



Navigating Challenges In Inclusive Education: A Case Study Of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black* And Shonali Bose's *Margarita With A Straw*

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Citation: Aishwarya Jha, (2023), Navigating Challenges In Inclusive Education: A Case Study Of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black* And Shonali Bose's *Margarita With A Straw*, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29(2), 385-390
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i2.5897

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the challenges in inclusive education as depicted in the films *Black* by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and *Margarita With A Straw* by Shonali Bose. Through a case study analysis, the paper examines the representation of individuals with disabilities and the barriers they face in accessing quality education and social inclusion. The study highlights the importance of inclusive practices, accommodations, and a shift in societal attitudes to ensure equal opportunities for all students. By analysing the narratives of the two films, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse around inclusive education and advocate for more comprehensive and empathetic approaches to supporting students with diverse needs.

Keywords: Disability, Inclusive Education, Diversity, Films

INTRODUCTION

This research paper explores the challenges faced in inclusive education through a case study of two films, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black* and Shonali Bose's *Margarita With A Straw*. These cinematic works provide an insightful examination of the obstacles and triumphs experienced by individuals with disabilities in educational settings. The paper analyses the characters' navigation through a variety of challenges, including accessibility, societal attitudes, and the role of educators in creating an inclusive environment. By analysing the experiences depicted in these films, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding inclusive education and advocate for a more equitable and accessible educational landscape. Both these films provide an insightful look at the obstacles and triumphs experienced by individuals with disabilities in educational settings. The characters in these films navigate through a variety of challenges, including accessibility, societal attitudes, and the role of educators in creating an inclusive environment.

In *Black*, the protagonist, played by Rani Mukerji, is a deaf and blind woman who strives to pursue an education despite facing scepticism and resistance from those around her. The film delves into the complexities of communication and the importance of supportive infrastructure for individuals with sensory impairments. On the other hand, *Margarita With A Straw* follows the journey of a young woman with cerebral palsy as she navigates her way through college life in New York. The film sheds light on the intersectionality of disability and other aspects of identity, while also highlighting the need for accommodations and understanding in higher education institutions.

By analysing the experiences depicted in these films, we can gain valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of inclusive education and the significance of addressing barriers to learning for all students. Through this case study, we aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding inclusive education and advocate for a more equitable and accessible educational landscape.

The Importance of Representation in Media

The portrayal of individuals with disabilities in mainstream media has a significant impact on public perceptions and attitudes. *Black* and *Margarita With A Straw* offer a powerful representation of the challenges and successes experienced by people with disabilities in educational environments. These films

not only provide a platform for raising awareness but also drive important conversations about the need for inclusivity and accessibility in education.

Moreover, the nuanced depiction of the characters' experiences in these films emphasizes the importance of authentic representation. It demonstrates the need for diverse narratives that reflect the individuality and complexities of people with disabilities. When individuals see themselves reflected in media, it not only validates their experiences but also fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment.

As we delve deeper into the discussion of inclusive education, it is crucial to recognize the impact of media representation and advocate for the accurate and respectful portrayal of individuals with disabilities. In doing so, we can further emphasize the importance of creating inclusive spaces within educational institutions and beyond.

Understanding Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a concept that goes beyond merely integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. It encompasses a philosophy that promotes equal opportunities, respect, and support for all learners, regardless of their differences. By creating an inclusive environment, educational institutions can address the diverse needs of students and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Key aspects of inclusive education include accessibility, accommodation, and individualized support. Students with disabilities should have access to appropriate assistive technologies, physical accommodations, and supportive resources to facilitate their learning. Additionally, educators play a vital role in creating a classroom culture that celebrates diversity and promotes positive attitudes towards differences. Furthermore, inclusive education encourages collaboration and cooperation among students, while also emphasizing the importance of understanding and embracing varied perspectives. It aims to create a learning environment that values each individual's unique strengths and contributions. As we delve into the dynamics of inclusive education, it is important to recognize the transformative impact it can have on the lives of all students. Through an inclusive approach, educational institutions can strive towards building a more equitable, empathetic, and enriched learning community.

