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Paradoxes of female affirmation: Curing the mental illness of the modern Indian woman in *Dear Zindagi*

Department of Media Studies

University of the Witwatersrand

Masters Dissertation

Supervisor: Dina Ligaga

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Dedication

To Alia Bhatt for participating in this film (and many others) that continues to challenge the way we understand feminism and mental illness in modern Indian society. This study is in no way a critique of your performance, but a broader examination of the effects these narratives and representations have on Indian society and audiences.

Abstract

In examining the Bollywood film *Dear Zindag*i this study explores the ways in which the progressive narrative of women empowerment is complicated through themes of mental illness and mental health. Furthermore, this study explores modern patriarchy as a concept used to control and manage femininity, further complicating feminist narratives. Theoretically centered within literature on feminism, Bollywood, mental illness, patriarchy, and the bildungsroman, this study examines the influence modern patriarchal narratives have on redefining feminist narratives to fit modern society and how *Dear Zindagi* is able to progress as a feminist narrative.

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Chapter one: Introduction

The representation of gender roles/norms has gradually shifted in Bollywood from a predominantly patriarchal representation of women in society and emphasis on gender roles of women to a narrative of empowerment and the engagement of feminist narratives worldwide. Bollywood has been known for its romanticised narratives of love, stereotypical gender norms, cultural integration of beliefs and values, and its patriarchal system and representation of life. Nevertheless, movies from 2010 show a shift in thematic focus toward women-centric films and/or films that include women in feminist narratives such as the working modern woman, unmarried single woman, and independent women, to name a few. For Bollywood, this is a significant step forward, especially when the dynamics of patriarchy, censorship and the emphasis on societal stature are often upheld. This shift in trends indicates changes in Bollywood where the emphasis and reiteration of patriarchy through repetitive portrayals of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, and the limited representation of women as submissive and dependent on men is being problematized.

Most studies on the relationship between Bollywood and gender, as well as the representation of mental illnesses and mental health, do engage in the unequal discourses and treatment of women. These include film analyses of older Bollywood movies, even though the research is limited (Morant, 1995; Bhugra, 2005, Malik 2011, Bhaumik, 2016). Newer blockbuster films such as *English Vinglish* (2012), *Queen* (2013), and *Piku* (2015) do question the role of patriarchy and portray a much more progressive representation of women in empowered situations. However, the treatment of women, their characters' lives, sexuality, career, and personal choices are still reflected from a patriarchal gaze, raising questions around whether the empowerment of women represented in the film is really achieved as successfully throughout the film's narrative and whether it leans into post-feminism. The narratives surrounding the themes of empowerment, mental illness, and mental health are still based on and portrayed through a patriarchal gaze and perspective, which can represent post-feminism (Malik, 2011).

Dear Zindagi is a film purporting to make a feminist intervention by reading the theme of "empowerment" and "mental illness" alongside each other, with both themes not being synonymous. Both themes are used to represent a specific narrative of feminists who fit the

Mad Woman in the Attic[1] discourse – those who do not conform are othered and considered delusional. Bollywood films, in their quest to represent feminist narratives that also include the theme of mental illness and empowerment have continuously portrayed the *Mad Woman in the Attic* discourse to demonstrate the othering of those who challenge the traditional patriarchal system but simultaneously represent the progression of society and celebration of women breaking away from patriarchal discourses. This, in some ways, alludes to the othering of those who do not support feminist narratives and conform to patriarchal norms within these films, thus, upturning the narrative and representing both perspectives. This is represented in *Dear Zindagi* as it attempts to challenge/change the patriarchal representation of women to promote feminism and women in modern society. However, in doing so it fails to directly challenge patriarchal discourses and norms that discriminate against women and represent women as being dependent and submissive, especially when associated with a mental illness. Instead, the representation of the *Mad Woman in the Attic* discourse (the distress and otherness) the protagonist in *Dear Zindagi* experiences through the themes of mental illness and women empowerment provides a different reading to feminist narratives as modern patriarchy is established to present faux support for feminism and women empowerment, thus leaning towards a post-feminist reading instead.

This study aimed to critically analyse the themes of woman empowerment and mental illness (and mental health)[2] represented in the Bollywood blockbuster film titled *Dear Zindagi* (2016), which is a film that claimed to present a bildungsroman, feminist narrative film of a young modern Indian woman (Sharma, 2017). The film explores mental illness, mental health and mental wellness through a young independent woman who seeks to find the perfect life. She meets an unconventional thinker and psychologist who assists her by providing a new perspective on life and, ultimately, enabling her to progress through her challenges with mental illness and mental health issues and rediscover herself to promote mental wellbeing.

Background to the Bollywood film industry

The Bollywood industry is one of the largest film industries after Hollywood and plays a crucial role in influencing the social factors of Indian society. As Shekhawat (2013, 54) has observed,

[1] This is a reference borrowed from a book title by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar who analyse Victorian literature from a feminist point of view.
[2] Difference between mental illness and mental health is explained further down in the background to study.

“Cinema wields the power to influence an individual’s behaviour, perception and position in his culture and society; hence it encompasses all the multifaceted aspects, integral to society”. Bollywood cinema influences, reiterates, and represents social norms and socially constructed realities back to its audience and back into society which results in the repetition of societal discourses such as hegemonic masculinity, gender roles and norms, and normalised societal behaviour.

The repetition of societal discourses ties into Nikita Ramkissoon’s (2009, 2) argument that:

> To an extent, Bollywood has shaped the way in which people read Indian culture as well as reflecting India’s events, traditions, values and customs by the mere fact that is a pervasive and inescapable force in Indian society.

The reiteration and representation of social norms further link to Bhaumik’s (2016, 55) statement about the influence of Bollywood cinema:

> Being one of the most powerful media for mass communication possesses the potential to combine entertainment with ideas. Because of its appeal to the masses, it can portray the aspirations, frustrations, and contradictions present in any given social order and can also exercise palpable influence on the mind of the people and thus generate social awareness and formulate public opinion.

The representation of women within Bollywood films has always aligned with Indian societal norms and cultural expectations, ensuring that the films “safeguard the status quo” (Shekhawat, 2013, 54). This ‘status quo’ is essentially the gender hierarchy and narrative repetitively used within Bollywood films that enforce hegemonic masculinity, submissiveness in women, cultural narratives of marriage, male heroics, and gender norms to be upheld and not to be deviated from. It structures itself on the influence of Indian societal norms and re-presents these norms and narratives of Indian society back into the society through film.

Bollywood reproduces normative views of gender, and in doing so, ideas about women are predominantly in favour of patriarchal ideologies, which link to Shekhawat’s (2013) discussion in exploring the position of women's roles in film, identifying the unique and specific character

and role placement they are given within Bollywood films. These portrayals of women in these films remain submissive, which Ramkissoon (2009, 2) elaborates by saying:

> Women have been and to an extent still are represented as mere wallpaper in Bollywood films. Issues around gender, gender-based violence, femininity, women's rights and sexuality (outside of being a sexpot) are often ignored and in most cases, subverted.

Bollywood upholds particular forms of femininity that align with subservient, quiet women, emphasizing the need for women to uphold and inherit the submissive nature. Films that repeat this narrative often portray the woman as finding herself through a man she would marry (Sarkar, 2012, 4) and include films such as *Vivaah* (2006), *Cocktail* (2012), and *Sanam Teri Kasam* (2016). Despite these films showing a gradual change in the representation of women in terms of their character's personality, career, or ambitions, the ideal characteristics of patriarchy and femininity that aligns with submissiveness are present, even ever so subtly. It is interesting how romance is used as an organizing principle of narrative in Bollywood both structurally and ideologically.

Shifts in Bollywood cinema are directly influenced by different political and social occurrences. For instance, in the late 1970s and 1980s, it has been argued that a representational shift occurred because the Prime Minister was a woman. Similarly, a representational shift occurred because of the first woman and twelfth president of India, Smt. Pratibha Patil, during her reign between 2007 to 2012. The increase in women-centric films could reflect the current social atmosphere in which women are in positions of leadership and power and are challenging patriarchal expectations of women being submissive and invisible. In turn, this simultaneously pleases the society's requests for change by directly influencing and challenging patriarchal Indian society. Thus, Sarkar's (2012) argument that this growth of women-centric films is a tactic to please cinematic audiences while coinciding with current affairs is relevant to understanding the influence of social and political factors on Bollywood cinema and society.

The patriarchal discourse attached to women is described fittingly by Shekhawat (2013, 54) as "consequently, the image of Indian women in the initial stages has been idealized as an ideal mother, wife, daughter-in-law and sister". This submissive discourse towards women

emphasises hegemonic masculinity within Indian society and the need for women to depend on men financially, influentially, and socially. Laura Mulvey (1999, 834) comments on this position of women's representation in Indian cinema by stating that the passive position of women in every film is projecting her as the "bearer not the maker of meaning". This further links to discussions on gaze, where the male gaze remains dominant in Bollywood films. The male gaze is the assumption that films take on the perspective and lens of the heterosexual male (Jose, 2017). Laura Mulvey explores the male gaze as the predominant gaze that exists in films, whereas Ashima Jose (2017) argues that Mulvey does not take into consideration the female gaze (among other gazes like queer gaze, homosexual gaze, etc) that now exists in Bollywood films. In Bollywood films, the male (actor) is the bearer of the gaze, the one who is looking, whereas the female (actress) is the object of the gaze, the one who is looked at. Male bodies are positioned as social objects; setting the example of what it means to be a man, whilst female bodies are often treated as sexual objects; item songs in Bollywood films focus the camera on the woman's breasts, hips, stomach, legs while she dances to songs with sexual lyrics. Often the actress is dressed in costumes that accentuate her breasts and hips, and the actress acts in an overly sexualized way to attract the male gaze (Jose, 2017, 56).

This representation of women has shifted recently to cater to women's empowerment within the work field, social environments, and emphasis on a woman as her own person detached from the dependency of men. Women-centric films in the 1970s challenged the representation of domesticity, while the representation of women empowerment from 2006 onwards explored socio-cultural and socio-political issues that were/are present within Indian society socially and politically and critiques the previous representations of women empowerment by promoting feminist narratives that raised the status of women from the domestic narrative to an advancing, less confined and opportunistic narrative. Additionally, Jose's statement that the female gaze exists within Bollywood films comes into play as Bollywood has released (and continues to release) women-centric films. By catering to women's capacity for arousal and women's sexuality, the female gaze has shifted the representations of men in Bollywood films to include being sexualized (Jose, 2017, 57). This is seen in songs where the camera positions itself to focus on the actor's chiselled bodies, dressed in costumes that emphasises the genital area and expose the actor's muscles (Jose, 2017, 57). However, Jose (2017, 58) also states that the female gaze focuses on the perfection of both male and female bodies, emphasizing the way they should conduct themselves, their appearance, etc, which appease patriarchal norms/codes.

Therefore, the female gaze becomes patriarchal, and from a feminist perspective can be argued to fit post-feminism.

> At the same time, it can be argued that the female gaze has been directed by the patriarchic notions of an ideal man and an ideal woman, and the way a woman is expected to act, speak and even look. In that case the female gaze itself becomes an extension of male power. Therefore, whether or not the position of the spectator gives a woman as equal an agency as a man, would be an interesting question to ponder on (Jose, 2017, 58).

In this study, I focused on the movie *Dear Zindagi*, which I chose to read as a bildungsroman. The bildungsroman genre provides an emotive representation of a journey to self-discovery from challenges within the protagonist's childhood transforming into a mature adult where the challenges are resolved, whilst simultaneously exploring the socio-political challenges the protagonist is faced with that force them to change and discover themselves (Schwarz and Crenshaw, 2011, 47). The bildungsroman genre, derived from the words "Bildung" meaning formation, and "roman" meaning novel, is designed to influence and educate audiences about the specific socio-political issues being addressed, as well as the self-discovery journey that the protagonist experiences (Okuyade, 2011, 143). For Bollywood films that aim at educating audiences on feminism and challenging patriarchal discourses that discriminate/restrict women, the bildungsroman genre has been (and can continue to be) useful in engaging with audiences to identify and examine their own lives based on the familiarity of the film narrative and its protagonist discovering themselves. Whilst the genre mainly focuses on a male protagonist, the female bildungsroman represents a woman who is financially and emotionally independent, is not dependent on a man to influence her life and chooses to not adhere to societal norms that limit/discriminate against her, whilst living in a patriarchal society (Okuyade, 2011, 151). For Bollywood, this genre also attempts to Indianize the representation and narrative of the Indian woman (and Indian society/Indian narrative as a whole) away from

a western-orientated narrative and becomes part of the challenge that the protagonist faces (as in the case of *Dear Zindagi* and other Bollywood films)[3].

To say that these films (see footnote 2) are women empowering while still representing a patriarchal perspective of women is problematic. The perspectives and placement of women in Bollywood films are still portrayed through a patriarchal, masculine, and hegemonic societal narrative that raises questions on whether this is actually a woman-empowering film that focuses on redefining women in society in a feministic manner, or whether it is perpetuating what audiences would like to see as empowering for women through the lens of a patriarchal and masculine system that does not redefine women in society, but rather finds them a place in a modern patriarchal society. In doing so this represents and promotes post-feminism. This research dissertation explores these questions through the study and analysis of the film *Dear Zindagi* (2016) which was essentially produced and promoted as women-empowering, feminist representation of women (Sharma, 2017). This dissertation argues that the representation of the modern Indian woman and mental illness (and mental health) is still viewed from a patriarchal gaze and standpoint, which, rather than promoting women's empowerment and feminism, is argued to be the same patriarchal representation of women catering to an already patriarchal society and system but within contemporary society. Therefore, by exploring how the film is read, as a bildungsroman and a feminist narrative, and by using the themes of mental illness, mental health, and feminism to explore where modern Indian women are situated in contemporary society, this dissertation argues that the representation of modern Indian women is post-feminist.

It is important to differentiate between the definitions of mental health and mental illness and how they are used within this dissertation when exploring the analysis of the film and broader discussions on the representations of mental health and mental illnesses. Goldman and Grob (2006, 738) quote a surgeon general who describes the difference between the terms as:

> Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and an ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity. …Mental illness is the term that refers collectively

[3] Films include *Wake Up, Sid (2009), 3 Idiots (2009), Queen (2013),* and *Tamasha (2015).* Apart from *Queen,* the three mentioned films include male protagonists.

> to all diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.

This definition is applied to the analysis of specific elements of the main character within *Dear Zindagi*, as well as broader discussions on the representation of mental health and mental illness, its profession, and its link to patriarchy and feminist struggles. *Dear Zindagi* attempts to challenge the stereotypical representations and discourses of mental illness and mental health by representing a destigmatized representation of a young modern Indian woman experiencing mental illness and mental health issues in a way that humanizes and normalizes both. Kaira (the protagonist) is not represented as stereotypically insane, othered, and/or a danger to society, instead mental illness and mental health narratives are normalized as common among young individuals. Therapy and treatment are also normalized which challenges the stigmatic representations and discourses of psychological treatment, emphasizing its benefits for audiences to lead a successful and fulfilling life despite experiencing a mental illness or mental health issue. Kaira's journeying motif is represented through her therapy experience with Dr. Jehangir (referred to as Jug); the self-discovery of her worth, integration into modern patriarchy, and the stability of her relationships (platonic and romantic).

Dear Zindagi attempts to challenge that narrative with a different perspective of feminism that has not been extensively explored in Bollywood cinema and presents a type of feminism that is more than just fighting for equal rights. This representation of feminism addresses the patriarchal control over women in restricting their behaviour, choices, and opportunities to become independent individuals of their own making. It explores the concept of self-identity being created through a modern spectrum of thinking, rather than being influenced by older generation patriarchal norms. This representation of feminism is a freer model of an independent woman who re-locates herself as a feminist and independent individual within an already existing patriarchal society. It is in this way that this representation of feminism leans towards post-feminism. Women within Indian society are controlled and monitored in their behaviour, movement, thinking/mindset, expectations, aspirations, and the opportunities they are given (Gupta and Prakash, 2021, 4861). This control ensures the patriarchal supremacy within Indian society prevails despite attempts to challenge it through feminism and other socio-political and socio-cultural movements. *Dear Zindagi* challenges these elements of

control and monitoring by addressing the patriarchal norm/discrimination/stigma attached to the experience or issue at hand. While in some ways this is achieved well, in other ways it falls into the category of post feminism which does not empower women but rather re-defines the male gaze and patriarchal norms under a faux intention of women empowerment.

Dear Zindagi explores a different type of femininity through the lead female character that uses her power as a woman to redefine herself within contemporary society (and in extension, a contemporary world). This is achieved by challenging and reconstructing certain experiences and situations that women can identify with and presenting a different response and expectation to the situation. For example, the film explores challenging and breaking stereotypical expectations and demands brought onto women by patriarchal Indian society including submissive nature, dependency on men, stigma attached to women who engage in sexual activity before marriage, etc. Kaira is designed to be an independent character specifically showcasing her financial independence. Kaira has a good education in New York City and is a successful cinematographer who travels and is presented with local and international work opportunities. She lives a modern lifestyle that caters to her social needs and romantic desires. There is little to no control or monitoring from her parents/family over the type of person she wants to be or the decisions she makes. This representation of femininity differs from the patriarchal norm of a traditionally good Indian woman who should be submissive, remain within the home and not work, be dependent on a man for her needs/wants to be fulfilled, etc.

While Kaira's character suggests women's empowerment because it challenges discrimination Indian women (specifically) face due to the patriarchal Indian society, it also represents a form of post feminism. There are subtle narratives within the film that Kaira engages with that suggest a post-feminist narrative, and the assumption that this representation of femininity is achievable (the feel-good motive for audiences to engage with) suggests that the film assumes patriarchy can easily be eliminated through a challenge and that Indian society (the older generation, men, women, non-binary audiences) are all accepting of this change in society towards women. This ties into post-feminist thinking that equity among men and women has been achieved with the elimination of gender discrimination formed through patriarchal norms and ideologies (Lewis, et.al, 2017, 4-5). Additionally, post-feminism is also based on the outlook that gender is not used to define and outline identity and other social advancements. This is false as real-life Indian society continues to face challenges in encouraging and

accepting feminism in its different environments and scenarios for women. The application of a post-feminist framework in these Bollywood films is reflected just as debatably globally, mirroring the same consternations.

Additionally, the post-feminist aspiration to exist in a world where gender is no longer used to determine and define identity and social norms is represented in *Dear Zindagi* in the way Kaira discusses romantic expectations, mental illness representation, and discourses and how Kaira interacts with other characters. While this post-feminist representation is flawed, it is important to note that post-feminism is a rigid yet powerful and complex system of beliefs.

The film also subtly suggests that because Kaira decides for herself to engage in sexual activities before marriage it is more acceptable or that people (society) are more accepting of this. There is an emphasis on a woman's power to be in and by her body, which links back to statements made by Butler (1999), Fourie (2001), Gill (2007, 2016), and McRobbie (2009). These decisions to engage in activities or mindsets that seemingly empower women while continuously pleasing the male gaze and male expectations/norms which are contradictory to feminist beliefs, thus, falling into the post-feminist category.

To extend further, the film also circulates Kaira around specific male characters who guide her into leading a happy successful life. Some male characters force her into peril, thus, impacting her mental health (Raghuvendra's engagement and fight, breaking up with Sid), forcing her out of her comfort zone (landlord, Dr. Jehangir), and creating problematic situations that force an emotive response (her uncle, Raghuvendra, Rumi). These male characters also create opportunities for growth and development; healing through her trauma and mental health (Dr. Jehangir), acting as a grounding tool[4] (Kiddo), exploring her interests and preferences in men (Raghuvendra, Rumi), providing work opportunities (Raghuvendra), and supporting her lifestyle and choice of being a modern independent woman (Raghuvendra, Rumi, Dr. Jehangir, her father, Kiddo). The placement of these male characters assists and promotes Kaira's growth towards becoming a 'successful' person based on what these male characters understand as successful – which coincidentally aligns with an empowering feminist narrative of femininity.

[4] Grounding techniques are used to calm and help individuals draw back into reality from flashbacks, negative or challenging emotions, and unwanted memories (Raypole, 2019).

Hence, the post-feminist narrative emerges as the themes of growth, success, and experience are interconnected with the male gaze and a re-defined patriarchal narrative.

The film provides a new understanding of patriarchy that supports feminist norms and narratives in a way that allocates a certain amount of surveillance and control that is present in a less manipulative and direct manner. It is, instead, monitored and controlled through a faux-acceptance and promotion of feminism whilst still ensuring that men (patriarchal thought) dominate.

Rationale

Bollywood maintains a particularly moralistic stance on womanhood, and that the modern woman (in film) is in constant struggle with this morality. By critically analysing the film *Dear Zindagi*, this research explored how the representations and narratives produced about mental health are used to 'control', manage or contain the idea of independence in the modern woman. The main character's 'rebirth' is experienced only when she takes a break from her 'fast life' and growing career and slows down to focus on her mental health issues and address her true self as a contemporary independent Indian woman. This fits into the structure of the bildungsroman genre which focuses on the growth and teaching that the main character experiences from a troubled and unknowing point in their life, to a mature and developed point in their life.

The main character is, however, still represented as a young contemporary woman who needs to find and maintain a healthy romantic love life with men, and her mental health issues and modern thinking are portrayed to challenge that process in many ways. This fits the gender stereotype and hegemonic feminine norm of seeking to attain a romantic structure and the certainty of wanting to adhere to romantic societal norms. While there are many research papers and articles that discuss the gender roles of women in Indian society and the representation of gender norms within Bollywood films, there is little that critically argues whether the 'newer' representations of women within a modern setting are actually a patriarchal tactic to situate

women with mental health issues and careers in new terms in a modern society (Sarkar, 2012; Shekhawat, 2013).

Bollywood is experiencing a shift in the ways of representation and production of film narratives which serves as a major achievement for the very patriarchal industry. The industry has always been known for its conservative patriarchal narratives that omitted the representation of women in non-submissive roles and placement in society. In more recent years, French kisses, open discussions of sexuality, and women empowerment, among many other societal factors, have been introduced more openly into Bollywood films. These representations are used as the primary themes of the film, focusing on the actual issues and non-patriarchal perspectives (to an extent). This is a major achievement for not only Bollywood as an industry, but its influence on Indian society as well. Over the past few years, there has been much awareness for minority groups worldwide such as feminism and the place of a woman in society, woman's healthcare, LGBTQIA+ identities, etc.

Dear Zindagi represents a narrative of mental illness, mental health, (and mental wellness) and the modern Indian career woman differently from other films that attempted to highlight the same. The film is structured as a bildungsroman genre film that highlights and follows the main character's experiences of mental illness and mental health issues, relationship struggles, and challenging the patriarchal norms of Indian society, until she emerges as a mature, knowing, and developed individual at the end. It represents an almost "real life" scenario that fits the social context in which young modern career women live today, and highlights narratives of mental illness and mental health, the self, career, and life that are currently being discussed on a wide scale in society as a whole. *Dear Zindagi* also represents the modern career woman very differently and works well with this research to understand the ways Bollywood represents the modern career woman in comparison to previous films. In addition to this, the film discusses mental illness and mental health positively by treating its severity as importantly and with the utmost attention as physical illnesses. In doing so this representation challenges the stigma attached to mental illnesses and mental health, and towards seeking psychological help. The film also is important in understanding the total eclipse of the self, the need to be a part of the community, and the trope of the return to the rural lifestyle as one that exists and is prevalent in most emerging modernities.

Despite having a large selection of Bollywood films to choose from that discuss the modern career woman and mental health within a bildungsroman genre such as *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010), *Karthik Calling Karthik* (2010), *English Vinglish* (2012), and *Hichki* (2017) (to name a few), *Dear Zindagi* seems to be a film that not only represents a new discourse for society, especially Indian society, to think and understand the modern career woman, mental illness and mental health, but also shows the dynamic shift Bollywood has taken moving away from romantic niches to addressing more pressing and current issues and its use of the different genres such as the bildungsroman genre as a means to achieve that.

Aim and Hypothesis

This research is aimed at critically engaging with Bollywood's representation of the modern career woman in the context of patriarchy through the theme of mental illness and mental health within the film *Dear Zindagi*. I argue that mental illness and mental health complicates the narrative of the progressive woman in a patriarchal setup. I also argue that the role of the bildungsroman genre, which allows for audiences to learn as they journey with the character, further enables the complication of the reading. Themes were identified within the film and unpacked to further understand and analyse the ways in which patriarchy is redefining the modern Indian woman.

Research question

In what ways do mental illness and mental health complicate the progressive narrative of women's empowerment through ideas of control and management of femininity?

Chapter two: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two sections. I begin by exploring general literature on Bollywood and women before narrowing down the use of specific themes such as mental illness, the representations of feminism and post feminism within Bollywood, modern working women, and so on, to pay attention to the details on particular forms of representation of women in film. This assists in understanding the way patriarchy, feminism and Indian women are situated within Indian society and Bollywood, providing a better context to understand *Dear Zindagi* and the ways women are represented in the film differently in comparison to other Bollywood films. The literature review also breaks down the bildungsroman genre and its use in analysing *Dear Zindagi* as a feminist narrative. The literature review concludes by examining the ways the abovementioned discussions relate to *Dear Zindagi*. In doing so, the themes of mental illness, feminism, and post feminism are unpacked in a broader context and provide a contrasting and/or similar analysis for *Dear Zindagi* to be understood as a post-feminist text. These broader discussions simultaneously assist in identifying whether the progressive narrative of women's empowerment is complicated through ideas of control and management of femininity.

Women within Bollywood

The representation of women in Bollywood cinema is explored by the works of Sushila Shekhawat (2013), predominantly through the analysis of older Bollywood films. Mahuya Bhaumik (2016) also discusses the representation of women in Bollywood cinema but analyses two modern blockbuster films: *English-Vinglish* (2012) and *Queen* (2013). While both theorists have provided substantial work on their respective focuses, they do not criticise and assume the possibility that perhaps women empowerment is not essentially being achieved without patriarchal influence, and that it is, instead, a ruse by patriarchy to re-establish the representation of women within a contemporary society through neoliberal cultural products that are meant to project feminism.

Bhaumik's (2016)[5] work enables one to understand the ways women were/are represented within Bollywood films, from the classics to the new blockbusters. A short synopsis of Bollywood films discussed below provides a clearer understanding of the patriarchal narratives Bollywood cleverly uses to promote some sort of empowerment. These norms and stigmas are reflected in Indian society and then, looped back to the cinematic representation of what Indian society is like (Shekhawat, 2013). Gender roles of women and men differ drastically, especially within Indian society, and the emphasis on women crossing that patriarchal line of what is and what should be is demonstrated as a severe consequence within films as if to show the severity of what a woman is meant to adhere to and aspire to be like against what would happen if she did not conform to those expectations. The narrative and representation of Indian women within Bollywood films have been carved out and "idolized as an ideal mother, wife, daughter-in-law and sister" (Shekhawat, 2013. 54). She argues that women are merely an "appendage to the man", who are the superior, independent decision-makers (Shekhawat, 2013. 54) and who hold more power over women in their families and in society (Rai, 2021, 29).

Many of Bollywood's older films practiced imposing this type of patriarchal representation into the film's narrative that represented women having no choice but to be dependent on men for all their needs (Ramkissoon, 2009). Physical oppression is an example used to demonstrate control over women (Shekhawat, 2013; Khan and Taylor, 2018) which is an occurring theme in older films and, at times, even the current films. Films including *Mohobbatein* (2000) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001*)* demonstrate the extent of submissiveness towards and expected of women, which include verbal violence combined with physical violence (Khan and Taylor, 2018, 3644). Sarkar (2012, 4) comments on this portrayal in which he states:

> Commercial Hindi films have constantly glorified the image of ideal Indian woman as accepting of the injustice and violence meted out towards her by men and society. Hence, violence against women has always been one of the standard components of the Hindi commercial formula cinema.

This, in turn, glorifies a toxic form of masculinity as it simultaneously forces women to accept submission, violence, and injustices. Rai (2021, 30-31) also states that patriarchal dominance

[5] Mahuya Bhaumik's article *Changing Role of Indian Woman: A Glimpse into Two Bollywood Movies English – Vinglish and Queen* (2016)

is portrayed through male violence against women and remains trapped in the cycle of violence "because of the developed perspective of men and women in society." Decisions concerning a woman's life; her choice of a partner, standing up for herself, and seeking independence are controlled by a male figure (father, grandfather, or brother), and if challenged the woman faces physical oppression in the form of abuse, restriction, forced conditions and/or being outcast (Shekhawat, 2013). This conditioning narrows down the enforced gender norms and expectations of women in Indian society, with films reemphasizing the place of women in comparison to men, and submissive aspirations enforced onto women by men (patriarchy) that women must uphold (Khan and Taylor, 2018, 3643; Rai, 2021, 29).

Bollywood is known to include stereotypical and superstitious narratives and discourses in its films when addressing issues of health, gender norms, feminism, and lifestyles to reiterate and emphasise societal norms (Sarkar, 2012). This is strategically used to emotionally connect to audiences through a cultural and social narrative, which audiences are already familiar with. Rai (2017, 23) explains that "movies are actually brainwashing and have the ability to influence audiences' thought patterns", therefore audiences can connect to and be influenced by what they see in Bollywood films. The attached chapter three and chapter six discuss this in further detail. They also provide an understanding of how Bollywood thrives, the Indian society, and Bollywood's influence on its society, as well as how particular issues such as feminism and mental illness/mental health issues are addressed.

Indian society is known for being an extremely male-dominated society, especially in terms of its treatment of women and enforcing the emphasised conditioning of patriarchy (Sarkar, 2012; Bhaumik, 2016; Rai, 2017). This aligns with Bhaumik's (2016, 54) statement where she states that the construction of the ideal woman "focuses on the way women were 'used perceived/ deployed/ represented in this predominantly masculine project' of the construction of nationhood". Women are taught from a young age that their role as women is meant to be inferior to that of men, inheriting the submissive behaviour expected of them to be carried out throughout their lives (Sarkar, 2012). Despite having a well-respected, praised, and elevated platform in ancient Indian scriptures[6] (Khan and Taylor, 2018, 3643), the reality of the Indian

[6] According to the Hindu scriptures, women have played many prominent roles in Hindu society and in rituals and divinity. The Mahanirvana Tantra (important scriptures detailing the rituals and knowledge about the

society is that of the submissive woman being conditioned to live in a patriarchal society that favours hegemonic masculinity (Bhaumik, 2016). Women are essentially limited and restricted from many freedoms that men have access to, some as simple as being prohibited from participating in internal and external discussions and decision-making (Bhaumik, 2016). This also aligns with Shekhawat's statement above that women are influenced by a male figure for most of their lives, be it their father, husband, and/or son.

There is a lot of emphasis on grooming a woman to fit the expected behaviour and aspirations of an ideal Indian woman, such as learning to be obedient to a man's desire, keep her chastity for marriage, learning domesticated skills, and knowing that her limits must remain behind a man and not progress beyond what he is capable of (Khan and Taylor, 2018, 3643). This links to Sarkar's (2012, 3) statement in saying:

> In their study of Indian movies, Gokulsing & Dissnayake (2004) found that women were given two major kinds of roles in commercial films, that of the mother (whose attributes are matched to that of the supreme form of feminine energy, the Goddess) and the wife based on the mythological character of Sita (epitomizes extreme devotion to the husband).

These narratives were used early in Bollywood films, dating back into the golden oldies in which actresses occupied the supporting roles rather than lead roles that were designated for men, and became a mechanism to influence Indian society into conditioning and upholding the 'supposed' ideals of an ideal woman (Agarwal, 2014, 159). This links to the argument made by Tupur Chatterjee (2014, 3) in which he states:

> The Hindi film actress has therefore always occupied an ambiguous space, promising the fantasy of an inherently 'Indian'— 'ideal womanhood' to their male audience while walking the tightrope between the masculine/material domain of the outside world and the feminine/spiritual kernel of the private sphere.

emancipation of men) explores the high-status women had, "girl, too, should be brought up and educated with as much care as a son" (Tamil and Verdas, 2013). Another scripture reads, "Like men, women too, can be poets. For potentially inheres in the self, irrespective of sex differences. It is heard as also seen that princesses, daughters of ministers, courtesans and concubines are possessed of an extensive knowledge of the scriptures and also are poets" (Tamil and Verdas, 2013). However, patriarchal influence affected the stature of women and altered their role in society to be dependent and submissive, especially towards men.

Between the years 2011-2012 Bollywood produced films that featured women as the main character and protagonists of the film. This was a major step for Bollywood, as films are usually male centred with the female lead repetitively shadowed by their male co-stars. This statement ties into what Sarkar (2012, 4) mentions:

> These movies have shown men in lead roles, where in most cases women did not have a substantial role to play.

More so, these films attempted to display "real-life" scenarios and narratives that women experienced, and by doing so presented an alternate perspective to the cinematic narrative. However, these attempts, while being a great starting point for Bollywood to recognise the need for change, were still very much compromised and camouflaged by patriarchal expectations and patriarchal perspectives and continued the narrative of defining what a woman's role should be (Bhaumik, 2016). This also links to an argument made by Sarkar (2012, 3) where he states that:

> It can be assumed that the portrayal of women onscreen by male directors and other male professionals will have gender biases and constraints and this may not always convey women's world views, perceptions and subjective realities.

The films failed to remove, or at least counteract the issue of the male gaze, the over-sexualisation of the female body, and the domesticating of the woman regardless of whether the woman has a career or not, and the decision-making process remained with the male figure (Jose, 2017, 55). The sexualisation of the female body has become a reoccurring and normalised theme within Bollywood (Chatterjee, 2014) and is highly problematic in terms of understanding the gender roles actresses are meant to portray, as well as the gender role narrative of women that is then represented to society and inherited into society. This further elaborates on the claim that Bollywood and its female-centric narratives are extremely patriarchal especially when it comes to the male gaze and what defines an ideal woman (Jose, 2017, 55). As Chatterjee (2014, 5) states:

> Also notable in this regard is Steve Derne's (2000) work on movie-going practices among lower middle class men in North India and their perceptions of the female actor, which again upholds the body as the central site of pleasure and fantasy.

