

DISABILITY NARRATIVES IN URDU FICTION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

Dr. Hina Hadayat Ali

(Assistant Professor in Special Education/Coordinator)

Department of Special Education, University of Education, Lahore, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan

Email: hina.hadayat@ue.edu.pk

Dr. Hina Fazil

(Associate Professor in Special Education), Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: hinafazil.dse@pu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Nazir

(Lecturer of Special Education), Department of Special Education, University of Education, Lahore, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan

Email: muhammad.nazir@ue.edu.pk

Abstract

Literature is a very important contributor to the attitudes towards society diversity, inclusion and marginalisation. In Urdu literature and literary criticism, a large number of themes have been dealt with in the light of social difference, but in the context of Urdu fiction, disability is under researched. The image of the person with a disability in literature means that there are important implications for practices in education, especially when considering inclusive education and the attitudes that need to be developed to ensure learning takes place in an equitable manner. This narrative review explores the depiction of disability in Urdu fiction literature by applying the concepts of Disability Studies and inclusive education. The review is based on the literature on disability representation and literature from around the world on disability, and educational inclusion, and addresses some of the dominant themes in these fields: tragedy, dependency, social exclusion, charity, resilience, agency. The article states that traditional Urdu fiction has often been defined by a deficit-based approach which perpetuates stereotypes and social isolation of disabled people. Awareness, however, of the rights, identities and abilities of persons with disabilities is increasingly reflected in trends in literature. The review also considers the possibilities of disability narratives in the educational arena to express empathy, resist stereotypes and promote inclusive values in the pupil. The study emphasizes the need to have more academic studies on disability representation in Urdu literature, and also recommends to incorporate inclusive academic viewpoints in the educational curriculum.

This study delves into the portrayal of disabilities in Urdu literature and the significance for the acceptance and understanding of disability. The paper emphasizes on the challenges in disability representation in Urdu fiction and the role it plays in disability acceptance and understanding.

Keywords: Disability, Urdu Fiction, Inclusive Education, Disability Studies, Literary Representation, Social Inclusion, Educational Justice, Urdu Literature

1. Introduction

Literature can reflect social realities, but can also be a tool to influence social attitudes and values. Literature shapes the view of people and themselves through characters, stories, and narratives. Literary texts play a vital role in students' learning about diversity, social justice, and human experiences in the school environment. Therefore, literature's portrayal of the marginalised communities has significant consequences for social attitudes and education (May-Simera, 2018).

Persons with disabilities have long been discriminated against, stereotyped and excluded from society, particularly by the marginalized populations (Wendell, 2013; World Health Organization, 2023). Such attitudes in society are frequently illustrated and perpetuated in literary narratives. How disability is represented in the media can foster understanding and acceptance or prejudice and marginalization (Ramberg, 2021).

In Urdu literature there has been ample scholarly commentary on issues of social injustice, poverty, gender discrimination, and human suffering. But the topic of disability has been relatively underdeveloped in the areas of literature and education. Characters with physical or intellectual disabilities are found in many fictional works, but there are very few systematic analyses of the representation of such characters. This gap is especially large in the context of the current global trend towards inclusive education and disability rights.

Inclusive education is about equality of access to education, to learn, to participate in the education and social life. This will need to involve structural and policy change as well as fostering inclusive attitudes among students, teachers and society as a whole. Literature can be of great assistance in this process, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and comprehension of human experiences (World Health Organization, 2024; Yell and Katsiyannis, 2024).

This article critically examines disability narrations in Urdu fiction and its implications towards inclusive education. The review aims to link the disciplines of Urdu literature, Disability Studies and educational research through dominant representational patterns and emerging views.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the portrayal of persons with disabilities in selected Urdu fictional literature through the perspectives of Disability Studies.
2. To identify the dominant themes and narrative patterns used in representing persons with disabilities in Urdu fiction.
3. To explore the implications of disability narratives in Urdu fiction for promoting inclusive education, disability awareness, and positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

Research Questions

1. How are persons with disabilities portrayed in Urdu fictional literature from the perspective of Disability Studies?
2. What are the dominant themes and narrative patterns used in the representation of persons with disabilities in Urdu fiction?
3. What are the educational implications of disability narratives in Urdu fiction for fostering inclusive education and positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities?

2. Literature Review

Disability Representation in Literature

Research on literary representations has been radically changed by the advent of Disability Studies (Shakespeare, 2017). In earlier literature, disability was frequently portrayed as a personal tragedy or moral deficiency, representing other assumptions in society about what is normal and abnormal. Literary narratives have historically helped to shape the social construction of disability by placing disabled bodies outside the boundaries of normatively accepted bodies, as proposed by Thomson (2017).