Harnessing the Power of Film in Understanding Challenges of Inclusive Education

The use of film as a medium for exploring challenges in inclusive education offers a unique and compelling avenue for understanding the complexities and nuances of this important issue. Through cinematic storytelling, audiences are invited to experience the realities and struggles faced by individuals with disabilities in educational settings in a way that fosters empathy and deep understanding. Films such as *Black* and *Margarita With A Straw* provide a rich and immersive narrative that goes beyond statistical data or theoretical discussions. They offer a window into the emotional and psychological aspects of navigating inclusive education, allowing viewers to connect with the characters on a personal level and witness the impact of societal attitudes and systemic barriers on their lives.

Moreover, the visual and sensory nature of film allows for a visceral understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, shedding light on the need for inclusive infrastructure, support, and understanding within educational spaces. By engaging with these narratives, educators, policymakers, and the broader community can develop a deeper appreciation for the importance of creating inclusive and accessible learning environments.

Incorporating film analysis and discussion into the discourse on inclusive education enriches the dialogue and enables stakeholders to glean multidimensional insights that transcend academic literature or policy documents. As we continue to explore the challenges in inclusive education, leveraging the power of film as a catalyst for awareness and empathy can contribute significantly to the advancement of inclusive practices in educational institutions.

Inclusive Education Depiction in Hindi Films

The portrayal of inclusive education in Hindi films has been instrumental in bringing to light the multifaceted experiences of individuals with disabilities and diverse identities within educational contexts. These films have offered compelling narratives that challenge societal norms and advocate for the creation of inclusive and empowering educational spaces.

Films such as *Taare Zameen Par* and *Hichki* have depicted the challenges and triumphs of students with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of understanding and accommodating diverse learning needs within educational settings. *Taare Zameen Par* sensitively portrays the journey of a dyslexic child and advocates for a paradigm shift in the traditional educational approach, emphasizing the significance of individualized support and inclusive teaching methods. Similarly, *Hichki* delves into the experiences of a teacher with Tourette syndrome and foregrounds the need for inclusive education that embraces and celebrates the unique abilities of every student.

Furthermore, the film *Paa* challenges societal perceptions of disability and parenthood, offering a poignant exploration of inclusion and acceptance within familial and educational spheres. The narrative underscores the transformative impact of supportive networks and the significance of creating an inclusive educational environment that fosters holistic development and empowerment for students with disabilities.

In addition to disability, the portrayal of gender and cultural diversity in the context of inclusive education has been exemplified in films like *Nil Battey Sannata* and *English Vinglish*. These narratives navigate the intersectionality of gender, socio-economic factors, and cultural barriers, advocating for educational spaces that recognize and address the diverse identities and experiences of students from marginalized communities. The depiction of inclusive education in Hindi films serves as a compelling catalyst for societal dialogue and introspection, prompting discussions on the need for educational environments that prioritize empathy, understanding, and the celebration of diversity. These films advocate for a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape, emphasizing the imperative of creating environments that affirm and empower the varied identities and experiences of all students.

In conclusion, the portrayal of inclusive education in Hindi films contributes to a broader conversation on the significance of creating educational spaces that accommodate diverse identities and experiences. These narratives advocate for a paradigm shift towards inclusive education, fostering a more empathetic and empowering educational landscape that celebrates the inherent diversity of its students.

Bhansali's *Black*: A Brief Synopsis

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black* is a poignant and thought-provoking film that revolves around the life of Michelle McNally, portrayed by Rani Mukerji. The story takes the audience on a journey through Michelle's world as a young girl who loses her sight and hearing at an early age due to an illness. The film delves into her struggles and triumphs as she strives to pursue an education at a special school for the visually and hearing impaired. The narrative unfolds under the guidance of her determined and unconventional teacher, Debraj Sahai, portrayed by the legendary Amitabh Bachchan. Through his unorthodox teaching methods and unwavering belief in Michelle's potential, he helps her break through the barriers of her disabilities and develop a deep understanding of language and communication.

