

**FINAL REPORT OF  
MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

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***A CONTRAPUNTAL READING OF THE INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED  
IN SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY***

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the UGC minor project entitled, “A contrapuntal reading of the Intellectually Disabled in select Indian English literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” is a work solely done by me and it has not been previously published anywhere else.

Principal investigator

Anju Sosan George

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Intellectual disability is an umbrella term that encompasses various intellectual deficits like mental retardation, learning disability, autism, dyslexia, acquired brain injuries and dementia. It does not include madness or mental imbalance due to trauma.

The problem addressed in the proposed research study is the discursive accessibility in the treatment of the Intellectually Disabled in Indian English literature. The importance of analyzing the specific and changing determinants of the construction of meaning in each phase of cultural production, distribution and consumption of the texts are looked at in detail. These works produce forms of subjectivity within specific discursive fields and the power relations promote particular meanings, interests and even forms of resistance.

The Introduction Chapter attempts to chart the territories of discussion about the Intellectually Disabled over the last two centuries around the world. Also it attempts to understand the trajectory of thought from the ancient world to the onset of modernity, which would facilitate a clearer understanding of the politics of signification of the intellectually disabled in fiction. It will also deal with the family of labels associated with Down's syndrome as studies often show that the history of Down's syndrome has often been told as a synonymous of the history of intellectual disability in general. The chapter would also discuss the changing notions of the word Disability and place Intellectually Disabled in the spectrum of Disability Life Writing.

## **ACTS AND POLICIES IN FAVOUR OF THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a series of acts passed by the Governments all over the world to facilitate sustenance and education of their disabled children. The focus of this study has been on the prominent global changes which influenced Indian Governmental policies and hence the finger points at what had happened in US considering the amount of recorded data available.

The watershed acts were 1944 Education Act in United States which defined the various categories of disability including blindness, deafness, physical impairment and speech problems, educational subnormality and mal adjustment and special schools were set for these children. A new category of uneducable children was also formed.

A step in progress was in 1970 when finally, all children with disability were given the right of education and no one was deemed uneducable.

The Warnock report of 1978, hinted a move away from medical, psychological model that presented learning difficulties as fixed within the child. It was suggested that the home background, the way the child was educated and the curriculum were of paramount importance in the child learners. ( Glass and Wise)

The term learning disability was proposed, divided into categories of mild, moderate, severe and specific. It was concluded that these children had special educational needs that were not much different from their peers. The 1981 Education Act in US required the local authorities to ensure that the children with special needs were incorporated into the main stream schools.

Yet another step in progression was the Education act of 1993 which introduced practical guidance to the authorities in teaching the intellectually disabled. A Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) had to be appointed by the schools and the Disability right activists started advocating

that the schools provided learning opportunities that best suited the child. Yet, despite a slow and painful growth of mainstreaming and integration that happened in the governmental policies over the years, the larger cluster of schools were yet to tackle the topic. As glass and wise mentions, “Despite the philosophy, there remained a great deal of anxiety in ordinary schools to meet the needs of these children.” (32)

Today, several literatures evolve from diverse perspectives, not just medical, or theoretical, but from the parents, caretakers, teachers, siblings of the intellectually disabled. Each attempting to demystify the myth of the intellectually disabled in their own way.

## **GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES WITHIN INDIA**

In lieu with the global scenario, India and its changing governments have also introduced various policies to benefit the intellectually disabled. The ministry of welfare has set up National Council on handicapped Welfare to frame policy guidelines for the country. To encourage more mentally challenged to be mainstreamed and brought into employment, National Awards for outstanding employers of persons with mental handicap are given. Travel concessions in Indian railways, children’s educational Allowance, monthly allowance for central government employees having children with mental handicaps are given. Income tax concessions are also provided.

Recently a scheme for providing Community Based rehabilitation Services (CBRS) for mentally handicapped from rural areas. Under Article 45 of Indian Constitution, the state should provide free and compulsory education for all children under the age of 14. This is applicable for the Mentally challenged students also.

National trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental retardation and Multiple Disability Act- Niramaya Scheme was instituted by the government of India which was revised

in April 2015. The act has provisions for Legal guardianship of the four categories with disabilities and for creation of enabling environment for their as much independent living as possible. Various NGO's have also come forward .

The first All India Conference on Mental Retardation was held on Nov 26 and 27, 1966 at New Delhi. The Prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi delivered the key note address. The events of the day were organized by Delhi Society for the welfare of Mentally Retarded Children and All India Association on Mental Retardation. A copy of the text was obtained by the researcher from Teen Murthi Jawaharlal Nehru Library which is attached as an appendix.

The books and movies under study in this work are

*Clear light of day* (2007) by Anita Desai

*Shame* (1983) by Salman Rushdie

*Ancient Promises* (2000) by Jaishree Misra

*Such a long Journey* (1991) by Rohinton Mistry

*My name is Khan*(2010)

*Barfi!* (2012)

## CHAPTER 2

### ***SUCH A LONG JOURNEY- MISTRY'S TEHMUL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY***

Mistry's first book, *Such a Long Journey* (1991) has its setting in the turbulent post independent India of the 1970's, with the Indo-China war as a frightening memory and the Indo-Pakistan war as a prospective entity. Amidst the insurgencies in Bangladesh, the upheavals in East and West Pakistan, the candid changing of colours by China, people of independent India feel the precariousness of their life. Inside a country torn with political raffles, life becomes less than predictable. Mistry points out with irony, the increasing autocratic power of the Prime Minister in the 'democratic' country. His clear tones do not hide his character's scorn at the rampant made by the government body to master anyone who poses to dissent. The ensuing result is such that the stench of the rotting system percolates into simple families like that of the protagonist, Gustad Noble and causes havoc.

