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## 5. Mapping out LGBTQ+ Representation in Hindi Cinema: A comparative analysis of selected Films

### 1. Dr. Priyanka Roy

Assistant Professor

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication

Asutosh college, Kolkata

Email - [priyanka.roy@asutoshcollege.in](mailto:priyanka.roy@asutoshcollege.in)

### 2. Sneha Sarkar

Student

The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

[snehasarkarmajmc23@efluniversity.ac.in](mailto:snehasarkarmajmc23@efluniversity.ac.in)

#### *Abstract*

*Cinema is one of the most popular mass media form which acts as a message-propagating tool or a messenger. Cinema can construct or even reconstruct people's perceptions about something or the way they think, react, and behave in their social environment. Cinemas are the representation of our social reality as well as work as an incentive for portraying it. Thus, the representation of sexual minorities on this platform not only becomes very crucial but also a prerequisite because the representation matters in such a heteronormative society, where heterosexuals dominate the society. This paper attempts to conduct a comparative study about the representation of the LGBTQ+ community in selected Hindi cinema.*

**Keywords:** *Cinema, LGBTQ+ community, heterosexuality, homophobia*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the early 1990s liberalization and globalization entered the Indian society, and this was the time period when various Non- Governmental Organizations and other groups of social workers and communities began to come forward and help various transgender, gay, and queer communities. They fought for LGBTQ rights. The effect of these two uprisings would eventually lead to groundbreaking law amendments in the next 2 decades. Starting from 2001, when Naz Foundation (NGO) filed PIL challenging Section 377 as it is discriminatory. On 10 January 2020 The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 was commenced and since then it's into effect. Another one of the historic landmarks of Indian judicial history was tearing down Section 377 and decriminalizing homosexuality in India on 6 September 2018. However, it's not the end yet; the queer population, and LGBTQ rights activists, all continue to fight for total equality and justice in society. The topic of same-sex marriage and child adoption by same-sex parents is continuing to fight for its



existence even today. However, the portrayal of the LGBTQ community in Hindi cinemas has always been a matter of controversy, and compared to other developments in terms of genre, this subject still lacks recognition. This paper aims at analyzing the evolving narratives of LGBTQ portrayal in Hindi Cinema with the help of film analysis of six critically chosen films: *Murder 2 (2011)*, *Bol Bachchan (2012)*, *Student of the Year (2012)*, *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga (2019)*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (2020)*, and *Badhaai Do (2022)*.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Chowdhury (2021) *Gender Minority and its Changing Portrayal in Bollywood Films* states that heterosexuals are considered “normal” in our society, whereas homosexuality or all other forms of sexuality are considered “abnormal”, though they all are coexisting side by side for ages. Chowdhury also states how ancient India never really defamed the concept of homosexuality; instead, homosexuality prevailed in various forms. However, the Hindu law book *The Laws of Manu* was quite contrary and extremely against homosexuality, which also became substantially a powerful weapon for the British to spread ‘homophobia’ in Indian society.

Dasgupta (2020) *Queer Representation in Indian Cinema* conveys that the word ‘queer’ was historically used as a derogatory word for insulting and disrespecting the group of sexual minorities and harming their sense of dignity and integrity.

Sajan and Padma (2018) *Indian Cinema and Its Portrayal of Emotional Complexities of the LGBT Community* states that the films instead of providing room for more acceptance and inclusivity for homosexuality, it adds to the stigma related to homosexuality which is considered an odd in the prevailing society.

According to Chugh and Kumar even in the 21st century, it is hard for people with different sexual identities to live in the society as a normal person. And the general public reacts differently on the topic of representation of LGBT in cinemas based on their age, gender and sexual identities, and personal preferences.

Banu and Yasmin in their article *History of Transgender Portrayal in Indian Cinema* says that most portion of the amount of hate, exclusion, and alienation the Trans community has been facing is due to a couple of alarming factors including ignorance of the subjects like ‘alternative’ or non-binary gender identities, gender expression and lack of awareness. Therefore majority of the population has developed a misconception about Trans people and believes that Trans people are either associated with begging or prostitution.

Dasgupta in the article titled *The Visual Representation of Queer Bollywood: Mistaken Identities and Misreading in Dostana* explains that the movie *Dostana* (2008) is not about homosexuality but is based on representing and celebrating, what is supposedly or allegedly meant to be known as a queer union.

