

Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal

Discovering the Fascinating Evolution of LGBTQ+ Acceptance in India with an Insightful

Analysis of Bollywood Films

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for the

award of B.A. degree in English Language and Literature.



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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Anagha T M, Register number:210021000928, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2021-2024.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation **Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal, Discovering the Fascinating Evolution of LGBTQ+ Acceptance in India** with an Insightful Analysis of Bollywood Films is based on the research that I did under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Mini M Abraham, Assistant Professor, Research Centre and Postgraduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma fellowship, or other similar title or recognition.

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Acknowledgment

I find myself fortunate to be surrounded by people who are forever willing to help and guide me. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Mini M Abraham for guiding me in accomplishing my research work titled Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal, Discovering the Fascinating Evolution of LGBTQ+ Acceptance in India. Her supervision and support truly helped in the progress and timely accomplishment of this research work.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the scholars and artists with whom I consulted and whose works I referred for my work.

I express my sincere thanks to the Principal Prof (Dr) Johnson K.M, Dr. Thara Gangadharan, Head of the Department, and all other faculty members of my college for their support and concern.

I am also grateful to my beloved Mother and Father, family members, and friends for their loving encouragement. Above all, I thank God Almighty for constantly supporting me and for blessing me with such wonderful people in my life.

Anagha T M

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This project follows MLA 8th edition

Chapter – 1

An Interrogation through the Evolution of Acceptance

In “*Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal*”, Writers and Activists introduced queer theory to address issues related to sexuality, the marginalization of women, and power inequality in society and culture. It aims to challenge normative assumptions about sexuality, particularly heteronormativity - the belief that heterosexuality is the natural rule. Queer theory seeks to dismantle monolithic views, taxonomies, and social norms related to sexuality, questioning their origins and development. Queer theorists view 'queer' as something that defies norms, crosses boundaries, and resists categorization by the majority. It encompasses sexual orientations beyond gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identities. Queer theory in literature emerged in the early 1990s as a result of studies on women’s discrimination and treatment in literary works, along with an exploration of queer sexuality.

Loving anybody and being loved by anybody is a tremendous danger, a tremendous responsibility - loving of children, raising of children. The discovery of one's sexual preference doesn't have to be a trauma. It's a trauma because it's such a traumatized society. Baldwin argues in this statement that love itself should not be a source of fear and that societal negativity creates the trauma surrounding LGBTQ+ identity.

In 2018, The Supreme Court of India decriminalized consensual homosexual acts by striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This landmark judgment

in the case of Navtej Singh Johar v/s Union of India ensured that gay sex is no longer a criminal offense.

The Supreme Court of India has held that the right to life and liberty under Article 21 includes privacy, dignity, and autonomy, indirectly protecting LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination.

This research paper provides “*The Critical Analysis of the Evolution of Acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in India.*” It mainly focuses on the lives of queer individuals, their identity crises, societal approaches, and the discrimination they face when identifying as gay people. Society often views them as inferior or outcasted without considering their position in the community or their educational qualifications. To support our analysis with queer theory, we have chosen two Bollywood films – ‘*Aligarh*’ (2015), a biographical drama film written by Apurva Asrani and directed by Hansal Mehta, ‘*Badhaai do*’ (2022), a romantic-comedy-drama film directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni and written by Akshat Ghildhial and ‘*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*’ (2020), a romantic-comedy-drama film directed by R.S. Prasanna.

“*Aligarh*” is a 2015 Indian biographical drama that touches upon the themes of social prejudices and the right to privacy. The leading cast of *Aligarh* includes Manoj Bajpayee as Professor Ramchandra Siras and Rajkumar Rao as journalist Deepu Sebastian. The movie portrays the true story of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a renowned professor of Marathi and the head of the Classical Modern Indian Languages Faculty at the prestigious Aligarh Muslim University. Dr. Siras was suspended from his job and removed from his position as Reader and Chair of Modern Indian Languages based on the grounds of morality. However, his suspension was unjustified as it was a violation of his privacy. A local TV station's film crew forcefully entered

his house and captured his intimate moment with a male rickshaw puller, leading to his suspension and subsequent legal battle. The court eventually ruled in Dr. Siras's favor, but sadly, he passed away before he could return to work. This movie is an eye-opening account of the struggles faced by the LGBTQ+ community and the need for privacy protection. The film showcases the legal battle and the public humiliation that Siras faced due to his dismissal. 'Aligarh' serves as a poignant reminder of the societal hypocrisy and inequality faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community in India.

