

## CHAPTER—3

### Portrayal of Disability in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

*Clear Light of Day*, a novel published in 1980, is written by Anita Desai who has been shortlisted thrice for Booker Prize. It is set in Old Delhi with 1947 carnage and exodus as its backdrop. Hence, it is also known as the novel of partition. Kamila Shamsie, who has written an introduction to this novel, classifies it as the genre of South Asian Gothic because like the traditional Gothic style there are references to the ghosts of Mira Masi, Mr Das and Mrs Das and of the cow carcass decaying in the well of the garden. Anita Desai points out:

Here in the house ...the very spirits of her parents that brooded on- here they still sat, crouched about the little green baize folding table that was now shoved into a corner with a pile of old *Illustrated Weeklys* and thin pencils with which her parents had sat, day after day and year after year till their deaths.... (33)

The novel, *Clear Light of Day*, makes use of flashback technique with reference to its narrative. Kamila Shamsie states, “The four-part structure of the novel mirrors this question: present, past, further past, present again” (x). The entire series of events revolve round Das Family comprising family members namely, Tara and her husband Bakul, her sister Bimla and her brothers Raja and Baba, and their parents. The plot of the novel begins in adulthood, with Tara married to Bakul, an Indian ambassador to the United States of America. Tara comes all the way from America for attending the marriage of her niece, Benazir, Raja's daughter, in Hyderabad. Her elder sister Bimla, a history teacher, still unmarried stays back in Old Delhi for the care of her disabled brother, Baba. Bimla denies attending the marriage on grounds of

the letter sent to her by her second brother, Raja, mentioning himself as her new landlord. The plot shifts back to the adolescence of the characters or British India showing tuberculosis infected Raja ministered by Bimla. Recuperating from the disease, he glorifies his landlord, Hyder Ali Saheb and his Urdu language. Such fascination persuades him to follow Hyder Ali to Hyderabad and marries his daughter, Benazir. Their caretaker, Aunt Mira looking after them in their parent's absence, dies of alcoholism. Meanwhile, Tara marries Bakul leaving Bimla all alone with their Baba.

The scene of the narrative shifts further back to childhood and depicts Tara, Bimla, Baba and Raja waiting for Baba's birthday. Aunt Mira, a widow maltreated by in-laws, is brought back to train Baba. Raja shares his poetry exclusively with Bimla. Raja and Bimla, fascinated by fame, aspire to be hero and heroine, respectively, but Tara simply wishes to be a mother for which she is mocked. Finally, the narrative shifts forward to adulthood or independent India representing Tara with Bimla in Old Delhi. Hoping to restore Bimla's broken relationship with Raja, Tara advises Bimla to attend the marriage of their niece. Tara finally succeeds in convincing Bimla to forgive Raja for the letter and thereby, brings about the reconciliation of Bimla and Raja. (Desai)

A lot of research has been conducted on Anita Desai's novel, *Clear Light of Day* and each study highlights distinct issues like imagery, feminism and partition. For instance, partition, be it a family partition or country partition, is one of the major themes of this novel, as affirmed in its introduction by Kamila Shamsie. She observes, "Among everything else that this is, it is a novel of Partition. 1947 is the backdrop of the story" (ix). Highlighting the capacity of time both as destroyer and preserver, Md. Nazmus Saqueb Kathon examined *Clear Light of Day* in the light of paradox of time.

She explored the paradox of time by referring to the divisive beginning and reconciliatory end of members of Das Family. She drew a parallelism between Das Family and British India as both have experienced pangs of partition. According to Mir and Nargis, the novel is preoccupied with the element of feminine sensibility where female characters like Bhimla continue to be a symbol of self-sacrifice for the sake of keeping their family intact. Her rejection of Dr Biswas's proposal symbolises her independence from patriarchy in which Tara pushes herself so easily. Although *Clear Light of Day* employs images like the green scum of old well, bee attack on Bimla, Aunt Mira's going nude, and cow drowning, it is not as rich in imagery as the rest of her novels. Imagery is not capitalised as 'objective correlative' to display mental states of her characters. However, it excels in domestic imagery. For instance, the scummy pond symbolises the unchanging nature of the house in Old Delhi.

Even the static house represents Tara's boredom. Hyder Ali's departure stands for Indian partition and his deserted house suggests plight of Bimla. Baba's listening to the same songs repeatedly portrays changelessness of house and the people who inhabit it (Prasad). In addition to this, Kirsti Weel Sanrud analysed *Clear Light of Day* as the novel of themes, symbolism and imagery. He brought forth the idea that Das Family stands for the country itself and the death of a cow in the well symbolizes impending atrocities of Partition. Moreover, all characters were scrutinized symbolically as Baba stands for the society which fails to accommodate weaker sections of the society.

All the aforementioned studies have overlooked the theme of disability representation based on the characterisation of Baba. This unexplored theme has galvanised the sensibility of a researcher into examining the novel through a disability perspective. The study focuses on the representation of Baba's identity and

subjectivity through social markers like language description, embodiment, dress, behaviour, choice of space and relationship. Anita Ghai states identity and body are closely associated, that is, identity emerges from the body which implies as to how body appears, what body feels, says and does and how others experience body (239). Baba is the only character portrayed with the condition of autistic disability and the rest of the characters are depicted as non-disabled. Medically, autism is conceived as the neuro-developmental disorder diagnosed by symptoms like impairment in social interaction, impairment in communication, limited repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviours, activities and interests. (Zager 12)

Drawing on the Medical Model of disability, Baba's autistic condition is authenticated by his recurring behaviour of playing the same records on his gramophone in the novel. Tara mentions, "Baba still plays the same song? Tara asked. He never stops, 'said Bim, smiling. Not for a day" (11). Baba's communicative problem is highlighted showing him in a state in which he hardly speaks for himself. His communicative vacuity confirms his second symptom of autistic identity. Bringing forth his impaired social interaction, he hardly interacts with people around. It implies that people with autism never respond to social stimuli of verbal and non-verbal nature. They behave indifferently towards verbal stimuli like the question, shouting their name, command, request, greeting and non-verbal stimuli such as passing smiles, gestures and pointing at objects. According to Zager Dianne, autism is characterised by impaired social reciprocity which implies an imbalance in the equation of giving and taking interaction.

It is difficult to integrate the verbal and non-verbal components of communication. The condition is identified by symptoms of limited relationships and interests. The person with the autistic condition often averts eye contact, feeling no

ethical responsibility to attend the voices and concerns of people around (8). Examining Baba in the light Zager Dianne's elaboration, his autistic identity is found accurately represented. He hardly replies to Bimla's questions and suggestions. Therefore, she doubts his competence and describes him futile in terms of performance in their office. His sister, Bimla, repeatedly asks Baba to go to the office for which he doesn't respond. Desai observes:

Baba, do you think you might go to the office? Won't you go today, Baba? Bim asked softly, not looking at him, looking at the tea-cups. Do you. You could catch a bus. It will make a change. We will be all busy. Then come home for a lunch. Or stay if you find it interesting. (16)

Identified as a shadowy figure, Baba is represented as very sensitive to the noise of the outside world that hints at his being autistic. Uta Frith puts forward in his book, *Autism: A Very Short Introduction* (2008) that one of the core features of autism is oversensitivity to stimuli of various types like noise and touch (71). Peggy Parks further reinforces the symptom of hypersensitivity of autism in his book and argues that classical signs of autism include a problem in making eye contact, repulsiveness to hugging, hypersensitivity, rigidly defiant to eating, angry outburst and bashing one's head. (18)

Baba is portrayed hypersensitive with respect to painful incidents and external noise, be it the chirping of *koel*, the noise engendered by automobiles or children moving around. For instance, the moment birds start tweeting in their garden, he feels panic and unease that forces him to leave his room for the street to rid of the chirping noise. None among his siblings summon the courage to stop him from going out

despite seeing him walking towards the exit. Paradoxically, such twittering of birds is shown to drive him frantic in contrast to listening to loud music on the gramophone.

