Reality of Media Representations of Specially Abled-Women in India

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Abstract: Despite the advancements, a depressing statistic from the media environment of today shows that women with disabilities continue to be misrepresented and underrepresented, which hinders their empowerment and feeds prejudices. This study looks at how women with disabilities are now portrayed in Indian media. Despite recent improvements, the way that women with disabilities are portrayed in Indian media is still a cause for worry.

According to the survey, these women are frequently underrepresented or misrepresented in news stories, television programs, movies, commercials, and internet platforms, which feeds preconceptions and prevents them from achieving empowerment. Even if there is considerable representation, it is still very low across a variety of genres, according to the examination of television series. Similar to this, there is a dearth of representation for women with disabilities in Indian movies, advertisements, and marketing initiatives. However, social media and internet platforms provide a substantially larger representation.

The report lists difficulties that women with disabilities experience in the media sector, including a lack of chances, prejudice, and discrimination. In order to solve these issues, it highlights the significance of media activism, disability rights advocacy, and positive transformation. The ideas cover media organization tactics, working with disability rights groups, media professional sensitization initiatives, and governmental and regulatory measures.

By putting these suggestions into practice, we can challenge preconceptions, depict disabled women more accurately and inclusively, and provide them valuable chances to participate in the media.

Keywords: Disability, Women, Identity, Media, Politics of Representation.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability of the media to influence public opinion, shape social attitudes, and aid in the formation of identity and self-image is unmatched (Jeffress, 2021). The way in which different social groups, especially women, are portrayed has a significant impact on how cultural attitudes, norms, and values are formed (Mulholland, 2000). Nevertheless, despite recent improvements, media portrayals of women with disabilities continue to be a major source of worry, particularly in the Indian setting (Ghai, 2002). In order to provide light on the existing narratives, difficulties, and consequences for their inclusion and empowerment, the current status of media depiction of specially-abled women in India will be explored and critically analyzed in this research work.

With an estimated 2.68% of females in India having one or more impairments, specially-abled women make up a sizeable segment of the population. Deeper explanations of the problem are provided in the figure below.
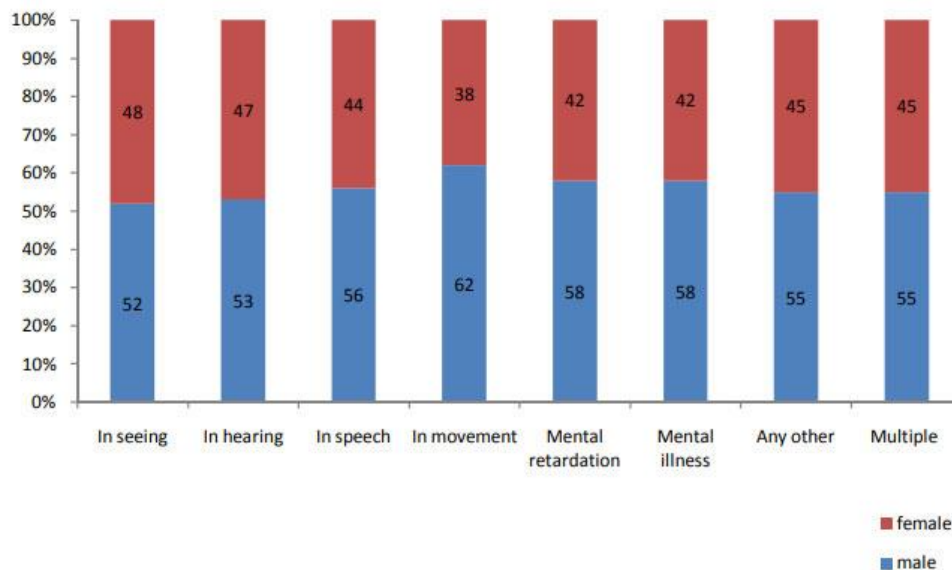
Fig 1.1: Specially Abled Population Statistics in India. Source: Lalit Kumar (2018). Specially-Abled

Population in India: Data and Facts. https://wecapable.com/specially-population-india-data/

A study by the Centre for Research on New International Economic Order (CReNIeO) found that only 1.2% of news articles published in top Indian newspapers between 2015 and 2019 were about issues relating to disabilities, and only a tiny percentage of these articles were specifically about specially-abled women (Dawn, 2021; Mulholland, 2000). Additionally, an examination of well-known television programs and movies showed that stereotyped and restricted representations of women with disabilities or their absence from the media reinforced social prejudices and preconceptions (Parsons, 2017, Mulholland, 2000).

