

REVIEWS

Sandhya Kumari, (ed.). (2019). *Jeevan Sangram ke Yoddha: Divyang Patron ki Prasiddh Kahaniyan*. Delhi: National Book Trust.

Disability Discourse in Hindi Literature: A Review of *Jeevan Sangram ke Yoddha: Divyang Patron ki Prasiddh Kahaniyan*, edited and collected by Sandhya Kumari

Disability has been an integral part of human history. This is evident from the existence of disabled people in history as well as in mythology. One Indian epic *Ramayana* had a character like Manthara who was a hunchback while *Mahabharata*, another epic, had Dhritarashtra and Shakuni, one blind and the other who limps, respectively, who are depicted as negative characters. The collected stories in *Jeevan Sangram ke Yoddha: Divyang Patron ki Prasiddh Kahaniyan* (henceforth *Jeevan Sangram*) represent the era of ‘new stories’ in Hindi literature. These stories indirectly engage with disability. Sandhya Kumari observes that the new stories are marked for their approach to realism. The stories are rich with themes related to Marxism, existentialism, science, industrialisation and individual consciousness. The main attributes of these stories are imagery and symbolism. Kumari (2019:19) points out that the struggle of disabled people and their family members became the plot of the post-independence writers, more so in contemporary writers. *Jeevan Sangram* edited and collected by Sandhya Kumari is perhaps the first of its kind of collection of stories on disabled characters in Hindi.

This review presents a critical understanding of collected stories from the perspective of critical disability studies. The collected stories help us understand the representation of disability and disabled people in Hindi society. Disability discourse is yet to make its presence in Hindi literature. This collection should create the space of disability discourse in Hindi.

Disability discourse enjoys its space in English literature. There are centres and schools of literary and cultural disability studies in the Western universities that became models from this perspective. However, disability discourse is yet to create its space in Indian languages and universities. It is limited to doctoral research in Hindi literature. Revita

Balbheem Kawale's work on the disabled characters in post-independence Hindi literature (2015) from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University is one such work. Other works on Hindi language include the sociolinguistic analysis of representation of disability in proverbs and folklore in the Linguistics department (Kumar, 2018). Sandhya Kumari's collection adds to the trend. Sandhya Kumari rightly admits in the preface that disability has not been considered as a subject matter of studies the way Dalit and gender have been recognised as subjects of studies and discourse in Hindi literature (Kumari, 2019). Kumari deftly collected the remarkable short stories of disabled characters written by contemporary Hindi writers.

This review deals with the different aspects of disability that are represented in these short stories. The stories deal with the social and cultural perceptions of disability, the intersection of disability and gender, disability and care, and social integration of disability, etc. This review also comments on the choice of terminology in the title and preface. I have tried to provide the translation of the Hindi title of the stories. The collection has thirty short stories that present the disability in its individual, familial and social relations.

These short stories reveal that disability has been part and parcel of Hindi literature and all the prominent writers such as Sacchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan 'Ageya', Shivprasad Singh, Panu Kholiya, Narendra Nagdev, Simmi Harishta, Upasana, Tajendra Khanna, Manisha Kulshrestha, Swati Tiwari, Kusumlata Malik etc. have written stories with disabled character.

Ageya's *Khiteen Babu* (1957), Shivprasad Singh's *Karmanasha ki Haar* (*The defeat of Karmanasha*), Sacchidanand Dhumketu's *Ek Thi Shakun Di* (*There was a Shakun Di*) (1979) are collected on the basis of the fierce characterisation of their central characters. However, the physical disabilities of these central characters are compensated with their extraordinary personality. For example, Ageya's *Khiteen Babu* works as a clerk who is a wheelchair user and meets with multiple accidents. He is, however, depicted as a jocular person. Bhairon Pande who uses crutches is the central character of *Karmanasha ki Haar* is an audacious person who fights against the whole village to save the life of a new-born. There are women characters with disabilities. For example, Dhumketu's *Shakun Di* has a hump but is a fierce woman who fights for her niece against the exploitative landlord of the village while Sushma Munindra's *Nutan* who has physical deformity in *Aap Apne Aap me Anupam aur Adhbut Hain* is quite modern and understanding. She was not married

because of her physical deformity but lives life on her own terms. These stories enrich our understanding of individual aspects of disability.

