

CHAPTER V

Technology Enabled Narrative of Disability as an Alternative

Approach

“Innovations in technoscience have the potential to redefine disability not as a limitation but as a different mode of interaction with the world”

- Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*
(2017)

V.1 Introduction

Lennard Davis and other academics in *Constructing Normalcy* (1995), critically examined how normalcy has been constructed historically and how this has influenced literary representations. This theoretical framework facilitates placing the historical development of disability narratives into context. By dissecting “Ableism”, literature shares a discourse that goes beyond conventional assumptions. Narrative patterns in fictions which include individuals with disabilities evolve as a consequence of the dynamic interplay between evolving literary traditions, cultural attitudes and technological advancements. The ableist framework is a dominating ideological and cultural system that views and represent able-bodiedness as normal, standard, and desirable state of human life, whereas disability is seen as a problem, lack of something, or imperfection. This framework encourages society to marginalise, exclude, and devalue individuals with disabilities based on bodily appearance or intellect. The ableist structure or framework even influence the way people with disabilities perceive themselves, frequently causing humiliation, feeling guilty, or compulsion to qualify as people without disabilities. Stories featuring individuals with disabilities have often been entwined with such ableist frameworks throughout history, reinforcing normative

values and maintaining stereotypes. Upon tracing the development of these narratives, a noticeable trend towards an alternative storytelling that is more technologically advanced and inclusive becomes apparent. This trend can be seen in the selected literary works, such as Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* (2010) where the protagonist Melody's cerebral palsy defies accepted norms. Melody's reflective odyssey makes the story's evolution easy to follow, emphasising how far the narrative has changed from the traditional disability narrative and how a more nuanced, technology enabled narrative has emerged as a result. Wendelin Van Draanen's *The Running Dream* (2011), questions traditional beliefs by portraying the protagonist Jessica, an athlete who faces her disabilities after a devastating accident. The narrative's growth illustrates a broader cultural shift towards acknowledging and accommodating persons with diverse skills with the help of modern advancements in medical technoscience. Another novel *Born Just Right* (2019) by Jen Lee Reeves and Jordan Reeves strongly emphasises the use of prosthetic arms as technological advances, indicating an empowering perspective on disabilities. Through the integration of technology breakthroughs, Jordan resists the traditional narrative pattern that often depicted those with disabilities as mere subjects of shame.

The evolution of narrative frameworks on disability is strongly connected to technology advancements, theoretical developments, and wider cultural as well as social transformations. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, that disability was historically seen as divine retribution, misfortune, or a lack in human body. In the nineteenth century, disability entered into the realm of science, with the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and the medicalisation of the body. Mid twentieth century was a turning point when the visibility of impaired soldiers and Civil Rights Movements following Second World War, helped disability to emerge as a socio-

political issue. In the 1970s and 1980s, the social model of disability showed how structural impediments and societal attitudes were the reason behind people's disablement. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Disability Rights Movement in the US raised issues surrounding accessibility, equity, and basic human rights. Another change took place in the 21st century when disability comes forward as a societal, political, and psychological concept. Personal experiences, narratives, and emotions start to contribute to the various fields of knowledge production. Simultaneously, technoscientific medical advancements which were previously seen as instruments of normalisation are being reclaimed. Adaptive technological devices, digital activism, and assistive designs increasingly function as instruments of empowerment rather than societal norms. In a report published by National Council on Disability, *The Power of Digital Inclusion: Technology's Impact on Employment and Opportunities for People with Disabilities* (2011), it has been discussed how the use of technology in various ways can be a great medium which can empower people with disabilities to lead independent, fulfilling lives. In an article by Somya Pokharna "Assistive Technology: How Is It Changing Lives for People with Disabilities?" published in 2024, it has been mentioned, "Assistive technologies have become the cornerstone of accessibility, offering adapted solutions for people with sensory, physical, and cognitive disabilities...Technology has proven itself a powerful equalizer, enabling individuals with disabilities to participate more fully in every aspect of life..."(Pokharna). This age signifies not only a development, but a shift in the theorisation, representation, and experience of disability, transitioning from ableist norms to an ethics of mutual dependence and transformative inclusivity. The literary works discussed into this chapter, represent this evolution, demonstrating an abrupt shift from ableist traps and an embrace of experiences that recognise the various

aspects of the human experience; here technological advances serve as a catalyst for this transformation.

V. 2 Intersection of Disability, Ableism and Technology Enabled Narrative

Tobin Siebers in *Disability Theory* (2008) talks about “ideology of ability”, he says, “The ideology of ability is at its simplest the preference for abled-bodiedness” (Siebers 8). He further talks about bringing “Disability out of the shadow of the ideology of ability, to increase awareness about disability, and to illuminate its kinds, values, and realities” (Siebers 9). Fiona Kumari Campbell in the book *Contours of Ableism* (2009) defines “Ableism” as denoting an “attitude that devalues or differentiates disability through the valuation of able-bodiedness equated to normalcy” (Campbell 5). She has redefined the definition of ableism in an article “Queer Anti-sociality and Disability Unbecoming: An Ableist Relations Project?” (2017), saying that it is:

A system of causal relations about the order of life that produces processes and systems of entitlement and exclusion. This causality fosters conditions of microaggression, internalized ableism and, in their jostling, notions of (un)encumbrance. A system of dividing practices, ableism institutes the reification and classification of populations. Ableist systems involve the differentiation, ranking, negation, notification and prioritization of sentient life. (Campbell 287 - 288).

