

Unveiling Unseen Realities: Disability, Sexuality and Cinema: An Analytical Approach

Project Report

Submitted by

Megha Krishnan (SB21CE019)

Under the guidance of

Ms. Neena George

In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

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Kottayam-686560

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project “Unveiling Unseen Realities: Disability, Sexuality and Cinema: An Analytical Approach” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam

Megha Krishnan

Date: 22/04/2024

SB21CE019

B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Shifting Paradigms: Disability, Sexuality and The Silver Screen: An Analysis” by Megha Krishnan is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



Ernakulam

Date: 22/04/2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neena George".

Ms. Neena George

Department of Communicative English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to offer my humble prayers and thanks to God Almighty for his mercy and blessings for the completion of this project.

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Megha Krishnan

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to analyse the portrayal of disability and sexuality in the light of two movies “Peranbu” and “Margarita with a Straw.”

By examining these cinematic narratives, the study aims to explore how these films challenge traditional paradigms and contribute to a more inclusive and authentic representation of individuals with disabilities and their sexualities on screen. Through a qualitative analysis of themes, character development, and cinematic techniques, the paper highlights the complexities and intersections of disability and sexuality, shedding light on the evolving discourse within the film industry. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the potential of cinema as a medium for social change and advocacy, paving the way for a more empathetic and inclusive society.

Ultimately, this research seeks to promote greater awareness, inclusivity, and acceptance of diverse experiences, amplifying the voices of marginalised communities in both academic discourse and broader societal narratives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to Amudhavan in “*Peranbu*” “Only nature treats humans based on their genders as man and woman. Thus, I fathomed that love and affection are beyond such differences.” (Peranbu, 00:48:42 - 00:43:00)

The world adjusts its focus on matters according to what is presented to them right in front of their eyes, because of which, it is mostly blind to the absolute truth and reality. It has been observed that differences are seldom accepted and seen as normal. The desire to be felt inclusive by many is often crushed by society simply because of the inability to agree upon what can now be called the “new normal.” Although this indifference is multifaceted, and can be attributed to many differences seen among the people, there are two main aspects often targeted in relation to a person’s biological orientation: disability and sexuality.

Disability can be defined as a physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological condition that may limit an individual’s ability to perform certain activities or participate fully in society. It is often observed that films challenge or reinforce stereotypes associated with disability.

Sexuality is a multifaceted aspect of human identity encompassing an individual’s sexual orientation, desires, behaviours, and relationships. The portrayal of sexuality in films may influence the perceptions of people, potentially challenging preconceived notions, and paving way into fostering great acceptance and inclusivity.

In the cinematic realm, the convergence between these two aspects of identity is often underexplored and misunderstood. As society paves way to new

developments and progress, there arises a need for a nuanced understanding of these critical facets of human experience. In the vast tapestry of cinematic narratives, certain stories possess the power to blur the boundaries of conventional storytelling, prompting a re-evaluation of societal and cultural norms.

Indian cinema in its history of over a century has seen various representations and interpretations of sexuality and disability. The evolution of movies in general has contributed to several changes in the portrayal of sensitive topics that continue to evoke in the minds of the audience, a sense of discomfort and reluctance.

It really was intended to be the voice of all differently abled people when Murray Kinnell said:

“We didn’t lie to you, folks! We told you we had living, breathing monstrosities. You laugh at them, shudder at them, and yet, but for the accident of birth, you might even be as they are. They did not ask to be brought into the world, but into the world they came. Their code is a law unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all.” (The Freaks, directed by Tod Browning, performance by Murray Kinnell, unabridged version, Metro Goldwyn Mayer pictures, 1932, (00:32).

One of the earliest international films to deal with the theme of disability was “The Miracle Man,” released in 1919. Directed by George Loane Tucker, this American silent film does not focus solely on disability as a central theme; but it continues to stand as one of the earliest examples of a film addressing disability in a significant way. The understanding and portrayal of disability in

films have evolved over time, and subsequent films have explored the theme in more depth and with greater sensitivity.

A number of films such as “The Best Years of Our Lives” (1946) directed by William Wyler, “My Left Foot” (1989) directed by Jim Sheridan, “Dancer in the Dark” (2000) directed by Lars von Trier and “A Fantastic Women” (2017) directed by Sebastián Lelio dealt with themes of disability in their own ways, and each one instilled a different perspective in the minds of the audiences while directing them to rethink and divert their mindsets from the typical stereotypes and prejudices associated with the concept of disability.