The Bollywood film '*Badhaai do*', released in 2022, presents an opportunity to examine how LGBTQ+ identities are portrayed in contemporary Indian cinema. The movie features Rajkumar Rao and Bhumi Pednekar in lead roles and narrates the story of Shardul, a gay police officer, and Sumi, a lesbian physical education teacher at a school in Dehradun. Shardul and Sumi reveal their identities to each other and decide to enter into a marriage of convenience to fulfill their families' expectations. The film explores the concept of Lavender Marriages, where LGBTQ+ individuals marry someone of the opposite sex to maintain social norms. In the first half, Shardul is in a romantic relationship with Kabir, then with Guru Narayan, a lawyer, while Simi is in a relationship with Rimjim. '*Badhaai do*' delves into themes of LGBTQ+ relationships, societal pressure for marriage, and the complex dynamics of family relationships. It is a movie that passionately explores Shardul's journey to self-acceptance and the challenges of confronting societal norms and family expectations. The climax of the movie revolves around Shardul and Sumi's decision to come out to their families and fight for their right to live authentically. Shardul participates in a Pride parade and meets Guru, an openly gay lawyer, who helps him confront his true feelings and hidden identity. The climax of the movie centers on their decision and the

subsequent consequences. It's a powerful story that inspires viewers to embrace their true selves and fight for their right to live without fear or shame and here we can see that both of their families started accepting them as who they are and their partners were also accepted during a ritual conducted by their family after Shardul and Sumi adopted a child.

"Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" is a 2020 film that deals with the sensitive topic of same-sex love. The movie revolves around the story of two men, Karthik and Aman, who fall in love with each other. However, their relationship faces challenges when Aman's family does not approve of it. The leading actors in this film are Ayushman Khurrana as Karthik Singh and Jitendra Kumar as Aman Tripathi. The film explores various themes like gay relationships, acceptance, and the significance of love. It follows the couple as they try to win over Aman's family. The movie received critical acclaim and was a commercial success. It was praised for its handling of a sensitive topic, performances, and humor. The movie's plot twist is that Aman's mother, Sunaina, is supportive of her son's sexuality all along. She pretends to be homophobic to protect him from the judgment of his father and society. In the climax of the film, Sunaina finally comes clean to Aman and reveals her true feelings. This revelation is a significant turning point in the film and allows Aman to finally accept himself for who he is. Karthik and Aman fight for their love and acceptance in a prejudiced society that is still largely against homosexuality.

By Analyzing the films, '*Aligarh*,' '*Badhaai do*' and '*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*' one can gain valuable insights into the portrayal of characters, their relationships, and the social context surrounding them. These films shed light on outdated Indian cultures that are still being followed by the Indian community without any guilt or regret. '*Aligarh*' is a powerful and thought-provoking movie that addresses a sensitive topic with gravity. It depicts the harsh

realities that members of the LGBTQ+ community face in India. However, the movie stirred up controversy even before its release, due to the decision of the censor board to give it an "A" certificate. The board deemed the subject of homosexuality inappropriate for children. The film also faced hurdles related to issues of LGBT and media freedom. On the other hand, *'Badhaai do and 'Subh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan'* is a heartwarming and entertaining movie that celebrates love and acceptance.

Understandably, some people may feel afraid to reveal their true identity, especially if it could potentially damage their family's reputation or the reputation of their community. This fear is a common factor that we can see in both of the movies mentioned above. However, it is important to remember that being true to oneself is ultimately more important than pleasing others. It can be difficult, but finding the strength to be authentic and honest with oneself can lead to a more fulfilling life in the long run. As we journeyed from the year 2015 to 2023, we can see that society's approach towards the queer community is changing due to people's willingness to change their perspectives.

It is becoming increasingly evident that more and more movies are being produced in the entire Indian film industry, including Bollywood, to support the upliftment of the LGBTQ community, specifically the queer community. These movies aim to portray members of the LGBTQ community as human beings rather than stereotyping them based on their gender. As a result, people have started accepting their existence as normal and have given these films more importance and discussion than ever before. Movies such as *"Margarita with a Straw"* (2015), *"Iratta Jeevitham"* (2017), *"Nagarkitan"* (2017), *"Moothon"* (2019), and *"Geeli Pucchi"* (2021), as well as OTT films and series like *"Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga"* (2019), *"Chandigarh*

Kare Ashiqui" (2021), "*Cobalt Blue*" (2022), and "Made in Heaven" (2023), these movies aim to portray LGBTQ individuals as human beings, rather than stereotyping them based on their gender. As a result, people are accepting their existence as normal and giving more importance to these films and discussions than ever before. Movies such as "*Margaret and Noreen*" and "*Kapoor & Sons*" have been successful in bringing attention to the LGBTQ community and promoting acceptance.

The purpose of my research paper is to conduct a comparative analysis of the movies '*Aligarh*', '*Badhaai do*', and '*Subh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*' from the perspective of Queer theory. I plan to demonstrate how the concept of Queer theory is portrayed in both films. By exploring the social construction of sexuality and deconstructing binaries, power, and marginalization, we will question the existing beliefs of society and families towards the LGBTQ+ community, particularly about marriage between homosexual individuals.

Through this analysis, we will be able to shed light on how Queer theory can challenge and transform perceptions of sexuality and gender. Our study is also focused on the evolution of change that has occurred in society since the Aligarh incident in the year that led to the suicide of Prof. Siras. We will explore how an empathetic approach led to the creation of a biographical drama in 2014, followed by more and more films that actively support LGBTQ+ individuals in the film industry.

