

Chapter IV

From Object to Subject: Independent Living and Political

Intervention

“The struggle for independent living is fundamentally a struggle for civil rights—demanding that disabled people have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other citizen.”

- Jenny Morris, *Independent Lives? Community Care and Disabled People*, Chapter IX (1993)

IV.1 Introduction

The independent living philosophy as a social and political movement, tried to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities to live independent lives and participate fully into the mainstream society (Deegan). This ideology heightened community integration, impartial opportunities, and self-determination. This chapter looks into how the ideas of independent living philosophy have been portrayed in these writings. The novels *Emily Included* (2011) by Kathleen MC Donnell, *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) by Aaron Rose Philip who is the first black, transgender and a model with physical disability, and *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) by Jeanne Betancourt, have been examined critically for their depictions of it. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the complex relationship that persists between these literary text's narrative structures and the independent living philosophy.

These books depict the wide range of experiences that people with disabilities had have. *Emily Included* (2011) has shared the challenges faced by a young girl

suffering from cerebral palsy who wanted to pursue inclusive education by going against the social norms. The memoir *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) has been written by teenager Aaron Rose Philip, who herself is having cerebral palsy. She has talked about how she has overcome both financial and physical challenges in her writings. She also has offered an understanding on the relationships between immigration rights and disability. Another novel *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) has tried to explore the difficulties that a child with dyslexia can face in inclusive education system and has provided unique perspectives on the roadblocks that arise during this learning process.

This chapter also examines the ways in which the experiences of the characters influence the growth of knowledge in the stories and the ways in which that knowledge results in social as well as personal transformation. Using literary theories like post-colonialism, post-modernism, disability studies, reader-response criticism, etc it is possible to investigate the complex process of modifying knowledge in the context of these works. Scholars such as Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser endorse reader-response criticism, which clarifies that the meaning of a book is not inherent but rather it emerges from the connections between the readers and the texts. These works of literature employ the characters' experiences as literary strategies to encourage the readers to interact with and understand the narratives.

IV.2 The Dynamics of Independent Living Philosophy

The Independent Living philosophy began to gain significant traction during the Civil Rights struggles in the United States throughout the 1960s and 1970s. People with disabilities already started to fight for their rights through questioning social conventions, and they demanded autonomy and self-determination during that time.

The starting of the Centre for Independent Living (CIL) in Berkeley, California around 1972 for people with disabilities by the advocates like Ed Roberts, was one of the significant events. The Centre for Independent Living enabled people with disabilities to live freely in the community by offering several social support services. The philosophy of independent living is depending on rights-based approach that supports the idea constitutive of agency, autonomy, and most importantly the dignity of people with disabilities. It stands for the removal of all obstacles or barriers such as physical, social, and mental that prevents individuals with disabilities from fully participating into mainstream society and from being included into community. independent living philosophy sees disability as a product of societal systems and attitudes that marginalise specific section of the society, as opposed to seeing it merely as limitation of bodies and minds.

Independent living as a philosophical concept emphasised on the autonomy of people with disabilities to make decisions about their own lives. This may include choices of housing, employment, schooling, health care services, sexual orientation, and other sectors of day-to-day existence. The gradual development of self-determination fosters a feeling of autonomy and ownership, empowering individuals to govern their own lives. People with disabilities were given priority in the independent living philosophy when it comes to their autonomy and decision-making power. This principle had highlighted the significance of giving these people the knowledge, tools, and required assistances they needed to take charge of their own lives, and to make wise decisions, therefore, become successful in their future lives. Individuals who possess choice and control are able to follow their own dreams and ambitions instead of having someone who can dictate to them regarding what should they do or not to do or having completely depended on others.

Independent living philosophy treated people with disabilities as independent, equally and providing them with several opportunities. It has emphasised on the value of equal rights, access, and participation while rejecting charitable practices and paternalistic attitudes. It ensured that people with disabilities could have equal opportunity to pursue their own goals and aspirations as people without disabilities, which was a crucial aspect of equality. The independent living movement is grounded in the belief that people with disabilities should be fully included and involved in all spheres of social life. This included having access to education, social activities, leisure, housing, workplaces, and transportation. Inclusion is genuine interaction and a sense of belonging within various communities, going beyond simple physical access. Including both structural and psychological barriers, accessibility was another important part of the independent living philosophy. Therefore, removing architectural obstacles and installing facilities like ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, accessible classrooms, teaching assistances were necessary for this inclusion.

IV.3 The Dynamics of Political Intervention

The United States has steadily established an effective legal system throughout time to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities in federally financed programs. Section 504 of that law was the first to do so. Then came the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, which made sure that all children with disabilities may have a free and proper public education. The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 made sure that voting sites were easy for those with impairments to go to. The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 added safeguards for people with disabilities to the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 prohibited discrimination in air travel. The

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 was a big step forward. It made it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in jobs, public services, and public places. The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 made these protections even stronger. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 required that communication technology be easy to use. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 is the most recent law to encourage inclusive employment and vocational training for individuals with disabilities. These laws have set the stage for people with disabilities in the United States to enjoy equal rights, respect, and a place in society.

Michael Oliver in *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice* (1996) mentioned, “Without sustained political commitment and legislative action, independent living remains a distant dream for many disabled individuals” (Oliver 119). Consequently, there was a need for definitive legislation for implementing the ideas of the independent living philosophy. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), was first drafted in the year of 2006. It was signed on March 30, 2007, in New York and then it was effective from the year of 2008. The CRPD has 50 articles that delineate precise rights and responsibilities pertaining to many components of the life of individuals with disabilities. These include privileges to accessibility, medical care, proper education, place of employment, involvement in political and societal affairs, access to legal resource, and more privileges. The CRPD assured that people with disabilities are subjected to the equal socio-political rights and freedom like other people and requires governments to take necessary measures to ensure full participation of people with disabilities in society. Under CRPD, the Right to Education was one of the most important social rights for those with disabilities. It mentioned about necessity of governments to guarantee that

individuals with disabilities are provided with inclusive, excellent and proper learning opportunities, and that appropriate modifications need to be implemented to allow them to take part in educational activities with their non-disabled friends. It is mandatory for governments to provide equal opportunities for education to individuals with disabilities across all educational levels, including preschool, primary, secondary, post-secondary, vocational, and lifelong learning. To help people with disabilities accessing educational opportunities, this involves offering educational and personal assistance, assistive technologies, accessible physical and digital infrastructures, and transportations. For people who have disabilities, the freedom from discrimination in the educational system is equally acknowledged as a right. Governments need to make sure that there is no discrimination against individuals with disabilities in any aspect of education, including admittance, registration, successful completion, and full involvement. Regarding employment, it is important for governments to implement policies which guarantee that the people with disabilities may find employment and that appropriate accommodations are provided to allow them to work. People with disabilities are also seen as having a social right to engage in public and political life. Governments must make sure that individuals with disabilities may exercise their right to vote and participate in public decision-making processes. This also involves offering accessible information and resources including wheelchair-accessible voting places, sign language interpreters, and braille ballots. The ability to run for office and occupy public office is a crucial political right for the people with disabilities. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination based on their impairments and are granted equal access to political participation and public office.

