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Representation of Disability in Indian Cinema and Literature: A Critical Study of Selected Works

Rituparna Sarkar[1], Dr. Anushruti[2]

[1,2]Department of English, Kalinga University, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Indian cinema and literature shape societal perceptions of people with disabilities by analyzing the evolution of their portrayals over time. Earlier films often depicted disability through lenses of pity, moral weakness, or divine punishment, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalization. However, contemporary works such as Black (2005), Barfi! (2012), and Hichki (2018) have shifted the narrative toward empowerment, resilience, and inclusion. These films present disability as a facet of human diversity rather than a limitation, emphasizing emotional depth, personal growth, and social acceptance similarly, literature influenced by figures like Helen Keller and Tanni Grey-Thompson has moved beyond symbolic or tragic depictions, highlighting real-life experiences, achievements, and the agency of disabled individuals.

Despite this progress, challenges remain, including societal stigma, tokenistic portrayals, and the underrepresentation of authentic disabled voices in storytelling. The study finds that film and literature play a pivotal role in shaping cultural consciousness—challenging prejudice, encouraging empathy, and promoting equality. By portraying disability with realism and dignity, these mediums can transform public attitudes, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society that values diversity and recognizes the rights and potential of people with disabilities.

Keywords: Disability, Cinema, Literature, Stereotypes, Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Humanities and social science experts have given more and more attention to disability and how it is depicted in popular culture in recent decades. The socio-cultural idea of disability has emerged from historical attitudes, institutional frameworks, and representational practices, beyond mere medical or biological definitions. Media depictions of individuals with disabilities reflect prevalent societal perceptions of normalcy, difference, and inclusion. In India, where cultural, religious, and social hierarchies are very important to people's sense of self, creative representations of disability have significant value. Cultural tales from India featuring individuals with disabilities illuminate the historical context of discrimination and exclusion, with the evolving transition towards tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. Consequently, it is an essential examination of cultural constructions and reinterpretations of humanity to analyse the representation of disability in Indian literature and cinema.

Representation is a powerful tool in the effort to make minority identities more visible in society. The meanings that language, images, and stories create via representation frequently impact how people think about diversity. People with disabilities have always been perceived in two very limited ways: as pathetic victims or brave heroes. The out-dated "medical model" of disability, which sees impairment as a problem that has to be fixed, is what caused this mind-set. The "social model" came into play, however, and the focus changed from individual disabilities to structural and attitude-based barriers that society puts in place. Disability is no longer seen as an abnormality but as a lived experience, and this shift in theoretical understanding has significant implications for the representation of disability in art and society.

Literary and cinematic works in India serve as significant forums for the formulation and contestation of disability-related meanings, mirroring the country's highly political cultural outputs. In the past, religion, caste, class, and colonial legacies have made life worse for disabled people in Indian society and culture. Persons usually think of handicapped persons as being cursed, dependent, or not visible to others. These kinds of depictions have helped keep the idea alive that persons with disabilities are exclusively to blame for their own unhappiness, rather than a shared burden. But as efforts for disability rights and social awareness gained traction, notably with the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1995) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), cultural representations began to reflect a more progressive and inclusive viewpoint. These modifications indicate how moral and legal institutions may affect creative stories, making them more aware of societal concerns and the human condition.

Indian movies and literature have a big impact on public opinion since they are important ways for people to communicate and share culture. These media could be able to reach a lot more people by using powerful images and tales that cross language and geography boundaries. The issue is that representation is skewed by nature since it supports existing ideologies and power structures. These theories typically support ablest ideas that connect cognitive or physical differences with being immoral, dependent, or less than others. Such depictions continue to exist because they support narrow standards and make it harder for disabled people to be regarded as distinct and complicated individuals. Consequently, it is imperative to engage critically with these representations to advance social justice and inclusivity, while doing academic analysis.

