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## **Broken Bodies, Breaking Boundaries: Representations of Bodies with Disabilities in Sri Lankan English Literature**

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Isuru Ayeshmantha Rathnayake, works in the capacity of an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of English, the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka from where he also holds a BA (Honours) in English Studies. Being a visually challenged person himself, his research examines the intersections of disability studies, critical pedagogy and South Asian Literature.

### Abstract

This study critically interrogates the representations of bodies with disabilities in Sri Lankan English novels as sites of immense possibilities that provide an in-depth engagement with hegemonic constructions/ normative readings of “traditional” Sri Lankan/South Asian identities. Studies on Sri Lankan English literature have analysed portrayals of gender, ethnic and racial identities, creating a huge lacuna in research that explores its depiction of disabilities. Thus, this study aims to critically examine the representations of bodies with disabilities in the Sri Lankan English novels, *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje and *The Road from Elephant Pass* by Nihal de Silva to argue that, such bodies can be marked as new epistemic spaces where the hegemonic understandings of gender, ethnicity and knowledge are challenged, demanding in that process a re-negotiation of the traditional identity markers that are considered unassailable. The study critically analyses the two selected novels by drawing on theories on critical disability and intersectionality to contend that, disability as an identity marker that cuts across different social identities is crucial to interrogate the multi-layered experiences uniquely felt by South Asian countries due to their common struggles such as ethnic crisis, religious fundamentalism and economic disparities. Using the two novels, this study points out that bodies with disabilities can be employed as alternative grounds where struggles such as continuing western influence in the production of knowledge, the impact of hegemonic religious beliefs, persistent stereotyping of gender identities can be contested: a third space similar to what Homi K. Bhabha describes in his theory of hybridity. Moreover, the study explores the performance/ pretence of disability with special reference to the novel *The Road from Elephant Pass* to portray the disabled body as an agent of empowerment thereby recasting disability in a more positive light. Therefore, this study concludes that bodies with disabilities or the broken bodies can be observed as bodies as breaking boundaries, and therefore of immense possibilities that can be employed by South Asian authors in depicting the unique experiences of living in South Asia to a global audience.

**Keywords:** Bodies with disabilities, identity politics, South Asia, Sri Lankan English literature, alternate space.

