

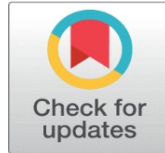
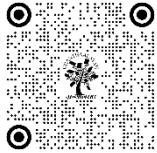
CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY MASCULINITY IN BOLLYWOOD: A STUDY OF SELECT FILMS STARRING AYUSHMANN KHURRANA

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the representation of modern masculinity in three select Bollywood films starring Ayushmann Khurrana: *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, *Vicky Donor*, and *Dream Girl*. The study examines how masculinity is portrayed in these films with a primary focus on the idea of hegemonic masculinity. The study makes use of qualitative research techniques to pinpoint important issues surrounding masculinity in these films, demonstrating a substantial movement away from conventionally hyper-masculine images towards more varied and complex representations. The male protagonists in these films are portrayed as being sensitive, frightened, and emotionally aware, which challenges traditional preconceptions.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, Contemporary Masculinity, Toxic Masculinity, Hyper-Masculine

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. MASCULINITIES IN INDIAN FILMS: THE BEGINNING

From its beginning, Indian films has portrayed gender roles through a traditional lens, with male protagonists typically taking center stage and embodying traits such as strength, valour, and moral righteousness. Conversely, female characters have often been portrayed in stereotypical roles as devoted wives, self-sacrificing mothers, or objects of desire, thereby perpetuating the patriarchal norms

that prevail in society. Women's internalization of subordination has led to a situation where capitalism and patriarchy both profits. The media actively participates in moulding societal beliefs and behaviors, which is important for understanding the process of internalization and its impact on shaping cultural norms and individual identities [Pant \(2018\)](#).

The *Angry Young Men* era set a foundation for an "ideal man" [Biswas \(2022\)](#), from the 1960s till the 1990s, and it made an everlasting impact on viewers' minds. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra defined masculinity as saving their mothers and their loved ones by fighting off villains on-screen. Early Indian films serves as a rich repository of narratives that reflect and perpetuate societal norms, including gender roles. [Dhar \(2012\)](#)

Popular Bollywood films like *Sholay* (1975) is an example of how media reflects and shapes gender roles and power dynamics in society. In the early era, the portrayal of men emphasised being Macho, tough, and aggressive. Throughout the 1980s also, Indian cinema frequently depicted patriarchal gender norms through its protagonists, mirroring the prevailing societal standards of the era. Male leads often emerged as dominant, authoritative figures who dictated familial decisions with minimal input from female counterparts. Women, in turn, were frequently portrayed as compliant and subordinate, tasked with prioritizing the needs and desires of their husbands and families over their own aspirations. For instance, *Arth* (1982) delves into the complexities of infidelity and patriarchal control, showcasing a woman's struggle for autonomy within a marriage dominated by her husband's authority. Similarly, *Mr. India* (1987) reinforces traditional gender roles, presenting the male protagonist as the heroic figure while the female lead assumes a role primarily defined by romantic involvement and caregiving duties. In the 1990s, actors like Akshay Kumar, Salman Khan, and Govinda continued to play similar roles, using humour and moderate sexual misconduct to build plots. These films normalized misogyny, ill-treatment of women, and other problematic issues in society [Das \(2019\)](#).

1) Shift in the Portrayal of traditional masculinity

The representation of masculinity in current mainstream Hindi cinema has evolved significantly in recent years. Traditionally, majority of the Indian mainstream cinema portrayed male characters as dominant, aggressive, and *hyper-masculine* (since 1970s). However, with changing social attitudes towards gender roles, there has been a shift in the representation of masculinity in mainstream Hindi cinema [Mehra \(2019\)](#).

According to Saayan Chattopadhyay, the "Angry Young Man" era in Indian films marked a significant period of rebellion and societal critique. The era in Indian films refers to a period primarily in the 1970s and 1980s when male protagonists portrayed a sense of rebellion, defiance against societal injustices, and frustration with the system. These characters, often played by actors like Amitabh Bachchan, symbolized the common man's struggles against corruption, poverty, and social inequality, resonating deeply with audiences during that time [Chattopadhyay \(2013\)](#). Many recent Hindi cinema depicts male characters as multi-dimensional, challenging traditional masculinity. The film *Padman* (2018) is an example of a protagonist who champions women's issues with sensitivity and empathy, showcasing that strength doesn't have to be purely physical. Male characters are shown to possess a range of emotions, breaking stereotypes and redefining masculinity [More \(2020\)](#).