Films such as *The Dirty Picture* (2011), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *Kahaani* (2012), and *English Vinglish* (2012) were among the few recent blockbuster films with leading successful actresses that portrayed a new dialogue for women within society and the different spheres of life (home, workplace, family, individuality). Of these films, *The Dirty Picture* is the only film that was produced by women, Ekta Kapoor and Shoba Kapoor. Of these four films as well, only *English Vinglish* is directed by a woman, Gauri Shinde (Bhaumik, 2016). Films such as *Patiala House* (2011), *Heroine* (2012), *Mary Kom* (2012), *Dangal* (2016), and *Ki & Ka* (2016) explore various patriarchal narratives that Bollywood subtly uses that are camouflaged under the progressive concept of women empowerment and feminism and are discussed below to explain these subtle patriarchal themes. It is important to note that these films catered for women/female narratives that were not always discussed openly or had not explored the various perspectives of the narratives. Previously, older films were solely focused on a masculine patriarchal perspective and narrative, while others were over-stereotyped and thrown out of proportion to insinuate stigma, taboo, the consequences of being engaged in those narratives, and the constant emphasis on the need to be saved (Sarkar, 2012). This is further linked to Sarkar's (2012) statement:

> The roles played by the women onscreen are mostly the male director's notion of what roles women ought to be playing. This notion is based on the director's beliefs, attitudes and values, combined with the director's perception of the viewers' demand.

The film *Heroine* (2012) discusses narratives of the modern working woman and mentions the challenge of coping with a mental illness and mental health issues, while at the same time re-stating that women are not able to manage and prioritise themselves and their successes when in the entertainment industry. Bollywood films and Indian society play on the narrative of women being submissive and not attaining roles that portray their independence, be it individual independence or independence from men (Ramkissoon, 2009). Women in films are represented as overseeing domestic life, and if they do have a career it is limited to specific fields such as being a teacher, doctor, engineer, or working in corporate (lower levels than that of men) (Sarkar, 2012). Mental illnesses are also commonly referred to as women and are

represented as a stigmatised problem that is invisible and/or not as serious as it is (Bhugra, 2005), or also a result of women being weak. Mental illness and mental health narratives are consistent with stereotyped submissiveness that struggles to successfully normalise itself enough to be treated as a common health disorder or ailment. This challenge is not only faced by Indian society and is something many societies worldwide struggle to bring awareness to; however, Indian society being drenched in superstitious beliefs, cultural/religious beliefs and patriarchal systems and norms make an issue such as mental illnesses a tedious struggle with only a few limited representational narratives (Bhugra, 2005). As the film plays out it is evidently shown that the working world is predominantly a "man's world" that women cannot handle, and the lead character is forced to remove herself from the entertainment industry out of shame and retreat to ensure a healthier lifestyle and image for herself.

The film *Mary Kom* (2012) portrays the struggle of a young Indian female who, after training and attaining her successful career as a boxer, marries and attempts to reclaim her title after having started a family. The constant and subtle underlying narrative is the struggle of this character wanting a career in a male-dominated sport, and the emphasis on marriage and bearing a family is still heavily emphasised throughout the film. Bollywood's one constant narrative, regardless of its many genres, is the integration and heavy emphasis on marriage and the domestic duties of a woman (Ramkissoon, 2009). The way Bollywood achieves this constant narrative is by normalising the role of women in domestic life, overly romanticising the success of women being able to juggle a domestic life and career, and subtly emphasising the need to be dependent on a man, as well as the emphasis of bearing and raising children (Ramkissoon, 2009). It suggests that only after she has accomplished her domestic duties of marrying and bearing children can she go back to her own life of aspiration and career, but with the conscious knowledge that her womanly duties still take prevalence. Ramkissoon (2009, 5) quotes Friedan (1963) in saying that:

> Truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights...all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.

Shekhawat (2013, 55) mentions how patriarchy manages this subtle but extreme conditioning by stating that "patriarchy exercises its dominance to confine the woman to the domesticity

and thereby controlling them." This 'control' is strategically enforced into Bollywood film narratives, which is then reflected in real-life Indian society through patriarchal gender norms.

The 2016 film *Dangal* showcased extreme merit towards the real-life story of two sisters who aspired to become professional wrestlers. The film was praised for representing and promoting women's empowerment. However, despite the excellent depiction of the women's strength and dedication to achieve their goals, the female characters did not have much choice in the matter of choosing what they wanted in their lives, and conclusively accomplished their father's failed dream of attaining a gold medal rather than earning it for themselves. This is often seen in many Bollywood films on a much smaller scale than compared to winning at a sport, in which the role of the father figure in a film will have already decided what their children are meant to do with their lives to bring the family pride (Bhaumik, 2016). The emphasis on failure to not attain the father's lost opportunity and unfulfilled dream is framed as motivation to achieve success but is removing the right for the female characters to voice their own thoughts and emotions. It also suggests that failure is considered the worst consequence that would bring further shame and disappointment to their father, which will result in a loss of respect and love from the father to his daughters.

A film that really explored this narrative is the 2011 film called *Patiala House* in which all characters could only live out the father's dream and not their own. This shows the problematic struggle for independence and the camouflaged empowerment given to women (and male characters within different contexts) in assuming that they can lead their own lives based on their own choices without any obligations. Again, the idea of failure, shame, and disobedience to this manner of living results in the characters bringing extreme shame to the family, loss of respect, and disappointment, and are often regarded as the outcast or too modern for going against tradition.

A film that seemed to challenge stereotypical gender norms is *Ki & Ka* (2016) as it interestingly explores the concept of gender roles being swapped. The female character is career orientated and does not want to marry at the expense of losing her career and shows no interest in domestic duties, whilst the male lead is not focused on any career and is more interested in being domestic and eventually takes the role of a house husband. As mentioned above, women are not encouraged to maintain career positions that are usually occupied by men (Bhaumik, 2016).

This argument can be extended further to how Bollywood cinema and Indian society are heavily influenced by each other. As Sarkar (2012, 3) points out:

> The Hindi film upholds the traditional patriarchal views of society which, fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman, a subjugation of her desires.

Collectively these films represent the diversity of women's roles, and successfully portray the trauma of women through the lens of different themes which include:

> intense exploitation, quest for freedom, physical, mental, sexual and economic, powerful assertion of self, quest for meaning, urge for identity, marital rape, dependence syndrome, emergence of a new woman... (Shekhawat, 2013. 55)

The narrative challenges Indian society and not only are the gender differences explored but the societal judgements, expectations, and stigmatisation, especially more so towards the female character than the man, are uncovered. This goes to the extent that within the film the male character is praised for his ability to do domestic work while the female character is taunted and shunned for being in the corporate (man's) world and not at home. This is not to be confused with gender swopping or any LGBTQIA+ identities, but rather the roles of each gender that are determined by patriarchal society being swapped.

Understanding the bildungsroman genre

The bildungsroman genre originated in Germany and is derived from the terms "Bildung" meaning formation and "roman" meaning novel. It is the literary term used to describe texts that are centered on the concern of the developmental journey of a protagonist. It is a genre that highlights an individual's awareness towards their unique self (Upadhyay, 2021, 197). The term bildungsroman and 'the coming of age' genres are often used interchangeably, however, the two terms are different from each other. The main difference between the two is the specificity of youth and transformation from youth to adult: a coming-of-age narrative can be applied to nearly any other genre and is a blanket term for a narrative on growing up (Upadhyay, 2021, 199). Upadhyay (2021, 210) further states that the:

> Bildungsroman is not a mere coming of age narrative but a growth and awareness of the hero or heroine's individual, national and class identity.

The genre follows the growth of the protagonist as he/she explores the compromises between society and the self and finds a balance between the two (Okuyade, 2011). Issues of religion, caste, gender, and class complicate the relationship between the protagonist and society, resulting in a postcolonial reading of the bildungsroman where "society is patriarchal, imperialist and Eurocentric in its outlook and ideals" (Upadhyay, 2021, 216). The bildungsroman genre follows the lead character (male or female) exploring and uncovering their unique selves, emphasizing the importance of individuality and the sense of self (Upadhyay, 2021, 197). This is where the genre emphasizes the journeying motif of becoming one's true unique self (Baruch, 1981, 3-4). Schwarz and Crenshaw (2011, 47) explain the journey of the protagonist who:

> […] wanders in search of love, social justice, or the meaning of life, and on the journey of discovery he or she faces conflict with the self, family and society.

This narrative of the bildungsroman is displayed in novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, or a contemporary novel like *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Among Indian writers the bildungsroman genre exists in *A God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga, and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. Films that are categorised within the bildungsroman genre include the *Harry Potter* series, *Little Women,* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower.* Within Bollywood, the bildungsroman genre (and the coming-of-age genre) is still a new concept, the first introduction of it being Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai* in 2001. Other films such as *3 Idiots (*2009) and *Queen* (2013) can be categorised within the bildungsroman genre as they explore challenges within the protagonist's youth that are later resolved in their adulthood and shape their character and identity as resolved individuals. The genre is popular with postcolonial writers who explore the effects of colonialism and attempts at decolonialism in different sectors:

> The genre fulfills the purpose of the postcolonial writers to scrutinize colonial relationship, resist colonial colonialist worldviews, and decolonize language and culture and to record the impact of colonization on the growing up process (Upadhyay, 2021, 205)

The conventional structure of the bildungsroman genre is the journey of growth of the protagonist, followed by the pattern explained by Okuyade (2011, 144):

> The sensitive, intelligent protagonist leaves home, undergoes stages of conflict and growth, is tested by crisis and love affairs, and then finally finds the best place to use his/her unique talents.

The goal of the bildungsroman genre includes the developmental tasks that the protagonist (specifically in their youth) must experience and achieve (Baruch, 1981, 4). These are outlined by Schwartz and Crenshaw (2011, 49) who quotes Havighurst (1972):

> Achieving mature relations with age mates, achieving socially responsible behavior, achieving a set of values and achieving appropriate social goals.

The magnificent influence the bildungsroman genre has is that it enables audiences to recognise and identify themselves within the narrative, providing comfort, recognition, belonging and a resolution of sorts to audiences through film narratives (Schwartz and Crenshaw, 2011, 47). This is considered an essential characteristic of the bildungsroman genre, which Schwartz and Crenshaw (2011, 47) agree with, "for many readers the journey acts as an impetus for examining their own lives." Okuyade (2011,143) also elaborates on this by stating that the bildungsroman genre:

> Educates while narrating the story of another's education. Interestingly, therefore, both the hero and the reader benefit from this education.

Expanding on this, Wolk (2009, 672) observes that the bildungsroman genre enables audiences to better understand themselves and use these media texts to identify and grow into the individual one would like to be. Bakhtin (1986, 9) provides the alternate perspective that the genre presents the protagonist journeying through their challenges "in the process of becoming" through a reflection of themselves and the historical injustices of the world. Thus, the art of living within the present as a transformed and grown individual from youth to adult is essential to meet the requirements of the bildungsroman. Bakhtin, as stated by Upadhyay (2021, 208) also explores how the protagonist "represents a changing society":

> Bakhtin makes it clear that the conflict which arises between the individual and his society in the Bildungsroman is a manifestation of the need on the part of the individual to change and adjust to changing social conditions (Upadhyay, 2021, 208)

Therefore, the journeying motif represents the transformation of the protagonist and the transformation of the society which reflects the socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic changes of the society (Upadhyay, 2021, 209). In doing so:

> The protagonist has to adapt his individuality with a new social and political circumstance of a world which will not change back (Upadhyay, 2021, 209).

However, the bildungsroman genre is found to privilege the male protagonist, with female protagonists challenging patriarchal norms and discourses (and other socio-political issues) that challenge their will and identity to achieve a state of fulfillment and peace. Felski (1989, 131) argues that the bildungsroman is not necessarily patriarchal in its emphasis on integrative development, but instead celebrates:

> The historical process of women coming to consciousness of female identity as a potentially oppositional force to existing social and cultural values.

The idea of a woman's journey as a "single path to a clear destination" is deplored by Felski (1989) and Fraiman (1993) who understand this process as a means of exploring different and recurring possibilities and challenges. Nunez (2017, 8) states that men find their place in society far more easily than women, and do not have a "culturally conditioned role in society" unlike women who do and must struggle to prove they are more than the gendered stereotypes enforced on them (more than a mother, wife, sister, etc.)

> The female protagonist has a need to challenge society in order to prove she is equal to men. She needs to be active in changing the structure of society in order to destroy her stereotypical role (Nunez, 2017, 8).

This dissertation reads the bildungsroman as a feminist reading, identifying the female bildungsroman as a feminist critique to representing women's experience "with the goal of finding a new definition of female identity" (Lazzaro-Weis, 1990, 19). Nunez (2017, 2) further explains that:

> The female bildungsroman is focused on the all-around growth and self-development of an individual within a defined society. The journey to this self development is initiated through loss or discontent at an early age that separates the character from her home or her family. The process of growing up is long and arduous, particularly for a woman, and can involve repeated clashes between the character's needs and desires and the society in which she is growing up

The female bildungsroman represents women making choices, leading their own lives, breaking away from the patriarchal conditioning and embarks on the journey of self-identity (Nunez, 2017, 6) In doing so, women choose whether to marry or not, whom to marry, choose their careers, choose whether to have children or not, etc. (Nunez, 2017, 7). As a result, the woman becomes an inspirational and aspirational model for audiences to be influenced by (Forss, 2013, 22). *Dear Zindagi* (2016) represents this form of female bildungsroman by portraying a young Indian woman in contemporary Indian society challenging patriarchal gendered norms by making her own decisions, choosing to have multiple relationships out of marriage, choosing not to marry for the sake of marrying, choosing to work as a cinematographer and travel the world, etc. While challenging patriarchal societal norms Kaira also learns about herself and how she fits into contemporary Indian society despite not conforming to the gendered norms (Nunez, 2017, 6). As a result, Kaira becomes an influential role model for younger audiences (female and male) who recognize and identify themselves within the character as both (the audience and Kaira) journey towards identifying their self-identity.

The two main differences between the traditional male narrative of the bildungsroman genre and that of the female bildungsroman is the mentoring process that the female narrative attaches to the female protagonist (Okuyade, 2011, 150), and that the female bildungsroman ends in marriage (Baruch, 1981; Nunez, 2017, 6). The mentoring serves to assess, understand, and guide the female protagonist psychologically for her to reach a sense of maturity and take

control of her journey to self-discovery. Bollywood films have consistently used the theme of marriage as a perfect ending regardless of the feminist and women empowering narratives it may include (as seen in *Mary Kom* (2013)).

While there are four distinct characteristics of the female bildungsroman, one major element includes the portrayal of an independent, working female who is responsible for the wellbeing of her family without the dependence on a man whilst living in a male-dominated society. A sense of independence ignites the theme of a liberated woman, and these women are then categorised as "women who refuse to be compartmentalized into their chiseled-up roles" (Okuyade, 2011, 151).

The four distinct characteristics of the female bildungsroman are not followed by all narratives and act as a guiding blueprint than a fixed paradigm. The first includes the awakening in which the protagonist identifies that their life is restricted by her conditions and displays discontentment and displeasure towards her spatial or psychological geography. Thus, begins the process of questioning themselves about their choices, gender, and social status (Okuyade, 2011, 165). Second is the process of self-awareness through relationships with mentors (a group of women who support and guide the protagonist through their journey of self-discovery within a patriarchal society). The third characteristic includes the exploration of femininity. The protagonist initiates "redefining her identity as she journeys into childhood" (Okuyade, 2011, 165). Lastly, the protagonist successfully attains a level of maturity, with the help of the mentor/s, taking control of her identity and her journey to self-discovery. Felski (1989, 141) explains further that:

> The heroine must become what she once was, recover an identity which is complete and self-contained, rather than contingent, and historically and socially determined.

In this way, the female awakening is circular in nature, rather than the linear nature of the traditional bildungsroman as there is a need for repetition. The significance of self-discovery for women is emphasised to encourage the narrative that women are (and should be) able to make their own choices and define their own lives without fear and judgement (Nunez, 2017, 9). Simultaneously, the audiences recognise and identify themselves within the narrative and protagonist, as mentioned above. *Dear Zindagi* challenges the process of self-awareness through the relationships with mentors who are groups of women because the support

group/person in *Dear Zindagi* is a man rather than with women. Thus, the patriarchal and post-feminist reading/narrative of the film are present.

Okuyade (2011, 141) explains that African novels that use the bildungsroman genre recreate the challenges women face in a patriarchal society and provide insight into the consequences on men within a culture that is created by men. These postcolonial bildungsroman novels in Africa appeared later than it did in India and include Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (Upadhyay, 2021, 212). Similarly, *Dear Zindagi* gives audiences a glimpse of women in a culture created by men and redefined to fit and include the modern culture of men, masking it as women empowerment. In the same way that African writers attempt to "Africanize a western-orientated narrative… to account for African experience" (Okuyade, 2011, 142), *Dear Zindagi* attempts to account for the Indian experience of feminism, the effects of patriarchy, and gender discrimination by providing an Indian narrative that is detached from the western-orientated narrative. It does, however, include the modern effects of globalization on Indian society, but attempts to reinvent the narrative of Indian stories and identities away from the western-orientated ones.

In Bollywood narratives, the bildungsroman is not used independently as the romance genre over dominates the cinematic industry. Films are meant to entertain and leave audiences feeling good about themselves rather than igniting an urge for change and transformation (specifically the older generation of audiences) (Bhugra, 2005, 250). Bollywood films have previously focused on men experiencing the journey of self-discovery instead of women, and while women are not being represented in these films as the lead characters, men are dominant in the experience of the women's self-discovery by means of influence, guidance, and/or reason. In addition to the theme of mental illness, men within Bollywood narratives are not associated with the theme and its discourses as their struggles often include power, social standing, and heroism (Bhugra, 2005, 254-255). Women are associated with the theme of mental illness as a weakness, but it has not been represented accordingly as a medical malady, but rather as a spiritual/horror malady and considered taboo. (Swain, 2020, 941) Thus, there are not many Bollywood bildungsroman films that represent the essence of a woman journeying through her challenges to self-discovery. However, *Dear Zindagi* can be argued to be one (of many new films) to fall under the category of a bildungsroman genre film.

Dear Zindagi follows the characteristics that form the bildungsroman genre: childhood trauma that affects Kaira's ability to trust and form long-lasting relationships, especially of the

romantic kind, the transformation and needing to change which results in her seeking psychological assistance, and the end of her journey to self-discovery in which she emerges healed and more mature. Kaira is an independent young woman who is sensitive to the fear of abandonment, is responsible financially without dependence on a male, and is living within a male-dominated and male-influenced society. Thus, she fits the group of women Okuyade mentions who do not strive to fit into the expected roles patriarchy enforces on them, she challenges it. This results in her questioning herself and her choices, beliefs, and understanding of the world which leaves her feeling detached from others and society. After spiraling into a state of self-crisis and turmoil, Kaira finds herself a mentor in the form of her psychologist, Dr. Jehangir Khan, who guides/shapes her into successfully overcoming her challenges/traumas through her journey of self-discovery. Kaira explores her femininity by overcoming and healing from her childhood traumas that have shaped and influenced her present and emerge as a transformed woman who takes control of her identity and life going forward.

The above discussions have provided a good foundation for analysing how *Dear Zindagi* challenges the societal norms and stereotypical narratives of feminism and themes such as mental illness and mental health, objectification of women, homosexuality, cultural emphasis on women, and stereotypical gender norms. These discussions enabled this research to critically analyse whether this change from Bollywood is serving to provide a moralistic representation of feminism and women empowerment, or if it is essentially providing a newer narrative for patriarchy to resituate the modern career woman in a current context, thus, representing post-feminism. By understanding the ways women are represented in Bollywood films, this research traced the ways feminism has been portrayed and included in Bollywood films and the shifts that have occurred when these films attempt to promote women empowerment. In *Dear Zindagi*, these discussions assist in understanding how feminism and post-feminism is located in the film through the lead character and in relation to the themes of mental illness and mental health. The discussion of the female bildungsroman locates *Dear Zindagi* as a feminist reading of the struggles young Indian women may face in order to discover their self-identity, in relation to navigating life with a mental illness and/or mental health issues whilst simultaneously challenging gendered patriarchal Indian norms. Thus, these discussions advance the research objectives to analyse and suggest that that Bollywood is not supporting women empowerment and feminism honestly as a platform to promote women away from patriarchal norms but is instead reallocating the expectations and requirements of

women within an already patriarchal society to fit the needs of the current and everchanging modern-day society and world, and thus creating a post-feminist discourse and representation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework identified and explored themes located within the film. These included: gender discrimination, the objectification of women's bodies, gender violence, intense exploitation, the powerful assertion of the self, the cultural conditioning within gender, and challenging societal norms that are against women. Theories on feminism, patriarchy and post-feminism were used for this study to further investigate how both these theories are embedded within sub-topics of representation, stereotyping, tradition, and family within Bollywood and Indian society. The specific framework of this study is the modes of stereotyping and representation of specific narratives that Bollywood films make use of to emphasise a norm within society. This not only re-influences society to continue the norm but fuels the power for patriarchal hegemony to continue.

Feminism and Post Feminism

The foundation of feminism is understanding that it is to attain equality and equity for women who are limited and restricted by a powerful patriarchal society and world. This is what theorists such as Judith Butler (1990), Bordo (1993), Briston (1993), and Mann and Huffman (2003) discuss and agree on. What began as an uprising of women against the restrictions of roles and opportunities in legal and social aspects of life led to a far more developed concept and ideology resulting in the three waves of feminism. The main priority of feminism is the finding of, creating, and promoting environments, discourses, and norms that generate equality for both women and men in different spaces, and that does not discriminate against either. Thus, feminism is not the reversal of gender power. This is elaborated on further by Briston (2003, 189):

> I think that feminists, at least those I'm involved with, want to change not only women's situation but also the world. That is, these are women who would like to see a certain dismantling of society and who think that if feminism were victorious, if the oppression of women were completely eliminated, well, society would be shaken to its foundation... So it's a matter not of women taking men's place in this world, but of their being emancipated in such a way as to simultaneously change this world.

Essentially, the concept of feminism is to even out the power dynamics that favour men over women. This statement links to what Judith Butler (1990, vii) discusses that "the radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female "other" suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory."

Gender power/notions are created to exist and appear in negative terms to regulate society through "limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and protection" of those who chose to represent that gender structure, as argued by Michel Foucault (as cited in Butler) (Butler, 1990; 2). This narrative of controlling, protecting, and restricting women of specific choices and opportunities is commonly represented within Bollywood films and is seen in Indian society, and arguably, many societies worldwide (Kandiyoti, 1988.) As discussed previously, the roles and requirements of women, represented within films and in society, include limitations to what they can/cannot do, aspire to be, or the opportunities presented to them. However, gender is not constructed to fit one universal ideology, as the gender construct differs depending on region, culture, and beliefs, among other things, as explored by Butler. This applies to feminism as well; not all women around the world suffer the same discrimination and inequalities as others (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990, 3) further explains:

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently, in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.

Hence, the assumption that gender and feminist identities exist cross-culturally cannot work, and each differs according to the above elements. As analysed by Mann and Huffman (2005; 59), the third wave feminism "was a critique of the 'essentialist woman' of second wave, which they claimed ignored or downplayed the differences among women", particularly women of colour. Second-wave feminists were also a strand of feminism that meticulously engaged itself in sex wars; questioning the concerning presentation of women's sexual bodies in the media (Chenier, 2015, 1). The representation of women's bodies in the media were addressed in a much more collaborative manner. Therefore, third-wave feminism provided opportunities for black feminism which demanded the inclusion of equality of women's rights to be among all

women of colour, not just white women. Alice Walker coined this type of feminism as Womanism (Izgarjan and Markov, 2012, 304).

The media holds the power of implementing patriarchal and ideological messages on criticisms, particularly on feminist criticisms (Fourie, 2001; 383). Therefore, apart from society, the media is powerful and capable of implementing ideologies, such as patriarchal narratives, into society through many of its mediums and platforms. Within cinema, especially Bollywood cinema, the representation of feminism and gender dynamics is a repetition of what already exists in society as a normative discourse (Butler, 1990; 1). In other words, the narratives that cinema portrays are narratives that society is familiar with rather than what is arguably or presumably the reality of an issue. This elaborates on Butler's statement:

> Representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women (due to the) pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all (1990; 1).

Despite being difficult to define due to the various interpretations, post-feminism essentially criticizes feminism while simultaneously "retrieving and reinstating some palatable elements" of feminism which include complete freedom of choice, freedom of identity, sexual freedom, and being financially independent (McRobbie, 2009, 2). Feminism is criticized within post-feminism because freedom of choice is ultimately what gives women the power to do what they want with their bodies, and the objectification of the body by the woman themselves enables a sense of power to be used publicly. Ultimately, this suggests that women are not empowered by feminism and undermines second and third wave feminism (McRobbie, 2006, 59).

> Women are currently being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism (McRobbie, 2009: 49).

This is why many theorists highlight the irrelevance and backlash of feminism according to post-feminism.

Butler (1990) and Gill (2007) state that the most powerful tool a woman can possess to challenge patriarchal supremacy is being a woman. Post feminism emphasizes that femininity is defined by sexuality and that gender is a social construct where specific social interactions and social environments in society determine the behaviour towards the gender (Gill, 2007, 7). Gill (2007. 443) explains that linking socialisation to post feminism readdresses the idea that the media has the influential power to create and circulate specific representations and ideas about femininities and masculinities that fit societal hegemonies. These, in turn, influence the ways audiences understand their realities (Gill, 2007, 443).

Post-feminism focuses on re-establishing "traditional assumptions of truth, knowledge and power" from a patriarchal perspective to include gender dimensions that consists of social and individual relations (Fourie, 2001: 401). In doing so, it rejects the idea of equality between men and women. Therefore, there is much focus on women's bodies. Post-feminism claims that the idea for women to live equally among men with no gender divisions or patriarchal influence is a reality that exists.

Patriarchy is a deeply rooted ideology that is present and represented in the media through literature, films, celebrities, among others. Thus, to assume that gender equality has been achieved through feminism is misleading (Gill, 2007). The patriarchal feminine traits that women are meant to conform to include being "good, passive, delicate, pure, submissive, calm, frail, small and dependent" (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). As discussed above, these patriarchal feminine traits and norms are represented in Bollywood films continuously, with a few films like *Dear Zindagi* challenging the patriarchal gender norms.

Post-feminism also believes in the act of subjectivity where it identifies and critiques Western influence, discourses, and ideas for not being universally accepted or being implemented successfully. This links back to the argument made above, that in the same way that feminism is not constructed to fit one universal ideology, neither is post-feminism. Furthermore, post-feminism criticizes whether, through these discourses and norms, a male-dominated system was created for a patriarchal world (Fourie, 2001, 401). Essentially, the norms and discourses of women are restricted and modified to fit into the patriarchal system to ensure they are not

equal to men. It is because of this that post-feminism often appears to consist of "unfavourable men-centred ideas" that challenge the patriarchal system such as #MenAreTrash (Fourie, 2001, 401). As stated above, post-feminism claims that gender is a social construct created through language and is not biologically inherited (Butler, 1990, 89). What it means to be human (along with aspirations) is represented and reiterated repetitively in the media through films, literature, etc (Fourie, 2001). Thus, the idea that women are not all alike is reinstated, emphasizing the idea that women have access to belong to any group within society (whether it challenges patriarchy or not).

With regards to this study, second-wave feminists who engaged in the sex wars and third-wave feminism that included the diversity of women apply in understanding how Indian women are represented within Bollywood films and Indian society, specifically how women are represented in *Dear Zindagi*. By understanding the shifts in the representation of women's bodies as sexual objects and being the object of the gaze in Bollywood films specifically, this study is able to identify whether Indian women are still represented to fit the male gaze or whether the feminist narratives progressively cater for the female gaze, or whether it is post-feminist. As previously stated, this study examines *Dear Zindagi* as a post-feminist text that adjusts the themes of women empowerment to cater for contemporary patriarchal Indian society. The concept of feminism and post-feminism enable this study to identify whether the progressive narrative of women's empowerment is complicated in Bollywood films like *Dear Zindagi* when it is integrated with other themes such as mental illness and mental health.

Patriarchy

The patriarchal ideology is rooted deeply within societies globally as a notion of male sovereignty that interferes with different spaces and environments of life including the domestic, work/corporate, and individual environments. Its specific target is the restriction and monitoring of women and their agency. It is important to recognise that while societies globally are challenged with patriarchal norms and influences, its impact affects societies differently and is not one universal narrative (Kandiyoti, 1988, 275).

Patriarchy is defined by many theorists including the likes of Einstein (1978), Barret (1980), and Hartman (1981), who provide different perspectives on how the ideology is understood,

implemented, and defined. However, Deniz Kandiyoti (1988, 275) examines patriarchy differently and provides a crucial, and forgotten, understanding of patriarchy:

> The term patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders.

Weber (1947), as cited by Sylvia (1990, 19), defined patriarchy as "a system of government in which men ruled societies through their positions as heads of households." While the definition appears simple, it successfully captures the essential understanding of patriarchy. However, the term has evolved to accommodate more than just affirming power over a household. According to radical feminists, patriarchy is understood as a characteristic of superiority over women by men (Sylvia, 1990, 20). This focused primarily on gender discrimination that resulted from patriarchy against opposite genders/sex instead of the power struggle between hegemonic heteronormative masculine power over and among men (Sylvia, 1990, 20). Dual-system theorists differ in their understanding of patriarchy, in comparison to the radical feminists, who define patriarchy as a system that exists alongside capitalism (and sometimes racism too) (Sylvia, 1990, 20). Sylvia (1990, 20) describes the term as "a system of social structures and practises in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."

The above definitions of patriarchy provide an understanding of how social constructs surrounding gender, taboo, culture, discrimination, and (hegemonic) norms are created, applied to, and exist within societies. This is more evident when analysing the Indian society specifically, which is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system; the influence and implementation of sexism, cultural taboo, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence are reinforced into gender norms and are repetitively reinstalled (through the media and cultural practices) back into society (Kandiyoti, 1988). The ideal image of an Indian woman and the expectations placed on women are duped by the expectations characterized by a male dominant construct, rendering the female gender restricted with the pressure of having a lot to live up to. This links to Kandiyoti's (1988, 275) statement about the power patriarchy has over and within societies and its resulting elements in society:

> 'Patriarchal bargains' exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different context.

This further links to Kandiyoti's (1988) statement on the power patriarchy give to men over women. Patriarchy emphasises the imposition and adherence to laws made by the man upon their wives and daughters. This is common and repetitively seen within Bollywood film narratives and Indian society (Kapur, 2009), and is a discourse that patriarchy is dependent on; the submission of women to succeed in being a powerfully dominant ideology. Kandiyoti (1988, 276) states that:

> Men's responsibility for their wives support... is in fact relatively low. Typically it is the woman who is primarily responsible for her own and her children's upkeep.

Narratives that include the emphasis on men's control over women are often depicted within Bollywood films as a strategic attempt to continue structure and prevent gender norms and discourses from being challenged or changed (Kapur, 2009). Kapur (2009) explored this analysis of Bollywood/Indian arranged marriages and describes the patriarchal emphasis on both genders being prepared for marriage and the emphasis on adhering to the prescribed gender norms expected of them. Kapur (2009, 228) states:

> The 'arranged love marriage' is a match between families of equal social status where sexuality is sublimated in the acquisition of goods and the maintenance of traditional hierarchies; where free market meets the hierarchies of caste, class, and gender; and all contradictions of capital are happily resolved by a voluntary return to patriarchal tradition. Women are prepared for such an arrangement through numerous calls to combine the tradition with the modern, the ethnic with the global.

Indian society has, therefore, been under scrutiny and faces many challenges with regard to gender equality, gender recognition, and gender acceptance, particularly among women. India has recently seen an incredible change in which the law against the recognition, acceptance, and punishment towards those of the LGBTQIA+ community had been lifted; women within the society still face the deeply penetrated challenges of patriarchy within the private, public, and mediated spheres.

There are six structures of patriarchy, as explored by Sylvia (1990,20), that assist in understanding the variations of gender relations in westernized societies. Firstly, the patriarchal

mode of production includes women's household labour seized by their husbands or male authority. Secondly, patriarchal relations in paid work entail the exclusion of women from "better forms of work and segregate them into the worst jobs which are deemed less skilled" (Sylvia, 1990, 21). Thirdly, patriarchal relations of the state include the discussions and reality of the capitalist and racist nature of the state. The fourth includes male violence which is consistently experienced by women through men. Fifth, the patriarchal relations in sexuality emphasise heterosexuality and the "sexual double standard" (1990, 21). Lastly, patriarchal relations in cultural institutions are explained as being "significant for the generation of a variety of gender differentiated forms of subjectivity" (1990, 21).

A set of institutions, such as religions, education, the media, etc, are responsible for the construction of representations of women that are made to align with the patriarchal gaze in various settings and environments (Sylvia, 1990, 21). The abovementioned tie into what Bollywood narratives, including *Dear Zindagi*, continuously portray and represent, with each element represented either independently as a main theme, or elements interconnecting with each other, as seen with more of the newer films. In conclusion, despite feminist attempts to challenge and re-direct the empowerment of women to be detached from patriarchy, it continues to struggle to maintain itself in a significantly patriarchal society. This is, essentially, what this study aims to analyse in *Dear Zindagi* to suggest that the film is actually post-feminist instead of being a women-empowering film that successfully challenges and eliminates (or atleast changes) discriminatory and restricting patriarchal discourses.

Mental Illness

Discourses of mental illnesses, mental health, and therapy have been represented as alienated conditions and concepts instead of being treated just as important as physical health matters, which has, thus, resulted in a stigmatized approach (Furedi (2004), Watson (2003), Corrigan (2004) and Anglin, Link and Phelan (2006)). The definition of stigma is well rounded as theorists have redefined the term over many years, providing a collective understanding of its purpose and depth (Anglin, Link and Phelan, 2006). Due to the global stigma attached to mental illnesses, societal judgement, and cultural judgement, mental illness has been considered a controversial discussion, let alone experience (Furedi, 2004). Goffman (1963, 3) defines stigma as:

> An attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that reduces the bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.

