

T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THE DEPARTMENT OF CINEMA AND TELEVISION

**REPRESENTATION OF LGBTQ IN SOUTH ASIAN CINEMA
(PAKISTAN & INDIA)**



MASTER'S THESIS

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ISTANBUL 2023

T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THE DEPARTMENT OF BIG DATA ANALYTICS AND
MANAGEMENT

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ETHICAL CONDUCT

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION OF LGBTQ IN SOUTH ASIAN CINEMA (PAKISTAN & INDIA)

Maseeh, Talala

Cinema and Television Master's Program (English, with Thesis)

Thesis Advisor:

Asst. Prof. Dr. Tolga Hepdinciler

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Media, despite being the fourth pillar of society, is often controlled by governmental policies. Literature, art, and culture are often disregarded. In the case of the South Asian cinema industry (India and Pakistan), the government mainly controls the narratives. They use cinema to show a positive image and do not want to appreciate taboo topics, whether it's liberalism, gender discrimination, gender identity, rape (sexual crimes), etc. South Asian countries like India and Pakistan are considered conservative countries. However, the media industry is changing gradually across the globe. The result obtained from this research is that people and their mindsets are changing in the South Asian media industry. The artists and filmmakers are willing to make or produce content that educates and creates societal awareness through art, films, cinema, and theaters through their body of work, their views, and their storytelling. The world is changing, and the wave of new filmmakers is the new change to society (are the greatest asset to convey medium to spread this change to enable acceptance. The change is good to be appreciated. As they say, "Art knows no boundaries."

ÖZ

ASYA SİNEMASINDA LGBTQ'NUN TEMSİLİ (PAKİSTAN VE HİNDİSTAN)

Maseeh, Talala
Sinema Ve Televizyon ve Yüksek Lisans Programı (İngilizce, Tezli)

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Bağımsız film yapımcılarının eksikliği ve Pakistan hükümetinde İslami ideolojinin en çok medya sektöründe etkili olması nedeniyle hükümet sinemayı özellikle olumlu imaj göstermek için kullanıyor ve liberalizm, cinsiyet ayrımcılığı, cinsiyet kimliği gibi tabu konuları takdir etmek istemiyor. Tecavüz (cinsel suçlar) veya hala tartışılmayan herhangi bir konu toplum veya Pakistan veya Hindistan gibi ülkeler şimdiye kadar muhafazakâr ülkeleri düşünüyor. Edebiyat, sanat ve kültür hâlâ takdir edilmiyor, her ne kadar bu mecralar dünyanın bakış açısını değiştirse de, bu tür konulardaki ifadeler hala tabu ve İslami ya da muhafazakar topluma liberalizm enjekte etmek olarak değerlendiriliyor. bu mu; insanlar değişiyor ve zihniyetleri de değişiyor. Böyle bir şey yapmaya veya üretmeye istekliler sanatla, sinemayla, sinemayla, tiyatroyla toplumda farkındalık yaratmayı, eğitmeyi amaçlıyor. Çalışmaları, görüşleri ve hikaye anlatımları aracılığıyla. Dünya değişiyor, yeni film yapımcıları dalgası topluma yeni değişimin (bu değişimin kabul edilmesini sağlamak için yayılım ortamını iletcek en büyük değerdir. Değişimin takdir edilmesi güzeldir.)

Dedikleri gibi, “Sanat sınır tanımaz.”

DEDICATION

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends, who have been unwavering pillars of support throughout this academic journey. Your encouragement, understanding, and belief in my abilities have been invaluable.

To my family, your enduring love and patience have been my foundation. Thank you for being my constant source of inspiration and for always cheering me on, even during the most challenging times.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Cinema acts as a catalyst for social change in society. Like any other form of art, Cinema highlights the social realities and plays a part in creating new social realities (Kaur, 2017). South Asian cinema, which is vast and includes the film industries of various countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka, and others (Chaudhuri, 2005), is becoming more inclusive (Kaur, 2017; Abbas, 2019; Mustafa 2022), but the representation of LGBTQ people on screen is still rare (Mustafa,2002; Katelyn, 2021). Indian cinema, also known as Bollywood, is one of the largest and most significant components of South Asian cinema, and Pakistani cinema, sometimes referred to as Lollywood, is known for producing Urdu and Punjabi-language films (WorldAtlas, n.d.). However, they are still grappling with the representation of LGBTQ communities due to the cultural taboo surrounding this subject (Sengupta, 2020). Despite being on the verge of revival, independent filmmakers still need help with their ideology and to put forward their perspective (Kaur,2017).

LGBTQ cinema is considered taboo in Pakistan due to several cultural, religious, and social factors (Saeed et al., 2017). Pakistan is a conservative society that adheres to traditional gender roles and values, and homosexuality is generally not accepted or even acknowledged in mainstream society. Irfan (2022) maintains that the main religion of the country, Islam, also convicts homosexuality, and there are laws that ban same-sex relationships (Saddique et al., n.d.). Due to this, LGBTQ cinema experienced substantial disapproval and censorship in Pakistan. (Sonia & Shahzaib ,2023) support that films that portray homosexuality or gender non-conformity are usually banned by the government and are criticized by religious leaders, conservative politicians, and sectors of the media. LGBTQ communities themselves go through a lot of discrimination, harassment, and violence, making it problematic for them to express themselves openly or be a part of creative fields such as cinema (Saddique et al., n.d.).

Despite these encounters, (Mustafa,2022) suggests that there have been a few efforts to increase awareness and encounter the taboo through LGBTQ cinema in Pakistan, especially by independent movie makers and activists. Still, it's a long and difficult road to acceptance of LGBTQ rights and representation in Pakistan (Saddique et al., 2017).

Representation and visibility LGBTQ films have historically been underrepresented in mainstream cinema media despite their contribution to increasing visibility by promoting diverse and authentic representation of LGBTQ (The Power of Film: South Asian LGBTQ+ Representation, 2022). There's a dire need for advocating for greater inclusivity in cinema and challenging stereotypes and biases (Publication & Paul 2019). This research aims to analyze and discuss stereotypical films for a deeper understanding of LGBTQ experiences and empathy and to encourage the dialogue around LGBTQ rights and equality.

Over the last few years, an increase in the production of LGBTQ films has been observed (Queer East: LGBTQ+ Cinema from East and Southeast Asia, 2021b). Moving pieces of filmmaking, like *'Fire,'* *'Bol,'* *'Joyland,'* and *'Kapoor and Sons,'* have charmed critics and audiences with their proudly queer stories. But this change in film production is only a reflection of a change in the world. Through years of fighting for the right to be openly proud of one's own sexuality and gender identity, LGBTQ people are finding their place in the world and media. The historical background of LGBTQ films in Asian cinema is marked by limited representation and challenges due to cultural and social factors. It's significant to note that Asia is not a liberal continent, so such thoughts and portrayals of LGBTQ-related material can meet strong opposition (Saddique et al., 2017).

1.1 History of LGBTQ

Here's an outline of the historical framework of LGBTQ movies in Asian cinema:

1996s: In these early ages of Asian cinema, LGBTQ representations were mainly absent or greatly demoted. Homosexuality was a taboo subject, and it was

usually referred to in a comedic or derogatory style. Those characters are usually represented as comic strips or sources of humor rather than intricate individuals (Bhugra et al., 2015).

2000s: LGBTQ representation marked an important revolving point in Asian cinema. *“Fire”* (1996), a film by Deepa Mehta, showed a lesbian bond, raised several controversies, and started debates about the LGBTQ community (Pooja & Rekha, 2018). Gopinath (2000) asserts that such films regularly faced opposition and censorship but made their way to a more subtle depiction.

2000s-2010s: In the 2000s, a few filmmakers in Asian motion pictures started discovering LGBTQ themes straighter and with a certain style. Through the lens of individual stories and public commentary, independent filmmakers and short filmmakers begin to create content that highlights the experiences and struggles of LGBTQ individuals (Gopinath, 2000).

2010s-Present: Over the last few years, Asian cinema has addressed LGBTQ themes further openly and with a wide-ranging appeal. *“Kapoor & Sons”* (2016) and *“Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan”* (2020), films like these introduced LGBTQ characters and relationships in an outline of commercial cinema, reaching a broader audience.

In Asia, LGBTQ films come across substantial challenges, including censorship and social criticism (Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, 2022). Censorship laws and guidelines restrict the obvious representation of LGBTQ content in mainstream cinema. The existence of traditional social attitudes and religious liberalism can lead to controversy and disapproval towards films addressing LGBTQ themes (Chugh et al., 2022.).

Despite the encounters, few Asian LGBTQ films have expanded global recognition and praise. *“Bol”* (2011), a movie directed by Shoaib Mansoor, and *“Dekh Magar Pyaar Say”* (2015), directed by Asad ul Haq, are a few movies that

attempted to represent LGBTQ within the wider social setting and are considered both nationally and internationally. LGBTQ activists and unconventional filmmakers have engaged in the creation of a crucial role in producing a place for LGBTQ stories and giving them a voice in Pakistani cinema. Through the unconventional film route and film festivals, the LGBTQ narratives challenge labels and promote inclusivity (Bhugra et al., 2015; Gopinath, 2000).

The findings reported by (Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression, 2022) suggest that the representation of LGBTQ themes in Asian cinema remains limited, albeit showing signs of growth. The slow progress is often met with resistance due to prevailing socio-cultural circumstances. (Kaur, 2017) maintains that Filmmakers and performers persist in pushing boundaries to explore LGBTQ subjects with authenticity and understanding.

According to (Saeed et al., 2017), the broader socio-cultural landscape and prevalent attitudes towards LGBTQ issues in a country significantly shape the historical context of LGBTQ films in Pakistani cinema. The challenges and limited representation underscore the necessity for ongoing efforts to foster inclusivity, acceptance, and dialogue regarding LGBTQ matters. This analytical approach serves to support and engage with the LGBTQ community, amplifying their voices and promoting recognition (Singh et al., 2017). LGBTQ films are recognized for their unique storytelling, innovative narration, and creative expressions, contributing to the empowerment of the community when represented on screen (Ceatha et al., 2019). The motivation behind writing about LGBTQ films stems from a desire to explore and celebrate the diverse and complex experiences of the LGBTQ community in South Asian society, challenging societal norms and stereotypes and contributing to a more inclusive cinematic landscape. According to many researchers, including (Chugh et al., 2022), films play a crucial role in promoting acceptance dialogue and advancing the fight for equality and representation within society, which are also the motivation for the thesis.

The thesis research involves critical analysis, cultural studies, and gender studies, providing an opportunity to contribute to existing scholarly knowledge and

engage with theoretical frameworks related to LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema. These films often address cultural issues such as discrimination and identity struggles for acceptance, with the hope that the thesis will raise awareness and promote social justice.

Discussing LGBTQ movies and characters in Islamic countries, including India and Pakistan, involves navigating complex and sensitive topics that encompass a range of beliefs, attitudes, and legal challenges in South Asian cinema. The upcoming discussion will focus on filmmakers and artists exploring LGBTQ themes and creating movies challenging societal norms. Emphasis will be placed on shedding light on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and addressing the issues they face. Ten movies centered around LGBTQ themes, along with the directors' perspectives and their role in the cinematic revival, will be discussed.

1.2 Motives of the Research:

The research is driven by the influence of political, social, and cultural factors impacting the environment. It aims to address the lack of knowledge on taboo topics, advocate for activism against discrimination, and explore societal norms and specific issues. Despite challenges such as the non-acceptance of transgender rights bills in Pakistan, filmmakers continue to convey messages from the LGBTQ community, striving to normalize these narratives. The researcher has actively worked for LGBTQ rights in various capacities, including media, research, documentaries, and as an art director for various NGOs from 2018 to 2020. Moreover, the researcher's interest in cinema and the desire for LGBTQ acceptance globally contributes to this research. The goal is for LGBTQ individuals to be recognized and accepted in society as normal human beings, eliminating invisibility and demanding representation.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The primary focus of this research is the examination of LGBTQ acceptance in Asian cinema, acknowledging the myriad factors influencing the film industry. Filmmakers often avoid addressing LGBTQ topics due to their status as taboo

subjects. The thesis discusses the specific movies that have contributed to a gradual change in the industry, centering on same-sex relationships, dating, cohabitation, individuality, and the challenges of coming out. The movie plots aim to foster recognition, awareness, and identification, addressing issues related to relationships, family dynamics, discrimination, health disparities, self-acceptance, ethnicity, gender, religion, and mental health. The idea of the thesis is the media recognition, legal and policy issues faced by filmmakers, activism, and social movements.

The transformative influence of cinema on societal perceptions is evident in the recent surge of Asian films addressing LGBTQ themes. For instance, the Pakistani film *“Bol”* challenges societal norms by portraying the struggles of a transgender person seeking acceptance. Similarly, *“Joyland”* explores same-sex relationships in a South Asian context, while Bollywood films *“Kapoor and Sons”* and *“Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga”* contribute to the growing narrative by examining family dynamics and the coming-out process.

These films served as compounds for change, presenting viewers a window into the lives of the LGBTQ community and promoting a sense of recognition, awareness, and identification. The positive evaluations and responses of these movies symbolize a gradual move in general attitudes. Religious and political influencers persist in having considerable influence, affecting the release and reception of films based on these issues.

