From Margin to Mainstream: Reeling Disability in the Cinematography of India

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Abstract— One of the most powerful mediums for influencing audiences is thought to be cinema & filmography. India is the world's largest producer of feature films with a sizable international following, how any matter is portrayed in Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood etc with films and documentaries is especially unavoidable. Examining how disability is portrayed in movies is important because it influences how the public perceives, visualizes, and stereotypes people with physical disabilities in real life. The medical model of instructions, which inspects disability as a functional limitation, is the foundation of the dominant viewpoint on disability socially and psychologically. According to this set of norms, people with disabilities face a natural disadvantage in competitive social situations, which calls for medical intervention. On the other hand, the social model emphasises the inclusion and acceptance of people having disabilities within society and offers a contemporary alternative. According to this, society should remove the obstacles that limit disabled people's options. The purpose of this study is to examine how physically disabled characters are portrayed and told in current Indian cinematics. According to earlier research, Indian cinematic viewpoints have a tendency to depict characters with disabilities in a way that is complicated, fractured, dependent, and pitying in general though there were certain exceptions to it. However, it appears that the representation of disabled characters in films has changed since the inclusion of disability rights & bills to the mainstream dices.

Keywords— Disability, Indian cinema, stereotype, inclusivity, social stigma, mainstream, filmography

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, a person's disability is mostly perceived as the wrongdoings of their assumed previous lives. The notion of karma in determining societal attitudes toward disability has been highlighted in large portion of India's disability literature. People with disabilities view deformity as a form of punishment for their parents' transgressions. There are numerous disabled characters in ancient Indian texts like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* who are generally described as strong but crafty and mischievous. The mindset and pre-established conjectures are way beyond than the modern idea of practicality and often sparks debate around.

Disabled people are frequently treated insensitively in Indian society since the advent of major myths of Indian classical literature like *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas* and *regional folklores*. Incidents of ridiculing people with disabilities in everyday life are not taken seriously. It appears that prejudice against disabled people is deeply ingrained in Indian culture and thought. There was no discernible public discussion of disabled people's rights until the past ten years. Characters with disabilities have typically been portrayed subtly in Indian filmography over the past century, with a few exceptions. In light of this sociocultural and humanistic context, it appears that stereotypical depictions of disabled characters, particularly in public arena, have cultural roots that warrant careful examination.

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, learning or sensory

impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. *(United Nations 2006).*

Physical disabilities can coexist with mental, neurological, learning or psychological disabilities. These disabilities include things like *dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia*, *Asperger syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, amnesia* and more. In India, the *Disability Rights Movement (DRM)* is a relatively recent phenomenon in contrast-to western nations. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it began as a few dispersed, individual attempts in various formats.

Cinema and filmography continue to be a powerful tool for educating, entertaining, and changing people's attitudes and behaviours despite the attached conflict between real-life and the fictional scape. The transformation of people's perceptions and the debunking of social clichés have been especially successful outcomes and courageous removal of stigmatised ideologies. In movies, disability is rarely depicted realistically; instead, it is either viewed as a sign of damnation or as a silly or frightening person if we view the earlier timelines from the first half of 20th century. Rather than educating about the lacking perspective and belonging with a raised awareness of the disability in terms of humankind, the storyline primarily puts disability for dramatic impact. Characters with disabilities are frequently used for financial benefit, to evoke fear, or as objects of sympathy and mercy.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Interdisciplinary research on how people with disabilities are represented in media has been expanding, spanning disciplines like sociology, cultural theory, film studies, and disability studies. This topic has historically been marginalised in India, but recent advances in academia and film have sparked important discussions about the agency, voice, and visibility of people with disabilities in filmography. Two fundamental models form the basis of a large portion of the scholarly discussion on disability in film:

According to the Medical Model, disability of a person is a personal flaw or limitation.

According to the Social Model, systemic exclusion and social barriers cause disability.

According to academics like *Lennard Davis (2013)* and *Tom Shakespeare (2006),* movies frequently support the medical model by showing disabled people as inspirational, charitable, or pitiful.

