

Title of Article

**Disability Portrayal in Hindi Films**

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## **Abstract**

Movies have a profound effect on human thought. This article has tried to investigate whether the portrayal of disability in Hindi films has a positive or even a negative effect. Portrayal of disability in Hindi films is a different matter. This portrayal gives high visibility and creates a potential impact on public attitudes. However, it is unfortunate to admit that this portrayal often mocks the disabled person, even mocks the disability itself. This paper provides an interdisciplinary review of the portrayal of disability by integrating film resources. It assesses several areas including the history of disability, its dimensions, the quality of cinematic representations of disability, and the politics of film. Mental retardation is the most frequently depicted in most Hindi films. It has identified many stereotypical portrayals of different types of disability. Directions for future research are discussed, including recommendations for quantitative investigations and calls for additional interdisciplinary research.

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**Keywords:** Disability, Hindi, Film, Media

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## **Introduction**

Medias is an effective way to change the world around. It is a mirror of the society. Literature and film are an effective tool of media. It is said that literature or film imitates real life and real life has much impact on media. Both the tools include disability in different ways. In India, not much literature or movies on disability are available. Psychiatric disorder, visual, hearing and speech impairment somehow is reflected in the films. This study has relevance to knowing how people with disabilities are represented in films, their wider social context, and the kind of performance they have had on screen. The highly influential role of films in the society and public life makes it more relevant from a mythological and narrative point of view.

## **Disability shown in Indian Films**

The motion picture camera and the projector were invented at the end of the 19th century. People started watching movies lovingly. It was observed that film can influence public opinion on social issues and change mind of a common man. Movies are not just fun to watch on the weekend but mean more. Movies are the only art form that allows one to identify with the characters on an emotional level. One lives through the movie and find his/her emotion, fear, desire, hope, and aspiration. The way people think about specific issues can also be changed by films. In this paper it is focused on how Indian film serve to change an attitude towards disability.

Many movies, especially in early days, heightened the effect of disability as comedy. Disability in Indian films was melodramatic. Disable character was presented either as victim or as villain as seeking revenge for his/her disability. The World Bank Report entitled, 'People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcome' concluded that characterizations of disabled women in Hindi film are not strong enough, though Indian films

have tried to enhance society's sensitivity. Many bollywood films played on gender differences. Commonly, men with disabilities for instance, are often loved by a devoted woman without disabilities, also women with disabilities are loved by men without disabilities. It remained melodramatic or just filmy. But slowly, the portrayal of disabled people in movies changed and their pain, ails and feelings started to be seen in movies. Some important films are reviewed in this article.

In many films, disability is treated in a comical way; e.g., in the film *Mujj se Shaadi Karogi*, Kader Khan is portrayed as a comic character with a new disability every day. In *Judai*, Upasana Singh can only speak Appa dappa Chappa and a comic character in the film. Shakti Kapoor in *Chalbaaz* is shown a disabled in smiling manner. Apart from that, many films portray disability to change an attitude of a common man towards disability.

*Dosti* (1964) is the first ever Indian film which deals with physical or mental disabilities. It is a story of two friends who are not only physically challenged but gifted with music by nature. When these two friends travel together in Mumbai performing their art and talent, the audience's heart melts. In this film, director Satyam Bose captures the essence of friendship and shows how two disable friends makes each other's life successful. The song *Chahunga Mai Tujhe Saanj Savere* became much popular from this film at that time. Very first time the film without romance was accepted by the film lovers. It was very clean and there is no cheesiness at any point. It can be said that what many words and pictures cannot tell, a simple film can tell. After success of this film, Indian film makers turned towards showing disability in sympathism. Immediately in 1965, film *Arju* showed how a disabled person can become a normal worker by wearing artificial arms and legs. For the first time, a film portrayed and spread a message that a locomotor disable person can work normally by wearing artificial leg/arm. Though it was not easily available in India and very costly, the film tried to build confidence and fight with one's disability. At the end of 1972, film *Anurag* became popular.

Mosmi Chatterjee, a blind girl, gets her sight after a cornea transplant in this film and make public aware of rehabilitation through cornea transplantation. In 1973, *Zeel Ke Us Par*, in 1979, *Sargam*, in 1984, *Neelkamal*, in 2006, *Humko Tumse Pyaar Hai*, films have shown men helping disabled women. These films inspire people to help and marry disable woman which was seen just 'filmy' in those days. Somehow, these films were treated as melodramatic whereas films like *Khilona* (1970) have given place to human values. This film shows that if disable person is treated lovingly, he/she can be rehabilitated.

