Accessibility of Films and Level of Film Literacy in Visually Impaired People: An Exploration of Media Literacy Skills

Gulshan, Sarvesh Dutt Tripathi
(Ph.D Research Scholar, USMC, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi)
(Assistant Professor, USMC, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi)

Abstract

This paper records the experiences of visually impaired people who face discrimination of exclusion from cinema which is not accessible to them. Cinema was one of the sectors among several, they are excluded from. This paper inquires about their accessibility skills to the films and measures the level of film literacy. Focus group discussion and expert interviews were part of the research methodology. With the help of a structured questionnaire, film literacy level was measured.

This study shows that emerging technology has made film accessible to the people who have seeing disability and assistive tools and software are helping to understand films better than ever before. Responses from the FGD show that satisfaction level of entertainment has increased as well as the critical and analytical capacity also have been developed.

The result with audio described movies *(Sanju and Dangal)* was much better than the non-audio described movie *(Bajrangi Bhaijaan)*. If we talk about audio described movies, participants were aware about the critical and hidden meanings of the dialogues, able to synchronize and clearly visualize the flashback scenes and capable to understand the vision of the filmmaker. While on the other side, it was difficult and challenging for them to understand and provide appropriate description of scenes of film without audio description. This study propounds that, assistive technology, such as audio description and XL Cinema can enhance film and media literacy skills of persons with visual disability but still they face certain physical limitations to learn these skills.

Key Words: Film Literacy, Film Accessibility, Media Literacy Skills, Persons with Visual Impairment.

Introduction

There is a say 'Cinema does not tell, it shows'.
Film and Cinema is a part of media and a most inventive medium of communication in modern world. From black and white silent movement in the early19ᵗʰ century now it has transformed into a coloured audio-visual medium using images, sound and editing to communicate, through which even illiterate people can understand what is happening on the screen. Film is actually a combination of different art forms where audience can be communicated and entertained through verbal and non-verbal communication about various real and fictitious narratives. Singh, H. (2011) opines that a film not only speaks through words but also speaks through silence, pauses, facial expressions, body language etc.

When we enter into a picture hall, not only a body enters into a building but it also carries a thought that apart from the entertainment what will be the take away from this movie after spending a long time span. After all, cinema is a reflection of the time and the society we live in, and therefore it plays a strategically significant role in shaping the perceptions and values of the masses including people with visual disabilities. The society gets affected from both positive and negative impact of cinema and from carrying the traditions to adopting the modern lifestyle, cinema's contribution in our routine life can be seen vividly.

To communicate and entertain huge audience including illiterate masses, as compared to other media of mass communication, cinema is the best medium and films have high commercial value. But even in 21ˢᵗ century of modern India, this medium of entertainment remains inaccessible for people who cannot see. Entering a cinema hall is itself a challenging task for visually impaired people. Even if they dare enter a cinema hall, (sighted) people surround them usually found commenting curiously "Ye Film Kaise Dekhega? (How he/she will watch a film?).

Inaccessible infrastructure and absence of audio descriptions in films are two major challenges which restrict them to enjoy films.

Due to ignorance of inclusive film making process in Indian film industry, people with seeing disability are excluded from this form of entertainment, while less sensitive understanding and disharmony in filmmakers prepare the path of exclusion.

The above statement prepares the platform for the study, where we will know the film (Bollywood Hindi) watching experience of visually impaired people with or without audio descriptions and will also have a close observation on their film literacy skills.

Purpose behind selection of Hindi Movies
The study will be conducted among visually impaired people who go to cinema halls to watch Hindi language Bollywood-movies.

India is a big producer and major market place of films. Films of different tastes, genres, moods are being produced for different audiences. This huge production is an identity of Indian Cinema which integrates South India film and other Indian language film industries.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2016 India is not only the top producer with almost 2000 movies in a year in different languages but India has more number of cinema goers than the United States, China and Japan combined.

Adding to this, during the discussion, a respondent's (all respondents were visually disabled) response validates the need of this research by saying that "I do watch films and serials on TV but I do not go to cinema halls to watch a movie due to my seeing disability. Although I love to watch movies in theatre but my visual disability deprives me from achieving the satisfactory level of entertainment. Some questions bother me, like, the film, I am going to watch will be accessible for me? Would I be able to get entertained by this movie without any assistance? Who will assist me to explain the scenes in absence of dialogues?"

Above stated inquisitiveness by a visually impaired respondent put weight into research questions of this study. The research questions were framed are as follows:

Research Questions
1. How visually impaired people are able to watch movies with same level of satisfaction?
2. What are the assistive tools or software they use to get entertained by films?
3. How much Indian films are visual impaired friendly in terms of audio-visual effects?
4. What is the level of film literacy among visually impaired people?

Significance and Purpose of the Study
In view of the above statement and research questions, this study proposes to know whether visually impaired people enjoy audio described films with equal satisfaction or face some kind of discrimination/difficulties because film is an audio-visual medium and these people face seeing disability. Apart from accessibility to watching films, one more important element of this paper is to know their level of film literacy which indicates their critical understanding and analytical knowledge about films. And most significantly, through this study, we will come to know about their capacity of accurate visualization of scenes through listening to sound and dialogues that how much clearly and similarly do they visualize as the director has tried to present in the film.

