

Screening the Other': An Analysis of Transgender representation in the Hindi Mainstream Cinema

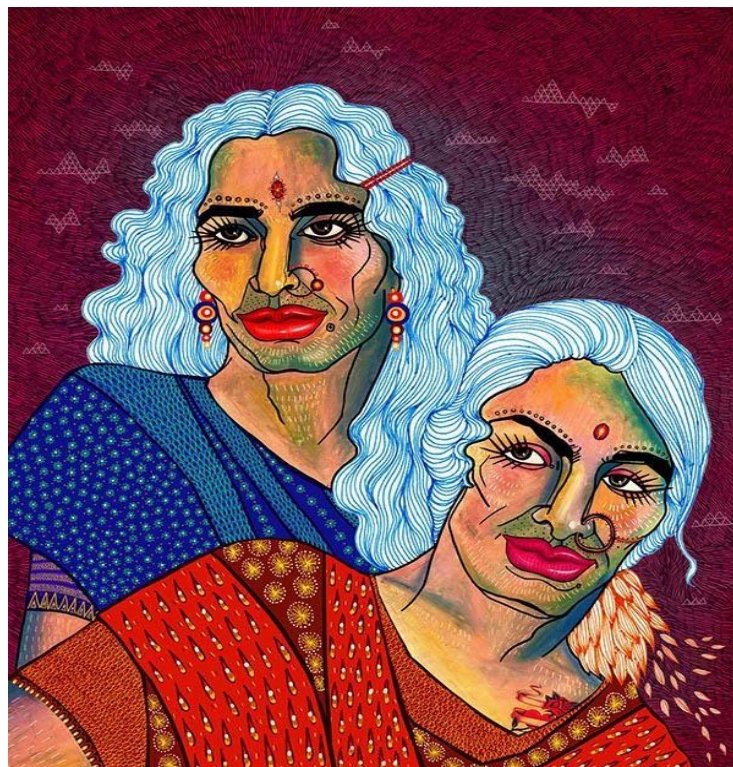
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, titled —Screening the _Other': An Analysis of Transgender Representation in Hindi Mainstream Cinema, examines the portrayal of transgender individuals in Hindi films and its impact on the Indian audience. The study aims to investigate how Hindi cinema has represented transgender characters, exploring both positive and negative portrayals, and their implications for the transgender community. The research seeks to understand the views and opinions of individuals regarding the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, covering both the positive and negative aspects of the topic. The study is grounded in the recognition that Hindi cinema has consistently featured transgender characters over the years, although with varying degrees of sensitivity and accuracy. While some films have portrayed transgender individuals in a respectful and nuanced manner, others have resorted to stereotyping and ridicule. The study will analyse the cinematic representations of transgender people, examining the ways in which Bollywood has contributed to a growing awareness and acceptance of transgender individuals among the general public. The research will also explore the implications of these representations on the transgender community, including the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and the potential for empowerment and acceptance. By examining the complex and multifaceted nature of gender identity and expression in Indian society, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of Hindi cinema in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards transgender individuals.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In India as well as around the world, Hindi movies are extremely popular. People watch movies more than they read newspapers. Hindi movies are not only released in India but also released across the world in places like Canada, Australia, and The United States etc.

Because of its immense popularity, Hindi movies have got the power to influence the opinions and views of the common public. So it is very important for the film directors as well as all the people associated indirectly or directly with the making of films to make sure that the content of the Hindi movies is truthful as well as harmless. It should refrain from misguiding people for the sake of entertainment. This leads to the dissertation topic –

'Screening the Other': An Analysis of Transgender representation in the Hindi Mainstream Cinema'

Transgender is an umbrella terms for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Transgender people have been documented in many indigenous, Western, and Eastern cultures and society from antiquity until the present day. However, the meaning of gender nonconformity may vary from culture to culture.

Many identities fall under the transgender umbrella. The term transsexual refers to people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex. Often transsexual people alter or wish to alter their bodies through hormones, surgery, and other means to make their bodies as congruent as possible with their gender identities. This process of transition through medical intervention is often referred to as **gender affirmation**. People who were assigned female, but identify and live as male and alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual men or transmen. Conversely, people who are assigned male, but identify and live as female and alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual women or transwomen. Some individuals who transition from one gender to another prefer to be referred to as a man or a woman, rather than as transgender.

Cross-dressing, a form of gender expression, involves individuals wearing clothes traditionally or stereotypically associated with a gender other than their assigned sex in their cultural context. The extent of cross-dressing can vary significantly, ranging from the incorporation of single article of clothing to full cross-dressing. It is essential to note that individuals who engage in cross-dressing is not inherently linked to erotic activity, and it does not serve as an indicator of sexual orientation. Notably, societal acceptance of cross-dressing differs for males and females, with some cultures exhibiting greater tolerance for one gender to wear clothing associated with another gender than vice versa.

Within the realm of gender identity, several terms are used to describe individuals who do not conform to traditional binary constructs of male and female. Drag queens and drag kings, for instance, are performers who adopt the appearance and mannerisms of the opposite gender for entertainment purposes. In contrast, gender queer individuals identify their gender as existing outside the male-female binary, often defining it as a continuum or a distant entity altogether. They may request the use of non- traditional pronouns, such as —ziel or —hir,¹ to reflect their gender identity. It is essential to note that not all gender queer individuals identify as transgender. Additionally, other categories of transgender people include androgynous, multigendered, gender nonconforming, third gender, and two-spirit individuals, who often experience blending or alternation of genders. These terms, while varying in definition and evolving over time, share a common thread of rejecting traditional, binary gender concepts as restrictive. Being a part of minority communities, the people belonging to these above mentioned groups of Transgender community are constantly subjected to discrimination and negative stereotyping. Cinema is one of the greatest medium of communication that is available to us and it is through this medium also, Transgender communities are targeted a lot of times.

Genesis of the problem

The transgender community in India faces numerous struggles in their daily lives, ranging from lack of acceptance in society to discrimination. One of the significant challenges they encounter is the portrayal of their community in Indian cinema. The representation of transgender individuals in Indian films has been a subject of concern, with many individuals perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the community.

The transgender community has been portrayed as outlandish characters, often used for comic relief. This stereotyping has led to a lack of understanding and acceptance of the community, perpetuating harmful attitudes towards them. The representation of transgender individuals in Indian films has been largely insensitive, with characters often depicted as deviant, psychotic, victims, or comical.

There is an inaccurate representation of Transgender Identity, for example, the term —hijral is often translated as —eunuch,² but it encompasses a range of sexual and gender conditions, including ambiguous sexual anatomy, impotence, infertility, homosexuality, and others. The cultural category —hijral appears to be a

magnet for a selection of sexual and gender conditions that do not have an analogue in Western cultures. However, Indian legal statutes do not permit forced castration of males, and therefore, there is an absolute secrecy around the act of —nirbaan (castration).

Indian cinematic representations of transgender identity have been limited, with brief cameo characters or effeminate prisoners. The first empathetic treatment of a transgender emerged in Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna*, reportedly based on the real life story of a eunuch who rescues a female infant left to die by her rich and powerful father. Other movies such as Mani Ratnam's *Bombay*, have portrayed hijras in a more humane and secular manner. The representation of transgender individuals in Indian films becomes crucial, especially when it involves creative texts. The way transgender population is represented in films can either perpetuate harmful stereotypes or promote understanding and acceptance. Movies like *Transparent*, *Boy Meets Girl*, and *New Girls on the Block* have had Trans people portray Trans characters, lending authenticity to their roles. However, movies like *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Dallas Buyers Club* have been criticized for their portrayal of transgender individuals and for allowing cisgender people to portray Trans roles.

The representation of transgender individuals in Indian cinema has been largely problematic, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the community. This study aims to understand the impact of these representations on the Indian audience and to explore the need for more authentic and sensitive portrayals of transgender individuals in Indian cinema. It attempts to answer through the views and opinions of a particular sample of individuals the question that whether in majority of the Hindi movies released till now, the representation of 'transgender Individuals' have been positive or negative.

Need for the study

While going through different articles, journals, YouTube videos and other research papers, it can be seen that there have already been a lot of research done in this area of 'transgender community' and their representation in media. But most of these sources concentrate only on the negative representations of 'Transgender Individuals' in the Hindi mainstream cinema.

There is not much research done on the positive changes that are coming through sensitive and matured portrayal of 'Transgender Individuals'. Also in most of the existing studies based on this subject, opinions of the common people have not been recorded. But this

particular study 'Representation of Transgender community' in Hindi Mainstream Cinema attempts to find out the views and opinions of individuals regarding this topic. This paper will cover both the positive and negative aspects of the topic. The main objective of the study is basically to find out what the individuals feel about the representation of people who belong to the category of 'Transgender community' such as Transman, Transwomen, Cross-dressers, Gender Queer in the Hindi Mainstream Cinema simultaneously covering both the positive and negative sides of the topic. This study will also help us understand the psyche as well as the mentality of citizens regarding these kinds of controversial subjects like Transgender man and Transgender women.

This study is grounded in the recognition that Hindi cinema has consistently featured transgender characters over the years, although with varying degrees of sensitivity and accuracy. While some films have portrayed transgender individuals in a respectful and nuanced manner, others have resorted to stereotyping and ridicule. For instance, films like *I Aml* (2010) and *Laxmiil* (2014) have been praised for their thoughtful and empowering representation of transgender characters, whereas movies like *Kya Kool Hain Hum* (2005) have been criticized for their derogatory and mocking portrayal of transgender people.

Despite the criticisms, it is essential to acknowledge that Bollywood's immense reach and influence have contributed to a growing awareness and acceptance of transgender individuals among the general public. The representation of Transgender characters in Hindi cinema has helped to normalize discussions around gender identity and expression, even if these representations have been imperfect or problematic at times. This research seeks to explore the ways in which Bollywood has represented transgender individuals, examining both the positive and negative portrayals, and their implications for the transgender community. By analyzing the cinematic representations of transgender people, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of gender identity and expression in Indian society.

Major concepts

The concept of 'Transgender Individuals' is not something which is new to Indian society. These individuals have always been there since early days but now due to Cinema, Books, Internet and other communication channels, they have come to the forefront. People have started openly discussing issues related to Transgender community. Film directors from different parts of India have come forward and started making movies related to these so called taboo topics. Even though these topics are controversial and considered to be taboo, viewers at the same time are also interested in watching movies covering these issues. These issues are considered to be happening, interesting and burning topics of today's era. The mindset of the viewers varies

greatly from one person to another. While some might feel that there is no harm in portraying Trans characters merely as comical or funny in a movie, others might feel that it is an insult to Transgender individuals. So through this research it will be interesting to know what people feel about the representation of 'Transgender community' in Hindi Cinema.

The portrayal of Transgender in Hindi movies has been a topic of interest and concern. Many films perpetuate stereotypes, leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of the transgender community. However, some exceptions have attempted to challenge these stereotypes and present a more realistic and empathetic portrayal of Transgender.

'Tamanna' is a remarkable Hindi movie where the main lead character, played by Paresh Rawal is a eunuch. It was released in 1998 and directed by Mahesh Bhatt. The film explores various issues faced by 'Hijras' in reality. Through this movie, the director had attempted to break all the stereotypical notions that common people have about the community of 'Hijras'. In the movie, the character of Paresh Rawal who is a eunuch has been portrayed in a non-stereotypical way. This movie shows that a 'Hijra' has the same feelings of love and caring that any other individual has.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is a Transgender activist who has been working for the betterment of the 'Hijral' community for a long time. She has been part of various documentaries and short films based on the lives of the 'Hijral' communities. She has even attended the UN development program to address the problems faced by the Transsexual society in India. She has always felt that in Hindi Cinema, the characters of Transgender are taken merely as part of comical scenes. She feels that through comical and negative portrayal of Transgender in

Hindi Cinema, the film directors directly or indirectly encourage the common people to laugh at the characteristic mannerisms of the 'Hijral' community.

According to Laxmi, 'Hijral' have always been mocked and stereotyped in Bollywood. To show her support for the 'Hijral' community, she was even present for the music launch of the Hindi movie 'Queens-The destiny of Dancel'. This movie is about an up-market 'Hijral' community and the story is told through the eyes of a young transgender called 'Muktal' who is considered to be one of the best dancers in the community. This movie was basically made with a sincere effort to showcase the common public the lives of Transgender who are usually looked down upon and misunderstood by people. This movie has made an honest effort to show the real struggle of a Transgender community.

There are also some new directors who have come forward to make films with the honest purpose of showing the real-life struggle of the Transgender in a matured and respectful way. So with this purpose in mind, Producers Suresh R. Bhonsle and J.R. Manoj along with the director Yogesh Bharadwaj comes forward to make a film based on the life of a Transgender activist named Shabnam Mausi. The film is also of the same name. The activist Shabnam Mausi is the first transgender Indian to be elected to public office. She was an elected member of the Madhya Pradesh State Legislative Assembly from 1998 to 2003. So keeping this fact in mind, the director have made this movie to inspire other people who belong to the Transgender community and also for the upliftment of Eunuchs and bringing them to the mainstream.

Overview of the study

It can be definitely said that the characters of Transgender individuals have been part of Hindi Cinema for a long time. Ever year it can also be seen that the inclusion of these kinds of characters in Hindi Cinema is increasing. It might be because people have become more open minded towards these issues of Transsexuality. This generation mostly comprised of people who are avid viewers of all kinds of movies. They are more well-informed, more aware and well-educated on these issues. It would be interesting to know what they feel about the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi Cinema.

So this study attempts to find out what individuals feel about the representation of people who belong to the category of 'Transgender Community' such as Transmen and Transwomen in the Hindi Mainstream Cinema simultaneously covering both the positive as well as the negative sides of the topic.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims: The primary aim of this study is to examine the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, with a focus on both the positive and negative portrayals and their implications for the transgender community. This research seeks to explore how Bollywood has depicted transgender people, analyzing the cinematic representations and their impact on audience perception. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the ways in which transgender individuals are portrayed in Hindi films, identifying any recurring themes or stereotypes and assessing their implications.

Furthermore, this research seeks to understand the role of mainstream Hindi cinema in shaping societal attitudes towards the transgender community, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of gender identity and expression in Indian society. Ultimately, this study aims to provide

insight into what individuals feel about the representation of transgender people in Hindi mainstream cinema, and to shed light on the ways in which these representations influence the audience's perception of the transgender community.

Objectives : The objectives of this study are multifaceted and interconnected, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the representation of transgender individuals in mainstream Hindi cinema.

Firstly, this study seeks to conduct a critical analysis of the portrayal of transgender characters in a selection of Hindi films, examining both positive and negative representations and their implications for the transgender community. Specifically, this objective involves a close reading of four films, which will serve as case studies, to identify recurring themes, stereotypes, and narrative patterns that shape the cinematic representation of transgender individuals.

Secondly, this research aims to investigate the impact of these cinematic representations on audience perception and attitudes towards the transgender community. Through a comprehensive survey of a sample of viewers, this study seeks to gauge the ways in which Hindi films influence public opinion and shape societal attitudes towards transgender individuals. This objective involves analyzing the survey data to identify patterns, trends, and correlations between film representation and audience perception.

Lastly, this study aims to contextualize the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema within a broader cultural and social framework. This involves conducting a comprehensive literature review to situate the study within existing research on gender identity, expression, and representation in Indian society. Furthermore, this objective involves comparing the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema with international film industries, assessing similarities and differences, and identifying best practices for promoting inclusive and empathetic representations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi Mainstream Cinema.

Secondary Data

The study began with an extensive literature review of existing literature review of existing research on the representation of Transgender individuals in Indian Cinema. This review drew on a range of secondary sources, including:

- **Journal:** Peer reviewed journal that published articles on the topic of Representation of transgender representation in Indian Cinema.
- **Articles:** Online Articles and News stories that discussed the representation of Transgender individuals In Hindi Mainstream Cinema.

The literature review provided a foundation for understanding the current state of research on the topic and identified gaps in existing knowledge. The review also helped to inform the development of the survey instrument and the analysis of the data.

Primary Data

To gather primary data, a survey was conducted among 75 individuals. The survey was designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.

Survey Methodology

The survey instrument consisted of a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide both quantitative ratings and qualitative responses. The survey was administered online, and participants were recruited through social media platforms and online forums. The sample consisted of individuals who had watched at least one Hindi mainstream film featuring a transgender character in the past year.

Quantitative Component

The survey included a series of closed-ended questions that asked respondents to rate their perceptions of the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema. These questions were designed to gather quantitative data on the following aspects:

- The frequency of transgender characters in Hindi mainstream films
- The accuracy of transgender representation in Hindi mainstream films
- The impact of transgender representation on respondents' attitudes towards transgender individuals.
- The importance of transgender representation in Hindi mainstream films.

Respondents were asked to rate their responses on a Likert scale. The survey instrument utilized a range of Likert scales to capture respondents' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions. Specifically, the survey incorporated five-point Likert scales, including Yes/No/Maybe, Yes/No/Not Sure/Rarely, Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree, Very Important/Not Important, and Positive/Negative. These scales allowed respondents to express their degree

of agreement, frequency, or importance related to various statements and questions, providing a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

Qualitative Component

The survey also included open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide qualitative responses to the following questions:

- Do you have any suggestions for how Hindi Cinema can improve its representation of Transgender individuals?
- Is there any particular movie or scene that you think has done a good job of representing transgender individuals in cinema?
- Is there anything you would like to share about the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi Cinema?

These open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide rich, detailed responses that provided insight into their attitudes and perceptions towards transgender individuals and their representation in Hindi mainstream cinema.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section of this dissertation paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research, scholarly articles, and theoretical frameworks related to the topic of representation of transgender representation in Hindi mainstream cinema. By critically examining the available literature, this section establishes a foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge, identifies gaps in the research, and highlights key themes and findings that contribute to the understanding of this previous issue.

