



Film Review of 'Margarita With A Straw' - Exploration of Sexuality By A Woman With Disability

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is a tool for positive social change within social work. It is a powerful tool for challenging deeply rooted social stereotypes in society. Cinema would provide a robust and in-depth portrayal of the lives of women with disabilities who are subject to double and triple oppression. Especially in dominant discourses, social models often interpret phenomena such as disability and femininity through narratives of pity, past karma, and social discrimination. The profession of social work aims to create well-being for marginalized citizens whose rights are violated in everyday life. In disability and social work, media, such as cinema, could critically analyze social models of women with disabilities. This review examines disability representation, focusing on Shonali Bose's 2014 film Margarita with a Straw, which explores the sexuality and intimacy of a young woman with disabilities. The film is relevant to a country like Sri Lanka in the South Asian region. Indian cinema has often highlighted the struggles and resilience of people with disabilities in their daily lives. Themes such as sexuality, intimacy, love, and relationships have been explored to a limited extent, especially in Hindi films. These dimensions of human life, often neglected in the South Asian region itself, must be addressed. The review uses content analysis to explore cinema as a medium. Finally, the film emphasizes the potential of films as social work tools for women with disabilities and also as tools for advocating for their rights and visibility.

KEY WORDS: Cinema, Social Change, Stereotypes, Femininity, Disability, Sexuality

INTRODUCTION

Even in the analysis of the United Nations Convention on the International Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the early 21st century, it was found that not much significance was given to sexual rights and family life. There is no explicit reference to sexuality and different gender identities (Schaaf, 2011). However, since 2000, in South Asian countries, including India, it could be shown that women disability rights activists and scholars strongly advocate sexual and reproductive health rights. Social activists played a crucial role in creating positive change to promote sexual rights, especially regarding education, economic integration, and employment opportunities, and have tried to eliminate social inequalities despite the constant rise in physical and accessibility challenges (Addlakha et al., 2017). In India, topics such as disability and sexuality have begun to be openly discussed and addressed, and in particular, disability rights activists, sexual and reproductive health rights activists, and social workers have been leading in overcoming those issues. A candid intervention to secure the sexual rights of people with disabilities by managing the challenging situation associated with disability and providing the necessary awareness is now happening in a culturally regressive country like India (TARSHI, 2018).

In the context mentioned above, Shonali Bose and Nilesh Maniyar were able to write and direct the Hindi film "Margarita with a Straw" in 2014, whose theme was exploring the sexuality of a young, woman with disability the backdrop of the sexual rights of women with disabilities. In the film, Shonali Bose, the director, mentions that her association with her differently-abled cousin's (Malini) real-life experiences profoundly influenced her making this film. "In an interview with Ravish Kumar at NDTV, Shonali Bose shares her personal experiences and says Malini" is too romantic, and whenever she sees a new young boy, she thinks he is in love with her. Also, Bose says she has not dated anyone, as Malini will feel offended. In another event, when they both cross the age of 40, Shonali asks how to celebrate this 40th birthday. Malini said that she wanted to have sex. In this

context, Shonali expressed how she could miss the idea that most usual things of any routine, the abled body needs sex idea". In addition, she highlights the arguments about the wheelchair that when people watch the film then, people should not think about the wheelchair. Story must look realistic story" (Kumar, 2015).

According to Garland-Thompson (2001), women and girls with disabilities face double as well as triple discrimination. Coexistence with minority identities such as disability and feminism require much effort to move forward and maintain their dignity (Thakur, 2020). People with disabilities are identified as the most marginalized minority group in the world. Among them, almost 15 billion of the world's population consists of people with disabilities (WHO, 2011). Much belongs to the youth and youth population (Addlakha, 2007).

"19.2% of the world's population is Girls, and women with disabilities comprise (80%) reside in developing countries (Kim 2013 Cited in Thakur, 2020, p.100). According to Indian Census estimates, there are 21.9 million people with disabilities (Census, 2001). "Amongst the differently-abled population, there are 44% (1.18 crore) females while men constitute 56% of the population (Chahal, 2021, p.1938). "This social group may be called the invisible, even though it is the largest minority" (Thakur, 2020).