In various Muslim countries, including Pakistan, there is a complex relationship between cultural, legal, and religious rules and regulations regarding LGBTQ rights (Saddique et al., 2017). The disgrace and discrimination that LGBTQ members come across in these areas reflect not only social attitudes but also legal frameworks (Gopinath, 2000). Therefore, according to (Gopinath,2000) filmmakers who are stepping into this ground must direct a risky path in view of the legal consequences of their work, which can range from censorship to legal aftermaths.

Despite these challenges, film producers in Muslim culture show resilience and daringly explore LGBTQ subjects. This exploration contributes significantly to societal discourse and understanding. By representing the struggles met by LGBTQ members, these movies become a powerful instrument to support, challenge unfair practices, and promote inclusivity.

The interlinking of cinema with activism and social movements is a significant aspect of LGBTQ representation in Asian cinema. Therefore, being an ethical researcher, I have tried to keep the biases in check while drawing from personal experiences working closely with the LGBTQ community. This approach allowed me to understand the deep impact of these films without getting influenced by the subjectivity of the knowledge. Considering the research conducted by (Theisen-Womersley,2021), stories of acceptance, trauma, and resilience shared by community members underscore the importance of cinematic narratives in facilitating dialogue and promoting societal change. Therefore, this research seeks to narrate people's experiences, including issues, acceptance, trauma, and daily discrimination. These personal accounts, coupled with research involving movies, articles, interviews, and documentaries, form the basis of the thesis.

The thesis discusses several movies throughout its course, including, "*Subh Mangal Zayda Saavdhan*", "*Bol*", "*Joyland*," "*Kapoor and Sons*", "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga*", "*Badhaai Do*", "*Aligarh*", "*Fire*", "*Margarita with a Straw*", and "*My Brother Nikhil*". These films collectively represent Asian cinema's exploration of LGBTQ struggles, garnering positive reviews indicative of societal changes. However, challenges, such as religious and political influences, still affect the release of these movies, particularly in predominantly Islamic countries facing social, cultural, and legal hurdles in LGBTQ rights and representation. When exploring LGBTQ narratives in Asian cinema, it is important to realize the diversity within Islamic culture. I admit that Islamic culture covers a wide-ranging field of beliefs, explanations, and attitudes toward LGBTQ subjects. Therefore, I approached this subject with distinction, recognizing that various regions may have changeable perspectives on same-sex relationships and gender identities.

By recognizing this range, film producers can generate narratives that resonate with a wide-ranging audience while being in respect of cultural distinctions. The exploration of LGBTQ themes within Islamic contexts, as highlighted by the researcher, demands a nuanced understanding of the cultural and religious landscapes, ensuring that these films contribute positively to fostering dialogue rather than perpetuating stereotypes.

The above movies are a combination of Asian cinema based on the struggle of the LGBTQ community to bring a new wave to the cinema. The reviews of the movies are quite positive, which gives a clear indication that the world is changing, and so are societies. However, still, some factors influence the release of these movies, such as religion and political influences. In many predominantly Islamic countries, there tend to be social, cultural, and legal challenges when it comes to LGBTQ rights and representation. LGBTQ individuals often face significant stigma, discrimination, and even legal repercussions in some jurisdictions.

Chapter 2

Design and Research Method

2.1 Design

For this study, a qualitative method is used to understand the LGBTQ characters' representation as portrayed in Asian cinema in the Pakistani and Indian media industry context. The primary purpose of selecting this qualitative design is to explore the what and how rather than the why, aspect of the problem (Emeritus, 2024). This study involves content analysis, in-depth reviews, and data collection through academic research journals, article reviews, and newspaper articles. For the current study, a descriptive method was chosen to focus on investigating human consciousness and experiences (Sirisilla & Sirisilla, 2023). Opting for this method allows the research to concentrate on individual life experiences and their specific encounters with the phenomenon (Nassaji, 2015). In summary, this study seeks to comprehend the lived experiences of participants, especially LGBTQ individuals, to understand the portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Asian Cinema.

2.2 Research Questions

- What types of LGBTQ characters are portrayed in Asian cinema?
- What themes related to LGBTQ issues are explored in Asian cinema?
- What cultural and social contexts are reflected in the representation of LGBTQ characters in Asian cinema?

2.3 Methodology

A thorough review of existing literature on LGBTQ representation in Asian cinema was conducted. Academic databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, along with film industry publications and online forums, were examined to identify the current state of research on the topic and pinpoint literature gaps. Along with it, semi-structured audio interviews were conducted.

Likewise, the first book on LGBT, "T, the Well of Loneliness" by Radcliffe Hall, was studied in-depth. This book, published in 1928, is one of the earliest and most widely recognized works explicitly discussing homosexuality. In addition, ten

Asian films featuring LGBTQ characters or themes were selected. The films were diverse in their country of origin, language, and genre, ensuring relevance to the research questions and providing valuable data for analysis.

Moreover, ten films were selected, and each film was watched by me, and data on the representation of LGBTQ characters, including the number and types of characters, the portrayal of their relationships, explored themes, and conveyed messages, was collected. Additionally, data on the cultural and social context of the films, such as the country of origin, production context, and intended audience, was gathered. Notes were taken during the analysis of films. Implications of the findings for the broader field of LGBTQ representation in media, as well as for cultural and social contexts in Asia, were discussed. The films that were selected as under:

Fire (1996): A landmark film directed by Deepa Mehta, "*Fire*" is a trailblazer in Indian cinema for its unapologetic exploration of same-sex love. Set against the backdrop of traditional Indian society, the movie presents a narrative around the emotional and romantic relationship between sister-in-law, Radha, and Sita. The film courageously confronts societal norms and challenges, sparking conversations about unconventional love relationship in mainstream Bollywood.

My Brother Nikhil (2005): Directed by Onir, "*My Brother Nikhil*" is a poignant and socially relevant drama that addresses the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and explores the resilience of the human spirit. The story revolves around Nikhil, a talented swimmer whose life takes a drastic turn when he is diagnosed with HIV. The film not only sheds light on the challenges faced by those with the virus but also delves into themes of love, acceptance, and societal prejudice.

Bol (2011): Directed by Shoaib Mansoor, "*Bol*" is a thought-provoking Pakistani drama that tackles various societal issues, including gender identity and women's rights. The film revolves around a conservative Muslim family and centers on their transgender son, Saifi. The narrative unfolds as Saifi faces discrimination, societal pressures, and a patriarchal system. "*Bol*" probes into complex themes such

as religious dogma, family dynamics, and the struggle for acceptance. The film serves as a powerful commentary on the consequences of rigid social norms and highlights the resilience of those who challenge them. Mansoor's storytelling has been widely recognized and appreciated for presenting a compelling narrative that not only confronts taboos but also addresses broader issues of justice, equality, and the right to individual identity. *"Bol"* stands out as a significant contribution to Pakistani cinema for its courage in addressing marginalized communities and advocating for social change.

Aligarh (2015): Directed by Hansal Mehta, *"Aligarh"* is a biographical drama that tells the real-life story of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a professor at Aligarh Muslim University. The film explores the unjust treatment faced by Siras due to his homosexuality and the subsequent legal battles. Through a powerful performance by Manoj Bajpayee, the film brings attention to issues of privacy, discrimination, and the struggle for acceptance.

Margarita with a Straw (2015): Directed by Shonali Bose, this Indian drama follows the journey of Laila, a young woman with cerebral palsy, as she explores her sexuality and identity. The film delicately portrays Laila's quest for love and acceptance, challenging societal norms around disability and sexuality. Kalki Koechlin's nuanced performance adds depth to the character, making the film a powerful exploration of self-discovery and breaking barriers.

Kapoor & Sons (2016): Directed by Shakun Batra, *"Kapoor & Sons"* is a family drama that subtly incorporates LGBTQ themes into its narrative. The film portrays a dysfunctional family dealing with hidden secrets and unresolved conflicts. It introduces a gay character, Arjun, portrayed by Fawad Khan, whose journey of self-acceptance and familial dynamics adds depth to the storyline. The film challenges stereotypes and highlights the complexities of relationships.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga (2019): Directed by Shelly Chopra Dhar, this film is a progressive Bollywood romance that addresses the complexities of same-sex love. The narrative revolves around Sweety, a young woman struggling with societal expectations and her own truth about her sexual orientation. The film

advocates for inclusivity and challenges traditional norms with its heartfelt storytelling and ensemble cast.

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (2020): Directed by Hitesh Kewalya, this Bollywood comedy-drama is a groundbreaking same-sex love story. The film humorously explores the societal prejudices surrounding LGBTQ relationships through the characters of Kartik and Aman. It delivers a message of acceptance and understanding within families, combining humor with a meaningful portrayal of love beyond societal norms.

Badhaai Do (2022): Directed by Harshavardhan Kulkarni, "Badhaai Do" is a sequel to the 2018 film "*Badhaai Ho*". The story revolves around a same-sex couple, played by Rajkummar Rao and Bhumi Pednekar, who enter a marriage of convenience to fulfill societal expectations. The film navigates the challenges and humor inherent in unconventional relationships, contributing to the evolving narrative of LGBTQ representation in Bollywood.

Joyland (2022): Directed by Saim Sadiq, "*Joyland*" is a recent addition to LGBTQ-themed cinema, providing a glimpse into Lahore's underground queer culture. The film explores the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community in a society that often rejects their identities. Sadiq's directorial debut offers a unique perspective on resilience, acceptance, and the pursuit of happiness within the constraints of societal norms.

Some of the directors selected for the purpose of this study:

Deepa Mehta (Film Director, Screenwriter, Film Producer)

Deepa Mehta, a renowned film director, screenwriter, and producer, has been selected for this study due to the recurrent theme in her films that focuses on the duality of her national and cultural identity. Referred to as the "quintessential transnational filmmaker," Mehta received accolades for her film "*Fire*", winning the Vancouver International Film Festival Award in 1996 and the Best Feature Film award at the Paris Lesbian and Feminist Film Festival in 1997. Despite facing censorship and life threats, Mehta, along with other directors and activists,

submitted the petition that referenced articles 14,19, 21, and 25, which highlighted the rights to equality, life, freedom of speech, and expression. She also led the candlelit protest with 32 groups of activists against the withdrawal of FIRE. She said: “*Lesbianism is just another aspect of the film...Fire is not a film about lesbians*”, but rather about “*the choices we make in life.*” Her involvement in a candlelit protest the withdrawal of “Fire” reflects her commitment to LGBTQ representation.

Onir (Film Director, Film Producer, Film Editor, Screenwriter)

Onir, a film director, producer, editor, and screenwriter, is chosen for this study due to his personal identification as gay. Onir, recognized for his directorial debut “*My Brother Nikhil,*” addresses the hardships faced by the LGBTQ community. His second film, “*I Am,*” explores discrimination and abuse against a gay man in Kolkata. Onir’s contributions to LGBTQ representation earned him awards, including the Best Director award from the Saathi Rainbow Film Awards, Kolkata, Best Film (Audience), and Best Film (Jury) by Montreal (Image + Nation Film Festival) in 2005, and again the Best Film (Audience) award at the 20th Milan International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival in 2006 for the Film “*My Brother Nikhil.*”

Shonali Bose (Director, Writer, And Film Producer)

Bose won several awards for the movies she made; she identifies herself as Bisexual she is an activist also; her film Margarita with Straw is a movie based on the true story of her cousin’s sister; her film won many awards for best film, best feature film, best screenplay, best script, best direction, youth jury award, NETPAC for best Asian film at Toronto film festival, audience award at film fest Washington DC international film award. She is a part of the Community. She identified the problem more keenly, which was clearly reflected in her movie, The Struggle of a Community Member; her movie was based on a lesbian girl story, the girl who has cerebral palsy. Bose said that this movie comes from two different experiences: one exploring her sexuality and the second the life of her cousin; she made a movie in 2015. At that time, section 337 was there in India, where homosexuality was

forbidden; she said she took it as a challenge and hoped that her film would play the role of debate in Section 337, she said on her telephonic interview;

“I am ready for right-wing protests when my film releases. Bring them on. If people can see the film and talk about these issues, I am ready to face it,”

—Shonali Bose

Hansal Mehta (Film Maker)

Hansal Mehta works mainly for television. He made a few films, and Aligarh is one of them, based on the true story of a professor at Aligarh Muslim University who was suspended on the grounds of morality. Mehta has strongly reacted against the criminalization of homosexuality, saying if the act is a crime, he is a criminal because he has participated in oral sex. He said:

“Today, right now, Section 377 is not just about homosexuality or about consenting adults having sex. It is for most of the adults. Even I am a criminal in the eyes of the law because anybody who has had oral sex is a criminal. The majority of India is a criminal because of 377.” —Hansal Mehta (India Today, 2016).

Shelly Chopra Dhar (Filmmaker)

Shelly is known for her first film *Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Asa laga*; the story was inspired by the 1919 novel *Damsel in Distress* by P.G Wodehouse; Transwoman Ghazal Dhaliwal wrote the film. By choosing to explore LGBTQ themes, Dhar contributes to the expanding landscape of Indian cinema, challenging traditional norms and advocating for inclusivity. Shelly Chopra Dhar's work reflects a commitment to bringing diverse stories to the forefront and fostering a more inclusive cinematic experience for audiences in India and beyond.

Harshavardhan Kulkarni (Film Director, Screenwriter, And Producer)

Harshavardhan asked do I needed to be gay to make a movie? or why I needed to cast a gay actor for the film, although film was praised by Onir, who wrote a film on an army guy who got rejected by the defense ministry because of being a gay, in the movie the cop was shown as a gay, the director said that they did

not want just acceptance from the audience “*We Want to Be Allies.*” (The Indian Express.2022).