It is a fact beyond doubt that Indian cinema has its own ways by which it addresses socially relevant topics and concerns. Thus, tracing the history of Indian cinema will take us to the first ever film that showcased it- “Anuraag.” Released in 1972 and directed by Shakti Samanta, the film explores the relationship between a mentally challenged boy and a young woman.

"Anuraag" is considered one of the first Bollywood films to address the subject of intellectual disability. The storyline revolves around the challenges faced by the mentally challenged boy and how society responds to his condition. The film is known for its emotional content and attempts to create awareness about mental disabilities.

Another early Indian film that was notable for its depiction of the theme of disability was “Sparsh”. Released in 1980 and directed by Sai Paranjpye, the film revolves around the relationship between a visually impaired principal of a school for the blind and a sighted teacher. The movie is still remembered for its sensitive portrayal of blindness and the challenges faced by visually impaired

individuals. The film explores themes of love, empathy, and the pursuit of a meaningful life despite physical limitations.

As Indian cinema evolved overtime, it aimed to erase all traces and evidence of existing stereotypical perspectives towards the differently abled and was able to do so to an extent by being the voices that challenged the society through certain films such as “Koshish” (1972) directed by Gulzar, “Anjali” (1990) directed by Mani Ratnam, “Black” (2005) directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and “Barfi!” (2012) directed by Anurag Basu.

These films represent a range of disabilities and have contributed to a more nuanced and empathetic portrayal of individuals with diverse challenges. To this day, Indian cinema is continuing to explore disability with sensitivity, shedding light on the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of individuals living with various conditions.

The portrayal of sexuality in films has also evolved over time. There has been a notable shift in the way this sensitive topic is being perceived even though society is still struggling to foresee a more inclusive tomorrow.

The first ever international film that tackled the theme of sexuality was "Coming Home," directed by Hal Ashby and released in 1978, an American drama film that explores the impact of the Vietnam War on the lives of its characters. The protagonist, Luke Martin, becomes paralyzed from the waist down during the war, and the film delves into his struggle with adjusting to his disability and his evolving relationship with his wife. While the film is not solely focused on the sexuality of a disabled character, it does include scenes that touch on the intimate and emotional aspects of the relationship between the disabled protagonist and his partner.

Some other films that left a deep impression upon the audience through the ways in which they managed to pull off this sensitive topic are “My Left Foot” (1989) directed by Jim Sheridan, “The Sessions” (2012) directed by Ben Lewin and the “Theory of Everything” (2014) directed by James Marsh.

Like the approach it has towards the portrayal of disability, Indian cinema has also tried its hands in bringing out the intricacies of strong-willed people with disabilities.

Films like “Hawa Hawai” (1997) directed by Hansal Mehta, “Koi Mil Gaya” (2003) directed by Rakesh Roshan, “Barfi!” (2012) directed by Anurag Basu and “Peranbu” (2018) directed by Ram are some of the most notable movies that Indian cinema has crafted that has successfully challenged the stereotypical norms created by the society.

Out of these films, one that has truly managed to stand out is “Margarita with a Straw”. Directed by Shonali Bose, this Indian film follows the life of a young woman with cerebral palsy and explores her journey of self-discovery, including her sexuality and desire for independence.

This project aims at exploring the various portrayal of disability and sexuality in Indian cinema in the light of two movies. Case studies of two movies are considered here to reflect upon cinema's potential to challenge stereotypes, evoke empathy, and foster a more inclusive world while unravelling the complex interplay between disability and sexuality, and to understand how these films contribute to reshaping the paradigms that govern our understanding of diverse human experiences.

Theories provide a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between disability and sexuality. In the context of this research project,

Feminist Film Theory and Narrative Semiotic Theory serve as a lens through which the female characters can be analysed in the movies “Peranbu” and “Margarita with a Straw.” The fusion of these theories allows us to scrutinise the character representations as well as their underlying societal implications.

Narrative semiotic theory creates a forum that will help to explore the signs and symbols that has built the narrative and is a guide to decipher the intricate webs of visual and narrative cues that helps shape the characters’ experiences throughout the story.