*Koshish* and *Sparsh* are most important milestones. These films revealed different aspects of the life of a disabled person, the intrusion of a disabled person, the disdain they face from the society, the disdain for mercy. At the same time, these films set an example of how the society should accept and include them. *Koshish* (1972) scripted by Gulzar proved that any kind of disabled people can successfully marry on their own. The lead pair of Sanjeev Kumar and Jaya Bhaduri who were dumb and deaf, created a human touch on the screen. But in this film, due to their disability, this married couple lost their baby because they can't hear his voice. This incidence again raises question whether two disabled persons should marry or not. The film remains sympathetic towards disable persons. *Sparsh* scripted by Sai Paranjpe is the notable one as it empowers especially blind people in a non-sympathetic way. It very subtly shows how visually impaired person heightened sense of touch, smell and hearing developed to replace the absence of visual inputs. The role of Kavita by Shabana Azmi and Aniruddha by Nasiruddin Shah is played brilliantly. Aggressiveness towards disable person's self-reliance is portrayed very wisely by Nasiruddin. The film remains most memorable for acting of both the artists as well as for wise handling of the issue of relationships with the visually challenged.

The 1983 film *Sadma* is also notable for its ending, which is still unusual in any Hindi film. The film revolves around Somu, a lonely school teacher and a young woman named Reshmi who has lost her memory and control on mind.

The film *Khamoshi*, (1996) which stars Nana Patekar and Seema Vishwas dumb and deaf in this film. It was Director Sanjay Leela Bhansali's first film whereas prominently understands and explains disability. It touches the heart of the audience as the senses of a person with any form of disability are heightened. Manish Koirala plays the dream daughter of deaf-dumb couple. A deaf-dumb couple's fear of losing their supportive daughter, a couple who does not give her the freedom to pursue a career, a desperate daughter who tries to chase her dreams with Salman Khan's entry into her life and parents who do not understand her at all and do not give her freedom all the time. The most heart-wrenching aspect of the film is that it insults people with a disability. When Bhansali was working on film *Khamoshi*, he came with an idea of film *Black*. The story is inspired by the activist Hellen Keller's life and autobiography 'The Story of My Life'. Rani Mukharji cast a blind and deaf girl, Michelle. At the age of two, she lost her eyesight and hearing ability. Her parents are not aware of how to bring up a girl and kept her isolated. The film has an important message about disability. It touches on the sentimental side of leading humanism in the 20th century. The film was released worldwide on 4 February 2005 and became a huge commercial success; in fact, it became the eighth highest grossing Bollywood film of 2005. The film received critical acclaim for the way in which the subject was presented. The film received numerous accolades, including story, screenplay, dialogues, cinematography, production design, costumes, performances by Bachchan and Mukherjee, and praise for Bhansali's direction. The film won three nominations at the 53rd National Film Awards, including Best Feature Film in Hindi and Best Actor (Bachchan). At the 51st Filmfare Awards, the film won all 11 nominations, including Best Film, Best Film (Critics), Best Director (Bhansali), Best Actor,

Best Actor (Critics) (Both Bachchan), Best Actress and Best Actress (Best Actress). critics) (both for Mukherjee), thus becoming the most awarded film in the history of the Filmfare Awards at the time. Acclaimed by critics and audiences in such an excellent manner, the film is a milestone in its line of bringing the plight of a disabled person to the hearts of society.

*Iqbal* (2005) is the story of a deaf and mute boy who dreams of making it into the Indian cricket team. Shreyas Talpade is in the lead role, of Iqbal. His status hinders his selection in the team of India. As he is in poor economic condition, there is nobody to train him, so he picked a retired coach to train him. And he leads him towards his goal. Iqbal overcomes all the obstacles and make it to go to the Indian cricket team. The film is appreciated by Talpade's great acting. It shows a ray of hope for the differently abled people as Iqbal's dream comes in true.

*Taare Zameen Par* (2007) focuses on lacuna of personal guidance to disabled persons. In the movie, a boy named Ishaan Srivastava suffers from a disease called dyslexia in which he has trouble reading letters and numbers. Although he is skilled in painting, his parents do not pay attention to his skill and repeatedly pay more attention to his studies. His advisableness is treated as laziness in studying and finally put him in a hostel as a punishment. This incident has a huge negative impact on the life of this tender-hearted boy. Fortunately, an art teacher Ram Shankar Nikumbh comes into his life, understands more about his disability, awakens a painter in him and inspired him. The teacher recognises his limitations and accordingly guided him properly and improves his reading and writing.

*Paa* (2009) is a very beautiful story of a boy suffering from a rare disease, Progeria. It perfectly showcased the symptoms and consequences of the disease through the character Auro, played by Amitabh Bachchan. Auro is 12-year-old boy who is charming and intelligent but suffering by progeria. As there is no perfect solution and it prevents body to grow with

growing age, a bot unfortunately dies at the end. Abhishek Bachchan and Vidya Balan played the lead characters in the film.

*Lafange Parinde* (2009) is a love story of blindfolded street fighter boy and blind girl dancer and their spirit to achieve the impossible. Deepika Padukone and Neil Nitin Mukesh stars the film. The film is about regaining lost confidence and conveys a serious message that people with disabilities can achieve great goals and even more than mainstream.