Saim Sadiq(Director and Screenwriter)

His movie Joyland won the jury prize of the uncertain regard section at Cannes 2022, the movie itself is controversial because the actor was transgender; Saim said, “I was writing the story for so long, and it was not wrong if I said I was being selfish about it because I was interested in these characters and I was focusing on a story.” He was called out for so many controversial things, but he said the seed was sown. It was always uncomfortable initially and unpleasant in the beginning, but hopefully, it will end up on the right side of history. He said: “*I knew these people were transgressing. Their very existence reminded us that there are people in the world doing exactly what they want. They are saying fuck you to everyone.*” He further added, “*People pray, and then they do a lot of things that they’re not supposed to do. There are these weird sorts of outlets that people have found to be able to express themselves.*” (Manzoor, 2023)

Shoaib Mansoor (Writer, Producer, And Director)

His film won the IRDS film award as the best Hindi movie. He is best known for his movies as he shows different perspectives every time and breaks the silence of society; he works on critical topics of society. Bol is one of them, the story of a patriarchal Muslim family who refuses to accept a transgender son, which creates conflict and tears them apart. It’s brutally honest, full of drama, and unforgiving intensity.

2.5 Hypothesis

The portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Asian cinema is significantly influenced by cultural and religious norms, values, the political climate, and the level of social acceptance of LGBTQ individuals across various countries and regions. In certain Asian areas, entrenched traditional gender roles and conservative perspectives on sexuality may result in negative or stereotypical depictions of LGBTQ individuals. Conversely, more progressive attitudes and increased social

acceptance in other Asian regions may contribute to positive and diverse representations of LGBTQ characters in cinematic narratives.

2.6 Suppositions and Implications

- The research contributes to the Representation of Asian Cinema (Pak & India), what is happening, and what made the topic so limited as compared to Western Cinema.
- Pakistani and Indian cinema are relatively limited due to conservative societal attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals in both countries.
- As a result of this research, my main motive is that people get awareness of LGBTQ and to normalize the third gender, as there's not only the existence of sex "Male" and "Female" and that there should be a greater acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in society.

2.7 Sampling

The reason of selecting these movies is that they are breaking stereotypes, and it includes comparison of LGBTQ characters. According to the representation of Asian Cinema, the films selected for the study were produced from 1996 to 2022.

1. Fire (1996)
2. My Brother Nikhil (2005)
3. Aligarh (2015)
4. Kapoor & Sons (2016)
5. Bol (2011)
6. Ek Ladki ko dekha to aisa laga (2019)
7. Shubh mangal zyada Saavdh (2020)
8. Badhai Do (2022)
9. Joyland (2022)
10. Margarita with a straw (2015)

However, there is a notable disparity in the number of films addressing LGBT themes in Asian Cinema compared to Western Cinema. The identified causes for the low ratio in Asian Cinema, specifically in India and Pakistan, include societal attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, conservative censorship laws, lack of representation, and language barriers. These challenges present difficulties for

scholars attempting to discern trends or patterns in the portrayal of LGBTQ individuals in Asian Cinema.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3. Theoretical And Empirical Research

3.1 Queer Theory in Cinema

Queer theory in cinema is an academic and critical approach that examines the representation of gender, sexuality, and identity in films (Bronski et al., 2006). In *Queer Film and Media Pedagogy*, (Bronski et al.,2006) states that Queer studies emerged in the late 20th century as an offshoot of gender studies, which focuses on understanding and challenging the dominant heterosexual and cisgender norms in society (Queer Theory, n.d.). Queer theory in cinema aims to show how films construct and portray queer identities, desires, and experiences, as well as how they stand against or reinforce societal norms and power infrastructures (Gever et al., 1993).

One of the key ideas in queer theory is drawn from the social constructionist view of French philosopher-historian Micheal Foucault, who argued that gender is not a fixed or stable element of the biological construct; it is a social identity that is fluid and constantly brought into existence through performative activities influenced by cultural, historical, and xenohormonal factors (Illinois University Library, 2013). Similarly, In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1990), Judith Butler argues that gender is socially constructed and performatively produced rather than being a fixed identity or mere biological fact. Butler posits that gender performed through repeated actions, behaviors and norms which then create the appearance of a natural and stable gender identity. Queer

theorists discuss that mainstream cinema often depicts gender and sexuality in limited terms, reinforcing heteronormativity and marginalizing non-normative congruity and desires (Queer Theory, n.d.). Queer theory in cinema aims to face and disrupt these norms by examining other representations and narratives (Doty, 2002).

Queer theorists inspect various aspects of movies, such as character development, narrative structures, visible aesthetics, and symbolic elements, to unleash the underlying meanings and power vitals at play. They check how queer characters are shown, whether they observe stereotypes or face them, and how their relation and desires are depicted. Queer theorists also show how movies can subvert or counter presiding ideologies through storytelling techniques and visible techniques (Queer Theory, n.d.).

Queer theory in cinema has conducted to the evolution of queer cinema as a specified genre, which includes movies made by queer filmmakers or that organized queer narratives and outlooks. Queer cinema often surveys themes of identity, desire, and social fairness, challenging normative depiction and offering alternative visions of gender (Doty, 2002; Bronski et al., 2006; Gevert et al., 1993).

Overall, queer theory in cinema provides a critical framework for checking out and understanding ways in which gender and sexuality are represented in movies. It also provides tools for raising questions and challenging ruling notions and power structures in cinematic communication (Queer Theory, n.d.).

3.2 Queer-Related Topic on National/Islamic Cinema

The convergence of queer-related subjects and national/ Islamic cinema is a multiplex and complex area. It's mandatory to keep in mind that various countries and cultures have a range of attitudes and approaches to investigating queer depiction and LGBTQ rights, and these points of view heavily impact the representation of queer discrete in national or Islamic cinema (Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, 2022). In many countries with a primarily Islamic culture or where Islamic norms

hold a significant impact, there may be old-fashioned attitudes toward LGBTQ identities (Gever et al., 1993). This can explain in limited or even nonexistent depiction of queer characters in normal national or Islamic cinema. According to (Dyer,1990), LGBTQ individuals might be diminished, stigmatized, or shown to be adverse in these circumstances.

However, it's critical to show that not all national or Islamic cinemas comply with a monolithic outlook. (Peach,2005) argues that there is a disparity in how many filmmakers, and artists immerse in LGBTQ themes, sometimes showing queer exposes and identities in delicate and respectful ways. Some films may provide criticized perspectives on societal notions or question the prevailing attitudes towards queer singulars within their cultural and religious perspectives (Dyer, 1990). For example, from 1996 to 2022, there has been an impacting existence of queer-themed movies from different countries with predominantly Islamic viewers. These films often lead to complex narratives that enlighten the questions faced by LGBTQ individuals and involve themes of identity, family, and social clearance. These movies project to start conversations, challenge stereotypes, and encourage acceptance within their respective societies (Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, 2022).

It's important to reach out to this topic with cultural sensitivity and concede that the depiction and acceptance of queer-related subjects in national/Islamic cinema often vary depending on the specific range of viewers, cultural subjects, and individual filmmakers. It's difficult to acknowledge the ongoing struggles LGBTQ went through as an individual in some of these subjects and support their rights and well-being (Gever et al., 1993).

In Asia, LGBTQ presentation in cinema changes across many countries due to cultural, social, and legal topics. Indian cinema has shown great improvements in the portrayal of the LGBTQ theme. Past demonstrations often relied on stereotypes or comical ways (Bhugra et al., 2015). There has been a change regarding more delicate and diverse stories. According to (Pooja & Rekha, 2018), Movies like "*Fire*" (1996), "*My Brother Nikhal*" (2005), "*Aligarh*" (2015), and "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Lga*" (2019) have stressed same-sex relations and LGBTQ notions.

However, explicit depictions still face challenges due to societal norms and legal circumstances (Kaur,2017; Pooja & Rekha, 2018; Bhugra et al., 2015; Gopinath, 2000). Whereas, according to the findings of (Saleem,2014), LGBTQ depiction in Pakistani films has been conserved because of narrow societal views and legal restrictions. Likewise, Pakistan is the second-largest Islamic state in the world (Saddique et al., 2017). However, there have been rare unconventional films that have shown queer matters, such as *“Bol”* (2011) and *“Dekh Magar Pyaar Say”* (2015). These movies show detailed descriptions of the challenges faced by LGBTQ groups in Pakistani society. There is no concept of LGBTQ exists in Asian countries, so it makes it hard for film industries to express ideas related to LGBTQ in movies (Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, 2022). However, there are unconventional filmmakers and an emerging queer cinema movement that focuses on questioning these problems and offer more deep and authentic LGBTQ narratives in Asian countries.

The researcher’s personal experiences and exposure encompass numerous stories that have remained unheard, untold, and unloved. Through work in various local NGOs, encounters with individuals from diverse backgrounds and histories have occurred. The common thread among these individuals is their need for acceptance and love from their families, a privilege experienced by only a few. Notable instances include a girl who underwent surgery and now resides happily with her partner outside Pakistan, overcoming societal disgrace and hardships. Another case involves a trans girl born into a religious family who, suffocated by societal expectations, chose to leave the country to live authentically.

The researcher encountered a close friend, a trans girl constrained by her religious family’s norms, navigating the challenge of dressing openly only at private parties. The complexity of managing such dualities, changing appearance after each event to ensure a safe journey home, is highlighted. During their bachelor’s research, the researcher documented the story of the first trans model of Pakistan, who was disowned by her family after coming out. Living with her boyfriend, they faced consequences after publicly acknowledging their relationship, including arrest, humiliation, and physical abuse at the hands of political and armed forces.

In another poignant case, a trans individual, disowned by family, expressed a desire to be treated like an animal or a dog, yearning for acceptance. The researcher noted the prevalence of gay individuals compared to lesbians or transmen in the region, eventually encountering a transman living a content life with a partner and a child after overcoming numerous challenges. These experiences significantly influenced the researcher's commitment to addressing the unaccepted feelings of abandonment by family and society. The researcher emphasizes the need for more movies and awareness on this topic, advocating for increased education to foster acceptance and authenticity among individuals facing societal prejudice. As an active member of the media, the researcher believes in the transformative power of storytelling to create a more inclusive and understanding society.

3.3 How Gay and Crossdresser Representatives in Cinema (Asia)

Gay and crossdresser representation in Asian cinema has seen both progress and challenges. The representation and experiences related to LGBTQ vary across different Asian countries and regions. Because of societal taboos and narrow-minded beliefs, LGBTQ movies have a limited history, which includes gay and cross-dresser characters (Sengupta, 2020). However, there are some movies related to this theme, such as *"Dostana"* (2008) and *"Fashion"* (2008), which feature cross-dressing elements. It's essential to recognize that while there have been positive developments, the representations of dressed crossdresser characters in Asian cinema can still be limited or stereotypical in contexts. Societal attitudes, censorship, and legal restrictions can influence the extent to which these stories are explored and portrayed authentically (Raja, 2018). According to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code 1860, homosexuality is strictly prohibited (Kaur, 2017; Darshana, 2021; Pooja & Rekha, 2018; Raja, 2018). However, independent filmmakers and a growing queer cinema movement have played a crucial role in pushing boundaries and providing more diverse and authentic representations (Sengupta, 2020).

Homosexuality is banned in Pakistan under Penal Code 1860, Section 377 Unnatural Offences, which can result in persecution and discrimination against

LGBTQ individuals (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Likewise, due to cultural and legal constraints, clear LGBTQ representation in conventional Pakistani film houses is rare (Saeed et al., 2017). Therefore, as per the Pakistani law, LGBTQ is presented in conventional ways is risky and may lead to severe punishment. Though unconventional film producers must face challenges or hurdles, they take steps and create movies related to LGBTQ (Mustafa, 2022). These movies often work outside the mainstream and face boundaries due to restrictions and societal reactions. We can take an example of the Pakistani film named “Bol” (2011), whose director is Shoaib Mansoor, based on the LGBTQ subject. It includes the depiction of a gay character who struggles with his identity. As a result, the film was criticized by conservative society and faced many challenges, such as censorship. LGBTQ topic in the Pakistani film industry is a complex and evolving topic. You will find ongoing discussions related to this topic to overcome criticism challenges. Thus, unconventional film creators, activists, and organizations are playing a vital role in spreading the positive representation of LGBTQ. But still, there are a lot of individuals in Pakistan who face challenges because they support LGBTQ society.

According to the literature review on LGBTQ, the research shows that illustration in the film industry is complicated and grips both cultural and social importance. Film house facilitates the visibility of various sexual focusses and gender personalities. It permits individuals to see themselves represented on screen and gives them a feeling of self-acceptance, which increases confidence. Moreover, it will also help in overcoming challenges posed by society (Sorice & Ciampa, 2020). Baldwin (2021) proposes that cinema house plays a central role in challenging heteronormative stories, which assume heterosexuality is the default and leading sexual orientation. LGBTQ illustration in cinema interrupts this standard by showcasing various relations, characters, and experiences, broadening societal viewpoints, and interrogating conventional ideas of love and romance. Likewise, increased representation of the humanized LGBTQ characters supports the pro-LGBTQ policies. By representing LGBTQ members in simple and relatable ways, film producers have the potential to end discrimination and promote approval (Sorice & Ciampa, 2020). When LGBTQ members are shown as multi-dimensional characters with their own truths, needs, and struggles, it humanizes them. It

promotes empathy and understanding among viewers, moving to a more accepting and diverse society.

