

Inform the Design of Indian Cinema Literature Inclusivity for People with Sensory Disabilities

Parin Somani¹, Nurbanu Somani²,

¹International Academic Scholar,

²Postgraduate Researcher, UK

Corresponding author e-mail: pusomani7@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Cinema and literature have always had a very strong association, stemming from a transformation of literary thought into a visual depiction, currently appealing to the masses. They both have the same intention; to make people see. However, this can be difficult when individuals suffer with sensory disabilities particularly hearing and sight impairments. This study aims to evaluate literature on Indian cinema inclusion of individuals with sensory disabilities and to determine what Indian cinematography requires to be all-inclusive. There is a focus on hearing and sight impairments. This was carried out by means of a systematic literature review via a well-planned search. Results have identified that there is a strong relationship between film and literature's ability to create societal impact and facilitate change. Indian cinema has attempted to shift perceptions and educate society, through films illustrating protagonists with sensory impairments. The Indian Government have approved initiatives to ensure inclusivity within cinemas. However, there is still a stigma attached to sensory disability, resulting in marginalising individuals. Readily available assistive mobile applications, audio descriptions, subtitles and sign language can facilitate change in stigmatised perception towards inclusivity. This is an issue that needs to be overcome within a diverse globalised society.

Keywords: Cinema, Literature, Sensory disability, Inclusive, Bollywood

Introduction

Historically, cinema and literature have always had a very strong association. This has stemmed from literary thought, that has transformed into a visual depiction over a period of time, currently appealing to the masses (Cahir, 2006). Literature is deemed as a productive skill that reflects on the norms of society, ethos of culture, beliefs, traditions and values (Albrecht, 1954). It can be perceived as containing power to transform human life; thus, perception and interpretation are important. Naturally, storylines used within films were originally depicted from literature written by great authors. The 1930's to 1940's was the first heyday of literary film (Corrigan, 2010), which started to shape existing literature through the mind, but supported by scientific developments that were used to appeal to human life. As technology progressed, film techniques also developed in sound engineering, lighting and graphics. This all enhanced film production, cultivating immense interest amongst filmmakers. Numerous individuals globally, within early history always perceived books to be better than films. However, there was a shift in this ideology, when great literary works written by influential writers like William Shakespeare, were used for film production. 'Hamlet' was transformed into a film in 1948 after which 'Macbeth' also written by Shakespeare, followed suit and was recreated into a film. This introduced an equilibrium

between films and literature, giving rise to informed discussions focusing on meanings and values. The relationship between films and literature was strengthened further from the 1970's (Brownstein, 2001). It was at this point that both equally extraordinary, yet distinct works of art were both recognised on their own platforms. Literature was expressed during the 18th and 19th century while cinema has emerged during the 20th century to current day (Kidwai, 2018). Overtime films started to address social issues and influenced social impact, in a similar way to literature, reflecting ethos of culture, values, beliefs and traditions.

Cinema and literature both have the same intention; to make people see (Marcus, 2007). Literature uses words to create imagery within an individual's mind, through reading texts. It is a medium through which the author can communicate to readers, through written description allowing minds to create. In comparison film scenes are already created for an individual through the producer and director's creation of their image portrayal. Numerous literary works have been converted into films over time, however it can be argued that adapting literature in this way can distract the existing interpretation that readers may perceive. For example, many individuals have read Harry Potter, then watched the films. When they read the book, their imagination took them to another realm. However, there would have been a differential between the image created within their own mind while reading the book, and the visual representation when watching the film. The main differential between film and literature for a sensory individual without disabilities is, that literature is perceived through mental images and films are perceived through visual images. Films and literature represent different genres, with unique characteristics and individual properties that they are identified by.

The film industry dedicated to Hindi cinema is renowned as Bollywood since the 1970s (Mazumdar, 2007) but previously referred to as Bombay cinema (Marcus, 2007). The Indian cinema is the largest national film industry in the world (FFJ, 2020) providing cinematic and film experience globally. Approximately 1800 digital feature films were released across India in 2017, in comparison to 500 films released in the United States by Hollywood which is the oldest and largest national film industry in the world. India still homes 6780 Single screen theatres (Farooqui, 2019) and in 2019 the Indian film industry generated over 11 billion rupees in revenue (Keelery, 2020). However, the films produced are predominantly enjoyed by individuals without existing disabilities.