'Aligarh', *'Badhaai do'*, and *'Subh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan'* are powerful movies that boldly challenge the notion of heteronormativity. By shining a light on the struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals in societies that refuse to recognize same-sex relationships, these films

offer a poignant reminder of the lengths that people must go to simply to love who they love. Through their compelling narratives and vivid characters, '*Aligarh*, '*Badhaai do*' and '*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*' inspire us to embrace diversity, reject prejudice, and celebrate the beauty of love in all its forms. Mentioned movies offer a starting point for conversations and they would have presented a more nuanced and diverse portrayal of LGBTQ+ experiences.

Queer theory and Bollywood have a complicated relationship. While Bollywood has taken some positive steps towards inclusion, it also has limitations that reinforce stereotypes. Historically, Bollywood has portrayed queer characters through clichéd tropes like the flamboyant '*Comic Sidekick*' or the villainous transgender person. '*Queer theory*' can be a powerful tool to understand how the Bollywood film industry, like many others, is influenced by the heterosexual "*male gaze*". This means that the stories and characters are often designed to cater to a presumed heterosexual male audience, leaving LGBTQ+ characters on the sidelines. By using queer theory as a lens, we can gain a better understanding of how these narratives impact society and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. It is time to demand more diverse and inclusive representations of all identities in our entertainment industry.

Chapter -2

Deconstructing the Gaze Through Queer Lens

Emerging from the feminist and gay/lesbian studies movements in the late 20th century, queer theory has become a powerful force in challenging societal norms surrounding gender and sexuality. Unlike its predecessors that sought inclusion within existing structures, queer theory takes a more radical approach by questioning the very categories of what is considered "*normal*" and "*abnormal*" when it comes to sexual and gender identities. The development of queer theory as a critical framework for understanding gender and sexuality has been greatly influenced by the works of prominent theorists such as Michael Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler.

"Queer theory" is based on the idea of breaking down the gender binary. Traditionally, society has operated under a strict binary system, where men and women are considered to occupy opposite and unchangeable positions. However, queer theorists, taking inspiration from scholars such as Michel Foucault, argue that gender is not an inherent characteristic, but rather a social construct that is shaped by language, social norms, and cultural expectations. These factors pressure individuals to conform to one side of the binary or face marginalization.

In her influential book "*Gender Trouble*," Judith Butler argues that gender is a performance - a set of actions and behaviors that reinforce the binary. Queer theory challenges this performance and encourages individuals to explore the fluidity and reject categorization.

The concept of sexual fluidity is closely linked to the deconstruction of the gender binary. Traditional models of sexuality tend to view it as a fixed and innate characteristic, with heterosexuality being the default and anything outside of it labeled as deviant. However, according to queer theory, sexuality is a spectrum rather than a rigid binary. People may experience an attraction that goes beyond the labels of "*gay*", "*lesbian*" or "*straight*", and their desires may evolve. This fluidity challenges the heteronormative framework that privileges heterosexuality and marginalizes all other sexual orientations.

The critique of power structures is a fundamental aspect of queer theory. This theory argues that the current classification of gender and sexuality is designed to maintain the existing power hierarchy. The framework of heteronormativity reinforces patriarchy, where masculinity is seen as dominant and femininity as submissive. Queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, through her concept of the "*Homosexual*," reveal how even heterosexuality perpetuates power structures. Therefore, Queer Theory serves as a tool for dismantling these structures and striving for a society where diverse expressions of gender and sexuality are not only accepted but also celebrated.

The influence of queer theory is not confined to academia anymore. It has emerged as a mighty perspective for dissecting cultural texts like literature, film, and art. By employing a queer lens, readers can easily detect how these texts either reinforce or challenge

conventional societal norms concerning gender and sexuality. For instance, a queer analysis of a classic novel such as *Jane Eyre* can uncover the subtle yet powerful expression of same-sex desire between Jane and her friend Charlotte, which would otherwise go unnoticed using a traditional approach.

Despite its contribution, queer theory has faced legitimate criticisms. One critique centers on the concept of "*Identity Politics*." While some theorists believe that crafting a strong queer identity is a crucial step toward social change, others argue that such categorization can be restrictive and inadvertently mimic the oppressive binary system it seeks to dismantle. Additionally, the complexity of queer theory can be seen as inaccessible to the broader public, limiting its impact on achieving mainstream social change.

However, the relevance of queer theory remains undeniable. Today, it continues to inform the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, particularly in areas like marriage equality and anti-discrimination legislation. Furthermore, queer theory's impact extends beyond the LGBTQ+ community, influencing broader discussions about gender roles, body politics, and the very notion of normalcy in society.

Looking ahead, queer theory can play a vital role in navigating the increasingly complex landscape of gender and sexuality. The growing acceptance of non-binary identities and the exploration of polyamorous relationships highlight the need for frameworks that move beyond established binaries.

