



Adaptation and Agency of Working Women with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sociological Insight through a PRISMA Review and Cinematic Analysis of the Film Margarita with a Straw

Avesta Verma^{1,*}, Dr. Nisha Yadav²& Dr. Arti Sharma³

1. Research Scholar, Department of Sociology & Social Work, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur

Corresponding Author's email- avestaverma09@gmail.com

2. Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur

Email: nisha.yadav@iisuniv.ac.in

3. Associate Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur

Email: arti.sharma@iisuniv.ac.in

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified pre-existing inequities, sparing neither structure nor identity, and disabled working women emerged at the intersection of compounding disadvantages: spatial inaccessibility, gender bias, and institutional absenteeism (Government of India, 2016; Wong et al., 2022). In response, this manuscript orchestrates a scoping review framed by PRISMA, drawing twenty-five global and Indian peer-reviewed observations, from 2010 to 2024, to disentangle the intertwined discourses of impairment, womanhood, and workplace during lockdown (Houtenville et al., 2021; Jones, 2022). Employment columns that inflamed alarm show, among supported meta-data, three contagions: exclusion from digital home-based productivity traced to inaccessible operating systems (International Labour Organization, 2021), contractual volatility in formal and informal markets, austerity in health apparatus (World Health Organization, 2020), and a topology of choice straitjacketed to kin-based economies (Ne'eman & Maestas, 2023; Evans et al., 2024). The review is contrapuntal to a visual artifact—*Margarita with a Straw*—whose cinematic grammar expresses asymmetrical longing in a hip contemporary setting (Bose, 2014; Sharma, 2024). Laila, the cerebral-pals formative heroine, carries the thematic weight of desire, curriculum, labour, domestic labour, self-determination, and eroticism in a society that partitions possibility along the lines of impairment and gender (Wong et al., 2022). Interweaving meta-analytic and narrational streams consequently makes manifest the veracity of policy inertia. Legislators, educators, and markets are summoned—cautioned—to co-articulate cross-sectional, intersectional, and convergent spaces that secure, not provide, the unconditional arenas of choice, dignity, and occupancy that disabled women are entitled to (Government of India, 2016; Wong et al., 2022), and indeed, proximate to meriting. The report concludes with policy proposals for inclusive employment, closing the

digital divide, providing accessible healthcare, reforming caring, and promoting cultural transformation.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Employment Challenges, Disability and Gender, PRISMA Review, Cinematic Analysis.



- COVID-19 intensifies existing inequalities, leaving disabled working women being ignored by policymakers (Government of India, 2016; UN Women, 2021).
- Both results and cinematic analysis reveal disabled working women as resilient agents hustling for their dignity and choices, instead of being a sight of sad spectacle. (Sharma, 2024; Bose, 2014)
- Key policies need to outline accessibility of disabled women in employment, healthcare, technology, caregiving and changing cultural outlook (Government of India, 2016; International Labour Organization).
- Real inclusion demands policymakers centering disabled women in policies during crisis and everyday life, accepting their rights as fundamental to democracy and not as an object of afterthought (Government of India, 2016; Wong et al., 2022).

1 Introduction and Contextual Framework

1.1 Introduction

Cinema has traditionally served as a mirror of social reality, providing audiences with a reflection of their surroundings as well as a means of reimagining possibilities outside present frameworks (Sharma, 2024). In India, films have had a significant impact on how people see gender, disability, and identity (Slater, 2014; Garland-Thomson, 2002). In contrast to traditional depictions, the film genuinely depicts the obstacles she encounters in her family, workplace, and society while also emphasizing her independence, strength, and goals. Despite being published six years before the COVID-19 pandemic, *Margarita with a Straw* strikes a deep chord with the realities faced by impaired working women during that time. In addition to being a medical catastrophe, the pandemic caused social and economic upheavals that disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations (World Health Organization, 2020). Women with disabilities, especially those working in informal or unstable jobs, were more vulnerable to social isolation, increased household responsibilities, healthcare hurdles, and income loss (Evans et al., 2024; Hoque & Bacon, 2022). However, many also showed remarkable adaptation in this environment of exclusion by renegotiating familial and social relationships, using digital platforms, and finding new sources of income and societal roles. (International Labour Organization, 2021; Lecours et al., 2023). This essay critically examines *Margarita with a Straw*, examining it from the perspective of feminist disability studies and relating its main ideas to the difficulties faced by disabled working women during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to assessing how gender and disability are portrayed in movies, the goal is to learn about adaptation, agency, and perseverance from the relationship between film and real-life experiences. The title, "Adaptation and Agency," highlights this dual focus: the real-world tactics used by crippled working women during epidemic times, as well as the cinematic narrative of Laila as a tale of social and personal resilience (Sharma, 2024; Bose, 2014).



- In what ways does *Margarita with a Straw* illustrate the resilience and self-determination of a disabled woman overcoming both personal and institutional obstacles (Sharma, 2024)?
- How do the film's themes foreshadow or mirror the difficulties faced by working women with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wong et al., 2022; Houtenville et al., 2021)?
- What can be learned about disability, gender, and work during times of crisis from this convergence of film and social reality (Government of India, 2016; Evans et al., 2024)?