This film aims to promote the sexual rights and human dignity of women with disabilities. It is to introduce the critical role that social workers working on disability have in promoting the inclusion of women with disabilities. The purpose of this film was the content analysis to highlight the relevance of Margarita with a Straw. The film further shows how the film could be applied to raise awareness about the interconnectedness of disability with sexuality and gender.

This content analysis depicts the multiple states of the sexual identity of a young disabled woman, as well as all women. The review emphasizes the need to

advocate for disability rights and the sexual rights of women with disabilities. It fosters the needs of women with disabilities and creates a discussion on empowerment to address systemic inequalities. It created a discourse in society on disability and the innovative roles of social work.

Methodology of the Film Review

The methodology for this film review used qualitative content analysis. This film examines the potential between disability and social work through theoretical frameworks such as disability studies, feminist theory, and intersectionality, considering the sociocultural context. The character of this film flows and develops visual imagery and story structure to build a discourse on the relevance of disability, sexuality, and intimacy in representing disability, sexuality, and intimacy, drawing on Indian cinema. Through this, it attempts to identify contemporary Sri Lankan society.

To this end, this interpretation, based on Michel Foucault's concept of sexuality as a sociocultural construct, would highlight the film's ability to address the hitherto unexplored dimensions of human life. By situating the analysis within these frameworks, the review explores how the film discusses advocacy for women with disabilities and promoting sexual rights, especially in marginalized contexts such as Sri Lanka.

Understanding of the plot of Margarita with a Straw movie

The film's binding narrative gives the viewer a deeper understanding of the intersection of disability, women, and sexuality. The film opens the door to the sexuality of women with disabilities, which has been tightly closed by culture or ignored and neglected by the society. There was a time when the Indian middle-class families lived in a combined or joint family. However, during the transformation of society, it had been observed that in the metro cities, India's middle class was mainly built around a nuclear family. One such had been used as the context for the movie. Laila, a young female student struggling with cerebral

palsy, has a fun-loving, independent lifestyle. She studies at Ramjas College and Delhi University and has expressed multiple talents, such as creative writing and poetry. The directors have succeeded in portraying Laila's character in Margarita with a Straw as an open-minded, forward-thinking, independent girl who likes to make friends with a general interest in building social relationships.

Laila's mother, as depicted in the film, devoted her entire life to supporting Laila's education. Although a talented musician, Laila's mother struggles with her physical and mental capacity to make her daughter's life succeed. The family even bought a suitable battery wheelchair to take Laila to college, and the film shows her mother driving it with her father and younger brother also being seated.

As the life cycle of an adolescent girl, when she reaches proper adulthood, contemporary opposite-sex peer interactions in college begin to create biological senses of sexuality. The film makes a remarkable attempt to socialize the very natural feelings possessed by every person about sexuality, which are unrelated to their disability. "A fertile tree needs sunlight and fertilizer," just as the opposite sex provides Laila with the natural stimulus to express her sexuality among her male peers. First, her stimulation was directed at a boy with physical disabilities who studies with her. Later, due to her passion for music, she expressed her love for a boy with her who had been involved in musical activities. He was kind to her and was a singer as well. It was shown as a one-sided love. One boy had shown to have a crush on Laila, but Laila was shown to be desperate for more love. Ultimately, she got tired of college and ultimately faced many rejections.

It had become a boring place for her. Even though she told her mother that she loved a boy, the mother smiled a little, as if she also acknowledged that society would reject her daughter. The film portrays the "common sexual need" possessed by everyone and the "repulsions within the social construct" towards incidents like other girls of her age, showing love and closeness to the protagonist. Laila's

temptation towards sex desired to attract her to use the technology "porn or erotic online website" to explore her self-curious interest in sexuality further.

The film's plot unfolds as Laila's creative talent gets recognized, and she gets a scholarship to pursue higher education at New York University in America. The event is also a culmination of her mother's irrepensible aspiration to make her daughter chase higher aims. Despite her father's disapproval, both Laila and her mother go to New York, majorly because of her mother's desire to inherit a better life for Laila.