Queer theory, with its emphasis on fluidity and deconstruction, provides the tools to understand and embrace these emerging forms of identity and desire.

A key concept in queer theory is heteronormativity. This refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural, normal, and preferred form of sexual orientation. This assumption permeates social institutions, legal frameworks, and cultural narratives, creating a system of privilege for heterosexuals and marginalizing those who fall outside the norm. Queer theory exposes this power dynamic and challenges the legitimacy of heteronormative dominance.

One of the most significant contributions of queer theory is the notion of "*queering*." This refers to the process of critically examining and challenging established norms and categories related to gender and sexuality. Queering can be applied in various contexts, from analyzing literature to critiquing legal systems. It calls for a world where fluidity and transgression are celebrated, and where identities are not confined by predefined boxes.

Queer theory has had a profound impact on academic discourse and activism. It has opened up new avenues for understanding sexuality and gender and provided a powerful framework for challenging social inequalities. However, it has also faced criticism for being too academic and inaccessible to the wider public. Additionally, some argue that its emphasis on fluidity can undermine the need for concrete political action.

As it remains a dynamic and evolving field. While it may not offer all the answers, it provides a powerful framework for questioning the status quo and imagining a world more inclusive and affirming of diverse identities. Its call for compactness and transgression

continues to inspire new generations of scholars and activists who are committed to dismantling the rigid structures that constrain our understanding of gender and sexuality.

Even in the great Indian epic, Mahabharata, Shikhandi plays a pivotal role. Through the lens of queer theory, we can interpret Shikhandi's story as an example of challenging the binary view of gender (male/female). Shikhandi was born as a woman but spent some time living as a man after receiving a boon from a yaksha. Mahabharata does not explicitly state Shikhandi's gender, and this ambiguity is key to the queer theory analysis. Shikhandi's experience can be seen as existing outside the categories of male and female, potentially transgender or genderfluid, and as resisting limitations placed on gender. Despite social norms, Shikhandi becomes a skilled warrior, achieving agency and resisting societal expectations. Shikhandi's story offers a rich ground for exploring gender identity and queer representation in ancient India, even if it was unintentional by the original authors.

The representation of queer characters in Bollywood has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with a notable move towards greater acceptance. However, the apprehension of censorship and societal norms has led to the portrayal of queer characters in a subdued and sanitized manner. To challenge these power structures, some movies have adopted coded language, humor, or subtext to subtly convey subversion and resistance.

Queer theory is an influential critique of traditional power structures surrounding gender and sexuality. It challenges the idea of binary and normalcy and encourages a more inclusive and fluid understanding of human experience. Despite facing criticisms regarding accessibility and identity politics, its relevance is undeniable. As our society

continues to grapple with evolving concepts of gender and sexuality, queer theory offers a critical lens for analysis, activism, and a future where diversity thrives. It has been influential in various fields, including literature, history, sociology, and law. Additionally, it has been used to critique and challenge mainstream LGBTQ+ politics, which is often seen as assimilationist and focused on gaining rights for a narrow range of identities.

Chapter -3

Deep into the Roots of the Real 'Aligarh'

This chapter of the project focuses on Hansal Mehta's "Aligarh" (2010), which offers fertile ground for analysis through the lens of queer theory. Queer theory deconstructs the idea of heterosexuality is the natural or normal form of sexuality. Aligarh portrays the isolation and discrimination Professor Siras faces due to his non-heteronormative identity. The film questions the equation of homosexuality with immortality. Professor Siras is a respected academic and his sexual orientation is unrelated to his professional competence. Aligarh brings the lived experiences of closeted LGBTQ+ individuals to the forefront. Professor Siras's struggles to maintain his job and dignity highlight the challenges of living an authentic life in a homophobic society. The film exposes the brutal invasion of Professor Sira's privacy through string operation. This highlights the vulnerability of the queer people and the hypocrisy of societal morals that target consenting relationships. Professor Siras's fight for reinstatement at the university becomes a fight for his dignity and the right to live an authentic life, even though he avoids using specific labels for his sexuality.

The film Aligarh depicts the suffocating pressure of heteronormativity within conservative universities and societal structures. The story follows the struggles of Siras, who faces isolation and judgment for not conforming to societal expectations. However, journalist Deepu Sebastian stands as a strong ally in Siras's fight for justice. The movie emphasizes the importance of solidarity in the LGBTQ+ community's struggle for their rights. The film leaves Siras's death

ambiguous, highlighting the ongoing fight for justice and the uncertain realities faced by many LGBTQ+ individuals in India, especially in the context of section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (now repealed).