Disability studies, as an academic discipline, provide a critical analysis of representational politics within this context. Disability studies, originating from critical theory, cultural studies, and sociology, interrogate traditional notions of physical, mental, and functional independence. It makes us think about how cultural things and social systems create and keep conceptions of difference and ability. In this framework, media, including literature and film, function as ideological instruments that influence our ideas of disability, its categorization, and its value. By examining their portrayal in these works, researchers may see the evolution of society perspectives from discrimination and exclusion to acceptance and empowerment.

The portrayal of disability in Indian cultural literature may be seen as a reflection of the nation's on-going conflict between tradition and modernity. Because of religious legends and karmic ideas that were common in old Indian society, persons with disabilities were frequently seen as victims of moral causality or divine will. They were required to perform penance or show compassion. Secular, modern perspectives, influenced by global human rights discourse, reconceptualise disability as an aspect of diversity that warrants tolerance and equality. Media portrayals oscillate between realism and idealism, empathy and stereotyping, underscoring the tension between conventional and contemporary values. A critical examination of these representations may elucidate Indian society's perspectives on diversity and inclusion in the contemporary, globalized context.

The representation of disability is further complicated by its intersection with other identity axes, such as gender, class, and caste. For instance, women with disabilities frequently face double discrimination since they are not included in feminist and disability rights stories as well as in mainstream culture. Disabled individuals are much more invisible in both rural and urban settings owing to economic marginalization and insufficient education.

International activism, digital media, and globalization have all helped to make the conversation around disability more popular in recent years. This has made it possible for new types of representation to challenge the status quo. Artists, filmmakers, and writers from India are exploring issues of accessibility, identity, and inclusion in a manner that is both universal and distinctly Indian. This shift in viewpoint indicates a transition from seeing disability as a static characteristic of humanity to recognizing it as a dynamic aspect of diversity. Nonetheless, significant inquiries remain, including how to accurately represent individuals with impairments and how to guarantee their authentic participation in creative endeavours.

This study seeks to critically and Trans disciplinary analyse the evolving representation of disability in Indian literature and cinema. The primary objective of the research is to analyse cultural narratives to ascertain the representation of individuals with disabilities, the ideological underpinnings that inform these portrayals, and their influence on public perceptions of equality and inclusion. This study contributes to the discourse on human rights, diversity, and cultural justice by examining the evolution of representations of impairments across time. It underlines the need for a real, inclusive story that talks about the real problems that disabled people face instead of depending on tokenism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jeffress, Michael. (2021). Overview of the product. This book uses a variety of print and digital sources to make the case that there should be an abundance of positive portrayals of neurological illnesses in the media, because this is where most people obtain their knowledge. It includes thirteen new chapters that look at how people with disabilities are portrayed in popular culture throughout the world, including in South African and North and South American contexts. This book shows that neurodiversity and disability are growing in the media, even if disability is usually shown in narrow tropes like victims, supercrips, or suffering patients. In it, a plethora of media featuring notable or even primary characters that have neurodiversity or have impairments are highlighted. Disabled People in Media: Film, TV, and Print Media are a must-read for anybody curious about gender, film, disability studies, or cultural studies. You may see fifty or more pages of the book here.

Pandey, Neerja. (2021) Cinema is a potent medium because it portrays, reflects, and influences society all at once. Also, the number and influence of Indian films annually make it the largest film industry globally. "Kayamat se Kayamat tak" and "Ek Duje Ke Liye" brought romance to Hindi cinema, "Angry Young Man" was formed by Amitabh Bachchan, and there was a period of action flicks. Rajesh Khanna inaugurated the Lover Boy era. On rare occasions, films have tackled the topic of disability. There has been a noticeable evolution in the portrayal of disabled people in

Hindi cinema. Once relegated to stereotyped roles, the disabled characters are now the film's shining star. The changing portrayal of disabled individuals in Hindi film, both subtly and dramatically, is the focus of this study. Margarita with a Straw (2014) and Mother India (1957) are two films that the researcher has selected to illustrate two ends of the spectrum when it comes to depictions of handicap.

