

## Reflection of the disabled concept in Indian cinema

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### Abstract

A number of meanings have accumulated around the term 'disability' over the decades. Disability is a class in itself that maintains no socioeconomic boundaries and anyone may fall prey to it at any time. It can be congenital and can also come about as a result of a sudden accident, a fall or a disease. Commonly accepted myths and stereotypes about disabled people, tend to present disability as a kind of 'lack' or 'misfortune' which make one's life miserable for ever. The negative terms usually used to describe them as 'crippled', 'handicapped' or 'less-fortunate' – all stress upon the disabled person's biological imperfections. Some other terms such as 'physically challenged', 'impaired', 'persons with special needs' stress the disabled person's apartness and dislocation from the group and community. Such negative terminology does a great harm to the disabled by marginalizing them in the society. Up to the 19th century disabled people were considered to be horrors of Nature or frightening freaks. With the professionalization of medicine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent attitudinal change in the scientists and doctors, the disabled people were no longer treated as 'human oddities' but as normal individuals with certain different kinds of abilities.

**Keywords:** miserable, disabled, cinema, physically-challenged

### Introduction

The present paper aims to examine the various aspects of the portrayal of the disabled in Hindi cinema and trace its growth, evolution and various inter-linkages in the form of caste, class, gender and other inter-connected aspects from the decade of 1950s to the present times. Commonly accepted myths and stereotypes about disabled people tend to present disability as a kind of 'lack' or 'misfortune' which makes one's life miserable for ever. The negative terms usually used to describe them as 'crippled', 'handicapped' or 'less-fortunate,' all stress upon the disabled person's biological imperfections. Some other terms such as 'physically challenged', 'impaired', 'persons with special needs' stress the disabled person's apartness and dislocation from the group and community. Such negative terminology does a great harm to the disabled by marginalizing them in the society.

The paper aims to examine disability and its projection in cinema in depth and detail but for want of space and focus, cinema includes only Hindi films, sixteen of which have been selected for detailed study starting from the decade of 1950's onwards to the contemporary times. Special care has been taken to select and include films representing each decade, genre, class, gender and type of disability.

The paper includes understanding the concept of 'disability' in its various nuances, its growth in national and international sphere, different models related to disability, its projection in media, social attitudes to disability, different kinds of disabilities, human rights and self-advocacy, different Acts and laws enacted to ensure full participation of the disabled population, constitutional provisions with special reference to Convention on Rights of the People with Disabilities (CRPD 2006), Persons With Disability Act 1995 and the support and care system; disability and freedom of expression and independent living. Other significant areas related to disability which are discussed in this chapter include national Institutes working for different disability groups, different

Government policies to support the cause of the disabled population and their efforts to provide them a 'barrier-free' environment; disability and education; disability and rehabilitation, women and children with disabilities and adequate knowledge of the provisions for the disabled.

Two films selected in this chapter for the purpose of detailed discussion include *Dosti* (1964) by Satyen Bose, and *Guzarish* (2010) by Sajay Leela Bhansali. *Dosti* deals with the friendship between a blind and a crippled person and establishes way back in 1964 that homogenous groups exist between people and pain is always a unifying factor among the sufferers and film *Guzarish* (2010) talks about a disabled character who after a severe accident while performing a magic trick, becomes quadriplegic. A long dreary, painful, solo existence compels him to appeal for 'euthanasia' – mercy killing, which is legally denied but the disabled character still 'chooses' death to life. It is found that most of the films belonging to 50s, 60s portray a charity based approach, a religious model of disability based on humane angle and social inclusion to certain extent. Finding a family away from the family does take place to a great extent. Everybody is settled by the end but no rehabilitation services are taken care of. No institutionalization is seen, no rehabilitation centre, no trail to incorporate any policy; as none existed. As a matter of fact, till 1981 there was no awareness about even counting the disabled population as 'humans.' It was only in 2001 for the first time that the Government of India thought it worth enough to enumerate the marginalized sector of society. A special shift from 'physical disability' to 'mental disability' is noticed with the growth in time. Film makers started doing research work for creating films like *Guzarish*.

To conclude, it can be said that disability in itself is a physical and mental condition which has to be tackled and fought with great courage and determination and disability, if coupled with different kind of barriers, hierarchies and prejudices, becomes all the more painful and threatening. For

instance disability and poverty together creates a greater negativity as compared to disability with economic support and care since economic deprivation for the disabled many a times, either leads to taking up professions which are of low and inferior nature or might tempt towards the world of crime and easy money making like robberies, extortions and the like. Disability coupled with caste and class hierarchy leads to triple marginalization-that of being a disabled, a poor and belonging to low caste or community which tends to enhance the social exclusion beyond limits.

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