LGBTQ depiction in cinema empowers queer members to express themselves and vocalize their truth. It provides a stage for queer film producers, actors, and storytellers to explore their identities and contribute to the diversification of filmmaking stories and viewpoints (Baldwin, 2021). On the other hand, LGBTQ representation in cinema can have a significant social and political impact. It can influence public opinion, challenge discriminatory laws and policies, and inspire societal change (Baldwin, 2021). By highlighting the humanity and struggles of LGBTQ individuals, cinema can contribute to advocacy efforts and foster conversations around LGBTQ rights, equality, and inclusion. As this is a topic of ongoing research and discussion, (Baldwin ,2021) suggests that increasing support for pro-LGBTQ policies is influenced by the media due to its innate nature of shaping public opinions. Likewise, LGBTQ representation in cinema reflects the evolving cultural landscape and attitudes towards sexual orientations and gender identities. It demonstrates progress and acceptance within societies and contributes to the overall cultural evolution by challenging norms and paving the way for greater LGBTQ visibility and acceptance in real-world contexts (Ayoub, 2019).

Overall, LGBTQ representation in cinema is significant for its potential to create social change, challenge stereotypes, empower individuals, and promote greater understanding and acceptance. It plays a vital role in shaping cultural narratives and contributing to a more inclusive and diverse society.

Chapter 4

Historical Background

Bollywood refers to the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai (formerly Bombay). It is the largest and most prominent film industry in India (Hafeez & Ara, 2016). Before 1996, Bollywood films primarily focused on mainstream commercial cinema, featuring elements such as song and dance sequences, melodrama, and star-driven narratives. LGBTQ representation was stereotypical and often relegated to stereotypes or used for comedic relief.

Alongside mainstream Bollywood, India also had a parallel cinema movement. Parallel cinema aimed to explore more socially relevant and artistic themes. Filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, and Mrinal Sen produced films with a realistic and socially conscious approach, delving into diverse social issues (Hafeez & Ara, 2016). While LGBTQ representation was still limited, these films sometimes touched upon LGBTQ themes more thoughtfully and critically (Kaur, 2017).

Lollywood refers to the film industry based in Lahore, Pakistan. Before 1996, Lollywood produced Urdu-language films that both Bollywood and Pakistani culture influenced. The majority of films focused on traditional narratives, family dramas, and romance, with limited exploration of LGBTQ themes (Abbas, 2019). Conservative societal norms and censorship regulations often restrict the representation of LGBTQ individuals. Pakistan also had a small but significant art film movement that sought to explore more experimental and socially conscious themes. Filmmakers like Saeed Akhtar Mirza and Pervez Malik made films addressing social issues, but LGBTQ representation was still limited due to cultural and legal restrictions. It's important to note that prior to 1996, LGBTQ representation in both Indian and Pakistani cinema was generally minimal or stereotypical due to societal taboos, conservative norms, and censorship regulations. Films that directly addressed LGBTQ themes were relatively rare, and when portrayed, LGBTQ characters were often presented in a negative or comic light (Jain, 2021). It was only in the years following 1996 that there was a gradual shift in both Indian and Pakistani cinema, with an increasing number of films exploring

LGBTQ themes in more nuanced and inclusive ways. However, the representation and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in Asian cinema continue to be a work in progress (Berry, 2013; Bhugra et al., 2015).

As an Islamic Republic State, Pakistan has experienced instances of censorship and deprivation that have impacted various aspects of society, including the arts and media, including cinema (Dastgeer & Stewart, 2021). However, it's important to note that the knowledge is based on information available up until September 2021, and the situation may have evolved since then. The Pakistani government exercises control over the content produced within the country, including films. The Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC) is responsible for reviewing and certifying films for public exhibition. The board has guidelines that restrict certain content, including explicit or sexual scenes, religiously sensitive material, and political dissent. Films deemed to violate these guidelines may face cuts, alterations, or even bans. Furthermore, Pakistan's Islamic identity and societal norms heavily influence the censorship process. Films that challenge or criticize religious beliefs, customs, or cultural values may face censorship or bans. Depictions of sexuality, nudity, and specific social issues are also subject to strict scrutiny (Center for American Progress, 2020). LGBTQ themes have faced significant challenges and are often censored or wholly avoided due to societal taboos and conservative attitudes (Sonia & Shahzaib, 2023). According to Pakistan Industry analysis, Filmmakers often practice self-censorship to navigate the sensitive environment and secure necessary approvals for their films. They may modify their scripts or avoid specific topics to ensure compliance with the state's guidelines and avoid potential backlash. This self-censorship can restrict artistic freedom and limit the exploration of diverse narratives and perspectives.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws have been used to restrict artistic expression, including in cinema. Filmmakers may face pressure or threats from religious groups or individuals who perceive their work as blasphemous or offensive. Such pressures can lead to self-censorship and fear among artists, inhibiting their ability to express dissenting viewpoints or address sensitive subjects (Pakistan - United States Department of State, 2023). Similarly, the Pakistani film industry has faced challenges in terms of resources, infrastructure, and financial support. Limited

government funding and inadequate distribution networks can deprive filmmakers of opportunities to create and showcase their work. This, in turn, can limit the diversity of voices and perspectives in Pakistani cinema.

Despite these challenges, some filmmakers and artists continue to create thought-provoking work within the constraints of the Islamic Republic State of Pakistan. They navigate the censorship landscape and strive to tell stories that reflect the complexities of Pakistani society. Additionally, the rise of digital platforms and independent cinema has provided alternative avenues for filmmakers to reach audiences and express themselves more freely.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2000), from 1996 to 2022, artists in Pakistani and Indian cinema have faced various challenges and issues including, both Pakistani and Indian cinema have experienced censorship and content restrictions imposed by their respective governments. Films deemed to be politically sensitive, culturally offensive, or socially controversial have faced cuts, alterations, or bans. This can limit artistic expression and hinder the exploration of critical or challenging themes. Due to its religious sentiments, in India and Pakistan, religious and cultural sensitivities often play a significant role in shaping the environment for artists. Both countries have diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, and depictions or discussions that challenge or offend these beliefs can lead to backlash, protests, or even threats against artists. In this regard, artists, particularly actors, often face issues related to stereotyping and typecasting. They may be confined to specific roles based on their gender, appearance, or ethnicity, limiting their opportunities to showcase their range and talent. Breaking free from stereotypes can be a challenge and may require perseverance and creative choices. On the contrary, pay disparities and exploitation have been prevalent issues in the entertainment industry in both countries. Female artists have often faced unequal pay compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, there have been instances of exploitation, including long working hours, Lack of contracts, and unfair treatment of artists.

The film industries in both Pakistan and India have faced challenges related to the Lack of support and infrastructure. Limited funding, inadequate distribution

networks, and a lack of proper training and resources can hinder the growth and development of artists. This can limit opportunities for artists to showcase their work and reach wider audiences. Artists sometimes face political interference, especially in politically charged environments. This interference can come in the form of pressure to align with certain ideologies, restrictions on creative expression, or even threats and harassment. Artists who express dissenting views or critique the government may be targeted or face backlash. Furthermore, both countries have societal taboos and stigmatization surrounding specific topics, including LGBTQ issues, mental health, and controversial social issues. Artists who attempt to address these topics in their work may face resistance, censorship, or backlash from conservative sections of society.

It's important to note that artists also navigate these challenges while striving to create impactful and thought-provoking work. Despite the difficulties, many artists continue to push boundaries, challenge norms, and contribute to the growth and evolution of cinema in Pakistan and India.

After 2011, both India and Pakistan witnessed a significant revival of cinema. Several factors contributed to this resurgence, including technological advancements, changes in content, and the emergence of new talent. The period after 2011 they witnessed a gradual but significant shift in the representation and acceptance of LGBTQ themes in cinema in both India and Pakistan. While the progress has been relatively slower compared to other countries, there have been notable developments in the portrayal of LGBTQ characters and narratives. Throughout these years, Indian cinema diversified its content, moving away from the traditional formulaic films. Filmmakers explored new genres, unconventional narratives, and social issues, catering to a broader audience. Regional cinema gained prominence, with films from different Indian states receiving critical acclaim and commercial success. This contributed to a more inclusive and diverse film industry. Indian films began receiving international recognition and accolades, with movies like *"Dangal"* (2016) and *"Baahubali: The Beginning"* (2015) garnering attention worldwide. This raised the global profile of Indian cinema. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships by overturning Section 377 of the

Indian Penal Code. This landmark judgment had a profound impact on the portrayal of LGBTQ characters and themes in Indian cinema. Independent filmmakers played a crucial role in exploring LGBTQ stories and characters. Films like *“Aligarh”* (2015), *“Margarita with a Straw”* (2014), and *“Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga”* (2019) tackled LGBTQ themes with sensitivity and received critical acclaim. Mainstream Bollywood films began incorporating LGBTQ characters and storylines, although progress has been gradual. *“Mangal Zyada Saavdhan”* (2020) and *“Kapoor & Sons”* (2016) presented LGBTQ stories full of comedy, emotions, and social critique. Some film festivals focused on LGBTQ cinema, which gained importance due to a platform that showed and promoted films with gay themes. The Kashish Mumbai International is one such unusual, Famous Film Festival that supports LGBTQ movie houses.

The Pakistani film industry went through with declination for a long period, but filmmakers didn't stop working on it, and at last Pakistani industry started making good standard movies, which made a huge difference in the positive progress of Pakistani film Industry. Partnership among Indian and Pakistani film producers escalated due to joint productions and exchange of talent. This corporation helped reduce the gap among the two film industries and enlarged the market for Pakistani films. In the last few years, Pakistani cinema has observed a gradual shift towards more inclusive stories. Producers have started analyzing and observing LGBTQ themes with greater sensitivity and variations. The Pakistani film *“Bol”* was publicized in 2011 and discussed different social problems, including transsexual rights. LGBTQ themes played a part in initiating discussions about oppressed communities.

The rise of films and production houses in Pakistan has led to the formation of documentaries and short movies that elucidate on LGBTQ issues. These films often point to raising awareness and promoting acceptance of LGBTQ. Films like *“Chuppan Chupai”* (2017) and *“Rani”* (2018) describe LGBTQ themes characters and explore their struggles in a conventional and conservative society. However, due to cultural reactivity and bounded distribution, movies may have a smaller reach. LGBTQ film carnivals and events, such as the Lahore International Film

Festival and the Islamabad Human Rights Film Festival, have given platforms for exhibiting and debating LGBTQ cinema in Pakistan.

While the description of LGBTQ movies and themes in Indian and Pakistani cinema has improved since 2011, there is still development in terms of presentation, acceptance, and inclusion of LGBTQ. Cultural and societal elements continue to affect the extent and nature of LGBTQ description in both Pakistan and India. However, the growing clarity of LGBTQ characters and stories in movie houses showed a positive shift toward higher acceptance and understanding of mixed sexualadaption and gender identities.

Consequently, film producers in both Pakistan and India have faced several confrontations in displaying LGBTQ themes because of socio-cultural factors and conservative behaviors prevailing in the regions. Both countries have censorship sites and platforms that analyze films before release. These boards may be conventional and oppose certifying movies with LGBTQ content, fearing counteraction or controversy. Film producers often face hurdles in getting their movies approved for release or must make huge edits to follow the rules and regulations.

Illustrating LGBTQ characters and themes can create social backlash and criticism from the conservative part of society. Directors may face opposition, threatening remarks, or bad publicity, which can influence the inauguration and distribution of their films. Film producers often struggle to save funding for movies that handle LGBTQ themes. Investors may be reluctant to aid projects recognized as risky or controversial. Furthermore, finding distribution channels for such movies can be hard, as mainstream distributors may be hesitant to take on projects with conceivably bounded commercial appeal.

To avoid the challenges posed by censorship and societal pressures, independent directors may spot self-censorship. They may tone down or slightly change the LGBTQ content to ensure a smoother release and extensive reach, compromising the actual artistic vision of their work. Compared to mainstream

commercial cinema, film producers have restricted access to resources, data, infrastructure, and wide networks. The absence of a strong or powerful support system for independent cinema makes it even harder for film creators to handle the complications of LGBTQ themes and reach more audiences.

Unconventional film producers often face hurdles in securing funding for projects that handle LGBTQ themes. Investors and production companies may be hesitant to finance movies considered controversial or lacking mainstream appeal. As a result, directors may face difficulty in searching for the necessary resources and support to bring their creativity to life. Unconventional movies, particularly those with LGBTQ subjects, often find difficulty in finding distribution and exhibition opportunities. Mainstream distributors may be reluctant to accept these projects, bounding their reach and audience. This lack of availability and visibility can stop the growth and impact of independent LGBTQ movies.

In a few scenarios, acquainting LGBTQ subjects in movies may face legal consequences in countries where homosexuality is illegalized or considered taboo. Film producers may face legal hurdles or dangerous threats to their safety, which can stop them from exploring LGBTQ topics openly. The unconventional film producer's ecosystem in both countries may lack inclusive infrastructure and support systems for LGBTQ film producers. Restricted access to resources, funding, and distribution networks can hinder the production and distribution of LGBTQ movies, making it hard for unconventional film producers to reach a higher audience. Despite these hurdles, unconventional film producers in both countries have made important strides in pushing limits and initiating conversations around LGBTQ subjects. Over time, with changing attitudes and growing acceptance, it is expected that the hurdles faced by unconventional film producers in addressing LGBTQ subjects will lessen, leading to a more inclusive and diverse cinematic landscape.

