, particularly in India, there are so many different things to worry about that sex is the last thing on their mind. Their education, economic independence, relationships in the family, and acceptance in society are more pressing issues.

Although women and men with disabilities share similar experiences of devaluation, isolation, marginalization, and discrimination, their fortunes diverge in important ways. Disabled women are often perceived as lacking in desire and considered undesirable. They are often viewed as broken or damaged – and infantilised as being always in need of control or protection. The feminist activists and ideologues in India haven't really raised the issues concerning disabled women though they have addressed other differences among women along various axes like caste and class and the need to address intersectional identities on road to empowerment. Nidhi Goyal makes a pertinent observation in this context, "while women in India are battling to assert their sexual rights and rejecting patriarchal norms about their sexual behaviour, non-disabled women are perpetuating some of the same attitudes when it comes to disabled women" (Goyal, 138).

In this paper, I will examine two recent autobiographies *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib, and *No Looking Back* (2014) by Shivani Gupta, and discuss the themes of love, longing, and desire from the perspectives of disabled women. Whereas major texts in disability studies, considered canonical in the field, do not discuss key aspects of sexual culture, often regarding sexuality and disability as incongruent identities, these autobiographies underscore the importance of the

vital role played by individual sexual urges in shaping one's personality and the overall sense of emotional wellbeing. The autobiographies repeatedly assert that the internal makeup of people with disabilities is no different from others and just like anyone else, they have needs, dreams, and desires too. My paper also makes a plea for the inclusion of sexual pleasure in the disability studies agenda.

### **Disabled Women's Autobiographies in India**

Of late, the disabled women in India have begun to challenge the traditional misrepresentation of disability in culture and the assumption that being disabled is abnormal. Some of the remarkable life narratives written by disabled women in India are *Naseema: The Incredible Story* (2005) by Naseema Hurzuk, *As the Soul Flies* (2007) by Yasmeen Sawhney, *The Other Senses* (2012) by Preeti Monga, *No Looking Back* (2014) by Shivani Gupta, *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib, *River of Time* (2017) by Jeeja Ghosh, and so on. Most of these texts are published in the last ten/fifteen years, and it does, in a way, seem to suggest a cultural shift in attitude toward the public representation of disability in recent times.

In line with the social model of disability, most of these texts seek to tell personal stories of disability in wider social and cultural contexts. Physical or cognitive impairments are not the primary focus of these authors; instead, they document the everyday relationships, prejudices, friendships, and cultural representations through which a complex sense of identity is maintained in a wider social context. The autobiographies do narrate their inspiring stories, heroic battles against adversity, prejudice, stigmas and stereotypes against disabled persons, their will to succeed and their search for identity in an indifferent, unsympathetic world. But they also consistently draw attention to the barriers, discrimination, negative imagery or lack of opportunity which shape experience. Indeed, there's a lot more to these autobiographies than simple stories of triumph and 'overcoming' adversities. Recent autobiographies consistently reject the 'charity framework' and prefer the discourse of human rights and dignity of individuals to frame their arguments. The writers

put forward a rights-based approach to disability and seek reorganization of society to include disabled people. They seem to underline the fact that rather than celebrating the narratives as individualistic stories of triumph against insurmountable adversities, it is important to understand disability as a socio-cultural and political phenomenon to counter the notion of disability as an inherent unchallengeable trait located in an individual.

### ***One Little Finger and No Looking Back***

*No Looking Back* is a moving and quite inspiring story of a young, independent girl full of life, who developed tetraplegia after an accident at the age of 22. *One Little Finger* is the autobiography of a woman with very severe cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a neurological condition that affects motor skills and makes walking, talking, and eating, difficult activities. Chib writes that cerebral palsy has also handicapped the right side of her brain permanently blurring her speech. Years of training have enabled her to *speak* to a large extent but it takes time to clearly understand her. In the first case, disability resulted from an injury to the spinal cord in a freak car accident, in the second case, a result of umbilical cord getting stuck around the neck during delivery, lack of oxygen to the brain of the baby caused a lifetime of a severely disabling condition. Both women are confined to wheelchairs for life as a consequence. Despite the most challenging circumstances, they have become a source of inspiration for all disabled people. Shivani Gupta is passionate about helping to make the environment more accessible for persons with disabilities and champions the cause of the disabled everywhere. Today, she is one of India's best-known accessibility consultants. Malini Chib is a writer, disability activist and at the time of publishing the book, Senior Events Manager at the Oxford Book Store in Mumbai.