Subhan in *Tryst with Destiny: Sexual Disease and Third Gender in Select Indian Bollywood Films* states that all the violence, violation, and backlash surrounding the



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issues based on sex and body, is not only considered as a sexual violation in nature but also points out at the issue of denial of different identities and voices in the society.

Jain (2022) *Indian Hindi Cinema and Queer Gaze: Presentation of LGBTQ+ In Bollywood* put forth the idea that how films like *Dostana* (2008), *Mastizaade* (2016), and *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), etc can be entertaining for many, however these kind of films are far from portraying the LGBT community in a true and just manner.

Labade and Ajgaonkar in their article *Localizing Queer Discourse: A Study of the Politics of Desire and Identity in Indian Regional Cinema* aims at how regional films play an important role in understanding the Indian cinema's reach to the subject 'queer'.

Regional cinemas have always been ahead and much more appropriate in representing the queer community than mainstream Hindi cinema or Bollywood. With the help of cultural contexts like art, religion, or social reality, regional films somehow help in encoding "queer bodies" and their desires by positioning them in between those cultural contexts.

Dutta (2015) *Beyond the Binary: (Trans)Gender Narratives and Class Distinction in Rituparno Ghosh's Later Films* highlights that after the economic liberalization in the 1990s and 2000s in India, there was a significant boom in the media coverage for all the 'alternative' sexual identities and genders in the Indian media, and as well as in the overall public sphere, as in 1990s Indian society also saw the rising queer movements as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other community-based organizations started working with queer and Trans communities and raised voices for their rights.

Callis in the article *Playing with Butler and Foucault: Bisexuality and Queer Theory* brings out another issue i.e. the lack of bisexual identity in the works related to queer theories and which might lead to an inaccurate view and understanding of sexuality and someone might assume these two fields are incompatible.

Raja in the article *An Analysis on the Representation of the LGBTQ Community in Hindi Cinemas* highlights that in recent times while advertising films with queer stories or themes no longer directly add the word 'queer' in their promotional activities unlike the earlier times, which itself can be considered as a "paradigm change" or a sign of change towards positive inclusivity.

Cinemas will always be the leading medium for disseminating messages that holds the power to change society. Cinemas have the power to sow the seed of positivity related to the acceptance of queer people in the heart of Indian society if it wishes to and strives for it. We know how important the representation of the LGBT community in Indian cinema is. With the changing times, the face and the dynamics of Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema, have also changed, especially during the last two decades. The Supreme Court of India's 2018 verdict on Section 377 of the IPC



became a landmark moment, allowing "gay sex among consenting adults in private" (The Times of India, 2018). With this, a subsequent and significant change or switch was visible in the later films with LGBTQ+ themes. After reviewing the above-mentioned literatures, a gap was found between the existing research works done, i.e., the effect of Decriminalization of Section 377 (2018) on the changing pattern of LGBTQ representation in Bollywood films. So this dissertation focuses on changing the portrayal of LGBTQ people in Bollywood films in reference to the Decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018. This dissertation aims to analyze three cinemas from pre-Section 377 (before decriminalization) and three from post-Section 377 (after decriminalization) and find significant differences.

The aim of this research work was to understand how LGBTQ representation in Bollywood films has changed in recent years and if the Decriminalization of Section 377 has affected queer representation in Bollywood films or not. During the 2010s, the world saw significant progress in terms of LGBTQ rights, which continued in the 2020s as well. The effect of such progress was seen in the films as well. Thus, it's important to study the Hindi films produced during this timeline in order to analyze how far the effect of such progress is visible in the Hindi film industry.

The objectives of this research work are:

**RO1.** To study the changing portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Bollywood cinemas in recent years (2010 onwards).

