

# The Role of Media in Shaping Perceptions Towards Persons with Disabilities (Divyangs) in India: Challenges and Possible Solutions

**Ms. Sakshi Aggarwal**

*Scholar*

*USMC, GGSIPU, University  
Delhi, India*

*Assistant Professor*

*BVICAM*

*New Delhi, India*

[sakshiaggarwal672@gmail.com](mailto:sakshiaggarwal672@gmail.com)

**Prof Durgesh Tripathi**

*Professor*

*University School of Mass  
Communication*

*Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha  
University, Delhi, India*

[drdurgeshtripathi@gmail.com](mailto:drdurgeshtripathi@gmail.com)

**Dr. Jagriti Basera**

*Assistant Professor*

*BVICAM*

*New Delhi, India*

[jagriti.basera@bvicam.in](mailto:jagriti.basera@bvicam.in)

**Mr. Ketan Kataria**

*Assistant Professor*

*BVICAM*

*New Delhi, India*

[ketan.kataria@bvicam.in](mailto:ketan.kataria@bvicam.in)

**Abstract** - The representation of persons with disabilities, or "Divyangs," in Indian media is often inadequate and problematic. According to the 2011 census, 2.1% of India's population is disabled, yet media coverage of this demographic remains insufficient and often inappropriate (Census of India, 2011). Media portrayal significantly influences societal attitudes toward people with disabilities, and this paper examines the challenges faced by media in covering issues related to Divyangs. The paper also proposes solutions to improve representation and awareness, thereby fostering a more inclusive society.

**Keywords:** *Divyangs, Indian Media, Disabilities*

## INTRODUCTION

India, with its vast and diverse population, has made considerable strides in terms of legal frameworks to protect and empower persons with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, defines a "person with disability" as someone with a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that hinders full participation in society (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016). This legislation aligns with global standards, particularly those set by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory. The shift from the term "viklang" to "Divyang," meaning "divine body," reflects a significant cultural and linguistic change, aimed at promoting dignity and respect. However, despite these advancements, societal attitudes and media representations have not kept pace with legal and policy changes. The media, as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and social norms, plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these attitudes.

## **Media's Role in Covering Divyangs**

The role of the media in shaping perceptions of persons with disabilities cannot be overstated. Media serves as a mirror to society, reflecting its values, concerns, and attitudes. However, when it comes to the coverage of Divyangs, the reflection is often distorted. Despite the significant number of disabled individuals in India, media coverage remains limited and often lacks depth. When Divyangs are featured, they are frequently portrayed as sources of inspiration rather than as individuals with rights and challenges that need to be addressed. This sensationalized portrayal can undermine efforts to integrate them fully into society (Shapiro, 2020).

The media's influence is particularly pronounced in shaping public perceptions and policy priorities. In India, where traditional beliefs and superstitions about disability still persist, the media has the potential to challenge these narratives and promote a more inclusive and accepting society. However, the current state of media coverage often falls short, perpetuating stereotypes and overlooking the systemic issues that contribute to the marginalization of Divyangs.

## **Issues in Media Coverage**

### **Scarcity of News**

The scarcity of media coverage on issues related to Divyangs is a significant concern. According to a study by Bhanushali (2018), disability-related news stories account for less than 1% of the total news coverage in Indian media. This lack of coverage is partly due to the perceived lack of audience interest in stories about disabilities. Media outlets, driven by the need for high ratings and readership, often prioritize stories that are sensational or have mass appeal. As a result, issues that directly impact the lives of Divyangs, such as accessibility, discrimination, and policy implementation, are frequently overlooked. When Divyangs are covered, the content often lacks depth and resorts to adding sensational elements to attract attention.

This scarcity of coverage has far-reaching implications. Without consistent and meaningful media representation, the issues faced by Divyangs remain invisible to the broader public. This invisibility contributes to their continued marginalization, as societal awareness and understanding of disability-related issues remain limited. Furthermore, the lack of coverage hinders advocacy efforts, as media attention is often crucial for bringing about policy changes and holding authorities accountable.

### **Portrayal as Inspirational Figures**

When the media does cover Divyangs, the portrayal is often problematic. The media frequently frames Divyangs as "superhumans" or "specially abled," which can be limiting and reductive (Jeffress, 2021). These portrayals, while well-intentioned, tend to focus on individual achievements and resilience rather than addressing the broader societal and infrastructural challenges that contribute to their struggles. For example, headlines like "What's your excuse?" or "If they can, you can!" overlook the systemic barriers these individuals face, such as lack of accessibility, discrimination in the workplace, and inadequate healthcare.

This "inspiration porn" approach, a term coined by disability rights activists, reduces Divyangs to objects of inspiration for non-disabled people, rather than recognizing them as individuals with their own agency and rights. It also shifts the focus away from the need for systemic changes, such as improved accessibility,

inclusive education, and equal employment opportunities. Instead of highlighting the societal changes needed to empower Divyangs, these portrayals reinforce the idea that they should be celebrated for overcoming their disabilities, rather than challenging the barriers that exist in the first place.