IV.4 *Emily Included*: Emily's Fight for Educational Rights

Emily Included (2011) by Kathleen MC Donnell is based on the case of *Eaton v. Brant Country Board of Education* (1997) and true-life story of Emily Eaton whose name is really inspiring in the milestones of Canada's Disability Rights Movement. The book has been written by taking help from the real characters including Emily who herself has contributed a message in the book. In the Chapter I named as "Regular School" it is mentioned that as a baby Emily used to go to "Granville Children's Centre, where all the kids had disabilities". She used to go there especially for "physiotherapy, speech therapy, play-time, and special celebrations like Halloween" (p.5). When Emily's parents meet the Principal of a regular school named "Maple Avenue School", they clearly mention, "Cerebral Palsy causes different problems in different people. In Emily's case, her body is 'floppy', so she doesn't have much control over her movements. And she can't see very well, because her eyes don't focus together" (p.7). Though the doctors declare that she will be like "vegetable", her parents are determined not to limit her future possibilities. Emily's father Clayton possesses very progressive thoughts inspired by independent living philosophy, he says, "she'll learn more with classmates who are not disabled. For example, she's been trying to learn sign language. She'll be encouraged to use it more if she's surrounded by kids her own age who can speak" (p.9). While talking about her rights of equality her father mentions she deserves every chance of learning like any other kids. He not only talks about his daughter's progress, but he talks about creating a society where kids with disabilities and non-disabled kids would be able to learn from each other and would create a society free from biased conventional mode of understanding disability. As he says, "putting Emily in a regular class would also be good for the other children, because they would learn about people with disabilities... The children she grows up

with will be part of her community when she's in adult. They need to get to know her, and she needs to get to know them" (p.10).

Maple Avenue School was not a disabled friendly school; therefore, the Principal asks time for the necessary arrangements in the school. Emily loves to play soccer ball with her brother, "with the help of the walker, seemed to give her more control over her legs" (p.16). Her mother introduces her to American Sign Language from very beginning so that she would use sign language while communicating with her friends in school. During the time of their lunch her mother keeps on asking her to recall signs for short terms like 'please', 'drink', 'more' etc. While teaching the sign of 'more' her mother Carol "held up both hands with her palms facing inward and brought the tips of her fingers together. Then she guided Emily's hands in the same motion" (p.18). Emily finds hard to sign the term "please", her father and mother keeps on encouraging her and she keeps on practicing it (p.19). When she joins Maple Avenue School, it becomes difficult for her, as the other kids appear to be "strangers" to her and vice versa. She gets an educational assistant, "full-time helper like Maria to push her wheelchair, take her to the bathroom, and help her with activities like this" (p.23). In this kindergarten, she starts to walk gradually without the help of walker. Soon the other kids of the school get too familiar with her use of American Sign Language and even they start to help her while walking. She starts to love finger painting and brush painting even if she faces problems while holding the brush. Emily faces difficulties while doing some activities, here Maria comes up with "hand over hand" strategy, which means, "Emily didn't just watch what the rest of the class was doing - she did the activity right along with them and felt really involved in what was going on. She was just as proud of the things she made with Maria as of the work she did on her own" (p.24).

There was a “Communication Book” to keep the record of the communication between Maria and Emily’s parents, which helped them to know the things that were going on in the school on daily basis. Once Maria mentions in the book the question asked by other kids regarding the vision of Emily. Carol answers in detail how it is difficult for Emily to make eye contact because of her medical condition but she further mentions, in future it may be possible that through using any communication device Emily will be able to communicate properly and she appreciates “her classmates’ efforts at learning to sign with her” (p.26). In birthday party Emily’s father Clayton observes that other kids are learning and using sign language to talk to Emily, which makes him surprised. After this party, Emily feels that her school friends are transformed into her real friends. After completing the grade one at the school the school authority informs that Emily needs to shift to a special school for children with disabilities. Being upset with the situation Emily’s parents take help of Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped, which is “interested in starting a test case based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since the Charter guaranteed equality for people with disabilities, ARCH wanted to argue that the school board was legally required to include Emily in a regular classroom just like other kids, and to provide the support she needed” (p.45).

By the time, Emily starts her grade two class at Maple Avenue. In the group activity of the class, she participates enthusiastically with her friends Carry and Tommy and does the required research. The school appoints a new assistant named Cheryl and endless series of tests repeatedly conducted by the school board officials for Emily, make her frustrated. Emily strongly feels the words of Bobby Curtola’s song that expresses her frustration:

I just can’t seem to concentrate

I can't buckle down
 I never get my schoolwork done
 My head's always turning around
 I catch the teacher's angry looks
 When my head's not buried in my books.
 She knows my thoughts are all around
 That girl three rows over and two seats down (p.56).

Emily watches the sand hill cranes soaring high in the sky and feels “a powerful longing to burst out of her wheelchair and fly alongside them” (p.59). She with her father takes part in the Spring into Action race competition, “she remembered the sand hill cranes” and she becomes the winner of the competition (p.60). During Special Education Tribunal hearing, Emily’s parents, brothers, even the parents of some of her friends give statement in which they mention that they really want their children to be a part of the same class as Emily. Because they want them to learn about and grow with each other (p.65). The school board argues on the point that Emily would not be tested based on what she learnt in class and therefore she can’t be the part of school anymore. The school board’s lawyer tries to focus on the difficulties of allowing a student like Emily in regular mode of class. However, Emily’s lawyer Anne focuses on the benefits of allowing Emily in regular class (p.67). The director of a disability agency with the United States government, Bob Williams from Washington, D.C. arrives as one of the witnesses who makes a positive impact in Emily’s life. She finds out that Bob Williams also has similar case history of cerebral palsy like her. However, the fascinating part about him is his way of communicating through a computer like screen attached with the arm of wheelchair, which has a keyboard too. This machine generates sound as soon as he types words on it. Emily comes to know

that at his early life Bob was ill treated by the society, once he started to communicate with the help of machine, he “noticed that people treated him differently, and took him more seriously...People think that because a person can’t speak, they don’t have anything to say” (p.70). However, at the ending of the hearing, “The Tribunal agreed with the school board. They said that Emily should be moved to a special class for disabled students” (p.72).

Emily’s parents decide to go to the Divisional Court. Maple Avenue school allows Emily to join the grade three class with full time educational assistant until the decision of the Divisional Court is made. Emily becomes worried about the pending decision as well as she does not feel comfortable while working with new educational assistant Laurel in the beginning. Emily “needed someone who would get to know her as a person and help her learn as much as she could” (p.82). Emily loves all sorts of activities, which are introduced to her, slowly her friends of the class start to understand her in a better way and they “started to come up with all kinds of ideas” (p.84). She is included into the drama exercises and gym classes too. Eatons come to know that Divisional Court of Ontario has supported the decision of Tribunal. Activists around the city believed that it would be a form of discrimination and violation of rights if Emily would not be allowed to join the regular school. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms stated, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (p.86). Therefore, different organisations and disability rights groups decide to be “interveners” in the case. On the other hand, Maple Avenue stops providing assistant for Emily anymore so, it becomes obvious that Emily must change her school.