*Guzaarish* (2010) is another story written, composed and directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The film stars Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. It is a story of a paraplegic person who is a paralyzed, wheel-chair bound man and a magician turned as Radio jockey. He files a petition in court seeking permission to end his life. The film showcased negative feelings in the mind of a disable person and touches the heart.. This film changed the notion of the way people perceive paralysis as a disease.

Anurag Basu's *Barfi* (2012) is the film makes India's official entry for the Oscars. In the film Ranbir Kapoor played the role of a deaf and dumb boy and Priyanka Chopra portrayed a mentally challenged girl. It is a non-glamorous and evidence of artistic talent.

*Aankhe* (2013) is a thriller and story of dark side of personality of blind persons who perversely turns to crime based on their abilities. Three blind men, who dare not be suspected, plan to commit a bank robbery. The film stars Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar, Arjun Rampal, Sushmita Sen and Paresh Rawal. It is the fold that the blindness that occurred or had led them to negative thoughts and forced them to do so. The film is based on director Vipul Amritlal Shah's own Gujarati play. Amitabh Bachchan portraying Vijay Singh Rajput is extremely talented and visionary but fueled by a vengeful mind; he is the mastermind of the story. Akshay Kumar in the role of Vishwas Prajapati though betrayed by destiny, is blessed with a sixth sense. Arjun Rampal plays the role of Arjun Varma- a tough guy with a

soft heart. Paresh Rawal as Ilyas is a street-smart beggar who sings for a living on the train and all the way dreams money and more money. Sushmita Sen plays Neha Srivastava, a blind coach; circumstantially forces to be a part of this dangerous mission. The film has made no attempt to portray disability as a handicap. It did well at the box office.

*Margarita with a Straw* (2014) is produced and directed by Shonali Bose. It is interesting to know how the film was born. The plot of the story was conceived Shonali Bose's mind in January 2011 during a conversation with Malini Chib, her cousin and a disability rights activist. Shonali was familiar with the discrimination faced by person with disabilities as grown up in the same household as Chib's. She was especially intrigued by the general ignorance exhibited towards the sexuality of people with disabilities, and therefore decided to incorporate it into the narrative. The screen-play is co-written with Nilesh Maniyar. *Margarita with a Straw* premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival. It was also screened at the Tallinn Black Nights, the BFI London, the Vesoul Festival of Asian Cinema, and the Galway Film Fleadh. The film was released theatrically in India on 17 April 2015. Kalki Koechlin played a role of Laila, an Indian teenager with cerebral palsy. Laila relocates to America for her undergraduate education. She comes of age following her complex relationship with a blind girl, played by Sayani Gupta. Laila ultimately finds her bisexuality. The film deals with the challenging concepts of sexuality, self-acceptance, self-love, and finally inclusion. The film is bold and different in various aspects; it deals 3 plots- first, story of two disable girls, second, second, sexual feelings of a disable girl and third, bisexuality of two girls. There is no a shred of self-pity but the honest depiction of disability. Koechlin's performance was appreciated by the viewers as saying that they forgot that she is an able-bodied person. She received several accolades including a National Film Award.

*Zubaan* is a musical drama. Vicky Kaushal played a role of Dilsher, a young boy. Due to speech impairment and stammer, he loses self-confidence and develops a fear of music. The film is about his effort to overcome that fear and discover himself. The film attempts building confidence of disable persons.

## **Conclusion**

The portrayal of disability in Hindi films has evolved over the years, reflecting changes in societal attitudes and perceptions. While early films often used disability as a source of comedy or melodrama, there has been a positive shift towards more nuanced and empathetic representations in recent years. The exploration of disability in films such as "Dosti," "Koshish," "Sparsh," "Sadma," and "Taare Zameen Par" has played a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and fostering a better understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

The analysis of various films, ranging from the comical to the inspirational, highlights the diverse ways in which Hindi cinema has addressed disability. From showcasing the struggles and triumphs of characters with physical or mental disabilities to promoting social awareness about issues like dyslexia and progeria, these films have contributed to a more inclusive narrative.

Noteworthy films like "Iqbal," "Paa," "Lafange Parinde," "Guzaarish," "Barfi," "Aankhe," and "Margarita with a Straw" have continued this trend, portraying characters with disabilities in a multidimensional and authentic manner. The inclusion of disability in these narratives not only serves as a means of representation but also challenges societal norms and fosters empathy.

It is essential to acknowledge the positive impact that certain films have had in inspiring change and promoting inclusivity. However, there is still room for improvement, and the

portrayal of disability in Hindi films should continue to evolve to reflect a more accurate and diverse representation. Future research in this area should explore the impact of these cinematic representations on public attitudes and perceptions towards disability. Overall, the intersection of cinema and disability remains a rich and evolving subject that warrants ongoing exploration and discussion.

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