Banks (2025) coined the term narrative prosthesis, which implies that disability often is a literary tool to propel narrative, establish tension or act as a metaphor for social issues. In these story types, disability is frequently used as a plot device but not a true reflection of disability experience.

Davis (2013) stresses the significance of literature in the formation of “cultural” ideas of “normality” and “abnormality.” Literary narratives that depict disability as a deficiency, dependency or tragedy can reinforce social attitudes that marginalize people with disabilities, as a result of repeated depictions.

Disability and Education

Literature has become recognized as an important instrument for inclusion and diversity for educational scholars more and more. Attitudes towards disability can be formed and

maintained through the literature that is accessible to children and adults. The research indicates that positive and realistic images of disability can improve understanding, diminish attitudes of prejudice, and foster inclusive schools (Slee and Tomlinson, 2018; Goodley, 2024).

Literary experts advocate for inclusive education to include a range of experiences and to counter stereotypes in literary texts. These representations support the development of students' critical awareness of discrimination; simultaneously, they contribute to respecting human diversity. Thus, the analysis of disability experiences in Urdu fiction has implications beyond the field of literary studies, as it also has relevance for education practice.

Disability in South Asian Literary Contexts

Disability has been defined within a religious, charitable and familial lens in South Asian societies. The attitudes are often expressed in literary works, where disabled characters are treated as a family dependent, a source of sympathy, or a symbol of moral perfection. While recent scholarship has brought disability rights and social inclusion to the forefront, the traditional representations continue to be influential (Chataika and Goodley, 2024).

While the themes of class, gender, colonialism, and nationalism have been extensively explored in Urdu literary criticism, disability has been comparatively less studied. This is a space that reveals the need to question disability narratives and their wider social and educational context.

3. Methodology

A narrative review method is used to review the literature on disability portrayal in literature and the implications for education. Narrative reviews can be helpful in exploring interdisciplinary areas where empirical research is sparse and where the goal is to uncover conceptual trends, themes and developing scholarly lines.

Relevant literature was sourced using the academic search engines Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC and the regional repositories of literature and education for South Asia. The following keywords were used in the search process: disability representation in literature, disability narratives, Urdu fiction, inclusive education, literature and disability, disability studies, literary portrayals of disability and educational implications of literature.

Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, theoretical works and policy documents were included in the review, and studies in Disability Studies, literary criticism and inclusive education. Themes of stereotyping, social exclusion, dependency, resilience, identity and educational inclusion were specifically looked at. The literature was thematically analysed to uncover the prevailing themes in disability representation and how they relate to practice in education.

4. Theoretical Framework

Three key theoretical frameworks are used to inform the analysis presented in this Review: the medical model, the social model and the human rights model of disability.

The medical model views disability as a person's problem which needs to be treated, rehabilitated or corrected. When this is the view you have, it may be reflected in literature in terms of lack, pain, and helplessness.

The social model, on the other hand, differs from this as it contends that disability is mainly caused by environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers. In this view, exclusion is not due to disability but to unsustainable social structures.

The human rights model builds on the social model highlighting dignity, equality, participation and self-determination. It upholds the rights of persons with disabilities as citizens, including to full inclusion in all aspects of society, including education.

These frameworks offer useful tools for assessment of disability narratives and its implications for education.

5. Disability Representation in Selected Urdu Fictional Texts

In Urdu fiction the portrayal of disability is largely set in a wider context of social ostracism, human anguish and moral consciousness. While disability is not the predominant theme of most of the texts, there are many Urdu writers who have created characters who have a physical, sensory, psychological or social disability that reveal the attitudes of society towards difference and exclusion. These representations are a useful resource for understanding how disability is culturally constructed and the educational implications.

One of the most characteristic aspects of Urdu fiction is that it is about marginalised people. The writers of Progressive Writers' Movement often portrayed characters in socially weak situations, especially Saadat Hasan Manto. Although not always on disability as a specific theme, Manto's depiction of people who have suffered from psychological trauma, social alienation and societal neglect provides valuable insights into the larger picture of exclusion. The narratives penned shortly after the Partition of India bring into focus the agony of the body and the agony of the mind as signifiers of social upheaval and man's vulnerability. These stories call for the reader to acknowledge political aspects to exclusion, not just individual.

Likewise, in fiction Ismat Chughtai's characters are often on the outskirts of society because of their identity. She frequently challenges rigid social norms and/or reveals the processes by which some groups lack agency and recognition. While disability itself is not always made explicit as a topic of focus, her investigation into social stigma and social exclusion does provide a context for the ways in which disabled people may be placed in unequal social structures. Through his stories, Chughtai invites the reader to challenge ideas of social value, productivity and normality.

