

## CHAPTER—5

### **Experiences and Issues in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* and Arunima Sinha's *Born Again on the Mountain***

*Trying to Grow* is a semi-autobiographical novel written by Firdaus Kanga in 1991. The setting of the novel is urban India. It was turned into a movie entitled *Sixth Happiness* starring its author, Firdaus Kanga. Moreover, it was shortlisted for *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-97* which is an anthology of the Indian writers of the last 50 years.

*Trying to Grow* is a semi-autobiographical novel which portrays the growth and development of a young boy, Daryus Kotwal. He constantly struggles for his self-actualization. He is born with 'osteogenesis imperfecta' i.e. brittle bone condition. His bones are susceptible to frequent breaking. It binds him to a wheelchair. Kotwal states, "I also lived with osteo. Or, to give the devil his full name 'osteogenesis imperfecta'" (Kanga 28). He is lovingly known as Brit by his sister Dolly because of his brittle bones. Firdaus remarks, "Daryus! said Dolly, wrinkling her nose. 'Doesn't seem right for this baby. I am going to call him Brit! That is short for Brittle!'" (Kanga 30). Even Brit's anglophile mother, Sera advocates the same name suggested by her daughter, Dolly, believing that Brit sounds more English than a short form of brittle. Daryus Kotwal, the protagonist of the novel, befriends Cyrus- a young man and next door neighbour. Confused by the sexual orientation of Cyrus, Brit switches over to Cyrus's girlfriend, Amy. Brit receives a good education in school and college which eventually evolves him into a great writer. The semi-autobiographical novel, *Trying to Grow*, has been analyzed as the novel of growth i.e. bildungsroman in which the protagonist, Daryus Kotwal, is in constant search of his expression with the passage

of time. However, the researcher attempts to explore the novel from a disability perspective. The study seeks to find out as to how the disabled character of the novel, Daryus Kotwal popularly known as Brit, shares his experiences and gives voice to his repressed thoughts. It records his experiences about his disability of dwarfism and ‘osteogenesis imperfecta’ and thereby the comments are aimed at him on account of his disability.

*Trying to Grow* is a novel based on actual experiences of its writer who is represented by the character Daryus Kotwal or Brit as his mouthpiece. The autobiography starts with the description of Brit’s visible features like the gap in-between his teeth which are compared with a window. The novelist observes, “His teeth are like windows, said father to the old Parsee” (Kanga 3). This contrast is not made by Brit himself but it is his father, Sam, who does so while discussing Brit’s problem of ‘osteogenesis imperfecta’ with a Parsee sitting next to them in the bus. The two non-disabled people even discuss his age, starting with a Parsee who guesses it four and his father, Sam, corrects him by revealing Brit as eight years old. This confusion about his age indicates his dwarfish stature. Kanga remarks, “The doctor had forgotten to tell us I was going to be a dwarf.” (Kanga 3)

As far as the description of Brit is concerned, it is mostly odious or off-putting in nature. Sam tells Father Ferra, Principal of the Champion School, that his son Brit is a cripple only to ensure his admission in Champion school. The political usage of words like cripple may help one monetarily but such terminology, in the long run, is recurrently used to identify disabled people which lead to psychological disorder. Firdaus Kanga observes, “He is my son, said Sam. I am Sam Kotwal. This is Brit, uh, I am sorry, his name is Daryus. He is a cripple” (50). Brit is often described odiously by non-disabled characters of the novel. He doesn’t feel helpless and hopeless though

he is often reminded by characters like Defarge that he is handicapped. Firdaus states, “We call him Brit, said Defarge. Brit is short for his brittle bones. Poor, handicapped boy...” (125)

Though Ruby is attracted sexually to Brit, she considers him ugly in outlook, commenting on the wholeness of his body mockingly. The act of making fun of deformed configuration of disabled people is degrading and discouraging in nature. Ruby states, “I was talking about the whole thing- you know, your body and your legs” (99). Many times, disabled people look down upon other disabled people for their ‘undesired differentness’. They call each other by different names, believing that they themselves are far better than others whom they think horrible. It is proved by the fear that Brit expresses in connection with the people who have some sort of disability. Brit states, “I was scared of the way handicapped people looked... Whenever I saw them I wondered if I seemed as ugly and pathetic. I’d shudder and turn my mind away.” (Kanga 38)

The outward appearance of disabled people often generates a lot of offensive reaction from a non-disabled community. Jerry, one of the acquaintances of Brit, comments upon the physical features of Brit negatively. Jerry calls his body undesired and fearful. Jerry remarks, “Hell, I’ m sorry,’ he said, ‘but the way you look I got such a shock, an electric shock’ (182). Jerry or Zarthoust even degrades Brit by comparing him with Original Sin. This comparison is restricted only to disabled people, precluding non-disabled from it. Jerry negatively questions Brit about his physique and enquires if he has acquired disease of Polio before or after birth. Such remarks hurt Brit emotionally which makes him think of his body structure and form, time and again. He feels embarrassed and offended. Jerry remarks, “Have you always been this way or did you get polio or something?” (185). Brit begins to accept and assimilate

his differentness which is both undesired and uninviting in outlook. Brit wants to see the outer world which doesn't resemble him in any respects in general but in his physique in particular. Brit points out, "I want to know the real world, other people, people who are not like me." (186)

Daryas Kotwal is repeatedly reminded about his physical differences and homosexual orientation by his parents and friends. There seems none to spare him from such stigmatising nomenclature. Moreover, he feels doubly marginalised, one on the basis of disability and second on the basis of sexuality. Kanga remarks, "You knew you were going to be considered different as long as you lived; so you thought better to be stared at as homosexual rather than handicapped" (188). His helplessness is mocked at by his closest friend, Cyrus who joins Amy to let go of his wheelchair. Kotwal points out, "So now he was making jokes about my helplessness." (193)

