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Perception Of Disability In Anita Nair's Novels

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ABSTRACT

Disabled literature reflects and explores the representations of all the kinds of disabilities. Literature, being a representation of life creates the conduit about disability and ability. It helps us to understand the experiences and hard realities of the disabled, their acceptance and positioning in our lives and our social culture. It also perpetuates the social processes which alienate, marginalize and exclude people with disabilities. In modern writings, disability is conceived as difference and not deficit. It is the perception of Anita Nair on disability. A notable Indian based woman writer, in her novels has given a prior description of differently able persons and the intimate world of their own in her novels. Idris, the protagonist of *Idris: Keeper of the Light* has a be-jeweled eye attracting every one; but he experiences the inability to sleep in his whole life. Smriti of *Lessons in Forgetting* undergoes the comatose condition for a noble cause which sways all her senses. Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* portrays the sufferings of Najma, an acid attack victim having a ghostly appearance, the sad plight of Maya in bringing up her autism affected son Naveen and the hysterical blindness of Theresa. This paper aims at using disability as a literary device to explore the, hitherto, untold sufferings of peripheral sections of differently able people and their perception of looking their disability into an advantage in Anita Nair's novels.

KEYWORDS: Disability, ability, Difference, alienation



Disability is the deformity which prevents the human being from being normal. The world is considering the individual as entity, with abnormal outlook and difference. Their every day is a struggle for survival for normalcy amidst the (normal) being. Such Survival is portrayed by Anita Nair in her novels to show the innermost sufferings with the queer perception of people on them, their estrangement and their ability to cope with the life more successfully and optimistically rather than others.

When Smiriti of Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* is on her dream project of saving woman, is harassed mercilessly by a group of savage men to stop her from revealing the secrets to the world, it leaves the traces of her behind in comatose condition. JAK, her father's paternal instinct makes him to suffer because of his daughter condition which is revealed as, "We are buying her alive... It kills me, Kala Chithi, to think that my Smiriti's life is over... It would have been better if she had died" (LIF, 56). When he learns the truth behind Smriti's disaster that she has been attacked while trying to project the existing female infanticide in Minjakkapuram, he gains confidence and decides to work for the cause of her daughter. He assumes it as his responsibility as an Indian and as a father, to reform the society, so he carries out the unfinished project of his daughter, "He lies on his back, staring into the darkness. I should be used to it by now, he tells himself... I am not playing god. I am merely fulfilling my professional obligations (LIF, 328)".

Idris, the hero of the *Idris: Keeper of the Light* has a golden colored eye, which gives him a strange identity wherever he goes. Being a Somalian trader, a very dark figure with queer eye cast, he is considered as a man from some mysterious land. In his young age he has lost the most valuable possessions of his life- his parents, wealth and the eye sight. Miraculously he has escaped the desert storm as,

The boy dug into the earth with his elbows and tried to push aside the cage of bones. It moved. Knowing that his life depended on it, he flung all of his being into moving the mighty skeleton... Quickly he wedged himself into the gap and began to crawl out... as the gigantic camel ribcage fell back onto the ground it had



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rested on for over a score of years, a bleached bone splintered off the vertebrae and flew through the still cold of the early afternoon and pierced the boy's right eye. He screamed. (IKL,9)

He is luckily saved from the disaster but that incident has stolen his eyesight making him to suffer with pain and unable to sleep from that day onwards. He simply awakens at all nights. His strange eye attracts Kuttimallu who considers it as a firefly: "I thought you were a firefly. Your glittering eye..." (IKL,33) Her admiration for his eyes results in their love. His deformed eye is never a burden in his life. When Kuttimallu asks him to practically train their son Kandavar, he takes him for an adventure trip from Thoothukudi to Golconda gold mine. Irrespective of his defect, he enjoys his life. The sense of fear of the accident steals the notion of his sleep. When he realizes his love for Thilothamma, he feels comfort and able to sleep for the first time, "I don't know when I slept last. I had forgotten what it is to sleep." (IKL,349) He enjoys a great life rather than any one with ecstasy and hope.