Emily shifts to Blessed Sacrament School, which “had a policy of including students with disabilities in regular classrooms” (p.88); in the new school, everyone welcomes her. In one of the assignments of giving speech in class, students come up with an idea that they will use special kind of tape player and Emily’s subject of speech will be “How I do things differently from most people” (p.95). With the help of her father, Emily’s speech is recorded. When it is finally played in front of class, everyone appreciates her and for the first time Emily “found her own voice” (p.96). On the other hand, the ongoing case “was about the principles of equality and justice for all people with disabilities” and Emily’s parent is determined to see the end. Finally, the verdict comes, and Eaton family wins the case as the Court of Appeal declares that “denying Emily the opportunity to be educated in a regular class did indeed violate her equality rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (p.99). Decision written by Madame Justice Louise Arbour mentions,

From the earliest age, disabled children should see themselves as part of the mainstream of society, and children who are not disabled should see them the same way. Inclusion into the main school population is a benefit to Emily because without it, she would have few opportunities to learn how other children work and how they live. And they will not learn that she can live with them, and they with her. (p.100)

The matter finally goes to the Supreme Court of Canada, when Emily is twelve years old. They reach to the courtroom, but they clearly understand at the entrance “Supreme Court was not welcoming place for visitors in wheelchairs” as the infrastructure is not disabled friendly. This time lawyer named Stephen Goudge took over Emily’s case. The hearing is witnessed by many people with disabilities including “many in wheelchairs, some who had the distinctive features of Down

Syndrome, others with guide dogs in harnesses” (p.106). This case is not only important for Emily but for every child with disabilities. It was hard to guess what the decision can be but the crowd inside and the outside of the court room that day proved that “society’s view of people with disabilities was undergoing a huge change” (p.108). The Decision of the Supreme Court of Canada was made by Justice John Sopinka, who said every school and institution should do every possible thing to include children with disabilities. It is victory for not only Emily but for each child with disabilities all over the country (p.109). By this time, Emily finishes her high school studies, and she starts to live fully with the help of assistant paid by government. She gets involved into “fitness classes, yoga, art galleries and the local library” (p.112). “In 2006, the United Nations had adopted the Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities. It called on society to view them not as objects of pity, but as active members of society who are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. In particular, the UN Convention strongly supported including children with disabilities in regular classrooms” (p.113).

In the book *Emily Included* (2011), Emily mentions in her message “I am happy that children will read my story. I am very proud that going to the Supreme Court has helped other kids with disabilities to be included in their classrooms” (p.120). MC Donnell criticises the ideology of the so-called normal society which thinks that communication is possible only using written and spoken words. However, it is possible that facial expression, body gestures can also be a medium of communication. As she mentions in Author’s Note, “Often these are spontaneous, natural gestures - nodding the head for ‘yes,’ shaking it to indicate ‘no,’ rolling our eyes to show we’re bored by someone or something. Signing, used by the deaf and

hearing-impaired, is a form of language that substitutes actions, particularly hand signals for spoken words” (p.122).

Emily Included (2011) by Kathleen MC Donnell has offered an insightful exploration of the independent living philosophy, shedding light on the unavoidable interaction between objective conditions and subjectivity, specifically through the real story of Emily Eaton. Postcolonial intellectual, such as Edward Said, proposed that people who are part of marginalised groups had the ability to actively question the narratives that have been forced upon them. The narrative can be seen as a medium to question common and traditional ideologies on disability by establishing a narrative environment specifically for this objective (Sawant). Emily’s narrative shows her resistance and interrogation of prevailing societal norms and expectations, emphasising her autonomy in building and shaping her own identity and subjectivity. The confrontation between Emily’s parents and the school officials reflects postcolonial ideals as it represents defiance against the enforcing of prevailing perspectives that often devalue people with disabilities. The story can be analysed through postmodern approaches to deconstruct dichotomies, while also challenging traditional notions of ability and disability. Postmodern theorists, such as Jacques Derrida, support the deconstruction of dichotomies to reveal the dynamic and interconnected nature of ideas. *Emily Included* (2011) presents a realistic description that transcends traditional categorisations, exploring the relationship between ability and disability.

The court battle that Emily’s parents started as portrayed in *Emily Included* (2011) is a prime example of how political and legal factors combine to support discriminatory educational practices. This is in line with political theory, which emphasises how policies affect the social system structurally. The most important court dispute, for instance, demonstrates the basic power dynamics inside political

institutions, impacting people's capacity towards taking action and the novel's understanding of the larger social effects of educational initiatives. *Emily Included* (2011) serves as a criticism of the ableist practices that are prominent in the field of education. Examining the discriminatory behaviours that prevent students with disabilities from being integrated may be accomplished critically using the lens of disability studies. The decision made by Emily's parents to appeal the school's decision and take the matter all the way to the Ontario Supreme Court is a dramatic action that exposes discriminatory practices and highlights the negative impact they have on the lives of those with disabilities. Emily saw her court victory as a personal accomplishment as well as a driving force for revolutionary social changes. A detailed account of the systemic barriers that legal activism challenges and removes are shown with particular instances, including Emily's real experiences in a regular classroom and the tension in the courtroom trail. The story of Emily serves as an example of how legislative frameworks, as recommended by inclusive education theory, may improve educational environment and foster more inclusivity for the children with disabilities.

IV.5 *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability): Advocacy for Accessibility and inclusivity*

The autobiography of Aron Rose Philip, *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) challenges traditional norms associated with disability by portraying Aaron as a human being with independent thinking and strength. Disability studies, influenced by scholars like Lennard J. Davis, emphasises the importance of recognising that society constructs disability. Aaron's experiences align with this perspective as she actively engages in life, questioning the prevailing societal narrative that often excludes individuals with disabilities. The story highlights various instances of Aaron's deep interests and knowledge into graphics, blogging, and inspirational speaking, as well as

her involvement in decision-making and modelling, which represent her autonomy and indicate the significant influence of independent living philosophy. The narrative moves beyond a basic portrayal, actively contributing to a further extensive societal discussion on both ability and disability. Aaron's experiences, which include both disability and transgender identity, represent an intersectional perspective that supports postcolonial theories. In the story, Aaron deliberately challenges authoritarian narratives by challenging norms of society and preconceptions. The narrative goes beyond one's own empowerment and functions as a collective appeal to rethink or reimagine existing social norms. From the beginning of the narrative, Aaron is seen to take a subjective position. She was giving a talk at Tumblr HQ, in front of "most creative and innovative people on the planet." In addition, what she felt was like as she mentioned, "When I rocked it at Tumblr, I felt like I had roared. Like I was a fighter. Like I was a champion. Like I could continue to roar-even fly! -despite the challenges I face all the time" (p.7). After moving to New York City, she was enrolled in a primary school for "kids with disabilities at Manhattan's Roosevelt Hospital." In that place, she received physical therapy, standing exercises, occupational therapy and speech therapy.

Aron's family did not have immigrant visa in America, therefore her father was having difficulties with even getting a part time job there. They were facing monetary issues along with an in between space of being "half in America and half in Antigua" (p.27). From the very beginning of her childhood days her parents supported her with lots of educational toys, they talked and read to her now and then, which helped her to understand things critically being in a subjective position. They took help from Antigua's Hourglass Foundation, which used to raise funds for charitable work and in case of Aaron, she received injection of Botulinum toxin type A, aka

Botox to relax the stiffness of the muscles. Being an outsider in US, she was not eligible to receive the medical insurance services (p.39). With the help of Lori Harrington from New York City Department of Education (DOE), Aaron started her kindergarten at Manhattan School for children which was full of resources and especially it had “Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes.” Aaron elaborated more on the inclusive way of involving kids with disabilities in this school, “Instead of shunting kids with physical disabilities into classes of their own, kids like me got to learn alongside kids with no physical or mental challenges. The curriculum and the class work, like the configuration of these classrooms, were designed with the needs of children with disabilities in mind” (p.41). Aaron used Leapster that helped her with, “spelling, memorizing things...” (p.42). He met teachers like Lisa Pomerantz and Mia Kargen who were ideal co-teachers to handle “a stubborn temper-tantrum-prone kid” like her (p.43). Teachers there helped her with “motor planning”. She started to develop interest in painting and watching anime shows. She got a paraprofessional who used to help her with changing her clothes, moving her with her wheelchair, taking her to the bathroom, and assist him in the classroom (p.47).