Expanding upon his description a bit further, it becomes obvious that he is not in tune with nature as he likes to listen to instrumental music but he is allergic to natural sounds. These intolerant natural sounds which turn him frantic and make him put on and put off the clothes simultaneously. At times, he flings them around the room haphazardly causing mess and mayhem in it. It is inferred that Baba has been portrayed as irresponsible with respect to his personal petty tasks. Desai mentions:

The silence of the room seemed to admit those other sounds that didn't soothe or protect him but on the contrary, startled him and drove him panic- the *koel* calling, calling out in the tall trees, a child crying in the servant's quarters, a bicycle dashing past, its bell jingling. (22)

Baba's hypersensitive nature has been repeatedly referred to affirm his autistic identity which surfaces on hearing the crash of planks falling down from the cart pulled by a horse. Baba being alone at the roadside is scared at sighting it because he is not well-trained to acclimatize to any incidental situation. Therefore, he isn't in a position to cope up with this unusual accident. Feeling himself crashed under the weight of noise and pitiable condition of the horse, he throws up his arms to cover his face. Baba's sympathetic nature can't see the horse squirming in the middle of the road. Therefore, he folds his arms before his eyes with the intention not to see anything depressing. However, he hears some of the screams of the man who keeps whipping the animal. He is shocked to sight aggressive man whipping the horse again and again. It brings out his subjectivity by evoking his sympathy towards the horse that is abused so ruthlessly. His sympathetic and pitiable nature for others brings out

his subjectivity which isn't spiced by the intervention of society. It shows his natural response to the unnatural stimuli. The author of the novel seems to have mixed feelings for Baba because sometimes she describes him sympathetic and, at times, depicts him hypersensitive towards his surroundings. For instance, Desai comments:

Baba raised both his arms, wrapped them about his head, his ears and eyes, tightly, and blind, turned and stumbled almost fell but ran on back up the road to the house, to the gate...his arms still doubled over eyes so that he should not see and about his ears so that he should not hear. (25)

Baba's sensitiveness is genuine as the incident makes him feel miserable. It seems as if he himself is trampled by someone. He is dumbfounded by the outside happening which is so shocking for him that Tara has to struggle to drag down his arms from his face. His wet eyes are seen rolling in their sockets wildly and the dark spots under them are looking bruised. His lips appear dry with teeth protruding outwards as if he has been racing. Tara asks him whether he has been injured but he doesn't answer her question. So she eventually leads him to his room where he twists himself into a heap without speaking to anyone. The narration of this incident shows that his autism has been made exaggerated with some emotionally charged statements. Desai mentions:

Tara saw him...Tugging at his arms to drag them away from his face, she cried, 'are you hurt? Baba, say-are you hurt? Pulling his arms away, she uncovered his face and saw his eyes rolling in their sockets like a wild horse, his lips drawn back from his teeth as if he were racing. (25)

The symptoms of autism as enumerated above include communication deficit, repetitive behaviour and oversensitivity. These symptoms are determined by a

medical discourse which focuses more on symptoms than to look into the problem of autism from a phenomenological and ethnographic perspective to capture experiences of autistic people from sufferer's point of view. Solomon and Bagatelle state that "Autism is currently viewed in biomedical terms as a neuro-developmental disorder that affects social cognition" (3). These symptoms are not absolutely correct because medical discourse alone cannot account for autism. It solely focuses on the challenges of affected individuals as authenticated in laboratory experiments, resulting in a contradiction between biomedical perspective and experiences of autistic individuals along with their families. Consequently, such tension-caused ideologies, experiences and discourses of autistic people contrast with ideologies, experiences and discourses of medical practitioners who render service in institutions. (Solomon and Bagatell<sup>3</sup>)

Therefore, prevailing medical discourses are instrumental in constructing subjectivity of autistic person in general and Baba in particular. His subjectivity is robbed of its agency. He is not free to create himself because he is subjected to medical discourses which define him, his role, place and his working capacity. Tremain Shelly has rightly observed that for Foucault a subject means someone subjected to the control of someone else. Moreover, the subject is also someone connected to his own identity through self-knowledge. Therefore, Baba's self-knowledge based subjectivity seems subservient to the structure represented by his siblings, Raja, Bimla and Tara. Kath Woodward states:

This tension, implicated in the interrelationship between agency and structure, addresses the extent to which identity formation is influenced or even determined by structural factors, which may take the form of external constraints or the limitations of the bodies we inhabit. (xi)



Even Anita Desai's description of Baba's autistic symptoms is governed by medical science. She draws on medical discourse while writing about Baba. Her discourse about Baba in novel reinstates and strengthens autism as a biomedical condition, distancing it from its social construction. Observing and writing about autism exclusively from the medical point of view cannot help us to understand it from a cultural or psychological perspective holistically. Drawing on the Bio-Pscho-Social model of disability, Baba's autism cannot be ascertained purely as a medical, social or psychological problem, rather it is the outcome of factors of all the three areas. Therefore, the onus lies on the shoulders of all positional intellectuals to highlight all the factors contributing to the causation of a particular problem.

Looking at Baba's autistic condition from the postmodern point of view, it seems more the case of neurodiversity than a biomedical condition. The diverse neurological conditions are determined by the variations in the genetic constitution of individuals. Neurodiversity, a portmanteau word formed out of diversity and neurology, opines that the neurological variations shouldn't be pathologised, rather these should be recognised and accepted as a social category. Alice Hall observes:

The term neurodiversity is used to refer to a range of atypical cognitive styles due to neurological differences, including autism, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity, epilepsy, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, Tourette's syndrome and schizophrenia. (167)

Baba's taking away of gramophone from Hyder Ali's home has many implications. First, he is not appealed to anything but gramophone. Secondly, the unattended house lying open offers him a chance to steal away anything of his choice from Hyder Ali's home because there is none to stop or enquire him. Bimla points

out, “And in a little while, he came out, staggering under the weight of the gramophone that he carried in his arms, carefully balancing the stacks of records on top of it” (116). There are two things to be inferred from Baba’s behaviour-his overindulged interest in the instrument and his natural relationship for gramophone which stands for music. Picking and choosing a particular instrument among many things lying around unattended indicates his interest in music. It manifests Baba’s buried talent which has neither been explored by writer nor has been recognised by his family. His association with gramophone is to be understood metaphorically. Gramophone stands for music and its playing by Baba shows his natural inclination to music.

Exploring Baba’s latent talent of music can perhaps lead to an upsurge in his chances of independence. It is said that these gifted talents of autistic people are generally ignored. Naturally, Baba, who is interested in music cannot turn out to be a good Accountant as he is forced by his sister, Bimla. His talent for music should have been checked and ascertained by early intervention of both social and medical factors. In case he is tested positive for instrumental music, he might do wonders in the field of music. This mastering of music might have given him an altogether different identity, shedding down all those labels stigmatising him as disabled and autistic. It holds good not only for Baba but for many others as well.

According to Grandin and Duffy, the intellect of autistic people is highly specialised which implies that a person excelling in visual tasks cannot be good at foreign languages and a person good at numbers proves a poor graphic designer. Therefore, the wrong choice of profession can mar the career of an autistic person (37). Moreover, some autistic people are born with extraordinary abilities within one specialised area like Music, Mathematics, arts, painting, designing or acting. These

outstanding talents are called savant skills and the people proficient in them are termed as autistic savants. Happe and Frith observe:

In popular accounts of autism, the existence of extraordinary talent in art, music, maths, calendar calculation or memory, often referred to autistic skills, has become a stock in trade...Nevertheless, the association of autism with a special talent, sometimes at the highest level, cannot be denied and provides one of the most tantalizing mysteries of this condition. (xi)

The novel, *Clear Light of Day*, depicts all the non-disabled characters at length giving them space for 'self-actualization' and identification through social markers like gender, mother, father or husband. Giving textual space in novel enables them to express their interests, issues and interrelationships, comprehensively. However, among the scores of characters, Baba is the only character experiencing 'textual exclusion' which denotes the deliberate literary act of ignoring and avoiding disabled characters completely or assigning them minor or miserable role in the plot of a text on grounds of their disability. The maximum number of characters portrayed in the novel are non-disabled while there is only one disabled character, Baba. In the novel, he is shown cloyingly pitiful. This engagement of long list of normal characters and only one disabled character also suggests textual exclusion. The statistical imbalance in the equation of disabled and non-disabled characters holds not only true for a particular text like *Clear Light of Day* but it is equally applicable to all the texts ranging from divine scriptures to human creations.

The numerical one-sidedness marginalises them by engendering a sense of insecurity and instability which in turn leads to an identity crisis. Extending Jacques Derrida's concept of centre or 'deconstruction' to character representation, normal or

non-disabled characters form the centre of almost all texts, pushing disabled people towards its margin. Such dominance of one group is to be displaced in order to strike a balance between central and marginal characters. So far as the roles assigned to characters in the novel are concerned, Baba is given minor roles which reinforce his stereotypical image through repetitive abnormal behaviour. His limited involvement in the plot of the novel is justified under the pretext of his autistic condition. Baba's disjointed details scattered across the novel are symbolic of his fragmented identity. Instead of three or four paragraphs at a stretch for character description as is the case with normal characters like Bimla, Raja and Tara, he is described in fragments. Although his character has elements of credibility, its traces are not put together organically. The scattered characterization of Baba across novel seems like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to be glued together to capture the holistic image of Baba in the right perspective. It highlights the uninformed nature of public about autistic symptoms. This benighted nature of his family regarding the spectrum of disability is substantiated by the numerous character list in the novel who do not offer a reasonable solution or description for Baba's condition. The stereotypical depiction of Baba suffering from autistic condition has only been touched upon, but to project him as the site of possible potentials is missing. Highlighting deficits and hiding the potentials of disabled people is observed in all texts. In other words, Baba is represented mostly as the site of tragedy though he can be equally explored as the site of possibilities. Baba's propensity towards gramophone indicating his extraordinary talent for music is one such possibility which gets ignored.