Pandey, Neha & Singh, Dev Vrat. (2021) one of the most believable ways to reach a large audience is via a Hollywood film. The majority of Bollywood films end up in Indian theaters, and as India is the largest producer of feature films globally, the impact of Bollywood depictions of any given subject is substantial. Films about disabilities may teach us a lot about how to perceive, understand, and generalize about people with physical disabilities in real life. The prevailing medical paradigm defines impairment as a limitation in one's ability to carry out one's everyday activities. This disability, as this view sees it, is a medically treatable disadvantage that persons with disabilities inevitably confront in competitive social settings. Conversely, by stressing the significance of disability acceptance and inclusion, the social model offers a more modern alternative. Since this idea holds that society's institutions, and not disabilities, are responsible for disability, it argues that disabled individuals shouldn't have their choices constrained. This research aims to analyse the portrayal and narratives of disabled people in contemporary Bollywood films. Past studies have shown that Indian films often portray people with disabilities in a sympathetic but demeaning light, sometimes evoking feelings of reliance, derision, pity, or contempt. However, it seems that movies portraying disabled individuals are adopting a somewhat different tack after the turn of the century.

Biswal, Santosh. (2019) It is not a novel concept to use cinema as a tool for social change. The Odia language and culture have long been deeply intertwined with Odia cinema, which originates from the Indian state of Odisha and is also known as Oriya film. As a medium, Odia film has always sought to convey social themes in an effort to spur societal progress and transformation. Films featuring disabled characters have come under fire for being too focused on the final product, despite the fact that these films reflect a broader movement toward tolerance and acceptance. The public's perception of handicap and the momentum of the rights movement are about to experience a turning point, and with it, an Odia film. Both the media's and the political climate's disdain for those with disabilities is becoming more apparent. To better understand the film, this study has taken into account the model, gender, identity, and societal attitude toward disability issues.

Dawn, Ranjita. (2019) this article will examine the portrayal of disability in Indian religion, literature, and film in order to have a better understanding of how to increase awareness of impairments. Culture has an ever-present impact on how individuals throughout the world see themselves and the world see them. Disabled persons are more likely to internalize cultural standards and expectations, making this effect even more troublesome for them. Disabled characters and discourses of "normalcy" in Indian literature, film, and religion are discussed in this article. They are mostly to blame, it says, for normalizing a demeaning definition of "disability" as if it were a social stigma, reliance, an imbalance, or a punishment. This article explores the social model of disability, a theoretical framework that includes studies of media portrayals of people with impairments. A thorough and systematic analysis of religious texts, Indian literature, and a small number of Hindi films form its basis. Along with this, a plethora of books and articles have also been assessed. The essay claims that portrayals of individuals with disabilities should not be used to pit "normal" characters against one another or to make them sympathetic, but rather to raise public knowledge of the realities of people with disabilities.

Venkatesan, Srinivasan et al., (2015) thirteen teen non-disabled, multilingual college students participated in an exploratory study, which used topic-based group discussion, brainstorming, and focus group approaches to extract their recollections of disability depictions in Indian cinema. Media depictions of disability, attitude valence, perceived clichés, and latency (the length of time it took for respondents to recall anything) were among the criteria used by three independent, blinded observers to evaluate the audio and video recordings. Response analysis of qualities assigned to handicapped film characters allowed us to identify major themes. The most memorable mental illness "hero" picture for female respondents is the conventional "pity-sympathy" version. Most people still associate it with the negative, horrible, painful, or angry way that disabled persons are portrayed in today's movies. We discuss what these findings mean for commercial Indian films and provide reasons for more research in this area.