Here is the literature review that includes a list of books and journals related to the topic of representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, along with a brief explanation of each source:

Journal Article

- **Portraying Third Gender: A study of select Bollywood Movies**

By SyedaAfshana and Heeba Din

This journal article contributes to the understanding of the Third Gender community, specifically the Hijra community in India, by providing a nuanced and comprehensive definition of the term. It highlights the diversity of individuals who identify as Third Gender, including those who were assigned a gender at birth that does not align with their gender identity, and those who challenge traditional notions of male and female. The article also sheds light on the social and cultural context of the Hijra community in India, including their historical and traditional roles, as well as the stigma and marginalization they face. Furthermore, it provides personal accounts and quotes from Hijra individuals, offering a glimpse into their experiences and perspectives. Overall, this article enriches our understanding of the Third Gender community and its complexities, and provides valuable insights for a dissertation on this topic.

- **Viewing cultural connections through analysis of the representation of transgenders and trans sexuality in recent Bollywood and OTT**

By MonisaQadiri

This article contributes to the understanding of how transgender individuals and their sexuality are represented in Indian media, specifically in Bollywood and OTT content. The study analyzes how these representations impact the audience and culture, and finds that while there has been an improvement in representation, stereotypes and inaccuracies still exist. The article highlights the importance of accurate and authentic representation of transgender individuals and their experiences in media, as it can shape societal attitudes and perceptions. This research is significant in the context of Indian society, where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, and transgender individuals have been marginalized and stigmatized.

Studies conducted or articles

- **Article: Why Is Bollywood's Portrayal Of The Transgender Community Problematic?** Author: Sourika Jana

This article talks about how Bollywood movies often portray the transgender community in a problematic way. They cast cisgender actors to play trans roles, perpetuate gender stereotypes, and turn trans identity into a comedy. These movies also misgender trans people and imply that not disclosing their former gender is —cheating! or —lying!. The article argues that Bollywood needs to do better in representing the trans

community with respect and accuracy.

- **Article: Top 10 thrilling performances by Indian actors who played trans characters** Author: Unknown
This article highlights the top 10 thrilling performances by Indian actors who have played transgender characters on screen, showcasing their versatility and bravery in taking on such roles. From exploring the nuances of the third gender to bringing awareness to the community, these performances have left a lasting impact on Indian cinema.

- **Article: Why Are There So Few Transgender Actors In Bollywood?** Author: Homegrown Staff
This article discusses the struggles of Indian filmmaker Faraz Arif Ansari to cast a transgender woman for his feature film, highlighting the lack of representation and inclusivity in Bollywood and the broader Indian film industry. Despite the legal recognition of the transgender community, discrimination and stigma persist, and Ansari's experience reveals the challenges of bringing authentic and compassionate storytelling to the mainstream.

- **Article: Transgender Portrayal in Indian Cinema** Author: GLSC
The Indian film industry has a history of portraying transgender people in a negative and stereotypical light, often using them as comic relief or depicting them as villains. This portrayal has contributed to the stigma and discrimination faced by the transgender community in India. The article argues that it's time for the industry to stop perpetuating these harmful stereotypes and instead portray transgender people in a more positive and humanizing way.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this project, I use conceptual frameworks and theories of representation, performative theory and Queer theory. These theories combine to shape my understanding of the ways transgender characters are constructed through the use of specific narrative conventions. In the following section, I address the ways these frameworks and theories guide this project.

Representation Theory:

Scholars like Stuart Hall and Annette Kuhn have shown that how we represent events shapes our understanding of them. According to Hall, representation isn't just a mirror of reality, but a way of giving meaning to events. In other words, events happen regardless, but it's through representation that we make sense of them. How we present and show things in media, like movies, affects how we think about and treat them in real life. This is especially important for transgender people. If we show them being attacked or harassed just for being themselves, it highlights the need for them to be safe. But if we show them in a negative or stereotypical way, it can lead to bad attitudes and behaviors towards them.

The way transgender people are shown in movies can shape how others understand them and even how they understand themselves. These representations can be both empowering and limiting. They can provide a sense of identity and community, but they can also be narrow and inaccurate. This project aims to analyze these representations in movies and identify the messages they convey about transgender people. By doing so, it hopes to understand how these representations can both empower and limit transgender people, and to find ways to promote more diverse and accurate representations in media.

Performativity theory And Queer Theory: Queer theory is a way of thinking that challenges traditional ideas about gender and sexuality. In the context of Hindi movies, it helps us analyze how characters who don't fit traditional gender norms, like hijras and

eunuchs, are portrayed. The movies I have used in samples show that hijras are not just one-dimensional stereotypes, but complex people with stories and struggles. They challenge traditional ideas about gender and sexuality and highlight the difficulties hijras face in their daily lives. By using queer theory, we can better understand and appreciate the diversity of gender and sexuality.

According to Judith Butler's performativity theory, gender is not something we are, but something we do. We create gender by performing certain actions and behaviors that society associates with masculinity or femininity. For example, wearing a skirt is seen as feminine

because society says so, not because it's inherently feminine. This creates a problem when trying to represent third gender identities, as we often rely on the same old symbols of masculinity and femininity to show someone is —different. This can reinforce the very same gender binaries we're trying to break free from. The movies analyzed in the sample tried to challenge this by moving away from stereotypical portrayals of Hijras and instead showing them as complex human beings, bringing attention to their issues, relationships, and identities in mainstream Bollywood.

This theoretical framework guides my general approach to Transgender representations in film. Particularly focusing on

- How individuals can identify themselves as transgender, but also how others can label them as such (even if they don't identify that way themselves)
- How audiences make sense of transgender characters in movies, and how their own experiences and biases can influence their understanding
- Building on previous research about transgender representations in film to add new insights and perspectives.

The goal is to better understand how transgender characters are portrayed in movies and how audiences respond to them.

Content Analysis

Chapter 1

REPRESENTING THE 'OTHER': A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF HINDI AND INTERNATIONAL CINEMA



Indian cinema has come aged in terms of its perceptions, interpretations and representations of the transgender identity. Some films, within the documentary and thus the feature format, national and regional, reveal social, cultural and emotional maturity in terms of acceptance of the transgender almost integrated into the mainstream in real world. There are attempts, where the transgender identity has been portrayed not only sympathetically and

understanding but also with the person's desperate longing to belong, to be accepted for what the person is. Despite the very fact that there are numerous sorts of entertainment cropping up almost every other day as a results of technological advancements, film as a medium continues to enjoy a serious fan following of its own. Movies still influence minds to quite large extent, as a result of which, representations and portrayals – be it of people or sections of society, become crucial. When it involves the third gender, tons of Indian movies are called call at the past for insensitive and/or inaccurate portrayals of their lives. Slice of life representations of these from the transgender community are generally hard to return by, which results in the continuation of unabashed stereotypes. Using case studies and literature reviews, this paper will plan to objectively study the portrayal of the Transgender community in Indian cinema, and why representation of such gender/sexual minorities is vital within the context of a society, especially within the current day and age.

Who are Transgender People?

Transgender or Trans for short is an umbrella term for those whose gender differs from that which they were assigned at birth. In other words, their inherent sense of gender does not align with the physical characteristics they were born with. For instance, a person born with male genitalia may identify as a man. Some transgender individuals may opt to undergo hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries to align their physical body with their gender identity, whereas others may not. Additionally, Transgender individuals may identify as non-binary, meaning they do not identify exclusively as male or female, or gender queer, meaning they identify as a combination of male and female or as neither. Ultimately transgender individuals are deserving of respect, understanding, and the freedom to live their lives as their authentic selves.

1.1 Defining the 'other'

The concept of the 'other' is a fundamental aspect of social and cultural theory, referring to the process of defining and distinguishing oneself from those who are perceived as different or outside the norm. In the context of transgender representation in Hindi cinema, the 'other' is constructed through a range of cinematic devices, including character development, plot narratives and visual representation. Transgender characters are often relegated to the periphery of the narrative, serving as mere plot devices or comedic relief, rather than being afforded agency and complexity as protagonists. This peripheralization of transgender characters reinforces their 'otherness' perpetuating a sense of difference and distance between the transgender community and the dominant cisgender audience.

One of the primary ways the 'other' is constructed in Hindi cinema is through the deployment of stereotypes and tropes. Hindi movies often portray transgender people in negative and stereotypical way, which is harmful and inaccurate. These stereotypes make transgender people seem abnormal and outside the norm, and reinforce a worldview that favors heterosexual and cisgender people. Transgender characters are often used as comic relief or plot devices, reducing them to caricatures rather than fully fleshed-out people.

The way transgender characters are visually represented in movies is also problematic. They are often shown in a sensationalized and eroticized way, focussing on their physical appearance and gender expression. This creates a sense of fascination and curiosity among cisgender audiences, further reinforcing the 'otherness' of transgender people.

1.2 Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings, influenced by the thoughts and opinions of those around them, as well as the media they consume. Cinema, in particular, has the power to catalyze social change. In India, the queer movement has been significantly impacted by cinematic representations. The LGBTQ+ community, comprising lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders, has long been marginalized and misrepresented in films, perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes. The transgender community in India faces immense struggles, from social rejection to discrimination. They are often portrayed as outlandish characters, used for comedic effect, rather than as accepted members of society. However, with the potential to shape the perceptions of a large population, realistic films about the transgender community can have a profound impact on mindsets. Indian cinema has made some attempts to represent transgender characters, but these efforts have been limited and often perpetuated harmful myths. The transgender community is frequently judged based on sexual behavior, and their

identity and voice are denied in society. According to India's 2011 census, which counted transgender individuals for the first time, there are an estimated 490,000 transgenders who identify as third gender. It is essential to challenge these myths and break the taboo surrounding the transgender community through realistic and sensitive cinematic representations.

1.3 History of Indian Cinema

The history of Indian Cinema goes back to the nineteenth century. In 1896, the very first films shot by the Lumiere Brothers were shown in Mumbai (then Bombay). But history was actually created when Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatavdekar popularly known as Save Dada, the still photographer, was so much influenced by the Lumiere Brothers' production that he ordered a camera from England. His first film was shot at the Hanging Gardens in Mumbai, known as 'The Wrestlers'. It was a simple recording of a wrestling match which was screened in 1899 and is considered as the first motion picture in the Indian Film Industry.

Beginning of Bollywood



Father of Indian Cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke released the first ever full-length feature film 'Raja Harishchandra' in 1913. The silent film was a commercial success. Dadasaheb was not only the producer but was also the director, writer, cameraman, editor, make-up artist and art director. 'Raja Harishchandra' was the first-ever Indian film which was screened in London in 1914. Though Indian Cinema's first mogul, Dadasaheb Phalke supervised and managed the production of twenty three films from 1913 to 1918, the initial growth of the Indian Film Industry was not as fast as that of Hollywood.

Numerous new production companies emerged in the early 1920s. Films based on mythological and historical

facts and episodes from Mahabharata and Ramayana dominated the 20s but Indian audiences also welcomed Hollywood movies, especially the action films.

Beginning of the Talkies

The first ever talkie *'Alam Ara'* by Ardeshir Irani was screened in Bombay in 1931. It was the first sound film in India. The release of *Alam Ara* started a new era in the history of Indian Cinema. Phiroz Shah was the first music director of *Alam Ara*. The first song which was recorded for *Alam Ara* in 1931 was *'De de khuda ke naam par'*. It was sung by W.M. Khan.

Thereafter, several production companies emerged leading to an increase in the release of the number of films. 328 films were made in 1931 as compared to 108 in 1927. During this time, huge movie halls were built and there was a significant growth in the number of audiences.

During the 1930s and 1940s many eminent film personalities such as Debaki Bose, Chetan Anand, S.S. Vasan, Nitin Bose and many others emerged on the scene.

Growth of Regional Films

Not only did the country witness the growth of Hindi Cinema, but the regional film industry also made its own mark. The first Bengali feature film *'NalDamyanti'* in 1917 was produced by J.F. Madan with Italian actors in the leading roles. It was photographed by Jyotish Sarkar.

The first ever talkie film in Bengali was *'Jamai Shashthi'*, which was screened in 1931 and produced by Madan Theatres Ltd. *'Kalidass'* was the first Tamil talkie which was released in Madras on 31 October 1931 and directed by H.M. Reddy. Apart from Bengali and South Indian languages, regional films were also made in other languages such as Assamese, Oriya, Punjabi, Marathi, and many more. *'Ayodhecha Raja'* was the first Marathi film which was directed by V. Shantaram in 1932. This film was made in double version. *'Ayodhyaka Raja'* in Hindi and *'Ayodhecha Raja'* in Marathi was the first ever Indian talkie produced by Prabhat Film Company in 1932.

Birth of a New Era

The number of films being produced saw a brief decline during the World War II. Basically the birth of modern Indian Film industry took place around 1947. The period witnessed a remarkable and outstanding transformation of the film industry. Notable filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, and Bimal Roy made movies which focused on the survival and daily miseries of the lower class. The historical and mythological subjects took a back seat and the films with social messages began to dominate the industry. These films were based on themes such as prostitution, dowry, polygamy and other malpractices which were prevalent in our society.

In the 1960s new directors like Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and others focused on the real problems of the common man. They directed some outstanding movies which enabled the Indian film industry to carve a niche in the International film scenario. The 1950s and 1960s are considered to be the golden age in the history of the Indian cinema and saw the rise of some memorable actors like Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Meena Kumari, Madhubala, Nargis, Nutan, Dev Anand, Waheeda Rehman, among others.

Bollywood – The Pioneer of Masala Movies

The 1970s saw the advent of Masala movies in Bollywood. The audiences were captivated and mesmerised by the aura of actors like Rajesh Khanna, Dharmendra, Sanjeev Kumar, Hema Malini, and many others.

The most prominent and successful director, Manmohan Desai was considered by several people as the father of Masala movies. According to Manmohan Desai, —I want people to

forget their misery. I want to take them into a dream world where there is no poverty, where there are no beggars, where fate is kind and god is busy looking after its flock. *'Sholay'*, the groundbreaking film directed by Ramesh Sippy, not only got international accolades but also made Amitabh Bachchan a *'Superstar'*. Several women directors like Meera Nair, Aparna Sen and others showcased their talents in the 1980s. The 1990s saw a whole new batch of actors like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Aamir Khan, Juhi Chawla, Chiranjivi, and many more. This new genre of actors used new techniques to enhance their performances which further elevated and upgraded the Indian Film Industry. 2008 was a notable year for the Indian film industry as A.R. Rahman received two academy awards for best soundtrack for *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Indian cinema is no longer restricted to India and is now being well appreciated by international audiences. The contribution of the overseas market in Bollywood box office collections is quite remarkable. Around 30 film production companies were listed in National Stock Exchange of India in 2013. The multiplexes too have boomed in India due to tax incentives. Indian cinema has become a part and parcel of our daily life whether it is a regional or a Bollywood movie. It has a major role to play in our society. Though entertainment is the key word of Indian cinema it has far more responsibility as it impacts the mind of the audiences.

1.4 Portrayal of Transgender in Hindi Mainstream Cinema



India is one of the countries which produces the most number of movies in a year and consists of an astronomical amount of cinema going public. Hindi films are the most widely and extensively distributed form of motion pictures in India.

Over the years, filmmakers have tried in terms of the perception, interpretation and representation of the transgender identity. However, there has been little to no proper portrayal of transgender and hijra community, as it is the subject which is

In the comedy cross-dressing part in "RafooChakkar"

still considered to be a taboo in this country. Representation of the life stories, experiences and issues of trans folk in Bollywood deviate between sarcasm, denial, biased, comic, criminal and stereotype.

The transgender and hijra community, which has been marginalized for a long time and were deprived of their true identity and representation in this social and cultural composition of society, deserve the rightful and justified attention. They have to deal with so much discrimination due to the lack of acceptance in the society. Among several issues, they also struggle in trying to discover or seek out a sector in society where gender nonconformity is not regarded or condemned as abnormality. In the movies and dramas, they were portrayed as outlandish characters. The representation of transgender folks in Indian cinema has mostly been portrayed as objects of mockery and denial. Their real life sufferings and experiences have always been dimmed or faded in the manuscript of the movie. There is a long history in Indian cinema where cross-dressing cis/het male characters were featured in song and dance sequence or in funny scenes such as Rishi Kapoor in Rafoo Chakkar (1975) or Amitabh Bachchan in Laawaris (1981).



Amitabh bachchan in Laawaris

Indian cinematic representations of the transgender identity earlier came within the sort of brief cameo characters like in song-dance numbers performed during a chorus or, within the character of an effeminate prisoner in Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*. The primary empathetic treatment of a transgender emerged in Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna* reportedly supported the real-life story of a eunuch who rescues a female infant left to die by her rich and powerful father and brings her up as his own. There are not any innuendoes around this person's sex life who barely manages to form a living by singing and dancing at marriage functions or when a baby is born. Although the Indian film industry tried to, in some rare cases, stay realistic and sensitive while portraying transgender community in movies, they failed to challenge the myths and the misconceptions circulating them. In most of the movies that we watch, transgender people are portrayed as either a horrifying villain or a comic relief. There is a continual potholing that takes place, where a trans person is portrayed outside of 'normal' bounds. For instance, Mahesh Bhatt's film, *Sadak*, consists of one of the most jarring violent depictions of a transwoman named 'Maharani'. Depicted as a villain, an evil brothel owner, who tortures young women, this movie consists of the reiteration of the worst kind of misconceptions associated with the trans community.

How many transgender celebrities exist in the mainstream cinema in India? And How many of them have been protagonists? The fact that not many cis/het people interact with the transgender people while representing their community becomes pivotal because then the queer message becomes fabricated and hollow. When a cis/het individual plays the role of trans person in a film, they are stealing the opportunity where the trans person, themselves, could have voiced their story. This is something Akshay Kumar has done in his latest movie *Laxmii Bomb*. Through this movie Akshay Kumar will receive applause, and not to mention money, for the struggles of trans folks, a cis/het male who has not experienced their struggles representing them on screen.