Identifying and promoting his musical tendency could have revolutionised not only his life but also the life of those staying around him. Instead, he is pushed towards office work without his consent. Unlike Baba, almost all non-disabled

characters like Aunt Mira, Tara, Bimla, Bakul and Raja are developed fully. Paragraphs after paragraphs are devoted to their description. It implies that they are textually included and engaged in the plot of the novel. Starting with Aunt Mira, a description of a few characters is examined in order to contrast textual spaces enjoyed by both disabled and non-disabled in the novel. Aunt Mira's condition is worse than Baba's due to her alcoholic habit and a failed woman in the family. Despite her addiction, she is involved in the plot to the satisfactory level in the role of caretaker, widow and distant relative. Her active engagement as in-charge of children's care seems more a politics of normality than an opportunity. She is given the charge of counsellor based on which she proposes the plan to purchase a cow. She turns out to be a victim of fate by losing her husband. Being a widow at her in-laws, she is exploited as a labourer. The second character portrayed in the novel is Bimla. Though she is assigned with a central role, she doesn't perform anything outstanding which may overshadow Baba's image. Despite being at par with Baba in terms of output, she enjoys the privilege of being at the centre of the plot. Her advantage of having upper hand in the text and Baba's placement at the fringes of the plot is due to their normal and abnormal social status respectively. Represented as responsible head of the family after her parent's death, Bimla attains a central role and one of her roles is to take care of her siblings. She permits Tara and Raja to leave Delhi for materialising their aspirations. Staying back at home in Delhi, she supports her home by teaching history. Depicted as resistant to change, she rejects the offer of marriage by Dr Biswas to enjoy her independence from patriarchy. However, Baba is held responsible for the rejection of marriage offer. As a character who handles her family alone, Bimla is posed as an averter of crisis and symbol of sacrifice. As evidenced by Raja's letter he writes to Bimla from Hyderabad, Baba is represented in the plot of the novel as

helpless and homeless. Believing Bimla and Baba's care as his moral responsibility, he lets them use his house. Raja states, "I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it. If you have any worries, Bim, you have only to tell-Raja." (7)

Baba is depicted as dependent first on Aunt Mira and then on his sister Bimla. He is shown as if he cannot survive without help and special care of Aunt Mira or the elder sister Bimla. Bim points out that "Baba to be taken care of for the rest of his life" (102). The dependence of Baba is repeatedly pinpointed across the novel to highlight his precarious life. Desai comments, "Bim earned her own living to supplement that unearned income, and it was really only Baba who needed to be supported" (51). Baba is shown as an unnecessary burden on his sister, Bimla. At times, she vents her frustration at Baba for being a constant burden on her in terms of expenses she has been bearing for years. She wants to get rid of him and therefore, she expresses it indirectly when she asks him to stay with Raja in Hyderabad. She keeps rattling at him incessantly like a train racing down a line, driven by a mad driver. Desai points out:

With my salary, I will be able to pay the rent, keep on the house, I will manage but I might have to send you to live with Raja. I came to ask you- what would you think of that? She was hitting the target now—hitting and hitting it. Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad? (249)

Dr. Biswas points at Baba's dependence as an excuse for Bimla's rejection of his marriage offer. He points out, "You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother, and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life" (148 ). The third character, enjoying satisfactory textual space of the

novel, is Tara. Her aspiration to be a mother is materialised by marrying Bakul. She leaves for America to settle and start her family. She is shown as the symbol of reconciliation because she puts in every effort to rid of bitterness existing between Raja and Bimla. She is well-settled with her own family and children. The fourth major character of the novel is Baba's elder brother, Raja. He as well leaves Delhi for Hyderabad in order to get married to Benazir and to set his family into motion. He shoulders the responsibility of his own family and estate after Hyder Ali's death. He asserts himself landlord through his letter sent to Bimla, embodying the message that he will not raise or sell the house till Bim and Baba inhabit it. Baba experiences loneliness even in the presence of a crowd. None is trained to interact with Baba. He is not involved in any general discourse either domestic or public on grounds of his being considered unfit for any worthy conversation. The communication gap and emotional distance between Baba and the rest of the characters sound to be unbridgeable in terms of the descriptions made by the writer. Her descriptions have kept every character at bay from Baba. They haven't put in an attempt to understand him emotionally or to identify themselves with him with full empathy. The physical distance has always been maintained on behalf of the abled characters because he is always seen lying alone in the company of a gramophone. None of his siblings cares about his isolation rather they wish him to adopt the state of solitude. Distancing him in this manner affects his socialization, chucking out the chances of both 'contextualized' and 'decontextualized' language. Anita Desai's observes, "Only Bim seemed to notice nothing odd. Nor did she seem to think it necessary to speak to or be spoken to by Baba." (13)

Baba who was outlined prettiest of all at his birth is now lying delicately in divine quietness. He is revealed as complete and whole in relation to his physical

form that is buzzing with the vitality of life. This sort of characterization paints his positive shade. Bimla remarks, “Even Tara, ordered to keep away, edged closer to where he lay sleeping and hung over the edge of the cot, wide-eyed and breathing heavily at the miracle of this tiny living thing, whole and complete and alive...” (158). He is shown as the slow learner of baby skills of sitting, standing, walking and talking. These skills appear to be life-time learning exercises for him. It reflects the neutral description of Baba. However, his negativity is often highlighted to the extent of exaggeration. Sometimes he is represented as a child without vitality and will-power as if his parents have showered all love and affection on earlier three children leaving nothing for Baba. Here, the writer resorts to highlight the concept of normal and abnormal implying, that normal is full of life qualities and abnormal is deprived of them. Desai mentions:

No one could help noticing how slow he was to learn such baby skills as turning over, sitting up, smiling in response, talking, standing or walking. He seemed to have no desire to reach out and take anything. It was as if his parents, too aged had given birth to a child without vitality or will- all that had gone into the other, earlier children and there had been none left for this last, late one. (158)

His senselessness is exaggerated to the extent that he even can't reach out his finger to the ants crawling on the floor. Though his mother is responsible for his birth and upbringing, she is concerned more about card playing games than her familial responsibilities. Dispassionately, she engages an *ayah* for nursing and nourishing him. The *ayah* is not trained in child care and not keen to learn it. Being ignorant in the art of child caring, she rolls him off her lap onto the floor very often.



In the light of literary realism, a novel is believed to reflect social reality lying outside the texts. There as well, the living and moving people face social exclusion on account of disability, that is, they are barred to enjoy rights, resources and opportunities. Symbolically, Baba represents weaker sections of the society vulnerable to the harshness of stronger sections like Bimla, Raja and Tara who are privileged and resourceful. At times, they even resort to burst out their anger over him. Kirsti Weel Sannrud explored that Baba often became the butt of blame for both Bim and Tara. To conceal their own insecurities, they turned to him with their harsh behaviour. His representation stands for poor and underprivileged masses of the society and his interaction with gramophone represents his privacy to achieve peace and joy (41). Gramophone as well stands for acceptance of difference and familiar route for him to express his subjectivity. Due to his verbal and non-verbal limitations, he enjoys the company of gramophone.

The process of identity formation is the function of both society and the person himself. In the case of Baba, society seems to play a more dominant role in making viral his autistic identity. His autistic problem is propagated by his sisters mainly. They circulate his autistic symptoms as proposed by the Medical Model of disability. Their assertion about his autism cannot be authenticated on grounds of their untrained observation and benighted nature in diagnosing its symptoms accurately. Moreover, they judge his condition only in light of the Medical Model, ignoring Social Model which traces roots of disability in society and terms it neuro-diversity. Thus, Baba's identity is constructed and controlled by the discourses of his siblings who represent society as a whole. His subjectivity, identity-based on self-knowledge, is subjected to medical parameters set by society. The autistic identity given to Baba is purely underpinned by medical discourse. Baba's perception of his 'self' matters

the least because society enjoys the upper hand in ascribing identity to an individual. In other words, social identity overshadows personal identity, making it invisible to the common eye. Baba's autistic identity is more the outcome of social discourse than his personal perception. Therefore, the identity of Baba or any other person is the balanced equation between personal and social identity. Baba is misunderstood by his sisters on account of their imbalanced understanding of autism. They draw only on medical approach in understanding Baba's condition, relegating his self-understanding towards margin. Kath Woodward argues:

Identity involves personal investment...but it is socially located. Identity offers a way of thinking about the links between the personal and social; of the meeting place of the psychological and the social, of the psyche and the society. It is the embodiment and location of the psycho-social. (vii)

According to Kath Woodward, an identity rooted in difference denotes an act of distinguishing 'us' from 'them' (viii). Drawing on this theory, it surfaces that Baba's siblings have differentiated themselves from him on account of Baba's autistic symptoms. In other words, they classify themselves as non-autistic, non-disabled and normal, leaving all the opposite identity marks for Baba to relish. For instance, Tara believes Baba as a strange and unusual person bereft of dynamism. It is inferred that he is compared with something which stays unchanged and fixed just like a non-living entity. Basically, his growth occurs according to his own need and nature which may not necessarily fall in consonance with average growth. But it doesn't mean that he is altogether stagnant in all indices of development. Tara remarks, "Surely Baba ought to begin to grow and develop, at last, to unfold and reach out and stretch. But whenever she saw them at intervals of three or five years, all was exactly as before."(18)