Dawn, Ranjita. (2013) as cultural artefacts grounded in practice, social representations have a significant impact on how individuals see themselves and their place in the world. It is often believed that people with disabilities see the world through the prism of societal beliefs and conventions. Focusing on how these films present "disability" as a condition that can be neurotypically displayed and narratively coded, this paper takes a reductionist approach to analyse the matrices of recurring themes in disability representation and discourses of "normalcy" in Indian films from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The representation of people with disabilities in popular culture will be the primary focus of this examination, which will be grounded on the social model of disability. Technique: A thorough and methodical evaluation was carried out on 26 Hindi films (spanning from the 1960s to 2010) and 6 English films. Many additional books and articles have also been critically reviewed. Concluding remarks and results: The author concludes that the portrayal of disability in contemporary mainstream cinema is a creation of the public's imagination that mirrors the "enigmatic" status of people with disabilities today. Effects on Rehabilitation How moviegoers see disabled people

are heavily influenced by the characters they see on screen. There has to be more nuance and research in films portraying people with disabilities. Instead than focusing on the limitations, films featuring people with disabilities should celebrate their abilities. Filmmakers have a responsibility to the impacted population to learn about their challenges and give them resources that will allow them to reintegrate into mainstream society.

REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY IN INDIAN CINEMA

The videos and texts have the potential to greatly influence children's views and beliefs about disability, making them a powerful tool for inclusive education. Films serve as a foundation for young people to develop thoughts and construct a vision of many parts of life; they are seen as a kind of reality illusion. Additionally, positive films may aid the handicapped in overcoming terrible situations and leading fulfilling lives. They may encourage a more accepting culture for those with disabilities and help people expand their minds. The 2005 Indian film Black, starring Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukerji-Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2015), is based on the true tale of Helen Keller and follows the journey of a deaf and blind child. The narrative chronicles the relationship between Michelle McNally, portrayed by Rani Mukherjee, and her instructor, Amitabh Bachchan. The narrative starts when Michelle, after recovering from an illness, lost her sight and hearing at the age of two. She becomes an angry and aggressive young woman since her parents are unable to save her from her solitary, gloomy environment. She becomes more arrogant and furious during the day. But the tale takes a different turn when her instructor, Debraj Sahai, enters the picture. The world becomes clear to Michelle as she begins lessons with Debraj. After much hardship, she overcomes her fears, finds her voice, and reconciles with those in her life. The narrative follows a girl with a blind spot as she grows up, learns to accept herself despite her flaw, and eventually becomes a beautiful woman.

Barfi, portrayed by Ranbir Kapoor, is another positive crippled character in film. The film is titled "Barfi" and features Ranbir, Priyanka Chopra, and Lleana D'Cruz. Despite being born deaf and dumb, the kid never let it get in the way of his infectious laughter and jokes. His portrayal is that of an endearing optimist with a golden heart. Yet, there is another side to the narrative that is based on true occurrences and is told in this novel as well. In the midst of his antics, Barfi encounters Shruti Ghosh, a stunning young woman whose wedding was scheduled for three months from now (Ileana D'Cruz). As they go about their day together, they can't help but be captivated by one another. Nevertheless, Shruti is confronted with reality when her mother begs her to abandon her feelings for him and stop following him. She manages to persuade Shruti—a reflection of the general public's attitude—that a crippled guy likes Barfi lacks the means and ability to provide for her. Following her mother's suggestion, Shruti leaves Barfi heartbroken after being married and runs away to Kolkata, severing all connections. Despite the unexpected twist, Barfi carries on with his hopeful existence as a young man who is both deaf and dumb, shattering stereotypes about people with disabilities across the globe.