In the Indian context, the marginalisation of individuals with disabilities, which is frequently mirrored in

popular media, is shaped by deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and institutional frameworks, as criticized by *G.N. Karna (2001)* and *Anita Ghai (2003, 2009).* With little regard for realism or lived experience, *Ghai* specifically contends that Indian cinema usually constructs the disabled body as a site of spectacle, pity, or miraculous cure.

Chatterjee (2016) examines how disabilities are portrayed in Indian cinema by concentrating on four Hindi films: *Koshish, Sparsh, Black, and Barfi.* In contrast-to the conventional view of disability as evil or ungodly, his article claims that Bollywood's portrayal of disability appears to be more varied and inclusive.

In their exploratory study, *S. Venkatesan et al. (2015)* employ evocative techniques to awaken viewer recollections regarding representations of people with disabilities in Indian cinema. Focus groups, brainstorming sessions, and theme-based group discussions were conducted with a total of 27 non-disabled multilingual college students. The study's findings showed that female respondents most frequently remembered the representation of the "hero" as the protagonist who suffered from a mental illness. Images, themes, language, and terminology that are most commonly evoked still reflect the depressing, negative, struggling, agonized, or resentful stereotype of how people with disabilities are depicted in modern movies.

The democratization of content is gradually changing the narrative from tokenism to authenticity, according to studies by *Bhattacharya (2021)* and *Pradhan (2022)*. Even so, disabled audiences still face accessibility issues such as the absence of audio descriptions or captions.

Although Indian films have attempted to "enhance" society's "sensitivity," a *World Bank study titled "Disability Glare on Bollywood,"* which was commissioned by the Indian government, claims that the portrayals of disabled women in the *"modern myth machine"* of Bollywood are insufficiently strong. According to the study, Bollywood portrays a hero or heroine's disabilities as usually acquired after birth, thereby "normalizing" the actor. In addition to data from the *National Sample Survey of 2002* and the *Census of 2011, Philip Keefe,* a Social Protection Specialist at the World Bank, based this report on a survey that was carried out in numerous states.

III.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The representation of disability in Indian cinematography is examined in this study using a qualitative content analysis framework. The method is interpretative and descriptive, with the goal of investigating the narrative patterns, character development and audience

reactions to movies with disabled themes or characters. Without directly comparing the texts, the analysis explores how these depictions either support inclusive cinematic discourse or perpetuate stereotypes based on specific disabilities represented, which are commonly seen in India. The study chooses a wide variety of Indian TV shows and movies from mainstream, regional, and over-the-top (OTT) platforms using purposive sampling. A thematic analysis of the chosen works is conducted using the narrative structure cum plotline, character portraiture and audience reaction. The chosen corpus includes 17 films and 2 television epics representing various genres, languages (Hindi, Bengali, Tamil), and time periods. Selection criteria include diversity of disability types, reach and popularity, mediums of distribution and in consideration of linguistic and regional discrepancy. The films and episodes themselves, as viewed on authorized over-the-top (OTT) platforms (Netflix, Prime Video, Hotstar, YouTube, etc.) comprise the primary data. Secondary Data includes panel discussions at film festivals, audience reviews, media coverage, interviews, and scholarly analyses pertinent to each filmography.

Unraveling and Dissection

Bollywood, the leading film industry in India, has historically used stereotypes to depict people with disabilities for example reference to *Koi Mil Gaya (2003) as* comical juncture, filmography like *Sadma (1983)* and *Anuraag (1972)* as metaphor for morality or divine punishment and to the iconic roles of *(Black, My Name is Khan)* as inhibited chronicles to be overcome. However, in terms of emotional intensity and acting range the actors have gone beyond the bar of expressions and understanding. Many critics claim that films like *Black (2005), Taare Zameen Par (2007), and Barfi! (2012)* are groundbreaking follow-ups with accurate representations of a situation with societal adjustments and genuine concerns. With the enhanced strategy and through the parlance of criticism director culture has been flourished with the rise of OTT platforms and new norms regarding censorship. In *Margarita with a Straw (2014), Laila,* the main character, has cerebral palsy. Her motor functions are problematic. She is a talented creative writer, a chess player, and a composer. She displays vitality, wit and humour. Even though she works, her mother must occasionally take care of her. Characters with physical disabilities are depicted fighting in many of the films, but this one is entirely different.

