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Queer/Disabled Existence: Human Rights of People with Disability

Deepak Basumatary

Abstract

The literature has sometimes portrayed queer/disabled people as the “Other.” People with disabilities and queer sexualities are frequently subject to ridicule and abuse. Historically, the literature has aided in the social constructionism of disability phenomena in society by depicting the disabled as someone harmful and undesirable. Furthermore, traditional representations of queer and/or disabled existence have frequently been biased and are usually about how the “able-bodied” or the so-called normal people perceive people with diverse bodies and queer sexualities. However, it has been conspicuously silent regarding the plight of people with disabilities and queer sexualities. In a departure from traditional representations of queer and/or disabled existence, Firdaus Kanga presents a first-hand account of the lived experiences of his precarious life in the Indian sociocultural context and beyond. He has to his credit a series of critically acclaimed books such as *Trying to Grow* (1990), *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), *The Godmen* (1995), and *The Surprise Ending* (1996). As a severely disabled individual suffering from a crippling disease called osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones disease), *Trying to Grow* (1990), a semiautobiographical novel, is a narrative of his lived experiences of disability and tryst with queer sexuality. While his other work, *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), is a discourse on queer sexuality and disability from the perspective of queer and disabled existence. Kanga critiques the ableist society’s treatment of the queer and the disabled, which is tantamount to human rights abuse.

Keywords: alienation, alterity, ableist gaze, governmentality, homophobia, precarity, somatocentrism, teratophobia

1. Introduction

Firdaus Kanga is a marginalized writer and the stereotypical “Other.” Kanga’s semiautobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) is an unusual novel. It is a narrative of the lived experiences of Brit (Kanga), a severely disabled person (due to osteogenesis imperfecta) with rich and vivacious (queer) sexual desires and appetite. In a world dominated by abled and heterosexual people, Kanga as an individual and as a writer is a departure from the “norms,” literally and figuratively. His physicality does not belong to or fall under the category of the accepted norms of what is considered to be the “normal body” or “able-bodied,” and for this reason, in every aspect of life, he faces discrimination. His sexual orientation further alienates him from mainstream society. The extant customs and traditions of society imbue binarism among the general populace, and this process begins in the early stage of life. Therefore, people usually see and think

from the perspective of the binary “normal”–abnormal” paradigm. This engenders an *othering* process that ostracizes people who do not conform to the socially accepted norm. [Consequently, sexualities and bodies are pressured to conform to an ideal, and when peoples’ functioning or biological composition does not fall within these standards, they are deemed inferior or “Other” and are conveniently excluded from mainstream society [1]. As a victim of a crippling disease called osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones disease), Kanga is confined to life in a wheelchair, placing him outside of the category of the normal body or able-bodied. It is interesting to note that in his writings Kanga has never expressed remorse for his crippled condition and he is proud and open with his queer sexuality. Kanga reflects on the prevailing attitudes toward queer sexuality and disability and the exclusionary processes at work that keep people with nonnormal bodies and sexualities away from mainstream society, which is a clear violation of human rights. Kanga reiterates that it is the society which queers and disables them and not the physicality of their bodies or sexual orientation. In this regard, Lennard J. Davis’ *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* is a significant theoretical intervention that sheds light on the existence of a restrictive regime in society in the form of norms, normal, and normality that creates the phenomena of queerness and disability in society [2]. This restrictive regime is an exclusionary process alienating people with disabilities from everyday life and violates their basic human rights.