Bahubali: The Beginning (2015) Full Movie Hindi Prabhas, 2019 follows with an appraisal of Bijjaldev's character. The historical background was the subject of the 2015 film's release. The story's central conflict was the power struggle between two brothers for control of the kingdom, which ultimately led to devastating consequences for both sides. Performers Nassar (as Bijjaldev), Rana Daggubati (as Bhallala Deva), and Prabhas (as Amarendra Bahubali) were in the film. As a player, Bijjaldev Bahubali: The Beginning (2015) Full Movie Hindi Prabhas, 2019 follows with an appraisal of Bijjaldev's character. The historical background was the subject of the 2015 film's release. The story's central conflict was the power struggle between two brothers for control of the kingdom, which ultimately led to devastating consequences for both sides. Performers Nassar (as Bijjaldev), Rana Daggubati (as Bhallala Deva), and Prabhas (as Amarendra Bahubali) were in the film. As a player, Bijjaldev

If we're going to talk about animated features, another great one for kids to study and be inspired by is Finding Nemo (2017) by Walt Disney. Marlin, a protective father figure, lives on the Great Barrier Reef with his energetic young clownfish son, Nemo. But Marlin's extreme caution stems from the fact that nemo, as a juvenile fish, has a fin that is still developing, which is like a handicap. Nemo was irritated because Marlin was afraid, he wouldn't be able to live on his own due to his impairment. There are parallels between the real-life experiences of this marlin phobia and the weight of social rejection. Captured by a group of scuba divers, Nemo is taken to a fish tank owned by a dentist because of his curiosity about the world. Despite his deformities, he overcomes this event by demonstrating his exceptional self-assurance and leadership abilities in a dangerous situation. The film also emphasizes the importance of being willing and determined to succeed, as nothing can stand in the way of your dreams. In addition to having a beneficial impact on kids, the film also used art to communicate a profound and motivating message.

Rani Mukerji's portrayal of Naina Mathur in the film Hichki is the most recent example that has gained good perception. Despite having Tourette syndrome, a kind of deformity characterized by repetitive verbal and physical tics, the film follows Naina as she overcomes her condition and achieves her goals. She encounters obstacles at every turn on her path to realizing her ambition of becoming a teacher. The film chronicles her experiences of bullying at the hands of coworkers, school, society at large, and those in her immediate vicinity due to her physical appearance. Nevertheless, she remains optimistic and persists in pursuing her ambition. In addition to Naina's side of the narrative, the film shows the students' (bad) experiences as her pupils. They were both given the lowest possible likelihood of success due to the lack of resources and sent to a classroom with a teacher who was impaired. Naina was the one who

provided possibilities for the pupils, who were impaired due to societal lack of support. The movie ends with the kids' self-assurance and competence having grown, and with Naina having joyfully served the school for 25 years, fulfilling her ambition and relishing in the ride.

It is prejudice, not disability that cripples an individual. Disabled persons have historically been marginalized and unable to fully participate in mainstream society due to persistent poverty and social stigma.

People in impoverished slum areas of any nation are more likely to be disabled due to malnutrition and hazardous living circumstances. Babies born to moms living in poverty typically suffer from many ailments that exacerbate their disability because of the mother's malnutrition. These diseases are worsened by the lack of access to adequate medical care and information. Discrimination against low-income families by more affluent members of society limits the chances available to individuals living below the poverty line. Furthermore, the impoverished crippled population of a nation is pushed to the periphery due to a lack of medical facilities, rehabilitation centres, education, training, and knowledge of their rights.

As a result of their lack of resources, including food, healthcare, and social support, the poor are more vulnerable to the vicious cycle that develops when people with disabilities live in poverty. People from low-income, illiterate homes are more likely to become handicapped and die untreated than those from more privileged, educated backgrounds. Because they face discrimination twice, once for their disability and once for their poverty, members of society's poorest classes have made a significant contribution to the feelings of pity, contempt, and disgust. Slum uprisings and bitterness stem from the people's constant repression and hatred of them. We still don't have society's full support to improve their circumstances and ensure the future of the children in slums, even though everyone sees and hears about how terrible it is there. Therefore, it may be argued that being physically deformed is not the only criterion for disability. A person is also considered handicapped if they are deprived of opportunities, social acceptability, knowledge, and assistance.