Chapter 5

Film Analysis

The film analysis is based on the representation of LGBTQ experiences, identities, and struggles of LGBTQ individual characters in the film. “*Subh Mangal Zayda Saavdhaan*”, “*Bol*”, “*Joyland*”, “*Kapoor & Sons*”, “*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*”, “*Badhaai Do*”, “*Aligarh*”, “*Fire*”, “*Margarita with A Straw*”, and “*My Brother Nikhil*” are selected to study LGBTQ themes and characters within the context of Indian and Pakistani cinema. The evaluation extends to the diversity of characters, considering factors such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and intersectionality. Considering the nuanced and authentic portrayal, the analysis encompasses an examination of the narrative structures and storytelling techniques employed in the films, showing how the LGBTQ themes are woven into the plot, character arcs, and overall story. Assess whether the film reinforces or challenges societal norms and expectations surrounding LGBTQ identities and relationships. Moreover, visual, and aesthetic aspects of the film, including cinematography, production design, and costume choices, are subject to analysis. Special attention is directed towards symbolism, color palettes, and visual motifs that may contribute additional layers of meaning to the film.

Likewise, the dialogue and language used in the film regarding LGBTQ themes are scrutinized in the analysis. The evaluation probes into the portrayal of LGBTQ characters through their interactions, conversations, and the language used to describe them. The overarching goal is to provide an objective and comprehensive examination of how the film handles LGBTQ representation in various dimensions.

For instance, “*Bol*,” directed by Shoaib Mansoor, explores the life of Saifi, a transgender character. The film subtly hints at Saifi’s identity until a pivotal moment when her sister discovers her dressing in women’s clothes. The movie effectively tackles transgender issues within the Pakistani cultural context, supported by bold storytelling, captivating screenplay, and impactful dialogues (Nahta, 2011) and the character Saifi is defined as Saifi's story is one of identity and resilience in the face of familial rejection and societal misunderstanding. Born intersex into a traditional family that did not understand or accept his gender identity, Saifi's early life was marked by a profound sense of isolation and

misunderstanding. His father, adhering strictly to rigid gender norms, perceived Saifi's affinity for dancing and dressing in a way that expressed his identity as a betrayal of their family values. This led to a tumultuous relationship, wherein his father never fully accepted him, often disregarding his presence or outright rejecting him. Despite these challenges, Saifi found solace and expression through dance. Dance became not only a refuge but a form of silent rebellion against the constraints imposed by his family and society. It was in dance that Saifi felt most authentic and free, able to express his feelings and identity. Growing up with sisters who may have been more understanding or at least less hostile, Saifi likely experienced moments of companionship and support within his immediate family circle. These relationships could have been his initial safe havens, providing him with the emotional support needed to navigate the complexities of his identity in a less accepting environment. The story of Saifi raises important themes about the struggles faced by intersex and transgender individuals, particularly in conservative societies. It highlights the importance of acceptance and understanding, showcasing how crucial familial support is to the mental and emotional health of individuals navigating similar challenges. Saifi's journey could inspire discussions about the need for greater awareness and inclusivity, pushing against the stigmas and prejudices that pervade many aspects of society. Saifi's narrative, though fraught with pain, is also one of hope and transformation. It serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the quest for self-acceptance, encouraging empathy and a deeper understanding of the complex nature of identity.

In another Pakistani film, "*Joyland*," the character Rohan's transgender identity is revealed progressively. The film portrays the clashes between modernity and tradition within a family, emphasizing the theme of acceptance (Smith, 2023). The depiction of Biba as a stage dancer in "*Joyland*" raises important points about representation and diversity of roles for transgender characters in film. While casting a real trans woman from Lahore can be seen as a progressive step towards authentic representation, the choice of profession stage dancing can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, featuring a trans character prominently in a film and employing a trans actor to play the role contributes positively to visibility. It can help humanize and normalize transgender individuals in the eyes of broader society, especially in regions where transgender people face significant stigma and

discrimination.

On the other hand, consistently depicting trans characters in entertainment roles, such as dancers or performers, might inadvertently reinforce narrow stereotypes. Trans individuals, like all people, have diverse aspirations and capabilities, and their professions can range broadly across all sectors of society. By frequently portraying them in entertainment or marginalized roles, media might suggest limited possibilities for trans people, potentially influencing public perception and expectations.

To enhance representation, filmmakers and media creators could strive to show transgender characters in a variety of roles doctors, teachers, lawyers, artists, and business leaders, among others. This not only reflects the reality of trans lives but also encourages a more nuanced understanding and acceptance by society. By diversifying the roles played by trans characters, media can play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and expanding what viewers consider possible and normal for transgender individuals. While "*Joyland*" made significant strides in certain areas, the ongoing discussion about representation highlights the need for continual evolution in how stories about transgender people are told, aiming for portrayals that fully reflect the depth and breadth of their experiences and contributions to society.

The film's vivid sense of place and emotional depth contribute to its impact. Similarly, like "*Joyland*" and "*Kapoor & Sons*" gradually reveals Rahul's homosexuality, adding depth to the family drama. The film explores various themes, including sexuality, infidelity, and family dynamics, with a touch of wit and wisdom (Saltz, 2016). Indeed, the portrayal of Rahul Kapoor, played by Fawad Khan in "*Kapoor & Sons*," is a significant example of evolving LGBTQ+ representation in cinema, especially within the context of South Asian media. Rahul is depicted as a successful, well-rounded character who happens to be gay, which is a refreshing deviation from many traditional portrayals of LGBTQ characters in South Asian films. Aspects of Rahul's Characterization That Enhance LGBTQ Representation: Rahul is portrayed as a successful writer, which positions him as a capable and accomplished individual. His success is a central aspect of his character, not his sexuality, which challenges the stereotype that LGBTQ narratives must be solely about struggle or adversity. The film explores his relationships within his family,

particularly focusing on themes of acceptance and secrecy. This adds depth to his character, showing him navigating familiar relationships that many viewers can relate to, regardless of their sexual orientation. Rahul is not defined solely by his sexuality; his character has multiple facets, including his professional life, his aesthetic sense, his relationships with family members, and his personal struggles. This complexity makes him a more relatable and realistic character. By portraying an LGBTQ character as likable, successful, and morally upright, the film challenges negative stereotypes and provides a positive role model for LGBTQ+ individuals. It helps normalize gay characters in mainstream media, showcasing them as just another part of the diverse human spectrum. The film reveals Rahul's sexuality in a relatively understated way, integrating it into the broader narrative without it overshadowing his entire character arc. This subtlety is crucial in normalizing LGBTQ identities as a non-sensational aspect of individuals. "*Kapoor & Sons*" has been praised for its progressive portrayal and has contributed to ongoing conversations about LGBTQ rights and representation in South Asia. By presenting a character like Rahul in a mainstream film, it helps foster a more inclusive environment in the media landscape, encouraging other filmmakers to include more nuanced LGBTQ characters in their work. The portrayal of Rahul Kapoor represents a shift towards more nuanced and respectful representation of LGBTQ+ characters in cinema, moving beyond clichés and stereotypes to offer audiences a character who is both relatable and inspiring. This shift not only reflects but also encourages changes in societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community.

When it comes to LGBTQ representation within the Bollywood landscape, Shelly Chopra Dhar's "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*" introduces a refreshing tale. The film revolves around Sweety, played by Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, who struggles to find acceptance and love in a small town in Punjab. The pivotal moment unfolds during a family celebration when Sweety reveals her true feelings to her family. The film masterfully addresses societal expectations, family dynamics, and the complexities of coming out (Jamkhandikar 2019). "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*" is indeed a landmark film in Bollywood's portrayal of LGBTQ relationships, particularly because it addresses a lesbian relationship in a direct and empathetic manner within a mainstream, commercial film format. Starring Sonam Kapoor as Sweety Chaudhary, the film explores her journey as a closeted lesbian in a

conservative Punjabi family, which brings a fresh perspective to Indian cinema. The film cleverly uses a typical Bollywood romantic comedy framework to introduce the theme of a lesbian relationship, making it more accessible to a broader audience. This approach helps normalize the conversation around LGBTQ topics among viewers who might not otherwise engage with such content. Sweety's struggle with her family's expectations and her fear of being ostracized by her community reflect real challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals. The film's focus on family reactions provides a relatable and poignant look at the conflicts involved in coming out in a traditionally conservative environment. By featuring a well-known actress like Sonam Kapoor in the lead role, the film breaks ground in bringing visibility to lesbian relationships in South Asian media, which often either ignores or misrepresents such relationships. This casting choice also helps draw attention to the film and its themes. The film avoids stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ characters and instead presents a heartfelt story of love and acceptance. It emphasizes the normalcy of Sweety's feelings and the legitimacy of her quest for happiness, contributing positively to the depiction of same-sex relationships. The narrative incorporates a play within the film that serves as a metaphor for Sweety's journey and as a tool for educating other characters and the audience about acceptance and love. This meta-narrative structure enhances the film's message and its emotional impact. *"Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga"* has sparked conversations about LGBTQ rights and representation in India, a country where homosexuality was decriminalized only recently (in 2018). It challenges societal norms and encourages a dialogue on acceptance and understanding in a culture where such topics have long been taboo. The film's reception shows a growing readiness among Indian audiences and filmmakers to address and embrace more diverse narratives. Films like *"Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga"* contribute significantly to the cultural shift towards greater acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ individuals, proving that cinema not only reflects society but can also influence and reshape it.

Despite some critiques about the film's execution, its contribution to sparking conversations about queer love in Indian cinema is undeniable. In addition, *"Badhaai Do,"* a new approach is presented which is often overlooked in society. A gay man and a lesbian woman had to enter a marriage of convenience. *"Badhaai Do"* balances comedy and drama, addressing the damage caused by homophobia

and the courage needed to live authentically (Rotten tomatoes, 2022). The charismatic performances of the cast contribute to the film's success. It is also observed that the fear of homosexuality remains a taboo within society, which is beautifully presented in "*Aligarh*." This movie is based on true events and revolves around Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a professor suspended due to allegations of homosexuality (Gupta, 2016). "*Badhaai Do*" represents a significant evolution in the portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Indian cinema, particularly for its nuanced and humanizing depiction of a gay man and a lesbian woman in conventional, yet non-stereotypical roles. The film stars Rajkumar Rao as Shardul, a masculine police officer, and Bhumi Pednekar as Suman, a physical education teacher. Their professional roles challenge the often clichéd portrayals of LGBTQ individuals in media, contributing to a more diversified representation. By casting Shardul as a masculine cop and Suman as a sporty physical education teacher, the film breaks away from the stereotypical portrayals of gay and lesbian characters. This choice is significant in challenging the audience's preconceived notions about gender roles and sexual orientation. The plot revolves around a lavender marriage—a marriage of convenience between a gay man and a lesbian to appease their families and society while hiding their true selves. This storyline provides a poignant commentary on the societal pressures still faced by LGBTQ individuals in many parts of the world. The film delves into the dynamics of family expectations and societal pressure, capturing the emotional and psychological struggles of living a double life. It explores the personal conflicts that arise when balancing one's happiness with familial duties, a theme that resonates with many viewers, regardless of their sexual orientation. "*Badhaai Do*" treats its characters with sensitivity and respect, focusing on their emotional journeys rather than their sexual orientations as plot devices. This approach allows the audience to empathize with Shardul and Suman as individuals facing unique challenges. By integrating LGBTQ themes into a mainstream film, "*Badhaai Do*" has facilitated broader conversations about LGBTQ rights and acceptance in India. The film uses humor and drama to address serious issues, making the narrative accessible and engaging for a wide audience. "*Badhaai Do*" stands out as a progressive film that not only entertains but also educates and provokes thought about the realities of LGBTQ individuals in a traditionally conservative society. It represents a shift towards more inclusive and realistic storytelling in Bollywood, where LGBTQ characters are given the depth and dignity

they deserve. This film, alongside others like *"Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga,"* marks an important step in the ongoing journey toward greater acceptance and representation of diverse identities in Indian cinema.

