

# **Analyzing the Cinematic Representation of Disability in Selected Bollywood Movies**

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## **Abstract**

Disability can be described as any kind of inability, dysfunction or deficit of the body or mind which causes impediments to an individual in performing specific activities and creates obstacles in communication with their surroundings contrary to what constitutes “normal” by the able population. It exhibits itself in several forms. Disability can be congenital or acquired. Disability Studies is the locus which as an academic discourse calls for a social and attitudinal change in our approach towards people with disability. Physical and intellectual deformation often leads to deformation of a person on the social front. The focus here is to perceive the area of disability studies not as a pathological category but rather as a critical category which can be reinterpreted and reshaped to give meaning to the lives of the people living with disabilities.

The application of disability studies on contemporary Indian fiction and films helps in widening the horizon of human consciousness. The focus is to make the invisible section of the society visible by working as an eye opener for the society so that the people with disability are saved from marginalization and social exclusion. This paper intends to do away with the commodification of disabled individuals and treat them as normal social beings. It is difficult for the people of the mainstream culture to agree with the fact that life is a process which starts with disability then ability and then it gets over with the disability. This thought seems disturbing to them, therefore, they hesitate to talk about these issues. Social stratification is the inequality fabricated by the society which gives privileged positions to some people while it renders a less privileged position to others.

Literature and Media have made a significant contribution in increasing awareness about various challenges confronted by persons with disability. They have helped in providing some insights into the psyche of the disabled through projecting their deprivation, segregation

and discrimination in the society. It has, thus, provided them with a voice of their own at socio-cultural and political level. This has, in certain specific ways, helped them to ameliorate their status by granting them access to some of their basic human rights, but the reality of their situation and its representation in media reveals that there is still a long way to go for the disabled, to get really empowered and lead a life of dignity and realization of their full potential. In this respect, the role of cinema, a potent means of enlightenment and social transformation, assumes crucial significance and, therefore, needs to be examined in depth and detail. Many mainstream Bollywood movies have depicted the experiences of differently-abled people either as a part of the plot or as the main subject of the story while exploring varied ways of fascination with the topic. This paper is an attempt to shed light on how Bollywood mainstream cinema incorporates the idea of disability in their movies, and what is the level of sensitivity when it deals with issues of disability? Whether the idea of disability has been romanticized or patronized in Bollywood movies? Whether Bollywood uses the idea of disability just to garner commercial success or communicate about the concerns of a disability type?

**Keywords:** Bollywood, Disability, Disability-Communication, Representation, Film on Disability, Mainstream Cinema, Physical Disability, Victimization, Segregation, Social Exclusion, Empathy.

The common worldview believes that the able-bodied are the norm in society, and the people who have disabilities must either strive to become that norm or should keep their distance from able-bodied people. The 'able-ist' worldview holds that disability is an error, a mistake, or a failing, rather than a simple consequence of human diversity. So, the term 'disability' doesn't only stand for physical or psychological impairment. This rightfully can be used to refer to the disabling barriers of prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion of the impaired person.

From an Indian socio-cultural context, the traditional concept of 'Disability and Karma' enunciates disability as a perception of punishment for misdeeds in the past lives or crimes committed by the parents, which to some extent still continues to be a common belief amongst not only the less educated, but amongst well-educated urban dwellers also. The construction and also modification of such common belief have been performed by the media with the dramatic proliferation in societal sub-systems, coupled with its symbolic power to shape reality. Depiction of disability in media embodying human roles and values has also undergone a paradigmatic change.

In Indian mythology and tradition disability is seen as a product of divine punishment. Intellectual disability is often associated with the possession of malevolent spirits, witchcrafts and sorceries. The distorted representation of disability in Indian mythology has created a social barrier for the physically and intellectually disabled people. In Indian mythology disability is associated with evil. It is a culturally fixed notion that the deformed bodies are the result of a person's moral depravity in the past. Even the greatest epics of all times, *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, speak of the same. Manthara, a hunchbacked woman in the famous Indian epic, *Ramayana*, is known for her evil deeds. Shakuni in *Mahabharata* is shown as a limping character in the narrative. The physical disability of Shakuni and Manthara respectively has been associated with the evil intentions and wickedness of each of them. Even the Greek myths talk about the same association of wrongdoings with corporeal distortion. Medusa in Greek mythology is portrayed as the most beautiful woman who was courted by the God of the Sea, Poseidon. Once, Athena the goddess of warfare, wisdom and handicraft gets annoyed with Medusa and Poseidon for making her temple their abode of love. Therefore, she turns Medusa into a scary monster with snakes trailing down from her head. Her sight could turn anybody into stone. The subtext of the story is that the distortion is always the result of wrongdoings.

Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness amongst the general public. While several entities have tried to bring about this awareness, their reach has been rather limited. Given this lack of awareness amongst the general public, media representation can provide a powerful medium for dissemination. Given the wide reach of the Bollywood industry, it can prove to be an effective tool for changing people's perceptions and uprooting social stereotypes. Any kind of disability, at any level, leads to one kind of victimization or the other. This victimization could be clearly discernible in the form of pain, segregation or suffering or it could be extremely subtle and silent so as not to be visible and acceptable to the society and sometimes not even to the person who is victimized. And there could, of course, be many shades in between, each different from the other in its nature and character. Any specific condition or situation that restricts normal activity and makes one more prone to any kind of subjugation, dependence and discrimination is likely to cause some kind of victimization. Seen in the broader perspective, what is called victimization is a state of affairs that takes place each and every moment of one's existence. When one begins to accept one's situation and the responses of the society unquestioningly without any resistance, resentment or defiance, it begins to take the shape of victimization. Victimization, seen in this sense of the term then, is a daily fact of life for many people with disabilities and is almost considered as 'a natural way of life'. The feeling of incompleteness, shame, humiliation, and social stigma, associated with various forms of disabilities begins from home and family levels, and spreads its tentacles in every sphere of social, cultural, economic and political life. Modernity, with all its rationality and enlightenment has failed to accommodate people with a difference. There is a widespread tendency to practise discrimination against them, to mock and jeer at them and, in a way, discard them as complete individuals.

Societal attitudes are reflected through the characters that one comes across. Generally, three strata of reactions are visible. One is that of a common man, who out of sheer curiosity wishes to inquire about the disability without any ill-will. Then there is the disabled itself who begins to consider it to be a burden on the family since he perceives his disability as a lack that cannot be overcome in spite of best efforts. His ability or disability, in this sense, is defined by the attitudes of his own society. This perception towards disability forces one to undergo "double exclusion"; exclusion by society at large and more dangerously, exclusion by one's own self, which leads to a stage of "complete surrender" and, "no resistance", a

stage where adjustment and compromise seem to be the only way to live. But there are people who are able to overcome such attitudes, exclusions and discouragements; their courage and determination help them, to transcend their disabilities and to emerge as individual stories of strength and success, but the pain undergone by them during the period of struggle stays with them, though they do not usually react, complain, resist or question the demeaning attitudes of people.

The Government of India appointed a 'Working Group' in May 1979 to study the present state of cinema. The report of the 'Working Group' on National Film Policy says: The wider popularity of cinema and its known strength as an audio-visual medium of communication invests this medium with a pervasive power for social influence. Cinema has, therefore, the potential to play an important role as a medium of enlightenment, information and education, and as a catalyst of social change. A critical analysis of the treatment of disability and its projection in Indian cinema shows that, for a long time, it has remained indifferent to the predicament suffered by the disabled.

Films are rightly touted to be the mirrors of the society we live in. While the Hindi film industry is catching up on the social issues that the Indian society faces, it has also been conscious of the people with physical and mental disabilities. Media is considered to be a powerful medium that reflects the happenings in a society. While it is caught up between the real and reel life, it still serves as an important medium of entertaining people, educating them and bringing a behavioral change in their practices and attitudes. Given the reach of the Bollywood industry in India and across the world, it has been particularly effective in changing people's perception and uprooting societal stereotypes towards Disability.

Dr. Atanu Mohapatra notes, "...portrayal of disability in films swings primarily between two extremes – pity, fun, caricaturing, sympathy, and awesome heroism are at one end of the spectrum while discrimination, coping-up, emotional swings and aspirations of the human soul are at the other end." The depiction of disability through the Bollywood movies mainly encompasses this very view. While several film-makers have used disability as a comic interlude or to give a dramatic twist to their script with scant regard for the rights of a large group of people with impairment, there have been some film-makers who have been able to

build a tale around the insensitivity of society towards the disabled. Observation can reveal multifaceted portrayal styles of disability within the filmic narrative of Bollywood.