This definition successfully explains the concept of the stigma of the self; an individual who is challenged by a mental illness through stigma induced by societal norms. Corrigan (2004, 616) explains that stigma is categorised into "self-stigma", which is described as a reaction to what "members of a stigmatized group may do to themselves if they internalize the public stigma", and "public stigma" which is described as what a "naive public does to the stigmatized group when they endorse the prejudice about that group". Discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices affect the well-being of individuals and their ability to lead successful lives socially and in work environments/family environments. This is seen in *Dear Zindagi* when Kaira's friend refers to therapy as a place for crazy people to go to (Shinde, 2016, 6), and when Kaira confronts her parents and calls them out for thinking she is crazy for seeing a psychologist (Shinde, 2016, 49).

Behaviours and attitudes towards individuals with mental illness and mental health issues affect how these persons are integrated into society, which in return affects their opportunities, wellbeing, and self-esteem. Similarly, Crocker, et.al (1998, 505) explores the concept that:

> Stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context.

This argument explains the reason for public stigmatization through the connection between mental illnesses and criminal justice; individuals with mental illnesses were first met by the police force before being treated by health practitioners, thus, heightening the fear towards these individuals (Corrigan, 2004, 616). Inappropriate/condescending jargon used to describe a mental illness or individuals with mental illnesses or mental health issues continues to feed the stigma on different levels, the discourse of the health problem, the bearer of the mental illness, or the public opinion/societal inclusion about either (Ganesh, 2011). Included in the jargon are words such as "dangerous, dirty, cold, worthless, and unpredictable" and words such as "counselling, therapy, and psychologist", framing the severity of this situation (Phelan, et.al, 2000, 189; Furedi, 2004, 16). Social distancing, taunting, mocking, rejection, and moral fear

are behaviours that increase the stigma attached to mental illness and individuals with mental illnesses, and these, consequently, become internalized by the bearer as self-stigma.

> Living in a culture steeped in stigmatizing images, persons with mental illness may accept these notions and suffer diminished self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence in one's future (Corrigan, 2004, 618).

The process of internalizing public/societal stigma into the self reflects the development and progression of an individual's self-esteem and emotional growth. Corrigan (2004, 618) explains that these negative effects of self-prejudice affect one's view and belief of self-worth and result in low self-esteem that affects the personal and public spaces of an individual's life. As studies show (Sirey, Bruce, Alexopoulos, Perlick, Raue, et al. 2001) individuals with a mental illness will rather behave in ways that are regarded as normal in society to avoid being stigmatized as a mentally ill person which, in turn, does not harm their self-esteem and self-worth. Feelings of powerlessness and helplessness resonate deeply throughout the internalization of self-stigma (Furedi, 2004, 8). Studies have also shown that individuals would prefer not to attain treatment/therapy for fear of being stigmatized and shamed (Furedi, 2004).

> Hence, people avoid being labelled mentally ill, thereby escaping the negative statements that lessen self-esteem and self-efficacy (Corrigan, 2004, 618).

However, the normalization and humanization of mental illness (its representation, diagnosis, and acceptance) have progressed over recent years more so than in the past as emotionalism had been embedded into society as a means of coping with unpleasant and negative emotions on a day-to-day basis (Furedi, 2004). With changing cultural values and societal norms that occur gradually over time, and that sometimes merge with traditional norms, therapeutic culture has been redefined as a cultural force of blurred private and public emotions and thoughts that create a powerful affirmation for emotionalism (Furedi, 2004, 17). Emotionalism is:

> The changing form of language communicates new cultural attitudes and expectations. In particular, the language expresses what one study on the rise of the 'myth of self-esteem' has characterised as the 'current ascendancy of feelings and wellbeing in the culture as a whole' (Furedi, 2003, 4).

It is considered a significant development in western culture, especially through its representation within popular culture. The normalization of traumatic emotions, low self-esteem, and sensitivity is now regarded as an invisible disease that affects people's ability to lead successful or fulfilled lives (Furedi, 2004, 5). People are losing their ability to cope with feelings of isolation, disappointment, and failure (Furedi, 2004; Corrigan, 2004). Furedi (2004) argues that mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related illnesses, have become radically new normalities among people, especially prone to children. People have become emotionally vulnerable to the extent that mental illness has, figuratively, been merged into the inability or difficulty to cope emotionally with challenges or experiences. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira finds everyday challenges difficult to cope with and navigate, and this includes her maintaining relationships, feeling vulnerable, managing loss, other people's opinions, among others. In other words, the therapeutic culture encourages the understanding of traumatic experiences and overwhelming emotions through mental health terms (Ganesh, 2011). In this way, the human condition is defined differently into what is presented as damaging to people's emotions, in a quest for "emotional survival" due to feelings of powerlessness and helplessness (Furedi, 2004, 7).

> The conviction that people cannot emotionally cope with a growing range of encounters, experiences and relationships informs the way that therapeutic culture makes sense of the human condition (Furedi, 2004, 5).

Therapy has progressed by providing tools and advice on how to manage modern day stresses and emotionally challenging experiences, not only serving as a medium for mental illness and mental health treatment (Furedi, 2003, 8). Contemporary society believes that emotional problems ought to be handled individually, and, hence, therapeutic culture intervenes in providing counselling to individuals for "unexpected, difficult, challenging or unpleasant" experiences by assuming the role of life experts (Furedi, 2004, 9). This does differ according to different cultural institutions and different societies; Phillip Rieff (as cited by Furedi) explains a universal merge of understanding and connectivity with a framework of therapy and counselling and the adaptation of local cultures and societal influences (Furedi, 2004, 17). Essentially, therapy becomes a culture in and of itself.

> The authority of counselling rests on its ability to give meaning to experiences in a world strongly wedded to a therapeutic ethos. According to Nolan, this authority is based on a new priestly class, mainly psychiatrists and psychologists 'who can understand and can decipher the emotivist language emanating from the authoritative self' (Furedi, 2004, 10).

This is represented in films (*My Name Is Khan* (2010); *Silver Linings Playbook*, (2012); *Barfi!* (2012); *Wonder*, (2017)) often where the therapist is seen to give life advice on everyday experiences or issues and how to cope with daily emotional experiences, rather than regarding mental illness/health issues. A popular narrative used within the media is "delayed grief", the progression of traumatic experiences that occurred at a young age, unaddressed and carried into adulthood with severe symptoms that have manifested because of the trauma (Furedi, 2004, 14). It aimed (and still aims) at creating a unified connection with audiences around the common experience of vulnerability. This is represented in *Dear Zindagi* as Kaira experiences trauma when she is a child and carries that trauma into her adult life, thus struggling to maintain relationships, experience being vulnerable and managing to cope with everyday experiences.

The above discussions have provided a good foundation for understanding how feminism, patriarchy, and mental illness are used as themes within *Dear Zindagi* and how each concept is used individually and collectively to represent patriarchal narratives of women within Bollywood films. These discussions enabled the research to critically analyse the feminist and patriarchal narratives of women empowerment, mental illness, and gender within *Dear Zindagi* by providing insight into how these concepts exist in Indian society, especially because feminism, patriarchy, and gender are not constructed to fit one universal ideology. The discussions in the theoretical framework assist the literature review by enabling this research to critically analyse whether the changes in Bollywood provide a moralistic representation of feminism and mental illness, or whether it essentially provides a modern narrative to resituate the modern career woman in a present-day context. By identifying how patriarchal narratives are used in Bollywood films it is easier to understand the influential power Bollywood has in shaping Indian societal norms. Thus, the continuation of patriarchal norms in Indian society is due to hegemonic patriarchal norms being strengthened by their reiteration in Bollywood films. Therefore, feminism struggles to maintain itself in a significantly patriarchal system, despite its attempts to challenge and redirect women's empowerment to be detached from patriarchy. In conclusion, this research stands to believe that Bollywood, as a platform that can challenge

patriarchal norms and has influential power, does not support feminism and women empowerment honourably and, instead, reallocates the expectations of an ideal Indian woman within an already patriarchal society to fit the needs of the current and everchanging modern day society and world.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were chosen to conduct this research as it was best suited to analyse and understand the narrative of the film *Dear Zindagi*. As explained by Shoshanna Sofaer (2002):

> (Qualitative research methods) are consistent with the developments in the social and policy sciences as large, reflecting the need for more in-depth understanding of naturalistic settings, the importance of understanding context, and the complexity of implementing social change.

Qualitative research methods emphasise the importance of analysing a text in its natural setting, as mentioned above. It invites open-ended questions to be asked that allow for comprehensive data collection and provides an in-depth analysis of a text that result in critical answers being reached. Qualitative research methods allow for a personal analysis of human experience, and were, thus, more suited for this research as a personal analysis of the film was conducted. This enabled me to work extremely closely with the media text by conducting a critical analysis of the narrative of the film and resulting in the identification and categorisation of themes. These themes have been explored and unpacked in the chapters attached to the methodology and have provided an extensive understanding of patriarchy within a modern Indian societal context (and global), feminism within Bollywood and Indian society, and how *Dear Zindagi* promotes patriarchy disguised as modern feminism. Additionally, understanding the structure of the bildungsroman genre enabled this research to explore feminist, patriarchal, and mental health/illness discourses in more depth, prompting a deeper understanding of the way these themes are used within Bollywood films and in *Dear Zindagi* to promote modern patriarchy, achieve universalism and locate itself within a local and diasporic setting.

Data Collection

The film titled *Dear Zindagi* was specifically chosen for this study (based on prior viewing upon its release in 2016) for its narratives and discourses on patriarchy, feminism, and mental health. The film was accessed through a purchase of a DVD copy, which was then transferred to the laptop in use for easier access. The themes identified within the film were categorised

and analysed through the discourses found within the film, which include mental health, feminism, and patriarchy. A narrative analysis of the film was conducted which enabled the themes of this research to be identified and critically analysed. It also provided substantial information on whether the film represents feminism as a holistic discourse, or whether it represented feminism from a (modern) patriarchal perspective.

By analysing the film script through discourse analysis, certain tropes emerged which aided in the identifying of specific discourses used within the film. These include feminist tropes, patriarchal tropes, discussions, and the representation of mental health and mental health professions. It further enabled a deeper study of characters within the film that were attached to these tropes in a variety of ways, and therefore, enabled this research to identify feminism and mental illness and mental health as discourses that are re-fitted into a modern Indian patriarchal context.

By analysing the narrative of the film, the abovementioned tropes were analysed in more depth and a deeper understanding of the emotional connection the film carries to its audience by influencing and promoting feminism and mental health representations were explored. The perusal of the songs in *Dear Zindagi* enabled a critical analysis of how music and lyrics are used to enhance emotion and a setting within the film through a character. It also provided the ability to understand the aided effect it had on the script as a whole, using specific discourses and representations to emphasise patriarchal narratives, feminist narratives, and strong emotive language.

Data Analysis

This study made use of discourse analysis and narrative analysis. Gill (2009, 531) explains that discourse analysis is a form of a comprehensive analysis of "language-in-use" in its different media forms. This method of research provides the critical approach of analysis needed to analyse the film and all its components (script, audio, and visual elements) for this research to identify reoccurring themes within these categories. The main characteristic of critical media analysis is the emphasis on meaning and the ways it is mobilised to maintain dominant narratives. Gill (2009, 351) explains that this approach is feminist because it seeks to "understand how cultural constructions... are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression". This ties into what this research aimed to achieve as well by analysing a film

that attempted to challenge patriarchal, social, and political injustices against women, and this research analyses whether the film masked or inverted these challenges.

According to Gee (1991), Riessman (1993), Kirkman (1997), and Bamberg (2012), narrative analysis is a research method that focuses on how an individual (or individuals) present themselves and their identity both from a place of lived experience and based on how their lives and experiences are constructed (Burck, 2005, 252). Bamberg (2012, 2) states that narrative analysis consists of two frameworks; the first is "where narratives are the object of study" and "where narratives are the tools to explore something else, typically of human memory or experience". In simple terms. narrative analysis systematically explores the plot of a story and makes sense of the experiences that occur within the story (Bamberg, 2012, 4)

In order to understand narrative as a genre, it is important to locate the narrative in the forms of storytelling over centuries (communal/tribal education), fables, folk tales and folk songs, and fiction (literature and novels) (Bamberg, 2012, 6). Over time, audiences became more interested in learning about biographies of events and people, romantic novels, histories, etc, and became invested in understanding these narratives from a self-reflective perspective to better understand the self (Bamberg, 2012, 6). The lead character in novels or other forms of literature is noted to undergo challenges and experiences that affect their personal growth. As a result, audiences are able to experience the journey of the protagonist as they read/view it, whilst also identifying themselves within the text with themes that resonate with them, prompting their own experience towards self-growth and self-identity (Burck, 2005; Bamberg, 2012).

> En route from the epic via the novel to the biography, narrative has emerged as a new but central formatting device for the organization of self and (modern) identity (Burck, 2005, 252).

Audiences engage in a cycle of identifying their own means for change by inviting and allowing the modern self to receive change and transition from the challenges one experiences to the fulfilled successful end goal that promises self-growth (Bamberg, 2012, 7).

> Grounding 'the problem' in some previous events, often reaching back into childhood experiences, and establishing a narrative connection that has led to the problem, not

> only is said to enhance self-reflection but is regarded the first step in a healing exercise that is supposed to free the narrator of 'the problem' and the suffering it causes (Burck, 2005, 252).

Riessman (1993, 2-4) explains that there are three ways in which narrative analysis can be approached, however, it depends on the researcher which type of narrative analysis is chosen which affects how the text is analysed. The first includes retelling and examining the character's story and experiences from a personal perspective, as if it were their own story and experience (Burck, 2005, 252). The second includes identifying prominent themes within the interview and analyzing their purpose (Burck, 2005, 252). The third consists of retelling and retransferring the story and experience to categorise themes for a better analysis of the experience (Gee, 1991).

> Because a narrative analysis examines how people construct their self-accounts, it seemed particularly useful for scrutinizing how individuals whose experiences are embedded in different languages give an account of themselves; in particular, whether and how they manage their different senses of self. (Burck, 2005, 252)

This research method works best for this study because it enables me to view the text as a retelling of experiences that are relatable and current in contemporary Indian society and globally and enables me to categorize the prominent themes identified in the film to better understand whether the themes of mental illness and mental health complicate the progressive narrative of women empowerment by situating the young Indian woman in a modern patriarchal Indian society. Thus, suggesting that Dear Zindagi can be read as a post-feminist text. The narrative analysis also explores the journeying motif of the protagonist, fitting in with the structure of the female bildungsroman of a Bollywood film. Simply put, it is a research method that enables an individual to connect with the data being analysed with a creative, critical, and personal approach.

Themes within the film

The film directly discusses patriarchal and feminist themes, as well as discourses on mental health and the representation of both mental health and the modern Indian (feminist) woman. Through the feminist narratives and mental health narratives, there is a strong emotive

connection with audiences that the film successfully managed to provide by selling its narrative in a way that audiences locally and globally can recognise and identify themselves within. This is powerful in that the film can influence societies and audiences on feminist narratives, mental health narratives, and modern patriarchal narratives. The chapters attached below explore these four themes in-depth and provide examples from the film to support the arguments being made.

Chapter Three:

Mental illness as a narrative strategy in *Dear Zindagi*

This chapter includes discussions on mental illness being used as a narrative strategy to locate narratives of feminism, patriarchy, and universal consciousness (the idea that Bollywood is using mental illness as an interventionist strategy to represent and relate to a universal audience). Firstly, this chapter discusses the placement of mental illness and mental health within Bollywood films and discusses how it was used in comparison to *Dear Zindagi* to challenge the ways the film is/is not different when promoting feminism and whether it does so. Secondly, this chapter analyses how Bollywood uses mental illness and/or mental health as a narrative tool to discuss themes of healthcare, class, feminism, urbanism (among many other themes), and the way that *Dear Zindagi* represents and/or sells an ideology of mental illness and mental health that is understood globally. This chapter further identifies the main character, Kaira, as an intervention towards linking mental illness and mental health and the larger narratives of feminism and class to the film and, eventually, discusses the character as a universal embodiment of Bollywood to create relativity and sell itself universally.

Mental illness

Mental illness has been used extensively as a trope within Bollywood films to represent and discuss specific discourses such as feminist interventions, hegemonic masculinity, and representations of class, struggle, and empathy, among others. It enables characters within a film to experience a particular reform (whether it is of the self, romantic interest, family responsibility, etc) and for audiences to emotionally invest and locate themselves within that context. Bollywood narratives are known for successfully achieving emotional connectivity and audience investment and manage to successfully deepen their effect on its society as well (Chatterji, 2018). The Bollywood film *Black* (2005), *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010), *Barfi!* (2012) and *Heroine* (2012), in which real-life scenarios of living with a mental illness/s are represented, achieve emotional connectivity with their audiences while simultaneously influencing society. Representations of mental illness and mental health are gendered, with Bollywood associating mental illness and mental health with female characters who struggle to lead a successful life, and who are dependent on men to assist them through their struggles. Thus, mental illness and mental health are feminised, while male characters are represented

with the heroism/saviour theme. It further emphasises female submissiveness and masculine dominancy within society, using mental illness as the tool to demonstrate and romanticise that gender norm. In this way, Bollywood falls back onto gendered stereotypes and gender roles that exist within patriarchal Indian society and, until recently, has not disrupted this patriarchal representation without stigma and misinformation. This means that Bollywood's representation of gender stereotypes and gender roles are often associated with narratives of stigma and misinformation alongside the theme of mental illness. *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010) successfully represents the dependency of women (who have mental health issues) on men to live a 'normal life', be it in their personal private lives or within their careers. It further reiterates the argument that mental illness is more prone to affect women, and the need for women to be 'saved' or cured by a man who can overcome such an issue more successfully than a woman. It is also important to highlight the ways sexism plays a part in shaping mental illnesses, mental health, and gender. Many mental illnesses are undiagnosed, untreated, or overlooked in women because mental illnesses tend to present women as quiet and reserved, which is how women are supposed to be per patriarchal norms of femininity. This sexism is applied to men as well, which mental illnesses are often undiagnosed or untreated in men because these mental illnesses tend to present themselves more explosively and involve more narcissistic behaviours, which is how men should be as per patriarchal norms. This dissertation does take into account the important nuances in relation to patriarchy's corrosive power to both men and women, where the effects of patriarchy affect are detrimental to a masculinized life. However, for the purpose of this research the focus is specifically on patriarchy's corrosive power to women.

This gendered and sexist representation exists in Hollywood too; films such as Soderbergh's film *Unsane* (2018) reiterate the message that women are constantly silenced and disbelieved, especially when it comes to their mental illness. Parkinson (2018) explores how the 1944 film *Gaslight* portrays the story of a husband manipulating his wife into believing that she is insane. *Gaslight* was well ahead of its time, representing the sexist and patriarchal nature that women with mental illnesses (and mental illness itself) are treated with. While there are still many films that choose to continue depicting women with mental illness by using the "sexist idea of the mad, wild woman", other films have taken a more sympathetic approach (Parkinson, 2018). The reality of living in the modern world with a mental health issue as a woman is carefully structured to connect to audiences who find themselves relating their struggles to the characters and narrative of the film. In this way, global trends in the representation of mental illness and

mental health have affected Bollywood's representation of mental illness and mental health. There has been an increase in public awareness of mental illness and women as celebrities have begun speaking out about mental illnesses more often, and "the tone, purpose and dynamics of films about mental health have slowly shifted" (Parkinson, 2018). There has been an increase in films that depict two characters with mental illnesses falling in love; *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2014), and Bollywood's *Barfi!* (2012) and *Dil Bechara* (2020). There has also been an increase in films that are not based on mental illness as a central theme but have side characters who have some mental illness/issue.

Apart from celebrity status and influence from cinematic platforms, welfare campaigns on digital media platforms have been able to create and promote awareness of mental illness and mental health problems. This provides insight and a better understanding of the severity of mental illness and mental health on individuals, tapping into the diagnosis and medical perspective process, to being made aware of the social implications of having a mental illness or mental health issues and the societal judgments and stigma attached to it. These campaigns on digital platforms also serve to invite individuals with mental illnesses and mental health issues to find their voices and share/interact with others to educate, inspire, and empower others. While discourses of acceptance and normality of mental illnesses and mental health issues remain an ongoing process, narratives that normalise, humanise, and destigmatise mental illness, mental health issues, and the individuals who have such issues exist and continue to be used by global media. Bollywood refreshing its previous narratives and representations of mental illness, mental health issues, stigma, and gender discrimination is paramount to creating beneficial awareness and empowerment towards mental illness, mental health issues, and these specific individuals.

Dear Zindagi's narrative is similarly structured to previous narratives that represent mental illness and mental health through a female character. Simplistically it is the story of a young modern Indian woman experiencing and struggling through a phase of her life with a mental health issue and eventually seeks help from a therapist who is a male character. *Dear Zindagi* is a romance and drama genre film that represents and discusses mental health issues, mental illness, and modern life in an empowering manner that aims to uplift women, rather than play out traditional Bollywood narratives of mental illness/mental health and female subjugation.

The casting of actors to play the role of the therapist is curious, as Shah Rukh Khan[7] is a well-established actor in the Bollywood cinematic industry and his placement reiterates the narratology of Bollywood traditions. Furthermore, Shah Rukh Khan's placement in *Dear Zindagi* embodies the role of a narrator, literally and figuratively, of patriarchal society, societal expectations, and feminism. As a therapist, he literally narrates different experiences and ways of thinking about mental illness and mental health for his patient (Kaira) by integrating thoughts on feminism and women empowerment to assist in her betterment. Figuratively, Shah Rukh Khan (and his character) embody the continuous shifts of societal discourses (feminism and patriarchy), other societal expectations, and movements that occur within Indian society. This simultaneously also represents the narrative that *Dear Zindagi* is attempting to achieve. Thus, Shah Rukh Khan covers a broad range of modes of expression by being cast as the therapist in *Dear Zindagi*, alongside being cast for his celebrity status. In creating a social consciousness toward the awareness of mental illness and mental health, the casting of the lead character, played by Alia Bhatt, is influential in promoting the narrative of the film. Alia Bhatt had previously aligned herself with *Vogue India* and their campaign for women empowerment, where she acted in a video that narrated a girl having car issues at night and having a group of men assist her (Vogue, 2010). The video presents a realistic and common scenario for men to take advantage of a woman, which is shown in the way Alia Bhatt is dressed, how late she is driving home by herself and the way she tries to jumpstart her car and ask for help, etc. It is important to note that these initiatives and videos are not produced by Bollywood cinema, but by leading brands and smaller production groups that take on female empowerment campaigns. However, it still has an influence on the celebrity image and the works they do, in this case, Alia Bhatt is the lead actress in a film that attempts to challenge patriarchal and stigmatised narratives of mental illness, mental health, femininity, and sexism.

The theme of mental illness, being read through the bildungsroman genre, can be seen as a metaphor for journeying. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira journeying back to Goa (homeland) whilst her mental health is in turmoil and ultimately seeking therapy and wellness in Goa can

[7] Shah Rukh Khan is an Indian actor, film producer and entrepreneur who is best known as SRK (initialism), King Khan and The King of Romance in the Bollywood industry. He made his debut film in 1992 titled *Deewana* (Crazy). Shah Rukh Khan works predominantly in Hindi cinema and has a powerful following in India and from the Indian diaspora. He has acted in over 80 films, his most famous film being *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). His signature pose is slowly lifting both arms and raising it in an upward motion awaiting an embrace. Shah Rukh Khan is one of the most awarded actors, having won 21 awards (TimesOfIndia, 2022).

symbolise this metaphor. Her journey home also signifies her healing of family trauma. The film cleverly presents an Indian woman who is empowered and continues to be empowered by challenging hegemonic norms of masculinity, femininity, beauty standards, homosexuality, mental illness, mental health stigma, and gender discrimination. The idea of the 'feminist challenge' is not presented in activist mode, but rather as a subtle correction; meaning the film, in locating itself as modern, presents the idea of the modern woman as a nonchalant everyday experience. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira is subtly correcting her peers and boyfriend on her rights in different situations. This labour is a strong indication of the work women continue to do, regardless of how modern they are. *Dear Zindagi's* representation of mental illness is not overt, as a result, its misunderstandings are more complex in terms of its representational ability. While the film does not state the term/category of mental illness distinctly, there are narrative and visual cues that suggest Kaira is depressed and has abandonment trauma. Kaira's decision to see a therapist is initially her attempt to cure her insomnia, which later progresses into unpacking her emotional trauma and mental state at the time (Shinde, 2016, 23-26). The film unpacks Kaira seeking help to lead a healthier and healed life through therapy, but the idea of her having a mental illness/mental health issue surfaces in a scene when Kaira explores why she does not feel safe being in a romantic relationship; her abandonment trauma surfaces and hints towards a state of depression (Shinde, 2016, 43). Kaira's mental illness and the state of her mental health is not a debilitating condition, rather it affects her ability to cope with life on multiple levels; career environment and opportunities, romantic experiences, and personal experiences. In this way, the gradations of mental illness in its representation in *Dear Zindagi* is seen clearly when compared to some Bollywood films (explored below), by consciously choosing to include a representation of mental illness, mental health, and therapy that enhances an individual's life through common individual experiences.

Mental illness is represented within films through different categories which shape how the film perceives and depicts that character and mental illness/mental health issue. Three of the main categories of representing mental illness and mental health in Bollywood films include mental illness as a punishment, as a comic interlude, and lastly as an object of pity and dependence (Sawhney, 2016). This results in films misrepresenting mental illness due to the intense dramatisation of their narratives. Despite the arguable shifts in modernising the representation of mental illness and mental health to fit the current times, these three categories of representing mental illness and mental health are commonly used within Bollywood films.

The following paragraphs discuss the three categories concerning a select few Bollywood films, and analyses whether *Dear Zindagi* follows the same categorisation, or whether the representation of mental illness and mental health plays out differently.

Mental illness as a punishment

Mental illness and mental health are important issues that continue to be deeply misunderstood in Indian society due to cultural/religious and societal influences. This misunderstanding, due to misrepresentation, has also affected the awareness of mental illness and mental health issues in the public and the lack of sensitisation has affected society's ability to recognise its importance and dissociate itself from myth and stigma. Patriarchal societal influences, as well as Indian cultural influences, have convinced the majority of Indian society that mental illness is directly linked to wrongdoings or sins (emphasis on the belief of reincarnation and its effects on the next life). Interestingly, parents are held accountable for their children's mental illness based on whether they were undutiful or had committed wrongdoings (Sawhney, 2016). This form of blame is explored in many Bollywood films including *Koi Mil Gaya* (2003), *Black* (2005), and *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) in which, on the introduction of the mental illness by the character, the parents are either blamed by others to have committed some wrongdoing for their child to have the mental illness, the parent blames themselves or one parent blames the other for their child's condition. Sawhney (2016, 1) elaborates by explaining how disabilities are misunderstood and misrepresented in Indian society, which he states:

> Unfortunately, the traditional concept of "disability and karma" where disability is often perceived as a punishment for misdeeds in the past lives or crimes committed by the parents, continues to be a common belief amongst not only the less educated, but also well-educated urban dwellers.

Additionally, Sawhney (2016) elaborates on ways in which punishment is represented within Bollywood films and the different degrees it has through disabilities. Exploring this representation enables a better understanding of how film narratives use mental disabilities as an extension to explore punishment through health. The prevalence of representing punishment alongside the theme of mental illness and mental health has "been the most popular representation of disability in our films as well" (Sawhney, 2016, 2). Cultural and societal

influences increase the stigmatic discourses of mental illness and mental health, emphasising imperfection and judgement on individuals with mental illnesses and/or mental health issues. Bollywood films, being inspired by socio-cultural and socio-political norms, reiterate the norms and discourses through film narratives that fuel the stigmatic and misinformed discourses of mental illness and mental health (Beachum, 2010).

To represent a cause of punishment in the form of mental illness or mental health issues, Bollywood films portray extremities of lust and unfaithfulness, greed for fame and money, chasing lavish lifestyles, and extreme arrogance among characters within a narrative (Sawhney, 2016). Additionally, an extreme representation of punishment (particularly towards disability) is to emphasise it being worse than death. Despite this theme not being commonly represented through the lens of mental health and the possible disabilities associated with mental illnesses (although it does exist), the representation is used strongly in a few Bollywood films (for example, *Haider* (2014)) to represent the severity of being limited by a physical and/or mental illness (Sawhney, 2016). *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010) explored mental illness (specifically depression and suicide) between two strangers and romanticised the concept of death as a means of escape (cure) from depression. *Barfi!* (2012) on the other hand explored autism through the narrative of leverage, in which the child's father in the film attempts to stage his daughter's death to remove her name from the last will and testament as the elder in the family. Extending on Sawhney's (2016) argument on disability and punishment, various Bollywood film narratives and representations dramatize the severity of the condition of a mental illness and/or mental health issue without presenting accurate information or understanding of the mental illness and/or mental health issue and possible treatments. This representation promotes the continuation of stigmatic narratives of individuals who have a mental illness or a mental health issue, especially when comparing these individuals to others who do not have a mental illness or mental health issue. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira moving from the independent city life in Mumbai to her parent's home in Goa appears as a punishment where it feels like she is forced to give up on her dreams and face her traumas at their source. Her mental health deteriorates as she spends more time around her family who pressure her on marriage, her lifestyle, and embodying the characteristics and expectations of a proper Indian woman. This is shown in her outburst towards her parents for neglecting her as a child (Shinde, 2016, 48-49). Whilst Kaira does not attempt suicide or consider death as an escape from her deteriorating mental health, death is associated with Kaira's trauma where her grandparents had passed on and she was forced to live with her parents again after being separated from them for years. This appears as

a punishment for Kaira who does not get along with her parents. Kaira's failed relationship with Raghuvendra also appears as a punishment when he confronts her for rejecting him, and Kaira's emotional response reveals the depressive and anxious state that she is struggling with.

Disability as a comic interlude

The repetitive stereotypical representation of mental illness and therapy enabled film narratives to use mental illness as a trope in any way they wanted to; usually portraying people with mental illnesses as violent and insane and meant to be avoided. Its lack of understanding and acceptance as a mental illness increased the stigmatised narratives that surround it, which increases the fear of having or being associated with someone who has a mental illness and is usually confronted with fear and rejection (Phelan et.al, 2000). The shift and change in representing mental illnesses more accurately and sympathetically came with the acknowledgement that these individuals are just as important in society and are a huge part of the ways people live and experience life. Parkinson's (2018) article in the *Mail & Guardian* titled 'Unsane: how film's portrayal of mental illness is (slowly) improving', emphasises that:

> Characters with mental illness are no longer necessarily seen as "uglifying" roles, but as normal people to be played in disparate ways.

Over time, the representation of mental illness and mental health changed in Bollywood films. Some representations included displaying individuals with a mental illness and/or mental health issue as amusing, undeveloped individuals who were displaced in society and needed institutional and medical help to lead a normal life. *Krazzy 4* (2008) ridiculed the severity of persons with mental illnesses and mental health issues and represented the concept of othering and displacement of these individuals in society by exploring how these individuals with mental illnesses and mental health issues are considered not normal (by behaviour and capabilities) to be integrated into society. Other representations focused on the seriousness of mental illness and mental health issues on individuals and society, attempting to represent a form of reality that individuals with mental illnesses and/or mental health issues experience. *My Name Is Khan* (2010) and *Barfi!* (2012) addressed and represented the seriousness of autism which provided an (almost) accurate insight into understanding the mental illness, the mental health issues it presents to the individual, the effects on family and friends, societal placement,

and acceptance, etc. *My Name Is Khan* (2010) and *Barfi!* (2012), when compared to *Krazzy 4* (2008), represents the attempt of progressive gradations of representation of mental illness and mental health issues that are represented in Bollywood films.

Representing mental illness and mental health issues through a comedic narrative challenges the progressive nature of correctly representing inaccurate and insensitive discourses and representations of mental illness and mental health in Bollywood films. This is discussed by Shoma Chatterji (2018) who elaborates on how, for the sake of the film narrative, the importance of representing mental illness properly is sacrificed:

> Bollywood films dealing with mental illness are generously sprinkled with ignorance about mental illness, abuse of mental illness and even, failure to recognize mental illness when it happens in any character in a given film and suggest an absurd.

Madness, in association with mental illness, takes on a form of resistance and challenges hegemonic societal influences that restrict its representation and understanding. Offering a representation of mental illness that focuses on the inclusivity and empowerment of individuals with mental illness in a society that is, otherwise, suffocating with patriarchal hegemonic discourses of stigma and sexism invites a change toward a social justice agenda (Costa, et.al. 2012, 86-87). Identifying and understanding the challenge and intent is to see madness as resistance. The narratives of madness reclaim the value of subjectivities; to empower, humanise/normalise, and embrace mental illness and women with mental illnesses. To understand the resistance against patriarchal discourses, norms, and representations of women and mental illness is to also consider the relations and positions of power of modern society and the unwillingness to conform to discriminatory, sexist, and/or stigmatised norms/representations (Callen, 2012, 122). In this way, *Dear Zindagi* acts as a platform of storytelling to promote and/or explore progressive change towards the representation of mental illness/mental health, therapy, women empowerment, and women with mental illnesses.

Bollywood films have followed a similar transition when depicting mental illness and mental health, especially using the patriarchal and sexist approach to representing women with mental illnesses being wild and insane. *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* (2007) portrayed a woman with a personality disorder who was said to be possessed by a ghost that haunted the mansion in Rajasthan. The treatment of a woman with a multiple personality disorder was treated with ridiculed laughter,

insensitive jokes by the lead male character, and psychiatrists who appeared to be God-like men able to treat her. With audiences being more aware of stereotypes, unfair societal discourses, and discrimination, there is heavy scrutiny on these films and the ways mental illness, mental health, therapy, and women were represented. Parkinson (2018) also quotes Charlie Covell[8] when expressing the power of using cinema as a platform that has a lot of influential power:

> Mental illness is such a huge part of the human condition. To not depict it onscreen would be to miss out a massive subject, which affects people on a daily basis.

