

Belittled Cultural Representation: Critiquing Disability Discourses in Malayalam Cinema

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 13-26
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Miby Miriam Jacob *

Research Scholar, Department of English, All Saints' College, Trivandrum

Ciby K Varghese

Film Student, New Wave Film School, Kozhikode

Abstract

The concept of normalcy presented in popular media and mainstream culture is complex, causing marginalised sections to be subjugated further. Indian cinema has always conformed to the conventional norms that glorify non-disabled, heterosexual, masculine bodies where minority communities are treated as 'the other'. Ableism is still prevalent in movies, where they continue to create a hierarchy of disability stigma, negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in multiple ways. Malayalam films, while trying to foreground aesthetic, traditional and moral values, knowingly or unknowingly become tools that promote the 'ideal' utopian world where there are no impaired bodies/minds. Over the course of time, the invisibility of disability in movies gave way to mocking, objectifying and commodifying persons with disabilities. Even those that come out with the label 'disability films' sometimes seem to be doing very little justice to themselves. The depiction of disability in an infantilised as well as an institutionalised manner occurs as a result of the harmful misconception that it is associated with illness, pity and dependency. Portraying disability as the ultimate punishment for one's ancestors' sins and using the particular idea to indicate evil omens is a trend even in contemporary narrative film. Desexualising disabled bodies diverts attention from individuals to physical structures and misleads the non-disabled audience to believe that disabled people lack sexual desires. Supporting characters who are disabled mostly turn out to be over-dramatising and end up being comic elements. The reluctance of the entertainment industry to cast disabled performers in disabled roles is another example of how ableism works. The paper does not limit its focus to a particular text alone but identifies a couple of Malayalam film narratives post 1990s, from the perspectives of a disability studies researcher and a film student. This study is also an attempt to destigmatise disability by rejecting the politically-incorrect notions that have been normalised over decades. Although the term constitutes a single category, disability as a cultural theme is diverse, with a plurality of different individual groups through which disabled people embrace and celebrate their identities. Considering how cinema impacts national consciousness, contributes to public opinion and influences their socio-political understanding, it is very significant to talk about and question the wrong ways in which sensitive topics like disability are placed on screen.

Keywords

Disability, Malayalam cinema, Visual Media, Cinematic language, Representation

* Correspondence: Email: mibyjacob22@gmail.com

Introduction

An average person's perception about various things largely depends on how each incident and individual is portrayed in art and literature. Powerful representations that reflect contemporary sociocultural issues are capable of exerting an impact on public opinion as well as the national consciousness. Popular cinema, being one of the most effective means that can influence the thinking of the general public, not only entertains its audience, but also enlightens them and brings in social changes. But a society that is conditioned by existing taboos and prejudices takes time to unlearn them and accept changes, especially when it comes to minority problems. In the attempt to shed light on the new phenomena in art and literary forms, the dilemmas of minority communities are often disregarded because they are not 'marketable' in the corporate sector. Whenever they are visible on screen, they are depicted in the most stereotypical manner possible. In a multicultural nation like India where patriarchy and ableism prevail, film narratives are still reluctant about getting the representation right. Such false portrayals, to some extent, have also contributed to the formation of certain expectations the mainstream society keeps about gender roles, body images, skin colour, the efficacy of human mind and the standard of living.

Disability, a topic that has not been given the importance it deserves, is still bound by stigma and negative stereotypes in the non-disabled culture. The general understanding of disability is that it refers to any malfunction associated with one's body or mind. Instead, disability is a social construct like gender or sexuality, and is a definition given to indicate the multiple barriers inflicted on them by society. Contrary to this, impairment is the term that describes the differences in one's physical structure or mental functioning. In short, a disabled person or a person with disability (PwD) is someone with a diverse bodily experience, for whom resources are inaccessible due to systemic barriers.

Cinematic language is the method and conventions of filmmaking that are used to communicate with the audience. Visual storytelling is only one part of cinematic language. Emotions and ideas are expressed primarily with cinematography and they are aided with different types of techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, colour and lighting, editing, use of dialogue and narrative (timings of scenes and importance of placement in the narrative timeline), cinematography angle choices and sound. It is useful to consider the conventions of literature that are used to convey meaning and communicate with the reader when we try to understand cinematic language. Literature often

uses literary techniques such as symbolism or narration to portray meaning and communicate plot, characterisation or themes. The same is done in screenwriting, but with cinematic techniques.