The decade of 1970s was a transitional period in that, one can find, for the first time, a few impaired individuals or women in the lead roles in Bollywood, with some of the established stars of this period being pioneers of change. Severe impairments were still the forte of character actresses like Farida Jalal who played the role of wheelchair bound sister of Amitabh Bachchan in *Majboor* (1970) or Naaz who played Rajesh Khanna's orthopaedically impaired sister in *Sachha Jhootha* (1974). They are greatly loved by the family, but one thing that still lacked was that no effort was made to make them self-sufficient. In *Saccha Jhootha*, character actress Naaz who plays the part of Belu, lives in a village with her brother and step mother. To escape from the atrocities of the step-mother, Bhola - her brother, decides to leave the village and go to a city to find some work, earn money and get his sister Belu married off which his mother otherwise would not allow as Belu is adept in household work. After the death of her mother, she comes to the city to find out her brother. She is beautiful and being disabled, is more vulnerable. An attempt is made to violate her modesty, but she is saved by the timely intervention of a gracious police inspector who convinces her to stay at his home until she finds her brother. The inspector's mother takes a liking to her and decides to arrange her marriage with her son. But before taking any final decision, she asks Belu whether her disability was congenital or it was acquired later on, after birth. It is, in fact, a reflection on the societal attitudes which go with the perfection of human bodies. Had Belu's disability been congenital, and not been the result of an accident and also not been potentially curable, perhaps the marriage would not have materialized.

Most of the times it is thought that getting married means getting settled down and empowered. But more often than not, this proves to be a myth, especially in the cases of disabled women. They have to be dependent on their fathers, husbands and brothers; and in the absence of these relationships, they are portrayed as totally wretched and vulnerable. They are never made or trained to act in a positive way so as to struggle courageously with their difficulties, earn their own livelihood, in terms of going out and making their life successful in their own ways and on their own terms. This kind of depiction raises a number of questions related to gender discrimination and stereotypical roles and attitudes. Why have the disabled characters and specially the disabled women been on the margins and why have their actual needs and problems not been addressed? Their visibility, their achievements, their

strengths and weaknesses are, as if, of no importance. Why has the Indian film industry, which produces thousands of films every year, produced only a few full-length cinemas about these characters? Some of the roles of the disabled in films here and there do get a treatment of prominence, but the mainstreaming of the disabled and their issues has hardly been taken into account. They have been chronically neglected from the celluloid for lack of sensitivity and inclusive approach; although, to a limited extent, the cultural, historical and sociological barriers have also played their part in not making of such cinema of substance, that is, a disabled person meets an able-bodied person who helps them look past their disability to live a happy life.

Disability has been seen as a punishment in Indian Cinema for quite some time. One such portrayal was seen in the movie *Jeevan Naya* (1936), where the lead character abandons his wife due to her background from a family full of dancers, which was considered shameful by the lead character, and subsequently is blinded in an accident and nursed back to health by a woman, who is revealed to be his devoted wife in the end. The movie *Kashish* (1980) is another example, where the evil brother torments his deaf sister and brother-in-law and, later, becomes paralyzed, which he takes as punishment for his acts. In the movie *Dhanwan* (1981), the rich protagonist is blinded and unable to buy a new pair of eyes, but later does find a benevolent donor only after he repents and turns to God. Similarly, in the movie *Netrikaan* (1981), the lead character ends up in a wheelchair due to the lascivious life that he was living. Apart from this narrative, more powerful representations have been shown where disability is portrayed as a punishment worse than death. In the movie *Haider* (2014), the protagonist decides not to kill his uncle, who murdered his father, partly because his uncle had his legs amputated.

A new wave of Hindi films has started portraying disability much more sensibly and sensitively on the screen. The intent is to use the platform as a mean to generate awareness and sensitivity among the common people. Also, there seems to be a paradigm shift in how a director looks at disability, by depicting individual and interpersonal acceptance and adherence instead of cliché melodramatic social negation and rejection. It is noticeable that, the earlier films of Bollywood while representing disability, mainly preferred to portray characters of deaf and mute, blind, accidentally impaired and impaired by action of revenge. On contrary, there have been a number of mainstream films in recent years about a range of conditions, many of which rarely get serious discussion in the public sphere; such as

Progeria, Dyslexia, Asperger Syndrome, Tetraplegia, Autism, Cerebral Palsy etc. It is gratifying to see that these kinds of films are indeed moving closer to an inclusive view of disability as integrated part of society. Though some of these movies have been accused of stereotyping, the fact that the concepts they discuss have never even made it to the screen make them worth appreciating, especially for taking effort to facilitate critical importance of public discourse of disability.