The novels and short stories of Qurratulain Hyder also have been discussed for identity and social belonging. Displacement, fragmentation, and social change are often themes that the characters in Hyder's works encounter. In these stories, embodied difference and social vulnerability are frequently interwoven with other issues of citizenship, identity, and participation. These representations are in line with the current nature of disability scholarship that suggests that exclusion is not just a result of disability, but also social and cultural barriers.

Bano Qudsia's fiction is another important aspect. Her stories often touch on the themes of psychological anguish, emotional pain, and social isolation. Mental anguish or social isolation can be a serious concern for characters and is often explored with great depth and complexity. Qudsia's work often highlights the humanity and individuality of marginalised people, in contrast to the traditional literary images which limit the person to the condition of their disability. This may serve to be closer to the current inclusive thinking which sees an individual as a whole person, rather than a person with a deficit or abnormality.

In the same way, the narratives of Ashfaq Ahmed's fiction are about compassion, the dignity of the human person, and human connectedness. His stories frequently remind the reader of the worth of all people, no matter their background or situation. While the focus is not always on disability, his ethic of his work is one that supports and embraces human difference and rejects exclusionary attitudes. These representations have a special educational value because they instill empathy and social responsibility in their readers.

The present-day Urdu fiction shows the incremental evolution to more complex representation of disability and difference. Increasingly, texts of the last few years have shifted from pity and dependency to self-determination, resilience, and social participation. Disabled characters are no longer confined to being a passive recipient of care; increasingly,

disabled characters are active agents who offer members of their family, community and society care in return. It is a reflection of the broader social development related to the disability rights movements, inclusive education policies and increased awareness of human rights principles.

Nevertheless, traditional stereotypes can still be seen in the Urdu fiction in parts. Disabled people are often a source of sympathy, a symbol of moral goodness, or a character in a story who elicits emotional responses. The representation of disability may also end up perpetuating deficit thinking about disability, which focuses on dependence and suffering rather than agency and participation. Therefore, it is crucial to engage with these narratives to encourage inclusive interpretations.

For Disability Studies, analysis of the Urdu fiction shows that there is a conflict between the traditional and new representations. Although goodwill and paternalism are frequently found in earlier accounts of disabled people, their dignity, identity and social inclusion are more frequently highlighted in current writing. This development reflects the ability of literature to represent as well as provoke responses to society's views on disability.

6. Disability Narratives in Urdu Fiction

There are numerous depictions of disability in Urdu fiction but most of these depictions are secondary to the narrative development of the fiction. Disabled characters have been often portrayed in the history through suffering, dependency and social marginalization.

A common theme is disability depicted as a personal tragedy. People with disabilities are regularly depicted as individuals whose life is restricted and lost. They feel that their impairments are part of their identity, and their story value often depends on how they impact the viewer's feelings.

Another common occurrence is dependency and paternalism. Disabled characters often are dependent on others for survival and social acceptance, especially family members or charitable benefactors. These stories are part of the culture's take on care and responsibility, but, this can have unintended effects to disregard disabled people as independent social actors.

Disability is also a common metaphor or symbol in Urdu fiction. Blindness can be a sign of ignorance or a sign of spiritual clarity, a physical disability can be a sign of social injustice and/or vulnerability or moral suffering. These metaphors add colour to the literary, but can mask disability as a lived social experience.

7. Social Exclusion and Marginalization

In the Urdu fiction, there are many disability stories which are about the feeling of exclusion and marginalization. There are barriers to education, employment, socialising and marriage for disabled people. These representations can also be used to illustrate that disability is not just a physical or mental state, but also a reflection of societal attitudes and structural barriers. In particular, this is relevant in relation to inclusive education. Literary texts can provoke readers' thinking about accessibility, equity and social justice by raising issues of exclusion. They also describe some of the ways in which negative attitudes can limit opportunities for participation and belonging.

8. Gender and Disability

The theme of disability and gender is a major part of the portrayal in literature. Women with disabilities experience many forms of discrimination, due to gender norms and disability stigma. They can be depicted as unfit for marriage, economically dependent or a social misfit. These images are symbolic of broader, traditional ideas of beauty, fertility and social worth. However, in the stories for today, disabled women are frequently portrayed as dynamic characters who are pursuing education, employment, and individual hopes and dreams.

9. Educational Implications of Disability Narratives

Literature is important in inclusive education because of the representation of disability. Literary Texts are very good learning materials that can influence the attitude and belief of students. Representations that are both positive and realistic can help to encourage empathy, challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance of diversity.