The difference in attitude towards disability in India and the West is a recurring theme in both books. Both Gupta and Chib write about surviving challenges of disability in a country that takes little account of the daily difficulties and indignities faced by them. They write about being stared at constantly, being asked intrusive questions by

strangers, and people suggesting various remedies including visits to sadhus to 'cure' their 'illness'. They write about many incidents in college or the workplace when their friends or colleagues seemed oblivious to their special needs, made plans for socialising, and had movie dates in front of them ignoring them completely as if they were simply invisible. They write from their location as members of middle/ upper-middle-class families in an urban, cosmopolitan milieu. They highlight the importance of familial ties and the constant encouragement and support of their parents as the most crucial factor that sustained them through the uphill struggle towards independence: financial, sexual and psychological.

Gupta was a hotel management graduate planning to go abroad on the eve of the accident. The freak accident turned her whole life upside down. Like a baby, she had to re-learn each movement, suffered from bladder incontinence and needed a caregiver to get through daily chores. Her degrees became useless overnight and no one was willing to employ her. Taking one day at a time, a small improvement at a time, accepting that she'll be confined to a wheelchair for life, Gupta gives an account of a truly inspiring journey of coming to terms with the disability forced upon her by the fateful accident to live a fulfilled, purposeful life completely on her terms. She is quite impatient with the charity model to address the concerns of disabled people.

Chib's parents moved from India to England when she was young, leaving behind a good life because they knew her needs would be better met in England. England eventually became her second home as she kept moving between the countries in search of education to suit her requirements, accessibility, and dignified independent existence. She writes extensively about her experiences as one of the first wheelchair-bound undergraduate students in Mumbai's prestigious college, her difficulties in negotiating her mobility and speech-related impairments, her angst at being excluded from the mainstream and her triumphant assertion and activism later on as one of the most prominent disability activists in India.

Both writers advocate a rights-based social model of disability and make a fervent plea for inclusion and accessibility. Chib writes, “society always has these stereotypical concepts of disabled people, where they are portrayed as being extremely dependent and helpless. Why? Disabled people are human beings first. But most people see the deformity and disability before they notice any personal attributes. The person within the disabled person is always unnoticed because their physical demands are so immense and often glaring” (85). Along with sharing glimpses of living with disability in a dignified manner, both writers also give a fascinating account of changing family relationships in the process of growing up, becoming independent and negotiating with and accepting their respective impairments.

#### **Gendered Dimension of Disability**

We must recognize that “disabled women occupy a multifarious and marginalized position in Indian society based on their disability and also on sociocultural identities that separate them into categories constructed according to such properties as caste, class and residential position. Disabled women thus can have plural identity markers that make their daily experiences perplexing and difficult” (Ghai,2002, 49). It has been observed that disabled men and women narrate their experiences in significantly gendered terms, with both content and styles reflecting the way in which gender expectations are modulated by disability status. The gendered dimension of disability is often ignored in the disability rights movement. Disabled people have often been represented as asexual, as freaks of nature, however, the gendered experience of disability reveals sustained patterns of difference between men and women. Upali Chakravarty argues that the image of disability may be intensified by gender. “For women, a sense of intensified passivity and helplessness, for men a *corrupted* masculinity generated by enforced dependence. Moreover, these images have real consequences in terms of education, employment, living arrangements, personal relationships, victimization and abuse that in turn reinforce the images in the public sphere (28).