"Aligarh" is a movie that has captured the attention of audiences worldwide, thanks to its unique and original theme. The story revolves around the heart-wrenching tale of a Marathi Language Professor at the esteemed Aligarh Muslim University. The movie takes a socio-political approach to represent the real-life struggles of Prof. Siras in the university, his neighborhood, the courtroom, and society in general. Director Hansal Mehta has brilliantly portrayed the socio-political ideologies of the AMU authorities in the movie. The characters and themes are genuinely portrayed, making for a captivating and thought-provoking experience. In the movie, an established Marathi Language poet immerses himself in verses and old film songs to cope with his depression. A professor attempts to help him regain his dignity, but unfortunately, the protectors of morality at Aligarh disrespect him. Director Hansal Mehta has brilliantly portrayed the struggles of Prof. Siras in the university, courtroom, and society.

At first, Professor Siras refused to speak with Deepu, the journalist. However, he later realized that Deepu was the best way for him to share his story with the world, so he agreed to be interviewed. During the interview, Siras revealed that some of his colleagues at the university were envious of his rapid rise to the position of chairman. They always saw him as an outsider and an oddity, and they didn't appreciate him living near their families because he was a bachelor. These incidents highlight the prejudiced attitudes and stereotyping that Siras faced from his co-workers because

he was from a different state and had achieved a higher position in his career. Ultimately, their resentment towards him led them to conduct a sting operation against him.

The movie depicts a sting operation that was conducted on Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras to reveal his sexual orientation towards a male rickshaw puller named Irfan. A regional TV channel invaded Siras' home and captured their intimate moments without his consent. This caused Siras to face profanity and disgrace from the community. As a result, he was forced to leave his quarters and the university suspended him, citing "immoral behavior". Manoj Bajpayee has effectively portrayed the role of Professor Siras, a sixty-four-year-old professor who faces the disgrace of society for being a queer person. Bajpayee won the Best Actor award at the 10th Pacific Awards in 2016 for this role. In court, Siras argues that the university's actions violated the rules of the apex court in India, which ensures the right to privacy. The orders of the Delhi court were violated as homosexuality was decriminalized during that period.

The court ruled in favor of Siras, and his suspension was lifted by the university and ordered to reinstate Siras however, before the verdict was announced On April 10th,2010. One day after Siras was found dead. At first, police had reported by foul playing that they had found traces of poison in Siras's blood, the autopsy report revealed that he had died 48 to 72 hours before the discovery of his body. No evidence showed he had committed suicide, and six men were accused of murdering Siras. However, due to a lack of evidence, all of them were eventually released.

Deepu Sebastian, played by Rajkumar Rao, forms a strong connection with Siras and takes his case to court. This compassionate approach towards Siras provides him with relief during a difficult time. Siras needs someone he can trust and depend on, without any shame or hesitation

Siras trusts in the words of Deepu and asks him whether he loves poetry and asks about his favorite poet after their conversion, Siras gifts Deepu a copy of his Marathi poetry and Deepu asks him for an autograph. The movie was premiered in foreign countries and was well-received. However, it faced opposition from Hindu and Muslim organizations in India. An alumnus of AMU filed a petition seeking a ban or a change in the film's name, but it was dismissed by the Delhi High Court on March 3, 2016. The bench, consisting of Chief Justice G Rohini and Justice Jayant Nath, rejected the plea stating that "no public interest is involved in this petition, so it should be dismissed at the threshold itself."

In a conversation scene between Deepu and Siras, Siras says, "It can't quite capture the depth of my feelings." He was talking about the three-lettered words "gay", (00:39:19). He further tells Deepu that "the meaning of true poetry is in the silence and pauses between the words and he admits that he takes refuge in the poetry during the tough times of the court proceedings and claims that he is a reluctant activist who does not know much about the legal system." He just wanted to be in his solitude with his dignity intact. In a dialogue promo (1:30:10), Professor Siras's lawyer (played by Ashish Vidyarthi) passionately defends him in court. He fights against the injustices faced by Siras after being asked to vacate the university premises due to his sexual orientation. He only wishes to be left alone with his dignity intact. Siras, known for his honesty, revealed to Deepu that he had been married once, (1:15:17).

Heteronormativity and its challenges, the construction of sexuality, privacy versus public morality, the politics of identity, and limited representation are key aspects analyzed through the lens of queer theory. The film "Aligarh" exposes the rigid structure of heteronormativity, which is the

belief that heterosexuality is the only acceptable and natural sexual orientation. The main character, Professor Siras, leads a private life that becomes scandalous simply because it deviates from this norm. This highlights the way societal expectations around sexuality can ostracize and marginalize those who don't conform.

Queer theory critiques the idea that sexuality is a fixed biological trait. "Aligarh" demonstrates how Professor Siras's sexuality is constructed through "the gaze" of the university administration, the media, and even Deepu, the journalist. These external forces define his identity based on their own biases. The film explores the tension between individual privacy and social morality. The university's intrusion into Siras's personal life raises questions about where the line is drawn between private choices and public conduct. Is there a right to privacy when it comes to sexual orientation? Siras's struggle for justice becomes a fight for recognition of his identity.

The film does not delve into specific labels like gay or homosexual. However, portraying Siras's emotional attachment and desire for companionship challenges the idea that same-sex relationships are inherently immoral or deviant. While "Aligarh" brings a marginalized story to light, it's important to acknowledge that it focuses on a specific aspect of the queer experience, that of an older, closeted man.