The Noble family consists of Mr. Noble, a respected middle aged bank clerk, his family of three children and his capable and loving wife Dilnavaz. This is a world where love and friendship is valued, the essence of hard work shared and the children taught to love one another. Ironically, it is this same friendship with Major Jimmy Bilimoria that leads him on a long journey in his otherwise unadventurous life.

Major Bilimoria's sudden disappearance is interrupted as treachery and a breach of friendship as he to the Nobles was a member of their family. Along with political upheavals, Jimmy's disappearance troubles Gustad with whom the latter shared a filial bond. As the text progresses, his youngest daughter Roshan's constant illness, his eldest son Sohrab thwarting his

dreams by not joining IIT, add to the political drama to which he is inexplicably dragged in by the arrival of a mysterious letter from the Major.

Intertwining the personal and the political, Mistry has masterfully woven the upheavals in the two fronts' - the political influencing the personal. Yet, innocent of all the turmoil or changes around him, is the intellectually disabled Tehmul.

Tehmul's disabled body is seen as a venue of violation. Rights of the intellectually disabled, virtually nonexistent in the period, are mirrored effectively in the text. Tehmul lives at the sympathy of the people around him. His guardian, his brother, is notable by his absence. In the latter half of the text, with the proximity of the impending war, Tehmul is seen to fend for himself. Set at a time when the dichotomous pull of rationality and superstition played an equal weight on confused minds, Dilnavaz feeds an innocent Tehmul charmed potions which would save her family from an evil eye and would make him more inconsistent. The guileless Tehmul, elated at the prospect of the sweetened drink laps it up, unknowing of the horrors it contains.

In addition to being intellectually disabled, he is lame, not by birth, but by an accident, hence gaining the name Tehmul Lungraa( Tehmul the lame). Physical disability is visible in many characters in the text including the protagonist Gustad who has a visible limp. If physical disability is accepted as a state of life or a phase of age, intellectual disability is seen more harshly by the society. Mistry's Tehmul at best is a nuisance and at worst is a menace.

Tehmul's characterization by the author deserves notice as he is seen as a child housed in a grown up body. Though in his mid-thirties, Tehmul is said to prefer the company of children to that of adults. His habit of "always wearing a big grin" (31), uncoordinated hand and feet movements, habit of trailing people till they wave him off mark him as one. Also, his scratching

of the groin and armpits (which made women complain about him that he did it deliberately to annoy them) and most importantly, Tehmul's vocabulary stands out significantly. As Mistry's narrator notes,

“The words of Tehmul- Lungraa's abbreviated vocabulary always emerged at breakneck speed, whizzing incomprehensibly past the listener's ear. It was as if some internal adjustment had been made to make up for the slowness of his legs with the velocity of his tongue. But the result was extreme frustration for both Tehmul and the listener.....GustadGustadchickenrace.

GustadGustadchickenranfastfast. IcaughtIcaughtGustad.” (31/32)

Tehmul's violence catches the attention of the readers as Mistry portrays a detailed description of the slaughter of the rats. He earned his keep by catching rats in the apartment building and handing it over to the municipal ward office in exchange for a little amount of money. Tehmul kills it by pouring boiling water little by little on the squirming rats and killing them.

“As the rats' squealed and writhed in agony, he watched their reactions with great interest, particularly their tails, proud of the pretty colours he could bestow on them. He giggled to himself as they turned from grey to pink, and then red. If the scalding did not kill them before he ran out of boiling water, he dropped them in the bucket.” (33)

Tehmul's banter causes irritation to those who are around him. His lack of ability to maintain secrets poses problems to all involved. Threatening him to silence is the only alternative left.

A striking parallel can be traced between Steinbeck's Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and Mistry's Tehmul. Both George and Gustad (protagonists of both works) cater to the emotional needs of the intellectually disabled. In their journey of self-realization and survival, the latter becomes not a burden, but an essential means to refine their finer side.

The heroes' closure requires a rite de passage through dire straits that leaves them more matured and uplifts their position in the eyes of the reader.

Both Tehmul and Lennie get into trouble because of their sexuality. The intense desire to touch and feel anything that looks soft, makes him beg to touch Roshan's doll and leads to trouble with the prostitutes. The same can be traced in Lennie's nature too. His over-cuddling of animals results in accidentally killing them, leading to the murder of Curley's wife.

At a pivotal point of the text, Gustad finds Roshan's missing doll at Tehmul's apartment, with a panting Tehmul in a compromising position. After rejection at the red zones, Tehmul's fantasy is lighted by the dainty British doll. Tehmul is fully aware of his deed and in this aspect sinks lower than Lennie in his crime. His repeated 'GustadGustadGustad. Verysorry. Veryverysorry.' (303) is due to the fact that he has sunk in Gustad's eyes. Mistry's protagonist understands the need for the intellectually disabled to satisfy his body's urges. He is sympathetic in spite of the fact that it was his daughter's first and only doll and Tehmul has desecrated it beyond repair. Hence very interestingly, as Tehmul sinks down the moral scale, Gustad rises up due to his benevolence.

Lennie's repentance after the murder of Curley's wife, is more at the anger and distress caused to George by his endeavors, than at the aftermath of the crime on himself. Hiding in the shrubs, Lennie conjures up various images who point out to him the effect of the damage done.