When distinguishing cinematic language, one must pay attention to how one feels when watching a particular scene. Screenwriters typically intend for meaning to be presented subtly and subconsciously. For instance, if a man in the shadows approaches a character from behind and the audience feels suspicious about that character, then that is more than likely what the film is trying to communicate. As Martin Scorsese says,

“You’re seeing it all in your mind’s eye, you’re inferring it. And this is the fourth aspect of cinema that’s so special. That inference. The image in the mind’s eye... For me it’s where the obsession began. It’s what keeps me going, it never fails to excite me. Because you take one shot, you put it together with another shot, and you experience a third image in your mind’s eye that doesn’t really exist in those two other images... And that has been called, appropriately, I believe, film language.” (Scorsese M. 2013)

When it comes to the representation of disabled characters in cinema, the cinematic language used to present the scene is equally important as the portrayal of the character. It is often noticed that the camera angle carries a subjective narrative and the background score used for accompanying these scenes uses sad background scores to invoke sympathy. Indian cinema has an inborn tendency to use minority representation either to supply comic relief or to evoke pity and fear in the audience. They take advantage of people’s lack of proper awareness and insensitivity towards the topic and hence regressive ideas are passed on to the psyches of an even wider group of spectators. This has to be viewed as a part of the agenda to enforce the utopian ideology in their land. It can also be perceived in connection with eugenic ideals, where flawless offspring are expected to be handed down. The cycle of demeaning and devaluing minority communities in movies has been continuing for ages until contemporary viewers started questioning it recently. The modern readers and theatregoers seem to be very well aware of the need for political correctness in films. They are alert when an individual or institution is degraded on screen.

Disability, for ages, has undoubtedly been used in movies as a punishment for the antagonist's ancestors’ long-forgotten sin. Even though Malayalam cinema has comparatively improved a lot in terms of adhering to political correctness, the film *Kaduva* (2022), directed by Shaji Kailas seems to have travelled back in time. The use of derogatory dialogues about disability in the beginning of the movie has faced much criticism on social media. The film uses an

insensitive comment in which the protagonist Kaduvakunnel Kuriyachen (Prithviraj Sukumaran) blames parents for their children's disabilities. The self-proclaimed virtuous hero passes an unmotivated comment — that disabled children are born because of their parents' sins — in order to support his argument that the antagonist Joseph Chandy IPS (Vivek Oberoi) is not morally upright. This comment is made almost at the beginning of the movie and Joseph Chandy is introduced moments before the controversial scene appears. On the other hand, Kuriyachen is given a long narrative entry as a hero who is wealthy, influential and morally upright. When we analyse the cinematic language used in the particular scene, the camera is placed at a slightly lower angle to show the character of Kuriyachen in a powerful position as he makes the remark. As Joseph Chandy leaves, the camera traces Kuriyachen from bottom to top and comes around at shoulder level and places itself at an angle below the shoulder placing him in a powerful position. The scene is interjected with two point-of-view shots in between. The visual treatment of the whole scene glorifies Kuriyachen and the music score that accompanies the scene builds tensions and has an upbeat heroic element to it. “For some bizarre reason, our filmmakers have often used the outdated belief surrounding bad karma ending in disability in various films. The subtext being that either they are being punished for their sins or for those committed by the parents” (Menon N. 2019). Due to mass criticism, the makers later apologised and removed (muted) the particular dialogue from the film. It is important to address these issues with sensitivity because it concerns the lives of so many people including disabled individuals as well as their families.

A similar approach is adapted in Renji Panicker's *Roudram* (2008), where Mammooty's character reasserts the power of karma, by cursing the villain that he deserves to undergo the consequences of his actions. The villain is also told that he deserves to live with a 'half-body' and crawl all his life as a repentance for the sins he has committed, because death is too convenient. Although the scene means to convey that traitors will have to encounter the results of their wrongdoings, the instance that accompanies it is questionable. *Kattu* (2017) directed by Arun Kumar Aravind has also a scene where the Moopan or the local judge of the village remarks that he had even punished his own daughter severely for her wrongdoing by sentencing her to spend the rest of her life with a man who is disabled. He further goes on to state that it is the most dreadful form of punishment she can receive in her life. The subjectivity in the cinematic language in such instances cannot be ignored as a close up shot is shown as the Moopan makes this remark.