The struggle and the stigma, be it social, personal or economic, faced by trans folks are mostly due to the cis/het patriarchal gender structures of the society. They are denied college admissions, they are discriminated at jobs and the small amount that overcomes these problems are still discriminated against. The struggles they face at every stage has an adverse effect on their mental health. The mere thought of being discriminated against is sufficient enough to trigger stress and anxiety.

Even though the times are changing, trans folks still face a lot of stigma within the society, despite being legally recognized as third gender. The community is still at the receiving end of hostility and distaste. While it is true that many individuals don't talk openly about their identity and sexual orientation, more and more people are breaking the silence and coming out to share their experiences, to represent their own community, providing the much needed representation and a platform to interact with the people who are still figuring themselves out. In today's world, there needs to be more space for the marginalized communities to live the way they want to, instead of just surviving.

1.5 Media Portrayals of transgender people on Global level

Historically

Transgender identity was discussed in the mass media as long ago as the 1930s. *Time* magazine in 1936 devoted an article to what it called —hermaphrodites!, treating the subject with sensitivity and not sensationalism. It described the call by Avery Brundage, who led the American team to the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, that a system be established to examine female athletes for —sex ambiguities!; two athletes changed sex after the Games.

Christine Jorgensen was a transgender woman who received considerable attention in American mass media in the 1950s. Jorgensen was a former G.I. that went to Denmark to receive sex reassignment surgery. Her story appeared in publications including *Time* and *Newsweek*. Other representations of transgender women appeared in mainstream media in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Delisa Newton, Charlotte Frances McLeod, Tamara Rees, and Marta Olmos Ramiro, but Jorgensen received the most attention. Her story was sensationalized, but received positively. In comparison, news articles about Newton, McLeod, Rees, and Ramiro had negative implications.

Film

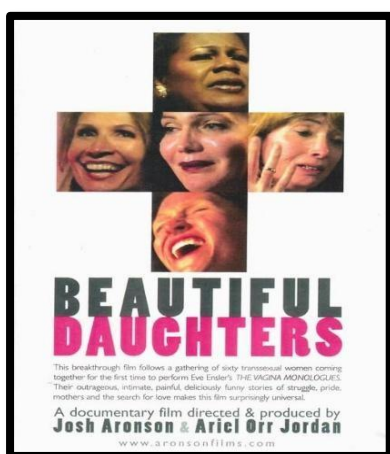
In the 1980s, writer, filmmaker, and actor Jake Graf said that he couldn't —find himself in any of the TV or film characters he saw! and called the worst manifestation of this was in the 1999 film, *Boys Don't Cry*. He called the film the —most horrific representation! which put him off transitioning —for another ten years.! He said, when interviewed in 2017, that representation of transgender people is improving from being portrayed negatively or as the —butt of the joke.!

Films depicting transgender issues include: *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*; *The World According to Garp*; *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*; *Dog Day Afternoon*, *All About My Mother* and *The Crying Game*. The film *Different for Girls* is notable for its depiction of a transsexual woman

who meets up with, and forms a romantic relationship with, her former best friend from her all-male boarding school. Ma Vie en Rose portrays a six-year-old child who is gender non conforming. The film Wild Zero features Kwancharu Shitichai, a transsexual Thai actor. When the main character is conflicted about falling in love with a —woman who is also a man!, Guitar Wolf tells him —Love knows no race, nationality or gender!!

Southern Comfort is a documentary film, directed by Kate Davis, that goes over the life of a transgender man, Robert Eads. As a transgender man, Robert was denied health care for his ovarian cancer because doctors were afraid their reputation would be negatively affected. The film being a documentary accentuates the factuality of the discrimination transgender people go through.

The film took the audience through the life of Robert Eads— it showed his family, —chosen! family and his battle with ovarian cancer. His chosen family were his friends that he considered to be family. Due to the denial of attention to his ovarian cancer, Robert Eads passed away. By walking through Robert's life the audience is introduced to the various struggles that transgender people may face. This documentary film mainly focused on the struggles transgender people face in the health care system. The recognition of these issues advocated for change by displaying the prejudice and discrimination Faced by transgender people in the health care system. The documentation of his life steps away from the narration of transgender people being the joke and gives the audience a chance to understand transgender people on a more personal level.



In February 2006, Logo aired **Beautiful Daughters**, a documentary film about the first all-trans cast of The Vagina Monologues, which included Addams, Lynn Conway, Andrea James, and Leslie Townseand directed by Josh Aronson and Ariel Orr Jordan. The film highlights trans women in film, regardless of their anatomy. The documentary focuses on a trans cast's challenges to make the production about the cast's identity.

Cover picture: "Beautiful daughters"

Also in 2006, Lifetime aired a movie biography on the murder of Gwen Araujo called A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story. Additionally, in 2017 Jake Graf, a trans filmmaker released a short film called —**Dusk!** which tells the story of a trans man from his childhood through adulthood. The film highlights the struggles trans men go through with transitioning and the lack of resources and acceptance in society available to them. Chris in the film meets a dream woman named Julie but struggles with self-identity and how life could be different. One of the struggles depicted is how gender roles are critiqued and expected in a closed society.

Ultimately, the film ends with Chris being old with Julie and still in their romantic relationship, which helps Chris understand that some questions in life have no answers or right ones which make us who we are.

In 2013, GLAAD noted a number of films which they felt had positive transgender representation. The organization specifically listed The World According to Garp (1982), Second Serve (1986), The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994), Ma Vie en Rose (My Life in Pink) (1997), Southern Comfort (2001), Normal (2003), and Transamerica (2005). Bustle also argued that TransAmerica had positive depiction of transgender people.

During the 2017-2020 period, GLAAD's annual Studio Responsibility Index revealed a notable absence of transgender or nonbinary characters in films produced by major studios. However, this trend was broken in March 2021 with the casting of Patti Harrison, the first known trans actor to voice a character in a Disney animated movie, specifically Raya and the Last Dragon. In a thought-provoking article published in Film Quarterly in March 2022, Professor Cael M. Keegan challenged the notion that more favorable media portrayals of transgender individuals can significantly impact their treatment in society. Keegan argued that popular

portrayals often overshadow more nuanced or unconventional depictions, ultimately becoming assimilative rather than revolutionary. He suggested that portrayals commonly deemed aversive or —badl might, in fact, be better equipped to produce thought-provoking depictions, as they cannot be contained within the existing aesthetic system.

Through an examination of films such as *Tootsie* (1982), *It's Pat* (1994), and *The Assignment* (2016), Keegan attempted to reevaluate their controversial portrayals of transgender individuals. He posited that the uncomfortable nature of these portrayals points to broader visions for trans politics, offering a fresh perspective on the representation of transgender people in media.

1.6 Transgender Visibility in a Globalized World: A Comparative Analysis of National and International Representations

The representation of transgender individuals in film media has been a subject of scrutiny and debate globally. In the context of international cinema, there has been a notable shift towards more positive and nuanced portrayals of transgender characters. However, this trend is not universally observed, and negative representations still persist.

In the 1980s, writer, filmmaker, and actor Jake Graf lamented the lack of authentic transgender representation in film and television, citing the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry* as a particularly egregious example. Graf argued that such negative portrayals can have a detrimental impact on transgender individuals, potentially discouraging them from transitioning. However, in recent years, there has been a marked improvement in the representation of transgender people in film. Movies such as *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, *The World According to Garp*, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* have featured transgender characters in more positive and complex roles.

Documentary films like *Southern Comfort* and *Beautiful Daughters* have also played a crucial role in highlighting the struggles and challenges faced by transgender individuals, particularly in the healthcare system. These films have helped to humanize and personalize the transgender experience, moving beyond stereotypes and caricatures. Furthermore, films like *Dusk*, released in 2017, have explored the experiences of transgender men, shedding light on the unique challenges they face in terms of identity, acceptance, and resources. GLAAD's annual Studio Responsibility Index has noted a significant absence of transgender or nonbinary characters in films produced by major studios. However, this trend was broken in 2021 with the casting of Patti Harrison, the first known trans actor to voice a character in a Disney animated movie. This development marks a significant step forward in terms of representation and inclusion.

In contrast, the portrayal of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema has been largely inadequate and problematic. Despite India being one of the largest producers of films in the world, the representation of transgender and hijra communities has been marred by stereotypes, bias, and denial. The transgender community has been marginalized and deprived of their true identity and representation in Indian society, leading to discrimination and a lack of acceptance. Films in Hindi cinema have often portrayed transgender individuals as outlandish characters, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the community. The lack of authentic representation has contributed to the marginalization of transgender individuals, making it difficult for them to find acceptance and recognition in society.

A comparison of the representation of transgender individuals in international cinema and Hindi mainstream cinema reveals a stark contrast. While international cinema has made significant strides in terms of representation and inclusion, Hindi cinema continues to lag behind. The negative portrayals and stereotypes perpetuated in Hindi films have contributed to the marginalization of the transgender community, whereas international films have helped to humanize and personalize the transgender experience. However, it is essential to acknowledge that even in international cinema, there are still instances of negative and problematic representations.

Chapter II

TRANSGENDER REPRESENTATION AS FARCE IN INDIAN CINEMA



Definition: A farce is a broad satire or comedy; though now it's used to describe something that is supposed to be serious but has turned ridiculous. Farce representation refers to the exaggerated, stereotypical, and often offensive portrayal of a particular group, in this case, transgender individuals, in media, including Hindi movies.

2.1 Introduction

Farce in media is a comedy that seeks to entertain an audience through situations that are highly exaggerated, extravagant, ridiculous, absurd, and improbable. Farce is also characterized by heavy use of physical humor; the use of deliberate absurdity or nonsense; satire, parody, and mockery of real-life situations, people, events, and interactions; unlikely and humorous instances of miscommunication; ludicrous, improbable, and exaggerated characters; and broadly stylized performances.

Despite involving absurd situations and characters, the genre generally maintains at least a slight degree of realism and narrative continuity within the context of the irrational or ludicrous situations, often distinguishing it from completely absurdist or fantastical genres. Farces are often episodic or short in duration, often being set in one specific location where all events occur. Farces have historically been performed for the stage and film.

Indian movies have often influenced much public thought. Some would go on to say that they create the way people think by making them look headfast unto issues that are usually not dealt with. Movies such as *Rang De Basanti* (2006) have provoked the populi into thinking about serious matters and started a national conversation. For an Industry so powerful and influential, the portrayal of transgender people is a cupboard of skeletons that nobody talks about. From the first prominent portrayal of Hijras in the Hindi movie *Kunwara Baap* (1974), they have been treated predominantly as sources of comic relief and mockery. Hijras are always brightly dressed, always loud and boisterous, and never human. They are objectified as glimmering sidekicks. The Indian film industry should stop the way they currently portray the transgender community in the movies in a cliché comic and negative light. Bollywood is thus reverse-modernising itself and is leading itself in this degeneration.

2.2 Stereotyping and Caricaturing

Comedy is a dominant genre in Indian cinema, and transgender characters are often used as a source of humor. Films like *Raja Hindustani* (1996), *Dulhe Raja* (1998), and *Kya Kool Hai Hum* (2005) have been commercially successful and have contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes about transgender individuals.

A comedy scene from movie "Dulhe Raja"

These films have not only entertained audiences but have also reinforced harmful attitudes towards transgender people. Scholars have argued that the use of comedy in these films serves to distance transgender characters from the audience, making them objects of ridicule rather than subjects worthy of empathy. John Phillips notes that cross-dressing in film represents a need for comedy and society to have a subject to ridicule. This ridicule is achieved through the construction of transgender identities as absurd and humorous, while heteronormative identities are privileged as the norm.

Hijras and other non-binary identities have always been shown in movies for comic relief or as antagonists who are out to rape and castrate as many men as possible. Undoubtedly, most Indian middle and upper-class families who have had no interactions with members of the LGBTQA+ communities have, over time, developed negative notions about the trans community and therefore create stigmas that they enforce onto their environment, friends and family.

In Indian cinema, the representation of transgender individuals is often limited to comedic roles, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating discrimination. For example, in *Raja Hindustani*, the character Kamal, played by Johnny Lever, is a transgender woman who is depicted as a comedic relief, with her gender identity being the subject of humor. Similarly, in *Dulhe Raja*, the character of Raju, played by Govinda, disguises himself as a woman to escape his enemies, leading to a series of comedic situations that rely on the ridicule of

transgender individuals.

In many movies, Hijras have been used as a source of slapstick comedy. The presence of a Hijra guard of the Zenana in Ashutosh Gowariker's historical drama *Jodha Akbar*, (2008) was used to lighten the heavy scenes and later to plot against the Queen, thereby

incorporating both the stereotypes of Hijras in Indian films. Ni'ammat, the Hijra, was a trained assassin and a hyper-sexualised comical person, showing the stereotypes and creating a demonic image. The only transgender actor in India, Ms Pakhi Sharma, better known by her stage name of Bobby Darling, has forever been limited to parts of prostitutes, idiosyncratic stylists, and gay perverts. What we find is that in neither of these parts has she ever been able to display basic emotions. She is shown to be the usual Hijra begging for money and displaying her body.

The use of farce in these films serves to further distance transgender characters from the audience. Mark Graves and F. Bruce Engel highlight the major elements of farce, including mistaken identity, disguise, and improbable situations. These elements create a lighthearted tone that implies the actions of the characters are not to be taken seriously, thereby positioning transgender characters as objects of humor rather than active participants.

The humor in these films is often derived from the enforcement and differentiation effects, where audience members laugh because they are happy to see a character facing difficulty while cross-dressed or because the experiences of the characters while cross-dressed are so distant from audience members' own lives that mocking the characters is acceptable. This

type of humor serves to reinforce conformity to social norms and perpetuate harmful attitudes towards transgender individuals.

The portrayal of transgender people in Indian cinema frequently consists of caricatures and stereotypes, which feed negative perceptions of the community. The 1997 Bollywood film

—*Kya Kehna!* is one instance of this, as the transgender woman's character is presented as a comic relief with exaggerated mannerisms and a caricatured appearance. By making transgender identity into a joke, this form of representation feeds negative preconceptions and strengthens discrimination against transgender people.

The harmful stereotype of transgender women as sexual objects is furthered by the portrayal of the transgender character in the 2005 movie —*Shabd* as a seductress. This type of representation not only helps to maintain negative stereotypes but also erases the humanity and agency of transgender people. Furthermore, the idea that transgender identities are not deserving of respect or dignity is reinforced by the way transgender people are portrayed either as sexual objects or as comic relief. It is not just in films that damaging prejudices are maintained. Transgender people have also been misrepresented in television serials. For instance, Kapil Sharma's character Nani from the well-liked TV programme

—*Comedy Nights with Kapil* cross-dressed for humorous effect.

The way Nani was portrayed was quite problematic since it encouraged the idea that transvestism is amusing rather than a respectable way to express one's gender identification. Not only does this type of depiction support negative stereotypes, but it also pushes transgender people to the margins. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of such portrayals. They support a climate of prejudice and exclusion in which transgender people are denied fundamental rights and respect. It is imperative that transgender people are portrayed in Indian television and film in a way that is respectful and subtle, moving away from these damaging preconceptions and caricatures. By doing this, individuals can contribute significantly to the advancement of inclusivity and acceptance as well as the development of a more just society for all.

This chapter also analyzes the ways in which Indian cinema uses specific narrative to communicate specific messages about transgender individuals. The films' narrative conventions, such as a crisis requiring cross-dressing serve to distance transgender characters from the audience by privileging the heteronormative identities of the characters.

2.3 The Absence of Authenticity: Underrepresentation and Misrepresentation of Transgender Identities in media

Whether mocked as punchlines or reviled as predators, trans characters are limited by narrative conventions that allow mainstream media —to appear inclusive of minority identities without having to suggest that they are equal. Even when trans characters are presented as

victims of transphobic violence, —the victim's suffering, not the perpetrator's motivation, becomes the narrative focus. This allows mainstream audiences to —condemn the horror of the act instead of questioning the transphobic assumptions and cisnormative systems that created it in the first place.

One can argue that these movies portray what the Hijras face in the society. In most parts of India, Hijras are not only looked down upon but also disallowed entry into shopping malls, temples, beauty salons and movie theatres, and even hospitals and police stations- so much so that they are even denied a fundamental right to use public toilets. What an Indian film-goer would see of them would be a façade of bright pink saris and absolute

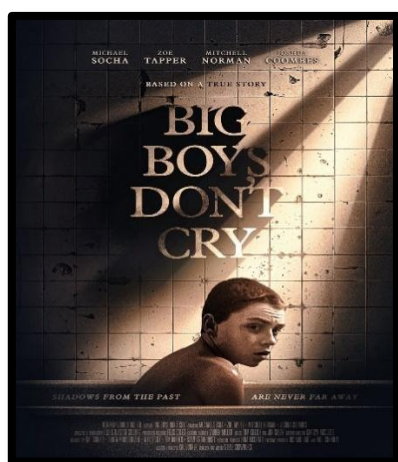
lecherous behaviour.

What is often left unseen is the face of dire poverty, their quest at the traffic signals and the cover-up of happiness while taking badhais at weddings. In international movies and documentaries, —the world of the Hijras was portrayed as a trans-utopia, where gender differences are celebrated and even revered. What is often however forgotten is the fact that most transgenders in India live and work in brothels. Movies and documentaries have not often delved upon this dark area. A rarity was Eunuchs: India's Third Gender which focused on this cinematic lacuna and received critical acclaim. The landmark movie Daayra was another such stunning film which showed all of the above in a humanising manner, without being mortifyingly pitiful.