The director of the film portrays Laila as a young girl with cerebral palsy and lameness who uses a battery wheelchair and needs help to do basic daily routines, but at the same time, being perfect through her smartness and talent. Although she arrives in New York in winter, Laila is brave enough to surpass the weather challenges, as she becomes self-reliant on accessing public transport and exploring life in her wheelchair. Her need for self-exploration about sexuality was further enhanced in the free environment in New York. In New York, she met people who respect differences and accept disability. While returning home in winter, a scene showed that Laila could not drive a wheelchair as it was stuck in the ice, but she met friendly and helpful people to proceed further.

The film's climax is based on Laila's experiences in New York. Laila has succeeded and adapted well to the new situation. Teachers and classmates provide adequate support for education. She succeeded in education. Within the liberal and inclusive environment of the university, fun parties and student engagement in politics have significance, and many joyful experiences are portrayed in that background.

While moving to New York, Laila met Khanum, a Pakistani visual-challenged girl, and the two immediately developed a special bond and became very close. The unexpected bond between the two turns into a homosexual 'lesbian' relationship. What happened next in the life of Laila was a self-exploration of

sexuality. While engaging in that process, she identifies herself as a bisexual girl. Her mother noticed her subscription to many adult-only websites and asked the same questions. Laila's response to the mother's questions was the interruption to her privacy. Laila's mother became resentful and unhappy about the response, just like any woman with a traditional outlook.

Once her daughter settled in New York, Laila's mother returned to India. Laila and Khanum started staying together after that. In an unexpected turn of events, Laila ends up having physical intercourse with Jared, her acquaintance from creative writing class, to whom she was attracted from the beginning. Once Laila and Khanum visited India, she explained their relationship to her mother. Her orthodox mother was in a position of astonishment and refused to accept it as a normal relationship. Meanwhile, Laila came to know that her mother was passing through the second stage of cancer, which had deeply upset her. With a decision to wipe out all disconcerts, Laila revealed to Khanum the physical intercourse she had with Jared. Shocked by the breach of trust, her partner broke up with Laila and left for New York. Finally, the film ends with the death of her mother and through the portrayal of a Laila who still explores her sexuality and intimacy in a new arena of individuality.

Based on the aforementioned narrative of the young woman with cerebral palsy exploring her sexuality, it is more critical to theoretically identify the intersection of disability, sexuality, and femininity in the film analysis. A contextual analysis of how the intersectionality of sexuality is discussed in the film is elaborated here. Towards the end, the utility of movies to change social attitudes around disability and sexuality is also discussed.

Theoretical component of the Study

Indian feminist scholars' academic arguments on women with disability, gender, and sexuality inform the contextual analysis of the film review on Margarita with Straw. These scholars emphasize the body politics of differently-abled women.

They argued how culture, economy, and political structures intertwine in shaping the experiences of women with disabilities. Society perceives women with disabilities as sexually dysfunctional individuals. More active, ugly, or repulsive parameters are primed around the subject. (Ghosh, 2013; Addlakha, 2013; Ghai, 2003).

"The feminist disability studies consist of an attempt to explore the complex relationships among gender, ethnicity, race, class, ability, and sexuality" (Thompson, 1997). The intimate relationship among these systems emphasizes how human bodies interact with cultural influences, economic and political structures, and environments. Those conditions play a key role in whether the interaction between disability and gender sociality conforms to or deviates from societal expectations. It describes how women with disabilities are negatively affected (Gosh, 2013).

Emphasizing disability femininity and body politics, the emotional challenges faced with disability are living with negative perceptions of one's body. With disability, self-perception is flawed and internalized as ugliness and disgust. Feelings of discomfort, weakness, and pain shape the daily lives of the differently abled. Instead of enriching her everyday life, a woman with a disability keeps a self-concept with regressive ideas (Addlakha, 2013).

Early adulthood, a crucial stage for young women with disabilities, is applied for the analysis based on the life cycle approach (20-40). The intersection of sexuality and disability, the leading formulation of this film, is reviewed and discussed from a feminist sociological perspective. The subjectivity of the afflicted female body and how it contributes to the construction of ideas around femininity, desire, and sexuality is used as the theoretical framework for this film review (Gosh, 2013). Focusing on definitions of differently abled womanhood, femininity, and sexuality would further intensify the aims of film criticism.

