

Dependencies of Discourse: Disability in Malayalam Film Narratives

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Extended Abstract

Representations of corporeal differences and anomalies can be identified throughout the history of literary narratives. Though these ‘disabilities’ in people as identified by the society fall into many categories, the stigmatizing attitude of the society towards these differences cannot be overlooked. Given the immense potential of films to captivate the attention of the widest possible public and their enormous power to depict social reality, they prove to be a substantial tool to study how disability is imagined, experienced, and lived in a social environment. Despite the fact that there are ample representations of disabled images, most people are unaware of this pervasive nature of disabled identities in literary narratives. To this paradox, disability activist Paul Longmore argues that films and television portray disability in such a way that the audience are taught to categorize disability as an individual condition and consequently people fail to perceive the connection between the stories of disabled identities. Without developing proper models for studying the functions and representational tactics of disability, viewers may tend to screen out the images of disabled characters from their minds.

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in their book *Narrative Prosthetics: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, identify the two major functions of disability representation in literary discourse: “disability pervades literary narrative, first as a stock feature of characterization and secondly, as an opportunistic metaphorical device”(Mitchell and Snyder 47). To describe this dependency of discourses on disability, they coined the term ‘narrative prosthesis’. Working within this theoretical framework of Narrative Prosthesis, this paper intends

to study how the disabled characters are used as a prosthetic in Malayalam Cinema and to further explore the shift in their representation with the coming of New Generation Films in the early 2010s. This paper also attempts to raise a set of crucial questions as to why disability is overlooked and to study the significant role that these films played in including/excluding the differently-abled.

A narrative is born when it strives to etch the story of the strange, a deviance which puts out trails to develop the tale to its completion. It is this deviance from the widely accepted norm that helps the narrative to attain its extraordinary status. And disability has been generally characterized as a body that deviates from the accepted standard of bodily form and ability. According to Mitchell and Snyder, “disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight”(Mitchell and Snyder 49). It is in this context that this paper attempts to examine select Malayalam New Wave Movies and the movies prior to the New Wave Movement namely *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum* (1999), *Kunjikoonan* (2002), *Mizhi Randilum* (2003), *Beautiful* (2011), *Bangalore Days* (2014), *Amar Akbar Anthony* (2015), and *Vikrithi* (2019) with the aim of understanding how inclusive the cinematic representations are of the disabled community. The article categorises these select movies into two sections to critically comprehend the shift in the construction of disabled bodies in the new wave Malayalam movies. A critical interpretation of the movies preceding the New Wave Movement demonstrates how disability was used as a mere ‘artistic prosthesis’ to enhance the narrative plot of these films. Analysis of these movies further substantiates how the disabled bodies in these narratives functioned as an overdetermined symbol that dishes out the long standing representation of such bodies in the narratives of the past. The stereotypes of disability in this set of movies simultaneously reflect the social exclusion of the disabled community in the Kerala society and reinforce negative images of disability among the audience. However, it could be said that there appears a shift in the representation of disability in the New Wave Malayalam movies. Unlike the previous films, the characterization of the disabled bodies in these new narratives extends potent challenges to the culturally accepted notion of the ‘normal’ or ‘whole’ body. Though the artifice of disability assigns these disabled characters with a problematic identity, the new wave narratives are more socially inclusive of the disabled community. By comparing how disability is

portrayed in these two sets of films, I argue that disability can be used to examine the society's evolving values and norms imposed on the body.

References

Amar Akbar Anthony, Directed by Nadirsha, performances by Prithviraj, Jayasurya, and Indrajith. United Global Media Entertainments, 2015.

Bangalore Days, Directed by Anjali Menon, performances by Dulquer Salman, Parvathy Thiruvothu, and Nazriya Nazim. Anwar Rasheed Entertainments, 2014.

Beautiful, Directed by V. K. Prakash, performances by Jayasurya, Anoop Menon, and Meghna Raj. Yes Cinemas, 2011.

Kunjikoonan. Directed by Sasi Shanker, performances by Dileep, Navya Nair, and Saikumar. Milan Jaleel, 2002.

Longmore, Paul K. *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*. Temple University Press, 2003.

Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. The University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Mizhi Randilum. Directed by Ranjith, performances by Kavya Madhavan, Dileep, and Indrajith. Rajashri Films, 2003.

Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum. Directed by Vinayan, performances by Kalabhavan Mani, Kaveri, and Praveena. Thriveni Productions, 1999.

Vikrithi, Directed by Emcy Joseph, performances by Suraj Venjarammoodu, and Soubin Shahir. Cut 2 Create Pictures, 2019.

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Disability Representation

- Unaware of the pervasive nature of disabled identities in literary narratives.
- Films as a substantial tool to study how disability is imagined, experienced and lived.
- Disability often presented as a crisis or problem

Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse

- By David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder
- Narrative theory on the pervasive use of disability as a device of characterization in literary narratives.
- Marginality in the midst of wide circulation of disabled images.

Disability in Malayalam Cinema

- Does Malayalam Cinema use disability as a mere artistic prosthesis?
- Is there really a shift in the characterisation of disabled images in New Wave Malayalam Cinema?

Primary Texts:

- *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum (1999), Kunjikoonan (2002), Mizhi Randilum (2003)*
- *Beautiful (2011), Bangalore Days (2014), Amar Akbar Anthony (2015), Vikrithi (2019)*

Prior to New wave Movement:



- Completely or partially depending on disability to get the narrative going
- Using it as an overdetermined symbol to dish out the long standing representation of disability.
- Reinforcing negative images- disability takes away all the joy out of one's life
- - a person with disability is fit to marry another person with disability
- `.

New Generation Malayalam Cinema





Don't you have anything to do other than following me?



Rather than following you..



I like to walk along with you.



- Everyone has two eyes,



But no one has same view. -

@ccstv



rsp

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A FILM BY V K PRAKASH

PRODUCER ANANDKUMAR

CINEMATOGRAPHY JOMON T JOHN EDITOR MAHESH NARAYAN MUSIC RATHEESH VEGHA

ART DIRECTOR AJAYAN MANGAD COSTUMES AZEEZ PALAKKAD MAKE UP HASAN WANDOOD

PROD. CONTROLLER BADUSHA STILLS AJITH V SHANKAR DESIGN OLDMONKS

YES CINEMA COMPANY & SRT RELEASE



- Though the artifice of disability assigns these disabled characters with a problematic identity, new wave narratives are more socially inclusive of the disabled community

- Challenges the previously established ideas of disability

- change in the characterization- never invite pity

- - giving the image that people with disability has feelings, needs and dreams like everyone else.

- - they needn't only aspire to marry someone with disability.

- comparing the depiction of disability helps in assessing a society's shifting values and norms imposed upon the body.

Thank You

