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## Disability and Cinema in India: Representation of Women with Disabilities in Bollywood since 1970\*

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the representation of women with disabilities (sensory impairment) in the Indian cinema, focusing on the Hindi speaking Bollywood. Three popular movies shown in Bollywood have been selected in order to investigate the way in which women with disability are represented. The movies include *Koshish* (i.e. 'Effort', (1972), *Lafangey Parindey* (i.e. 'Cheeky Birds', (2010) and *Kaabil* (i.e. 'Capable', (2017). The year 1970 has been selected as the beginning of the time frame because it is the closest time to the first Bollywood movie (*Koshish*, 1972), in which a disabled woman is depicted as a leading role. To analyze the movies, Critical Disability Theory (CDT) was selected as the study's theoretical framework, and Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) has been applied as the study's research method. Results reveal that the representation of women with disability has undergone significant positive changes over time, which includes variations in social status, ability and achievements, issues and concerns, patterns of pleasure, presence and acceptance, social attitude, words and phrases used, as well as changes in policies related to women with disabilities.

**Keywords:** Bollywood Movies, Content Analysis, Disability, Representation, Women

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## 1. Introduction

According to a recent World Health Organization report ‘an estimated 1.3 billion people or 16% of the global population experience a significant disability’ (WHO, 2021). ‘Disability relates to any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being’ (Impairment, Disability and Handicap | Emory School of Medicine, n.d.). In the similar way, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) defines disability ‘as the different functional limitations occurring in any population in any country of the world. People may be disabled by physical, intellectual or sensory impairment, medical conditions or mental illness’ (Guide, 2014, p. 26). In consequence, the large number of people with disabilities underscores the importance of understanding and addressing their diverse needs for inclusivity and equal opportunities. This requires governments and societies worldwide to establish accessible policies and initiatives, providing accommodations and support systems. A comprehensive approach is necessary, recognizing the various physical, intellectual, sensory, medical, and mental impairments that can contribute to disability.

Globally, people with disabilities face significant barriers to full participation in the labor market, which has serious implications for their living standards and quality of life (Gannon & Nolan, 2004, p. 151). These individuals often have lower educational attainment and employment rates (Mitra et al., 2011, p. 178). Moreover, the majority, approximately 75%, of people with disabilities live in the rural areas of developing countries, where they have limited or no access to necessary services (Shenoy, 2011, p. 38). Within the disabled population, girls and women are particularly vulnerable

and marginalized (UN General Assembly, 2000, p. 20). As highlighted in a 2017 study by S. K. Biswal, women with disabilities face double discrimination, as their right to have sex and reproduction is often grossly denied, which constitutes a violation of their human rights. Additionally, their social and economic participation is severely undermined (Biswal, 2017, p. 66). This discrimination is further perpetuated by societal portrayals of women that predominantly follow the male gaze perspective, as discussed by K. S. Kusuma (2018, p. 96). Hence, people with disabilities encounter multiple barriers in the labor market, resulting in lower educational attainment and employment rates. Particularly, women with disabilities face increased vulnerability and marginalization, with their rights and social and economic participation neglected. These issues are perpetuated by societal perspectives that predominantly align with the male gaze.

As reported by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation of India (2016), out of the total 1.2 billion population, about 2.21% (or 26.8 million) people can be classified as disabled. Among the total disabled in the country, 56% are males and 44% are females. In consonance with A. Ghai: 'within the Indian cultural context, disability implies a "lack" or "flaw" leading to a significantly diminished capability' (Ghai, 2002, p. 51). The author explains that: 'in Hindi the phrase, "Women with disabilities" (i.e. *Ek to ludki oopur se uupahij*) means, one a girl, and that too disabled'. 'This intermingling of disablement and gender in such phrases marks the reality of a woman with disability in India. Consequently, both congenital and acquired disabilities for the female child are seen as additional rather than initial liabilities. Additionally, opportunities for improving the quality of life of a disabled girl are virtually nonexistent' (Ghai, 2002, p. 53).

In a similar way, Indian scholars V. Kumar and K. Dwivedi (2017, p. 375), in a recent study, underline that ‘the phenomenon of disability has failed to grab the attention of Indian sociologists as other issues like gender, caste, ethnicity, poverty and various other developmental issues dominated’. The authors conclude that ‘sociology could play a vital role in this direction by sensitizing stakeholders as also all those involved in shaping and implementing policies for mainstreaming persons with disabilities’ (Kumar & Dwivedi, 2017, pp. 383-384).