The film, directed by Hansal Mehta, portrays the discrimination faced by the LGBTQ community and the legal battle fought by Dr. Siras. The film isn't just a cinematic achievement but an essential and timely exploration of LGBTQ rights. In short, *"Aligarh"* stands as a crucial milestone in Indian cinema's LGBTQ representation. *"Aligarh"* is a critically acclaimed Indian film released in 2015, directed by Hansal Mehta and starring Manoj Bajpayee in the lead role. The film is based on the true story of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a professor of Marathi at Aligarh Muslim University. The character of Siras and the narrative of the film explore profound themes regarding privacy, dignity, and the struggles faced by LGBTQ individuals in a conservative society. Dr. Siras is a linguistics professor specializing in Marathi and is a noted scholar and poet. He leads a quiet, solitary life, devoted to his academic pursuits and his love for Lata Mangeskar songs, which he listens to on his old tape recorder. Siras is depicted as a deeply introspective man who enjoys his own company and the quieter, finer things in life, such as poetry and music. Despite the humiliation and ostracization he faces, Siras maintains a dignified composure. His character exudes a gentle, resilient strength throughout his trials. Even in the face of adversity, Siras shows resilience. His battle is not just for himself but inherently becomes a part of a larger struggle for LGBTQ rights in India. *"Aligarh"* begins with the invasion of Siras's privacy when he is suspended from his university job after being caught on tape in a sting operation having consensual sex with a rickshaw puller in his own bedroom. This event sets off the central conflict of the film, highlighting deep-seated homophobia and the violation of individual privacy. The story then follows Siras as he faces social ostracism and battles the legal system to clear his name and regain his dignity. He finds an unlikely ally in a young journalist, Deepu Sebastian (played by Rajkummar Rao), who works for a Delhi-based newspaper. Deepu's articles and his growing friendship with Siras help bring national attention to his plight. A significant part of the narrative focuses on the right to privacy, a fundamental right that was egregiously violated in Siras's case. The film exposes the institutional and societal homophobia that LGBTQ individuals face, particularly in conservative environments. Siras's isolation is palpable and speaks

volumes about the loneliness that many LGBTQ individuals experience due to societal rejection and discrimination. *"Aligarh"* was well-received for its sensitive portrayal of Siras and the challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals. Manoj Bajpayee's performance was particularly praised for bringing depth and nuance to the role. The film played a significant role in raising awareness about LGBTQ issues in India, contributing to the ongoing discourse around the decriminalization of homosexuality, which was eventually realized in 2018. *"Aligarh"* stands out not only as a piece of cinema but as a poignant reminder of the personal and societal challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals in retaining their dignity and basic human rights. The film is a somber, realistic portrayal of their struggle for acceptance and equality in a society that often shuns diversity.

Equally, Deepa Mehta's *"Fire"* emerges as a groundbreaking film that explores the complexities of a lesbian relationship between two sisters-in-law, Radha, and Sita. The film's controversial release and protests in India highlight its daring approach to depicting homosexuality and challenging traditional gender roles. *"Fire"* is not the one that sparked controversy in India and set against the backdrop of societal norms and gender roles, courageously exploring LGBTQ themes and challenging traditional narratives (The Indian Express, 2016). *"Fire"* is a groundbreaking Indian film released in 1996, directed by Deepa Mehta. It is notable for being one of the first mainstream Bollywood films to explicitly portray a lesbian relationship, which sparked much controversy and dialogue regarding homosexuality in India at the time. The film stars Shabana Azmi as Radha and Nandita Das as Sita, two women who find solace and love in each other within their oppressive domestic lives. Radha played by Shabana Azmi, Radha is married to Ashok, a man who has taken a vow of celibacy in his quest for spiritual purity and has thus neglected Radha's needs and desires. She is initially submissive and reserved, conditioned by years of tradition and duty to conform to the expectations of her husband and family. As the film progresses, Radha becomes more assertive and self-aware. Her relationship with Sita becomes a catalyst for her self-discovery and emancipation from the restrictive norms of her life. Sita played by Nandita das, Sita is the younger wife of Jatin, Ashok's brother, who is also unhappy in her marriage as Jatin is in love with another woman and largely neglects Sita. Sita is more rebellious and questioning of the status quo compared to Radha. She is

energetic, expressive, and challenges traditional norms more openly. Sita's discontent with her situation drives her to seek connection with Radha. Her boldness and clarity about her needs influence Radha, and together they explore their identity and desires. The narrative of *"Fire"* revolves around the lives of these two women who, bound by societal norms and stuck in loveless marriages, develop a romantic and sexual relationship with each other. Their love is a form of resistance against the traditional roles imposed upon them as wives and daughters-in-law in conservative Indian families. The film explores themes of sexual identity and freedom, as both women seek love and fulfillment that they do not find in their heterosexual marriages. *"Fire"* critiques the patriarchal structures that confine women, showcasing how both Radha and Sita struggle under the dominance of the male figures in their family. The tension between traditional values and modern desires is a recurring theme, reflecting broader societal conflicts in India regarding gender roles and sexuality. Upon its release, *"Fire"* caused significant controversy. It was met with protests and even violence from some conservative groups who were opposed to its themes and portrayal of a lesbian relationship. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, *"Fire"* is considered a pioneering work in Indian cinema. It opened discussions on LGBTQ rights and representation in Indian society, which were largely taboo at the time. *"Fire"* remains a powerful film for its daring portrayal of themes that challenge the norms of Indian society. Its narrative and the performances of its lead actresses have been widely praised, making it an essential film in the context of LGBTQ cinema in India.

Shonali Bose's *"Margarita with A Straw"* also faces strong protests despite receiving global acclaim. This movie is a coming-of-age drama that delicately explores the intersectionality of disability and sexuality. Kalki Koechlin's portrayal of Laila, a woman with cerebral palsy, is both nuanced and powerful. The film beautifully captures Laila's journey of self-discovery, including her exploration of her sexuality (The Times of India, 2015). *"Margarita with a Straw"* is an Indian film directed by Shonali Bose, released in 2014, which tells the story of Laila, a young woman with cerebral palsy exploring her identity and sexuality. The film stars Kalki Koechlin as Laila, who delivers a compelling performance that brings depth and nuance to her character. Laila is a college student in Delhi who writes lyrics for a band, enjoys electronic music, and is studying at a university. She uses a wheelchair

due to cerebral palsy, and her family is supportive, yet protective of her. Laila is portrayed as an adventurous spirit with a curiosity about the world and herself. She seeks out experiences that challenge her and is eager to explore her identity beyond the constraints of her disability. Despite her physical limitations, Laila exhibits a strong sense of independence and resilience. She navigates the complexities of her life with a determined spirit. Laila's experiences with her own vulnerabilities make her deeply empathetic and insightful about the emotions and struggles of others. Laila's journey in the film is one of self-discovery and self-acceptance. It begins with her experiences at her university in Delhi and transitions dramatically when she moves to New York for a semester to study creative writing. In New York, Laila's exploration of her sexual identity deepens. She initially has a crush on a male classmate but later develops an intimate relationship with Khanum, a blind Pakistani-Bangladeshi woman. This relationship marks a significant turning point in Laila's understanding of her own desires and sexual orientation. Throughout the film, Laila confronts and navigates various forms of discrimination and stigma, not just regarding her disability, but also her sexuality. The challenges she faces include managing her relationship with her family, particularly her mother, who struggles to understand Laila's sexual orientation. "Margarita with a Straw" prominently explores themes of disability and sexuality, a rare focus in cinema. It challenges stereotypical perceptions that people with disabilities are devoid of sexual desires or identity explorations. The film delves into Laila's autonomy over her body and her choices, emphasizing her right to explore and assert her identity independently. Laila's experiences as a disabled, bisexual woman highlight the intersectionality of her identity, providing a layered and comprehensive exploration of her life. "Margarita with a Straw" received critical acclaim for its sensitive and realistic portrayal of a disabled woman exploring her sexual identity. Kalki Koechlin's portrayal of Laila was particularly praised for its authenticity and emotional depth. The film won multiple awards at international film festivals and is considered a significant work for its bold and compassionate exploration of complex, often underrepresented themes. Overall, Laila's character in "Margarita with a Straw" is a powerful representation of breaking stereotypes, not only about disability but also about sexuality, offering a fresh and enriching perspective in Indian cinema and beyond.

Their intimate moments are sensitively handled, challenging preconceived notions about disability and desire. While the film received praise for its representation, some critiques surfaced, particularly regarding the casting of a non-disabled actor in the lead role. Finally, *“My Brother Nikhil”* portrays the challenges faced by a gay man, Nikhil, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India. The film, directed by Onir, sheds light on societal discrimination and the resilience of the LGBTQ community. The film’s emotional impact remains relevant in discussions about HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ rights (The Movie Buff, 2021). Nikhil Kapoor is a beloved son and brother, an accomplished swimmer, and a popular figure in his local community. His life takes a drastic turn when he is diagnosed with HIV. Nikhil is portrayed as a gentle and loving individual, deeply caring for those around him, including his sister Anamika (played by Juhi Chawla) and his partner Nigel (played by Purab Kohli). As the narrative progresses, Nikhil’s resilience is put to the test. Despite facing severe discrimination and social ostracization, he maintains his dignity and fights for his rights. The story of "My Brother Nikhil" is primarily centered on how Nikhil’s life changes after his HIV diagnosis. Until then, he had been living a normal life with his supportive family and his boyfriend Nigel, a secret he keeps due to societal pressures. After being diagnosed with HIV, Nikhil is wrongfully isolated and detained because of the prevailing laws and social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. His arrest and subsequent isolation are a significant part of the story, highlighting the inhumane treatment often meted out to AIDS patients at the time. Initially, his family and friends are shocked, and he faces rejection from various quarters, including being ostracized by his swimming community and friends. Over time, his sister Anamika and his boyfriend Nigel stand by him and fight for his rights. The film also portrays the legal battle that Nikhil’s family and his lawyer undertake against the discriminatory practices faced by HIV-positive individuals. This struggle is crucial in highlighting the lack of awareness and the misconceptions about HIV/AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s in India. The film tackles the intense stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency viruses), particularly within the context of Indian society. A significant theme is the support of Nikhil’s family, especially the strong bond between him and his sister, Anamika, who becomes his staunch advocate. The film addresses homosexuality with sensitivity and respect, portraying Nikhil and Nigel’s relationship as loving and supportive, which was quite progressive for

Indian cinema at the time. "My Brother Nikhil" was well-received for its sensitive portrayal of difficult themes and won acclaim for its advocacy against the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and its progressive portrayal of a homosexual relationship. The film helped start conversations and potentially contributed to changing perceptions about HIV and homosexuality in India. Sanjay Suri's portrayal of Nikhil and the supporting performances by Juhi Chawla and others were particularly praised for their depth and emotional resonance. Overall, "My Brother Nikhil" remains a significant film in the landscape of Indian cinema for its humane portrayal of complex issues and its role in advocating for social change.

Ten movies (Table 1) have been selected out of 15 films produced between 1996 and 2023. The selection process of movies is based on the following:

1. An Association with the research topic.
2. Availability of films on social media platforms
3. Film produced across Pakistan and India

Table 1. List of movies

Movie name	Director	Year
Bol	<i>Shoaib Mansoor</i>	2011
Joyland	<i>saim Sadiq</i>	2022
Kapoor and sons	<i>shaken Batra</i>	2016
Ek ladki ko dekha tu aesa laga	<i>shelly Chopra Dhar</i>	2019
Badhaai do	<i>Harshavardhan Kulkarni</i>	2022
Aligarh	<i>Hansal Mehta</i>	2015
Fire	<i>Deepa Metha</i>	1996
Margarita with a straw	<i>Shonali Bose</i>	2015
Shubh mangal zyada Saavdh	<i>Hitesh Kewalya</i>	2020
My brother Nakhil	<i>Onir</i>	2005

The representation of LGBTQ directors in the Indian and Pakistani film industries has seen some progress in recent years, although challenges still exist. Historically, the Indian and Pakistani film industries have been relatively conservative when it comes to LGBTQ representation. LGBTQ individuals and their stories were often marginalized, ignored, or portrayed negatively due to societal and cultural taboos surrounding homosexuality and non-binary identities. LGBTQ representation in the region initially found space in independent or art-

house cinema rather than mainstream commercial films. Film producers, such as Onir (Indian director of “My Brother...Nikhil”) and Sridhar Rangayan (Indian director of “Evening Shadows”), appeared as pioneers in exploring LGBTQ narratives and experiences in their work.

Various LGBTQ subject movies from India and Pakistan have gained international identification and acclaim, often directed by LGBTQ film producers. For example, “*Fire*” (1996), directed by Deepa Mehta, which analyzed a lesbian relationship, sparked controversy in India but faced worse acclaim globally. “*Bol*” (2011), directed by Shoaib Mansoor in Pakistan, touched on transgender problems and garnered attention both domestically and internationally.

Filmmakers like Hansal Mehta (Indian director of “*Aligarh*”), Faraz Arif Ansari (Indian director of “*Sisak*”), and Sarmad Sultan Khoosat (Pakistani director of “*Khoosat*”) have made notable contributions by bringing LGBTQ narratives to the forefront and challenging societal norms.

The emergence of web series and digital platforms has provided an additional avenue for LGBTQ representation in the region. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and MX Player have showcased LGBTQ-themed content, often directed by LGBTQ filmmakers or those supportive of LGBTQ stories. Examples include “*Made in Heaven*” (Indian web series), “*Hum Tum and Them*” (Indian web series), and “*Churails*” (Pakistani web series).

Despite progress, challenges persist in the representation of LGBTQ directors in India and Pakistan. Homophobia, social stigma, and conservative attitudes in society can hinder LGBTQ representation in mainstream cinema. LGBTQ filmmakers may face difficulties securing funding, finding distribution platforms, or encountering censorship issues due to sensitive content. LGBTQ directors from India and Pakistan have been actively involved in advocating for LGBTQ rights and representation. They have used their platform to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and promote inclusivity in the film industry. Their work has contributed to a broader dialogue about LGBTQ issues in society. It’s important to note that the

Indian and Pakistani film industries are diverse, and the experiences of LGBTQ directors may vary. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition of the importance of LGBTQ representation, and the efforts of LGBTQ directors are gradually shaping the landscape of cinema in both countries.