Sensory disability is when an individual does not have normal awareness of their eyesight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. It affects how an individual obtains information from around them, approximately 95% of information stems from our vision and hearing (Aruma, 2020). with language an essential means to convey verbal and nonverbal communication messages (Somani, 2020). As literature and films require vision and hearing to obtain optimum experience, consideration must be given to those individuals who suffer with sensory disabilities particularly those with hearing and visual impairments. Yet, there is a lack of good quality research in this area, considering the vast number of individuals within the Indian population suffering with visual and hearing impairments.

Objective

The study aims to evaluate literature on Indian cinema inclusion of individuals with sensory disabilities and to determine what Indian cinematography requires to be all- inclusive. There is a focus on hearing and sight impairments.

Method

A systematic literature review was carried out by means of an extensive literature search. A well-planned search was implemented, using electronic databases and manual resources. Published journals, magazines and grey literature were searched in the subject of Indian cinema literature and sensory disabilities. In order to identify primary sources for this study, a process of identification, extraction, analysis, evaluation and interpretation was conducted. Four research questions were devised to be addressed in this study:

Q1 What is the relationship between film and literature?

Q2 What is sensory disability?

Q3 How are sensory disabilities portrayed in Indian cinema?

Q4 What designs are being implemented to help create inclusivity for individuals with hearing and visual impairments?

The following electronic databases were searched to address the research questions: GALE, ResearchGate, Scribd, DOAJ, Semantic Scholar, Lexis Nexis Library, and Google Scholar. The keywords used to define the search included 'Cinema' 'Hearing loss' 'Vision loss' 'Literature' 'Bollywood.' This resulted in several papers identified, however it was necessary to find the necessary papers to answer the research questions. An inclusion and exclusion criteria were decided, comprising of reading the paper abstracts aiming to include the relevant sources after which the full texts were read.

The following points were considered:

- Sources irrelevant to Indian cinema and disabilities were excluded
- Sources that did not concentrate only on sensory disabilities and cinema were not used
- Literature written in language other than English were disregarded
- Sources relating to global cinema only were excluded
- Sources with insufficient technical information relating to their approach were removed

There is enough evidence to answer Q1 and Q2, however a further 'Google' search was carried out to answer Q3 and Q4 to obtain conclusive information. In total, twenty-seven papers were collated ready for investigation, out of which three were duplicates and as a result removed upon investigation. Upon further investigation a further four papers were rejected after completing a full paper analysis and a further two papers were not used to lack of implementation detail. Therefore, eighteen primary literature sources were identified and used within this study. Other electronic sources comprised of newspapers and literature providing information on mobile applications.

Results and Discussion

Results have found that the earliest films were initiated through a film producer's intent to visually recreate or recapture the artistic desire of a literary writer's work. Therefore, the

replication of storylines, scenes and plots were extremely accurate, depicting the literary writer's intent without deviation. The film makers were able to reproduce the literary elements created through their own imaginations into visual representations. Films largely converted original literary texts into a visual form of art. However, due to progression in technology and diversity, with an array of thought processes, the film industry underwent a revolution which made it possible to access films through multiple platforms; at cinemas, televisions, computers, laptop, tablets and smartphones. Thus, evolving from obsolete videocassettes, to DVDs, HD-DVDs, Blu-ray, downloading or streaming films through Netflix, Amazon prime and many others. This is when films found independent artistic value, deviating from literature dependency.

As a result of the vast number of films now available in different genres, including comedy, action, romance, Sci-Fi, horrors and thrillers etc, all of which satisfy demands of the greater target audience, video libraries have emerged. They are taking a similar shape to literature libraries; where electronic or hardcopies can be searched and selected. Films can mesmerise viewers and create emotions through their storylines, colourful costumes, music, background settings and the way in which the main protagonist and other characters portray their roles. They use visual imagery to convey ideologies relevant to the storyline. However, we must realise that everyone has their own perception of what they are viewing or reading linking to their imagination which is associated with their own personal past experiences that they cannot overcome.

A large proportion of the Indian population live with sensory disabilities. Results have found that in the 'disabled population by type of disability in the India census 2011', 19% of the population have a visual disability, 19% have a hearing disability, while 7% have a speech impediment. Therefore, approximately 45% of the overall Indian population have a sensory disability. Out of which approximately 38% of the overall Indian population have a combined sight and hearing impairment, which affects the way that they perceive literature and films. Looking at these figures closer, 1,382,122,843 is the total population in India (Worldometers, 2020), this is 17.7% of the total world population. With approximately 38% of the total Indian population having hearing and sight impairments, this constitutes to a significantly high number of the overall population, that are unable to participate in the overall experience of film entertainment. Therefore, it is important for constructive sensitised measures to be implemented across India and around the world, to ensure inclusivity for individuals with sensory disabilities. However, that is difficult to attain when stigma has been attached to these individuals particularly in India, for many generations.