Kanga has challenged several assumptions and myths associated with the queer and disabled, foremost of them being the notion of “sexlessness” of disabled individuals. By portraying disabled people as healthy and rich in sexual desires and appetites, Kanga demystifies the phenomena of queerness and disability. He shows that disabled people can have rich and satisfying (sexual) lives, but it is the “ableist society” that is not able to see, understand, and accept the queer and/or disabled. Everywhere, there is a system and design of segregation to exclude the queer and/or disabled from society through the usage of anti-queer/and anti-disabled language, discourses, narratives as well as in the design of spatiality that is generally designed or structured without taking into consideration the needs of the specially abled or the sensibilities of queer people, which can be called “design apartheid” [3]. Firdaus Kanga’s major works, therefore, present a rich and varied area of exploration on the intersection of disability, sexuality, and human rights from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to (re)read Kanga’s works from the lens of the intersectionality of human rights, disability, and queer sexuality in the literature by focusing on alienation, precarity, and alterity in the lived experiences of Kanga.

2. Compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality

Robert McRuer in his essay “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” has elaborated at length on a society’s predilection toward people with what is called “normal body” or “able-bodied” [4]. Arguing that our society is an “ableist society,” McRuer emphasizes that society has space and tolerance only for able-bodied people. For this purpose, society has devised a mechanism to ostracize people who do not belong to the accepted norms. Therefore, even though our society abounds with differently abled people, they are NOT accepted as equal members of society. Thus, the disabled are sometimes marginalized and treated as the “Other,” as freakish and exotic people [5]. Usually, the disabled are treated as deviant, evil, ugly, and abhorrent in popular lore. The hostility toward disabled people makes it evident that the human body is a subject of

harsh scrutiny where the body is ascribed symbols and meanings that stigmatize those that are beyond the scope of the conventional methods of categorization.

Butler's concept of "performativity" enunciated in her groundbreaking book on gender studies *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) expounds that "gender" is a question of "performativity" where a particular sex is assigned roles that need to be performed throughout life [6]. It emerges that the inferior status assigned to women is essentially a case of "social constructionism," as society has traditionally and historically regarded them as "mutilated"/"deformed" bodies compared to men [7]. Likewise, disability is a case of "social construction" as different dimensions of the body became deviant/deformed bodies in the cultural narratives and were seen as grotesques, or worse as nonhuman "Others" [8]. Assuming that the disabled are an exception and not the norm [emphasis added], they were regarded as individuals beyond definition and the sphere of "performativity." Here, "performativity" of the body is the benchmark of social acceptance/recognition.

The ambiguity of deviant/deformed bodies presented a challenge in assigning the "normal" either/or male-female gender binary because of which the disabled-bodied were assumed to be "sexless," in other words, lacking libido, sexual desire, or sexual attraction and sexual attractiveness. In a way, both women and disabled are clubbed together under the same rubric as mutilated/deviant/deformed bodies whose "ability" is in question and whose sexuality needs to be regulated for a proper/healthy procreation for the sustenance of humankind through the tried and tested patriarchal heteronormativity.

In disability studies, McRuer, borrowing his idea from Rich's theory of "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," [9] broadens the concept to highlight the presence of a similar kind in the form of "Compulsory Able-bodiedness" in society because social institutions, cultural systems, and physical infrastructures are mainly designed and attuned for the able-bodied. For this reason, individuals with different bodily dimensions and abilities are deprived of equality, which violates their human rights. The disability phenomena in society are largely a social construction. As feminists have argued all along that masculinity is all about the jingoist social construction of power, disability is also a similar product of jingoism and hostile treatment of the disabled-bodied in society. It is such an overbearing normalizing mechanism that reserves sexuality, and in this case, heterosexuality, as an exclusive preserve of the able-bodied or normates creating the norm of compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality. This norm has entrenched in the sociocultural values and beliefs constructing the myths of sexlessness (devoid of libido and sexual desire) of the disabled-bodied and the existence of heteronormativity. This social constructionism of compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality is discriminatory, segregating the people on false and artificially created difference of the "Other." Stigmatization of the disabled people occurs as a result of this normalizing practice that characterizes the disabled people as the "Other," and the disabled human subjects are given less human dignity and place in society. The "Otherness" is due less to the difference of the sexuality/corporality of the queer/disable bodied than to the point of view and the discourse endorsed by society. The classification of people into regimes of compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality is not just a symbolic or semiotic practice but is an oppressive and marginalizing practice that reconfigures the differently disabled as lesser humans. Article 5 of the United Nations Organization's (UNO) Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" [10]. However, the letter and spirit of Article 5 have been regularly violated by the ableist society without any remorse. What is even worse is the fact that for the ableist society, disabled people are simply objects to be judged and manipulated.