Partly from his past (Aunt Clara who raised him) and partly as fantastical images ( Giant rabbit) they tease and taunt him into repentance.

Tehmul's and Lennie's death occurs when they are both happy, in a trance, imagining things they have always wished for to happen. Tehmul's fascination with air borne things lead him to the center of a fight between the municipality construction workers and the local people. "What fun. What an immense game of catch – catch. With a thousand players." (332). As he positions himself to catch the flying bricks, one of them hits his forehead and he succumbs to the fall leading to his death.

Lennie enters a parallel world of dreams, of himself and George and the farm they would have. With the assaulters drawing close and George knowing that Lennie would have a painful death in their merciless hands, shoots him as he speaks of Lennie's all time dream of tending rabbits in their farm. George sets Lennie at peace by reinforcing the idea that he is not angry with him. " No Lennie. I aint mad. I never been mad, and I aint now. That's a thing I want ya to know." (106)

Noll and Trent, in their path breaking book, *Mental Retardation in America* point out that as early as 1880, the feeble minded adult began to replace the feeble minded child in both professional and popular literature (3) It was during this time that the word 'feble-mindedness' began to replace 'idiocy'.

This subtle change carries massive subliminal messages. A child who can be trained, educated, pardoned at omissions, loved and cared for symbolizes promise at the end of a long journey. When this was replaced by 'adults' (who behave as children, as Tehmul and Lennie), the implication was that they could no longer be trained, or worsen, no amount of training could

do any help. It also meant that as flawed individuals, no omission could be entertained or pardoned.

“As burdens, they prevented their families from participating in the nation’s free wage labour market. In their sloth and ignorance, also, they were the easy prey of purveyors of vice. Petty thievery, vagrancy, prostitution and illegitimacy- all were outcomes of feeble-mindedness left unattended.” (Trent, 3)

This fear of the prospective harm that a sexually potent intellectually disabled could incur to the society, had a natural progression into the dark period of ‘the menace of the feeble-minded’. It resulted in calls for total institutionalization of all feeble minds and later on progressed into forced sterilizations. Literature of the period mirrors this fear.

Thus, Mistry’s Tehmul and Steinbeck’s Lennie bring alive the challenges faced by the intellectually disabled in their day to day existence. The writers subtly point out, against the popular assumptions existent at the time, that the desires of the body fall as naturally in the challenged as any other person and to repress it, needs patient training and understanding. Gustad and George, through their compassion, encourage the readers to take a more sympathetic outlook towards the mentally challenged.

## CHAPTER 3

### ***SHAME-RUSHDIE'S SUFIA ZINOBIA AS INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED***

## CHAPTER 4

### ***AUTISM IN MY NAME IS KHANAND BURFI!***

Bollywood has been testing newer grounds by introducing bold autistic characters, who unlike the earlier days are not marginalized by the script ( being added to showcase the tolerance of the hero or heroine) but emerge in the central role. Movies like *Taare Zameen Par*, which was immensely popular, introduced to the ordinary viewers the concept of Dyslexia or learning difficulty. In the movie, an empathizing AAmir Khan urges the educational system to show more tolerance to their students who tend to have the difficulty. Movies like *Barfi!* (2012) star popular actors ( Priyanka Chopra) who showcase their talents as convincing autists in an attempt to test their level of acting by venturing into a newer and more complicated arena- the realm of the psychological.*Koi Mil Gaya* (2003) starring Hrithik Roshan as a developmentally challenged person who befriends an alien who restores his brain damage is another addition to the oeuvre of mainstream movies dealing with the topic.*Margerita with a straw*( 2014) explores the sexuality of a girl affected with cerebral palsy with Kalki Koechlin in its lead.

Many studies on disability have looked at the way deviations from the ordinary physical or mental norm have been seen by the public eye. Often there is a demand to know 'what happened to you?' (Couser,603). This underlines the need for explanatory narratives, introducing the cause, the reason , the impact of disability and finally labelling the person as falling under a particular category. Such explanations can be seen at the very beginning of movies that tend to channelize the attention of its audience explaining the reason of its hero/heroines behavior traits. Frequently, it is to prove that the

reason they behave so is because of no particular fault of theirs. The initial scenes in the doctor's clinic in *Koi Mil Gaya* explains the reason for Rohit's (Hrithik Roshan) seemingly bizarre behavior.

Karan Johar's popular movie, *My name is Khan*, starring Shah Rukh Khan successfully brought Asperger syndrome into the midst of the common audience. The movie attempts to portray that in spite of the differences posed by autism, the hero is able to accomplish an otherwise impossible task. To make the success story more beguiling, Karan Johar and his team pose not just physical and emotional barriers en route to the completion of the task, but developmental barriers that stems out from the very grain of the hero's personality. No one can be blamed for his differences, but he is visibly quite different in the way he carries himself. Yet the overcoming narrative clearly implies in the middle aged protagonist, visible traits of autism. Rocking movement, inability to maintain eye contact, irritability of specific colours ( yellow in particular) intolerance to loud noises, mechanical repeating, dislike of physical contact, are spread intermittently through the three hour long movie. In particular, some traits become characteristics of the protagonist, for example, his constant rotation of the stones in his hand. Repeated visualizations zoom in on the heroes rotation of the black balls again and again, especially during an emotional turmoil.