Contemporary Hindi cinema depicts male characters as allies to female characters, promoting gender equality. The film *Pink* (2016) is a notable example

where male characters support the female protagonist's fight for justice against sexual assault, challenging mainstream cinema's norms and expectations. The film addresses the issue of victim-blaming and advocates for a more equal and inclusive society [Mishra \(2016\)](#). While there have been limited instances in recent mainstream Indian cinema, such as the film *Kabir Singh* (2019), that glorifies toxic masculinity and reinforces traditional gender norms.

2) Contemporary Masculinity in Indian Cinema:

Contemporary Masculinity in Bollywood signifies a shift in how male characters are portrayed in Indian mainstream cinema, particularly in Bollywood. The representation of masculinity goes beyond physical strength and dominance, now encompassing emotional intelligence, empathy, and sensitivity. This change emerged in response to concerns about reinforcing harmful gender roles in Indian cinema. Contemporary Masculinity in Bollywood seeks to move away from traditional portrayals and promote a more inclusive and progressive depiction of masculinity. The modern male characters in these films are multifaceted and intricate, supporting women's causes, expressing emotions, and challenging traditional notions of masculinity [Sabharwal \(2022\)](#).

Rohit K. Dasgupta and K. Moti Gokulsing argue that given its unique impact on the collective consciousness of the Indian public, it is plausible to suggest that an Indian film holds considerable potential to raise awareness about social and political issues. Contemporary Masculinity in Bollywood signifies a positive shift towards inclusive and equitable gender roles in Indian society. It encourages men to embrace a diverse and complex understanding of masculinity, fostering healthier male-female relationships and interactions [Dasgupta & Gokulsing \(2013\)](#).

1.2. AYUSHMANN KHURRANA: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW MAN

"In recent years, Ayushmann Khurrana's image has been synonymous with eccentric screenplays, and he is one of the actors whose ground-breaking films have shattered prejudices" [Karmakar & Pal \(2023\)](#), p. 170. Since his debut in *Vicky Donor* (2012) more than a decade ago, Ayushmann Khurrana's stardom has continued to rise. His body of work, which includes films that address social issues, original scripts like *Andhadhun* (2018), and a recurring theme of male insecurities, has greatly contributed to enlarging conversations among men and women in the modern era [Sanil \(2020\)](#).

Ayushmann Khurrana is known for breaking gender stereotypes in mainstream cinema. In his debut film *Vicky Donor*, he portrayed a sperm donor, exploring themes of love, relationships, and societal perceptions of unconventional career choices and reproductive choices. In *Shubh Mangal Zada Savdhan* (2020), he played a homosexual man, and in *Dream Girl* (2019), he worked as a woman in a call center, embracing soft masculinity and challenging traditional notions of men as "macho" in Indian cinema. His films reflect a progressive approach to male characters and their roles in society.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1) Masculinity trends in Bollywood:

Studies have examined the evolving portrayal of masculinity in contemporary Indian cinema and the factors influencing this evolution. Drawing examples from Bollywood films like *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001), *Rock On!!* (2008), and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), these investigations suggest that such films present a more

diversified and inclusive perspective on masculinity, challenging conventional stereotypes [Chopra et al. \(2000\)](#). In this current study, the authors delve into the contemporary depiction of gender roles in films featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, who is renowned for his portrayal of characters breaking gender stereotypes, thus promoting gender inclusivity. Moreover, the research explores the impact of globalization on the construction of masculinity in Indian cinema, proposing that globalization has heightened awareness about the need to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, leading to a more progressive and inclusive portrayal of masculinity in Indian films.

The present study also incorporates insights from researches examining the evolving depictions of masculinity in South Asian films, aiming to explore how these portrayals mirror broader social, cultural, and political trends in the region. Utilizing examples from various South Asian films, including Indian classics like *Sholay*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), as well as films from Bangladesh and Pakistan, the study illustrates a spectrum of masculinities. These films depict a range of male identities, from traditional hyper-masculine figures to more intricate and nuanced representations [Rajan \(2006\)](#). Within this context, the current study seeks to emphasize the necessity of promoting more inclusive and progressive portrayals of masculinities in South Asian cinema, reflecting evolving societal attitudes toward gender and identity.