Review of Literature
The inquisitiveness to know about the film watching experiences of persons with visually impaired, relevant literature was explored. Further, to know more and to develop the understanding about the film accessibility in context of visually impaired people and to gauge their level of film literacy, existing literature was reviewed. Film literacy is a part of media literacy, so right from media literacy to film accessibility, alternate techniques to access films and film literacy level in reference to persons with vision impairment were the part of literature review section.

Media Literacy
Literacy is perceived as a communication skill and learning to read and write which enable learners to better understand the world and express themselves more widely (Avik Ghosh, 2006 p. 82-84). Media literacy is Centre

for Media Literacy consider media literacy as a 21st century approach to education which builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skill of inquiry and self-expression (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). In the context of media literacy skills, one should acquire these media literacy inter-related competencies that are needed to participate in contemporary culture. These competencies are Access, Analysis, Evaluate, Create, and Reflect & Take Action (Hobbs, 2001 and NAMLE).

Film Literacy

In context of visually impaired people quite a few studies have been conducted in India in the field of film and media literacy. The basic output of concept and idea of film literacy emerges from different studies is that we have to develop our literacy skills to acquire critical knowledge of films in context of their social, cultural and industrial impact. Media education can help to raise literacy attainment levels and film education may raise the level of film literacy skills.

To gain a critical understanding of film and to enjoy the creative activity of filmmaking one need adequate film literacy which is a part of Media and Information Literacy (MIL Curriculum for Teachers, UNESCO, 2011). Film literacy enables to understand how the film and moving image texts make meaning, encourage watching films from a variety of sources and inspires to create films. (Bradford, UNESCO).

Film literacy helps people to be active citizens and deal with issues of equity and social inclusion and contribute to societal cohesion. Promote peace, understanding and empathy amongst people, their peers and with in their community (Higham Mark, 2016, MIL, UNESCO).

According to Bradford UNESCO, with the use of new technologies and platforms, film education can help to watch a wide range of films. Film education encourages learning, critical understanding, writing, speaking, listening, debate and conversation about films and the issues and emotions which raise and also encourage learner to use film as a vehicle for their own creativity and encourages the film industry to respect their voices.

This research has also shown that film literacy can improve confidence, motivation to learn as well as communication and critical skills. And for visually impaired people it may open up the window to experience the culture of different state of the world to broadening their horizons.

The Need of Film and Media Literacy in Visually Impaired

Film and Media literacy are two mediums which need to be explored by one who wants to gain ability of critical understanding of films as well as filmmaking process and other media content and wish to produce films by their own (Frank Baker, 2017). Media plays an important role in advocacy and building opinion and films are part of media, now has become a major medium of entertainment as well as education which influence the society in a big way. People conceive better critical and analytical skills of media content through media literacy education. So it is today's need to be media literate to not only able to understand the available media content but to produce media in variety of forms like films. Marsh and Bearne, 2008, Brooks, Cooper and Penkem (2012) opine that film literacy can resulted in measureable improvements in writing, reading, critical and creative thinking skills including other personal and interpersonal benefits.

Films in context of Visually Impaired People

The motion picture is not a fixed pattern of meanings and ideas which are received by a passive mind. Rather what the individual gets is determined by his background and his needs. He takes from the picture what is usable for him or what will function in his life (Fearing, F., 1947). Istiak Mahmood (2013) consider cinema as the combination of technology, business, entertainment and aesthetics. A visual art of story-telling with rich inputs of music, screenplay, cast and script mirrors the contemporary society in which it functions. A movie is not only a visual treat to its audience but it also an account of societal, economic and political set up in which a person is living.

But a film without support of assistive technology cannot be experienced by a visually impaired person in a same way as a general audience can. Different people understand and interpret the same media message differently (Centre for Media Literacy, 2005). Gestures, facial expressions, and other such nuances take the story forward in many ways, but persons with visual impairment often have to rely on their sighted companions to explain the less wordy sections of the film. Filmmakers in India don't acknowledge their blind audience when they conceive a story. There is a need to make audio description mandatory for film makers so that cinema becomes an inclusive source of entertainment for persons with blindness and visual impairment. (The Better India, January, 2017).

Mr. Dipendra Manocha (Managng Trustee of Saksham) in an interview to UNI at IFFI in 2018 stated that "Whenever a producer makes a film internationally, they treat audio description to be an integral part of making that film. So, when people choose to watch films in theatres, the visually impaired can also enjoy the movie in same theatre. In India, we should now move beyond special shows and have audio description for every movie release in India".

Assistive Technology making Films Accessible
In Tianjin, of Northern China, there is a 'Cinema for the blind' founded by Zheng Wei. Mr. Zheng says "some movie plots have many twists and turns which are presented through pictures, but blind people would have no clue what is going on. He said that the scenes, costumes, actions or even emotions on the actors' faces are added into the audio descriptions to help visually impaired understand the story. (China Daily.Com, February 15, 2019)

Today there are many applications and software available which make a film accessible to a person who cannot see. Recent media reports (The Indian Express, October 14, 2019), states that some big cinema halls like PVR Cinemas have partnered with a company to offer audio descriptions with the help of XL Cinema App to make a movie accessible and equally enjoyable for visually impaired people. For example, a person can go to theater to watch screening of a Tamil film and can hear the dialogues in Hindi. The app offers both services, choice of language and audio description.