There are stories that depict familial aspects of disability. Panu Kholiya's *Anna*, Narendra Nagdev's *Samapan* and Simi Harshita's *Animantrit* (Uninvited) present the impact of having disabled children in the family. While Upashana's *Mukti* (Liberation) depicts the helplessness of a pregnant mother of an abnormal foetus, Tejendra Sharma's *Mujhe Maar Daal Beta* (Please kill me, son!, 2007) sensitively depicts the helplessness of a son whose father is bedridden and seeks euthanasia. The needs of the family and the liability of disability in Indian middle-class families can be seen in Manisha Kulshrestha's *Katbputaliyan* (Puppets), Swati Tiwari's *Vidai* (Goodbye), Kusumlata Malik's *Upabar* (Gift). Aspects of accidental disabilities and familial relationship is portrayed in Mridula Garg's *Jijeerisha* (Strong wish for life), Maitraiye Pushpa's *Sabchar* (Cohabitant) and Ramesh Khatri's *Mai Talaq Le Rabi Hun* (I am taking divorce).

Disability is also related to charity in society. Chandrakiran Saunreksa's *Khuda Ki Den* (The gift of God), Jawahar Singh's *Kangali* (Paupery) and Mehrunnisa Parvez's *Siddhiyon ka Theka* (Tender of the ladder) are important short stories that highlights the charity model of disability. Ghai (2012) rightly observes that disability is considered as the retribution of misdeeds of the previous birth. Because of this reason, common people do charity to secure their next birth. This model of disability suggests that charity is the duty of able-bodied people. Nazzo is at the centre of Chandrakiran Saunreksa's *Khuda Ki Den* (The gift of the God) which normalises begging on the basis of disability. Similarly, Jawaharlal Singh presents the story of Ghasitu (literally, dragged) who has polio and how he is treated as an object. Mehrunnisa Parvez's *Siddhiyon ka Theka* offers an insight into the Muslim community's perception of disability and charity.

Deformed bodies are always gazed upon and that reveals societal perception. Dharamvir Bharati's *Gulki Banno*, Jagdish Chandra's *Aadha Ticket* (Half Ticket), Ramdarash Mishra's *Seema* and Mamta Kalia's *Munni* offer different challenges that people with bodily differences face in terms of marriage that prevent social integration. While Bharati's *Gulki Banno* was abandoned by her husband, Chandra's *Banno* was made fun of because of her short stature. The intersection of gender and disability becomes quite vivid here. Proverbs in Hindi language also attests this – for example, *ek to kani ladki ki maai, dusra puchhane walon in jaan khai* (Kumar, 2018). Accidental disability results in dysfunctional wedlock.

Jaya Jaadvani's *Jo Bacha, Vab Shabd Nahī Tha* (Whatever left, that was not speech) depicts the narrator who is deaf and blind with one eye. He is engaged to Priya who is also deaf. However, their engagement is broken because Priya got to know about the artificial eye of the narrator. This story indicates the internal hierarchy that exists within the disabled community.

Anand (2013) stresses upon the need to understand the history of disability in India from Indian perspectives for a more nuanced disability discourse. Markandey's *Hansa Jaai Akela* (*Hansa goes alone*) and Madhav Nagada's *Zabarkanta* offers us the Indian perception of mental illness. While Markandey's Hansa lost his mental health because of individual and political crises, Nagada's Rama lost his in search of a job who got stuck in a riot in the city. Rama fails to read the communal grammar of the city. Both the stories offer an insight that the reason of mental illness is *dukha* (suffering) that is based on social and political chaos.

Sandhya Kumari also provides a rich discussion on the different aspects of disability in the preface. She points out that the attempt has been made to understand the social, economical and political situation of disabled people in the society (Kumari, 2019:11). The preface also works as guidelines in which the editor has tried to throw some light on. However, the title of the book *Jeevan Sangram Ke Yoddha: Divyang Patron ki Prasiddha Kahaniyan* suggests more emphasis on emotion than on the subject matter. It is acceptable that the life of a disabled person is full of challenges but the able-bodied person wishes to overcome those challenges on behalf of the disabled person. The title of the volume is based on this social rhetoric. Societal pressure prevents us from understanding those aspects of disability that are beyond the obvious of social rhetoric.

Terminology matters a lot in disability studies. Sandhya has used *divyangata* in place of *viklangata* but has not offered any note of clarification on that. As India is witnessing a matured disability movement now, and many disability activists and scholars showed their reservation to the use of the term *divyangta* or *divyang* (Chander, 2016, Singh, 2020), it becomes pertinent to clarify on the choice of the terminology. This book will be of great benefit for those who want to engage in disability research in Hindi literature. The writers' introduction is given in the book that is useful for non-Hindi scholars, however the lack of year of publication and reference source makes it difficult to situate the work in the historiography of disability in India.

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