There can also be inappropriate scenes and conversations in cinema due to the makers' lack of direct experience with the topic. Tracing this portrayal, a

suitable example is the Malayalam films directed by Vinayan that have created multiple outlashes in progressive movie groups on social media in recent times. They are basically filmic representations that demonstrate social/cultural insensitivity towards disability. His works had not been questioned over the first one and a half decades of the 21st century as the audience then were not as politically aware as today's. In *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum* (1999), it is evident that the helplessness of the protagonist Ramu (Kalabhavan Mani), who is blind, is marketed in order to gain the sympathy of the audience. His father (Bharath Gopy), who is bed-ridden, is another disabled character who often rebukes his son for his blindness. His lover who is mute, is used as a rape victim, to evoke sympathy, and to send out the message that the likelihood of deaf or mute women getting sexually assaulted is high. The protagonist and his family live on the charity of the local landlord. Addressing disability in connection with charity is also a part of the discourse of pity. The movie intentionally tries to convey that the life of a disabled person is full of tragedy. *Karumadikuttan* (2001), is no different in its portrayal of a mentally disabled character played by Kalabhavan Mani. The movie as a whole lacks sensibility and logic in its portrayal of Karumadikuttan. It presents various instances showing that Karumadikuttan is incapable of discerning adulthood and their world. He is shown as a weak and helpless child who takes orders from others and executes them without any choice. He is incapable of feeling any serious emotions. In one instance when Karumadikuttan seeks help from the antagonist in the movie, he is forced to sing a song in exchange. The song Karumadikuttan sings ("*Nenjudukkinte thalamthudippil*") is full of depth and meaning referring to his sorrowful plight. This instance defies the logic of the character presented to us so far in the movie.

Oomappenninu Uriyadappayyan (2002) is Vinayan's another sentimental portrayal of the problematic relationship of a deaf woman (Kavya Madhavan) and a mute boy (Jayasurya). Instead of using a full, proper language, unwanted gestures and facial expressions are used in order to converse with the disabled characters, which turn out to be pure mockery. The movie is a classic example of the director not doing his homework or researching about deaf and mute people. The movie also portrays the social balancing act of pairing a disabled person with another disabled person. *Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum* (2003) revolves around the lives of the hero and his disabled sister (Ambili Devi), who considers herself to be a lifelong burden for the family. The brother's efforts to make the two ends meet and secure his sister's future go in vain when she commits suicide. Even though Meera is capable of doing daily chores like cooking by herself, her actions are given a sentimental tone and the director makes attempts to glorify it. This indicates how the filmmaker

has used disability to assert the wrong notion that a disabled person cannot possibly have an independent life. The eagerness of non-disabled people to associate disability with dependence has rooted deeply in their subconscious minds. The movie suffers from multitudinous flaws in its representation of disability and the narration of the story. In another instance, Muthu severs off the hand of a fake *guru* who comes under the pretense of healing Meera and eventually tries to rape her. When the case is in court, the lawyer representing Muthu tells the judge that Muthu cannot even afford a lawyer to represent him and it is the Disabled's Welfare Association that has made arrangements for his representation in court. Previously, we often hear other characters say that Muthu is ready to spend any amount of money to treat Meera and get her better. Despite all this, we never see Muthu attempting to at least seek the help of the Disabled's Welfare Association to get a wheelchair for Meera. The director conveniently lets Meera crawl throughout the movie to evoke sympathy in the audience. In its ironic climax where Meera attempts suicide and Muthu receives news that someone has agreed to marry Meera, we see the age-old 'fate's justice' where the crippled/flawed/burdensome dies and emancipates the hero.

Though *Albhuthadweep* (2005) — inspired by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* — tries to celebrate the lives of dwarf people, it is found that one of the heroes as well as all the women in it are 'normal', 'perfect' beings. Dwarfism is considered as one of the 21 disabilities recognised by RPwD Act, 2016 as it restricts their access to mainstream spaces and facilities. Though dwarfism is used as a comic interlude for ages, this movie seems to provide a different approach, but it inadvertently ends up portraying their physical feature as a limitation. The movie portrays its dwarfed men as valiant in the beginning but towards the end, when their island is attacked by giants, they are shown as incapable of defending their land and women and seek the help of the 'normal' Indian airforce men who accidentally land on their island. There is even a song-scene where the dwarfed protagonist and young prince Gajendran (Ajay Kumar) is shown as a tall man romancing with his love interest.

