

# The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking  
Double-blind Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 4 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2024 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 65-77

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[www.cavemarkpublications.com](http://www.cavemarkpublications.com)



## Femininity Redefined: Cinematic Portrayal of Intersection of Disability and Sexuality in *Margarita with a Straw*

Kumari Manjari

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1700-4140>

**Corresponding Author:** Kumari Manjari, Research Scholar, Department of HSS, IIT Roorkee, India, [manjarichb3@gmail.com](mailto:manjarichb3@gmail.com)

### Research Article

#### Keywords:

Disability,  
Sexuality,  
Intersectional,  
Cerebral Palsy,  
Bisexual,  
Heteronormative

#### Article History

##### Received:

July 16, 2024

##### Revised:

July 22, 2024

##### Accepted:

July 28, 2024



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPL-JLH)



### Abstract

**Aim:** *This research paper aims to examine the relationship between disability and sexuality in Margarita with a Straw, a film directed by Shonali Bose. It also investigates how Laila (the protagonist), a young lady with cerebral palsy, manages her relationships and sexuality while overcoming the obstacles imposed on her. In my opinion, the film subverts the widely held belief that people with disabilities are asexual and incapable of feeling love or sexual desire by showing Laila's sexuality and desire as significant aspects of her existence. The article discusses how Laila's intersectional identity as a bisexual, disabled woman complicates her journey of life.*

**Methodology and Approach:** *The study is primarily qualitative and employs textual analysis as a theoretical tool for critically evaluating the film. Both primary and secondary sources have been examined. In addition, it has been studied in the context of feminist theory and disability studies.*

**Outcome-** *The researchers have discovered through this paper that the film Margarita with a Straw undermines ableist and heteronormative presumptions about sexuality and relationships by offering a complex and inspiring portrayal of disability and desire.*

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** *By focusing on the experiences of a protagonist with a disability, "Margarita with a Straw" fosters a more diverse and inclusive cinematic landscape, increasing comprehension, empathy, and acceptance of underrepresented identities. Disability awareness's objectives and tenets are to protect individuals with disabilities from prejudice, promote their equal involvement in society, and ensure that they have access to the same opportunities and rights as persons without disabilities.*

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One billion individuals globally are thought to be disabled, with women accounting for 19% and men for 12% of those affected [1]. Environmental obstacles that lead to a lower economic and social standing, as well as people's attitudes about them, might be the source of the systemic marginalization that women and girls experience. Women who fall into this category are subjected to both physical and sexual violence. Disability awareness's objectives and tenets are to protect individuals with disabilities from prejudice, promote their equal involvement in society, and guarantee that they have access to the same opportunities and rights as persons without disabilities. For a very long time, cinema has been a potent medium for questioning social norms and expanding upon conventional ideas of identity and representation. Director Shonali Bose takes a bold approach to examining the relationship between sexuality and handicap in "Margarita with a Straw," providing a novel interpretation of femininity that challenges gender norms and preconceptions [2]. The world of Laila, a young lady with cerebral palsy, is opened up to audiences in this cinematic masterpiece as she negotiates the difficulties of love, desire, and self-discovery. "Margarita with a Straw" transports viewers on an emotional journey through the life of its protagonist, set against the backdrop of contemporary India. Kalki Koechlin does a fantastic job portraying Laila, a fiercely independent and vibrant person whose disability is just one feature of her complex character. Along with navigating the difficulties of having cerebral palsy, Laila investigates her developing sexuality and sets out on a journey to find acceptance and personal fulfilment [3].

Globalization contributed to the perpetuation of patriarchy by projecting women as consumers who would strain the already meagre resources of their families, despite their status as economic creators. Beauty pageants became more widespread, reaching far-flung and tiny Indian towns. This objectified women, thrusting them to the forefront of the sex industry and exacerbating the angst experienced by the already marginalized women with disabilities who were viewed as asexual—that is, not physically attractive nor sexually marketable. They lost their ability to make people notice them, which made society label them

as "inefficient, incapable, unwanted, and undesirable." [4]. This paper will critically examine the filmic representation of femininity in "Margarita with a Straw," delving deeper into the concepts of sexuality, identity, and handicap. We'll look at how the movie defies clichés and clichés to create a complex and real picture of Laila's real life. We will also talk about the cultural significance of "Margarita with a Straw" in the context of feminist theory and disability studies, emphasizing how it has changed how various identities are portrayed in movies [5]. We will also talk about the cultural significance of "Margarita with a Straw" in the context of feminist theory and disability studies, emphasizing how it has changed how various identities are portrayed in movies [4-6].