Queer theory can be utilized to expose the social and legal challenges faced by those who don't conform to heteronormative expectations. It sparks conversations about privacy, representation, and the need for a more inclusive society.

While the film might not offer a complete exploration of queer theory, it serves as a significant stepping stone for Indian Cinema in addressing these issues. Although Siras died in 2010, in 2015, Bollywood film director Hansal Mehta decided to shoot "Aligarh" as a biographic drama to empathetically approach his pathetic life and the incident.

Chapter-4

Observing the Transition from Margins to Mainstream

In this chapter, we will be discussing the analysis of Harshvardhan Kulkarni's movies "Badhaai Do" and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" directed by Hitesh Kewalya. We will be exploring these films through a queer lens and focusing on discovering the fascinating evolution of LGBTQ+ acceptance in India. Our analysis will provide insight into these films and their impact on LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema. Isolation and secrecy, Pressure to conform, yearning for acceptance, limited options, conformity to societal expectations, reclaiming symbols, and coming out of narrative are the emotional toll of living portrayed in both films.

Badhaai Do, a Hindi-language comedy-drama film directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni, revolves around the lives of Shardul Thakur Flag lot and Suman Singh, two individuals who are closeted members of the LGBTQ+ community. Facing societal pressures to get married, they enter into a lavender marriage, a term used to describe a marriage of convenience between two people of the same sex to deceive their families about their true sexual orientations.

Shardul, played by Rajkummar Rao, is a gay police officer stationed in Dehradun. He is constantly hounded by his family to settle down and find a suitable bride. On the other hand, Suman, portrayed by Bhumi Pednekar, is a lesbian physical education teacher who also faces similar pressures from her relatives. Their paths cross when Suman visits the police station to report a

man, who has been stalking her. Shardul, unaware of Suman's secret, apprehends the stalker, who inadvertently outs Suman to him.

Realizing their shared predicament, Shardul and Suman strike an unlikely deal to enter into a sham marriage to appease their families. They present themselves as a heterosexual couple, navigating the complexities of their fabricated relationship while also pursuing their romantic interests. Shardul meets Guru, a flamboyant and openly gay criminal lawyer, and they begin dating. Meanwhile, Suman develops a relationship with Rimjhim, a woman who has been ostracized by her family for coming out as a lesbian. Rimjhim moves in with Shardul and Suman, further complicating their charade.

As their lives intertwine, Shardul and Suman face numerous challenges, including maintaining their secret from their families, dealing with their own suppressed desires, and navigating the complexities of their respective relationships. Amidst the chaos and confusion, they find solace and support in each other, developing a deep bond that transcends their initial arrangement. The film explores themes of love, acceptance, and the struggle for identity in a society that often struggles to embrace diversity. It challenges societal norms and prejudices, highlighting the importance of self-acceptance and the courage to live authentically.

“Badhaai does”, culminates in a heartwarming and emotional climax as Shardul and Suman confront their families with the truth about their sexual orientations. The film's message of love and understanding resonates deeply, leaving a lasting impact on the audience.

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (Be Extra Careful of Marriage) is a 2020 romantic comedy film written and directed by Hitesh Kewalya, produced by Aanand L. Rai, and starring Ayushmann Khurrana, Jitendra Kumar, Neena Gupta, Gajraj Rao, and Maanvi Gagroo. It is a spiritual successor to the 2017 film Shubh Mangal Saavdhan, which was also written by Kewalya.

The story follows Kartik Singh (Ayushmann Khurrana), a young man from a conservative family in Uttar Pradesh who falls in love with Aman Tripathi (Jitendra Kumar), a web designer from Delhi. Kartik and Aman want to reveal their relationship to their families, but they face resistance from Kartik's traditional parents, who believe in arranged marriages. Despite their efforts to convince Kartik's parents to accept their relationship, they are unsuccessful. Kartik's parents attempt to arrange a marriage for him with a girl from their hometown, Seema (Maanvi Gagroo). Kartik and Aman continue to see each other in secret, but their relationship is eventually discovered by Kartik's parents. In response, they throw Kartik out of the house and disown him. Kartik and Aman decide to leave their hometown and move to Delhi, where they face numerous challenges but eventually find acceptance and happiness. The movie mainly focuses on Aman's journey of coming out to his family, a common theme in queer theory that explores the struggles of accepting and expressing one's sexual identity.

Both films primarily focus on gay and lesbian characters, neglecting the broader LGBTQ+ spectrum. This reinforces the binary of homosexuality. The film tackles the societal norms of heterosexuality, where characters like Aman struggle with societal expectations around marriage and family. This challenges the idea of a fixed sexual identity and highlights the fluidity of human

attraction. Aman's flamboyant personality and nose ring can be seen as a reclamation of symbols often associated with negativity towards homosexuality. The film uses these to represent pride and self-expression.