His brother, Raja, as well identifies Baba as an unnatural being with whom he feels bored along with the rest of the family members. Bimla remarks, "In the evenings, tired of his own noisy sisters and peculiar old aunt and still a more peculiar little brother, he would wander across to the Hyder Ali's garden" (74). Raja's leaving for Hyder Ali's home reflects the repulsive relationship the family has developed with autistic Baba. The relationship between individuals in a society or in a family forms an important component of identification. Kathward argues, "The identity story is one that has been told around different relationships, such as those between the personal and the social and those between self and others" (1). Baba's sisters, Bim and Tara, also consider him an outlandish creature on grounds of his obsession with listening to old songs, showing no interest in new ones. It implies two points; one is his interest in music and second is his matter of taste. Listening to any sort of song is a matter of interest. There is nothing odd and abnormal about listening to a particular collection. Even normal beings behave in the same way with respect to their favourite song. But that is not questioned or labelled as strange. However, when a person with a disability like Baba does so, he is identified as abnormal and strange. Drawing on a sociological understanding of identity, it is imperative to refer to Baba and his family in terms of 'agency' and 'structure' concept respectively. Agency promises two things to an individual-independent action and free choice. Taking a cue from such concepts, Baba seems a being without agency and autonomy. It implies that Baba's action of playing monotonous music records is found objectionable by his family that stands for 'structure'. He is expected to imbibe socialization as dictated by society. Tara argues:

It is loud, complained Tara in a distressed voice. I used to look for new records to send Baba. Oh he doesn't want any new records, said Bim. He wouldn't play with them. He loves old ones. Isn't it strange, said Tara,

wincing at the unmodulated roar that swept across the still, shady veranda in an almost visible onslaught of destruction? We are strange, I told you, laughed Bim. (11)

In the novel, it is projected that Baba's only solace is gramophone playing because he is not involved in other interesting activities at the pretext of his autistic problem. The only way to shoo out his loneliness is to enjoy the company of his musical instrument with which he is so much obsessed. The act of gramophone playing is highly objected by his family members who get irritated and thereby, overstate Baba's obsession as a negative trait of abnormality. Moreover, the author has repeatedly made references to his gramophone playing. It is almost referred throughout the entire novel. Focussing on his single activity to explore the same thing is in itself an exaggeration of description. It further propagates the notion that Baba never ceased to play records, rather his pursuit of playing it appears unending. Desai writes, "The sound of a 1940s foxtrot on Baba's gramophone followed them down the drive to the gate as if a mechanical bird had replaced the *koels* and pigeons of daylight. Then they turned out of the gate and ceased to hear the tinny rattle of the wartime foxtrot." (45)

Baba is identified as irksome on account of his association with a loud gramophone playing. It is projected as extremely intolerant. The author writes that his gramophone playing has even driven away the pigeons from the roof of their house. They come back to it and settle down in their nests no sooner than the gramophone comes to a halt. The words, 'a dagger plunged into his breast' make his gramophone playing extremely annoying and irksome. This statement is confirmed by the textual evidence in which Anita Desai observes:

As Bakul stirred his tea thoughtfully with a little spoon, the song rose to its raucous crescendo as though the singer had a dagger plunged into his breast. Then, at last, the rusty needle ground to a halt in the felt-embedded groove of the antique record and they all sighed simultaneously and sank back in their chairs, exhausted. The pigeons that had retreated to the roof came fluttering back to their nests. (12)

The analysis of Baba's characterization displays that he is far less the master of his own freedom of action. He even feels hesitated to play the gramophone due to the threatening and sarcastic looks from his siblings. Though he does not comply with their dictation, the effect of their voice tone becomes obvious from his act of not turning on the gramophone over and over again. Desai remarks:

Do you think you will go to the office today? She persisted, beads of perspiration welling out of her upper lip. Now Baba took his hand off the gramophone arm, relinquishing it sadly, and his hands hung loosely at his sides, as helplessly as a dead man's. His head, too, sank lower and lower. (20)

The relationship among siblings assumes master-subject shape on grounds of Baba's disability. He is forced by his two sisters Bimla and Tara to go to the office to ensure its smooth running even though the two know it very well that he is not willing to attend it. Being pushed against his own wish, he leaves for office. His subjectivity is outshined against the commands of his non-disabled siblings. It appears as if he is driven out of the home under a well-conceived scheme. On the way to the office, he witnesses scores of miserable happenings unworthy of seeing. His compassionate attitude can no longer bear the horrific state of the horse that deeply hurt by the thrashing of the cart driver. Observing the incident, he gives a full vent to his feelings

in a violent outburst which attracts the attention of the members of the family who seem not to appreciate his reaction. It is argued that creating a problem and offering its solution appears politics of sympathy. The way the two sisters persuade him for office work can be classified as oppression because he doesn't nod in agreement for it, rather it is imposed on him against his will. He accepts their command out of fear but not out of his willingness. His freedom of executing his subjectivity in accordance with his will is challenged. Therefore, curtailment of freedom of disabled people represented by Baba is an important concern that needs to be addressed vehemently. But the two sisters are not always so cruel and harsh in nature. Bimla's bringing of cone-type ice-cream for Baba depicts her care as well. Tara brings him out of frightening trauma, serves him water, shakes his hair and pats his cheeks. It highlights the sympathetic face of their attitude to Baba.

Baba is exhibited as an irresponsible person holding no accountability for his independent actions and decisions. His construction as indecisive and careless person puts a question mark at the credibility of his agency or individuality. His irresponsible depiction indirectly questions his identity which defines one's position and holds him accountable for his actions. For instance, he is illustrated indifferent to irritation he causes to people by playing high volume gramophone endlessly and repeatedly. Desai remarks, "He did not look as if he could be held responsible for any degree of noise whatsoever" (12). Baba's condition seems a constructed conspiracy as well because his sisters, who don't have expertise in diagnosing any developmental disorder, make his abnormality public. Exaggeration of Baba's autistic identity on behalf of his family and society is imbued with elements of power politics. His abnormality is insisted on in order to boss and bully him which Foucault calls 'self-subjectification', that is, "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Shemian 86).

The process of 'objectification' implying "transforming human beings into subjects" completes in three steps viz. classifying practices, dividing practices and self-subjectification practices. In the first two steps, subject like Baba is classified as autistic and is kept under surveillance as per divisive discourses and in the third stage of self-subjectification, Baba acquires reflexivity (Shemian 86). Therefore, it is very difficult for Baba to express his subjectivity because it is controlled by Bimla. This relationship has undercurrents of power politics which make weaker people like Baba as subject and stronger institutions like family and society as master. Reinstating such hierarchies lends an upper hand to the master to justify all his treatments meted out to subject. The power politics works tremendously in the world of disability because disabled people are not privileged with power positions to create their own self in the light of self-knowledge. Substantiating the theorization on power politics, it is pertinent to refer to James Coetzee's novel *Slow Man* in which the protagonist Rayment is subjected to the surveillance of hospital staff after meeting with an accident and losing his leg. The intervention of prosthesis on behalf of hospital staff appears to him a sort of violence reinforcing his sense of being controlled not only somatically but spiritually also. James Coetzee remarks, "What is this that is being done to me" (4). John Bothwell holds that power ensures its presence everywhere and disabled people experience it in the same way as Rayment does in relation with a caregiver. The caregiver's exertion of social power renders Rayment soulless (26). Examining Baba and Rayment, there seems parallelism in terms of their subjection to the institutions of power like family and hospital. These institutions are established in the name of care but, at times, they tend to exercise their purview of power. To make it more lucid, it is relevant to draw on Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'. He defines it 'conduct of conduct' which literally denotes shaping

and governing of behaviours through calculated activities. It implies as to how a particular activity shapes, guides or affects the behaviour of an individual. Government as well aims at "welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, et cetera" (Murray Li 1). Extending Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality to disability and care, the family is established to take care of the needs of inmates supporting its economy for its smooth running. Those contributing to the economy, as Bimla does in the novel, are lifted to power positions and non-contributors, like Baba, are given specific identities, like in his case autistic identity, with special needs. Such identification is not as neutral as it appears overtly. It is a medicalised identity imposed by medical professionals. The medical expertise affirms its somatic centred nature in order to justify their surveillance in the name of care and concern. According to Synder and Mitchell, care is proposed on the presumption that disability is a medical condition requiring fixing or cure through eugenics policies. Peter Hamilton remarks:

Power relations are embedded in social life and, as Foucault observes, governmentality is an inescapable fact of social life. Life in society, literally from the cradle to the grave, inevitably involves action(s) being exercised on other(s) actions. In institutions such as the family, school, hospital, prison, commercial enterprise and so forth, the conduct of individuals and groups is directed, in short, it is subject to government. (xv)

Baba's nature is depicted as irresponsible because he neither takes upon himself any responsibility of the office nor does he find it necessary to answer his sister's questions as to why he is not sincere in his official responsibilities. Holding a pillow tightly, he concentrates on gramophone records and doesn't feel like responding Bimla. Desai holds, "Baba with decision and determination shrank against



the pillow on his bed. He compressed his white lips, inclined his head towards the record with the most acute attention.” (234)

Baba’s identity and subjectivity are sometimes accurately represented medically and, at times, misrepresented in the novel socially. The point is to appreciate the real representation and critique misrepresentation of Baba. Sometimes, the novelist sincerely delineates Baba through the description of outward appearance which is not always negative in nature. It appears, at times, as if she has conducted an ethnographic study on autistic children while sketching disabled identity of Baba. Autistic children are generally handsome in outlook, so is Baba shown in the novel. However, descriptions of Baba as an angel is a matter of debate as it has both positive and negative implications. To give disabled a transcendental or idealised nomenclature may nullify their real-life concerns and issues. It can bring about their further marginalization and impoverishment. Desai states:

Tara stood staring, made speechless by his fine, serene face, and the shapeliness of his long fingers, his hands that either moved lightly as if in a breeze or rested calmly at his sides. He was an angel, she told herself, catching her lip between her teeth, an angel descended on earth, unsoiled by any of it.