Recent biopics and the inclusion of debarred section of disabled have been included in the storytelling art of *Chandu Champion (2024)* and the upcoming one *Sitare Zameen Par (2025)* respectively. Visually, the contrast between gold-lit Paralympic arenas and dusty wrestling grounds of Chandu Champion conveys both adversity and success. Boxing, swimming, and even a one-shot battle scene are examples of realistic sports scenes that showcase camerawork aimed at exposing the difficulties of disability beyond sentimentality. Although several critics believed it skipped over the physical retraining process, it normalises disability by portraying Petkar as an athlete ahead of a "differently-abled" person. Its photography, emotional depth, and Kartik Aaryan's metamorphosis were all acclaimed by critics, however some claimed it overused well-worn biopic clichés. The movie aggressively challenges the *"Bechara" (pity)* syndrome through direct monologues that challenge narratives that rely on sympathy. With real actors with disabilities, *Sitare Zameen Par* promises a more inclusive, ensemble-based story. A dispute over inventiveness versus faithful adaptation has been sparked by early comments that claims it is a scene-by-scene remake of Champions. Sudha Murty, however, labels it a "eye-opener" that challenges social conventions and demands sensitivity. Viewers now want representation that is genuine and unpitying, which is a change in audience sentiment. Real disabled voices should be included both on and off screen, and they want nuanced representations that steer clear of emotional clichés. Some view the remake format as a creative risk, with a flipped storytelling of adults helping the coach with disabilities issue in terms of eye-opening spirit, but it is riding optimism for heartfelt storytelling. But for the matter of fact a common concept is the "supercrip," a disabled person who triumphs over hardship to become an inspiration has been seen throughout the style and artistry of the makers.

Beyond focusing on the protagonist's journey to overcome his disability, *Srikanth (2024)* examines his shortcomings, ambition, and morally dubious moments, portraying his disability as an integral aspect of who he is rather than just a barrier. Pratham Mehta uses close-knit, realistic images all throughout the movie. Simply compassionate, focused framing that fits with daily living rather than producing spectacle—nothing too dramatic. By using natural lighting, everyday settings, and understated graphics to highlight his character's inner world rather than his infirmity, the camera reflects Srikanth's viewpoint. Ability is prioritised in the narrative over impairment. Not only is Srikanth blind, but he is also intelligent, ambitious, ethical, and yes, even egotistical. By focussing on the actual societal impediments rather than his vision disability, it promotes equality, empathy, and inclusivity. We witness the character's ascent, his shortcomings (his haughty phase), and his redemption, giving him more depth than a straightforward "hero overcoming disability" cliché. Positive reviews for Rajkummar Rao's highly embodied performance, which many have praised as genuine and

humanised instead of tokenistic. The Netflix edition lacked audio descriptions, which some believed went against the inclusive theme. Nevertheless, accessibility attempts were acknowledged, albeit incomplete. Realism and humility are the foundations of narrative depth, although they can occasionally veer into moralistic preaching. The portrayal of Rajkummar Rao, praised for its realism and restraint, continues to serve as the film's emotional fulcrum. More than 70 actors with disabilities were cast, which attracted particular attention. However, the official remake of the *Forrest Gump (1994)* in essence *Laal Singh Chaddha (2022)* faced strong backlash from the audience for repeated use of terms like "langda/langdi" ("crippled") and as exaggerated performance of the actor in terms of facial gestures yet the movie managed to carve out the struggles the character had to undergone with an insight into the lived experiences. Laal shares traits with neurodivergence or intellectual developmental delay, such as sluggish processing, literal interpretation of language, and social awkwardness, even if they are not mentioned in the movie. His moral purity, perseverance, and innocence are framed by these qualities, which make him an observer of India's social development. Dramatically stylised, the braces-breaking action represents "freedom from limitation" in a really mystical, cinematic manner. The slow motion and swelled background music used in this scene, however, have been criticised for being unduly emotional and clichéd, which reinforces the idea that "overcoming disability" is possible by sheer effort.