It is generally observed that in Indian subcontinent people with disability are taken to *Dargahs*, shrines, temples and *Baba's* for the purpose of treatment believing that spiritual healing has potential to cure all diseases and disabilities. Deeply rooted in religious faith, spiritual healing is supposed to cure diseases and disorders through the chanting of prayers or *mantras*. Parsee remarks, "Don't we have Parsee prayers for children like these?" (Kanga 4). However, while going for spiritual healing, the discretion of a disabled person, Kotwal, is never sought. He is forcefully carried to *Wagh Baba* for spiritual healing. Brit is repulsed by Baba's methods of spiritual healing and decides not to visit him for the further cause of treatment. Brit states, "I am not going in there, I whimpered, my heart is lurching at the thought of *Wagh Baba* and his merciless tortures" (Kanga 4). This belief system is so deeply entrenched among people that even educated people cannot afford to challenge or question the effects of spiritual healing. For instance, Brit's father, Sam takes Brit to *Wagh Baba*

to treat his 'osteogenesis imperfecta' which can be treated medically. Some serious diseases require both social and medical treatment which may be given separately or simultaneously, depending upon the nature of the disease. However, in case the condition doesn't fall within the ambit of social treatment, it is required to draw on medical treatment which cannot be conducted by a layman like *Wagh Baba*. Sam remarks, "I am taking him to a holy man, *Wagh Baba*. May be he will cure my son" (Kanga 3). Jerry, Brit's friend, uses strange methods to treat Brit's disability. He buries Brit's armpit-high on the beach to cure his brittle bone disease because Rati remarks, "It is an age-old cure for limpy legs." (237)

Daryus Kotwal's bones break very easily and frequently. It damages his teeth and affects his walking adversely, binding him to a wheelchair. Firdaus remarks, "Your boy is born with bones brittle as glass. The ones in his legs are delicate as test tubes; I doubt he'll ever walk" (28). However, sometimes doctor's diagnosis of Brit's possibility of growing toothless turns out to be nothing more than a rumour because Brit has grown brittle teeth with the advancement in age. Firdaus states, "In spite of all the discouragement, my teeth appeared, translucent as lightly-frosted glass, and stayed on" (28). He doesn't only overcome his physical problems but also resists his image which is projected as fragile and dependent. *Trying to Grow* unfolds Brit's perception about himself and the perceptions of other characters about him.

Daryas Kotwal naturally prefers *Kama Sutra* to Shakespeare. His physical disability doesn't hamper his growing desire for the expression of his sexual identity. Although he is not taller than four feet, he actualises his sexuality and adulthood. He feels inclined towards female characters. The characters like Jeroo, his aunt, ignores his masculinity and expresses herself before him as if he is not capable of understanding the language of sex. She believes like other characters, that disability of

one type leads to the disability of other organs also. Even Brit himself says that for people around him, osteogenesis imperfecta means sexual neutrality. Firdaus Kanga observes, “You understand when I say men, I mean—men. Not someone like you, Brit. I wasn’t male. Not to them. The magic mirrors of their minds had invented a formula: osteo= sexlessness” (40). Brit’s sexual identity is called into question on account of his physical disability. His virility is normal and beyond doubt as per his own experiences, but he is thought to be sexually disabled by others. This overshadowing of Brit’s sexual identity is vindicated on account of his brittle bone disease. Disabilities, especially physical disability, tend to affect disabled individuals so adversely that their best abilities are ignored and ruled out. Therefore, it is relevant here to extend the concept of ‘spread effect’ to Brit’s physical disability which overshadows the rest of the abilities like his sexual virility and potential to write. Spread effect is practised when the total worth of an individual is judged by a specific limitation of an individual. It is because of this effect that disabled people fail to find opportunities which can bring them at par with non-disabled people.

This outlook of outshining of all abilities on sighting one disability of any nature is termed as ‘spread phenomenon’ by Bryan and ‘spread effect’ by Ervin Goffman and Beatrice Wright (Bryan 75). Such depictions also exemplify the ‘spread effect’ of prejudice. The ‘spread effect’ implies that an individual’s disability negatively affects other senses, abilities, or personality traits, or that the person is totally impaired. For example, many people shout at people who are blind or don’t expect people using wheelchairs to have the intelligence to speak for themselves. Focusing on the person’s abilities rather than on his or her disability may counter this type of prejudice. The stigmatized trait assumedly ruins every aspect of the person, pervasively spoiling social identity.

Moreover, according to his parent's knowledge, Brit's problem of brittle bone is inheritable which means that Brit may pass on the disease to his progeny. Therefore, both parents, especially his mother Sera advises him to stay a bachelor, without taking cognizance of sexual needs of Brit. The notion that 'disability of one ability means disability of all abilities' is prevalent across the world. It is, therefore, an urgent issue that needs to be addressed through writings, media and movies in order to stop repression of their self-actualization. Sera remarks, "My Brit is going to be a bachelor boy, aren't you darling. I wanted to shoot back, certainly not. I mean, what guy of fourteen is a confirmed bachelor, unless, of course, he is still stuck in that all-girls-are-asses phase. I answered nonchalantly, 'I guess so.'" (93)

Brit's sexuality manifests itself when he comes into contact with two girls, Tina and Ruby. Dolly's anticipation with reference to his sexual behaviour has come true because Brit has actually turned into a sex maniac. His sexual desire is aroused on sighting the two girls who feed his lust, imaginatively. Brit remarks, "Tina and Ruby were both budding before me and watching their growing feet and breasts and bottoms filled me with giddy delight. It was ever better because I really cared for them both" (95). The symptoms of his sexual desire get manifested in his French kiss to Ruby and his resorting to masturbation. He withdraws after smooching Ruby in the fear that he may no longer resist a soggy love affair if kissing is prolonged. Brit who bathes and dresses himself every day without the support of his family, but his daily routine is interrupted by his family members on the day he goes for an outing with them. It makes him question his abilities, though he enjoys it at times. It might affect his confidence of being independent in some respects. Brit observes, "I was perfectly capable of doing all this myself. But you know how it is when you cannot do some things people feel you cannot do anything." (52)