In Indian films, certain character traits, such as the portrayal of anger, have undergone conceptual evolution, transitioning from being depicted as a destructive and uncontrollable emotion to becoming a potent instrument for social justice and personal empowerment in recent cinematic works. Filmmakers purposefully harness anger to challenge societal norms and tackle issues such as gender inequality, corruption, and social injustice. Supported by studies, this assertion is exemplified through notable instances from prominent Hindi films, offering a compelling examination of how anger is depicted in mainstream Hindi cinema and its potential for conceptual transformation [Rajamani \(2012\)](#). In the present study, the authors also delve into such character traits utilized by protagonists to address gender-related themes.

The conventional depiction of Indian masculinity, embodied by the romantic hero, has shifted towards a more assertive and physically imposing form, as demonstrated by Salman Khan's roles in Bollywood action films. This evolved masculinity is characterized by a muscular physique and a readiness to employ violence for the sake of justice. Female characters often occupy secondary roles with limited agency, while the male lead is portrayed as dominant and heroic. Films such as *Dabangg* (2010) and *Sultan* (2016) have exemplified Khan's on-screen persona as a commanding and charismatic figure. However, the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) challenges traditional ideals of Indian masculinity by depicting Khan as a sensitive individual rather than a hyper-masculine action hero [Shandilya \(2014\)](#). The present study further delves into the portrayal of sensitive individuals in contemporary Indian cinema, especially in films featuring Ayushmann Khurrana.

2) Redefining masculinity in Bollywood:

There is a "masculinity crisis" in the portrayal of the Bollywood hero, in which traditional concepts of masculinity are being challenged and reinterpreted. Instances from Bollywood films such as *Chak De India* (2007), *Rock On!!* (2008) were used to support the point. The male hero in *Chak De India* is shown as sensitive; the film subverts gender stereotypes by showing a male hero who is not scared to cry or exhibit vulnerability. Similarly, the male hero in *Rock On!!* is portrayed as a musician who embraces his creative side and challenges the traditional concept of

masculinity [Jha \(2022\)](#). The progression in how masculinity is depicted in Indian cinema reaches new heights through the films examined in this study, which embraces a spectrum of gender identities and expressions. By doing so, they not only challenge societal norms but also contribute to a more inclusive and representative cinematic landscape. This commitment to depicting diverse experiences and perspectives reflects a growing awareness within the industry of the importance of authentic storytelling and the need to reflect the complexities of human identity.

Films serve as a reflection of society, which has undergone significant evolution, particularly concerning gender and identity issues. Since the inception of the Indian film industry, many films have depicted a patriarchal and hegemonic view of masculinity, portraying male protagonists as angry, violent, and sexist. This trend persists even in recent times, as evidenced by films like *Arjun Reddy* (2017, the original Telugu version of Kabir Singh), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999), which have been utilized to contextualize patriarchal ideals of manhood, violence, and love in Indian cinema [Ganguly & Singh \(2021\)](#). [Ganguly & Singh \(2021\)](#) also underscore the necessity for Indian cinema to adopt more progressive and inclusive portrayals of masculinity. In this study, the chosen films starring Ayushmann Khurrana serve as exemplars for addressing concerns regarding gender inclusivity and the portrayal of masculinity. These movies provide a stage to delve into alternative storylines that defy conventional gender norms, allowing for a deeper examination of masculinity within modern Indian cinema. Through analysing these films against the backdrop of wider societal changes, the paper endeavours to illuminate film's capacity to shape and reflect cultural perspectives on gender and identity.

Research has extensively delved into the impact of desire on the construction of identities within Hindi cinema. Through meticulous scrutiny of chosen films portraying same-sex desire, this examination not only challenges the prevalent heteronormative narrative in the industry but also delves into the historical progression of these portrayals, considering the influence of power dynamics and cultural contexts. Drawing from theories such as queer theory, cultural studies, and postcolonial perspectives, the analysis aims to decipher how desire functions either to uphold or contest established power hierarchies. Moreover, it addresses the tension between global queer imaginaries and local cultural politics, thus offering a significant contribution to scholarly discussions [Srinivasan \(2011\)](#). The authors of this paper also explore the influence of desire on identity formation in Indian cinema. In a selected film, Ayushmann Khurrana portrays Maanveer, who falls for Maanvi, later revealed as a transwoman. Initially shocked, Maanveer struggles with his emotions and societal expectations. Despite hurdles, their love story flourishes as Maanveer embraces Maanvi, defying norms and stereotypes. This paper also examines desire among individuals with diverse sexual orientations, a topic that has been relatively bold and uncommon in Indian cinema until recently. This trend signifies a notable shift towards greater gender inclusivity in film narratives. The examination of these themes demonstrates an increasing willingness to portray a broader spectrum of human experiences and relationships, pushing against conventional norms and expanding the range of representation in the Indian film industry.