Complementing the semiotic theory, the feminist film theory also acts as a tool that helps in analysing the female characters in both these films, each fighting their own battles.

A more detailed analysis of these films and the theories that govern the main ideas expressed, along with how they can be found relevant in certain time stamps of both films will be discussed in the following chapters.

Films taken for case study:

1. Peranbu
2. Margarita With a Straw

This project, therefore, is a systematic and comprehensive approach to analysing the portrayal of disability and sexuality in the chosen films, incorporating both theoretical frameworks.

Chapter - 2

Case Study: Movie 1: Peranbu

‘Peranbu’ is an Indian Tamil-language film written and directed by Ram. The film portrays the struggles of Paapa, a girl suffering from cerebral palsy and her father Amudhavan.

‘Peranbu’ can be considered as one of those films that courageously tackles the themes of disability and sexuality. It throws light on the discrimination and oppression that the people living on the fringes of society are subjected to and delves into the challenges and complexities of raising a child with special needs.

The film is narrated from Amudhavan’s point of view and was indeed a journey filled with emotions and pride as the hearts of every person went out for both *Paapa* and her father. The struggles Amudhavan faces while being a mother and father to his daughter at the same time, having to fight with his past trauma and facing constant rejections from the society is portrayed effectively as the story progresses.

The themes discussed in the film resonate with many theories in the field of film studies. One such theory through the lens of which ‘Peranbu’ will be analysed is the Narrative Semiotic Theory introduced by Roland Barthes.

“How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there beyond?” (Roland Barthes, featured in Roland Barthes quotes)

Roland Gérard Barthes was a French literary critic, theorist, and semiotician. His ideas contributed to the development of many theories such as literary theory, structuralism, and anthropology. He gained recognition initially for his usage of

semiology to disintegrate and analyse the deeply rooted meanings that were present within a text to gain a better understanding.

By introducing the Narrative Semiotics theory, Roland Barthes intended to define semiology as the process of studying signs, what they convey, how they communicate and finally, how they are constructed. It is impossible to take away the concept of signs from everyday life, because it is present in almost every aspect; from gestures and body language to morse code and graffiti. Analysing 'Peranbu' with the help of Narrative Semiotic theory will pave way for a deeper understanding of the allegories and metaphorical elements that the film has employed to communicate deeper meanings and will also direct focus towards certain specific details that often tend to be misunderstood and misinterpreted.

"Nature is hateful." (04:28- 04:34) The long shot zooming into the isolated Mannavanur village, located 2.5 kilometres away from Kodaikanal depicts how society has disowned Amudhavan and his daughter, leaving them all by themselves and the former comments how hateful the nature is to have given them such an ill fate. This secluded location reflects how humanity abandons people with disabilities and looks down at them with distaste. The cold, scenic hills of Kodaikanal and the lush green paddy fields that adorns Paapa's house is not enough to make her feel comfortable with herself and contradicts with Amudhavan's feelings and emotions.

Referring to the timestamps 9:11 till 10:11 from the movie, it is almost understandable that Amudhavan shares quite a strained relationship with her daughter. She avoids him, refuses to speak to him or acknowledge his presence. However, one fine day, a curious Amudhavan, worried about his daughter, decides to check on her. He climbs up the ladder that takes him to the roof of his

house, right above Paapa's room. As he looks inside and struggles to keep his balance, thus making a sound, Paapa looks up. She immediately contorts her face in utter discomfort and crawls under the bed with great difficulty. Amudhavan, disheartened and confused, retreats.

On Paapa's bed, there lies a Barbie doll, which is stained with nail paint. The doll represents her inner woman and beauty, something she is not able to show the world outside. Her disability refrains her from adorning and accepting her physical beauty and chains her to a state of penultimate helplessness. She sees herself through the doll, which is rather, a woman; who, according to the society, is physically beautiful and flawless. Although the doll causes an apprehension deep down inside Paapa, she refuses to give up on the seemingly perfect physique of the doll and beautifies it further, while secretly hoping that one day, she too, would break free from the clutches of disability.

"Nature is cruel." (37:53-37:56) After managing to bring his relationship with Paapa back on track, Amudhavan finally can be at ease and begins to treasure his moments with her. However, one morning, he sees blood stains on the bed and realises that Paapa has gotten her first period (37:07-37:17). Immediately, his face looks crestfallen and he is frozen in place. For an instant, thoughts of having to attend to his disabled daughter's menstruation needs as well makes him weak.