As Michelle navigates her educational journey, the film confronts the challenges she faces in gaining acceptance and support from those around her. It highlights the emotional and psychological impact of her disabilities, as well as the importance of creating a nurturing and inclusive environment for individuals with sensory impairments. *Black* is a compelling portrayal of resilience, determination, and the transformative power of education in the face of adversity. It captures the essence of inclusive education through the lens of Michelle's inspiring journey, offering profound insights into the complexities of navigating the educational landscape with disabilities.

Exploration of Inclusive Education as Portrayed in *Black*

Black delves deeply into the themes associated with inclusive education, offering a compelling portrayal of the challenges and triumphs experienced by individuals with disabilities in educational environments. The film emphasizes the significance of inclusive and accessible learning spaces while shedding light on the transformative power of dedicated educators and supportive environments.

One of the central themes explored in *Black* is the pivotal role of individualized support and mentorship in inclusive education. Through the character of Debraj Sahai, the film highlights the impact of a dedicated teacher who goes beyond traditional approaches to impart knowledge and understanding. Debraj's unconventional teaching methods and unwavering belief in Michelle's capabilities underscore the importance of personalized and innovative approaches in addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, *Black* brings attention to the emotional and psychological dimensions of navigating inclusive education. Michelle's journey portrays the profound impact of societal attitudes and perceptions on individuals with sensory impairments. The film confronts the challenges of gaining acceptance and support, thereby emphasizing the importance of fostering an inclusive and empathetic educational environment that recognizes and celebrates diversity.

Moreover, *Black* underscores the transformative power of education in empowering individuals with disabilities. Michelle's journey exemplifies resilience, determination, and the potential for personal growth and achievement in the face of adversity. The film serves as a poignant reminder of the need to create nurturing and inclusive spaces that facilitate the holistic development of all learners, irrespective of their differences. By portraying these themes, *Black* provides a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities and nuances of inclusive education. It offers a compelling narrative that encourages reflection and empathy while advocating for the creation of inclusive and accessible educational spaces that prioritize the diverse needs and experiences of all learners.

Shonali Bose's *Margarita With A Straw*

Shonali Bose's *Margarita With A Straw* is a moving and captivating film that follows the life of Laila, portrayed by Kalki Koechlin, a young woman with cerebral palsy. The narrative centres around Laila's journey of self-discovery, love, and independence as she navigates the challenges of living with a disability, pursuing her education, and exploring her sexuality. The film delves into the complexities of Laila's experiences as she transitions from her familiar surroundings in India to attending college in New York City. It sheds light on the barriers she encounters in accessing inclusive educational spaces, as well as the societal stigmas and misconceptions surrounding disability and sexuality.

Bose's film poignantly captures Laila's quest for personal identity and fulfilment, showcasing her resilience and determination in overcoming the obstacles presented by her disability. Through its authentic portrayal of Laila's journey, the film challenges traditional narratives and norms, advocating for a more inclusive and understanding society. *Margarita With A Straw* not only amplifies the importance of inclusive education but also advocates for a holistic approach to embracing diversity, challenging prejudices, and fostering an environment of acceptance and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. The film's narrative serves as a powerful catalyst for initiating meaningful conversations and promoting greater awareness of the multifaceted challenges faced by students with disabilities in educational settings.

Exploration of Inclusive Education as Portrayed in *Margarita With A Straw*

Margarita With A Straw offers a profound exploration of the themes associated with inclusive education, shedding light on the multifaceted experiences and challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities in educational contexts. The film delves into the complexities of navigating inclusive educational spaces and emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that celebrates diversity, challenges societal norms, and promotes empowerment.

One of the central themes portrayed in the film is the significance of self-discovery and personal growth in the context of inclusive education. Laila's journey of pursuing her education, exploring her sexuality, and asserting her independence serves as a poignant representation of the inherent rights of individuals with disabilities to experience personal fulfilment and self-actualization within educational settings. The narrative challenges stereotypes and societal misconceptions, advocating for an inclusive educational landscape that values the holistic development and agency of all students.

