



AFFECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF DISABILITY IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA: ANALYZING EMOTIONAL RESPONSES AND SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS IN TAARE ZAMEEN PAR (2007) AND BADHAAI HO (2018)

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Abstract: Bollywood through its Hindi-language production of films has acted as a cultural power in India by both expressing and influencing societal beliefs and dreams. Indian entertainment industry named Bollywood stands as the nation's most influential film sector which reflects social transformations yet simultaneously advances or confronts dominant beliefs in society. The historical depiction of marginalized groups by Bollywood spans people with disabilities down to lower-caste individuals alongside gender minorities. When it comes to depicting disabilities in Bollywood the tradition has shown people with disabilities either as objects of sympathy or sources of motivation yet fails to display their active presence as capable persons. During their release in 2003 and 2007, *Mil Gaya* and *Taare Zameen Par* depicted neurodivergent and learning-disabled characters mostly through the narrative arc of societal acceptance and personal triumph rather than self-assertiveness. The history of Bollywood has shown ineffective depiction of disability which maintains traditional misconceptions about disability while failing to create understanding about true disabled experiences. Certain movies have introduced comprehensive portrayals of disability along with various distinct characteristics to transform prevailing narratives. This study primarily draws upon Disability studies and Affect theory to analyse how Bollywood films construct and convey disability as a social and emotional experience. These two frameworks provide critical insights into how disability is represented in cinema and how audiences engage with these representations on both intellectual and

emotional levels. This research paper analyses films as affective texts to study their influence on public attitudes regarding disability because prior research demonstrates an insufficient analysis of these elements.

Keywords: Affective construction, Societal misconception, Stigma, Neuro divergent, dyslexic, osteoporosis, social model of disability.

1. Introduction

Bollywood Cinema as a Cultural Medium

Bollywood through its Hindi-language production of films has acted as a cultural power in India by both expressing and influencing societal beliefs and dreams. Indian entertainment industry named Bollywood stands as the nation's most influential film sector which reflects social transformations yet simultaneously advances or confronts dominant beliefs in society. Throughout Bollywood's history, the industry presented stories that match what audiences daily experience as well as their dreams and battles in both post-independence nationalistic times and today's globalized world. The way Bollywood represents marginalized communities in movies often contains issues because it either condones stereotypes about these groups or ignores their life stories completely. The historical depiction of marginalized groups by Bollywood spans people with disabilities down to lower-caste individuals alongside gender minorities. Entertainment in India presents social awareness through its films but its principal film industry predominantly chooses to represent marginalized communities through limited victimization or heroic representations (Vasudevan, 2011). When it comes to depicting disabilities in Bollywood the tradition has shown people with disabilities either as objects of sympathy or sources of motivation yet fails to display their active presence as capable persons. During their release in 2003 and 2007, *Mil Gaya* and *Taare Zameen Par* depicted neurodivergent and learning-disabled characters mostly through the narrative arc of societal acceptance and personal triumph rather than self-assertiveness.

Throughout its history, Bollywood faced challenges in portraying faiths and caste groups accurately in their films. Mainstream narratives contained no Dalits except in cases where they either suffered oppression or were shown as criminals. The film *Article 15* (2019) attempted to battle caste discrimination by showing systemic oppression within mainstream culture. Throughout cinema's evolution, women have shifted from being portrayed as submissive honorable victims during early film periods into multifaceted assured female characters in modern movies (Balabantaray, 2022). The media industry struggles with persistent gender

inequality problems even though it sustains biases that restrict women's freedom to act independently. The public perception shaped by Bollywood film content matters strongly because millions learn their cultural knowledge primarily through movies. The reinforcement of stereotypes within films leads to stronger societal prejudice which obstructs genuine representation of minority groups by public society. The repetitive treatment of mental health issues through excessive and violent imagery within films has resulted in expanded public misconceptions about mental illnesses. Films of progressive themes produce social change through their capacity to inform people about important matters while inviting constructive dialogue (Rajadhyaksha, 2009). The films *My Name is Khan* (2010) and *Pink* (2016) challenge mainstream viewpoints through their depiction of Islamophobia and female consent rights which leads audiences to engage in important social discussions.

