



**Quest from Disability to Ultimate Ability through Sexuality: A Study of the
Movie *Margarita with a Straw***

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to investigate the treatment of an urge to lead an everyday life and sexuality of a woman with a disability in society across nationalities. Disabled people often are neglected at different stages in their life by other people. The movement for the rights of disabled persons has impacted the community in general and governments in particular, owing to which governments have taken measures to improve their lives. However, social perception still stigmatises them and their desires across cultures. To examine a woman with disability's zeal to lead an everyday life and her treatment by relatives and friends, this research selects *Margarita with a Straw* movie as a primary source for study. To accomplish the study, critical disability theory is used as a tool to analyse the chosen movie. The study proves that disabled persons are not only neglected physically but their urges and emotions, too. Loneliness furthers their disability. But, only a few among the persons with Disabilities, like the lead character in the movie selected, transcend the social disability and attain ultimate ability too.

Keywords: woman with disability, sexuality and Socialisation, sexuality to spirituality, orthodox mindsets, cerebral palsy

Introduction

Disability is a biological phenomenon, and sometimes it is social, too. Approximately 1.3 billion people in the world experience disability in the world which is almost 16% of the total population of the world (Disability para 2). Disability owes to physical, mental and social conditions. Mental disability includes mental disorders, intellectual disorders, acquired brain injury, autism, etc. (Different types). Cerebral palsy is one the mental disorders which affects the cognitive as well as physical health of a person. Apeksha G Vyas, in this regard, argues that "Nearly 15-20% of physically disabled children are affected by Cerebral Palsy" (56). And India is no exception. India's land is diverse and affects disabled people differently based on the location and socio-economic status of the disabled people and the society.

Persons with Disability (PwDs) deserve all the right to lead a life at par with other ordinary people. However, the reality is startling as these people are discriminated against directly or indirectly by society. They are not treated as equals, which is why they live an



isolated, neglected and humiliated life, which furthers their pain. In this regard, Pandit reports that “the instances abuse and attacks on persons with disability tend to go up in time of great stress” (para 4). It is false that they accept life as they are left with. Contrary to this, some PwDs endeavour hard to socialise and be independent. But, society ignores their efforts and even stigmatises their desires to lead as usual as others do.

Aims and Objectives

In this background, this paper aims to map the journey of a woman with disability at the intersection of disability, sexuality and middle-class family background to self-realisation. It seeks to explore how a woman with disability sexually her sexual orientation is perceived by males and females from different backgrounds. Further, its objective is to investigate how such women transgress the limits in search of a meaningful life and success to socialise in society and the final resolution to lead a happy life with(out) other people.

Material and Method

To achieve these objectives, this research is based on a chosen movie, *Margarita with a Straw*, based on *One Little Finger* by Malini Chib, who has cerebral palsy. To study the selected movie, Critical Disability Theory and other related theories are used as a tool to engage with the data selected. This research is divided into three parts: One, Socialization: Disabilities and Society; Two, Transcending Disabilities: Breaking Stereotypes; and Three, Assertion: For Human Rights and Beyond.

Discussion

Disability is a long-standing issue that has been raised vociferously in Indian mythologies, too, through disabled characters such as Ashtavakra¹, Dhritrashtra², Shakuni³, Manthara⁴, Shukracharya⁵, Trivakra⁶ etc. In mythologies, all those who empowered themselves get respect, such as Dhritrashtra, Shakuni, Ashtavakra and Shukracharya. In contrast, weak characters such as Manthara or Trivakra are humiliated and are only pitiful ones. But, now, even though society is being sensitised and measures have been taken by governments, PwDs still have to struggle hard to make a niche in society. Society has never been kind and humane for PwDs since ancient times. It is only they who can overcome the disability, not society as a whole, that helps.