Gendered socialization is one of the fundamental processes through which identities are constructed and maintained in daily life contexts, which happens through learning sociocultural ideologies regarding appropriate behavior and practices. It is evident that all girls, able-bodied or differently abled, are socialized into gender identities, but for the latter, the socialization process is tempered by how their impairments are interpreted within their families and the wider society (Ghosh, 2013; Addlakha, 2013; Ghai, 2003).

Differently, abled girls are pampered, cosseted, protected, and cared for within the family, creating differences between them and their siblings in subtle and overt ways. Some women express rage at such gender-based practices and believe that their parents could have been challenged by such perceptions instead of devaluing them with assumptions of incapability. Neighborhoods, schools, and other public spaces were experienced as oppressive and degrading atmospheres, where one was judged solely by the prescribed standards of idealized normality and not by one's actual capabilities. It is clearly shown in the music competition where Laila had taken part in the music composition, and their team got the prize. Here, the judges explained that it is the compulsion to give the award to the team to motivate the differently abled participant. This event shows that instead of appreciating differently abled women, giving them sympathy or empathy. Though cultural ideologies negate the capacities of differently abled women, their lived realities often differ as they experience, negotiate, and tailor the needs of their impaired bodies to the performance of the ideal feminine self (Ghosh, 2013). The embodied female identity of a woman with a disability is primarily shaped by the traditional standards of beauty and sexuality in the dominant male-centric world (Addlakha, 2013).

'Margarita, with a Straw' is made out of the social discourses that build the lives of women with disabilities discussed in these studies. The film even implies the in-depth knowledge of its makers regarding the nuances of the theoretical framework being elaborated here. The next part of the film review discusses how

the aspects discussed in the theoretical framework could be extracted and further used for a positive transformation.

Portrayal of Theme of Persons with Disabilities in Hindi Cinema

The portrayal of disability has been a widely discussed theme in the Hindi film industry. Research has shown that the film themes related to disability in some eras have led to the construction of many negative stereotypes. At the same time, many contemporary movies with a theme of disability have raised support for advocacy with raising awareness in society.

Ghai's (2003) academic comments on disability are essential when considering the construction of those negative ideas in cinema. Being a differently-abled woman as well as an educated woman, she emphasizes that disability in the Indian context is often seen as a deficiency that creates a difference from the normal. Such perspectives can be seen in Hindi films from earlier periods as well. Just like gender, disability is seen as a social construct. She notes that around the world, people with disabilities navigate social markers such as "handicapped," "disabled," "differently abled," and "special" in normative cultures that contribute to their acute marginalization. The discrimination towards disabled eventually creates stigma, as the individual journeys endured by them were seen as tragedies (Ghai, 2003). Prime Minister Narendra Modi Announced in 'Maan Ki Baat' in Dec 2015 that the word Viklang one having a disability (one having extraordinary physical or sensory abilities) should be replaced with Divyaang (Modi, 2015).

Many Hindi films could be considered to discuss the formation of societal perceptions regarding disability in the Indian cultural context. Often, Hindi films have tried to showcase penance for people with disabilities, as the state of disability itself was being portrayed as misfortune. Early Hindi films such as *Arzoo* (1965), *Sadma* (1983), *Koyla* (1997), and *Vadaa* (2005) depict magical miracles with disability. Sympathy, comic portrayal, and heroism seem to be shown in the movies. As seen in films like *Aadmi* (1968), *Koshish* (1972),

and "Kasam" (1988), early depictions of disability were often associated with repentance for wrongdoing or the result of bad karma. Also, the state of disability was showcased as something worse than death. It is also observed that often in movies, making one disabled was projected as a punishment, whose prime example could be "Sholay" (1975). In that iconic movie of Bollywood, Gabbar Singh (played by Amjad Khan) amputates Thakur (Sanjeev Kumar) by cutting off both his hands rather than killing him, as the former is regarded as the harsher punishment. In "Mehboob Ki Mehendi" (1971), the protagonist Kumar opposes killing his nemesis Iftikhar while he is in a wheelchair. The reason given for the same was again the picturization of disability as a worse state than death. The very recent "Haider" (2014) also echoes a similar sentimental perspective in its storyline; the film Iqbal (2005) focuses on a theme that attempts to convince society about the capabilities of people with disabilities (Anju, 2015).