Daryas Kotwal's sexual virility is normal. He is not disabled in all respects as he is generally believed to be by non-disabled people. However, his sexual orientation is more towards a male than a female which is no longer thought to be an unnatural sentiment. Daryas Kotwal is enticed sexually towards his friend, Cyrus whom he finds more interesting and attractive than a female. Daryas Kotwal remarks, "I wanted Cyrus: his mocking mouth, his quiet eyes, his thigh and hair and cock" (Kanga 155). Even his friend Ruby reveals Daryas Kotwal's gay nature. When Kotwal is requested by Ruby to visit his home in order to talk to his friend, Cyrus, Kotwal denies and, in turn, gets scolded by Ruby in words like, "ok, you gay rascal" (157). He observes and examines his nude body and is highly allured by it. He even caresses and gropes his body near the thighs to gain sensual pleasure. Kotwal observes, "My hand reached out like a mechanical arm to make its way through his legs" (158). He feels jealous of Ruby who has enticed Cyrus. It is on account of this that Brit begins to curse Ruby and begins to imagine as to how the two would be busy with love-making activities like kissing and caressing her hair. Brit points out, "I could see his firm hands in her hair and his arcing mouth mocking kisses into her neck." (167)

The sexual orientation of Daryas Kotwal comes to fore when he feels sexually aroused in the company of Cyrus who holds him around his back firmly. Brit feels no chance of falling down from Cyrus's arms. He begins to kiss Cyrus's eyelids and lips. Cyrus kisses back Brit in his mouth and both begin to suck each other with small milky sounds. Brit remarks, "Then I realised I had a huge hard-on pushing into his tummy...I opened my mouth to the bristle of his stubble (169). The two individuals are highly inclined towards each other and reveal their gay nature as well. Therefore, he is called 'perverted son' by his mother, Sera and 'homosexual' by his father, Sam.



Brit's experience with parents has been very considerate. His mother, Sera, shows her courage, saying that her son Brit will handle his bodily problems in due course of time. She describes him handsome, claiming that her chin resembles Brit's. The beauty of the parents' wit lies in accepting Brit as different, without labelling him disabled. Firdaus observes, "But Daryus is different...We only have to be a bit careful, otherwise, he is just like any other baby" (30). The process of disastrous labellization has been avoided. His parents, especially his father never labels him abnormal on the basis of his brittle bone diseases. He accepts Brit's different condition as a problem, instead of abnormality. Kanga states, "Sam, Brit is a normal person. He has just got a problem. Can't you see it that way?" (30). It brings forth the difference between positional intellectuals and disabled writers. Positional or non-disabled writers, such as Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie, describe disabled people in stigmatizing way that doesn't hold good for them, but disabled writers like Firdaus Kanga, write about disabled issues out of their experience. Being a disabled person, he has lived through the experience of being disabled.

While sharing his experiences, Brit narrates that he is barely permitted by his parents to go out even to visit the house next door. On the other hand, his non-disabled sister Dolly feels free in this respect. He is reminded of Dolly's strength in comparison to his fragility and feebleness. Firdaus states, "I agree, said Sam. You are not as strong as Dolly is" (135). However, Brit feels internally strong enough to take care of himself. He asserts his potency and rejects their discouraging attitude, completely. He is restricted within his home and denied the opportunities to meet friends. His parents believe that books are enough for Brit to keep socialise him. However, socialization might teach him more than books. Firdaus remarks, "There is

nothing wrong with me...As long as I don't feel I am safe. I am not delicate at all."  
(135)

Daryas Kotwal has an experience of being labelled unfit for professional pursuits. His father thinks it unfair to expect anything from him. He believes that Brit is not the right person because of his disability, which is absolutely unfair. However, Daryas Kotwal is very confident about his fitness. The imposition of 'being not right' upon Daryas Kotwal seems a sort of violence. Kanga observes, "I'm right to myself," I shouted. 'And it is awful of you to go on thinking I'm not (145). Daryas Kotwal's experience of listening to off-putting lexicon and comments discourages him to a great extent. The day his father passes away, one of the neighbouring ladies, Defarge comes beating her breasts and points at Brit as a crippled and helpless son. He has hardly even heard any motivating and encouraging remarks from people around him. This holds not true for Brit and other disabled people alike, but it is almost the same across the board for all disabled people. His aunt, Mrs Rati Auntie, responds strangely after looking at Brit's physique. He is delineated as big in the brain and small in the body. They consider him awkward looking human being. Rati Auntie remarks, "How strange you are looking." (203)

One of the biggest issues for people with disability is the act of gazing and staring at them by non-disabled people. The moment they appear at the public place, be it a school, hospital or bus-stop, almost all people gaze at them, making them realise their 'undesired differentness', suggestively. This 'gaze harassment' makes them uncomfortable, sending them rolling back to their private space. The theorisation can be substantiated by the experience shared by disabled character, Brit. The moment he enters school premises, he is thronged around by schoolboys who look upon him agape as if he were an alien. They find Brit to be structurally very strange, though Brit

believes himself alright. Brit remarks, “About sixty boys stood around us staring, their mouths open. I saw them all but not for a moment could I look at anyone. I’d never felt worse about my body.” (53)

Despite being a precocious child, Brit accepts his health issues as his weakness. He has learnt to adjust with his problem but he is very susceptible to gazing and staring of people. When Madame Manekshaw takes Brit on an outing for snacks to Sea Lounge at the Taj Mahal Hotel, he feels cool and comfortable there because there is none to gaze at Brit. There he finds that everybody is busy with his own self, having no tendency to meddle in the matters of others. Firdaus states, “Oh, no! I said. It is the people. They don’t stare like the people at the movies and *Campion* do...they make me feel comfortable. I think they have got better manners” (56). Staring and gazing seems very ordinary to the non-disabled community because they are not themselves subjected to such gazing tortures. However, disabled people are subjected to gaze victimisation which they cannot avert or escape from. For instance, Brit often seeks to escape from the sights of people who seem to X-ray him to his consternation. When Brit comes across Cyrus for the first time, he turns away from his sighting because his staring begins to irritate him and makes him feel uneasy. Firdaus observes, “Cyrus patted the back of her white blouse abstractedly, all the while staring at me over her head with a speculative eye. I turned my chair so he wouldn’t be able to see my legs.” (124)

The second issue highlighted in the text is exaggeration and magnification of limitations of disabled people. Sometimes, their mistakes are exaggerated and parabolically heightened to the extreme end. Brit shares his experiences in school where his teacher Miss Pinto’s behaviour is obnoxious. She shouts at him during his exam. Firdaus Kanga remarks, “Write! She squeaked. In figures. Five crows” (53).

