

Proposed to Scopus Publication
DISABILITY IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

Disability has historically been perceived through the lens of inferiority, rooted in classical texts that associate impairment with *karma phala* (the consequences of past-life actions). This proposal explores both Western and Indian historical texts to demonstrate how societal attitudes shaped by such literature have marginalised individuals with disabilities. These perceptions influenced writers and filmmakers, leading to the portrayal of disabled characters as villains, outcasts, or objects of pity, rather than protagonists. Drawing on Michel Foucault's "truth effect," this study critiques how outdated notions of *karma phala* permeate creative representations, thereby perpetuating stereotypes. By analysing epics, novels, and cinematic portrayals, the research traces a historical trend of sidelining disabled characters, with particular attention to Indian cinema. However, a contrasting narrative emerges in Chinese and Korean dramas, where disabled characters are often depicted as strong, heroic, and central to the plot, challenging conventional stereotypes.

Miracle (2015) is one of those Turkish movies that challenges several stereotypes related to disabilities, and so does the Chinese drama series *Sword Snow Stride* (2021-22). James Cameron's *Avatar* series blends disability with a future world in which heroes become able-bodied through the aid of a scientific machine. Old literature depicts several disabled authors, such as John Milton, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Lord Byron and others, who are rarely studied as disabled writers, thereby weakening the discourse. The weaknesses of disabled writers include a tendency to overemphasise biographical details, and they have failed to create the magic of Dickens's Master Dick or Richard from *Oliver Twist*. Bringing a brave, disabled character like Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick* (1851) is hard for modern writers.

The Indian literary definition of disability related to "karma" (Indians) and "sin" (Westerns) is still haunting the views of modern writers of literature and directors of cinema. Reading Indian mythical literary characters like Ashtavakra, Pandu, Ganesha, Surpanakha, Dhritarashtra, Shakuni, and Manthara through the lens of Maud Bodkin, Michel Foucault, Carl Gustav Jung and Northrop Frye's "archetypal criticisms" involves analysing how these figures represent societal power structures, norms, and the construction of knowledge. Indian cinema can portray the disabled as a hero (*Saajan*, 1991), but without the ability to take revenge (*Sholey*, 1975). Most Indian movies portrayed the disabled as beggars (*Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008) and depicted them with sympathetic eyes, such as the blind parents of Shravan Kumar in *Roti* (1974). It trope is well seen in the movies ie., *Aurat* (1940); *Mother India* (1957); *Anjali* (1960); *Hum Dono* (1961); *Naandi* (1964); *Bheegi Raat* (1965); *Kodimalar* (1966); *Koshish* (1972); *Anurag* (1972); *Vyarnthavagal* (1977); *Sparsh* (1980); *Moondram Pirai* (1982); *Sadma* (1983); *Kally* (1988); *Sirivennela* (1986); *Pestonjee* (1988), *Sati* (1989); *Machitrathazu* (1993); *Mookilla Rajyathu* (1991); *Sooryamanasam* (1992); *Ardhangni* (1995); *Khamoshi* (1996); *Kunjikoonam* (2002); *Aakhen* (2002); *Fanaa* (2006) and others.

Indian cinema, from the beginning, remains able-centric: *Sholey* (1975) is the story of a disabled Thakur, yet the limelight is stolen by two able-bodied characters, Jay and Veeru. The lead hero in *Khandaan* (1965) and *Avatar* (1983) belong to a wealthy family, as in *Saajan* (1991), which excluded the poor. Bollywood stereotyped disability by portraying the disabled as pitiable characters like Salim (*Sadak*, 1991), who cannot take revenge against Maharani, a villain. *Vimanam* (2023) and *Bibi Rajni* (2024) present disability in different lights by denying power and respect. Only disabled villains are portrayed as powerful (*Pushpa: The Rise* (2021), but Sanjay Gupta's *Kaabil* (2017) challenges the

concept. Most of the time, the disabled are submissive, like Saadat Hasan Manto's "Titwal ka Kutta" (tr., Dog from Titwal), on whom both Indian soldiers and Pakistani rangers are shooting for fun.

By emphasising the necessity of iconoclastic disabled writers who utilise autobiographical works not just as tools for garnering empathy but as platforms to critique and challenge conventional societal norms. Such an approach will create a paradigm shift that has the potential to redefine the discourse surrounding disability and its representation, and it will radically alter the way disability is perceived and discussed. The disabled writer did not extend this trope by including old age as a form of disability, as in *K.D* (2019) and *Thalaikoothal* (2023). Due to these weaknesses, disabled authors remain unable to create what Dalits have created, i.e., Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, nor do they produce any Kalidas, Shakespeare, Milton or Pope. Neither did they have any iconoclastic poets like Jamaica's Poet Laureate, Marvyn Morris, whose poem "Judas" challenges traditional views of Jesus, nor did they become like Aime Cesaire, renowned for *A Tempest*, which critiques William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* through a postcolonial lens. Either in Literature or Cinema, they have failed to inspire collective movements akin to the Suffrage Movement for women's rights, the Black Panther Movement for Black empowerment, the Dalit Panther Movement or the Maveshi Nara Movement for Dalits' upliftment in India.

Themes:

- Indian Disabled hero/ villain
- Western Disabled hero/ villain
- Chinese Disabled hero/ villain
- Lack of canonical disabled authors
- Are there any Dalit disabled?
- Where are disabled women?
- What happened to disabled Muslims?
- Disability in Mythology
- Oral, Folk and Disability
- Old age as disability
- Disabled after the Partition of India
- Soldiers as Disabled after war
- Able vs Disabled
- Ayurveda and Healing for the Disabled
- Disabled Autobiographical Authors
- Current Status of disabled in Cinema and Literature
- Future of disabled

Kindly send an **Abstract of 250** words at deepak@mgcub.ac.in by **September 15, 2026**

1. We are accepting abstracts from everyone until Sep 15, 2025
2. International authors will be given preference.
3. High research topics are welcomed