Laila's sexual path is dynamic in that she is in four distinct relationships, all of which require analysis in light of the contentious confluence of sexuality, handicap, and censorship. Through Laila's transformation and acceptance of who she is at the end, the movie also sheds light on the relationship between handicap and body image. that's the tale of Laila's sexual exploration; she has cerebral palsy but doesn't let that stop her. She attends University of Delhi's Ramjas College and resides in Delhi with her family. Her cerebral palsy has affected her motor abilities, but not her mental faculties [7-8]. The movie's title, Margarita with a Straw, perfectly captures the character of Laila. She is gorgeous like a Margarita, brave and self-assured in her aspirations. Here, Straw's wheelchair may be examined in terms of how it has changed body aesthetics and challenged ideas of sexuality and desire.

The relationship between sexuality and disability may find a new voice thanks to movies like these. The movie might serve as an illustration of how to portray disability in the modern era while emphasizing "crip-queer" sexuality [8]. LGBTQ+ identities and experiences have been marginalized in film because heteronormative and cisgender perspectives have dominated representations of sexuality in the medium. LGBTQ+ characters were frequently portrayed as parodies or targets of mockery, which contributed to their lack of exposure in popular media and reinforced negative preconceptions. Furthermore, conversations on sexuality were sometimes frowned upon or limited to skewed,

sensationalized representations that fell short of capturing the richness and diversity of interpersonal relationships and desires [9]. The groundbreaking movie "Margarita with a Straw" defies preconceived notions about handicap and sexuality in the movies. By focusing on the experiences of a disabled lead character negotiating her sexual awakening, the movie dispels preconceptions and provides a more genuine and inclusive representation of desire and identity. The movie emphasizes the intersectionality of sexuality and disability through Laila's character, acknowledging the subtleties and complexities of these intersecting individualities [10].

Authentic representation in film has been increasingly important in recent years, especially when it comes to underrepresented identities like disabilities and LGBTQ+ experiences. Both activists and filmmakers have pushed for increased diversity and inclusivity in storytelling, opposing popular narratives and elevating the perspectives of marginalized people [11]. "Margarita with a Straw" is a testament to this shift, demonstrating the power of cinema to challenge norms, foster empathy, and redefine our understanding of disability, sexuality, and identity. It is critical to acknowledge the continuous need for more inclusive and diverse depictions as we discuss disability and sexuality in film. Movies like "Margarita with a Straw" are significant turning points in the continuous effort to increase the diversity of human experiences' representation and acknowledgement. Cinema has the power to inspire change, promote understanding, and celebrate the richness of human diversity by elevating underrepresented voices and questioning social norms [12].

"Margarita with a Straw" is a filmic gem that proposals an emotional examination of individuality, love, and self-discovery [13]. "Margarita with a Straw" trails the expedition of Laila, a vibrant woman with intellectual palsy, as she circumnavigates the difficulties of life, love, and self-discovery. The film investigates into Laila's associations with her friends, relatives, family and idealistic partners, discovering themes of disability and sexuality [13].

Shonali Bose has a very personal connection to the "Margarita with a Straw" story since she was inspired by her cerebral palsy-affected relative Malini.

The film is sensitive and authentic because of Bose's deep grasp of the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities [14]. Bose's approach to storytelling is further informed by her own journeys as an activist and filmmaker, which enables her to create a story which is both socially and emotionally relevant [14–15].

The Stigma Theory of Erving Goffman investigates how labels from society impact people's identities. He contends that because of their alleged shortcomings or distinctions, stigmatized people face discrimination and social marginalization. Goffman emphasizes how social norms affect the lives of those who are stigmatized by influencing how people see and interact with one another. Both reviewers and viewers praised "Margarita with a Straw" extensively for its accurate depiction of sexuality and disability. The film won multiple prizes and acclaim for its deft handling of complicated subjects and Kalki Koechlin's outstanding performance as Laila. "Margarita with a Straw" has had a significant cultural impact in addition to its critical success, igniting discussions on diversity, representation, and the ability of storytelling to subvert social norms [16]. The movie has helped promote a better awareness and acceptance of varied identities in cinema and beyond by elevating the voices of marginalized populations and providing a forum for underrepresented tales."

Laila's identity is complex in "Margarita with a Straw," influenced by her sexual orientation, disability, and life events. Viewers are encouraged to dive further into Laila's intricate inner world as the movie progresses, discovering the many facets of her identity and the difficulties she encounters when negotiating the intersections of her sexuality and disability.

Laila's cerebral palsy is a major factor in shaping who she is. She has struggled with physical restrictions and societal perceptions of her ability since an early age. But Laila accepts her impairment as an essential component of who she is, refusing to let it define her [17]. With Laila's journey, the movie dispels ableist ideas about disability and shows her as a fully formed person with goals, aspirations, and agency.