Regarding Mass Media, Deo (2022, p. 4) asserts that: ‘women are often depicted in their relation to men as mothers, sisters or love interests, and never as single, unattached women and the depiction is meant to evoke sympathy, and pity and to add a dramatic twist at some crucial moment’. The author also concludes that ‘there is no attempt to understand the kind of life they want to live’. In this regard, Kusuma (2018, p. 87) mentions that ‘most films are predominantly patriarchal and have their themes around male-centric ego. South Indian movies project the male actor as super-heroes who enable the powers to fly and beat up goons in one shot and many such heroic acts’. Examples can be found in movies Kanthaswamy (2009) and Mugamoodi (2012). Concerning representation of disability, Chivers and Markotić (2010) emphasize that ‘many films represent the problem of disability as caused by impairment rather than as socially oriented or constructed. Thus, the medical model of disability has almost total hegemony over the modern definition of disability on film: placing “disability” within the individual’s own body as its impairment’. In this regard, ‘despite social change, the archetypal and stereotypical persist’" (Chivers & Markotić, 2010, p. 97).

According to Biswal (2017, p. 71), Bollywood is no longer

adhering to the pity, charity, or medical approach to disability, but is now embracing the social and rights model. Acharya (2016) also explores the portrayal of women with disabilities' sexuality in Bollywood, supporting this argument. On the other hand, there is a significant research gap in the representation of women with disabilities in Bollywood and in Indian society as a whole. The history of the Indian women's movement has primarily focused on issues such as poverty, caste, employment, dowry, sati, population control, female feticide, sexuality, and domestic violence. However, disability has been largely neglected in this agenda (Samarthyam, n.d.). Similarly, disability legislation in India also adopts a gendered approach, with no chapters specifically addressing the problems faced by disabled women (Ghai, 2002, p. 53). This reflects the overall attitude towards disabled women in India.

Moreover, the dissemination of information in accessible formats for people with sensory impairments is severely limited (Ghai, 2002, p. 50). This lack of accessibility further exacerbates the societal barriers faced by women with disabilities. In light of the influential role that media plays in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes, it is crucial to examine the way in which Bollywood represents these issues in its films. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of women with disabilities in Bollywood cinema. By identifying the barriers faced by these women in society and examining the strengths and weaknesses in their representation, this research can increase public awareness and prompt action towards solving the problems faced by this marginalized group. Ultimately, the goal is to promote greater acceptance and inclusivity for women with disabilities in the Indian society.

Based on previous studies, the issue of disability, especially women with disabilities, has not been addressed appropriately in India. Although these women constitute one of the most marginalized sections of the society, little attention is paid to them. Recently there are some works that examine disabled women's sexuality, for example Black (2005), but since there is not enough study regarding women with sensory impairments. This research attempts to study and examine this further. This paper seeks to provide an analysis of the portrayal of disabled Indian women in Bollywood movies using the Critical Disability Theory. It aims to examine the ways in which the status of these women is depicted in these films and explore the changes in their representation over the years from 1970 to the 2010s.

The first question delves into the exploration of the way in which the Critical Disability Theory can illuminate the representation of disabled Indian women in Bollywood movies. By employing this theoretical framework, the paper intends to critically analyze the depiction of these women, considering factors such as stereotypes, stigmatization, and the intersectionality of gender and disability.

The second question aims to investigate the evolution of the representation of women with disabilities in Bollywood films over the span of four decades, from the 1970s to the 2010s. By examining the changes in their portrayal, the paper aims to identify any shifts in societal perceptions and attitudes towards disabled women during this period. This analysis will consider aspects such as increased inclusion, empowerment, and the challenge of prevailing stereotypes.

These research questions are intended to be approached from an academic standpoint, employing rigorous analysis and drawing

upon established theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive examination of the topic. The period from 1970 to 2010 was chosen in the article since it encompasses several decades of Bollywood filmmaking, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the portrayal of women with disabilities over a significant period of time. It also represents a transition in both societal attitudes towards disability and the Bollywood industry's approach to inclusivity, making it a relevant timeframe for such an analysis.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

‘Critical disability theory (CDT) is an emerging theoretical framework for the study and analysis of disability issues’ (Hosking, 2008, p. 1). ‘CDT, as a member of the critical theory family, is a theoretical approach to the concept of disability which is simultaneously explanatory, practical and normative’ (Hosking, 2008, p. 3).

Separately, ‘the task of critical disability theory is to analyze disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon’ [(Critical Disability Theory (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), 2019)]. ‘It must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation’ (Critical Theory, 2005).

A leading disability scholar, Hosking (2008) lists seven categories, on which the critical theory of disability is based. These categories include: (1) Social model of disability; (2) Multidimensionality of disability phenomenon; (3) Approach based on the rights; (4) Diversity as value; (5) Giving voice to persons

with disabilities; (6) Influence of language on understanding disability; and (7) Transformative policies. As CDT's main goal is to transform society into a barrier-free society, this theory is in line with the objectives and direction of this research.