For instance, *Sanju* (2018) became the first audio described Indian film of any language which was screened for visually impaired people too at a same time in theatres. Other than that, many Indian films like *Dangal, 3 Idiots, Andhadhun, Thackeray,* have been added audio-description in later stage.

Audio Description
Film, television, theatre performances and museum tours use audio descriptions to enable visually impaired people to access these forms of art. The inclusion of these descriptions has a consequence, however that visually impaired audiences cannot access the work directly, they have to rely on a describer. According to the American Council of the Blind, "Audio Description involves the accessibility of the visual images of theater, television, movies, and other art forms for people who are blind, have low vision, or who are otherwise visually impaired".

Brack, F. (2019) opines that Audio Description is a commentary and narration which guides the listener through the presentation with concise, objective descriptions of new scenes, settings, costumes, body language, and 'sight gags', all slipped in between portions of dialogue or songs.

This description is generally pre-recorded and synced to the movie soundtrack. Audio description includes a voice over that describes what transpires on the screen during natural pauses in the audio and in sometimes during dialogue. (Essar Foundation, 2017)

We can classify audio descriptions in to three basic types (Amnet, January 08, 2019)

1) Real-Time Audio Description which is like a live commentary or narration via a small transmitter and headphones.

2) Open Audio Description is integrated into the movie's audio track and everyone in the theatre can hear them along with the dialogue, sound effects, score etc.

3) Closed Audio Description which can be played as an alternated audio track on home video release (Blu-Ray, DVD, etc.).

Origin of Audio Description
Founder of The Metropolitan Washington Ear (1974) Dr. Margaret Pfanstiehl and her husband Cody Pfanstiehl developed the unique art and technique of Audio Description program in 1981 and used it for live theatre performances. Later it became the part of the western cinema (especially Hollywood) to produce movie for the inclusive population. Snyder, J. (June 2013) in his thesis, discuss about the priceless contribution of late Dr. M. Pfanstiehl in the area of audio description. The Metropolitan Washington Ear established in 1974 by Dr. Pfanstiehl created the first audio description soundtrack for an IMAX film, *To Fly!*

Alternates of Audio Description
According to Dr. Mariana Lopez (2015) a story can be told without the need of visual elements or an audio description track. By focusing on new sound design techniques and the creative use of surround sound, the format- called

'audio film' can become a standard part of the filmmaking process. Audio film aims to create an enhanced version of audio description that allows both sighted and visually impaired audiences to experience the same soundtrack.

Szarkowska (2013) presents a new type of Audio Description for auteur and artistic films. Auteur description which incorporates the director's creative vision in the audio description script through the use of a screenplay. The main function of auteur description is to immerse spectators who are blind or have low vision in the story world created by the film's director.

Another research on the same aspect conducted by Pablo Romero-Fresco and Louise Fryer (2013) describe their different method that is Audio Introduction (AI) which can be played before or after watching the films with audio descriptions which give the information to understand the artistic vision of the filmmaker. Each AI comprised 10 minutes of continuous description incorporating information about film's visual style, fuller description of characters and settings, a brief synopsis, and cast and production details.

All these above discussed techniques a) Audio Description, b) Audio Film, c) Auteur Description and d) Audio Introduction, are tested tools and useful for visually impaired people in some or other meanings. All these efforts and researches indicate that access to all type of visual media; convenient understanding of the visual content and better experience of screen media for people with visual impairment can be enhanced by additional cinematic and other visual information. (Duffy, Maureen, 2015 for Vision Aware).

Mark Twain wrote in a Letter to George Bainton on October 15, 1888 that *"The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter--it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."* In other words, Joel Snyder (2010), an internationally known one of the first audio describers says "A picture may worth 1000 words but for visually impaired people, few well-chosen words by the audio describer can conjure vivid and lasting images. This can be called audio description literacy.

Gap Areas and the Need of New Research in the Subject
After the extensive review of the available literature, it was found that assistive technology is available and being used (mostly in western world) to make films accessible and inclusive for all the sections of the society but till date no major and bold initiatives have been taken in India to make films accessible to the persons with visual impairment. Only one (Hindi) film *Sanju,* released recently in 2018, can be considered under inclusive film category.

People cannot interpret and analyze the content what they don't understand, so the first and important requirement is to provide them the material or content in the accessible format (Teaching Media Literacy to Students with Disabilities, 2017).

In the previous studies, film and media literacy issues have been discussed but no research focuses on the issues of accessibility and film literacy among visually impaired people. That might be due to their different objectives and limitations of their research.

So, in reflection of the research questions discussed above, objectives of this study have been decided, that could lead the study in right direction to achieve the desired goals. The following objectives of the study focus on how persons with visual disability deal with the issues of film accessibility and film literacy.

Research Objectives
1. To understand different aspects of accessibility to films by visually impaired people
2. To Identify the assistive tools they use to entertain films
3. To gauge the capacity of people with visual impairment in decoding films
4. To understand the level of film literacy in visually impaired people
5. To identify the necessity and scope of media literacy training programmes for visually impaired people

Research Methodology
Focus Group Discussion
The important feature of focus group discussion is engaging a small group of respondents to capture their responses (Merton, 1987) and understand their views, behavior and meanings related to the research topic (Hennink, M.M. 2007). FGD was conducted with visually impaired young people of Saksham. Saksham: Samrdrushti Kshamata Vikas Evam Anusandhan Mandal (MAH/654/2008. Reg.) is a charitable national organization working for persons with disabilities especially dedicated to the service of visually impaired.