Gita, wife of Pujary in Anita Nair's *Chain of Custody* is a victim of Paralysis. She has lost her senses when she met an accident with her sweet heart Pujary, before their marriage. Though she becomes paralysis below the waist level, the love of Pujary for her never fades. Her inability to lead a normal life tortures her. She is loved by him a lot. She has to dependent on him for all her daily needs and activities. It haunts her. His desire to make her life as a queen takes him in the wrong turn. Her deformity disturbs when she suspects something strange with him. She even risks her life by killing the lawyer Rathore to safeguard her husband whom involves in trafficking child for prostitution as, "The lawyer was waving his hand as he gave the thekedar a lecture...she reached for the stone Buddha on the table and slammed it on his head...One heavy blow... 'You won't let him change...You are evil. Not him' (COC, 305)". The guilt of turning her husband in to a corrupted man overwhelms with the change of her in to a murderer.

Anita Nair in her recent novel *Eating Wasps* has explored the sufferings of Najma, an acid attack victim. Thriving the cruel hands of poverty, she manages to become a teacher much to the effort of her mother who employs as a cook. They begin to dream for a comfortable life from



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their past sufferings. But their dreams are shattered when Najma is physically exhausted by an acid attack by a colleague of her mother whom she wants to marry. Her mother refuses to give her any concern for the marriage, thinking of a good prosperous life for her. The negative reply humiliates and aghast him. So he threatens her by reprimanding the innocent girl publicly in a train. But none comes for her safety later he destroys her and her life as,

Do you know what it feels like to have acid on your skin? Do you know what it does to you as your skin melts and your nerve ends scream?... Do you know what it feels like to see the shock and horror in the eyes of everyone who walks past you? Do you know what it's like to look at yourself in the mirror with one eye and know you will never be you again? ... Do you know what it's like to live knowing your life is destroyed and the man who did it walks free? (EW,63).

She is left with the burnt face, having a ghostly appearance. The students will never want to have a ghostly figured teacher so her prosperity of getting permanent placement as teacher is shattered. Time is a key factor of healing the misfortunes of life. She makes her mind to face the world as such. So she picks her usual train, and asks justice with the fellow passenger and curses them for not preventing her from the attack of the rogue as, "I am Najma... I am the girl you never saw. I want you to take a good look at what that man did to me. If you didn't see me then, I hope you will now"(EW,66). She makes her mind to lead a valiant life not from hiding herself. So she begins to work as a cleaner in Radha's hotel Nila without covering her face: "I will never hide behind a burkha again...I am Najma"(67). Her boldness assaults the world marks her identity.

Thelma is the hysterical blindness sufferer portrayed in *Eating Wasps*. Molly, her sister seeks refuge in her house after the death of her husband. Anto, the bread of Thelma's life is rotten with his admiration for Molly whom he begins to see as "his prize cake"(96). She feels devastated unable to look into the amorous deeds of her beloved. So she pretends to be blind as an excuse by shutting her eyes willingly like mythical Kanthari: "So I shut my eyes that day and all was blank and all was fine...So I never allowed myself to see again. The doctors call it hysterical



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blindness” (EW, 96-7). She voluntarily tortures herself for the distrust rendered by her relations yet her motherly figure feels sorry for not seeing the growth of her son. She uses her deformity as a weapon to take revenge up on them as a consolation by putting excessive salt in dishes for her sister. Blindness seems to be a blessing for her.

Maya, the life partner of Koman experiences the difficulty in upbringing an autism affected son. Their life moves with much ease along with Koman whom consider as his son but after his death she feels sorry and afraid of frets of life in upbringing her son. The most devastated thing is her fear of her son’s life after her death. The mother’s love senses the risk of his life without her. So decides to kill her son and herself on the day of their birth: “ At midnight, she would turn seventy one and Naveen would turn thirty-nine...What would happen to Naveen when she was gone? (EW, 201). So she prepares the badusha, his favourite sweet and coats it with poison to be given as the sweet to him for his birthday. When she is about to do that he sings her the birthday song which melts her and decides to give up the plan of killing themselves as , “...he looked at Maya and said, ‘...appybdaama!’... ‘Appybdaama’ he said again (EW,202)”. She makes her mind to make his life in the great way that’ she can endure. She realizes living presence is more needed rather than killing him. So she decides to live for the sake of her son. Through Maya, Anita Nair shows the difficulties of parents experience in upbringing the differently able people.

Anita Nair has focused on the arena of disability by exploring the hard realities of their life, their coping with the difficult situations of life with an optimistic outlook and the parental struggle in providing a better life for them with the hope of change in the society with the acceptance of the disabled people as the fellow entity.

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