The significance of positive and diverse representations of trans identities in Indian media cannot be emphasized enough. Despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018, the LGBTQ+ community in India still faces discrimination and marginalization. In a society where traditional gender norms and binary thinking are deeply ingrained, the lack of representation and understanding of trans identities can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to discrimination. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing social attitudes. Therefore, it is essential to have more diverse and detailed portrayals of trans individuals in Indian media. By providing opportunities for cisgender audiences to engage with trans characters and storylines, Indian media can help break down barriers and foster greater understanding and empathy. This, in turn, can lead to a more inclusive and accepting society, where trans individuals are valued and respected.

In India, where family and community play a significant role in shaping individual identities, media representation can also help create a sense of belonging and validation for trans individuals. Seeing themselves reflected in positive and empowering ways can help trans people feel seen, heard, and valued, which is essential for their mental health and well-being. Moreover, inclusive media representation can also help challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote a more fluid understanding of gender. By showcasing a range of trans identities and experiences, Indian media can help move beyond binary thinking and promote a more inclusive and accepting understanding of gender diversity.

On the other hand, a sincere question can be raised of this idea of 'showing the truth'. Movies are meant to be trailblazers and are meant to change social influences. The mere fact that movies from Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini in Italy and even Guru Dutt in India have led a major change in beliefs in their respective societies. Why has it been so that transgenders or other non-binary and non-cis identities cannot have a decent portrayal in Indian cinema? The movements that have changed the portrayal of the Black Americans and the Hispanic Americans in Hollywood with movies such as The Color Purple (1985) and West Side Story (1961), and have put issues of immigrants and gay youth to the forefront in Daniel Day-Lewis' My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) in the UK. It has also influenced many a change in social behaviour in South Asian settings, when the highly acclaimed Pakistani movie Bol (2011) led to more transgender and intersex students' admission in the Punjab University, Lahore, and crime against transgenders reduced in 2012. Today, the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill has been approved by the Senate, and daily



Cover picture "Boys Don't Cry"

television sees a queer person named Ali Saleem to come in drag as Begum Nawazish Ali and have a Stephen Colbert style Late Show.

A big issue that often goes ignored is the lives of transmen- men who were born as women and transitioned to being men. The transmen are practically invisible all across the world,

save a few appearances such as Hillary Swank's Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). In Indian cinema, transmen are completely invisible and have not been seen. Transmen are most persecuted and have internationally been sexually assaulted more than any other intersectionality.

A move to sensitise the films has gradually started. Though transformative results are yet to be achieved, movies such as the acclaimed Marathi drama, *Jogwa*, and the Rituparno Ghosh starrer Bengali romance, *Arekti Premer Golpo*, herald a new change. There also has been a significant move in other parts of popular culture. An all transgender band by the name of 6 Pack Band has gained some time in conversation and about 15 million views on YouTube.

This, however, is not enough. Despite the acceptance of the transgenders as a third gender by the Supreme Court no prominent Hindi movie has come out with any substantial role to a transgender character, and no big award has ever been given to any of the upstate movies.

There is always a topical taboo of movies that deal with LGBTQA+ relationships. *Fire* (1994), Kapoor and Sons (2016), and *My Brother Nikhil* (2016), along with a few other movies are trying to reverse the demonisation of homosexual relationships, but there has certainly been very little progress in displaying the battles of the gender minorities for societal acceptance. The end to the portrayal of an extremely negative construct of the transgenders and replacing the same with a positive narrative, however, is a process that has yet to take its baby steps. It is high time for us to stop this brutal degeneration and halt the Indian Film Industry's stooping to such low levels.

Why Is Bollywood's Portrayal Of The Transgender Community Problematic?

With almost 1.2 billion Indian watchers, Bollywood has always been the trendsetter of social movements and a large platform for artistic expression. It has the potential to bring some issues to light and spread awareness amongst the society in one go. On the occasion of trans visibility day, let us analyze the impact of some of the onscreen —trans representation that Bollywood has given us.

When the aim of media changes from capitalizing on the viewers rather than artistic expressions, we get TV series like —*Pati Patni Aur Panga*. With Adah Sharma starring as Shivani Bhatnagar in the MX Player's comedy drama, who is married to a man, we see a typical newlywed couple. Things change when he realizes that the person who he has married is a transwoman. This leads to him filing for divorce under fraud.

The most off-putting thing is that Bollywood has always cast cis people to play the role of a trans person. We might question how exactly can they capture the feelings of the trans community when they are shielded under the umbrella of cis-heteronormativity. With movies like —*Laxmii* II and now —*Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, we are left to wonder what exactly are the intentions of the filmmakers.

In the film —*Laxmii*, Akshay Kumar plays the role of a man possessed by a female ghost and starts acting —effeminate. Not only does this film perpetuate gender stereotypes but reinstates the idea that transwomen are basically men dressed in feminine clothes, who act effeminate. The real horror is how they portray transsexuality as something of comedy.



Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui, Film Still

Similarly, with the release of —*Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, we see another Bollywood movie try its hand at spreading awareness about the trans community. Vaani Kapoor, a Zumba instructor is romantically involved with Ayushmann Khurana, a weightlifter targeting national competitions. Vaani Kapoor is shown to be the epitome of female beauty which makes him fall in love with her. However, when he comes to know that his partner is a transwoman, he is enraged. He accuses her of defrauding him. We also see how Ayushmann tells his friend how he had sex the same way the others do, cementing the idea that

penetrative sex is the only —real sex|.

Turning trans identity into a comedy

One of the common features of all these films is that they have no respect for the trans community. On one hand, they claim to raise awareness yet all they do is create a joke out of their identity. As soon as they come to know about their partner's identity, they start misgendering them even though they had no problem using she/her pronouns for their partners before.

Another problematic aspect is that thinking not coming out is essentially —tricking| them,

—lying| to them, or —cheating| them. Why are we basing someone's identity on what they appear to others? Shivani would be a woman as much as the next ciswoman. And so will be Maanvi. Not disclosing their former gender is not cheating someone at all. If you fall in love with a person why does it matter what gender identity they associate themselves with?

In —PatniPatniAurPangal we see the actor having a nightmare of how his wife is peeing beside him just like a cisman does. Dare I say that the humor of Bollywood movies has reached rock bottom. These movies perpetuate the idea that transwomen are not women but men who have changed their sex. We need movies that don't violently propagate transphobia in front of society and pass it off as spreading awareness. We need movies that don't treat trans identity as a secret to be disclosed.

2.4 Narrative Conventions

Through the use of specific narrative conventions, the representations in transgender farces support the overall work of transgenderrepresentation to distance the transgender characters from the audience by positioning them as the objects of laughter and ridicule. Narrative conventions include a crisis requiring crossdressing.

The narratives of these films may seem to be aiming only for laughs but through the use of specific conventions, messages are sent to the audience that clearly privilege the heteronormative identities of the characters over their transgender identities. At various moments throughout the films, the heteronormative identities of the characters are given greater weight and importance than their temporarily adopted transgender identities. These moments range from the characters leaving their normal lives in face of a crisis by adopting transgender identities to regularly discarding those identities in order to pursue a heteronormative romance.

At the end of these narratives, the characters are portrayed as having learned important lessons and grown as individuals through their experiences, but their transgender identities are cast aside as inconsequential, just part of their personal growth. One such narrative is crisis requiring cross dressing

Crisis requiring cross dressing

The characters in Transgender farces never chose to cross dressing unless prompted by an external crisis. Chris Straayer argues that —the necessity for disguise is the genre's most fundamental narrative element.| Transgender characters in Hindi mainstream cinema are frequently relegated to the domain of comedy, with their identities used as a story device to generate humor. One such narrative convention is the —crisis requiring crossdressing,| in which a cisgender character is forced to dress as a member of the opposite gender, frequently resulting in humorous misunderstandings and mishaps. This tradition has been employed in a number of Bollywood films, propagating harmful stereotypes and promoting negative gender norms.

In this narrative tradition, a cisgender character, typically a man, is confronted with a situation that can only be solved by dressing up as a woman. This crisis can take many forms, including avoiding a villain, getting out of a tough position, or even winning over a love interest. The character's decision to crossdress is frequently portrayed as a desperate measure, with the audience invited to laugh at the character's alleged —femininity| and the ridiculousness of the circumstances.

One of the earliest examples of this trope can be found in Rishi Kapoor's 1974 film —Rafoo Chakkar,| in which his character, a young male, disguises himself as a woman to flee a group

of goons. The film's use of crossdressing as a humorous element establishes the tone for subsequent Bollywood films. In —Chachi 420| (1997), Kamal Haasan's character, a struggling actor, dresses himself as a woman to look after his kid, resulting in a sequence of comic

misunderstandings. Similarly, in —Duplicatel (1998), Shah Rukh Khan's character, a cook, dresses up as a woman to flee a thug, resulting in a series of slapstick comedic scenes. The crisis requiring crossdressing trope perpetuates harmful



Scene from Chachi 420 movie

stereotypes about transgender people, reinforcing the notion that gender identity is a joke or a costume that can be worn and discarded at will. This narrative convention also reinforces damaging gender norms, suggesting that men who dress up as women are somehow less masculine or more feminine. Furthermore, the trope erases the experiences of transgender people, reducing their identities to a comedic device or a plot twist.

The crisis-driven crossdressing narrative also leads to the erasure of transgender identities in Hindi mainstream cinema. By using crossdressing as a humorous ploy, these films dismiss transgender people's very real difficulties and experiences. The lack of representation and visibility of transgender characters in Bollywood films contributes to a culture of invisibility in which transgender persons are pushed to the edges of society.

2.5 Conclusion

There are many Hindi films that have featured transgender characters in their plots, but unfortunately, they have failed to portray them in a positive light. Transgender individuals are not being properly represented in Hindi mainstream cinema. In comparison to international cinema, we are still lagging behind. There is a persistent issue of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of this serious issue. For instance, movies like Chachi 420 and Dulhe Raja showed transgender characters cross-dressing due to a situation, which further exploits the situation of representation. Even in recent films, such as Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui and Pati Patni Aur Panga, the issue of misrepresentation is still prevalent. I believe we still have a long way to go before we can truly feel the growth of their representation. We can conclude that the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema is somewhat negative and still has a long way to go. While there are efforts being made to improve representation and make it more relatable, I believe that as long as there is no transgender person involved in a movie to play a certain role, it's not a genuine representation.

Chapter III

REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS AS VILLAINS



3.1 Introduction

Historically, Indian cinema and especially Hindi cinema hasn't had the best record in terms of gender and sexuality. From blatant sexual objectification to glorifying stalking and harassment, Bollywood has treated women abominably; but, it didn't stop just at cis women. When it comes to the transgender or hijra communities, Bollywood has fared even worse.

For over a century, Indian films have portrayed transgender characters either as villains or have used them for comic relief. Such stereotypical portrayals fail to bring to the fore the complex lives of transgenders who have been living on the margins of society for thousands of years. Such character misrepresentation has been happening for too long, at least in the Indian film industry. Though in the recent past an attempt has been made to portray the transgender community with utmost sensitivity in films and series, Sushmita Sen-starrer Taali

has initiated a pertinent debate—Can gender be performed? While a few transgender- transsexual acti-vists and scholars are of the opinion that actors, by the very virtue of their jobs, are free to take up any roles, another section thinks it is a time-tested mechanism to deny deserved representation to transgender actors.

Some recent films have chosen to focus on the complexity of trans lives, but cis-gender actors were picked to play the roles of transgenders. While *Than-gam* (2020), a part of the Sudha Kongara-directed anthology *Paava Kadhiagal*, was critically appreciated for showcasing the character of 27-year-old transgender Saathar, who is secretly in love with their childhood friend Saravanan, the role was played by cis-gender actor Kalidas Jayaram. Even Vijay Sethupati's noteworthy acting in Tamil film *Super Deluxe* (2019) couldn't evade the allegation of appropriating the role of a trans woman.

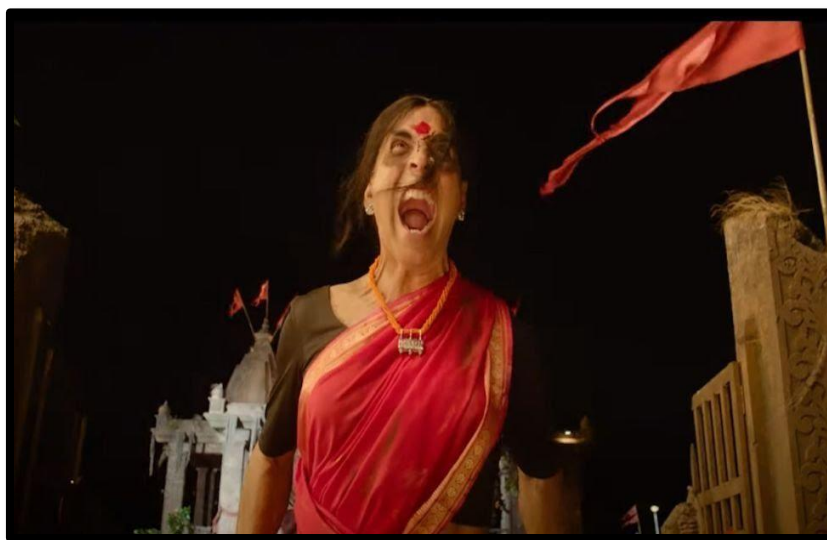
3.2 Transgenders in Bollywood – Terrifying villains

Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema, has not had the best record in terms of gender and sexuality. From blatant sexual objectification to glorifying stalking and harassment,

Bollywood has treated women abominably; but, it didn't stop just at cis women. When it comes to the transgender or hijra communities, the industry has fared even worse.

Sangharsh

Sangharsh came out in 1999 and is perhaps one of Bollywood's extreme dehumanisation of the trans community. Ashutosh Rana plays Lajja Shankar Pandey who is a radically religious transwoman involved in multiple child abductions and murders. Pandey is shown as a barbaric, psychopathic being who sacrifices children to attain immortality. This portrayal gave way to a rigid generalisation of trans people, that has stayed intact even twenty years later.



A particular scene from Movie "Laxmii Bomb"

Laxmii

The Akshay Kumar starrer has been at the receiving end of severe criticism by the trans community. Kumar plays Asif, who is possessed by the spirit of a revengeful transwoman. While the filmmakers proclaim that the film is progressive, it has done little to break stereotypes. Instead, it reinforced the stereotypical image that portrays trans women as loud and scary maniacs. The way Akshay was trying to act 'feminine', the movement of the hands, the neck, the body posture were precisely the ways in which cis men and women have tried to imitate and mock my expressions all these years. It is not empowerment, it is a stereotypical, transphobic imitation, and a bad one at that.

Sadak

Sadashiv Amrapurkar bagged several awards for his role as a Maharani, a transgender. Sanjay Dutt and Pooja Bhatt starrer '*Sadak*', was a huge hit back then. Sadashiv's character was considered as one of the dreadful villains in the Hindi film industry. Maharani remains one of Amrapurkar's most unforgettable performances. An evil trans woman who runs a brothel, Maharani's involvement in prostitution and illegal trafficking does a whole lot of damage in the plot while also cementing prevailing notions about transgender communities being

mired in sex work. Yet for all the prejudice that laces the writing of this character, there's something about the menace that Amrapurkar brought with his performance that is gripping. There's nothing flat about Maharani, who commands the scene every time she appears. If only it wasn't her transness that was shown as fearsome.



Nawazuddin Siddiqui in "Haddi"
Haddi

When Nawazuddin Siddiqui widely acclaimed as one of contemporary Hindi cinema's finest actors, is playing a trans woman, you're entitled to expect an impactful performance. To Siddiqui's credit, his turn as Haddi, the heroine of *Haddi*, is measured and not clichéd. However, within the film's first few minutes, Haddi commits two murders, one of a friend, the second of a stranger. Both are men whom Haddi kills because she thinks they're more use to her as dead bodies. Let's just say that this is not a role that will make you rethink the prejudices against trans people. —Patahai log hum se kyun darte hain? (do you know why people are so scared of us?)¹¹, Haddi asks early in the film (—hum¹² here refers to the Hijra community as a whole). In the film, the answer is simple: Because Haddi is scary. Once again, the film conflates aggression and transness, depicting Haddi's criminality as typically trans and not as deviance.

These movies are just a few examples of a larger trend where transgender identities are portrayed as villainous. The plotlines of such films often revolve around exploiting transgender identity to make the characters seem more menacing and terrifying.

Unfortunately, the movies I mentioned above failed to represent transgender identity in a positive and respectful light, instead perpetuating harmful stereotypes against the transgender community.

3.3 The Significance of Representation in Media for Young Transgender People

Representation, particularly for young transgender individuals, plays a crucial role in shaping their self-perception, understanding of the world, and identity formation. Positive portrayals of transgender characters and experiences in media can foster a sense of acceptance, validation, and normalization of diverse gender identities. This, in turn, can help transgender youth develop a healthy and positive sense of self, reducing feelings of isolation and marginalization.

However, when representation is harmful or stereotypical, it can perpetuate damaging stigmas and prejudices. The Indian film industry, despite its massive reach and influence, has a history of problematic representation of transgender people. During the 'Golden Era' of Hindi cinema, transgender characters were often depicted as comedic relief, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reducing their identities to caricatures. Even in recent years, films

like 'Kya Kool Hain Hum' have featured transgender women as sexually predatory characters, reinforcing harmful myths and misconceptions. In contrast, the history of transgender representation in Indian advertising has shown gradual progress. From virtual erasure to ads like the 2017 Vicks 'Touch of Care' campaign, which showcased a

heartwarming relationship between a transgender woman and her daughter, there has been an increase in

representation and visibility. While debates around 'rainbow capitalism' and the commercialization of LGBTQ+ identities persist, the mere existence of transgender representation in advertising is a significant step forward.