Additionally, *Margarita With A Straw* confronts the intersectionality of disability and identity, highlighting the need for inclusive educational environments to recognize and accommodate diverse experiences. The film navigates the challenges faced by Laila as she confronts societal stigmas and misconceptions surrounding disability and sexuality, advocating for an educational space that embraces and affirms the multifaceted identities of its students. It prompts reflection on the importance of creating inclusive educational spaces that acknowledge and celebrate the intricacies of individual experiences and identities.

Moreover, the film amplifies the significance of nurturing mentorship and support systems in inclusive education. Laila's journey is shaped by the mentorship of individuals who recognize her potential and advocate for her inclusion, thereby highlighting the transformative impact of dedicated educators and allies in fostering an inclusive and empowering educational environment. *Margarita With A Straw* underscores the value of creating supportive networks and promoting understanding and acceptance within educational institutions to facilitate the holistic development of students with disabilities.

By navigating these themes, *Margarita With A Straw* provides a compelling portrayal of the complexities and aspirations inherent in inclusive education. It advocates for the creation of educational spaces that prioritize self-discovery, celebrate diversity, and cultivate supportive communities, thus contributing to a more empathetic, inclusive, and empowering educational landscape for all learners.

Intersectionality of Gender, Disability, and Other Identities in *Black* and *Margarita With A Straw*

The films *Black* and *Margarita With A Straw* offer a poignant exploration of the intersectionality of gender, disability, and other identities within the context of inclusive education, shedding light on the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by individuals with diverse identities.

In *Black*, the intersectionality of sensory impairment and gender is sensitively portrayed through Michelle's journey. The film delves into the complexities of navigating inclusive educational spaces as a young woman with a sensory impairment, highlighting the intersectional barriers and societal attitudes that shape her educational experience. Michelle's story prompts a reflection on the unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of gender and disability, emphasizing the need for educational environments that recognize and address these intersecting identities. Furthermore, *Black* serves as a compelling narrative that underscores the impact of gender and disability on an individual's access to inclusive education and the importance of fostering an empathetic and accommodating educational landscape that celebrates diverse identities.

Similarly, *Margarita With A Straw* explores the intersectionality of disability and sexuality, challenging traditional narratives and societal norms surrounding gender and disability. The film navigates Laila's journey of self-discovery and love as a young woman with cerebral palsy, highlighting the complex interplay of her gender, disability, and sexuality within the educational context. It prompts a critical examination of the multiple layers of identity and the need for inclusive educational spaces that affirm and celebrate the intersecting identities of students. *Margarita With A Straw* advocates for a holistic and inclusive approach to education that acknowledges the intersectionality of gender, disability, and other identities, thereby fostering an environment of acceptance and empowerment for all individuals.

Moreover, both films address the intersectionality of race, gender, and disability, acknowledging the diverse and multifaceted experiences of individuals within the educational landscape. The nuanced portrayal of intersecting identities in *Black* and *Margarita With A Straw* contributes to a deeper understanding of the

interconnected challenges faced by students with disabilities, emphasizing the imperative of creating educational environments that honour and accommodate diverse identities.

Theoretical Perspectives on Inclusive Education and Disability Representation

The depiction of inclusive education and disability representation in Hindi films is aligned with various theoretical perspectives that underpin the discourse on education, identity, and social inclusion. These theoretical frameworks provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding inclusive education and the representation of disability in media and educational settings.