Largely inspired by Steven Spielberg's 'E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial', Rakesh Roshan's *'Koi...Mil Gaya'* was a mainstream science fiction movie, starring Hrithik Roshan and Preity Zinta. *'Koi...Mil Gaya'* was the story of a disabled boy Rohit, played by Hrithik Roshan, whose life changes when he comes across an extra-terrestrial. Released in the year 2003, the movie has its theme revolves around heroism and sympathetic base. The film received highly positive critical reviews and was declared a "Blockbuster" by Indian Box office. The character of Rohit, a child-man, is mentally disabled due to a brain injury he received in an accident while still being a foetus. He is survived by his mother and lives a middle-class life. He faces ridicule and torment at every phase of his life. But, one day with the help of his lone companion Nisha, played by Preity Zinta, Rohit managed to contact and call, though by fault, the Aliens through his demised scientist father's computer, and this incident led an extraterrestrial left behind on earth. Ever since Rohit become friend with that alien, his life changed drastically and dramatically, given the silver screen requirement of dramatized twist. The alien, named Jaadoo by Rohit, bestowed powers on Rohit that made him to behave and act normal as of his age; his Intelligence Quotient increased; and he physically become stronger. By the virtue of his new powers, the protagonist becomes a hero among his friends and people around. In this movie the idea of disability is well utilized to give momentum to the heroism of the protagonist rather than to aware and sensitize the audience, a part of the society, about the type of disability the protagonist is suffering from. At one point it can be said that the idea of disability has been used to make the audience to patronize the mentally challenged protagonist who had been mocked by his peers, but at the second point the disability condition of Rohit helped romanticize his character when he became normal with the power bestowed on him by his extra-terrestrial friend. Since the protagonist is differently-abled in this film, the director has dealt with the disability condition with high sensitivity as in scenes where his school teacher insults in the classroom when he couldn't give the answer to a simple question, and where his ill-minded peers bullied him and broke his scooter, and he couldn't fight back.



Released in 2012, ***Barfi*** is a Bollywood film directed by Anurag Basu who explores an intriguing relationship between a deaf and mute person, an autistic person and a normal person. This film is a comedy-romance-drama with disabled protagonists – a deaf and dumb man, Murphy (Ranbir Kapoor) whom everyone calls Barfi, and Jhilmil (Priyanka Chopra), an autistic grown up girl and a childhood friend of Barfi. Received as a path-breaking film that has changed the Hindi Film Industry's perception about the abilities of the disabled characters, the film ***Barfi*** garnered a huge commercial success at box office and became one of the highest-grossing Bollywood films of 2012 in India with a gross 24.8 Million of revenue. The film ***Barfi*** revolves around a boy named Murphy, popular as Barfi and Jhilmil, an autistic character in the film who is a childhood friend of Barfi. Although, Barfi can neither speak nor listen, a deaf and mute by birth, he is quite an attention grabber with always up to a prank in his mind. Barfi lives his life with full enthusiasm, without an inch of melancholy of being a disabled person and works around his dis-abilities with always carrying a smile on his face. With his spirits always high enough, he falls in love with Shruti (Ileana D'Cruz), a physically normal girl unlike him, and she too starts loving him for his happy go lucky attitude for life but gives up to the societal pressure of disabled-nondisabled as well as rich-poor gap they had and ends up marrying someone else. Then enters Jhilmil in Barfi's life. With his utter zest for life, Barfi even helped Jhilmil to meet life beyond her disabilities. However, some audiences fail to understand the character of Jhilmil, but within the movie plotline Barfi instantly finds a bond with the girl (Pal, 2012). ***Barfi*** is a film which pulls the audience into the world of the disabled without carrying the weight of pity. However, the focus of this film is not on the portrayal of associated predicaments of disabled characters, rather its more about enjoying life, giving happiness, feeling love. Despite being a deaf and mute person, Barfi never stops experiencing the joys of life.