The ideologies of filmmakers and directors in India and Pakistan regarding LGBTQ topics can vary significantly due to the diverse cultural, social, and political contexts of the two countries. In recent years, there has been a growing number of Indian filmmakers and directors who actively advocate for LGBTQ rights and inclusion. They strive to break stereotypes, challenge societal norms, and create authentic portrayals of LGBTQ characters and experiences in their films. These individuals aim to foster empathy, understanding, and acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Indian society. Many Indian filmmakers use their work to address social issues, including LGBTQ rights. They view filmmaking to provoke thought, initiate dialogue, and bring about societal change.

These directors may incorporate LGBTQ characters and stories to shed light on the struggles and triumphs of the LGBTQ community, encouraging viewers to reflect and question prevailing attitudes. Given the diverse cultural fabric of India, some filmmakers approach LGBTQ topics with cultural sensitivity and a desire for nuanced portrayals. They may consider the specific cultural contexts, traditions, and complexities surrounding LGBTQ issues in India. These individuals aim to strike a balance between authenticity and cultural sensitivity, addressing LGBTQ themes in a manner that resonates with Indian audiences. Despite the progress made, there are filmmakers in India who hold conservative or traditional views on LGBTQ topics. These individuals may be hesitant to address LGBTQ issues or may present them through a cautionary or limited lens. Factors such as cultural norms, religious beliefs, or the fear of controversy can influence their stance.

Furthermore, there has been a gradual shift in the representation of LGBTQ themes in Pakistani cinema. Some filmmakers are emerging who are open to addressing LGBTQ issues, seeking to challenge societal taboos and advocate for greater acceptance and understanding. They aim to shed light on the experiences and struggles faced by the LGBTQ community in Pakistan. Filmmakers in Pakistan

often face challenges due to censorship regulations that restrict the portrayal of LGBTQ themes. As a result, some directors may choose to explore LGBTQ issues indirectly or symbolically, employing metaphors or subtext to navigate censorship constraints. Others may opt for independent or digital platforms to showcase their work without the same level of censorship scrutiny. Some Pakistani filmmakers incorporate LGBTQ themes within a broader framework of social issues, highlighting the intersectionality of identities and the interconnectedness of struggles faced by marginalized communities.

They use storytelling to address not only LGBTQ rights but also broader issues of gender, class, and religious discrimination in Pakistani society. While progress has been made, the representation of LGBTQ characters and stories in Pakistani cinema remains limited. However, some filmmakers actively seek to challenge this lack of representation and advocate for more diverse narratives. They aim to normalize LGBTQ characters and stories within the Pakistani film industry, challenging existing norms and biases. It's important to remember that these are broad observations, and individual filmmakers may have diverse perspectives within India and Pakistan. The evolving nature of the discourse surrounding LGBTQ topics and the ongoing societal changes can lead to shifts in ideologies among filmmakers over time.

Chapter 6

Significance of LGBTQ Movies

The impact of LGBTQ movies on social groups in India and Pakistan can be significant, as they have the potential to shape attitudes, challenge stereotypes, and promote greater acceptance and understanding. However, it's important to note that the impact can vary depending on factors such as the reach of the movies, cultural context, and individual perspectives. Here are some potential impacts LGBTQ movies provide representation and visibility to the LGBTQ community in societies where they may be marginalized or stigmatized. By showcasing diverse LGBTQ characters and stories, these movies can help break stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of the LGBTQ experience. This increased visibility can contribute to a greater sense of acceptance and recognition for LGBTQ individuals and their struggles. LGBTQ movies provide representation for the LGBTQ community, often showcasing diverse characters and stories that may not have been previously portrayed in mainstream media. This increased visibility helps LGBTQ individuals feel seen and validated, fostering a sense of belonging and pride within their community. LGBTQ movies have the power to evoke empathy and understanding among viewers. By portraying LGBTQ characters and depicting their experiences, these films can challenge stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and promote a more nuanced understanding of the LGBTQ community. This can lead to greater empathy and acceptance among viewers, breaking down barriers and reducing prejudice and discrimination. LGBTQ movies serve as educational tools, raising awareness about LGBTQ issues, identities, and struggles. They can provide insights into the challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals, including discrimination, coming out experiences, and the fight for equal rights. This increased awareness can lead to more informed and compassionate attitudes toward the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ movies often spark dialogue and discussions about LGBTQ rights and representation. They encourage conversations among viewers, communities, and even policymakers, creating opportunities for deeper exploration and understanding of LGBTQ issues. These discussions can contribute to societal change, challenging existing norms and promoting more inclusive perspectives. LGBTQ movies can

empower and inspire both LGBTQ individuals and allies. Seeing LGBTQ characters overcome challenges, find love, and lead fulfilling lives on screen can provide hope, encouragement, and a sense of possibility. These films can motivate individuals to stand up for LGBTQ rights and promote inclusivity in their communities.

LGBTQ movies have the power to evoke empathy and humanize LGBTQ characters, helping viewers understand their experiences, emotions, and challenges. By portraying LGBTQ individuals as multidimensional and relatable, these movies can foster a sense of connection and empathy among viewers. This can lead to greater acceptance and a reduction in prejudice and discrimination. LGBTQ movies can serve as educational tools, raising awareness about LGBTQ issues, identities, and rights. They can provide insight into the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, including social stigma, discrimination, and the fight for equal rights. These movies can prompt discussions, challenge misconceptions, and contribute to a more informed society.

LGBTQ movies have the potential to challenge societal norms and cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. By presenting LGBTQ characters and relationships in a positive light, these movies can challenge existing prejudices and promote more inclusive perspectives. Over time, this can contribute to a cultural shift and create an environment that is more accepting and supportive of LGBTQ rights. LGBTQ movies can have a significant impact on the LGBTQ community itself. They can provide a sense of validation, representation, and empowerment for LGBTQ individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and pride.

LGBTQ movies can also help build a sense of community by connecting individuals who share similar experiences and struggles. It's important to acknowledge that LGBTQ movies can face resistance and backlash from conservative or traditional segments of society. Some individuals or groups may oppose the portrayal of LGBTQ characters and stories, leading to controversy or censorship attempts. However, such resistance can also spark conversations and debates, furthering the discourse on LGBTQ rights and representation.

Over time, LGBTQ movies can contribute to a broader cultural shift and social progress. By challenging stereotypes, promoting positive representations, and normalizing LGBTQ experiences, these films can shape societal attitudes and perceptions. This can lead to increased acceptance and support for LGBTQ rights and the dismantling of discriminatory practices and policies. It is important to note that LGBTQ movies in India and Pakistan have the potential to bring about positive social change by challenging stereotypes, fostering empathy, and promoting understanding and acceptance. While their impact may face challenges in conservative environments, they contribute to a broader cultural shift toward greater inclusivity and recognition of LGBTQ rights.

Consequently, the impact of LGBTQ movies on the representation, state, and dynamic environment of India and Pakistan can be significant. Still, the specific cultural, social, and political contexts of each country influence it. LGBTQ movies can contribute to increased representation of the LGBTQ community in the film industry. By showcasing diverse LGBTQ characters and stories, these movies challenge the underrepresentation and marginalization of LGBTQ individuals in mainstream media. This representation can help break stereotypes, provide positive role models, and foster a sense of visibility and validation for LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ movies have the power to influence cultural and social attitudes toward the LGBTQ community. By depicting LGBTQ characters and their experiences in relatable and authentic ways, these films can challenge societal norms and broaden perspectives. Over time, this can contribute to a cultural shift that promotes greater acceptance, understanding, and inclusivity for LGBTQ individuals.

LGBTQ movies can empower LGBTQ individuals by providing them with a platform for self-expression and visibility. Seeing their stories and identities depicted on screen can instill a sense of pride, self-acceptance, and empowerment within the LGBTQ community. This empowerment can lead to increased mobilization, activism, and advocacy for LGBTQ rights and social change. LGBTQ movies can raise awareness and educate the public about LGBTQ issues, identities, and struggles. They can help dispel myths, challenge stereotypes, and provide insights into the experiences of LGBTQ individuals. This increased awareness can

contribute to a more informed and empathetic society, fostering dialogue and understanding. LGBTQ movies can influence legal and policy discussions surrounding LGBTQ rights. By shedding light on the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, these films can create momentum for policy changes and legal reforms. They can also contribute to the recognition and protection of LGBTQ rights, influencing public opinion and supporting advocacy efforts. LGBTQ movies may also face resistance and backlash from conservative segments of society, particularly in contexts where LGBTQ rights are still contentious. These films can be seen as challenging societal norms, religious beliefs, or cultural traditions, leading to controversy or censorship attempts. However, such resistance can also spark essential conversations and debates and ultimately contribute to societal progress.

It is essential to recognize that the impact of LGBTQ movies on the representation, state, and dynamic environment of India and Pakistan is complex and multifaceted. The extent of their influence can depend on factors such as the reach and accessibility of the movies, the prevailing societal attitudes, and the existing legal and policy frameworks. Nonetheless, these films play a crucial role in shaping conversations, challenging norms, and promoting greater inclusivity and acceptance for the LGBTQ community.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusions

At the onset of this research journey, my preconceived notions were rooted in the belief that LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema was virtually non-existent, and any attempts by activists to address this gap would be met with insurmountable challenges. The initial scepticism was fuelled by a lack of visibility in mainstream narratives and a perception of societal resistance prevalent in the region. However, as the research unfolded, it became a transformative lesson, reshaping my understanding of the landscape.

The comprehensive exploration into LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema, detailed in the extensive conclusions, has unveiled a nuanced narrative. Contrary to my initial assumptions, the cinematic landscapes of India and Pakistan have witnessed a gradual evolution. Films like "Bol," "Joyland," "Kapoor and Sons," and "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha to Aisa Laga" serve as powerful examples, challenging stereotypes and fostering recognition, awareness, and identification. These narratives not only exist but have become catalysts for change, indicating the resilience of filmmakers and activists in South Asian countries.

The research has also highlighted the pivotal role played by independent filmmakers and unconventional storytellers in pushing boundaries. Despite the challenges posed by censorship laws, societal criticism, and religious conservatism, these individuals have become agents of change, providing a platform for LGBTQ narratives. Films like "Dekh Magar Pyaar Say" and the engagement of LGBTQ activists in film festivals contribute to challenging labels and promoting inclusivity.

Furthermore, the exploration into the impact of South Asian LGBTQ films on social groups in India and Pakistan revealed the profound influence these movies have on reshaping attitudes, challenging stereotypes, and fostering acceptance. The power of representation, educational aspects, and the empowerment and inspiration derived from these films became evident, contradicting my initial assumption that such efforts might go unnoticed or face significant resistance.

In essence, the research journey has been a paradigm shift from scepticism to acknowledgment of the transformative potential of art, particularly through LGBTQ movies, in transcending societal boundaries. The lessons learned underscore the resilience of activists and filmmakers, the power of representation, and the crucial role of cinema as a catalyst for societal change. This newfound understanding fuels a commitment to continue advocating for LGBTQ rights and contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to amplify diverse voices and stories in South Asian cinema. The research journey has not only broadened my academic perspective but has also instilled a deeper appreciation for the profound impact of storytelling on societal perceptions.

In examining the landscape of LGBTQ representation in Asian cinema, with a specific focus on Pakistan, being a researcher, my focus remained to shed light on the intricate interplay of socio-political factors that significantly influence the filmmaking milieu. The absence of independent filmmakers and the pervasive impact of Islamic ideology within the government emerge as pivotal determinants shaping the direction of media narratives in the region.

The notable observation was made is the government's strategic use of cinema to project a positive image, deliberately steering clear of taboo subjects such as liberalism, gender discrimination, gender identity, and sexual crimes. This deliberate avoidance of contentious topics reflects the conservative ethos prevailing in countries like Pakistan and India, where the realms of literature, art, and culture remain undervalued despite their potential to bring about transformative societal change.

During the research, I keenly noted the government's reluctance to engage in conversations around these issues, viewing such discussions as potential threats to established societal norms. The prevalent attitude perceives discourse on these subjects as attempts to introduce liberalism into conservative societies. However, beneath this resistance, the researcher identifies a nuanced societal landscape that is quietly undergoing a perceptible transformation.

The study also recognizes the intersectionality of cinema with activism and social movements, emphasizing the ethical responsibility to amplify LGBTQ voices

and experiences. The research's motives, rooted in addressing the lack of knowledge on taboo topics, advocating against discrimination, and exploring societal norms and specific issues, reflect a commitment to social justice. The personal experiences of the researcher, who has actively worked for LGBTQ rights, provide a nuanced understanding of the deep impact of these films and the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community. The narratives in the thesis intertwine personal accounts, research involving movies, articles, interviews, and documentaries to present a comprehensive exploration of LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema. The researcher's personal involvement in LGBTQ rights, coupled with a passion for cinema, underscores the desire to contribute to the recognition and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals globally. The thesis aims to bridge the gap in knowledge, providing an in-depth examination of LGBTQ acceptance in Asian cinema and shedding light on the transformative influence of films on societal perceptions.

The cinematic landscape of South Asia, encompassing diverse countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and others, stands as a powerful mirror reflecting the evolving social dynamics and challenges faced by the LGBTQ community. This research aimed to unravel the intricate relationship between cinema, societal attitudes, and the representation of LGBTQ individuals in the South Asian cinema, with a particular focus on Indian and Pakistani contexts.