### **Lack of Information on Policies and Events**

Media coverage of important policies and events related to disability is also lacking. Significant events like World Down Syndrome Day, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and government initiatives like the Deen Dayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme receive minimal attention (Gupta, 2020). This omission contributes to a knowledge gap that gradually excludes Divyangs from mainstream social, economic, and political life. The lack of coverage on policies and events that impact the lives of Divyangs further marginalizes them and perpetuates their invisibility in society.

The failure to cover these events and policies not only deprives the general public of important information but also prevents Divyangs from accessing resources and opportunities that could improve their lives. For instance, many Divyangs may be unaware of government schemes designed to assist them due to the lack of media coverage. This information gap can have serious consequences, as it limits their ability to advocate for their rights and access the support they need.

Moreover, the lack of coverage on disability-related policies and events reflects a broader issue within the media industry: the lack of diversity in newsrooms. Journalists and editors who are unaware of or indifferent to disability issues are less likely to prioritize these stories. This lack of representation within the media itself contributes to the ongoing marginalization of Divyangs.

### **Proposed Solutions for Better Coverage**

To address these challenges, the media must adopt a more comprehensive and responsible approach to covering issues related to Divyangs. This involves focusing on in-depth stories, increasing coverage of their representation in various sectors, and promoting awareness of the challenges they face.

#### **In-Depth Coverage**

One of the most effective ways to improve media coverage of Divyangs is through in-depth reporting. Rather than focusing on superficial or sensational stories, journalists should delve deeper into the issues that affect this community. This could include exploring topics such as the impact of COVID-19 on the employment of Divyangs, India's standing in funding programs for people with disabilities, and the potential buying power of Divyangs (Sharma & Kumar, 2022). These stories would provide a more nuanced understanding of their lives and challenges, and help shift the narrative from one of pity or inspiration to one of empowerment and rights.

In-depth reporting also has the potential to influence policy and public opinion. By providing detailed analysis and highlighting the experiences of Divyangs, the media can help to build a more informed and engaged public. This, in turn, can lead to greater support for policies that promote inclusion and equality. Additionally, in-depth stories can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, NGOs, and advocacy groups working to improve the lives of Divyangs.

For instance, a comprehensive report on the challenges faced by Divyangs during the COVID-19 pandemic could bring attention to the specific needs of this community, such as accessible healthcare and economic support. This type of reporting could also highlight the shortcomings of existing policies and the need for targeted interventions. By providing a platform for Divyangs to share their experiences and perspectives, the media can play a crucial role in amplifying their voices and advocating for change.

### **Coverage in Sports, Politics, and Education**

The representation of Divyangs in politics, education, and sports is another area where the media can play a crucial role. Government initiatives like the Khelo India Scheme, which promotes sports participation among people with disabilities, deserve more attention (Singh, 2021). Media coverage of these initiatives can help ensure that policies are implemented effectively and that Divyangs are recognized for their contributions in various fields.

In sports, for example, the media can highlight the achievements of Divyang athletes and the challenges they face in accessing training facilities, sponsorships, and competitions. By giving visibility to these athletes, the media can challenge stereotypes and promote the idea that Divyangs are capable of excelling in all areas of life, including sports. Moreover, media coverage can help to increase public interest and support for disability sports, leading to greater investment and opportunities for Divyang athletes.

In the realm of politics, the media can play a vital role in promoting the political participation of Divyangs. This could include coverage of disabled candidates running for office, as well as reporting on policies and legislation that impact the lives of Divyangs. By bringing these issues to the forefront, the media can help to ensure that the voices of Divyangs are heard and that their rights are protected.

In education, the media can focus on the challenges faced by Divyang students, such as lack of accessibility in schools, discrimination, and limited access to resources. By highlighting these issues, the media can raise awareness and advocate for changes that would make the education system more inclusive. Additionally, media coverage can help to promote success stories of Divyang students who have overcome barriers and achieved academic success, providing inspiration and motivation for others.

### **Addressing Societal Stigmas**

Media has the power to challenge societal stigmas and misconceptions about disability. By covering stories that highlight the challenges faced by Divyangs and offering solutions, the media can help change public perceptions and foster a more inclusive society (Roy, 2019). This could include stories that challenge stereotypes about disability, such as the idea that Divyangs are dependent or incapable of contributing to society. By presenting Divyangs as active and capable members of society, the media can help to shift the narrative and promote greater acceptance and inclusion.

One way to address societal stigmas is through the use of positive representation. This involves showcasing Divyangs in a variety of roles and contexts, such as in the workplace, in leadership positions, and in the arts. By presenting a more diverse and accurate portrayal of Divyangs, the media can help to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive society.