Unfortunately, misunderstanding individuals with sensory disabilities has been a result of stereotypical views and association with karma, punishment and lack of awareness. This stems from ancient orthodox Hindu schools of thought, which believes that an individual is disabled as a result of their past mistakes, therefore they are repenting through their karma through enduring their current disability. As a result, individuals with disabilities are largely marginalised with a stigma attached to their existence. Literature and cinema through the years have aimed to break boundaries to educate the public in various ways. They have depicted protagonists to possess disabilities, aiming to communicate with wider audiences. They have tried to connect with society through films and literature illustrating how people with disabilities communicate, feel, and behave.

Disability and punishment have been illustrated in Bollywood several times, starting with one of the first films in Indian cinema called *Jeevan Naiya*, in 1936. The male protagonist of the film married a female, who's family background was associated with dancers. At that time,

this association was a social taboo, as a result the protagonist leaves his wife. He then encounters a car accident through which his vision is lost. Over a period, he is nursed back to good health by a lady. Towards the end of the film, it is revealed that the lady who helped him, is actually his wife, whom he had previously abandoned due to social stigma. Another film is the 1974 film *Kashish*, where a brother tortures his sister who has a hearing impairment. As a result, he is crippled, illustrating punishment for his actions. However, with the progression of time, characters with disabilities have been utilised to entertain the audiences, for example in the film *Golmaal* 2017, Lucky who is played by Tushar Kapoor has a speech disability, while *Somnath* played by Paresh Rawal and his wife have visual impairments. The 2002 film *Aankhen*, illustrates three blind heroes, Akshay Kumar, Arjun Rampal and Paresh Rawal, who all rob a bank using their sixth sense. Therefore, results have shown that film and literature can take the mode of multiple portrayals within storylines, to help overcome the stigma attached to individuals with sensory impairments or any disability. They have the power to create change in the world, addressing sensitive matters, and portraying them in ways that resonate with global audiences

Fortunately, with technological advancements provisions have been made for individuals with sensory disabilities. The visually impaired, can enjoy the film experience through dialogue, tones of voices. Quantitative and qualitative research has established that there is a vast requirement for audio described films in India. There is now an option to select audio description integrated within the film and with talking books in literature. This provides narration of the surrounding key visual elements, a commentary that describes body language, movements, expressions and any on screen activity that is deemed important if the individual is unable to see it, so that the film experience is enhanced.

Audio description is available on the television, streaming devices and sometimes organised shows within cinemas around the world. Some cinemas have XL cinema Mobile Application (App) that can be downloaded and streamed through a pair of headphones. This App is used by approximately 8000 visually impaired individuals around the world providing users with audible visual detail (Das, 2019). Similarly, for individuals with hearing impairments, many films have the option of subtitles. There are some films around the world that have sign language interpreters. Both have been proven to enhance the film experience and entice individuals with sensory impairments to go to the cinema more. However, within India these are very few and far between. The information on broadcasting ministry of India issued a directive to the Central Bureau of Film Certification, to ensure that audio descriptions and closed captioning in cinemas are used (Narayanan, 2019). This is a measure that will ensure that viewing films within the cinema will become more inclusive over a time period and aim to put an end to discrimination within theatres. This reinforced the audio-described UI-enabled app XL within Indian cinemas and have been available in some more recent films like *Sanju* starring Ranbir Kapoor, *Romeo Akbar Walter* starring John Abraham, *Andhadun* starring Ayushmann Khurrana and Tabu.

Conclusion

It has been deduced that attempts are being made to deliver an all-inclusive society by creating measures to help individuals with sensory disabilities in cinemas. There is still much work to be done, in order to create awareness and provide education to help shift mindsets away from the stigma associated with disabilities. This may be achieved through creating innovative cinematized productions to generate awareness and facilitate acceptance within society. The option to choose assisted devices, for hearing or visual impairment should be

offered on every platform used to view a film. This includes in cinema's or through other mediums like on television or on internet connected devices. Through making assisted devices completely accessible every time, the stigma associated with the sensory disability will slowly start to change perceptions.

Film and literature should continue to address issues that help the wider community to understand sensory impaired individuals better. They should portray vital and correct information in a sensitive manner, to educate society. This will form a stronger connection between cinema, literature and society helping viewers and readers to understand the predicament of sensory impaired individuals, facilitating progression to an all-inclusive society.

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