3) Globalization and Gender dynamics in Bollywood:

Studies have traced the evolution of gender dynamics in Indian films from the past to the present, highlighting globalization's influence on storylines, visuals, and the roles assigned to women. A study on the role of globalisation in gender dynamics

in Indian cinema explores the diverse cultural changes and their effects on the portrayal of women, offering a comprehensive understanding of shifting narratives and power dynamics within the Indian film industry. By situating these developments within the broader context of socioeconomic and cultural shifts brought about by globalization, the study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between cinema, gender, and globalization. It uncovers the tensions and contradictions in the representation of women, exploring how global influences intersect with local cultural norms, patriarchy, and power dynamics [Datta \(2000\)](#). This paper highlights the influence of globalization on the portrayal of gender roles and diverse gender identities in Indian cinema. Through an examination of selected films, the study briefly underscores how globalization has shaped the representation of gender roles and identities. It notes that films and literature from around the globe had been tackling these issues prior to Indian cinema, suggesting that global cultural currents have influenced the narrative approaches adopted by Indian filmmakers. This observation underscores the interconnectedness of global cultural trends and their impact on the portrayal of gender in Indian films, indicating a broader shift in cinematic discourse influenced by global perspectives.

Indian Films depict the changing dynamics of urban places, influenced by global ideas and modernity's impact on Indian society. The tension between traditional values and the influx of global influences is portrayed, shaping modern Indian identities. The cinematic representation of cities as symbols of modernity and globalization is explored in the studies, using films like *Mahanagar* (1963) and *Charulata* (1964) to illustrate the fast-paced and cosmopolitan essence of Indian cities. These films shed light on the social, cultural, and economic changes brought about by urbanization, revealing the intricate relationship between the city, modernity, and the individual [Bose \(2008\)](#). Hence, it is suggested that the chosen films featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, which offer a nuanced portrayal of masculinity and gender representation, are also shaped by global ideas and the influence of modernity. This observation implies that the depiction of masculinity and gender roles in these films reflects broader cultural shifts influenced by global trends. Furthermore, the study suggests avenues for further exploration by introducing the role of globalization in shaping the storyline of these films. This opens up opportunities for researchers to delve deeper into the impact of globalization on cinematic narratives and representations of gender.

Given the need for additional investigation, this study aims to further explore the portrayal of contemporary masculinity in Hindi cinema, with a specific focus on films featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, who often embodies such roles in Indian cinema. Understanding the influence of urban environments, global trends, and modernity on narrative structures and character portrayals in Indian films is crucial. Despite existing research on masculinity representation in Indian cinema, there exists a gap in analysing the emergence and depiction of modern masculinities in contemporary films. Therefore, examining this aspect can offer significant insights into the evolving portrayal of gender and societal norms in modern Indian cinema.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes qualitative research methodology, employing content analysis to meticulously examine the films' content. The authors have identified key themes, characterizations, and narrative elements associated with masculinity. Thematic analysis is subsequently employed to elucidate and interpret these identified themes within the context of contemporary masculinity.

The data collection process involves viewing and systematically analyzing the three chosen films: Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui (2021), Vicky Donor (2012), and Dream Girl (2019). Each film is thoroughly examined to identify instances, dialogues, character traits, and visual cues related to masculinity. Data extraction is conducted systematically, capturing relevant information pertinent to the research objectives.

4. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To critically examine the portrayal of masculinity in select Bollywood films starring Ayushmann Khurrana and to identify the primary themes employed to construct masculinity.
- To study how Ayushmann Khurrana's performances in select Bollywood films defy conventional hyper-masculine representations of male heroes in Indian cinema and symbolize new-age masculinity.
- To briefly understand how power dynamics, cultural contexts, influence of desire on identity, global trends and modernity impacts on the narrative structures and character portrayals in Indian films.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper's conceptual framework is based on the *Social Constructivist approach* to gender understanding, which emphasizes the significance of social and cultural variables in developing and sustaining gender identities and expectations. Gender, from a *social constructionist perspective*, is a social construct that we attempt to maintain by our actions rather than an underlying personality structure Sprague & Kobrynowicz (2006).

According to Butler (2002), gender is not real but a mere social construct. She propounded the concept of gender performativity which argues that being born male or female does not determine behaviour. She postulated that gender is a carefully choreographed routine, which is repeated and perfected over time and hence seems naturalised. She argues that the strict belief that there is a "truth" of sex makes heterosexuality as the only proper outcome because of the coherent binary created of "feminine" and "masculine" and thus creating the only logical outcome of either being a "male" or "female."

The idea of *Hegemonic Masculinity* Donaldson (1993) is also used. This refers to the dominant type of masculinity in a given society and how it is maintained and reinforced by various social practices and cultural norms.

This paradigm is used in Indian cinema to analyse how the construction of masculinity has changed over time and how it is reflected in contemporary films. The framework explores how *traditional forms of masculinity* are questioned and subverted in the selected films and how a new type of masculinity is produced in its place.

5.1. VICKY DONOR

Vicky Donor directed by Soojit Sircar is the debut film of Ayushmann Khurrana. The film is a story of a young man living in New Delhi whose life takes a turn when he starts donating sperms at a fertility clinic. The film made Khurrana an overnight star while also cementing his status as an actor who portrayed character driven roles. Discourse around sex and sexuality is generally a taboo subject in Indian

society and mainstream Hindi films have seldom forayed into narratives about infertility.

Vicky Arora's portrayal and embodiment of masculinity diverges from the conventional archetype of silent, brooding, and frequently aggressive leading male characters commonly seen in Hindi films. Vicky relies on his mother to cover his daily expenses, as he lives with her and his grandmother. The audience is introduced to Vicky as a guy who is aimless and unmotivated, a montage towards the start of the narrative shows Vicky playing cricket, going to pubs and refusing conventional employment opportunities. Although certain aspects of his personality align with traditional masculine norms, such as objectifying women in discussions, participating in sports, and displaying a sense of entitlement in his interactions with women, Vicky's behavior becomes evident when he encounters Ashima, portrayed by Yami Gautam, at the bank. His presumption that Ashima, as a bank employee, should bend the rules to assist him, and his refusal to wait in line, underscores elements of dominant hegemonic masculinity. [Arora & Sylvia \(2023\)](#)

However, this characteristic is challenged by the revelation that Vicky willingly assists his mother in her beauty parlor without hesitation. He demonstrates proficiency in various tasks essential for the job, such as providing manicures and pedicures to his mother's clientele. Additionally, Vicky is depicted as an empathetic individual who empathizes with the challenges faced by women. His profound and mature comprehension of Ashima's infertility further underscores this quality. It can be argued that Vicky exemplifies a hybrid masculinity, a masculinity that incorporates elements of performativity that is associated with marginalised and subordinate gender performances [Bridges & Pascoe \(2014\)](#).

Dr. Chaddha pursues Vicky to become a sperm donor for his fertility clinic, motivated by Vicky's youth, virility, and masculinity. A montage follows, showcasing Dr. Chaddha interviewing various candidates for the same position. This montage is imbued with instances of homophobia, fem-phobia, and sexism, as candidates are rejected based on their failure to conform to societal expectations of an ideal man. During the interview process, a character is rejected because of their feminine presentation, serving as a source of humor in the narrative. This montage effectively contrasts Vicky as the epitome of an ideal sperm donor, given his embodiment of a conventionally attractive heterosexual man. Dr. Chaddha envisions Vicky as adhering to traditional norms of hegemonic masculinity, distinguishing him from all other applicants for sperm donation. Consequently, Dr. Chaddha views Vicky as the perfect candidate capable of rescuing his clinic from financial ruin.

[Brannon & David \(1976\)](#) list an array of attributes that is considered embedded in the fabric of our society, those being emotional stoicism, no sissy stuff, being a big wheel, being sturdy as an oak, willingness to accept and inflict violence on other men and participation in sports, the military and other fraternal organizations.