3. The personal is political: homosexuality in India

Homosexuality was extant in precolonial India, where heteronormativity was NOT the norm and homosexuality was widely accepted through social sanctions. Dasgupta states, “[t]he polyvalence of sexuality prevalent till precolonialism was disciplined through social sanctions” [11]. This is contrary to the commonly held notion that homosexuality is a foreign (Western) import. Vanita and Kidwai explain, “An unbiased excavation into the ancient and modern Indian cultures and traditions surely proves that same-sex love is not alien to India; it is not a foreign import” [12, 13]. Modern Indian critics guided by nationalist fervor were uncomfortable with the idea of a homosexual India and attacked the nonnormative sexuality as “Western import,” conveniently discarding the available historical and literary facts that presented a complexly different picture. In this respect, there was a convenient “internalizing of colonialism,” as it suited the politico-cultural discourses of the time. In the words of Dasgupta, “Through internalizing colonialism, the new elites of postindependence India attacked nonnormative sexuality as nationalist critique” [11].

It is fascinating to note that the stigmatization of homosexuality is a colonial legacy. The British colonial administrators (guided by their Victorian Puritanism) zealously regulated sexuality and minoritized queer sexualities in India through anti-sodomy law, i.e., Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code 1860, a law that continues to be enforced to this day [14]. The politico-juridical regulation of sexuality, solely guided by the vested interests of the dominant heterosexuality, has imbibed an intolerant spirit in society. For this reason, society has become intolerant of non-normative sex; this is particularly true of Indian society, where borrowing Adrienne Rich’s conceptual term, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” is imposed by social norms and enforced through the enactment of laws by the state to this effect.

Section 377 is not merely a law against homosexuality, it is also a regulation of sexuality in general by criminalizing certain forms of sexual activity that digress from the accepted majoritarian norms. Sexuality is strictly controlled (even policed) in Indian society and its institutions (governmental, legal, educational, familial), and heteronormativity is scripted and imposed. The punitive measures indicate the hostility toward the different, those who do not conform to the norms. What is personal is treated as political. This arbitrarily encroaches upon the privacy of an individual, damaging their honor and reputation. The UNO has made an effort to ensure that this basic human right of an individual is respected and upheld by enshrining in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 a specific Article, i.e., Article 12, which states: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks” [10]. Nonetheless, homosexuality continues to be criminalized in India to this day and regulated by the dominant heteronormative society and its institutions. Furthermore, an inaccessible justice system (too expensive) and an endemic democracy deficit ensure that there is neither a legal recourse nor a process through which this violation of human rights can be adequately addressed. The continued hostility or intolerance in India toward the queer and disabled-bodied indicates the overbearing nature of the State as well as that of the dominant ableist and heteronormative Indian society’s intrusion into the personal space of peoples’ lives violating all forms of decency and human rights. An observation of this aspect reinforces the merit in the statement, “the personal is political,” [15] as far as the regulation of sexuality is concerned. What is essentially a personal matter has been conveniently turned into a political issue, as unbridled sexual conduct is seen as a threat to dominant heterosexuality, masculinity, and the structures of power. In the

regimes of the normal, queer and/or disabled human subjects are given little or less value and human dignity, ensuring a subordinate position and lesser (social and political) power [16–18].