Disabled women are often considered asexual and childlike. Often well-meaning over-protective families can create ‘learned helplessness in the disabled person preventing him/ her from being autonomous (Ghai,2015,12). Middle-class families in India could be aspirational about their children with disabilities to become financially self-sufficient, yet fail to recognise key aspects of their sexuality and demand for privacy (Sinha, EPW,2020). The topic of sexuality, the need for personal space, is usually never discussed or even acknowledged. Our liberal and progressive ethos quite willingly accepts independence as far as the professional competence and financial security of a disabled daughter is concerned but ignores the importance of emotional well-being and the need for companionship. Chib asserts, “People with disabilities are no children. We have thoughts too. Which could be adult thoughts, desires, feelings, passions and expectations like any non-disabled person” (147).

In the Indian cultural context, there is pervasive othering of the disabled woman and her infantilization. People often assume that she needs to be in constant protection of the family with few prospects of autonomy and independence. In fact, there’s nothing unusual about the constant surveillance of unmarried women in our culture. Against this background, both Chib and Gupta writers assert their need for privacy, separate space of their own, to be treated as adults. Chib writes that in London, she would go out frequently but was always accompanied by either her carer or her parents. She had to nag her parents to let her be on her own for some time. “I desired solitude sometimes. At the age of 28, it was too stifling to be accompanied by someone constantly. I wanted a bit of freedom, to be on my own for a while” (112). Gupta writes that before her accident, she never craved an independent identity. But after four years of being taken care of, she wanted to get away from the warmth and security of her family. She decided to live away from her family because she wanted to be independent. Ensuring that she wasn’t a burden on her father obsessed her. “I had compromised enough because of my disability—I didn’t want to

make any more compromises. I wanted to live on my terms, take risks and carve out my identity" (82)

Chib has constantly talked about gender roles in disability. She has referred to how a disabled woman faces difficulty in her everyday life. A disabled woman might need help with personal care, housekeeping, child care and several other responsibilities. On the other hand, male, disabled persons are free from these duties as well as various other socially assigned stereotypical duties. According to her, in India, the life of a disabled male is comparatively easy than a disabled woman. As such a male can get a normal woman for her bride but vice versa is not possible. "Disabled men are luckier than disabled women when it comes to partners. Disabled men get more able-bodied partners than do disabled women. An *able-bodied man who is a lover, partner, spouse or even a long-term friend with a disabled woman* is an extreme exception (Chib, 2015,105).

Gupta had lived a fairly independent life with supporting the extended family before her accident as her mother had passed away when she was in school and her father worked abroad. Her primary aim after the accident was to get some sense of 'normalcy' as she had known before, back in her life. Both, Chib and Gupta assert that being wheelchair-bound is simply one piece of their lives, one that while significant, is certainly not the core of their identity, nor their principal motivation. One cannot view an individual exclusively through the prism of disability, that is not how they understand themselves. Chib writes, "My disability is one of the components that make up my identity. I am a disabled, heterosexual, and Asian upper-middle-class woman. My disability is only one part of my identity, yet sadly, that is the only part the society decides to see or even acknowledge" (Chib, 2015, 106).

#### Disability and Sexual Agency

How do people with disabilities conceptualise, experience and engage with themselves as sexual beings? Disabled people are rarely asked to express their dreams, their sensual or sexual desires, as the standard belief is that they have none. Adlakha writes that in addition to the

specific constraints imposed by a particular disability, such experiences crystallise within the broad rubrics of culture, socialisation, socio-economic class, gender, caste and other specific locations that contribute to particular configurations of gendered sexual identities at the individual level. In most cultures, the pleasure associated with sexual intimacy is both decried and denied. Moreover, while sexual violence towards people with disabilities is moderately well documented, and human rights violations in this regard are well recognised, a crucial analysis of personal context and gender/ sexual dynamics, are limited. (Adhlakha,5)