### 3. Research Method

This study applies a qualitative content analysis, which is defined as 'a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Content Analysis, on the other hand, is described as 'the scientific study of content of communication, analyzing its meanings, contexts, and intentions contained in messages' (Prasad, 2008, p. 1). By utilizing qualitative content analysis, this study seeks to extract and interpret the underlying themes and patterns within the text data, providing insights into the communication content and its significance. The sampling includes one movie before 2000 and two movies after 2000. The names and years of the movies are *Koshish* (i.e. "Effort", 1972), *Lafangey Parindey* (i.e. "Cheeky Birds", 2010) and *Kaabil* (i.e. "Capable", 2017). The content of the movies as part of the coding scheme has been analyzed according to the seven categories of Critical Disability Theory. To examine each of them, the following categories and subcategories have developed. Table 1 summarizes the information pertaining to these categories and subcategories.



**Table 1. Main Categories and Subcategories of Critical Disability Theory (CDT)**

N	Main themes and categories	Subcategories
1	Social model of disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discrimination and abuse</li> <li>▪ Challenges and obstacles</li> </ul>
2	Multidimensionality of disability phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coercion in choice and decision</li> <li>▪ Inferiority among women</li> </ul>
3	Approach based on the rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social status</li> <li>▪ Abilities and achievements</li> </ul>
4	Diversity as value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creative solutions</li> <li>▪ Achieve goals</li> <li>▪ Pattern of living and pleasure</li> </ul>
5	Giving voice to persons with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding behavior by other people</li> <li>▪ Acceptance of speech</li> </ul>
6	Influence of language on understanding disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Used words and language (lexicon)</li> </ul>
7	Transformative policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy vacuum</li> <li>▪ Changing social attitudes</li> </ul>

Source: Developed by Authors According to Hosking's (2008) and Sztobryn-Gierczkiewicz's (2017) Points on Critical Disability Theory (CDT).

Ways of operationalization of the categories are offered below:

### **3. 1. Social Model of Disability: Discrimination and Abuse, Challenges and Obstacles**

Based on Hosking (2008, p. 7) 'Social model of disability balances the contributions of impairment, personal responses to impairment and the barriers imposed by the social environment to the concept of disability'. In this way, by examining the abuses and discriminations that disabled women experience in the society, the

social aspect of the theory can be analyzed. In addition, by mentioning the challenges and obstacles that women with disability face during their life, the way that environment fails to meet the needs of people who do not match the social expectation of normalcy can be described.

### **3. 2. Multidimensionality of Disability Phenomenon: Coercion in Choice and Decision, Inferiority among Women**

The disabled person experiences discrimination in several ways; in this way Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz (2017, p. 32) mentions that 'intersectionality, in its early feminist form, evolved in this case into multidimensionality, according to Hosking'. In this study, a woman with disability is more discriminated compared to a man by itself, in addition to this, the paper tends to examine coercion in decision-making to see whether or not women with disabilities are given the opportunity to make decisions about their personal life. In addition, it examines the inferiority between a disabled woman and a non-disable woman to understand whether or not women with disability are inferior to non-disabled woman (In the fields of femininity, charm and beauty).

### **3. 3. Approach based on the Rights: Social Status, Abilities and Achievements**

As mentioned by Hosking (2008, p. 12) 'Critical Disability Theory's central concerns with disabled people's (individual) rights to autonomy and (social) rights to full participation in society are reflected in the tension between the social welfare- and rights-based approaches to disability policy'. Accordingly, it is crucial for Critical Disability Theory to recognize the rights of disabled persons to autonomy as individuals, and to full participation in

society; for examining this issue, we will see the social position of disabled as well as their abilities and the achievements that they have made in society.

### **3. 4. Diversity as Value: Creative Solutions, Achieve Goals, Pattern of Living and Pleasure**

Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz (2017, p. 33) concludes that ‘the critical disability theory embraces differences and appreciates their inevitability, comprehending equality as a value based on diversity’. In this way, the paper looks at disabled women’s creative solutions when they face barriers and their success in goals, and investigates the way in which they enjoy life despite being disabled. It will look at the films to see whether the phenomenon of disability is seen as a difference or as impairment and disability.

### **3. 5. Giving Voice to Persons with Disabilities: Understanding Behavior by Other People, Acceptance of Speech**

Based on Hosking (2008, p. 13) ‘able bodied people think about disability from their abled perspective. For them being severely disabled is imagined as unmanageable suffering, a life subject to constant dependency and without value’. In this regard, the paper will see the ability of other people to understand the behavior of women with disability, as well as the acceptance of their speech in different situations.

### **3. 6. Influence of Language on Understanding Disability: Used Words and Language (Lexicon)**

Another area of interest in the Critical Disability Theory is the way in which language influences the understanding of disability.

Regarding this, Hosking (2008, p. 14) mentions that 'the words and images used to portray disabled people have a direct effect on social attitudes towards disabled people'. As a result, to examine this case, the paper seeks to examine which words are being used in the case of disabled, and the way in which disabled are addressed among/by different people.

### **3. 7. Transformative Policies: Policy Vacuum, Changing Social Attitudes**

Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz (2017, p. 35) asserts that 'CDT provides a theoretical basis for differentiating disability policies - policies that take inclusion, equality and autonomy of people with disabilities into account'. Accordingly, the paper will see whether or not there is any policy vacuum regarding disabled women. In addition, it will examine the trend of representing women with disability to see if there are any changes in social attitudes toward this people or not.