Dr. Laurie had given Aaron the opportunity only at the age of nine to visit Mercy College to present a topic “Growing Up with CP & Parenting a Child with CP” to her students who were going to be school-based occupational therapy practitioners or occupational therapists (OTs) in future. According to the doctor, the future OTs needed practical knowledge about the kids they were supposed to work with, and it was possible through the interaction with people with disabilities. It was an excellent opportunity for Aaron too to express her inner thoughts and to display her knowledge. Both Aaron and her father received very positive feedback from this future OTs (p.56-60). Aaron could explain to these OTs, what are the difficulties a child with disability

can face while performing different activities in a regular classroom with non-disabled kids. She could discuss her weakness (math) and strength (reading and writing), his passion and hobbies, her dream of becoming an anime cartoonist with them. She also mentioned about technological device like e-reader gifted by her father, phone gifted by doctor, and a new wheelchair with new possibilities which made her life easier (p.58).

The school Aron joined, there she had many opportunities as she was being included into plays and other activities. She did not have opportunities at outside of her school being homeless but the school she mentioned, “was my world. It was the only place I had to be social” (p.71). The monetary issues and the shelter home were the reasons due to which she was not able to make new friends outside. One thing disturbed her in the school was that kids with disabilities were supposed to sit separately from the other non-disabled kids during the lunchtime. Aaron thought to raise questions about it and asked the principal directly if the kids with disabilities could sit wherever they wanted in the cafeteria and the answer was positive (p.74). Although the school was inclusive, but Aaron still felt lonely and to move out of this loneliness she started “Tumblr Blog: Aaronverse” a platform where the people those who use wheelchairs like Aaron could share their thoughts and feelings (p.79). At the Children’s Museum of the Arts (CMA) in Manhattan besides drawing the class was also about “friendship-making and bonding sessions, with sibs and friends of all abilities welcome to participate. And talk about liberating! The emphasis was on ability- what people like me can do- not disability - what we cannot do,” as mentioned by Aaron (p.81).

Aaron has described well how accessibility of public transportation plays a major role in the daily lives of the people with disabilities. She has described how the

New York City subway stations had no elevators therefore were not fully accessible to the people with disabilities. For the people like her who did not have money for booking cabs they had to take the help of Access -A-Ride, which again had its issues due to which most of the time Aaron used to be late for her school. She mentioned, “I really wish more people with full mobility would think about what people like me have to go through to get from point A to point B and join movements for more accessibility in subways and everywhere else. For some, the life they help may be their own” (p.89). According to the report of Council for Disability Awareness (CDA) 2013, as mentioned by Aaron, “one in four people, then age twenty, would become disabled before they reached retirement age”. She has questioned the conventional concept or understanding of physical disabilities. What society understands when people talk about disabilities is not the actual understanding. Disability can take place in a person’s life at any stage of his/her life. For example, as she further mentioned, people can have accidents in workplace, in traffic area, on icy streets, in bathtub at home, in pools and in other ways, which can make them disabled in any point of life. Not only these but people those who have “back problems, heart diseases, and other illness”, they are also temporarily disabled, and they also prefer to use elevator “to ease their way a bit”, which is absolutely normal (p.89).

In Aron’s blogs, she has not only shared about herself, but she has written about more people who have achieved a successful life having physical disabilities. She has mentioned about a person named Brooke Ellison who became quadriplegic from neck down in a car accident when she was just in seventh grade. However, it never could stop her from moving forward in life. She finished her higher studies from Harvard University and magna cum laude school. Aaron further says, “Talk about ability! Ellison proves every bad theory about people with disabilities wrong”

(p.90). She has questioned the wrong ideology or “ignorant assumptions” of the people who think that people with physical disabilities have mental disability too, or people with physical disabilities “enjoy being pitied” (p.91). She has stressed upon the fact that, “People with physical disabilities appreciate concrete help and opportunity way more than pity” (p.91). According to her, “Concrete help and opportunity” are actually referring to the accessibility, in every sphere of life. Another person about she has mentioned is Terence Moakley a disability activist, who was the president of the United Spinal Association, who along with some students had identified street corners at New York City, which did not have curb cuts, which make easier for the wheelchair users to move outside. He also filed a lawsuit with other wheelchair users “under the banner of Taxis for All”, in 2014 Taxi & Limousine Commission settled the matter and more than 200 taxis were made wheelchair accessible (p.92). Aron approached First Lady Michelle Obama through her blogs and asked her to include “young people with disabilities” in her attempt of sending the minority students and students with economic weakness to the college. Through her “virtual protest” she mentioned about a young boy with disability named Dan who had a dream of working in the field of green energy, but he was all alone, “He had the smarts, but not the supports” (p.93).

Aron also started to share her blogs by focusing on the events where people with disabilities faced humiliation and she actively fought for their rights through writing. For example, she shared the story of wheelchair user Banetta Grant who was arrested on a case, when the trial was going on she needed to use washroom. However, there was no accessible bathroom in the building, unable to hold the urine she did it on herself, she felt humiliated. Aaron emphasised in her blogs, “NO ONE SHOULD EVER BE DENIED OF USING THE BATHROOM EVER. ESPECIALLY IF YOU

ARE DISABLED AND DON'T HAVE THE ABILITY TO GO BY YOURSELF...This is a violation of human rights, everyone! It doesn't matter if you've committed crimes or not...This should get more attention. No one should ever have their rights stolen away from [them] like this. NOT EVER" (p.96). Aron started to receive replies, comments from many followers with disabilities who were encouraged and inspired by her words.

Aaron got chance in a movie called "You Don't Need Feet to Dance" and the movie was on Sidiki Conde who lost his legs due to polio. However, he started to use his hands for walking, and dancing too. He formed a group called "Message de Espair" with people with physical disabilities and musical abilities, and this group used to perform all over West Africa. He was part of National Association of the Republic of Guinea for the Handicapped. He founded "Tokounou All-Abilities Dance and Music Ensemble", which used to teach people with different abilities at schools, hospitals and universities. Aaron has mentioned how it is very rare that people with disabilities are found to perform in any movie or TV show in opposition to able-bodied actors. She also has mentioned the facts that people like her hardly get opportunity to work in schools, banks, in markets or any other places. She was worried about the same that this disability would become a reason of her invisibility. However, after working on a movie with Sidiki, she got "visibility with disability" which was really a good start for her (p.106). Aaron was a big fan of Fred Seibert who was a famous person from the field of art and animation. Angel Deb wrote to him mentioning about Aaron and her situation and requested to meet Aaron. Finally, Aaron visited Frederator Studios and showed Mr. Seibert her drawings, animation that she had made using flip notes and read him a story written by her. Being impressed Mr. Seibert allowed Aaron to visit his studio, which was a great opportunity for Aaron.

Mr. David Karp invited her at Tumblr, where he started to work on blogs and communicate with people around and she asked them to get to know more about people with disabilities. Aaron got visibility and she felt, “validated” (p.128).

Aaron created the site aaronverse.tumblr.com, and with the help of Angel Dr. Laurie, they created an organisation ThisAbilityNotDisability.org (TAND. org), as mentioned by Aaron, “to promote self-determination, self-advocacy and all that good stuff in young people like me, and to rally other people around us with loads of support for our dreams so that when we are adults, we can have successful lives.” Dr. Laurie explained well the story behind inclusion when she mentioned how the schools and community clubs set their activities for so called normal children; there might be a little space for those with disabilities and “they may be on the sidelines and not able to fully participate” (p.130). Aaron’s Tanda project was a successful one. She started to work on her write up and videos. Seeing her working hard everyone including professional artists took her seriously. Finally, she was able to publish her book and video, and she got her identity of an author, illustrator and animator too (p.136).