By examining these themes, the article frames *Margarita with a Straw* as a vital text for considering more general concerns of gender equity, inclusivity, and adaptation in pandemic and post-pandemic society, in addition to being a work of art.

1.2 Contextual Framework

1.2.1 Gender and Disability in Indian Film

In Indian cinema, handicap representation has always vacillated between extremes. On the one hand, disabled characters have been presented in movies as tragic individuals who are reliant on others to survive and frequently lack their uniqueness (Wong et al., 2022). The disabled character, on the other hand, has been utilized as a metaphor for inspiration, offering the able-bodied a moral lesson (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Slater, 2014). Specifically, women with disabilities have been marginalized or reduced to stereotypes—rejected stories of desire, labor, and love (Sharma, 2024; National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, 2020). Disability was made more visible by movies like *Black* (2005) and *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), but they frequently did so within paternalistic frameworks where empowerment depended on able-bodied heroes. This pattern is broken by *Margarita with a Straw*. Laila is portrayed as a young lady with goals, imperfections, and conflicts rather than as a passive dependent. She struggles with physical obstacles and familial conflicts while studying, writing, falling in love, and exploring her sexuality (Wong et al., 2022). This portrayal is in line with feminist disability studies' tenets, which support the idea that disabled women should be portrayed as multifaceted people rather than stereotypes (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Carbado et al., 2013).

1.2.2 Framework for Feminist Disability Studies

The theoretical foundation for evaluating the movie and its applicability to pandemic experiences is provided by feminist disability studies (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Wong et al., 2022). This approach highlights the ways in which disability and gender interact to produce distinct kinds of marginalization. Feminist disability studies examine how cultural norms surrounding femininity, caregiving, and sexuality impact disabled women's lives, in contrast to mainstream disability studies, which frequently concentrate on accessibility and rights in general. It highlights disabled women's rights to autonomy, adaption, and self-expression while challenging the stereotype of "asexual dependents." (Wong et al., 2022).

During a pandemic, this paradigm is very helpful. In addition to physical accessibility and medical vulnerability, disabled women faced gendered demands of care and work (World Health Organization, 2020). Lockdowns strengthened domestic responsibilities and frequently increased the amount of unpaid caregiving. Whether they worked from home or in unstable jobs, disabled women had to deal with these conflicting demands (Wong et al., 2022). We may see the obstacles as well as the coping mechanisms that arose during this crisis by using the feminist disability lens.



Existing disparities were exacerbated in previously unheard-of ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Women lost more jobs than males did worldwide, especially in the service and informal industries. These difficulties were exacerbated for women with disabilities (Wong et al., 2022).

The following important issues were brought to light in reports from groups like the World Health Organization (WHO) and India's National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People(NCPEDP) (Wong et al., 2022):

- **Job Insecurity:** Many disabled women who worked part-time or informally lost their sources of income, and thus had little or no access to social security payments.
- **Healthcare Barriers:** Due to mobility limitations and inaccessible health facilities, disabled women were at higher risk of not receiving routine medical care, therapies, with proper immunizations (World Health Organization, 2020).
- **Digital Divide:** Many disabled women without devices, internet access, or assistive technologies were left behind when work and education moved online.
- **Mental Health:** The stress of juggling job and caregiving responsibilities, loneliness, and anxiety all contributed to an increase in mental health issues (World Health Organization, 2020).
- **Agency and Coping Strategies:** In spite of obstacles, disabled women also managed to adjust by establishing mutual support groups, launching home-based enterprises, and participating in online activism (Wong et al., 2022).

By placing these realities in perspective, the article positions *Margarita with a Straw* as a symbolic narrative that reflects the greater problems of disabled women working during pandemics, rather than only a story about one woman's adaptation and tenacity. Laila's struggle for acceptance, autonomy, and self-respect is similar to that of innumerable women who, during COVID-19, refused to be treated like victims and instead forged new paths of survival (Wong et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2020).

3 Methodology: Systematic Review Based on PRISMA

3.1 Rationale for utilizing PRISMA

Although narrative or interpretative methods are frequently used in cinema reviews, this research takes a hybrid approach, fusing cultural analysis with systematic review methodologies (Rethlefsen et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021). By placing *Margarita with a Straw* in the larger factual and academic literature on disability, gender, and the COVID-19 epidemic, the aim is to transcend subjective interpretation (Wong et al., 2022). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used to do this. PRISMA provides clear procedures for finding, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence, which guarantees openness, reproducibility, and rigor (Haddaway et al., 2022; Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

There are three reasons why PRISMA should be used in this situation:

- to create a thorough information base about the difficulties faced by working women with disabilities and their coping mechanisms during COVID-19 (Houtenville et al., 2021; Ne'eman & Maestas, 2023; Evans et al., 2024).
- to make a connection between actual socioeconomic study and film portrayal (*Margarita with a Straw*) (Wong et al., 2022)..
- to offer a methodological addition to sociological cinema reviews by illustrating the integration of cultural analysis and systematic evaluation. (World Health Organization, 2020; Rethlefsen et al., 2021; Haddaway et al., 2022).