**RO2.** To study the changing prospects of queer Bollywood cinemas after 2018's Decriminalization of Section 377.

**RO3.** To study the difference between LGBTQ representation in Bollywood films before and after 2018.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To understand the changing pattern of queer representation in Bollywood films, film analysis, and comparative study based on its narratives was done on three chosen films after 2010 and on three films after 2018. These six films were critically picked based on IMDb ratings, box office collection, and relevance to the time frame. The films are listed below:

- *Murder 2 (2011)*
- *Bol Bachchan (2012)*
- *Student of the Year (2012)*
- *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga (2019)*
- *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (2020)*
- *Badhaai Do (2022)*



For the film analysis, the narratives explored revolve around queering of cinematography, queering of the film narratives, and the positive representation of the queer characters. The three films made before 2018 were compared with the ones made afterwards to understand the evolving narratives and prospects of the Bollywood films representing LGBTQ characters.

## DISCUSSION

In an analysis of the three following films, *Murder 2 (2011)*, *Student of the Year (2012)*, and *Bol Bachchan (2012)*, the researcher was able to codify one major narrative from each film which emerged as a precarious and problematic way of portraying the LGBTQ characters. The three major narratives, by which LGBTQ characters in Hindi films are mostly stereotyped and portrayed as, are analyzed. They are as follows: 1. Criminal (*Murder 2*), 2. Sexual Predators (*Student of The Year*), and 3. Comic relief (*Bol Bachchan*).

Queer characters are often depicted as criminals and psychopaths and are associated with kidnapping, killings, trafficking, and prostitution in Hindi films.

*Murder 2* is a commercially acclaimed film with 6.3 IMDb ratings, and is praised by many critics for its plot. However, the antagonist of this film is Dheeraj Pandey, who is a eunuch or Trans. Dheeraj is a Psychopath serial killer, who brutally tortures and kills women. In the opening scene of the film, Dheeraj is shown killing a female dancer in such a way that it leaves a frightening impact on the viewers from the very start. He even records his victims screaming while he is tormenting them till they die and later listens to those voice recordings. In succeeding scenes, it is revealed he chops off his victim's bodies into pieces and throws them in a well nearby. The next scene is more spine-chilling when the camera pans down to show the well which is filled with multiple bags of dead bodies. Starting from the cinematic scope, the tone of the film to dialogue delivery by Dheeraj Pandey leaves behind a very unsettling feeling every time. A series of problematic dialogues are delivered in the next scene by Dheeraj. His absolute ridiculous hate speech for women continues throughout the film.

Dheeraj is also a manipulative liar too. During his first interrogation at the police station, he lies about having a brain tumor and that he has no memories. Suddenly he confesses about the murders he did. In this scene what's disturbing is that Dheeraj seems pretty calm. However, he denies his confession in the other interrogation scene where cameras are on. However, when the scene of interrogation between him and Psychiatrist Dr. Sania (who is a female) comes up, his real character, or the one who hates women is highlighted. He made several confessions starting with how he became an eunuch, he hates women because he thinks women lurks men. His hatred does not stop there, he reveals he had a wife before (he even used to abuse her and lock her up in a cage for days, and burnt her with cigarettes). In the end, he even



attacks Dr. Sania for confronting him. The way Dheeraj speaks and behaves is enough to send chills down one's spine. Whenever the camera focuses on his character during the interrogation, his eyes show no remorse.

Prashant Narayanan who plays the role Dheeraj Pandey, a trans, was praised by many for his performance and gave a lot of major screen time to a Trans character. However, unfortunately, this film portrays the trans person as a psycho killer and criminal. In such films where a trans character is given so much screen time, yet the image of the transgender community does not get any better, as the damaging myths about the trans community are frequently repeated, thus, contributing to the development of the stereotypes surrounding Transgender in Indian mainstream culture. The stereotype that Transgender people are criminals and are associated with killing, trafficking, and prostitution is repeated and conveyed once again through this kind of portrayal of a Trans person (Dheeraj Pandey) in this film. In addition, hateful comments against women and abuse perpetuated on women by Dheeraj Pandey contribute to the creation of harmful myths associated with the Trans community existing in our Indian society and such comments reinforce societal prejudice as well.

Queer characters are often portrayed as sexual predators or creepy stalkers who target straight or heterosexual characters in Hindi films. *Student of the Year* is a 2012 Dharma film that turned out to be commercially successful, however, was still criticized for its weak screenplay. However, there was another problem with this film, i.e., the character of Rishi Kapoor, Yogendra "Yogi" Vashisht, and yet another example of misrepresentation of a Gay character. Yogi Vashisht is the Dean of St. Teresa's College, and he has a crush on the college's sports teacher and football coach Kararas Shah. Coach Shah is a married man, and the dean is also aware of it, yet he lures around the coach.