The message that has been tried to be driven into the mind of the audience is that of all battles to be fought, the inner war (one within your head) is the toughest to be won. As the plot progresses, the hero visibly outgrows many of his prominent autistic features which were dominant in the former scenes. In particular, his dislike of physical contacts is totally forgotten as a happy Rizwan Khan links his hand with the crowd in the Black church (most of them strangers to him) and helps them in their crisis.

Yet, terrorism is the focus of the movie, not autism. Johar and his team works at the post September 11 trauma that tagged all muslims to Al Queda, and the ensuing identity crisis faced by them. This racial threatening seeps into the happy Mandira- Khan family when their 13 year old son Sameer is found dead in the soccer play ground. Mandira, the jovial, animated, gregarious single mother whose life solely revolved around Sameer, bursts into a litany of hate, which sets Khan's odyssey through the united

states in motion. She asks him, which later becomes the oft quoted by line of the movie, to tell the President of United States and the whole of America that “ my name is Khan and I am not a terrorist.”

In a sense, autism or Asperger's is downplayed in the latter part of the movie as the focus changes from the trouble caused by an autistic to the prospective trouble caused by a muslim. Khans mission to reach the President becomes arduous due to his autistic body language. He is twice mistaken to be an actual terrorist and is unable to emerge from the locked up situation without external help.

Khan's mother plays a significant role in recognizing her son's difference and trains him in life skills and social cues which otherwise eludes him. The text attributes Khans vaulting progress to the extra effort she puts in, in spite of her limited resources to make sure that her 'different' son was given a different opportunity.

As the plot shifts through Khans odyssey, near savant like features ( can repair almost anything) mingle with his humanism ( help for cyclone affected victims) convert shy Rizwan Khan into the messiah for muslims in America.

The plot loosens at the seemingly improbable love story between Rizwan and mandira, almost letting the viewers think that Mandira has married beneath her chances. General tendency to ignore or overlook autistic sexuality is not seen in the film. In the initial part of the movie it is Mandira's effervescence that overlooks khan's inconsistencies. By not patronizing either, the movie attempts to draw the family as a regular family with understanding neighbours and loving camaraderie – regularity and normalcy, an underlying thrust in the former half of Khan- Mandira married life.

The latter half of the married life, post 9/ 11 and after Sameer's death, all trace of normalcy vanishes. Autistic khan is thrust to one extreme, intolerant, hate driven mandira is on the other. It is also noticeable that Mandira in the course of the movie, never regrets marrying an autistic though she regrets marrying a khan.

Khan's lack of understanding social cues is drawn heavily in the initial stages of the text and more subtly in the latter half. Mandira's tolerance threshold snaps when Khan seems unconcerned to Sameer's death or her pain and appears to be more bothered of his dinner time.

Adherence to routines, which is essential for an autistic's understanding of the surroundings is one of the least developed areas in the movie. Khan's odyssey across America gains gargantuan dimensions precisely because of this. It is evident that the text visibly downplays this particular aspect as the story revolves around the unpredictability of his journey following the President.

Eventually in the overcoming narrative, the hero wins two battles. His battle against autism and racism. Yet by pitting one against the other, the connotation points them out as two equally dangerous entities a man had to endure.

Anurag Basu's *Barfi!* Played an equally significant role in introducing autism into the mainstream audience with the popular actress Priyanka Chopra cast as an autistic person. Chopra's Jhilmil, is seen as an autistic person who unlike *My Name Is Khan* does not boast of any savant like qualities, but possess all idiosyncrasies of an autistic person.

The film deserves credit, as it does not at any point show condescension towards Jhilmil. Rather, it encourages in understanding and to an extent in respecting her eccentricities as similar to that of any other person.

Barfi (Ranbir Kapoor) is a deaf and mute person, whose exuberance makes the audience forget his disability. Comedy is featured through gestures and actions. Barfi's endless energy, guileless animations render voice to the film which words deny. Otherwise, Barfi's silence, conjoined with Jhilmil's occasional words, deem the movie more or less silent compensated with soulful musical interludes.

Traversing over thirty years with the lead characters, the audience watch their love flourish in the nonlinear narrative. Basu by introducing autistic Jhilmil, highlights the innocence of his character. She is

surrounded by loving caretakers at Muskan, an extremely rich grandfather, and good natured burfi who plans to kidnap her and later on falls in love with her.

What is strangely amusing is that inspite of being given a choice of accepting the hand of the extremely beautiful Sruthi (Illena D'cruz), Barfi desires the company of Jhilmil. he is seen to take care of her through the daily routines of changing clothes, to taking her to the toilet and putting her to sleep. Jhilmil requires assistance in dealing with her day to day affairs which Barfi happily concedes.

Pitting two heroines together, is a definite tactic for the box office revenue generation. The initial romance between Sruthy and Burfi compensates the need of masala box office audience who would have difficulty in accepting the role of an autistic heroine. Sruthy's poised dazzling beauty and old world charm, compensates Jhilmil's innocent demeanor. The hero's acceptance of innocence over beauty is the striking message that the movie leaves with us. The message that an autistic is capable of love, of relationship, of family life if found in an accepting society is shown by the end of the movie where we see the elderly couple still deeply in love and happy with their lives. This does give hope to many people with autism who are denied a family life.

No attempt is made to sympathize with the lead characters or to normalize them but the movie encourages the audience accept them for who they are.

