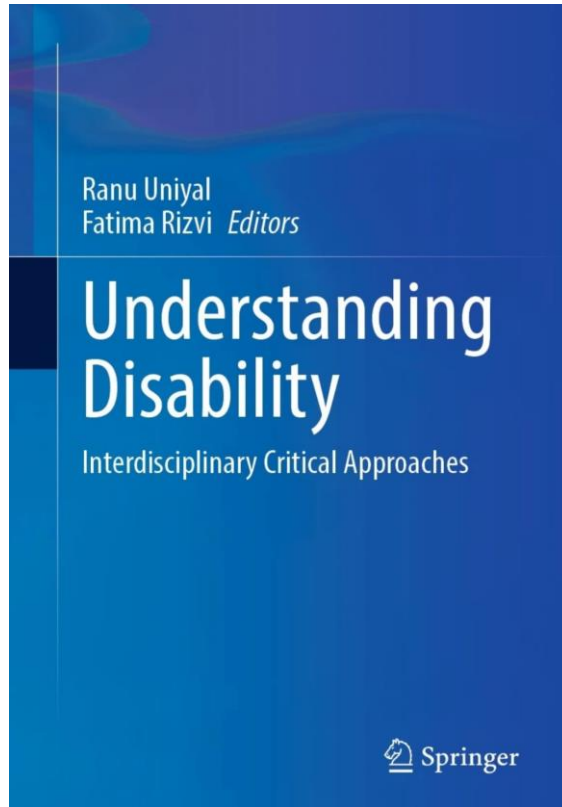


**Ranu Uniyal and Fatima Rizvi (Eds.). 2023. *Understanding Disability: Interdisciplinary Critical Approaches*. Singapore: Springer Singapore, 245 pp. ISBN:978-981-99-4924-3**



This book is an exploration of a potentially emerging area of disability studies. The thrust of the book is on creating an inclusive and empowering space for disabled people. This becomes evident in its dedication “to all persons with special needs and all caregivers.” The editors acknowledge the Indian Disability Studies Collective (IDSC) and PYSSUM for co-hosting the inaugural disability conference “Deglobalising Disability: Texts and Contexts” in October 2019, which laid the foundation for this book. The “Foreword” to the book is written by Thomas J. Neville, Professor of Disability Studies and Educational Foundations at Millersville University (USA). He mentions that disability studies has been looked at through a variety of lenses as an academic discipline, a certification course, an area of social activism, a political agenda, a personal or

close experience, and an individual experience. Disability studies addresses the gap existing between the ableist and disableist perspective. It accounts for the creation of a whole new vocabulary and terminology to cater to the conceptions emerging out of it. This book contains twenty-one chapters categorised into three parts. Each part locates the disabled experience in a distinct field of theory and practice, arts and culture, and social and political interventions.

The “Introduction” opens with synonyms used for disability: disabled, dysfunctional, disturbed, disfigured, distressed, disrepute, disgusted, and so on. It shows how often in the construction of the images of perfection, abled narratives, and success stories of and about greatness and normalcy, anyone with any weakness can be put to the periphery, ostracised from the social and public sphere, and made to suffer the social stigma of discrimination and exclusion. It celebrates the emergence of disability studies as a discipline, as an area of study and research. It helps readers understand disability from a deeper social and personal perspective and encourages them to look beyond the normalisation of disability as a negative attribute. Instead, it can be seen as an opportunity for channelising human energy and resources for establishing narratives and spaces for “empathy and understanding, inclusion and acceptance.” This will help in generating awareness, sensitivity, and an environment for the reception of people who are otherwise forced into anonymity and silence.

Part One illustrates “Disability and Empirical Experiences.” Gael Sobott in her essay discusses disability aesthetics and how disabled writers create their models to subvert a disableist narrative. Dana Elken Terrel’s and Cecily Resnick’s article assesses the impact of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy in the alleviation of anxiety, depression, and stress through the case study of six parents. The article by Elizabeth Neville, Percy Cardozo, Mitu De, and Raymond Lemay focuses on Social Role Valorisation (SRV) in India and how this approach has helped people get good things in life denied to them because of their social status marked by disability. Naval Chandra Pant’s essay emphasises adding yoga practices, particularly breathing exercises, to the routine of disabled people. It suggests that yoga exercises have helped students with intellectual disability in aiding their concentration and behavioural patterns at PYSSUM (ParamahansaYogananda Society for Special Unfolding and Moulding).