Things took a bad stage when Aaron’s father had a massive heart attack which left Aaron in complete shock and she first time in life felt as if she was a burden because of her disability. The reason behind her dad’s heart attack was as she mentioned, “ten long years of stress after stress after stress- the loneliness, the joblessness, dealing with social services, dealing with insurance companies, dealing with my surgeries, dealing with homelessness” (p.147). In this condition, Aaron and her brother were shifted to Zamoras, a shelter for the kids. Her father had a heart surgery and many people around her especially the Angels of MSC helped in many ways. Just after the surgery Aaron got opportunity for a solo artist exhibition in “CMA’s Pepperman Family Fine Arts Studio” where nine pieces of art were sold out

of fourteen. In MSC Aaron, met New York Times columnist Jim Dwyer in a program called “Meet a Professional” where they told, “kids with physical challenges that we could fly” (p.153). The MSC parents held an online fund-raising campaign to get home aide to take care of her because her dad was not in condition to lift heavy things or to do regular activities while helping Aaron.

Aaron left for Frost Valley camp where again she faced challenges as the village that was selected for her age group and was not accessible to wheelchair users. She was given the choice of decision making whether she wanted to join her juniors or the senior team. She mentioned, “I was put in a position of being independent, which wasn’t something that happened to me very often” (p.160). Moreover, she chose the team of the older kids. First few days she found it difficult to talk to anyone but when they started activities, they became friends, especially when Aaron in one session spoke as she mentioned, “from my heart about all the challenges, frustrations, and worries that stem from my CP, so many of those...became really nice to me, showed me so much love” (p.163). She always found it better to make friends through social media due to the “limited access to friends in real life...” (p.166). When time arrived for her admission in the high school, she mentioned, “I had to eliminate some schools I was interested in after I discovered that there were accessibility issues. Like it might be easy for me to wheel into the school, but there was no elevator and so no way for me to get up and down in the school. Or there was an elevator, but it was too narrow for my chair...” (p.173). She always wanted to get into good school and college. She clearly said, “I want to make something of myself. I want to thrive in my future. I want independence in my future, including financial independence” (p.174). Finally, she was selected in “NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies” (p.178). Aaron’s motive of writing this book as she mentioned, “I hope it makes folks more

aware of the millions and millions of people with disabilities all around them and help fight the good fight for their rights and greater accessibility. I hope it makes all my readers realise that so much is possible no matter what the difficulties” (p.179).

This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability) (2016) is a wonderful example of how effective human stories can be when challenging institutional norms. In line with the principles of independent living philosophy and critical disability discourse analysis, Aaron Philips uses her own story to promote a cause. Her media content creation, motivational speaking, and blog challenge current policies and advance a more accepting societal discourse on disability, all which function as tools for empowerment. Aaron's narrative successfully blends personal activism, disability studies, and an analysis of educational inclusivity. Struggling with homelessness and monetary challenges, Aaron Philips has become a strong advocate for her own rights as well as people like her. The narrative has offered a thorough examination of the ways in which institutional barriers influence educational opportunities while also revealing the relationship between disability and socioeconomic concerns. While looking at Aaron's issues with delayed paratransit, dysfunctional lifts, and stereotypes in society, one can examine how several challenges still exist in society, which can create barriers. The journey demonstrates the independence, growth and autonomy of people with disabilities as they prosecute a variety of societal expectations and standards. Aaron's experiences in Disability Studies highlight the need for a thorough understanding of barriers that extend beyond physical impairments.

IV.6 *My Name is Brain Brian*: Embracing Learning Differences

Brian introduced himself in the novel *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) as, “I'm Brian Toomey. And I'm your in-between kind of kid. I'm in between John and Dan height-

wise. I'm in between Richie and John sports-wise. My mom says I'm the best-looking boy she knows. But my sister, Hilary, says I'm the ugliest thing that's ever walked the face of the earth. So, I guess maybe I'm in between in the good looks department, too" (p.4). This description says it clearly that Brian belongs to an in between space in his circle according to him. The four friends together created a group called the jokers club where they set their own operation called J.D.B.R with few rules, which would make their school time better or enjoyable. Brian has mentioned about a dream that keeps on disturbing him even when he is awake, as he describes the dream, "An army of huge gray rocks - each as tall as a refrigerator - are chasing me. I'm screaming for help as I try to run away from them. I'm out of breath. The monster rocks are falling toward me. They are going to bury me. I'll be crushed to death. I scream, but no sounds come out" (p.8). The dream itself stands for his struggles, difficulties and fear that he bears within himself every day and which he can never spell out. He feels heavy inside and pressurised by the societal norms and expectations, which are equal to "monster rocks" to him. Although Brian hates to go to school, Brian starts his journey with new class, and he feels determined that he promises himself to work hard from the very beginning. In the beginning of the new class, a new teacher named Mr. Bigham asks the students to write their names on the board and Brian writes "Toomey Brain" and pronounces it as "Toomey Brian", all the students start to laugh at it. To make the situation normal, Brian declares it as a joke. The gray letter on his copy seems to be "Big gray rocks" which he has seen in his dreams. As he says, "I realize that the rock-monsters were shaped like the letters of the alphabet. They were the alphabet. Big stone alphabet letters crushing me to death. I think about how much I hate the letters of the alphabet and press down even harder on my eraser. My paper rips" (p.19).

The problem that Brian faces during the classes he has described well, “I’m in the lowest reading group, and in math I can’t remember the multiplication tables, even easy ones like the five-times tables. In social studies, we’re studying states and their capitals and what each state is famous for like maple syrup from Vermont. I can’t remember any of them but that one” (p.21). That is why he gives up on the idea of new beginnings and promises that he had made once. During English class when Mr. Bigham asks him to read out the part of Carlos from West Side Story, he is very slow at reading and most of the words are spelled by Mr. Bigham and Isabel. Mr. Bigham asks Brian to meet him privately where he questions Brian, and he gives the answers. Then he asks Brian to read some questions and write the answers. Next day Mr. Bigham hands over an envelope with a note to Brian to show it to his parents whom he wants to meet. The moment his father sees the note he starts to scold Brian. He even blames his mother for not taking care of Brian’s studies. His father gives him to practice writing where Brian again wrote “i-n-c-e-r-d-i-b-l-e” instead of “Incredible” and again his father shouts at him. Seeing his parents, Mr. Bigham said, “I know that Brian has a lot of trouble with spelling. But there are different ways of being smart, and some very smart people have trouble with reading the letters of the alphabet and putting numbers in order. Brian is one of them” (p.32). He is the first person to detect that Brian has Dyslexia in which people can have difficulties while reading, writing and remembering things. He takes the names of famous personalities like Tom Cruise, Cher, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, and Leonardo da Vinci those who had this learning difference. Mr. Bigham asks them to visit specialist and to make it official in the school records that he is a kid with dyslexia. He assures his parents he would help Brian in every possible way. On enquiring, he comes to know from Brian’s mother that

Brian is good at designing, building, beside this he plays soccer, he is active in swimming and received brown belt in karate (p.35).