Such intolerable behaviour has discouraged him from answering her questions. Instead of answers, he begins to vomit. When he vomits in Mrs Pinto's lap, she passes on his vomiting mischief to her colleagues, making everyone aware and averse towards Brit. This excludes him educationally because at that moment none of the teachers is ready to accommodate him. Firdaus observes, "Mees Peento, she has told one and all of the unfortunate experience with thee child so no teacher ees prepared to sit weethheem" (56). However, the same student, Brit, performs very well and gets through the examination on being encouraged by another teacher, Mrs De Souza. She doesn't shout at him, rather she calls him a smart boy and passes on a smile to Brit as positive reinforcement, inspiring him for higher aspirations. Firdaus states, "She smiled a big smile and said, 'Naughty boy! Put on your thinking cap. Which made me giggle so much, I sort of floated through the test... Mrs De Souza ruffled my hair; I kissed her hand. She made me feel good. Just like I felt at home'" (54). One more teacher, Madame Manekshaw, encourages him indirectly with statements like 'precious things are brittle' (59) and Father Ferra boosts his morale by conferring an award on him. These examples suggest that discriminatory treatment against the disabled community may exclude them from mainstream society. This observation doesn't hold only true for disabled students but also for other marginal sections. In case the teaching and learning atmosphere is made conducive and inclusive, it is sure to sustain the hope of disabled children. Therefore, school teachers have an important role to play in bringing disabled children out of their introvert and reclusive nature through motivation and positive reinforcement. They can be encouraged to study by making their school infrastructure, curriculum and its staff inclusive in nature.

Although Brit tops his class in exams and is appreciated with an award, his parents continue to doubt his competitive competence. They believe that he cannot

acquire and manage a job well in the way non-disabled people do. The dearth of trust on the capability of the disabled people affects their self-confidence, negatively. They feel helpless when they don't find a conducive and sensitive environment around them. Even Brit's parents wish that their daughter Dolly should take care of him after them. Sam states, "How on earth do you think he can go out and compete with all those young men bursting with energy!" (93)

People with disability experience textual exclusion in the same way as they face social exclusion. In real life, they are hardly even engaged in activities like decision-making, marriage ceremony, outing parties so on and so forth. Similarly, Tina, who is a hearing impaired character, experiences discrimination in her family. Although she communicates nicely through sign language, she is not taken along for seeing Dolly's match merely on grounds of her deafness. Firdaus observes, "Tina was left behind because even Sera had to admit that the two handicapped children in one family was a bit too much" (80). The moment a person with disability makes a rationally sound statement, he is further mocked at as if the application of reasoning is the exclusive right of non-disabled. To authenticate the statement, it is relevant to cite the example of Brit's reply to the lady. The lady believes that Madame Manekshaw's crime of killing her husband has urged her to commit suicide. Being a rational child, Brit clarifies the lady that she has committed suicide out of love for her husband. Being a supercilious lady, she feels offended. She retorts him by calling 'small mouths' and tells him that it is none of his business to indulge in such serious conversations. Brit observes, "The lady, hook-nosed in a black silk sari, looked at me haughtily. 'Small mouths', she said, 'shouldn't concern themselves with big affairs.'" (92)

Man is an emotional being and therefore, his behaviour is affected by odious words, nicknames and negative statements. Similarly, as an individual, Brit is sensitive to all the repulsive comments. He feels and internalises the feeling of being commented upon and ignored by others. Firdaus observes, “Sera told anyone who met me and was worried I would be spoiled rotten, staying at home like this” (63). The next important issue that is raised in the novel is the inaccessibility of books, both at home and in the library. Brit finds it difficult to access the books from high shelves which are beyond his reach. Daryas Kotwal has faced the problem of this nature at his home. Also there, a heap of books falls over him while pulling down one book from the shelf. Brit remarks, “An avalanche swooshed down on me.” (194)

The issue of carelessness shown by attendants has also been highlighted explicitly in the novel. His servant, Esmero leaves him at the British Council Library without turning back in time. Brit feels hungry and giddy because of the negligence of Esmero who perceives the problem of Brit in a careless manner. The second issue that embarrasses Brit is the non-availability of disabled-friendly toilet system. Brit shares that he cannot use the toilet seat meant for common man. He is scared of falling into it because it is wide in width than the one that fits for Brit to sit on. Therefore, the inaccessibility of infrastructures like toilets, bathrooms, kitchens and library, makes their lives far more miserable. A disabled person like Shivani Gupta believes that accessibility is equality. In other words, she believes in inaccessibility as inequality. The issue of inaccessible transport system has been raised very often in the novel. It is described that a cab driver cannot haul Brit inside his cab. It reflects the problematic and exclusive nature of the existing transport system. Brit states, “And both of us thought it was unfair to ask the driver for help” (254). The concern of inaccessible nature of the prevailing transport industry has still remained unrecognised and hence

unresolved. The normal friendly transport system is almost taken for granted, ignoring the requirements of the disabled community with whom the system is in complete disharmony. The kitchen shelves are mostly inaccessible to non-disabled people. The issue has been highlighted in the novel by Brit when he gets his kitchen renovated in accordance with his own convenience. He watches, instructs and explains the mason to level his kitchen to his knee-level in order to make it accessible. (272)

The problem of disability doesn't diminish Brit's power of feeling as adversely as is believed generally by non-disabled people. Brit points out that he feels as normally as any non-disabled person does. Even his friend confirms his power to feel by remarking, "To feel you didn't have osteo" (278). The problem of brittle bone doesn't intervene with his power of thinking which seems absolutely intact. His choice of writing career proves the potential of his pen. Brit remarks, "I have to be osteo Brit and not mind" (278). Finally, Brit astonishes everyone with his assertive statement that he likes the way he appears.

