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A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE: DISABILITY EXPERIENCES IN ABHISHEK ANNICA'S *THE GRAMMAR OF MY BODY*

Abstract

The representation of disability in literature has often perpetuated stereotypes, marginalizing individuals with disabilities and reinforcing societal misconceptions. This marginalization is particularly noticeable in narratives preceding the Disability Activist Movement, where characters with disabilities were frequently depicted as objects of pity, tragedy, or even villainy, serving primarily as foils to non-disabled protagonists. Such portrayals not only contributed to harmful stereotypes but also marginalized disabled voices and their experiences. In response to such representations, life writing emerges as a powerful means for marginalized voices to reclaim their narratives. This paper explores the transformative power of life writing, focusing on Abhishek Annica's memoir *The Grammar of My Body* (2023) as a counter-narrative to the negative representations of disability in literature. The memoir portrays the complexities of disabled life in India, shedding light on social, cultural, and institutional barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. Drawing on McRuer's theory of "compulsory able-bodiedness," this paper examines how societal norms not only uphold but also enforce the notion of "able" and "normal" bodies, positioning deviations from this norm as deviant and contributing to the marginalization of individuals with disabilities. By analyzing Annica's memoir, this study underscores the role of life writing in challenging ableist narratives and advocating for inclusivity and social change.

Keywords: Abhishek Annica, *The Grammar of My Body,* disability, life writing, able-bodiedness, stigma, normalcy

1.Introduction

"To marginalized people, autobiography may be the most accessible of literary genres" (Couser, *Signifying Bodies* 78). G. Thomas Couser's assertion underscores the transformative power of life writing as a crucial medium for marginalized voices. The literary genre of life writing, encompassing autobiographies, memoirs, and personal narratives, provides a poignant threshold for expressing unique experiences and perspectives that have long been overlooked. Historically, this genre has been championed by various marginalized groups, from African Americans and women to LGBTQ+ individuals, serving as a means to reclaim narratives that have been misrepresented or erased. Life writing not only revolves around self-representation but also endeavors to comprehend and mirror the "other" through first-person narrative (Singh 180). The marginalized communities have often been portrayed as "other," but the narrator attempts to blur the line between the self and society through life writing. This genre not only renders unfamiliar experiences tangible but also humanizes the "other" by presenting them as a complete being in the world. Moreover, life writing possesses the capacity to challenge and rectify misrepresentations by offering a nuanced portrayal of diverse lived experiences and fostering more inclusive literary discourse.

Within this evolving field of life writings, the narratives of persons with disabilities also emerge as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of personal storytelling. These narratives provide a platform for individuals to voice their expressions, experiences, challenges, and triumphs. Historically, particularly before the twentieth century, access to education and accommodation for persons with disabilities posed significant challenges, limiting their ability to express themselves and present their perspectives (Newman 261). Consequently, the narrative surrounding disability from firsthand accounts remained conspicuously absent for a prolonged period. It was only in the aftermath of the Second World War that a notable shift occurred, as G. Thomas Couser contends in his essay "Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation." Couser writes that the trend of life writing concerning disability began to take shape post-Second World War, emphasizing that the war has both generated and glorified specific forms of disability. Not surprisingly, disabled veterans emerged as significant contributors to this narrative surge, producing a substantial number of personal narratives in the post-war period (Couser, "Disability" 457). Later, the Disability Activist Movement emerged as a catalyst, further fostering the prominence of life writing within the discourse. This movement not only advocated for equal rights and accessibility but also introduced the "social model of disability," marking a significant departure from the prevailing "medical model." Unlike the medical model, which predominately focuses on curing or fixing impairments within individuals, the social model of disability argues that "the problems disabled people face are the result of social oppression and exclusion, not their individual deficits" (Shakespeare 194), placing a critical emphasis on the societal factors contributing to disability. By promoting awareness about the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and advocating for social changes, the Disability Activist movement empowered individuals to articulate their stories. It underscored the notion that personal narratives serve not only as a means of individual expression but also as power tools for advocacy and societal change. As Michael Berube rightly stated, disability "demands a story" (570), emphasizing the critical role of storytelling in shaping perceptions and driving societal transformations. Through sharing experiences, individuals with disabilities could challenge stereotypes, break down barriers, advocate for policy reforms, and foster a more inclusive world.