In the *2010 film Guzarish*, cinematographer *Sudeep Chatterjee* uses a purposefully moving camera to contrast the protagonist's immobility with images of fishbowls and fluttering curtains to bring life to the wheelchair-bound magician *Ethan Mascarenhas*. The movie is about this quadriplegic, or paralysed from the neck down. The main source of contention is Ethan's wish to pass away with honor—not because he is depressed, but rather because he feels that life is not living without agency. The movie examines issues of freedom, bodily rights, and morality in addition to pity for people with disabilities. The portrayal of Ethan is one of humour, emotional intelligence, and dignity despite his physical immobility. In order to contrast Ethan's immobility, Sudeep Chatterjee employs sweeping, mobile camera movements; the environment around him is always moving and full of warmth and richness. Ethan's home is a riot of colour, sound, and dramatic light, reflecting his lively inner life and mind. Instead of using pathetic close-ups, the movie presents Ethan with empathy rather than sympathy by utilising aesthetic distance and visual grace. Ethan's prior physical freedom and current corporeal captivity are contrasted through flashbacks of him as a magician, but always

through an artistic rather than tragic lens. Instead of being a straightforward inspirational story, it centres on *paraplegia* and the right to *euthanasia*, giving *Ethan* agency in choosing death and posing a significant ethical conundrum. *Progeria* is viewed by *Paa (2009)* as a reversal of the father-son relationship, in which the child is the wise parent figure. Auro's disability doesn't determine his abilities or relationships; he is shown to be intellectual, humorous, playful, and emotionally mature. The movie stays away from the cliché of "overcoming" a disability. Rather, it normalises Auro's condition by demonstrating how he leads a fulfilling life despite his physical limitations. The narrative focusses more on love, parenting, and emotional development than it does on the illness itself, and his mother (Vidya Balan) raises him with confidence and independence. To immerse viewers in Auro's universe, cinematographer P. C. Sreeram employs organic framing and warm, genuine lighting. There aren't many pity shots on camera. Instead, it intimately and respectfully depicts Auro's everyday activities, school life, and emotional manifestations. Christien Tinsley, a Hollywood artist, created the prosthetics and cosmetics that were used to realistically portray progeria symptoms, striking a balance between sensitivity and acceptability. Instead of tragedy, the story examines humour, vulnerability, and dignity. *Iqbal (2005)* Photographed by *Sudeep Chatterjee* as well, the film uses sports-drama, grounded imagery, such as dusty village fields and close-ups of silent faces, to highlight *Iqbal's* will to overcome his deafness and quasi-muteness. Iqbal is presented as confronting societal barriers in belief and opportunity rather than as "overcoming" disability. His disability is secondary; his talent is paramount. He never romanticises his impairment; rather, it is viewed as a component of who he is, and the true struggle is with societal, not physical, restrictions. Iqbal practices diligently utilising visual cues, signs, and intuitive communication with the assistance of an alcoholic former cricket player named Mohit (Naseeruddin Shah), demonstrating adaptive learning and accessibility. Iqbal's modest environment is reflected in the handheld camera movements, natural light, and rustic rural scenes. Iqbal's lack of spoken conversation is made up for by close-ups, which highlight body language and emotional expression. Because they are grounded in grit and realism, sports scenes are dynamic without being unduly stylised, allowing the audience to concentrate on effort rather than magic. For "Best Film on Other Social Issues," it took up the National Film Award. Iqbal should not be shown as a "helpless victim," but rather as ambitious, wise, and resolute, avoiding dramatisation and clichés. regarded as a turning point in the mainstream cinematic portrayal of disabilities in India.