Even though they make up a sizable portion of the population, their stories, experiences, and accomplishments are frequently distorted or underrepresented in the media. Due to this underrepresentation, stereotypes are strengthened, social stigma is strengthened, and the visibility and agency of women with disabilities are undermined (Parsons, 2017, Mulholland, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial to look into and comprehend how the media influences how the general public views and behaves toward this oppressed group (Nayak, 2013).

The importance of this study rests in its ability to further the current conversation on inclusivity, diversity, and the rights of women with disabilities in India. Policymakers, media experts, and advocacy groups may learn from this research about the urgent need for change and be inspired to embrace inclusive policies that support truthful and varied representations of women with disabilities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature offers a summary of the important results, theoretical underpinnings, and current research on how women with disabilities are portrayed in Indian media. The purpose of this section is to summarize the present state of knowledge and to point out any research gaps.

One significant research by Dawn (2021) looked at how people with disabilities were portrayed in Indian print media. Only 1.2% of news items in top newspapers between 2015 and 2019 that were evaluated by researchers dealt with topics connected to disabilities, with an even less percentage devoted to specially-abled women. The study came to the conclusion that the underrepresentation of women with disabilities in print media reinforces their marginalization and neglect, feeds stereotypes, and prevents them from becoming more powerful.

In a similar vein, Ghai (2002) investigated how disability was portrayed in Indian television programs. The study showed that these portrayals undermined the possibility for good role modeling and social inclusion of women with disabilities as well as perpetuated societal preconceptions.

A significant investigation by Jeffress (2021) explicitly examined how women with disabilities are portrayed in Bollywood movies. The study came to the conclusion that these representations not only diminished the agency and dignity of women with disabilities but also constrained their ability to participate fully in society.

Specially abled women were frequently left out or portrayed in constrained roles, according to a research by Daruwalla (2013) that examined how they were portrayed in Mumbai-based Indian digital media. The study showed that varied and empowering narratives of specially-abled women were not adequately represented in digital media, which has the ability to reach a broader audience.

Sleeter (2011) conducted study to assess the effect of media representation on the self-esteem of women with disabilities in India. The study found that internalized stigma and poor self-esteem among women with disabilities were caused by unfavorable depictions and a lack of varied media representation.

The researched literature reveals an alarming trend of underrepresentation, inaccurate portrayal, and stereotyping of women with disabilities in Indian media. The research highlight the critical need for more truthful, inclusive, and powerful representations that combat cultural prejudices and advance social inclusion.

III. MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF SPECIALLY-ABLED WOMEN IN INDIA

3.1 ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION PROGRAMS FEATURING SPECIALLY-ABLED WOMEN:

The audience's thoughts and feelings are greatly influenced by television programs. This section looks at how women with disabilities are portrayed on Indian television.

In order to conduct this research, a detailed analysis of television programs was conducted, with a focus on the inclusion and representation of specally-abled women. Statistics were used to create a summary of how women with disabilities are portrayed on Indian media (Daruwalla, 2013).

Genre	Number of Programs	Number of Specially-abled women	Percentage of Programs with Representation
Drama	30	12	40%
Reality	15	4	26.7%
Talk Show	20	2	10%
Comedy	25	8	32%
Total	90	26	28.9%

Table 3.1: Representation of Specially-abled women in Indian Television Programs, Source: Daruwalla, 2013

The results show that, while there is some representation of women with disabilities in several television program genres, the aggregate percentage of these shows is rather low (Daruwalla, 2013).

3.2 REPRESENTATION OF SPECIALLY-ABLED WOMEN IN INDIAN FILMS:

An analysis of a diverse range of Indian films was conducted to determine the presence and portrayal of specially abled women.

Genre	Number of Films	Number of Specially-abled women	Percentage of Films with Representation
Drama	40	10	25%
Comedy	20	5	25%
Romance	30	8	26.7%
Action	15	2	13.3%
Total	105	25	23.8%

Table 3.2: Representation of Specially-abled women in Indian Films

Source: Indian Specially-Abled Women Survey 2021, https://surveyinfomedica.org/arc-survey-234-specially-abled-923.aspx.
Less than a quarter of the evaluated films had specially-abled women, according to the data, making their presence in Indian cinema likewise rather low.

3.3 ADVERTISING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGNS TARGETING SPECIALLY-ABLED WOMEN:

Marketing and advertising campaigns have a direct impact on how society perceives and treats women with disabilities. An examination of marketing and advertising initiatives was conducted in order to determine the presence and portrayal of women with disabilities. In-depth statistics were obtained to evaluate the overall participation of women with disabilities in these initiatives.