To be perceived as physically attractive is to be socially and sexually desirable. As a result of their invalidated condition, women and men with disabilities are constrained in their opportunities to nurture and to be nurtured, to be loved and to love (Gerschick,1266). Individuals whose mobility is limited or whose deformity is evident are exposed to many forms of attack upon their sense of worth and desirability. Cultural constructs, such as a wholly unrealistic emphasis on physical beauty or strength as an index of being desirable, and the practical barrier to finding a partner, all combine to make the aim of sexual self-validation seem better given up. Any public articulation of sexuality as an aspect of life to which everyone should be entitled still remains almost unthinkable within mainstream discourse. It is often easier to disassociate from discussions pertinent to sexual urges and identity in India and undermine the role it plays in shaping our personality. Societal attitudes toward people with disabilities have largely served to quiet both personal and political discourse on sexual pleasure and disabilities until most recently. Against this backdrop, the assertions of femininity, voicing their needs of connection, mutual support, intimacy and pleasure in disabled women's autobiographies are refreshing and honest to the core.

#### Love, Longing and Desire in disabled Women's Autobiographies

Traditionally, due to cultural conditioning, women writing autobiographies in India have been either reticent about their sexual desires, their

longings and frustrations as a body or chose to write about it in an indirect manner. Historically, the DRM has focused its energy on issues more amenable to social change, such as access to the built environment, education and employment, ignoring the sexual issues relevant to disabled people (Chakravarty, 31). In addition to the accessibility issues, and marginalisation in the mainstream, the two autobiographies also explore the experiences of teen crushes, romantic love, sexuality, conjugality and the social and psychological barriers to be negotiated in intimate relationships marking a refreshing and courageous departure from conventions.

Though both write about their longing for love, friends and relationships as any other girl in that age bracket would, Chib is more forthcoming and direct about disabled women's sexuality, probably because of her academic training and experience in the DRM and exposure to the rights movements abroad. She writes extensively about her feelings regarding love and sexuality in her book, she has also written many articles about the topic. She writes about how disabled women's personal and sexual needs are constantly hidden and ignored. Disabled women directly and tacitly are taught to be ashamed of their bodies. And disabled women too shy away from the problem, thinking they are asexual, and usually hide behind a self-created brave front of denying that their sex and sexuality matter to them. However, "The truth about disabled people is that disability does not hamper a person's emotional need to be touched and loved on an emotional and physical plane just like everyone else. Our sexual organs are not damaged or affected, and hence we do long for and are able to enjoy pleasurable sexual experiences" (2015, 105). She continues, "Sex is a basic physiological need that even animals have. Like any other person of my age, I adore romances. Being in the mainstream of life, one sees a lot of images of a man and woman together. As I grew older, I naturally desired sex and relationship. Like most women sometimes I craved to be in the arms of a man, (but) most men look at me as asexual" (ibid).

Sharing her teenage angst and anxieties while studying in a co-ed college with regular students for

the first time in life, she writes, "Like most women of my age, I loved the company of men. I would try and seek them out and initiate a conversation... only a handful of men would make that extra bit of an effort to understand my atypical speech. But they never really went beyond superficial chatting" (64). Social events continued to make her get into dregs of depression because she got the feeling that she was never really wanted. She writes, "I wondered if there would ever be a man in my life? Would a man see beyond my body? Would anyone put their arms around me and dance with me? Would anyone kiss me passionately? Would I ever be needed by a man emotionally or would I always be regarded as a burden for someone to take care of?" (65) and that "I have had a hard time accepting that I am trapped in a rejected body. A body that is not sexually attractive" (146)

Chib writes that her speech was slow and laborious so she often felt left out, isolated and frustrated at not being able to participate and contribute to conversations fast. She writes that hardly two/ three boys took the trouble to get to know her and understand her speech, most others looked at her as if she was still a child, "It was a combination of their shyness as well as and unsurity about how to act and what to do. I think it also had to do with their macho image. For a typical boy, it was not acceptable to be seen with a disabled girlfriend. They all wanted a 'normal girlfriend' in their arms" (147). She writes that at times, attending weddings in family or friends seemed extremely painful and she collapsed into tears but she chose to cry at night, quietly. Weddings were a reminder that she possibly would not share such an equation with someone. Once after such a bout, she tried to verbalise her emotional outbursts of needing a partner, like most people around her. her aunt and uncle agreed that she should satisfy her sexual needs, "but of course, no one knew how?" (148) With time and maturity, she has become more detached she writes. She no longer thinks that the only way forward is marriage.