Laila's identity changes significantly as she investigates her sexuality and desires. Her relationships with men and women help her work through issues of

intimacy, pleasure, and self-awareness. Laila's romantic and sexual experiences are delicately portrayed in the movie, emphasizing the complexity of desire and the universal yearning for connection. "Margarita with a Straw" praises the multiplicity of human relationships and subverts heteronormative standards by centering on Laila's wishes and agency [17–18].

Laila affirms her agency and autonomy throughout the movie, in spite of the obstacles she encounters. Her enthusiasm for writing and her desire to go on solitary travels are examples of her refusal to let society's expectations or constraints define her. Laila's story is proof of the strength of self-determination and the resiliency of the human spirit. She becomes a symbol of bravery, strength, and resiliency as a result of her hardships and victories [19].

Laila's identity is affected by her cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, and handicap, all of which interact to create an intersectional whole. Laila struggles with various levels of discrimination and persecution as a disabled woman navigating her sexual awakening in Indian society [20]. In order to show the intricacy of identity development in a diverse and linked world, the movie examines how these overlapping identities impact Laila's experiences and viewpoints. "Margarita with a Straw" offers a subtle and accurate portrayal of debility and sexuality while deriding Laila's individuality. The movie concludes Laila's path of self-discovery and empowerment by posing questions to stereotypes, embracing diversity, and reaffirming the intrinsic value and dignity of every person, despite differences. Viewers are encouraged to embrace their own identities and live real lives by Laila, who emerges as a potent symbol of resilience and self-acceptance [20].

"Margarita with a Straw" presents Laila as a fully developed, multi-dimensional character, challenging prevalent preconceptions and clichés related to handicap and sexuality. Laila's attractiveness defies expectations by asserting her activity and independence, instead of being well-defined exclusively by her disability or condensed to a helpless object of sympathy [22]. The movie challenges heteronormative and ableist myths by showing Laila as a multifaceted

person with hopes for the future, wants, and the ability to experience closeness and love.

Laila has significant epiphanies and periods of self-discovery during her journey. She challenges social norms and expectations, challenges the current quo, and asserts her right to live authentically as she navigates her sexuality and desires. Laila rejects external pressure to fit into preconceived notions of femininity and instead learns to embrace her identity with confidence and pride via her relationships and life experiences [23]. Her self-discovery journey is a moving example of the human spirit's tenacity and the transformational potential of accepting oneself as one truly is.

Laila's persona is extremely important in questioning conventional ideas of femininity, especially in the context of Indian culture. Laila subverts normal gender roles and expectations by expressing characteristics typically associated with masculinity, such as aggressiveness, independence, and sexual agency, and by defying preconceptions [24]. Her representation subverts the patriarchal conventions that frequently control women's conduct and limit their independence, creating room for alternative feminine narratives that value individuality, diversity, and self-expression. The film "Margarita with a Straw" offers a powerful indictment of societal norms and expectations via Laila's journey of gender rediscovery. Through its subversion of stereotypes, celebration of empowerment, and challenge to traditional gender standards, the film invites viewers to reconsider their preconceived perceptions of femininity and embrace a more inclusive and expansive image of what it means to be a woman [23–24]. Laila's persona inspires viewers to live courageously in defiance of social standards and embrace their own identities since she is a source of courage, strength, and sincerity.

The belief in society that individuals with disabilities lack awareness of their sexuality, are incapable of forming close relationships, or are uninterested in doing so results in a lack of possibilities for sex education and information that does not address their needs.

"Margarita with a Straw" explores the complex intricacies of family dynamics and social perceptions of sexuality and handicap [25]. Laila's journey is intricately linked to her family's responses to her disability and her sexuality discovery. Laila struggles with her fear of rejection and her yearning for acceptance, and the movie depicts the difficulties of negotiating social conventions and familial expectations [25–26]. The film highlights the need for greater understanding and acceptance within society by shedding light on the impact of cultural views and stigma surrounding disability and sexuality through interactions with her family members.

Laila, a young woman residing in India, encounters a plethora of cultural conventions and expectations that influence her experiences and self-perceptions. The movie looks at how Laila's sense of identity and agency are affected by these cultural elements, especially in light of her sexual orientation and handicap [27]. As Laila balances her own desires with those of society, her journey is replete with moments of conflict and reconciliation. The video emphasizes the intricacies of cultural identity and the significance of defying constrictive standards in order to live authentically via her trials and victories.