Expert Interviews

Expert interview is an appropriate method to collect the primary reliable information and in-depth authoritative opinions on the research topic. In-depth interview with selected experts was conducted with the help of open-ended questions. Using open-ended questionnaire usually save time and resources and allow the subjects to answer in any way they wish (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

Social activists, teachers and other professionals who are working for the betterment of visually impaired people were interviewed. Purposive sampling technique was used to conduct in-depth interview. Purposive sampling is a widely used method in qualitative research for the selection of information rich respondents for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Total four experts, allowed to take their interview, namely, Dr. Dayal Singh Panwar (President, Saksham and Professor at Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, Delhi), Mr. Harish Gulati (Principal of Government School, Delhi), Mr. Danish Mahajan, (General Secretary, Radio Udaan), and Dr. Vedabhyas Kundu (Programme Officer, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti and one of the promoter of Media Literacy).

Sampling

Selection of respondents of focus group discussion and selection of films was based on convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling can be used to collect information from easily accessible sources. In convenient sampling subjective methods are used to decide which elements should be included in the sample (Lavrakas, P. J. (2008).

Selection of Films

Due to large producers of films in Indian film industry and having a maximum reach to the Indian masses including people with different disabilities, Bollywood Hindi movies have been selected to centralize the research. Convenient sampling was used for the selection of films. In the procedure of selection of films, it was discussed with participants that, only those movies will be selected for this study which are seen by both, the participants and the researcher. One movie from each category was selected. These three different categories are: 1) Film made with audio-descriptions, 2) Film, added audio description later, and 3) Film without audio descriptions.

At last, with the collective decision by all, following three movies were selected for each category.

1) *Sanju* was selected for category-1, (film made with audio-descriptions),
2) *Dangal* was selected for category-2, (film added audio-descriptions later) and,
3) *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* was selected for category-3, (film without audio-descriptions).

Sanju (a biopic on actor Sanjay Dutt) is the first Indian movie produced with audio descriptions that was seen by persons with visual impairment in theatres from the first day of the release.

Dangal, produced by Amir Khan is a sports film based on Kushti (Wrestling) was later converted into audio descriptions.

Bajrangi Bhaijaan is a non-audio described movie which has a great moral story of mankind and popular among all the population of the society similarly in visually impaired too.

Selection of Participants

Sighted people can easily watch movies but persons with seeing disability face real challenges to watch and access a movie with equal entertainment. Persons with visual impairment have been selected for focus group discussion to know their perception, opinion and experience of watching movies with and without audio-descriptions, to know their satisfactory level of entertainment and also to understand their critical knowledge about films (film literacy). For this, an open-ended questionnaire has been used as a primary data collection tool (Ajayi, V. 2017).

The researcher has organized this FGD at one of the hostels of Saksham in Delhi and Mr. Prabal (in-charge of the Boys hostel, Saksham in Delhi) has announced about the objectives of the research to all the residents of the hostel and also urged that interested people can participate in focus group discussion. As informed by the hostel in-charge, at that time about 30 visually impaired people were residing in the hostel. After a wait of about 20 minutes, 17 visually impaired persons gathered in a room. Among them only those persons were selected who watch Hindi films regularly. After scrutiny, four persons left and total 13 visually impaired persons participated in the FGD that lasted for more than three and half hours with a tea break in between. Nine participants were pursuing their graduation and four participants were pursuing their post-graduation from Delhi University. Discussion reflected

on their interest, habits, knowledge and perception about films, media literacy skills, critical understanding and analysis of films, and film literacy.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this research study, the data has been collected from the both primary and the secondary sources. To collect the data from primary sources focus group discussion and expert interview have been conducted so that the first hand experience could be recorded and documented (Salkind, N.J., 2010). On the other hand, some data relevant for the research have been collected from secondary sources as government publications, online journals, websites of social organizations & news channels, social media and other published & unpublished sources (Ajayi, V. 2017).

Findings of Focus Group Discussion

Habits of watching Movies

The first question to the respondents was asked about their habits of watching films. The response was surprising that they all not only watch movies but also love to watch serials and different reality shows on their phone or television.

When the researcher asked that how many of them use Smartphone to watch movies, 10 respondents (80%) showed their Smartphone and told that they also use youtube, and other accessible News Apps in their mobile. 3 respondents (20%) told that they do not have Smartphone, but they do know the use of internet.

In the reply of how frequently they watch movies on their Smartphone, more than 70 percent of respondents respond that they watch one to two movies in a week on their Smartphone or laptop. All of them understand Hindi so they watch movies made and dubbed in Hindi language but many times they face challenges to connect the scenes in a sequence.

When researcher asked that how many of them go to cinema halls to watch a movie, only 15 percent respondents told that they go to watch films in cinema halls but face accessibility challenge due to their visual impairment.

Challenges and Issues of Film Accessibility

Films are an important source of both entertainment and information. Yet there is a section of society which is deprived of this enriching experience of cinema, so it was important to discuss about what kind of challenges visually disabled people face in accessing films.