Gupta was a stylish, independent, twenty-two-year-old girl with a steady boyfriend on the eve of her accident. Everyone in her family blamed her boyfriend for her accident because he was driving

the car. When she was in the hospital, her family resented her boyfriend's visits but she wanted him to visit daily. He represented 'normalcy' to her. When everything was bleak, his presence gave her a sense of purpose to face her situation with a fighting spirit. He was after all, "a man once attracted to me, a light at the end of the tunnel" (54). The freak accident suddenly forced the prospect of wheelchair-bound desolate existence on a lively, vivacious girl of twenty-two. Though she knew everything between them has changed overnight, his visits had a therapeutic effect as they saved her from despair.

Gupta is irked by random bystanders feeling sorry for her and commenting that no one would marry her now and how she's doomed because of that. She writes that each time she went out of home in the wheelchair in Delhi, she had to face curious bystanders, random strangers who wanted to know what happened to her and feeling sorry for her "such a young and pretty girl on a wheelchair – who will marry her now?" (76) They were completely unmindful about the impact of such comments on her. When her priority was getting used to the wheelchair and getting some degree of control over her life, finding some mobility despite huge limitations, such comments made her feel even more dejected. Though she did not care much for marriage in that state, the prospect of a lonely future without any companion was unsettling. Gradually, she got used to it. Social attitudes like this reveal the centrality of the idea of marriage and family to a woman's identity and sense of self-worth. Gupta was convinced that for wheelchair-bound people like her, the option of love and romance simply did not exist but during her training in Salisbury, England, she saw many people like her socialising, going to parties and so on. She happened to be a guest at one such party and witnessed an engagement ceremony between a wheelchair-bound guy and a pretty physiotherapist at the training institution in Salisbury. Though she felt happy for them, she thought it was incredible, "Was this really possible, I wondered the entire evening, gazing at them with a sense of envy" (79).

While working at the Indian Spinal Injury Centre, she met Vikas, an occupational therapist and

colleague. He was seven-year younger than her but they discovered a lot in common and became close friends. He was the only person, she writes, who did not consider her disabled and tried to get to know the person she was within her physically imperfect body. Everyone else she knew had their affection, concern, liking or any other feeling towards her tainted to some extent by her disability. Vikas motivated her to push herself beyond the limits imposed by her impairment. She writes that Vikas was sometimes ruthless to her in his expectations, asking things of her that were too difficult for her to achieve but it was those expectations that forced her to challenge herself and her capabilities. She writes about her insecurities and anxieties when they two went to attend a training program in Bangkok. She felt, "He would abandon me... as soon as he realised exactly how much assistance I needed in my activities of daily living" (116).

Gupta shares some bitter experiences of being left out by friends and colleagues from their socialising plans because they were not keen to accommodate her special needs. Soon the friendship with Vikas developed into a close bond as he never let her feel that he is making any 'sacrifice' or accommodation to be with her, there was never any condensation or patronizing. Vikas accompanied her while travelling, they went sightseeing, to restaurants, and pubs and hosted parties for friends at her place. She no longer felt left out and learned to enjoy her life despite the limitations. She writes that Vikas was selfless in his love and friendship. An able-bodied man who is a lover, partner, spouse or even long-term friend of a disabled woman is an extreme exception. Gupta writes that taking the responsibility for her or just standing by her through everything was not an easy task. "It meant helping me in grooming and using the toilet, apart from pushing the wheelchair around and facing discrimination with me" (138). She writes how her caregiver tried to be her moral guardian when she witnessed a passionate kiss between them. She even tried to blackmail them and warned his parents about this. Both, Vikas's parents and Gupta's father were against their relationship. While Gupta understood Vikas's parent's opposition and tried to prepare herself for a future without Vikas, he didn't

agree with his parents at all. They kept in touch even after Vikas went to London for further education and work. Finally, after ten years of close friendship, that had remained intact despite parental opposition from both sides, through periods of separation in connection with work, and so on, his parents agreed to their marriage.