## **4. Analysis**

In this section, the movies are analyzed based on the first three coding schemes mentioned in the methods section. The themes and categories that will be used for analysis of the movies include: Koshish (i.e. 'Effort' (1972), Lafangey Parindey (i.e. 'Cheeky Birds' (2010) and Kaabil (i.e. 'Capable' (2017)).

### **4. 1. Koshish (i.e. 'Effort', 1972)**

The first movie examined in this study is Koshish. It was made in 1972 and directed by Gulzar. The movie tells the story of a deaf-mute couple (Haricharan and Aarti). It depicts their love story

along with difficulties they faced in raising their children as well as handling their daily life. The following sections provide an analysis of the movie through themes and categories explained in the research method section.

#### **4. 1. 1. Discrimination and Abuse**

In the first scene, Aarti's brother, Kanu, enters her room and after realizing that she is asleep, picks up Aarti's suitcase and her money-box from the top of the closet. At this time, something falls on the ground, making a loud noise, but Aarti does not notice because she has severe hearing impairment. In the middle of the film, this is repeated again when Aarti is sitting in her wedding ceremony, her brother stares at her gold necklace. He goes to Aarti's home at night and easily steals her jewelries and bicycle.

In another scene when Aarti is shopping alone, two men follow and push her. At this time, another deaf-mute man comes to help her. In these three cases, the abuse of a disabled woman is well depicted. Financial abuse can be seen in the first two cases and physical abuse can be seen in the third case. Early in the film, while Aarti is shopping, she sees Haricharan calling the shop owner by whistling. Aarti could not hear the whistling, but from the shop owner's reaction she realizes that he had made a loud noise. Aarti wants to try, but when she is ready to whistle, the shop owner tells her that women should not do this, which means what a man can do without being blamed, a woman cannot do.

In the first part of the film, when Aarti returns home with Haricharan, she asks him what the bicycle horn does. Haricharan explains to Aarti, but she cannot understand the function of the horn until he does it in near a person and from that person's reaction to the horn, Aarti realizes the effectiveness of the bicycle

horn. In another scene, it is shown that Arti sees a man talking on a pay phone, she also wants to experience this. In this scene, Arti asked her husband about the pay phone and her husband takes her inside and dials numbers for her. Even though he is not able to hear the voice, he tries to make sounds in response. Arti also repeats this and they both spent good moments together.

In these two scenes, about the horn and the payphone, Haricharan has more information than Aarti, and in fact Aarti is shown to be ignorant of simple issues. This indicates that the disabled woman has not had the opportunity to participate in the society and she does not receive the necessary training, while her husband with the same disability has been accepted as a member of the society, and his level of knowledge and experience is not comparable to Aarti. Therefore, Aarti has been indirectly discriminated by the society. It can be concluded that a disabled woman is doubly discriminated, both because she is a woman and because she is disabled.

#### **4. 1. 2. Policy Vacuum**

In the first part of the film, the attention of the audience is drawn to the way Aarti and her grandmother communicate. They do not talk to each other through sign language, but convey their meaning with hand gestures and making sounds. In other words, Aarti does not know sign language, even when Aarti goes to the store, the salesman has difficulties understanding what she means.

This situation continues until she meets Haricharan. When he realizes that Aarti does not know sign language, tries to enroll Aarti in school by convincing her grandmother. Aarti's grandmother expresses her concern about the cost of the school, but after he says it is free, she agrees to take Aarti to register. Pursuant to Critical

Disability Theory, this case relates to transformative policies and can be seen as policy vacuum because Aarti is not identified as a disabled person, although it has been shown that education is free, but these people should be identified as disabled first and then less to learning by government.

According to Section 3(2) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 'every child, aged six to fourteen years-old, including a child with disability or child belonging to the weaker sections of the society, shall have the right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till the completion of his or her elementary education' (Act, R. T. E. 2009, p. 4). Interestingly, in the first part of the film, it is shown that a blind man wants to cross the street and is waiting for someone to help him. Aarti saw him and helped him to cross the street. The movie beautifully portrays that a person with disability is able to help another person with disability. On the other hand, no one helped the blind person except Aarti.

#### **4. 1. 3. Inferiority amongst Women**

In this movie, *Koshish*, discrimination is shown in several ways. Aarti is both a woman and a disabled person. Based on these two reasons (being woman and being disabled), there are other discriminations, that is, she is not given the opportunity to study, and because of the previous three reasons, she cannot have an active presence in the society. Generally, women with disability experience more discrimination, and they are shown as inferior compared to other women in the society.

#### **4. 1. 4. Challenges and Obstacles**

In another scene, it is shown that Aarti and her husband are asleep and do not notice the baby crying. After a few minutes, the door is

opened by Aarti's brother, Kanu, the baby goes out of the house and falls from a height and died.