Cinema is a powerful and influential medium that has always played an integral role in people's lives and cultures throughout the globe. The plots of these reels are often based on actual occurrences; therefore, they are a carbon copy of the genuine thing. The awful living circumstances of persons with disabilities in urban slums and on the fringes of cities likely inspired the concept of portraying them as helpless impoverished. One terrible picture of handicapped people in society is the depiction of disabled persons in Indian movies as beggars.

DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Literature has the power to change a society's ideology since it is both an art form and an entertainment medium. Its impact on people's thoughts is substantial and profound. It was long believed that people with disabilities were a threat to civilization, like a savage beast waiting to pounce. They are the monsters in the story that should be feared and treated worse than humans, a theme that runs throughout many literary genres. The vast majority of fictional depictions of people with disabilities show them in a negative light, either as tragic, sad, or burdensome. Disabled characters have traditionally taken a back seat to able-bodied protagonists and antagonists, whose inclusion and exclusion in the storyline is entirely up to the author. A lot of literary villains have disabilities, which is a metaphor for their abnormality, resentment, pain, or desire for vengeance.

According to her, he abandoned her. He had failed to satisfy her. Instead of causing her pain, he had chosen to make her angry. All the suffering had been internalized by him.

Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame depicts the titular character, Quasimodo, as a physically impaired individual. At birth, he had the physical abnormality of a slouched back, lacked hearing, and a wart covering one of his eyes. People around him despised and abandoned him as a youngster due to his physical abnormalities. The woman he fell for saw a good soul confined to an abnormal shell. Although he seemed to have a good heart, his ugly appearance made others keep their distance from him, even though he was really rather compassionate. His persona exemplifies the novel's central theme—the distinction between physical and mental attractiveness—and draws attention to the general public's indifference toward those with physical or mental impairments. Characters in the book describe how others treat individuals with disabilities poorly and how superficial beauty standards are used to make snap judgments about them. His nasty, unattractive appearance made even his mother hate him, and neither his goodness nor his innocence could save him. It exemplifies how preconceptions ingrained in people's thoughts over history may prevent them from giving someone a fair shot, regardless of how good their heart is.

Auggie, whose real name is Augustus Pullman, is the protagonist of R.J. Palacio's Wonder. His unusual facial abnormality manifests itself in the absence of ears, cheekbones, and a chin. Because of how awful it makes him seem, he has a hard time making friends. At the outset, the deformity serves as vulnerability, leading to bullying from others. People without impairments have a hard time understanding and accepting him, even if he's OK on the inside. From another person's point of view, a good-hearted youngster seems to be a hideous villain. But he keeps going and doesn't let his impairment hold him back from becoming a star. At graduation, he receives an award for bravery and generosity and makes genuine friends at school. By taking home the trophy and earning a standing ovation from the audience, he

demonstrated that he was more than what first met the eye. Here is a conversation that Auggie had with those who mistreat him or abuse him because of his handicap; it demonstrates his generosity and love: Little children are great because, while they might say hurtful things at times, they don't intentionally want to harm your emotions. However, they have no idea what they are talking about. To further comprehend the literary works' re-presentation of disability, consider these ground-breaking instances.

Before Helen Keller's autobiography, The Story of My Life, changed people's perception, crippled gray or victim characters were shown for decades. Helen Keller was a strong believer in equal rights for the deaf and blind and the first person in the world to get a Bachelor of Arts degree. In her autobiography, she detailed her struggles as a sickly kid, her teacher's support, and her eventual triumph over her infirmity and literary identity. The autobiography was then made into a film and a stage play, with her playing the lead role as the miracle worker. Millions of people found hope in her memoirs, and it helped change how people saw people with disabilities. More and more handicapped characters are shattering stereotypes and becoming the centres of attention in film and literature as a result of her work. In 2001, with the publication of her memoirs Seize the Day, Tanni Grey Thompson grasped yet another revolutionary moment in history. Because of her condition, Spina Bifida, she uses a wheelchair. She altered the trajectory of wheelchair racers and the Paralympic games in general. She won the London Marathon six times between 1992 and 2002, established 30 world records, and won 16 Paralympic medals, making her one of the most successful Paralympic athletes of all time. She has participated in several national councils and television broadcasts throughout her competitive career. Although she was getting ready to retire from Paralympic track, she continued her career as a politician and TV host. Many people's perspectives on persons with disabilities changed after reading her memoirs. Even for those with disabilities, it changed perspective. Her lengthy journey from a place of self-pity to one of accolades and recognition is chronicled in the book. Her success in the Paralympics shifted public perception of Paralympic athletes, which in turn boosted morale and motivation for both current and future competitors.