Vinayan movies can be seen to evoke pity, helplessness and sympathy for people with disabilities. The common feature in all of Vinayan's directorial ventures about disabled people is that the disabled person is a curse. There will always be a character to make this remark about the character with disability. The scene is apparently followed by a sad background score to evoke sympathy. The disabled character is shown to be dependent and suffering from internalised ableism. Internalised ableism is the habit of some disabled individuals projecting their own negative traits due to the belief that they do

not belong (to a person or a place). This yielding characteristic may be another form of colonisation, where they are forced to comply at the request or order of a dominant group. Such persons hold the view that they are unworthy of good things as a result of the conditioning they have undergone, yet do not realise that they are oppressed by themselves.

Another instance of internalised ableism can be seen in *Mazhayethum Munpe* (1995) directed by Kamal. The movie manifests how one of its two female protagonists, who is disabled, finds herself to be a burden for her lover. Uma (played by Shobhana) is influenced by the comments of Sruthi (Annie), who is a representative of the coloniser — the non-disabled society — when she reinforces the myth that a disabled woman is not a ‘normal’ person to get married happily. Eventually, Uma continues to believe that her body is not sufficient to please her non-disabled partner’s eyes and hence withdraws from the love relationship thinking that he is already doing too much by loving her. This points to her inferiority complex and submissive behaviour, as well as the misconception that disabled women are not fit to lead a family life because they do not possess the qualities of a ‘good wife’.

Carrying out a detailed perusal of the representations of disability in films that star Dileep in the leading role, they are mostly either problematic or controversial as they uphold the notions of normalcy. Many scenes in *Kunjikoonan* (2002), the popular Malayalam movie directed by Sasi Shanker promote the active gaze of the dominant mainstream culture. Kunjan (Dileep), a man with a hunchback, looks for a ‘normative’ life partner, but it is shown that his dreams are shattered when he sees a dwarf woman in a bride-seeing ceremony. This scene is clearly used as comic banter, where both of these characters tremble with outrage upon seeing each other. Even though the supporting actors find it as a usual thing, Kunjan as well as the prospective bride feel that they are humiliated by getting themselves introduced to a marriage proposal that involves disabled beings. On the contrary, Dileep’s double role, Prasad, is depicted to have a ‘perfectly-crafted’ body structure, with whom the audience is unable to connect emotionally the way they sympathise with the sentiments of Kunjan. The portrayal of the disabled female protagonist and the usual approach to the theme is also noticeable. Kunjan later comes across a blind woman (Navya Nair), with whom he falls in love, and this unison may or may not be a result of the makers’ presumption that she cannot possibly love him back after seeing his spinal curvature if she happens to be non-disabled.

The makers of the 2006 movie *Pachakuthira* (directed by Kamal) have also played the sympathy card and thus manipulated the audience emotionally with the portrayal of the life and love relationship of a boy with intellectual

disability. In *Punjabi House*, Dileep acts like a deaf man throughout the movie and occasional comedy scenes related to the same follow. In the climax, when his childhood lover comes across the fact that the person he is in love with is mute, she forgives him and is glad that he is 'offering' his life and resources for a disabled girl (Menon N. 2019). *Sound Thoma* (2013) directed by Vysakh places its focus on Thoma, a man with cleft lip and a deformity in sound. Dileep's over-dramatised character along with his voice is primarily used for comic purpose and the mocking scenes are proportioned by songs and dance. The male protagonists in the Jayaraj-film *Thilakkam* (2003) and the Lohithadas film *Chakkaramuthu* (2006) are believed to have an intellectual disability since both of these characters possess similar traits in terms of their body language and mannerism.

The sexuality of the disabled is a topic not much discussed in Indian popular cinema. Visual media often forgets to open up the various dimensions of the questions on the sexual orientation of persons with disabilities. The trend in depicting the disabled as asexual or impotent has long been normalised in commercial cinema. Desexualising disabled bodies diverts attention from individuals to physical structures and misleads the non-disabled audience to believe that disabled people lack sexual desires. There needs to be a paradigm shift in Indian cinema culture, that opens vistas to debates on gender and sexuality of the disabled and the queer. While trying to foreground aesthetic, traditional and moral values, society considers the changes in one's body despicable. In *Kattu*, Muthulakshmi's (Varalaxmi Sarathkumar) father proudly sentences her to spend the rest of her life with a man who cannot move his arms or legs. But his statements carry undertones of her leading a sexless life and her time spent serving her husband's daily needs. The film portrays the life of her husband as fated to lead a life of celibacy.