The movie "Tare Zameen Par" (2007) emphasizes the importance of understanding and embracing the human potential of people with different identities. It is a 2007 film directed by Aamir Khan. The movie and its tagline, "Every child is special," received worldwide popularity. The movie was unique among the attempts made in Hindi cinema on the themes of disability, as it powerfully conveys the challenges of a differently abled child in specific circumstances. At the same time, the film also highlights the importance of empathetic, nurturing social workers in recognizing the complexities of human emotions and bringing out hidden talents in individuals. Like many others, this film illustrates cinema's profound impact in shaping perspectives and fostering empathy for people with disabilities. The movie "Tare Zameen Par" could be identified as a movie that challenged many traditional stereotypes followed till then while discussing the theme of disability and thus being able to bring a paradigm shift. Recognizing the evolution of Hindi cinema, it is essential to explore the flow of Hindi cinema in dealing with deeper emotions of the disabled, such as sexuality, intimacy, and love.

Margarita with a Straw explores sexuality and Women with Disability

Sexuality is still largely considered a taboo subject in India and many parts of South Asia, although newer spaces are rapidly opening up to voice and address concerns surrounding it (Addlakha, 2013; Gosh, 2013; TARSHI, 2018). However, in ancient times, Indian culture was Highly modern, which has been reflected in literature like "Kamasutra" Kāma-sūtra (principle of love), by Vatsyayana, which is an ancient Indian Sanskrit text, which shows sexuality, eroticism, and emotional fulfillment in life (Coltrane, 1998; Wendy, 2003). Sexuality is managed and moderated by societal rules, norms, regulations, and ideals in this region and different ways in other parts of the world. Sexuality concerns are publicly addressed in Indian society primarily in the context of violence, abuse, and also with the negative consequences surrounding unsafe sex. While these are relevant matters to address, it is also essential to understand sexuality as an element much beyond the prevention of disease or abuse. Sexuality is also as much more about intimacy and relationships. Self-worth. Pleasure and eroticism all play their own roles here. All individuals have the right to sexual well-being, but when it comes to people with disabilities, more often than not, they are considered not only sexless but might not even be human beings (TARSHI,2018).

The point Addlakha (2017) raises is crucial in examining the academic discourse on disability and sexuality in the Indian context. According to her, historically, in India as well as in the world, there had been a deep-rooted cultural antipathy towards persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages, disabled persons have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they were subhuman. They had been portrayed as helpless victims with medical anomalies and a lifelong burden to family and society. Today, there is a general recognition that enhancing educational and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities will promote their economic self-reliance and independent living. However, still, their sexual needs, aspirations, and dreams are more or less invisible to the

mainstream. Sexual reproductive rights are perceived as something irrelevant to the context (Addlakha, 2017).

The conceptualization of gender and sexuality rendered by Foucault helps to substantiate Addlakha's (2013) discussions. As per him, the body is not a mere neutral entity but rather acts as the center of power marked by cultural and historical customs. Both political and economic forces have significant influence over the determination of identity according to this concept (King, 2004). The aforesaid discussion on the negligence of Hindi cinema towards sexuality could be understood on the basis of this academic discourse.

This discussion of gender and sexuality in films would be able to begin by elaborating on the depiction of marriage and child-rearing in the context of disability. Gulzar's "Koshish" (1972) emerges as a pioneering work showcasing disability, mainly focusing on the human need for love and belonging. With a storyline surrounding a hearing-impaired couple, the film portrays societal attitudes towards people with disabilities and the challenges faced by them in marriage and raising children. Similarly, "Sparsh" (1980) also made an attempt to capture the emotional struggles and dilemmas experienced by disabled people in real life. They mark critical steps that shed light on the social perceptions shaping the relationships of people with disabilities (Adhikari, 2015).