Another approach is to provide platforms for Divyangs to share their own stories and experiences. This could include interviews, personal essays, and documentaries that give Divyangs the opportunity to speak for themselves and share their perspectives. By giving Divyangs a voice in the media, their experiences and perspectives can be better understood and appreciated, and societal attitudes towards disability can be challenged and changed.

### **Promoting Distance Education**

Distance education offers significant opportunities for Divyangs, particularly for female students who face additional societal barriers. Media should promote awareness of these opportunities and highlight the various career paths available to Divyangs through distance education (Patel, 2020). By covering success stories of Divyangs who have benefited from distance education, the media can help to promote this option as a viable and accessible alternative for those who may not be able to attend traditional educational institutions.

In addition to promoting distance education, the media can also advocate for the development and implementation of inclusive educational practices. This could include coverage of initiatives that aim to make distance education more accessible to Divyangs, such as the use of assistive technologies, accessible course materials, and support services. By highlighting these initiatives, the media can help to promote a more inclusive and equitable education system for Divyangs.

Furthermore, media coverage of distance education can help to address the challenges faced by Divyangs in accessing education. This could include stories on the barriers to participation in distance education, such as lack of internet access, inadequate support services, and discrimination. By bringing attention to these issues, the media can help to advocate for changes that would make distance education more accessible and inclusive for Divyangs.

### **Collaborations with NGOs**

Collaborating with NGOs can help media outlets produce more accurate and impactful stories about Divyangs. These collaborations can lead to interviews, talk shows, and programs that promote the inclusion of Divyangs in society (Verma, 2019). NGOs often have valuable insights and expertise on disability issues, and partnering with them can help to ensure that media coverage is informed, accurate, and impactful.

One potential collaboration could involve NGOs providing training for journalists on how to cover disability issues sensitively and accurately. This could include workshops on disability rights, the use of appropriate language, and best practices for interviewing and reporting on Divyangs. By equipping journalists with the knowledge and skills needed to cover disability issues effectively, these collaborations can help to improve the overall quality of media coverage.

Another potential collaboration could involve joint campaigns to raise awareness of disability issues. This could include coordinated efforts to promote specific events, policies, or initiatives, such as International Day of Persons with Disabilities or campaigns to improve accessibility. By working together, NGOs and media outlets can amplify their impact and reach a wider audience.

Furthermore, collaborations with NGOs can help to ensure that media coverage is representative and inclusive. NGOs often have connections with diverse communities of Divyangs, and can help to facilitate access to sources and stories that might otherwise be overlooked. By partnering with NGOs, media outlets can ensure that their coverage reflects the diversity and complexity of the experiences of Divyangs.

## CONCLUSION

The media has the power to shape societal norms and influence public opinion. By improving its coverage of Divyangs, the media can play a pivotal role in their empowerment. As Stephen Hawking aptly stated, "Disability need not be an obstacle to success." Media must move beyond portraying Divyangs as mere sources of inspiration and instead focus on their potential as equal participants in society. Through thoughtful and inclusive coverage, the media can help dismantle the barriers that continue to hinder the full participation of Divyangs in all aspects of life.

A more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of Divyangs in the media can contribute to a more inclusive society, where the rights and dignity of all individuals are respected and upheld. By addressing the current shortcomings in media coverage and adopting the proposed solutions, the media can help to promote greater understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of Divyangs in Indian society.

## REFERENCES

- Bhanushali, R. (2018). Representation of Disability in Indian Media. *International Journal of Communication Studies*, 12(3), 45-57.
- Chakraborty, P. (2021). Media's Role in Shaping Public Perception of Disabilities. *Journal of Media and Society*, 15(4), 66-78.
- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD). India.* (n.d.). <https://depwd.gov.in/>
- Gupta, A. (2020). Media and Disability: A Comparative Analysis. *Indian Journal of Media Research*, 9(1), 38-49.
- Jeffress, M. S. (2021). Disability representation in film, TV, and print media. In *Routledge eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035114>
- Lidubwi, J. U. (2017). Representation of Disability in media. *ResearchGate*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331546523\\_Representation\\_of\\_Disability\\_in\\_media#fullTextFileContent](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331546523_Representation_of_Disability_in_media#fullTextFileContent)
- Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India. (2016). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. [https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-49\\_1.pdf](https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-49_1.pdf)
- Patel, S. (2020). Promoting Distance Education for Persons with Disabilities. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 14(2), 23-33.
- Roy, M. (2019). Challenging Stigma: Media's Role in Disability Awareness. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 39(3), 12-19.
- Shapiro, J. (2020). *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement*. Times Books.
- Sharma, R., & Kumar, V. (2022). The Economic Impact of Disability in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57(6), 48-55.
- Singh, T. (2021). Khelo India and the Inclusion of Disabled Athletes. *Sports and Society Journal*, 5(4), 22-35.
- United Nations. (n.d.). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- Verma, K. (2019). NGO-Media Collaboration for Disability Awareness. *Journal of Non-Profit Management*, 11(3), 59-71.