This study offers a textual analysis of Abhishek Annica's memoir *The Grammar of My Body* (2023), exploring its depiction of the complexities of disabled life in India. The memoir highlights the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that shape the everyday realities of individuals with disabilities, shedding light on the systematic exclusion and marginalization they face. The primary objective of this paper is to examine how the memoir challenges dominant disability discourses and reclaims agency through personal narrative. The study employs Robert McRuer's theory of "compulsory able-bodiedness" as its theoretical framework to understand how the text resists societal pressures to conform to able-bodied norms. The theory elucidates how societal norms construct an expectation of able-bodiedness, labeling deviations from this norm as deviant and leading to the marginalization of individuals with disabilities. *The Grammar of My Body* strategically challenges this notion by presenting a distinctive portrayal of disability as an integral and complete aspect of human existence and offers a counter-narrative that redefines disability beyond the limitations imposed by mainstream discourse. Through this analysis, the paper attempts to establish how the memoir contributes to reshaping societal perceptions regarding disability, aligning with the broader objectives of the Disability Activist Movement to break down stereotypes, advocate for policy reforms, and foster a more inclusive world.

2. The Narrative of Disability in India

The discourse surrounding disability in India is multifaceted, reflecting diverse interpretations and complexities inherent in the term, with Jan Grue characterizing 'disability' as polysemous in nature (1). The general understanding of disability refers to a limitation or lack of ability, which includes various physical, cognitive, sensory, and developmental impairments, but its definition extends beyond mere simplicity. Disability is not solely a medical condition but a social construct influenced by cultural beliefs, legal policies, and societal attitudes. The narrative surrounding disability in India is complex and interwoven with historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have evolved over centuries. In the traditional context of India, the perception of disability has long been influenced by the notion of Karma or fate. People with disabilities are typically portrayed as suffering the repercussions of their own or their family's past acts because disabilities are frequently attributed to divine retribution for past life transgressions. This portrayal often associates them with deceit, mischief, or even devilry, painting a picture of individuals undergoing a form of penance or retribution for alleged misdeeds. The prevalent response to disability in this cultural framework has been primarily through acts of charity, and these charitable acts do not stem from a genuine commitment to addressing the challenges of disability. Instead, they often align with the cultural expectations, framed as religious duties towards the weak and needy. Across ancient Indian society, there exists abundant literary evidence detailing the instances of marginalization and societal stigmatization faced by individuals with disabilities. India's historical record has numerous mentions of disabilities dating to the Vedic era and classical antiquity, prevalent in diverse written works (Islam and Jana, "Text" 203). This mention can be traced back to ancient epics such as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, where characters with disabilities are prominently featured. In these epic narratives, individuals with disabilities are not mere peripheral figures but play significant roles, further emphasizing attachment to disability. For instance, characters like the hunchbacked Manthara in the Ramayana and the blind Dhritarashtra, along with his disabled brother-in-law Shakuni in the Mahabharata, serve as notable examples (Sati et al. 2). However, the portrayal of disability in these epics is often imbued with negative connotations, "associating disability with evil or malevolence" (Debroy 15). While these representations provide insights into the enduring nature of disability discourse in India, they also highlight the need for critical reflection and reevaluation of societal attitudes towards disability.