Shakespeare's (2006) social model of disability had some perspectives that would significantly contribute to unraveling the drawbacks of the portrayal of sexuality in Hindi cinema. Understanding the sexuality of people with disabilities demands a rights-based perspective. Sexuality should not be limited to a definition that takes its sole basis on sexual desire or physical intimacy. Instead, a rights-centered approach that comprises a variety of identities, intimate beliefs, and desires is needed. In order to attain the rights of people with disabilities in their fullest sense, the opportunities to navigate relational public spaces should be

abstracted from body control and their identities. This concept expresses the importance of agency in relational lifestyles and experiences (Shakespeare, 2006).

"Black" (2005) is a Hindi movie that takes a progressive approach by addressing the sexual desires and intimacy needs of a disabled woman. The central character of the movie, portrayed by Rani Mukerji, is a person with hearing and visual impairments. The film courageously explores the protagonist's longing for a physical connection, notably portrayed in a scene where she asks her teacher, played by Amitabh Bachchan, to kiss her. Despite his compliance, the aftermath is marked by guilt, leading to his departure, which sheds light on the societal challenges and complexities at the intersection of disability and sexuality.

Additionally, "Barfi" (2012) touches on a small aspect of sexuality, depicting the emotional experience of love between individuals with disabilities, featuring a deaf character played by Ranbir Kapoor and an autistic girl portrayed by Priyanka Chopra. The film also addresses societal perceptions towards marrying individuals with disabilities, exemplified when the main character, played by Ileana D'Cruz, rejects marriage to the male lead due to concerns raised by her mother (Adhikari, 2015). In this societal context, the discourse on disability and sexuality in Hindi cinema could serve as a basis for securing the very personal rights of persons with disabilities, such as marriage and sexuality.

Margarita, with a Straw made a positive mark against the hitherto regressive and disenfranchised portrayal of people with disabilities in mainstream cinema. This movie is radical in Hindi cinema as, unlike many mainstream movies, it has taken the perception of disability to a different societal dimension. The intersection of disability, feminism, and sexuality in an unprecedented way makes this film groundbreaking in bringing the experience of a woman with a disability to the screen.

As mentioned in the above introduction to the film, the navigation of sexuality has not taken away from the character arc of the protagonist, Laila, while she is in

her youth as a disabled female student at Delhi University and during her time in New York. As a young girl, she keeps exploring her inner instincts like any other so-called "normal" person. The idea that sexuality is a spectrum, as mentioned by the famous Indian writer Arundhati Roy, is well represented by the character of Laila in this film.

Laila, who played the main character, tried to lead a life of dignity and self-worth, and how she overcame the challenges as a disabled individual for the same is all about the movie. The film has been able to entirely change the stereotypical notion that the physical limitations of disabled people prevent them from leading a satisfying life like others by establishing that disability is not an obstacle to attaining a fulfilling life. The film convincingly conveyed that the achievements of a human soul are love, intimacy, fulfillment of sexual desires, and shared relationships.

This film also challenges the social model of sexuality. The social constructionists would argue that the 'choice' element in sexual orientation is heavily weighted towards heterosexuality and that it is reinforced by robust social regulations and institutions (Foucault, 1995). Also, the makers of the film have well assimilated the idea of Shakespeare (2000) that the sexuality of people with disabilities is a social construct. The film upends the asexual hegemonic discourse in which people with disabilities are treated as children, which is argued by him. In this film, Laila is disabled and, at the same time, also an independent and intelligent woman. The film prompts the viewer to re-think the dominant discourses like disabled people's sexual innocence and asexuality, the need to protect them from sexual abuse due to their perceived dependence, and the general fragile outlook towards them.

There is a perception that those with disabilities will not be able to engage in 'normal' penetrative heterosexual intercourse because of their impairment. Persons with disabilities who are not heterosexually active are, in turn, considered asexual

(Addlakha, 2013; Gosh, 2013; TARSHI, 2018). In this film, the directors built a discourse on homosexuality through the relationship between Laila and her friend, Khanum. Laila continues to self-explore her sexuality and buys a tab for the same. What should be raised here is the needed awareness and acceptance of sexuality for everyone. The film also shows the importance of self-exploration.