Finally, Brian meets Dr. Ruth Jenner who comes to take few tests of Brian regarding his dyslexia. In the school, usually three students named Jae Kim who does not know English well, Jenny who is deaf and Leonard who has a head injury, they must go to resource room during study period. Mr. Bigham calls Brian also to move to resource room. In the resource room, Brian reveals to his teacher Ms. Crandal, “I can’t listen and write at the same time”. He is suggested to use tape recorder to record the lecture in the class which he can use later to make notes (p.41). In the class project, when Brian and Isabel are supposed to work together for a class project on Canada goose, but Isabel is not interested to work with Brian. Here Mr. Bigham is seen to encourage Brian at every moment by saying, “you’re very smart” (p.47). Ms. Samuel another retired teacher from regular school starts to teach Brian in tutoring session after school. She starts with the difference between the sound of consonants and vowels, which seems to Brian “baby work” (p.49). Brian tries hard so that no one from his class could know about his learning differences. In Mr. Dithers’s class while taking notes, he must use tape recorder. However, he becomes very much conscious while using the recorder as he mentions, “As soon as people have stopped staring at me, I take out the tape recorder Ms. Crandal gave me. At home, I wrapped it in a paper napkin and practiced pressing the record button without looking at it. With this disguise I figure no one will notice what I’m doing.” However, Mr. Dithers in front of whole class mentions, “Whenever the class takes notes, Brian will record my lecture. As you probably know, he has a learning disability. He also will be able to spend as long as he needs to on tests.” Moreover, he gives long lecture on people’s different learning styles, which makes Brian feel like “world-class jerk” (p.54). It is very clear from his

statements that he is afraid of the fact that his own friends would reject him due to his learning differences or would make fun of his condition. Isabel had worked on Mr. Bigham's project on animal life and showed it to Brian. Brian also shows his fieldwork where he has used his tape recorder to capture the sound of the geese. Mr. Bigham really likes the way Brian has recorded the movements of the geese. This time Isabel also appreciates him after seeing his unique efforts (p.66).

When the Brian's family received a letter from Brian's grandfather, it revealed that he wrote "d-e-e-r" instead of dear, "incerible" instead of incredible and he missed one 'n' in the word sunny. At the very moment Hilary mentions, "He spells like Brian. I didn't know that." Additionally, Brian's mother mentions, "I remember the first Valentine's Day card your father sent me, above the printed verse he wrote, 'Deer Ellen.' D-e-e-r. The same mistake!" So, it was already clear indication that both Brian's grandfather father and father had same issues with the spelling like Brian was facing, but Brian's father never really wanted to accept the fact publicly (p.73). Brian takes a close look at the letter of his grandfather and thinks, "I wonder, is Grandpa dyslexic? Does he have the same learning difference I have? Maybe my Dad is dyslexic, too. Maybe I inherited it the way I inherited my mom's blue eyes and my dad's long legs. Has Tyson inherited dyslexia, too? I decide that if he has, I'll be sure he doesn't have to wait until sixth grade to get special help like I did" (p.75). With the help of Mrs. Samuels, Brian starts to learn typing words on computer without looking at the keyboard. During the journal writing class for the first time Brian writes what he feels, there are spelling mistakes in his write up, still his willpower to do better is visible in his attitude. While talking to Mrs. Samuels, Brian comes to know that she taught his father "how to read too...he is dyslexic. He had a hard time learning to read, just like

you.” She mentions more, “learning differences, like dyslexia, are often inherited. Especially from father to son” (p.90).

Isabel the person in the class, once hated Brian most, eventually while working on the animal project, they become good friends. They learn from each other and help each other to make it successful. Together Brian, Isabel and Dan do brilliant work as they plan to film a video on the Canada goose. Brian’s father has been discouraging him for long but later he mentions, “I only expect a lot from you because I know now that you can do it...” (p.119). Before the summer vacation starts, while writing in journal writing class Brian thinks, “...my dyslexia. I know it’s never going to go away. But it’s not going to get worse, either. And I’m going to get better and better at the thinking things I am good at, like understanding birds, how things work, and having creative ideas” (p.123). With the help of his teachers, Brian is able to come out of his years of struggles that he was dealing with fear; however, he finally embraces his differences with positive outlook of doing better and better further in future. The novel ends with a poem written by Brian on the Canada goose that Mr. Bigham recites in the class, which beautifully has explained the inner thoughts of Brian. The poem goes like:

Fly, Goose, fly free So I can hear
The strength in your call.
Fly, Goose, fly free
So, I can see
The power of your wings.
I cannot lean my body into wind
And move free through blue skies like you.
But, O great Canada goose, I can fly on
Wings of thought, soaring within my mind space.

There I can be free and strong (p.128).

My Name is Brain Brian (1993) challenges established stereotypes about education and intellectual ability and disability. Poststructuralist philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, supported the destruction of conventional structures and methods for expressing. The narrative looks at dyslexia as a prominent theme, challenging traditional notions of cognitive ability and achievement in the field of education. When Brian's teacher identifies his intellectual abilities irrespective of his dyslexia, leading to the implementation of a specific educational methodology, exhibit the poststructuralist notion of challenging existing norms. The narrative provides a framework for analysing and questioning the traditional norms of performance in education and cognitive ability. Through using the literary theory of psychological realism, which is based on the works of George Eliot and Henry James (Cuddon), the character's psychological reality can be analysed. This includes Brian's attempts to conceal his learning differences from his classmates and the psychological effects of social discrimination. The narrative depicts Brian's inner world and shows how his dyslexia shapes his experiences differently in life. This influences his opinions and responses in the context of Independent Living Movement, which results in a deeper understanding of the subject.

The novel encourages new approaches towards learning abilities by challenging accepted notions of intelligence and academic creativity or ability and performances. Building on her own unique experiences with dyslexia, the writer Jeanne Betancourt has created a narrative that questions and reimagines conventional methods of teaching as well as learning. Realistic instances, such as Brian's struggles, the instructor's participation, and the various approaches to learning, provide a thorough illustration of the integration of disability studies and Critical Educational Theory (Erevelles). Within

the context of an inclusive educational framework, the novel has functioned as a narrative setting which challenges established structures, therefore, emphasised the need of recognising and accommodating different learning styles and methods in academia which are the rights of people with disabilities.

IV.7 Autobiographical Depth vs. Narratives by Non-disabled Authors

Literature authored by people with disabilities on the theme of disability includes direct and very personal narratives of their own experiences, ideas, emotions and feelings, which feels more authentic. G. Thomas Couser claims that first person disability narrative provides a kind of “embodied authority” a legitimacy derived from firsthand knowledge that is sometimes lacking in portrayals by non-disabled authors (Couser 604). First person disability narrative provides unique understanding that can only be gained from an individual who has personally experienced the life of living with disability or deformity. This type of representation with minute details enables a more esoteric, empathetic understanding of the obstacles or barriers, achievements, and intricacies that people with disabilities come across in their day-to-day life existence. On the other hand, narratives authored by people without having any impairment on the people with disabilities may lack the same degree of minute details, personal introspection and direct involvement. Although non-disabled writers may have the ability to understand and explain the experiences of people with disabilities, but their stories may be impacted by some prejudices, preconceptions, or stereotypical ideologies that unintentionally promote misunderstandings or further isolate individuals with disabilities from the mainstream society. Literature on disability coming from people with disabilities can be distinguished by its originality and individualistic expression. Here the author has the capacity or space for expressing ideas, and feelings and share their unique journey in an abstruse way that technically seems more