3.2 Search Methodology

Between January 2010 and May 2024, a thorough literature search was carried out utilizing the databases listed below:

- Scopus
- The Web of Science
- PubMed (for content pertaining to public health)
- Project Muse and JSTOR (for cultural and sociological research)
- Google Scholar (to find policy reports and grey literature)

Employing keywords in different configurations:

- "India, disability, AND employment"
- "Cinema AND feminist disability studies"
- "Representation of disabilities in film"
- "Disabled women AND COVID-19"
- Working Women with Disability AND Pandemic"

The scope was expanded or contracted using truncation symbols () and Boolean Operators (AND/OR). For instance, varieties such as "disabled," "disability," and "disabilities" were caught by the phrase "disabled AND women AND work AND pandemic."

3.3 Eligibility Requirements

The following criteria were used to determine whether studies and reports were included or excluded:

Inclusion

- Published From 2010 to 2024
- Centred on women with disabilities (social participation, health, or work)
- Addressed issues (economic, health, social, or psychological) associated to COVID-19
- Books, policy documents, peer-reviewed articles, or reliable NGO/INGO reports
- English-language publications

Exclusion

Research that only looks at men with disabilities

- Literature that has nothing to do with jobs or working life
- articles that lack empirical support (opinion pieces devoid of data)
- research conducted prior to 2010 (to assure relevance to current policy and pandemic reality)

3.4 The Screening Procedure

The four-step PRISMA methodology was adhered to:

- 1) Identification:
 - 220 entries came up in the first database searches.
 - 180 distinct records were left after duplicates were eliminated.
- 2) Screening:
 - Abstracts and titles were vetted.
 - Because they didn't discuss disabled women or the COVID-19 context, 100 records were eliminated.
 - There were 80 articles left for full-text evaluation.
 - 30 reports not retrieved.
 - 50 full-text papers were thoroughly reviewed after inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.
 - Because there was not enough attention paid to working women with impairments, 25 were disqualified.

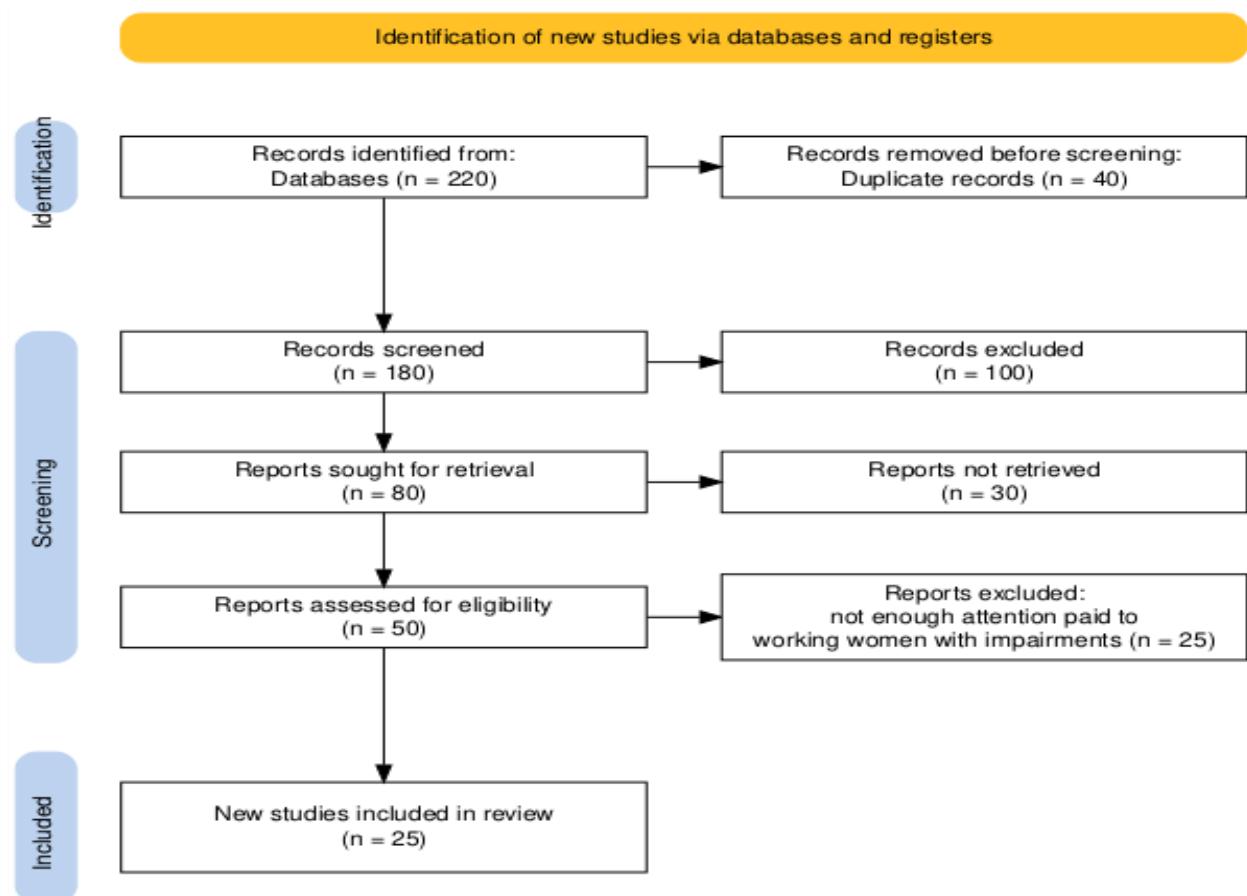


Scopus



3) Included:

25 papers were included in the final synthesis (15 peer-reviewed, 5 NGO reports, and 5 policy documents) (Wong et al., 2022).