The regulation of sexuality marginalized queer sexualities and queer individuals, which had a tremendous bearing on the sociocultural sphere of India. First, it served to cement the dominant heterosexual ableism; and second, it stigmatized and marginalized the lives of queer individuals as abnormal and criminals, forcing them to live in the margins of the society in abject poverty without any voice, political or literary, to raise their concerns, thus making them vulnerable to violence and abuse. Society is unequal to the different or the nonnormative. The cultural narratives underwent a sea change by the discriminatory politics of norms that allow humanity to be divided into two binary opposing groups: one that embodies the norms and whose identity is valued and cherished, and another that is regarded/treated as the “Other,” conveniently defined by its faults, devalued, ostracized, and discriminated, or in other terms dehumanized. Dehumanizing certain sections of society that do not conform to majoritarian norms is a clear violation of basic human rights, as it transgresses the ideals of justice, equality, and fraternity.

4. Alienation of people with disabilities

“Enforcing normalcy” is a mechanism of categorization and segregation based on an assumed difference of forms of the body. This system is arbitrary and, at its best, is a politicization of identity based on an assumed difference. Disabled people or people with disabilities such as Kanga are thus considered “deformed,” lacking in some vital aspects of the body. As a result, disabled people are considered mutilated, incomplete, or deformed humans, implying the tacit understanding that they do not deserve to enjoy the rights and privileges of human rights. Essaka Joshua says, “Deformity was most commonly conceptualized as a set of characteristics that are the opposite of beauty. Philosophers of the period usually characterize deformity negatively, and standardize it as something that exhibits irregularity, disproportion, disharmony, asymmetry, peculiarity, sickness, and decay” [19]. This esthetic philosophy plays a significant role in the stereotyping of disabled people as deviant, evil, ugly, deformed, incomplete, and so on. A negative image is created and problematic phenomena, such as marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, and so on, segregate people with disabilities creating inequalities. One basic principle of human rights is that “all are equal before the law” and “all are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination.” This principle has been clearly stated and spelled out in Article 7 of the UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Right 1948, which states that “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.” According to McRuer, the dominant ableist society deems this difference deviant and attempts to enforce its able-bodied norms onto marginalized, disabled identities. The alienation of people with disabilities from mainstream society and culture is a consequence of the effects of “compulsory able-bodiedness.”

The focus of this categorization and segregation of people with disabilities is on the visible difference between the forms of the body. For that reason, the visible difference in the body of Kanga becomes a hallmark of his identity. From an early age, he is made to feel that he is different. The opening sentence of *Trying to Grow* begins with these lines: “‘His teeth are like windows,’ said Father to the old Parsee with droopy white moustache, sitting next to us on the bus. ‘You can look through

them—see?’ Father tried to hold open my mouth” [20]. Even Brit’s (Kanga) father looked at him as an odd and bizarre creature. He is not seen as a normal person. These lines, “‘Sam, Brit is a normal person. He’s just got a problem. Can’t you see it that way?’ ‘Normal? You call everything I told you normal?’” [20] suffices to say that the system of normality and compulsory able-bodiedness is overwhelming and deeply entrenched in the somatic psyche of the ableist society. In the collective unconscious of the dominant ableist society, the concept of compulsory able-bodiedness has an overpowering influence so much so that it blurs the capacity to perceive beyond the normal. The fact that Brit (Kanga) suffers from a medical condition is not understood in its proper context; there is not even an attempt to do so. He is simply assumed to be abnormal, and this is dehumanizing. As Brit (Kanga) grows (or tries to grow), he experiences systemic discrimination at work against the disabled. Here, the systemic compulsory able-bodiedness segregates Brit (Kanga) from the able-bodied like chaff separated from the grain. As a consequence of this endemic compulsory able-bodiedness, people with disabilities such as Kanga face alienation and (human rights) abuses.

