

We're not all superhumans

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[On target: "When a video this striking comes along, it comes with a lot of potential for giving disability the attention it deserves." A video grab from Channel 4's Rio Paralympics trailer.— Photo: YouTube](#)
The Rio 2016 Paralympics trailer is heart-wrenching but presents disability as "inspiration porn"

My social circle includes writers, photographers, designers, musicians and producers. I have always been the odd one out. I'm "that" girl from the disability and development space and I'm pretty sure none of them knows what I really do. It works just fine for me, but only till the time that tear-jerking Ted Talk comes along and my inbox gets flooded with the same link over and over again along with the clichéd comment, "thought of you when I saw this."

Something similar happened recently when Channel 4 released its trailer for the Rio 2016 Paralympics.

[Trailer talk](#)

The trailer is gorgeous. It hits the spot, visually and emotionally. It is slick, heart-wrenching, and it's got real people — athletes with disabilities. The music and the beat are spot on and will maybe even make you shed a tear or two. I want to like this trailer. I really do. It's the kind of thing I want people to share because no one talks about disability, especially in India where people with disabilities constitute an invisible population owing to the lack of any kind of access. So, when a video this striking comes along, it comes with a lot of potential for giving disability the attention it deserves.

But here's the problem. Each time I watched this video, I cringed when I heard the word 'Superhumans'. The term is not new to the world of Paralympics. Channel 4's commercial for the 2012 London Paralympics was called 'Meet the Superhumans'.

A quick overview of the global disability movement will tell you how the struggle to remove the "special" syndrome continues to this day in many parts of the world. These athletes are phenomenal and at no point am I trying to undermine their hard work and determination. The real problem is with the way disability is presented — "inspiration porn" for all of us.

I remember a college lecturer recounting an incident about an extremely flustered mother of a disabled child. **Taare Zameen Par** (titled "Like Stars on Earth" internationally) — an Indian film about an eight-year-old dyslexic child, an underachiever who progresses to win an art competition under the guidance of a teacher who doesn't give up on him — had just released. The mother was concerned about her son's fate because he did not know how to paint. My lecturer, while narrating this incident, talked about the lack of a middle ground, a kind of regularity. It was either complete helplessness being an underachiever because of one's "condition" or being special and exceptional, a superhuman.

[The right terminology](#)

Different organisations and individuals use different terminologies. While many continue to use the term "handicapped", the world has moved on to accepting the expression "people/persons with disabilities". We are way past the medical and charity models of disability which put the onus on the individual and the "impairment". The focus now is on rights and removing barriers. And that is why nomenclature becomes important. We possibly cannot be talking about dignity on the one hand while using labels on the other.

The trailer has been inviting an extraordinary amount of attention across the world, which is good news because it's about time we started talking about disability. But my fear is that it is doing to millions what

Taare Zameen Par

did to the mother — taking away that middle ground.

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