In contemporary India, awareness regarding the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities has only recently gained momentum (Ghai xxiii). Following India's independence in 1947, persons with disabilities were largely overlooked, with minimal acknowledgment in the Indian Constitution. It was not until the 49th year of independence that the inaugural legislation advocating equal opportunity for persons with disabilities materialized in 1995, highlighting previous neglect of their concerns (Sati et al. 4). This legislation, however, predominantly reflected a charitable rather than a right-based approach, indicative of the government's patronizing attitude. According to the 2011 Census, India counted approximately 26.8 million people with disabilities, which makes India one of the largest populations of individuals with disabilities globally (Disability in India). Despite such a large number, both the inclusivity and accessibility in the country remain inadequately addressed. The prevailing societal expectation places the burden on an individual to adapt to their surroundings, fostering an environment where disabled persons bear the responsibility for adjustment rather than society. However, in 2016, the government of India revised the earlier legislation for persons with disabilities, emphasizing the rights of these people and making accessibility their priority (RPWD Act 2016).

The marginalization of individuals with disabilities is noticeable in both the Indian legal framework and cultural landscape, where prevailing societal attitudes often relegate an individual to an object of charity, dependency, or medical intervention. However, autobiographical works written by individuals with disabilities have disrupted this dominant discourse and offer counter-narratives that foreground agency and resilience and highlight systemic and institutional discrimination. Hellen Keller's seminal work, *The Story of My Body* (1903), marked an important moment in disability life writing and provides a rare insight into the lived experience of disability and the struggle for self-empowerment. While Keller's autobiography is celebrated for amplifying a previously silenced voice, it simultaneously reinforces certain normative ideals of success through assimilation into an able-bodied society. In the Indian context, early autobiographies such as Subodh Chandra Roy's *The Blind in India and Abroad* (1944) shed light on the historical neglect of disability, particularly in relation to education and employment. Islam and Jana, in their essay "Disability Life Writing in India," argue that the emergence of life writing since the 1990s has served as a powerful means for disabled individuals to articulate their centuries-old-silence and expose the social, economic, and cultural oppression within India's stratified society (204).

Disability in literature has often functioned as a metaphor or prosthesis device, as argued by Mitchell and Synder in their prominent work, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. They argue that disability has been used in literature as "a device of characterization narrative art" (Mitchell and Synder 9). However, autobiographies counter this by presenting disability as a lived and embodied experience. The necessity of a Disability Studies perspective becomes particularly pronounced in the Indian context, where the deeply ingrained notions of Karma and charity continue to shape societal perceptions of disability. The memoirs collectively challenge such reductive interpretations and offer nuanced perspectives on the intersection of disability with gender and sexuality, education, economic class, caste, and cultural stigmatization. Ved Mehta's *Face to Face* (1957) is a foundational text in this discourse that provides critical insights into the socio-cultural history of disability in India. Mehta lost his vision at a very young age and narrates his experience of being treated as a family tragedy and his daily encounters with discrimination and ridicule. His memoir reveals the structural barriers faced by blind individuals in India, particularly the lack of accessible education and biases that render disabled individuals invisible within the broader social fabric (Islam and Jana, "Disability Life Writing" 211). Similarly, Preeti Monga's memoir *The Other Senses* (2012) presents a compelling critique of the intersection of disability, gender, and education in India. Monga was expelled from school at the end of class eight due to her blindness, and as a result, she was forced to remain at home and receive informal music training. Her narrative exposes the lack of educational opportunities and institutional support for the disabled in India. Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* (2010) further exemplifies the socio-cultural barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities in public spaces. Chib recounts her journey as a cerebral palsy woman who has been subjected to intrusive stares and whispered conversations about her condition. The emotional distress caused by such encounters not only affected Chib but also had profound repercussions for her family, ultimately leading them to relocate to London in pursuit of a more accepting and inclusive environment. Chib also depicts how society, especially medical professionals, views and treats people with disabilities as something that needs to be fixed. This, she says, is extremely dehumanizing (Seal 187).