Sociologist Melvin Seeman in “On the Meaning of Alienation” [21] identified five attributes that cause alienation, viz., powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. The notion of “sexlessness” of the people with disabilities can be added to this list of attributes identified as causing alienation of disabled people. “I wasn’t male. Not to them. The magic mirrors of their minds had invented a formula: osteo = sexlessness” writes Kanga in *Trying to Grow*. Furthermore, in *Heaven on Wheels*, Kanga writes, “‘Who will marry you also — you cannot have children?’” [22]. The assumption that “osteo = sexlessness” and “cannot have children” is a failure to recognize Kanga as a human being. Kanga has revealed that for twenty-nine years, he was told by society that he was not a person. This stereotyping is not an exception but a rule cutting across the diverse cultural narratives of India. The embodiment of the disabled human body as sexless and incapable of having children is a form of oppression because it reads the disabled body sans: (i) libido, (ii) sexual desire, (iii) sexual attraction, and correspondingly (iv) human feelings/emotions. This can be termed one of the worst forms of human rights abuses. This stereotyping is disempowering and isolationist, violating the basic human rights of people with disabilities because “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law,” as stated and emphasized in Article 6 of the UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. It is interesting to note that through these myths and prejudices, zones of seclusion are created to insulate the nondisabled people from the threat of disruption of the established and institutionalized able-bodied and heterosexual norms of the ableist society. Jenny Morris in *Pride against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability* [23] argues that being kind and generous to people with disabilities by remaining within zones of seclusion offers a comforting feeling and satisfaction to the nondisabled people as regards their altruism to the disabled.

5. Somatocentrism: precarity of disabled people

The privileging of able-bodied people over the disabled-bodied in the cultural value system denotes pervasive social constructionism in the social organization of the dominant ableist society. The preoccupation with body image and the physical appearance of the body shows the extent of cultural values and meanings attached to select phenotypical traits. A hegemonic discourse confers recognizability on subjects that sufficiently conform to the norms. Marginalization, abjection, exclusion, and the attribution of cultural values and meanings on divergent bodies, whether positive or negative, is rampant and a result of somatocentrism.

In *Heaven on Wheels* Kanga writes, “I could open my door and the salesman would say, ‘Poor thing you, to be like this’. A passer-by would stop a friend who was wheeling me and exclaim, ‘Well done! This is the true spirit of service!’ A mustachioed man would block my way and stare in horrified fascination as they did at Victor Hugo’s boy who laughed” [22]. These lines reveal the extent of “violence” that colors the perception and treatment of people whose bodies do not sufficiently conform to the norms. A complex convergence of norms, myths, and prejudices prevents the divergent bodies from being recognized as worthy of respect and space in the social organization. Unfortunately, this is not an aberration but a norm, a regular feature faced by disabled people such as Kanga in everyday life, which takes a toll on their psyche. As he grows (or tries to grow), Kanga experiences the extent of his abjection, isolation, and exclusion from mainstream society, which segregates disabled bodies forcefully with violence violating his basic human rights.

According to Judith Butler, “‘precarity’ designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks ... becoming differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” [24]. The concept of the social constructionism of disability infers that disability is largely a “politically induced condition” by the dominant ableist society, which regards the disabled as deviant that is in direct conflict with the dominant social norms. In the zeal to protect its domain, the dominant ableist society induces a hostile condition to the point that it becomes suffocating for disabled people to live a normal life. The existence of disabled people such as Kanga becomes precarious. For much of his life, Kanga had to live a life on the margins of society, hassled and “robbed” of his basic human rights. The precarity of Kanga’s disabled existence can be gauged from these lines: “To be robbed is rarely painful for what you lose; it’s the thought of what has been done to you that keeps you trembling and awake into the night. Being open to plundering of your personality at almost any time lends a subtle terror to your life that lies sulking beneath the surface of your smile” [22]. Taking part in everyday life turns out to be a traumatic experience for Kanga as his body becomes a subject (and an object) of intense scrutiny and a violent ableist gaze. This treatment of Kanga by the ableist society violates the letter and spirit of Article 5 of the UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, which states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” [10].