Kerala's cultural history often puts so much pressure on its people to conform to bodily norms. *Sooryamanasam* (1992) directed by Viji Thampi, is believed to be inspired by the American film *Of Mice and Men* (1992) based on John Steinbeck's story that shares the same name. The movie begins with a note that Patturumees (Mammooty) has the strength of six men but the brain of a six-year old. His only companion is his mother and he is constantly rejected by society because of his child-like features. The villagers kill him at the end due to the misconception that he causes social issues in the locality, giving a tragic climax to the movie. This character, as it is perceived as 'abnormal', is now widely used as a meme material in fan fight clubs for his intellectual disability and difference in physical appearance.

Taking broad inroads into history, it is crystal clear that most of the celebrated classes have obstructed the growth of marginalised minorities across the entire

socio-economic spectrum, placing them far away from the spotlight. ‘Blacking up’, a style used mainly in English movies, is about non-black actors putting on blackface makeup to portray people of colour. Likewise, the practice of using non-disabled actors to perform as disabled characters is called ‘cripping up’ in the entertainment industry. Such misrepresentations invalidate people’s cultural history and identity, calling attention to the need to ensure representation in films. It is open to debate whether the ‘invisibility’ of disability happens as an effort to keep the chances open to skilful entertainers in the industry, but it is again an issue that necessitates cross-examination because women characters, for instance, are never performed by male artists. *Thirike* (2021), directed by George Kora and Sam Xavier, is a revolutionary work that questions the practice of casting non-disabled performers in disabled roles. The role of Ismu a.k.a Sebu is carried out smoothly by Gopi Krishnan, an actor with Down syndrome, probably the first one to be in the lead role in Malayalam cinema. Guaranteeing self-representation is an essential requirement while making cinema, as it is a matter of the identity of a particular group, which *Thirike* has beautifully captured.

The systemic fashion of infantilising disabled adults is frequently seen in many Malayalam disability films. In *Thirike*, 26-year-old Ismu is infantilised by his foster parents throughout the movie. This practice, in a way, is a reflection of the patronising or ‘helping’ mentality of an ableist community. As a reaction to the same, important decisions regarding disabled individuals are mostly taken by their immediate non-disabled relative or caretaker due to the prejudice that they cannot take decisions in a mature and responsible way.

Actor Jayasurya’s disabled characters need special mention. His recent decision not to act in movies that involve persons with disabilities, has invited public attention. He states that so many disabled roles are coming to him and this makes activists think that it is easy to get him to take part in disability movies. In his latest crime thriller *John Luther* (2022) directed by Abhijit Joseph, he plays the role of a police officer who loses his hearing in a brawl. He is not discriminated against by his family or friends due to his hearing loss and is not portrayed as an officer who sits back and relax due to the same. Rather, he joins back the force, carrying around a recorder along with a hearing aid, to play the voices again. Talking about individual approaches to life and disability, someone who is born disabled and someone who becomes disabled at a later point of life due to a mishap may not take it in the same way. When the former comes to terms with it at a very young age and lives with it, the latter takes a long time to acknowledge the new way of life. This aspect makes John Luther’s character different — accepting the change and getting back to life within a short span.

Coming to his role of a radio jockey who loses his voice in the film *Meri Awaz Suno* (2022) directed by Pranesh Sen, it is very unpleasant to watch his speech therapist emotionally torturing the patient. Speech language pathologists criticise the movie stating that therapy does not work the way it is shown in it, because they always study multiple research papers for the best evidence-based practice and never adopt techniques of public humiliation or embarrassment, no matter how severe the client's condition is. However, professional boundaries are not maintained between the therapist and the mute protagonist in the movie and she even intervenes in his personal life, which is not the ethical way to rehabilitate a disabled person.

Beautiful (2011) directed by V. K. Prakash showcases a myth-busting scene in which Stephen, a quadriplegic man, remarks that he is able to smile in bed only because he got enough money and those who do not have money or privilege may not be able to stay happy in their disabled state. The movie offers a positive approach towards disability when Stephen mocks the mainstream concept that disabled people are expected to inspire others because they live a different way of life. When the journalist who takes his interview says she feels motivated to do something for the disabled/underprivileged, he asks if she is ready to marry him, to which she reacts with a shocked expression. This scene implies how the disabled are objectified merely as an inspirational source whereas having a life with them is the worst nightmare for many. In addition, the scene in which he experiences a bike ride in the rain has tried to address that wheelchair users also desire to go out and experience the most common things just like others do.

