



ARUNIMA SINHA'S *BORN AGAIN ON THE MOUNTAIN* AS A MILESTONE OF MENTAL HEALTH: AMPUTATION OF PERIL AND ASCENDING TO TRIUMPH WITH ENDURANCE

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Abstract

*The paper examines Arunima Sinha's *Born Again on the Mountain* (2014) and sheds light on the theme of mental health and its significance to her journey of overcoming trauma and achieving extraordinary rewards. Sinha faced a train accident in 2011 in which she was severely injured. Both of her legs were damaged, especially the left one. Consequently, she lost her left leg because of the accident. Despite her amputated status, she achieved her incredible goal, Mount Everest, in 2013. She made a record of the world's first female amputee Everest achiever. Her story, a journey from trauma to triumph, serves as a case study to reflect how mental strength can be cultivated to face and fight against physical, social, and emotional upheavals. The life story of Arunima Sinha shows how mental health can be developed to handle all kinds of struggles and challenges. In the light of psychological and disability studies with postcolonial context, this paper explores her ability to deal with her trauma in rebuilding the confidence along with recovery and success. It delves into coping instruments, her journey toward self-empowerment, and the role of goal-setting in recovering physically and mentally. The study concludes that her story is a powerful illustration of the resolute spirit of human mind and its ability to cope with unfavorable conditions and triumph over adversity for survival.*

Keywords

Amputation, Disability, Mental Health, Postcolonial, Trauma, Survival, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and it is significant to overall health, wellness, and quality of life in a human's life. Mental health affects individuals' lives, as their feelings, behaviours, actions, reactions, attitudes, and approaches depend on their mental well-being or status; it influences how people look at hardships or adverse circumstances in their lives and respond to them. Mental health plays a significant and decisive role in a human's life. For example, in critical cases, fatal diseases, severe physical injuries, sufferings, or trauma; mental health plays a decisive or pivotal role in determining whether an individual paws in negativity and surrenders to misery or embraces a positive mindset and restarts their life with new enthusiasm and purpose. Arunima Sinha's life account, *Born Again on the Mountain*, is one of the best examples that show the human capacity or mental ability to overcome harsh conditions.

Medically, 'amputation' refers to the surgical removal of a deadly body part to save someone's life. Symbolically, it represents the act or process of eliminating everything harmful, dangerous, or toxic to one's well-being. In literature, it often signifies overcoming challenges or conquering obstacles, reflecting themes of sacrifice, resilience, and transformation. Both literally and metaphorically, 'amputation of peril' is represented in Arunima Sinha's life story as her left limb was amputated through a medical operation to save her life from the risk of a deadly



infection. In this case, amputation marks the actual removal of the threat or peril to her life. Metaphorically, 'amputation of peril' aligns with themes of resilience, overcoming challenges, and transformation that are reflected in Sinha's story. The phrase 'amputation of peril' signifies her act of overcoming distressing and life-threatening challenges brought by the train mishap. She restored her confidence and believed that her amputation was not her weakness. She decided not to let her amputation or so-called physical disability define her future, and instead, she chose mountaineering or Everest expeditions to pursue incredible goals. It reflects her strong mental status and victory over adversity. 'Amputation of peril' also encapsulates her mental strength or potential in 'removing' the doubts, fears, societal perceptions and prejudices that often surround disabled people. Arunima Sinha is redefining not only her identity by embracing her artificial limb and various challenges and winning Everest but also helping society to upgrade the vision to look at disability. She amputated and crossed not just physical peril but also the psychological and societal obstacles that could have held her back.

Arunima Sinha is a prominent figure in the world scenario. She hails from Uttar Pradesh, India. She has been a national level volleyball player. She astonishes the globe with her incredible achievement by registering her remarkable victory over Mount Everest despite her amputee or disabled state. She was honoured with Padma Shri, the most prestigious award. Sinha has depicted her challenging and inspiring life journey in the book *Born Again on the Mountain*. Mental health plays a key role in her journey of overcoming challenges and achieving incredible goals. Her life account reflects her journey from trauma to triumph and provides a unique lens or makes it an important study for understanding mental health in the context of disability, women with disability, resilience, social norms, perceptions, stigma, personal tragedy and goal-oriented recovery. Her story sheds light on how mental strength can be nurtured to handle physical, emotional and social problems or stresses and mental upheavals. Her narrative reflects transformative power of hope, believe, confidence, resilience, determination, and mental well-being or mental power.