She discusses the importance of using cinema as a platform that represents mental illness and mental health in a way that does not harm the audience's perceptions or discourses about it (including women). Being able to use film as a platform to identify oneself in a narrative also constitutes progressive responses to mental illness and promotes a sense of unity that one is not isolated. For a long time, the theme of mental illness has been used as a metaphor for 'speaking back' at power. The use of the mental illness theme in *Dear Zindagi* can be read as a 'speaking back' for more than one reason; in addressing mental health, *Dear Zindagi* also addresses the madness of patriarchal Indian societal norms and their imposition, especially towards Indian women. The theme of mental illness and madness is rarely not subsumed with other categories of identity such as gender, sex, class, etc. *Dear Zindagi* reads as a narrative beginning with 'madness' that ends with resolving that madness into acceptance and normality. In the same way that *Dear Zindagi* reads as a narrative of journeying towards a better self, Eromosele (2021, 4) asserts Duiker's claim that "[…] madness is not a condition needing cure, but a life enhancing journey into the self."

The idea of madness being a journey toward understanding the self is shared by Callen (2012, 120) in his article titled *An Investigation of Madness as Resistance in Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland*, where he states that:

[8] Charlie Covell is the writer of a blackly comic drama teen series called *The End of The F***ing World.*

> Madness is very much non-nonsense, or perhaps it is un-nonsense—in any case, *Alice in Wonderland* is not a story of Alice's finding her way back home as it is of her becoming a "self" through being with madness.

Additionally, it is important to locate and understand where the gaze of madness comes from, and who is being gazed upon (Eromosele, 2021, 6). In *Dear Zindagi*, 'madness' is the gaze of patriarchal Indian society that Kaira is conditioned to be aware of. She mentions this in awareness in her outburst when she refers to herself as "crazy" and "gone mad", assuming that is what her family believes of her (Shinde, 2016, 49). Kaira's position of power remains defiant, brave, knowing, and capable as she is aware of societal discourses and stigma attached to mental illness and her being a woman with a mental health issue. However, when Kaira begins therapy, the gaze shifts to Dr. Jehangir (this is the therapist played by Shah Rukh Khan) as the relationship of power changes, and Kaira is now in the position of helplessness, vulnerability, and innocence.

Bollywood film narratives have suggested, through representation, that the ideal 'treatment' an individual with mental illness or mental health issues needs is tenderness and attention, rather than addressing the importance and serious implications of the illness and the needs of the individual (patient). *My Name Is Khan* (2010) explores this theme in which Shah Rukh Khan's character (who has Asperger Syndrome) is helped to fit into society better through his relationship with Kajol Devgan's character as an independent single mother. Velsen (1998), as stated by Ewens (2015), produced results on the relationship between cinema representation and the actuality of therapy/medical attention towards individuals with mental illnesses, in which she states that:

> In a lot of the films there is the underlying message that all the patient really needs is love and affection. There is a tendency in films to try and normalise mental illness by saying that patients don't need treatment, they need love. The audience gets the two extremes and what we are not getting are portrayals of people with chronic illness.

This representation is seen in *Mujhse Shaadi Karoogi* (2004), *Pyaare Mohan* (2006), *Tom, Dick, and Harry* (2006), *Golmaal* (2006), and *Krazzy 4* (2008), and narrate the impact this has

on individuals with a mental illness not being able to find themselves managing to fit into society successfully (according to the norms of hegemonic patriarchal society). Their behaviours as mentally ill individuals are problematic in that it represents these characters as child-like, in need of constant affection when they are in challenging situations, and labelled as dangerous, unpredictable, and troublesome when in society. Thus, stereotypes are often used to create comedic relief towards an otherwise sensitive topic and can also be read as a means of pointing out the ridiculousness of a belief or narrative that exists within society.

Expanding on the stigmatic discourses of mental illness and mental health that are represented through comedic relief, *Dear Zindagi* briefly acknowledges the shame and stigma attached to professions within the field of mental illness and mental health. Dr. Jehangir shares his memory of his parents referring to him as a gynaecologist instead of a psychologist due to the stigma attached to mental illness and mental health, and its professions (Shinde, 2016, 22). As stated by Phelan et.al (2000), stigma not only affected individuals with mental illnesses but those who worked in the profession of assisting and rehabilitating those with mental illnesses. The stigma and shame attached to mental illness and mental health representations and discourses, as well as therapy and medical professions, link to previous discussions about the global awareness of mental illness and mental health, demonstrating its relatability and importance in societies globally. While the stereotypical representations of mental illness and mental health, women, and therapy are used by both Bollywood and Hollywood (explored by Parkinson above), the progression of a sympathetic and destigmatised representation of mental illness, mental health, and therapy is more evidently the result of audience demands and socio-political and socio-cultural awareness created by individuals within societies.

Mental illness as an object of pity and dependence

A repetitive element of the representation of mental illness and mental health issues is an individual's dependence and helplessness in most ways. This representation problematises the individual's condition and their experiences separately from their mental illness and/or mental health issues. Bollywood uses this theme of mental illness and mental health inexhaustibly with the addition of female submissiveness, representing women to be dependent on men financially, emotionally, and socially.

According to Sawhney (2016, 5), the film *Koshish* (1972) is a milestone for films representing disabilities (hearing and speech disabilities). *Koshish's* attempt to promote sign language and educate audiences on a language that caters to the deaf and mute community was enlightening. However, the representation of pity and charity emphasised in the film shadowed the educational narrative, manipulating audiences' emotions towards society's support for and awareness of characters with disabilities without challenging or changing its patriarchal discourses. *Koshish* explores the difference in class hierarchies and physical abilities between a married couple. The character of the wife is deaf and mute, and the film explores the trials and celebrations of navigating life together as a couple through the lens of a patriarchal society. This representation locates and reiterates the discourse that individuals with a disability (usually represented as women) are or would be dependent on an able-bodied individual (usually represented as men) to lead a fulfilled and normal life. While *Koshish* represents this sexism and dependency through a physical disability, the narrative can apply to physical disabilities/illnesses and mental illnesses/disabilities. *Koshish* also explores the othering and undesirable stereotype and stigma towards individuals with disabilities; the character of the husband initially refuses to marry a woman with a disability. Additionally, the film raises issues of class differences and hierarchies, and explores disability through patriarchy, which Sawhney (2016, 5) explains "is particularly disturbing for its combination of class with disability, implying that for a disabled girl, a small class adjustment is reasonable".

More recent Bollywood films have attempted to challenge and alter the representation of class hierarchies and caste, and the dependency of women on men by representing characters who are already established financially and academically, achieving personal goals and dreams, and are successfully integrated into society. This is represented in *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010) where both characters are independent and established financially and socially. The recurring narrative to associate an emotionally dependent female character who needs a male character to support her needs, pity, and love her, however, is evident throughout the film. This recurs in many Bollywood films when representing mental illness and/or mental health issues including *Black* (2005), *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), *Karthik Calling Karthik* (2010), *My Name is Khan* (2010), *Barfi!* (2012), *and Hasee Toh Phasee* (2014). All include the dependency and pity for/from a love interest or a caretaker/therapist.

Inclusive changes implemented by society to provide accessibility for individuals with disabilities in public institutions (schools, entertainment areas, workplaces, shopping malls,

etc) have promoted the destigmatisation and acceptance of specific (not all) disabilities (both physical and mental disabilities). This simultaneously influences Bollywood to challenge and/or alter representations and narratives of disabilities (in extension, physical and mental illnesses) to reflect and fit in with current modern times, specifically representing the middle class (see below chapter four: Middle class within Indian society).

Shin (2014) states that the middle class is more accepting of changes in socio-political norms/ideologies especially currently with the emergence and spread of awareness campaigns and movements, but also maintains that the middle class is not the same in each society, as each middle class experiences different challenges or demands different things to others. In Indian society, the middle class has become a space that is more open to the advancements of society and the betterment of political/societal change. Shin (2014) explores this when explaining how specific South Asian societies have recognised the growth of expanding itself as a necessary step to ensuring democratisation, especially in favour of socio-political issues:

> On the one hand, it is assumed that the middle class may speed up the process (of democratisation) by exerting pressure on the state, informed by their greater awareness of individual rights that may come into conflict with the practices of authoritarian undemocratic states. On the other hand, it is also possible that when the middle class benefits from the economic development spearheaded by authoritarian undemocratic states, the middle class populace may not necessarily challenge the state as long as their material interests are not infringed upon.

This middle class representation of mental illness and therapy encourages self-decision making and self-awareness by promoting the positive outcomes of therapy and stimulating mental health to encourage a fulfilling and beneficial way of living. Kaira making the decision herself to seek therapy to better her life is a representation of independence, her lack of asking permission and being controlled by her family and financial independence promotes the empowerment that audiences within the middle class can identify with.

The above discussions set the basis for understanding the possible placements of mental illness, mental health, and women within Bollywood films, however, Bollywood uses mental illness not only to create a convincing film but also as a means of selling something (relatability, ideology, product, lifestyle) to its audiences. As explored above, mental illness and mental

health are presented as a tool to represent narratives of feminist interventions, and hegemonic masculinity, among many others. Through this analysis, these linked narratives need to be discussed to understand what exactly the film is portraying about feminist intervention, hegemonic societal norms, feminism, and patriarchy within a modern context. Throughout *Dear Zindagi*, the narrative presents patriarchal and/or societal norms through unfolding character discussions and experiences in an attempt to highlight the concerning challenges these patriarchal issues pose to women within a modern context. At the same time, it also presents an alternative awareness/consciousness of why these norms are issues within society and possible ways in which these norms can be addressed and overcome.

Feminist intervention

To identify the source and characteristics of patriarchal discourses, with specific reference to the social construction of femininity and gender roles, the use of feminist theory and feminist intervention are particularly helpful (Buckley, 1986, 3). How women interact with and are associated with mental illnesses, sexual relations, study, and career opportunities (among others) have been recorded as methods to frame and give meaning to what it means to be a woman within a patriarchal society, all within a patriarchal context. These norms exist and are learned at a conscious and unconscious level through family, language, religious institutions and teachings, and media texts. When challenging these discriminatory and restricting patriarchal norms/expectations of women, these discourses of mental illness, career opportunities and differences, sexual relations, and stereotypes are often used to navigate and promote feminism. Channelling feminism through specific narratives instead of addressing patriarchy for all that it is, provides specificity for the need for change and equality in those areas, which further address many other injustices towards women along the way. By exploring the feminist intervention in *Dear Zindagi*, we can identify how the challenge and (if any) attempts of reconstruction of patriarchal discourses are explored and through which discourse specifically, with emphasis on the mental illness discourse. *Dear Zindagi*, upon its release, was marketed and promoted as a film that addressed feminism and the empowering representations of mental illness and independent modern women within Indian society specifically. Alongside the theme of mental illness, *Dear Zindagi* represented and addressed the difficult reality independent young women face within a patriarchal society that is explored through sexism, submissiveness, and objectification (and others that will be explored).

Sexism is rife within the film, with scenes depicting Kaira being told her place within society, the need to tame her attitude, her place and limits within her work, the role she plays with her friends, and her behaviour towards and with love interests. Shinde (2016, 18) assesses these scenes in *Dear Zindagi* by specifying on Indian patriarchal norms; reminding Kaira of the career fields that patriarchal Indian society deems fit for Indian women, especially one that does not require extensive travel and open-mindedness, and continuously dwelling on the need for her to be married. Kaira, however, challenges these patriarchal narratives through her defiance to not conform to them, she actively does not reconstruct herself to be the submissive woman who is dependent on male figures to lead a successful and happy life true to herself. This is the feminist intervention represented through Kaira as the main character, actively demonstrating the need to challenge the patriarchal narratives and norms and how they do not fit into modern society as well as they did before.

> Filmy men are okay for checking out abs, but not okay to marry?
>
> There is a 100% chance of not getting a divorce... ...by not getting married.
> (Shinde, 2016, 19)

Additionally, the film addresses sexism through stereotypes, stigma, objectification, and the sexualisation of women. Kaira experiences most of this from her love interest Raghuvendra who questions her working capabilities by sexualising her for being beautiful before acknowledging her skillset (Shinde, 2016, 3). These experiences are recognisable to audiences and have become conventions for women and men as accepted and usual behaviour towards women, often downplayed as humorous at the expense of women. The link to mental illness or mental health is the result of low self-esteem and insecurities that, in Kaira's case, plays into her fears of abandonment and simultaneously her defiance towards adhering to patriarchal norms. Pushing Kaira's therapy and healing aside, this representation of women is common in Bollywood films and an act of defiance and recovery is usually used to frame feminist interventions. *Dear Zindagi*, however, adds more to this by demonstrating self-healing and self-love as the pinnacle for feminist intervention, rather than overcoming patriarchal societal discourses for external praise and/or recognition. In this way, Kaira is represented as more liberated and empowered, but simultaneously the acts of self-love, acceptance, and healing of a mental illness and poor mental health, and independence from the constraints of patriarchal

norms and discourses are romanticised and celebrated as forms of liberation and feminist intervention for empowerment.

Gordon Allport, a psychologist who founded the *Five-Factor Theory of Personality* in 1936, explores how one or many personality traits can shape an individual during the different stages of their lives. By applying his theory to *Dear Zindagi* to analyse how audiences can understand Kaira through the short period we see her experiencing the different phases of her life, audiences can identify the feminist intervention through her changing/developing personality traits. All five factors are not analysed in this study, and only two are used to exemplify how these apply to *Dear* Zindagi. Kaira's extroverted nature, assertiveness, and expressiveness challenge the discourse that these are negative traits for the ideal Indian woman to possess, as she stands up for herself and sets firm boundaries with those around her, especially those that go against her morals and beliefs as an independent Indian woman. Allport (1936) calls this the extraversion factor and can be identified as a feminist narrative challenging the patriarchal discourse of femininity. Kaira's mindfulness, control, and goal directed behaviours are examples of the conscientiousness factor that demonstrates the growth of an individual rather than the stagnant acceptance of toxic or unpleasant behaviours and experiences. This feminist narrative challenges the submissive and toxic nature of patriarchal masculinity and femininity discourses that do not promote growth outside of the constraints of the patriarchal norms.

On the other hand, Kaira's emotional instability and anxiousness, and fear of abandonment is not entirely a feminist narrative that challenges previously used themes demonstrating a woman's poor mental health. Despite its relatability, the representation of Kaira's mental illness/mental health journey and its effects on the people around her are similar to patriarchal representations of women having a mental illness or poor mental health and being excluded from society and as a burden on others. This neuroticism factor does not assist the feminist narrative to challenge previous representations of women and mental illness/mental health, but it does provide a platform for the other themes to launch the feminist narrative from.

Reading through this chapter, there is an acute observation of the possible gradations of mental illness in Bollywood representations. The representation of mental illness in films over the past decade has progressed to include sensitive and realistic narratives that promoted the inclusivity of individuals with mental illness, simultaneously challenging the stigma attached to mental illness and individuals with mental illness. This does not suggest that the stigma attached to

either has been successfully overcome, or that films in the future are incapable of creating a problematic narrative of mental illness, but it does argue that the representations of mental illness, in its entirety, have progressed and reached new levels that can create a more positive and promising impact. These gradations of mental illness in Bollywood representations include creating films that are family friendly, whilst discussing the severity or challenges of mental illness, humanising mental illness by shifting the genre and tone of a narrative from madness, horror, and comedy, to portraying individuals leading a healthy and capable life rather than being assigned to mental/rehabilitation asylums, giving back individuals with mental illness a voice by separating the identity of an individual from their mental illness instead of making the mental illness their entire identity, restructuring power dynamics as in removing the dependency of an individual with mental illness to be saved, the financial dependency on a man, and the idea of being a burden to others and within society.

Mental illness in *Dear Zindagi* plays itself out differently in addition to the abovementioned themes that Bollywood uses to portray mental illness and women. *Dear Zindagi* may have scenes that are located within those themes, but the film organically represents different discourses of mental illness that promote it to be read as an empowering text. As mentioned above, *Dear Zindagi* uses mental illness as a metaphor to read into journeying, following the bildungsroman genre of journeying toward the self (better self). Kaira physically journeying from Mumbai back to her hometown in Goa also symbolizes her journeying to discover and heal herself and the traumas that have affected her relationships with herself, her romantic partners, and her family. *Dear Zindagi* frames mental illness as a form of self-heroism; Kaira becomes the hero of her own story, but simultaneously becomes the symbolism of hope, inspiration, and transformation (self and socially) through her mental illness which audiences can resonate with. In this way, Kaira symbolises the progression of challenging patriarchal society against the stigma attached to mental illness, sexism within different environments, and gender norms. In this way, mental illness plays itself out differently in *Dear Zindagi* as it challenges tradition and is seen as remission from societal and traditional norms and stigma. The destigmatisation of the theme of mental illness enables a hopeful and comforting representation that mental illness and mental health are transitions an individual can move through with the help of psychological treatment and lifestyle changes. Thus, this challenges the theme of mental illness as punishment and challenges the patriarchal stigma that individuals with mental illnesses are ill-fated. Kaira's mental illness is realistically rooted in family trauma and is a result of her parent's neglected behaviour towards her, but unlike the traditional

narrative of mental illness as punishment (as explored above) her mental illness is not the result of traditional or religious myth or punishment by karma. *Dear Zindagi* represents mental illness as curable and/or manageable by representing and promoting a positive glimpse into psychodynamic therapy. As a result, *Dear Zindagi* reframes mental illness and psychological therapy as empowering; encouraging the discovery and acceptance of the self, promoting inclusivity of individuals within society, prioritising the importance of mental illness and mental health to be as important as physical illnesses, prioritising individuals with mental illnesses and mental health issues as important members of society and reclaiming the independence to lead a healthy and successful life through therapy tools and management of one's mental health. It is evident, based on the above, that there is a changing narrative in Indian society and representations of mental illness through Bollywood because mental illness has become increasingly normalised and prioritised.

Additionally, mental illness in *Dear Zindagi* can be read as a highlight of tough conditions within society. The film represents the effects of patriarchal and cultural societal norms and expectations, in addition to the influence, globalisation and modernisation have on individuals, specifically young women in this case. It suggests that these pressures result in individuals developing mental health issues (that can lead to mental illnesses such as anxiety or depression), or that these individuals are unable to cope mentally and emotionally with everyday life which affects their mental health and ability to perform daily tasks, thus seeking psychological treatment/therapy. In this way, *Dear Zindagi* also frames mental illness as an issue affecting those within the middle class.

Dear Zindagi challenges the traditional representation of curing mental illness through love and affection; the idea that once love is attained the effects of the mental illness on the individual is less severe and/or completely cured. Differing from the traditional theme, *Dear Zindagi* frames love as a goal/asset that Kaira can achieve if her mental health is managed, and her traumas resolved. While love does not cure her of her mental illness, the film suggests that she can attain a longstanding and successful relationship once she overcomes her poor mental health and manages her depression and traumas. Throughout the film, as Kaira journeys through healing herself and learning to manage depression, her romantic interests are not long term and fall through quickly. At the end of the film, where therapy has concluded and she has control of her depression, the film presents (what the audience is meant to assume) what could be a romantic interest that may be more successful than Kaira's previous relationships. This

emphasises the romantic genre and the prominent theme of love in *Dear Zindagi*. It further represents a gradation of love from seeking it externally (romantic partners) to seeking love internally (within the self), which then results in achieving it externally. *Dear Zindagi* continues to prioritise therapy in addition to attaining love (both externally and internally) rather than traditional themes that suggest love and affection alone are required to cure and/or treat/manage mental illnesses and poor mental health.

Dear Zindagi cleverly reframes the patriarchal norm of female dependency on men; it moves away from traditional narratives of women depending on men financially and for security, as we see Kaira is an independent, young woman who is employed and financially stable and lives independently. The film also explores the emotional dependency of women on men through the emphasis on companionship and Kaira's desire to attain a romantic relationship. It is emphasised through the empowered lens; Kaira not forcing herself into relationships and marriage due to societal pressures and through traditional patriarchal Indian norms represented by her family who insist on her marrying. This representation of emotional dependency challenges traditional narratives of dependency that depicted individuals (women in particular) to be isolated or incapable of but emphasises the normality of needing to seek out and be in a heterosexual relationship to satisfy one's emotional needs.

Dear Zindagi cleverly reframes the dependency on men in two distinct ways, dependency on the therapist and dependency on romantic partners to achieve her goals, heal from her traumas, and attain a sense of belonging and validation. Dr. Jehangir literally represents the image of a man instructing, guiding, and re-integrating Kaira into modern patriarchal Indian society in a manner that appears empowering (in some cases it is) but, upon closer inspection, is reiterating the patriarchal norm where men organise and categories gender placement and expectations within society. Kaira is dependent on Dr. Jehangir to heal her traumas and manage her depression, identify herself within society being an 'empowered', independent Indian woman, and to validate her behaviour and actions against stigma (from mental illness and being a woman), and rebel against traditional norms. The dependency on romantic partners is rooted in Kaira's inability to maintain a stable long-term relationship due to abandonment trauma. *Dear Zindagi* navigates how Kaira's trauma prevents her from seeking emotional satisfaction through a long-term relationship, which affects her desire to attain an international work placement because of an ex-boyfriend and having low self-esteem because she has dated many men. Additionally, Kaira is validated by Dr. Jehangir during therapy for dating and exploring

different men to discover who she is compatible with. He introduces the "Kursi theory" (chair theory) which normalises the act of dating numerous people over some time to find one's perfect partner and which challenges stereotypes attached to women who date many men. It is not until this validation from Dr. Jehangir that Kaira believes she is a "fast girl, a cheap girl…" (Shinde, 2016, 30-31), a result of patriarchal conditioning and stigma.

Madness takes on a different form in *Dear Zindagi*; it acts as a form of resistance to hegemonic influences and invites a change towards a social justice agenda. It represents the suffocating effects of hegemonic societal norms and expectations on an individual (specifically a young woman). Finally, it suggests a madness towards those who continue to reiterate hegemonic patriarchal and cultural stereotypes/stigmatic discourses through harsh judgement, lack of empathy and acceptance, and need to dominate/enforce the norms. Through these representations of mental illness in *Dear Zindagi*, the idea of uncomplicating life with a mental illness is achieved by simplifying the social expectations expected of an individual to achieve, and instead, suit the needs of the individual at that time and to the best of their capabilities, rather than enforcing rigid expectations that further affect one's mental health. Dr. Jehangir illustrates to Kaira that the expectation to choose difficult solutions when one may not be equipped to manage them is a damaging expectation on one's mental health. He attempts to remove the shame associated with choosing a solution that may seem easier but is more beneficial to an individual's mental health and simultaneously challenges to remove the expectation that things need to be achieved in a specific way as per societal norms and conditioning (Shinde, 2016, 26). Madness, through this perspective, challenges the harsh expectations and rigid thinking that society has conditioned individuals on how to prioritise one's successes, even at the cost of their mental health.

In conclusion, this chapter focused on how the theme of mental illness was used within Bollywood films, alongside other genres, to promote a progressive narrative of women empowerment and other discourses that challenged Indian patriarchal norms. This chapter directly addressed the research question by exploring mental illness and mental health as a theme used by Bollywood over time and confirms that this theme is used in conjunction with the theme of feminist intervention and (in many other films, commonly the older films within Bollywood) through the representation of women. The submissive and dependent representation of women demonstrated sexism and the confining gender norms within Indian patriarchal society that encouraged this form of femininity, reiterating hierarchical hegemonic

norms of masculine dominance and toxic masculinity. Additionally, this negatively represented women within Indian society who attempted to break stereotypes and not conform to the patriarchal expectations of femininity. It also negatively represented those women who had a mental illness and/or mental health condition, and, as a result, negatively represented mental illness and mental health as medical conditions. Discriminatory and stigmatic discourses emerged that were supported and further fueled by Indian tradition, religion, culture, and myth to continuously outcast and other mental illnesses as taboo. Furthermore, this discourse is fueled more when linked to women with a mental illness. Sexist and submissive representations and narratives of women are worsened when she has a mental illness as her dependency on men (or others) transitions from responsibility to liability; she becomes a burden on those around her who either justify her condition as a traditional or religious punishment, a defect, as dangerous, or as an unfortunate condition to those around her. This increases the stigmatic representations of mental illness and slows down the progressive narrative of women empowerment. Changes to this representation of mental illness and women that promote an empowering and destigmatised narrative of mental illness and women as separate entities and as a unit helped to challenge patriarchal norms (especially Indian patriarchal norms within Indian society) and promote feminism. Femininity transforms (at a slow pace) through cinematic representations that empower women in different roles and spaces within society. This results in the gradations of women's representation in Bollywood films; representations of women being submissive and obedient housewives who are entirely dependent on men in all areas of their lives transition into a working woman who remains a submissive and obedient daughter /wife/mother. This representation transitions into women who are engaged in further tertiary studies to qualify as doctors, teachers, or secretaries, but remain dependent on men emotionally and are encouraged to settle down, resulting in financial dependency on men. This representation then transitions to women who are career-orientated businesswomen and are not dependent on men financially but are frowned upon and represented as problematic and undesirable by patriarchal Indian society and men, especially for marriage and not being the ideal submissive and dependent housewife. Bollywood, then, expands on this representation of femininity by including global and local socio-political and socio-cultural discussions on feminism to represent women as financially independent, educated in a variety of fields, emotionally matured, and intelligent, that are accepted and encouraged within patriarchal Indian society. Furthermore, these women understand and experience the challenges and restrictions that patriarchal Indian norms and discourses (as well as expectations and others' mindset) affects their ability and desire to challenge patriarchy and promote women

empowerment through feminist narratives. However, this is complicated by issues of modernity versus tradition, East versus West, class, and culture, and external themes used in Bollywood cinema such as mental illness, romance, family ties, etc. In *Dear Zindagi*, this representation is complicated as it follows a different categorisation that is still, however, recognisable and, in some ways, shares certain themes from the previous representations of femininity and mental illness, but, ultimately, the representation of mental illness and femininity is played out differently to embody a feminist and empowering rendition that challenges patriarchy. However, as mentioned above, due to the representation of shifts in women's dependency on men and the structuring of gender norms within *Dear Zindagi*, this representation may appear to challenge patriarchy but can be argued that it is, instead, a re-structuring and re-placement of gender norms, discourses of mental illness, discourses of empowerment, among others, to fit into modern patriarchy.

Chapter Four:

Middle Class Within Indian Society

Understanding the middle class within Indian society enables this chapter to explore how hegemonic norms and ideologies regarding gender and mental health are represented and reinforced through Bollywood films to strategically represent and frame the modern Indian woman in a patriarchal setting. Gender norms within Indian society (and society in general) often have several other socio-cultural discourses emerging from them, one of which includes the discourses on mental health and gender norms. By defining the middle class and identifying the ideologies and discourses that exist within Indian society (focusing on the middle class specifically), this chapter further analyses the way Bollywood films are designed to represent a specific image of an ideal middle class Indian society that is either reiterating, challenging, or remoulding patriarchal ideologies back into modern Indian society. Additionally, this chapter analyses the way the caste system shapes/influence the patriarchal norms and discourses within patriarchal Indian society and explores the flexibility and accommodation the middle class has provided for audiences of different castes to aspire to and be provided with economic, social, and political opportunities. By exploring and analysing the caste system in relation to the middle class, this chapter will locate and analyse how Bollywood films, like *Dear Zindagi*, represent and reiterate the aspirations for an ideal Indian society, gender, and mental health discourses, and the ideal modern Indian woman.

Understanding the middle class

Class literature indicates that the idea of class has been generated from an understanding of the economic positions and shared interests of groups of individuals within a society. There is a conflict and comparison that exists between the lower class and upper class for its differences, increasing the divide between the two both financially and socially. However, Marx Weber (1961) distinguishes a third class which is termed the middle class. This coincides with Darendorf's (1960, 52) definition of the middle class as a class that exists between two other classes; the lower class and upper class and fills the space between those two classes. This definition is the clear-cut understanding of what a middle class is within society.

While there are debates about the relevance of the idea of class presently, the term 'middle class' has remained a popular term among scholars and the media. The term's popularity is also linked to the large amount of literature that links it to "national outcomes such as 'social cohesion, political stability, and economic growth'" (Burger, et al, 2014, 4).

Class is not defined universally and does not have the same characteristics for each different society in the world. Different societies, along with their opportunities, disadvantages, challenges, and movements, have different components that make up each class, and thus, the middle class within Indian society is different from that of the American society, for example. The global Indianness discourse creates a form of compatibility between Indianness and Westerness, which was previously separated, and "sets the moral and personal boundaries for the material success available to the West" (Radhakrishnan, 2008, 9).

The middle class is categorised not by what it owns, but by what it can control by means of production (in comparison to the higher class). This, as Burger, et.al (2014, 3) explains, categorises them as "small business owners, shop keepers, artisans, and managers." The middle class differs from the lower class, with regard to occupation and income, because they work alongside their staff to attain a specific lifestyle. Similarly, Prasad (1986, 9-11) (whose work on the middle class can later be applied to the new middle class as well) argues that the middle class falls into four categories: salaried persons, independent professionals, the non-salaried, and widows from wealthy families or the retired persons. Salaried persons include individuals employed in administration, institutional, or government officials. Independent professionals include individuals employed as lawyers, teachers, medical practitioners, journalists, artists, actors, etc. The non-salaried include individuals involved in business or entrepreneurial activities, while the widows from wealthy families or retired persons are self-explanatory. Each category integrates to collectively explain and understand the components of the middle class (and, in extension, the new middle class as well). Burger, et.al (2014, 4) explore these factors that place individuals within the middle class, and the cycle that the middle class follows:

> The lower and middle class (without access to owning property), their education, skills and knowledge determine their market value, their occupation and their wages, and in turn, wages determine the lifestyle that an individual can afford.

Weber (1961) further explores that, in addition to the above, shared life experiences, thoughts and chances also set the basis of this class. Misra (1978, 7) (whose understanding of the middle class can also be applied to understanding the new middle class) shares similar thoughts with Weber. He agrees that the middle class is unified by a specific lifestyle, behavioural pattern, and voice of solidarity for "democratic values which they express in their social and political conduct, and not solely by occupational interest" (Patole, 2018, 33). Debroy's (2009, 5) explanation of the middle class also takes into consideration its social aspects and is not specifically defined only by income, which includes "values, cultural affinities, lifestyles, educational attainments and service sector employment."

These social aspects provide more detail when categorising individuals into the middle class- providing an in-depth understanding of the circumstances of different people within the middle class. Through this one can begin to understand, by analysis, the development of the middle class within Indian society. The Indian middle class is expanding. There is a significant increase in the Indian share of the middle class, especially because of the influential power of the economy.

Understanding India's middle class and new middle class

This chapter follows C.W. Millis' idea of the new middle class in his assessment of the post-war white-collar working class in America. His research examines the shift of workers from production to service and management orientated occupations, as well as the social changes that emerged from it.

The new middle class within Indian society has redeveloped itself into an expanding urban middle class that has transitioned into its own class. Scholars, such as Fernandez (2000), Pandey (2009), and Patole (2018), state that the new middle class resulted after the emergence of the economic liberation in India in 1990, which was connected to the expansion of the urban middle class, and the transition from the urban middle class to the new middle class occurred. It became the focus of attention, as James Patole (2018, 31) states, due to its "socio-economic mobility, socio-cultural and political influence and consumer potential". The new middle class has significantly developed as a:

> Powerful, influential and dominant class in urban India and largely determines India's economy, policy, culture, education and social relationships (Patole, 2018, 31).

Thus, we understand the new middle class in India using the same definitions that translate what the middle class is (as explored above) but explore the influences and changes that modernity, socio-cultural changes, and the effects of globalisation have had on individuals within the middle class that has resulted in the birth of new middle class. Iqani (2017, 105) elaborates on this by stating that:

> This is a project that is at once local and global in scope; local because the particular histories and socio-economic formations of each cultural context will shape the particularities of each middle class, and global because transnational flow of finance, media and culture ultimately influence middle class consumption patterns.

For this research, the focus is mainly on identifying these flows of media and culture within Indian society and the film *Dear Zindagi*, to expand the understanding of how ideologies (local and global) about gender and mental health are represented, intertwine with each other, and are strategically used to represent the modern Indian woman in a patriarchal setting.

In Indian society, the new middle class is the fastest growing component of the Indian population. However, it has been relatively unexplored. Patole (2018, 31) considers the new middle class as a "class-in-progress" as it develops and reconstructs itself through its politics, regular (social) practices and economic mobility. It is also extensively influenced by globalisation. Thus, the new middle class is a significant phenomenon with flexible and changing boundaries that are repeatedly being challenged and understood. Liberalisation, according to S.P Aiyar (1973) is the ideology of India's modernisation which brought economic, social, and political changes to the country. It was then that the austere lifestyle within Indian societies was replaced with consumerism which enahnced the Indian economy, improved educational opportunities locally and internationally, and both information and communication technologies were enhanced. This is explored again by Iqani (2017, 109) (who refers to works from Mazzarella (2003)) stating that "India's new middle class signalled more free trade and an opening up to the consumption of international brands and commodities." This resulted in the upward mobility for multiple Indians within different classes, especially the new middle class. Iqani (2017, 109) further explores consumption (with reference to

Upadhya's (2008) work) stating that "one outcome has been that 'discourses about consumption, more than consumption itself, [...] have become constitutive of middle-class identity". Consumption was/is not limited to products/services accessible to the middle class, but also access to global ideologies and discourses that have influenced Indian society and outlook on progress and success (including modernity) (explored above through the works of Iqani (2017)). This expands into how specific behaviours, norms, cultures, and movements should look like and be constructed within Indian society, including ideologies of sexism, feminism, patriarchy, etc. This has already been seen through the influence of hegemonic beauty standards influencing Indian society, as Indian society has (and continues to) push forward the influence of 'whiteness' concerning skin colour. Celebrities are oftentimes seen endorsing skin whitening products to audiences, who are influenced to endorse, accept, and practise these norms which are rooted in the global influence of western hegemonic beauty standards[9]. Thus, it is important to understand how both the local and global contexts of discourses (gender, specifically women, in this case, mental health) are manifested to understand how globalisation and the sharing of ideologies, norms, and discourses produce identities and practices within the middle class.

The influence of globalisation on the new middle class lifestyle can be seen in *Dear Zindagi* through Kaira's regular spendings on *eBay*, specifically when she receives a phone call from customer services asking her if she is satisfied with their services.

> Hi Ma'am, I am calling from eBay, are you happy with our services?
> Yes, why?
> Please do continue shopping with us. Please let us know if you do require any further assistance.
> Thank you.
> (Shinde, 2016, 54-55).

