

Infirmity and Gender:

Critiquing Issues of Disabled Teenager in Popular Film

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Abstract:

Disability has recurrently been a topic for cinema. But, it has often been used as a substance to arouse compassion on screen. Societal approaches towards people specifically women with disabilities have often altered from usual phase. Gender, edification, religion, profession, income, race have a noteworthy impact on disability cognizance. The examination of Indian cinema from this perspective reveals that the disabled characters tend to fail in certain broad categories or groups. Gender-wise study, in general, elucidates that there are weak characters who resigned themselves to the situation, and in contrast; there are those who face their fate more courageously. This paper explores the gender consciousness in handling disability in the Tamil film *Peranbe* (2019) directed by Ram; which pacts with the leitmotif of disability to comprehend the psychological and gender tensions in the life of an adolescent and her father. The nature of the character's disability and its trauma has facilitated to shape of disability depiction in contemporary Indian cinema like *Peranbe*.

Keywords: Film, Disability, Gender, Sexuality, Trauma.

1. Introduction

Although disability has occasionally been signified as a curse or punishment, several recent Indian films have allocated with the question of current interpretation on disabled and have had noteworthy impression on the disability movement at present. Cinema would be estimably used as a halfway to melt the treatise and put inferences to the long-standing miserable depiction of disability in India. The worth in which individuals are represented in popular media can have a considerate effect on how they are observed by society on the whole. It is, consequently, firm to catch even one story turning around an unattached disabled woman. There is an insentient taming of thoughts and perceptions of the audiences that take place by observing women playing minor roles on screen. Now a day an episodic engagement with disability in Indian cinema is often obvious. Rarer tales about disabled relate that there is a slender image of life in overall. Disability can be defined as long-term physical, psychological, logical or sensual impairments which interact with numerous obstacles that may hamper their full and real input in society on an equivalent base with others. On one hand, we find some of disabled consigned to a state of nullity in the society, serving in the movie a purpose of evoking pity from the audience; on the other, one tends to admire those who revolt or rebel against discrimination and injustice, achieving even heroic proportions sometimes. The infirmity finds a vital aspect of factual life and it is habitually appealed into the reel version of life. A critical analysis of the treatment of disability and its projection in Indian cinema shows that, for a long time, it has remained indifferent to the predicament suffered by the disabled. Disability Studies is a resourceful area with academic and professional groundwork in humanities and rehabilitation. Patriarchy dominates everywhere; often portrayed

and least highlighted is the depiction of persons with disabilities through the medium of popular cinema (Chivers 321). Traditionally, cinema has evaded stepping into the dominion of persons with disabilities or their caretakers at home. Film utilizes characters with disability in uncountable methods. It may depict characters visual or audio impaired and proliferate handicapped. The recurrent leitmotifs induced from the corpus of accounts and the interim filmography on disability as assumed by participants. The film description of disabled in most movies was obtainable as objects of shame, empathy, or disaster. The interpretation of women with infirmity is regarded by the viewers as deterrent to identity, household and society. They were revealed as reliant on bodily, emotive as well as financial and hence necessitate shelter without which they surrender to immoralities or voluptuous abuse. The disabled heroes as a vital personality in a film exposed them as heroic, valiant and achievers against all probabilities till the conclusion of the movie. Whereas the female leads are displayed as meek and powerless disabled. The viewers were overwhelmed by the self-effacement, easiness, and sub-ordination of such roles to the gentle and compassionate behavior of their male hero. Cinema must abstain from dramatizing, bestowing persons with disabilities as prodigious attributes, describing them as non-sexual units, stuffs of inquisitiveness or victims or perpetrators of violence, objects of jest, mock or being made the cask of jokes.

Southern cinema has intermittently familiarized numerous new performances in filmmaking. Tamil films particularly showed that more than social stigma, domestic prejudices and parental desertion made the disabled persons, sufferers of insult and disgrace, lead to a grade of depression. *Peranbu (Resurrection)* is a Tamil film written and directed by Ram in 2019 and produced by P. L. Thenappan under Shree Rajalakshmi Films. It casts Mammooty, Anjali Ameer, Sadhana and Anjali in the main roles. The story revolves around a father Amudhavan (enacted by Mammooty) lives with his fourteen year old daughter Paapa (enacted by Sadhana) who suffers from cerebral palsy in a joint family. Amudhavan's wife elopes with another man as she was not able to handle the spastic child on her own. The film was globally premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2018, Shanghai International Film Festival, China in June 2018, the Indian Panorama category of 49th International Film Festival of India, before being scheduled for a theatrical release on 1 February 2019. The film won the Best Film award at the Zee Cine Awards Tamil, while it received ten nominations at the Ananda Vikatan Cinema Awards, receiving two wins with one for Best Film and the another one for Best Music Director for Yuvan Shankar Raja. The movie was registered at the Top evaluated Indian movies of 2019 by the Internet Movie Database.

