



## Embracing the positivity: Analysis of Nandhika Nambi's *Unbroken*

**Amrutha Modcy**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Holy Cross Institute of Management and Technology, Calicut, India  
Email – [ammumodcy@gmail.com](mailto:ammumodcy@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *Disability is often considered a burden and abnormal in the society's point of view. The disabled people thus faces the fear of being rejected in the world he/ she is boen into. This fear of abnormality and rejection leads them to a state of psychological stress and embraces the negativity as reality. Children's literary works in the contemporary era and the critical disability studies attempts to embrace the positivities and leave the negatives of being the disabled to a state of being differently abled. The children's literary works discusses on the psychological trauma faced by the disabled people dues to the fear of rejection and opens a new world of embracing the reality with positivity.*

**Key Words:** *disability, psychology, positive psychology, idenity crises, trauma, normalising.*

Disability is a state of being where the individual undergoes a traumatic experience of not being normal like the other human beings. The trauma of disability affects the most to a person who become disabled due to some unfortunate occurrences which leads then to a different existence, like a transformation from fully abled to being disabled. The traumatic experience of the person leads them to a depressed state of losing hopes in life and thereby feeling detached from the positive aspects of life.

Psychological imbalances faced by these people will be more depressing for them as they won't be able to adjust to the drastic changes they have been suddenly introduced towards. The psychological studies about the experiences of these people have exhibited their broken ray of hope and difficulty to accept the reality. This situation in turn makes them detached from every positive aspect of life and attaching every events to the negativities. The people with such experiences need special care to overcome the negativities.

Positive psychology is one of the recent streams of psychological study that deal with aspects of shifting the focus from the negativities to the positivity through various methodologies. The main claims of positive psychology are the need for every individual to accept the positivity and leave behind the negativities. These positive traits they advocate are happiness, care, concern etc which might have been lost in a person's life due to their experiences in life.

Children's literature was a genre of literature which was looked upon for leisurely readings but in the recent times the genre has undergone a shift in the subject matter of interest. The genre began discussing upon various aspects of psycho-social importance through the stories. The genre is found to have incorporated various aspects of comic and serious elements to bring forth a discussion that can inspire the children from very young age. The subject matters discussed in the recent children's literary works included topics on ecology, disability, gender stereotypes etc which were not much discussed in the children's literary works. One such important aspect of discussion was on disability, which opens a new door of understanding and retrospective learning in the children's world.

Many writers of children's books had begun discussing on disability in their works with the aim of educating the children's about a concept of social importance. Nandhika Nambi, children's literary author, chose to discuss about the unexpected disability and its impact on the mind and life of a child through her work *Unbroken*. The work discusses about the life of a girl who became disabled due to an accident and how she has detached herself from leading a normal life. Akriti is portrayed as a teenage girl who has started feeling detached from happiness in life after her accident.



Akriti is found to have lost the happiness in life and had started looking at the negative aspects of life leaving behind the positive elements. Being disabled was not her normal for her as the stage in her life was a result of an accident and because of the same reason she feels detached from every aspect in her life even her family and friends. She is found to have developed a world of her own where she lives with the frustrations and depression of not being able to lead a normal life. She is found to have developed a sense of disliking towards everything in her life. Akriti is completely closed off to the person she was before and takes the people who care for her for granted. To actually care for someone is a painful thing to her, so a great way of avoiding future pain is detaching herself from everything that matters. This evidently describes the need for her to find the positivity's in life and positive psychology is that stream of study focuses on the positive events and influences in life, including positive experiences, states and institutions. Positive psychology spends much of its time thinking about topics like character strengths, optimism, life satisfaction, happiness, wellbeing, gratitude, compassion (as well as self-compassion), self-esteem and self-confidence, hope, and elevation.

Akriti is sarcastic and spews out hate on the world unable to come to terms with her condition. She is mean and cruel, especially to people, who are sympathetic to her. To appear "unbroken", Akriti creates a fortress around her: loud music on ipod, overeating, strong opinions, harsh words, sleep and avoidance. Her room on the first floor of her home and her seat on the last desk in her class as spatial metaphors of emotional distance and disconnect from all around her.