This is just one of the various incidents that can happen to a disabled mother. Based on Critical Disability Theory, this issue relates to social model of disability, and it can be seen that society fails to meet the requirements of those who do not match the social expectation of normalcy. To solve this problem, a device that is sensitive to high frequency can be used to notify the mother if the baby cries and the sound is loud. These devices usually use a light and vibration to communicate. Therefore, it is not the person's disability that causes the problem, in fact, the lack of necessary facilities makes problems for a disabled person. By providing the necessary equipment and having sufficient facilities, people with disabilities are able to live like normal people.

#### **4. 1. 5. Creative Solutions**

In another part of the movie, it is shown that after the death of the first child, a clever solution is used to prevent this issue to repeat. The couple tie one end of a rope to the child's hands and tie the other side of the rope to a normal person at home and when he wakes up, he shakes another rope tied to the disabled person's leg. By doing this, the disabled person wakes up and notices the child crying. Based on Critical Disability Theory, their creative solution mentioned above, is related to diversity as value part. it embraces differences and appreciates disabled inevitability. As in the previous case, by providing assistive devices to these people, they can easily live without others' help.

#### **4. 1. 6. Pattern of Living and Pleasure**

In the last part of the film, a scene is shown in which Aarti tells her son to come and drink milk, but the son is listening to music and



dancing. Aarti calls him several times, but he does not pay attention. At this moment, Haricharan puts Aarti's hand on the music player so that she can feel the vibrations of the song. After doing this, she realizes that her son is dancing to the rhythm of the song. She enjoys the music and starts clapping in harmony with the rhythm of the music and encourages her son.

Based on Critical Disability Theory, this scene is related to diversity as value and indicates the way in which a disabled person enjoys the song despite not having the ability to hear. People with disabilities are deprived of understanding many of the pleasures and events that occur around them, and it will be difficult for a disabled mother to be able to share her joys with her child.

#### **4. 1. 7. Coercion in Choice and Decision**

In the last part of the film, a scene is shown in which the head of Haricharan company invites Haricharan to his house with his son. The head of the company asks him to allow the marriage of Haricharan's son to his daughter. At first, Haricharan's son is happy to see the girl, but when he realizes that she is disabled, he changes his mind. When Haricharan sees his boss's daughter, he remembers Aarti and goes to her and accepts the head of company's offer as the boy's father. At this moment, when his son realizes his father's consent, he gets angry and says that he is not going to marry her.

In this episode, it is shown that despite the fact that the person who raised Haricharan's son was disabled, his son does not choose such a person as his future wife. In another view, the disabled girl was not given a choice in this regard. That is, the decision is made entirely by the boy, and the girl, because of her disability, cannot even express her opposition in this case. In fact, it is understood that people with disabilities are not only discriminated throughout

their lives and face various problems due to lack of necessary facilities, but they also do not have authority regarding their personal life decisions and other people make decisions for them.

#### **4. 1. 8. Changing Social Attitudes**

This movie has well depicted the fact that communicating is not a complicated process and only requires mutual understanding of the situation. In addition to the close and intimate relationship between Aarti and her husband, who is also deaf-mute, friendship with a blind person is also shown. These three people are able to communicate and be friends despite their different disabilities.

On the other hand, this issue can indicate that these people are indirectly excluded from society, and they do not have close friends except close family members, which may include those who intend to abuse them (e.g.: Aarti's brother).

The close relationship of these three disabled people with each other indicates that the rest of the society has limited the disabled community to itself, and considers disabled people completely separate from the rest of the society, otherwise they have no shortage or defect to communicate. If they had defect in this field, three disabled people would not be able to communicate efficiently with each other. In general, this issue completely depends on people's attitude towards the disabled person and disability.

#### **4. 2. Lafangey Parindey (Cheeky Birds, 2010)**

The second movie is Lafangey Parindey. It was made in 2010 and directed by Pradeep Sarkar. The movie is about Nandu and the love of his life, Pinky. Pinky Palkar is a famous and talented skater that wants to make her dreams come true through a television show. But

her dreams fade away by the time Nandu knocks her down in a car accident, making her blind. Nandu encourages Pinky to “see” through other sense that she has.

#### **4. 2. 1. Abilities and Achievements**

This film shows that the blind girl, Pinky, is expert at skating. In fact, in this film, the disabled woman has her own unique ability, and she is shown as a single girl who is trying to achieve her goal. In the second part, it is shown that pinky teaches Nandu how to skate. In fact, in this movie, in addition to showing her ability and skill in skating, she is actually able to teach this skill to others.

#### **4. 2. 2. Achieving Goals**

This film shows a woman with disability who has a unique goal in her life, participating and winning India’s Got Talent, which she is finally able to do. One the most important aspect of the film is the way in which it portrays Pinky’s resistance to her problem and her persistence to achieve her goal. She practices every day in any situation, although she faces numerous problems.