In a book *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (1998) Simi Linton criticises how society medicalises and discriminates against disability, highlighting ableism in institutions, legislation, and various narratives. Ableism is not just a set of overt actions or attitudes, but a deeply rooted system of meaning that shapes how disability is understood and talked about. It is a widespread societal concept rooted in cultural norms

and beliefs, has historically shaped the representation of those with disabilities in literary works. Conventional narratives often include and promote ableist perspectives, establishing a paradigm whereby individuals with disabilities are confined to predefined roles that uphold standard ideals. Comprehending the convergence of disability and ableism provides a sophisticated perspective on how social ideologies shape the portrayal of characters with disabilities, alongside the transformative role of technology in countering ableist narratives (Leal et al.). The connection between disability and ableism is profoundly ingrained in societal norms, shaping the creation of fictional characters and stories. In the past, literature has often perpetuated ableist perspectives by portraying those with disabilities as outliers. The conceptual framework offered by disability studies, especially the contributions of scholars like Davis, elucidates the relation between disability and ableism. Davis's examination of the notion of normalcy in *Constructing Normalcy* (1995) explains the formation and transmission of ableist beliefs (Leal et al.). This theoretical framework clarifies the intricate ways in which literature has consistently reflected and reinforced societal views towards disability, therefore conserving ableist conceptions inside narrative structures. Traditional narratives sometimes include ableist traps, characterised by the common inclination to depict individuals with disabilities as simple objects, relegating them to plot devices or instruments for emphasising normative standards. This traditional trend of objectifying individuals with disabilities in literature is often reflected in their narrative outcomes. Historically, the medical model of disability promoted for the treatment or repair of the bodies with disabilities, infiltrating traditional narratives that often confine characters with disabilities to tragic or redemptive trajectories following the ableist trap, concluding in either their exclusion from the story, a declaration of death, or a resolution suggesting a cure. For example,

in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831), Quasimodo, the protagonist with disability, passes away in the end. In *Heidi* (1881) by Johanna Spyri, the character Clara who is a wheelchair user, visits mountainous regions leading to her miraculous cure. In *Of Mice and Men* (1937), by John Steinbeck, character with cognitive disability Lennie Small is shot by his companion George which reinforces that people with disabilities die tragically. The main character of *Flowers for Algernon* (1959) by Daniel Keyes, has an intellectual impairment, who undergoes medical surgery to improve his IQ.

A scholarly work "Crip Technoscience Manifesto" (2019) By Ami Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch, analyses how society and individuals with disabilities create technologies that challenges the concept of ableism. In this work Hamraie & Fritsch have mentioned how "the crucial world-building work of Independent Living activists who learned to code, repair wheelchairs, and plan cities while refusing to remain institutionalized" (Hamraie & Fritsch 6). Individuals with disabilities utilise technologies to adapt and alter structures that cause disability or try to create limitations for them. They have also mentioned, "technoscience can be a transformative tool for disability justice" (Hamraie & Fritsch 3) and "Disability technoscience positions enhancement and capacitation as progressive moves to overcome disability" (Hamraie & Fritsch 4). Therefore, as opposed to conventional narratives, technology-enabled narratives signify a substantial transformation in the portrayal of people with disabilities in literature. This transition signifies a departure from conventional, ableist narrative frameworks, enabling characters with disabilities to express their own perspectives. The technology-driven narratives in the selected works such as Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* (2010), Wendelin Van Draanen's *The Running Dream* (2011) and *Born Just Right* (2019), interrogate the intersection of disability and ableism by providing characters with a

platform to declare their autonomy and question traditional conventions. Investigating this thematic evolution is essential for comprehending how technological advances can be utilised to question traditional norms and foster inclusive narratives, enabling characters with disabilities to surpass ableist constraints using contemporary technologies such as advanced wheelchairs, communication devices, and prosthetics. These narratives question the concept of disability “cure” and emphasise diversity, accessibility, and autonomy. Here medical and technoscientific advances are seen as tools for improved life, not eradication. The most noteworthy disability depiction refuses to see disability as a tragedy but shows how to use helpful technologies while embracing and accepting their identity with disability. By emphasising accessibility and participation instead of curing disability, assistive technologies enable individuals with impairments to engage in activities independently, in accordance with the social model. Gerard Goggin and Newell Christopher in their work *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media* (2002) have mentioned, “When properly designed, technology becomes an inclusive force that removes barriers and fosters participation for all” (Goggin & Christopher). Therefore, accessible designs may diminish obstacles, reinforcing the perspective that disability is primarily a social issue rather than only a medical one. These advancements provide flexible solutions that accommodate particular needs, questioning the “abled” vs “disabled” binary. Oliver’s social model of disability argues that societal obstacles, rather than individual obstacles, are the root cause of disability (Oliver). This perspective is strengthened by scientific and technological developments in medical research that remove external obstacles, like accessible transportation, motorised wheelchairs, prostheses, and devices for communication, different therapies and so on.

V.3 *Out of My Mind*: Melody's Journey with Technology

Out of My Mind (2010) by Sharon M. Draper narrates the life of Melody Brooks, an eleven-year-old girl diagnosed with cerebral palsy. The narrative explores Melody's perspective as a nonverbal kid with exceptional intellect, emphasising the obstacles she encounters in communication and social connections. Sharon M. Draper herself mentioned at the end note of the book that she wanted Melody "to be accepted as a character and as a person, not as a representative for people with disabilities." Draper employs a first-person narrative, allowing readers direct access to Melody's thoughts and emotions. Melody's first-person narrative serves as a potent medium for articulating her experiences, contesting societal norms, and establishing her autonomy within the story. This narrative approach dismantles the ableist tendency to confine characters with disabilities to passive roles, instead depicting them as proactive participants in their own narratives. Melody introduces herself by mentioning, "When people look at me, I guess they see a girl with short, dark, curly hair strapped into a pink wheelchair" (p.3). The story in the very beginning emphasises the importance of communication and displays the difficulties encountered by persons such as Melody in articulating their thoughts as she mentions, "I remember words. Very early figured out there were millions of words in the world. Everyone around me was able to bring them out with no effort. Everybody uses words to express themselves. Except me. And I bet most people don't realize the real power of words. But I do. Thoughts need words. Words need a voice" (p.8). It highlights the need of offering accessible tools and technologies for those with impairments to make their life easier. She is limited by a wheelchair, but she is "ridiculously smart" having "a photographic memory" (p.13). The narrative questioned the traditional ideology of medical model from very beginning when Melody mentioned how doctors never really could "fix" her. Before joining