This study enunciates the historical trajectory of LGBTQ representation in Asian cinema, recognizing that the journey has been one marked by challenges, taboo subjects, and evolving societal norms. From the early ages where LGBTQ representations were either absent or relegated to comedic and derogatory styles, to the pivotal turning point in the 2000s when films like "Fire" sparked controversies and debates, the landscape has undergone transformation. Independent filmmakers and short films in the 2000s started exploring LGBTQ themes more straightforwardly, paving the way for a more open and nuanced depiction in the following decades. The 2010s witnessed a significant shift, with films like "Kapoor & Sons" and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" introducing LGBTQ characters to a broader audience, challenging traditional norms.

During the study, it is found that the path to LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema is not without obstacles. Censorship laws, societal criticism, and

religious conservatism continue to pose substantial challenges. The socio-cultural landscape and prevailing attitudes toward LGBTQ issues significantly shape the historical context of LGBTQ films in Pakistani cinema, as well as Indian Cinema. The resistance and disapproval faced by LGBTQ films in many Asian countries, including Pakistan, highlight the complexity of navigating cultural, legal, and religious frameworks. Furthermore, with religious and political influences continuing to affect the release and reception of films addressing LGBTQ themes. The complex relationship between cultural, legal, and religious frameworks in predominantly Islamic countries adds an additional layer of complexity.

Despite these challenges, this study found that the resilience of filmmakers and activists in South Asian countries is evident. The research underscores the vital role played by independent filmmakers and unconventional storytellers in pushing boundaries, challenging societal norms, and providing a platform for LGBTQ narratives. Films like "Bol" and "Dekh Magar Pyaar Say" attempt to represent LGBTQ stories within a broader social context, gaining recognition both nationally and internationally. The engagement of LGBTQ activists and filmmakers in creating crucial narratives through film festivals contributes to challenging labels and promoting inclusivity.

The cinematic narratives discussed in the research, including films like "*Bol*," "*Joyland*," "*Kapoor and Sons*," and "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha to Aisa Laga*," serve as catalysts for change. These films offer a window into the lives of the LGBTQ community, fostering recognition, awareness, and identification. The positive evaluations and responses symbolize a gradual shift in societal attitudes, challenging stereotypes and contributing to a more inclusive cinematic landscape.

The researcher acknowledges the need for a nuanced understanding of the diversity within Islamic culture, recognizing varying perspectives on same-sex relationships and gender identities. It leaves a resonating echo of the transformative journey undertaken in exploring LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema. The cinematic landscape, though riddled with challenges, is witnessing a gradual evolution. Over the course of the study, it was established that independent filmmakers, activists, and unconventional storytellers are becoming agents of

change, challenging societal norms, and providing a voice to the LGBTQ community.

The stories of acceptance, trauma, and resilience shared by community members, coupled with critical analysis, cultural studies, and gender studies, contribute to existing scholarly knowledge. The films discussed throughout the research serve as beacons of change, challenging stereotypes, fostering empathy, and promoting societal dialogue. The ongoing struggle for LGBTQ rights and representation in South Asian cinema is both a reflection and a catalyst for broader societal changes.

In essence, the LGBTQ representation in South Asian cinema encapsulates demands more than a scholarly endeavour. It requires the academia to understand power of cinema as a medium for social change, a celebration of diversity, and a call to action for a more inclusive and accepting world. The researcher's journey, guided by a commitment to activism and a love for cinema, contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to amplify LGBTQ voices and stories.

To conduct this overall research, the design and research methodology employed is exploratory in nature. This qualitative approach allowed to explore the representation of LGBTQ characters in Asian cinema, particularly within the Pakistani and Indian media industries. While being unbiased and unmoved by the finding, the researcher conducted content analysis, in-depth reviews, and extensive data collection from academic journals, articles, newspapers, and semi-structured audio interviews to study this phenomenon. The research questions were carefully formulated to address the types of LGBTQ characters, themes explored, cultural and social contexts depicted, and audience responses in Asian cinema. Noteworthy film directors like Deepa Mehta, Onir, Shonali Bose, Hansal Mehta, Shelly Chopra Dhar, Harshvardhan Kulkarni, Saim Sadiq, and Shoaib Mansoor were selected for their impactful contributions to LGBTQ representation.

During the study, it was found that the LGBTQ portrayal in Asian cinema is influenced by cultural, religious norms, political climates, and societal acceptance levels. The research aimed to contribute valuable insights into the representation of

Asian cinema, particularly in Pakistan and India, and illuminate the reasons behind its limited scope compared to Western cinema.

The study acknowledged that only a few movies were selected from the era of 2000s to present that pinpointed the challenges such as societal attitudes, conservative censorship laws, and language barriers that hinder the exploration of LGBTQ themes in Asian Cinema. The theoretical and empirical research incorporated Queer Theory in Cinema also aimed to explore how gender, sexuality, and identity are portrayed and the emergence of queer cinema as a genre. Additionally, the convergence of queer-related topics and national/Islamic cinema was examined, recognizing the complexity influenced by cultural attitudes and individual filmmakers.

Personal experiences and exposure were interwoven to highlight the struggles and triumphs of LGBTQ individuals, emphasizing the transformative power of storytelling. The representation of gay and crossdresser characters in Asian cinema was explored, acknowledging progress while recognizing challenges due to societal taboos and legal restrictions.

The chapter 2 underscored the profound impact of LGBTQ representation in cinema, emphasizing its role in challenging norms, fostering acceptance, empowering individuals, and contributing to societal change. The importance of diverse, authentic narratives was highlighted, illustrating how they humanize LGBTQ individuals and promote empathy and understanding. Ultimately, LGBTQ representation in cinema emerged as a catalyst for social and political transformation, reflecting the evolving cultural landscape and paving the way for a more inclusive and accepting society.

While conducting the research, it became evident that the cinematic landscapes of Bollywood and Lollywood before 1996 predominantly adhered to mainstream commercial cinema, relegating LGBTQ characters to stereotypical portrayals or serving as elements of comedic relief. The parallel cinema movement in India did offer a slightly more thoughtful approach, occasionally delving into LGBTQ themes. However, both nations encountered impediments such as stringent

censorship, societal norms, and conservative attitudes, limiting the exploration of LGBTQ identities on the silver screen.

Pakistan, operating as an Islamic Republic State, faced notable censorship challenges, significantly impinging upon artistic expression. The restrictive blasphemy laws and societal taboos surrounding LGBTQ content posed formidable obstacles for filmmakers. Despite these constraints, resilient artists persist in navigating this challenging terrain, crafting narratives that authentically reflect the intricacies of Pakistani society. The advent of digital platforms and independent cinema has emerged as a liberating force, providing alternative avenues for filmmakers to articulate their narratives more freely.

The period from 1996 to 2022 witnessed both Indian and Pakistani cinema contending with a myriad of challenges, ranging from censorship to issues of pay disparity and exploitation. Post-2011, however, marked a resurgence fuelled by technological advancements, evolving content, and the emergence of new talent. The pivotal moment of 2018, with the decriminalization of consensual same-sex relationships in India, acted as a catalyst, influencing the nuanced portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Indian cinema.

The film analysis segment meticulously dissected ten selected films from both countries, revealing the complexities of LGBTQ storytelling. From the poignant narrative of "Bol" to the insightful exploration of family dynamics in "Kapoor & Sons," each film added a unique layer to the evolving discourse around LGBTQ representation. This section highlighted the diversity of characters, narrative structures, and storytelling techniques employed, underscoring the complexity of portraying LGBTQ themes authentically.

The representation of LGBTQ directors also underwent a transformative journey, with pioneers like Onir and Sridhar Rangayan paving the way for more inclusive storytelling. Despite facing hurdles such as funding challenges and censorship, these filmmakers actively advocated for LGBTQ rights and worked towards dismantling stereotypes within the industry.

Examining the ideologies of filmmakers in both countries revealed a spectrum of perspectives. While some actively challenged societal norms, others

approached LGBTQ topics cautiously due to cultural and religious influences. The emergence of LGBTQ filmmakers, coupled with the rise of web series and shifting societal attitudes, contributed to a more inclusive cinematic landscape.

Yet, despite notable progress, challenges persist. Filmmakers grapple with censorship, societal pressures, and the imperative for more LGBTQ representation in mainstream cinema. The concept of self-censorship, alternative distribution channels, and advocacy efforts remain crucial tools in navigating these challenges.

In essence, the film analysis highlights the dynamic interplay between cinema and society. It showcases the ongoing journey towards greater inclusivity, acceptance, and understanding of LGBTQ individuals and their multifaceted stories within the evolving Indian and Pakistani cinema industries. As societal attitudes continue to evolve, so too will the cinematic representation of LGBTQ themes, promising a future where diverse narratives can find their rightful place on the silver screen.

Analysis of the research study also demonstrated that there is profound impact of LGBTQ movies on social groups in India and Pakistan. These movies have the potential to reshape attitudes, challenge stereotypes, and foster a greater sense of acceptance and understanding. It is crucial to recognize that this impact is multifaceted, dependent upon various factors such as cultural context, individual perspectives, and the reach of the movies. By providing representation and visibility to the LGBTQ community, these movies become a potent force in societies where marginalization and stigma persist. Moreover, the various LGBTQ characters and narratives presented in the study showcased that the directors and actors are breaking free from stereotypes. They are ushering in a more nuanced understanding of the LGBTQ experience. This increased visibility not only contributes to a greater sense of acceptance but also acts as a catalyst for recognition, allowing LGBTQ individuals and their struggles to be seen and acknowledged.

Through the study, it became apparent that this representation offered by LGBTQ movies extends beyond mere visibility. It serves as a source of validation and pride for the LGBTQ community. The diverse characters and stories portrayed on screen, often absent in mainstream media, create a space where LGBTQ

individuals can feel seen and validated. This visibility fosters a profound sense of belonging, instilling pride within the community. These movies become a medium through which the LGBTQ experiences is woven, fostering empathy, and understanding among viewers. By humanizing LGBTQ characters and depicting their multifaceted experiences, these films challenge stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and pave the way for a more nuanced comprehension of the LGBTQ community. The resulting empathy and understanding contribute to breaking down barriers, reducing prejudice, and fostering an environment of acceptance.

Furthermore, beyond their role as entertainment, LGBTQ movies emerge as powerful educational tools, raising awareness about LGBTQ issues, identities, and struggles. By providing insights into the challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals, including discrimination and the quest for equal rights, these films prompt a more informed and compassionate attitude toward the LGBTQ community. They initiate dialogue and discussions, not just within the confines of cinema halls but echoing in communities and even influencing policymakers. These conversations become avenues for deeper exploration and understanding of LGBTQ issues, fostering societal change, and challenging existing norms.

Another point to ponder is that the LGBTQ movies carry the transformative power to empower and inspire. As audiences witness LGBTQ characters overcoming challenges, finding love, and leading fulfilling lives on screen, a ripple effect of hope, encouragement, and a sense of possibility ensues. These films motivate individuals to stand up for LGBTQ rights and promote inclusivity in their communities. Beyond the screen, LGBTQ movies contribute to the empowerment of the community itself. By offering a platform for self-expression and visibility, as mentioned earlier, these films instil confidence, sense of pride, self-acceptance, and a sense of belonging among LGBTQ individuals. The shared experiences, when shown on screen has the power to connect individuals who have faced similar struggles. This allows to build a sense of community and solidarity within LGBTQ individuals, and those who do not associate themselves with them.

Despite the acceptance and resilience, the study uncovers that the transformative journey paved by LGBTQ movies is not devoid of challenges. Resistance and backlash from conservative or traditional segments of society can

lead to controversy or censorship attempts. Throughout the years, movies that highlight a taboo topic related to LGBTQ whether directly or indirectly have been subjected to censorships. Yet, this resistance becomes a catalyst for essential conversations and debates, furthering the discourse on LGBTQ rights and representation. Over time, these movies contribute to a broader cultural shift and social progress by challenging stereotypes, fostering empathy, and promoting understanding and acceptance.

In the specific context of India and Pakistan, this research study posits that the impact of LGBTQ movies is shaped by the unique cultural, social, and political contexts of each country. The researcher's exploration unveils a nuanced landscape where government influence, societal resistance, and a burgeoning generation of filmmakers coalesce. While governmental reluctance to engage with certain topics remains, there is an undercurrent of change propelled by a new wave of filmmakers determined to challenge norms. The societal landscape, though resistant on the surface, is quietly undergoing transformation, reflective of evolving perspectives and a growing willingness to create content that serves as an educational tool. The research attests to a populace in transition, with evolving perspectives and a growing willingness to create content that serves as an educational tool and raises awareness through mediums like art, films, cinema, and theatres. The emergence of a cadre of filmmakers committed to pushing boundaries and addressing societal taboos signals a promising shift in the cultural milieu. The findings underscore the evolving mindset of individuals, reflecting a readiness to engage with and produce content that challenges societal norms and contributes to positive change.

In conclusion, this research underscores the transformative potential of art, particularly through the lens of LGBTQ movies, in transcending societal boundaries. The new generation of filmmakers emerges as pivotal agents of change, navigating uncharted territories to contribute to a cultural evolution reflective of shifting societal attitudes. As the researcher aptly notes, "Art knows no boundaries," becoming a catalyst for societal change and fostering a more accepting and diverse narrative. The ongoing journey toward acceptance in India and Pakistan finds its champions in these storytellers who, by challenging conventional norms, contribute to a cultural shift toward a more inclusive and enlightened future. As the curtain falls on this

exploration, it leaves behind a resonating echo - the power of storytelling to shape societies and pave the way for a more accepting and diverse world.



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