"He put the plate on the bedside table. It was a rule. I hated people putting it on my lap or handing it to me, and no one dared to do it after the riot I created the first time around. Not at home and not even at school." (10)

Richly interwoven is the underlined message is that physical disability constrains but it is attitudinal disability that cripples. While unwavering patience and unflinching love of family are important in overthrowing these barriers, participation too is deemed important as it was impossible to get one's arms around someone in a wheelchair unless they moved forward cooperatively.

Positive psychology advocates that happiness is present-oriented, rooted in the moment, while meaningfulness is more focused on the past and future and how they link to the present; this finding suggests that you can focus on the present to increase your happiness, but you might consider thinking more about your past and future to find meaning. Akriti is found to have lost the importance of living in the present and accept the reality to create meaning in her life. She could have been a normal grumpy teenager but the inability to do the simplest of things for herself, and having to depend on others, makes her angry.

Akriti's session with the psychiatrist makes her feel restless as she is found to have developed anger in the concept of visiting a doctor for help. Her ideals of life would have undergone a drastic question due to the visit but she finds it rather helpful in the end. But more than the psychologist the person who helped her revive her thought about life was a young girl Priya who had visited Akriti's house. Priya had been silent but gave Akriti a space to open up on her experience of accident which Akriti was reluctant to speak about. Priya's statement of ISnt being able to do everything from chair ability startles Akriti about all the thoughts and negativities she had accepted as reality. This statement changes Akriti's look out about life and her need to free herself from the burden.

Akriti's had never given her parents an opportunity to openly talk about the changes she has undergone after the accident. But since her visit to her psychologist her mother opens up about how Akriti has distanced herself from happiness which in turn denies her the positivity's and abilities she had within her. The doctor is found to be a facilitator for Akriti to open up and embrace her life with fullness. He discusses about the five stages of grief and makes her realize her mistakes. He clearly states the reason for Akriti's anger towards life as "she always wanted to have control in life....Opening up to people makes you feel weak. You make no effort to be happy because you think you won't have as much of it as the rest of the world" (154).

The goals of positive psychology are to positively impact the client's life—this goal is above all others, and all others feed indirectly into this goal. The main goal of coaching is to improve the client's life. It increases the client's experience of positive emotions and help clients identify and develop their strengths and unique talents. Thus cultivate the client's sense of happiness and wellbeing through helping the client build and maintain healthy, positive relationships with others.



Akriti showcases the changes in her attitude towards life through her acceptance of reality as being able to follow her strengths devoid of the disability. She is found to have accepted her reality through the words of her doctor and in turn changes her responses towards her family. She seems to have opened up her world to her family and starts her sketching to uplift her mood rather as an escape mechanism.

Her acceptance of the reality helps her search for happiness in her life and move towards meaningfulness. The positive psychological sessions with her doctor helps her view life from a different perspective. Her frustrations towards the actions of her brother is found to be undergone a drastic change. She is found to live life to the fullest and found her brother to be her inspiration. The note she received from Ranjith's room of being somebody to offer help for others than being a trouble helped her receive justifications for his actions and inspiration to use the opportunity.

She is clearly found to have achieved the state of being encouraged to accept the life with happiness and be an inspiration for others. The positive thoughts thrown upon her by the young girl of twelve years and her brother's view of life helped her embrace the happiness. This act of embracing positivity helped her overcome the fear of rejection and utilise the opportunities without the fear of being broken.

Thus *Unbroken* by Nandhika Nambi is thus a full pack of disability, empowerment denial and acceptance. The book portrays the self-centred view of Akriti's disabled life struggle and the complexities of life developed due to the same. The depiction of the disability and the psyche of the person with disability, the fear of being not accepted as normal, linger throughout the work. Akriti's rebellious independence and gritty refusal to take help from anyone, leads to her unhappy existence and she uses her disability to her advantage at right junctures because it makes her feel "empowered". The changes in her attitude to life help her overcome the rejection and anger towards every person and opportunity in her life. The positive approach helps her fight with her reality and accept life to the fullest. Thus, positive psychology and its methodology is always subject to influences by new creative ideas, pressing human needs, and changing circumstances.

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