In addition to these narratives, Abhishek Annica's *The Grammar of My Body* (2023) emerges as a poignant memoir that impels readers not to perceive individuals with disabilities as mere tragic figures but as individuals with complex emotions and nuanced sexual desires. The memoir is written primarily from a non-biological lens and reframes disability as a social and cultural category. Annica was born with conditions like an imperforate anus, ectopic kidney, and scoliosis. His journey into disability commenced in his early twenties, marking an irreversible transition in his life. Unlike traditional narratives that construct disability as an obstacle, Annica interrogates the binary of disabled/nondisabled, offering a perspective that situates disability as a socially and culturally mediated identity. His work also foregrounds issues that are often absent from mainstream disability discourse, including sexuality, intimacy, and the right to desire, further expanding the scope of Disability Studies in India. The memoir reflects on various stages of Abhishek's life, his journey from hating himself for living with illnesses and disability to finally accepting and embracing his body. Through close reading of such memoirs, it becomes evident that disability in India cannot be understood merely through the lens of individual perseverance or medical intervention. Instead, these narratives collectively expose the structural inequalities, cultural biases, and social exclusions that shape the disabled individual's experiences. While early works such as Roy's contributed to the visibility of disability issues, contemporary Indian disability life writing expands the discourse by addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and sexual dimensions of disability.

3. A Voice in the Silence: Abhishek Annica's Reflection on Able-Bodied Culture

The world we inhabit is fundamentally structured around the ideology of able-bodiedness, which refers to a hegemonic construct that dictates what kinds of bodies and minds are deemed 'normal' and, consequently, which are marginalized. This normative ideal is not merely a passive preference for certain physical and cognitive capabilities but an active mechanism of exclusion that positions disability as deviance rather than a legitimate form of embodiment. Robert McRuer, in his famous book *Crip Theory* further extends this discussion by theorizing 'compulsory able-bodiedness,' a concept that underscores how able-bodiedness is not only valorized but systematically enforced through cultural, institutional, and structural mechanisms (1). The framework does not only privilege certain bodies; it actively produces disability by defining it in opposition to idealized standards that are perceived as the "natural order of things" (McRuer 1). Within this oppressive paradigm, individuals with disabilities must navigate an environment that is designed to accommodate the able-bodied by default, rendering accessibility an afterthought rather than a foundational principle. Disability, therefore, is not an inherent condition but rather a product of the societal construction of able-bodiedness. The ramification of this systematic ableism extends beyond physical barriers to include pervasive social prejudices and institutional constraints, which force individuals with disabilities into a constant negotiation of space, agency, and identity.

Within McRuer's framework of compulsory able-bodiedness, Annica's memoir serves as a powerful critique of the systemic entrenchment of ableist norms, revealing how the constructed notion of "normalcy" dictates the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities. This section of the paper attempts to explore how the memoir serves as a tool for questioning and challenging the purported "natural order" dictated by the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness. The memoir, instead of just depicting personal struggle, serves as a subversive tool that interrogates the very foundation of a world built for the non-disabled. Annica's narrative does not simply depict exclusion; it actively destabilizes the assumption that able-bodiedness is the default and forces readers to confront the ways in which public spaces, policies, and social attitudes are designed to privilege normative bodies while rendering disabled bodies as aberrations. His experiences illuminate McRuer's argument regarding the "natural order of things" (1), which operates as an ideological mechanism that naturalizes exclusion by positioning disability as an inherent deficit rather than a socially produced marginalization. Through describing his interactions with inaccessible public spaces and the pervasive expectations of normativity, Annica maps a landscape where systematic ableism is not incidental but structural, embedded within the very design of public life.

Annica's daily ordeal of navigating inaccessible spaces, particularly his struggle to descend stairs to reach a taxi, exposes the pervasive assumption of able-bodied mobility within the public infrastructure. His decision to crawl amongst the gaze of the neighbors underscores the objectification he endures in his everyday life, transforming his journey into a spectacle that elicits stares and curiosity. He describes how the neighbors were curious and attempted to steal "glares from their half-opened doors" (Annica 3). His experiences of being stared at align with Rosemarie Garland Thomson's notion of the disabled body as a spectacle, wherein visibility often equates to objectification. Annica's choice to crawl publicly, despite the social gaze, can be seen both as an act of forced compliance and as an assertion of agency within an inaccessible environment. This duality highlights how individuals do not simply conform to able-bodied expectations but also carve out their own means of existing within them.