Bangalore Days (2014), directed by Anjali Menon, also offers a shifting paradigm from the views of dependence and institutionalisation of disabled persons. It is important to note that disability is not used as a tool for inspiration in the movie. One among the three female protagonists (Parvathy Thiruvothu) is a radio jockey and a wheelchair user, but her identity as a disabled person is not mentioned anywhere in her talks, even though she has multiple chances to employ it to 'inspire' some idle non-disabled listeners. Her disability is not disclosed to the audience until the male protagonist meets her for the first time. She is presented as an independent and educated person, who takes pride in her identity as a person with a disability. She is pursued by a professional rider who decides to marry her — another way of conquering stereotypes, by displaying inter-abled relationships on screen.

The imbalance between the line of thought of a disabled person and the 'norm' may generate tension in the surrounding and this can cause the peer group to be unable to understand the particular person's mental functioning. The 2017 Srikant Murali movie *Aby* is designed to display the life of Aby (Vineeth

Sreenivasan), a young, brilliant boy who is awed by the ways machines work and whose life motto is to fly. Though the film does not mention the name of any mental condition, it refers to him as a 'special baby', and there are indirect implications that he has mild autism or Asperger's Syndrome. His mother dies and the alcoholic father who works in an insurance company sentimentalises his condition using Aby, in order to meet his targets and to achieve his goals. Aby is seen to be lacking social skills, making his parents believe that he is deaf and cannot vocalise. The mainstream people around him seem to be ignorant of his skills and inventions, and people take advantage of his social awkwardness. The 2018 movie *Hey Jude* directed by Shyamaprasad also tries to depict the struggles of the protagonist with Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Jude (Nivin Pauly) finds it difficult to socialise and understand human emotions, due to which his father labels him as irresponsible, immature and lazy, whereas he has extraordinary intelligence in mathematics and marine science. He cannot make direct eye contact and he is often the victim of the personal jokes of his colleagues. His parents are later educated about his intellectual state but are still worried if there is any treatment for his condition, to which his friend, Dr. Sebastian (whose daughter — Jude's only friend — has bipolar disorder) says that there is nothing to be cured through treatment and that parents should not be an obstacle in their journey towards being 'normal'. ASD is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) and as an intellectual disability in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 of India. Considering the fact that autism has not been discussed much in Malayalam cinema, these movies have played a role in introducing to the Kerala audience that it has different levels and types and hence the kind of support they require can also be different.

Athmakadha (2010) directed by Premlal portrays a blind couple who work at a candle factory and lead an independent life, which is what differentiates it from many other films about people with visual impairment (Pal J. n.d.). His daughter also loses her vision towards the end of the movie, which she embraces without much worry, as she is prepared by her father to deal with future events. The 2019 Emcy Joseph film *Vikruthi* based on a true story, shows a deaf protagonist (Suraj Venjaramood) who is naive and the epitome of righteousness. In the film, the deaf couple is not shown to be isolated or discriminated against due to their disability and it is clear that their immediate circle is also empathetic and compassionate towards them, giving a positive outlook. But it is disturbing to see the film trying to make him symbolic of goodness and virtue. Though he faces social media bullying for his misrepresentation as a drunk man sleeping on metro train and his life turns

upside down after the incident, he is still found to be forgiving those who commit the crime because he cannot stand anyone struggling in front of him. The climactic scene reaffirms the common mindset that disabled people are flawless at heart and they are bound to forgive and forget.

Apart from visual language, musical expression plays an essential role in conveying the emotions of the characters. Music shapes these emotional responses and helps the viewers experience the soul of movie scenes. Whereas some songs make them travel with the characters and experience the same emotional sway, a few others take them to an imaginary space. It is said that music has healing power but if it is not used the right way, it can cause the opposite effect. Knowing that it is a powerful tool that works like magic, filmmakers make use of it to sentimentalise and market human vulnerability.