Respondents were asked to point out the issues of film accessibility. The response was very clear and loud that in India, there are a number of successful movies based on different disabilities including vision disability, autism, psychological disorder and others like Kabil, Tare Zameen Par, Paa, Barfi, and many more, but very fewer efforts have been made in India to make movies accessible for disabled people especially for people who have visual and hearing challenge. Respondents opined that after watching movies based on disability, people show their emotions and sympathy for people who are disabled, but they do not need that. They also want to become equally able and for this, they only need to have the better availability and use of assistive technologies.

On the question of accessibility barriers, in a larger meaning it remains a challenge for them. Here in our country after more than 70 years of independence even the toilets and roads are not totally accessible for people with visual disability. Then, the options of accessible platforms for higher education, better entertainment facilities and quality empowered life are very far from their reach.

They face accessibility barriers in livelihood resources. They cannot go to bank and ATMs without physical help of our near and trusted ones. Many essential books and study materials are not available in accessible format to them. When they visit any website or online shopping site, there is always a threat of phishing. Even convenient tactile paved pathways are not available for them to walk independently. At zebra crossings, signals do not beep when it is green for crossing the road. They always need a help of a sighted person to cross the roads because people do not stop their fast moving vehicles even after seeing that a blind person trying to go to the other side of the road. So, inaccessibility has become a usual pattern for them to sustain. It was a common opinion that getting accessible platforms is our basic need to contribute equally as an active citizen of the country.

On the question of inaccessible cinema in India and mentality of filmmakers behind not producing inclusive cinema, a very strong and satirical response was received that, in India, not only in films, but in all the sectors, the concept of inclusive development is not part of our thought and execution process. Similarly, inclusive films are of very far-fetched deal in India. Population of visually impaired people in crores is just a number for them (filmmakers).

They already have crores of sighted audiences who go to watch their films and pay for it, then why filmmakers will be bothered for the blind audience to pay separate attention on producing inclusive films with audio descriptions.

When respondents were asked about difficulties they face while watching films, there was line of answers. They said, when you are a blind, it is not easy to visualize the accurate picture of the sound you are hearing. According to our cognitive capacity and life experiences, everyone imagines and visualizes a different picture of the heard sound. "I think, we assume a near to appropriate visuals by hearing dialogues of a picture" one respondent said.

Need of Inclusive Cinema for All
It was commonly opined that when we can produce cinema for all in one time cost then why we need to separately invest our time, energy and money to make it accessible for disabled people like who cannot see. If a filmmaker adds audio descriptions in the film at the time of production, the cost of making an inclusive cinema will be reduced to zero and this step by Indian film industry can make a great contribution to prepare an inclusive society. It will help people with visual disability to understand and enjoy the full movie without any help from others and disturbance.

When respondents were asked to share their opinion and perception about need and importance of inclusive film making, they said that they are fighting and raising their voice against this societal discrimination which has been unnecessarily imposed on them due to their physical disability. They are also the native of this country as others who are non-disabled. They didn't choose the disability, it is unsolicited. They do not see it as a curse to them but they find alternate instinctive solutions to get their work done with equal perfection as sighted people do.

It is true that technology can make films accessible. Audio-described movies have proven to be an important technique to help persons with blindness enjoy cinema at par with their sighted counterparts (The Better India, January 2017). When we asked about their capacity of using technology and software making films accessible for visually impaired people, they said that earlier they did not have this thought that movies also have any technical requirement of accessibility for different audiences. But today when the technology has been developed and it is available for all, visually impaired should also be benefitted from it. Indian film industry has also made its move towards making cinema accessible to all by producing *Sanju*.

Non-Audio Described Movie Experience
Further, when we enquired about their experiences of watching films which they have seen with and without audio descriptions, respondents shared their odd and even experiences with us.

When they watch non-audio described moives, sometime they fail to understand the correct sound of a bird, animal, motor vehicle or making artificial sound by a character of a film.

One respondent told that "I was watching a film on television. Suddenly, a long gap came in between the dialogues. No sound or voice was there for few seconds. Complete silence. I thought electricity has gone but abruptly, a sound of a blast heard". It happens when a filmmaker does not have a vision that what will be the effect when a visually impaired person will watch this movie. It shows that people who are making films do not consider blind people as their active audience.

Many times it becomes difficult to understand as they miss the story due to a flash back scene. They find more difficult to watch and understand horror and thriller movies because film contains so many visual and sound effects. It becomes challenging to visualize the accurate scenes and connect the visual effects with dialogues. With a big laugh one respondent said, "Ham Darte Bhi Nahin Hain' (we do not get afraid). There is nothing horror for us and it cannot make us thrill".

Since starting of cinema in India, disability is a thing which can be sold through films. There are many instances of films where disability has been portrayed as a tool to make story sensitive and sympathetic. Dosti (1964), Aankhen (2002), Black (2005), Paa (2009), Barfi (2012), Andhadhun (2018) and many others are the example of movies which exhibit a heartrending narrative of disabled people. Though, all these movies are successful and popular but are not completely accessible to us. They feel that, many good films are not made for them.

About 70% (9) respondents said that they experience inability to critically understand the full movie without audio description. Only one (9%) respondent responded that he is able to understand the film which does not have audio description while 21% of respondents were not sure with their answer.

Movie Experience with Audio Description
When we asked them to share their experiences about audio described movies, more than 90% respondents said that they feel easy and satisfied with audio described movies. Respondents were more satisfied with *Sanju* than *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* in terms of understanding the film critically. It has become easy for them to arrange and visualize all the plots in a sequence of the film with audio description as well as they were satisfied with the level of entertainment.

