

**Homosexuality and Premarital Sex Taboos:
A Textual Analysis of Six Bollywood Films**

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SUMMARY

Indian society has always been steeped in conventions and traditions. Various forces, among them Bollywood in recent times, have helped in scripting changes in society, in the way people react to old ways and embrace the new. Among some of the oldest mores of Indian society, like any other around the world, has been its negative, closed, and intolerant stance towards relational taboos.

This thesis deals with two such taboos – homosexuality and premarital sex, leading to pregnancy. The Indian social attitude towards both these taboos had been clouded over by judgmental reactions, guided by religious and socio-cultural factors. With the economic liberalization of India in the early 90s, post the Cold-War, the country opened its skies to cultural liberalization as well.

This is when relational taboos, like homosexuality and premarital sex, leading to pregnancy, shoved under the carpet for ages, were first put on the discussion table by way of cable television. With American shows reaching increasing number of audiences over the years and Hollywood films beaming on screens with increasing regularity since then, Indian film makers seemed finally to get courageous enough to broach on screen subjects like homosexuality and premarital sex, leading to pregnancy.

The thesis studies six films, which hit the theaters between 1996 and 2006 and were focused on two relational taboo topics. The analysis uses Todorov's theory of structural analysis to study the plots of the films, collects and categorizes data, connects concepts and interprets findings to find out how Bollywood is coming to terms with homosexuality and premarital sex

taboos, deconstructs and sustains its reactions, and then reconstructs new ones, perhaps leading to a negotiated reaction to hitherto totally unacceptable issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Society in Flux

Rich with the history of thousands of years, interwoven with strict social norms and ways of life, society in India has been known for most times as a rather conservative one (Arora, Gorea, Sharma, & Aggarwal, 2009). Inside the complicated being that is Indian society, a conglomerate of a variety of subcultures from each region in the country extends through the Indian subcontinent. This has been in existence for many millennia. Within this framework, societal trends have been known to guide cultural practices. This happens in such a way that the all-encompassing meaning of culture takes into account everything from beliefs, traditions, and customs to the languages, values, and arts of the Indian People (Mohammada, 2007).

But social and cultural trends change. New sets of values, due to modernization – “the overwhelming economic and political forces that drive cultural change” (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 20) can lead to the revision of conventional values and their substitution with contemporary ones. This gives rise, especially in a country like India, to a society caught in flux.

On the one hand is the conventional culture of India, outlined by a considerably stern hierarchy of societal elements (Makar, 2008). This operates in such a way that from early childhood children are taught their function and status in a society, which has been governed by strict taboos for millennia. On the other hand, are elements of modernization, especially in urban areas, so much so that such strict lines of taboo and social mores about an individual's role or situation in society have become blurred, sometimes even non-existent. For example, in

the past 20-odd years, social transformation in India has seen an almost dramatic alienation from the strict guidelines of conventional cultural structures in the country (Lockwood, 2009).

The transformation in the position of women in society best mirrors the changes it goes through. For example, changes have led to Indian societies being more open to accepting a revolution in the roles women play in society. For example, this empowerment can be used as to explain the fact that in a scenario where divorce rates are rising in the country, it is women now who are initiating about 80 per cent of divorces in urban India (Lockwood, 2009).

B. Bollywood – Playground for Change

This change has been felt in every field in India, including that of art. Along with the myriad forms of dance and music, such as Bharatnatyam, Carnatic, and Tthumri to name a few, popular films too, had mirrored intrinsic social norms for most of their existence in India. Be it the depiction of prevalent customs and accepted values, or portrayal of ideal ways of life that the audience should look up to and emulate, Indian art in the cinematic realm had most often stuck to traditional, easily-acceptable, non-eyebrow-raising topics for entertainment and education of the film-going public (Burra, Day, & Rao, 2006).

According to the authors, from its very seminal stages in the early 20th century, cinema, as we know today, had been increasingly popular among India's various economic strata. While pre-Independence era cinema, that is, films made and distributed prior to 1947, did have some leeway with eyebrow-raising elements, this trend ceased to be a norm with the introduction of the censor board in 1951, shortly after the country threw off the yoke of foreign rule.

The Central Board of Film Certification (also called the Censor Board, in short) is a statutory classification and censorship body, working under the aegis of the Indian

government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Working with the provisions under the Cinematograph Act 1952, the board is assigned with the responsibility of controlling the way films are exhibited in India. It attaches certifications to everything from cinema, TV programs, and advertisements to any audio-visual publication for hire, sale, or even exhibition in the country. It is only post certification from the board that films can be shown to the public in India.

According to film critic Khubchandani (2007), earlier films in post-1947 India used to have a liberal sprinkling of controversial elements like kissing and sex. She opines that the transformation of representation of content in Hindi films – from portrayal of sexual innuendos to completely avoiding the same - came about in the wake of the myriad rules and stern regulations that the censor board lay down, regarding representation of propriety in films.