Diverging from theses narratives, disability has also been equated to heroism. Films such as ***Dushman*** (1998) and ***Aankhen*** (2002) portray blind protagonists using their “sixth sense” to save the day. Such movies distort reality and do not help in improving or raising awareness of people living with disabilities. The inability for people with disabilities to live independently has also been portrayed as a setback. Movies such as ***Dosti*** (1964) and ***Khamoshi*** (1970) depict people with disabilities as dependent upon other “abled persons.” While the movie ***Koshish*** (1972) is seen as a landmark depiction of disability in Indian cinema by representing the life and struggles of a deaf person, it fails on

account of a father begging for his deaf daughter to get married to his deaf employee's son, which reinforces the idea of reliance of a deaf person upon a fully abled person for a successful life.

While there have been numerous negative portrayals of disability, there have been instances that have played an important role in generating awareness. Movies such as *Barfi* (2012), *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), *Main Aisa Hi Hoon* (2005), *Sparsh* (1980), *Black* (2005), and *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) are movies that have had both box office and critical success and also helped change attitudes toward disability. *Sparsh* is a 1980s movie that portrayed the potential and the challenges that hinder the success of blind people. Upon the release of this movie, the funding for the Blind Relief Association doubled, which is credited with kick-starting the discourse surrounding the disability movement in the 1980s. *Taare Zameen Par* is a critically acclaimed movie that dealt with the issue of a child with dyslexia. It was such a huge success that, a few days after the release of the movie, the Central Board of Secondary Education issued circular allowing students with disabilities to have extra compensatory time to complete their exams. After the release of this movie, a lot of fashion shows started raising funds for disability organizations due to popular demand from customers.

*Main Aisa Hi Hoon* is a film which revolved around a legal battle for child custody between a mentally challenged father and the maternal grandfather, who wanted to take his granddaughter back with him to the United Kingdom. This film not only dealt with the issue of using words such as “retard,” “paagal,” “handicapped,” etc., but also engagement with national as well as international laws and their applicability, demonstrating the sincerity and research put in by the team during the making of the movie. This movie also helped in shaping The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, India's disability legislation passed by the Indian Parliament, which fulfills its obligation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The films like *Iqbal* (2005) and *Black* (2005) mainly jive with the rhetoric of heroic triumph of the impaired protagonists against all misfortunes and social obstacles. Nagesh Kukoonoor's *Iqbal* is about the mute son of a farmer (played by Shreyas Talpade), who has a passion for the game of cricket and eventually goes on to make it to the Indian Cricket team

overcoming all barriers. Inspired by the film 'The Miracle Worker', which was based on Helen Keller's life and struggle, the cathartic tale of a visually challenged and hearing impaired girl (played by Rani Mukherjee) in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's **Black**, overcomes the adversity of being disabled to become one of the 20th century's leading humanitarians. **Black** also portrays the lack of social touch and numerous formal rules, which bind up the disability in elite family where the struggle is mostly inward and confined to the person with disability.

With movies still portraying disability in a negative, sometimes comical light, there is a need for even more sensitization and awareness, which is possible if movies stop resorting to stereotypes and provide opportunities for disabled actors to represent their community. To help 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. Cinema has a prominent niche in society and reflects the real through reel life. As much as it is a medium of entertainment, it also serves as a means to educate and bring a behavioural shift in its audience. The extensive reach of cinema is not just limited to India but is worldwide; hence it is to be used judiciously in uprooting such societal stereotypes. In Bollywood mainstream movies, the protagonists are those who can represent ideal aspects, something that everyone can connect to. A protagonist is a person with heroic traits who cannot be desexualized, cannot be incomplete, cannot be someone to be made fun of, and cannot be dependent. The disabled bodies thus have conventionally fulfilled either supporting character roles, or else if they are the central characters or protagonists, they must become an object of tragedy or their senses and skills would be stretched beyond reality, in an exaggerated fashion. The disabled character is somewhat sensitive and sensible when they are protagonist in a movie but in non-protagonist role, their woes are scarcely shown; generally, a mockery is created or fun of their disability is made. The depth with which the disability conditions have been dealt in Bollywood cinema varies based on the role of the disabled character as protagonist or non-protagonist. Sometimes it is puzzling why disabled characters were used in non-protagonist roles as movies are mostly fiction-based.