Vicky's willingness to become a sperm donor can be read as a disruption to traditional expectation of masculinity. Vicky's evolution from a reluctant donor to someone who takes pleasure in his position also symbolises the changing perception of what it means to be a man. Vicky's ability to overcome social constraints and reimagine masculinity on his own terms is demonstrated in the scene where he exposes his career to his fiancée and her mother. Due to conventional expectations of masculinity and his concern that it would undermine his own manhood, Vicky is initially reluctant to accept his role as a sperm donor. Vicky, however, comes to terms with the notion that masculinity is not just defined

by conventional gender roles but also by one's choices and actions as the film goes on and his conception of masculinity changes.

The movie *Vicky Donor* discusses how social and cultural standards affect the idea of parenthood and family. The shame associated with infertility and the long-standing expectation of having biological children are also topics covered in the movie. In a conversation with Vicky, Dr. Chaddha expresses this, saying, "*Naasoor hai na, nishana hai, toh society ko pareshan hai*" (Infertility is perceived as a weakness, a problem, which disturbs society). The pressure on people to have biological children and the prejudice against infertile couples are both highlighted in this debate. Additionally, the film questions these conventions by offering alternatives, including sperm donation and adoption, as respectable routes to motherhood. This is demonstrated in the scenario where the mother of Vicky's girlfriend supports Vicky's work as a sperm donor, defying social norms and highlighting the value of understanding and acceptance.

Through Vicky Arora's persona, *Vicky Donor* examines how masculinity affects relationships and family dynamics. His relationship with Ashima and her family is strained as a result of Vicky's choice to donate his sperm. The conflict between conventional ideas of masculinity and the decisions people make for their own lives is explored in the film. When asked about his masculinity in a conversation between Vicky and Ashima's father, Vicky replies, "*Mard hone ka matlab sirf bachcha paida karna hai kya?*" (Is having children the only requirement for being a man?) This conversation questions the limiting notion of masculinity and emphasises the value of empathy, deference, and comprehension in relationships.

Through the figure of Ashima, the movie *Vicky Donor* examines how patriarchy affects gender roles. Ashima's inability to conceive strains her marriage and reflects societal assumptions that women should be the only ones in charge of having children. Ashima expresses concern about the unfair burden imposed on women by saying, "*Hum auratein, hamari zindagi sirf bachche se ghiri hui hoti hai*" (We women, our lives revolve around children solely). This is in a conversation between Ashima and her mother-in-law. This conversation highlights the limitations imposed by patriarchal norms and refutes the notion that a woman's value is primarily determined by her capacity for reproduction.

By introducing Dr. Chaddha, a man who defies social conventions and redefines masculinity, the movie *Vicky Donor* exposes toxic masculinity. The reproductive specialist Dr. Chaddha challenges conventional ideas of masculinity by choosing a non-traditional career and being upfront about male infertility. Dr. Chaddha tells Vicky that "*Asal mard vo hota hai jo apni kamzori ko pehchaan leta hai*" (*A real man is the one who acknowledges his weaknesses*). This conversation encourages people to identify and address their vulnerabilities rather than adhering to harmful masculine stereotypes, fostering a healthy perspective of masculinity.

5.2. CHANDIGARH KARE ASHIQUI

Chandigarh Kare Ashiqui (2021) is the story of Manu Mujal, a gym instructor and body builder who falls in love with the Zumba instructor Maanvi. The plot is driven by the disclosure that Maanvi is a transgender woman and this revelation causes distress in their relationship. The character of Manu Mujal is portrayed by Ayushmann Khurana, he is a brash young man, and he runs a gym and is to win a contest that would proclaim him to be the strongest man in Chandigarh. As the gym instructor and body builder, Khurana's corporeal image is at the heart of the narrative, his bulging muscles and toned physique and his gait exemplify his

masculinity. The film reifies binary notions of gender by contrasting Manu's masculinity with Maanvi's femininity. Maanvi, portrayed by Vaani Kapoor is a Zumba instructor at Manu's gym. She is a closeted transgender woman who falls for Manu's charm and pursues a relationship with him. Maanvi in contrast to Manu is portrayed as being unsure and at a perpetual state of fear every time she steps out of her house. The camera lingers on her gaze at her mirror as she obsesses over every minor detail of her corporeal image. Manu's corporeal performance of his masculinity is in juxtaposition with Maanvi's expression of her femininity, while her expression of femininity is docile and meek.