2. Film and Representation of Disability Disability and gender

2.1

Trauma studies has absorbed trauma as an image for suppression and the conception of denotations, disability studies has obliterated the instant of trauma to a communal framework. Trauma is not unstated symbolically in disability studies, but relatively political. Therefore, both trauma and disability studies emphasis on the physique and its troubles, every arena has its own sites, objectives, and confines. Trauma and disability may be abundantly abstracted as personified displays of social sorting systems. *Peranbu* traces upon two central issues, the trauma of disabled and the gendered concerns of their caretaking. At the centre of this film is Paapa, who has cerebral palsy. Her father, Amudhavan, lastly has his retaliation, for deserting her and her mother and moved successfully to Dubai. He never visited either of them, not to intricate in their lives anyhow. Thus, his wife leaves him and Paapa for another man. This made Amudhavan with no other choice than to resign his job and start taking care of Paapa. Although his family members, relatives and neighbours know about her condition they try to keep them away. Finally, Amudhavan decides to take Paapa away from home for her own good. They reside in an isolated house far away from the town. The house has a lake as its boundary. They have to either cross the old wooden bridge at one of the sides of the house to reach the other bank or take a country boat or a coracle boat. Therefore, the lake acts as a border separating Amudhavan's house and the locality that exhibit discrimination against disabled. Amudhavan liked this house as it is isolated and it would not annoy anyone nearby as every other house was on the other side of the lake. Amudhavan efforts to union with her, but he recognizes that Paapa desires a feminine caregiver, since she is attaining her sexuality. He becomes irritated that society does not permit his immobilized daughter in its core, and precedes her away to a place detached from human interaction. When they are involuntary to arrival to the city, he has

to agree with the indexes with which humanity guises at a distinct teenager.

2.2 Disability as an object of trauma - pity and dependence

Children

with special healthcare are at increased risk of prolonged bodily, growing, social, or emotional (McPherson 138). The film is told in chapters and assist us appreciate the father-daughter bond well. The film receives a profound scarp into the psyche of a destitute father who got involved of his teenage daughter who has cerebral palsy, and how did they seem to make affinities together in life respectively. This is a growth of adult drama and a steady-striking version of survival in the world. Whole first half is fixed in the midst of nature. Few filmmakers have touched the theme of sexuality as delicately as Ram, and he delights it with respect. The film unblushingly talks about a young girl's sexuality and sorts us apprehend that there is nothing mistaken in deliberating as it is quite usual. *Peranbu* structures a transwoman (Anjali Ameer) in a key role. It's optimistic to see that the film does not make a ridicule of her character. Ram discourses puberty associated issues and the sexual impulse that grasps teenagers in that phase. Amudhavan is tricked by a woman whom he beliefs and is required to alter from an isolated hillside to Chennai. Disability interpretations often hesitate between a comical interlude, understated heroism, compulsion and encumbrance. It is a black comedy when he meets and invites a man to his house not grasping that the woman he lives is truly the other's wife. Paapa appears like a blow at dark humour, agreed that the movie conserves that she is truly a girl who grows into a woman in front of her father's eyes. With his excellently nuanced depiction, Mammooty situates across the absolute feebleness of Amudhavan. He is neither a good, well-behaved son, as he is not unable to accommodate with his mother or sister-in-law, nor does he own passable social skills to mollify the irritated neighbourhood. The same dilemma trails him in the secluded valley where he seeks shelter. There he encounters with two women who derive to him as house maids; while the first one is required by her envious husband to consent the job, the second one, Viji, who eventually starts living with him, goes on to cheat him. As it turns out, it was all a shame, and he had no clue that she was there just to grab his land. Hounded out thus from the idyllic valley, he moves to the city, where he meets another woman, Meera, who is a transsexual sex worker. He forays a friendship with her that is nonsexual from the beginning of their relationship. But it is the sex worker Meera who finally rescues him and brings him back to life. So, we have an unusual male hero here who consistently fails in all his manly roles - as father, son, husband, and lover. In disparity, all women he comes into contact with overtly express their wishes, embrace their desires and pursue their outlines even in the air of obstacles and opposition. Sometimes they do it assertively like his former wife who leaves him on her own or cleverly like Viji who cheats him. Others ensure it empathetically as in the occasion of Meera, or insentiently like Paapa. In this movie, Ram takes the emasculation of the masculine hero advance and unfathomable. In the end, we find the trio - Amudhavan, Meera and Paapa in a house surrounded by verdant green landscape. Amudhavan's throughout narration has been stopped and happy-go-lucky Paapa cheerily walking sideways and Meera hasten to attend her, while Amudhavan, now smooth-shaven and pleasing, amusedly guards them from overhead. The sexual awakenings of Paapa, which in the first place drove Amudhavan to the edge of death, is totally ignored or nullified here. It is as if she is pulled out of the urban surroundings and its umpteenth lures only to merge and dissolve in nature all over again. In the case of Amudhavan and Meera, there is never an occasion where we find them sexually attracted to each other; though he does help her and even visits her home twofold, he is mortified by the teasing and joyfulness of her transsexual company. So, the refuge the trio discovers final shelter in is an asexual, one that is unadulterated by sensual desires.