This instance, too, makes Amudhavan blame nature. All the hatred he has towards his wife who left him long back, the frustrations within himself as well as towards his difficulties in taking care of Paapa add up to his anger towards everything around him, especially nature. This explains the importance of the location of the film and why Amudhavan comments upon nature everytime

something eventful happens. He firmly believes that even nature has abandoned him by keeping him away from all sources and forms of humane help, forcing him to take matters into his own hands.

Finally, the story takes quite a dramatic turn as it reaches the climax. After trying all he could to satisfy Paapa's needs, Amudhavan decides to put an end to his misery by killing his daughter and taking his own life.

The timestamps from 2:16:59 to 2:19:57 demonstrate how Amudhavan, after spending a few happy hours with Paapa at the beach, forcefully drags her into the water. Paapa tries to free herself and cries out for help, but is unable to defend herself.

Amudhavan is fed up of facing rejections and humiliation from everyone and just like the waves crashing angrily at the shore, realisation hits him deep, pushing him further and further into depression and hopelessness. Furious with himself and at nature, the sequence stands as a testament to Amudhavan's decision of giving back his daughter to nature herself. However, fate had other plans and eventually, the female transgender character *Meera*, rescues Paapa, changing Amudhavan's life for good and later, they get married.

The theme of the project revolves around the representation of sexuality of the disabled character, Paapa. Her life is devoid of all forms of happiness. Director Ram delves into Paapa's experiences and emotions with a rare sense of perfection, revoking a sense of altered perspective towards fostering a more inclusive society. The movie not only explores Paapa's journey through tough times during her teenage years with a physique that requires special attention, but also challenges stereotypes that have been associated with the sexuality of disabled people.

The plot not only delves into Papa's sexuality, but also her identity, as she spends years without getting to experience motherly love and affection. Her hatred towards her father once she started to identify him as a male and herself as a female stands as a testament to representing every child with special needs who struggle to adjust with the opposite sex.

The relevance of this movie must be deeply felt and understood as society is still trying to accommodate children with disabilities and make their needs seen and heard. Differently abled children struggle to cope with their own body and are also exposed to a different perspective of the society; one that is filled with sympathy and negligence, instead of empathy and love. Like every other individual, children like Paapa also have equal rights to express their feelings, wants and emotions to the outside world.

Feminist Film Theory also helps to briefly analyse certain female characters and their portrayal in this movie. Thus, analysing certain timestamps from the movie will help in understanding how the film addresses gender roles and gives importance to female characters.

The timestamp 37:00 shows Amudhavan's reluctance to accept and acknowledge Paapa's menstruation. This also highlights gender roles as there has always been a common taboo existing around the concept of menstruation that only women are supposed to know how to take care of a female while she is menstruating. It is very evident during this scene that there are certain patriarchal norms revolving around menstruation that makes the male society ignorant and uncomfortable, as Amudhavan can be seen helpless and confused.

Another instance is during the timestamp 45:00 when flashbacks of Amudhavan's relationship with his wife are shown. This paves way to infer how

societal expectations influence husband-and-wife relationships as women are often seen adjusting with the family, for the sake of children. In *Peranbu*, Amudhavan's wife comes out of this bubble of expectations by leaving her own daughter in the care of her husband, as she felt that raising a child with special needs is the responsibility of both the father and mother. She receives no acknowledgement or support from her husband and is forced to take care of Paapa. This shows how patriarchal norms stay suspended in such a way that it is almost impossible to accept the fact that men have equal responsibilities in the household.

Another important sequence from the film is during the timestamp 1:45:00. This is the time when Paapa experiences sexual awakening. This deviates from the normal portrayal of individuals with disability, as it is often believed that people with disability will be unable to have and maintain a stable, healthy and normal sex life. However, Paapa communicates her desires through her expressions and is not willing to stop exploring her boundaries.

Finally, during the timestamp 2:00:00 is when Paapa expresses her desire to be seen, felt and heard just like every person in this world would do. She is unwilling to let her disability set boundaries for her or hinder her from exploring the world and living according to her own wish. Feminist film theory celebrates Paapa's resilience to come out of her comfort zone, be comfortable in her own skin and show the world that she too, wants to feel loved and wanted.