Disability is one among different human experiences and identities. It is a form of diversity that is mostly misunderstood as a 'special ability'. In a world that claims 'ability', living with a disability becomes challenging when proper facilities and accessibility services are not provided to meet their needs. Malayalam cinema has always conformed to the conventional norms that glorify non-disabled, heterosexual, masculine bodies where minority communities are treated as 'the other'. Over the course of time, the invisibility of disability in movies gave way to mocking, objectifying and commodifying persons with disabilities. The concept of normalcy presented in popular media and mainstream culture is complex, causing marginalised sections to be subjugated further. Ableism is still prevalent in movies, where they continue to create a hierarchy of disability stigma, negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in multiple ways. Not many movies have considered the inclusion of non-visible disabilities. Even those that come out with the label 'disability films' sometimes seem to be doing very little justice to themselves. The fact that all disabilities are not visible at first glance is still unknown to the majority. Owing to misrepresentations, the image that people keep in mind about a disabled person is that of an impaired physical structure. But there are physical and mental conditions that are beyond sight and measure. Each disability is culturally diverse just like any other identity related to human existence. Since the ordinary people do not possess much knowledge or awareness about it, it is through films and books that they acquire a clear idea about many activities. But when these representations go wrong, it affects the socio-political understanding of the general public, making them puzzled about how and how not to deal with these sensitive issues. This is why terminologies also matter when it comes to art and literature. Each frame and colour shown in cinema plays an integral part in influencing public opinion. In the cinema legacy that focuses on promoting an 'ideal' world where there

are no impaired bodies/minds, modern cinephiles can set it right by ensuring inclusion of diverse categories and rectifying the asymmetric practices in our cinematic heritage — because the real world is heterogeneous and signifies diversity.

References

- Aravind, A. K. (Director). (2017). Kattu [Film]. Karmaayug Films.
- Jayaraj. (Director). (2003). Thilakkam [Film]. Hamsadhwani Films.
- Joseph, A. (Director). (2022). John Luther [Film]. Alonsa Films.
- Joseph, E. (Director). (2019). Vikruthi [Film]. Century Films.
- Kailas, S. (Director). (2022). Kaduva [Film]. Prithviraj Production.
- Kamal. (Director). (1995). Mazhayethum Munpe [Film]. Murali Films.
- Kamal. (Director). (2006). Pachakuthira [Film]. Varnachithra.
- Kora, G. & Xavier, S. (Directors). (2021). Thirike [Film]. Nationwide Pictures.
- Lohithadas. (Director). (2006). Chakkaramuthu [Film]. Seven Arts Films.
- Menon, A. (Director). (2014). Bangalore Days [Film]. Anwar Rasheed Entertainments & Weekend Blockbusters.
- Menon, N. (2019, May 11). Pitied and Desexualised: How Malayalam Cinema has Portrayed People with Disability. The News Minute.
<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/pitied-and-desexualised-how-malayalam-cinema-has-portrayed-people-disability-101614>
- Murali, S. (Director). (2017). Aby [Film]. Little Big Films.
- Pal, J. (n.d.). The Portrayal of Disability in Indian Cinema: An Attempt at Categorisation. Phalanx: A Quarterly Review for Continuing Debate.
https://www.phalanx.in/pages/article_i009_Portrayal_Disability_Indian_Cinema.html
- Panicker, R. (Director). (2008). Roudram [Film]. Marikar Films.
- Prakash, V. K. (Director). (2011). Beautiful [Film]. Yes Cinemas.
- Premlal. (Director). (2010). Athmakadha [Film]. Pavithram Creation.

- Raffi & Mecartin. (Directors). (1998). Punjabi House [Film]. New Saga Films.
- Sankar, R. (Director). (2015). Su Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam [Film]. Dreams N Beyond.
- Scorsese, M. (2013, August 15). The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema. The Film Foundation.
<https://www.film-foundation.org/the-persisting-vision>
- Sen, P. (Director). (2022). Meri Awaz Suno [Film]. Universal Cinema.
- Shanker, S. (Director). (2002). Kunjikoonan [Film]. Galaxy Films.
- Shyamaprasad. (Director). (2018). Hey Jude [Film]. Ambalakkara Global Films.
- Thampi, V. (Director). (1992). Sooryamanasam [Film]. Nandhana films.
- Vinayan. (Director). (1999). Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum [Film]. Thriveni Productions.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2001). Karumadikuttan [Film]. Surabhi Cinema.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2002). Oomappenninu Uriyadappayyan [Film]. Shirdi Sai Creations.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2003). Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum [Film]. Kolath Films
- Vinayan. (Director). (2005). Albhuthadweep [Film]. Gulflin Productions.
- Vysakh. (Director). (2013). Sound Thoma [Film]. Priyanjali Films.