On a comparative note they said that today, Hollywood is producing inclusive cinema and constantly working on providing better services to the people with disabilities especially who has seeing and hearing disability. But in our country, this trend came too late with *Sanju*.

Respondents told that, with the help of XL Cinema (a software providing audio description) they have seen many movies which are available in accessible format with audio descriptions. It helps to watch and understand each scene of a movie through audio descriptions without any obstacle and minimize the dependency on others. First time they have watched *Sanju* in a theatre hall with others which was inclusively released for all kind of audiences in India. The film was made with audio descriptions and subtitles. One respondent told that "with the help of audio descriptions, I became an independent cinemagoer".

In an Interview with Economic Times (Dec. 03, 2018), Sanjeev Kumar Bijli Joint MD, PVR said that "Accessible Cinemas are aimed at making movie-going an inclusive experience for everyone."

Reading Film Reviews
This is a remarkable response received from the respondents when they were asked that do they read film reviews. About 69% (9) respondents said yes they do read film reviews. They say that it prepare them to make an opinion about a movie. On the other hand, no respondent has ever written a review for any film but sometimes they share their film viewing experience on their social media platforms.

This habit of reading film reviews can be counted as film literacy skill because some studies believe that critics are influential because consumers view them as connoisseurs, that they somehow know more than the average consumer and are able to distinguish good taste from bad taste. [*see* Basuroy, S., Chatterjee, S., & Ravid, S. A. (2003), Botawright, P., Basuroy, S., and Kamakura, W. (2007)]. Pentheny, Jacob R. (2015) states that type of information in a review, positive, negative or mixed can affect the consumer.

Film Literacy Skills in Persons with Visual Impairment
Both Media and Films are integral instrument of entertainment but sometimes it becomes critical for a consumer to choose the right and suitable product for them. When respondents were asked how they decide to make suitable selection of films, different answers were received. One of the respondents said that earlier "I was a blind follower of mainstream media. I had an opinion that if something is being served and presented in mainstream media through news is very much reliable. I had complete faith on some news channels. Similarly with films, if a movie based on a good social topic, I believed that the director has tried to show the real story. But as I grew up and became more sensible I came to know that people in media and films make massive use of modern technologies to make the presentation real".

It was commonly opined that films are one of the attractive visual medium of entertaining the masses but sometimes, they find it difficult to understand the hidden meaning of the story. Many times it happens that film does not make any sense and filmmakers present senseless material on the reel. This kind of films do not carry strength and unable to entice audiences for long time.

When we queried about the film's cast, which were selected for this study, respondents were able to recognize the name of the main actor, actress and other important characters in the film. All of them were aware about the theme of films. They were also able to recognize the vision of the filmmaker behind production of these films.

Critical Understanding of Films: Film Literacy among Visually Impaired People
During the focus group discussion, researchers asked the respondents to share their opinion and perspective about the films selected for the study purpose to gauge their decoding capacity of films and to know their film literacy skills. Following are the outputs show their critical and analytical approach towards films.

1) ***Sanju (Movie released with audio description):*** When we talked about *Sanju*, it was observed that respondents were more confident to share their opinions and specific about the film.

a. All respondents were aware that *Sanju* is a biopic film of Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt. Some have commented that this film is a positive presentation of an actor, who once did a big mistake in his life.

b. It was commonly stated that *Sanju* is a well directed and projected film which replace and shift the perception of any person who knows about the past of actor Sanjay Dutt. Director very positively represents the story and avoids many controversial moments which are part of the life of actor Sanjay Dutt.

c. One of the respondents said that selection of songs (*Ustaad*) by Sanjay Dutt's father Sunil Dutt (Paresh Rawal) like *Duniya Me Rehna Hai To Kaam Kar Pyare* and *Kuch Toh Log Kahenge etc.* are efforts of intentionally placing the plots to build a sentimental approach about the life of actor Sanjay Dutt and shows that he is improving himself after facing so many Ups and Downs in his life.

d. About the audio description facility, respondents said that many times we feel that a better or more appropriate audio description can be put to describe the certain scene. Similarly some participants said that at some moments in *Sanju* audio description was not appropriately designed. The tone of the spoken words is important that put an impact on us to prepare an appropriate (positive or negative) opinion about the particular scene.

2) ***Dangal (audio description added later):*** This is the most loved movie among all three selected movies. Some participants said that they have watched this movie three times.

a. Respondents were very much able to recall the song 'Bapu Sehat Ke Liye Tu To Hanikarak Hai'. Respondents were aware that this film has achieved great success in China too.

b. All the respondents were satisfied with the added audio descriptions in the movie. They said it is completely satisfactory and enjoyable to have the perfect match of audio description and the scene.

c. It was commonly said that some Masala might be the part of the real story but it is a remarkable effort done by the Director and the film caste to produce this kind of film which showcase the real women empowerment.

d. Respondents were aware about the efforts made by the key role actor Aamir Khan. The acotr has gained a lot of weight to play the role of old age father (Mahavir Phogat) and after that he has released his weight to play the role of young wrestler Mahavir Phogat according to the scene requirement in the film. The respondent said that he has received this information when he was listening to a review on youtube. This shows their film literacy skills.

3) ***Bajrangi Bhaijaan (non-audio described movie):*** All the respondents were aware about the action, adventure and the drama genre of the film. The story of the film including songs was also remembered to them.