In *Dear Zindagi* the new middle class challenges caste and societal norms concerning women remaining chaste until marriage, women not engaging in multiple relationships, women being financially independent, women travelling abroad for work, and challenges the limited choice

[9] Hegemonic western beauty norms have historically emphasised light skin colours over darker ones, as seen most popularly among white individuals with fairer skin tones and black individuals with darker skin tones.

in careers for women. At the beginning of the film, Kaira and Raghuvendra discuss their relationship after having sexual intercourse together, and Kaira mentions her active sexual life and multiple relationships in therapy with Dr. Jehangir:

> Admirers?
> - Yes
> You're trying to say that there are lots of men! That's what you're trying to say
> No, what do you want me to say? Why would I say that? No
> That's what you are saying. You actually mean that I'm a fast girl, a cheap girl...
> - No come on! Fast dirty cheap... why use these words?
> Isn't that what the world thinks? If a girl has more than one relationship then that's it! (Shinde, 2016, 30).

This scene sets the tone for stigmatic representations of women being sexually active before marriage and dating multiple men over time to be challenged. Dr. Jehangir does this by reinstating Kaira into modern Indian society and re-enforcing her self-worth not to be defined by the conditioning of patriarchal societal norms and the influence of caste norms. In this way, *Dear Zindagi* represents the challenging of patriarchal ideologies, the promotion of feminism and the empowered woman, and the destigmatisation of mental illness/mental health and therapy, which are influenced by globalisation and adapted in ways to fit with Indian society specifically, through a new middle class setting that, in turn, appeals to audiences as an aspirational and relatable reality.

An ideology of "global Indianness" materialised which is explained by Smitha Radhakrishnan (2008, 9) as "a set of beliefs and practices that are at once tied to a global lifestyle and to a deep sense of belonging to the Indian nation." These social aspects provide more detail into categorising individuals into this class, understanding the circumstances of different people within the middle class, and the development of the middle class within Indian society. The new middle class is significantly influenced by globalisation, urbanisation, and post modernism which enables the new middle class to transform their culture, religious beliefs, and overall cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Others believed that those who have emerged because of social mobility and status attainment should also be included. Leela Fernandez (2000, 90) contributed to the explanation of the development of the distinct representation of the 'new' middle class, describing it as:

> One that has left behind its independence on austerity and state protection and has embraced an open India that is at ease with broader processes of globalisation.

Referring to Weber's, Misra's, and Debroy's shared understanding of the middle class through its social aspects, the new middle class practices self-identification and is a subjective social class (Burger, et.al, 2014, 11). By this, I mean that the perceptions of those within the new middle class and their place in society are largely influenced by globalisation through the representations shown on social media, acquaintances within workplaces or social environments including colleges, urban city life, friend groups, or on shared digital platforms. Burger, et.al (2014, 11) summarises this behaviour by stating that:

> The crux of the argument is that homogeneity of reference groups – the assertive tendency to surround oneself with friends of similar education, occupation and income – fundamentally distorts the subjective sample from which one generalises to the wider society and from which one develops perceptions of one's subjective location. Taken together, these lead to images of society with few at the top, the great majority in the middle, and a few at the bottom.

Burger, et.al's (2014, 16) work on understanding the black middle class in South Africa tends to lean its ideas into understanding the middle class in India as well. According to their research, the black middle class within South Africa does not identify themselves as being middle class despite their income brackets fitting the categorisation of fitting into the middle class. As explored above (Prasad (1986) and Burger, et.al (2014)), the occupation and income level of those in the middle class are not the only factors that define the middle class. Thus, as Burger, et.al (2014, 16) explores, it is:

> ... Indicating that this is a more loaded term and is not simply seen as referring to those who see themselves occupying the middle of the income distribution

Similarly, the same can be said for the middle class in Indian society. The new middle class can (and probably is) identifiable and individuals within society aspire to be included within the new middle class, but those within this class do not describe themselves as middle class solely based on their income alone. Lifestyle, education, global influence, modernity, and

exposure/engagement on digital media, as well as access to goods and services, make up the new middle class. This refusal to not identify with the class itself is explored in relation to coloniality, as Burger, et.al (2014, 17) state:

> Skilled Black South African's appear uncomfortable with the 'middle class' tag and are hesitant to describe themselves in that way- seemingly at least partly because of the category's strong historical association with being white and consequent perceived tensions between the racial and cultural identity and persistent ideas about what being middle class presents.

A lot can be unpacked from Burger's statement if we relate this to the Indian new middle class. The Indian new middle class is associated with modernisation and globalisation which, contrary to the above, are in most ways aspired to and desired by the individuals within society. The category is associated with post-colonialism and Indian liberation, which pulls out strong empowering and positive emotions. However, the effects of globalisation are closely monitored by individuals within Indian society (specifically the older generation) who fears its Western manipulation and strong influence over Indian societal norms, lifestyle, and culture. The historical association India has to the West also, in similar ways, relates to being white – in extension the effects of colonisation. However, India and Indian society has a love-hate relationship with the West and its attributes, as in most cases (especially depicted within cinema), there is an aspiration toward the West being the pinnacle of success and advancements in life (societal and economical).

In conclusion, the new middle class still follows the structure and characteristics of what scholars have explained the middle class to be. The only difference is that the new middle class embodies newer ideas, aspirations, and opportunities that differ, and at times, clash with the older characteristics of the middle class. With the influence of globalisation and modernity and the comparison of lifestyles among audiences from around the world, the new middle class has evolved to cater to the effects of those influences within society.

Understanding the caste system

Derived from the Portuguese word 'casta' during the time that India was still under colonial rule, the term has been generically used to describe the various orders and units of the system.

The caste system is understood in three ways; first being the 16th century identification of the caste system by the Portuguese, the colonial discourse that emerged from the Western Orientalist scholars, the Christian Missionaries, and the British administrators, and India's post-independence understanding of the caste system. Each of these features aids in the understanding of the caste system that is implemented presently, which will later be discussed.

During the 16th century, Duarte Barbosa identified the main characteristics of the caste system by interacting with the local Indians in their own language (Sheth, 1999, 2502). Firstly, Barbosa identified the caste system as a hierarchy, with the Brahman situated at the top of the hierarchy and the 'untouchables' at the bottom. Secondly, he identified the link of untouchability to the idea of pollution (not the entire system, just towards this category of people). Thirdly, he identified that within the caste system existed a "plurality of 'castes' that are separated from each other by, endogamy, occupation, commensality" (Sheth, 1999, 2502). Fourth, the different castes applied sanctions to ensure their own customs and rules were maintained. Finally, Barbosa identified the relationship of caste with political organisations. These features of caste have set the basis for understanding the definition of caste, including current studies of caste. In addition, the caste system is understood as a framework for "self-governing" cultural communities (Sheth, 1999, 2502).

For decades after India's independence, Western Orientalist Scholars, Christian Missionaries, and British administrators' studies of caste continued to be guided by the framework set by the colonial discourse, as there are some distinctive features of this discourse that differ from the previous understanding of caste. Firstly, they questioned whether the caste system benefitted or worked against the Indians. Secondly, caste was viewed in a very schematised and linear manner, "as an inflexible hierarchy of vertically ranked ritual statuses" (Sheth, 1999, 2502). For example, the idea of pollution being attached to a category of people that Barbosa referred to was now extended to the entire system, and purity/impurity of statuses among the castes was considered an important concept that controlled the caste system. Thirdly, the Orientalist scholars recognised and considered the Hindu scriptures, which enabled them to understand Indian people and Indian society through the lens of the caste system. Sheth (1999, 2502) states that:

> Caste was now seen as representing a world view of Indians and a totality of Indian's social and cultural life.

Fourthly, the British administrators were concerned about finding ways to manipulate and alter the caste system that was governed from the past to better suit the needs of the colonial rule. This prompted a theoretical comparison of understanding the caste system:

> Caste now began to be seen in comparison with the normative (values of equality, individualism, etc) and social (estate, race, class, etc) categories of the western societies (Sheth, 1999, 2503).

Fifth, with an empirical understanding of class, caste was viewed as independent communities that were often divided by ancestry/lineage ("racial and tribal origins"), customs, and political organisation (Sheth, 1999, 2503). Sixth, the relationship between the state and castes led to the explicit realisation that some caste ranks (based on the name or tribe) were favoured over others. This explores the existence of the middle class before India's liberation which was due to the elite hierarchies within the caste system that favoured these specific groups of people with high standing in the culture. The existence of the middle class being influenced by the favouring of certain caste groups is not specific to India only, but rather within caste systems in other countries as well. For example, Iqani (2017, 108) compares the existence of the black middle class in South Africa to the new black middle class that emerged after Apartheid:

> Before and throughout Apartheid Black middle class existed, thanks to missionary education and existing elite hierarchies in indigenous cultures.

The effects of the colonial regime brought about unintended changes in the caste system, which emerged from the consequences of the colonial policies:

> [...] they were related to the larger historical forces of modernization, secularisation and urbanisation which had begun to make some impact on the Indian society by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (Sheth, 1999, 2503).

However, there were some policies created that aimed to support its own rule and specifically delegitimise the "power of the traditional social elites" (Sheth, 1999, 2503), with the caste system being directly affected. Towards the end of the colonial rule, these changes significantly altered the caste system with the most important change being the formation of a "new trans-

local identity among 'lower castes'"; as a people who were collectively aware of being oppressed by the hierarchy of the caste system (Sheth, 1999, 2503). Human rights, as a discourse, were introduced in the context of the caste system, which was quite unusual in the traditional hierarchy system. The idea of ritual purity and impurity was interrogated by new ideological categories such as social justice. Castes were now identifying themselves horizontally rather than vertically within society and being recognised as the bourgeoisie along the social democratic and political trajectory, as the importance of them negotiating with the state emerged (Fernandes and Heller, 2006, 496). Through this process, they also began to promote larger social identities and their strength in numbers. The ideological foundation of the ritual hierarchy of castes was under attack by the lower caste's movements for upward mobility. This was not towards the internal of the system, but rather through modern ideological terms of equality and justice.

After India's independence, changes towards the caste system required a "greater transformative edge", and this was due to the:

> [...] establishing of a liberal democratic growth of institutions of competitive, representational democracy (Sheth, 1999, 2503)

Despite the changes to the stratification system because of India's independence, the caste system was still being interpreted through the older, colonial ideological framework, and the terms used to describe the changes made to the caste system were attained from the colonial discourse. This presented two polar perspectives about the change in the caste system; the first was that the caste system emphasised certain cultural and structural continuities that had manifested into Indian society through modernisation. Fernandez and Heller (2006, 496) explain this by stating that:

> […] the middle class, and in particular the dominant fraction of the middle class, plays a central role in the politics of hegemony. These hegemonic politics are played out both as attempts to coordinate the interests of the dominant classes and to forge internal unity within the highly diverse fragments of the middle class.

The second perspective includes the viewing of modernisation as a universal and linear force of history, which shaped "the caste system into a polarised framework of economic classes"

(Sheth, 1999, 2503). Sheth (1999, 2503) argues that holistically, post India's independence, discourse on caste remains divided by the debates on "'traditional' versus 'modernity' and 'caste' versus 'class'".

Understanding caste and the new middle class

The caste system served super-structurally as a "common social language" among the Indian society and served to supply normative discourses of legitimating statuses among the different local and substantive hierarchies (Sheth, 1999, 2508). New social formations materialised within Indian society- which was the result of India becoming a pan-Indian political entity that was governed by a liberal democratic state. In comparison to the old caste system, the new social foundations operate as a rather flexible and open-ended framework. However, the new social formations do compete for political power. This occurs among the different categories of social formations which are identified as:

> [...] The forward or the 'upper castes', the backward castes (OBCs), the dalits or scheduled castes (SCs), and the tribal or the scheduled tribes (STs). (Sheth, 1999, 5208).

Through this competition, there is a glimpse of a representation of a fusion between the old caste system and the new social formations; the upper castes have the resources available to them by their higher position within society and caste, while those in the lower castes have the resources made available to them by the state. Thus, the newer framework of status groups has transformed from being closed and contained to a more fluid and broader system of social stratification. This system is not complete, but is still a process in progress, and cannot be described entirely only in terms of caste or class respectively. However, the visibility of the importance of the new middle class in this category has increased over time.

The term "new", according to Sheth (1999, 2508), is linked to the deterioration of the caste system, which has resulted in a more socially diverse and more accepting system compared to the older vertically structured hierarchy that favoured the upper oriented middle class specifically. Fernandes and Heller (2006, 500) explain this further:

> The NMC is not "new" in terms of its social composition (that is, new entrants to the middle class). Rather its newness is characterized by the ways in which

> this fraction has sought to redefine middle class identity through the language of liberalization.

Factors associated to identify being within the new middle class include:

> [...] new lifestyles (modern consumption patterns), ownership of certain economic assets and the self-consciousness of belonging to the middle class (Sheth, 1999, 2508).

Thus, members of other castes can become members of the new middle class, especially those who have received a modern education, have chosen non-traditional careers/occupations, those with higher incomes, and can command political power. The new middle class becomes the standard for which other classes and castes measure their lifestyle aspirations and successes (Fernandes and Heller, 2006, 501). It is important to note, though, that the new middle class does still contain elements of the caste system within it (subconsciously) (Narasiman and Chawdry, 2013); for example, those from an upper caste who are entering the new middle class will have the resources attached to the status of their class at their disposal, and vice versa. In this way, the continuation of certain elements of the old caste system will remain within the new middle class:

> To the extent that modern status aspirations are pursued, and the possibility of their realisation is seen, by individuals in terms of the castes to which they belong (Sheth, 1999, 2508).

Acknowledging that the middle class collectively uses resources from their castes, individuals from all castes go through a classification process when entering the new middle class, which includes; distancing themselves from ritual functions and roles that are associated with their caste, to recreate and attain a new identity that creates a sense of belonging to the new middle class, and their lifestyle and economic aspirations coincide more with those within the new middle class, rather than with those outside of the new middle class (Sheth, 1999, 2508). Kaira actively breaks away from traditional ideologies and norms of marriage and the expectations of a traditional Indian woman. She consistently reasserts her own beliefs and lifestyle to her family which consists of her independent lifestyle in the city, her financial stability, and independence, her choice to date and be sexually active before marriage, to travel, and have a career that is not considered conventional for women by traditional patriarchal standards and

belongs to a friend group that shares these beliefs and lifestyle with her. Thus, she reaffirms her new middle class lifestyle as a place of belonging and continues to aspire to maintain that lifestyle that the new middle class offers.

The complete elimination of the caste system is difficult, and arguably impossible considering that it is an integral factor of Indian culture, despite the urban influences of globalisation and modernisation. It remains a dominant subconscious factor among individuals throughout the different classes. Fernandes and Heller (2006, 509) explain that the "selective appropriation of global culture" simultaneously romanticises Western influences and representations of modernity whilst maintaining the Indian heritage and the Indian identity. Thus, present day India (urban and modernised) has incorporated the caste system into society's mindset; one's way of choosing a romantic partner and the types of choices people make in relationships. Cultural racism and the caste system distinctions faltered the utopian hope India had of an all accepting nation after its liberation. Despite the new middle class being known for its open minded and more accepting nature, racism among the different Indian nationalities, cultures, and social standings created divisions within Indian society which, arguably, could have increased/maintained the hegemonic patriarchal norms within Indian society. Raj Gandhi (1983, 41) explores this by stating that an individual's class defines the status of a person based on their education, occupation, and income, while their caste is considered to add/remove value from a person's status for marriage. This is explored within Bollywood films explicitly, most recently in series such as *Indian Match Making* (2020), and *Never Have I Ever* (2020) showcased on the online streaming platform *Netflix*. The gist of this theme is to use romance between two individuals from different castes (one higher and one lower) to explore the challenges it creates, as well as thoroughly explain the vast differences between the lower and higher castes. The 2018 romance film *Dhadak* [10](2018) tragically explores the caste hierarchy and highlights the extremities of honour killings among the higher castes against the lower castes. This is a reality among castes in India to ensure the purity of high caste individuals that should not mix with lower caste individuals, regardless of their class position in society. The *Netflix* series *India Match Making* (2020) thoroughly explores the caste system as a subconscious mindset that is attached to the patriarchal Indian societal norms and discourses that frame women and men in specific ways and attach specific responsibilities and

[10] *Dhadak* is a 2018 Bollywood film that explores differences between castes through romance and explores honour killings that occur within Indian society. The film features actress Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter.

expectations to what an ideal Indian woman should and should not aspire to be/do. The show is based on finding men and women romantic matches for marriage but emphasises what constitutes a desirable Indian woman, as well as demonstrates how the caste system (and patriarchal societal norms) is integrated into a person's identity and mindset. An example of the subtle conditioning of the caste system and patriarchal societal norms in *Dear Zindagi* is Kaira's dream which she reveals to Dr. Jehangir during a therapy session:

> I was at this construction site... with all these construction workers... all short and strange people Suddenly, I lose my balance... and I go falling down... this big fall... and land in muck. I think it was a gutter. All these workers are just staring, but no one is helping... I look up... and I see my camera dangling... and then suddenly out of nowhere... this group of newly married women... in saris, pallus & bindis all land up there... and they start pointing at me, laughing at me. Bam! I woke up.
> (Shinde, 2016, 29).

Dr. Jehangir interprets the dream to reveal Kaira's preference for men, and the fear and/or guilt of being shamed by society for not being a virgin and having multiple relationships over some time, which can be identified as conditioning from the caste system and patriarchal norms in Indian society. It suggests that Kaira is/would not be a traditionally desirable woman for marriage and demonstrates the subconscious manifestation of these norms in Kaira's mind, ultimately affecting her self esteem and understanding of her self-worth.

The *Netflix* series *Never Have I Ever* (2020) explores a first-generation young girl's trouble with adjusting to American society, with the clash of her Indian societal mindset and norms. This show demonstrates the major differences between the two societies: their norms and discourses on women, modernity, and normative gender behaviour. With the influence of pop culture, globalisation, and films, however, the caste systems and their extremities are being challenged to keep up with modern times, as well as the negative effects it has on individuals within Indian society. This can act as a possible point of reference where Bollywood gets its inspiration from to draw its audience's attention to the current transitions of society, as seen in *Dear Zindagi* with narratives of feminism, challenging patriarchy and destigmatising mental health/illness and therapy As the dual-influential effects of Bollywood films and society have been previously explored, Indian society is exposed to the influences of new discourses and narratives about change and attitudes towards the caste system in modern present-day society.

This redevelops how the caste system exists and could arguably be the force that gradually disregards or eliminates the caste system entirely to cater to a modern lifestyle and modern Indian culture instead.

Analysis of *Dear Zindagi* in relation to the new middle class

As this chapter continuously states, Bollywood cinema is an important platform that has the power to represent and reiterate social discourses, ideologies, and an image of a modern and accepting Indian society to audiences. The middle class within Indian society has previously been explored through pro feminist lenses which analyse the way specific films have challenged and/or reconstructed patriarchal discourses and expectations of Indian women (Chatterjee (2014), Arora (2014), Gupta (2015) and Ahad and Akgul (2020)) [11]. This chapter provides a different perspective on understanding the middle class by suggesting that feminist narratives are used in Bollywood cinema to shape and reiterate societal norms, expectations, societal change, and aspirations through a modern patriarchal lens.

The basis of recognising the new middle class is through their earning capacity. This is derived from the middle or higher castes, as explored above. Over time, there has been an increase in the percentage of dual-earning couples within the new middle class, including an increase in the representation of women and youth within the private sector due to living in an era of contemporary globalisation (Patole, 2018, 33). This is important because it represents the changing dynamics and aspirations within Indian society and the shift in mindsets among couples who strive to achieve the new middle class lifestyle while simultaneously ensuring their financial survival. *Dear Zindagi* is quite subtle about this; especially since the only character that indirectly mentions that they have a dual-earning relationship is Kaira's friend Fatima:

> Hello, my husband is a software engineer.

[11] Sushmita Chatterjee's article: "'*English Vinglish*' and Bollywood: what is 'new' about the 'new woman'?" Anupama Aurora's article**: "**Nobody puts Rani in a corner: Making of the new Indian woman in *Queen* (2014)". Sukanya Gupta's article: "*Kahaani*, *Gulaab Gang* and *Queen*: Remaking the queens of Bollywood". Waseem Ahad and Selma Koç Akgul's article**: "**Female body, femininity and authority in Bollywood: The "new" woman in *Dangal* and *Queen".*

> And we have many interesting discussions.
> (Shinde, 2016, 13)

This subtlety enhances the film's power to normalise the concept to audiences as a way in which the modern society works and to attain a modern lifestyle as a couple that this method of earning is essential. Thus, criticism regarding the topic is not expected, and the film manages to achieve three points by this; it normalises couples both working and earning, it normalises women working to support their relationship/family and provides a theme of empowerment, and (from a critique perspective) re-positions women into the modern patriarchal society by suggesting that it is acceptable for women to work/earn for their families. It may not question whether it is culturally correct, but the concept is restructured to appear rational and accepted within society. Throughout the film, Kaira is not engaged with this topic, making it difficult to understand whether she believes in dual-earning couples or not. However, by analysing her general character development throughout the film, and her behaviour around her romantic partners and family, we can argue that subconsciously this mindset is integrated into Kaira's personality.

Two out of the four categories mentioned by Prasad (1986) (in the above discussion of understanding the middle class) are dominantly represented within *Dear Zindagi*; these being independent professions and non-salaried individuals. Kaira and her immediate friends (Jackie, Fatima, Ganju, and Raunak) are categorised under independent professions as they work together in the film industry. Kaira's romantic interests are also categorised under independent professions; Raghuvendra works in the film industry, Rumi is an upcoming singer and artist, and actor Aditya Roy Kapoor (who makes a special appearance at the end of the film) plays a character that manufactures and sells furniture. Kaira's therapist, Dr. Jehangir Khan, is also placed in this category. The three characters that are categorised as non-salaried individuals are Sid (Kaira's first partner) who owns a top-end restaurant, her father who owns a business in Goa, and Karan (a man her uncle introduces to her at their home) who is an IT specialist. Arguably, her father can also fall into the retired person's category as the film is ambiguous about his working status. This highlights the characters of the film to be identified as middle class (new middle class).

Thus, as explored above, different classification processes would occur when joining the new middle class for individuals from different castes and classes, thus the sacrifices, fears, and

challenges of each individual entering the new middle class would differ. The caste system, along with its subconscious norms and expectations, is either challenged as extended and unfitting discourses of patriarchy or is integrated into modern patriarchy to fit the current times. Bollywood uses the common theme located within Indian society that examines an individual's class to determine their status, and whether their caste adds value or removes value from their status, specifically for marriage. However, the exposure and influence of globalisation challenge the caste system to locate itself within modern society and create awareness of the harmful effects it has on individuals within Indian society. This, too, is where Bollywood draws its inspiration to remain relevant to audiences by engaging in and representing the shifts and gradations within society. Films, like *Dear Zindagi*, that engage in feminist narratives, and socio-cultural and socio-political discourses that affect Indian society (mental illness/mental health discourses) influence, reiterate or challenge societal norms, aspirations, and social change to audiences. As a result, Bollywood films also represent a specific image of an ideal new middle class Indian society, which this chapter aimed to highlight. *Dear Zindagi* achieves creating a specific image of an ideal middle class that challenges patriarchal norms, promotes feminism and destigmatises mental illness/mental health narratives, and encourages therapy. Kaira and Dr. Jehangir allude to this image of an ideal world (and, in extension, an ideal new middle class) when discussing the "kursi theory" (chair theory) in relation to dating:

> A chair, kursi have you ever bought one?
> Yes.
> And did you just go into a shop and buy the first chair you saw?
> No.
> Exactly my point. We look at so many different chairs until we find the right one. Some chairs may be comfortable but look like shit... others look nice but are hard on the butt... So the process starts, chair after chair... how many chairs we check out before we find... that one chair! It doesn't creak with me. If we look for so many options just to buy a chair... then shouldn't we look at options... when choosing a life partner?
> (Shinde, 2016, 31)

In doing so Dr. Jehangir challenges patriarchal norms and caste conditioning of marriage and relationships by promoting a feminist and modern narrative, and that alludes to acceptance and a sense of belonging. However, these representations are sometimes achieved through a modern, yet patriarchal, lens. Ultimately, this provides a different reading to feminist

narratives, strategically framing the modern Indian woman in a patriarchal setting. By representing the new middle class in Bollywood films as a sector within Indian society known for challenging patriarchal discourses, creating awareness for feminism (among other ideologies), and attempting to create and promote an empowered modern society, films like *Dear Zindagi*, which are structured using the bildungsroman genre, can promote progressive discourses on feminism and mental illness (and mental health). However, the case of *Dear Zindagi* also represents progressive patriarchy within modern Indian society. This is specifically explored through Dr. Jehangir being the one to guide and advise Kaira through her journey of healing and being re-instated into modern Indian society, and the emphasis on attaining a relationship and dating.

In conclusion, this chapter reflects how the middle class, and the new middle class, are established in Indian society and their socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural position within Indian society. The middle class constitutes more than just a financial bracket that individuals aim to achieve for a better standing in society. Instead, a series of lifestyle aspirations, global influence, education, access to goods and services, modernity, and exposure and engagement in digital media additionally constitutes the middle class, more specifically the new middle class in Indian society. As explained above, the term "new" signifies the system being more socially acceptable and diverse when compared to the older hierarchy that notably favoured the upper middle class. By associating the new middle class to modernisation and globalisation is to also associate the new middle class to Indian liberation and post-coloniality. The caste system in Indian society is integrated into the norms of Indian society and the mindsets of individuals and remains a dominant subconscious factor in Indian culture, to benefit and suit the patriarchal rule, which cannot be abolished easily.

Debates on the discourse of the caste system are fractioned by the concepts of modernism versus tradition, and class versus caste. By exploring the new middle class and the caste system as entities that co-exist in Indian society, this chapter established that individuals from other classes and castes can become a part of the new middle class. By extending this understanding of the new middle class to the bildungsroman genre, the new middle class represents the journeying of youth on their paths to achieve success, self-establishment, and locating themselves within Indian society and society at large. This is explored in *Dear Zindagi* when Kaira faces challenges that affect her mental health such as having no work, not living in Mumbai anymore, moving to Goa, losing Raghuvendra who proposed to someone else, and

losing a sense of self and belonging. Her journey to success, re-locating herself into modern Indian society and emerging as her best self begins with Kaira starting therapy. As Kaira belongs to and continues to aspire towards the new middle class lifestyle, and through Kaira's journeying, the new middle class is represented as relatable and aspirational to audiences who identify with the challenges and achievements Kaira experiences. The idea of belonging, and the self-consciousness of belonging as Sheth discussed above, is reinforced throughout the film to audiences by representing a class and standing within society that is recognised and understood by audiences and influences those who aspire to the new middle class. Thus, *Dear Zindagi* acts as a point of reference to audiences (local and Indian diaspora) to reaffirm their sense of Indianness and their sense of belonging within a specific class in society. Lastly, *Dear Zindagi*, by showing the influence and effects of globalisation and modernisation within the narrative, and as a film marketed to audiences globally, becomes easily accessible and it, in itself, targets audiences of a specific market to aspire to and be influenced by the film towards the new middle class.

Chapter Five:

Indianness and the Indian diaspora

This chapter will include discussions on the Indian diaspora and the influential power Bollywood has on diasporic Indian communities globally through its film narratives. Firstly, the chapter will define the term diaspora and explore the Indian diaspora in relation to the different definitions provided and explore the ways in which Bollywood uses diasporic references and representations within films to connect to audiences of Indian diasporas (and local audiences simultaneously). Secondly, this chapter explores the way Bollywood uses the diasporic theme within its films to educate and influence Indian pride in diasporic communities to reaffirm Indian heritage, and identify the themes of nationhood, the love quest, and reinforcing family values and a sense of kinship as a means of achieving this. Finally, this chapter will identify *Dear Zindagi* as a film catered to appeal to diasporic Indian communities through the themes of feminism, mental illness and mental health, and challenging socio-political and socio-cultural issues that exist within Indian society, as well as the clash between traditional Indian society and norms against modern Indian society and the effects of globalisation.

Defining diaspora

William Safran (1991, 83-84) defines the diaspora as a group of people who have been dispersed to two or more places from a "specific-centre" and continue to value the homeland through a "collective memory, vision and myth about the original homeland". Safran (1991, 83-84) argues that the homeland is believed to be the "ideal", and the aspiration to return to the homeland while simultaneously ensuring that the ethnocommunal bond between them and the homeland is strongly upheld. He also mentions that the diasporic community maintains a problematic and troubled relationship with the wider society, believing that they are alienated and not entirely accepted within the society (othering themselves). Theorists such as Stuart Hall (1990) and Paul Gilroy (1994), understand the diaspora being created by and through differentiation, which Raghuram and Sahoo (2008, 10) states:

> It is the contradictory emotions, the ambivalences in the diasporic's notions of belonging, their identification with and against territorial social and cultural formations,

> especially as they are shaped through processes of exclusion that they highlight in their work on diaspora.

The difference between the location of belonging and the location in which one resides is represented to expose the socio-political issues that arise. Robin Cohen (1997, 26) defines the diaspora as an expansion of economic or trade opportunities. He agrees with Safran's definition and adds that individuals of a diaspora show "empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members" who have settled in other countries and expands on the possibilities of enhancing host countries that have a "tolerance for pluralism". Michele Reis (2004, 47) explores the contemporary diaspora stating that the contemporary diaspora is a creation of the globalised post-colonial world. She characterises it as "fragmentation and dislocation", international/transnational communication, and that the dislocation from the homeland does not imply a "decisive break" from the homeland and is not considered permanent (Reis, 2004, 47). Addressing the specificity of individuals that fit a diaspora, David Carment and David Bercuson (2008, 6-7) state that the:

> Members of a diaspora may include ethnic migrants, first, second, or even third-generation immigrants, as well as expatriates, students, guest workers, and refugees. The term reflects the rise of truly transnational populations, people who can be thought of as almost literally living in two places, playing an active role in two communities simultaneously.

Carment and Bercuson (2008, 6-7) further argue that there is a difference between the previous understanding of the diaspora and "ethnic migrants", and the current 21st century understanding of the diaspora where the advancing telecommunication and digital media, and the more affordable travel costs allow for "a new type of 'hyper-connectivity' between diasporas and their home communities". However, theorists such as Floya Anthias (1998) and Soysal (2000), critically analyses the omnipresence of "diasporic thinking" that fails:

> To move beyond attachment to 'primordial' connections expressed through notions of ethnicity and nationality or to provide a meaningful basis for an intersectional analysis that takes gender and class differences within and across the diaspora seriously (Raghuram and Sahoo, 2008, 10).

Sökefeld (2006) critiques this and provides a counter accusation of "primordialism" by arguing that the diaspora may correspond to social movements; that the diaspora occurs in response to triggers that requires the mobilisation of audiences/groups to imagine and construct a diaspora (Raghuram and Sahoo, 2008, 10). This results in imagined transnational communities.

Despite the many arguments and critiques surrounding the many definitions of the diaspora (as suggested by McGown (2008)), the Indian diaspora represented within Bollywood films cannot help but identify with a few of the definitions presented above. Firstly, analysing the older Bollywood films (films set in 1995-2005), the Indian diaspora can be understood through the definition of William Sefran (1991) where individuals are dispersed from the homeland (India) to another foreign country (mainly the United Kingdom or the United States). The films portray the value of the homeland as sacred and crucial to their identities, recapping memories, retelling stories, and idealising the homeland through cultural narratives (songs, traditions, norms, and dance). Films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*)(1995), *Khabi Khushi Khabi Gham* (2001), *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* (2002), and *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) explore this narrative through comparisons of the diasporic society the characters are in, with storytelling, songs, dance sequences, themes of romance and traditions, and traditional/cultural practices that symbolise or directly address the longing of the homeland and its norms and culture. *DDLJ* (1995) is considered to have assisted in the establishment of Bollywood films in overseas markets because of the Indian diasporic narrative and evoking of romance. The bond between the individual (or character in the film) and the homeland is emphasised through recapping memories and aspiring to return to the homeland at some time, as well as ensuring that the norms (societal and cultural) are upheld despite being away from the homeland. In this way, the clash of cultures and norms between the homeland and the diaspora (place in which these individuals/characters are) creates othering, maintaining a problematic relationship with their current abode and the ideals and norms of the homeland. The concept of othering and differentiation links to the definition presented by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, in which emotions and socio-cultural and socio-political beliefs clash creating a division and a sense of not belonging. The film *Namaste London* (2007) brilliantly explores the theme of othering and the difference between the societal norms of the homeland and the diasporic land as the film is centred around this theme of the Indian diaspora (the film was set in the UK).

> No no, I am British. I was not born in India. I've never even been to India. My parents are citizens of London. I've been singing the British national anthem since I was three.

> I was born and brought up here. Therefore my attitude, my thinking, my likings are all British. How could I be Indian, Laila?
> (Nair, 2007, 3)

> You are in a foreign land but your soul is still stuck at the Gateway of India. You want to live in a clean city like London, earn in pounds and give your kids an English lifestyle. But you insist on an Indian son-in-law. I wonder why?
> (Nair, 2007, 19)

The film *The Namesake* (2006) also explores the theme of othering and the socio-cultural differences between Indian society and American society, specifically through the characters of immigrated parents and first generation born children. The film explores representing the clash and difficulty between holding onto Indian tradition and upholding socio-cultural norms that encompass the Indian identity and heritage and accepting and merging the norms and culture of another country (in this case America) which is centred around the theme of the Indian diaspora.