## CHAPTER 5

### ***ANCIENT PROMISES- MISRA'S RIYA AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY***

Jaishree Misra's part autobiographical work *Ancient Promises* centers around a young girl Janaki and her tumultuous marriage. Married into the illustrious Maraar family, Janaki tries her best to fit into the ways of Kerala, unlike the familiarity of Delhi where she was brought up. Her desperation to be a capable daughter in law to the staunch Matriarch and an efficient member of the extended family falls apart within the initial hours. Her husband's apathy confuses her and his escape into whiskey drinking and business journey's take away any sense of comfort she yearned .

Shuttling between Delhi and Kerala, the narrative strictly demarcates Janaki's free and happy childhood and adolescence in Delhi brought up as a single child to adoring parents. Kerala then, was to her a place of annual visits to ancestral homes and contrasts it with the after marriage monotonous existence in the same place where she once held happy memories.

Her teenage romance with Arjun, a Delhite was snipped off before it was allowed to bloom and the news of the dangerous infatuation was received with horror by the parents. Janaki knowing the futility of her affair with Arjun , knowing that she couldn't wreck the hopes of her loving parents consents in marrying into the Maraar family. The news of the prospective marriage itself causes celebration as the Maraars were an affluent family who had proved their worth in the hotelier business.

Janaki's husband Suresh and his practiced "art of escape" brought in plausible excuses which led him into prolonged absence from their marital life. His lack of a need for companionship with his wife was accosted initially by temerity and then with withdrawal by Janaki.

Janaki's inability to find a place or identify a friend within the immense family leads to loneliness which goes beyond consolation.

Misra's exploration of Janaki's life within the Kerala family brings to her readers a vivid picture of the intricacies of Kerala society in the fag end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Untouched by politics ( local or global) the women who are within the cloistered walls, spend their times feeding the increasing members of their family. Visits to their relatives, gossips, expansive lunches, sari's and jewellery were all a part of the upperclass entourage. Various sociological studies have proven that the middle and lower class working women in Kerala were more politically updated than the upper class women who were educated but not politically motivated.

The birth of her daughter Riya brings the hopes of Janaki crashing as the new born is a girl into a family that was looking forward to boys and more importantly because of Riya's mental handicap. Janaki in the early days of her daughter's birth does not find any significant in the baby and plays a deaf ear to her mother in laws words of caution. Janaki receives no help in raising her daughter.

Riya to Janaki was her " potential best friend" (116) and her "transformer of bad things to good" (16) the family's exclusion of Janaki extends to her daughter too. Added to the brunt of it is Riya's handicap.

Language was another barrier that separated Janaki from the others in the family. Her lack of ease of spoken Malayalam to an extent, creates her incompatibility. Riya's lack of speech adds to this equation and together they form the subaltern. Riya's addition to the family as a mentally handicapped child causes more breach in the relationships between the husband and the wife. The first person narrative of Janaki leads the readers through the intertwining's of an upper-class Kerala family. Her ability to adapt to the new family extends to her daughter.

Riya's constant keeping her mouth open, letting her saliva drool from her mouth, her inability to do things incomparison with other children of her age, are all pictured in detail by the writer.

Riya is not the only intellectually disabled character the readers encounter with in the course of the text. Padmaja Maraar's brother was born with "severe learning disability, a foot that dragged uselessly

behind him and a heart so weak that he had lived only for twelve years.” ( 125) this causes an instant prejudice against Riya in the family. Both Amma and Suresh keep their distance from the baby, not wanting to do anything with such a child.

*Ancient promises* narrates a mother’s world shattering down as she learns of her daughter’s handicap. She looks at the new tag of “Deffinnitely mentally Handicapped” which the famous paediatrician had given Riya, a “little wrist band, to carry with her through life.” (128). Among the questions she throws at herself the introspection leads to the thought of having done something to deserve the punishment. She asks, “ had I done anything that deserved such unending punishment? Why me? Why me? Why me?” (129) she also wonders if it a mother’s guilt that leads to the Mental retardation. This was a notion that was prominent in the symbolic paradigm of disability.

Riya changes Janaki’s life. The desire to make Riya accepted in the family provides increasing pressure to the young mother till she realizes the futility of her attempt. The walls of prejudice that encircled her now encircled her daughter and there was no refuge outside it. This realization hardens her and strengthens her to become another person. “My own rights had not seemed worth fighting for , but Riya needed me to be her voice and a battle on her behalf would be far more satisfying.” (133) . Riya plays a crucial role in Janaki’s transformation into a hardened mature person who unflinchingly tries to create a space for herself and her daughter in contrast with the earlier demure person who willingly let herself be pushed about. It is for Riya that her mother starts to fight the battle and through her that she reaches self-sustenance.

The treatment of the Intellectually Disabled over the year’s included forced isolation which can be seen in Amma’s words as she tells Janu that her mentally handicapped brother was left behind at home and she should get used to leaving Riya behind. This exclusion of the disabled is fought against by Janaki who stresses that children like Riya need opportunities, outings and care as much as any other children.

Literature, from Harper Lee's *Boo Radley* to Misra's *Ancient Promises* has depicted mentally challenged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lee's *Boo Radley* had been prominent by his absence and materializes only in the fag end of the text. He is locked down under the basement and was imagined to be a fear inducing cannibal, causing the children sleepless nights. With changes in the society, changes started appearing in the treatment of intellectually disabled and literature mirrored these changes. Riya's situation in *Ancient promises* is a far cry from *Radley's* plight. Riya's mother is willing to put everything at stake and give her daughter a fair chance of survival. The sprouting facilities of educating the disabled, both physical and mentally handicapped are mentioned in the text. But the challenges of mainstreaming such a child still seemed impossible as ordinary schools do not have the man power or infra structure to cater to the growing needs of an intellectually disabled person. Riya's expulsion from the kindergarten of St Thomas school is a clear indicator.