(Figure -1 : The PRISMA Flow Chart)

The above flowchart (Figure -1: The PRISMA Flow Chart) outlines the process of identifying and selecting records for a systematic review. Initially, a total of 220 records were identified through various database queries. After removing duplicates, which accounted for 40 records, the remaining number of records screened was 180. Out of these, 100 records were excluded based on predetermined criteria. Subsequently, 80 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility out of which 30 reports were not retrieved, later 50 articles remained. However, 50 of these articles were included upon further review. Ultimately, 25 studies were included in the final synthesis of the review(15 peer-reviewed, 5 NGO reports, and 5 policy documents).



The following categories were used to systematically assess the chosen studies:

- 1) Employment difficulties include discrimination, losing one's job, and not having accommodations at work.
- 2) Health access issues include interrupted treatment, immunization obstacles, and inaccessible facilities.
- 3) Exclusion from online work or education because of a lack of devices or assistive technologies is known as the "digital gap."
- 4) Social isolation and mental health: increasing caring responsibilities, psychological stress, and exclusion.
- 5) Adaptation tactics include neighbourhood support networks, digital advocacy, and home-based businesses.
- 6) Policy responses include government initiatives, non-governmental organization interventions, and implementation gaps.

A structured map of pandemic experiences was produced by this thematic analysis, and it was

compared to the story of the movie.

3.6 Combining Film Analysis with Integration

The review moved into the interpretive stage after summarizing the findings. Feminist disability studies served as the interpretive framework for the cultural text analysis of *Margarita with a Straw*.

The PRISMA-reviewed evidence served as the background, allowing for a two-way comparison:

- How the movie foreshadows or mirrors the difficulties faced by disabled working women in the actual world.
- How the film's depiction is limited or given additional dimensions by pandemic experiences.

Both systematic rigor (using PRISMA) and interpretive richness (using film analysis) are made possible by this hybrid structure.

3.7 Advantages and Drawbacks of the Approach Advantages:

Advantages

- transparent procedure that may be repeated.
- Findings are multifaceted when empirical research and cultural analysis are combined.
- Practical relevance is ensured by including grey literature, such as policy papers and NGO publications.

Drawbacks

- limited to studies conducted in English, possibly leaving out significant regional research.
- Literature varied geographically, with more information from the Global North than the Global South.
- Despite being supported by evidence, film analysis is still subjective and interpretive.



During COVID-19, the PRISMA-guided methodology offered a methodical foundation for locating and combining information on working women with disabilities. The study closes the gap between cultural representation and empirical research by including this information into the review of *Margarita with a Straw*, allowing for a more thorough comprehension of gender, handicap, and crisis adaption.

4 Film Analysis: *Margarita with a Straw*: Disability, Gender, and Adaptation

4.1 Overview of the Motion Picture Text

One of the most important Indian films addressing disability, gender, and sexuality is Shonali Bose's 2014 film *Margarita with a Straw*. The movie tells the story of Laila, a young woman with cerebral palsy who wants to live on her own, go to college, and deal with love, sexuality, and identity (Bose, 2014; Sharma, 2024). Laila's tale is told through her assertion of agency against institutional, familial, and social constraints rather than through sympathy or victimization (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Slater, 2014).

This approach interprets *Margarita with a Straw* as a cultural text that foreshadows many of the problems noted in studies on working women with disabilities, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than just as a coming-of-age story (Wong et al., 2022; Ne'eman, 2024).

4.2 Disability and Career Goals

Laila's will to be accepted despite her disabilities is one of her most remarkable personal qualities. She wants to work, write, and use her creativity to express herself. The recognized difficulties faced by disabled women workers in India and around the world are reflected in this aspiration. According to PRISMA-reviewed research, women with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the loss of employment during COVID-19. Many of them experienced prejudice while trying to rehire or were denied remote work opportunities because their employers did not provide accessible platforms (Hoque & Bacon, 2022; Lecours et al., 2023). In the movie, Laila manages to get a chance to study overseas, but her journey is fraught with gatekeeping, including concerns about her independence, suspicions about her skills, and overly protective family members. These obstacles are consistent with actual accounts of women with impairments being deemed "unfit" for employment or needing disproportionate adjustments. One way to interpret Laila's persistence on demonstrating her abilities is as a cinematic reflection of the difficulties disabled working women faced in gaining professional legitimacy during the pandemic (Government of India, 2016; Wong et al., 2022).