Disability Representation in Bollywood: A Case Study of *Taare Zameen Par* and *Badhaai Ho*

The history of Bollywood has shown ineffective depiction of disability which maintains traditional misconceptions about disability while failing to create understanding about true disabled experiences. Certain movies have introduced comprehensive portrayals of disability along with various distinct characteristics to transform prevailing narratives. The film industry releases *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) and *Badhaai Ho* (2018) which demonstrate meaningful approaches to disability and public perception of such conditions. The maternal protagonist in *Badhaai Ho* displays osteoporosis as the film presents disability through an aging Indian woman living with this bone condition. Aside from this storyline, the film follows the struggles of neurodivergent students in Indian educational institutions as shown in *Taare Zameen Par*. The films illustrate public responses to difference and disability which makes them critical additions to Bollywood since disability-based content remains scarce (Ashcroft, 2012). The film *Taare Zameen Par* from Aamir Khan depicts the educational difficulties faced by dyslexic Ishaan who lives under the oppressive pressure from his parents and his school environment. The movie delivers two essential messages about the necessity of inclusive learning programs along with the damage caused by unidentified learning differences while showing how strict academic systems harm students who think differently. The Indian family drama *Badhaai Ho* shows middle-class society's reaction to late pregnancy and also portrays the experiences of the grandmother through her aging and disability condition. Through her story of osteoporosis alongside mobility limitations and changes in family life, the movie shows how elder disabled persons frequently encounter societal disregard. In contrast to *Taare Zameen Par*, the plot of *Badhaai Ho* encompasses

disability yet positions it among other societal discussions making it a distinctive approach to movie representation (Mishra, 2011). The movie falls short of exploring the emotional aspects of aging with disability thus providing additional space for potential critical evaluation. Limited scientific research about disability portrayal in Bollywood exists because most studies examine either overly uplifting or exhaustive victimization portrayals. The research analyzes little how feelings and public opinions together with routine social contact contribute to constructing disability in the movies. Research analysis of emotional representation in *Taare Zameen Par* and *Badhaai Ho* will lead to an enhanced understanding of how Bollywood shapes public attitudes about disability which shapes cultural attitudes and social policy decisions.

- How are emotional responses to disability constructed in *Taare Zameen Par* and *Badhaai Ho*?
- What societal perceptions of disability do these films portray?
- How do these films contribute to evolving narratives of disability in Bollywood?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study primarily draws upon disability studies and affect theory to analyse how Bollywood films construct and convey disability as a social and emotional experience. These two frameworks provide critical insights into how disability is represented in cinema and how audiences engage with these representations on both intellectual and emotional levels.

Disability studies

Davis, (2016) stated that disability studies analyse disability as both a social construction in addition to its medical definition. Societal barriers generate disability according to the social model of disability which remains an essential principle in this field. The film analysis of *Taare Zameen Par* benefits from a disability studies view because Ishaan faces greater barriers from his inept educational institution rather than his dyslexic condition. *Badhaai Ho* portrays the grandmother's osteoporosis as an illness influenced by social perspectives which determine how people view aging bodies in their world.

Affect theory

Ahern, (2018) examined that public emotions and societal perceptions result from cultural texts through the analysis of embodied responses. Throughout cinema, the specific medium uses its visual techniques together with musical elements and narrative structure to produce particular emotional responses in viewers. *Taare Zameen Par* portrays Ishaan's struggles through brilliant cinematography and climax sequences which drive audience members toward feeling his pain of being misunderstood and socially isolated. The affective response in *Badhaai Ho* emerges from both humorous moments and heartwarming scenes to prompt audience members to change their views about aging and disability. The theory of affect allows us to measure how these movies make audiences feel and how these emotional responses affect prevailing social mindsets about disability. The research examines how Bollywood productions work as affective materials which help form emotional and conceptual knowledge about disability within Indian culture through an intersection between disability studies and affect theory.

2.2 Disability Representation in Indian Cinema

Dawn, (2014) pointed out that the *Bharatiya* films have made substantial progress in how they present disability because characters now get realistic portrayals instead of distorted stereotypes. In the past disability was frequently displayed in three forms tragic heroes comedic sidekicks or antagonists leading to stereotype consolidation instead of authentic representation. Bollywood experiences a gradual transformation in its content which now presents disability through authentic experiences instead of simplistic story elements. Indian cinema from its early years showed disability as something that caused emotional hardship to mix moral messages within stories. The movie *Dosti* (1964) portrayed disabled characters as helpless objects which highlighted the use of tragic disabled figures that needed social assistance to survive. The lead characters in *Koshish* (1972) face discrimination from their surroundings as they are a deaf-mute pair who encounters few who show understanding during their journey. Even though viewers praised the movie for its sensitivity concerning disabilities it focused on disability overcome through perseverance rather than discussing the underlying societal impediments. Gupta (2022) stated that the motion picture industry of India mostly eliminated disability-related content during the 1990s before the early 2000s except within highly emotional dramatic moments. The 2003 film *Koi Mil Gaya* showed a neurodivergent main character alongside demeaning developmental images. In 2005 *Black* offered a visually