"Indian womanhood is based on a multi-layered accretion of myths that serves patriarchy in both its global and local manifestations" (Ghosh, 2013). Hence, Social attitudes are influenced by the sexual self-image of women who grew up with disabilities. *Margarita with a Straw* challenges' social ideologies, which often makes the sexuality of disabled people restricted through myths and misconceptions. "*Margarita with a Straw*" marks a significant radical approach in its nuanced representation of the sexuality of people with disabilities. It is a liberating and empowering cinematic representation of the sexual rights of women with disabilities.

The 2014 Hindi film '*Margarita, with a Straw*' paved the way for low-risk discussions around topics such as disability and sexuality in the South Asian context and created a paradigm shift through the portrayal of the same sexual intimacy of young disabled girls. The film reminds us that it is high time to focus on matters such as love and self-acceptance in the context of disability.

The nexus between the film *Margarita with a Straw* and the issues of the Sexual Rights of Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka

When we consider the studies that have been done on women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, we can see the studies done on various themes related to thirty years of war in Sri Lanka. Among those themes, attention had been focused on the interpolation and alienation of law, peace, justice, and the welfare of women with disabilities, poverty, and the contribution of women with disabilities in the process of building peace in a post-war situation. The manner had also been mentioned. These studies emphasize that there must be a paradigm shift beyond

the traditional approach to women with disabilities that affirms all the rights of women with disabilities (AKASH, 2011; Samarathne & Soldatic, 2015; Samarathne et al., 2018; Soldatic & Samarathne, 2020; Vanniasinkam & Vitarana, 2020; Emmanuel & Saroor, 2022).

In this context, open debates about the sexuality of people with disabilities are minimal. Filling this void, the research conducted by Hettiarachchi and Attanayake (2019), *Candid Conversations: Narratives of Young Adults with Disabilities in Sri Lanka on Intimate Partner Relationships*, discusses the candid experiences of young adults about sexuality. The gendered sociality associated with the experiences of people with disabilities raises a conversation about cultural intersectionality. Especially when sexuality is a taboo topic in Sri Lanka, the aforementioned factors discuss the experiences of sexuality and intimacy of women with multiple disabilities from a sociocultural approach (Hettiarachchi & Attanayake, 2019).

However, we suggest that there should be a paradigm shift to secure the rights of women with disabilities. For that, there should be an open dialogue about the sexual rights of women with disabilities. Therefore, in a context where there had been limited exploration of the sexuality and intimacy of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, films like these would be able to shed some light, as Indian cinema has the potential to create significant ideological change in Sri Lanka. In particular, based on the *Story of Laila*, a girl with cerebral palsy, the film "*Margarita with a Straw*," which marked the beginning of Indian cinema, could be used to promote the sexual rights of women with disabilities.

In comparing Indian society and Sri Lankan society, the entrenched social stigmas and cultural beliefs about sexuality are similar. At the same time, *Laila's* narration in this film brings out the common desire of all people about sexuality and its multiple forms. It is neither unique nor unusual for women with disabilities. Therefore, *Laila's* portrayal transcends the barriers posed by all the agencies and

social norms that limit the sexuality of women with disabilities. Simply put, women with disabilities would be empowered.

Additionally, the exploration of self-sexuality that Layla's narrative evokes suggests the need for comprehensive sexuality education. The importance of agencies for improving sex literacy was highlighted. The light from this film provides the basis for strengthening the social networks necessary to lead a fulfilling life, recognizing and respecting the sexual rights of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

When promoting the sexual rights of women with disabilities, health sectors, civil society, policymakers, and social workers could be able to make a transformative difference. Accordingly, in securing the sexual rights of women with disabilities, the roles and responsibilities of social workers are as follows.

Role of Social Worker in Promoting Sexuality Rights of Women with Disability

Theoretical constructions related to the film show how the sexual rights of women with disabilities were violated in Indian society. Social workers as disability rights activists must be able to challenge the sociocultural constructs that analyze the sexuality of women with disabilities, as addressed in this literature review, as they strive to bring social well-being to marginalized communities. One of the primary sub-objectives of the review was to convince the feasibility of using "Margarita with a Straw" as a powerful empowerment tool to promote the sexual rights of women with disabilities. Therefore, it is pivotal to identify the directions that social workers could be able to include in their initiatives.