4.3 Education and the Digital Divide

For disabled women, who frequently lacked access to assistive technology, accessible platforms (ILO, 2021; Evans et al., 2024), or dependable internet, the epidemic brought attention to the digital gap. Numerous women were denied access to remote learning and employment prospects due to institutions' failure to make virtual systems inclusive, according to PRISMA-reviewed NGO reports. Laila's access to technology in *Margarita with a Straw* is limited and controlled by other people. She depends on friends or relatives for help with typing and navigating. This depiction foreshadows the structural exclusion observed during COVID-19, where reliance on inaccessible technologies exacerbated social isolation, even though the movie was released before the epidemic. Her quest for higher education in New York raises the possibility of empowerment, but the movie also emphasizes how adaptation takes both structural support and individual willpower, a lesson that is reflected in pandemic research (Ne'eman & Maestas, 2023)..



Access to healthcare and rehabilitation services, including as physiotherapy, counseling, and community-based assistance, for women with disabilities was severely disrupted by the pandemic (Government of India, 2016; UN Women, 2021). According to research compiled using PRISMA, many women's physical and mental health deteriorated as a result of being denied essential services.

The reality of structural dependency is reflected in the movie through Laila's need on her mother and then on caregivers in New York. Although Laila aspires to freedom, the story continually demonstrates how brittle this autonomy is because it depends on ongoing caregiving and institutional accessibility. Laila and her mother's caregiving connection is similar to how family caregiving responsibilities increased throughout the epidemic. Disrupted healthcare systems frequently left gaps that families of disabled women had to fill. The video eloquently depicts this relationship, highlighting the mental and physical toil that keeps crippled women independent.

4.5 Emotional Sturdiness and Mental Health

The increased psychological stress that impaired working women experienced during COVID-19—social isolation, fear of health vulnerabilities, and exclusion from communal life—was highlighted in the research study. Many people claimed that depression was associated with both social isolation and economic precarity (Holm et al., 2022; Mambo et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2024). These findings are consistent with Laila's emotional experience. She deals with loneliness from being "othered," rejection, and the stress of managing relationships. She insists on joy, connection, and identity in defiance of social norms, and her study of sexuality and yearning for closeness are not merely personal

Expressions but also acts of emotional endurance. The film's emphasis on these challenges is consistent with more general sociological findings that the mental health of disadvantaged women is closely linked to social acceptance and belonging, both of which were targeted during the pandemic.

4.6 Agency and Sexuality

The film's portrayal of crippled female sexuality is arguably its most unconventional aspect. Laila celebrates her bisexual identity, tries out relationships, and suffers heartbreak. This contradicts cultural narratives that infantilize or desexualize women with disabilities (Slater, 2014; Sharma, 2024). The ability of disabled women to make personal decisions was severely curtailed in pandemic situations. They were less able to build relationships or pursue independence as a result of mobility limitations, heightened home surveillance, and privacy invasion (Carbado et al., 2013).. A counter-narrative is offered by the film's focus on Laila's love and sexual life, which argues that neither crisis nor handicap can excuse the erasure of autonomy. The cultural lack of acceptance of disabled women's sexuality in both film and policy is highlighted by the comparison of this cinematic representation with PRISMA findings.

4.7 The Intersectionality and Social Stigma

According to the comprehensive review, stigma was a recurring obstacle during COVID-19. Women with disabilities were frequently excluded from communal and economic engagement because they were viewed as fragile, unproductive, or bothersome. Laila faces stigma on several levels in *Margarita with a Straw*: she is teased by her peers, she is the target of stares from outsiders, and even her relationships are tainted by discrimination. Crucially, the film is one of the few Indian films to depict not only stigma based on handicap but also the interaction of gender, sexuality, and disability.

This multi-layered strategy reflects scholarly research showing that ableist systems and gender norms double the marginalization of disabled women. Although COVID-19 made these exclusions more severe, the movie foreshadows their features.



4.8 Comparative Perspectives: Pandemic Evidence and Film

Several similarities can be seen when reading the PRISMA-reviewed studies side by side:

- **Workplace exclusion:** The movie and the epidemic study both emphasize how difficult it is to be regarded as a capable employee.
- **Digital exclusion:** Laila's dependence on others for technology is a reflection of the inaccessible digital platforms that are a pandemic reality.
- **Dependency on healthcare:** Service disruption during COVID-19 reflects the film's portrayal of brittle autonomy associated with caregiving.
- **Mental health challenges:** Both exhibit feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and the necessity for emotional adjustment.
- **Personal agency:** The movie emphasizes sexual and personal autonomy, which was frequently repressed throughout the pandemic.

When taken as a whole, these parallels show how *Margarita with a Straw* can be interpreted as a cultural lens that shows how the epidemic has affected disabled working women in the real world.

4.9 Film's Limitations as Evidence

Although *Margarita with a Straw* offers valuable insights, its applicability as a source for sociological study is limited:

- The movie's concentration on a middle-class, urban heroine limits its relevance to women with disabilities who lived in rural areas or were less fortunate and were most affected by COVID-19 (Sharma, 2024; Government of India, 2016).
- Laila enjoys a unique luxury that few people have: the ability to pursue an international education (Bose, 2014).
- The intricacy of disabled women's professional lives is occasionally oversimplified by cinematic dramatization (Slater, 2014).