It was difficult for the respondents to find the correct visualization of what was happening in the scene when Pawan (Salman Khan) was taking back that little girl to reunite her with her family in Pakistan. Respondents told that, the sound of spitting back the water into the river was neither audible & nor identifiable for them because it was not correctly described in the video. They also couldn't recognize those two signs which were indicated by the little girl near the river. "Everything is not showcased as per our requirements and entertainment needs.' One respondent said.

Respondents told that if such kind of scenes (like spitting back into the river) have shown in the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan,* then it is not acceptable because this act is against our environment protective human nature and also not acceptable in our culture. Films are mirror of the society and we learn from films. This statement shows that if persons with visual disability could be explained the things in appropriate way, they would be able to understand the things critically and express themselves in better way.

A common response from all the respondents was received that only dialogue and sound effects cannot deliver everything. Without audio description, it is not easy for them to visualize exact situation of a scene i.e. costume, emotions, surrounding circumstances, accuracy of location/venue i.e. snow mountains or desert, change in scenes, flashback scenes etc.

Ms. Rummi Seth (Saksham) says 'through such audio described movies visually impaired get to know about the latest trends of fashion and style. Visually impaired persons are exposed to the usual landmark clues that otherwise are never known to them".

Rating given by VIPs to the Movies selected for Study
It was asked to the respondents to rate the selected films on the aspects of 1) Accessibility, 2) Entertainment, 3) Critical Understanding and, 4) Overall Rating. The below chart shows the gist of ratings responded by all the respondents.

Excerpts from Expert Interviews
Mr. Harish Gulati visually impaired and Principal of Govt. School in Delhi says 'to know how a visually impaired feels when he/she watches a movie, I request you to please watch a movie with closed eyes and try to enjoy the film with satisfactory level of entertainment. It is difficult to arrange all the scenes of the movie in a sequence. Yes, it would not be difficult to understand where dialogues are in rich flow but the act with no verbal communication, long pauses, only background music and some other gaps will become very much difficult to understand. You will feel embarrassed. And this kind of humiliation a visually impaired person experiences every time when he/she watches a film.

Dr. Dayal Singh Panwar's statement leads us towards a hope of a better experience. He says Language and dialogues form a very important part of this comprehension. However, all the other things happening on screen like the actions, drama, location and the scenery - how do blind people enjoy these too? Audio description makes this possible. Today, it is changing the cinema-viewing experience all round the world. This is a step ahead towards accessible cinema for all persons including persons with disabilities.

In an interview, Dr. Vedabhyas Kundu, says putting subtitles at the bottom of the visuals of a film do not make a film inclusive. It is a serious issue which has to be tackle in a better technical way to fulfill all the obstacles in the way of inclusive cinema. Similarly, film literacy is also important to understand the hidden agenda of a filmmaker behind production of a film. Understanding the dialogues, reading the subtitles and assuming the seductive meaning of the produced content cannot be counted as film literacy. A film has many aspects which communicate a constructive message in artistic way. Decoding a film is film literacy, he says.

Barrett, M. (2015) argues that film study and film literacy are two different area of study. Film literacy is primarily about the mechanics of film; about how meaning is made and interpreted, not about the content of films. Content of any film generate from the cognitive process of the filmmaker and it can be accessed without the need to learn decoding skills. If you want critical understanding about film, you need literacy skills. To interpret and create meanings from a film, you need decoding abilities. (Barrett Marc, 2015).

Mr. Danish Mahajan, a visually impaired and active promoter of media literacy skills among the visually impaired community says "we initiated Radio Udaan with very few resources and now we are a successful platform in the field of media for disabled people. This is true that the necessity is the mother of any invention. Sometimes regular experiments with technology make it possible what was unpredicted before the invention. Who had imagined ever that one day visually impaired people will also be able to enjoy each and every scene of a movie without need of any kind of explanation from any sighted person. In India, many individuals and social organizations are working in this field to make movies accessible for those who have visual disability. But in doing so, they face many challenges.

The first and time taking challenge is to re-write the script to remove each gap and fill it with audio description as per requirements in context of visually disabled people. This is a team work which cannot be done in one night. So it takes time to re-design the movie and add audio description in scenes where there is absence of dialogues, influence of actions and presentation of emotions without dialogues. (Rummi Seth, 2019, Founder Saksham).

The accessibility of movies is all about inclusion. As a blind person, the question to me is do we have the right to go to the movie halls like everybody else or not. If we have the right then we are entitled to use every facility available to us. Physically challenged people may have some kind of limitation in terms of walking, sitting and speaking etc. Adding audio description to make films accessible is an initiative to help such people participate in it and be part of the active society. (Dipendra Manocha in a Press Conference held at IFFI, 2017)

The old Hindi films were easy to understand without any special audio description for visuals but today use of advance technology in Bollywood has improved the way of film making. In view of this all the experts had the common opinion that production of inclusive cinema is the hours need. The Indian film industry must learn and accept new techniques (such as adding audio descriptions to the film sound track) to make the industry inclusive and accessible for all classes of the society.

Audio Description can enhance Film literacy skills

It was observed during focus group discussion that by listening to audio descriptions, visually impaired people can become more capable to understand the vision of the film director, develop film literacy skills and to be a critical film viewer.