and hearing-impaired lead character in a film that showed disability as an obstacle to overcome instead of accepting a disabled identity. Bollywood faces criticism from scholars Ghai (2003) and Bhugra & DeSilva (2020) because its portrayals of disability rarely move beyond showcasing individual overcoming skills instead of structural accessibility improvements. The movie industry has evolved toward displaying genuine and multifaceted representations of disabled people in recent times. The 2007 film *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) displayed an understanding of dyslexia to challenge dominant educational standards while *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) investigated how disability interacts with sexuality while representing independence terminally. Advances in disability advocacy and studies have encouraged film producers to move away from basic portrayals of disability. Bollywood continues making progress but still lacks sufficient representation of disability. Few representations of disabilities in Indian cinema depict disability as normal life without using the shallow stereotypes of inspirational exceptionalism. Future cinema will succeed when disabled characters become integrated into general storytelling while their disability remains separate from their character development.

2.3 Emotional Construction in Film Narratives

Bandyopadhyay, (2008) examined that cinema depends heavily on emotions to carry its storytelling impact through visual auditory, and narrative elements. Through affective cues comprising musical melodies and camera techniques and changes in protagonist journeys, filmmakers can guide viewers to experience particular emotions thus affecting how they understand and become involved with the narrative. Through skilled design of storytelling components, movies can establish linkages between viewers which generate sympathy and create distress along with producing happiness or suffering that advance the watching experience into a more impactful journey. Music holds the power among all storytelling elements to express deep emotions effectively during narrative presentation. Music scores in the background alongside soundtracks serve two purposes: they establish mood while intensifying dramatic moments and directing viewers how to feel emotionally. When emotional moments arise in a scene the use of slow symphonic music brings out sadness yet upbeat or triumphant music creates hopeful and resolution-strengthening expressions. Through Maa, the musical number in *Taare Zameen Par* the filmmakers deepen Ishaan's mounting emotions thereby heightening his feeling of social separation and his desperate desire to belong. Rai, (2009) analysed that light-hearted background music in *Badhaai Ho* economically adds a playful tone to the movie while preventing scenes of aging and disability from resonating without optimism. Visual

storytelling effectively conjures emotional responses during the filmmaking process. Cinema-dependent methods including close-up shots along with light manipulation and colour-based choices in film production determine viewer perception of character emotional experiences. The application of dim lighting represents seclusion in a scene whereas bright colours tell a story of happiness or fond memories. Directors employ close-up camera shots in disability-oriented movies to display the emotional distress of disabled characters which allows audiences to better identify with their hardships. The evolution of fictional characters throughout stories boosts the audience's emotional connection because viewers can identify with these character developments. The transformative experiences of characters throughout the story evoke cathartic feelings in movie watchers. The deep emotional involvement of audiences leads to empathy which enables them to understand social issues about disability at a deeper level. Affecting strategies found in movies serve both entertainment purposes and societal culture transformation through attitude modification and enhanced awareness.

2.4 Existing Studies on *Taare Zameen Par* and *Badhaai Ho*

Rai, (2009) stated that examines how disability appears in Bollywood movies with special attention on the successful films *Taare Zameen Par* and *Badhaai Ho*. *Taare Zameen Par* mainly examine how the film increased public understanding of learning disabilities, especially dyslexia. The film demonstrates both a sensitive portrayal of neurodiverse children and a negative assessment of India's educational structure. The film acted as a leading force in igniting important national dialogues about disability-inclusive education together with new teaching techniques. The film still reinforces individualized disability perspectives and other critics because it centralizes the "*gifted child*" story over systemic barriers those students with disabilities encounter. Academic research surrounding *Badhaai Ho* exists in limited quantities because scholars tend to focus on the groundbreaking aspects of aging life and late-pregnancy themes instead of disability. Dwyer, (2014) pointed out that the film presents physical decline narratives primarily through its depiction of the grandmother character but available research has not thoroughly examined the disability and aging impairment representation in the film. Academic research has already discussed themes and narratives in these films yet fails to fully study the affective elements like music alongside visual storytelling elements and character development which create empathy in audiences toward disability. This research analyzes films as affective texts to study their influence on public attitudes regarding disability because prior research demonstrates an insufficient analysis of these elements.

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