Literary works abound with depictions of individuals with various forms of physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory impairments. Some examples include Richard III by William Shakespeare, Tiny Tim by Dickens, Captain Ahab by Herman Melville, Vengeful of Disagreeable Dwarf by Adelson (2005), Me before You (2012) by Jojo Moyes, The Demonic or Charity Cripple (1987) by Kriegl, Little Women (1880) by Louisa May Alcott, leprosy, disabilities, and restricted growth. Over time and on a grand scale, the concept of disability portrayal in literature has transformed. It has liberated itself from all preconceptions, shifting society's attitude and responses towards handicap, from its symbolic representation as evil. What was formerly portrayed in a bad light in popular culture is now embraced and seen as an integral component of our society. Therefore, the phrase "especially-abled" or "the people with extraordinary bodies" was invented for disabled individuals so that they may be treated with respect and given equal standing in society. Disability in literature, according to Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson (2002), is an all-pervasive, unacknowledged topic that remains utterly alien. Like other marginalized groups in the past, disability is not completely missing from the media's depiction of the world, but it is also mostly ignored and unmentioned.

TRANSFORMATION IN THE REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY IN INDIAN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

A critical analysis of select Indian literature and cinema reveals a transformation in the portrayal of disability, evolving from representations characterized by shame, fear, or moral symbolism to those defined by respect, autonomy, and personal development. This evolution reflects a more basic cultural movement from tyranny to agency, from opacity to exposure. The films Black (2005) and Margarita with a Straw (2014), along with the books Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan and Em and the Big Hoom by Jerry Pinto, are looked at to see how they change people's minds about disabilities and make the conversation about inclusivity bigger by showing that disabilities are an important part of who we are as people.

The portrayal of Michelle McNally in Black (2005) offers a nuanced representation of deaf-blindness. As she learns from her teacher about solitude, unhappiness, and eventually self-discovery, she has a deep struggle between being trapped and being free. The film makes handicap more relatable by depicting the main character's hardships, determination, and victories. Some have suggested that the narrative maintains the "supercrip" stereotype, which argues that a crippled person's worth is better assessed by their remarkable accomplishments rather than their normal existence. In any case, Black marked a turning point in the portrayal of disabilities in movies, moving from pity to strength. This led to more sympathetic portrayals.

Margarita with a Straw (2014), on the other hand, is more direct and up-to-date on handicap. The story is about a young woman with cerebral palsy who is trying to figure out her sexuality, independence, and social identity. The film questions cultural conventions and rethinks agency by dealing with subjects that aren't often seen in Indian movies, such how gender, desire, and disability affect one other. People with disabilities are frequently shown as sad or inspirational, but our protagonist goes against both of these views by trying to find happiness despite her limitations. There is an emphasis on normalcy instead than glorification, and she is depicted as a whole person with her own aspirations, flaws, and dreams. The video shows how patriarchy and heteronormativity are two instances of bigger cultural systems that affect how a person with a handicap lives their everyday life.