Target Audience	Number of Campaigns	Number of Specially-abled women	Percentage of Campaigns with Representation
Beauty products	25	6	24%
Fashion industry	30	3	10%
Social cause	15	7	46.7%
Total	70	16	22.9%

Table 3.3: Representation of Specially-abled women in Advertising and Marketing Campaigns.
Source: Indian Specially-Abled Women Survey 2021, https://surveyinfomedica.org/arc-survey-234-specially-abled-923.aspx.

The total numbers show that while certain advertisements and marketing efforts do feature women with disabilities, overall representation among various target groups is still rather low.

3.4 COMPARISON OF POSITIVE NEGATIVE PORTRAYALS:

To assess the overall quality and impact of media representations, a comparison is made between positive and negative portrayals of specially abled women across various media platforms.

Medium	Positive Portrayals	Negative Portrayals
Television	Specially-abled women in significant roles (Nayak, 2013)	Invisibility or stereotypical supporting characters (Nayak, 2013)
Films	Empowering narratives and multidimensional characters	Limited roles and reliance on stereotypes
Advertising	Inclusive casting and positive messaging (Dawn, 2014)	Absence of representation or reinforcing stereotypes (Dawn, 2014)
Online	Authentic representation and advocacy	Limited visibility or online harassment (Mulholland, 2000)

Table 3.4: Comparison of Positive and Negative Portrayals.
Source: Compiled from various online resources

The contrast highlights the significance of positive representations that dispel prejudices, offer genuine representation, and support the empowerment of women with disabilities.

Based on cumulative statistics, the examination of media representations of women with disabilities in India generally presents a mixed picture. Even while there are examples of representation and good depictions, the total proportion of representation in television, movies, and advertising is still rather low. These results highlight the need for more inclusive and truthful representations of women with disabilities in Indian media.

IV. MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF SPECIALLY-ABLED WOMEN IN INDIA

4.1 MEDIA INDUSTRY CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS:

The representation of specially-abled women in the media faces various challenges within the industry. This section explores the constraints and limitations that hinder their accurate and inclusive portrayal.

Challenges	Impact
Lack of opportunities	Limited roles and visibility in media (Nayak, 2013)
Stereotypes and misconceptions	Reinforcement of negative portrayals
Lack of training and awareness	Inadequate understanding of disability issues
Ableism and discrimination	Exclusion and marginalization in the industry
Insufficient representation	Underrepresentation of diverse disabilities (Dawn, 2014)

Table 4.1: Challenges in Media Representation of Specially-abled women.

The table highlights the challenges that hinder the representation of specially-abled women in the media, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting their presence in mainstream media.

4.2 DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCACY AND MEDIA ACTIVISM:

Disability rights advocacy and media activism play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes, promoting inclusivity, and creating opportunities for specially-abled women in the media.

Initiatives	Impact
Awareness campaigns	Increased public consciousness about disability issues
Representation demands and lobbying	Pressure for more inclusive media representation
Disability-led media organizations	Creation of platforms for self-representation (Nayak, 2013)
Collaborations with mainstream media	Increased inclusion and accurate portrayal (Mulholland, 2000)

Table 4.2: Impact of Disability Rights Advocacy and Media Activism

The table highlights the positive impact of disability rights advocacy and media activism in challenging existing norms and promoting greater representation and inclusivity for specially-abled women in the media.

4.3 POTENTIALS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE AND PROGRESS:

Despite the difficulties, there are chances for good change and advancement in the media's portrayal of women with disabilities. The possibility for progress and inclusion is examined in the below table.

Opportunities	Potential Impact
Inclusive casting and diverse hiring	Authentic representation and increased visibility (Joseph, 2006)
Disability-inclusive storytelling	Empowering narratives that challenge stereotypes
Collaboration with disability activists and organizations	Accurate representation and promotion of disability rights (Joseph, 2006)
Training and awareness programs	Improved understanding and sensitivity towards disability issues (Mulholland, 2000)
Policy and regulation changes	Guidelines for inclusive representation in the media (Joseph, 2006)

Table 4.3: Potential for Positive Change in Media Representation

The table emphasizes the potential influence of inclusive practices, partnerships, and legislative modifications in creating positive change and advancement in the portrayal of women with disabilities in the media.

Despite difficulties and restrictions, there are prospects for progress due to the promotion of disability rights (Emmett, 2006), media activism (Joseph, 2006), and the possibility of a paradigm shift.

V. RECOMMENDATION FOR INCLUSIVE MEDIA REPRESENTATION

To address the challenges and promote inclusive media representation of specially-abled women in India. This section presents a set of recommendations for media organizations, content creators, disability rights organizations, policymakers, and regulatory bodies.