(19)

Although subjectivity of an individual includes social perception about an individual, it also implies one’s own perception about one’s own self prior to any suppositions. It may broadly encompass one’s needs, requirements, tastes and interests. It is quite relevant to introduce here the concept of phenomenology propounded by Edmund Husserl. It is defined as the philosophical perspective “to describe the concrete living world, as this is experienced independently of any prior

suppositions, whether these suppositions come from philosophy or from common sense” (Abrams 289). It is purely subjective in operation in contrast to the objective approach of the Medical Model of disability. It doesn’t make use of discourses to perceive a phenomenon rather “it is irreducible to discourses” (Shemain 88). Drawing on this theory and extending its application to Baba, it is somehow possible to arrive at his subjectivity. The normal characters of the novel employ their own perspective in judging and defining for Baba what music and noise for him is. They don’t look at any phenomenon from Baba’s point of view. What sounds music to Baba appears noise to the rest of the characters. This clash of standpoints basically questions the established standards of the majority, suggesting an alternative that no character is entitled to impose his will upon another. It means everybody’s wish must be taken into account with equal dignity. In the plot of the novel, Tara calls Baba’s gramophone music as the horrendous noise and predicts that his primitiveness will accompany him forever. She suggests him indirectly for the change of records in order to bring his taste at par with the taste of normal characters like Bimla and Tara. Desai observes:

But then why did he spend his days and years listening to this appalling noise? She wanted to explain to him, her daughters was an ever-growing, ever-changing collection, their interest in it was lively, fresh, developing all the time. Also, she knew they would outgrow their need of it. But Baba would never leave his behind, he would never move on. (19)

The perspective problem is also touched upon in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* written by Harper Lee in which character, Boo, is shown dangerous only from people’s point of view. Contrary to their thinking, he emerges out very considerate and courageous at the end. Baba’s bland depiction of disability seems very

monotonous because he is given a flat character unyielding to dynamicity. He is habitual of listening to a gramophone, playing the same records repeatedly for his own pleasure. The repetition of listening to the same songs sounds awkward to the rest of the characters who express it either through their words, actions or attitude. Such deviance is bound to be celebrated in accordance with the propositions of the postmodern narrative rather than to be stigmatised as a disease or abnormality. Tara, one of the sisters of Baba, displays a negative attitude towards Baba's playing the same music repeatedly. Tara states:

He was crouched low, listening raptly to the last of 'Don't Fence Me In' unwinding itself on the old HMV gramophone on a small bamboo table beside his bed. But then why did he spend his days and years listening to this appalling noise? But Baba would never leave his behind, he would never move on. (19)

It is somewhat mysterious to know as to what the author has in her mind regarding the disabled character Baba. She hasn't made an effort to highlight the various possible potentials of Baba to perform anything smoothly. In the plot of the novel, Baba's disability serves to tie down his elder sister Bimla, engendering her lack of progress and travel in life. It is inferred that Baba is shown as a hindrance in the path and progress of his siblings. The obstruction offered by Baba is often slipped out from Bimla's tongue. Bimla's targets Baba in holding him responsible for all the mundane changelessness. Bimla states, "Oh, I never go anywhere. It must seem strange to you and Bakul who have travelled so much- to come back and find people like Baba and me who have never travelled at all" (7). It is explicit from the above statement that people start talking about disabled negatively, as soon as they sight them. However, no such whispering takes place in the novel regarding Baba's

disability. Instead, they welcome him with their cheerful smiles extending their help saturated with empathy and encouragement. He is portrayed in very poor light either consciously or unconsciously. His body movements are described as the movements of an appendage to convey that his body parts have been attached to the main body trunk with some adhesive compulsively. Such wording has not been used while giving the description of any normal character but has only been kept in store for Baba. At times, it sounds the writer is well-conscious while delineating Baba. For instance, she proposes that Baba's apparent loneliness and hopelessness is merely superficial rather than the real one because he is neither alone nor hopeless. He often enjoys the company of gramophone with full energy and enthusiasm. Desai remarks, "His hands swung as if loose in their sockets, as if in a light breeze. But there was no breeze." (16)

The novel highlights the issue of lack of care and concern for disabled people with respect to their road crossing where they find themselves in dilemma to cross it or stay back. However, this condition of theirs doesn't entitle others either to drive over them or to beat them for their faulty crossing. The need is to understand their subjectivity in order to make their travelling easy and barrier-free. The disabled character of the novel, Baba, faces the problem of crossing a road on edge of which he hesitates and unwittingly becomes the cause of a bicyclist's fall who beats him ruthlessly. This wildish and self-centred view must be viewed as an encroachment upon the rights of people with disability. Desai observes, "Once, when he had ventured out, a bicycle had dashed him as he stood hesitating at the edge of the road, wondering whether to cross. The bicyclist had fallen and cursed him, his voice rising to a shrill peak and then breaking on Baba's head like eggs or silver of glass." (23)

Baba, the representative of the disabled community, live through the experience of affliction and suffocation both in the bus and on road. Sometimes, he is dashed by the cyclist and, at times, squeezed by the crowded buses where he has to adapt himself to the existing normal-friendly infrastructure. Desai remarks:

Another time, he had walked as far as the bus stop but when the bus had arrived there was such a scuffle between those trying to get off and those trying to get on that people were pushed and bumped. He heard all those shouts again, the shouts that had been flung at his head, knocking into him till he was giddy with blows. (23)

It further raises the concern of accessibility for people with disability. Disabled people in general and Baba in the novel, face a lot of difficulty in accessing public transport that is designed in recognition with the needs and requirements of abled-people. It suggests that the issues and concerns of the disabled community are generally ignored. The vehicles like buses are not easily accessible to them and have no reserved place for them. They have to adjust and adapt themselves to the crowded buses which make their journey painful and horrific. Such inaccessibility deters their movement and participation in the public sphere, engendering their insularity. Shivani Gupta, the founding member of Access-Ability organisation, herself a disabled person, upholds the cause of people with disability for their accessibility to infrastructure. She argues that accessibility is equality and asserts, “We believe access equals ability. It is only when the disabled have access to infrastructure, can they be mainstreamed into society” (1). Thus, the major issue highlighted in the novel is the exclusion of disabled people in developmental processes like transportation. The road pavements without curb-cuts obstruct free movement of the disabled community as a whole. Due to the lack of alternative structural facilities, they are dependent on

normal-friendly infrastructure. Baba, a representative of the disabled community, live through such hindrances. He is not humanly treated while crossing or walking along the road hesitatingly. He is scolded, abused and threatened for having taken the route. Moreover, he doesn't feel safe and secure outside his home because he is either scoffed at or treated inhumanly. In an instance, horse rider, Hider Ali, rides a horse at an accelerated pace, flying up the sand and dust at Baba's face. It implies that normal people lack care and concern for the disabled people and they are indifferent towards the rights of others. Disabled people are hardly accommodated due to the lack of sense of peaceful coexistence. Desai states:

Baba was standing on the sand dunes. But out of that lunar stillness, a man loomed up and roughly pushed past him shouting 'Hato! Hato!' to make way for a white horse that plunged up out of the dunes and galloped past, Baba, crouching on his knees in the sand, the terror of the horse hooves beating through his head, the sand flying back into his face and voice still commanding 'Hato! Hato!' (24)

Everyone among us learns about life from the experience. The people with a disability often face harsh treatment at public places which haunts them throughout day and night. This discourages them from moving out of the home. Baba, the disabled character of the novel, is bullied serially in a range of incidents by horse rider, bicyclist and a bus crowd. Though the bus incident has taken place long before, he still experiences the shouts and sounds of the bus mob. He feels as if the shouts hit his head like anything. He still remembers the blows of the mob causing giddiness. Due to such unkind and callous conduct, he feels very apprehensive while stepping out of the home. However, within his home, he is often forced to go to his office by his sisters. Thus, Baba feels a sort of centrifugal force developed by his sisters at

home for which he has paid by becoming the victim of horse driver, bicyclist and fellow travellers in the bus. Have they not compelled him to go to the office, perhaps he must have been safe at home. Desai observes:

His knees trembled in anticipation, knowing he would be forced down, or flung down if he continued down the road. But it was as if Tara had given him a push down a steep incline. She had said he was to go. Bimla had said he was to go. Bimla and Tara, both of them, wanted him to go. He was going. (Desai)

Baba's condition outside the home is gruesome which is caused by the untoward incidents he met with. His arms appeared hung from his body with his eyes highly strained. His condition is described so wretchedly pitiable that he is about to fall down and faint. Desai observes:

His feet in their unfastened sandals scuffed through the dust of Bela Road. Sharp gravel kept slipping into them, prodding. His arms swung wildly, propelling him along. His head bobbed his white hair flopped. His eyes strained and saw black instead of white. Was he going to faint? Would he fall?  
(24)

Somatic differences of disabled people are projected in writing, media and films in a way to evoke fear among readers and viewers. Likewise, in this novel, Anita Desai, resorts to the linguistic discourse that portrays him as an object of horror. Baba's posture, colour and various other differences are described as gruesome. It evokes apprehension and terror to see and sight him. The character's reaction differs while coming into contact with him as is evidenced by Tara's reaction in connection with Baba in the novel. Anita Desai observes:

Tara saw a pale elongated shape lurching and blundering down the veranda and onto the drive, bent almost double as if in pain or in fear- or perhaps because of the sun beating down with white-hot blows. She stood up in fright and it took her a minute to realise it was Baba. (23)

Baba's subjectivity is stigmatised by projecting him as an object of fear. The adverb-noun combination of words 'ghostly look' with reference to Baba's description represents him as a horrible creature that creates awe and fear among people living around. As soon as he steps out of his house, people begin to whisper about him, questioning his identity, subjectivity and ontological status. The chunk of words 'make people start' has implications of making neighbours cringe back in fear on sighting him. This transcendental description of Baba through terms like 'ghostly figure' even negates his earthly existence. It contrasts with the existentialist claim of 'existence precedes essence'. It also implies that the author terms his essence real and his existence as unreal. Reacting with such attitude towards disabled people like Baba brings forth stereotypical notions prevailing in society against disability. Desai remarks, "His face, too, was blanched, like a plant grown underground or in deepest shade and his hair was quite white, giving his young and fine grace a ghostly look that makes people start whenever he appeared" (12). The harsh social reactions towards Baba are also experienced by disabled character Quasimodo who is depicted as born with a hunchback in Victor Hugo's novel, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. He hardly ventures outside Notre Dame, cathedral, because he is hated on grounds of his appearance. In the novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Spiros Antonapoulos, an intellectually disabled character, dies of institutional negligence. The plight of disabled people is almost of the same nature in many other novels like *Moby Dick* (Ahab) written by Herman Melville and *Peter Pan* (Captain James Hook) written by



James Mathew Barrie. At times, the inclusion of disabled characters in novel or movie seems highly political because they are exploited as a means to propel the plot forward or to invoke pity, fear and other odious emotions. For example, Gothic novels dwell upon the execution of melodramatic events where disabled are presented as monsters promoting the idea that a deformed soul resides in the deformed body. Similarly, attributing monsters with features like ugliness, deformity, imperfection and possession directly pinpoints prejudices against disabled people. The monstrous misrepresentation of disabled people holds the same across literature, be it revengeful Shakuni Mama in the *Mahabharata* or William Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Across the board, disabled people are stereotyped as villains, monsters or victims. The execution of plot-driven necessity shouldn't always imply that monstrous or villainous roles are reserved for disabled characters only. Moreover, the outward appearance of Baba along with his dress is presented in very poor light. His apparent outlook is described as pejorative and derogatory in comparison with the normal characters. This negative depiction of appearance is often taken for-granted and Baba's depiction resounds the stereotypical attitude about the disabled. His reaction to the sun is the same as will be the reaction of any normal person. The sun is shown surprising him only, but not other non-disabled characters. Anita Desai comments, "Coming out into the veranda, he blinkered as if the sun surprised him. He was in his *pyjamas*- an old pair with frayed ends, over which he wore a grey bush shirt worn and washed almost to translucency" (12). Such discourses promote and perpetuate stereotypes as something given and natural, concealing their constructed nature. The consumers of the text, in turn, will pass it on to the next generation. This transference distances it from its constructed roots giving them avenues for getting fossilised. Once the stereotypical image gets fossilised, there are meagre chances of its backsliding. These cumulative

steps render stereotypes as permanent and real. Thus, the major issue for people with disability in general and for Baba, in particular, is their stereotypical representation in the literature by non-disabled writers without first-hand experience of disability. Mairian Corker points out, “Positional intellectuals are, for example, non-deaf, non-disabled intellectuals who develop and control ideas and theory about deafness disability from a positional or outsider perspective.” (148)

Positional writers hardly depict disabled people in a positive light, making it essential for the disabled community to write for themselves. As a genre ‘Life Writing’ started in Europe but in India, disabled people are yet to come out with their life experiences. Disabled people have somehow created a vacuum and presented themselves as texts to be written on for positional writers, resulting in their misrepresentation. And when there is a misrepresentation of disability, it challenges the stability and security of an individual and group both at the domestic and public level. Kobena Mercer observes, “Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis” (4). It is elicited from the statement made by Mercer that people with disability in general experience insecurity at the government legislation which reinstates anti-disability laws and policies to reinforce their identity. Kathward states, “Crises occur when an identity position is challenged or becomes insecure, whether at the level of the individual or at the level of the state.” (xi)

People with disability are portrayed as if they are meant only for the domestic sphere which is supposed to serve as their safe haven. They are often described in a domestic setting, perpetuating the notion of their confined locomotion and restricted social interaction. This propagates the idea of their being a burden on family and society to the generation after generation of readers. Anita Desai mentions, “And of course Baba stayed at home.” (Desai)

A language is an important tool of the representational process of 'Disabled People'. Believed as the thinking tool, language shows and modifies the perception of people. It implies that people know each other through language which is instrumental in generating and promoting stereotypes and attitudes. The language also affects the thinking process because we think in symbols and words. According to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the process of thinking demands language for its execution and language shapes and modifies thinking of a person. But its strongest form believes that thought is the function of language, that is, a specific language individual employs decides his way of seeing the world (230). Therefore, usage of opprobrious vocabulary and phraseology for disabled community affects their image adversely in society. Extending this theorization to Baba's characterization, he is described negatively in terms of imagery employed for him. The literary device of simile "come home crawling like a thirsty dog" is exploited to compare Baba with a dog which sounds highly offensive because it degrades a person from human to subhuman level. Although dog and Baba haven't even a far-off relationship, it is reinstated consciously or unconsciously to add literariness to the text. Such literary innovations may indeed affect literary sensibility but not disability scholars and disabled people because it stigmatises the image of disabled people like Baba. Tara outlines, "If anything, anyone, had stopped him now, he would have collapsed with relief and come crawling home like a thirsty dog to its water bowl" (23). The usage of literary devices like simile and metaphor is so powerful in the impact that Ludwig Wittgenstein proposed philosophy to be scripted as 'one writes a poem'. He pointed out that simile is 'the best thing' in philosophy and associated it with 'parallel cases'. He states, "Digression: the use of similes is to give parallel cases. Parallel cases change our outlook. We can look at the thing in a new way" (Erden 128). It can be inferred from

Wittgenstein's theorization that simile is inherently powerful enough to bring about a change in cognitive processes like thinking, perception and even perspective. Amy Vidali states that problematic use of disability metaphors strengthens certain attitudes and beliefs. They have the capacity to influence the worldview as 'we often think in metaphoric ways'. Literary devices like metaphors tend to highlight deficiencies covering away reality from the element of humanity. (34)

Expanding further upon the impact of metaphorical language with regard to disabled people, it is relevant to bring in ideas of David Mitchell. He argued that figurative language has a 'cumulative impact on cultural attitudes towards disabled people' especially because disability works 'primarily as a metaphor for things gone awry with bodily and social orders' (Vidali 35). Drawing on the theorization of Mitchell and Vidali, Baba's comparison with a dog through the literary device of simile, will certainly affect Baba's image on one hand and shape negative public opinion towards him in the society on the other hand. Such problematic usage of imagery that stigmatises disabled people should be avoided in order to render language disabled-friendly as well. These inclusive linguistic overtures will affect public opinion positively and will conduct the writers to use language carefully.

According to the interactional view of theories of metaphor introduced by I. A. Richards in his book *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, metaphor functions by fusing together 'tenor' and 'vehicle' in hope of effecting a meaning out of their interaction. It serves not only the rhetorical function but also shapes our ways of perception and conception. Max Black also espouses Richard's argument that meaning and perceiving is the result of interaction between 'subsidiary subject' (dog) and 'principal subject' (Baba) (Abrams 214). These comparisons are a clear sign of human degradation because attributes of 'vehicle' are ascribed to 'tenor', and their oneness is

emphasised in terms of essence. Thus, it raises the issue of language usage with regard to disabled people which blights their identity and their image as well.