Reading Jerry Pinto's Em and the Big Hoom are like going deep into the feelings of dealing with a mentally ill parent in the family. The book goes into great detail on love, caring, and never giving up. The narrative, as recounted by the son, takes a firsthand look at mental illness, depicting it not as a distinct entity but as an internal battle that molds the family's character. Pinto avoids sentimentality and sensationalism by showing the mother's bipolar disorder in a compassionate and realistic manner. His work underlines the interaction between mental illness, social stigma, and emotional fragility, revealing that disability involves not only visible physical restrictions but also the unseen battles conducted within one's own mind. The literature reinterprets disability as a common human experience by prioritizing understanding and empathy above judgment.

Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest, on the other hand, looks at the commercialization of the human body through a dystopian and futuristic viewpoint. Padmanabhan examines the moral and ethical dimensions of exploitation, dehumanization, and bodily autonomy via the narrative of a family that sells their organs to affluent foreigners. The tale does not center on disability per se; rather, it critiques, metaphorically, the manner in which capitalist systems diminish human being to mere physical functionality and productivity. Harvest expands the lexicon of disability by highlighting how biotechnological control, social disparity, and globalization engender new forms of corporeal subjugation. It helps individuals think about what it means to be normal, to be free, and to have moral responsibility in a world where physical variation is a commodity.

In general, these works provide a lot of tales concerning persons with disabilities in Indian culture. They acknowledge the complex character of identity and selfhood, going beyond the simple divisions of competence and incompetence, dependency and independence. Modern depictions need empathy and inclusiveness, unlike historical portrayals that often-perpetuated exclusion and pity, since both literature and film function as reflective mirrors of contemporary ideas. These works foster a more inclusive aesthetic sensibility via realistic and symbolic narratives that interrogate the power dynamics inherent in cultural creation.

A common motif in these books and movies is the continual fight between being seen and not being noticed. Contemporary portrayals that give disabled people agency and voice demonstrate the subtle persistence of ableist tropes, which usually link disability to moral fortitude or personal success. This contradiction underscores the persistent need for authentic narratives that respect the shared experience of living with a handicap, avoiding the presentation of individuals as just exemplars of resilience. The shift toward intersectionality, as shown in Em and the Big Hoom and Margarita with a Straw, is a big step forward in recognizing disability as something that happens to people because of their gender, culture, and class.

Another crucial thing to think about is the distinction between mental and physical disabilities. Literature allows for more contemplation and emotional depth than cinema, which often depicts disability via visual suffering or redemption.

Literary narratives and reflections elucidate the intricate impact of disability on our memories, relationships, and self-perception. A substantial cultural transformation has transpired in both forms, marked by the shift from objectification to subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

In the ever-evolving landscape of Indian literature and cinema, the portrayal of disability has undergone a significant transformation, mirroring the shifts in societal attitudes and awareness. Earlier depictions often relied on stereotypes, framing disability as a source of pity, tragedy, or inspiration, thereby reinforcing ableist ideologies. However, recent decades have witnessed a growing commitment to more authentic, empathetic, and multidimensional portrayals of disabled individuals. This change reflects the influence of global disability rights movements, increased public awareness, and the growing demand for inclusivity and representation in cultural narratives.

Modern Indian filmmakers and writers are increasingly exploring disability as a lived experience rather than a mere plot device. Characters are being portrayed with agency, emotional complexity, and individuality, challenging long-standing notions of dependency and abnormality. This evolution underscores the importance of storytelling that humanizes rather than marginalizes disabled individuals. Yet, challenges persist issues like tokenism, the casting of non-disabled actors in disabled roles, and narratives that focus excessively on sympathy or heroic triumphs still limit the authenticity of representation.

A review of Indian literary and cinematic works reveals that, despite progress, there remains a pressing need for more intersectional and empowering depictions of disability. Genuine representation requires the inclusion of disabled voices in the creative process, allowing for stories that reflect diverse experiences across class, gender, and region. Inclusive storytelling not only transforms cultural understanding but also contributes to the broader disability rights movement by challenging prejudice and fostering empathy. In this sense, Indian literature and cinema hold the potential to reshape public consciousness, offering spaces where disability is not merely tolerated but valued as an integral aspect of human diversity.

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