India's parallel and regional film scenes have demonstrated more sensitivity and realism than Bollywood, which has a tendency to commercialize disability. Filmmakers such as *Mani Ratnam (Anjali), Satyajit Ray (Kapurush, Sadgati), and Shyam Benegal (Ankur)* have examined disability with social critique and psychological nuance. *Chotoder Chobi (Bengali, 2014),* in which, Khoka, a dwarf, starts to doubt the system of exploitation that sees crippled people as entertainment. The movie questions the commodification of bodies that deviate from the so-called "normal" in the circus and entertainment industries. As is typical in Indian cinema, Chotoder Chobi portrays dwarfism with profound empathy and dignity rather than using it for comedy or compassion. Through its examination of romance, relationships, suffering, and financial difficulties*,* it demonstrates how emotionally complex persons with dwarfism are much like everyone else. The delicate and sensitive portrayal of Khoka's connection with Soma (the injured performer's daughter) challenges viewer assumptions about intimacy, love, and beauty standards. Intimate close-ups, tight framing, and natural lighting are commonly used in the movie to highlight feelings rather than physical differences. The subdued, somewhat documentary-style visual tone conveys the terrible facts of the individuals' lives without sensationalising or glamorising them. The true casting method, which used real dwarfs rather than prosthetics or computer-generated imagery. It spurred discussions on societal stigma, body politics, and representation in the entertainment sector. *Haridas (Tamil, 2013),* Autism is not shown as a terrible defect in the movie. Rather, the father uses it as a tool to change his own life by learning about love, patience, and emotional intelligence. The narrative highlights the disparity between the strict requirements of society and the compassionate inner world of a child with autism, illustrating how social institutions frequently fall short in accommodating neurodiverse youngsters. Amala Paul, a supportive instructor, plays a crucial role. She emphasises how inclusive education can empower autistic children when treated with care by utilising empathy and innovative teaching techniques. Haridas's development is steady, not magical, and based on sensitivity, routine, and emotional connection. Haridas's emotional sensitivity and remoteness are conveyed through close-ups of his face. A child who is overwhelmed by sensory noise can feel safe in a home and classroom that is kept warm and simple. It was recognised at international film festivals for its humanistic, non-patronizing approach to handicap and received the Tamil Nadu State Film Award for Best Film. Advocates for people with disabilities praised the educational value and nuanced storytelling, emphasising how it could change public perceptions of neurodivergent children in India, and

Peranbu (Tamil, 2018) Where Paapa is an adolescent who does not speak because she has cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that affects posture, movement, and motor skills. Peranbu doesn't sympathise with or romanticise Paapa. Rather, it highlights the agency, emotional complexity, and dignity of a disabled person—even if she is mute. Additionally, the movie breaks taboos around sexuality and handicap, which is a very uncommon issue in Indian cinema. Paapa's sexual awakening and her father's difficulty processing it are depicted, making the spectator face the way society trivialises those with impairments. Paapa is viewed as a burden by carers and institutions. As a single father of a girl with a disability, Amudhavan faces criticism. The movie raises issues of "normalcy" and who gets to define what constitutes a meaningful existence. Amudhavan frequently takes Paapa to serene outdoor locations, signifying liberty and non-judgment, as nature is a recurrent theme. The spectator is able to experience Paapa's universe without being overly dramatic thanks to the visual minimalism and extended silences. Even when Paapa is at a vulnerable or intimate moment, the camera respects her personal space and never objectifies her body, are recent regional films that have won praise from critics for their complex and multi-layered depictions of disabled protagonists. These movies frequently address intersectional issues, such as poverty, gender, and class, which gives the portrayal a stronger social reality foundation. Regional filmmakers seem more eager to transcend the "margins" and treat disabled characters as complete people rather than as symbolic devices, according to *Banerjee and Rao (2020).*

B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat (1988–90, Doordarshan) became a cultural phenomenon and popularized the epic in a visual form. However, despite being true to some mythological texts, its portrayal of disability also exhibits regressive stereotypes and a lack of creativity in terms of the roles that disabled characters can play. Although it depicted the strong and manipulative characters like *Dhritarashtra* as an epitome of morale but with political incapacity and the cunning nature of limp and villainy of *Shakuni* as a part of deceitful observation with his physical traits and gestures with the low angles cinematics, the same direction ignored the sage like *Ashtavakra* who is physically deformed but intellectually brilliant and marginalized the content from the audience mainstream along with the minor characters like *Chyavana* whose disability can be framed with certain timelines.