It is essential to acknowledge that representation in media is most relevant in urban settings, where access to diverse media and information is more readily available. In many rural areas, transgender individuals continue to face violence, discrimination, and marginalization.

Despite progress made in areas like the ban on 'conversion therapy' by the National Medical Commission, there is still much work to be done to ensure complete inclusion and acceptance. Small steps forward, including increased positive representation in media, can have a profound impact on the lives of young transgender people, helping them feel seen, validated, and empowered.

3.4 Narrative conventions

The narratives of transgender thrillers may seem to aim for cheap thrills or scares, but the use of specific conventions sends messages to the audience that the transgender identities of the characters are the sources of their fear. In a variety of ways throughout these films, the characters' transgender identities are positioned as a threat to heteronormativity. The characters are initially positioned outside of heteronormative society and then strike back at the repressive agents of heteronormativity when they are either punished for their deviance from heteronormative standards or forced to reenter heteronormative society. The films end with efforts at containment; these efforts, however, are not aimed at problematizing the violent portrayals of the transgender characters in the films but at assuring heteronormative audience members that the transgender characters are no longer a threat.

Positioned as outsiders by heteronormative society

The characters in transgender thrillers are positioned as outsiders by heteronormative society. Their outsider status is constructed through physical or interpersonal isolation and separation from society as a whole.

In the world of transgender thrillers, the protagonists are frequently pushed to the margins of society, ostracised and marginalised by the dominant heteronormative discourse. This outsider position is expertly produced through a variety of narrative patterns, including physical and interpersonal isolation, which emphasises their distance from the majority.

A closer look at Bollywood films like *Sadak* (1991), *Laxmii* (2020), *Sangharsh* (1999), and *Haddi* (2022) indicates how these narrative methods are used to strengthen the transgender characters' outsider status.

In *Sadak*, Maharani, played by Sadashiv Amrapurkar, is a transgender lady who lives on the outskirts of society. Her physical seclusion is emphasised by her employment as a brothel proprietor, which places her in an already marginalised and stigmatised environment.

Furthermore, her interactions with others are characterised by a sense of detachment and exploitation, which reinforces her outsider identity. Maharani's portrayal exemplifies how transgender people are frequently pushed to the outside of society, lacking the same social and economic opportunities as their cisgender counterparts. In *Sangharsh*, Ashutosh Rana plays the part of Lajja Shankar Pandey, a serial killer who targets transgender women. The film's portrayal of Lajja's character reinforces the idea that transgender people are prone to violence and



Ashutosh Rana played the role of Lajja Shankar Pandey In Sangharsh (1999).

abuse, cementing their outsider status. The usage of the thriller genre in the film adds to the sense of tension and suspense, which is heightened by Lajja's career as a serial killer. This narrative strategy highlights the difficulties and risks that transgender people confront in a harsh and unforgiving society.

Similarly, in *Laxmii*, the character of Laxmii, played by Akshay Kumar, is a transgender woman who is possessed by the spirit of a vengeful transgender woman. Laxmii's physical isolation is underscored through her occupation as a ghost, which situates her in a realm that is beyond the boundaries of the living. Moreover, her interpersonal relationships are marked by a sense of fear and mistrust, as those around her struggle to comprehend her transgender identity. The film's use of horror elements serves to further reinforce Laxmii's outsider status, positioning her as a figure of fear and otherness. Finally, in *Haddi*, the character of Haddi, played by Nawazuddin Siddiqui, is a transgender woman who seeks revenge against

those who wronged her. Haddi's physical isolation is emphasized through her occupation as a contract killer, which situates her in a space that is marked by violence and danger.

Furthermore, her interpersonal relationships are marked by a sense of mistrust and betrayal, as those around her seek to exploit her transgender identity.

Kill or threaten the repressive agents of heteronormativity

In transgender thrillers, the targets of violence are agents of heteronormativity who seek to conform or punish transgender individuals for their deviance. The films suggest that the violent actions of transgender characters are a reaction to their positioning as outsiders and the intrusion on their spaces by those who try to force them to conform. This focus on the murders as a response to heteronormativity aims to provide a fuller understanding of why certain characters are targeted, rather than simply blaming the individual transgender characters. The violence could be avoided if transgender individuals were fully accepted or left alone, but instead, the dominant gender system perpetuates deviance and violence.

In transgender thrillers, the violent acts committed by transgender characters are a response to the pressure to conform to heteronormative standards. The targets of violence are those who enforce these standards, such as bullies, taunters, and those who remove loved ones. This perspective highlights the extreme reactions to heteronormativity and the threat constructed around transgender identities.

3.5 Conclusion

Indian cinema has an insensitive representation of sexuality and gender, which is even more problematic when it comes to representing minorities in mainstream cinema. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the negative representation of transgender individuals. One of the most horrifying experiences for a child can be watching the movie *Sangharsh*, where Ashutosh Rana's portrayal of Lajja Shankar Pandey was downright terrifying. It was simply

unacceptable to watch. I believe that Hindi cinema, with its massive audience, has a responsibility to uplift the image of the transgender community and not perpetuate negative stereotypes. The plot should not focus on how their unfair treatment by society drives them to seek revenge and become murderers. This perpetuates a deep-seated fear of transgender people, leading to their marginalization and treatment as outcasts. Even with recent OTT releases and movies, I feel disheartened to see that there has been little change. While there are attempts to feature transgender individuals in leading roles, they are not necessarily portrayed in a positive light.

For instance, the movie *Laxmii*, starring Akshay Kumar, started off by representing the issue in a positive way but failed to maintain that tone after the interval. The narrative conventions in these movies position transgender individuals as a threat to the heteronormative mindset of the majority audience. In my research, I have found that directors rarely acknowledge the issue or make an effort to represent transgender individuals in a positive light. The excessive focus on their gender as a means of exacting revenge is a stereotypical trope. They are not just a plot device for the protagonists to shine. There are only a handful of movies where transgender characters take center stage. This chapter highlights the unjust attitude and unfair treatment of transgender individuals, and I believe that there will come a day when they are not treated unfairly because of their gender.

Chapter IV

BOLLYWOOD MOVIES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES



4.1 Introduction

Cinema always represented the society, and any visual representation about 'not so commonly discussed' topics becomes crucial as they are the image blocks for the future generation. The power of cinema is high among Indian audience, which is evident from the emergence of two great political leaders who are byproducts of it. It is essential to understand how sexual minorities are represented in a culture-specific society. In India, representation of the third gender was insensitive, and Hindi mainstream cinema is no exception. These

representations cannot be ignored as 'just in screen' as screen represents reality. Nevertheless, few fair images are making a significant impact on the audience about transgender. Studying representations about Transgender in Hindi cinema is important in today's context, where young minds are exposed to digital platforms.

A transgender person referred to as a person who has a different gender identity. Such a person's sex changes over some time. It can be either female to male who refers to as trans- men or male to female who refers to as trans-women. So, why should their life be of any concern to the 'normal' men and women? How much of the population do these transgender people constitute so that we have to worry about them? Or is it even worth spending the time and energy to know about them? It seems these questions have never posed to many people in society for a long time. It is only in the year 2014, transgender people have given an

identification of the 'Third gender' in the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court. It took so many years for the transgender community be recognised.

4.2 Popular Hollywood depictions of Transgender in Movies

Boys Don't Cry (1999) Director: Kimberley Pierce

Trans women became more popular as subjects of feature films and documentaries throughout the 1990s, but it was not until the end of the decade that a major picture centred around a trans man. Based on the true story of Brandon Teena, raped and murdered in

Humboldt, Nebraska in December 1993 after 2 acquaintances discovered that he was trans, Boys Don't Cry starred Oscar-winner Hilary Swank as Brandon, whose struggle to fit in with the local guys while keeping his gender identity secret results in tragedy, for which his community blames him. Alongside Kate Davis' 2001 documentary Southern Comfort about trans man Robert Eads, Boys Don't Cry deals intelligently with exclusion and prejudice, asking viewers to understand the layers of difficulty imposed on its protagonist. It's ultimately heartbreaking, but an important record of trans living in a particular time and place.

All about My Mother (1999) Director: Pedro Almodóvar

Pedro Almodóvar often used trans subjects and had a progressive attitude to casting, sometimes having cisgender (non-trans) women as trans women and trans women as cisgender women, notably with Carmen Maura playing transsexual Tina and Bibiana Fernández as her niece in Law of Desire (1987).

All about My Mother, focused on femininity and womanhood, was Almodóvar's most sustained and sensitive look at trans women's lives. It starts with Manuela's attempts to find the father of her son Esteban, who died in a road accident – she never told Esteban that his father was a trans woman, Lola, and that Lola, like her transsexual friend Agrado (played by Antonia San Juan), is a sex worker. The highlight of Almodóvar's intricately plotted and beautifully written masterpiece is Agrado's monologue, where she talks about the price of

being —authentic in a hostile society, but throughout, it accords trans women a level of dignity and respect that they had rarely experienced in feature films.



Wild Side (2004) Director: Sébastien Lifshitz

Also focusing on a transsexual sex worker is *Wild Side* by Sébastien Lifshitz, a French-language film which premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004. Non-professional actor and trans woman Stéphanie Michelini plays the central character, also called Stéphanie, who returns to her small hometown to look after her sick mother, who still uses her old name.

Stéphanie Michelini in Wild Side (2004)

Her flatmates, an AWOL Russian soldier and an Algerian street worker, come with her, and she begins relationships with both men, who are also attracted to each other. Named after Lou Reed's famous song, 'Walk on the Wild Side', and including a cameo by Antony Hegarty of Antony and the Johnsons (now Anohni), *Wild Side* was impressionistic, telling its story in non-chronological fragments. Its non-judgmental script and cinematography contrast Stéphanie's sadness about her relationship with her mother with the joy she finds in her ménage à trois with Mikhail and Jamel. Michelini's casting allows her to move well beyond the usual clichés that established characters as trans, and lifts *Wild Side* into a subtly defiant piece of poetry.

Transamerica (2005) Director: Duncan Tucker

Unlike *Wild Side*, Duncan Tucker's film did not employ a trans woman as its protagonist. It featured *Desperate Housewives* star Felicity Huffman as transsexual Bree, who goes on a road trip after getting a call from her previously unknown son Toby, 17, jailed in New York. Although it is very much Huffman's movie, plenty of trans people feature – *Transamerica* begins with a recording of writer and activist Andrea James providing voice training for trans women, with several scenes showing Bree attempting to integrate with trans communities, a challenge rarely before shown on screen. The script – on which James was a consultant – displays impressive awareness of the issues that trans people face and the language they use, especially with Felicity struggling to live in 'stealth' by not revealing her gender history. It's sometimes ridiculous and occasionally uses Bree's body for shocks or laughs, but it's also often touching, and crucially, never allows her to become a victim.

4.3 Representation of Transgender community in Popular Hindi Mainstream Cinema

The way transgender people are represented in the media reflects how society views and accepts or rejects them in India. However, these representations often show them in stereotypical roles or appearances that are not realistic and portray them as —the otherl.

There is not much research on hijras, and what exists is often confusing, contradictory, and judgmental. Most of it is not based on actual fieldwork or in-depth interviews. One of the main debates in this research is whether hijras are homosexual or not. Some people think that being a hijra means being asexual, but in reality, many hijras do engage in homosexual activity. This difference between the ideal and real behavior causes conflict within the community. Additionally, some hijras identify as male, while others identify as female, and they resist being labeled as —third genderl. This creates confusion about the identity of the third gender and highlights the idea of gender fluidity. This lack of understanding has led to stereotypical representations of transgender people in the media, which are often based on hearsay and assumptions. Bollywood movies, in particular, have perpetuated these

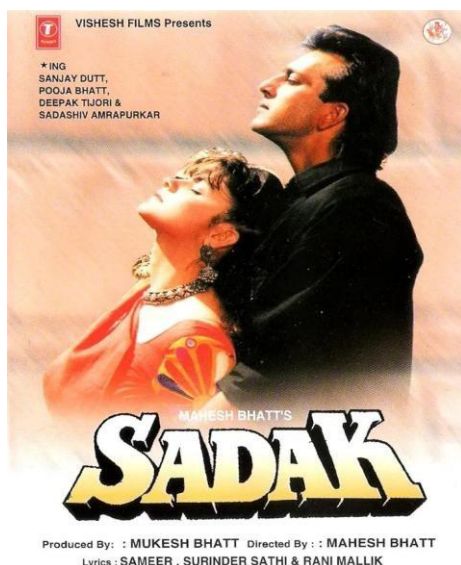
stereotypes, limiting the audience's understanding and acceptance of the community. This paper aims to highlight a few Bollywood movies that have broken away from these stereotypes. Although these movies still show transgender people in stereotypical ways, such as with loud makeup and behavior, they also portray complex characters, the challenges the community faces, and the conflicts they experience at both social and

personal levels.

4.4 Sample Studied

Sadak (1991) Tamanna (1997) Shabnam Mausi (2005) Welcome To Sajjanpur (2008)

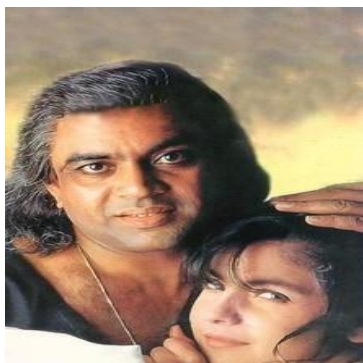
Sadak (1991) Directed by Mahesh Bhat



Sadak (1991): Directed by Mahesh Bhat, the movie is romantic thriller film. It stars Sanjay Dutt and Pooja Bhatt. The film was the second highest grossing Hindi movie of the year 1991. The plot of the movie revolves around Maharani (Sadashiv Amrapurkar) is an evil madam running a brothel that employs many girls like Pooja (Pooja Bhatt) and Chanda (Neelima Azeem).

Ravi (Sanjay Dutt) a taxi driver is a distraught young man who works day and night by driving a taxi in order to forget his horrible past. He visits a brothel with his friend, Gotya (Deepak Tijori) and falls in love with a prostitute by the name of Pooja. Pooja becomes Ravi's obsession. Ravi put's his entire life's savings at stake and sets out to free pooja from the brothel. The second night when Ravi comes alone in the brothel while Gotya and Chanda wait outside Ravi comes to take Pooja out for the second night, but maharani refuses because he thinks Pooja and Ravi are in love and they'll run away. Maharani says no to Ravi and Ravi stabs maharani with a knife and runs away with Pooja, while Gotya and Chanda come with them. Gotya and Chanda are killed by maharani's men, but Ravi and Pooja escape. Pooja is, however, captured again by Maharani, after Ravi is tortured and left for dead. Ravi remembering the fate of his sister and Pooja are the same regains his lost strength. He fights his way back to Maharani by setting ablaze to Maharani's Brothel and finally killing Maharani and rescuing Pooja.

Tamanna(1997)Directed by Mahesh Bhat

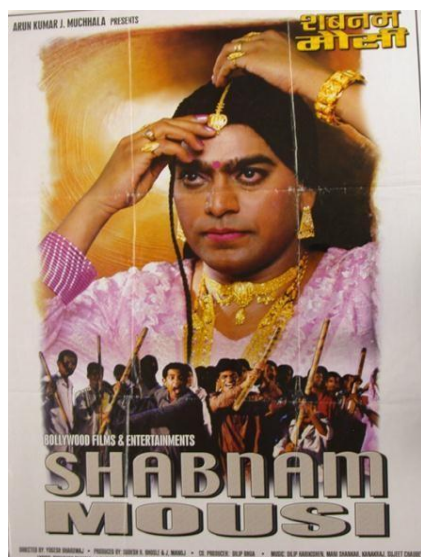


Tamanna(1997): Directed by Mahesh Bhat, It stars Paresh Rawal, Pooja Bhatt, Sharad Kapoor and Manoj Bajpayee in the lead roles. The screenplay was written by Tanuja Chandra. The movies is placed in year 1975, the place is Mahim, Bombay. The movie is the story of Tikku (Paresh Rawal), a eunuch, the only child of

yesteryear Bollywood actress Nazneen Begum. She has fallen upon hard times, is virtually destitute and is dependent on Tikku, who does makeup/ Hairdressing of Bollywood actresses. When she passes away, Tikku is beside himself with grief. After the funeral, he witnesses a woman leaving a child in a garbage bin. Tikku picks up the girl, longing for human company, decides to keep her, names her Tamanna, and brings her up on his own with the help of a close friend, Saleem (Manoj Bajpayee).

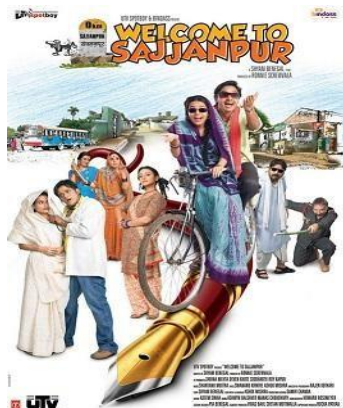
When she is old enough, he arranges for her education in St. Mary's High School's hostel. When she completes school, she returns home to find Tikku in the guise of a hijra and shuns him, but subsequently relents. Then Tikku finds out that Tamanna (Pooja Bhatt) is the daughter of Ranvir Chopra, an up and coming politician. He tells her, and she goes to their palatial house, however the biological family doesn't accept Tamanna and throws her out of their home. Finally Tamanna confronts her father on why he abandoned her and records his confession, after which her father (Ranvir Chopra) assaults her and Tikku and members of his Hijra community save Tamanna. The movie ends with the biological mother coming to take Tamanna home, where she chooses to live with Tikku rather than with them.