In the first part of the film, Pinky is shown getting ready to go to the training ground; in this scene, Pinky is trying to fix her shoelaces alone, even though there are several people who could help her. When she is training, her spirit is very high, so that after every wrong move that happens to her because of her impairment, she apologizes with a smile and continues.

The first day of her training is not pleasant at all. She is not able to recognize the location of the chair and the equipment and collides with them. As a result of this collision, her legs are hurt, but she is not disappointed. In another scene, in the second part, she

is returning home on a rainy day, due to the unevenness of her path, she falls in the mud and gets wet and muddy. At this time, her friend puts his hand behind her shoulder to help. But she does not accept his help, avoiding to rely on anyone, trying to find her way home by herself.

The interesting point about this film is that Pinky is not shown to have an extraordinary innate ability, but it is shown that she achieves success only through her effort and perseverance. As an illustration, in the second part of the movie, when Nandu and his friends are training Pinky, they ask her to throw stones towards the sound and hit the bell. Once Nandu throws the stone to the bell and asks Pinky to start practicing. Pinky asks how she can do it without being able to see. To show that this work can be done by the power of hearing and not by sight, Nandu takes Pinky's hand and puts it in front of his eyes, then he starts to hit stones and in all three throws, he hit the stones at the bells. After this scene, Pinky starts to practice. At first, she cannot hit the target, but with practice, she succeeds at the end. This shows that if there is perseverance and effort and belief in the result in any work, doing that work is possible even for a person with a disability.

#### **4. 2. 3. Pattern of Living and Pleasure**

One of the strong points of this movie is that it does not deprive the blind person of any entertainment, nor does it show her as being in a different situation than others. The film shows that the blind girl (Pinky) goes to the cinema, walks near the sea, rides a motorcycle with Nandu, goes to club and participates in public dances. A disabled person, like the rest of society, has the right to have fun and be a part of society. In this film, an attempt has been made to show a disabled woman as a member of society. We see the active

dance of disabled woman next to other people on the street. Showing a blind woman going to the cinema means accepting women with disabilities as active people in society.

#### **4. 2. 4. Changing Social Attitudes**

In this film, it is shown that all of Pinky's close friends help her to achieve her goals. All of her close friends practice with her every day and think of her goal as their own goal. In the third part of the movie, a scene is shown where acquaintances and people are watching Pinky and Nandu's performance and everyone is happy and cheering them, in a way that it seems as though her blindness is not important for any of the viewers, and they are just attracted to her skating skills.

Her friends also try to strengthen her sense of hearing so that she could dance on stage with her partner during the day of the competition and be in tune with the sounds she hears. It is also shown that they do this with the least facilities, like catching a chicken by hearing its sound or using other creative ways. This type of representation can lead to more acceptance of women with disabilities, which will provide more support for them in society.

In another scene when Pinky is returning home, a scene is depicted in which a policeman helps her cross the street. A few seconds later, when she starts going the wrong direction in the alley, an old man grabs her hand and explains her the way to get home. Whether crossing the street or finding directions, the right thing to do, for people in the community is to help the disabled. Such scenes indirectly teach the society how to deal with and help a blind person.

#### **4. 2. 5. Challenges and Obstacles**

The film shows that every day, when Pinky wants to leave the house to practice, she faces various barriers and difficulties, like falling down several times. There is no smooth path for her to cross. For solving this issue, streets must be equipped with tactile paving. These tiles serve as a navigation guide for visually impaired people and play an important role in their daily life. These tiles, marked with small bumps and ridges, would be installed in any place that claims to be accessible for the persons with visual impairments. One of the positive effects of such films is introducing these barriers and trying to propose/find creative solutions for them.

#### **4. 3. Kaabil (i.e. 'Capable', 2017)**

The third movie is Kaabil. It was made in 2017 and directed by Sanjay Gupta. It is a movie about Rohan Bhatnagar and Supriya Sharna. They are visually-impaired and decide to marry and start a new life together. However, unfortunately, a few days after they are married, two person attack them and one of them assaults Supriya and Rohan. The story of the movie is about the Rohan's attempt to prove the guilt of the two men who assaulted them.

##### **4. 3. 1. Social Status**

The film shows that the blind woman, Supriya, has a respectful social status and a job; when she goes out with Rohan to see whether he is suitable for marriage, she tells him that she has a job and income and she is not dependent on anyone. This is one of the few films in which a disabled woman is shown completely independent. Supriya lives alone and does not need anyone's assistance. She does not even agree to get married because she does

not like to be dependent on someone else. In this film, the rights of women with disability as independent individuals are recognized and cherished.

#### **4. 3. 2. Patterns of Living and Pleasures**

In the first part of the movie, it is shown that Rohan and Supriya appear as the main roles in the dance and others accompany them. Also, they go to the mall and shop and buy high heels for Supriya. In another scene, it is shown that even though Supriya is blind, Rohan takes her to a building under construction to show her their future house. Although she is not able to see, she imagines their future house and talks about its decoration. The film also shows Supriya going to the amusement park with her future husband, having a great amount of fun.