school, she had to go through a test of her intelligence which was performed by Dr. Hugely. By following the traditional medical model of disability, he asked some foolish questions to her and reached to the conclusion that “Melody is severely brain-damaged and profoundly retarded” (p.22). Moreover, the doctor kept on emphasising on the limitations that comes with cerebral palsy. However, her mother protested by saying, “a person is so much more than the name of a diagnosis on a chart!” (p.23). Her point of view was that the body of a human being may have limitations, but the mind is always free. The doctor even called her a “burden” and suggested to send her to a “residential facility” to get fixed. However, Melody’s mother never took his words seriously rather she questioned the ideologies of the doctor, “you think you’re smart because you have a medical degree?” (p.26). By raising such question, *Out of My Mind* (2010) subverts the traditional way of excluding people with disabilities and challenges the predetermined fate ascribed to people with disabilities. At Spaulding Street Elementary School, which was an inclusive school, she used a communication board that helped her in communicating. She mentioned the board had, “common nouns, verbs, and adjectives, some names and a bunch of smiley faces. There are also a few necessary phrases, like, I need to go to the bathroom, please and I’m hungry...I’ve got please and thank you, yes, no, and maybe...” And there was an alphabet strip and row of numbers attached to the communication board so that she could spell words or count things (p.37). But she “needed words” means the feeling of speaking words, she was feeling helpless as she knew words, she had millions of thoughts, but she never could share those with anyone. A prominent issue in the novel is the difficulty of communicating. The story emphasises the need of efficient communication tools and the significance of recognising and validating the perspectives of individuals who may express themselves differently. For Melody to articulate her ideas, experiences, and

emotions, it is necessary that she uses a communication gadget. The narrative illustrates language not only as a means for interaction, but as a formidable tool through which Melody may express her agency and challenge ableist norms. She and her mother eventually developed meta language to “talk without words” through using facial expressions and signs (p.84).

Melody came to know about ALS, through a documentary on Stephen Hawking, and she was “interested in almost anything that has a wheelchair in it” (p.45). In fifth grade at school, when she received “an electric wheelchair”, she felt, “my new chair to my old one is like comparing a Mercedes to a skateboard. The wheels are almost like car tires, which makes the ride smooth and easy, like riding on pillows...” (p.90). Melody’s new motorised wheelchair serves not just as a mode of movement but also as a representation of her freedom as she mentions, “it’s all about the freedom. Now I don’t have to wait for somebody to move me across the room. I can just go there. Nice. So, when they decided to start mainstreaming us into the regular classes, the electric chair was really helpful” (p.91). It enabled her to move around her immediate surroundings, affording her a degree of liberty that she would not possess otherwise. This wheelchair enabled Melody’s engagement in social activities, both at school and throughout the wider community. It improved her interaction with classmates, enhancing her visibility and supporting social engagement. The narrative also emphasises the barriers that Melody encounters about accessibility. Not all places are accessible to wheelchairs, highlighting the genuine challenges faced by those with mobility limitations and need for more accessible and advanced technoscientific designs.

While giving a test Melody felt she could score 100 percent but as she didn’t have enough words on her board to express therefore, it was not possible. It shows

clearly that people with disability may have potential but if they don't receive proper aids, it becomes difficult for them to channel potentialities. In the school some of her classmates did not accept her and they discriminated her based on her physical appearance and inability to articulate words. She dreamt of having "Melody-made computer", which she mentioned, "would talk...it would have room to store all my words, not just the most common ones that have gotten pasted on my dumb plastic board. It would have big keys, so my thumbs could push the right buttons, and it would connect to my wheelchair" (p.123). She needed something "specially designed" for her so that she can communicate (p.124). While talking about school project, she pointed that she wanted to know about "S-T-E-P-H-E-N-H-A-W-K-I-N-G" (p.125). Besides knowing his everyday activities, she was interested to know about "his talking devices, the supercool computers that help him talk and do really hard math problems, like finding black holes in space" (p.126). Catherine and Melody researched about "adapted computers, talking boards that speak the words, push-button systems, and even devices that work with blinks or head nods." Then finally they found "a Medi-Talker" which was very costly, still she was hopeful as she thought, "that looks like a possibility. It has spaces big enough for my thumbs to get into and millions of words and phrases built into it!" (p.129). Her insurance covered the half of the cost of the machine, and she finally received "Medi-Talker" for which she waited all her life (p.132). Melody realised that the "Medi-Talker has more than a dozen levels", as the level one they kept names of her family members, family friends, kids and teachers from her school, her doctors, neighbours. They added lots of words including nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives to the machine. There was a level for sentence making, for numbers and computation, another level full of jokes and even for playing music (p.134). Melody was so happy that she felt like hugging the Medi-Talker. She named it "Elvira" (p.136).