People with disability are very often stared at in such a manner that they feel irritatingly harassed. Daryas Kotwal shares his experience of being gazed at with surprising and suspicious looks by a tiny kid inside a cinema hall. Brit remarks, "I guess a lot of my problems come from the way I think people look at me" (225). Even the child has the audacity of asking as to why the uncle is so short and dwarf. The father of the child describes Brit as 'handicapped' which is an offensive term. The father misinforms his child that Brit cannot execute his plans on his own and therefore, he is accompanied by his sister in the cinema. Even the father of the child taunts Brit that he has not learnt any lesson from his birth (224). However, Brit's friend, Amy comes to his rescue by rebuking the man for his obnoxious comments. She questions the conservative mentality of that man about Brit's disability. She

remarks, “As for Karma if it existed, it would take u hundred more births to become what this man is.” (224)

Tina, one more disabled character of the novel, is identified by her mother as deaf and dumb than an individual. Jeroo is reminded of her deafness and dumbness by *Swamiji*. Everyone around including Sera, Sam, Dolly and Ruby nod in agreement with *Swamiji* except Brit who objects to her being called a dumb because she can speak through sign language. For Brit, non-verbal language is as good a language as verbal language is. Tina is proficient enough in sign language to communicate her thoughts and feelings to her friends like Rohit, Ruby and Brit. Being in love with Rohit, she never faces a problem in communicating her elopement plans to him. She seems to be as perfect in her language as Brit and others are in the verbal language. Therefore, Brit doesn't agree with Tina's mother on labelling her dumb. Kanga observes, “*Swamiji* says, she went on, ‘I must remember that my daughter was deaf and dumb’. She wasn't dumb, I said. Jeroo looked shocked as if I had ruined her spell. She was dumb, she insisted. Only we could understand what she said. So she was dumb to the world.” (110)

Drawing on the theory of linguistic imperialism, it sounds to be accurately the case of imposition of verbal language over those performing sign language. According to this theory, sign language is thought as inferior because it involves no speech at all, and prefers verbal language for being embedded with speech and utterance. However, the core of any language is intelligibility which is the same both in verbal and non-verbal language. Therefore, there should be no issue of inferiority and superiority as long as they serve the same function but with a difference of medium. Moreover, sign language is not documented and taught in schools due to the dominance of students who use verbal language. Moreover, Brit is discouraged by his



mother Sera in his love affair with his girlfriend, Amy. She gives him a long piece of advice telling Brit that he cannot love anyone because of his disability. This instance suggests that Brit is not permitted to express his subjective choices. Although his love affair is called unfair, he wishes to live and love like others. Brit says, “Let me love Amy...feel the things they do” (249). Brit’s and Amy’s lovemaking in public evokes different reactions from every passerby. The onlookers start describing and discussing them as if they are objects of study. They guess Amy’s relationship with Brit in terms of money and pity. People’s reaction to Brit varies when some consider him to be God’s favourite while there are others who believe him to be God’s punishment and unfortunate.

Even the urchins warn each other while mocking at Brit, lest misfortune should befall them also. Perhaps, their love-making activity in public is condemned not on account of moral grounds but on account of Brit’s disability. Kanga points out, “At least they shouldn’t come out, such people. Then loving in public-it’s too much” (253). The friendship and love-making between a disabled and non-disabled evoke even the meanest responses. Amy starts crying at being gazed strangely by non-disabled people when she is in the company of Brit. One man wearing muslin dhoti points out that something is fishy about Amy as he ascribes her love for Brit to be an anatomical problem. He says that she may have no option other than Brit because of her inner problems. Such varied responses make Brit contemplate about his subjectivity, time and again. Brit expresses that he doesn’t appear as funny as people look at him. He reveals that he doesn’t look upon blind and lame with such contempt. All the people do have their inner ‘self’ which matters more than their bodies. One pious-faced woman remarks, “The body is only like clothes we wear. *Bhagavad Gita* tells us that” (254). It is pertinent here to bring Abraham Maslow’s theory of

'hierarchy of needs' to bear on the situation of Brit who is denied basic instincts like love, sex and accessible infrastructure. According to Abraham Maslow's theory of 'hierarchy of needs' proposed in 1954, human needs can be classified in 'hierarchies of prepotency' i.e. one need relies on the gratification of consecutive lower needs. The five sets of interlinked and mutually dependent individual needs include physiological needs (food, air and sleep), safety needs (job, house etc.), belonging and love needs (friends, love etc.), esteem needs (self-respect, recognition and reputation) and self-actualization (expression, perfection and justice) (Mangal 151). Although Abraham Maslow's theory of 'hierarchy of needs' is proposed on a sample of a few distinguished personalities barring crippled and disabled people, it is very relevant to address the concern of disabled people also. The 'higher version' of self-esteem entails components of independence and freedom and self-actualization includes perfection, self-expression and self-sufficiency. These components help them in building self-confidence which, in turn, capacitates them to perform their routine work satisfactorily.

Drawing on this theory, Brit feels disappointed to observe that everything has been tucked away in an inaccessible place for him. It makes him dependent on parents for everything which otherwise should have been easily accessible for him. He is bound to request them for ordinary things, time and again. It hurts Brit to be excessively dependent upon his parents. He holds that frequent dependency limits his freedom and mars his confidence. Sera remarks, "But, Brit, you just have to ask. We are always here to help. Which made me mad. I didn't want someone always to be there...And frank it was about not letting me treat them like bonded labour" (63). Such dependence on parents for every petty thing affects his self-esteem and expression, arousing in him an inferiority complex. It implies that people with disability cannot

express themselves fully unless they are provided opportunities, basic amenities of life and needs. Moreover, the physiological needs, safety needs and social needs of disabled are fulfilled, if ever, carried out in the name of a charity which affects their self-esteem and self-actualization. In other words, they hardly bring into motion their own subjectivity and true self. Sometimes, the stereotypical thinking about the disability of an individual obstructs his self-actualization i.e. what he wants to be. The moment Brit shares his wish of becoming a psychiatrist with his teacher, Madame Manekshaw, she reminds him of his dwarfism. She reminds him that he cannot practise psychiatry because people will not trust him on grounds of his disability. Firdaus observes, “I don’t think you can do it, Brit. People are going to find it very difficult to trust you to solve their problems...To a lot of people, you seem stupid because you are so short and, I know it is absurd because you cannot walk.” (68)