In addition to being a television program, *Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan (1987-1988)* TV show was a religious and cultural phenomenon that had a profound impact on Indian culture. But because it is based on conventional narrative structures, its depiction of characters

with physical differences or disabilities exposes a strong undercurrent of ableism, moral symbolism, and gendered suffering. Through *Manthara's* crooked gestures, high-pitched voice, and unsettling background music, her body is visually and aurally associated with her cunning, jealousy, and manipulation. Because Manthara's motivations and background are not explored in the series, it reinforces her role as a one-dimensional villain and portrays disability as intrinsically suspicious and morally lacking. It promotes the damaging and regressive trope of judging characters based solely on their outward appearance. Similarly with the character of *Shurpanakha* though mutilated and monstrous still dealt with departure from dignity, social worth and female beauty. Her sexual desires with beastly casting acquired a disfigurement that seems a bit justifying in later parts with the violent uprising against the demons. The vision further breaks this sort of narrative with the character of *Trijata* who's empathy and emotions in the *Ashok Vatika, Lanka* holds an elderly or stooped figure who treats *Sita* with kindness.

One such film is *Sparsh (1980),* directed by *Sai Paranjpe*. The movie tells the story of a blind school principal who is a self-sufficient being. The filmography narrative illustrates the frustration that many disabled people frequently experience when society continuously doubts their abilities by stating that they do not want sympathy or needless assistance. With its genuine lighting and understated camera technique, the movie is personal and authentic. Instead of emphasising visual extravaganza, Sai Paranjpye uses a subtle, character-driven tale that concentrates on ordinary moments—touch, speech, and silence. In order to emphasise how Anirudh perceives the world by sensation and intuition rather than sight, the visual language is employed to heighten emotional textures through subtle sounds, speech pauses, and tactile encounters. Its character depth and delicate storytelling. a daring depiction of romance and handicap, a subject that is rarely handled so realistically in Indian cinema. The picture, which was praised for being ahead of its time, struck a chord with those seeking out clever, socially conscious narrative. Advocates for disability rights and filmgoers still point to Sparsh as a model for respectful, real representation.

Many people consider *Gulzar's Koshish (1972)* to be a seminal work in Indian cinema's depiction of disability. In order to demonstrate that a disability does not exclude happiness, conflict, intimacy, or emotional intelligence, the movie centres on the couple's emotional depth. The biggest obstacle facing the pair is not their disability per se, but society's resistance to change. A pivotal moment in the story occurs when the parents are faced with the question of whether to marry a crippled girl after their child develops normal hearing and speech. A dramatic, introspective moment in the movie, this change illustrates how even those who live with disabilities can internalise ableist biases. Gulzar conveys emotion mostly through gestures, facial expressions, silence, and music, with very few words. Silence is a potent storytelling technique that draws the spectator into the characters' sensory world. In situations where words cannot convey emotion, sound designer Madan Mohan employs subtly evocative background music. K.Vaikunth's realistic and personal cinematography emphasises eye contact and facial expressions over spoken speech. At various points, the film adopts what could be considered an educational stance toward its audience by incorporating how a deaf person may participate economically and communicate. The film begins with the sign language alphabet in its credits. Despite this, the film exhibits both sympathy and apathy.