She realised that she never said anything to her parents directly, so through the machine she uttered the words “I love you”, which she had never been able to utter (p.138). Melody’s speaking gadget was an effective instrument that enabled her to articulate her thoughts and deep emotions. She attended the inclusion classes at school with her Medi-Talker, which attracted the other students and together they laughed when Melody shared a joke through the machine. In her entire life that was the first time, she felt she was the “part of the group” (p.142). The technological advancement here serves as an essential instrument, enabling her to express her views and engage more comprehensively and inclusively with the environment. While introducing the machine to the class Catherine mentions, “Melody’s Medi-Talker is a combination computer, music player, and speech device. It’s got HD, high-tech guts, and it’s designed to rock her world and connect you to it...” (p.143). Melody got involved in her educational and social spheres simply because of being equipped with the communication device, which serves as a sign of inclusion. With the help of Medi-Talker, Melody won quiz competition at school, Mrs. V started to prepare her for more future competitions by using Medi-Talker. Melody said that people around her always asked, “what’s wrong with you?” and their intentions are to know whether she is ill, or she is having any pain which can be cured. For people who are really concerned she prepared answer on her board, “I have spastic bilateral quadriplegia, also known as cerebral palsy. It limits my body, but not my mind”. However, for people who laugh at her, she prepared answer, “we all have disabilities. What’s yours?” (p.168). Melody’s use of a communication gadget shows the transforming power of technology. Melody’s interactions through this technology drive the narrative forward, giving her a voice and agency that challenges and questions typical ableist traps. This technical integration serves as a metaphorical

bridge, connecting Melody to the larger story and allowing her to express her experiences beyond the limitations of her physical condition (Jose).

Melody wanted to be a part of quiz team at her school for which she needed permission from Mr. Dimming. Her friends like Jessica and Molly completely denied including her into the team. Mr. Dimming even ignored her presence while talking to Cathrine. However, through Medi-Talker Melody made her point clear, “I am here to take the test...I am very smart...I am tough” (p.179). She raised her voice through her device and is able to assert her autonomy and oppose ableist norms. The way Melody’s distinctive approach to word development through Medi-Talker is portrayed by Draper is exceptional. Melody’s use of words through a communication device transforms into a potent method of empowerment for her. Melody’s distinctive mode of communication presents a challenge to the linguistic conceptions of disability by demonstrating how language, even in non-traditional forms, becomes a medium through which Melody can express her agency and articulate her experiences. Here technological advancements become tools for empowerment, allowing her to take an active role in her own narrative. Finally, Mr. D gave her chance to participate into the competition at school and Melody recorded the answers in Medi-Talker (p.184). When the result was declared, it was Melody who scored highest, and she was selected to be there in the team (p.190). She finally participated in the live competition with all preparations, where several teams representing several schools came to participate (p.203). Her team from Spaulding Street Elementary School won the competition and she even gave interview to a reporter by her speaking machine (p.226). They all were ready to fly to Washington D.C. (p.250). However, Melody could not go because of flight cancellation at the end moment, and she was hurt by the fact that her team members intentionally didn’t inform her regarding this matter, and they left for Washington early (p.260). This incident made

her to cry at first but eventually she became very strong. On their return, Melody raised question against their actions through her Medi-Talker. This device provided Melody a voice that resisted the consequences that were planned for her. When they decided to share their ninth-place trophy with her, she strongly rejected it by saying, “I don’t want it” (p.292). As she started her new journey of writing her autobiography with the help of “Elvira” her Medi-Talker, she said, “So much is stuffed inside my mind. I have lots to say and just one thumb to say it with. I guess I’ll start at the very beginning...” (p.294). Melody’s intellect and intricate thinking are apparent through her way of using words on her Medi-Talker. Melody’s communication gadget symbolises the power of technology to dismantle communication boundaries and enable self-expression. On one hand the adoption of a first-person narrative perspective in this novel is a substantial shift from traditional patterns. On the other hand, the technology enabled narrative has allowed the protagonist to reclaim her narrative and reestablish her identity outside the constraints that are imposed by societal norms. Sharon M. Draper’s *Out of My Mind* (2010) highlights how contemporary technologies such as motorised wheelchairs, communication devices influence not just the empowerment of characters with impairments but also function as a catalyst for dismantling the notions that perpetuate ableism. The narrative advocates for the accessibility of such technoscientific tools. Melody’s distinctive method of word construction via the communication device goes against linguistic norms, emphasising the power of technology to alter the mode of articulating and communication frameworks. Melody’s story is narrated via the refraction of technology. The story illustrates how modern technology may function as dynamic narrative components (Acquaviva), so redefining the experiences as well as representation of those with disabilities in literature.

V.4 *The Running Dream*: Prosthetics and Overcoming Stereotypes

The Running Dream (2011) is a young adult novel authored by Wendelin Van Draanen. It narrates the story of Jessica Carlisle, a high school track superstar who suffers the amputation of a leg due to a road accident. The narrative starts with pessimistic tone, as the protagonist Jessica says, “My hopes, my dreams, my life... it’s over” (p.3). She met an accident due to which she lost her right leg from below knee, and it changed her life completely. The immediate aftermath is examined, illustrating the trauma, frustration, and astonishment that develop after such a horrific incidence. Jessica experiences several medical treatments and procedures, Dr. Wells who performs surgery on her leg, behaves such a way that “he’s trying to soothe away reality”. He promises that she could return to her normal life as he says further, “we’ll have you up and walking again in short order”, however, nothing could console her at that moment (p.5). The story does not explore the scientific details of the operations extensively, but it highlights the physical and emotional impact these treatments have on Jessica. Her sense of identity is deeply associated with what she used to do, she says, “I AM A RUNNER. That’s what I do. That’s who I am...It made me feel alive...” but now she thinks, “I’ll never run again” (p.6). The narrative explores the psychological effects of disability, in addition to its physical dimensions. Jessica undergoes a spectrum of emotions, including denial, rage, acceptance, and determination. She meets prosthetist Hank who would help her with the process of getting a prosthetic leg. Doctors consider her case as easy recoverable, as she was very young, but still, they inform that only after six months they would start with “preparatory prosthesis” (p.8). One of the most significant components of Jessica’s journey of transformation in *The Running Dream* (2011) is the impact that medical equipment, and especially prosthesis, have on her narrative. This is regarded to be one of the most crucial aspects of her journey. Her dad

seemed to be more concerned, by believing in the ideologies of traditional medical model, he was thinking to “fix” his daughter as soon as possible. However deep-down Jessica thinks, “I’m not something he can fix” (p.13). Everyone around command her to “get well” as if it’s a task for her but she thinks, “I’m not sick. I’m crippled. Disabled. A gimp” (p.19), but still, she is “stronger than pain” (p.34). The curing or fixing vs. accepting, this dichotomy has an impact on this literary narrative formulations as well. The rejection of the “cure” narrative empowers characters with impairments to express their agency and reclaim their identities outside of the medical model (Jose).