The impactful scenes of both films revolve around the main characters of both films to break the shackles of stereotyping. The impactful scene of *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* revolves around Aman's parents (played by Neena Gupta and Gajraj Rao). Neena Gupta whispers to her husband, "Supreme Court jin pataakhon par bahas kar rahe hai naa woh apne annga mein futt rahe hai" (The issue the supreme court is debating are happening right in our courtyard),(1:26:30). This question reflects the internal conflict parents face due to societal pressure and their love for their child. The movie uses humor to challenge stereotypes. A dialogue like "Tumne Purush Se Pyar Kiya Hai Ladke Se" (You fell in love with a man, not a boy),(00:49:57) breaks the idea that homosexuality is a weakness.

In "Badhaai do", A pivotal scene involves the protagonist, Shardul (Rajkumar Rao), coming out of his policeman father (played BY Gajraj Rao). The exact wording might vary depending on the source, but the essence is Shardul saying something along the lines of "Main andar se alag sa hoon, mamma. mujhe ladkhon ki taraf tertarik hai (Mom, I am different on the inside. I am attracted to men). Another impactful dialogue comes from Shardul's wife, Sumi (Bhumi Pednekar) When questioned about her lack of desire for children, she delivers a line that challenges societal expectations. It could be phrased as," Bachhe paalna koi zindagi ka masqsad nahi hai (Raising children is not the sole purpose of life)." During the scene of Shardul's confession about his

identity to his family, Shardul says “All you are repulsed. why? It's a natural thing and no one asks you to decide and choose between men and women. The feelings come from within. right? God created us in this way. Homosexuals are human beings as all of you. So, if you are so repulsed by her, you should be repulsed by me as well”, (2:06:07). In the movie, after a certain scene, we are shown a Pride Parade that highlights the character Shardul's homosexuality and the acceptance and belonging he finds within the community. Towards the end of the movie, there is a ritual at Shardul's home to celebrate the adoption of a child. Simi's father asks Rimjim, the partner Sumi, and Guru Narayan, the partner Shardul, to join them in the naming ceremony of their daughter. Simi's father expresses his gratitude and happiness for their presence. Sumi's father says to Rimjim.

“Rimjim go and sit with Sumi. A mother must be present at the ceremony, (2:20:27) and Shardul also asks Guru Narayan “Mr. Tytler, you come and sit. I'm not asking you to be a father. I just want you by my side,” (2:21:19).

Both *Badhaai Do* and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* explore the complexities of LGBTQ+ lives in India, shedding light on the challenges they face within traditional family structures and societal expectations. In *Badhaai Do*, Shardul and Rimjhim, the protagonists, enter into a lavender marriage to please their families and avoid societal scrutiny. This arrangement, while seemingly practical, exposes the deep-rooted homophobia and heteronormativity prevalent in their community. The film subtly critiques the societal pressure to conform to conventional gender roles and the stigma attached to non-traditional relationships. On the other hand, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* focuses on a more accepting portrayal of a same-sex couple, Kartik and Aman.

Their relationship faces opposition from Kartik's conservative family, who struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality. The movie deals with the issue of parental acceptance and the importance of open communication in fostering understanding and support.

Both movies effectively capture the emotional turmoil and social isolation experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals in India. They highlight the need for greater acceptance and inclusivity within families and communities, challenging traditional norms and promoting empathy towards diverse sexual orientations. Both *Badhaai Do* and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* have been praised for their progressive portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood, however, they have also faced criticism for perpetuating certain stereotypes.

In *Badhaai Do*, the characters of Shardul and Rimjhim are depicted as somewhat stereotypical, reinforcing the notion of LGBTQ+ individuals being flamboyant or effeminate. This can be seen as a missed opportunity to present more nuanced and diverse representations of queer identities. On the other hand, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, while more progressive in its portrayal of a same-sex couple, also falls into the trap of tokenism by limiting the film's central conflict to the acceptance of Kartik's homosexuality by his family. This overlooks the broader spectrum of LGBTQ+ experiences and is a missed opportunity to spark deeper conversations about queer identity and the challenges faced by the community. Despite these shortcomings, both films represent a positive shift in Bollywood's approach to LGBTQ+ representation. They have contributed to raising awareness and fostering discussions about queer issues, paving the way for more authentic and inclusive portrayals in the future.

Despite facing societal pressure and familial disapproval, the protagonists in both movies find solace and courage in their relationships. Their stories of self-discovery and acceptance offer hope for LGBTQ+ individuals in India, showing that love can overcome even the toughest challenges.

Badhaai Do's message of acceptance is particularly strong, as it challenges the idea of lavender marriages as a solution to societal homophobia. The film encourages open communication and genuine understanding, emphasizing the importance of embracing true love in all its forms. Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan also celebrates love and acceptance, portraying a supportive and loving family despite initial resistance. The film offers hope for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking acceptance.