Socialisation: Disabilities and Society

Society is always as rude to PwDs as it is to other disabilities such as caste, colour or ethnicity. The case of Laila Kapoor, a lead character in the movie *Margarita with a Straw*, is not a different one. Having cerebral palsy, she gathers the courage to fight against all the odds in her life. The family is fully supportive regarding her education, other help she needs or an automotive wheelchair to empower her. At the same time, her mother is very caring for her



throughout the film, ignoring her disease, i.e. cancer. But, the real hardships one faces are outside. Those who support disabled people willingly make them feel weak, and those who support them reluctantly think of them as a burden. It is expected that “Individuals with disabilities are often identified as a 'burden' to society” (Lero and Pletsch para 1). One such incident film depicts when Laila finds the lift broken down, and the school staff has to help her move upstairs. The helpers say, “*Jaldi Khatm karo yaar*” [Finish it quickly] (*Margarita* 0:06:10-0:06:16). This is the mindset of the society regarding disabled people. Even disabled-friendly infrastructure development is seen as a burden by the heads of organisations.

Further, it is not that disabled people are not zealous to move ahead. Undoubtedly, they are, provided they have a disabled-friendly environment and attitude. Laila can study at the University of Delhi and abroad because her family is middle-class and can afford to educate her. Her mother, Shubhangini Kapoor, helps her wholeheartedly and ritualistically. But her mother ignores her human feelings, emotions and desires. Since Laila often meets Dhruv, a boy with a disability, her mother diverts Monu’s information about her hanging out with Dhruv by saying that “Dhruv is not her boyfriend” (*Margarita* 0:08:08-0:08:14). This exposes the typical mindset of Indian parents who ignores the love life and sexual orientation too of their children. Banerjee argues that “they are somehow negligent of the fact that children have sexualities too. They feel attracted, they want to receive pleasure as well” (para 4).

Laila, with typical sexual desires, watches porn and “masturbates” too (*Margarita* 0:09:02-0:09:10). Dhruv also wants to lead an everyday sex life which is why he says to Laila “Hame aur explore karna hai” [we should explore further] (*Margarita* 0:15:20-0:15:30). Further, she makes love with Dhruv too (*Margarita* 0:11:20-0:11:40). Wolfson argues that “sexual desire is one of the — if not the — strongest of human needs” (para 4). However, in an attempt to lead an everyday life, Laila inclines Nima, an ordinary boy, but he ignores her initiative. Soon, she says “He doesn’t love me” (*Margarita* 0:25:55-0:26:05). Not only does she realise, but she is reminded that “he [Nima] leaves her abruptly” (*Margarita* 0:22:52-0:22:58). She faces a tension between ghettoisation of her relation with a disabled person like Dhruv and normal ones like Nima. She moves like a pendulum that has stayed nowhere. It is pretty strange for her that her advancement in having relationships with average persons is not accepted by PwDs if it is Dhruv or Khanum, and ordinary persons like Nima and Jared have no feelings for her. After knowing her inclination toward Nima, Dhruv says, “*Mai tere liye time paas hoon*” [I am mere pastime for you] (*Margarita* 0:15:20-0:15:30). This indicates the human’s possessive nature that doesn’t allow the move of the other one likes.

Transcending Disabilities: Breaking Stereotypes

Laila strives to overcome her disability, which is why she enthusiastically participates in a protest for the death of Robbies, a Black boy, by police in New York City in America (*Margarita* 0:30:00-0:30:20). She meets a blind girl, Khanum, whom she meets after blast by police to suppress the agitation. Later, she was in love with whom. She cooks herself (*Margarita* 0:57:25-0:57:55). She honestly accepts that relationship, too, when Khanum feels her (*Margarita* 0:44:00-0:44:20) and later kisses and makes love (*Margarita* 0:50:36-0:51:20).



Again, she attempts to love usually to an ordinary boy, Jared, a student in her creative writing class. He has sex with her (*Margarita* 01:06:20-01:06:55). But Khanum doesn't like their having sex. Laila, though, has cerebral palsy and has the urge to move ahead and lead an everyday life with ordinary people, which is why her friends, even more than the friends Khanum and Dhruv, never transgress the boundary of their disability that Laila transgresses twice. Khanum and Dhruv have accepted and internalised their disability; they never attempt to be free from their disabilities. Having known that Laila is in love with Nima, Dhruv sarcastically says, "*Normal logon ke sath dosti karne se tum normal nahi ho jaogi*" [you won't be normal by living with ordinary people] (*Margarita* 0:15:50-0:16:10). It implies the insensitivity of the ordinary people towards disabled that is why PwDs limit themselves in the given circumstances. Likewise, Khanum exhorts Laila having known that she had sex with Jared, "Jared certifies that you are normal" (*Margarita* 01:21:40-01:21:50). Likewise, having known that Laila intends to date someone, Khanum comments "*Hamesh apni beizzati kyu karti ho*" [why do you insult yourself always?] (*Margarita* 0:47:15-0:47:25). Nima had already discarded her. But, all these persons forget the carnal sexual desires of a human being, as the song in the film expresses the general feeling of a living being. The lyrics are like this: "I need a man song in the middle of a night" (*Margarita* 0:49:00-0:50:00).