After coming back to Jessica’s own place, she feels like stranger at her own home, even she feels stranger to herself and everything around her only irritates her (p.52). At her school her friends welcome her but still she feels “herself shutting down”. Her friends ask her to be friendly with everyone, but she feels “withdrawing”, and finds it challenging. She adds more, “I don’t want to be treated like I’m invisible” (p.99). The story that Jessica tells from her first-person perspective sheds light on the obstacles or challenges that she encounters as well as the influence that societal opinions and attitudes have on her sense of who she is. The story encourages readers to contemplate their own perspectives and prejudices by confronting the issues Jessica encounters in her school and neighbourhood. In her math class, she meets a girl named Rosa in “motorized wheelchair” (p.105). When the teacher asks her while showing discriminatory attitude, to sit with Rosa, she finds it difficult while dealing with her post accident identity, she even tries to defend herself saying, “I’m missing a leg, but the rest of me is...well. it’s normal”. The story portrays Jessica not as a victim, but as a protagonist who confronts problems directly and refuses to be defined by her physical state. Throughout her previous classes she never paid attention to Rosa as according to the society she is not normal, but now she decides to sit with her (p.106). She comes to

know that Rosa has cerebral palsy, and she is a wheelchair user since her childhood (p.107). The narrative illustrates the robustness of Rosa and Jessica's relationship, founded on reciprocal understanding and support, surpassing physical disparities.

One of Jessica's friends Kyro shows her one video of Oscar Pistorius "a runner on curved, spiked feet" and another video of a woman Amy who also runs marathons and other girl of her age who runs for her team. Kyro talks about how he manages to form a group called "Help Jessica Run campaign" to buy a "running leg" for Jessica so that she can come back to the track and compete like earlier (p.144). However, the problem is that the running blade costs twenty thousand dollars which is not easy to collect (p.148). When Dr. Hank tests the plastic version of the prosthetic on her, she feels that she has stood up for the first time on her own after her accident. The narrative elucidates the preliminary medical intervention, and rehabilitation that Jessica undergoes in her adaptation to live with a prosthetic leg. An essential element of Jessica's adjustment to her new circumstances is the incorporation of a prosthetic leg along with rehabilitation and physical therapy. She was really excited to know that soon she will receive the temporary prosthetic by which she can "learn to walk again" (p.154).

Jessica mentions, "running was like eating and breathing -it was something I had always done, and without it I felt miserable. Suffocated. Losing a leg was like having to learn to suck in air through the pores of my skin". When she saw the footage of amputees running with prosthetics, she feels, "air seemed to fill my lungs again. I was heady and happy, and I could feel myself -a future me- running" (p.157). By choosing to get a prosthetic limb, Jessica is demonstrating her will to triumph over physical challenges and reclaim her lost identity as runner. This is a reflection of her determination to conquer physical barriers. The narrative examines the impact of

medical innovations on Jessica's aspirations for life. When for the first time Jessica receives her prosthetic leg, she is assisted by Dr. Hank in proper manner so that she does feel comfortable. The book delineates the modifications and calibrations necessary to guarantee the prosthetic's comfortable fit and optimal functionality. The prosthetic limb exemplifies sophisticated technology, demonstrating how technoscientific innovation supports the rehabilitation and adaptability of persons with impairments. After standing up with the help of prosthetic, though she knows that her leg is not there, but she feels as if her brain is giving her signals that her foot is there, and it is good sign as mentioned by doctor. She gains confidence as she starts to move forward and she feels, "I am walking again" (p.183). In *The Running Dream*, Jessica's usage of a prosthetic limb symbolises her journey to restore her voice and agency. The technology-enabled story not only improves her physical mobility, but it also serves as a metaphor for breaking free from conventional expectations and standards. This paradigm shift undermines the historical narrative in which individuals with disabilities were frequently reduced to passive roles or exploited as objects to emphasise normative ideals. Her friends start their campaign with car wash event by which on the very first day they collect 876.50 Dollars. The event is covered by local newspaper, and it comes with a heading "Getting Back on Track" (p.198). After few months doctor advises her that before running leg, she can have everyday leg a "flex foot" although "it's not for track work" but being "very dynamic" it can be used to run (p.267). Though it took time for adjusting with the fake leg, but she even starts to drive again (p.268). However, she says, "the thought of running again has kept me awake nights...(p.268). The "flex foot" is more high-tech prosthetic leg and is much more "comfortable...like it belongs" and she says with joy, "I love this". Jessica navigates a learning curve as she acclimates to the prosthetic limb, with the narrative highlighting the struggles and instances of

