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One Little Finger by Malini Chib, New Delhi: Sage, 2011, pp. 198.

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One Little Finger is the autobiography of Malini Chib. Aptly titled, the book has been entirely typed by Malini using only her little finger. Born in 1966, Malini suffered from anoxia at the time of birth. This resulted in her developing a disabling condition that was eventually diagnosed as cerebral palsy. The doctor feared that she would not survive for more than a few days. But she survived. The spirit of survival, of life, is visible in the experiences that she shares throughout the book. In fact, just from this first description, Malini makes it apparent that this is a story of living, not with remorse, self pity or compromise, but with spirit, determination, and resilience. Through Malini's story, we can learn the power of acceptance of one's condition and how it enables one to live to one's fullest.

It was this acceptance of reality by Malini's parents that led them to decide the course of education for young Malini. In the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, when understanding of special education was limited in India, they decided to sacrifice a comfortable life in India and shift abroad where Malini was tested to have an above average intelligence level. Even today, the generic labelling of all children with neurological, motor and psychological disorders as 'mad' is what renders them uneducable. In other words, it is less their disability but more the social stigma arising out of a lack of understanding that makes one socially misfit.

Malini argues that the birth of a second child brings normalcy to a family where the first born is 'special'. However, she also points out that handling two children proved to be a challenge for her parents. It must also be added that parenting a child with special needs can be very consuming of time and energy. While in the case of Malini and her brother Nikhilesh, this did not seem to be a problem, there are cases of strained relationships between parents, between siblings and sometimes, a feeling of being neglected experienced by at least one of the children.

Malini also focuses a great deal on describing the setting up of special schools for children with difficulties. The fact that her family was well connected and had the requisite connections to gather the resources to set up a school is significant. However, this was significant in Malini's upbringing, having increased her mother's understanding of special education tremendously. Her subsequent experiences in a boarding school led her to be able to pursue her graduation. The years at school were difficult but also helped her to become independent and gain confidence.

Her experiences in school and college point towards the significant role that peers play in the growth of a person with disability. The normalcy of college life was experienced by being called to the principal's office, communicating with friends despite limitations of speech, and the patience that they displayed. Not being able to find romance when boys wanted to date 'normal' girls rather than one with disability, sitting alone when everyone else was dancing and not being able to access the libraries, were some of the challenges faced that brought back the reality of living with disability.

Her subsequent life at Oxford acquainted her with the stark contrast that existed between lives of people with disabilities abroad and in India. In India, even today, it is rare to see people with disabilities in the public sphere. She points out that part of this is because of lack of access. Parks, public transports, and many public buildings are still to be disabled friendly. Even our roads are not built for people who use wheelchairs to 'walk'. All of this prompted her to work more actively for the rights of people with disabilities as well as towards increased inclusion of people with disabilities in the mainstream. Subsequently, she managed to get a job and is today a writer, and an activist. She is vocal about the rights of people, including those who have disabilities.

Malini's journey, documented in first person in the book, is an important source of learning of the spirit of a person living with disability. One who is 'a person' before being 'a disabled'. Malini has a fulfilling life. Her story challenges reducing persons with disabilities to their immediate identities of being visibly disabled. At the same time it raises several important questions. Would she have survived had she been born into a family that was less educated? Financially or socially underprivileged? What course would her life had taken if her family had not relocated during her infancy? Or she had not been privileged to receive education? In her story, education appears to be an empowering tool, despite the difficulties posed by lack of adequate infrastructure. However, for many with overt disabilities, education is not only inaccessible, but also a traumatic experience. This points towards the need for attitudinal changes along with issues of access.