Based on the true tale of *Gauri Gadgil*, a girl with Down syndrome who plays herself in the film, *Yellow (2014)* is a touching Marathi film. The movie is a biographical drama that follows Gauri's journey from a young kid who struggled with social acceptance to a champion swimmer who was supported by a strong mother and a committed coach. Instead of showing her as a victim or a "patient," the movie shows her as a young girl with feelings, dreams, and uniqueness. She has learning disabilities, social anxiety, and speech problems, but she also has a lot of humour, love, and tenacity. As a reflection of the actual stigma associated with intellectual disability in India, Gauri's mother first experiences social pressure, embarrassment, and denial. Her father deserts them, underscoring the ways in which a disability can weaken family ties in a culture that lacks sensitivity and knowledge. Gauri's mother gradually comes to accept her for who she is and works tirelessly to develop her skills. Swimming is introduced to Gauri, and it turns into a healing and life-changing experience. The limitations placed on her in daily life are contrasted with the freedom that the sea offers. The fact that a disabled person is telling her own tale and enabling genuine, respectable depiction is a landmark moment in Indian cinema. Her organic performance, free of exaggeration, adds emotional nuance and realism. Her expertise utilised in swimming and personal development moments show hope, optimism, and inner fortitude. Details of Gauri's facial expressions makes her more than just her diagnosis. Restricted background music at poignant moments lets the silent speak and enables viewers to empathise with her in her battle. Smooth underwater photography in the course of swimming practice and competition stand for freedom and change. Disability is not framed by Yellow as a weakness, but rather as a difference that needs to be accepted and understood. The

story emphasises inclusion, tenacity, and acceptance over sympathy or miraculous treatments. Notwithstanding the difficulties she encounters, Gauri's lively attitude is encapsulated in the term Yellow, a colour that represents warmth, vitality, and brightness. The movie won praise from critics and struck a chord with viewers, particularly those who support disability rights, parents, and educators. It contributed to raising awareness of the significance of sports therapy, early intervention, and Down syndrome. Yellow is regarded as an example for appropriate handicap representation in Indian cinema and is frequently utilised in inclusive education seminars.p

One of the most devastating natural disasters in Indian history, the 1999 Odisha Super Cyclone, provides the backdrop for the gripping Odia film *Kathantara (2005),* which translates to "Another Story." Despite surviving the cyclone, Kalpana, a Dalit woman and widow, suffers from trauma, social humiliation, and institutional neglect. Kathantara presents disability as psychological, social, and structural rather than physical, which is consistent with contemporary conceptions of imposed and invisible impairment. She struggles to express herself, withdraws socially, and stays away from close or trustworthy connections. Although she never receives a specific diagnosis for her trauma, her actions are consistent with PTSD, a type of mental illness. Her participation in daily life is restricted by society, which also deprives her of her dignity and views her as a source of shame or charity. Systems prevent her from being autonomous, not because she lacks the capacity to obtain resources or take back her life. Kalpana is frequently invited to share her tale with bureaucrats, NGOs, and the media. However, none of these facilities offer emotional support or effective rehabilitation. Her identity is diminished to that of a "case study"-a disaster survivor, making her a symbolic victim rather than a real person. The act of objectification itself turns into a structural impairment and a kind of identity erasure. Slow tempo and extended silences reflect Kalpana's inner silence and detachment from the outside world. In-depth views of Kalpana's face stresses the importance of psychological tiredness and emotional distance. Subdued colour scheme reflects the desolation of her inner life and her shattered environment. Sequences that are repeated, such as going over the past show signs of trauma loops and mental stagnation. Images of individuals in camps, waiting helplessly and without basic dignity, represent either temporary or permanent handicap brought on by a tragedy. The film makes the argument that entire towns can become physically, psychologically, and socially incapacitated by natural disasters and insists that neglect can prolong disability and that recovery is not just physical but also social and emotional.

With the shift from later 20th century, recent concepts of 21st century which speaks of modern cinematics like *Ram Setu (2022), Adipurush (2023),* and series *like Asur (2020–23) or Karm Yuddh*, combine traditional stories with contemporary aesthetics. Mythological retellings have become more popular in Indian cinema and on streaming services (OTT) in the 2010s and 2020s. The science fiction drama *Zero (2018)* features stereotypical words like *Bauna* for repeated terms as a symbolic word for dwarfism. But the plotline introduces the onlookers to a broader arena of space science and research through the character of *R Madhavan and Anushka Sharma* where the lady cast is seen as a sufferer of cerebral palsy but the inherent courage and strength posits a dynamic viewpoint of being capable of getting into the scope of technology and inspires the co-acter who seems devoid of socially awkward and outcast character. And the climax results in the victory of *Bauua Singh* as an astronaut with a staunch belief upon himself discarding the societal criticism of the surrounding scape.