ShabnamMausi(2005)Directed by YogeshBharadwaj



ShabnamMausi(2005): Directed by Yogesh Bharadwaj, the movie is based on a real-life character shabnam and her struggle to enter politics. The movie starts with a child born in a police officer's house and eunuchs coming to his home to celebrate and give blessings. It is at the same time that the eunuchs realize the baby is of their gender and take the child with them. The child is named Shabnam and is raised in the close knit Hijra community, until the Shabnam is falsely framed in a murder and runs away to Anupur (Madhya Pradesh). It is here that Shabnam saves a young girl from getting raped and becomes famous and well accepted in the village. The local political leaders convince Shabnam to stand up for elections, which she accepts and finally wins.

Welcome to Sajjanpur (2008)Directed by ShyamBenegal



Welcome to Sajjanpur (2008): Directed by Shyam Benegal, it is a comedy film starring Shreyas Talpade and Amrita Rao in the lead roles. The movie is a satirical, but warmhearted. Mahadev (Shreyas Talpade) is an

unemployed graduate with a Bachelor of Arts from Satna college, who is forced to make a living writing letters for the uneducated people of his village. His real ambition is to become a novel writer portrait of life in rural India. Among Mahadev's customers are: Mahadev's childhood crush Kamla (Amrita Rao) who is desperate

for communication from her husband Bansi Ram (Kunal Kapoor), who works as a labourer at a dockyard in Mumbai. A hurried mother (Ila Arun) who wants to get her manglik daughter, Vindhya (Divya Dutta) married. A landlord whose wife is a candidate for the village Sarpanch, and who wants all her political rivals eliminated from the race. A eunuch Munni who is contesting the elections for the village Sarpanch but fears the threats from the landlord. A lovelorn compounder, Ram Kumar (Ravi Kishan), who is crazy about the widowed daughter in law Shobha Rani (Rajeshwari Sachdev) of a retired army soldier. Mahadev manages to get his friend engaged, police protection for Munni. However Munni is seriously injured in the head, and he learns a shocking truth about

Kamla's husband. It soon turns out that the story was a fictional novel written by the real Mahadev, but it is mostly based on his own experiences. As Mahadev, under pseudo name Sukhdev, reveals that Munnibai became a successful politician, becoming an MLA, or a Member of the State Legislature, with high connections and powerful people surrounding her. It is also revealed that Kamla and Bansi are happy in small house in Mumbai, who come to visit Sajjanpur every Diwali. In midst of all these good news, Mahadev notes that Ram Kumar and Shobha Rani were lynched because members of their community opposed a widow getting remarried. Mahadev also notes that he got married to Vindhya, the manglik, after wooing her by writing 40 letters. While most people consider a manglik to be a great misfortune, Mahadev notes that he became successful due to his marriage, as he paid down his farm land mortgage, built a wonderful house and realized his dream of writing a novel.

4.5 Analysis & Conclusion

Taking the context of Judith Butler's performativity theory and Queer theory, we find that all the movies taken in the sample construct the third gender via movie representations. Butler explains that Gender is not that it is a performance (or something false), but that gender is something that is made by doing. Butler's idea is that gender comes to exist as it exists because it is done in a certain way, and this doing gender in a certain way makes it so. For example, when a woman wears a skirt, the skirt is made feminine. This feminization does not happen because women are "naturally" made to wear skirts, or because male anatomy is more conspicuous when a skirt is worn, but because, according to Butler, the female body belongs (always already) to a specific social category which gives it the power to assign its prescribed meaning (or sign) to the things that it does.

When a woman wears a skirt, it's seen as a feminine thing to do because our society has associated skirts with femininity. Similarly, when a woman lets a man open a door for her,

it's seen as a feminine behavior. These actions become symbols of femininity because they're linked to the female body and the way society expects women to behave. But here's the thing: these symbols aren't fixed or absolute. They can change depending on who's performing them. For example, if a man wears a skirt, it doesn't automatically become a masculine thing to do because our society still associates skirts with femininity. However, the man's body has the power to change what the skirt means, and he can potentially make it a symbol of masculinity.

The problem is that our understanding of gender is based on centuries-old social categories of masculine and feminine. To create space for third gender identities, we need to break free from these rigid categories. But when we try to represent third gender identities in media, like in movies, we often rely on the same old symbols of masculinity and femininity to show that someone is —different! or —other.! This can be problematic because it reinforces the very

same gender binaries we're trying to break free from. For example, if a movie portrays a third gender character as someone who wears loud makeup and cross-dresses, it's using symbols associated with femininity to show that this person is —other.! But this can perpetuate the idea that femininity is the —opposite! of masculinity, rather than allowing for a more fluid understanding of gender. So, the paradox is that we need to use the same old symbols to create an understanding of third gender identities, but in doing so, we risk reinforcing the

very same gender binaries that we're trying to challenge.

The movies analyzed in the sample tried to bring attention to the third gender (people who don't identify as male or female) and their issues, relationships, and identities from the sidelines to the center of mainstream Bollywood. They moved away from the usual stereotypical portrayal of Hijras (a term used to describe people who are born male but identify as female) as comedic relief or fillers, and instead showed them as human beings with complex characters. One movie, Sadak, directed by Mahesh Bhatt, was a game-changer in this regard. It brought the third gender to the forefront and broke the norm of having a masculine villain in Hindi

cinema by casting a Hijra as the villain. The character of Maharani, played by Sadashiv Amrapurkar, was a eunuch who was cruel and anti-heterosexual, which was a shocking and dramatic portrayal for the Indian audience. While the character of Maharani may have reinforced some negative stereotypes about the third gender, it was still a significant step forward in Bollywood. For the first time, people from the third gender community, who are often shunned and marginalized, were given a leading role in a movie. The portrayal of a eunuch as a villain was also ironic, as it challenged the common discourse that people from the third gender are impotent and incapable. Overall, *Sadak* marked a change in the way Bollywood portrayed the third gender, and it paved the way for more nuanced and humanistic representations in the future.

Similarly in the movie *Tamanna*, directed by Mahesh Bhatt, the clichéd version of Hijras dancing in ceremonies and giving blessings has not been showcased as the main theme. The movies very realistically shows varied humanistic emotions and experiences a Hijra has to face in a society that shuns the third gender. The movie highlights several key points like the inability of third gender to rightfully acquire a share in the parental property- a legal right. Or the continuous struggle third gender has to face in order to get accepted in the society. The sequence in the movie, where the main protagonist, Tikku dresses up in a suit to hide his natural body on the occasion of his appointment with the principle of Tamanna's School or the hiding of Tikku's identity as a hijra from Tamanna and eventual rejection of Tikku by

Tamanna on knowing that he is a Hijra; highlights the social oppression, ridicule and lack of acceptance third gender community faces in the society. The discourse that has constructed is that a hijra is biologically incapable of producing a child and this impossibility has also substantiated the very possibility of rearing any child, the movies breaks away from this discourse and shows how Tikku instinctively develops parental feelings towards the baby who has been abandoned and rears her as own. The movie also shows the lack of economic opportunities the community goes through and its consequences. With the little bit of earning as a hair dresser of the heroines he tries to manage education and space for her. But he fails to keep pace with the fast moving society due to lack of education and any other alternate means of livelihood. He loses his job and continues to live in penury. Tikku's changing role points out the impact of westernization on the traditional mode of earning livelihood.

Tikku having lost his job and left with no other alternate means of earning money now decides to celebrate his sexuality to earn money. He says —Ab aap dekhiye, iss hijre ke haddiyon main kitna dam hai (you just see, what this hijra can do). He plays the traditional jobs like dancing in the marriage party, dancing on the occasion of new born baby or blessing the people. This was a profession which he has long back abhorred but now it appeared to be the

only way to earn money. Having decided to play the role of hijra he dresses up himself with kajal, powder and lipstick, ill-fitting blouses and colourful saris. This deeply resonates with the discrimination third gender faces in the society that pushes them to the clichéd structure and never allows them to come out of it. Mahesh Bhatt not only beautifully captures the dilemma of Tikku whose love for Tamanna makes him hide his identity as a

Hijra and at the same time in order to pay for her expenses and upkeep, Tikku decides to celebrate his sexuality to earn money; but also makes a dual statement in a sense that coming out as Hijra liberates Tikku from hiding his real identity. In a nut shell, the film through the character of Tikku and Tamanna deconstructs sexist ideology of the Indian society. Tikku by challenging the gender roles assigned to third gender expands the discourse and understanding towards the Hijra community and Tamanna by finally deciding to live with Tikku instead with her biological mother, further shatters the gender roles and assumptions that hijras are not capable of fulfilling various societal roles.

While the movies *Sadak* and *Tamanna* were critical in giving space to third gender community and bringing them to centre from the margins, the movies mostly focused on breaking the stereotypical discourse around third gender community. However the movie *Shabnam Mausi* (2005) directed by Yogesh Bharadwaj played an instrumental role

in inspiring a lot of eunuchs to participate in mainstream activities giving up their traditional roles of dancers, prostitutes and beggars. The movie inspired by a real life story, narrates the story of eunuch Shabnam who when is forced to run away from her hijra community, finds her true identity as a peoples representative and a good politician. The movie manages to realistically shows the journey of Shabnam, the trial and tribulations third gender community faces at every step and how the third gender community is much more than just their gender. The movie starts with family giving up their child to local hijra community after coming to know its gender, which points to the stark reality of how third gender babies are abandoned.

The director then shows how the members of local hijra community rear the child as their own and in one sequence even shows how the kid is ridiculed in school due to which the kid stops going to school. Sequences like these establish the oppressed narrative of the third gender community but the director doesn't weave the entire story around it, he successfully manages to highlight not only the politics within the hijra community with the leader of the community running a covert prostitution racket which Shabnam and her

mother opposes to but also shows how Shabnam eventually finds her identity beyond the rigid structures of gender identity imposed on third gender. In another sequence in the movie, when Shabnam goes in to file the nomination papers, there is a very powerful scene where Shabnam writes and marks her gender as a —Kinarl (Hijra) besides the two given options of male and female.

The powerful scene simply breaks multiple rigid structures and identities that third gender community faces and brings a sense of liberation and acceptance of one's own self.

Moving on to the movie *Welcome to Sajjanpur* (2008), directed by Shyam Benegal; the movie unlike other movies mentioned doesn't make an attempt to build the entire narrative around third gender community; rather it showcases the community within the society trying to find an equal plane and not just categorizing and highlighting the otherness. This is wherein the victory of movie lies. Set in a Maharashtra village, the plot revolves around the people of Sajjanpur and tackles a number of socio-economic issues like casteism, superstitions, gender and politics. However, the film to a greater extent reflects the plight of the hijra vis-a-vis the dominant sexual as well as power discourse. Sexual discourse, formulates the identity of people of different sexual orientation and it is seen that on the basis of biological sex gender roles are given to the hijra. The power discourse on the other hand differentiates and excludes the hijra from the mechanism of power operating in the society.

The film debates over the question of identity formation of the hijra in a bi-sexual society. Benegal presents a democratic environment on the one hand and gender politics of the larger sexual discourse on the other and tries to come out with the possibility of a true recognition of identity of the hijra in the society. There are five scenes that deal with the issue of hijra i.e. first a short meeting with Mahadev (the hero of the film) then a election campaigning scene, at Mahadev's house after the threat to her life by her opponent, at the time of election result and the final scene of murder by Ram Singh and his men. A very powerful scene in the movie is where Mahadev asks Munni which community's support will she be getting in elections.

As in India politics is often fought on caste, religion and region. The question raised by Mahadev highlights a very important concern vis-à-vis the denunciation the community goes through. What Benegal has succeeded in the movies is the struggle for proper recognition of the identity of third gender community by themselves. Munni Bai is seen fight for a fair treatment of her people in the socio- cultural set up and not trying to hide their identity or forcing to change as per the norms of the society. The victory of Munni Bai in the end is an attempt to showcase the changing attitudes of the people but murder of Munni Bai by men of Ram Singh further iterates the position of third gender in the Indian Society and imprints psychological fear of dominant discourse among the hijras.

In the context of Queer theory, the portrayal of characters in the movies I've chosen as a sample is particularly relevant. Queer theory is a critical framework that challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality, arguing that these categories are not fixed or natural, but rather are shaped by societal norms and can be fluid. This perspective is especially useful for analyzing films that feature characters who defy conventional gender roles, such as hijras and eunuchs. In the movies *Sadak*, *Tamanna*, *Shabnam Mausi*, and *Welcome To Sajjanpur*, Queer theory can help us understand how these characters are represented. For instance, in *Sadak*, the character Maharani is a complex and multidimensional eunuch who subverts traditional stereotypes of hijras being asexual and impotent. Similarly, in *Tamanna*, the character Tikku is a loving and caring hijra who faces difficulties in society. These portrayals demonstrate that hijras are not one-dimensional or reducible to a single characteristic, but rather are complex individuals with their own stories, struggles, and experiences.

In *Shabnam Mausi*, the movie shows a hijra who becomes a politician and fights for the rights of her community, challenging traditional ideas about hijras being powerless. In *Welcome To Sajjanpur*, the movie shows a hijra who faces discrimination and violence when running for office, highlighting the struggles that hijras face in their daily lives. Overall, these movies use queer theory to challenge traditional ideas about gender and sexuality and to show hijras and eunuchs as complex and multidimensional characters. The way transgender people are represented in popular Hindi movies is complicated and multifaceted. While some movies have tried to portray hijras and eunuchs in a more realistic and humane way, there is still more work to be done to challenge traditional ideas about gender and sexuality. Using queer theory to analyze these movies shows us that we need a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality.

All in all, we find that though movies have been successful in breaking as well as challenging the rigid gender structures around third gender communities but the low commercial success of these movies also points to the stark reality of the situation on ground. As mentioned sexual discourse often sets the identity of the people, the discourse around the third gender has that been of impotency, something incomplete, unable to function within the structures of gender binary, something as a deviant, not to be trusted and ridiculed. The movies make an attempt to change the narrative and portray the community in a more humane and realistic setting, which shows different, shades of character of the community like that of any gender. The movies have also been successful in highlighting the poor socio-economic conditions that the third gender people live and which further forces them to live and earn through the traditional way of dancing and begging. While the movies

still represent a fringe segment of mainstream Bollywood, the attempt is commendable and a welcome from the either silent treatment with no representation of Third gender community or passing them off a comical trope; something to be laughed at.

4.6 Discussing Commerciality as a barrier for representation of Transgender in movies

The representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream movies has been a topic of discussion for quite some time now. While there have been some attempts to portray transgender characters in films, commerciality often becomes a significant barrier in their accurate and respectful representation. One of the primary reasons for this is the fear of alienating a large section of the audience who may not be comfortable with the idea of transgender individuals or may not understand their experiences.

A recent example of this is the film *Laxmii Bomb*, which was released in 2020. The film, starring Akshay Kumar, tells the story of a man who gets possessed by the spirit of a transgender woman. While the film's intention was to raise awareness about the transgender community, it ended up perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing harmful tropes. The film's portrayal of the transgender character was highly problematic, with many critics accusing it of being insensitive and disrespectful. The film's commercial success, however, was not affected by these criticisms, and it went on to become a box-office hit. This raises questions about the priorities of the filmmakers and the audience – are they more concerned with making a profit or with telling a respectful and accurate story?

Another example is the film *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, which was released in 2021. The film, starring Ayushmann Khurrana, tells the story of a man who falls in love with a transgender woman. While the film's intention was to promote acceptance and understanding of the transgender community, it ended up being a watered-down and stereotypical portrayal.

The film's transgender character was played by a cisgender actor, which was widely criticized by the transgender community. The film's commercial success, however, was not affected by these criticisms, and it went on to become a moderate box-office success. This raises questions about the importance of authenticity and representation in films – are filmmakers willing to take risks and challenge their audience, or are they more concerned with playing it safe and appealing to a wider audience?

The film *Sadak*, released in 1991, is another example of the commerciality barrier in the representation of transgender individuals. The film, starring Sanjay Dutt and Pooja Bhatt, tells the story of a man who falls in love with a sex worker who is also a transgender woman. The film's portrayal of the transgender character was highly problematic, with many critics accusing it of being insensitive and disrespectful. The film's commercial success, however, was not affected by these criticisms, and it went on to become a box-office hit. This raises questions about the impact of films on society – do they have a responsibility to promote positive and respectful representations, or are they solely concerned with entertaining their audience?

The film *Tamanna*, released in 1997, is a rare example of a Hindi mainstream film that attempted to tell a respectful and accurate story about a transgender individual. The film, starring Paresh Rawal and Pooja Bhatt, tells the story of a transgender woman who adopts a child and raises her as her own. The film's portrayal of the transgender character was widely praised by critics and the transgender community, who appreciated its sensitivity and authenticity. However, the film's commercial success was limited, and it did not become a major box-office hit. This raises questions about the audience's willingness to engage with films that challenge their assumptions and promote positive representations – are they willing to take a chance on films that may not be commercially successful, or do they prefer to stick with what they know and are comfortable with?

In conclusion, commerciality is a significant barrier in the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream movies. Filmmakers are often more concerned with making a profit than with telling a respectful and accurate story, which can lead to stereotypical and problematic portrayals. The audience also plays a crucial role in perpetuating these stereotypes, as they often prefer to stick with what they know and are comfortable with.

However, there are examples of films that have attempted to challenge these stereotypes and promote positive representations, and it is essential to recognize and appreciate these efforts. Ultimately, it is up to the filmmakers and the audience to prioritize authenticity and representation over commercial success.

4.7 OTT- A New Platform? Discussing Popular Series and Cinema.

The representation of transgender individuals in Indian media has been a topic of discussion for a long time. With the rise of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, there has been a significant shift in the way transgender characters are portrayed in Hindi popular series and cinema.

OTT platforms have provided a new avenue for storytellers to explore diverse themes and characters, including those from the transgender community.