In light of 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016', Government of India has also requested through a notification (No.M-11021/29/2018-DO (FC), dated 01 October, 2019) to filmmakers to make audio description a part of the production and distribution process of a film. Nipun Mehrotra (a disability rights activist), suggests that "A film without audio descriptions shouldn't be certified as per the RPWD Act" (The Indian Express, October 14, 2019).

Moreover, once filmmakers recognize the need for audio description, they can incorporate several story changes to make cinema inclusive. We must acknowledge the visually impaired as avid cinema watchers, instead of ignoring them while producing mainstream cinema (The Better India, 2017).

Ms. Rummi K. Seth (Founder and Managing Trustee of Saksham) says that earlier it was not possible. Before *Sanju,* movies with audio description were only shown at special screenings. As we have held a special screening for *Dangal* after putting subtitles and audio description into it for visually and hearing impaired. Now, more people go to theatres and watch movie with their family members and friends without disturbing them. The XL Cinema App is freely available for android or iOS Smartphone. XL Cinema easily synchronizes with the audio track in the cinema and plays the audio described track through the headphones of a mobile phone, she adds.

Film Literacy may include following skills

The output collected from the focus group discussion and expert interviews, it is propounded that following skills or characteristics can be part of Film Literacy skills.

- Cognitive Consumption of Cinema
- Understanding the Language and (dual or hidden) meaning
- Critical Analysis of the artistic vision of filmmaker
- Ability to read and write critical review on films
- Expressing Creativity through this medium (making films)

Discussion on the Findings

We have to accept that persons with disabilities including visually impaired people also want to be social and make friends. They also love to go out in group and enjoy films with friends. But we (sighted people) do not tend to go with them to watch movies in cinema because we feel that they (visually impaired) will disturb us by repeatedly asking 'what is happening' in between the scenes during action or music or pause or silence. We may be right but they need an assistance to understand and enjoy the whole film as we sighted people do. If they are blind this does not mean that they will be alienated from all aspects of development.

When we were discussing about the contribution of technology through which visually impaired people get an opportunity to watch movies, one respondent emphasized on one aspect and said that technology can minimize the challenges but it cannot replace the disability. One of the important findings of the study is that visually impaired persons have certain limitations in way of developing critical skills of film and media literacy. It has also been identified that technical assistance can contribute to fill and bridge the gap which has occurred due to disability but it cannot bring perfections because technology is for people, not disabilities. Technology give access to education, commerce, employment and entertainment (Foley, A. & Ferri, B. 2012). Further, Foley, A. & Ferri, B. (2012) opine that communication technologies can revolutionize our lives by breaking down barriers and expanding access for disabled people.

Respondents were unable to respond on scenes without dialogues and many times they showed inability to connect the story when the sequence of plots was missed due to silence or sound effects, although they were able to connect themselves with the vision of the filmmaker.

During the discussion with participants (visually impaired people) regarding selection of films for this study, an observation has emerged that they were more critical about their choices of watching films. They were not in favor to select the films which include too much fight and drama, but they showed interest in films which are near to reality, spread social messages and contribute to a positive content oriented cinema. It can be gauged that emerging technology and review reading skills have developed their critical understanding about the films.

Audiences need to be able to make free and informed choices in a context of transformation of the whole value-chain of the audio-visual industry. Film literacy is the best instrument in order to develop a sustainable audience. (Creative Europe Media, 2014)

Bharat Vasani and Drishti Das (2019) in their article say that "From adopting new technologies and starting conversations around various issues of vital societal importance, there is a large shift in consumer behaviour from commercial (Masala Entertainment) to content driven cinema (addressing social causes).

Here, filmmakers' statements show that nowadays content based movies have a broader appeal but traditional commercial movies have not been successful. Acclaimed actor K.K. Menon told IANS in an interview on January 24, 2018 that the cinema literacy in India is almost negligible in commoners and since there is no cinema literacy, they fail to appreciate the art of cinema. There is a need to increase the cinema literacy among youngsters to find a suitable audience for experimental films in India. He feels schools can play an important role in promoting film literacy, so that content-driven films can find a sustainable audience. Shoojit Sircar in an interview (IANS, 2018) said that dancing-singing days of Bollywood have gone. All are concentrating on good stories. In fact content is now the commercial or main stream cinema.

Conclusion

Assistive technologies play an important role in the life of persons with disabilities and help them to be an independent human being. In this study we have discussed how visually impaired people are capable to watch films and to what extent they can show their critical skills to decode a film. The results show that with the help of assistive technologies i.e. audio description, films become accessible and more enjoyable to them but some responses show that technological dominance is not the solution for all the problems. They need practice and time to adopt fast growing technology and also need training and guidance to be comfortable with and assimilate the changes occurring in daily life due to socio-economic conditions.

It has also been gauged that the new audience including visually impaired cinema lovers are no longer remains like the older one which was satisfied in the nautanki like films with some songs and dance. There is a vast shift in thought process and entertainment taste of the audiences and they want to see something new and vibrant which is near to reality, make sense and leave audience with a strong message or thought. Now audience is a careful customer. Before entering to cinema halls they read reviews. However, films without audio descriptions are less accessible to people with visual impairment.

The experience of this study allow the researchers to make an opinion that visually impaired people need an exclusive training of media literacy to be an active citizen and to imbibe the media literacy skills among them, we need an exclusive framework of media literacy.

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