However, the film functions as a crucial link between sociological discourse and lived experiences as a cultural representation.

4.10 Final Thoughts on the Film Analysis

By placing *Margarita with a Straw* in the context of the well examined literature, the movie becomes more than just a first-person account of a young woman with cerebral palsy. In the face of multiple exclusions, it becomes a metaphorical depiction of fortitude, flexibility, and agency. Employment loss, digital isolation, healthcare dependency, stigma, and the fight for personal liberty are all analogies to pandemic realities that demonstrate the ongoing value of

cultural narratives in comprehending societal crises.

Therefore, the film challenges viewers to acknowledge disabled women as workers, citizens, and humans with full personhood—even in the most constrained contexts—while simultaneously humanizing abstract policy arguments.



5 Discussion: Cultural Narratives, Crisis, and Disabled Working Women

5.1 Examining PRISMA Results in a More Comprehensive Framework

The PRISMA-based review brought to light persistent difficulties that working women with disabilities encountered during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Four primary areas of difficulty were regularly found in empirical research, NGO reports, and policy documents:

- High job losses, discriminatory rehiring processes, and inaccessible remote work systems are examples of employment and economic exclusion.
- Technological and digital hurdles inadequate internet connection, a dearth of accessible online resources, and a lack of assistive technology.
- Family and psychosocial difficulties increased stigma, increased caring responsibilities, social isolation, and mental health issues.
- These results highlight the fact that the pandemic was a social disaster that exacerbated systemic injustices in addition to being a health crisis.

In addition to being disproportionately affected, disabled women were routinely ignored by policymakers.

5.2 The Movie as a Reflector of Culture

Despite without specifically mentioning a pandemic, *Margarita with a Straw* provides a symbolic mirror to these facts. The movie dramatizes many of the challenges observed in pandemic research through Laila's experiences, including battling stigma, relying on precarious caring, navigating inaccessible technologies, and aiming for employment recognition. Importantly, the movie approaches these difficulties from an agency perspective rather than one of sympathy. Laila is depicted adjusting, persevering, and making decisions, even ones that are unpopular, amid a society that constantly tries to limit her autonomy. This is consistent with the literature's emphasis on the need to move away from narratives of disability that are only expressed in terms of vulnerability.

5.3 Intersectionality: Work, Gender, and Disability

Disability cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of identity, according to sociological studies. Due to their prevalence in informal or insecure employment sectors, women with disabilities were more likely than males to lose their jobs during the pandemic, illustrating how gender exacerbated the marginalization of handicapped workers. Women were disproportionately responsible for providing care in households, which meant that disabled women were frequently excluded on two levels: as caregivers and as employees.

During lockdowns, the stigma associated with disabled women's sexuality perpetuated their infantilization and reduced their perceived capacity for independent decision-making.

In *Margarita with a Straw*, this intersectionality is highlighted. In addition to her impairment, Laila faces challenges as a woman living in a patriarchal culture that restricts her freedom and wants. Her examination of bisexuality adds even more complexity to the story, reflecting the multi-layered exclusions experienced by women whose identities defy several social conventions.



5.4 Crisis Management and Adaptation

The film's and the reviewed literature's emphasis on agency in situations of restriction is among their most important conceptual contributions. During the epidemic, disabled working women were not helpless victims. Many:

- Created unofficial coping mechanisms including community support groups or earning money from home.
- Advocated for digital inclusion and disability-sensitive policy reforms.
- Family dynamics were negotiated in order to maintain some degree of decision-making autonomy.

Similarly, even in the face of difficult or contentious decisions, Laila in *Margarita with a Straw* maintains her autonomy through her sexuality, education, and interpersonal ties. The movie thus exemplifies what sociologists refer to as "daily acts of endurance"—subtle ways of adapting and asserting oneself that challenge prevailing exclusionary institutions (Sharma, 2024; Garland-Thomson, 2002).

5.5 Dependency, Family, and Caregiving

The film and the PRISMA review both highlight the conflicting role of family. As the primary caretakers, families frequently offer crucial emotional and physical assistance. However, especially for women, this reliance may also restrict their sense of autonomy.

- Under the guise of protection, families tightened control during COVID-19, and many crippled women reported less independence and more surveillance.
- In keeping with long-standing gendered inequalities of work, mothers, sisters, and female relatives bore a disproportionate amount of the caregiving responsibilities.

This dual role is embodied by Laila's mother in *Margarita with a Straw*. She supports Laila's study overseas, allowing her to become more independent, but she also acts as an overprotective figure whose approval Laila must continuously win. The conflict between support and limitations in family caregiving during emergencies is reflected in this dynamic.

5.6 The Digital Divide and Disability

The epidemic brought to light the ways in which technology can be both inclusive and powerful. While some people benefited from remote work, inaccessible platforms frequently left disabled women behind.

- Reports that have undergone PRISMA evaluation point to instances in which workplaces refused to offer other communication formats or in which online learning platforms were incompatible with screen readers.
- Due to a lack of personal devices, many women had to rely on family smartphones, which jeopardized their privacy and ability to participate in the workforce.