One of the most notable examples of accurate and sensitive representation of transgender individuals in Hindi popular series is the character of Kukoo in the Netflix original series

—Sacred Games (2018-2019). Played by Kubbra Sait, Kukoo is a transgender woman who is a cabaret dancer and a love interest of one of the main characters. What sets Kukoo apart from other transgender characters in Indian media is that she is not portrayed as a caricature or a stereotype. Instead, she is a multidimensional character with her own agency, desires, and struggles. Her character is not defined solely by her gender identity, and she is not

relegated to the sidelines or used as a plot device. Kukoo's character is a testament to the fact that transgender individuals can be complex, multifaceted, and deserving of respect and dignity.

Another example of positive representation of transgender individuals in Indian cinema is the film —Super Deluxe (2019), directed by Thiagarajan Kumararaja. The film features a transgender woman named Shilpa, played by Vijay Sethupathi, who is a complex and nuanced character. Shilpa is not portrayed as a victim or a caricature, but rather as a strong and independent individual who is fighting for her rights and dignity. The film tackles themes of identity, gender, and sexuality in a sensitive and thoughtful manner, and Shilpa's character is a testament to the fact that transgender individuals can be heroes and protagonists in their own stories.

OTT platforms have also provided a platform for transgender individuals to tell their own stories and share their experiences. For example, the YouTube series —The Transgender

Diaries (2020) features interviews with transgender individuals from across India, sharing their stories of struggle, resilience, and triumph. The series is a powerful testament to the fact that transgender individuals have their own voices and stories to tell, and that they should be given the opportunity to share them with the world. However, despite these positive examples, there is still a long way to go in terms of representation of transgender individuals in Hindi popular series and cinema. Many transgender characters are still portrayed as stereotypes or caricatures, and are often relegated to the sidelines or used as plot devices. There is a need for more diverse and nuanced representation of transgender individuals, and for more opportunities for transgender individuals to tell their own stories and share their experiences.

In conclusion, OTT platforms have provided a new avenue for storytellers to explore diverse themes and characters, including those from the transgender community. While there are still challenges and stereotypes to overcome, there are also many positive examples

of accurate and sensitive representation of transgender individuals in Hindi popular series and cinema. As the Indian media landscape continues to evolve, it is hoped that there will be more opportunities for transgender individuals to tell their own stories and share their experiences, and that they will be given the respect and dignity they deserve.

4.8 Conclusion

My research has found that most Hindi movies have poorly represented transgender people, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and marginalizing the community. However, a few films have broken this trend by providing a more detailed portrayal of transgender people and challenging traditional gender norms. These films, such as Sadak and Tamanna, have utilized symbols associated with femininity and masculinity to highlight the 'difference' of transgender people, but they have also created space for third gender identities and questioned dominant gender discourses. Through the lens of queer theory, I have seen how these films have attempted to subvert traditional gender and sexuality norms and create a more inclusive environment. While there is still much work to be done, these films have taken an important step towards accepting and humanizing transgender people. My research underscores the importance of creating a more inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

Furthermore, I have also explored the possibility that directors may be hesitant to tackle such storylines due to concerns about commercial viability, which may also implicate us as an audience. However, with the growing popularity of OTT platforms and a more open-minded approach, we can hope that many more movies and series will explore these storylines and showcase the upliftment of transgender individuals.

Chapter V

TRANSGENDER AS LIVED EXPERIENCE



5.1 Introduction

The final image of the transgender individual focuses on characters who actively claim transgender identities, rather than being forced to adopt transgender identities as a result of external forces or having their identities constructed as a threat through their violent actions.

I argue that the films in this chapter situate the audience in a position of sympathy, rather than empathy, for the characters; audience members feel for the characters, recognizing the difficulty of the situations the characters experience, while remaining unable to feel with the characters, not only because of a lack of personal understanding of what the characters are experiencing but also because the films are unwilling to convey the level of intimate knowledge necessary to connect with the characters at a deeper level.

Through my analysis of the narrative conventions of the films under study, I analyze how the films distance the audience from the characters through feelings of sympathy. Transgender representations take an important step forward in transgender dramas by presenting the characters as objects of sympathy rather than objects of ridicule or fear, but it is important to recognize that sympathy does not equal unconditional acceptance of the characters' transgender identities. Because the films resist the kinds of intimate knowledge that would allow for deeper connections with the characters – not least of which in their tendencies toward an ironic or detached indie sensibility – the characters remain at a distance from the audience. Audience members may feel sorry for the characters but as the characters are constructed by the films, they are unable to fully bridge the gap that separates them.

5.2 Sympathy vs Empathy

The portrayal of transgender characters in Hindi movies has often been a subject of controversy, with many films relying on sympathy rather than empathy to tell their stories. While sympathy implies feeling sorry for someone without truly understanding their experiences, empathy involves putting oneself in their shoes and understanding their emotions and struggles. Unfortunately, Hindi cinema has frequently opted for the former, reducing transgender characters to mere caricatures or objects of pity.

In many Hindi movies, transgender characters are introduced solely to evoke sympathy from the audience. They are often depicted as marginalized, oppressed, and helpless, with their struggles and hardships serving as a backdrop for the cisgender protagonist's journey. For instance, in the 2014 film "Mary Kom," the transgender character, Chandni, is portrayed as a victim of societal rejection and harassment. While the film attempts to raise awareness about the transgender community, Chandni's character is relegated to the sidelines, serving only to highlight the protagonist's compassion and empathy. This kind of representation reinforces the "othering" of transgender individuals, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing their marginalization.

Another example is the 2019 film "Dream Girl," where the transgender character, Koyal, is depicted as a comedic relief, with her gender identity used as a punchline for jokes. The film's attempt to showcase Koyal's struggles is superficial, reducing her character to a mere prop for the protagonist's storyline. This kind of representation is not only offensive but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes, reinforcing the notion that transgender individuals are somehow less deserving of respect and dignity.

In contrast, empathetic representation involves creating complex, multidimensional characters that are not defined solely by their gender identity. It requires a deep understanding of the transgender experience, acknowledging their agency, autonomy, and humanity. Unfortunately, such representations are rare in Hindi cinema, with most films opting for sympathy over empathy.

However, there are some exceptions. For instance, the 2019 film "Super 30" features a transgender character, Anand Kumar's sister, who is portrayed with dignity and respect. Her character is not reduced to her gender identity, and she is shown to be a strong, independent individual with her own agency. This kind of representation is a step in the right direction, acknowledging the humanity and complexity of transgender individuals.

5.3 Narrative Conventions

The Tragic Backstory

One common narrative convention used to evoke sympathy for transgender characters is to provide them with a tragic backstory. This typically involves a traumatic event, such as rejection by family or society, that led to their decision to transition. For example, in the film *Laxmii* (2020), the transgender character Laxmii is shown to have been abandoned by her family and forced to live on the streets, evoking sympathy from the audience. This convention creates a sense of pity and sorrow, encouraging the audience to feel sorry for the character's circumstances.

The "Sacrificial Lamb" Trope

Another narrative convention used to elicit sympathy for transgender characters is the —sacrificial lamb trope, where the character is willing to sacrifice their own happiness or well-being for the benefit of others. For example, in the film *Khwaja Sarail* (2016), the transgender character Khwaja is shown to be willing to give up her own life to protect her lover, demonstrating her selfless nature and evoking sympathy from the audience. This trope creates a sense of admiration and respect for the character's selflessness, encouraging the audience to feel sympathetic towards them.

The "Victimhood" Narrative

Finally, the —victimhood narrative is a common convention used to represent transgender identities in Hindi mainstream cinema. This involves depicting transgender characters as victims of circumstance, often at the mercy of societal norms and expectations. For example, in the film *Aligarh* (2016), the transgender character Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras is shown to be a victim of discrimination and harassment, evoking sympathy from the audience. This narrative convention creates a sense of outrage and injustice, encouraging the audience to feel sympathetic towards the character's plight.

Overall, these narrative conventions are used to create a sense of sympathy and understanding towards transgender characters in Hindi mainstream cinema. However, it is essential to critically evaluate these representations, as they often rely on stereotypes and tropes that can be harmful and limiting.

5.4 Distance and Intimacy

Hindi mainstream films have a significant influence on the Indian audience's perception of transgender individuals. Unfortunately, these films often create distance between the audience and transgender characters, preventing a deeper connection and understanding. One way they achieve this is by portraying transgender characters in a stereotypical and caricatured manner. In films like *Kya Kool Hain Hum* (2005) and *Grand Mastil* (2013), transgender characters are depicted as comedic relief, with their gender identity being the punchline of jokes. This kind of representation reduces transgender individuals to mere caricatures, stripping them of their humanity and dignity. The audience is encouraged to laugh at their expense, rather than empathize with their struggles. This kind of portrayal creates a sense of detachment, making it difficult for the audience to form a genuine connection with transgender characters. Another way Hindi films create distance is by portraying transgender characters as —others, often as villains or outsiders. In films like *Sadak* (1991) and *Dushman* (1998), transgender characters are depicted as menacing and predatory, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating fear and mistrust. This kind of representation creates a sense of irony, as the audience is encouraged to fear or revile transgender characters, rather than understand or empathize with them. The irony is further exacerbated by the fact that Hindi films often use queer characters as a plot device to advance the story or provide a twist. In films like *Dostana* (2008) and *Bol Bachchan* (2012), transgender characters are used as a means to explore themes of sexuality and gender, but are ultimately reduced to mere plot points. This kind of representation creates a sense of detachment, as the audience is encouraged to view transgender characters as mere devices, rather than fully fleshed-out human beings.

Furthermore, Hindi films often fail to provide queer characters with agency and autonomy. In films like *Lagaan* (2001) here queer characters are depicted as being rescued or saved by cisgender characters, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about transgender individuals being helpless and dependent. This kind of representation creates a sense of power imbalance, where transgender characters are denied agency and autonomy, and are instead relegated to the sidelines. The detachment and irony created by Hindi films can have serious consequences, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing discrimination against transgender

individuals. By portraying transgender characters in a stereotypical and caricatured manner, Hindi films create a sense of distance between the audience and transgender characters, preventing a deeper connection and understanding. It is essential for Hindi films to move beyond these harmful stereotypes and provide transgender characters with agency, autonomy, and dignity.

In recent years, there have been some efforts to change this narrative, with films like —Aligarhl (2015) is providing more nuanced and sensitive portrayals of queer characters. However, more needs to be done to challenge the harmful stereotypes and representations that have been perpetuated by Hindi films. By providing transgender characters with more agency, autonomy, and dignity, Hindi films can help to create a more inclusive and accepting society.

5.5 Impact on Transgender community

Here are a few Hindi movie names where queer characters, focusing on transgender characters, were portrayed as sympathy characters:

Darmiyaan (1997)

Directed by Kalpana Lajmi, this film tells the story of a transgender woman, Immi, played by Kiron Kher. Immi is a sympathetic character who is shunned by society and struggles to find acceptance. While the film's intention was to raise awareness about the transgender community, it ultimately perpetuated stereotypes and reinforced harmful tropes. The film's portrayal of Immi as a tragic figure, deserving of pity, did more harm than good to the transgender community. It reinforced the notion that transgender people are inherently flawed and in need of sympathy, rather than deserving of respect and dignity.

Tamanna (1997)

Another film released the same year, Tamanna, directed by Mahesh Bhatt, features a transgender character, Tamanna, played by Paresh Rawal. Tamanna is a sympathetic character who is shown to be struggling with her identity and seeking acceptance from society. While the film attempted to humanize the transgender experience, it ultimately fell into the trap of portraying Tamanna as a pitiful figure, eliciting sympathy from the audience. This portrayal reinforced harmful stereotypes and perpetuated the notion that transgender people are inherently flawed and in need of sympathy.

I Am (2010)

Directed by Onir, this film features a segment called —Omarl, which tells the story of a transgender woman, Megha, played by Abhimanyu Singh. While the film's intention was to raise awareness about the transgender community, Megha's character is portrayed as a sympathetic figure, struggling to find acceptance in a society that rejects her. The film's portrayal of Megha reinforced the notion that transgender people are inherently flawed and in need of sympathy, rather than deserving of respect and dignity.

The impact of these films on the transgender community in India has been significant. They have perpetuated harmful stereotypes and reinforced the notion that transgender people are inherently flawed and in need of sympathy. These portrayals have contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization of the transgender community, making it even more challenging for them to access basic rights and dignity. The films have also reinforced the

notion that transgender people are —otherl, reinforcing their exclusion from mainstream society. It is essential to note that these films were released during a time when there was limited understanding and awareness about the transgender community in India. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the harm that these portrayals have caused and to strive for more nuanced and respectful representations of transgender characters in Indian cinema.

5.6 Conclusion

Hindi mainstream cinema has often portrayed transgender individuals in a way that sparks sympathy rather than empathy. Sympathy means feeling sorry for someone without truly understanding their experiences, while empathy means putting oneself in their shoes and understanding their emotions and struggles. Hindi films often use narrative conventions like tragic backstories and —victimhoodl narratives to create sympathy towards transgender characters. However, these conventions rely on harmful stereotypes and tropes that can be limiting. They also create distance between the audience and transgender characters, preventing a deeper connection and understanding.

The impact of these films on the transgender community in India has been significant. They have perpetuated

harmful stereotypes, reinforced marginalization, and made it harder for transgender people to access basic rights and dignity. To change this, Hindi films need to shift from sympathy to empathy, from pity to respect, and from marginalization to inclusion. They should provide transgender characters with agency, autonomy, and dignity. By doing so, Hindi films can help create a more inclusive and accepting society. It's crucial to acknowledge the harm caused by these portrayals and strive for more respectful representations of transgender characters in Indian cinema.

Chapter VI

VIEWERS PERSPECTIVE ON REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDER IN HINDI MOVIES



The purpose of the survey on Representation of Transgender in Hindi movies is to gather data and insights regarding the challenges, accurate representation, opportunities and the need of more authentic portrayal in the Hindi filmmaking industry. And to know the viewers perspective on this topic. The survey aims to address the issue of representing Transgender in a positive or negative light in Hindi movies and what effect these movies have on society's mindset.

6.1 The objectives of the survey may include:

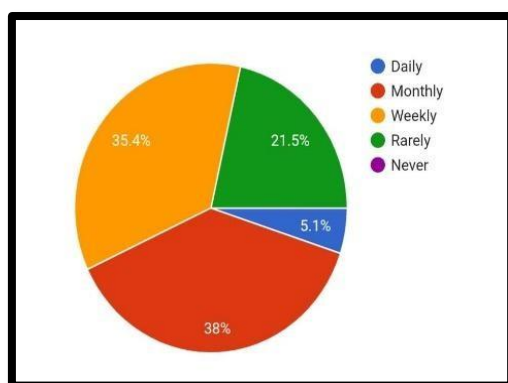
The primary objective of this survey is to investigate the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, with a focus on examining the portrayal of transgender identity in Hindi films and its potential impact on societal attitudes towards transgender individuals. Specifically, this study aims to explore the frequency and nature of transgender representation in Hindi cinema, including the prevalence of stereotypical portrayals and the presence of transgender characters in leading roles.

Another key objective is to gauge public opinion on the importance of diverse representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema, as well as the perceived impact of films featuring transgender characters on challenging stereotypes and promoting acceptance. The survey also seeks to identify directors who have made a positive contribution to the representation of transgender individuals in their movies, and to gather insights on how films like —Chandigarh Kare Aashiquil and —Laxmiil have contributed to the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore the broader implications of transgender representation in Hindi cinema on societal perceptions of transgender individuals, and to gather suggestions for how Hindi cinema can improve its representation of transgender individuals. Ultimately, the objective of this survey is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, and to inform strategies for promoting more inclusive and nuanced portrayals of transgender identity in Hindi films.

Next page deals with the survey questions explained and survey results presented:

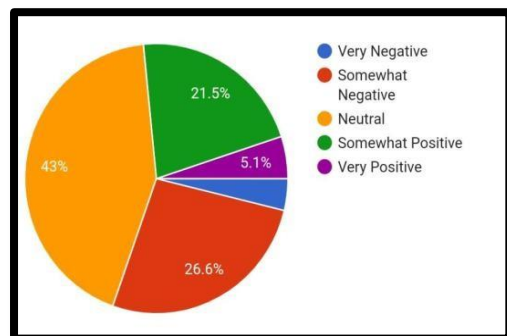
1. How often do you watch Hindi movies?



The question generally helps to find out about respondents' general interest in watching Hindi movies. The purpose of the question is to assess their overall affinity for watching movies, rather than asking for specific

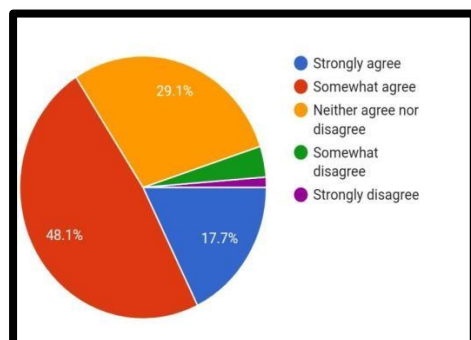
details about their preferences or opinions about specific theme, directors or movies. This question helps gauge general interest and enthusiasm for movies among survey respondents, providing a broad understanding of their movie-watching habits. Here the results of pie chart shows that majority of survey participants enjoy watching Hindi movies.

2. How would you rate the representation of transgender individuals in Mainstream Hindi Cinema?



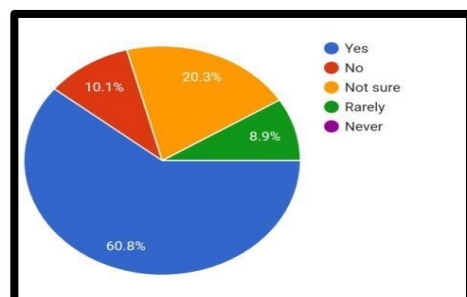
A survey on the representation of transgender individuals in mainstream Hindi cinema found that 43% of respondents remained neutral, while 26.6% expressed a negative view, suggesting that many feel transgender individuals are misrepresented, stereotyped, or marginalized in Hindi cinema. This highlights the need for more inclusive and accurate representation in the film industry, which has a significant influence on shaping societal attitudes and perceptions, and is essential for promoting positive and respectful representation of marginalized communities.