Initially the film builds Manu's character around hyper masculine codes and conventions of strength, the ideal body, sexualising women etc. But as the narrative progresses, Manu's relationship with the transgender woman Maanvi dismantles the hyper masculinity that his character inhibits. In his drive to become the strongest man in the city, Manu exhibits the hyper masculinity that is typically associated with traditional masculinity, which is concentrated on physical strength and power. This is made evident by the words "*Chandigarh ka sabse bhaari bharkam mard*" (Chandigarh's most built man) in the pivotal scene. Such strong emphasis on physical ability upholds conventional gender stereotypes.

However, Vaani Kapoor's portrayal of the character Maanvi in the film also offers a different point of view. Conventional notions of masculinity are challenged by Maanvi's disclosure that she is a transwoman. "Tune mujhe diya dhoka... Jawaab de?" When Manu confronts Maanvi, stating, "*Tu hai kya, ladka ya ladki,*" (You cheated me... Reply me? What are you? a man or woman?), it illustrates the conflict between modern society's growing understanding of gender and traditional masculinity's hostility to various gender identities. One of the linchpins of dominant hegemonic masculinity is hostility towards any gender or sexual expression that is considered as inferior. Homophobia, transphobia and other masculinities like soft masculinity and hybrid masculinity are characteristic of dominant hegemonic masculinity. But similar to Vicky Donor, the character that Ayushmann Khurrana portrays exhibits a sense of vulnerability towards the latter half of the narrative. He educates himself on transgender identity and accepts his attraction towards Maanvi. Manu develops a friendship with another transgender character Jassi, in a poignant scene, Manu expresses to Jassi, "*Mard hone ka matlab yeh nahi hota ki humein apne dil ki baat chehre pe laake ghoomne*" (Being a man doesn't mean we have to hide our true thoughts) in a moment where he confesses his feelings for Jassi. This conversation challenges the misconception that males should suppress their emotions and highlights the importance of self-acceptance.

Through the perspective of arranged weddings in particular, *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* explores the effects of societal and cultural conventions on the lives of the characters. In the movie, Ayushmann Khurrana's character Manu Munjal experiences pressure to live up to social norms and marry within his caste. In the scene where Manu's mother informs him, "*Tum ladki ko bataoge, aur hum ladke ko*" (You will inform the girl, and we will inform the boy). "*Sab arrange ho jaayega.*" (Everything will be arranged). This discussion emphasises the assumption that family members should make marriage-related decisions, highlighting the impact of societal and cultural norms on people's decisions. The film also looks at the effects of breaking these rules. Manu encounters opposition and social condemnation in his search for love outside of his caste. When Manu's father confronts him and asks, "*Tera ghar, tere rishte, tere rishthedaar, sab kuch chhod dega tu?*" (Will you quit your house, your relationships, or your family?) is a good example of the tension that exists between personal aspirations and the need to fit in with societal and cultural expectations.

5.3. DREAMGIRL

Dream Girl directed by Raaj Shandilyaa is the story of Karam, who is known for his portrayal of female characters in local theatrical productions. He is adept at imitating female voices which eventually leads him to secure a job at a contact centre where he takes on the character of Pooja. This leads to an upswing in callers and the character of Pooja becomes popular overnight at the centre. This film challenges conventional masculinity by showing a male character who subtly embraces feminine traits. The ability of Karamveer to sound feminine while still satisfying the emotional needs of male callers calls into question traditional gender roles and expectations. This is testament to Khuranna's relentless pursuit of roles in films that defy normative standards of gender expression and masculinity. The dual personality of Karam and Pooja ameliorates what Butler argues about gender performativity. Butler questions where the categories of male and females come from? She argues that gender is not real nor natural and that there is no connection between gender and sex, and it is social rules about clothing and behaviour that gives the appearance of a natural basis. According to Butler, when people behave in ways that is expected or accorded to them, that makes gender real. She says that gender is a performance, a choreography that you practice since the time you are born.