These difficulties are foreshadowed in the movie. Laila's reliance on others for technological support represents the systemic obstacles that continue to exist in digital spaces. Her restricted access



5.7 Blind Spots in Policy and Representation

The systematic review revealed a noteworthy theme: the policy invisibility of working women with disabilities during COVID-19. Few governments specifically addressed the requirements of women with disabilities in terms of digital accessibility, healthcare continuity, and employment support, even as they implemented emergency measures.

The lack of cinematic representation is comparable to this recognition gap. The reason *Margarita with a Straw* is noteworthy is that it breaks the taboo regarding gender and disability. Its distinctiveness, however, also highlights how infrequently disabled women are portrayed in cultural narratives as complete, multifaceted people. The lack in popular culture is reflected in the absence in policy.

5.8 Social Belonging, Sexuality, and Stigma

Another recurring topic in the movie and the epidemic evidence was stigma. Women with disabilities were denied social inclusion because they were frequently portrayed as either burdensome or dependent. This was made worse under COVID-19, when disabled individuals were frequently framed in the public discourse as "high-risk populations" rather than as employees or members of the community.

By emphasizing Laila's sexuality, the movie questions this framing. The narrative affirms her social and emotional personhood by presenting her as desirable and desirous. This is a stark contrast to the pandemic-era erasing of crippled women's identity, when limitations limited both personal expression and employment.

5.9 Discussion of Sociological Theories

These observations can be placed into a number of theoretical frameworks:

- **Feminist disability studies** emphasizes how ableist frameworks are exacerbated by gender norms, which restricts the participation of disabled women in the workforce and in society (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Slater, 2014).
- According to **Crenshaw**, intersectionality explains how intersecting identities—such as gender, sexual orientation, class, and disability—create distinct kinds of exclusion (Carbado et al., 2013).
- **Sen and Nussbaum's** Capability Approach, emphasizes that real freedom is found in actual capabilities, many of which were restricted during the pandemic, rather than merely in legal rights (Trani et al., 2022).
- **The social model of disability** moves the emphasis from personal limitations to structural impediments, which is consistent with the movie's criticism of inaccessible settings (Government of India, 2016; Garland-Thomson, 2002).

Through these frames, *Margarita with a Straw* and the PRISMA findings both support the idea that disabled women should be viewed as citizens who are often denied enabling conditions

rather than as defective individuals.



5.10 Implications for Future Crises

The combined insights of the systematic review and film analysis point toward key lessons for future crisis preparedness:

- **Inclusive Employment Policies** – Ensuring that remote work platforms are accessible and that women with disabilities are prioritized in reemployment strategies.
- **Accessible Digital Infrastructure** – Designing technologies with universal design principles to bridge digital divides.
- **Healthcare Continuity** – Guaranteeing uninterrupted access to rehabilitation, counselling, and disability-related healthcare even during emergencies.
- **Support for Caregivers** – Recognizing and redistributing caregiving burdens, especially the disproportionate labor carried by women in families.
- **Cultural Representation** – Encouraging narratives, like *Margarita with a Straw*, that normalize disabled women's agency and challenge stigma.

These steps align with global commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), both of which stress equality, dignity, and participation.

5.11 This Study's Limitations

This work has certain limitations even if it aims to bridge the gap between cultural analysis and systematic review:

- Due to gaps in scholarly attention, the PRISMA evaluation was limited by the research that were accessible, many of which were NGO reports rather than peer-reviewed journals.
- Despite its richness, the film analysis is limited to a single cinematic text and is unable to capture the variety of situations faced by disabled women.
- Cultural literature should be interpreted carefully since they may romanticize or oversimplify experienced experiences.

However, by incorporating cultural and factual data into discussion, the paper highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approach.

5.12 Towards a Comprehensive Knowledge

In the end, the conversation emphasizes that statistics alone cannot adequately capture the realities of disabled working women during COVID-19. While statistics show trends in exclusion, narratives highlight the human cost. This void is filled by *Margarita with a Straw*, which personifies the challenges and goals that statistics cannot fully convey.

By combining systematic review and cultural analysis, this holistic approach enables us to perceive disabled women as workers, caretakers, daughters, lovers, and citizens who simultaneously negotiate systemic exclusion and exercise daily agency.

Conclusion

Existing disparities for disabled working women were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed fault lines in digital infrastructure, social recognition, healthcare, and employment. *Margarita with a Straw* provided a cultural narrative that personifies these problems, while the PRISMA-based review brought attention to systemic deficiencies.



When taken as a whole, they demonstrate how gender and disability must be at the forefront of crisis response plans. More significantly, they serve as a reminder that agency, perseverance, and adaptation are lived realities that are determined by the meeting point of institutional limitations and individual desire. Future civilizations must acknowledge disabled women's economic contributions as well as their entitlement to full, respectable participation in all aspects of society, both during and outside of emergencies, if they are to become more inclusive.

6 Conclusion and Suggestions for Policy

6.1 Conclusion

Pre-existing disparities that impaired working women experience in job, healthcare, family life, and social belonging have been brought to light and made worse by the COVID-19 epidemic. These women were not only disproportionately impacted, but also disproportionately disregarded in governmental and institutional responses, as the PRISMA-based systematic evaluation shows. However, *Margarita with a Straw* offers a potent cultural counterweight, reminding us that crippled women are not helpless objects of sympathy but rather multifaceted people negotiating adaptation, coping mechanisms, endurance, and agency (Bose, 2014; Sharma, 2024; Slater, 2014).