challenging to someone without disabilities. This authenticity may cultivate true connections, sense of empathy, and a deeper level of understanding on experiences of people with disabilities. Writings by the non-disabled writers may focus sometimes on outsiders' view on disability and further can romanticise the experiences of disability. These types of writing mainly will focus on the process of overcoming the condition of disability, which may disregard the systematic barriers, which can affect these people in everyday life. Writings coming from the part of the people with disabilities will always try to bring to the light the societal barriers and further will advocate and fight for the rights of these people. It will also try to explore the whole concept of disability including the challenges as well as achievements. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson contends that when individuals with disabilities articulate their own experiences, they question prevailing cultural depictions and create a counter-narrative that opposes discrimination and prejudice (Garland-Thomson). Narratives by writers with disabilities concentrate on empowerment of these people, therefore, will emphasise on resilience, agency, and their community. Mitchell and Snyder suggest that when authors without disabilities depict characters with disabilities, such representations may inadvertently strengthen "narrative prosthesis," a term they employ to describe the inclination of literature to utilise disability as a metaphor or plot mechanism rather than as an authentic experience (Mitchell and Snyder 47). In the writings of non-disabled writers there may be a risk of representing individuals with disability as "objects" of pity or as "inspiration porn," (Young) where their stories and they can be used as props to indicate any message or to make able-bodied people feel good about themselves. A writer without disability may use outdated or offensive terminology without thinking about its implications, which can further create space for reinforcing stereotypes. On the other hand, the writers with disability, being the active part of this

community, they will use the language, which is respectful, and they will represent the characters such a way that respect their individual humanity.

In *Emily Included* (2011), the personal connection of MC Donnell to the story is clearly apparent through the emotional subtleties, meticulous depictions of medical visits, the exact details, review from the actual characters, the pictures of Emily herself, and the unwavering determination of Emily's parents as they confront cultural conventions and bureaucratic obstacles. The author's perspectives not only demonstrate a dedication to presenting information accurately, but also a fervent support for the rights of the people with disabilities, particularly in the realm of education system. *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) by Aaron Rose Philip is a truly notable autobiography that has shown Philips recounting her experiences with CP, offering readers more realistic portrayal of her progression from confronting homelessness and physical obstacles to emerging as a motivating orator and activist for the community of people with disabilities. The storytelling method is appreciable for its raw and unedited nature, which vividly conveys her personal experiences and highlights her unwavering tenacity and resolve to challenge society's attitude towards disability. *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) by Jeanne Betancourt provides a distinctive viewpoint on disability because the author, being dyslexic herself, gives personal insights into it. Betancourt has depicted the character Brian to examine and share her personal experiences and confront common misunderstandings regarding dyslexia, as well as the several issues faced by people with learning differences in regular mode of education system. Betancourt's intimate understanding of dyslexia influences the storyline, as she depicts her own experiences through Brian's experiences of prejudice, misconceptions, and eventual success as he uncovers his own intellectual capabilities.

IV.8 Literary Theoretical Lens on Autobiographical Writing in the Novels

According to the theory of reader-response criticism (Iser & Fish), when people with disabilities write about their own lives, it encourages readers to identify with their own experiences, creating a direct and intimate link between the author's voice and the reader's reaction. The reader's interpretation is influenced by the author's viewpoint and the emotional depth conveyed through the narrative. On the other hand, write-ups depicting persons with disabilities authored by those without having any disabilities may develop a distinct reader reaction. The dynamic relationship between the author's viewpoint and the reader's reaction emphasises the possibility of diverse mindsets and understanding of disability. The narrative of *Emily Included* (2011), urges audiences to engage in a moral reflection on the concepts of equality, inclusion, and the rights of those who have impairments. Written from Emily's perspective, it acts as a bridge that connects readers to the ethical injunction of addressing discriminatory attitudes based on one's ability. The story has offered the readers an opportunity to critically think upon the legal and institutional challenges that Emily's parents faced regarding the issues related to accessibility and adaptability of educational institutions. *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016), by Aaron Rose Philip, in which she herself is the main character, provides readers a vivid depiction of her own life by providing them with an in-depth inspection of both her hardships and her achievements. It highlights her capability for accelerating empathy and understanding that can only be achieved through the means of thoroughly researched and sensitively created storytelling. Through depicting Brian's journey in the novel *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993), Betancourt has questioned the prevalent preconceptions and social biases that tend to be directed towards those who have learning differences. The narrative pattern has been

encouraging to the readers to empathise with and comprehend the subject matter under deep consideration.

Postcolonial literary theory in literature, examines the admeasurement of power and the portrayal of marginalised people. Evaluating the autobiographical writing by an individual with disability through this perspective emphasises on it as a deliberate attempt of representing oneself and reclaiming personal as well as communal agency. Writers with disability may actively question prevailing narratives, deconstruct stereotypes, and emphasise their own unique experiences, thus eliminating existing power relations that have conventionally suppressed their voices. Stories on people with disabilities written by non-disabled authors may unintentionally encourage established power hierarchies. This may strengthen the position of the non-disabled author who further gains the authoritative voice on disability, which may conclusively exclude or misrepresent people with disabilities. The use of postcolonial literary theory to examine these autobiographical writings may focus on the side of empowerment that is accomplished via the use of personal narrative mode of writing. As a method of challenging a system that discriminates against people with disabilities, the novel *Emily Included* (2011) demonstrated the legal battle for inclusive education system. As an immigrant with cerebral palsy, Aaron Rose Philips, the protagonist of *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016), neatly navigates the complex intersection of identities that she encounters. Postcolonial theories place an emphasis on the attainment of power via personal narrative. This provides Aaron a space to express and share her own voice and challenge the conventions of societal norms. Through an examination of dyslexia or leaning differences within the context of broader cultural views, *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) contributed to this point of view. This is analogous to the process of examining colonial impositions.

Disability study is a multidisciplinary field of research that looks into the societal, cultural, and political dimensions of disability. Autobiographical writings by people with disability are directly linked with the ideas of disability studies since it focuses on the experiences, viewpoints, and activism of the individuals with disabilities. Disability studies may be used to analyse narratives about persons with disabilities that are authored by those without disabilities. These narratives may be assessed to evaluate how they are depicting disability, how they are representing characters with disabilities, and how they are interacting with disability culture and identity. They may be evaluated on basis of their capacity to confront the concept of ableism, foster disability pride, and make contributions to the wider aspects of Disability Rights Movement. The work *Emily Included* (2011) investigates the concept of ableism within the framework of inclusive education system, calling into question cultural norms that continue to uphold discriminatory practices. The autobiography *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016), represents a comprehensive investigation of the concept of disability identity, which challenges the usual depictions of those who have cerebral palsy. The novel *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) has offered a criticism of the ableist systems that are existing within the educational system. It has tried to highlight the importance of alternative methods that may accommodate a broad variety of learning styles. Therefore, theories related to the field of disability studies provide a framework for analysing societal views on disability and the role that identity formation plays in these narratives.

IV.9 Reimagining Disability Narratives through Alternative Approaches

One possible strategy to reimagine disability narratives is to “centre” the voices and experiences of individuals with disabilities by themselves. One way to do this is to find

out and promote autobiographical writings, memoir and various forms of art by authors with disabilities. Placing their stories at the centre, we can get a different view of disability narratives, which can break the traditional pattern of portraying people with disabilities from non-disabled people's point of view. It crosses with a whole lot of things such as reimagining disability narratives while acknowledging and examining intersections of disability, race, gender, sexuality, class and so on. This includes discussing the experiences of people with disabilities belonging from various backgrounds as well as the ways in which they may experience different forms of marginalisation. The society should embrace intersectionality and by doing so, it should encourage the narratives that reflect the real diversity of experiences of various people with disabilities. Most mainstream stories about disability in the past focused on the trope of inspiration of casting individuals with disabilities as inspirational or heroic figure in comparison to non-disabled people. Therefore, in seeking to reimagine disability narratives, society needs to move away from these types of narratives and should promote the narratives where people with disabilities empower themselves. By highlighting the strength and capabilities of individuals with disabilities, society can challenge pity-driven narratives and promote a more balanced and realistic portrayal.

