

Tracing the disability in Indian society and films

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Different people look on the subject disability in different ways. The Persons with disability are considered with respect of pity, sympathy, isolated or rejected in the family and other social institutions. People maintain a social distance and treat disabled as outsiders. The development of disabled individuals depends on their personality and the way society treats them and motivates them. This will be determined by the attitude towards his/her own disability, towards other disabled people and other members of the society as well as the attitude of the society towards him. The present paper will discuss what is disability, its percentage in India, attitude of the society towards it, social exclusion level the disabled and their projection in films.

Disability is not an all-or nothing phenomenon but ranges from slight to severe. A disability is a result of the interaction between a person with a health condition and a particular environmental context. Individuals with similar health conditions may not be similarly disabled or share the same perception of their disability, depending on their environmental adaptations. For example, having access to technical aids, services or medication, or physical adaptation to the environment may allow individuals to overcome their disabling conditions.

In India, the population with disabilities is around 40 million, constituting 2.21% of India's total population, as per the 2011 population census. Disability rights activists and academicians working on disability issues, however, say that these numbers in the census are a very small percentage of the actual numbers. World Bank data estimates the total number of persons with disabilities in India to be between 40 and 80 million.

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) set up the National Centre for Disability Studies during the 11th plan period that is operational since November 2006. In order to achieve the goal of education for all, the National Centre for Disability Studies (NCDS) was established to undertake plethora of academic, research, extension and awareness activities for human resource development to empower the persons with disabilities and create a society that is friendly for them.

The evolution of the disability rights movement in India spans over four decades. Voices began demanding the rights of people suffering from disabilities in the early 1970s; however, nowhere close to being a movement at that time. The various demands from groups and individuals were significantly scattered.

People with disabilities are vulnerable because of the

with so much to contribute to the world. Governments everywhere can no longer overlook the hundreds of millions of people with disabilities who are denied access to health, rehabilitation, support, education, and employment and never get the chance to shine. (Stephen Hawking)

Until the 1970s, most of the people who suffered from any kind of disability were considered as outcasts from the mainstream society and were looked down upon. To put it bluntly, though it may sound politically incorrect, any disabled person was treated like dirt in Indian society. Most of these people were either seen as beggars or, in better cases, they were associated with the field of medicine. Even the system thought of them as a liability; these people were considered to be of little use to society and hence their concerns were severely disregarded. Many people thought of disability as the result of someone's previous life's karma and thus held them responsible for their present condition. This absurdity led to various forms of injustices in India.

The 1980s witnessed the consolidation of demands from various groups and their organization under a broad disability umbrella, representing the interests of the disabled. Many NGOs started operating in the disability sector during this decade and this subsequently provided further momentum to the disability rights movement. After a series of petitions and protests, the government passed the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 which reserved three percent of government posts for those in the disability category.

In the film industry Bollywood casted people with disabilities in poor way, there are some films that stand out for their compassionate and realistic portrayal of disabled people. More often than not, Bollywood fails to capture the life of a specially-abled person in its true sense. Many movies end up portraying 'disability' either in a stereotypical manner or use them for comic relief. However, there are a few Bollywood films that have not only managed to capture

by Ajay Phansekar, released in India in 1999, starring Dilip Prabhavalkar as an old man suffering from split personality. This was the first Marathi movie on paranoid schizophrenia

The story revolves around the two worlds inhabited by Prabhakar Phadke and Dilip Prabhavalkar - an ordinary senior citizen who is an avid reader of crime fiction. Living his normal life by day, he is transformed into his fantasy world by night. This is the world in which he imagines himself to be a blind industrialist who is the target of conspiracies of his near and dear ones. This schizophrenia leads to a tragedy in his real life and he ends up at a mental asylum where the psychiatrists try to separate the fantasy from reality so that he can lead his normal life once again.

The term 'mentally ill', does bring some stereotypical images in our minds like a person looking blankly on the walls, mumbling to themselves, aggressive behaviour etc. Our perception of mental illness is quite limited, all thanks to the films we watch. For those who have been looking forward to get the better understanding of mental illness, here is a list of Marathi films that are realistic in their approach and did not negatively portray those who have mental illnesses.

National Award winning Marathi film 'Kaasav' directed by filmmaker duo Sumitra Bhave-Sunil Sukthankar, revolves around a depressed youngster. Maanav has been hospitalized for cutting his wrists. He runs away from the hospital, but Janaki finds him collapsed on the side of the road. She asks her driver Yadu to take him home to Goa and appoints a private doctor. Janaki is a divorcee who often consults a psychologist for her panic attacks. She also helps Dattabhau (Mohan Agashe), who is working on an Olive Ridley Sea Turtles conservation program.

Astu is a film again directed by the duo Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Suktankar and stars Mohan Agashe, Iravati Harshe, Milind Soman and Amruta Subhash in lead roles. The film is about Dr Chakrapani Shastri, a Sanskrit scholar who has been diagnosed with the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease. One day, as Ram has to appear for his exams, Shastri's elder daughter Ira takes Shastri to her house. While driving back home, Ira stops at a shop, requesting Shastri to stay in the car. The story takes an interesting turn when Shastri sees a passing elephant on the road, and gets fascinated. He then starts following the elephant through the lanes of the city. When Ira comes back and finds her father missing from the car, she and her husband, Madhav starts looking for Shastri at various places and also reports him to the police station

involving developmental disability and children. The directorial debut film is based on a true story of Gadgil, a child with special needs, who also plays in the film.

The story is about Mugdha and Shekhar, the parents of Gauri a child with down's syndrome & mental disability. Despite her unsupportive husband, Mugdha wants to bring Gauri up normally. She steps from her husband and starts living with her brother. However Gauri remains tough to handle, till she dies her love for swim

There are some movies still portraying disability negative, sometimes comical light, there is a need for more sensitization and awareness, which is possible if we stop resorting to stereotypes and provide opportunity to disabled actors to represent their community. To the disability movement, Bollywood needs to make full use of its medium to spread the message and end the negative portrayal of disability in India. In India, the number of disabled are so large, their problems are complex, and resources also scarce, social stigma still attached is damaging. Attitudinal barriers engrained as part of historical response to disability must be changed through education programs for both teachers and the general populace

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