This meant that the intrinsic matter of the movies was now styled specifically to adhere to the guidelines laid down by the Censor Board and at the same time, had to be attractive and appealing to the masses. Not surprisingly, directors would make it a point to include tenets from India's society, culture, and life into the content of their work. This was done in a way such that the entertainment left in its wake, a content and comfortable audience.

Since the late 50s to the early 90s, cinema in Bollywood was, on the whole known for its penchant for expensive, saccharine-sweet, melodramatic representation of rather stereotypical formula elements (Athique, 2008). Some of the same formulae still remain. These include song and dance sequences of destined lovers, siblings lost and reunited by chance, the inevitable love triangle, various plays of sacrifice for love and family.

However, according to Gupta and Omoniyi (2001), Bollywood started to undergo a subtle change since the early 90s, when Indian economic policy opened itself up for the world, at the close of era of the Cold War. It was around the same time, that thanks to heightened use and exposure to Western cultures in India and the increase in volume of Indians living in the West, that Bollywood started to more vehemently emulate Hollywood themes and structures.

An examination of television programs and advertisements, even cinema (Virdi, 2003), has shown proof of Indian's reaction to modernity. This change appeared in the horizon specifically from the end of the 90s, when mainstream Indian cinema seemed ready to greet and face topics which by and large would be taboo by earlier Indian standards.

With the Indian economy on the threshold of the recent chapter in worldwide-inclusive participation, development, and liberalization (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2010), plots in Hindi movies, post the 90s, have shown a tendency to portray urban characters which are heavily influenced by the West. Dating freely, visits to night clubs and marrying according to their own choice as opposed to giving into earlier portrayed arranged marriages abound (Gupta and Omoniyi, 2001). This does not necessarily refer only to the North American continent but also to western European countries. With cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (1996) idea of how the idea of Asia had been synonymous for long with a land filled with elephants, over centuries the countries of western Europe seemed to be known despite their many differences, as a conglomerate "West."

Considered also as a method of organization in the relations of power that are transacted globally, the West is as much a historical construct as it is geographical. Societies that developed after the end of the feudal period in history, around the 16th century, were the

fallouts of certain processes of history resulting in culture of society that was defined by development, urbanization, secularism, capitalism, and industrialization. Comprising North America and countries of Western Europe, which then will be the reference point of the West in this thesis.

According to Bhattacharya-Mehta (2010), among all other avenues of mainstream culture in India, it is Bollywood that most freely explores within India, issues most popularly associated with the Indian conception of the West. These are the matters of gender, society, justice, individualism, and identity. As Bollywood gets bolder by the year, post the economic liberalization of the 1990s, it is being increasingly able to let go of the shackling chains of inhibition (Basu, 2012). This is helping the industry to slowly make way for representation and enjoyment of perversion with the new phase of sexual liberation in Indian cinema.

As Bollywood takes a brave stride from championing morality towards explicit on screen smooching (Slatz, 2010), it walks out from its earlier world of bobbing flowers and buzzing bees as symbols of sex. This marks its entry into a new era where film makers are seemingly ready to explore and demolish taboos.

Taboos in all societies around the world are generally centered around various concepts of sex, sexuality, and relationships. Along with incest, homosexuality and premarital sex and pregnancy are the most common taboos that are prevalent in most societies around the world, including India (Janetius & T.C., 2009).

According to the authors, the concept of taboo might include in its broader purview of various social interactions, like caste relationships, social hierarchies, and functions of our socio-systems. But the issues of homosexuality and premarital sex and pregnancy taboos are the

most commonly presented forms of taboos that the public experiences through portrayal of sexual innuendos in films, television broadcasts, music lyrics, newspapers, and the Internet. Case in point, a recent onslaught of Bollywood films depicting previously regarded taboo subjects, such as homosexuality and pre-marital sex, leading to illegitimate children.

But how exactly is Bollywood taking up the challenge of articulating homosexuality and pre-marital sex? Do the storylines examine the topics explicitly? Or is it a subtle sort of expression of ideas? Or is it still sugar-coating taboos to make it palatable and easily digestible by an audience which had been habituated to tame topics, bubble-wrapped in safety idioms? Why is such a treatment of taboo subjects necessary or prevalent on Indian screens? Is the struggle against power a tough one in the Bollywood context? Are there any commonalities in the way the topics are treated in the films? If so, what are they?

This thesis aspires to conduct a textual analysis of six select movies based on the method of portrayals of the taboo topics of homosexuality and premarital sex leading to pregnancy and illegitimate children, and tries to examine the reasons behind such portrayals on screen and the cultural transitions that might accompany them. The films are *Fire* (1996), *Kya kehna* (2000), *Girlfriend* (2004), *My brother Nikhil* (2005), *Salaam namaste* (2005), and *Tere sang* (2006). Spanning 11 years from 1996 to 2006, these films hit screens right after the skies opened up in India at the start of the country's tryst with liberalization and involvement in the global scenario (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2010).