"*Peranbu*", thus celebrates the life of a differently abled girl child, by challenging societal stereotypes that revolve around disability.

Chapter - 3

Case Study: Movie 2: Margarita with a Straw

‘Margarita With a Straw’ is an Indian film directed by Shonali Bose. The film follows the life of a young woman named Laila, who is suffering from cerebral palsy and her journey towards self-discovery and love.

The title itself stands testimony to a significant portrayal of various sensitive themes such as disability and sexuality. The title captures the audience’s attention as Margarita is often considered as a drink associated with fun, pleasure, and relaxation. However, ‘Margarita with a Straw’ is a metaphor that explains the complexities and challenges that lies within the story, in Laila’s life. She uses a straw to drink her Margarita and this shows how willingly Laila has adapted to her life despite her disability and narrates the tale of yet another strong woman who is determined to fight through all challenges in life, by overcoming and sidelining personal limitations.

Analysing the movie through the lens of Narrative Semiotic theory will help in gaining a deeper insight into how the film portrays certain meanings through signs and symbols.

Laila is a pleasant, carefree woman in her mid-twenties and leads a happy life with her family. She suffers from cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. Through certain visual cues, it is easy for everyone to be immersed in Laila’s day-to-day routine. How her desire to be independent supersedes her disability and how her personal relationships start getting affected during her quest for exploration and new experiences forms the central plot of the story.

Loaded with characters, the film was indeed a visual treat as it dealt with the themes of sexuality and the LGBTQ+ community in general.

(00:19:50) In this scene that portrays Laila's first musical live performance in her college, the wheelchair is used as a prop to express her physical hindrance. However, being the lyricist of the composition, Laila can be seen enjoying and vibing to the music. This challenges the stereotypes associated with disability and brings out the free spirited will of Laila to express her creativity and talent to the outside world.

Later, after winning the competition, while being with her team onstage, the judge openly expresses her will to dedicate the prize to Laila, and sympathises with her in public. This infuriates Laila and she abuses the judge. (00:21:45-00:22:10).

This scene speaks for itself as the society always either judges or sympathises with the disabled, instead of treating them with empathy or even attempting to protect them from harassment.

(00:30:30) This is the scene that portrays Laila's journey to New York, which later, becomes the turning point in her life. Despite knowing that a totally new place will bring her new responsibilities and experiences, Laila's decision to travel abroad reflects her strong and resilient personality that often is overlooked by society. Analysing Laila's journey to New York through the lens of Narrative Semiotic theory will lead to a better understanding of the emotional and physical displacement she must undergo.

The bustling city of New York is in stark contrast with Laila's quiet and subdued hometown, which marks a transition phase in Laila's life. Thus, Laila's New York journey stands as a symbolic representation of her desire to explore and refusal to be glued to her comfort zone. The busy streets of New York, the

plethora of cultural diversity among the people and the gleaming cityscape awakens the desire for self-exploration in Laila.

(00:36:50) The scene during this timestamp is when Laila meets Khanum for the first time during a college event.

Khanum is a visually impaired activist of Pakistani-Bangladeshi descent living in New York. She is portrayed as strong, independent, and determined and spills confidence and resilience as she advocates and stands strong for the rights of the differently abled.

The encounter between Khanum and Laila is portrayed effectively by using certain visual cues that signifies the beginning of a deep and meaningful bond between the two. Laila's disability is portrayed through her wheelchair and Khanum's blindness is shown through the cane she uses. Their meeting underlines the foundation of many strong relationships that begin simply by accepting each other's flaws and celebrating the differences seen and felt in another individual. Their relationship also challenges the normal method of representing disability in movies and empowers the representation of LGBTQ+ communities.

(00:50:00-00:52:45) This timestamp shows Laila's sexual awakening for the first time in the movie. This is the scene when Laila and Khanum get intimate with each other. The use of close-up shots and intricate framing enhance the portrayal of intimacy between both the differently abled women. The scene emphasises Laila's desire to be loved and the exploration of her own body.

The scene ruptures the conventional norms associated with disability and immerses the audience in Laila's life on a much deeper level. Highlighted with

various visual and auditory cues, the scene brings out Laila's sexual satisfaction and the heightening of music represents her pleasure and satisfaction in her relationship with Khanum.