This paper focuses on the role of mental health and resilience in Sinha's journey, investigating how she dealt with her trauma and transformed it into a narrative of empowerment. By integrating concepts or ideas from psychology, disability and postcolonial studies, the research delves the theme and portrayal of the mental health in Sinha's life account, *Born Again on the Mountain* focusing on the significant aspects like coping with trauma and physical disability, the role of societal perceptions or norms in shaping mental health and the psychological framework or construction of goal-setting and self-actualization.

Portrayal of Mental Health:

Born Again on the Mountain is a testament to how one can overcome severe challenges and unpredictable odds of life with the help of mental strength. Arunima Sinha, the central character of the story, accepted and confronted challenges bravely with a strong mindset in her life and made her unforgettable position in the world scenario by winning Mount Everest in 2013. The book reflects Sinha's mental strength and potential. In 2011, she faced a life-changing train accident. She was thrown out of the Padmawati Express, a Delhi-bound moving train, by some thieves while she was confronting them all alone against her gold chain snatching. When Sinha was flung out of the train, the moment she collided with another running train on the adjacent track. The impact tossed her back toward the same train on which she was travelling before, and her condition was like a ping-pong ball before being pulled down near the rail track. Despite trying, her left leg fell on the track and was severely injured by the passing train. She lay there with severe injuries in a pitiable condition in the accident spot for several hours overnight and struggled to survive. The condition of her left leg was very miserable; as a result, the foot was operated on and amputated



without anaesthesia and it was so painful. Arunima Sinha says, "...The surgery was more painful than I had imagined..." (Sinha, BAM, 37). She further added, "It took me time to adjust this 'new pain'. To keep my mind engaged, I kept talking to myself throughout the procedure. Every now and then I would let out a silent scream, whenever the knife slit my skin open or when the doctors stitched the wounds" (Sinha, BAM, 37). This reflects her healthy mental condition.

The terrible train mishap affected Arunima Sinha's life massively; she endured utmost inner and outer pain and struggle. However, also before this, her life was not peaceful, as her father's mysterious death, her brother's murder, the police arresting her mother and sister on false charges, etc., tormented her. But the train accident added new challenges to her life. Amongst all difficulties, instead of giving up, she reacted positively through a challenging journey to Everest. She empowers herself by fighting and winning adversity in her life. Sinha's decision to climb Mount Everest symbolizes an unusual triumph over physical, psychological, and societal barriers. She asserts, "Remember, none can defeat you until you concede. Yes, occasional failures will test you but keep trying. Some door of opportunity will certainly open" (Sinha, BAM, 170).

Trauma and Recovery through Mental Heroism:

Mental heroism highlights the strength and ability of an individual's spirit to endure and flourish. It refers to the person's capacity and capability to show exceptional or extraordinary courage, resilience, and determination against fears, psychological and emotional challenges, and adversity. Mental heroism is apparent in Arunima Sinha's journey. For instance, her decision and determination to climb Everest after losing a leg and her victory over several challenges reflect mental heroism.

Arunima Sinha's life story opens with a depiction of her dreadful train accident. She says, "I WAS LYING BETWEEN TWO RAIL TRACKS" (Sinha, BAM, 1). She further says, "...My body was soaked in my own blood. My left leg had been run over by the train, the right was battered, with numerous broken bones...Every part of my body was in agony..." (Sinha, BAM, 1-2). All alone on that dark night with an injured and deteriorating bodily condition, Sinha was struggling to survive near the railway track. The cost she paid due to this incident is the loss of her left leg. She lay there the entire night until a villager, Pintu Kashyap, noticed her. He saw her in the morning and helped. After the accident, Sinha confronted significant emotional distress, including societal stigma, self-doubt, and inner and outer conflict. As Sinha says, "...to jumping off the train in an attempt to commit suicide...not being a national-level player...Everyday new charges would be levelled against me..." (Sinha, BAM, 74). She added, "I was terribly hurt with all these accusations and started losing hope" (Sinha, BAM, 75). She further says, "A senior police official alleged that my family and I were trying to gain sympathy by hyping the tragedy..." (Sinha, BAM, 77). She suffered excessive mental stress.