Both films have a positive and hopeful message, emphasizing the power of love to overcome all obstacles. They serve as a reminder that LGBTQ+ individuals are worthy of love, acceptance, and celebration just as they are. Badhaai do and Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan, while not perfect, represent significant milestones in Bollywood's depiction of LGBTQ+ characters. They have sparked important conversations about queer identity, acceptance, and the challenges faced by the community in India. Although there is still room for improvement in terms of representation and storytelling, these movies represent a positive step forward, paving the way for more genuine and inclusive portrayals in the future and understanding within their own families

Chapter - 5

Interpreting New Normality through the Lens of Gayness

So far, we have discussed the movies and the theory that we will use to prove the aim of our project, which is to explore the "Evolution of Acceptance: Abnormal to New Normal". We aim to discover the fascinating evolution of LGBTQ+ acceptance in India by analyzing the Bollywood films "Aligarh", "Badhaai do", and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan" through the Queer theory coined by Italian-American feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis. It is important to note that theories in literature are interconnected, so Queer theory is also connected to both Gender studies and Psychoanalytic theory.

Our project focuses on the evolution of acceptance in the Indian film industry, particularly in Bollywood, as well as on society's perspective towards gender and sexuality. Firstly, we have analyzed, "Aligarh", an autobiographical drama that tells the real story of a professor Ramchandra Siras of Aligarh University who committed suicide due to societal discrimination against his identity as a gay person. Despite facing isolation and discrimination, he fought against the discriminatory rules and agitations filed against him and advocated for the implementation of the rule for the decriminalization of gayness and same-sex relationships following section 377. Upon its release, this film faced sharp criticism from society. However, we should not let the initial disapproval cloud our judgment of its artistic merit. Let us give this film a fair chance and appreciate it for what it is.

Society used to be strongly opposed to same-sex relationships, especially when it involved a man in a position of authority like a professor. This is evident from how Prof. Ramachandra Siras was exposed, targeted, and dismissed. However, in other movies, the opposition was not official, but society itself was unaccepting at first. Nevertheless, filmmakers tried to empathize with the characters and encourage society to accept homosexuality, leading to a shift in societal attitudes and evolution from 2010 onwards. The year 2009 was a turning point because it was when homosexuality was decriminalized. Despite this, when Prof. Ramachandra Siras' real incident took place in 2010, social acceptance was still lacking, even though the law was on their side. In later movies, however, even though the law remains the same, society is more willing to accept homosexuality. The society has become more accepting of homosexuality. Although the incident occurred in 2010, there was an empathetic approach to showcase the individual and the event in 2014. In 2018 and 2019, there was a positive momentum of activism to embrace LGBTQ+ personalities.

It's been a long journey for the LGBTQ+ community in India, with several legal petitions and judgments over the years. In 1994, a legal petition was filed to decriminalize homosexuality in Delhi, but it was rejected. However, in 2018, a petition by 20 students from IIT and alumni was taken up by advocates Menaka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju, resulting in a positive outcome. One significant victory for the community came on 2nd July 2009, when the Delhi Court declared portions of section 377 as unconstitutional. This judgment was made by Justice A.P. Shah, but it faced challenges till 2010, which was the year of the controversial case of Prof. Ramachandra Siras, a professor at AMU. Although things were set in motion, the Supreme Court changed the rule to criminalize same-sex relationships as illegal in 2013. However, the positive attitude towards

the community was reflected in the 2015 movie "Aligarh," which aimed to empower individuals to come out of their shells. "Aligarh" received critical appreciation acclaim for its performance, especially Manoj Bajpayee's portrayal of Professor Siras. This film can be praised for its sensitive handling of the subject matter and its scathing critique of social hypocrisy. "Baadhai do" and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan" were also well-received and their portrayal of a same-sex relationship within a family setting.

From 2015 to 2023, many great films like "Margarita with a Straw," "Nagarakirta," "Moothon," "Geeli Puchi," "Badhaai Do," "Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan," "Made in Heaven," etc., were released without much protest or disapproval from society, marking a long way from social stigma to a growing movement for acceptance. The decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 marked a watershed moment, but the fight for equality continues. A shift in the legal landscape with the decriminalization of homosexuality. Growing activism and visibility of the challenges remain. The journey of full acceptance of gayness is far from over, but India's LGBTQ+ community is moving forward with increasing confidence and determination. "Aligarh," "Badhaai do" and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan" can be considered movies that explore LGBTQ+ themes in contemporary India. However, they take a very different approach. Aligarh is a hard-hitting social drama while the other two movies are lighter comedy-drama. Despite their tonal differences, both films deliver important messages about acceptance, individuality, and the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India.

The directors of Bollywood films "Aligarh", "Badhaai Do", and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhaan" which we have taken have set a remarkable example by showcasing the lives of gay characters. Through their brilliant portrayal, they have effectively conveyed the true essence and value of human life. Their captivating narrative and direction have contributed significantly to the acceptance of homosexuality, transforming it from being perceived as abnormal to being deemed as the new normal. These films have undoubtedly paved the way for a more inclusive, diverse, and accepting society.

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