One of

the most poignant proportions it unlocked up in a brave and conspicuous way: that of the query of sexuality and erotic needs of somebody like Paapa. In Indian cinema, the differently-abled are unvaryingly genderless; they are depicted as everlasting children bereft of sexuality. Paapa is a girl, who, in her psychological condition, unabashedly pursues sexual pleasure; and it is what all institutes in society greatly overwhelm, punish and exile from inside them and without. Instead, the film is focused by the existential crisis of Amudhavan and pursues retreat in a resolution that ensembles him alone. Like any other Indian social, the film ends with the establishment/foundation of a family, though this family is marked by the miscellany and inequality in their sexual alignments and hence, asexuality. People with disabilities are often rebuked by their care-givers for conveying about their sexual needs and are often teased as well. Shampa Sengupta, an activist working on gender and disability issues recounts that she

has seen special educators treat young people's sexual desire negatively; these desires are often the subject of school gossip and often also lead to young people with disabilities being sexually harassed and even abused. Shampa adds that young people with disabilities are often ridiculed for expressing a desire to become parents or to get pregnant. In a 2014 article, she says, "One needs to understand that persons with disabilities are mostly denied their sexual rights. But their biological needs are same as others. Sometimes, they do not know where and how to behave. For example, one can see adolescents with mental disabilities trying to masturbate in public - we need to teach them when and where this is acceptable" (Sengupta 7).

Caretakers for children with special needs are ought to provide much of their time and kindness. Circumstances such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, cancer, and cerebral vascular accident are amongst the categorized severe illnesses that roots immense stress among caregivers reliant on the rigorousness of the condition (Hack 15). The more austere the condition, the more the caregiver is exposed to great levels of stress (Smith 23) and can follow along with other disorders such as depression and anxiety. Amudhavan's fears in this film of his daughter being hazarded to sexual assault or other forms of abuse are not misplaced. In his incompetence to pact with these intricate topics that is conventionally dealt with only by women, Amudhavan feels out-of-place. He moves her to housing while he works as a driver. But the problems seem tenacious. He finds that the caretakers at the shelter he's left her in hit her because she touches herself. He immediately moves her out of there. Amudhavan pauses into tears when he meets face-to-face with Pappa's desires. His logic is, "Why does a father look for a groom for his daughter, for this too right? Nobody will marry my daughter so I want her to experience this.' The absence of the concept of consent, the leap from masturbation to sex, and his decision to give her what he thinks she needs, even though she's a minor" (*Peranbe*). All over the film, Paapa faces denial and discrimination, and lastly Amudhavan appears to settle for a negotiation as the climax. Amudhavan is finally relaxed, even glowing, when there is a woman in his life. If it was Vijayalakshmi who came to work in his house earlier, in the end it is Meera who stops him from killing himself and his daughter

3. Conclusion

Assumed that the harassment underwent by Paapa with disability proved that it is a stock of extreme prominence in the drive for entire enclosure of disabled in the communal typical life. Infirmary or disability has been approximately pragmatic as an admonishment in India for some span of time, and this has been the most prevalent depiction of disability in movies. Though a lot of the interpretation of disability in films in the era leading up to the early 2000s was aggressive distortion, a new wave of cinema has revealing disability more wisely and thoughtfully on the screen. The resolute is to use the display as a worth to create awareness and compassion among the broad public. Also, there appears to be a pattern shift in how a director aspects at disability- from the outlook of the disabled person rather than something to exploit. From a pitiable to an independent and self-reliant person with disability, Indian films have come an extensive way in illustrating disabilities.

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