An critical reality is shown by the link between the film's story and empirical data: disabled women's fights are essential to any meaningful comprehension of social justice during emergencies, not merely incidental. In order for women with disabilities to fully engage in public and private life, the review and the movie both emphasize the need to remove institutional impediments, such as inaccessible technologies, discriminating employers, strict caregiving systems, and ingrained stigma (Government of India, 2016; UN Women, 2021). This work contributes to an interdisciplinary knowledge of disability, gender, and crises by integrating cultural analysis with systematic review methodology (PRISMA). While the film analysis sheds light on the lived, emotional, and symbolic qualities that are sometimes overlooked in quantitative studies, the systematic review records patterns and trends across contexts. When combined, they present a comprehensive picture of disabled working women as citizens whose goals, hardships, and perseverance need attention, acknowledgment, and governmental priority.

6.2 Suggestions for Policy

Several specific policy recommendations are derived from the synthesis of PRISMA findings with the thematic insights gleaned from *Margarita with a Straw*. These actions are essential for the structural inclusion of disabled women in the workplace and in society at large, as well as for future crises.

a. Policies for Inclusive Employment

- Enforce anti-discrimination laws to keep disabled women from losing their jobs first in times of crisis.
- Make workplace accessibility audits, encompassing both digital and physical infrastructure, mandatory.
- Companies that hire and keep women with disabilities, particularly in formal sectors, should get targeted employment incentives.
- Encourage remote and flexible work arrangements that adhere to universal accessibility guidelines and provide voice recognition, captioning, and screen reader compatibility.

b. Closing the Digital Divide

- Provide women with disabilities with assistance technologies (adaptive keyboards, screen readers, and speech-to-text software).
- Increase access to reasonably priced broadband, especially in peri-urban and rural areas where a large number of women with disabilities live.
- Establish mandatory accessibility standards for telework and e-learning systems.
- Encourage digital literacy initiatives that enable impaired women to use technology on their own.

c. Fortifying Support and Healthcare Infrastructure

- During emergencies, use telemedicine and community-based care models to ensure continuous access to counselling, therapy, and rehabilitation services.
- Include disability-inclusive clauses in national frameworks for disaster management.
- Create networks of mental health support for women with disabilities, acknowledging their increased susceptibility to social isolation, anxiety, and depression.
- Reduce discriminatory practices in clinics and hospitals by educating healthcare professionals on disability-inclusive and gender-sensitive practices.

d. Redefining Support for Families and Caregivers

- Families who support disabled women should receive caregiver stipends or direct financial assistance.
- Promote community-based care services to help women become more independent by reducing their over-reliance on relatives.
- Encourage therapy and education initiatives that tackle the delicate balance between control and caregiving, allowing families to offer assistance without limiting their independence.

e. Cultural Shift and Representation

- Encourage the representation of disabled women as complex, multifaceted people with agency, sexuality, and goals in movies, media, and cultural initiatives.
- Incorporate gender studies and disabilities into school curricula to combat stereotypes early on.
- Collaborate with civil society groups to start nationwide campaigns that fight stigma and honour the accomplishments of women with disabilities in all fields.

f. Gender-Disability Mainstreaming and Crisis-Readiness

- Make sure that special accommodations for women with disabilities are included in national and state crisis responses (pandemics, natural catastrophes, and conflicts).
- Create advisory groups with disabled women on them to help shape public policy.
- To prevent invisibility in future policymaking, include intersectional data collecting in surveys and censuses.

6.3 Concluding Contemplation

Laila's narrative in *Margarita with a Straw* has resonance that extends well beyond the movie theater. Her battles for freedom, education, employment, and love are reminiscent of the experiences of other disabled women dealing with emergencies such as COVID-19. The comprehensive review attests to the fact that these conflicts are systemic rather than isolated and call for structural solutions.

For academics, decision-makers, and society at general, the lesson is clear: inclusion cannot wait till the crisis is over. It is imperative that disabled women be not viewed as afterthoughts and are at the core

of both routine policies and emergency actions. Only then can nations assert that they are upholding their obligations under national legislation like India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and international frameworks like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).



In summary, disabled working women are active agents of perseverance, adaptation, and aspiration rather than representations of vulnerability. It is an act of justice, democracy, and humanity to properly acknowledge and support them; it is not only an act of kindness (Carbado et al., 2013; Trani et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022).

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A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

- **Avesta Verma** is a research scholar at IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur, specializing in sociology and studies related to women. Her research focuses on working women and COVID-19, examining societal impacts and adaptation during the pandemic.
- **Prof. Nisha Yadav** is a professor at IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur, with extensive research experience and has guided numerous PhD scholars. Her primary research interests include society and globalization, artisans, women, tourism, sociological theory, and spirituality.
- **Dr. Arti Sharma** is Associate professor at IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur, with more than 20 years of research experience. Her primary research interests include sociology of education, gender studies and Indian social problems.