Linking to Michele Reis's (2004) understanding of the diaspora being a construct of the globalised post-colonial world, the Indian diaspora is connected through transnational communication and the conscious knowledge that the homeland is available for return at any given time, if need be, for travel and leisure purposes or to settle down. This is evident in the above-mentioned film as well as many other films that return to the homeland either for the celebration of cultural/traditional festivities, holidaying, or to settle, which Carment and Bercuson (2008) explain due to the advancing digital media and inexpensive travel costs. This further links to the definition stated by Carment and Bercuson (2008) who explain the duality of consciously living between two places and actively playing a role in both countries simultaneously. Bollywood films (especially the older ones mentioned) represent this link to both countries through marriage, a career/business, or the reunion of family members after a long time has passed; *DDLJ* (1995) and *Namaste London* (2007) represent the link through the union of marriage, and *Khabi Khushi Khabi Gham* (2001) represents the link through the reunion of family. Beyond 2005, the Bollywood industry added to this theme by addressing socio-cultural and socio-political movements that affected both the homeland and the diasporic nations in an attempt to represent issues/differences of the same/similar interests to trigger a movement towards/against its society. Bollywood films are, arguably, obsessed with the Indian

diaspora and are viewed across many international markets including South Asia, South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Russia (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 267). The influential power that Bollywood has as a media text relates to Anderson's (1991) concept of "print capitalism" in which he states that the media has the power to create a familiar discourse that promises the maximum exposure for that specific media text.

Apart from *Dear Zindagi*, other Bollywood films have used socio-political and socio-cultural themes to represent the effects of these issues/movements both on the homeland, the diasporic nation, and the individuals/audiences in both places respectively and that is recognisable and identifiable by both local and diasporic audiences. *My Name Is Khan* (2010) aimed at representing an 'accurate' portrayal of mental illness (Asperger's syndrome) and the stereotypes and effects of terrorism on Indian/Muslim individuals living abroad (especially focusing on the xenophobia in America towards Islam and Muslims) but is relatable in India as well due to the ongoing Hindu-Muslim war. *Patiala House* (2011) aimed to represent the problematic adjustments and integration of diasporic Indians living in the United Kingdom. *English-Vinglish* (2012) aimed at challenging the submissive representation of Indian women and re-establishing their identity as powerful and modern. While the film was set in a diasporic community in New York, the themes are recognisable and identifiable with audiences from India too, where learning the English language is praised and considered important. *2 States* (2014) challenges the stigma and Indian norms around marrying out of caste and cultural backgrounds (North Indian and South Indian) which are a controversial topic in Indian society. *Pink* (2016) aimed at portraying the injustice towards women who are raped or molested by men whose voices are made silent and do not always successfully have their cases fought for. *Dhadak* (2018) brought to light the harsh reality of honour killings within the Indian cultures and caste and societal ranks, where lower caste ranked individuals are often murdered by higher caste ranked individuals, especially when love or marriage is involved. Finally, *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019) addresses the LGBTQIA+ community and portrayed the stereotypes and stigma that surround lesbianism and the conservative Indian society and community. Thus, the imagined transnational communities are created and exist through the cinematic themes Bollywood uses to address both the local and Indian diasporic audiences by addressing socio-political and socio-cultural issues that both groups of audiences can identify and connect with, including the traditional cinematic themes of modernity, romance, and melodrama to enhance the narrative of the film.

Dear Zindagi addresses the diaspora in this manner. While the film features a short scene in Singapore and mentions New York, the film is mainly set in Mumbai and Goa exploring modern Indian society and its clash with the traditional Indian society and norms. This concept of modernity and globalisation being present in Indian society makes the narrative of the modern Indian woman, modern day challenges and experiences as an Indian individual, and societal challenges (challenging patriarchy, for example) relatable to local and global audiences. *Dear Zindagi* remains loyal to the romance theme as well but integrates it into the film differently than previous Bollywood films have done by addressing romance as societal pressure and its modern-day complications. The use of digital technology and communication applications such as *Skype* represents the digital connectivity of communication, which Kaira uses to communicate with her parents, friends, romantic interests as well as her landlord. The troubled and problematic relationship with society within the film is not represented traditionally as aforementioned with the diaspora, but is represented to internally explore the troubles of Indian society within India; the youth (new middle class local and Indian diaspora) being challenged with socio-cultural and socio-political issues that affect their sense of truly belonging in their own society, and expands to include the same/similar struggles/challenges other Indian audiences of a diaspora would be faced with as well. Kaira is portrayed to feel like an outcast within society for having many relationships with men (that could include sexual activity as well). An example of this is explored during her therapy sessions with Dr. Jehangir:

> Isn't that what the world thinks? If a girl has more than one relationship then that's it! ... So the women in my dream who believe that... marriage is the only acceptable relationship... I felt dirty because of them
> (Shinde, 2016, 30-31)

Kaira also represents the modern concept of living away from home and working in a different city from her hometown. While the diaspora is not an international one, she does symbolise the greater concept of living by oneself and being financially independent, which brings about its own challenges. This links to Reis' understanding of the diaspora as well; being away from her home in Goa does not prevent her from not returning (apart from her personal choice not to return), and while at the beginning Kaira does not attach to the "homeland" with an aspiration or desire to return due to her trauma, she eventually re-develops that construct of Goa as home which could serve useful to her if she moves away from home. While Kaira herself is not actually within a traditional diasporic setting, her character is constructed to embody the

challenges and experiences an individual both locally and within the Indian diaspora would recognise and identify with.

As mentioned above, Bollywood uses specific themes and genres traditionally within its films to attract and influence its audiences locally and globally. When addressing the diasporic Indian community, Bollywood makes specific references to three main themes, namely: nationality, the love quest, and the family. The following will explore these three themes in relation to the Indian diaspora and will conclude by analysing *Dear Zindagi* in relation to these themes in more detail than explored above.

Targeting the Indian diaspora has been a strategy of Bollywood cinema for the economic success of the Indian films, as well as exposure to the Hollywood/foreign cinematic market (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 14). Locally, Bollywood's target market is usually aimed at the new middle class audiences within India and is not limited to only cinema. Film promotions and product endorsements are encouraged for Bollywood celebrities to create and enhance the specific target audience of both local and global audiences alike (Dudrah, 2006, 149). This act of globalisation within the Bollywood cinematic industry links to the concept of cultural representation that is recognisable to local and diasporic audiences. Thus, it is important to understand the societal impact of globalisation in Indian societies worldwide.

The beginning of this chapter explores the definition of the diaspora in its literal sense. However, Anderson (1991) and Appadurai (1996) explore the Indian diaspora with specific context to the ways in which the diaspora is imagined and the effects of electronic media on the diaspora. The theory of rapture by Appadurai (1996, 3-8) understands migration and the media as both being a concept of influence on how the diaspora is imagined and argues that cinema (among other forms of electronic media) is a platform that enables new resources "for self-imagining as an everyday social project" which, in turn, creates "communities of sentiment" with "groups of people that share the same emotions and imaginings" (Takhar, et.al, 2012). Anderson's (1991, 6) ideas of imagined communities is comparable to Appadurai's statements and distinguishes these imagined communities "by the style in which they are imagined". Furthermore, the concept of imagined communities specifically "addresses the cultural roots of these imaginings" (Takhar, et.al, 2012). Both these theorists draw specific attention to the symbolic relationship between the media, geographical dispersal, and nationhood, and emphasise the historical role of the media to engage with and enable audiences

of a diasporic community to relate to others in new ways. One could also argue that more fitting than the concept of "communities of sentiment" is the concept of "interpretive communities" as a response to specific genres. Key theorists such as Gaines (2005); who explores the "exotic other" through ethnographic research of an American on Indians and India, and Murphy and Kraidy (2003); explore how, through Orientalism, the West may be exoticized by the East and vice versa which creates a mutual objectification when understanding the exotic other, and Murphy (1991); who identifies "that interpretive communities exist at an institutional and semiotic level" aid in understanding the interpretive communities in its entirety (Takhar, et.al 2012, 269). Thus, the power of interpretive communities is to create a particular imaginary world that inherits and adopts their own cultural contexts and emphasises the importance of how specific genres are framed and consumed within an interpretive community. The values and meanings of specific texts, in this case, the Bollywood film narrative, are identified and understood by audiences through a common sense of identity. This is illustrated through the analysis of two interpretive communities in India with a specific focus on the development of two particular dancing styles which, according to O'Shea (1998, 57), created two different sets of choreographic conventions and aesthetic frameworks. Similarly, Parameswaran (2001) explored the ways in which conflicts and contradictions of middle class and upper class Hindu women's private lives were reconciled and negotiated through a study of their reading of the Western romance genre (*Mills and Boon* romances). Thus, Bollywood can be considered a "textual construct that upholds and reinforces the cultural values of the Indian homeland" and is more relatable to Indian diasporic audiences than Hollywood is (Takhar, et.al. 2012, 271).

Vertovic (2000) elaborates on the concept of nationhood and geographical dispersal within the diaspora and refers to the "diasporic consciousness" which is explained as:

> A sense of relationship across dispersed domains that give members of a diasporic community multiple reference points through which they identify with both the homeland and their country of residence (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 267).

The hybridisation of cultures is characterised by identity negotiation between two (or more) different societies/places. These reference points explain how the cultural values that are embedded within themes used by Bollywood play out a narrative of 'reality' for those within a diasporic community. Expanding on Appadurai's statement, the objective is to understand the specific Indian imaginary and the ways in which the values embedded within it affect the

diasporic audiences/individuals. Thus, understanding the influences of Bollywood as a vital cultural reference point is crucial in enabling members of the Indian diaspora to gain extensive knowledge about their Indian roots and develop a specific sense of Indianness and belonging (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 269). As explored above and in the previous chapters, the one key factor of information Bollywood consistently exposed is the distinctive Indian courtship rituals that seemed to be outgrown and replaced in the diasporic society.

The global demand for Bollywood films has increased since the establishment of *DDLJ,* especially among the large Indian diasporic communities worldwide. The diasporic genre has been a captivating and recognisable genre for diasporic communities, and as Dudrah (2006) mentions, the establishment of stores and online platforms that provide access to Bollywood films in overseas countries such as the UK, Africa, and the US has grown due to the consistent demand for its narratives. The global recognition of certain Bollywood films has also increased the awareness and demand for Bollywood cinema, such as the film *Devdas* (2002) by Sanjay Leela Bansali which was featured at the *Cannes Festival* in 2002, and *Lagaan* (2001) which was nominated at the Oscars in 2005 under the best foreign film category.

The three themes mentioned above are culturally embedded with values that link the films to the diasporic audience; nationhood is manifested to reaffirm the pride in Indian heritage, and the love quest is a frequently used genre to evoke romance and longing within films and reinforce family values and a sense of kinship within the film narrative to influence and "educate" audiences on their Indianness.

Nationhood: reaffirming pride in Indian heritage

This theme is used extensively to educate audiences on a sense of Indianness, ethnic identity, and pride in Indian heritage. The homeland, as previously explored, is vital in maintaining links to the Indian culture and traditions and is deeply embedded in Bollywood's use of ideologies. However, these narratives about the homeland affect the Indian diaspora individually, "according to their specific interpretive frameworks" (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 270). By consuming these Bollywood films, new middle class diasporic communities (especially the youth) can identify with both their current place of residency and the homeland and integrate it into their identity. This relates to what Clifford (1991, 312) explains as the "discrepant cosmopolitanism" where audiences experience an existential presence and participation in both the homeland

(India) and the place of residency. This exposure to Bollywood films also enables young diasporic audiences to self-monitor their behaviour and role enactments to ensure that, when necessary, they are conforming to traditional values and norms. This act of identification also refers to audiences identifying themselves with Indian actors and actresses within the Bollywood industry, which Dudrah (2006, 18) terms as "collective social meaning". This can be through the actor/actress's skin colour, hegemonic beauty standards, fitness and lifestyle, and socio-cultural beliefs/opinions, among others. These imagined constructions of Indianness are interpreted by audiences in accordance with their specific circumstances and traits. Per Mankekar's (1999, 113) analysis, the enforcement and influence of Indian hegemonic societal norms of identity and community are extensively to construct a pan-Indian culture across many parts of the world.

Takhar, et.al (2012, 271) explore the specific ways in which Bollywood can enforce the specific type of Indianness by teaching gender-based roles and the appropriate courtship behaviour and rituals within Indian society through film narratives. Reflexive questioning of both audience behaviour and identity is promoted when analysing the ways in which values and norms are embedded within these genres. Bollywood films are targeted at audiences of different age groups, and the marriage narrative is aimed mainly at the Indian youth as they are at an age of searching for romantic or marriage partners (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 271). The massive impact of Bollywood influences on the Indian diasporic youth (specifically the new middle class) begins from childhood as a favoured means of entertainment and the implementation of cultural norms. This idealised narrative of searching for romance, attaining a lifelong partner, and hosting a spectacular Indian wedding through Indian tradition and customs serves as a template of Indianness. This occurs despite residing within a western culture that contrasts with the imagined homeland. Takhar, et.al (2012, 271) explains how Vertovic (2000) describes this "diaspora as a mode of cultural production" in which the third (or next) generation of diasporic youth who were born and raised in the resettled country form a diasporic consciousness about their culture and traditions. Therefore, local, and diasporic audiences buy into a transnational community through the consumption of Bollywood films. The continuous reinforcement of a happy ending that prevails and erases any factors that may have challenged or undermined the idealised scenario (geographical distance, external cultural influences, or intergenerational disagreements) is continuously implemented within these narratives. This reinforcement occurs through the joint Indian family system to reunite despite the challenges that had previously occurred, and although these experiences are far-fetched from audiences' everyday realities,

the idealisation of this theme/genre and narrative is believed to be possible and worth striving for (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 272). In *Dear Zindagi*, this concept of the idealisation of Indianness is tweaked to cater to a modern narrative but still corresponds to the specificity of reaffirming Indian pride and Indian heritage through the acknowledgement and acceptance of Kaira with her family, personal trauma, and her own goals. While Kaira still resides within India in Mumbai (her homeland), the place in which her family settled down and brought her up is Goa.

Her relationship with the homeland is troubled; her traumatic childhood caused by her parents in comparison to the relationship she has with her place of residence (Mumbai) provides her freedom and comfort, which is different when compared to previous statements about the homeland being the place of aspiration and desire. This switch between the two could emphasise the film's decision to portray a modern representation of the transition away from the traditional narrative towards a modern narrative, as well as the negative attributes an individual may have towards a place due to socio-cultural/personal experiences. In Kaira's perspective, Goa is a place of negativity, traumatic memories, constriction on social growth, and the reality of Indian tradition and traditional Indian societal norms which she aims to extensively avoid to the best of her abilities. She attaches positive attributes to Mumbai which include the perks of modern globalised societal norms and influences, a more accepting society (influenced by Western society), a mix of traditional and western norms that seem to work in favour of the urban middle class citizens, and a less confining and demanding environment that promotes social and self-growth with less stigma from patriarchal Indian society.

Kaira's identity as an Indian is not supported by the need to uphold her Indian roots or traditional/cultural norms and practices, but by the simple fact that she is of Indian ethnicity residing in India. She is an Indian citizen and therefore has experienced the Indian traditions and societal norms first-hand. However, her modern upbringing, international tertiary education in New York, and career that requires her to travel, as well as her independent lifestyle enable her to detach herself from the traditional Indian identity and norms and understand the diasporic Indian communities in more depth as she begins to integrate into modern Indian society. Thus, as stated above, Kaira can identify with the traditional/patriarchal Indian society and identity, as well as the modern Indian society, and integrate it into her own identity as a young modern Indian woman.

Throughout the film, especially during her therapy sessions with Dr. Jehangir, Kaira self-monitors her behaviour and role enactments against the traditional values and norms of Indian society, which creates conflict and attaches a stigma to her modern influenced identity. This emphasises the constricting pressures of patriarchal gender and behaviour norms on the youth especially what is regarded as appropriate courtship behaviours and norms. Kaira explores this exact narrative to Dr. Jehangir when she explains a dream that later symbolises her feeling excluded from Indian society because of her having many romantic partners before marriage, which patriarchal Indian society frowns upon:

> And then suddenly out of nowhere... this group of newly married women... in saris, pallus & bindis all land up there... and they start pointing at me, laughing at me. Bam! I woke up. It was 4 am... I went straight to the bathroom and stood under the shower. Why shower?
> I don't know I felt dirty, I felt like I needed to clean up...
>
> You know what I felt... I felt I am ugly, trashy, cheap, dirty...
>
> Wait, wait, wait. So the women in my dream who believe that... marriage is the only acceptable relationship... I felt dirty because of them?
> (Shinde, 2016, 30-31)

In this way, the film presents a new concept of Indianness for Indian youth, both the local and Indian diasporic new middle class individuals that contrasts with the traditional patriarchal norm that women are not meant to date many men for fear of being stigmatised to be impure of marriage. This flexibility becomes a recognisable and relatable narrative that diasporic audiences of modern society can identify with and inherit into their own identity, which recognises the old norms but implements the new influences of Indianness.

Dear Zindagi does not disappoint in providing a happy ending that reinforces the narrative of triumph against the factors that challenged Kaira in many areas of her life. The film concludes with a short film on women's empowerment in which Kaira creates the reunion of her family with whom she has forgiven and re-establishes her bond with and the reunion of all her ex-romantic partners with scenes that portray her good relations with them despite their breakups. The short project film Kaira creates (the storyline and script) symbolises the main theme of

feminism within the entire film of *Dear Zindagi*, as well as her newly developed self that is healed from her traumatic past and can be argued to reflect Kaira's own value and beliefs about herself.

> For the first time... Dona Maria had the courage to face her true self
> Finally she felt free, she felt alive
> (Shinde, 2016, 59)

The happy ending suggests, as mentioned above, that the idealised narrative is achievable and worth striving for, which can be relatable and encouraging to diasporic audiences especially the Indian diasporic youth who may experience similar challenges or conditions that Kaira represented. This includes the healing and commitment to therapy and self-love, the challenges of life as an Indian individual (specifically an Indian woman) conflicted by traditional norms, or the understanding of relationships and gender-based courtship behaviours that differ from the traditional norms and are more relatable to modern day society. The final scene of the film, which shows Kaira walking on a beach and playing with the waves while a voice over plays out, emphasises the idealised narrative of achieving and striving towards a happy ending. Kaira mentions that her emotional trauma against her parents was her overhearing her mother telling her grandfather that they cannot care for Kaira (who was aged six at the time) while they are travelling, despite having had their second child and leaving Kaira to reside with her grandparents.

> But every letter ended with the same question... 'When will you come back?'...
> Then I would wait for a letter wait for an answer to my question... but it never came.
> When they called once a month, they had some excuse each time... something about 'an address change, no post office close by, feeling unwell' etc etc.
> But I still kept writing...
>
> As I was about to enter the room I heard my granddad shouting at my mom... he was telling her that what she was doing was not right... how could she not respond to my question, to my letters...
> And then, I heard my mom reply... "I can't give her false hope... the truth is that we can't take her back just yet... not until the business is set up... It is too tough to handle two children... and travel constantly" blah blah.

> But everything just seemed to... fade away...
> (Shinde, 2016, 51-52)

This betrayal leads Kaira not to write any more letters to her mother, for she feels that she is not loved and prioritised. The film ends with Kaira writing a letter to "life", which symbolises her healing and progress from her trauma, and embracing her life as she is.

> Dear life, I know we haven't been in touch for a while...
> So nothing
> Just wanted to say hi.
> (Shinde, 2016, 60)

Thus, the happy ending theme links to the joint family and to herself as well, specifically symbolising her newfound placement within modern society as an independent modern Indian woman, her healing and acceptance of her trauma and mental health issues as well as her curiosity toward a fulfilled life. In these ways, the new narrative of Indianness that fits the hopeful and western influenced diasporic audience is represented and encouraged to be a modern understanding and framework of the Indian identity. In conclusion, Bollywood has the influential power to assist in maintaining the Indian identity.

The Love Quest: evoking romance and longing in *Dear Zindagi*

As mentioned previously, Bollywood influences audiences on courtship behaviours, gender-based roles, and the concept of romance and love within their film narratives. Romance has always been a prominent genre in Bollywood films and has focused on the idealisation of searching for a marriage partner to attain a wholesome life. The longing for love depicted in Bollywood films and yearned for by diasporic audiences conforms to the beliefs of the romantic love mythology used by Bollywood in the romantic genre, which emphasises that those who find their soul mate attain completeness in life (see chapter on Bollywood genres).

Paradoxically, Bollywood narratives tend to undermine and challenge the traditional Indian norms and views of courtship and romance, especially that love is attainable after marriage (older Bollywood film narratives encouraged courtship through an arranged marriage) (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 272). This is despite their pride in being Indian and the Indian culture. Bollywood

has successfully influenced and captured the attention of Indian youth (both local and diasporic) by portraying a perfected imagined world of Bollywood and the ideal fictional landscape that 'promises' a happy ending. Takhar, et.al (2012, 272) explores this tool used by Bollywood by stating that Bollywood is:

> Demonstrating a very positive attitude towards the love story and highlighting the influential power those plots have to search for a perfect man in the real world.

However, audiences are critical and aware that these perfected imagined worlds are unattainable realistically and are also aware of the influential power Bollywood narratives have in implementing norms and views about romance and courtship, and their responses to it. Despite this acknowledgement of manipulation by Bollywood films, audiences are drawn to normalise and converge the two worlds (imagined and reality) being conditioned by its powerful narratives and traditional norms and adopt specific preferences that should meet the requirements of the imagined characters in a romantic setting. Takhar, et.al (2012, 272) explain this behaviour by audiences by stating that:

> The ability to willingly suspend belief is particularly crucial when readers are consuming texts that have strong fantasy elements, as readers are required to go with the emotional flow of the narrative and suspend any scepticism or cynicism they might have for such fantastic and implausible tales.

Audiences are drawn into the idealised romantic narrative of the film, the characters within the narrative, and the theme of perseverance and a happy ending. This extends to audiences attaching themselves to fictional characters; male actors being portrayed with specific hegemonic masculine traits that male audiences are conditioned to aspire to, and female actresses being portrayed with specific hegemonic traits to attract the male gaze that female audiences aspire to. The exchange of aspirations occurs as well, in which both genders have a framework that conditions them into what they need to find in a romantic partner, based on the gender roles and behaviours of the fictional characters within the Bollywood film, which is not only unhealthy and fits the patriarchal norms of society, but is also unrealistic when removed from the ideal imagined landscape into reality. Takhar, et.al (2012, 272) mention that through their study they have discovered that "audiences also admit to living in their own 'little Heer Ranjha (Romeo and Juliet) fairytale'."

Thus, audiences are presented with the dilemma of upholding the traditional norms presented to them (courtship behaviour and expectations), but with the conscious acknowledgement that it contrasts with the reality of their everyday lives. Audience identity is manipulated and influenced repeatedly through Bollywood films, even if the narrative of the film changes (different challenges posed to hinder the perfect romance). However, the specific concept of Indianness is still present and influential in the way Indian audiences (local and diasporic) identity themselves. This is present in the personal ways that Bollywood narratives affect the audience's thoughts and actions (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 272). With reference to *Heer Ranjha* (a famous romantic Punjabi story of a rich girl who meets a poor boy), the romantic genre which entails the hero rescuing and attaining the heroine is largely popular within Indian cinema and has been influenced by Western culture. This romance, however, has clashed with the emphasis on marriage in Bollywood narratives, as romantic love is identified as passionate and emotive, and married love is identified as pragmatic and for companionship (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 273). Older Bollywood films (and traditional Indian norms and beliefs) valued marriage as romantic success in one's life, while current Bollywood films (and Indian society and beliefs influenced by globalisation and modernity) explore romantic love with more flexibility than before, and still emphasise marriage as the end goal that should want to be attained, but without the pressure and stigma of not achieving it instantly. This representation of romantic love and marriage attracts Indian diasporic youth who search for the compatible notions of romance in a partner, and are:

> ...Aspiring to be the heroes and heroines of their own romantic narratives, recreating and re-enacting the search for true love and the eventual completion of that search in marriage with the man or woman of their dreams (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 273).

The concept of wholeness and completeness in life within *Dear Zindagi* is represented a bit differently than the traditional narratives, in that it is achievable when Kaira, herself, becomes whole as a person after her therapy sessions with Dr. Jehangir and forgives herself and others in her life. The wholeness attained through romance is promised only after she embraces herself and heals from her trauma, thus suggesting that since she was not whole emotionally due to her trauma she could not commit and achieve wholeness from a romantic partner. This is represented in the film through her three failed relationships, in which with each of them she is confronted with some sort of trauma or challenging experience within her own life that

results in her leaving that relationship and not attaining completeness. Dr. Jehangir makes a reference to this after Kaira finally reveals the root of her childhood trauma by saying:

> If you don't cry wholeheartedly, how will you laugh wholeheartedly?
> ...You have carried this fear with you all your life... this burden is falling on all your relationships, especially on your love life.
> So you leave others before they can leave you
> You want to say bye before they can say bye
> Because you never want to face that pain again
> (Shinde, 2016, 53-54).

Once Kaira has completed therapy, and ultimately feels more whole and secure with herself, the promise of attaining a committed relationship is portrayed when the film nears the end, and she meets a new man at the screening of her short film project (whose name is not mentioned in the film). This could suggest the film's reiteration of the romance theme is a promising opportunity for Kaira to achieve wholeness in romance as she has already attained wholeness within herself.

The film challenges the unattainable idealised imagined world Bollywood has created by presenting discourses between characters that bring awareness to how unrealistic it is. Kaira, throughout the film, is portrayed to represent the reality of modern new middle class Indian youth, and in doing so she presents the impossible expectations Bollywood imagined worlds have on audiences. Kaira first problematises the cliché romance genre through her frustration with love and romance when a couple bumps into her.

> Have you gone blind in love? Am I invisible?
> We said sorry
> Staring into her eyes!
> They are a couple...
> 'Oh my coochie coo' 'So sweet I love you'... The same rubbish crap it's irritating
> (Shinde, 2016, 6)

This cliché narrative of love is commonly represented within Hollywood and Bollywood films, meant to symbolise the essence of true love as time becomes a matter of fragmentation while

the couple falls in love. Kaira calling out the cliché romance traits immediately brings to light the overly romanticised theme that appears unrealistic. She, then, challenges the Bollywood industry as an environment of people (actors and actresses) that do not necessarily fit the ideal marriage characteristics when her aunt comments on the people she associates herself with.

> If you keep hanging with these filmy men... how will you find a nice boy?
> Filmy men are okay for checking out abs, but not okay to marry?
> (Shinde, 2016, 19)

The representation of Bollywood actors and actresses being idolised for their professions and problematised for their lifestyles is challenged by Kaira addressing the objectification of Bollywood men in the industry. This removes the imagined concept of celebrities being overshadowed as entertainers leading lifestyles that are influenced by the west and that challenge or oppose traditional Indian societal norms. An example of this is the independence women have in the industry that enables actresses to lead a more independent life (financial independence, social independence to do, go or be with whom they please without being answerable, etc) that challenges the need for the dependence on a man. By doing so Kaira also enforces the theme of feminism and challenges toxic masculinity when addressing actors' body types and looks as undesirable traits for what constitutes a "nice" man. Finally, Dr. Jehangir challenges Kaira's understanding of a romantic partner having to fit a specific criterion, bringing to her attention the unfair treatment it is towards another person when they are unable to be everything to one person.

> Why just that one special relationship? I think one can have many relationships in life...
> The romantic relationship is just one of many.
> To expect a single relationship to take on the burden of every need... a bit unfair, right?
> (Shinde, 2016, 56)

This challenges the imagined idea that a romantic partner should be able to possess all the characteristics wanted by another; that they should be the person for every need and interest that their partner may have. The romance genre normalises the unrealistic expectations an individual needs to adhere to and seek out when addressing a soulmate and Dr. Jehangir's statement aims at challenging and bringing awareness to this problematic and unrealistic characteristic of cliché and idealised romance.

With this said, *Dear Zindagi* presents a narrative that proposes a new possible imagined world for diasporic audiences, especially when addressing the romance genre. Kaira opposing and challenging traditional Indian societal norms (especially the emphasis on marriage) represents the shift in modern day Indian society, both locally and in Indian Diasporas that are influenced by western culture. Audiences, especially the new middle class Indian diasporic youth, are able to recognise and identify with this modernity within their society, being influenced by globalised norms through digital media and Hollywood films and embracing the societal shift along with the shift away from traditional beliefs and practices. Kaira reinforces feminism with her narrative of being able to date in Indian society and having multiple relationships that may/may not include sexual activities without the stigma of being undesirable or a fille de joie. Kaira also normalises the need to date as many men as she wants, not settling for someone who is not compatible with her to maintain her self-worth and value in society. Kaira is represented as her own hero in the film who overcomes her challenges in the romance field. However, she is still portrayed to need a romantic partner despite her independence and modernity, which re-emphasises the need for a man in a woman's life, and the presence of traditional Indian values.

Reinforcing family values and a sense of kinship

The Indian family system is recognised as the social foundation of defining the Indian identity, despite being in the homeland or in a diasporic community. Thus, the family trope is used extensively in Bollywood with the romance genre to maintain a narrative for Indian identity, Indian social norms, and the resistance to any change to these traditional norms (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 274). Takhar, et.al (2012, 274) also mentions that alongside the family being an influential institution, the family also serves as a:

> Semiotic concept to ensure that social and cultural interests are upheld and disseminated.

While Hollywood films display the romance and family genre as individualistic, Bollywood film narratives are embedded and encoded with a variety of themes to ensure the maintenance of Indian societal norms, which constitutes the role and hierarchy of the family. Ultimately, other family members are conditioned to be collectively responsible in submissively adhering to and maintaining the greater interests of the family over an individual's needs and wants.

These Bollywood films are termed "family love stories" (Mehta, 2005, 136), as the Bollywood industry has been known to produce films that are suitable for family viewing and display a "happy marriage between Indian traditions and the global market." This is successful when the ideologies of both genres, romance, and family-centric, are intertwined, creating a strong connection of desire and longing, as well as pride in the Indian heritage and Indian identity. Family values and norms within Indian society and culture have demanded the utmost respect for the longest time, with the hierarchy of the father (or eldest family member that is usually a male) overpowering the rest of the household. The hierarchy has been represented with such authority and resistance to change within Bollywood films that the narrative has penetrated deeply into Indian society, creating what could be called a reflection of the patriarchal societal Indian norms that exist in Indian society. Films such as *DDLJ* (1995), *Mohobbatein* (2000), *Waqt: The Race Against Time* (2005), *We Are Family* (2010), *Piku* (2015), and *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019) have maintained the importance of the family respect and adherence to family values and norms, and each film explores the family hierarchy through the romance that demands that the Indian traditional family norms are upheld despite the romance that may challenge it. The repetition of these narratives enhances and emphasises the importance of family values and norms. Characters (and audiences) experience the tensions between the desire for romance that poses challenges for the family/societal norms, and their desire to maintain the highest degree of parental respect. Thus, one can argue that one of the most important and emphasised values in Indian culture is the respect for and maintenance of the family system. With this said, the ideal values of Indian femininity are strictly upheld with a preference over western values of femininity. It also includes the fundamental role of women in ensuring that these patriarchal norms (of the family, courtship norms and behaviours, and others) are upheld in the family, despite her individual opinions and beliefs about it. Examples of Indian femininity include a woman's chastity, vulnerability, submissiveness, and shy nature, softness, beauty, sensuality, among many more (this is explored more in the chapter Mental Illness within Bollywood). This differs from the western values of femininity that are, either, more flexible with expected gender behaviours and roles within society, and Indian society ensures the othering of the western culture and differentiates itself from, what they classify, as undesirable norms. This becomes the creditable narrative of the bearer of Indianness.

Due to Bollywood's influential relationship with Indian society, audiences of Bollywood films are often appeased that the films challenge the patriarchal norms of Indian society through the pursuit of romance and love, which, at times, challenges the family values (which also

symbolises the patriarchal Indian societal norms) but simultaneously uphold and treasure the family values even though it is patriarchal. This contradictory behaviour is what creates the idealised pursuit of striving for a happy ending which audiences are attracted to. Takhar, et.al (2012, 274) explain how self-reflexive young diasporic youth are of their interests and behaviours, differentiating and distinguishing themselves from western (or "'white'") courtship behaviours which are understood to be licentious and too individualistic and are often (from the perspective of Indian patriarchal society) disrespectful to an individual's family and community. It is important to point out that Bollywood's objective is not to oppose either culture over the other but to build a distinct understanding and negotiation between the different cultures and the diasporic community. Bollywood films emphasise the ideologies of family values and kinship, specifically targeting the young diasporic audiences as a means of 'educating' them, which in turn affects these individuals' self-identity, the construction of their family identity, and their knowledge of the community expectations. The importance of the family genre (being a family film that also includes romance stories) is to promote these ideologies from an early age, thus acting as a cultural institution.

> In this way, the Bollywood film industry's attempts to 'reproduce the Indian nation' (Mehta, 2005, 127) globally through Bollywood are successful (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 274).

Bollywood being globally recognised and having the influential power to act as a cultural institution enables the industry to control and spread the specific messages/ideologies that it would want to broadcast. Takhar, et.al (2012, 274) emphasise Shukla's (1991, 2) statement of the influential power Bollywood has in influencing, monitoring, and maintaining Indian societal values (in extension the familial values) by stating that:

> The Indianness that is learnt and adopted through Bollywood films is 'at once a language of locality, of serving to articulate migrants place in society, and of (inter-) nationality, to share up their position in a particular notion (and materiality) of India.

This links back to the points made on how imagined worlds are constructed by Bollywood and the ways in which diasporic audiences embrace this influential power that Bollywood celebrates. The level and depth of influence these narratives have on audiences globally, however, differ depending on different diasporic communities and audiences. Some audiences

are conditioned to reject the Western culture of individuality and use Bollywood films and narratives as a framework and basis for doing so to maintain Indian values (Takhar, et.al, 2012, 274). This occurs because the representation of the western culture is portrayed as damaging and misleading to Indian societal norms and identity, as previously explained.

The family genre is used in *Dear Zindagi* alongside the romance genre, which shows that Bollywood's uses of the two genres are used continuously in more recent films. However, *Dear Zindagi* uniquely does not merge the two genres to interplay with each other; Kaira's romance narrative does not overlap with the family narrative, and vice versa. The narrative of Indianness and Indian identity is modern instead of the traditional narrative, as Kaira's parents are not portrayed as a traditional Indian family, but are influenced by Western culture in their dressing, behaviours (drinking wine while dining with a small group of friends/family), modern style home in Goa, their mindset is a merge of western thinking with the knowledge of Indian society, Kaira and her brother are given the opportunities to study abroad, have a career in creative fields, reside independently away from home, and make their own choices (their lifestyle, social life, etc):

> Why will she do some other job? She's done a cinematography course in New York She is brilliant at her job and she's still young.
> (Shinde, 2016, 18)

In this way, Kaira challenges the patriarchal ideologies of being a modern woman in Indian society and the norms of the family from this perspective. Her parents have merged both the western culture and Indian culture to work for their modern lifestyle, which provided their children (Kaira and Kiddo) with more opportunities and flexibility in developing their Indian identity. This also includes the merging of Indian and western ideologies of femininity.