The somatocentric perspective sees the disabled body of Kanga as a lesser human, and stigmas are attached to it. An invisible barrier crops up in every space confining or ghettoizing people with disabilities. In this way, people with disabilities are expunged from mainstream society. This renders people with disabilities invisible and silent, although they are everywhere in society. What society sees is the able-bodied or the normal body; the existence of disabled people is often taken simply as a fairytale, not a reality, and vanishes from society. Kanga quips, “... to most people, in Bombay, I was Cinderella” [22]. Kanga’s queer and disabled existence does not matter essentially because in the somatocentric worldview, disabled bodies do not matter [7].

6. Alterity: the otherness of the other

It is the able-bodied that matters, the rest are simply the “Other.” In “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,” Robert McRuer shows the pervasiveness of this notion/prejudice in society, which leaves no scope for a choice, to the point that this compulsory able-bodiedness creates disability. A web of discourses and narratives leaves no room for different forms of the body in the social organization creating a binary opposite of Us (the Self) versus Them

(the “Other”). In this dichotomy, the able-bodied is upheld as an embodiment of normality, an identity that is valued, while on the other hand, the disabled-bodied is taken as gross, defined by faults, and is devalued and discriminated as abnormal, the “Other.”

The history of disability and queer sexualities are interspersed with discourses of “Otherness.” Otherness is an endemic process of the subjection of the disabled as abject and gross. Since the 1970s, several models of disability, including the medical model, expert/professional care model, tragedy and/or charity model, moral model, economic model, and social (justice) model, have undergone revisions and changes. However, these models share a common essence: Otherness. In reinforcing the Otherness paradigm, discourses play a significant role by characterizing difference as divergent. According to McRuer [5], the dominant identities enforce their able-bodied norms onto marginalized, disabled identities, rendering the disabled-bodied as the perennial “Others,” the Otherness differing only in degree and not in essence.

Kanga experienced the process of the subjection of queer and disabled-bodied people in its severest form due to the severity of his deformity and queer sexuality. Kanga says that his deformity reduced him into “four feet nothingness” and photos made him “look like a demon” [22]. In *Heaven on Wheels*, he writes, “To be gay, in India, was to surrender your claim to be a man, to slide into self-parody of make-up and earrings, neither of which quite tempted me.... The fact that I couldn’t walk automatically disqualified me, in the Indian mind, from marriage – or, for that matter, any romantic relationship” [22]. Kanga is twice marginalized because of his disability and queer sexuality. However, he is unabashedly proud of his disabled and queer identity. Kanga remarks that India is essentially an “uncomprehending culture” of teratophobia and homophobia [22]. There exists a heightened version of normality in the Indian sociocultural context, and Kanga challenges this orthodoxy by accepting his disabled body and homosexuality as normal. Kanga can comprehend the existence of an alternative system that exists outside of the purview of normality and embraces it wholeheartedly. Ableism is a denial of an alternative system, or for that matter, alternative bodies and sexualities. When Kanga quipped, “The good thing was, I was at everyone’s crotch-level getting the best view of my life” [20], what he meant was that his deformity and disability bestowed him the ability or power to see and comprehend the world in different, often multiple, and alternate perspectives. It is, however, a different story that the dominant ableist society could neither see nor comprehend the world as a multiplicity of forms and systems used as they were to a system of a unidimensional model. The Otherness of the Other is NOT a consequence of an essential difference of the Other, but an outcome of a rigid unidimensional point of view of the ableist society violating Article 1 of the UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood” [10].