To reimagine disability narratives, one must actively confront and challenge ableism and the prevalent preconceptions that are often linked to disability. The process entails undermining the portrayal of disability as a tragic or burdensome condition and instead highlighting people with disabilities as intricate and personalities with diversity. To develop a more accurate knowledge of disability, it is important for society to avoid simplistic depictions and stereotypes that lead towards misunderstandings. Narratives on disability often concentrate on remarkable or unique experiences. Reconceptualising disability narratives embodies emphasising the daily experiences of people with

disabilities and recounting commonplace anecdotes. By highlighting the ordinary and relevant elements of living with deformity, one may establish disability as a usual and inherent component of the human existence. This method promotes the perception of characters with disabilities as whole persons with a various range of experiences, aspirations, as well as obstacles.

Use of collaborative storytelling is an additional method to rethink narratives of disability in an alternative way. This strategy takes in the process of inclusion of people with disabilities into the world of creativity, as co-authors, experts, either counsellors or advisers. By incorporating the perspectives of people with disabilities into the process of storytelling, one can guarantee that the stories are genuine, considerate, encompassing, and acceptable. Reconceptualising disability narratives might include delving into future and theoretical fiction genres. By conceptualising societies that have defeated the concept of ableism and have flawlessly embraced people with disabilities, one may combat existing prejudices and motivate readers to envision a future that is more inclusionary. Speculative fiction also creates space for imaginative investigations into assistive technology, different realms, and opportunities for representing disability.

Kathleen MC Donnell's *Emily Included* (2011) allows the readers to move towards a journey, which is very complicated and personal. However, the writer herself is not a person with disability, but the story is based on the true account of the Eaton family and is not fictionalised at all. This method not only has gifted a fascinating real-life story, but it also has engaged the readers intellectually, through offering a detailed understanding of the challenges and successes that are inherent in the experience of having a disability. The narrative has included an epilogue narrated by Emily herself; beside this, it has also incorporated the spoken words of her parents, teachers, mentors, educational assistants, the activists of Independent Living Movement and the Court

judgements. The multivoiced perspective and collaborative story telling method provides a full knowledge of the experiences of having a disability, calling into question the concept of a singular narrative and drawing attention to the diversity that exists within the community of people with disabilities.

People who read *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) are left with a lasting impression since the work has offered them an experience that is both lively and captivating. By using blog postings, motivational speeches, and multimedia elements, Aaron Rose Philips is able to keep aside the standard methods of storytelling, which results into a narrative that profoundly resonates with the audience's intellect as well as their emotions. Using this alternative method, readers are encouraged to not just watch but also actively participate in Aaron's journey, which ultimately results in a deep connection to the story associated with disabilities. By interactive methods of storytelling, *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) is able to intensify its effect by transforming readers from only observing the story into actively participating in it. This tactic not only has improved the overall experience of delivering a narrative, but it also has made the understanding of the concept of disability more impactful.

The inclusion of both personal experiences and imaginative elements in Betancourt's *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) introduces an unorthodox approach to thoroughly assess dyslexia on an individual basis. Betancourt adeptly employs her own personal experiences to create a fictional story, skilfully balancing the fine line between realism and creative freedom. The impact is derived from the genuineness that arises from personal experiences, while still preserving the adaptability of the story. *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) has examined the Critical Educational Pedagogy (Freire) and

challenges readers to consider alternative approaches to teaching. The author has termed Brian's dyslexia everywhere in the novel as "learning difference" instead of "learning disabilities", which can be seen as an alternative way of looking into the terms we use while talking about this type of disability. The story challenges accepted educational practices while emphasising the transformative power of identifying and accommodating different learning styles. The framework of Critical Educational Pedagogy (Freire) provides guidance in understanding the potential impact that educators may have in creating inclusive learning environments. Brian's story, which is marked by discrimination and the presence of a supportive teacher, is an example of how different teaching approaches might provide opportunities for students with learning differences. The narrative illustrates how "Critical Pedagogy" (Freire) fosters student empowerment by recognising their unique talents and capacities. By using alternative teaching strategies, Betancourt in *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993), not only highlights the challenges but also offers the possibility of restructuring of the educational system.

IV.10 Conclusion

The novels *Emily Included* (2011) by Kathleen MC Donnell, *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) by Aaron Rose Philips, and *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) by Jeanne Betancourt, have dealt with different aspects of disability while resisting the conventional ideologies while also supporting the concept of inclusion. These three stories, have a shared common space, that deals with the theme of empowerment against the challenges. Whether it is the story of little girl Emily's years of fight for her rights of inclusive education, Aaron's achievement overcoming her physical as well as economic hardships, or Brian's journey of coping with learning

differences against normativity, emphasise on the agency and strength of the people with disabilities.

In the book *Emily Included* (2011), Emily's narrative has challenged the readers' preconceptions regarding disability and ability. The choice made by Emily's parents to communicate with the school administration proves to be a crucial illustration of collaborative meaning making. Instead of being passive consumers of knowledge, readers actively influence how people perceive disabilities by reacting to Emily's narrative. The autobiography of Aaron Rose Philips, *This Kid Can Fly: It's about Ability (Not Disability)*, published in 2016 provides an opportunity for readers to rethink their ideas regarding disability and ability. Because the narrative is told from Aaron's point of view and is based on her real-life experiences with cerebral palsy, readers are encouraged to empathise with and learn from her struggles as well as victories. As they interact with Aaron's story, readers are actively participating in the construction of knowledge, therefore changing their conceptions on ability and disability. Being a dyslexic person Jeanne Betancourt has addressed cultural expectations around learning differences or disabilities through the story of Brian in *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993). The work served as a platform for Brian's empowerment and confronts prevailing cultural prejudices towards kids with dyslexia. The novel takes a significant turn when Brian's father, who lacks sympathy towards Brian and has dyslexia, too, is confronted, and a teacher finally acknowledges Brian's brilliance. This vital event contributes to the character's empowerment and challenges traditional beliefs.

The use theoretical tools such as postcolonial perspectives, reader response criticism, post-modern theory, and theories related to disability studies have brought out the complex connections between activism, identity, agency, autonomy, and social

criticism within the autobiographical contextures of these novels. Autobiographical elements in these novels have been powerful tools that represent personal agencies in the face of societal challenges. These novels introduce alternative ways of storytelling while amalgamating the various perspectives on unique disability experiences in the true sense.

The examinations of different alternatives ideas regarding the method of storytelling create space for more academic research. This research further can try to examine the effects of such alternative ways of storytelling on the readers and their views on the narratives of disability. A comparative study on the narratives of disability coming from different cultures may contribute to the further research and wider understanding on the philosophy of Independent Living Movement. Reimagining the concept of social inclusion and empowerment can be beneficial to re-examine how the narratives of disability have been represented through chromatic literary traditions. Exploration of the styles of writing, the conflicts of the writers' mind regarding the representation of personal story, the creative imagination, the pressure of responsible storytelling and its effects on the readers mind can also be a part of future research. A critical evaluation of the autobiographical writings on disability narratives gives opportunity to talk about the real impact of the social perceptions on the people with disabilities; it creates space for the discussion on the existing laws/regulations/policies related to disability rights, therefore, advocates for social reformation and inclusion of people with disabilities.

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