The Legend of Hanuman (2021-2024) symbolizes a milestone in Indian animation. It's cinematics, high quality VFX and CGI integrate comic inspired art and digital vector artists. Relatable characters with humanized figures are enhanced by mythic symbols with synchronized voice work. This OTT version though exists with temple art, animated book aesthetics feels like immersive and magnificent as global standards like *Miyazaki* or *LOTR*-level visuals. Despite their claims to be progressive in tone and visual language, these reimaginings- which are frequently wrapped in high-definition storytelling— continue to treat disabilities, both psychological and physical, with inherited biases. But the CGI has somehow distorted the assumed body postures and somehow deviated the original as described by the manuscripts. Particularly modern versions like *Siya Ke Ram (Star Plus, 2015)* where the Gods are presented with extended abdominal muscles (6/8 pack abs) but in terms of character portrayal *Manthara* for example is more layered- her motivations are well defined and not demonised outright.

An early psychological trauma and a misinterpretation of religious destiny shape the antagonist in the techno-mythological thriller series *Asur*. The show maintains the cliché of "difference as danger," but in psychological terms, by replacing overt physical disabilities with a metaphorical "moral and emotional deformity." Nonetheless, selective storytelling highlights how mainstream adaptations continue to favour binary visual contrasts over layered representations, such as fascination versus deformity and bravery versus depravity.

India's habits for consuming content have changed as a result of recent developments in OTT streaming services. A *2023 FICCI-EY* report states that digital media surpassed television and film in India in terms of revenue contribution, with a notable rise in character-driven, niche, and socially relevant storytelling. Nuanced disability narratives that previously struggled for theatrical viability now have a place thanks to the decentralization of content. This rise challenges the tokenism frequently observed in earlier mainstream cinema by providing disabled protagonists and authentic narratives with increased visibility.

IV.   CONCLUSION

The main goal of the study, which was to determine if Indian film has embraced inclusive and humanised representations of differently abledP in place of stereotypical ones, has been mostly achieved. While earlier representations frequently diverged into moral-symbolic or inspirational tropes, more recent narratives exhibit increased sensitivity and authenticity, according to the carefully chosen selection of texts, which range from mythological television series like *Ramanand Sagar's Ramayana* and *B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat* to modern films like *Margarita With A Straw, Chandu Champion and Srikanth*. The scope of this research is further expanded by the inclusion of regional films like *Peranbu (Tamil), Chotoder Chobi (Bengali), and Haridas (Tamil),* which demonstrate how regional filmmakers have frequently taken the lead in dismantling ableist presumptions through emotionally stirring narratives. The study reveals a noticeable change in visual storytelling from the marginalisation of disabilities to their mainstreaming.

The study's main conclusion is that OTT platforms are increasingly playing a part in this shift. More experimentation with narrative formats, character-driven plots, and socially conscious themes have been made possible by the quick growth of India's digital content ecosystem. Films that might not have done well in traditional theatres, like *Laal Singh Chaddha or Margarita With A Straw,* have found more sophisticated and appreciative audiences online, as the number of OTT viewers in India is expected to surpass 500 million by 2023 and digital platforms account for a significant portion of content discovery. The mainstreaming of disability in Indian media has benefited from this democratization of content, which has made room for more varied narratives to the ground.

From the perspective of content analysis, all movies and television shows were used in the study in authenticated and legally sourced versions. Methodological credibility has been ensured by the interpretations' adherence to well-established scholarly frameworks like media reception studies, narrative theory, and the social model of disability. A promising future for Indian cinema and the cultural representation of the disabled community is indicated by the continued expansion of the space for more inclusive, intersectional, and authentic stories of disability as digital platforms continue to redefine content boundaries.

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