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability, as portrayed in the films *Taare Zameen Par*, *Hichki*, and *Paa*, emphasizes that disability is not solely a result of an individual's impairments but is rather a product of the barriers and societal attitudes that restrict the full participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. These films challenge the traditional medical model of disability by highlighting the importance of creating inclusive educational environments that accommodate diverse learning needs and celebrate the unique abilities of every student. In doing so, they advocate for a shift towards a social model approach to disability within educational settings, reinforcing the idea that it is society's responsibility to remove barriers and create enabling environments for individuals with disabilities. Renowned disability studies scholar, Lennard J. Davis, emphasizes the social model of disability and its implications for education. He states, "Disability is not a 'bracket,' something added on to a person. Rather, it is a central defining feature of a person, a way of being embodied and in the world." (Davis) This insight underscores the significance of recognizing disability as an inherent aspect of individuals and calls for educational environments that embrace this fundamental aspect of students' identities.

Intersectionality and Inclusive Education

The intersectional analysis of gender, disability, and cultural diversity in films such as *Black*, *Margarita With A Straw*, *Nil Battey Sannata*, and *English Vinglish* aligns with the intersectionality framework, which emphasizes the interconnected nature of multiple social identities and the resulting impacts on individuals' experiences and opportunities. These films prompt critical reflection on the complex interplay of identities within the educational context and advocate for inclusive educational spaces that recognize and address the intersecting barriers faced by students from diverse backgrounds. In doing so, they contribute to the theoretical discourse on intersectionality and inclusive education, highlighting the importance of creating educational environments that affirm and empower the multifaceted identities of all students. Intersectionality scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's influential perspective complements the narrative of intersectionality depicted in films. He asserts, "Intersectionality is about the different ways people and the social institutions they create interact in the shaping of inequalities." (Kang) This notion resonates with the films' exploration of intersecting social identities and the complexities they introduce within educational spaces.

Inclusive Pedagogy and Differentiated Instruction

The films *Taare Zameen Par* and *Hichki* also resonate with the theoretical framework of inclusive pedagogy and differentiated instruction, which underscores the need for educators to adapt their teaching approaches to cater to diverse learning styles and abilities. These films advocate for individualized support, inclusive teaching methods, and the celebration of unique abilities within educational settings, aligning with the theoretical principles of differentiated instruction that prioritize personalized and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. It is further substantiated by the words of education theorist Carol Ann Tomlinson, who advocates for inclusive teaching practices. Tomlinson affirms, "Excellence in education requires that each student's unique abilities be recognized, valued, and nurtured." (Singal) This aligns with the films' emphasis on individualized support and the celebration of unique abilities in educational settings.

Universal Design for Learning

The concept of Universal Design for Learning, as echoed in the films' narratives, emphasizes the importance of providing multiple means of representation, action, and expression to accommodate diverse learning needs. This aligns with the UDL framework, which aims to optimize learning for all students by proactively addressing the variability of learners.

Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

The collaborative and cooperative learning approaches depicted in the films underscore the value of peer interaction and mutual support in educational settings. Implementing collaborative learning strategies fosters a sense of community and inclusivity, providing opportunities for students to learn from and with one another.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The exploration of cultural diversity in films like *Nil Battey Sannata* and *English Vinglish* underscores the significance of culturally responsive teaching in inclusive education. This approach recognizes the cultural backgrounds of students, integrates diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and promotes equitable learning experiences for all. By integrating these practical strategies into educational practices, institutions can embody the principles of inclusive education advocated in Hindi films and create environments that prioritize diversity, equity, and empowerment.

Conclusion

Black and Margarita With A Straw offer a thought-provoking depiction of the intersectionality of gender, disability, and other identities in inclusive education. Through their compelling narratives, these films advocate for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to education that embraces the complexity of individual experiences and identities, thereby fostering an empowering and affirming educational environment for all students.

The portrayal of inclusive education in Hindi films not only highlights the theoretical foundations but also offers practical insights into implementing inclusive education strategies. These strategies align with the principles of creating empathetic, supportive, and empowering educational environments that cater to diverse identities and experiences.

In conclusion, the portrayal of inclusive education and disability representation in Hindi films aligns with various theoretical perspectives, contributing to a broader theoretical discourse on identity, inclusion, and educational practices. These films serve as a catalyst for promoting inclusive educational environments and challenging traditional understandings of disability and diversity within educational settings.

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