

The Spectrum of Silent Pain and Hidden Hope of Disabled Women in India Through Malini
Chib's Autobiography *One Little Finger*

Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)
Volume 11, Issue 3, September 2020: 712-715

**The Spectrum of Silent Pain and Hidden Hope of Disabled Women in India
Through Malini Chib's Autobiography *One Little Finger***

Asiya Samoon

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir
Asiya.samoon@gmail.com

Literature is not only about the dispersion of society but also about the radiation of human activities in that particular society through its own imaginative, poetic beauty since the ages. In this framework, the literature on disabled people has reflected the disabled culture, their humiliation, activities, pains, pangs, pathos, and exploitations. Although their narratives have been read and studied worldwide since their inception, they have often been given less prominence than others. Therefore, Disabled records have been neglected from the literary canon of history for an extended period. However, with time, it has dismantled the old stereotypical framework and broken the long silence of the marginalized disabled, especially the disabled women who have been trying to possess everything, such as the sea, wind, sky and earth and moving out to create their space in the human logo. In this context, Malini Chib's autobiography *One Little Finger* (2011) is a powerful story of the silent pain and hidden hope of disabled women in India through her triumph in overcoming disability. It deals with the harsh reality of her distress, pangs, pathos, and sufferings and exposes her cruel treatment in India, which is a diffraction of disabled women in India. This paper attempts to show how Malini Chib's autobiography shows the testimony of the silent pain and hidden hope of the disabled women in India.

Keywords: Dispersion, Disable, Stereotypical, Malini Chib, Diffraction

For any lived body, the world appears as a system of possibilities correlating to its intentions. For any lived body, the earth seems to be populated with opacities and resistances correlative to its limits and frustrations. For any bodily existence, an 'I cannot' may appear to set limits to the 'I can.'

— Iris Marion Young, on Female Body Experience (2005)

A disabled person is a person with an impairment who experiences a disability. Disability is the result of negative interactions that take place between a person with impairment and their social environment. In this sense, an indicator of a society's regard for the disabled lays in the terms used to label them. It is a disturbance of a bodily system caused by infection, disease, age, or disorders of a physical system caused by social factors. Such factors can include accidents,

poverty, and pollution. It also states that a person's adaptive equipment should be described functionally as something that assists a person, not as something that limits a person, for example, "a woman who uses a wheelchair" (Sarkar 2) rather than "a woman in/confined to a wheelchair" (Sarkar 2). However, in the late 1980s, primarily influenced by people with disabilities themselves who argued that disability is a socially constructed concept and society itself creates the disability, there was a shift from the medical model to the social model. In this model, prejudice, discrimination, and inaccessible environments are the disabling factors rather than the medical conditions.

Malini Chib is a renowned name in the history of Indian disabled literature in the 21st century. She is much acclaimed for her depiction of the empirical view of Indian mentality regarding disability through her art of craftsmanship which touches the global horizon. Therefore, she is widely appreciated for her technical excellence as well as the vernacular form of memoir, exploring a wide range of themes and subjects regarding the present social scenario in India, especially the pangs and pathos of disabled women as well as the marginalized one in terms of physicality, colour, race, power, gender, sex, identity, and so on in the grip of logocentric gravity to reform the present social structure through bringing the social and cultural change. She persists in working hard to express the plight of disabled individuals through her writing to raise awareness at both local and global levels. Her goal is to create a world where disabled individuals are fully integrated into society and allowed to interact with the broader human community.

Chib's book, *One Little Finger*, is the autobiography of a woman with a severe form of Cerebral Palsy. Her one little finger' is her lifeline, her powerhouse of strength. She uses it to type, first on a typewriter, then on a computer and, much later, on a mobile phone to send text messages. In this context, it delineates a path-breaking exploration of disability and gender of a disabled girl whose pain and suffering become a wheel for universal hidden hope.