The movie is thought to be a potent medium that captures the events of society. Even though it blurs the lines between reality and fiction, entertainment plays a vital role in educating the public, changing their attitudes and behaviours, and providing amusement. The Bollywood industry has been especially successful in altering people's perceptions and dismantling societal stereotypes because of its global and Indian appeal. The movie "Margarita with a Straw" has had a significant influence on how disabled people are portrayed and seen in the media and in general society. The film dispels myths and prejudices about disability and elevates the voices of underrepresented groups by focusing on Laila's experiences negotiating her sexuality as a disabled woman [28]. The film's sensitive and genuine depiction of disability has spurred significant discussions on diversity and representation in media, encouraging a deeper sense of empathy and understanding for people with disabilities. Furthermore, Laila's persona functions as a potent representation of resiliency and self-determination,



highlighting the significance of visibility in influencing cultural narratives and encouraging a broader acceptance of other identities [29]. "Margarita with a Straw" sheds light on the challenges of managing societal expectations and the transformational potential of representation by examining cultural acceptance and visibility [28–30]. The movie fosters more empathy, understanding, and acceptance of underrepresented communities by getting viewers to face their own biases and prejudices through Laila's journey. "Margarita with a Straw" inspires viewers to embrace the richness of human diversity and appreciate the inherent worth and dignity of every person, serving as an inspiration of optimism about greater diversity and inclusivity in narrative as cinema keeps on evolving progress [27].

Shonali Bose is an Indian film director, writer, and producer who was born on June 3, 1965. Since launching her feature film career in 2005, she has received numerous honors, including the Sundance Mahindra Global Filmmaker Award, the Bridgestone Narrative Award, and the National Film Award. By using her narrative skills, Bose draws the audience into the world of the main character, Laila, and gives them an emotionally charged and engaging experience. Audiences are able to establish a very personal connection with the characters through her use of authentic language, delicate character development, and intimate close-ups [1;22]. The film's realism and power are further enhanced by Bose's directing decisions, which include her focus on character-driven storytelling and her readiness to address taboo themes with compassion and honesty.

Laila's experiences and feelings are effectively communicated in "Margarita with a Straw" thanks in large part to the film's sound design, visual symbolism, and cinematography. Using a genuine style, cinematographer Anne Misawa skilfully and gracefully captures intimate moments [22]. The film's feeling of intimacy and immediacy is enhanced by the use of handheld camera work and dynamic framing methods, which let audiences experience Laila's journey up close. In addition, the film's emotional resonance is enhanced by the sound design, which immerses audiences in Laila's environment through ambient

noises and subdued musical cues. The narrative gains depth and complexity from the use of visual symbolism, such as recurrent themes of water and movement, which act as a potent metaphor for Laila's journey of self-discovery and development [29–30].

The outstanding performances of "Margarita with a Straw" ensemble, especially Kalki Koechlin's portrayal of Laila, are crucial to the film's success. Laila is portrayed by Koechlin in a complex and sympathetic way that authentically and deeply conveys the character's power, fragility, and resilience [31]. Koechlin brings Laila to life with empathy and compassion through her partnership with Bose and the rest of the cast, receiving widespread praise for her remarkable performance. Furthermore, Koechlin's relationship with her co-stars enhances the emotional effect of the movie by fostering an atmosphere of intimacy and genuineness that stays with viewers long after the credits have rolled [30].

Shonali Bose exhibits her skill as a director in "Margarita with a Straw," showcasing her ability to employ cinematic techniques masterfully and her collaborative narrative style. Bose's directorial decisions craft a complex and engrossing story that compels audiences to identify with the characters, face hard realities, and ultimately rejoice in the resiliency of the human spirit. "Margarita with a Straw" is proof of the ability of storytelling to promote understanding, elicit empathy, and provide light on the human condition as film continues to advance.

The film "Margarita with a Straw" is a potent example of how cinema has the ability to redefine gender and subvert social standards. The movie provides a sophisticated examination of identity, desire, and agency through its realistic and inclusive portrayal of sexuality and handicap. Through focusing on the experiences of a protagonist with a disability, "Margarita with a Straw" fosters a more diverse and inclusive cinematic landscape, so increasing comprehension, empathy, and acceptance of underrepresented identities. "Margarita with a Straw" offers hope and inspiration for upcoming generations of filmmakers and viewers as the film industry develops.

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**Kumari Manjari**

Kumari Manjari is currently pursuing her research on Disability Studies at the Department of HSS, IIT Roorkee. An alumna of the prestigious Banaras Hindu University, she completed her BA Hons and Master's in English literature from the Department of English, BHU. She has an excellent academic record and cleared the UGC NET in 2017. Ms. Manjari has presented research papers at various national and International Conferences. The quality of her research reflects her exceptional academic mind and innovative thinking.