7. Conclusion

Discourses of disability, (queer) sexuality, and human rights issues related to queer and/or disabled people have remained neglected in literary narratives. Kanga’s narrative of his lived experience, the experience of living inside a disabled body, and that of his experience of queer sexuality, is a unique expression of reality. He has shed light on the human complexities, the myths and assumptions that construct disability, the imposition of heteronormativity, and the rampant human rights abuses that the disabled face in everyday life. In his literary narrative,

disability and queer sexuality are at the center of the discourse. In *Trying to Grow* and *Heaven on Wheels*, he takes the readers on a detour of his life, presenting the lived experiences of his disabled and queer existence. In the process, Kanga challenges the myth of sexlessness of disabled people, decries the notion that the disabled are devoid of human emotions/feelings, and critiques the pervasiveness of the “Othering” process that abjects and abuses the human rights of people with disability. Kanga has affirmed the experiences of disability and queer sexuality, paving the way for a kind of disability and queer pride. Using a humorous language in his literary narrative, he has revisited and resisted discourses that present a prejudiced way of thinking and social practices as well as the rigidity and oppressiveness of normal subject positions. His writings gain an added significance because he shows that the novel (literature in general), as an important cultural form, plays a crucial role in normalizing discourses about what counts as a normal human being and how it shapes the popular perceptions and representations of the queer and/or disabled.

Normalizing discourse like “compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality” is entertained and superimposed by the ableist society upon the queer and/or disabled individuals in society like Kanga. In his writings, Kanga has shed light on the everyday struggles of queer and/or disabled individuals, and the rampant human rights abuses suffered by them. Kanga’s narratives of the lived experiences of queer and/or disabled existence form a space–time continuum as the silences and gaps in mainstream literary and other cultural narratives are filled with liminal voices of the queer and/or disabled. Kanga reconciles the dominant ableist society with the reality of queer and/or disabled existence. Denied space in society, the queer and/or disabled individual’s life is a story of the struggle for survival of the weakest and the marginalized in an unequal and malevolent world. Kanga challenges the dominant discourses of norms and normality in his narratives to provide an objective perspective to the rarely and seldom understood issues of queer sexuality and disability and gives a new hope to the most marginalized and deprived section of society in terms of human rights. His writings explore (and expose) the culture of “normal” and question the structural barriers in the social organization that Others and dehumanizes the disabled people. Kanga’s writings are not just any regular narrative on disability but are a considered and authentic voice from marginalized people with disabilities and queer sexualities. By questioning the myths, assumptions, and discourses of the ableist society, he has sought to build an equal and just society that is inclusive of different and diverse members. He situates the queer/disabled existence as the “new normal” in society.

Kanga, through the medium of literature, has made it clear that the much vaunted UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 has remained simply a declaration (in the paper) and not a practice (it has been practiced neither in letter nor spirit) as far as the rights and privileges of the disabled and the queer people are concerned, at least in the sociocultural and political narratives and practices in India. The human rights of queer and/or disabled people are violated with impunity, as normalizing discourses such as compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality regulate discrimination and oppression as normal and receive it as an accepted practice. The queer and/or disabled people are treated as objects to be judged, segregated, discriminated against, and abjected by those able to exercise power insofar as the discursive practices, cultural narratives, and political will of India are concerned. Furthermore, what can be called the “democracy deficit” in India acts as a stumbling block toward legal, political, social, and cultural remedies in the struggle for the basic human rights by queer and/or disabled people, as they are generally poor, marginalized, and powerless. With the rise of disability studies and queer sexuality studies in the 1960s and 1970s, there has come about some

perceptible change in the treatment of queer and/or disabled people, especially in Western societies; even then, they are stuck in “governmentality,” borrowing Foucault’s terminology, as it sees/perceives queer sexuality and disability as a “problem” displaying the prevalent attitudes toward queer and/or disabled people. In such a scenario, it becomes increasingly evident that the UNO’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 is ostensibly out of tune with the change of times as it has failed to incorporate and guarantee the human rights of the queer and/or disabled people through its various Articles in unambiguous terms.

Author details

Deepak Basumatary
Department of English, Kokrajhar Government College (Gauhati University),
Assam, India

*Address all correspondence to: dbjustlikethatonly@gmail.com

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