People with disability become a common victim of the wrath of non-disabled people. For instance, when Brit supports Dolly for choosing her career as air-hostess, he is rebuked by his mother, Sera. Dolly fails to convince her parents for the job. Being upset with their decision, she pours out her anger over Brit and calls him as a sex maniac. The transference of anger followed by labelling exposes him to vulnerability and victimisation. Firdaus states, “Bloody rot and poppycock! said mother, quite forgetting Sam’s admonitions. Has Dolly been telling you such rubbish and corrupting your mind... You son is a sex maniac if ever I have known one, said Dolly” (71). Even Dolly’s delay and deferment of marriage are ascribed to Brit by his neighbours who symbolise society. The neighbours around believe that Dolly has grown spinster in the hope to shoulder the responsibility of Brit who is thought to be helpless by society. This rumour is circulated across neighbours through women gossiping around the streets which affect Brit psychologically. Firdaus remarks, “You

want her to stay and look after Brit, don't you? You are worried he will be alone when God forbid, you both are gone." (76)

The problem of disability doesn't diminish Brit's power of feeling as adversely as is believed generally by non-disabled family. Brit points out that he feels as normally as any non-disabled person does. Even his friend confirms about his feeling power by remarking, "To feel you didn't have osteo" (278). The problem of brittle bone doesn't intervene with his power of thinking and reacting to situations. Besides, his choice of writing career proves the potential of his pen. Brit remarks, "I have to be osteo Brit and not mind." (278)

Brit has deconstructed the traditional and outdated thinking that a physically disabled person cannot convert his received education into a way of life. In his case, the education that he received in school and college turned him into a prolific writer. He becomes the talk of the town through his writings. Here, Brit seems to have availed the opportunities in tune with the 'capability approach' of Amartya Sen. This approach was conceived in the 1980s as a fresh theoretical framework about well-being, development and justice. 'Capability approach' implies 'freedom to achieve well-being' in terms of capability i.e. practical opportunities of people to do or be what they have reason to value. It includes assessment of well-being, the evaluation of social arrangements and designing of policies and proposals of social change. It gives priority to people's 'beings' and 'doings' by offering them practical opportunities. The practical opportunities include education, employment, health service and social relationship.

According to Amartya Sen's capability approach, the term 'capability' is not only limited to mental or physical ability but it also includes those opportunities

which are not directly observable. 'Beings' and 'doings' refer to activities and various states that a person desires to do or be. 'Beings' implies being well-educated and well-nourished while engaged in a social relationship. 'Doings' include participation in the election, travelling and caring of children (Mitra 237). Capabilities are practical opportunities or real freedom to realise those functionings. Therefore, travelling is a functioning and accessible bus service is the corresponding capability. In light of this approach, disability is a denial of capabilities which obstructs their functioning. In the novel, Brit has been given a practical opportunity to receive education in schools and colleges which has enabled him to become a great writer. It can be inferred that his actual disability has not been extended to his potential disability. Actual disability means the impairment which imposes a restriction upon the individual functioning and deters him in his attempts to be or do. On the other hand, potential disability is the dearth and deprivation of practical opportunities like education, health facility and employment (Mitra 241). Although Brit is disabled, he is empowered with an education that makes him acquainted to solutions to his problem. Drawing on Amartya Sen's theory of 'capability approach', Brit is imparted quality education to empower him to make a free choice for himself and realise a sense of freedom. It contributes to his individual development. Therefore, potential disability indirectly attacks the freedom and choice of a disabled person.

The study brings home the point that if a disabled person is given an opportunity to bring out his best into practice, the chances for successful execution of functionings increase, which in turn promotes his well-being, positively. The Sen's idea of capability is closely associated with 'substantive equality' which demands different treatment in order to counter disadvantages. 'Substantive equality' enfold equality of opportunity and structural and social inclusion. Kothari observes that

difference that arises out of personal characteristics and impairment is to be acknowledged in order to ensure different treatment levels. It means that schools and colleges are obliged not to give identical printed question papers to all students but also arrange alternative formats for visually challenged people. Similarly, electoral authorities are not supposed only to entitle all the citizens with the right to vote but also to ensure their positive participation by making the polling booths accessible. Such measures of accommodating human differences are called 'reasonable accommodation'. (Kothari 11)

*Born again on the Mountain* is an inspirational and autobiographical story (Yuvraj Singh) written by Arunima Sinha in 2014. The book is an account of Arunima Sinha's losing everything and then achieving it back through her efforts to the extent that she was conferred with Padma Shri award, the fourth highest civilian award in India. Arunima Sinha is brave enough to question the mentality that 'disability is inability'. She has the distinction of being the first female amputee from India to conquer Mount Everest.

*Born Again on the Mountain* is a factual story of Arunima Sinha, a twenty-four year old national level volleyball player. Being an athlete, she participates in games like volleyball and football. Arunima Sinha remarks, "I had represented my school in football and later my college at national-level volleyball" (Arunima 6). She boards the train, Padmawat Express in order to face interview for recruitment in Central Industrial Security Force. In the train, she confronts the thieves who attempt to rob her golden chain and eventually throw her out of the running train for not yielding to their design. She lies unnoticed on the railway track till the next morning when people come to defecate on the railway station. Despite being thrown and injured, she doesn't lose hope and courage because life has something good in store

for her. Early in the morning, she is spotted by a local villager, Pintu Kashyap, who takes her to the hospital. To avoid spreading infection throughout the whole body, one of her legs is cut off without using anaesthesia which changes her entire life drastically. She is bold enough to ask the hospital pharmacist, B. C. Yadav to operate her leg without giving her anaesthesia. Although the pain is unbearable without anaesthesia, she encourages the hospital staff to operate upon her leg. Doctors praise her gutsy attitude with remarks, “She is a special girl” (43). While being operated upon in the hospital, she makes up her mind to ascend the Mount Everest in order to set the record of being the first female amputee conqueror of Mount Everest in the world. Her iron will enable her to accomplish her plan of becoming the first disabled female mountaineer of India who mounts the summit of Mount Everest.