success related to this new adjustment. In *The Running Dream* (2011) technoscientific medical innovation surpasses its typical position as a basic medical aid, becoming a narrative aspect that radically alters the protagonists' journeys. She finally feels thankful to Dr. Hank whom she hated in the beginning (p.269). She mentions more, "with my new 'flex foot' my gait looks smooth, my stride confident. I feel almost... normal" (p.270). That means she feels normal, and it is not about looking like normal or abled bodied. Her sense of "feeling normal" is not about looking like an able-bodied person rather reclaiming her agency over her physical appearance or presence. Here, She is undergoing an alteration of her bodily schema. The prosthetic limb assimilates with her identity, facilitating motions that seem instinctive. This re-embodiment illustrates how the body schema adjusts and adapts to new states of existence. This philosophically rejects the ableist belief that a body must adhere to certain standards to be deemed "whole" or "normal." Rather, it acknowledges the flexibility and the diversity of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty). It is not about imitating an able-bodied stride but embracing a new mode of mobility in the environment. Finally, Jessica receives her running leg through a surprise arranged by her teammates (p.273). As she grapples with her new reality, she resumes her journey with a prosthetic limb. The utilisation of technology and medical developments in this literary text represents a revolutionary departure from the limitations of the medical model of incapacity. Both her coach Kyro and Dr. Hank starts to prepare her. After few sessions she starts to gain confidence and she gains speed, she expresses the feeling of running again, "It's a wild, electrifying feeling, and once I get a taste of it, I'm hooked" (p.278). On the other hand, she feels bad for Rosa whom she can't "help her live some of the things she dreams about... Rosa is... invisible" she says. As Jessica moves forward in her life leaving behind her disability, she wants Rosa to not be left behind (p.283). She starts to think how she can

give Rosa an experience of having crossed a finishing line of race and plans to participate into River Run race (p.290). She also wants to “have people see her instead of her condition” (p.307). The prosthetic limb enables Jessica to follow her love and passion for running, serving as a symbol of empowerment. She finally participates into the race with Rosa and successfully completes it. She feels that this finish line is not only a finish line anymore, eight months ago she was not able to stand up properly but now with the help of her prosthetic she ran with her friend. She says, “This race has made believe that there’s nothing I can’t do. This is my new starting line” (p.332). Jessica’s prosthetic leg represents perseverance, adaptation, and the junction of technology and human capabilities. A primary theme in the work is Jessica’s quest to reclaim her identity of a runner. The track serves as a metaphor for life’s challenges. Jessica’s return to running symbolises her ability to face difficulties head-on and find purpose in the midst of adversity with the help of technology. In *The Running Dream* (2011), technology takes the shape of prosthesis, and it is shown in the novel not only as a means of providing physical assistance, however, prosthetics are depicted in the text as narrative elements that symbolise resiliency, modification, and the intersection of technology and human capability. The novel’s use of modern medical devices as narrative elements enables it to investigate the junction of disability and technology, demonstrating how new inventions can redefine the potentials of individuals with impairments. This chosen novel, together with theoretical ideas from disability studies, demonstrate how technology enabled narrative writing can defy historical norms and embrace more inclusive and nuanced depictions of persons with disabilities. This narrative shift reflects a broader cultural recognition of the value of acceptance, accommodation, and diversity in the narrative landscape, moving away from the ableist traps embedded in the historical medical model of disability. The integration of

contemporary medical technology, including prosthetic limbs and customised running blades, exemplifies how innovation can empower those with impairments. These challenges conventional beliefs about the barriers of physical impairments and emphasise the significance of technology in improving the quality of life for those with disabilities. The story normalises the existence of persons with impairments by including Jessica into daily contexts, including education and athletics. This normalisation serves in dismantling stigmas and promoting a more inclusive perspective.

V.5 *Born Just Right*: Jordan's Innovation and Autonomy

The curing narrative perceives disability as something that needs fixing, often dominating the identities and lived experiences of persons with impairment. This approach, grounded in traditional medical model of disability, perpetuates ableism by suggesting that impaired bodies are unpleasant until “fixed.” Scholars in disability studies question these narrative patterns by promoting a transition towards acceptance, accessibility, and autonomy. *Born Just Right* (2019) embodies the social model of disability, that encourages a recognition of diversity instead of trying to “fix” or “cure” impairments. The text illustrates this perspective by rejecting the idea that prosthetic devices are made to replicate non-disabled bodies. This perspective challenges ableist narratives and provides alternative frameworks for conceptualising disability, identity, and agency. *Born Just Right* (2019), exemplifies this approach by using technology to develop prosthetic arms that emphasise individuality and empowerment rather than societal norms.

Born just Right (2019) is a collaborative autobiographical work by Jordan Reeves and her mother Jen Lee Reeves. In the introduction of the book, Jordan has

mentioned that she was “born with full arm and one short arm that stopped growing just above the elbow” and her story is something beyond “normal”. Though she has limb impairment, she mentions that it has given her opportunity to know more about the “disability world” (p.3). This work has shown how the medical innovations help to enhance the sense of creativity and independence in Jordan’s journey, shedding light on the obstacles and struggles she faces and highlighting how these factors contribute positively to her unique experiences in daily lives.

As Jordan was born with just right hand, for her it was very “normal to live a one-handed life”. She also mentions when she was born, her parents accepted her, and the doctor also mentioned she was “fine” (p.6). In the very beginning she has thanked “occupational and physical therapy” which made her “physically and mentally strong” (p.3). There are various treatment procedures that exist to assist individuals with impairments in enhancing their strength, mobility, and general quality of life. Physical therapy is one of them, which often serves as the first treatment modality for individuals with impairments. It emphasises enhancing muscular strength, flexibility, and general physical performance. Another procedure, occupational therapy aims to assist individuals with impairments in enhancing their capacity to engage in daily tasks, including dressing, eating, and grooming etc. In her preschool, she had a therapist to help her in learning these “life skills” (p.6).