As Laila and Khanum are ready to live life as partners, Khanum says, "move in with me" (*Margarita* 0:55:30-0:55:35). Laila is prepared to live with Khanum rejecting the popular stereotypical belief "how will you bear child?" (*Margarita* 0:10:-20-0:10:30). For majority of people, marriage is an institution to bear child primarily. Further, bisexuality is unattended in popular perception. The social perception towards bisexuality does not approve of bisexuality or bisexuals. Owing to social conditioning, her mother makes the disapproving gesture "chhee" (*Margarita* 01:15:00-01:15:02) derogatorily when she comes to know her being bisexual and particularly Khanum being her girlfriend. It implies that Indian parents generally avoid talking about sex, sexuality and sexual health.

Assertion: For Human Rights and Beyond

Laila, from the beginning, asserts her rights vociferously. She claims her privacy when her mother comes to know hers watching porn (*Margarita* 0:55:00-0:55:10). Further, when Laila comes to know that "He [Nima] doesn't love me" (*Margarita* 0:25:55-0:26:00), she has her journey. This journey starts with the dating with herself. In the last scene of the movie, she is seen telling someone on the call that "I have a date" (01.35.50-01:36:00). Now not only does she choose to date with herself but also travels in a wheelchair without someone's help on the roads of Delhi which are not PwDs-friendly. Lastly, she smiles at herself, who is symbolically her dating partner. It is the only way to lead a happy life without being humiliated, rejected, dejected and burdensome. Similarly, her mother raises questions about the need for a brain surgeon. Laila's mother asserts, "Brain surgeon ki jarurat kisko h" [Who needs a brain surgeon] (01:24:20-01:24:30). This is a severe invention as who needs a brain surgeon—the ordinary people who live with pride and prejudiced against the disabled persons or the disabled ones who want to lead an everyday life with ordinary people.



After rejection from all sides and by all the people, she feels forlorn only when she decides to lead a happy life alone. At this juncture, the movie ends with quotes from Rumi, a Sufi poet, who says, “The wound is the place where the light enters you...If you let it” (01:36:00-01:36:10). Laila is significantly wounded owing to rejection which she is in love with ordinary or PwDs, ignore by family members regarding her bisexuality and by-passing by the band though she writes lyrics for it. This wound forces her to take the step that gives a new birth in the form of Margarita with a Straw (01:36:00-01:36:10). New birth. Her spiritual birth. Independent self.

Conclusion

The study exposes the cruel nature of society towards PwDs. Further, Normal people don't hesitate to use them sexually or emotionally. PwDs are insensitive towards their wants and needs. Meanwhile, PwDs want to lead life generally in every aspect. On the one hand, they remain in a dilemma as their secluded life owing to being ignored by society increases their problems. On the other hand, social life can't lead to not being accepted. To live life among PwDs is a kind of ghettoisation that limits them to themselves by rigidifying their disability. The only way to nullify the disability and overcome the social perception is to ignore all and live with oneself as Laila does. The spiritualistic attitude towards way of life is the only way to overcome one's disability—PwDs as well as the so-called ordinary people in society. It initiates everyone into the new birth, but the disabled in particular.

Notes

¹ The Great Vedic Sage with 'eight' deformities

² The Blind King (regent) of Kuru Dynasty

³ Greatest villain in Indian Mythology who walked with a limp

⁴ The Maid with a Hunchback and Probably Visual Impairment in One Eye

⁵ The Guru of Asuras who was Blind in One Eye

⁶ The Krishna-loving Lady with the Hunchback

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