Moreover, Annica's critique of accessibility in India reveals a fundamental disconnect between legislative advancements and lived experiences. The Rights for Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016, which promotes inclusive design principles, has been implemented deficiently, and many old and new buildings and offices have yet to understand the accessibility needs. The building, which has ramps, is steep and ill-suited for individuals with mobility aids beyond wheelchairs, thus perpetuating exclusionary practices for someone like Annica, who uses crutches or sticks as their mobility devices. Annica's narrative portrays the pervasive othering experienced in the heart of the nation's capital, New Delhi, where the disjunction between purported ideals of inclusivity and lived experiences of disability becomes starkly evident. The text thus interrogates the superficiality of inclusionary rhetoric, demonstrating how accessibility remains a performative ideal rather than an actionable commitment. Beyond physical barriers, Annica's memoir foregrounds the social and cultural processes that actively produce disability. His description of his movement as a "circus performance" (Annica 24) and his reflection that "the journey from being a human to being a thing is a journey that all disabled people go through" (Annica 36) demand critical scrutiny. The everyday humiliations he experiences epitomize McRuer's contention that compulsory able-bodiedness permeates all facets of life, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and erasure. The text further challenges the construct of "normalcy" by foregrounding the alienation experienced by individuals, as Annica articulates:

> Imagine being surrounded by people who have very different ideas about life, the body and experiences. When everyone around you has a different body, different ways of living. All of them considered 'normal' while there is a constant gaze that separates you, puts you in the limelight. In a bad kind of way. Wouldn't that be alienating? (132)

This passage should not be read as a lament but as a strategic exposure of the systemic forces that dictate "who belongs and who does not." The memoir, in this sense, does not simply describe alienation; rather, it critiques the very condition that makes such alienation possible and challenges the reader to recognize how the myth of normalcy is sustained through everyday exclusions. Annica's memoir also exposes the deeply ingrained stigma surrounding disability, particularly the ways in which societal norms construct certain bodily functions and assistive devices as shameful. Erving Goffman, in his famous book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, becomes relevant in this context. He describes stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (6), which means that stigmatization occurs when society labels some attributes as discrediting. In the context of disability, stigma becomes an everyday part of an individual's life and identity. The memoir compels us to interrogate how stigma is not just an individual burden but a socially produced mechanism that polices bodily norms. Annica's internalized shame regarding his reliance on diapers at the age of thirty-three is not an inherent consequence of his disability but rather a reflection of the ableist conditioning that frames dependency as a failure. His characterization of diapers as a "secret document of my lived life" (Annica 23) reinforces how disability is systematically relegated to the private sphere and highlights the broader cultural expectation that individuals with disabilities must either conceal their bodily realities or be prepared to endure social judgment. The demand that he "deliver (diapers) personally to the garbage bin" (Annica 23) is not merely a logistical concern but a manifestation of how society constructs disability as something to be erased from public consciousness. Even his own description of his body and reality as "ugliness that one can't take" (Annica 28) raises critical questions: does this reflect his personal perception, or is it the result of internalized ableism that mirrors the aesthetic preferences dictated by an able-bodied society? The memoir becomes a site of both resistance and complicity, and it illustrates how even those who resist ableist norms may still find themselves negotiating the shame imposed upon them.

The stigma extends beyond bodily functions to encompass various aspects of Annica's life, including his desire for intimacy and relationships. Disabled bodies are often viewed through the lens of asexuality, and individuals with disabilities are usually denied the possibility of being seen as desirable or capable of experiencing romantic and sexual relationships. Annica's statement reflects the longing for affection as he states,

> But at some point in time, we want to be desired too. It's a very human need. Imagine being disabled. Imagine being constantly reminded that you might never find someone who desires you, your body. (71)