In Jen’s note, she mentions that from the very beginning she has provided space to Jordan so that she can do necessary things by herself. Jen mentions, “I never assume there is a ‘can’t’ in Jordan’s world. She can do it all, with or without a prosthetic arm helping her out” (p.15). The narrative shows how technology can transcend conventional ideas of ability. The narrative does not show the use of prosthetic arm as a way to mimic a “normal” arm, Jordan uses it only when she needs to. She is not

completely dependent on her prosthetic arm. Her mother had taken help from “other parents, doctors and therapists” to know about the ways she could help her. Jordan says that most of the people believe in traditional ideologies that people with disabilities always need the “help of traditional body... A lot of things are possible if you shift your perspective. My perspective is one-handed” (p.18). Jordan’s this statement serves as a kind of resistance to ableism, illustrating how individuals with disabilities may contribute to society on their own terms in different ways with different perspectives. This narrative approach challenges previous ableist stereotypes that often-portrayed individuals with impairments as dependent on abled-bodied people. The autonomy that Jordan has serves as a powerful catalyst that transforms her story beyond societal norms. Jordan also mentions that whenever she needs access to different tools that can help her in work, she uses them (p.18). She is not merely a passive receiver, rather an active individual who takes control of her own choices regarding what she needs. At just ten years old she received her prosthetic arms which is called “helper arms”. At first, she was unable to sit properly as she had weakness in her neck and torso, but her “helper arm” helped her to build strong muscles so that she could sit properly. The prosthetic arm supports her ability to strengthen her muscles, maintain good balance over body, emphasising the significance of assistive technology in enhancing quality of life. She clearly mentions that this prosthetic arm helps her to “stay healthy” and it gives a feeling of “what it’s like to have two hands”. For her prosthetics could offer her a sense of completeness or wholeness. Earlier she had to use her left shoulder like an elbow and her parents were concerned that she might have other physical issues due to the overuse of shoulder. Therefore, her prosthetic arm gave her shoulder “a break from all extra work”. It clearly highlights that against the traditional medical approach of disability; this medical invention was not merely a support system to her rather it helped

her to maintain a healthier life which she deserves (p.20). Instead of seeing the prosthetic arm as a replacement for a “missing” limb, the narrative presented it as a means to enhance physical capability, and overall health or well-being. Her mother explains that people with limb differences suffer from chronic pain. Therefore, to prevent her daughter from painful future, she took the help of occupational therapy and physical therapy that included yoga exercises too (p.25).

Jordan mentions, “therapy and helper-arm-building was teaching me about fit, function, and design. It also taught me to speak up and share my opinions...” (p.27). Influenced by existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, *Born Just Right* (2019) emphasises the individual’s autonomy in shaping their own essence into existence. Jordan’s passion in designing prosthesis exemplifies self-definition, and her statement is full of agency that resonates with Sartrean existentialism, because identity is not predetermined but constructed through choices. *Born Just Right* (2019) presents a posthumanist and phenomenological perspective on disability, seeing it not as a deficiency but as an adapted and creative attribute of existence. This approach not only questions ableist standards but also acknowledges technological intervention as a means of empowerment. Mr. David Rotter is the person who makes these prosthetic arms for her, as she mentions, “David and his team work on building legs and arms and other things that help people. There are all kinds of machines and tools” (p.29). She says that she is not always depended on her prosthetic arm, and she is not fond of “curing” or “fixing” her impairment rather sometimes she loves her different look with one hand, but she further says, “there are other times when I just want to look like a two-handed person. If I could, I would rather just not wear anything. But when I need to, I want my prosthetics to feel good and look really cool” (p.31). Jordan’s use of prosthesis is not aimed at “fixing” her arm difference, but rather at accepting and

appreciating it. The autobiography contests the notion that technological assistance is just compensatory. The prosthetic arm serves not just as a functional device but also as a symbol of self-representation, emphasising disability pride. According to Jordan, her parents too never tried to fix her disability as she mentions, “they knew they could only do their best to help me deal with all the challenges that would come my way. They have given me tools to help me, and some of those tools include lots of different hands” (p.36). Here technology or tools serve as instruments for transforming societal views on disabilities. This narrative enhances discussions in disability studies on the power of technology to transform perceptions of disability, accessibility, and autonomy.

Jordan has also talked about how she and her mother tried to change people’s thoughts by talking to grown-ups and especially the parents of non-disabled kids regarding limb differences by letting “them know that not every kid is born looking like a traditional person. Lots of people have physical differences. One way a person can be different is that they may not have hands or feet!” (p.41). Against the principles of medical model, her focus or her motive is to change the societal perceptions regarding physical differences. The autobiography therefore becomes a powerful tool for fostering empathy and understanding, urging readers to examine their own biases and preconceived notions about impairments and accept people with physical differences. The narrative emphasises the need of recognising and accommodating people with disabilities, along with the principles of disability studies. Even though she uses prosthetic arm, she is equally comfortable without it, and she thinks that the more she will disseminate information regarding impairments, people will start to take it positively. Besides helping her, the prosthetic arm gives her the confidence to be vocal in public, as she gets older, people start to judge her, the reason behind this, as she mentions, “I stand out. I have lot of opinions...” (p.49). Every year she participates into

“Camp No Limits” a camp for “kids with limb differences”, there she meets many younger as well as elder kids with impairment and they get to learn life skills. In the camp while helping a kid to tie shoes she says, “can’t isn’t a word I use” (p.56). Throughout the book, Jordan reveals her capacity to convert barriers into opportunities for personal growth and achievement. Her story exemplifies the resilience and autonomy that individuals with disabilities demonstrate throughout time. Regarding the usage of tools Jordan mentions, “what you and I think is ‘normal’ can be totally different! To you, a one-handed person may sound strange. But to me, having two hands seems totally unusual! Maybe using a wheelchair is different to you. To a kid using a wheelchair, it’s a super-helpful tool that helps him or her have the freedom to move!” (p.62). *Born Just Right* (2019) advocates for the notion that individuals with disabilities may take ownership of their tools and surroundings.