The book describes her journey of challenges, her new reality, and her mental and psychological journey. It shows her ability to direct or divert her pain into determination, highlighting the significance of mental resilience against hardships. Arunima Sinha's journey begins with the terrible train mishap that led to the amputation of her left leg, which could have left many people in dejection and depression but instead became the initial step, or starting point, of her transformation. Her decision to climb Everest was not just a physical challenge, but it was also a mental upheaval. The mental discipline, willpower, and courage required to undertake such a formidable goal reflect Sinha's inner strength and optimistic attitude. Sinha claims, "Since that fateful night when I was pushed from a moving train by some greedy wolves, nothing had been easy for me... have had to always fight our way for everything. My climb till this point too hadn't been easy. I had given everything for this moment so that I could live my dream...A world record awaited me" (*Born Again on the Mountain* 190). Sinha depicts how she pushed past her doubts,



fears, and physical limitations by upholding a positive attitude. Possibly, she might be frustrated sometimes due to physical and mental suffering caused by her injury, disabled status, self-doubt, and societal stigma, but later she learned to handle the adverse situations in her life with an unwavering mind and attitude. She depicts, “Stung by the accusations that were hurled at me, I was now more determined than ever before to prove myself. The country knew me as a victim. I wanted them to now know me as a winner” (Sinha, BAM, 92). It reflects her conscious and determined decision to reshape her trauma as a test rather than hindrances. She proclaims, “I firmly believe that if you have set your mind to achieve something, you should pursue it. Nothing is impossible for a truly determined person...” (Sinha, BAM, 194)

Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth:

Psychological resilience, defined as the ability to adapt in the face of adversity, proved important to Arunima Sinha's recovery. There was much psychological distress she was facing due to her accident. The trauma of losing a limb was compounded by societal stigma, as she faced discrimination, criticism, and her own and others doubts about her capabilities. Sinha says, “I wanted to answer such criticism by doing something big enough not just to silence my critics but to set at rest my own doubts about my ability... Ultimately I wanted to climb the Everest to believe in myself again” (Sinha, BAM, 103). It is observed that during rigorous mountaineering journey, her mind-body co-ordination played a significant role in building her resilience as she says, “I had overcome obstacles in a route that other team members had found difficult to cross” (Sinha, BAM, 109). She asserts, “Indeed, a strong-willed person can overcome anything” (Sinha, BAM, 109). Sinha reflects that how her defective body coordinated with her healthy mind and functions well than the so-called abled body. She took the highly dangerous path to reach her destination during mountaineering training while the other abled members skipped that route because of the fear of high risk. Her action mirrors the harmonization of her mind, body, and thoughts even in extreme conditions, like facing icy cold harsh winds, blue ice—the very slippery ice, heavy bleeding from her stump, etc. She says, “I wouldn't leave without a fight” (Sinha, BAM, 184). She was focused and determined toward her goal despite the challenges. She claims, “Staying mentally healthy is one of the keys to success here-where nature tests your resolve, your ability to stay focused at every step” (Sinha, BAM, 177-178). Sinha steers her pain into a meaningful and purposeful goal of ascending Mount Everest, transformed her mental upheavals into a source of motivation. She proclaims, “...I now had something to look forward to-a mission, a goal, a reason to dream. It was not going to be easy. But, throughout my life nothing had come easy...I planned to test myself against a mountain” (Sinha, BAM, 81). Her words reverberate or resonate with the psychological theory of posttraumatic growth proposed by Tedeschi and Calhoun, which describes how persons develop positive changes through the struggle with traumatic events. As www.sciencedirect.com writes, “Posttraumatic growth develops as a result of the struggle with traumatic life events, the same type of events that are known to produce negative responses in many people...” (Calhoun, 01) The ‘posttraumatic growth’ is central to Sinha's story. Her resilience, perseverance, and determination toward her goal show this process, where trauma, when harmonized with inner strength, nurtures personal growth, self-discovery, and transformation.

Goal-Setting, Mental Strength and Self-Actualization:

A recurring theme, or the central idea, in *Born Again on the Mountain* is that having a purpose or aim can change one's view or outlook on life. For Arunima Sinha, her goal of scaling Mount Everest gave her life renewed meaning. It reflects how goal-setting gives her mental stability, strength and peace and keeps her focused despite several challenges. She says, “No female amputee had succeeded before. It was both a challenge and an opportunity” (Sinha, BAM, 81).