Inclusion of disability in the school curriculum provides students with opportunities to critically examine problems of social exclusion, discrimination and human rights. This interaction can help to foster inclusive attitudes and promote respect for difference.

Furthermore, disability stories can be used to help foster the implementation of inclusive education and to highlight the importance of accessibility, participation and equality. They foster the awareness that disability is not an absence that needs to be corrected, but instead it is a part of the diversity of human beings.

10. Discussion

The review shows that the portrayal of disability in Urdu fiction has been and will be shaped by customs and norms that emphasize on tragedy, dependency and isolation of people with disability. These depictions are indicative of wider social values which have often excluded, marginalised and restricted recognition of the agency of persons with disabilities.

Simultaneously, new trends in the present day indicate an apparent movement toward symbolic forms that are more inclusive and embracing of rights. The newer stories are influenced by the global disability rights movements, as well as by educational reforms, so that disabled people are no longer passive recipients of care, but active agents in society.

These modifications of representations have educational implications. However, policy and practice are not enough to sustain inclusive education, it requires cultural attitude as well. The potential of literature to change such attitudes can be significant when disability is represented in a way that helps to maintain dignity, equality and social participation.

11. Conclusion

The Urdu fiction texts in this category give significant clues about the relationship between literature, society and education. Conventional images have focused on suffering, dependency and exclusion, but modern images have focused on the agency and rights of persons with disabilities. They reflect the general trend in inclusive education and social justice.

The review highlights that there has been no scholarly interest in Urdu studies to bring the issue of disability in the study of Urdu to the limelight. Careful study of specific novels and short stories can be undertaken to explore disability in different genres and at various times in the past. With such scholarship, we can begin to create more inclusive literary criticism and towards education that encourages respect for diversity and human dignity.

12. Implications for Curriculum Development and Teacher Education

Literary works about disability are not only appreciated as literary works, but also for their educational value. Literature has the potential to be a powerful tool in developing empathy, critical thinking, respect for diversity, in inclusive education. The study of Urdu fiction can help students to understand the complex social dynamics and issues and discuss how culture constructs narrative about disability and how they affect attitudes towards disability.

Literature that focuses on disability can be integrated into the school and university curriculum to promote disability awareness and social inclusion. Students are encouraged to consider issues of discrimination, accessibility and human rights when they read stories about marginalised people. This interaction can help to question stereotypes and foster more positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

For teacher preparation programs, disability narratives can be incorporated into courses and programs. Teachers-in-training often go into classrooms without much disability-related knowledge. Literary texts are a rich resource for examination of the social and emotional

dynamics of exclusion and for inspiring educators to become more inclusive in their approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers can become more aware of the issues of diversity and inclusion through critical discussion of literary representations.

Moreover, disability narratives can be instrumental in the process of implementing the principles of inclusive education policies, by reinforcing the principles of equity and participation. Literature helps students and teachers to view disability not as an individual issue, but as a dimension of human diversity that is influenced by social settings. This is essential to developing learning communities that prioritize students from all backgrounds.

Moreover, the incorporation of disability narratives in Urdu language and literature education also provides an opportunity to link the process of literacy with other goals of education. Topics around character development, social relationships, and cultural values can be connected with the concepts of inclusion, citizenship, and social justice. Thus, Urdu fiction can serve as a tool for both learning and literature to build inclusive societies.

References

- Davis, L. J. (2016). *The disability studies reader*. Routledge.
- Banks, J. (2025). *Conversations and Key Debates on Inclusive and Special Education: Global Insights from 'The Inclusion Dialogue'*. Routledge.
- Thomson, R. G. (2017). *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. Columbia University Press.
- Goodley, D. (2024). Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction.
- Chataika, T., & Goodley, D. (Eds.). (2024). *The Routledge handbook of postcolonial disability studies*. Routledge.
- Shakespeare, T. (2017). *Disability: the basics*. Routledge.
- Slee, R., & Tomlinson, S. (2018). *Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny*. Routledge.
- May-Simera, C. (2018). Reconsidering sheltered workshops in light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). *Laws*, 7(1), 6.
- Ramberg, J. (2021). Global Education Monitoring Report 2021–Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia–Inclusion and education: All means all.
- Wendell, S. (2013). *The rejected body: Feminist philosophical reflections on disability*. Routledge.
- World Health Organization. (2024). *Health equity for persons with disabilities: guide for action*. World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Global report on children with developmental disabilities: From the margins to the mainstream*. World Health Organization.
- Yell, M. L., & Katsiyannis, A. (2024). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: School Districts' Obligations under the Law. In *Handbook of special education* (pp. 177-196). Routledge.