Jordan joined dance classes at the early age of her, she tried different types of sports too. She says, “I enjoy ones that involve hands, like basketball and softball. Maybe it’s because I like the challenge”. she participated into many activities with the help of her helping arm, but there are instances when she was equally comfortable with her just little arm (p.66). Jordan’s energy is shown by her numerous accomplishments, including the exploration of various hobbies. She has mentioned that she has attended “an Amputee Coalition national conference” where she has heard the talk of various experts regarding “the new ways they’re building helper arms for adults”. She also meets a person who have made a prosthetic tail for a dolphin Winter. While visiting Disney World, she meets Winter, she learns to that Winter too “doesn’t wear her helper tail all the time”. She comes to know from Winter’s therapist that the “helper tail keeps her from getting really hurt”, after that she understands “why prosthetics can be helpful” for her too (p.77).

The autobiography underscores the importance of creativity in the development of Jordan's identity. Jordan's autobiography reframes disability as an aspect of identity rather than a personal tragedy, therefore contesting the conventions linked to ableism. While working with Mr. David, she developed interest in designs and she never realised that "all those experiences with prosthetics" would motivate her thinking on design, which "could lead towards some really nontraditional ideas" (p.80). She takes the help of artificial arm and tries to invent something new with 3-D printed design. She invents a glitter spraying machine which she names Project Unicorn. Her project reconceptualises disability not as a limitation but as a catalyst for innovative and creative solutions. Jordan Reeves' renowned glitter-shooting arm defies societal expectations by converting a prosthetic device into an instrument of creation and self-expression. This reconceptualises prosthetics as extensions of identity instead of instruments of normalcy. Jordan's interest in designing helping arms promotes an inclusive approach in technology, encouraging innovation inspired by personal experiences. This approach acknowledges the creative abilities of persons with disabilities rather than seeing them as mere receivers of assistance. In this context, disability is not a condition to be overcome but a unique experience that inspires creativity and innovation, reshaping societal perceptions and highlighting the importance of inclusivity in technological design. On the other hand, this autobiography corresponds with posthumanist philosophy, especially the concepts of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. Posthumanism contests the rigid confines of the human body, highlighting the fluidity between humanity and technology. Jordan's glitter-shooting arm embodies Haraway's cyborg a synthesis of machine and organism symbolising liberation and a reinvented identity. Here prosthesis serves as a symbol of self-creation, integrating technology and subjectivity.

Jordan accepts the fact that, “working on helper arms with Mr. David helped a lot” (p.94). She receives “Editor’s Choice Award” for her innovative contribution. She gives interviews on different TV shows where she talks about limb differences, she proudly mentions, “I didn’t hide my difference-I showed it off! Even better, my limb difference wasn’t a big deal. I had a chance to just be me and show off something cool with- out even needing to explain my physical difference” (p.102). Philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) suggests that the body is fundamental to experience and perception. Disability, from this perspective, is not only a deficiency but a mode of existence what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “being-in-the-world.” *Born Just Right* (2019) demonstrates how Jordan Reeves perceives the world in an alternative way. Her prosthetic arm serves to enhance her capacities, embodying Merleau Ponty’s concept that the body functions as a medium of perception and agency (Maurice Merleau-Ponty).

Jordan’s writing has criticised the traditional ideologies and negative attitudes of people regarding disability and people with disabilities as she says, “Some people think ‘disability’ is a bad word, but for me, it has opened the doors to all kinds of new opportunities” (p.118). She mentions more, “The only thing that can stop us is our attitudes. My attitude is to just keep trying!” (p.119). The social model of disability claims that disability is a product of societal obstacles rather than inherent obstacles. The narrative transcends this idea by adopting an alternative philosophy, the notion that technology may boost human capabilities. This approach reflects David Chalmers and Andy Clark’s notion of “The Extended Mind” (1998), where cognitive activities and state of mind are not only limited to the brain; they may also include surrounding factors, especially tools, technology, and other things (Chalmers & Clark). Jordan’s

prosthetic arm does not “cure” her impairment but rather respects it, challenging the concept of normality.

V.6 Conclusion:

The inclusion of technoscientific and medical innovations into literature dismantles conventional constraints of the medical model of disability, initiating a change in perspective that goes beyond the exclusive emphasis on fixing or curing physical impairments. This chapter examines how contemporary literature use these advancements as transformative tools, altering the lives of characters with disabilities in ways that challenge historical ableist norms and foster a more inclusive narrative landscape. This research utilises examples from the chosen novels to illustrate the intricate impact of technology and medical advancements on the experiences and autonomy of people with disabilities. The influence of technological and medical advancements transcends individual experiences, serving as a catalyst for challenging societal norms and fostering an alternative and more inclusive understanding of disability. The chosen novels, together with theoretical insights from disability studies, demonstrate how these developments transform into dynamic forces that affect the lives of characters with impairments. This paradigm shift reflects a broader societal recognition of individuals with disabilities’ agency, autonomy, and diverse identities, making an important contribution to the changing narrative landscape of disability depiction in literature. To illustrate how modern innovations and medical help empower characters rather than aiming to “fix” or “cure” them, the function of technology in the selected novels becomes a prominent theme. From Melody’s motorised wheelchair and communication gadget in *Out of My Mind* (2010) to Jessica’s use of various prosthetic legs in *The Running Dream* (2011) and Jordan’s innovative spirit of making and designing prosthetic arms in *Born Just Right* (2019), technology becomes a tool of

breaking down barriers, fostering autonomy, and defying standard narrative patterns. Such technoscientific medical innovations have a far-reaching impact in literature, serving as a narrative instrument for probing the nexus of disability and identity. This chapter advocates for an inclusive environment not only adding to the representation of disability within the selected texts but also contribute to broader societal discourses regarding the intersection of ableism, disability and technology enabled narrative, therefore, promotes the development of a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of disability.

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