In a part, "*Mardon ko bhi kabhi kabhi Maa ki zaroorat hoti hai*" (Men too sometimes need a mother). This phrase challenges the idea that men should always portray strength and suppress vulnerability. Karam's portrayal is an example of a new-age masculinity that emphasises empathy, emotional connections, and dismantling gender norms. Karam defies conventional ideas of masculinity and sexuality by assuming feminine personalities over the phone. The film examines the ambiguity of gender norms and how it affects Karam's identity through his skilful portrayal of women's voices. Although the film takes a comic approach to this topic, it exposes issues on how men should define masculinity and how they should explore their sexuality outside of social norms.

The movie *Dream Girl* investigates how relationships and gender roles are impacted by societal and cultural norms. The film discusses the typical expectations that Indian culture has for both men and women. The moment in which Karamveer's father admonishes his son to "*Beta, tum ladkiyon jaise baat mat karo*" (Son, don't talk like girls) is an example of the pressure to follow gender-specific behaviours and uphold traditional gender roles. The film also examines the effects of changing one's identity to conform to social standards. The hilarious situations Karamveer creates while impersonating a woman's voice also illustrate the underlying pressures that both men and women experience to live up to social conventions and expectations. Through Karamveer, a character in *Dream Girl*, the function of masculinity in interpersonal interactions and family dynamics is explored. Because Karamveer can assume feminine personalities over the phone, his interactions are disorganised and unclear. The film investigates how societal expectations affect masculinity and family interactions.

"*Ladke ko ladka banne chahiye*" (A boy should act like a boy) is a line Karamveer's father uses when confronting him about his decisions. This conversation highlights the difficulties people encounter when attempting to reject traditional gender stereotypes by illustrating the conflict between societal expectations and individual expression. In *Dream Girl*, Karamveer, a character, addresses patriarchy and gender norms. The strain to adhere to cultural conventions and the gendered expectations placed on people are highlighted by

Karamveer's ability to imitate female voices over the phone. When Karamveer's brother challenges him about his decisions, he says, "*Ek mard, ek aurat ki awaaz karke kaise jeena chahta hai?*" (How can a man desire to survive by sounding like a woman?) This conversation emphasises the need to overcome such patriarchal restrictions by highlighting the social judgement and perplexity that result when people question standard gender norms.

Understanding how patriarchy and gender roles are portrayed in Indian cinema may be gained by analysing the topics of a few particular films. These films challenge social norms and prejudices while opposing patriarchal structures that impose gender-based limitations on people. In the movie *Dream Girl*, the toxic masculinity of Jagjeet's persona is criticised. As a result of feeling threatened by Karamveer's success as Pooja, Jagjeet engages in toxic behaviour by becoming violent and aggressive. Jagjeet yells at Karamveer, "*Tu mera naam kharab kar raha hai*" (You are ruining my reputation). The toxic masculine urge for dominance and control, which leads to violence to uphold dominance and superiority, is reflected in this discussion.

6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the representation of masculinity in three Hindi films featuring Ayushmann Khurrana - *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, *Vicky Donor*, and *Dream Girl*, aiming to analyse the construction of masculinity and the ways in which traditional hypermasculinity is being questioned within these particular Indian films. The films showcased a shift towards modern masculinity that defies stereotypes, blending traditional and contemporary values to reflect changing relationship dynamics. The study contributes to redefining masculinity in Indian cinema emphasizing the need for more complex and forward-thinking portrayals to promote cultural change and gender equality. By advocating for more complex and forward-thinking portrayals, the study suggests a shift towards representations that encompass a broader range of traits and behaviours. The dynamic interplay of power dynamics, cultural contexts, and the influence of desire on identity enhances the narrative depth in Indian cinema. Within this framework, themes like tradition versus modernity, societal conventions, and personal aspirations often converge, shaping compelling storylines and nuanced character arcs, as evidenced in recent films starring Ayushmann Khurrana.

Although the study provides valuable insights, further research on LGBTQ+ depictions in Ayushman Khurrana's films and their impact on viewers attitudes is suggested to better understand the intersections of gender and sexuality in Bollywood's adoption. Inclusive and diverse images of masculinity can contribute to a more equal and inclusive society, as highlighted by this study's examination of the evolving nature of masculinity in Khurrana's films. Overall, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about gender representation in media and underscores the importance of cinema as a powerful tool for promoting change and fostering gender equality in Indian society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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