Janaki's words about the working of an intellectually disabled's mind is a carefully chosen imagery by the writer. " messages keep flying around inside her head without getting to the right destinations. Like a post office gone mad." (139) Riya's condition prompts Janaki to complete her degree and post graduation and apply for a scholarship to study special education in United Kingdom. Riya becomes her urge to fight and single handedly, she tries to rechart her life.

Her adolescent love Arjun returning unquestioningly back to her life, willing to wait as many years as she wants to finish off her obligations and becoming a hearty father to Riya is the only fairy tale element in the text.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED AS THE SUBALTERN IN DANIEL KEYES *FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON*

“A daring novel of a startling human experiment” reads the jacket of Daniel Keyes widely acclaimed novel, *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). Initially published as a short story and then reverted as a novel by the writer, *Flowers for Algernon* has successfully installed into the field of science fiction and popular literature, the Intellectually Disabled.

Indeed, *Flowers for Algernon*, deals with 32 year old Charlie, the protagonist, who works as a hand in Donners Bakery. Though an Intellectually Disabled person, Charlie is visualized as having high motivation that makes him attend the Beekman College for the retarded adults three times a week. Keyes in his novel, envisions a mentally challenged person, whose entire life is a struggle to get smart. The experiment to be done by the scientists’ promises him that he would attain his aim. Keyes portrays dual domains, a man spending an entire life dreaming to be smart, and on being a genius, understanding, how futile and lonely it is. The novel opens with “ I want to be smart” and ends with “I’m gone to keep trying to get smart.” (216) Charlie’s need of being smart is translated by Miss Kinian towards the end of the novel.

“You’ve lost something you had before. You had a smile.”

“An empty, stupid smile”

“No, a warm, real smile, because you wanted people to like you.”(208)

And Charlie drawing a conclusion, “Maybe that’s why it was so important for me to learn. I thought it would make people like me. I thought I would have friends.” (208)

As an aftermath of the experiment, Charlie’s I Q soars to 185. Standing on the other side of the intellectual spectrum, draws him near more and more information. He is able to take in a printed page in a second, read innumerable languages, both ancient and modern, and finds himself intellectually much higher than his mentors. He authors a research paper and names it the Algernon- Gordon effect .

Keyes translation of the retarded into his writing is by giving the readers Charlie’s first person narrative. This is attained through the progress reports he maintains everyday for the sake

of the experiment. Broken words, erratic grammar, jumbled thoughts are used to show Charlie's incoherent speech.

Progress report 1 march 3 (Progress Report 1 March 3) says, " My name is Charlie Gordon. I work in Donners baery where Mr. Donner gives me 11 dollars a week and bred or cake if I want. I am 32 yers old and next munth is my birthday" (1) An intellectually disabled's perspective of the world is brought in the first half and in the last pages of the book ( after Charlie's regression). This involves a happy, immensely optimistic mindset, that makes him envision, even people who mock him, his friends.As Charlie's Progress Report 3 says, "Gimpy hollers at me all the time when I do something rong, but he reely likes me because hes my frend" (4) It is quite clear to the reader that Charlie 's 'best friends' Joe Carp and Frank Reilly have their fun at his expense. Though Charlie manages to put the blame on himself for any mistake he has committed because he is not smart, it is obvious to the reader that he is a source of entertainment to the smarter men in the bakery.

Charlie's attempt to please others does not really create a yes man. There are instances where Keyes make his protagonist think for himself and think differently from the group he is in. But this is seen only as an aftermath of the experiment. Initially, when Algernon the mice, on whom the intelligence experiment has first been tested, beats him by finishing a maze faster than him, he does not feel sorry or irritated. "I didn't feel bad because I watched Algernon and I learnd how to finish the amaze even if it takes me along time" (6) Coincidentally, his first instance of protest comes from his connection to Algernon. "That made me sad because if he couldn't lern, he wouldn't be able to eat and he would be hungry. I don't thin it is right to make you pass a test to eat. How would Bert like to have to pass a test everytime he wnts to eat." (23) This is one of the many instances where the subaltern registers protest. But noticeably, Keyes Charlie is able to do this only because of his post-operative intelligence.

Though the events of his life are recorded in first person in the Progress Reports he writes each day, the reader can clearly decipher the treatment mentally challenged person receives in the society. Perspectives of the mother/ caretaker, of the siblings, of the governmental institutions, of the educated, of the working class, of the religious, all of which comes into play in the text.

Other parallel images of societies perspective of the intellectually disabled is brought out more sharply through Charlie's mother. Janice Brockley in "Mothering the Mentally Retarded" portrays shifting societal attitude towards the family from 1850 through 1960, ranging from the moral mother (savior of the afflicted) to the scientific mother (Physicians tool) to the unfit mother (Over protective creator of autism) Rose Gordon believed in appearances and to show that nothing was wrong with her family, Charlie had to be kept inside. Charlie's memory also manifests this. "Strange that most of my memories of the street are framed by the window, with me always inside watching children play". Rose fought for Charlie's place in the world in the initial days of Charlie's childhood, precisely before Norma was born. After Norma, the realization that she could give birth to an ordinary offspring and Charlie was just an anomaly, reverses Charlie's place in the family. The once overprotective mother, now insists that he be taken away to the Warren State Home. Mother's paranoia that her unstable son might harm his sister sexually, is an underlying thread hinted by the author.