5.1 STATEGIES FOR MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTENT CREATORS:

Strategies	Description
Increase representation of specially-abled women	Ensure diverse and authentic portrayals of specially-abled women in media content (Emmett, 2006)
Create multidimensional characters with disabilities	Develop complex and relatable characters that challenge stereotypes (Joseph, 2006)
Provide opportunities for disabled actors and creators	Encourage casting, hiring, and collaboration with disabled individuals (Emmett, 2006)
Foster collaboration with disability-led organizations	Partner with disability rights organizations to ensure accurate representation (Joseph, 2006)
Promote disability-inclusive storytelling	Highlight disability experiences and perspectives in narratives (Mulholland, 2000)
Implement accessibility measures in media productions	Make media content accessible for audiences with disabilities (Parsons, 2017)

Table 5.1: Strategies for Media Organizations and Content Creators

These methods seek to develop an inclusive and varied media environment that fairly reflects women with disabilities and offers them significant career chances.

5.2 COLLABORATION WITH DISABILITY RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVISTS:

Collaborative Initiatives	Description
Consultation with disability rights organizations	Seek guidance and feedback from organizations working for disability rights (Joseph, 2006)
Co-creation of media content	Involve disabled individuals and organizations in the development process (Mulholland, 2000)
Joint awareness campaigns	Collaborate on campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity (Parsons, 2017)
Establish partnerships for advocacy and representation	Work together to advocate for accurate and inclusive media representation (Dawn, 2021)

Table 5.2: Collaboration with Disability Rights Organizations and Activists

Collaboration with disability rights organizations and activists ensures that the voices and perspectives of specially-abled women are central to the media portrayal process (Joseph, 2006).

5.3 SENSITIZATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS:

Programs	Description
Disability awareness workshops	Increase the understanding of specially-abled people's issues and promote inclusivity (Joseph, 2006)
Sensitization programs for content creators	Educate writers, directors, and producers on proper representation (Parsons, 2017)
Training on accessible media production	Improve skills in creating accessible content for diverse audiences, including the specially-abled women (Joseph, 2006)

Table 5.3: Sensitization and Training Programs

These programs facilitate a better understanding of disability, encourage sensitivity, and equip media professionals with the necessary skills to create inclusive content.

5.4 POLICY AND REGULATORY INTERVENTIONS:

Policy and Regulatory Measures	Description
Guidelines for inclusive representation in media	Develop and enforce guidelines that promote accurate and diverse portrayal of disability (Emmett, 2006)
Incentives for inclusive casting and production practices	Provide incentives to encourage media organizations to prioritize inclusive practices (Joseph, 2006)
Accessibility regulations for media content	Mandate accessibility features in media productions to ensure inclusivity for all (Joseph, 2006)

Table 5.4: Policy and Regulatory Interventions

By establishing norms and rewarding inclusive behaviors, policy and regulatory interventions play a significant role in ensuring inclusive media coverage.

By putting these suggestions into practice, the media sector may encourage a more truthful and inclusive portrayal of women with disabilities, dispels prejudices, and give them chances for meaningful engagement in the media environment.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research article has illuminated the current media portrayal of women with disabilities in India, highlighting the dominant narratives, difficulties, and consequences for their inclusion and empowerment. The research reveals a troubling trend of misrepresentation, underrepresentation, and stereotyping of women with disabilities across a range of media, including television, movies, advertisements, and online venues.

Despite recent improvements, the total proportion of representation is still low, perpetuating prejudices and preventing the empowerment of women with disabilities. Nevertheless, there are chances for advancement and good transformation. Hope for a more inclusive and varied media environment is offered by media activism, disability rights advocacy, and prospective improvement opportunities (Mulholland, 2000).

A list of suggestions is offered to solve the issues and support inclusive media depiction of specially-abled women. Increased representation, multidimensional characters, opportunities for disabled actors and creators, collaboration with disability-led organizations, disability-inclusive storytelling, and the use of accessibility features in media productions should all be priorities for media organizations and content creators.

Collaboration with disability rights groups and activists is essential because it makes sure that the media depiction process prioritizes the opinions and viewpoints of specially-abled women. Sensitization and training programs for media professionals, such as workshops on disability awareness, programs for content creators, and instruction on producing accessible media, can improve understanding, encourage inclusivity, and give professionals the skills they need (Mulholland, 2000).

Interventions in policy and regulation are also important for advancing diverse media representation. Incentives for inclusive casting and production techniques, guidelines for inclusive representation in media, and accessibility rules for media material may all help to create standards, promote inclusive behavior, and guarantee accessible for everyone.

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