This passage encapsulates the isolating experience of being told, both explicitly and implicitly, that romantic fulfillment is unattainable for those with disabilities. The notion that a disabled and chronically ill person could not possibly have a fulfilling sexual life also reflects the intersectionality of ableism and heteronormativity, wherein disabled bodies are deemed undesirable or incapable of experiencing love and desire. Eunjung Kim, in the article "Asexuality in Disability Narratives," examines the prevalent association of disabled individuals with asexuality, characterizing it as a "damaging myth imposed on disabled people" (480). However, Annica's recognition of his queerness and bisexual identity challenges such assumptions and highlights the contradictions within his own internalized perceptions of disability and bodily worth. His assertion of identity becomes a site of both resistance and vulnerability as he grapples with the deep-seated stigma surrounding disabled sexuality. He confronts this stigma in his reflection on the supposed absurdity of discussing his sex life, stating, "It would be funny to talk about my sex life…How could a disabled, fat guy have sex?... It's an ugly image to even to picture it" (Anicca 68). This statement, though framed in irony, reveals the extent to which dominant narratives of beauty, normalcy, and desirability shape his own understanding of his body. His statement does not simply expose societal bias; it also lays bare his internalized struggle, raising critical questions about the power structures that dictate who is seen as sexually viable and who is excluded from the realm of intimacy. The tension in his words suggests that, even as he challenges ableist assumptions, he remains aware of how deeply embedded they are within his own psyche. His critique of historical and systemic marginalization further broadens his discussion. He reflects on the long history of violence against disabled individuals, stating:

> Our bodies have been shamed and stared at for centuries. We have been forcibly sterilized, considered unproductive for society, killed in gas chambers. And here we are and all we want is to be respected and desired. The joke's on you, society. (Annica 69)

This assertion underscores the enduring legacy of marginalization faced by disabled individuals. While this passage is a powerful reclamation of agency, it is also necessary to critically examine its implications. By framing desire and respect as ultimate acts of resistance, does Annica inadvertently uphold the same value systems that equate desirability with worth? The demand for recognition is significant, but it also raises the question of whether seeking validation within ableist and heteronormative structures truly subverts them or reinforces their authority. Annica's embrace of his bisexuality and rejection of traditional markers of partnership and marriage signals a broader defiance of normative expectations. His rejection of heteronormative ideals suggests that fulfillment need not be contingent on conforming to societal prescriptions of love and family. However, while his narrative provides a powerful challenge to the exclusion of disabled individuals from romantic and sexual discourse, it is essential to interrogate whether it entirely disrupts the structures that create these exclusions in the first place. Thus, his memoir becomes not just a personal testament but a complex site of negotiation between resistance and internalized bias, between reclaiming desire and questioning why desirability remains a battleground.

4. The Narrative of Transformation: Annica's Journey from Self-Hatred to Self-Acceptance

The Grammar of My Body presents Annica's journey from self-hatred to self-acceptance. It is intricately woven with the pervasive influence of societal expectations and medical interventions aimed at rectifying his disabled body. From early childhood, his life has been marked by a series of medical surgeries and treatments, each endeavoring to mold his body into conformity with the "normal" body. His journey to Kolkata to obtain a special jacket for his curved spinal cord serves as a poignant example of the lengths to which he is forced to go in the quest for achieving normalcy. This desperate attempt to correct or fix his curved back reflects the internalized ableism that permeates his existence as he seeks validation and acceptance from external means at the cost of his well-being and self-acceptance. He expresses that sometimes he is even forced to hate his disabled body since he does not "fit into the definition of normal"

(Annica 195). This relentless pursuit of achieving normalcy in *The Grammar of My Body* aligns with Lennard Davis's concept of "imposing normalcy," where disabled individuals are pressured to conform to societal standards of bodily perfection. Davis further elaborates that to understand disability, "one must return to the concept of norm, normal body" (23), which he sees as the main reason to exploit those who deviate from this norm. The continuous medical interventions contributed to Abhishek's feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred. The constant pressure to conform to societal standards weighs heavily on him as he internalizes the belief that his disability renders him inherently inferior. His feeling of shame is palpable when he writes, "Shame is a five-letter word I carry on my back" (Annica 119), reflecting his mental state and the societal validation of the imperfections. Furthermore, this internalized ableism does not only affect his perception of his body but also extends to his self-image and identity. The cultural hegemony of normalcy enforces the idea that disability restricts both the body and mind, reducing individuals with disabilities to a lesser existence. While these notions often go unnoticed, they have a profound impact on individuals' lives. Annica highlights the propound psychological toll of this imposed normalcy, stating,