The role of social workers as disability rights activists in promoting the sexual rights of women with disabilities could be identified in various roles. In the areas of sex education, counseling, and empowerment, social discourse could be fostered through multiple programs to create a more inclusive and equitable understanding of sexuality while protecting the rights of women with disabilities.

So, the primary role of Social workers as disability rights activists is to raise systematic awareness to improve sexual literacy among women with disabilities. Based on the movie "Margarita with a Straw," Disability Rights Activists should also understand how the movies could be used as a means of increasing the sexual awareness of women with disabilities. Nuances of sexuality could be elaborated by pointing to examples and situations from the film. Based on such a framework, identifying various phenomena in the movie would be used to propagate the need to maintain sexual health and, thus, the fundamental rights of women with disabilities. The film lays the foundation for an evidence-based approach and opens the space for a scientific outlook through a systematic approach to sexuality and sexual health education.

Changing social attitudes is a gradual process, not an overnight miracle. One of the prominent roles of Social workers as disability rights activists is to change the ideologies that are harmful to society, which could have been formed from different cultural backgrounds and long historical foundations. Social workers could play a huge role in fostering a broader social dialogue on subjects such as the sexual rights of women with disabilities. Using a film like "Margarita with a Straw" as a tool would be very useful in that context. It could also lead to the optimistic reconstruction of social views that are persistent and long-term reproduced in various social institutions. The utility of using this film to change social attitudes is that it acts as a catalyst to promote a non-judgmental approach, which is essential to working with any group of people, not just disabled individuals. Furthermore, the film addresses various personal grievances of the general public in both Indian and South Asian societies.

Everyone, in general, can experience love, intimacy, and sexual attraction, and also such feelings are normal for women with disabilities. Such an understanding provides valuable insight into developing a tolerant approach towards marginalized people. These social constructions are always there around people with disabilities, and social workers can play a significant role in changing those

stereotypes. The film 'Margarita with a Straw' would be a valuable tool for them by conveying positive attitudes with compassion, humor, and curiosity.

Empowering women with disabilities are another role of social workers as disability rights activists where the film could be a helpful tool. This film would also be used as a tool in raising awareness about sexual health rights and also in improving sexual awareness and self-reliance of women with disabilities. Another significant role of a social worker is that of a communicator, where the film could be an effective instrument. Social workers can also use communication skills to guide the self-esteem and self-acceptance of women with disabilities. Social workers as disability rights activists can apply open communication in building a supportive environment where people with disabilities can feel comfortable in expressing their needs.

A key role of social workers as disability rights activists is advocacy. From the studies related to the lives of women with disabilities, one thing that emerges is how they could experience the denial or violation of their sexual rights (Ghosh, 2013). Women with disabilities often internalize the same stereotypes that society holds about people with disabilities.

Social workers working for the welfare of women with disabilities would help emphasize the importance of living with dignity and respect for both non-disabled and disabled people. Meanwhile, social workers would be able to contribute to creating a culture of inclusion of women with disabilities in society.

Foucault's (1995) view of sexuality as a sociocultural construct can be propagated utilizing the film, enabling social workers as disability rights activists to foster critical thinking about sexuality. Similarly, highlighting the concepts of Shakespeare (2006), like pointing out the social aspect of sexuality, could promote awareness regarding the rights of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

The film *Margarita with a Straw* discusses the gender rights of women in a forward-looking way, grappling with differently abled female bodies in public spaces and locking body politics within social norms. The film sheds sharp light on dark areas that are often overlooked, such as the sexuality of women with disabilities. The film highlights the need for greater awareness and inclusiveness of sexuality in an open society rather than perpetuating cycles of internalization and devaluation of disabled women's bodies by the application of traditional approaches to the subject matter.

The film '*Margarita with a Straw*' highlights the empowerment of women with disabilities by focusing on their ability, resilience, and motivation to pursue internal happiness. The film also provides a positive outlook by portraying respect for cultural diversity in the Indian context and family support for people with disabilities. Laila's higher education gives liberty and self-awareness about fundamental Human rights to provide awareness of sexual rights. Also, it has been able to go beyond the traditional film narrative style by presenting the situations realistically faced by marginalized communities. Social workers who aspire to promote the rights of the differently-abled could utilize this type of film as an effective tool to bring desired societal transformations.

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