(01:06:00-01:06:54) This timestamp is the moment when Laila comes into terms with her sexual orientation. As Laila develops a sexual desire towards her classmate Jared, she realises that she is bisexual. However, this doesn't stop her from getting intimate with Jared, despite being in a relationship with Khanum. The significant changes in the music, lighting and certain camera angles heighten the overall intensity and mood of the moment, contributing to a pivotal moment in Laila's life. Her curiosity, anticipation and excitement are equalled and exceeded by Jared and overall, the scene is crucial as it brings out the central theme of the movie.

Moreover, analysing this timestamp through the lens of narrative semiotic theory would also pave way into understanding the feelings and emotions of sexual intimacy experienced by differently abled individuals like Laila, which often tends to be overlooked, swept under the carpet, or even ignored through the conventional methods of storytelling in cinema.

(01:34:21-01:36:39) "*Margarita with a Straw*": Laila's solo date.

The movie ends with a positive note as Laila treats herself to a makeover and goes for a date with herself, accompanied by a Margarita- with a straw.

This scene has a profound impact on the message intended to convey through the story: embracing one's flaws and accepting the differences seen in others. As Laila sips her Margarita with the help of the straw, the drink symbolises her life and the straw stands for her determination to enjoy the drink despite being disabled. The journey she undertook towards self-exploration was

finally complete, as she now has a message to convey to everyone around her:

Love yourself.

Laila is a tactful and strong individual, who is not hesitant to venture into the world and accept what the world looks like, outside her web of reality and stereotypical beliefs and notions set by her family. She succeeds in creating a life of her own, woven by her identity and strengthened by her mother, who succumbed to cancer.

Feminist Film theory also helps in analysing Laila's character in a way that enhances the overall understanding of the movie.

(00:03:00) This timestamp shows Laila's relationship with her parents. Feminist film theory is in stark contrast with the representation of differently abled individuals, especially women, who don't fit in with the society's expectations and tend to deviate from stereotypical norms because of their differences.

(00:06:10) This scene portrays Laila meeting her bandmate Nima, who she has a crush on. Laila does not consider her disability as a hindrance that would stop her from pursuing romantic relationships. She observes Nima from a distance and her heart longs for love. This scene deviates from the usual portrayal of disabled women and stands with Laila's desire for fitting into the world of affection and normalcy.

(00:15:47) "Being friends with normal people will not make you normal." This scene from the movie is when Laila's best friend Dhruv reprimands her for trying to be friends with her crush, Jared. He asserts the fact that people like Laila will never be able to lead a normal life with ordinary individuals. This scene highlights the patriarchal tendency to suppress and deny differently abled

individuals their happiness and desire to explore. The fact that even her best friend judged her makes Laila heartbroken.

(00:27:00-00:28:00) This timestamp depicts Laila's interaction with her parents, while informing them of her decision to travel to New York and continue her education. Laila's father disapproves and tells her that she should drop the idea. This shows how the gender society has an influence over disabled women over their mobility and independence. Laila's desire to travel abroad is ignored and sidelined by the male members of her family.

(00:30:30) This scene depicts Laila's journey to New York. Despite being discouraged by her family, Laila's decision to travel to a new country underlines her strong and determined femininity that is often neglected and judged by society.

Laila's decision to navigate through difficulties and her willpower to break free from the chains of physical limitations is expressed strongly through this timestamp. Her encounters with new characters in New York add to her determination to not stay put and instead, she continues to charge forward, overcoming her personal limitations.

(01:06:54) When Laila discovers that she is bisexual, she does not feel guilty even for a moment. Even though she realises that she has been unfair towards Khanum, Laila does not regret her decision of exploring her feelings with Jared.

This scene from the movie challenges the norms associated with femininity, heteronormativity, and sexual desires of the differently abled. Society often tends to disregard the sexual feelings of disabled women and refuse to

accept heterosexuality. Thus, the film is all about Laila's unwavering desire to explore her own identity and accepting the womanhood she crafts for herself.

(1:14:40) The scene that depicts Laila's conflict with her mother when she tells her that she is bisexual is one filled with intensity, tension, and misunderstanding.