One of the first scenes where a regressive portrayal of a gay character is presented is when Dean Yogi Vashisht is shown touching the cover page of a magazine with a shirtless John Abraham, kept inside his drawer, seductively, while sitting in his office. In the next scene, as soon as the dean sees Coach Shah enters his office, and he spills all the tea he was drinking. When Coach Shah helps Dean to clean up, the feel and tone of the cinematic shot shifts. It becomes weirdly creepy and uncomfortable when Dean Vashisht starts looking at Coach Shah seductively. In the football ground scene, Coach Shah was guiding the students; suddenly, Dean Vashisht out of nowhere comes into the frame and starts massaging the shoulders of Coach Shah. The frame demonstrates the unlawful act of touching someone without their consent.

When the song *Radha* is played, in that sequence, there is a scene where the Dean sees the coach and his wife together, and his wife was fixing his dress. The dean starts imagining himself in place of the Coach's wife, implying he is in total delusion. He even threw the dhol he was playing aggressively towards the coach's wife and which eventually hit her. Such aggressive behavior was not required at all. This implies that



Rishi Kapoor's character did showcase the qualities of a stalker. *Student of the Year* propagated the stereotype concerning Gay people that a gay person always lurks around a 'straight' man and touches them inappropriately. From a typical Karan Johar movie, the audience can't expect much, however, that never justifies the poor and misrepresentation of LGBTQ characters in the films.

LGBTQ+ characters are frequently employed in Hindi cinemas as comic relief, where they are satirized and presented as caricatures. *Bol Bachchan*, a Rohit Shetty film, is another example of how Bollywood distorts the representation of Queer people's identities. Abhishek Bachchan is playing a double role in this film, where he gets caught by Prithviraj, to whom he lied about his real name, Abbas, he tries to come up with the most absurd lie, that he has a twin brother, and whom Prithviraj saw celebrating Eid wearing Muslim traditional attire, was his twin brother named Abbas, who is a dancer. Abbas is portrayed as an effeminate man in the most bizarre way.

In the first scene, where Abbas is introduced, he is shown in the same stereotyped version of a queer man, which continues even in the dance sequence. The so-called mannerisms are enforced in these characters. Whether it is the walk, hand gestures (hanging hands), or facial expressions, the mainstream mannerism continues. In another sequence, when Prithviraj visits Abbas and his mom out of nowhere, in one scene, Abbas is seen delivering his dialogues (for example, "manicure, pedicure, or waxing karne ki umar to meri hain na") in a very objectionable and ominously seductive way. And to make it more frustrating, the existence of LGBTQ representation is accompanied by hilarious background music.

Filmmakers present such harmful portrayals of Queer characters, which damage and hurt the sentiments of the Queer people, for their profit and business. Filmmakers use the excuse of mainstream audience enjoys such portrayals of LGBTQ people and considers them humorous. Thus, catering to such stereotyped and satirical versions of LGBTQ characters, and using them as a comic relief is profitable for the filmmakers.

Through analysis of the films, *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga (2019)*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (2020)*, and *Badhaai Do (2022)*, the researchers was able to explore different narratives in each film. These films are primarily defined as films with a positive portrayal of LGBTQ+ community. These films tried to provide a deeper insight into the real issues faced by LGBTQ+ community living in a heteronormative society. However, it is important to outline that positive portrayal doesn't mean glorifying every LGBTQ+ character, but normalizing the representation of queer people in films, just like heterosexual characters are normalized, and overcoming the under representation of queer characters in mainstream cinemas. After critically analyzing the data, the researchers was able to identify three different narratives that act as social problems faced by queer people in real life and were tackled by the chosen films. Through analysis of these films, the researcher was able

to get a more honest insight into the life lived by homosexuals in society. The major three narratives which were shown and confronted in these films are 1. Heteronormative gaze, 2. Homosexuality is an illness, and 3. Alienation of homosexuals. There can be some sub-narratives as well. Homosexuals have to face discrimination on a regular basis because they live in a heteronormative society where heterosexuality is considered the only normal.