Another interesting scene is the time when Rohan proposes to Supriya in a public place. Although Supriya is not able to see, Rohan kneels down to one knee in front of her and other people are happy them. After that, they have a beautiful wedding party with all the usual rituals.

#### **4. 3. 3. Usage of Words and Language (Lexicon)**

In the first part of the movie, Rohan and Supriya are talking in a restaurant. Rohan tells Supriya that in this first meeting, he realized that she is very confident and independent, which he finds rather amazing. Furthermore, when Rohan wants to date Supriya, she says that she goes to dance class on even days. Rohan is rather surprised and asks Supriya if she can dance, to which she replies that not only can she dance, but she can also play the piano. Rohan jokingly says: 'you actually make people dance on your fingers', referring to Supriya's being an artist.

In the first part of the movie, a scene is shown where Rohan and Supriya are talking to each other. Rohan says: “the light was never in my life, but I feel the darkness for the first time today. I always lived alone, but today I felt loneliness for the first time.” With these sentences he referred to the time when due to crowding, he was separated from Supriya against his wish at the mall for a few minutes. Moreover, in the second part of the movie, after the wedding, Rohan tells Supriya that she has had enlightened his dark world.

As aforementioned, Supriya is always admired for her independent personality and her abilities throughout the film; she is also depicted as someone who enlightens Rohan’s life. The praises are repeated several times in the movie.

#### **4. 3. 4. Discrimination and Abuse**

Further in the movie, a scene is shown in which several people who were hostile to Rohan, come to his house and rape Supriya. This scene is in line with a quotation by Khalifeh and colleagues mentioning: ‘people with disability are at increased risk of being victims of domestic and non-domestic violence, and of suffering mental ill health when victimized’ (Khalifeh et al., 2013, p. 1). In fact, ‘there is general agreement that disability introduces additional vulnerability for abuse in women’s lives’ (Nosek et al., 2001, p. 178).

#### **4. 3. 5. Abilities and Achievements**

As aforementioned, in addition to having a job and income, Supriya has the ability to play the piano. It is also shown in the movie that when the assailants enter Rohan's house, Supriya notices their presence through her sense of smell before she even hears



a sound from them. Actually, this scene refers to her high sense of smell.

#### 4. 3. 6. Changing Social Attitudes

In one part of the movie, Rohan asks Supriya to dance with him. When they go to the dance floor together, one of the students asks Supriya where she is going? She says that she is going to the dance floor and the student says ok and suggests to turn on the music for Supriya. Such scenes normalize for the people that disabled people can live like other people and use their moments in the best way.

#### 4. 3. 7. Acceptance of Speech

It is shown in the movie that when Rohan and Supriya go to the police station to report the rape, the police does not accept their claim because Supriya neither saw the person who attacked her nor heard his voice. Accordingly the police sends Supriya for test.

Here is one part of the conversation between the two police officers.

- P1. Maybe she wants to speak in court based on her sense of smell?  
P2. She has not seen his face.  
P1. She has not even heard his voice.  
P2. Maybe the court must trust his nose!

It is true that the court's decision is finalized based on the test results, but their claim has not been accepted.

## 5. Conclusion

In response to the main research question which is about the status of women, three aspects of Critical Disability Theory are emphasized. First, the Multidimensionality of disability phenomenon, second, the Social Model of Disability and third, the approach based on the rights.

These three movies are about sensory disorders on which Bollywood has focused; if the trend of changes in these movies be considered thoughtfully, it will be realized that this is a gradual process of change. At first, a woman is shown who has no financial independence and no specific goal in her life; then a woman who has an acceptable ability and a special purpose for herself and an active presence in society. Finally, a woman is represented who lives independently in every way, goes to work, plays the piano and teaches, and does not need anyone else in her life.

The findings of the article reveal that the representation of women with disability and their personality and social position after 2000 has become very different. They changed from women who were only busy with housework and dependent on their husbands to very independent women with different objectives in life. They are working and trying hard to reach their goals; getting married and having children is a choice for them. In fact it is not the only opportunity they may have in life.

Based on Critical Disability Theory, it can be seen that the first film (Koshish) emphasizes the Multidimensionality of disability phenomenon. It can be clearly seen that discrimination is visible in several aspects in the movie. The female character (Aarti) was both a woman and disabled. Based on these two cases (being woman and being disabled), there were other discriminations, that is, she

was not given the opportunity to study, and because of the previous three cases, she could not have an active presence in the society. In fact, each of the discriminations acted as a deterrent to the other. However, according to the Critical Disability Theory, in the recent films (Kaabil and Lafangey Parindey), two aspects of approach based on rights and social model of disability have been emphasized. We witness, therefore, positive changes and the entry of women with disability into the society.