Sinha further proclaims, “In my mind I had already begun to steel myself for taming Everest” (Sinha, BAM, 83). Her focus on accomplishing goals aligned with an optimistic approach helped her overcome the obstacles that she faced. She says, “...For me...no matter what happened, the glass was always half full. The effort was always on how to fill up the glass entirely. We should always live in hope. (Sinha, BAM, 81).

Arunima Sinha’s life account aligns with Edwin Locke and Gary Latham’s Goal-Setting Theory, as it (the story) reflects her clarity and commitment toward specific challenging task, which have significant aspects of the theory. It is central to the theory that clear, specific and difficult or challenging goals motivate individuals and enhance performance or drive superior performance. As, “*med.stanford.edu* writes, “The goal–performance relationship is strongest when people are committed to their goals” (Locke, 707). Arunima Sinha, after losing her left leg, set a clear, difficult, or challenging goal to climb Mount Everest that echoes the theory. She depicts one of the incidents that she experiences during mountaineering training or a journey that mirrors Locke Latham’s goal-setting concept. Sinha says, “I told myself that I needed to improve on my timing. It was true that I suffered from a handicap but then I wasn’t here to gain sympathy. I was here to accomplish a mission... Only the truly committed pass the challenges that come one’s way here. I kept motivating myself...It helped... the dedication bore fruit.” (Sinha, BAM, 112). Similarly, she highlights another incident that reflects the significant aspects of the theory, as during her Everest expedition, she was in a critical situation, but still, she held her grip on her clear and focused goal and ultimately conquered the Everest mission. She says, “...despite crampons hindering my movement and making it risky too...I continued to walk (186). She further asserts, “This effort aggravated the bleeding in my legs. I was really in bad shape and was still trying to increase my speed...” (Sinha, BAM, 186). She added, “I was so exhausted...moving like a drunkard. There was ice all around me and over me, on and inside my jacket... I was losing energy fast. Ramlal and Kanta... thought I wouldn’t survive. They wanted me to come down. ‘The record is still going to be yours. No female amputee has come even this far,’ they said” (Sinha, BAM, 186-187). Like Ramlal and Kanta, another mountaineer, Sattu also said “‘Arunima, return now.’...” (Sinha, BAM, 187). Even her Sherpa advises her to quit the mission after seeing her deteriorating condition. But she did not accept his advice and chose to go ahead to embrace her goal. She depicts, “My Sherpa said I must quit. But I knew that there was no going back from this point... my Sherpa first warned me about the depleting oxygen levels and suggested-yet again-that I quit... I could sense that my condition was deteriorating badly (Sinha, BAM, 188). Thus, it is obvious that whatever the difficulties Arunima was going through she was only thinking and focusing about her target. She neglects the danger or peril and Sherpa’s warning, and pushed or motivated herself towards the goal. When Sherpa realized that she is not going to stop, he informed the agency leader. Arunima Sinha says, “Having failed to persuade me... inform my agency leader. ‘If she doesn’t quit now, she will die,’ I heard him say on his wireless talkie” (Sinha, BAM, 188). Sinha states that Sherpa was frustrated because she refused to “follow his warning” (189), and he also shouted at her. Even her agency leader tried to convince her “on a satellite phone” (189) by saying, “‘Arunima, you have already posted a world record; please come back’” (Sinha, BAM, 189). Arunima further depicts “This was something rare-a female amputee pushing on, against everyone’s advice” (Sinha, BAM, 189). It is apparent though Arunima has already made the record but her mission was to win the Everest Expedition. Therefore, she was not ready to leave the mission. It reflects her commitment, focused goal, determination and ability to take risk. Her action shows that she was even more focused or determined even in most difficult phase or challenging situation to achieve her goal, to reach on top or summit point of the Mount Everest. Sinha says, “I PUSHED FORWARD EVEN AS MY SHERPA KEPT INSISTING that I return. I remember telling him that if he wanted to return he could do so but there was no way I



was going back now...” (Sinha, BAM, 191). She declares that “What happens after that doesn’t matter” (Sinha, BAM, 191) but she is not going to return without completing her mission. It reflects that her mind already won it and just she was needed to prove her victory through registering physically. With her courageous, committed or determined efforts she crosses every risky zone or path and finally astonishes the world by achieving her specific goal. She says, “I had lived this moment so many times in my mind that I didn’t have to be told that finally, I had arrived” (Sinha, BAM, 192). She added “At 10.55 a.m. on 21 May 2013, I was on top of the world” (Sinha, BAM, 192). She further says, “...I looked around for a pole to hoist my country’s flag...I held my flag and raised both my hands high up to symbolically register my country’s record” (Sinha, BAM, 192). Sinha’s story reflects courage, motivation, determination, perseverance, and achievement. Her aim of ascending Mount Everest became both a literal and metaphorical peak of success.