Part Two is the lengthiest collection of articles, as it covers the literary and artistic representation and reception of disability in genres of fiction, short fiction, drama, and cinema. Chapters by Ega Peter and Richa Joshi Pandey engage with Jerry Pinto’s description of bipolar disorder in *Em and the Big Hoom*. These articles problematise the linear perception and treatment of an individual’s

condition resulting in the pathologising by dominant medical and social discourses. Arunabha Bose argues in the context of Bengali fiction that the sexuality of disabled people is often considered defected and barbaric, and is marginalised in the dominant narratives of normativisation and masculinisation. Jaya Upadhyay explicates the representation of disability in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." Her paper subverts through the embodied and subjectified experience of a disabled self by contextualising it in the backdrop of the 'other' created in the normative environment and social relationships.

Akshata Jaiprakash through her reading of some adult's and children's texts refers to the dichotomy in the Indian social system that sometimes separates disability as abnormal and sometimes assimilates it as normal. Dipanwita Mondal interprets Rabindranath Tagore's story "Subha" highlighting the personal and social disability faced by the protagonist. Saumya Srivastava looks into the experience of a disabled female in Leela Gour Broome's *Flute in the Forest* and her transformation from a disabled status to an empowered individual. Meenakshi Pawha's paper argues that disability is shown as a recurrent literary subject resulting in a "stock element of characterization," an "opportunistic metaphorical device," and as a "narrative prosthesis" in terms of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder. Her analysis of Aparna Sen's film *15 Park Avenue* touches upon the role cinema can play in sensitising and providing inclusive space for people with cognitive disability. Aahuti D. Dhandhukia adds another angle by her interpretation of two movies *Dosti* and *Barfi* from two different periods of Indian cinema. Separating disability from the baggage of past sinfulness and karmic misfortune, her paper focuses on the experiences of exclusion and the possibility of inclusion of disabled people in Indian society. Megha Negi and Ankur Konar in their articles explicate the treatment of disabled females' experience in performance referring to Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.

Part Three touches upon perspectives of "Dealing with Disability." Pranita Lele delineates the cultural roots in understanding the social construction of disability. Her paper talks about the humane model adopted by the UAE that rejects discriminatory religious and cultural practices and takes measures to adjust and adapt social and infrastructural environments to the needs of disabled people. Sumit Garg and Kumar Sushil suggest the role played by formal institutions in handling disability concerning Susan Nussbaum's *Good Kings, Bad Kings*. Nicky Naincy and Anuraj Singh's paper touches upon the economic aspect of disability. They particularly urge the need to consider economic factors operating in the labour market for disabled people in analyzing social and psychological models. Radhika Bali shows that female ways of working misalign with masculine norms and therefore appear abnormal in a male world. S. Gokul's article explores the

life narratives of disabled people in Sundari Sivasubbu's *A Bumblebee's Balcony* and Malini Chib's *One Little Finger*. It looks at the binaries of east and west, rural and urban, ability and disability, and emphasises looking at the experience of disability at a more personal level. Amrita Sharma establishes a connection between the theoretical premise and the lived experience of disabled people in the larger discourse of disability studies.

This book furthers the cause of disability activists who seek to create spaces and give voices to muted disabled narratives. By bringing so many articles by people from various spheres, it emphatically looks at the disabled experience as a creative, constructive, and shared space. It connects the stages of disability from childhood to old age. It deliberates on various types of disabilities – bodily, psychological, social, and cultural. It touches upon diverse narratives on disability encountered in short stories, children's texts, theatre, performance, media, and films. Most importantly, though registering the traumas of disability faced by people in real life, the book retains an optimistic approach forcing, suggesting, and manifesting the positive changes in accommodating the interests of disabled people in society, culture, institutions, infrastructure, mindsets, and popular imagination.

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