The various textual fragments of the novel bring to light that Baba often stays at home. His description shows that his childhood passes at home with Aunt Mira and gramophone. Baba's siblings, except him, go for an outing to river Jamuna for playing on sand dunes making holes in it and enjoying the boat rides as well. It highlights his exclusion since his childhood which must have affected his socialization substantially. To distance Baba from beautiful childhood as enjoyed by Bimla and Raja amounts to snatching his childhood. Tara reveals, "That was Bimla and Raja, Tara reminded her. I never dared get into that boat, and of course, Baba stayed at home. It was you and Raja who used to play there, Bim" (Desai). More and more, Baba is not taken along to visit their neighbour's, Mishra, home. Bimla, Tara and Bakul all go there, leaving Baba all alone in the company of gramophone. It highlights his social exclusion which affects socialization and learning of social behaviour. Desai comments, "Come, Tara, if we don't go home at once, the cook will fall asleep and we will have no dinner and Baba will go to bed without any." (59)

Baba's disabled identity becomes the talk of the town through rumours circulated out by his family and neighbours who represents society. Aunt Mira, a pathetic figure and an untutored widow, is summoned to take charge of Baba's care. Thinking him so backward mentally, she teaches him the games uninteresting to him. The games are so dull that none finds them appealing and interesting. Moreover, none among his siblings steps forward either to join his game or to engage him in their own activities. It highlights the need for socialisation which helps an individual in the acquisition of skills and learning habits from society. Shutting away an individual like Baba from the society may push his disabled condition from bad to worse. Therefore,

there is desperate need of making the atmosphere inclusive both at home and in society with regard to disabled people. It appears shockingly strange that Aunt Mira, who is given charge of raising an autistic child, is not a well-trained person. In other words, she is neither a special educator nor inclusive caregiver who can understand and accommodate Baba's needs and accommodate them. Despite being deficient in special education skills and no experience of raising either normal or abnormal child, she is handed over the charge of his upbringing.

Baba's responsibility of upbringing is again handed over to one of the untrained ladies, Aunt Mira. Being a childless widow, she doesn't have any experience of bringing up children. She is given charge of Baba's nursing whose condition demands an expert to educate him about life skills. Although Baba has learnt walking by Aunt Mira's arrival, he shows no symptoms of further learning. It seems as if something is really wrong with him. Desai relates, "I am to look after Baba, 'Aunt Mira agreed'" (161). She teaches him strange games and thinks him to be far backward than he really is. She trains him to slip a button into a buttonhole. His learning of tying of button and bathing surprises everyone right from family members to outside visitors because they believe him incompetent for learning. Even his mother thinks of him as an unlearning creature. He has learning capability but the problem is in the method of teaching adopted by his mother who can't afford the time to teach him. Desai recounts, "Aunt Mira even played with Baba, teaching him games no one else had tried to play with him, thinking him too hopelessly backward. Then she showed him how to slip a button into a buttonhole" (Desai). More surprising and miraculous is his playing of marble game with Aunt Mira. He manages and rolls them back to her very skilfully. He plays the game of bagatelle with Aunt Mira and defeats

her so easily. This incident reflects Baba's learning aptitude contrary to the expectations of his parents. Desai observes:

Eventually, he could do up his buttons himself and then would stand basking in their congratulations like a duck in a shower of rain. Visitors could hardly believe their eyes when they saw him sitting on the veranda and playing a game of marbles with Aunt Mira. It was a miracle. Baba would lift his head timidly-pale shining- then drop it in shy triumph. (162)

Baba is often left all alone at home. Perhaps he is not thought fit for parties. It may be because of this reason he is not taken along to attend the party hosted by the Misra family. There is none at home to take care of him except his gramophone. When his siblings return home, they find Baba sleeping without having any meals. His body is described as if he were a sculpture painted milk-white. His sleeping posture is described analytically as if he is not a complete being with soul and flesh. While sleeping on his bed in the veranda, one of his hands is depicted lying below his chin and the second one beside it with palm upwards and fingers curved in. For instance, his stretched legs are depicted as if he is running or half flying through the sky. He is illustrated as a spider's web and moonlight split across the bed. He is even compared with a white flower or harmless garden spider. This entire description sounds somewhat vague because terms like white flower make it positive but at the same time it appears negative on sighting words like a harmless garden spider. Desai states:

Baba was already asleep on his bed in the veranda when the sisters slipped quietly past, only glancing to see him lying on his side, one leg stretched out and the other slightly bent at the knee as if he were running, half-flying

through the sky, one hand folded under his chin and the other uncurled beside it, palm upwards and fingers curved in a finely composed piece of sculpture in white. (61)

Baba's essence is pointed at very negatively. His sisters take him as a being with no vitality and personality. They blame their parents for not having passed any positive trait to him. They suppose that their parents have handed over their vital elements to their earlier children such as Raja, Bimla and Tara, leaving nothing for Baba. Thinking themselves superior to Baba, they believe to possess human quality Baba is deprived of. They associate their subjectivity with good and perfect, and Baba's as abnormal and deficient. Even his breathing is described as imperceptible and invisible. Moreover, his subjectivity is depicted as if blood is drained of his veins and flesh is washed away from his bones. He is presented as a strange creature. Desai remarks:

The sisters thought, as if, when he was born, his parents, late in their lives, had no vitality and no personality left to hand down to him, having given it away in thoughtless handfuls to the children born earlier. Lying there in the dark, dressed in white, breathing quite imperceptibly, he might have been a creature without blood in his veins, without flesh on bones. (61)

Baba doesn't have good identity and image in society. His music playing is not only underestimated by his family but also his neighbours like Misras who happen to scoff at his gramophone playing. He happens to get negative reinforcement both from family and society. His gramophone record playing appears as a great disturbance in home and neighbourhood. Desai writes, "The Misara brothers shouted



let's call Baba. Tell him we will have music that will make him forget that rubbish he listens to." (59)

One of the consoling games Baba plays is scattering of pebbles across the tiled floor which produces clattering sounds. The smashing sound so produced is objected by his siblings especially Bimla. Annoyed by such sounds, she describes it beyond her tolerance. She hardly stops herself from rebuking him for creating such rattling sounds. Basically, she is worried because of the atmosphere of communal disharmony. Her social tension and anxiousness are exploded out at Baba, clarifying Baba's vulnerability to ridicule and anger of others. Desai remarks:

Bim was at times grateful for it and at times irritated beyond endurance by it, just as one might be by the perpetual sameness of clock hands. Baba smiled vaguely but not quite in her direction and jiggled the pebbles in his fist for a moment before he let them fall again. Bim had to set her jaw firmly to keep from rebuking him for the clatter. (95)

Baba is delineated helpless to shoulder any domestic responsibility. After his father's demise, Raja, instead of holding charge of office management, hands it over to his brother, Baba. Though Raja thinks him worthy to inherit his father's duty apparently, his sisters are very skeptic about his capacity to ensure official duties. Raja argues, "I know what I am doing. Baba can take whatever position father meant for me" (100). However, Baba's sister always doubts his potential for performance in office. Bimla shouts at Raja showing her disbelief in Baba's competence of discharging office duty at his father's place smoothly. She considers him inept for any sort of job, simple or simplest. Bim argues, "Baba? What you are talking? You know

Baba, Bim cried out in disbelief. You are making fun of him, very cruelly, Raja, if you want to send him to the office.” (100)

Paradoxically, his sister, Bimla also doubts his competence. Exploiting him like a puppet, she respects his name and signature more than his intellectual worth. She flares up and becomes furious with Raja for his thoughtless selection of Baba for his father’s office work. She goes even to the extent of scolding Mr Sharma who keeps listening to Raja passively. It is not only Bim but Raja also who later thinks of him as nonsense and good for nothing. Doubting Baba’s competence, he hires Mr Sharma to assist him. Thinking Baba intellectually retarded, he assures Bimla that Sharma will speak and explain to him details of office work. The entire characterization of Baba brings to light that Baba is nothing more than a shadow. His presence is required just for some signing purpose. They have neither trusted him nor have they given him a fair chance to prove his potential. He is insulted every now and then, implicitly and explicitly. Desai remarks:

Oh, is that all? said Bim, and Raja looked at her in triumph. You see, he told her that is all. Don’t you think Baba can manage that much? Just signing papers? No, he can’t, Bim said more sharply. But you can. Nonsense. I will speak to Baba. I will explain to him. He can go to the office for an hour or two and then Mr Sharma will help him. Don’t baby him, Bim. (101)

Baba’s existence is realized in terms of either gramophone playing or smashing of pebbles over the floor. His existence is shown contingent upon inanimate objects. His family members become conscious of his presence because of the instruments he plays with. It appears as if his living nature is a function of his non-living things. Desai observes:

An ugly sound that stopped him short. In the sudden silence, they heard a handful of pebbles fall with a clatter on the veranda steps, making them aware, too, of Baba's presence. The doctor hadn't mentioned Baba. Now they both breathed heavily, adding Baba to his list. (104)