The portrayal of disability in early eras of Bollywood was social with high level of patronisation but the new trend of Hindi cinema has gone beyond stereotyping the disability conditions like in the film **Barfi** that is the manifestation of Bollywood's concern of pulling up the abilities of disabled, though in exaggerated fashion, to add romanticism to the theme to engage more audience. The B'town film makers also use disabled characters to pull up comic

interludes, which is way too far from a real situation. Films in which the disabled character is protagonist and being portrayed in exaggerated fashion with all the heroic activities such as '*Koi...Mil Gaya*' and *Barfi* are higher grosser. On the other hand, films in which the nonprotagonist character(s) are shown with a disability conditions such as *Tera Mera Saath Rahen* and *Golmaal* sequels are usually make lesser box office revenue. However, it is also being noted that a movie, like *Iqbal*, in which the disabled character is a protagonist but as a dependent folk, grossed poorly at box office. The movies dealing the disability conditions with less sensitivity are commercially more successful. In fact, filmmakers consider the issue of physical disability as a politically charged commodity that can make audiences to 'buy' it.

To conclude, it can be said that an overall positive shift towards recognition and celebration of different kinds of abilities in the films, as a result of combined efforts in the field of increased awareness, support structures and rehabilitation of the disabled through various groups and policy level interventions by the Government, has certainly made a visible difference towards initiating a more inclusive, participatory and barrier free society ,but there is still a long way to go. A beginning has certainly been made in the form of challenging the conservative attitudes towards disability but much more remains to be done at the level of representation in the films, as well as in real life that can ensure their right to live with dignity and lead to fuller inclusion and participation at various levels. The helplessness expressed by Ethan suffering from multiple disabilities culminating in appeal (*Guzaarish*) for euthanasia cannot be allowed to prevail upon in real life, as well as on screen since any desire for escape from life under any circumstances whatsoever, reflects more a failure of the existing social attitudes and opportunities than that of the concerned individual. The depiction of Rowan's victory at the end, who through his disability, is able to correct the misconceptions related to prejudiced thinking, is more affirmative and reassuring since it serves to restore faith in life and meaningful living. So does Barfi with his incompleteness of the body but completeness of love for his disabled life partner. The ability to live and love transcends all other inabilities and provides a ray of hope even in the midst of complete darkness. Kavita's assertion in Sparsh that though the problems of the able bodied and the disabled vary, their hopes and illuminations could be one; provides useful insight for a harmonious blend of the world of the abled and the disabled. One of the songs in Taare Zameen Par "*Ham jaise dekhe, ye jahan hai waisa hi*" conveys that this world is as one sees it and intends to make it. The disability does not so much lie in the individual as in the way it is seen, interpreted and dealt with by the members of the society.

"Rather than celebrating our uniqueness, those character traits are perceived as flawed and we are encouraged to aspire towards perfection. It places a huge amount of pressure on individuals ... Sadly, it is a universal phenomenon. The most damaging by-product of this is our self-perception and how we see ourselves through the eyes and opinions of others" (Bumcombe and Waheed). This tendency for homogeneity and perfection in films and real life tend to deprive the disabled characters to live in a normal and natural way at ease with their different and unique qualities. There is a need for a radical change in the attitudes and perceptions of the filmmakers and public at large. The perceptions related to physical appearance, beauty and success in the context of the films need to be revised so as to include characters with different kinds of beauty and strength; even those who might not be beautiful and screen friendly in the conventional sense of the term; so that the real beauty comprising of all kinds of human nature and capabilities, could be represented on the screen. This particularly applies to the silent and repressed world of the disabled women that find negligible representation in the films for fear of not being accepted by the public. Women who are not sexually attractive or bodily perfect deserve as much space and visibility as any other individual so that the public perceptions related to beauty and worth could be enlarged to include the "ugly", uncomfortable and challenging realities of life. The appearance of the disabled themselves on the screen as actors or in character roles might make a huge difference. It can lead to enhancing their own visibility and confidence and at the same time, could also lead to a change in public perceptions through more authentic portrayal of their life and desires.

From a pitiable to an independent and self-reliant person with disability, Bollywood has come a long way in depicting disabilities. While disability has often been represented as dependence and punishment, several recent films have dealt with the issue very sensitively, and have had significant impact on the disability movement in the country. Observing the current trends, one can be hopeful of the appropriate and effective utilization of the powerful medium of films. However, there have still been some movies that have presented disability in the stereotypical conventional light or for comical effect (the controversy regarding *Golmaal 3* poking fun at people who stammer is one such example). Thus, festivals such as the international disability film festival must be continued and promoted to ensure that the Bollywood fraternity is even more sensitized and the disability sector is able to make full use of Bollywood for getting its message across to the public.

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