3. Do you think Hindi cinema portrays transgender individuals in a stereotypical manner?



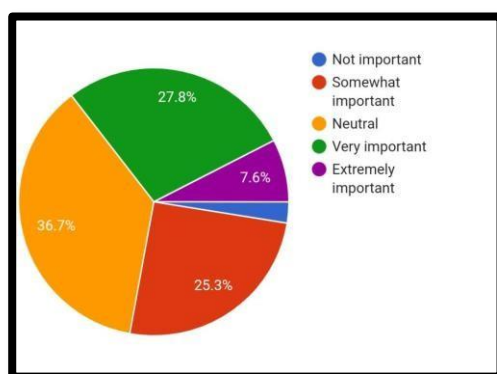
The survey question yielded a majority response of —somewhat agree, indicating that most respondents believe that Hindi cinema often resorts to stereotypical representations of transgender individuals. This suggests that the film industry's portrayal of transgender characters is perceived as lacking nuance and authenticity, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing societal biases. The results of this question provide insight into the public's perception of the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema, highlighting the need for more thoughtful and inclusive storytelling in the industry.

4. Have you seen any Hindi movies that feature transgender characters in a leading role?



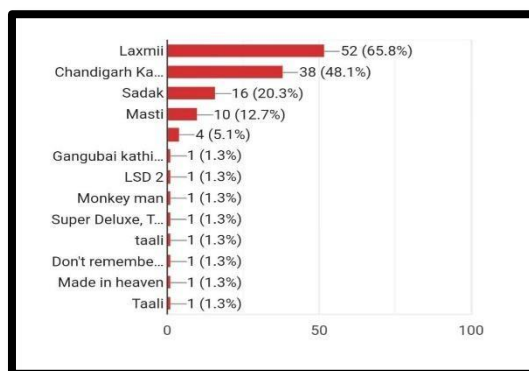
The question reveals that a majority (60.8%) of respondents have seen such movies, indicating a growing interest in representation and inclusivity in Indian cinema. This suggests that audiences are open to diverse storytelling and are willing to engage with narratives that feature transgender characters in prominent roles.

5. How important is for you to see diverse representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema?



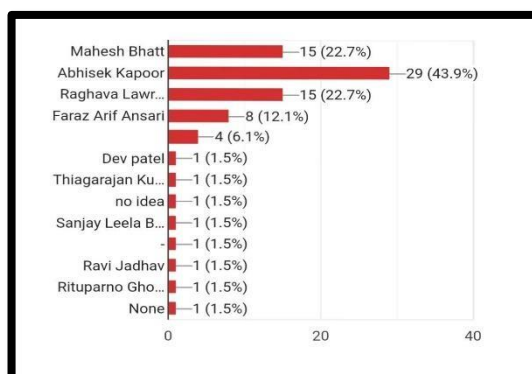
The question reveals that majority of the respondents feel the need to see diverse representation of Transgender in Hindi cinema. This shows the eagerness and interests of the majority of the people who feel that representing minorities through media should be more. As media being the fourth pillar of democracy can portrayal and throw light on the issues of minorities representation.

6. Have you seen any of the following movies that feature transgender characters?
(Select all that apply)



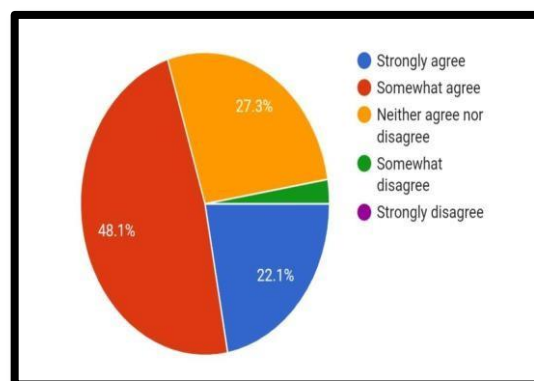
Majority of respondents selected Laxmii and Chandigarh kare Aashiqui.

7. Which director(s) do you think have done a good job of representing transgender individuals in their movies? (Select all that apply)



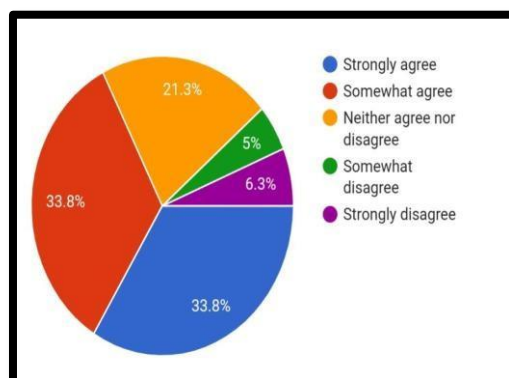
Majority of respondents selected Abhishek Kapoor along with Mahesh Bhatt and Raghava Lawrence (22.7%) each.

8. Do you think movies like —Chandigarh kare Aashiquil and —Laxmiil have contributed to the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema?’



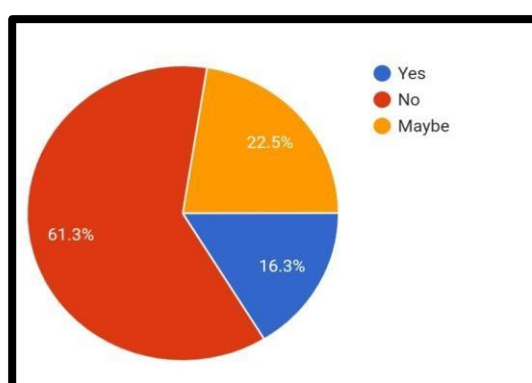
This survey shows that majority of the respondents are agreeing to the question. This question is not asked in the survey to show the positive or negative impact. It simply shows if these movies had any impact whatsoever. Majority of respondents believe that these movies particularly have contributed to representation of transgender in Hindi movies.

9. Do you think Hindi cinema has the power to challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance of transgender individuals?



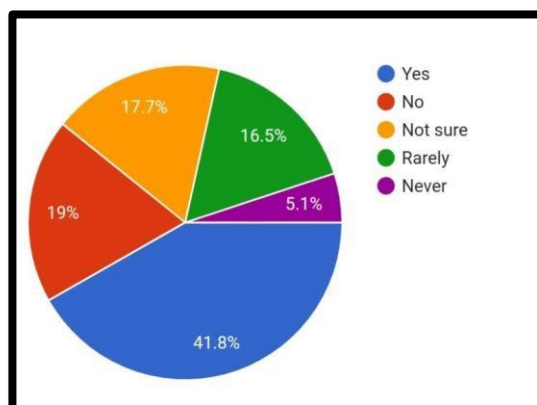
To this question majority of the respondents agree that Hindi cinema has the power to challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance of transgender individuals as Hindi cinema is a big platform with lots of viewers. It helps to reach every corner of the world and through this medium it can challenge as well as promote the idea of representation.

10. Have you seen any movies directed by Onir, a director known for his LGBTQ+ themed films?



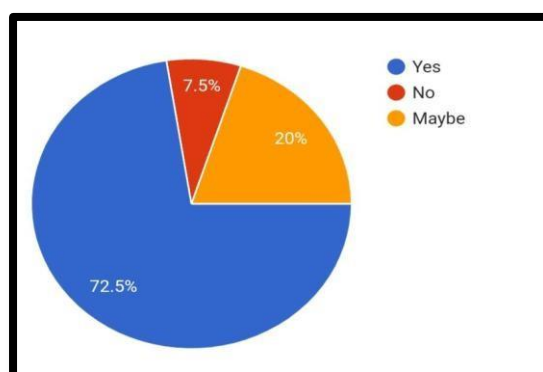
Majority of the respondents selected —No!, as a part of their answer. This shows that majority of the respondents don't have the knowledge and idea about —Onir! and his movies.

11. Have you ever had a conversation with someone about a transgender character in a Hindi movie?



To this question majority of the respondents agreed that they have conversations about how a minority character is being represented in Hindi films. This shows that majority of individuals are interested in representations and storylines based and focused on Transgender community. More and more directors should come forward and approach such storylines.

12. Do you think the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema has an impact on how society perceives them?



Majority (72.5%) believes Hindi Cinema has an impact on how the representation of Transgender individuals has an impact on how society perceives them.

Bollywood movies are available everywhere with platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime it reaches every corner of the world. It is natural audience will believe what they see through these movies. It also focuses on the sensitivity of representation. It is important to deal these storylines carefully.

13. Do you have any suggestions for How Hindi cinema can improve its representation of transgender individuals?

The question seeks the respondents' suggestions for how Hindi mainstream films can improve representation of Transgender individuals. This question seeks to gather qualitative information about how respondents feel about the representation and what suggestions they have on these representations. By asking this question, we can gain insights into the respondents' understanding of the importance of representation, their awareness of the existing stereotypes and biases, and their ideas for creating more authentic and respectful portrayals of transgender individuals.

The question is open ended, which encourages participants to provide their individual, subjective opinions. This allows respondents to express their personal thoughts, feelings, and interpretations regarding the representation

of transgender in Hindi mainstream movies and how these representations can improve.

Below are the answers given by respondents-

- Discrimination should be avoided and educating the audience is important
- By depicting their humane side
- showing the real struggle
- By not portraying them different from us and making them very much part of daily life like having a transgender friend.

14. Is there any particular movie or scene that you think has done a good job of representing transgender individuals in cinema?

Specifically, this question asks if there is a particular movie or scene that they think has done a good job of representing transgender individuals in cinema. This open-ended question allows respondents to share their personal opinions and experiences, providing rich qualitative data. The representation of transgender individuals in cinema has improved in recent years, moving away from stereotypes and towards more nuanced portrayals. This survey aims to identify what makes a film or scene effective.

This open-ended question will provide insights into what constitutes positive representation and highlight films that have resonated with audiences, contributing to greater understanding and acceptance.

Below are the answers given by respondents-

- Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui
- Taali has been good so far.
- Taali
- Saving one of the twin kids amidst riots in the movie 'Bombay'

15. Is there anything you would like to share about the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema?

The dissertation explores the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema, examining whether films accurately and respectfully portray their experiences or perpetuate harmful stereotypes. By asking about respondents' perceptions of these representations, I aim to gain insight into their impact on transgender community, the importance of authentic storytelling, and the role of cinema in shaping societal attitudes. The responses will highlight gaps in current representations and inform strategies for improvement and advocacy for more inclusive storytelling.

Below are the answer given by respondents-

- Representation in Hindi cinema has been largely inadequate and stereotypical, but recent films offer hope for a more inclusive and authentic portrayal of transgender individuals.
- Transgender representations in Hindi cinema has been limited and often stereotypical, but recent years have seen some positive changes emerging.
- Hindi cinema is doing a good work in representation of transgender and good to see that audience are showing interest in this type of movies.

Content Analysis

The dissertation paper explores the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, examining the challenges, opportunities, and need for more authentic portrayals in the industry. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey of viewers' perspectives with a content analysis of Hindi movies.

Chapter Overview

The paper is divided into six chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of Transgender representation in Hindi cinema. Chapter VI presents the survey results, which provide insights into viewers' perceptions of Transgender representation in Hindi movies.

Survey Results

The survey results reveal that:

- A majority of respondents (60.8%) have seen Hindi movies featuring Transgender characters in leading roles, indicating a growing interest in representation and inclusivity in Indian cinema.

- Most respondents (43%) remain neutral about the representation of Transgender individuals in mainstream Hindi cinema, while 26.6% express a negative view, highlighting the need for more inclusive and accurate representation.
 - A majority of respondents (48.1) believe that Hindi cinema often resorts to stereotypical representations of Transgender individuals, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing societal biases.
 - The majority of respondents (67.6%) believe that Hindi cinema has the power to challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance of Transgender individuals.
 - The survey results also highlight the importance of diverse representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema, with a majority of respondents expressing the need for more authentic and nuanced portrayals.
- Movie Analysis:** The dissertation paper analyzes four movies in particular: Welcome to Sajjanpur, Sadak, Tamanna, and ShabnamMausi. These movies are chosen for their portrayal of Transgender characters and storylines, providing a deeper understanding of the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema.

Content Analysis Findings

The content analysis reveals that:

- The representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema is often stereotypical, perpetuating harmful biases and reinforcing societal attitudes.
 - The portrayal of Transgender characters in Hindi movies is often limited to secondary or marginal roles, reinforcing their marginalization in society.
 - The few movies that feature Transgender characters in leading roles, such as Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui and Laxmii, have contributed to the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema.
 - The survey results and movie analysis highlight the need for more authentic and nuanced portrayals of Transgender individuals in Hindi cinema, challenging stereotypes and promoting acceptance.
 - The open ended questions revealed the majority of respondents stressed the importance of depicting transgender individuals in humane and realistic light. Many respondents also emphasized the need for accurate and positive representation, one that prioritizes authenticity and dignity.
 - Based on the survey responses, it appears that the movie 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' stands out for its positive representation.. The movie's portrayal of a transgender character in a romantic lead role is seen as a significant step forward in representation and inclusivity.
 - The respondents' answers reveal a mix of opinions on the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi cinema. While some felt that Hindi cinema has made progress in portraying transgender individuals more accurately, others believed that the representation is still largely inadequate and stereotypical. Respondents stressed the need for authentic transgender portrayals in Indian cinema, suggesting collaboration with transgender actors to break away from stereotypes and harmful tropes, and to normalize and celebrate transgender diversity and humanity.
- The dissertation paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the representation of Transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema, highlighting the challenges, opportunities, and need for more authentic portrayals in the industry. The survey results and movie analysis reveal that Hindi cinema has the power to challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance of Transgender individuals, but more needs to be done to ensure inclusive and nuanced representation. The study's findings have implications for the film industry, policymakers, and society at large, emphasizing the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity in media representation.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper has examined the representation of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema through a comprehensive analysis of survey findings and a content analysis of selected films. The survey findings provided valuable insights into the perceptions and observations of the portrayal of transgender individuals, including the frequency of transgender characters in Hindi mainstream films, the importance and accuracy of their

representation, and the impact of transgender representation on respondents' attitudes towards transgender individuals. In my dissertation, I examined the portrayal of transgender individuals in Hindi mainstream cinema. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the representation of minorities in media, I began by offering a brief historical overview of international cinema and Indian cinema in my first chapter. My research categorizes the representation of the transgender community in Hindi mainstream cinema into three distinct themes. I argue that transgender individuals are often depicted in films that fall into one of these three categories. Firstly, they are frequently relegated to comedic roles, where they are presented as figures of ridicule and amusement. Secondly, they are often portrayed as negative characters, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and stigmatization. Lastly, there is a theme that focuses on evoking sympathy for transgender individuals, often through narratives that emphasize their struggles and marginalization.

Through my research, I have found that Bollywood consistently misrepresents and underrepresents transgender individuals. The film industry has a significant impact on societal attitudes, and the negative and comedic portrayals of transgender people in movies can have harmful consequences. These stereotypes can prevent transgender individuals from fully embracing their gender identity, and may even discourage young people from accepting their own gender identity. I have provided numerous examples of Hindi movies that

demonstrate the industry's failure to create nuanced and natural transgender characters. To address this issue, there needs to be more character depth in their stories, and transgender actors should be given opportunities to play leading roles. By doing so, Bollywood can help promote a more inclusive and accepting society. I believe the biggest issue with representation in Bollywood is the lack of transgender actors in leading roles. Despite cisgender actors delivering excellent performances, I think it's essential to have transgender individuals involved in the filmmaking process, especially when the movie's theme revolves around their empowerment and acceptance. If a film aims to promote their inclusion and pride in their gender identity, it should start by giving them a platform to tell their own stories. By doing so, we can ensure authentic representation and provide opportunities for transgender actors to shine in leading roles.

I believe that a commercial concern may be hindering many directors from tackling sensitive themes in their movies. Historically, films that address these topics have not typically been box office hits, as evidenced by examples in my research. However, with the rise of OTT platforms, there has been a significant shift in the industry. As audiences, we have a crucial

role to play in supporting these movies. While it's understandable that we often watch films for entertainment purposes, it's essential to acknowledge that misrepresentation can have severe consequences, including mental trauma and depression, for individuals from marginalized communities. We need more nuanced and in-depth portrayals of third-gender characters. By supporting directors who tackle these themes, we can help increase awareness and acceptance of transgender individuals as an integral part of society. It's time for us to work together to reduce the suffering of these communities and promote a more positive and inclusive representation of them in the media. Over time, there has been a notable shift in the portrayal of transgender individuals in the media, with a greater emphasis on depth and nuance. I believe this change is driven by public demand for more accurate and respectful representation, as well as the efforts of directors who are committed to portraying transgender people in a positive light. As more people speak out against negative stereotypes and advocate for change, I'm optimistic that harmful portrayals will eventually disappear. This shift will pave the way for more transgender actors to break into mainstream Hindi cinema, leading to a more inclusive and diverse industry.

The portrayal of transgender people in Indian movies has a significant impact on how they are perceived by the public, often leading to discrimination. Unfortunately, most Indian films depict transgender individuals in a negative and stereotypical manner, which only serves to perpetuate misconceptions and hinder their acceptance and understanding. This study highlights the need for a change in the way transgender people are represented in movies, promoting more accurate and respectful portrayals. Filmmakers have a responsibility to foster inclusivity and respect, and by examining how transgender characters are portrayed, we can help bridge the gap between cinematic representation and public perception, ultimately working towards a more accepting society that values and celebrates transgender identities.

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