Varying perspectives about association with the intellectually challenged include a sibling's side of being raised with retardate. Not being called to friend's parties, getting mocked by classmates are some of the painful memories Norma shares with Charlie. "And they scribbled things on the sidewalk in the school yard- Moron's sister, dummy Gordon family." (110)

Fanny Birken , a worker at the Donner's Bakery and nurse Hilda are two distinct voices that stand out due to the tolerance they show to the deficient Charlie. To the question of should science re work on the retarded and make them intelligent, the dire religious mind would say as in Fanny, "It was evil when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge. It was evil when they saw they was naked, and learned about lust and shame."(75) This same idea is voiced by both women who believe that science should not tamper with what God has given. Fatalism does play a role here as Hilda says to Charlie at the Hospital, "If God wanted me to be smart, he would have made me born that way."(12)

Charlie's anger is pointed at the scientists for not considering him as an individual before the operation. They confine him to a non existent entity. "I am an individual now and so was Charlie before he ever walked into the lab.. Yes, suddenly we discover that I was always a person- even before- and that challenges your belief that someone with an IQ of less than 100 doesn't deserve consideration." (172) Yet Keyes too, in the body of the text, falls into

stereotyping the Intellectually Disabled. Charlie has to race with the mouse Algernon, before and after the operation. Algernon defeats Charlie in 'Amaze', the maze. The initial response of Charlie is surprise. Keyes does not give his Charlie the space to register discomfort or remorse or any feeling. He ends up saying, "and the other 10 times we did it over Algernon won... I dint now mice were so smart." (6) Four days after the operation, Charlie registers emotion, specifically hate and disgust. "I hate that mouse. He always beets me." (13) "Those amazes are stoopid. And those picturs are stoopid to."(13)

By giving an Intellectually Disabled a chance to speak for himself, Keyes, visibly attempts to re work on the subaltern. Charlie's shift from the voiceless uncommunicative retarded, to the voiced, authoritative genius and his regression to the older self, forms the trajectory of the text. Yet, what is remarkable is that Keyes' protagonist, the subaltern, is given a space to speak. This can be seen as an attempt to give voice to the voiceless. Charlie from being the 'other' for 32 years tries to belong to the intelligent community. (His quest to become smart). Charlie's tragedy arises from not belonging to the two mutually exclusive domains.

Keyes tries to rework on the Intellectually Disabled as the 'other'. Spivak uses Foucault and Deleuze to say that the oppressed, if given a chance and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics can speak and know their conditions. Thus Flowers for Algernon, critiques conventional historiography-The treatment of the Intellectual subalterns as devoid of consciousness, and hence without the ability to make their own history. The authenticity of Charlie's narratives are never doubted, the scientists photocopy the work before handing it over and references to it repeatedly pointed out.

The limits of their identity is fixed by their physical conditions( the drooling, the vacant smiles, lack of coordination, slurred speech)and their economical conditions ( no job or menial jobs) Amidst literature with Manichean constructions, ( well/ disabled, moron/ genius) the literature of the intellectually disabled subaltern becomes marginalized.

## CONCLUSION

Writers started redefining mental deficiency in world literature. The shift was visible from Dicken's morally gifted fools to amoral defectives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Gerald Schmidt in "fictional voices and view points for the mentally deficient" points out, naturalism which was a prominent movement then provided a point of departure. With its emphasis on heredity and determinism, naturalism corresponded to the interest of American Association of the feeble minded.

Yet writers like Steinbeck and Faulkner sought to bring back innocence of the lost world. Coupling the once forgotten notion of the "holy fool" with that of the child narrator, they introduced Lenny, Tularecito, and Benjy who tried to visualize their world around them in ways they understood it. Steinbeck as Schmidt points out viscollates between two genres, the naturalistic short story and the fairy tale.

Tularecito , the eponymous hero who appears in the fourth chapter of the pastures of heaven is introduced as " the baby had short, chubby arms and long, loose jointed legs. Its large head sat without interval of neck between deformedly broad shoulders. The baby's flat face, together with its peculiar body, caused it automatically to be named Tularecito, little frog." (36)

As Karen Keely points out in *Sexuality and Storytelling: Literary representation of the feeble minded*, the menace of the moron challenged literary notions too. James Fennimore Cooper's 1841 novel, *The Deer Slayer* painted a conventional stereotype of the "simple" sister Hetty as sexually pure and the "intelligent" sister Judith as sexually fallen.

As time passed a reversal of governmental policies, lead to a change in the perception of the intellectually disabled. "Cultural anxiety about the unrestrained sexuality of the mentally impaired contributed to apprehension about narrative production both by and about the same

population. “ (207). Coupled with Henry Goddard’s, publicized and notorious script on the Mentally challenged, “ every feeble minded person is a potential criminal since the feeble minded lacks one or the other factors essential to a moral life, an understanding of right and wrong, and the power of control.”

With the looming threat of raising a potential criminal within the family circle, the families for their own benefit and believing the doctors who vouched for it, preferred institutionalism. What horrors held within the walls of institutions came out only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with some photographers sneaking into the closed in walls and managing to capture the reality. Insanitary settings, unhygienic and claustrophobic rooms, chained in or drugged patients, were the litany of these institutions that bloomed as mushrooms through the length and breadth of the country. One would be reminded of Foucault’s ship of fools, a floating ship where the captain was paid to keep the undesired family members away from their relations. In short ,it was one of the earliest institutions.