It is observed that Sinha became the best version of herself by surmounting challenges which aligns with Abraham Maslow’s concept of self-actualization. As *www.thoughtco.com* writes, “Self-actualization, to Maslow, is the ability to become the best version of oneself.” Scaling Mount Everest was not just a physical success for her, it also reflects her mental well-being, determination, and inner growth, signifies her complete personal fulfillment or self-actualization. Her narrative shows how structured goal-setting can serve as a therapeutic tool for rebuilding self-confidence and agency.

Disability in Postcolonial Context: Societal Perception:

Arunima Sinha highlights the Indian mentality and attitudes toward disability in her life narrative. She was subjected to pity, misfortune and skepticism because of her physical condition which initially upset her. She depicts “I would meet women who would express sympathy, bemoan my leg loss, feel sorry for me and wonder aloud about how I was going to spend the rest of my life” (Sinha, BAM, 90). Her story emphasizes how societal norms and perceptions, of disability blend with gender, as she confronted additional obstructions as a woman with a disability. She depicts, “The few people to whom I had confided my plans of scaling the Everest had described me as ‘mad’. They thought that I had lost my mind” (Sinha, BAM, 90). It reflects the Indian societal perceptions associated with disability as disabled are considered weak, passive and dependent. As *www.egyankosh.ac.in* says, “The majority of women with disabilities in India suffer the triple discrimination of being female, being disabled and being poor” (Addlakha, 428). Arunima highlights the discriminatory attitude toward the disabled in the field of mountaineering training courses, as initially the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM) denied her admission. She writes, shocked to know “that NIM doesn’t admit handicapped people. The principal said they have never trained a handicapped person and cited rules that prohibit them from training people with disability” (Sinha, BAM, 113). Sinha, being a woman with disability strongly opposes the discriminatory approach toward abled and disabled body and resisted societal norms and expectation by transcending the parameter of ability and disability.

In a postcolonial and disability context, her journey can be seen as a form of resistance against colonial, patriarchal, ableist, and societal attitudes that marginalize people with disabilities. She won the socially marked male and abled-bodied dominated area and responded to stigma particularly associated with disabled women by creating a world record as the first female amputee Everest winner. It shows a connection between external criticism and her resilience. Sinha challenges the medical model of disability by emphasizing the social and structural barriers she overcame. Her ‘assertion of agency’ ascending Mount Everest, despite amputation, subverts dominant narratives of passivity, mercy, and dependency often associated with disability in postcolonial societies.



Support System in Arunima Sinha's Journey:

Arunima Sinha highlights the unforgettable support system, like her family, the villager, medical staffs, media, politicians, mentors, and others, who strengthens her mental well-being. Sinha says, "I AM THE SUM TOTAL OF THE KINDNESS AND LOVE bestowed on me by countless people. Were it not for them, I would not be here today..." (Sinha, BAM, 213). This support system highlights the significance of nurturing positive environment for her mental recovery and growth. Disability studies stress the role of group and community support systems in encouraging resilience, aligning with Sinha's experiences.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Arunima Sinha's *Born Again on the Mountain* is not merely a story of physical endurance but a profound exploration of mental resilience. Her ability to transform trauma into triumph highlights the importance of mental health in overcoming adversity. Psychological, disability, and postcolonial studies frameworks helped to explore an elixir, the mental health in the book. Sinha's story serves as a blueprint for resilience, demonstrating that mental strength is not innate but cultivated through purpose, determination, and a supportive environment. Her narrative invites broader discussions on intersection of mental health, disability, and societal expectations, offering hope and inspiration to all who face life's challenges. It concludes that *Born Again on the Mountain* serves as a powerful illustration of mental well-being that shows how the human mind can transcend barriers, to rise above adversity, limitation and redefine possibilities and reach the sky.

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