Her autobiography began at the beginning of her life when she was in her mother's womb. During delivery, she was stuck in the umbilical cord, resulting in her disability. At her birth, doctors told her family that it was tough for her to survive and that she would have to live a vegetable life if she survived. That was a hard time for her family and her mother, who later slipped into depression. Chib has talked about the attitude of people and doctors. For doctors, she was just a project to learn better as she could not feel any emotions from their sides. However, her parents were very active and never lost hope. They visited many doctors, and finally, it was declared that she had cerebral Palsy, which is almost incurable. As she says:

Every doctor my parents met in India told them I would be a vegetable and nothing could be done for me. The doctors confidently said to them that the damage to my brain was irreversible. (Chib 5)

Her story deals with the effect of internal discomfort from the external impact of humiliation, harassment, embarrassment, and teasing, which refers to the psychological distress that results from incongruence between one's sex assigned at birth and one's disability. It reveals how she, at the very beginning of her life, refuses to go to outside activities such as school, college office

The Spectrum of Silent Pain and Hidden Hope of Disabled Women in India Through Malini
Chib's Autobiography *One Little Finger*

and other social activities due to pressure to dress in a way associated with fear of being harassed or teased. It can also impair the ability to function at any outside work. It can lead to depression and anxiety and hurt daily life. This point highlights the dark side of Indian society, which plays a significant role in one's biology, sexuality, gender, manner, and marriage. She ironically asks the questions against the social norms:

I knew I was different and trapped in a dysfunctional body, but did others realize I had a mind, a spirit separate from this body? Did they realize that my mind was normal? Did they consider thinking that my desires were just the same as theirs? (Chib 54)

In India, she considered herself merely a vegetable despite fulfilling most criteria of having a sound mind. She recalls in her book the problems she faced when she got her first job in Mumbai:

The basic problem of working in India was the lack of accessibility. Even the toilet for people with disabilities was not accessible, neither the canteen was accessible, nor the lift good. Even for the toilet, there were steps. So finally I had to leave the job. (Chib 104)

Besides India, her story depicts her life in England; how her 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. She describes growing up in a close family with her loving parents, 'normal' little brother, aunts, uncles and cousins, whom she treated like brothers and sisters. Her tales of these times with her family took me back to my childhood. Life in the USA is awe-inspiring. There are many arrangements, such as an accessible library, park, hotel, restaurant, theatre, and museum for disabled people. She remembers:

What I found hugely amazing was that disabled people were in charge and placed in positions of power. I saw many disabled people like me, or more severely than me, in positions of power, heading disability organizations. (Chib 84)

Moreover, her story delineates the humiliation, harassment, teasing, and embarrassment she faced due to her childhood uneasiness in and outside the home. At the same time, it shows her unflinching courage and invincible rebellious spirit, which motivate disabled women to rise against the ridiculous oppression, persecution and violence within the logocentric society in India. *One Little Finger* is the personable and lively recollection of Malini Chib's journey from being branded a 'permenant vegetable ' to becoming an internationally recognised scholar and activist.

After the above discourse, it is quite evident that Malani Chib is sensitive to human suffering and explains life's woes in the broader framework. Scrutiny of her autobiography reveals that the dynamics of protest are manifested in many forms, political, racial, social, sexual and psychological and in varied dimensions. Therefore, her testimony makes an in-depth study of the silent pain and hidden hope of disabled people, which left an indelible mark on their psyche, personalities and points of view, to explore various types of protest, its causes and effects on the ordinary person which unfolds the global concerns. In summary, the autobiography serves as a

symbol of the struggle humans face against different forms of oppression, and most importantly, it represents the universal desire for freedom and liberation.

Works Cited

1. Adams, Rachel, et al., editors. "Disability." *Keywords for Disability Studies*, NYU Press, 2015, pp. 5–11. Web.
2. Buckingham, Jane. "Writing Histories of Disability in India: Strategies of Inclusion". *Disability and Society* 26:4. 2011. Web.
3. Chib, Malini. *One Little Finger*. SAGE India. 2010.
4. Dworkin, Ronald. *Taking Rights Seriously*. London: Duckworth, 1977.
5. <http://glocalcolloquies.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/21.-Vishal-Singh-205.pdf>
6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263683061_One_Little_Finger_-_By_Malini_Chib
7. James D. Fearon, *What Is Identity (As We Now Use The Word)?* Stanford University, 1999.
8. Menon, Nivedita. *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Zubaan/Penguin Books. 2012.
9. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Longueuil, Québec: Point Par Point, 2007.
10. Nayar, K. Pramod. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd licensees of Pearson Education in South Asia, 2010.
11. Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Clash Within Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future*. Permanent Black. 2007.
12. Sarkar, Avishek. "Differently Abled Section of the Society." 2018, Pp 1-3, <https://www.scribd.com/document/138540262/Differently-Abled-Section-of-the-Society>
13. Waugh, Patricia. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
14. Wehmeier, Sally. And Ashby, Michael. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2000.