*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* was one of the first Hindi films with queer themes released in 2019 after the Decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018. It is a love story between two young women, Sweety and Kuhu. The heteronormative gaze has been illustrated in this film very precisely. In the scene where Sahil becomes drunk and confesses his love, Sweety shouts in anger and confronts the heteronormative gaze. She is frustrated by everyone around her forcing her to marry a man, following this she breaks down, and finally confesses that she likes women. This movie points out the reality where people assume one's sexuality based on their understanding. There is another sub-narrative that is responsible for such gaze, i.e., patriarchy. Sweety belongs to a conservative Punjabi family, where everything she does is controlled by her abusive brother and family. Her brother decides to marry her off to a guy after she returns from Delhi so that she can stop running away. Everyone in her family starts looking for a groom without even considering her opinion.

*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* the 2020 Bollywood film is based on two gay men, Kartik and Aman, who try to persuade Aman's family to accept their relationship. After their relationship is disclosed to everyone at the wedding of Goggle, Aman's father Shankar Tripathi sends Kartik off and warns him not to come back. On Kartik's way to the station, the conversation between him and Aman's Uncle Chaman leaves many rethinking their perception of "deciding to become gay".

When Aman's uncle asks Kartik, "*Ye kab decide kiya ki tum ye banoge?*" (When did you decide you will become this/gay?), Kartik replies with "*Apne kab decide kiya ap gay nahi banoge*" (when did you decide that you would not become gay). This reflects how society considers being gay or homosexual as unnatural. When uncle replies, "*Isme decide karne ki kya baat hai, ye to janam se hi esa tha*" (What's there to decide, by birth it has been like this), he realizes that it is the same with homosexuals. Nobody decides or chooses what their sexual identity will be.

*Badhaai Do* is a 2022 film that explores the concept of "lavender marriage" (it is a mixed-orientation marriage between male and female, where the partners marry to conceal each other's socially stigmatized sexual orientation). Living in a heteronormative society, where even the Indian judicial law doesn't allow marriage between same-sex couples, Shardul (who is gay) and Suman aka "Sumi" (who is a lesbian), decide to go for a lavender marriage. Here, not only family pressure but also the Indian legal system influences the lives of homosexuals.



In our Indian society, the stigma that homosexuality is a disease and it needs to be treated is very prevalent. Homosexuals are considered “ill”, and “abnormal” in our society. These films portrayed that reality as well.

A comparative study has been done between the three cinemas released before 2018 (*Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year*), and the three cinemas released after 2018 (*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do*). The researcher was able to find subsequent differences in how Queer themes are portrayed in Bollywood films. In films like *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year*, queer characters are subjected to horrifying representations, which pose a threat to queer people, as it perpetuates the preexisting notion of stigma and myths attached to them. In these films either the LGBTQ characters are portrayed as terrifying villains like in *Murder 2*, or in a “comic” way, who have no business than preying on “straight” men. The films *Bol Bachchan* and *Student Of The Year* not only give the queer character a most ridiculous portrayal but there are also repeated offensive homophobic jokes, which the filmmakers like to call “humour”, directed towards them. The films *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do* portray LGBTQ characters as their protagonist, not just some side characters or antagonists. *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* and *Badhaai Do* explore the emotional complexities, struggle, and pain LGBTQ people go through every day. *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* is one of those films where the portrayal is light-hearted but carries a serious undertone with it. *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do* have rejected the heteronormative cinematic gaze.

The films made after like *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do* are part of the mainstream Bollywood films, which have caught mainstream media and public attention. However, the films with Queer characters that caught mainstream attention and are also part of mainstream Bollywood films catered the lousiest and most insensible portrayal of LGBTQ people, like *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year*.

The films *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year* promoted stereotyped mannerisms, and crude caricatures, whereas the films *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, and *Badhaai Do* countered those mannerisms and caricatures, and worked towards promoting social message. There has been a significant paradigm shift observed between these films in terms of the in-depth research executed by the filmmakers before portraying LGBTQ characters in their films. The difference is quite clear. The underwhelming portrayal of LGBTQ characters in *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year* reveals that filmmakers tend to be extremely negligent in portraying LGBTQ characters and their true struggles. Filmmakers are



also prompted to use queer people's insensible portrayals in their films for the money-making business. However, in the later films, *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do*, the affirmative efforts to present a more authentic portrayal of LGBTQ characters and their stories finds visibility.