Having a social status and achieving a goal can be the right of everyone regardless of whether they are male or female, disabled or not. Based on Critical Disability Theory, this is one of the ways that can be used to claim the equality of disabled people, especially women with disabilities. As a result, this issue also emphasizes the Approach based on the rights' aspect of Critical Disability Theory.

According to the Social Model of Disability, which is one of the sub-branches of Critical Disability Theory, in recent movies, the way people and society deal with women with disability has changed, from a disabled woman who is not able to work and be present in society, to a woman with impairments who is able to be active and learn and work in the society. In fact, the main emphasis of the recent films is on the rights and social status of women with disabilities, as well as the way in which people in society deal with them.

Now, the focus is more on exploring the psychological trauma and emotional impact of abuse on disabled women. Films like Kaabil delve into the inner struggle and strength of the character, showcasing their journey of seeking justice and reclaiming their lives. Moreover, the portrayal of disabled women in recent films is more authentic and nuanced. Instead of reducing them to mere

victims or objects of pity, these films portray them as multi-dimensional individuals with their own goals, dreams, and desires. They highlight their agency and resilience, challenging societal stereotypes and prejudices.

Furthermore, the representation of disabled women in cinema has become more diverse, encompassing various disabilities and intersectional identities. This reflects a growing understanding of the intersectionality of discrimination and the unique challenges faced by disabled women from different communities. Subsequently, the evolution in the portrayal of disabled women in recent films signifies a positive shift towards more inclusive and empowering narratives. These films not only shed light on the specific issues faced by disabled women, they also aim to create social awareness, foster empathy, and promote inclusivity.

From 1970 to 2010, we have observed remarkable changes in the lifestyle and enjoyment opportunities for women with disabilities. In the film *Koshish*, for instance, women with disabilities were primarily portrayed in home settings, with limited exposure to special entertainment. However, as time progressed, their representation diversified, and films began showcasing a wider range of pleasure patterns for disabled women. This transformation is evident not only in *Koshish* but also in other films, where disabled women are depicted going to the movies, riding motorcycles, visiting amusement parks, and enjoying various forms of entertainment with other individuals.

Moreover, the presence and acceptance of disabled women in society have significantly increased over the years. In *Koshish*, we witness a pivotal moment when a disabled woman places her hand on the speaker, encouraging her family members to join in the dance. This scene symbolizes the growing acknowledgement and

integration of disabled women into social settings. Similarly, in movies like *Kaabil* and *Lafangey Parindey*, we witness the active participation of disabled women in society, where they confidently take on the role of main dancers.

These developments reflect the progress made in society's understanding and acceptance of women with disabilities. The evolving portrayal and inclusion of disabled women in various forms of entertainment not only provide them with equal opportunities for enjoyment, but also inspire positive societal change. Consequently, it is evident that the lives of women with disabilities have significantly improved in terms of pleasure patterns and social acceptance between 1970 and 2010.

By watching these three movies, it becomes apparent that the depiction of society's treatment towards women with disabilities has undergone a transformation. For instance, in the movie *Koshish*, a disabled woman is portrayed as being completely isolated and alone, with no friends except for her husband. However, in the subsequent films, the roles of women's friends and relatives take on a more prominent position. Furthermore, the way in which other individuals interact and assist women with disabilities demonstrates a notable improvement. In recent movies, the instances of people mocking and displaying indifference towards women with disabilities have significantly decreased.

The initial movie, *Koshish*, paints a black picture of the societal perception and treatment of disabled women. The protagonist is shown as being completely isolated from society, with minimal social connections apart from her husband. This portrayal highlights the prevailing stigma and lack of understanding surrounding disability at the time. It emphasizes the deep-rooted

social norms that isolated disabled individuals, particularly women, from the rest of society. However, as the subsequent films unfold, a noticeable change is observed in the representation of women with disabilities. Their friendships and relationships with friends and relatives are given more prominence in the narratives. This shift in focus signifies a growing recognition of the importance of social connections and support systems for individuals with disabilities. These films depict women with disabilities as being actively engaged in relationships, suggesting that they are not defined solely by their disability, but rather by their diverse roles and interactions within society.

Moreover, a significant change is depicted in the way other members of society perceive and interact with women with disabilities. Unlike in *Koshish*, where individuals generally exhibited indifference or mockery, recent movies display a greater inclination towards assisting and empathizing with disabled women. The scenes of mockery and indifference have significantly decreased, indicating a shift in societal attitudes towards disabled individuals. This change could be attributed to an increased awareness and understanding of disability issues in society.

In conclusion, the exploration of women with disabilities in these three movies highlights a notable transformation in the way the society perceives and treats them. From being completely isolated and alone in *Koshish*, to having supportive relationships and friends in subsequent movies, the representation of women with disabilities has evolved. The decrease in scenes depicting mockery and indifference further signifies an improvement in societal attitudes. These films serve as a testament to the changing narrative and progression toward inclusivity and understanding in modern times.

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