*Born Again on the Mountain* is an account of experiences Arunima Sinha goes through in her life after losing her left leg. She relates as to how she was thrown out of running train by robbers when she resisted them from snatching her golden chain and lost her left leg. The excruciating pain she experienced both at the railway track and during the operation in Bareilly District Hospital is terrifying and unutterable. She mentions as to how her father, Harendra Kumar Sinha, met a mysterious end by drowning in a pond and her brother, Ravi, was murdered. The police didn't find it appropriate to probe into the murder of her brother as they didn't have any resources and connections with media, politicians or bureaucracy which prove instrumental in ensuring the justice to the aggrieved. However, Arunima Sinha's tragedy shakes up collective conscious of entire India and catches the attention of photojournalists from the Hindi daily *Hindustan*. The news was also covered by English newspaper the *Hindustan Times*. Her distinction of being national volleyball player attracts electronic and print media that give wide coverage to her achievements. They market

and circulate her news to arouse the curiosity and awareness in public. It appeals local and national politicians like Supriya Aron, the former MP of Bharatiya Janata Party and Santosh Gangwar, influential Bharatiya Janata Party leader. They expressed their solidarity with her and promised to lend support to her. Even the then Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh and Congress Chief, Sonia Gandhi were informed about her accident. The top leaders of all political parties and senior officials of Railway Board visited her. Mamata Banerjee, a minister, came all the way from Bengal to make some huge announcement for her. Arunima was paid a visit by State Women's Commission who gave her a cheque of one lakh rupees and ensured her that all expenses incurred would be borne by Uttar Pradesh government. She received generous support from the government and Akhilesh Yadav, chief of Samajwadi Party, gave her Rs 25 lakhs for climbing up the Mount Everest and Rs 1 lakh for her personal expenses. It means that electronic media made her a public figure overnight.

Arunima Sinha remarks, "I was prime-time TRP material now" (46). Almost all the TV channels started relaying her condition online and covered her from all angles. Media became the means to turn a local cry into a 'national outcry' (48). The media networking brought her the best treatment by specialist doctors which could have been otherwise impossible. In other words, the marketing of accident news through media mobilised all government and non-government agencies to empathise with Arunima Sinha in particular and women in general. Arunima Sinha reiterates, "I started getting better treatment, more personalised care with some big doctors beginning to visit me" (48). Moreover, the continuous running of the news made her the centre of attraction for politicians, bureaucrats and social activists. She was even offered free treatment in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) by the then union Sports Minister, Ajay Maken, for which a journalist advised Arunima, "AIIMS



is a far better hospital than the one in Lucknow” (62). Eventually, she was air-lifted from King George’s Medical University to All India Institute of Medical Sciences in cavalcade comprising media vans, district magistrate and top police officers. It is said that even the common man like auto-drivers, roadside-vendors and young people began marching in the streets to gain support for her. One day, she was visited by Shahnaz Hussain, a big name in the fashion and beauty world. She taught her beauty tips within the hospital premises and made her a diploma holder in beauty. This diploma boosted her confidence and raised her morale high, though she didn’t practise it (72). Seeing the networks of relationships at work in highlighting the case of Arunima and placing her at the centre of public attention, it is relevant to refer to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of ‘social capital’ that forms the core of Bourdieu’s project. The term ‘capital’ is generally figured out as specific resource that an individual can exchange, invest or have an access to. Bourdieu classified the resources into social, cultural and economic capital. These resources help one to rise high in social space.

The position in the social hierarchy, in turn, affects individual’s life experiences, aspirations and expectations which are called ‘field of the possibles’ by Bourdieu (Thatcher Jenny, Nicola Ingram, Ciaran Burke and Jessie Abrahams 2). Pierre Bourdieu observes, “Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacqu 119). Eileen Green, John Horne, Caroline Oliver and Louise Ryon observe that it is the network of social contacts that constitutes the core of social capital. These contacts are generally used by people to their advantage. Therefore, to have contacts is not enough but their usage to grow in a particular field and increase

one's life chances turns them into social capital (13). The social capital absolutely fits well when it is brought to bear upon Arunima Sinha's situation. She develops connections with media, politicians, bureaucrats and the common man and utilised those connections for realising her aspirations. These connections supported and encouraged her to become the first Indian amputee to scale the Mount Everest. The moment she was thrown out of the window, nobody observed or heard her till morning but her courage attracted the attention of all. Even before her accident, her father and brother were killed mysteriously, and the murderers were not traced because of lack of social relationships and contacts. The same happened with the robbers responsible for Arunima Sinha's accident. They were not traced out. Lying on the railways track amputated, there is hardly any hope of her survival and the expenditure of operation. But once the media started highlighting Arunima Sinha's condition, she became a buzzword for national news and evolved into a national daughter. The politicians, women activists and philanthropists called on her with monetary help, showing their solidarity. This growth of connectivity and relationship evolves into social capital which convinced her to rise from the railway track to mount the Everest. This is how she makes and marks a new chapter in the history of mountaineering by becoming the first amputee to triumph Mount Everest. What the researcher attempts to convey is that a person with disability ceases to be disabled if he/she is supported by the 'social capital' which may enable one to enjoy all the opportunities which a disabled person is generally deprived of.