> From being a confident, young, sexual being, I started questioning all of these aspects of my life. It definitely impacted the image I had of myself, often hampering my confidence. (138)

His words reflect how the pressure to conform does not merely alter his physical experiences but fractures his self-perception, affecting his sense of agency, confidence, and even his understanding of his own desirability. Annica's visit to obtain a disability certificate further highlights the dichotomy between his lived experiences and societal norms of normalcy. He received the disability certificate mentioning him as "57 per cent disabled", which he interprets as "more than half of my body is not normal" (Annica 210). This bureaucratic quantification of his body reinforces the idea that disability is always measured against an arbitrary, externalized notion of the 'normal' body. Rather than acknowledging the complex, multifaceted realities of disabled lives, these types of systems reinforce a reductive framework in which disability exists only in relation to a normative ideal, one that is itself constructed and exclusionary. In response to the pressure of achieving normalcy, Abhishek develops his own coping mechanisms that reflect both resistance and internalized ableism. His engagement in behaviors such as overeating, drinking, and seeking distraction through entertainment can be read not merely as acts of escapism but as attempts to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between his self-perception and the external gaze that marks his body as deviant. These acts of self-soothing, often dismissed as personal failings, must be interrogated as responses to a world that refuses to accommodate disabled identities beyond the binary of deficiency and cure. However, as he critically reflects deeper into his own psyche, he begins to question the validity of societal norms and expectations that render his existence undesirable. He began to understand that instead of accepting the ableist premise that demands his body to be hidden or corrected, he should reclaim his own narrative.

Writing poetry emerges as a therapeutic outlet for him as it gives him a sense of agency and power over his own life. It serves as both a site of introspection and a mode of resistance against dominant ableist discourses. Through his poetry, he does not simply find solace but actively challenges the ideological structures that marginalize individuals with disabilities. His creative expression resists the imposition of pity, instead framing his experiences as one of radical self-definition. Furthermore, his contemplation on masculinity and vulnerability serves as a locus of profound introspection. In a cultural landscape that valorizes strength and stoicism as markers of masculinity, his embrace of vulnerability constitutes a radical departure from normative paradigms. Instead of positioning disability as a threat to masculinity, he reconfigures it as a space of new possibilities, one that dismantles the very premises upon which traditional masculinity is built. Annica's narrative, therefore, is not just a personal journey but a critique of the larger ideological frameworks that construct disability as aberration, masculinity as invulnerability, and desirability as contingent on able-bodiedness. By rejecting both the pressure to "overcome" his disability and the expectation of 'silence,' he asserts that disabled lives cannot be reduced to medical classification or cultural stereotypes. His memoir does not merely document struggle but actively interrogates the mechanisms that create and sustain systemic ableism and offers a counter-narrative that resists simplistic notions of normalcy, masculinity, and self-worth.

5. Conclusion

Through an analysis of Annica's memoir, this paper critically examines how disability narratives function not merely as personal testimonies of struggle but as interventions that challenge and redefine dominant societal norms. G. Thomas Couser, in his work *Signifying Bodies*, argues that disability narratives often conform to the trope of triumph over adversity, hence reinforcing the perception of disability as an obstacle to be overcome (33). However, *The Grammar of My Body* not only disrupts this preferred storyline but also serves as a potent vehicle for dismantling the illusions of a 'normal' body. Instead of portraying disability as a condition to be endured or conquered, the memoir exposes how societal structures are deeply embedded in ableist ideologies that construct disability as a site of exclusion and marginalization. By foregrounding the realities of living with a disabled body in an environment structured for able-bodied individuals, Annica's narrative shifts the focus from personal perseverance to a critique of systematic discrimination and deeply ingrained biases regarding normalcy and desirability.