The traditional Indian norms are represented through subtle behaviours by Kaira's parents, such as Kaira's mother making traditional Indian dishes such as Bibek and coconut Laddoos, and a few female characters (her aunt and mother's friend) wearing traditional Indian clothing, the saree. Kaira's uncle symbolises and represents the hierarchy of the family unit and embodies the patriarchal norms of Indian society in his mindset. As explored previously, her uncle constantly mentions his disapproval of Kaira's lifestyle and choice not to get married, and continuously dismisses her choices and emotions in favour of her parents or reputation.

She should be doing a proper job... in an office... something more respectable. That's when we can talk to people seriously about marriage.
(Shinde, 2016, 18)

Make her understand that... once your parents moved back, she never failed in school again... so they took the right decision.
(Shinde, 2016, 49-50)

The respect of the family is also represented differently in the film, where Kaira has a troubled and problematic relationship with her parents. While she shows general respect towards her parents for being her parents and her elders, she does not adhere to their demands and opinions about her lifestyle and choices, thus not respecting what they would aspire for her to have or do. Kaira's parents do not understand their daughter as a person, and Kaira, who has already created and attached a specific depiction of her parents due to her trauma, does not understand her parents as people beyond that attachment she has created. This creates and adds more tension to the already troubled relationship. Examples of this are her dismissal of marriage when her parents attempt to discuss it with her, and her moving out of her parent's home to stay with her friend- Jackie- instead.

Yes, are you a Lesbian'?
Oh my God... If I were, would that stop you from talking about marriage?

...I'm going to stay with Jackie...
I don't care what people think... I'm not going to stay with you for other people...
(Shinde, 2016, 18-20)

Kaira (as well as her family) represents a new narrative of Indianness and different ideologies concerning courtship behaviours, romance norms, and family values for audiences (local and diasporic audiences) to self-reflex on and relate to. The film narratives may lean more towards the influence of western culture, but the traditional (and patriarchal) norms of Indian society are still visible as a means of recognising and identifying with different characters and experiences portrayed in the film. Arguably, the film attempts to normalise certain norms that are influenced by western culture and attempt to place these norms within Indian society

harmoniously. Therefore, Bollywood cinema appears to be circulating "Indian nationalism itself as a commodified and globalised product." (Rajadhyaksha, 2003, 37)

However, the film is created in a family-feel-good manner that is still enjoyable and recognisable as an influential media text, even if an audience does not identify with the themes of the narrative. In this way, as explored above, there is a distinct understanding and negotiation between the two different cultures and the diaspora. Overall, the film acts as a cultural institution that transmits new ideologies and narratives for the diasporic audience to recognise and identify with, therefore constructing a newly imagined world.

In conclusion, this chapter reflects the ways the Indian diaspora is constructed as an imagined transnational community, the way the Indian diaspora exists and is represented within Bollywood film, and the influential power Bollywood films have in influencing the Indian diaspora on Indian heritage, Indian pride and the reiteration and influence of hegemonic Indian norms. The diaspora originates from the globalised post-colonial world and the different socio-political and socio-cultural norms/issues in different societies that contest the socio-political and socio-cultural norms/issues of the homeland. The diaspora maintains an ethnocommunal bond with the homeland, thus the homeland is framed as the paragon for identity construction, national pride, and individual aspirations and expectations. The homeland remains available for return for the Indian diaspora and remains an influential anchor for individuals to return to and be rooted in their culture. Bollywood films often use the Indian diasporic narrative alongside the romance genre to idealise the homeland and ensure societal and cultural norms and expectations are upheld. It also influences audiences to subconsciously (and consciously) monitor their behaviour and role-enactment to conform to traditional norms. It also represents the clash between different societies and cultures between the homeland and the diasporic community. This results in the othering of the diasporic individual's/family and maintaining a strained relationship juggling between the ideals and norms of the diasporic society and the society of the homeland. Bollywood repetitively represents this narrative, with a specific focus on the merging of norms and culture of the diasporic community with traditional Indian heritage and socio-political norms. Alongside the emotions of othering, a sense of not belonging to either the diasporic society or the homeland develops. However, there is a duality between consciously living between the two places and playing an active role simultaneously in both the diasporic community and the homeland. Bollywood represents this duality through the romance genre, linking both countries through a marriage and family reunion. In addition

to this, Bollywood began addressing the impact of socio-political and socio-cultural movements that affected the homeland and the diaspora, highlighting the issues of similar/different interests that trigger a movement towards or against a society. To enhance the film's narratives, and to connect to audiences locally and of the diaspora, Bollywood includes themes of tradition, modernity, romance, and melodrama.

Dear Zindagi explores the clash between traditional Indian society and patriarchal norms and the modern Indian society that challenges these norms and is influenced by globalisation and modernity. *Dear Zindagi*'s narrative of the modern Indian woman, modern day challenges and experiences, and the societal challenges (like feminism) on an individual is relatable to audiences locally and within the diaspora, as it explores the theme of modernity and globalisation. The romance genre in *Dear Zindagi* differs from the traditional representation of romance in other Bollywood films, and it instead represents the societal pressures of courtship and marriage along with the modern-day challenges. Current Bollywood films (like *Dear Zindagi*) explore the romance genre and expectations with flexibility, emphasising marriage as a life goal while also detaching from societal stigma and pressure on age, preference, and lack of agency and free will. Kaira experiences othering when challenging patriarchal societal norms and journeying through therapy and her mental health. The diaspora is not represented through two different countries, but rather through Kaira living independently in a different city away from her parents, with different aspirations and expectations that differ and challenge the traditional patriarchal Indian societal norms. She is not unable to return to her hometown, Goa, which represents the traditional ideologies and narratives of the ideal Indian woman, marriage expectations, stigma, and trauma that she struggles to get away from and challenge. In this way, the character of Kaira is created to embody the challenges and experiences of an individual (specifically a modern Indian woman) that audiences both within the homeland and the Indian diaspora would recognise, identify with, and be influenced by. Understanding the ways in which the diaspora is integrated into *Dear Zindagi* explores the influential power Bollywood films have as a learning institute for cultural references for audiences to be educated on Indian heritage and culture leading to a sense of Indianness and a sense of belonging. This can range from educating and aspiring to maintain the appropriate courtship behaviour and rituals, to enforcing gender-based roles and maintaining the patriarchal hierarchies among men and women. In other words, Bollywood's power to create a representation of a perfect imagined world and ideal fictional landscapes with the promised happy ending is normalised and converged into reality by audiences who are conditioned/influenced by the narratives and

discourses that are designed to create specific preferences and requirements to attain national Indian pride, cultural and societal inclusion, and fulfilment in life.

Chapter Six:

Global Context of Bollywood and *Dear Zindagi*

This chapter aims to locate the film to universalism- in other words, to get the film to mean something on a global level, keeping in mind that universalism is a longstanding philosophical issue of contention among theorists of culture. This enables discussions on Bollywood's relativity of certain discourses such as feminism, mental health, gender, modernity, and patriarchy, which are all highlighted within the film. By navigating the global circulation of the film as a global south text, we can understand how these discourses are used as a tool of universality by Bollywood cinema. Bollywood has discussed women's issues and politics as an entry point into global interventions, whilst also addressing the same/similar issues faced within the Indian society as well. This extends into the Indian society abroad and away from India (the diasporic Indian communities across the world) that are also able to recognise and identify these narratives within *Dear Zindagi*. This chapter will explore the ways in which Bollywood became more global and its representation and influence with modernity, and in conclusion explore the way mental health and women empowerment is reintegrated into the modern day patriarchal Indian society, rather than being a movement to address and change patriarchal norms against women in Indian society.

Bollywood context: How Bollywood started becoming more global

Over recent years, Indian cinema has been taken more seriously by scholars globally; understanding the industry and its projects in its own identity, rather than understanding the entertainment industry from a Eurocentric perspective of cinema and norms. The magnificence and influential power the Indian cinematic industry has (this includes Bollywood and other Indian language-speaking entertainment industries), has encouraged a keen interest in understanding the ways in which this industry works, the norms and narratives it produces, and the effects these films and narratives have on audiences globally. This includes analysing and understanding the provincialism that is addressed in Hollywood, as there has been an increase in postcolonial and transnational research globally (Rai, 2009, 1). Scholars such as Madhavan Prasad (1998), Ravi Vasudevan (2011), Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2014), and Rosie Thomas (2015) have contributed to the analysis of Bollywood films over a variety of perspectives and

critiques to revolutionise the previously understood characteristics of Bollywood and Indian cinema and its culture.

Origins of Bollywood and its importance to global identification

The term 'Bollywood' was coined after the central city of Bombay (now referred to as Mumbai) and can be loosely defined as 'Bombay's Hollywood', which is meant to represent the Indian/Hindi speaking cinematic entertainment industry (Takhar, et.al, 2012). The city of Bombay had its name changed as a form of dismissal of its colonial past and influences that had shaped Indian society and the ways in which India was understood to be[12]. The change of name represented a new identity for Indians within the city, including cultural and religious influences to shape its heritage and identity, all while recognising and slowly embracing the progression of global modernisation. As a ripple effect, the identity of the Indian heritage and culture changed the ways in which the Indian entertainment industry identified itself, providing content and narratives that were aimed more at Indian culture, religion, and Indian societal norms, and less at colonialism and western narratives. Post 2000, the content produced by Bollywood included an integration of transnational texts which included Indian frameworks, genres, and themes (religion, tradition, and culture) as well as western frameworks, influences, and systems (representations of modernisation, western societal norms, diasporic communities, etc)[13]. Bollywood has a significant influence on Indian society, and its society influences the types of content/narratives Bollywood produces for the audience's interests. Thus, the representation of Indian heritage and culture mixed with the representation of western (and global) aspirations, norms, and movements became a way to expose Indian society to broader discussions and realities. What is interesting about the Indian cinematic industry is that the title 'Bollywood' holds specific symbolism and ideologies attached to it, separate from its unit as

[12] The name Bombay was associated to the British Raj/Empire, which was attached to the legacy of colonial power and was no longer by the Indian nation (Nox,2018)

[13] Cinematic frameworks include discourses of which narratives are told, camera position, lighting, scene cuts, camera shots, sound effects, dialogue and editing. The styles change for each cinematic industry and are not universal in its usage. Most common difference between Hollywood and Bollywood films are the *mise-en-scène* (the way in which a scene is staged). While the Hollywood style of cinematic frameworks is the most copied, popular and aggressively marketed model globally, it is not the only way in which movies can be made. For example, Germany, in the 1920's, used a concept of Expressionalism to "depict the extreme mental state of characters throughout mise-en-scène" in their films (Costanzo, 2014, 18). The French filmmakers experimented with Impressionalism and Surrealism. According to Costanzo (2014, 18), "Italian neoliberalism proved to be an inspiration for Brazil's 'Cinema Nova' (New Cinema), Argentina's Third Cinema, and other film movements, from Iran to Sub-Saharan Africa."

an entertainment industry. Kaskebar (1996) explains that the term 'Bollywood' represents a mode of production that caters to creating and sharing its culture in a local and global context by emphasising and prioritising the representation of Indianness (culturally, socially, and politically) to promote a unique and fairer Indian identity. Prasad (2003) states that the term 'Bollywood' became an interchangeable term used to describe the linguistic nature and region of popular Hindi and Indian cinema[14]. Kaskebar (1996, 365-391) mentions that the term has, however, been identified as the "catchall term for Global Asian popular culture" (referring specifically also to South Asia). This presents the issue that the term, being identified in this way, ignores the diversity of other Indian cultures and geographies, such as Tamil, Telegu, Bengali, Punjabi, and Malayalam. This automatically privileges one cinematic industry (and in extension one type of Indian vernacular, culture, and region) over the others.

Bollywood is unique in that it has developed the ability and skill to cater to and include a variety of niche markets when creating cinematic material. This includes a mix of different genres, languages, creating and sharing cultures and social norms, narratives from other cinematic industries worldwide, and adding an Indian perspective to it. Deprez (2010) emphasises this by adding that these niche markets include "contemporary multilingual masala films, films imitating Hollywood genres, films depicting life in the Indian diaspora and so forth." (Masala films explained below). As Rajadhyaksha (2003) states, the definition of Bollywood becomes much more complex, consisting of many other elements and frameworks attached to it other than only being referred to and recognised as Indian cinema. It is a platform that shares culture and socio-cultural norms with the specific inclusion of the Indian country, Indian society, norms, and traditions in its liberated post-colonial economy.[15]

Accusations against Bollywood being a cinematic industry that imitates and plagiarises narrative content from Hollywood has been in effect due to the ways in which Bollywood has been marketed globally. The Eurocentric perception of Bollywood and its industry has not allowed for an unbiased opinion on what the cinematic industry is about (Desai and Dudrah,

[14] While this is true, the past recent years have seen a progressive emphasis on distinguishing different types of Indian films that do not necessarily fall under the term 'Bollywood'. These are considered to be part of the Indian cinematic banner that extend their possibilities to cover a wider range of narratives, representations, the remaking of foreign films into Indian/Hindi medium films, and the opportunities for actors/actresses to work with different casting and film agents that are outside of the Bollywood industry.

[15] Interestingly, the term Bollywood has become the global reference for Hindi cinema, despite being predated by Indian cinema. This could be because Indian cinema was globally recognised seriously after 1970 when India overtook America as the world's largest film producer (Moktan, 2016).

2008), thus there is difficulty in changing this perception and understanding the similarities between Hollywood and Bollywood.

> Scholars writing on non-Western cinema, in general, have had to wrestle with Eurocentric frameworks that implicitly see Europe and North America, not simply as the sites of emergence of film, but as the sites from which all cinema development and progress must be measured and understood (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 2).

Prasad (2003, 2) points out that this accusation against Bollywood is problematic as it suggests that Hollywood is the standard of cinematic entertainment while other cinematic industries (not limited to only Bollywood) are regarded as lesser and secondary. Prasad (2003, 2) also mentions that there are other cinematic industries worldwide that have used similar narratives to that of Hollywood, which has not come into as much scrutiny as Bollywood has. Perhaps, apart from the Eurocentric perception of what Bollywood is understood to consist of, it is also the growing demand for Bollywood films and its rank as the second largest cinematic industry that attracts such scrutiny. Included in these accusations are extended arguments on the content Bollywood produces, such as Bollywood being poor imitators of content creation, not representing social realism in their productions, and being accused to be merely spectacles for music, its whimsical settings, melodrama, and its grand aesthetics. Takhar, et.al (2012, 266) quotes Dudrah (2006) when explaining that:

> Bollywood has often been disparaged by film journalists for its characteristically overwrought and elaborate plots, escapist and fantastic story lines, exaggeratedly elaborate costume settings, simplistic romantic plots, and soap opera nature.

There is some truth in that, to a certain degree, Bollywood does use similar plot devices in its cinematic narratives. However, the main difference is that their narratives, settings, and musicals are far more attuned to the local culture, created with a strategic influence of Indian traditions and narratives that cater to address its audiences locally and globally[16].

[16] The comparison to Hollywood as well, Nollywood (Nigerian cinematic industry) had been considered to be of inferior to the West and was undermined by the achievements of the cinematic industry. It did, however, challenge and remove the "neo-colonial mindset and contests Western understanding of African industries", and in extension, African narratives and representations that cater for the African audiences (Schnell, 2017, 26-27).

Including Bollywood, other foreign cinematic industries (excluding the UK cinematic industry and Hollywood) have used the same technique in recreating film plot narratives to fit their own public audiences and engage in socio-political matters that their public audiences can recognise and respond to. Thus, reframing the accusation against Bollywood for imitating cinematic content made by Hollywood should be considered as Bollywood successfully maintains its originality and culture by integrating elements of Indian religions and cultures, Indian societal norms, the mix of genres, dance and song sequels, and the mix of different Indian languages into its films (Appadurai, 1996). In this way, we can argue that Bollywood is, then, not universal in its usage but is, instead, specific only to India (and its Indian audiences) and is considered to be a culture industry (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 1). To further strengthen this claim, film critics, such as Daniel Chandler (1997), Jonathan Auerbach (2000), Inbar Shaham (2013), and Esma Akyel (2015), have argued that even when narratives are borrowed from one cinematic industry by another, there are restrictions on the ways in which that narrative can be repeated and presented without it eventually appearing mimicked.

Unlike Hollywood being understood and defined by its many genres, defining Bollywood through its genres is too simplistic (Jones, et.al 2005, and Desai and Dudrah, 2008). Bollywood has successfully found ways to merge and mix genres to create their dynamic and emotional narratives. This merge of genres is defined as a 'mix masala' (literal translation being mixed spices), and Bollywood films made in this way are classified as *masala* films. This mix of genres has a commonality of melodrama being mixed with another genre and merged into one film. Considering the recent transformations that have occurred in Bollywood and Indian cinema, addressing social issues, providing realistic representations, engaging in local and current movements, etc, it would be too simplistic to define Bollywood through its genres.

The mix masala of genres Bollywood uses include elements of "comedy, action, adventure and romance, and featuring song and dance, special effects and flamboyant costumes", musicals and coming of age genres, and are combined to appear as flexible and ever-changing (Larouche and Brunet, 2015, 66). In this way, Bollywood has normalised the framework of using many genres in one film to provide unique cinematic entertainment, which contrasts with the framework Hollywood uses. Dudrah (2006, 175-180) explores this further:

> It is not odd for a 'masala' film to consist of elements from any or all of the genres (romance, NRI (Non-Resident Indian), supernatural, horror, socials, Muslim socials, mythological/devotional).

Before the *masala* film, however, Bollywood had gained global recognition for films made by director Satyajit Ray, specifically the *Apu* trilogy (1995-1959) which was categorised under the art cinema genre (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 10). The *masala* genre and romance genre have become the popular and most recognisable genres attached to the Bollywood cinematic industry. The *masala* film genre has been reduced to being a genre of entertainment, rather than that of serious film narratives, and does not provide the opportunity for the possible engagement of discussing socio-political issues (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 11).[17]

In addition to these films, Bollywood has diversified its co-productions into the area of three-dimensional (3D) animation feature films, as well as collaborating with Walt Disney Studios to create a cartoon *masala* film in 2008 titled *Roadside Romeo* and produced their first 'princess' film titled *Khoobsurat* in 2014. In this way, the Bollywood industry is engaging with trends and cinematic progress of the West that compete and provides audiences with similar entertainment frameworks. Furthermore, popular Hindi cinema has established an overlapping and relevant genre called middle art and parallel cinema which was defined by "more-realistic visuals and issue-driven filmmaking", such as *Dear Zindagi* (2016) or *Padman* (2018) (Chauhan, et.al, 2019). These films have been popular with the urban middle class and the working class within Indian/diasporic societies as they attempt to represent the aspiraions and concerns of the everyday individual in the ever-changing modern world; they utilise all aspects of Indian popular culture and are portrayed as a spectacle and escapist melodrama that impacts its audiences at a maximum level (Desai and Dudrah, 2008, 12). Bollywood's relatability to local and global audiences (both Indian and non-Indian audiences) has been termed the "Bollywooodization of Indian cinema" by Rajadhyaksha (2003, 38).

In conclusion, the progression of the Bollywood cinematic industry to include narratives that address socio-political and socio-cultural discourses within their film narratives has increased,

[17] According to Lugmayr, et al. (2016), a serious film is defined as "Storytelling outside the context of entertainment, where the narration progresses as a sequence of patterns impressive in quality, relates to a serious context, and is a matter of thoughtful process." This differs with the non-serious genre which does not engage in serious themed matters of discussions with the aim addressing socio-political/socio-cultural issues. Non-serious film is more popular due to its nature to provide an escapist platform for audiences to laugh and enjoy.

as a response to the universality of social movements located both within Indian society locally and abroad. With Bollywood known for mixing many genres into one film, we can consider the idea to use the romantic genre and serious film genre (as well as the middle art and parallel cinematic genre) a strategic success that provides audiences with both a platform of escapism, while addressing important socio-political and socio-cultural issues that are being challenged in the Indian society at large. Dudrah (2016, 179) explains that the romance genre has been:

> [...] featured highly across the spectrum of Indian cinema and romantic films have been popular from the very beginning of Bollywood in particular.

Gulzar and Chatterji (2003) also explain that the romance genre appeals to all age groups, and specifically to the urban working and urban middle class audiences, both in India and the wider diaspora. It is an easily recognised genre that appeals to audiences who engage and invest their emotions deeply within the script. *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), *Veer Zara* (2004), *Cocktail* (2012), *Dear Zindagi* (2016), *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019), and *The Sky is Pink* (2019) are films that include the romance genre and the serious film genre (as well as the middle art and parallel cinematic genre and coming-of-age genre); providing both the elements of a happy ending that aligns with the romance genre and addressing important (and at times, sensitive) socio-political and socio-cultural discourses. Furthermore, these discourses that are being discussed within films often coincide with larger global movements that are also affecting other societies (both Indian societies worldwide; in other words, the Indian diaspora, and non-Indian societies as well). In this way, the film engages with the universality of global concepts, which undercut their (previously held) values as symbols of Indianness.

Bollywood using women's issues, feminist politics, women empowerment, mental health, patriarchy, and gender as tools to achieve a global intervention

Bollywood's portrayal of mental health, patriarchy, and feminism have become much more progressive currently, with films, like *Dear Zindagi*, striving to represent realistic, non-dramatized, and normalised narratives of mental health/illness, equality, and acceptance within Indian society. As discussed in chapter three Mental Illness as a Narrative Strategy in *Dear Zindagi*), Bollywood's interest in mental health seems to be one of the ways or modes of representing women in Bollywood films. Stereotypically, mental illness is associated with emotions of weakness, othering, abnormality, and stigma (Corrigan, Watson, and Miller, 2006,

37). Bollywood is known to have previously used this stereotypical narrative in films to create comedic relief (*Krazzy 4*), produce horror films (*Bhool Bhulaiyaa*), and re-iterate the weakness and powerlessness of women who have mental illnesses, and their dependence on men to lead a successful life (Bhaumik, 2016, 55). Therefore, we can state that the interest in mental health seems to be one of the ways or modes of representing women in Bollywood. Mental health becomes synonymous with a form of 'collapse' or mental break, a form of reality check needed to get women to either realize their 'true selves' i.e., subservient, or find a path of 'peace and settlement'. The recurring trend of this representation within Bollywood films includes a set of opposites; modernity versus tradition, feminism versus patriarchy, and Indianness versus western culture (globalisation). *Cocktail* (2012) successfully engaged with a mix of discourses that included mental health issues, traditional versus modernity, Indianness versus western culture, and included the Indian patriarchal norms that continue to exist both in the homeland (India) and in the diasporic setting (London). [18] These norms include the emphasis on heterosexual marriage, women needing to be chaste before marriage, being respectful towards men and Indian tradition (uninfluenced by modernity in their identity), mental illness being a result of unrequited love/being too modernised and not in touch with their Indianness, and the emphasis of depending on/needing a man to attain a successful life. Films like *Cocktail* (2012) and *Dear Zindagi* (2016) are designed to engage in conversations of importance- mental illness, patriarchal norms, the positive impacts of globalisation/modernity in some cases – but are strategically produced to re-place patriarchal norms within these discourses in a modern context, as well as to attract audiences, both locally and abroad (diasporic communities) to relatable (and modern) Bollywood content. There is no doubt that the shift in representation of mental health and women empowerment has been greatly improved in Bollywood films- as discussed previously that mental illness was used as a theme to represent horror, comedic relief, and reiterate stereotypes and stigma. *Dear Zindagi* provides a realistic representation of a young woman living with a mental illness and the anxieties associated with the modern, independently working lifestyle. It provides a realistic and destigmatised representation of psychological therapy as a method of managing and treating mental illnesses, as well as a

[18] The film *Cocktail (2012)* was shot in London, Cape Town and India. Across all locations, the film plays out with different representations of the negative effects of globalisation, modernity and being away from the homeland, comparing a traditional Indian girl as desirable rather than the modern girl brought up in London.

positive representation of the career of a psychologist (that it also challenges gender discrimination and the stigma attached to being a psychologist).[19]

This tool used by Bollywood also emphasises that internal growth is akin to the journeying motif necessary to enable women to fully mature in Bollywood. The success of a woman in a Bollywood film is measured by the internal challenges she overcomes to reconnect with the desirable attributes that would make her appealing and integrated into Indian society. In *Cocktail* (2012), Deepika Padukone's character is an independent, single modern woman, living by herself in London, is financially stable, has many sexual partners, and is an alcoholic. After her love is unrequited, and she is compared to the traditional lead actress (played by Diana Penty), she spirals into a depression, continues drinking, is hospitalised after being knocked over by a car, and undergoes rehabilitation for her physical and mental wellbeing. This journey in the film also shows her reform to become more traditional and adhere to Indian norms. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira is an independent, young modern woman, living by herself in Mumbai, is also financially stable, and has many sexual relationships but fails to maintain a healthy committed relationship. When she learns that the man she loves is engaged to another woman, her abandonment trauma resurfaces leading her into a depression, unable to sleep, and decides to seek therapy for her mental wellbeing. As explored above, this journey in the film shows her reform from unhealed to healed but also addresses the traditional and Indian norms by problematising them, and the success of Kaira's character is measured not only by her healing her mental health but by overcoming the internal challenges of Indian patriarchal norms that restrict her from living a fulfilling life and reconnecting and embracing with the desirable attributes of women empowerment and feminism that make her appealing and integrated into society. However, despite challenging traditional Indian patriarchal norms of society with feminism, she remains conditioned and influenced by modern Indian patriarchy that fits itself into the faux context of wanting to correct its previous discriminations and restrictions, especially towards women.

[19] Psychologists have been stigmatised for their field in understanding mental illnesses, therapy and for engaging with patients with mental illnesses (Petkari, 2017, 2).

Locating these tools of attaining global intervention within *Dear Zindagi*

Dear Zindagi is centralised around the representation of realistic, normalised, de-stigmatised narratives of mental health and therapy, the independence of women, and the shedding of Indian patriarchal norms enforced on women. These discourses are globally trending as movements that need to be addressed (or are currently being addressed in different forms) in their respective manners. For diasporic Indian communities who understand the Indian societal norms and movements Bollywood is encouraging, *Dear Zindagi's* narratives become recognised and relatable content for audiences with mental health issues, the youth, and women aspiring to be independent and ambitious – whilst being Indian. In this way, *Dear Zindagi* (including other Bollywood films as well) achieves this global intervention through its inclusion of globally recognisable and relatable content of mental health discourses, and especially the use of women issues, feminist policies, and women empowerment as a tool to be au fait and current. In *Dear Zindagi* (as mentioned above) mental health is represented in a destigmatised manner and provides a realistic and normalised approach to having a mental illness and seeking therapeutic health to achieve stability and health. The film explores the stereotypical discourses that exist within society through the patriarchal thoughts of family members, Kaira's own conditioning, and in her therapy sessions. It is strategically placed within the film to demonstrate the moving away from older traditional mindsets and societal expectations of mental illness and therapy and re-present the modern understanding and acceptance of normalising mental health and its growing support for it- especially for women.

> Why are you seeing a therapist? Are you mad?
>
> [...]Tell me something... Why did you start seeing your therapist? So that you could tell everyone you're gay?
> No So that I could tell myself, I'm gay.
> (Shinde, 2016, 6-7)

In a scene quite early in the movie, the discussion of both the stigmatised and stereotypical discourses of mental health are represented and then challenged to provide a normalised glimpse into the truth and importance of therapy being used for one's personal state of peace and acceptance. As the film progresses, this discussion opens more between characters that

interact with Kaira, for example when Dr. Jehangir is asked about his views on what determines a "crazy person" with regards to mental health by a panel of health experts and journalists:

> Because here we still believe that... a problem of the mind is something to be ashamed of. If you have a problem with your body, that's normal..., you can tell everyone... [...] But if it's a problem of the mind... then the whole family goes silent... hush hush hush... as if the mind is not even a part of the body.

These discourses within the film are simple yet easily recognisable to audiences, especially by those who have experience with mental illness and therapy and by others who do not. In this way, universalism presents itself within the film by representing and exploring the social policy of mental illness/mental health within an Indian context. The film's strategy to address these stereotypical discourses of mental health is unpacked in its entirety by Dr. Jehangir Khan when he treats Kaira as his patient in therapy. His advice pushes Kaira into rediscovering her 'true self' for her to find a place of peace and settlement. Other characters, such as Kaira's family (specifically her uncle), are used to embody the patriarchal and stereotypical mindset towards mental health and women's empowerment. This results in Kaira being used as the tool to achieve feminist narratives as she stands up for herself with regard to her choices of being a financially independent woman, travelling, and in a career as a cinematographer who chooses not to marry. Kaira is simultaneously used as a tool within the film to normalise and embrace mental health and therapy towards herself as well as others around her as she engages with them.

> She should be doing a proper job... in an office... something more respectable. That's when we can talk to people seriously about marriage.
> (Shinde, 2016, 18)

This particular scene highlights the difference between the older generation mindset that is rooted in patriarchal Indian societal thought of women needing to have a respectable career that is not outgoing or requires a woman to be around men, to travel, or be in positions of power (Datta, 2000, 77). Kaira's uncle is used to portray the patriarchal and stereotypical narratives within Indian society, whilst Kaira portrays the modern and feminist narratives as she unpacks the toxicity of his statements and views. This is executed in the following scene where Kaira unpacks and makes her point on the need not to marry, and defends her career:

So why don't you settle down?
We're just worried about you Koko.
If you keep hanging with these filmy men... how will you find a nice boy?

Filmy men are okay for checking out abs, but not okay to marry?
(Shinde, 2016, 19)

In a scene located much further into the film, Kaira takes this position again to represent the tool used to stand for her feminist beliefs and her mental health in a normalised and realistic manner. This scene brings forth the realisation of the negative and discriminatory effects of patriarchal norms and society on the modern youth (and women). It also highlights the realisation of these norms and discourses being challenged to fit healthier, more accepting, and destigmatised discourses on women empowerment and mental health that embrace the modern society and its youth.

I have begun therapy! Yes! I am seeing a 'Brain Doctor'. So feel free to call me crazy, mad.
Please say it to me right now say it to my face Say it! I'm crazy! 'Kukoooo 'Kaira's gone mad!' That's what you think... that people like me are crazy.
(Shinde, 2016, 49)

A similar argument as above can be made in this scene, as Kaira confronts her family (metaphorically the patriarchal norms/mindset) about her trauma (being abandoned by her parents as a child) and her mental illness, mental health issue, and need for therapy being a result of that trauma. This scene is significant because the topic of mental health and therapy has negative connotations and is regarded as taboo, especially within Indian households and society in which mental illness is not accepted as an illness and not taken seriously (Dr. Jehangir also refers to this). This scene is also very significant because Kaira – a young woman – is confronting her family which breaks the submissive nature that patriarchy has classified Indian women to behave as.

In conclusion, the abovementioned analysis provides a clearer link to the ways in which *Dear Zindagi* makes use of thematic tools (feminist politics, mental illness, patriarchy, and gender)

to achieve universality. Universalism is argued to not have a widely accepted meaning yet as it remains a complex concept. However, it can be understood as a concept that is conventional to people and societies worldwide; "it carries some ideas of wholeness, unity, totality and sameness" (Antonnen, 2012, 3). The discourses of mental health, feminism, challenging patriarchy, and stigma are universally recognised as "common to all people" (Anttonen and Sipilä, 2015). These topics are globally recognised as challenges that many societies face, even if the context of the issue may differ. Addressing these discourses creates an invisible connection to audiences locally and abroad, especially those who are part of the Indian diaspora. Thus, universalism enables the film to engage in concepts as global, thereby undercutting their (previously held) values as symbols of Indianness. Audiences who are Indian or understand the workings of patriarchal Indian societal norms and mindset will recognise these themes as progressively challenging the stigma attached to Indian women and mental illness. It will also enable these audiences to emotively invest in the film as it creates a sense of identity and belonging to those who may relate to the issues/challenges discussed in the film. In this way, the film achieves a sense of global intervention by using modern content that is identifiable to audiences who are aware of feminist movements, awareness of mental illness and mental health, and the promotion of Indian identity as a matter of universality.

How discussions/representations of mental health and women empowerment are re-positioned within the 'new' patriarchal Indian society in *Dear Zindagi*

As previously stated, Bollywood uses the romance and coming-of-age genres in its films to reiterate the patriarchal norms within Indian society. The romance genre is one of the most used genres in Bollywood cinema and is often the basis of most films before other genres are added to it (such as comedy, action, horror, etc). The most common tool used to represent the romance film within Bollywood is the 'boy-meets-girl' theme, which presents a range of thematic responses such as emotive connectivity with audiences, challenges that are overcome, good triumphing evil, and a happy ending. This relates to Dudrah's (2006) statement on the dualities that Bollywood emphasises as a course of extreme differences, but ultimately upholds the belief in love mythology. This means that the belief in love conquering all and the belief in love being the aspiring factor to achieve a complete identity and a wholesome life is achieved. These dualities that pose challenges to the characters include:

> [...] binary oppositions such as East meets West, tradition and modernity, rich and poor, and so forth (Takhar, et al, 2012, 3).

The romance genre, thus, is attributed to include specific patriarchal norms that assist the film narrative in achieving an effectively emotion-packed film. With the inclusion of 'boy-meets-girl', heterosexuality is enforced as the preferred and most aspiring form of love to aspire to attain. There are very few Bollywood films that have challenged heterosexuality; *Kapoor & Sons* (2016) subtly base one character as a homosexual, but there are no scenes showing that this is the case other than him stating he is, *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019) openly narrates the love story (and the effects of a stereotypical Indian society) of an Indian homosexual girl, and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (2019) narrates the love story between two homosexual men who face the challenges of patriarchal and conservative Indian society when wanting to marry. These narratives are fairly recent, as the socio-political and socio-cultural movements surrounding the acceptance and normalisation of the LGBTQIA+ community had been at their prime in Indian society during this time (and globally, simultaneously). Despite these examples, heterosexuality is enforced as the norm of sexual identification, and the ruling representation of romance narratives within Bollywood films.