From the beginning of the films, *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student of the Year* made it clear that these films don't intend to provide true insight into queer characters, and they are simply portrayed as caricatures. However, the films *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do* experiment with their storytelling by reflecting on different Indian laws and regulations that affect their daily lives and decisions. In *Badhaai Do*, the issues of adopting a child by same-sex couples and same-sex marriage were highlighted. In *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, towards the climax of the cinema, it was revealed that how the relationship between Aman and Kartik was all depended on the final verdict of the Supreme Court on Section 377 of IPC the next day (6 September 2018). The decriminalization of homosexuality stopped them from getting arrested. This scene also reflects on how, in real life, this landmark judgment has brought a ray of hope to many Indians.

There has also been a gradual shift in how audiences perceive and connect to these six films over the course of their release. *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student Of The Year* were released in the early 2010s, whereas *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do* were released almost a decade later, and these later films were also released after 2018 (in reference to the Decriminalization of Section 377). The Indian audience has become more open to new narratives in the films, and many expect more representation of queer narratives in the films.

## CONCLUSION

When the Supreme Court of India passed the landmark judgment of Decriminalization of Section 377, where private relations between two consenting homosexual adults will no longer be punishable, brought a wave of hope among many Indians. While this landmark judgment unquestionably brought a positive influence on our society, its ramifications on the film industry and representation in films are still unfolding, and the effect is still in its exploratory stage when it comes to practicality in the Bollywood film industry. Since decriminalization, there has been a subtle but discernible change in how LGBTQ characters and stories are portrayed in Indian cinema. Filmmakers are now able to take up LGBTQ issues and address them more authentically and openly. Films that deal with same-sex relationships, self-acceptance, and LGBTQ hardships have become more prevalent, which raises their exposure and



representation unlike before when underrepresentation or ill representation of LGBTQ stories were normalized.

Along with the plot, the famous cast also helps in bringing queer-themed films to the public's attention and making them part of mainstream Bollywood Cinemas. It is crucial to understand that famous actors can make a huge difference in how far the reach and impact of the message conveyed by their acting can be delivered. All six films were quite successful in reaching a vast audience; however, when comparing *Murder 2*, *Bol Bachchan*, and *Student Of The Year with Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Badhaai Do*, the messages they conveyed surrounding queer narratives are contrasting in nature. Thus, it is important from the actor's side as well, that they should be careful, conscious, and well aware of the decisions they opt for their acting roles. Anil Kapoor and Sonam Kapoor's *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, Rajkummar Rao and Bhumi Padnekar's *Badhaai Do*, and Ayushmann Khurrana's *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* are a few instances of exploring new roles involving queer characters. After 2018's landmark verdict, many actors and filmmakers are able to take on new and challenging roles and explore queer narratives and characters more confidently and openly.

Although there has been progress in the Bollywood filmmaking industry, there is still a long way to go. Many filmmakers are still hesitant and uncomfortable around queer themes. Some filmmakers like to stick around or rely upon the old stereotypical versions of portraying queer characters by considering the commercial value and audience spectrum. However, even the audience is now getting more familiar with and aware of these subjects. So, filmmakers should become braver to bring out real portrayals of issues LGBTQ people face and explore different narratives of queer cinema.

During the interview, when asked if the Decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018 has actually made a difference in the filmmaking community and if the effects are visible in the films, the maximum number of respondents agreed that it certainly has some effects, as the filmmakers now have more freedom to explore queer narratives. Previously, most non-queer Bollywood films, mainstream or not, depicted LGBTQ characters as villains, sexual predators, caricatures, etc. However, after the decriminalization of homosexuality, many filmmakers have become more conscious of their actions and choices.

The Decriminalization of Section 377 has also affected filmmakers' creative freedom and confidence. It has inspired more filmmakers to confront prejudice and depict LGBTQ characters with more humanity and empathy. The narratives of queer cinema have evolved, and humanizing and empathizing with issues faced by LGBTQ people



have bought great change. The dynamics of stories about queer people have also evolved. Though all these changes are gradual, with growing time, more visibility of queer people is expected from the film industry. The film industry alongside Indian society together must move forward with more acceptance, inclusivity, and just representation.

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