

# The Representation of Disability in Indian English Literature: A Study on Sushmita Bagchi's Children of a Better God (2010)

Disability has often been understood as a condition that leads to social exclusion or isolation of an individual from the larger social framework, a view succinctly captured by Dr. B. P., who defines disability in terms of the marginal position it enforces upon the individual within society. Indian English Literature offers a rich and significant space to trace the evolving representations, issues, and tropes associated with disability. Traditionally, in many Indian novels, disability has been portrayed as a stigma, frequently interpreted through the lens of fate, karma, or the misdeeds of a previous birth. Such representations tend to naturalize suffering by suggesting that impairment is a form of punishment, thereby rendering the disabled individual as someone destined to endure pain, exclusion, and social neglect. This moralistic framework not only reinforces ableist attitudes but also legitimizes the marginalization of disabled persons within family and community structures.

However, in recent years, a noticeable shift has emerged in the discourse of disability in Indian English writing, with authors increasingly engaging seriously and sensitively with the lived realities, struggles, and subjectivities of disabled individuals.

The present paper, entitled "The Representation of Disability in Indian English Literature," undertakes a critical analysis of Sushmita Bagchi's novel *Children of a Better God* (2010), which foregrounds the experiences of children with autism and other impairments within an educational setting. The novel provides a nuanced portrayal of a school environment that attempts to accommodate children with disabilities, thereby highlighting both institutional challenges and possibilities of inclusion. Bagchi realistically depicts the varied responses of families towards disabled children, ranging from denial and rejection to reluctant acceptance and eventual reconciliation. In many instances, the birth of a disabled child is perceived as an unbearable burden, prompting families to distance themselves emotionally or even physically from the child. Ironically, as the child grows older and demonstrates a degree of independence or self-sufficiency, the same family seeks to reclaim the child, revealing the conditional nature of familial acceptance. Through such narrative moments, the novel exposes the deep-rooted social anxieties surrounding disability and the utilitarian expectations imposed upon disabled bodies.

Bagchi's engagement with disability is not limited to this novel alone. Her later work, *Beneath a Rougher Sea* (2016), further extends the discourse by centering on a male protagonist who works as a psychologist and attends to numerous patients suffering from psychological disorders. In a significant reversal of roles, the caregiver himself becomes afflicted with a psychic disorder, transforming into a patient in need of care. This shift powerfully illustrates the fragile boundary between normalcy and impairment and challenges the hierarchical distinction between the able-bodied and the disabled. By portraying the psychological, emotional, and social hardships faced by individuals with mental illness, Bagchi emphasizes the vulnerability inherent in human existence and questions society's rigid categorizations of health and disability.

A broader survey of literary representations of disability across cultures and historical periods reveals that disability is a common and enduring human phenomenon, and that locating disabled individuals within the social fabric should be considered normal rather than exceptional.

Nevertheless, literary narratives consistently point to the segregation and marginalization of disabled persons, who are often constructed as the 'other' and excluded from dominant definitions of normalcy, productivity, and social worth. Such representations underscore how disabled individuals, despite fulfilling social roles and conforming to normative expectations, continue to be denied full inclusion and recognition. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with society to acknowledge disabled persons as integral members of the social and cultural community. Genuine acceptance and inclusion have the potential to significantly improve the psycho-social status of disabled individuals, enabling them to live with dignity, agency, and a sense of belonging.