Heterosexuality is reinforced naturally throughout *Dear Zindagi*, in a manner of expectancy that removes the option for audiences to question the sexual identification of the main character or the expected romance. The beginning of *Dear Zindagi*, which shows a film crew shooting a scene with a heterosexual couple, reinforces the heterosexual identification and expectancy to be found throughout the film. There is only a brief representation of a homosexual character within the film, Raunak, who we learn is Kaira's friend that attends therapy:

> Why did you start seeing your therapist? So that you could tell everyone you're gay? No. So that I could tell myself, I'm gay.
> (Shinde, 2016, 7).

This representation explores the patriarchal conditioning of societal stigma and the struggle for self-acceptance of individuals who identify as homosexual. Homosexuality is, in this scene, linked to the concept of psychological treatment; the need to re-locate the self within a drenched patriarchal society that is coupled with Indian norms with the help of therapy. This representation is emotive and empathetic in that it addresses the individual's need to accept

themselves for who they are but is also a representation of the consequences of patriarchal norms and conditioning that have led to the stigma attached to being homosexual. India's acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community is fairly new, with marriage laws for the LGBTQIA+ community being passed in 2018.[20] There is no other scene that explores this particular representation of homosexuality following the above-mentioned scene, other than narratives that discuss the stereotypes and stigma attached to homosexuality. This represents the patriarchal conditioning that many people have towards homosexuality, whether it is subtle and discreetly mentioned or not. An example is Raghuvendra (Kaira's work colleague and potential love interest) who fails to recognise Raunak as a male:

> Hello ladies, and one gent.
> Oh hello?
> Oh sorry two gents.
> (Shinde, 2016, 10)

The concept of homosexuality is used later in the film by Kaira's uncle and aunt who question her sexuality as a reason for her not wanting to marry and settle down:

> Are you a Lebanese?
> It's not Lebanese', it is lesbian!
> Yes, are you a Lesbian'?
> Oh my God... If I were, would that stop you from talking about marriage?
>
> [...] So, are you? A 'lesbo?
> No, unfortunately not
> So why don't you settle down?
> (Shinde, 2016, 18-19)

The concept of heterosexuality is closely linked to marriage within patriarchal Indian norms, especially towards Indian women who are meant to take on the role of dutiful wife and mother, rather than honouring their own independence. This further develops the idea that attaining a

[20] The Indian law section 377 "is a 157-year-old colonial-era law which criminalises certain sexual acts as "unnatural offences" that are punishable by a 10-year jail term" (Pandey, 2018).

relationship brings a sense of wholesomeness, fulfilment, and happiness (as mentioned above). Marriage is synonymous with this concept, and pressuring Kaira to marry to secure her happiness and life is developed through this patriarchal Indian norm of emphasising settling down (Shinde, 2016, 19). Her independent lifestyle, which includes her single status, is challenged and disputed by the older generation that is heavily enforced by patriarchy, and while pursuing a relationship for Kaira is something she is open to, discussions on marriage become the challenge she is triggered by most often. Thus, as stated above, the independent woman is successful in many aspects of her life (personal choices, lifestyle, career), but remains within the confinements and structure of a patriarchal society that is monitored by hegemonic norms and discourses. In the case of *Dear Zindagi*, it is through the emphasis on marriage and romantic heterosexual relationships.

Heterosexuality is further enforced through/by the types of men Kaira fancies, which Dr. Jehangir unpacks for her to help her understand her preferences. Exploring the different men that Kaira encounters, Raghuvendra, Rumi, and Sid, aids in understanding the display of a specific type of masculinity, which fits into hegemonic masculine norms within patriarchal society. This includes the physical aesthetic of each male character being well built, muscular, charming, and fits a specific image of attraction and desire. Their personality traits and careers/jobs are designed to fit into a specific category of masculinity; Rumi is an upcoming musician with a quirky relaxed lifestyle, Raghuvendra is a film producer with a busy lifestyle, and Sid is a restaurant owner who fits the established and luxurious lifestyle. Heterosexuality is enforced in Kaira's character development being attracted to these men and toxic hegemonic masculinity traits are enforced in the character development of the abovementioned male love interests.

The ending scene in which Kaira meets an attractive carpenter, who also embodies the toxic hegemonic masculine traits explored above, provides the feel-good vibe of a happy ending with a potential promise of Kaira finding her romantic partner. The scene emotively suggests that the happy ending usually achieved in cliché romance films is still being achieved in *Dear Zindagi* even if it is not in the normative manner of living happily ever after with the romantic interest already identified. Instead, the film achieves the normative Bollywood romance ending with a happy promise of a future relationship that may develop, while also showcasing Kaira's happier self simultaneously to demonstrate her being 'healed/cured' and still capable of attaining a healthier relationship.

There is a shift in the patriarchal stigma attached to women who have more than one romantic partner; where words associated with prostitution were previously enforced on women who had multiple relationships or had engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage. Indian society has, of late, challenged these labels against women to recognise the discrimination against women. This demonstrates the feminist movement within Indian society at large, which includes the fight against the suppression of women of their choices and romantic engagements. Alia Bhatt (who plays the role of Kaira) worked alongside Indian director Vikas Bahl in 2014 to create a short film that addressed a visualised utopia for women to be safe within society around men, regardless of what they wear, what time they are out or needing to offer men sexual favours[21]. However, the emphasis of these movements and representations does not seem to be challenging the patriarchal norms of male dominance over women, the discrimination against women and their supposed submissive nature, or the reckless behavioural patterns and expectancies of men towards women. Instead, these representations create a utopian world of women being safe, free, and equal to men in an already patriarchal society that has not changed or challenged its toxic norms, conditioning, and behaviour. Heterosexuality is enforced as the norm and the idea of attaining and aspiring to find romance, along with the magical fairy-tale-like narrative, is still emphasised in films, especially in Bollywood films. Despite these films addressing important socio-political issues, they repetitively portray the expected narrative of a curious beginning, challenges that affect the romance, and a happy-ever-after ending to the romance story.

The romance genre emphasises the idea that a relationship brings about a sense of self wholesomeness, happiness, and self-fulfilment that cannot be achieved by remaining single. This is enforced within films as the goal and aspiration to seek out and desire a relationship. Older films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), and *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) have used this theme extensively to emphasise the importance of seeking out and being in a relationship, and the positive effects it has on the self by bringing out personal happiness, self-love, feelings of fulfilment and meaning, and a sense of completeness in life. This theme is attributed to the patriarchal norm of needing to attain a relationship, aimed at both men and women, to attain a successful life, and does not take into account the separation

[21] The short film titled *Going Home* was made in collaboration with *Vogue India's #VogueEmpower* campaign in 2014.

of self-care and self-fulfilment as its own entity and that of being in a relationship as another separate entity that does not depend on each other for success. This is linked to the abovementioned claim that patriarchy exists in the very idea of needing romance and aspiring for a fairy-tale-like romantic experience. Bollywood films emphasise the desire of seeking out a relationship in a manner that is like that of an achievement that results in self-fulfilment and wholesomeness, feeling complete, and attaining true happiness. Despite films such as *Dear Zindagi* (2016), *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* (2017), and *Street Dancer 3D* (2020) that portray empowered and independent women who lead successful lives by themselves, the patriarchal narrative within these films still emphasises the need to acquire more happiness, fulfilment, and wholesomeness that can only be achieved through a romance. Thus, this demonstrates the 'new' patriarchal acceptance of empowered women who are independently successful in many aspects of their lives but are still within the confinements and boundaries that are monitored by patriarchy and its norms.

Furthermore, the romance and boy-meets-girl genre commonly develop the male character as the hero that ultimately provides comfort, assurance, solutions, and insight to challenges that both characters may be faced with. This is evident in the different roles created for men within Bollywood films (such as grandfather, father and uncle figures, and son and potential love interest characters) that embody the characteristics of superiority, dominance, educated, and wiseness, whereas the roles created for women within Bollywood films (such as grandmother, mother, daughter or potential love interest) embody submissiveness, domestication, limited knowledge on big matters and are meant to comply to the needs/decisions of the male character. Despite films attempts to reduce this unfair and discriminatory hierarchy, such as *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (2016), *Dear Zindagi* (2016), and *Secret Superstar* (2017), there are always some representations in which the male figure is constantly shown to aid, provide guidance and have some form of authoritative power over women. Thus, patriarchy is prominent in ensuring that while women are empowered, accepted, and applauded for their successes and strength, male superiority is still enforced over women. Depending on the circumstance, this dominance of men over women is enforced in ways that still appear as though women are in the power of their own choices, lives, and dreams, whereas they are actually motivated, supported, challenged, and/or assisted by a male figure that enables them to identify and achieve their true self. This reinstates the universality of hegemonic gender norms and patriarchal norms that the male authority exists over women and promotes modern patriarchy that appears to be in support of feminism challenging its discriminatory norms but, in actuality, is not.

The reliance on male authority in *Dear Zindagi* is mainly seen through Kaira's interactions with Dr. Jehangir. Being her therapist, he guides her in making decisions about herself and influences her new way of thinking by addressing issues of stigma and stereotypes attached to femininity and relationships and aims to assist her to 'save herself' after her mental breakdowns as a result of her emotional trauma. Kaira's mental breakdowns become synonymous with her rediscovering her true self and finding peace and settlement, but this is only achieved through the help and guidance of Dr. Jehangir. She relies heavily on Dr. Jehangir for her life to continuously make sense and feel secure and reaffirms that she will need him in their last therapy meeting (Shinde, 2016, 58). While Kaira is making her own decisions for her life without pressure or influence from her parents (or specifically her father), her need to make decisions on her health and wellbeing is heavily influenced by what Dr. Jehangir tells her to do/not to do. This follows through in many decisions she makes, for example: not choosing to work in New York with Raghuvendra because she does not need to prove anything to herself if she is not ready to face him, which Dr. Jehangir advice through words of wisdom.

> [...] that sometimes we choose the tough path only because... we feel that to achieve important things... we have to take the tough path. We feel we need to punish ourselves... but why? Why not choose the easy way out? What is so bad about it? Especially when we are unprepared for the tough path...
> (Shinde, 2016, 26)

While it may seem that Kaira came to that decision by herself and stood up for herself by choosing to prioritise her mental health, the idea and influence of that idea came from Dr. Jehangir, and not Kaira. Raghuvendra also plays the role for a short while in which Kaira relies on his words of praise and affirmation towards her job. His words of encouragement and praise for her skills and her job are what bring Kaira acknowledgement of her talents:

> Of course you're talented... You are shooting so many ads...earning good money.
> Ads and all are fine I want to shoot a film.
> You will, you will, soon.
> (Shinde, 2016, 4)

Kaira understands she is good at her job and is also aware that opportunities to film an entire movie production would be available, the praise and reassurance Kaira receives from Raghuvendra encourages her to believe it is possible. At the end of the film Raghuvendra reiterates the talent that Kaira has in her cinematographic career by praising her ability to accomplish a short film by herself:

> She could not have done this without you
> Actually if I was with her, she couldn't have done this
> (Shinde, 2016, 2020)

Despite this statement suggesting praise and admiration for Kaira's work, it also suggests that he is responsible for enabling Kaira to have reached this point in her life and create her project. His statement assumes the position of authority over her successes, but in a manner that subtly promotes the patriarchal norm of hegemonic masculinity over women. This is easily recognisable as it is part of the universality of patriarchal narratives that reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

In conclusion, this chapter reflects the ways in which mental health, women's politics, feminism, and patriarchy are used as themes to represent women in Bollywood films, and how these themes are used by Bollywood to achieve universalism and make itself relevant on a global scale. The inclusion of socio-political and socio-cultural themes in Bollywood films that are universally recognisable through the influence of globalisation enables films like *Dear Zindagi* to strategically reaffirm patriarchal norms back into Indian society but within a modern context. This explores the universality of these discourses as movements or challenges audiences locally and globally can relate to in addition to being a part/or not being a part of Indian society as well. Therefore, Bollywood films engage with the universality of global concepts, which, as a result, undercuts their (previously held) values as symbols of Indianness. Bollywood achieves plenty by representing these themes and by addressing feminism within its films; it continues to remain current; it reaches global recognition specifically with its diasporic audiences and is able to support feminist movements by accommodating it within a modern patriarchal setting and society. Thus, despite feminist efforts to challenge and eradicate discriminatory gender norms and rectify women's place within Indian society, this chapter established that the independent woman can be successful in multiple areas of her life but

remains within the confined structure of patriarchal society that is monitored by hegemonic norms, discourses, and tradition.

The romance genre is used as the foundation for most Bollywood films before other genres are integrated into the narrative. This chapter established that the use of the romance genre enables Bollywood to create an emotional connection with its audiences demonstrating the challenges heterosexual lovers experience and concluding with the promised happy ending. This, simultaneously, enables Bollywood to discuss socio-political and socio-cultural issues that are affecting Indian society at the current time, thus enabling the film to construct specific representations and discourses about feminism, mental health, globalisation, challenging patriarchy, etc. The romance genre remains a strategic cinematic tool for Bollywood to promote patriarchal norms and discourses as the genre is specifically used to encourage heterosexual relationships, reaffirm the desire for wanting a relationship and marriage, emphasise hegemonic gender norms and each gender's respective place within Indian society, and the emphasis to reinstate one's Indian identity and culture by implementing these norms to achieve a fulfilled life.

By extending this understanding of the reiteration of Indian patriarchal discourses and norms and the bildungsroman genre, the romance genre explores the journeying motif of women overcoming personal challenges that determines their desirability, success, and integration back into Indian society. The concept of mental health and a form of collapse emphasises the journeying experience of a woman to realise her true self. *Dear Zindagi* explores the journeying motif of Kaira's mental health and recovery; representing a troubled woman who is unsuccessful in maintaining a long-term relationship and explores the undesirability of a woman having many romantic and sexual partners within Indian patriarchal society. Kaira's journey is explored through the Indian patriarchal lens and continues to be monitored through this lens by Dr. Jehangir during therapy who re-locates and restructures a woman's position within Indian society that masks the promotion and implementation of feminism to promote modern patriarchy. Thus, the film provides a different reading to feminist narratives, which is strategically framing the modern Indian woman in a patriarchal setting. As mentioned above, Bollywood draws its inspiration to remain relevant to its audience by engaging in discussions of feminism and the destigmatisation of mental health that affect Indian societies/audiences locally and globally, representing the challenges, shifts, and successes that occur within society. Bollywood also uses its platform as an influential tool to promote a specific

representation of these themes to encourage and reiterate a constructed discourse that benefits the hegemonic patriarchal norms of Indian society and culture, which this chapter aimed to highlight. This demonstrates the influential power films like *Dear Zindagi* have on audiences as it reiterates, influence, and/or challenge societal norms, aspirations, and social change, further establishing the universality it achieves in making itself relevant globally. Therefore, this chapter highlights that by using concepts of universalism (women's issues, feminist politics, and mental health) as themes in Bollywood films to challenge patriarchal discourses, create and promote an empowered modern society, and address and create awareness for feminism and the destigmatisation of mental health (among other ideologies), films like *Dear Zindagi*, which are structured using the bildungsroman genre, can promote progressive discourses on feminism and mental illness (and mental health). However, in the case of *Dear Zindagi*, it also represents progressive patriarchy within modern Indian society.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the themes of mental illness and mental health complicate the progressive narrative of women's empowerment through the ideas of control and management of femininity. By centering the research within the theoretical fields of feminism, post feminism, patriarchy, and mental illness, and locating the bildungsroman genre as a methodology, the representation of women empowerment in Bollywood films like *Dear Zindagi* is met with faux support to challenge patriarchal norms and discourses (with a specific focus on Indian patriarchal norms and discourse). Chapter two located patriarchy not to be a universal narrative but rather a concept that affects societies differently, similarly to that of feminism and gender not fitting one universal ideology. This is despite recognising that different societies are challenged by patriarchal norms and influences in different ways. By exploring the definition of patriarchy, chapter two established how social constructs of gender, culture, discrimination, taboo, and hegemonic norms are attributed, administered, and exist within society. As explored in chapters one to six, the influential power that the Bollywood cinematic platform has to educate and enforce socio-political and socio-cultural norms in local and diasporic Indian societies affects the representation and discourse of feminism and women empowerment within a modern context. As established in chapter two, and located within chapters three, four, five, and six, it is, thus, seen in films like *Dear Zindagi* that through the representation of faux support of feminism and women empowerment, modern patriarchal norms are constructed and reiterated to audiences in attempts to re-establish the representation and placement of women within a modern context/setting.

The literature review (in chapter two) established that the representation of women empowerment in Bollywood films is not successfully achieved without patriarchal influence; the representation of women within Bollywood films that claimed to include women empowering narratives represent the dependency of women on men for emotional, financial, and physical needs to be met. *Dear Zindagi* established that while Indian patriarchal norms are being challenged with themes of female politics, mental health, and feminist narratives, it is being restructured by well-developed male characters who reintegrate women into modern day Indian society. These shifts in the representation of women in Bollywood films are the results of globalisation, modernisation, and political and social occurrences in Indian society, as established in chapter one. This research study has, therefore, explored certain elements of the

progressive narrative of feminism and women empowerment in relation to representations of mental health and mental illness, Indian society, the universality achieved by *Dear Zindagi*, factors of class, and the Indian diaspora in Bollywood, Indian society, and *Dear Zindagi*. Chapter three located that the changes to the submissive representation of women and mental illness by Bollywood films promoted an empowering and destigmatised narrative of women and mental illness that challenged patriarchal Indian norms and discourses and promoted feminism, as represented in *Dear Zindagi*. It also located the film to represent important factors of what it means to be a young, modern Indian woman in Indian society. This led to the progressive gradations of representations of mental illness and the representations of women in Bollywood films, like *Dear Zindagi*, that continues to enable the cinematic industry to remain relevant.

However, as located in chapter six, the independent woman remains confined within the intransigent structure of patriarchal society that is monitored by hegemonic norms, traditions, and discourses. Chapter two elaborated that despite identifying shifts in the representation of women in films like *Dear Zindagi* which demonstrates the significantly progressive steps for Bollywood but highlights the failure to empower women as these representations continued to counteract issues of the male gaze, oversexualisation, domestication, male dominancy, and emphasising some form of dependency on men. This affects the purpose of feminism to promote women empowerment and redefine gender roles, and narratives of women empowerment and, instead, fits the ideals of post feminism. Chapter three identified that it is in this way that Bollywood falls back onto gendered norms, however, *Dear Zindagi* disrupts this discourse. Chapter one located that the repetitive representation of the ideal Indian woman (in a modern context) in Bollywood narratives ensures that the discourses of hegemonic masculinity and the dependency of women on men are maintained. Chapter two further argued that the dependency on men is directly examined as a result of toxic masculinity when/if women challenge patriarchal norms, used as a means to control women. Furthermore, chapter two established that the submissive representation of women in films that attempted to promote women's empowerment represents women’s incapability of maintaining a balanced personal life, physical and mental wellbeing, and career, effectively demonstrating the detriment and/or loss of either. This representation also acts as a narrative of consequence when representing women who challenge patriarchal norms and discourses, as seen in *Dear Zindagi* and explored in chapter three. Established in chapter six, and as seen in *Dear Zindagi*, the emphasis on the

journeying experience of a woman to her discovery of her truest self is represented through the form of collapse and weakened mental health.

The argument held in chapter two located the dependency patriarchy has on the discourse of women's subjectivity; that to remain a powerfully dominant ideology it needs the submission of women to succeed. Therefore, despite feminist attempts to challenge patriarchal discourses and to re-direct women's empowerment to be detached from patriarchy, feminism continues to struggle to maintain itself in a notably patriarchal society. Furthermore, chapter three also established that the theme of mental illness and mental health is feminised, and the heroic/savior theme is represented through male characters. In this way, the notion of the feminist challenge is presented as subtle correction and not in activist mode, which is demonstrated in *Dear Zindagi*.

Chapter two and chapter three located the bildungsroman genre as a methodology that aligns with *Dear Zindagi's* narrative exploring the journeying motif of the protagonist on their quest to discover their best self, specifically from youth to adult. The discussion of the bildungsroman genre established the repetitive representation of challenges women experience in Bollywood films within a patriarchal society (a culture created by men), which films like *Dear Zindagi* redefine to fit and include the modern culture of men and mask it as women empowerment. The argument held in chapter three is that *Dear Zindagi* promoted the progressive representations and discourses of mental illness and women through a platform of storytelling to speak back at the madness of patriarchal Indian societal norms and their imposition on Indian women. Additionally, chapter two located the bildungsroman narrative in *Dear Zindagi* to demonstrate the effects of patriarchy on women and represented the Indian experience of feminism which included the effects of globalisation on Indian society but remained detached from the western orientated narrative. Thus, madness is read through the narrative of journeying; instead of resolving the madness with the need for a cure, madness is represented as an enriching journey of self-discovery. Furthermore, chapter three located the concept of madness, as linked to mental illness, as a form of resistance to challenge hegemonic stereotypical and discriminatory discourses in society and argued that the narratives of madness assist in empowering, embracing, and humanising mental illness and women who experience a mental illness. Additionally, the ideals of post feminism and modern patriarchy assist in framing *Dear Zindagi* as the epitome of what it means to be a modern Indian woman who experiences challenges in her life that affects the success of her career and love life and

overcomes them to uncover her better self. This links to how patriarchy, as represented and enforced by Bollywood films, and located in chapter one, fits in with the already established gender norms, mental health and mental illness discourses, and the discourses of therapy. Chapter one and chapter two further established the influential power that Bollywood has in shaping the way audiences understand Indian culture by providing a reflection of Indian society and representing ideological discourses of feminist criticisms to their audiences. Thus, the representation of gender dynamics and feminism is a repetition of what the Indian society is already familiar with instead of what is presumably the reality of the issue. Additionally, chapter two located how deeply rooted in the patriarchal system Indian society is as it continuously implements sexism, gender discrimination, cultural taboo, and gender-based violence which are reinforced in gender norms. By extending this understanding of power Bollywood has in reiterating patriarchal norms to the bildungsroman genre, the use of the romance genre represents the journeying motif of women overcoming challenges that determine their worth, desirability, success, and integration back into Indian society.

Chapter two established that due to cultural and societal judgement and stigma towards mental illness and mental health, these discourses have been considered a global controversial discussion, thus attaining universality through its various discourses. The progression of normalisation and humanising of mental illness and mental health (the diagnosis, acceptance, and representation) resulted in a means of embedding emotionalism into society to cope with unpleasant and negative day-to-day emotions. The argument held in chapter two is that mental illness and poor mental health have become a radically new normality among people, leading to the idea that mental illness has, metaphorically, merged into the inability or hardship to manage emotionally with experiences and challenges has led to individuals to being emotionally vulnerable. Chapter three established that *Dear Zindagi* also promoted healing the self and self-love as the apogee for feminist intervention, which represents the protagonist being liberated and empowered within a modern context. Simultaneously, the acts of self-love and healing the self, and breaking away from the constraints of patriarchal discourses/norms are romanticised and admired as forms of feminist intervention for empowerment and liberation. Thus, universality is achieved by ensuring Kaira resonated with audiences by normalising mental health and mental illness, therapy, and women empowerment Chapter two located therapy as a culture in and of itself as it has progressed from being a medium for mental health treatment to providing advice and tools to cope with modern day and emotionally challenging experiences.

Chapter three located Bollywood's use of the theme of mental illness to not only create a convincing film, but to sell relatability, product, lifestyle, and ideology to its local and diasporic audiences. Chapter five established that the Indian diaspora depends significantly on Bollywood narratives to continue to uphold Indian traditions and norms, despite being away from the homeland. Ideally, the homeland (being India) is framed as the quintessence for constructing Indian identity, affirming national pride, and influencing and endorsing individual aspirations and expectations of local and diasporic audiences. In this way, chapter five identified that through Bollywood narratives and representations, audiences are regulated to monitor their role-enactment, behaviour, and identity (consciously and subconsciously) to conform to the traditional expectations and norms of Indian culture. Thus, *Dear Zindagi*, being read through the bildungsroman genre, enables audiences (local and diasporic) to identify and recognise themselves within the narrative and can be educated by the narrative. It is in this way that universality is achieved by *Dear Zindagi*.

Chapter four expanded on the discussion of *Dear Zindagi* achieving universality as it is located in the middle class as a complex standing in a society where multiple factors such as global influence, modernity, and lifestyle aspirations, among others, contribute to its desirability. In this way, the argument held in chapter four established the effect Bollywood has to create an ideal representation of the middle class in Indian society that audiences should aspire towards. Understanding the term "new" in the new middle class established society's diversity to be more socially accepting of socio-cultural and socio-political discourses which, as a result, challenged societal class hierarchy, located the diverse shift from societal hierarchies, and located the possibilities of change and inclusion. The middle class in Indian society consists of tradition, culture, and the caste system, which chapter four located to be integrated as a dominant subconscious factor in Indian culture and society to benefit patriarchy. Through the analysis of *Dear Zindagi*, the argument held is that the representations and/or narratives of the caste system (the subconscious norms and expectations) are either challenged as unapt discourses of patriarchy or are integrated to fit the current times of modern patriarchy. Linking to arguments held in chapters two, three, five, and six, chapter four established that globalisation challenges the caste system to locate itself within modern society which creates awareness of its repercussions on individuals within society. Additionally, chapter four argued that despite these modern representations, it is achieved through a patriarchal lens which strategically frames the modern Indian women in a patriarchal setting, thus creating a different reading of feminist narratives. Thus, chapter six established that *Dear Zindagi* ultimately

provided a different reading for feminist narratives which strategically frame the modern Indian woman in a patriarchal setting.

As this research explored, there have been extensive attempts by Bollywood to emphasise the changing narratives that support and promote feminism, women empowerment, and destigmatised narratives of mental health and mental illness. Bollywood films, like *Dear Zindagi*, can promote progressive discourses on mental illness/mental health, feminism, and women empowerment when representing the new middle class as a sector within Indian society that creates awareness for feminism, challenges patriarchy, and attempts to promote empowerment in modern society, especially when structured using the bildungsroman genre. However, this research established that it can be faux support for feminism challenging Indian patriarchy and is, instead, the implementation of modern patriarchy. This changing narrative also establishes some connection between the film narrative, the characters of the film, and the audience. Bollywood's use of universally recognisable socio-cultural and socio-political themes (through the influence of globalisation) aids in its relatability, and strategically enables its film narratives to reaffirm patriarchal discourses back into society within a modern context. Therefore, local, and diasporic audiences who do identify with *Dear Zindagi* and its characters are likely to be influenced and educated by the narratives and entertainment presented by Bollywood. However, the argument remains that it also represents progressive patriarchy within modern Indian society, as in the case of *Dear Zindagi*.

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Glossary

Ae Dil Hai Mushkil: translated as 'Oh My Heart, It's Difficult' is a 2016 romantic/drama film directed by Karan Johar, featuring Anushka Sharma and Ranbir Kapoor.

Anjaana Anjaani: translated as 'Boy Unknown, Girl Unknown' is a 2010 romantic comedy-drama film directed by Siddharth Anand, featuring Priyanka Chopra-Jonas and Ranbir Kapoor.

Barfi!: translated as a dense milk sweetmeat, is a 2012 romantic comedy-drama film directed by Anurag Basu, featuring Priyanka Chopra-Jonas, Ileana D'Cruz, and Ranbir Kapoor.

Bhool Bhulaiyaa: translated to 'Maze' is a 2007 psychological horror-comedy film directed by Priyadarshan, featuring Vidhya Balan and Akshay Kumar.

Dangaal: translated to a specific type of wrestling competition, is a 2016 action sports-drama film that is based on the lives of Mahavir Singh Phogat and the Phogat sisters. The film features Aamir Khan, Fatima Sana Shaik, Sanya Malhotra, and Zaira Wasim.

Dear Zindagi: translated to 'Dear Life' is a 2016 coming-of-age romance drama directed by Gauri Shinde, featuring Alia Bhatt, Shah Rukh Khan, Zafar Ali, Kunal Kapoor, and Angad Bedi.

Devdas: (name) is a 2002 romance-drama film directed by Sanjay Leela Bansali, featuring Madhur Dixit, Aishwarya Rai, and Shah Rukh Khan.

Dhadak: translated to 'Heartbeat' is a 2015 romance-drama film directed by Shashank Khaitan highlighting the honor killings among different castes within Indian society. The film features Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khattar.

Dil Bechara: translated to 'My Helpless Heart' is a 2020 coming-of-age romance film directed by Mukesh Chhabra. The film is an adaptation of the book *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. It features Sanjana Sanghi, Sushant Singh Rajput, and Saif Ali Khan.

Dil Chahta Hai: translated to 'The Heart is Yearning' is a 2001 coming-of-age romance film directed by Farhan Akhtar, featuring Preity Zinta, Dimple Kapadia, Sonali Kulkarni, Suchitra Pillai, Saif Ali Khan, Aamir Khan, Akshaye Khanna.

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ): translated to 'The Big-Hearted Will Take The Bride' is a 1995 romance film directed by Aditya Chopra, featuring Kajol and Shah Rukh Khan.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga: translated to 'When I Saw This One Girl, Then I Felt' is a 2019 coming-of-age film highlighting the LGBTQI+ community and homosexuality in India. The film features Sonam Kapoor, Juhi Chawla, Anil Kapoor, and Rajkummar Rao.

English Vinglish: is a 2012 comedy-drama film directed by Gauri Shinde, featuring Sridevi, Priya Anand, and Adil Hussain

Golmaal: translated to 'Chaos' is a 2006 comedy film directed by Rohit Shetty, featuring Ajay Devgn, Tusshar Kapoor, Arshad Warsi, among others.

Hasee Toh Phasee: translated to a common Hindi phrase meaning 'If she smiles she is snared', is a 2014 romantic comedy-drama film directed by Vinil Mathew, featuring Parineeti Chopra and Siddharth Malhotra.

Hichki: translated to 'Hiccup' is a 2018 comedy-drama film directed by Siddharth P. Malhotra, featuring Rani Mukerji and Asif Basra.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (*KKKG*): translated to 'Sometimes Happiness Sometimes Sadness' is a 2001 melodrama film directed by Karan Johar, featuring Jaya Bachchan, Kareena Kapoor, Kajol, Rani Mukerji, Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, and Hrithik Roshan.

Kahaani: translated to 'Story' is a 2012 thriller-mystery film directed by Sujoy Ghosh, featuring Vidya Balan and Nawazuddin Siddiqui.

Kal Ho Na Ho: translated to 'Tomorrow May Be or Not Be' 2003 comedy melodrama film directed by Nikhil Advani, featuring Preity Zinta, Jaya Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, and Saif Ali Khan.

Khoobsurat: translated to 'Beautiful' is a 2014 comedy-romance film directed by Shashanka Ghosh, featuring Sonam Kapoor, Kirron Kher, Ratna Pathak Shah, and Fawad Khan.

Ki & Ka: translated to 'Her and Him' is a 2016 romantic comedy that highlights and challenges patriarchal gender norms. Directed by R. Balki and features Kareena Kapoor and Arjun Kapoor.

Koi Mil Gaya: translated to 'I Found Someone' is a 2003 Sci-fi/romance film directed by Rakesh Roshan, featuring Preity Zinta and Hrithik Roshan.

Koshish: translated to 'Effort' is a 1972 romance drama film directed by Gulzar, featuring Jaya Bachchan and Sanjeev Kumar.

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (KKHH): translated to 'Something is Happening' is a 1998 romantic comedy directed by Karan Johar, featuring Rani Mukerji, Kajol, and Shah Rukh Khan.

Lagaan: translated to 'Taxation' is a 2001 historical sports drama film directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, featuring Gracy Singh, Rachel Shelly, Aamir Khan, and Paul Blackthorne. *Lagaan* earned an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film at the 74th Academy Awards.

Mohobbatein: translated to 'Love Stories' is a 2000 melodrama film directed by Aditya Chopra, featuring Shamita Shetty, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Preeti Jhangiani, Kim Sharma, Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Jugal Hansraj, Uday Chopra, and Jimmy Shergill

Mujhse Dosti Karooge!: translated to 'Will You Be My Friend' is a 2002 coming-of-age film directed by Kunal Kohli, featuring Rani Mukerji, Kareena Kapoor, and Hrithik Roshan.

Mujhse Shaadi Karoogi: translated to 'Will You Marry Me' is a 2004 romantic comedy directed by David Dhawan, featuring Priyanka Chopra-Jonas, Salman Khan, and Akshay Kumar.

Namaste London: translated to ‘Greetings London’ is a 2007 romantic comedy directed by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, featuring Katrina Kaif, Akshay Kumar, and Rishi Kapoor.

Piku: (name) is a 2015 comedy-drama directed by Shoojit Sircar, featuring Deepika Padukone, Irrfan Khan, and Amitabh Bachchan.

Pyaare Mohan: (names) is a 2006 comedy film directed by Kookie Gulati and Indra Kumar, featuring Amrita Rao, Esha Deol, Fardeen Khan, and Vivek Oberoi.

Sanam Teri Kasam: translated to ‘I Swear on You’ is a 2016 romantic tragedy film directed by Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, featuring Mawra Hocane and Harshvardhan Rane.

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan: translated to ‘Extra Careful Of Marriage’ is a 2020 social drama-romance film that highlights homosexuality within Indian society. Directed by Hitesh Kewalya and features Ayushmann Khurrana and Jitendra Kumar.

Tamasha: translated to ‘Spectacle’ is a 2015 coming-of-a-middle-age romantic drama directed by Imtiaz Ali and features Deepika Padukone and Ranbir Kapoor.

Taare Zameen Par: translated to ‘Stars on Land’ is a 2007 drama film that highlights dyslexia in a child. It is directed by Aamir Khan and Amole Gupte and features Darsheel Safary and Aamir Khan.

Vivah: translated to ‘Marriage’ is a 2006 romantic drama film directed by Sooraj Barjatya and features Amrita Rao and Shahid Kapoor.

Waqt: Race Against Time: translated to ‘Time: Race Against Time’ is a 2005 drama film directed by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, and features Priyanka Chopra-Jonas, Shefali Shah, Akshay Kumar, and Amitabh Bachchan.