Although Baba suffers from the problem of interactive communication, he is described as lesser interactive than he really is. He remains silent very often, talking as less as he can. But it doesn't mean that he is speechless. His sister Bimla compares him with a bell that fails to ring when pressed in a hand. He is said to produce very distracted sound at the sight of the gramophone. In one way or other, this sort of representation stigmatises Baba as a dumb stereotype. Desai observes, "Baba had been silent all through this ghostly tour, keeping close to her. Now he pointed his figure and made a little desperate sound like a bell that won't ring when pressed" (112). Baba's eco-friendliness is at times highlighted. His eco-friendly nature surfaces on visiting Hyder Ali's house where he kisses and caresses a dog. Bim states, "Baba knelt on the ground, fondling her, clasping her dribbling mouth to his chest in gentle protectiveness." (114)

Baba is marked out as an indecisive individual with no will-power of his own. He is expected to follow the dictation of his siblings who impose their orders upon him. They don't allow him to execute his will freely. It appears as if the key to his choice lies with his sister Bimla. She terms everything of his choice as absurd and outlandish. Bimla states, "Oh Baba, she grumbled, helping him by taking the orders off and carrying them for them. Do you have to have this stupid old thing? I don't suppose it matters". Desai comments, "Next door, in Baba's room, a strange rasping roar started out of the stillness, grew louder like a train approaching through a tunnel, and emerged, not in a whistle, but in a woman's voice smokily wailing." (118)

Although Baba's gramophone is somehow disturbing, its shrilling records are overstated. His playing is exaggerated to the extent that it offends even the animals like Hyder Ali's dog lovingly called Begum. Dr Biswas states, "While trombones shrieked and saxophones howled in Baba's room, making poor Begum, who lay at Bimla's feet on the top step, raise her head and gaze into Bimla's face like a sick child pleading for comfort" (121). Baba is represented over-possessive. Being in love with the gramophone, he can't afford to lose it. His indifference to things like jewellery is also highlighted. Desai mentions, "He only loves his old HMV gramophone, he loves to wind it up and sit by it, watching the record turn. All through their visit, he was so afraid Benazir might ask for it back- it was hers, you know." (220)

The author doesn't discuss directly Baba's autism directly, rather she conceptualises his autism through its symptoms. He faces a communication problem which affects his socialization adversely. He speaks a word at one time haltingly. He is shown unable to speak out the whole sentence in one breath. Desai mentions, "Only their efforts to make him talk failed. He would say one word at a time, if pressed, but seemed happier not to and could not be made to repeat a whole line. His manner of communication seemed full and rich enough to them." (163)

The gloomy atmosphere of Das House is ascribed to the continual absence of Bimla's parents, their lack of interest in their children, and most importantly her mother's sickness. But most of the members hold Baba's existence responsible for the gloomy atmosphere. The siblings are shown more disappointed because of Baba than by parental indifference. They consider him as an eternal baby with no chance of maturation. Desai observes, "The secret, hopeless suffering of their mother was somehow at the root of this subdued greyness, this silent desperation that pervaded the

house. Also, the disappointment that Baba's very life and existence were to them, his hopeless future and their anxiety over him." (200)

The novelist represents him senseless because he can't feel Bimla's presence or absence, rather he lies passively on a cot by her side remaining as unconscious in waking as in sleep. It is inferred that presence, absence, sleep and waking mean almost the same thing for him. He is thought unconcerned about Bimla's gaiety and sadness. His interest is never aroused by anything other than his gramophone. He is said to have never noticed his sister's helplessness and even he may not be worried in case she disappears. His sister, Bimla, complains that he never notices her passing age, sadness and happiness. Desai holds, "Bim stared at Baba lying stretched out so peacefully, so passively on the cot next to hers on the dark veranda. But he was unaware of her, as unaware in waking as in sleep. He never raised his eyes from the gramophone and never noticed if she were gay or sad, grey or young." (234)

Baba is described as unworthy of any decision-making process evidenced by Bimla's lack of trust in him. Doubting his decisive competence, she considers his consultation unnecessary in sorting out business issues with their business partner, Sharma. Thinking herself more competent, she ignores his involvement. She even makes fun of Baba's consultation ironically while her brother-in-law, Bakul, asks her to settle the business issues by sitting together with her siblings. Bimla is so stubborn that she even doesn't care to ask either Tara or Raja for the suggestions. And to ask for inputs from Baba is beyond her imagination. Bimla observes, "Discuss it with whom? Baba? He and I are the only ones concerned any more. I have to decide for him." (244)

Baba is often used as the butt of Bim's angry outburst. Her complaints against Raja are generally shot at Baba. These grievances find violent vent against Baba every time as if he is born to bear the brunt of those accumulated complaints. Desai states, "Why had she chosen Baba to vent her hurt and pain and frustration on? Why had she not written a letter to Raja, pouring out all she had to say to him over the years?" (250). Therefore, the basic cause of her annoyance is her loneliness. Her siblings, Raja and Tara, have left her all alone for Baba to start their own families. He has often become the target of Bimla's over-spilling anger caused by her secluded life. She gives vent to her anger against Baba by jolting the needle head off the record 'Don't Fence Me In' on his gramophone. She forces him to avoid his record playing in order to listen to her. Therefore, it may be inferred that she attempts to foist her opinions upon him. Sometimes it comes out that Bimla wants to break out his silence and reserved nature. Desai remarks, "She would not look at Baba's widening eyes, more white than black, as she rattled on, straight at him, for he was the target she had chosen to hit and hit. She was telling him of her idea of selling their shares of the firm to Sharma, using that as a line to run on." (248)

Although Baba is thought of as a useless and senseless fellow throughout his life, Bimla repeatedly visits his room to have a talk with him on different issues, particularly family business. She wants him to compensate for the deficiency of Raja and Tara. He is supposed to peep into her complaining heart with an attitude of care and concern. She expects to receive from him some response or justification. Desai points out, "She had only walked in to talk to Baba- cut down his defence and demand some kind of a response from him, some kind of justification from him for herself, her own life, her ways and attitudes, like a blessing from Baba" (249). The way Baba reacts to Bimla's suggestion for going Hyderabad exhibits his power of

understanding. He draws back from her as if she is going to send him forcefully and his mouth is left-skewed as if slapped hard. This reaction deconstructs every stigma that has been attached to Baba on account of his autistic problem. Sometimes Baba is believed to be a thoughtless creature. He never responds to any question of Bimla, rather he stays mum as if he is unknown to communicative processes. Desai comments, "I wanted to ask you, Baba- what you thought. But Baba never told what he thought. No one knew if he thought" (249). As the novel nears to its end, the author sensitises Bimla about Baba's needs. She realizes that she doesn't give him the required care and concern. She loves him excessively but can't express and materialize it with loving words. Somehow she feels like wresting forgiveness from him. She caresses his cheeks and gives him sympathetic smiles. In every possible way, she attempts to please him either by lying down by his side or by offering him a hot cup of tea. Desai states, "Her love for Baba is too inarticulate, too unthinking. She had not given him enough thought; her concern had not been keen, acute enough." (252)

The author describes Baba's physical structure and sleeping posture as very fearsome and frightening. At times, Bimla feels scared to sleep by his side on sighting him sleeping like a ghost. At times, he is idealised irresponsible like a god with his body structure arousing the feelings of a saint. This representation seems very unreal and stigmatizing for Baba. Desai points out, "She ignored the bed laid out for her at the end of the veranda, next to Baba's. She dreaded seeing his sleeping shape, unresponsive as a god, guilt-arousing as a saint." (254)

Besides, Baba's sports sense sounds very sharp and strong but it hasn't been recognized or explored thoroughly. His energy is never directed to materialize his sports spirit. Winning a bagatelle game and scoring five hundred pounds is

unbelievable. It seems extremely shocking to notice the unbelieving attitude of his sisters, Tara and Bimla. They can't believe his victory against Tara's normal daughters. These notions of failure of Baba like people are very common and people take their defeat for granted. Desai states, "Then they found the old bagatelle board and insisted he plays with them. Once Bimla and Tara even heard Baba calling out excitedly on winning five hundred pounds and turned to each other in disbelief" (260). The sociable nature of his two nieces makes him shout out his win excitedly which is never expected from him. Moreover, he keeps playing and laughing with them unexpectedly. Such a congenial atmosphere created by his nieces makes him come out of himself. He manifests his latent capacities in terms of game playing and interaction. Thus, socialization seems to play an important role in enabling or disabling an individual. Desai remarks, "Did you hear them playing bagatelle? The way they squabble over his gramophone! Did you hear Baba laughing?" (261). Bimla associates with Baba many things that are not true of him. She asserts that Baba isn't habitual of travelling and hence feeling scared of coming and going. It is not a fact-based statement. She basically wants him to stay back with her to drive away her loneliness as well. For the materialization of her own purpose, she stigmatises him with travelling fear. It explains as to how disability comes into being around the impaired people. Desai points out, "He feels frightened by all this – this coming and going. You know he is not used to it." (267)



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