Gupta writes that at the age of 39, "Marriage somehow, had begun to seem unimportant now. After our closeness through all those years, what did marriage really mean? How would it change our lives?" (187) Though she had reconciled herself that marriage was not meant for someone like her, she writes that "strangely enough, the proposition seemed to heal me somewhere within and bring back my faith in life. It seemed to calm the anger I felt towards society since my accident... somehow the thought of getting married seemed to wash away all my negative disability karma" (188). Marriage at that moment was symbolic of society accepting her the way she was, with all shortcomings—just the way Vikas had accepted her. She writes about the changing role and responsibilities and shares her anxieties and insecurities in new relationships, her joint business venture with Vikas as a leading accessibility consultant and the sense of purpose and engagement with work her relationship gave her. Sadly, life had other plans for her. Just as in the beginning, in the last part of the autobiography, Gupta is devastated, once again trying to collect the broken pieces of life, find meaning and purpose, and hold on to her sanity after the tragic death of her husband in a terrible road accident

Despite the different trajectories of their lives, one can find certain commonalities in their attitudes towards love, romance, and companionship. The process of gendered socialisation and internalisation of cultural norms shapes most of their gender expectations. From a young age, they internalise and are guided by social attitudes, expectations and modes of behaviour considered appropriate for women. Love and companionship are big motivation factors for any individual for a sense of emotional stability and security. The young disabled women have normal desires and expectations from life as anyone else in

their age group. However, social attitudes and cultural norms usually deny them a legitimate feminine identity and they are forced to suppress their normal desires for fear of humiliation, rejection and social stigma Ghai makes a pertinent observation in this context, "the assumption that sexuality and disability are mutually exclusive ...denies that people with deviant bodies experience sexual desires and refuses them recognition as sexually typical despite their differences. In addition, the construction of the daughter as a burden is rooted in a cultural milieu that looks at daughters as 'parai', and puts disabled women in abusive marriages in a very difficult position (Ghai, 2002,53). Recent life narratives by disabled women like Gupta and Chib, who also happen to be disability rights activists and pioneering accessibility consultants articulate the desires and aspirations of disabled women. As Chib asserts, "the truth about disabled people is that disability does not hamper a person's emotional need to be touched and loved on an emotional and physical plane just like everyone else. Our sexual organs are not damaged or affected, and hence we do long for and are able to enjoy pleasurable sexual experiences" (2015, 105).

### **Concluding Observations**

Sexuality is a vital means of pleasure, interpersonal connection, personal efficacy, and acceptance of one's body and self. The sexuality and sexual desires of people with disabilities, mostly remain unaddressed and unacknowledged. Disabled women's autobiographies question their misrepresentation in the mainstream culture and argue that the only way to normalise their existence and give them agency is by understanding and facing the fact that the internal makeup of people with disabilities is no different from anyone else in terms of needs, dreams and desires. As a result of their invalidated condition, women and men with disabilities are constrained in their opportunities to nurture and to be nurtured, to be loved and to love. Though people recognise their need for financial independence and inclusion, their emotional and physical needs are often ignored. The autobiographies do not dwell upon the physical pain due to impairment; their focus is on the pain experienced because of their mobility impairment.

They highlight the pain caused to them by society, and their fierce determination of being a part of mainstream society, living life to the fullest despite the impairment and obstacles created in the built-in environment which seems unwelcoming to people with disabilities. They challenge the stereotyped representations of disabled people as being extremely dependent and helpless and argue that people must recognise their identities beyond their physical deformity or disability. In articulating their desire for finding loving companionship, to live a fulfilled life, they seem to highlight the truth about disabled people is that disability does not hamper a person's emotional need to be touched and loved on an emotional and physical plane just like everyone else and challenge the misleading notion of their being 'asexual' on account of some impairment.

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