The fear of the sexuality of the intellectually disabled, led to the sterilization statutes that were passed without hindrance in the United States. The movement flamed by Indiana caught fire among other states.

It is suggested that Jack London’s “Told in the drooling ward” a 1914 story was one of the pioneering books that gave narrative power to the mentally impaired. London argues through his impaired and institutionalized character Tom that the correspondence between sexual reproduction and textual reproduction is faulty and that all people, including those deemed feeble minded are entitled to a privilege of the narrative. Equally powerful is Faulkner’s 1929 *The Sound and the Fury*, the text begins and ends with 33 year old, prearticulate child Benjy who is institutionalized by his brother Jason at the end of the work. Benjy’s narration focuses more on

his experiences with his sister Caddy. His echolalia ( pattern of repeating words and sentences) make sense only when the sections of others are read. His wail, resonating agony is the one complete and unifying entity in his segment. “ Ben wailed again, hopeless and prolonged. It was nothing. Just sound. It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets.” To many critics, Benjy’s wail is the most articulate element.

Tony Tanner in his work, *The Reign of Wonder* speaks of three types of narrators and the effectiveness of using them in fiction. “ the naïve eye- idiot, Indian, infant- seems to pay the most profitable kind of attention to things, to enjoy a lost intimacy with the world, to have the freshest, clearest perceptions.” (34)

No writer can produce a text totally devoid of judgement. He might possess an inimitable style, but he is guided by the readers perceptions while dealing with his characters. Till date many westernwriters have attempted in writing texts with a mentally challenged protagonist. By placing them as the center, as the narrator or by inserting them at the margins, the instilling of such novels in mainstream literature cannot be unnoticed anymore.

Mirroring the west, India too started updating policies, ushering new and liberal policies. With Dr. B. Kuppuswamy as the President of All India Association on Mental Retardation, an All India Conference was held on Nov 26-27 at New Delhi. The conference held under the initiative of workers in the field of mentally challenged was “to organize their efforts in a more fruitful manner and to bring to the notice of the state as well as the society, the magnitude of the problem and its urgency.’(8). Initially, the mentally challenged in India found himself in an agrarian world, where he could easily find a pattern and blend in as much a possible. Routine tasks helped him in maintaining normalcy . the decision making responsibility fell on the head of the family. With industrialization and advance in technology, alterations have stepped in. the unskilled intellectually disabled who is not adept to the advancing technology finds himself back laid

The first scientific approach to the problem in India was made by Dr V.V. Kamath who made a survey whilst standardizing the Binet test in 1929 for the Kannada speaking people. Another landmark in India's approach to solving problem of Mentally challenged children was the foundation of the first home for such by Bombay Children's Aid Society at Umerkhadi in 1941.

The "School for children in need of special care" at Bombay founded by Mrs. Jai Vakeel in 1944. Mrs. Selwyn started the "Heaven" in Versova, Bombay. This was the first registered residential school. The first indian Journal treating the mentally challenged is Mrs. Nimbkar's Occupational therapy Journal later called as Journal of Rehabilitation in Asia.

The changes in the local and the global scenarios, led to the instilling of intellectually disabled characters in main stream Indian literature. The texts under study clearly explains the politics of signification in the treatment of each of the character of each of the novelists.

Rushdie's Sofia Zenobia emerges as a beast from her disability while Mistry's Tehmul succumbs to his fate. Mishra's Riya reflects the new age parentage who are willing to take risks for their children and Desai's Baba is accepted without questions by the family members who create a world around him and with him.

The chosen books span generations of intellectually disabled characters, both men and women. Writings on and about the intellectually disabled often confirms and conforms to the dominant cultural norms. As Couser points out, the "marked" (16) body calls for an explanation, an answer to "what happened to you?". The writers attempt to pacify the curious reader by submerging the latter with details of the reason for disability- the cause of the person becoming intellectually disabled. The same can be found in Mistry's Tehmul and Rushdie's Sufiya. Explicit details are given about their birth and the slow revelation and understanding that the child is not normal. This has led to many studies which seek to answer the question if disability could generate a narrative. As already pointed out, while addressing the issue, what cannot be overlooked is the

“ethical dilemma” (19) in representing an individual who cannot give consent to the authenticity of representation, nor is able to speak for himself. Attempts by others to speak for them entails misrepresentation.

Given below are some facts about Autism.

1. Autism comes from the Greek word ‘auto’ which means ‘self’.
2. The term autism was coined in 1943 by Leo Kanner.
3. No one knows the exact cause of autism. There is no medical test for it and also no cure.
4. Autism appears in the early childhood. It does not develop later on in life.
5. As it is a spectrum disorder children on the mild end of the spectrum may be very bright, have no speech delay but have underdeveloped social skills.
6. Children with autism start speaking later than others.
7. Common signs of autism include repetitive behavior, flapping of hands, rocking the body, spinning in circles, and repeating words and phrases over and over.
8. Lack of eye contact
9. A person with autism has trouble reading social signals given by the other person’s body language.
10. Temper tantrums are often visible.
11. Autism affects more boys than girls
12. Autism could be hereditary. Children with a sibling or parent with autism have a higher risk of being autistic.
13. This is often associated with other medical problems such as gastrointestinal problems, autoimmune disorders, seizures and allergies.
14. Some people with autism are mentally challenged some others have extremely high IQ s

15. Early intervention for children with autism is crucial in the development of the child.
16. Each person with autism is unique.
17. They are highly sensitive to certain colours, textures and sounds.

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