Arunima Sinha shares her experience of the prosthesis through which she gets artificial limbs that help her in walking and scaling the Everest. She didn't find much difference between natural and artificial legs, rather she develops a love for her artificial leg. She raises the need for state-sponsored assistive technology which

proves effective in countering the physical disability. It is because of the prosthesis that she could dream to scale Mount Everest on her artificial leg after practising wall to wall walking. The inner turmoil she went through after losing her left leg was neither shared nor was it understood by anyone. She points out, "I was walking ...walking on my own ...without anyone around" (85). The book, *Born Again on The Mountain*, embodies experiences of diverse types, ranging from her accident right up to the act of scaling the Mount Everest. She sought Bachendri Pal's phone number who is India's first and most prominent woman mountaineer to get basic tips about mountaineering, though initially, she was reluctant to disclose her plan of scaling the Everest with the fear that she might be taken as an insane. She points out, "They thought that I had lost my mind" (90). Her mission of climbing the Mount Everest appeared shocking to the people on account of her disability because athletics is generally thought to be an exclusive arena for non-disabled people. Disabled people are not considered worthy of achievements and recognition in sports. The surprising reaction evoked among non-disabled people with regard to her climbing holds good for all disabled people. Prior to her accidents, she had unkind experience of meeting the people. Even after her accident, many people visited her with useless sympathy with the concern as to, "how I was going to spend the rest of my life...Have faith in God" (90). The visitors couldn't anticipate any miracle in her life. The life-boosting elements like empathy, solidarity, encouragement and guidance were missing in their conversation. They looked upon her as a victim but she wanted to prove herself the first Indian amputee to climb the Everest. However, there were some people like Bachendri Pal who encouraged her with positive reinforcement and praised her as, "I was a brave girl" (97). Bachendri Pal gave her a chance in her training institute, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation at Uttarkashi to prove herself as a winner. She was

laughed at by people on account of the apprehensive look she was wearing but she didn't give up her struggle. She took up the dangerous route during her training for trekking, whereupon Bachendri Pal appreciated her with the statement, "Arunima, you are far better than them. In fact, these people now seem to be suffering from a handicap, not you" (110). One of her fellow climber named Madhuwanti Godse remarked that Arunima is no longer disabled. She could do with one leg what non-disabled could do with both.

During the trekking exercise Arunima started competing with non-disabled people; thereby she refuted her handicapped nature. She was suggested to have a basic mountaineering course from Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM) which is a professional institute for mountaineering in Uttarkashi. She was taken aback to learn that NIM doesn't allow disabled people for training purpose as per its provisions. Such exclusion is very common in other institutions as well where facilities are not available to meet their educational and vocational needs. This is one of the major concerns that have been highlighted in her book.

Arunima issues some inspirational statements in her book *Born Again on the Mountain*. One such motivating statement is, "Remember, none can defeat you until you concede. Yes, occasional failures will test you but keep trying. Some door of opportunity will certainly open" (170). She proved her theory by competing with non-disabled people while scaling Mount Everest. She got injured, bruised and her legs started bleeding but she didn't give up her fighting up the mountain with her eventual success. Most of her fellow climbers didn't know that she is disabled and nor did she feel like telling it to them. (171)

Subsequently, her realization of being supported by the public in times of need and necessity inspired her to set up the International Sports Academy for the Handicapped. The academy has been named after Pandit Chandrashekhhar Azad, great Indian freedom fighter hailing from Unnao. To raise funds for the academy, she met the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and corporate houses like Tata, Microsoft, Eldeco and Tech Mahindra. She was helped by Ramakrishna Mission, Vadodara and Swami Nikhileshwaranand. Believing that the academy would ensure identification and security of disabled people, she remarks, “Just because a part of them had been incapacitated didn’t mean that they had nothing to look forward to (207). Arunima is now fighting for the cause of the disabled community.

There were several problems that Arunima Sinha faced after achieving disabled status. The first infrastructural problem she faced in the guest house is the lack of a lift or elevator facility. In other words, inaccessibility of the buildings has been indirectly highlighted as one of the major concerns that disabled people face generally. In the novel, there is the mention of an instance during her expedition. While in the midway of Mount Everest, she felt the need of a toilet, but the toilet that one found was not convenient for the disabled people in general, and disabled people with prosthesis in particular. Arunima remarks, “I couldn’t sit on the Indian-style toilet seats and had to literally stand and deliver.” (165)

The insensitivity of the bureaucracy makes the lives of the disabled more miserable. While travelling in the bogie reserved for disabled people, she was repeatedly asked to produce the disabled certificate, though her disability was obvious and visible. Her certificate of disability from AIIMS was not accepted by train security staff. The noticed disability was less convincing for them than a disability certificate. On their insistence for the disability certificate, she reacted, “I took off my

artificial limb and waved it at the security team. Look, here is the proof” (95). She said that rules are good to follow but reason as well matters a lot with respect to identification of disability. Railway authorities must not rely solely on certificates from the district administration and unnecessarily harass people travelling without it. They must use reason and sight to check out if the person travelling in a compartment reserved for disabled is really disabled or not. Such incidents highlight the disability of the non-disabled people who don’t possess the sensitivity and sensibility towards fellow humans. Arunima’s determination enabled her to achieve her target of scaling Everest very bravely, challenging the stereotype ‘disability is inability’. Eventually, after facing a lot of physical and mental hardships and hindrances, Arunima Sinha registered a record of being the first Indian amputee to scale the top of Mount Everest at 10:55 a.m on 21 May 2013 (192). She proclaimed, “Nothing is impossible for a truly determined person.” (194)

## Works Cited

- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loic J.D. Wacqu. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Polity Press, 1992.
- Bryan, Willie V. *Socio-political Aspects of Disabilities: The Social Perspectives and Political History of Disabilities and Rehabilitation in the United States*. Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2010.
- Chakraborty, Rakhi. "How the worst tragedy of her life turned Arunima Sinha into a world champion". 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.
- Jenny, Thatcher, et al. *Bourdieu: The Next Generation*. Routledge, 2016.
- Kanga, Firdaus. *Trying to Grow*. Penguin Random House India, 1990.
- Kothari, Jayna. *The Future of Disability Law in India*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Mangal S.K. *Advanced Educational Psychology*. PHI Learning Private Limited, 2012.
- Mehrotra, Nilika. *Disability, Gender & State Policy: Exploring Margins*. Rawat Publications, 2013.
- Mitra Sophie. "The Capability Approach and Disability." *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, March 2006.
- Sinha, Arunima. *Born Again on the Mountain*. Penguin Books, 2014.