Jane Buckingham rightly comments, "Written memoirs and academic writing on disability experience are an important element in the emerging historiography of disability in India" (425). *The Grammar of My Body* aligns with this perspective and functions as both a deeply personal account and a socio-political text that contributes to the broader discourse on disability in India. The memoirs disrupt the passive consumption of disability narratives as either tales of suffering or stories of inspiration, instead demanding critical engagement with how disability is framed, regulated, and responded to in both public and private spheres. Through its raw and unfiltered portrayal of experiences such as stigma, bodily shame, and the denial of sexual agency, the text highlights the ways in which ableism permeates every facet of life, often rendering disabled individuals invisible or undesirable. By incorporating McRuer's concept of compulsory able-bodiedness, this analysis moves beyond individual experience to examine how disability memoirs act as sites of resistance. Annica's assertion that adaptation must be shared responsibility; "It's not only our responsibility to adapt to the situation. Everyone around us must adapt too. Only then we will be able to live a life of dignity and respect" (43), directly challenges the dominant assumption that individuals with disabilities alone must conform to an inaccessible world. This statement calls for a fundamental restructuring of not just physical environments but also social attitudes, which continue to view disability as an individual limitation rather than a reflection of systemic exclusion.

This paper, furthermore, argues that *The Grammar of My Body* is not merely an individual account of navigating disability but a text that opens up necessary conversations about how disabled bodies are perceived and treated within Indian society. It engages with themes of bodily autonomy, sexuality, and social exclusion in a way that refuses to sanitize the disabled experiences. In doing so, it expands the discourse on disability beyond the medical and rehabilitative models, pushing for a more nuanced understanding of the social, cultural, and historical factors that shape disabled identities. In essence, *The Grammar of My Body* functions both as a mirror reflecting the complexities of lived disability experiences in India and as a catalyst for social change of true equality and inclusion for all individuals.

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PUT OTPORNOSTI: ISKUSTVA INVALIDITETAU DJELU *THE GRAMMAR OF MY BODY* ABHISHEKA ANNICE

Sažetak

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Predstavljanje invaliditeta u književnosti često je perpetuiralo stereotipe, marginalizirajući takve osobe i učvršćujući društvene zablude. To je osobito uočljivo u narativima koji prethode pokretu za prava osoba s invaliditetom, u kojima su takvi likovi nerijetko prikazivani kao objekti sažaljenja, tragedije ili čak zloće, služeći ponajprije kao kontrast protagonistima bez invaliditeta. Takvi prikazi nisu samo pridonosili štetnim stereotipima nego su i potiskivali marginalizirane glasove i njihova iskustva. Kao odgovor na takve reprezentacije, autobiografsko se pisanje pojavljuje kao moćno sredstvo kojim marginalizirani glasovi ponovno preuzimaju pravo na vlastite narative. Ovaj rad istražuje transformativnu moć autobiografskog pisanja, usredotočujući se na memoarsko djelo Abhisheka Annice *The Grammar of My Body* (2023.) kao protunarativ negativnim reprezentacijama invaliditeta u književnosti. Memoari prikazuju složenosti života s invaliditetom u Indiji, osvjetljavajući društvene, kulturne i institucijske prepreke s kojima se suočavaju takve osobe. Polazeći od McRuerove teorije „obvezatne tjelesne sposobnosti", rad ispituje kako društvene norme ne samo podržavaju nego i nameću predodžbu o „sposobnim" i „normalnim" tijelima, pozicionirajući odstupanja od te norme kao devijantna. Analizom Annicina memoarskoga djela istraživanje naglašava ulogu autobiografkog pisanja u osporavanju ableističkih narativa te u zagovaranju inkluzivnosti i društvene promjene.

Ključne riječi: Abhishek Annica, *The Grammar of My Body*, invaliditet, autobiografsko pisanje, tjelesna sposobnost, stigma, normalnost