Laila's mother refuses to understand the concept of heterosexuality and questions her. This shows how a woman is socially programmed by the society to behave and live in a certain way, that does not affect the family's position and reputation in any way. Laila has also been imposed upon with her family's expectations of being an "ideal daughter" especially since she is disabled. Her family too, to an extent believe that normalcy for her is limited.

(01:34:00) The climax showcasing Laila's solo date, analysed through Feminist Film theory celebrates the film's portrayal of empowerment of differently abled women.

Laila embraces her identity as a bisexual woman despite her illness and this serves as an example of voices that are often sidelined by society. The climax, thus raises the need for a more inclusive portrayal of women with disabilities and their sexual desires. Every woman has the right to be on a quest to explore her identity, and this is often surrounded by patriarchal disagreements that eventually leads to questioning a woman's choices and decisions.

"Margarita With a Straw" continues to stand as a movie that invites people to rethink and reconsider preconceived notions associated with gender roles, social programming, disability, and sexuality.

Chapter - 4

Conclusion

Society tends to accept what is normal and devoid of complications and discards anything that requires a deeper understanding. The time has come for us to value humane relationships in its purest form and accept the authentic identities of individuals.

This research paper explored the portrayal of disability and sexuality in the Tamil-language film “Peranbu” and Hindi-language film “Margarita with a Straw”. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study also explored the nuanced representation of individuals with disabilities in the context of their sexual identities, unravelling the complexities and challenges they face within societal constructs.

"Peranbu" transcends conventional stereotypes and tropes associated with disability, by presenting the main character Paapa as a multifaceted individual with her own desires, struggles, and agency. The movie serves as a powerful example of how film can serve as a platform for marginalised voices, providing a platform for individuals with disabilities to see themselves reflected on screen in a positive and affirming light.

Amudhavan fails to provide the right means of exposure for Paapa in order to pursue her sexual feelings. By failing to acknowledge his daughter's intimate feelings and desires, and trying to find a male prostitute to satisfy her sexually, Amudhavan turns out to be a negative example of a father figure.

This affects Paapa's life immensely as she struggles to cope with her inner turmoil and her incapability to keep her desires in control.

My findings after analysing the movie “Peranbu” is that society is still reluctant to accept the sexuality of disabled individuals. The different ways chosen by people to satisfy the sexual feelings of disabled individuals hinder their exposure and confines them to the wrong ways of attaining sexual satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to stand by and treat differently abled individuals as equals and make their needs felt.

"Margarita With a Straw" presents Laila as a woman whose disabilities are intricately intertwined with her sexuality, challenging conventional narratives and stereotypes. The film highlights the importance of agency and autonomy for individuals with disabilities in expressing their sexual desires and pursuing intimate relationships.

Laila’s family is unable to accept her sexual orientation and stands against her desire to be independent. This depicts the conventional parenting in every female household as women with disabilities are often presented as weak.

Lesbian women in our society are unable to express their desire to marry a woman and live in peace. Real life examples such as the story of the infamous lesbian couple Adhila and Noora helped me in making the asserting the findings of this study in a nuanced manner.

After analysing the movie, I was able to conclude that it is wrong to confine differently abled individuals to their walls of insecurity. Instead, the world must be open in welcoming individuals with differences and be their happy place.

My research successfully addressed the research statement by providing a thorough examination of the portrayal of disability and sexuality in contemporary cinema, by analysing two movies. This research, thus contributes to broader

conversations about inclusivity and social justice by advocating for more authentic and respectful portrayals of individuals with disabilities in film and other forms of media.

While these movies make significant strides in representing disability and sexuality, disability remains underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream media, and the intersectionality of disability and sexuality is often overlooked or sensationalised.

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The analysis is limited to two specific films, and two specific aspects; therefore, the findings may not be entirely generalizable to all portrayals of disability and sexuality in cinema.

My research primarily relied on textual analysis, neglecting perspectives from individuals with disabilities themselves or other stakeholders in the filmmaking process. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating a more diverse range of films and employing methodologies such as audience reception studies or interviews with filmmakers and disability activists.

In conclusion, this research project has provided valuable insights into the portrayal of disability and sexuality in cinema, underscoring the need for more authentic and inclusive representations. It is my hope that this research will inspire further scholarship and creative endeavours that amplify the voices and experiences of marginalised communities, fostering a more equitable and compassionate society for all.

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