Viewers saw, for the first time, on-screen versions of the West's relaxed notions of gender, society, and sexual habits – how societies in America and Europe were open to concepts of dating, free-mixing, gender issues, premarital sex among young adults and the like.

Simultaneously, this was also the time when the country as a whole was dealing with changes of ideas in policy and economy at the start of the global capital. It is therefore not surprising, that some effect of the same would create ripples in the Bollywood, one of India's biggest cultural machines (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2010). These films are representative of two hitherto uncommon film subjects, specifically related to relationship taboos, being explored by filmmakers at that critical juncture in India's socio-cultural history.

This thesis aims to examine their treatment of relationship taboo subjects, i.e., homosexuality and premarital sex and illegitimate children, to explore the cultural transitions behind Bollywood screens. Then an attempt has been made to tie it to the transforming Indian social perspectives of today, specifically from the perspective of how globalization might have influenced the coming of age of Bollywood. The thesis also tries to examine and interpret the various ways Bollywood tries to deconstruct the audience's reaction to relational taboos, sometimes even sustains it to some extent, and then reconstructs a negotiated version of reaction to taboos earlier considered unacceptable in every way.

II. Literature Review

Bollywood has come a long way from dealing mainly with conservative themes in the beginning of the 20th century, to social complexity topics in the middle of the century, to crime, family dramas, and overt romances towards the end of the century. Touching upon taboo themes in movies had been attempted only now and then before the mid-1990s. Implication and manifestations of taboos, especially relationship taboos like homosexuality and premarital sex and illegitimate children, were viewed with much strictness by Indian society and the Central Board of Film Certification.

This meant that Bollywood had to play it safe in order to attract the audience. With the opening of the India's economy in the 90s and the onset of globalization, Indian cinema and the organizations around it have, since then, been trying to keep up with the transformations taking place in the economic policy of the country, and by induction, in the nature of expression of society's various facets, including that of homosexuality and premarital sex.

In this chapter, Indian cinema is examined from a historical perspective – how conservative themes gradually gave way to bolder themes in Bollywood. Then the concept of taboo is studied in details with definitions, functions and manifestations discussed, leading to how Bollywood handles relationship taboos.

Thirdly, an exploration is conducted on the nature of Bollywood's portrayal of the two taboo concepts - namely homosexuality and pre-marital sex, leading to illegitimate children – and how the portrayal reflects Indian society to an extent, then reflects on it and offers a commentary and a subjective dealing of the topic at the same time.

A. Historical Perspective of Indian Cinema

1. Conservative themes

From the very beginning of the history of Indian cinema till the present day, makers and mass consumers of Indian films have always been most comfortable dealing with accepted social norms as themes (Basu, 2012). Dealing with taboo subject matters was the farthest thing on their minds. Take the first full length motion picture in India for example. It was Dadasaheb Phalke's production of *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), a silent film, based on the life of a king known in history for his honesty and righteousness.

Then look at the first talkie film, Ardeshir Irani's *Alam Ara* (1931) which tells the tale of victory of goodness over evil. So, cinema in India has a strong history of depiction of ideals, religion, and social topics that could be used to educate the teeming masses (*The History*, 2009). For example, according to director Mukesh Bhatt, most films Indian directors make are inherently founded on the principle of the triumph of good over evil (*Social, Family Themes*, 2011). This goes hand-in-hand with the conservatism that Indian society has always been known for.

The only interlude during this early period had been of neorealism (inspired by Italian neorealism) and the Indian New Wave (Robinson, 2003). Italian neorealism, also famous as Italian cinema's Golden Age, is a national movement in the sphere of films, which is underlined by plots involving the working class of society. Most of these films are shot on location, as opposed to being shot in studios, and most often use actors who are not professionals. Like Italian realism, the Indian version, championed as parallel cinema, mostly dealt with socio-

economic scenarios, and had their plots woven around issues like poverty, unemployment, oppressive rules, hopelessness, and injustice.

According to Robinson (2003), these dark films, made specifically to contrast against the commercialism of mainstream Bollywood films with routine songs and dances, were represented through the works of Ritwik Ghatak, as evidenced in films like *Nagarik* (1952), Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* (1942), Bimal Kar's *Do Beegha Zameen* (1953), and Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* (1955-1959).

Neo-realism films in the 1940s and 1950s dealt with social issues and a general theme of overpowering despair, post the Second World War, Bollywood saw the advent of a different set of films that dealt not with despair and social issues in the broader sense, but with complexities of urban life in India. These such as *Shree 420* (1955), *Pyaasa* (1957), and *Kagaz ke Phool* (1959) in the late 1950s. This was followed by the 70s with crime-centric movies such as *Sholay* (1975) and *Deewar* (1975) and middle cinema of the likes of Hrishikesh Mukherjee such as *Guddi* (1971), *Mili* (1975), and *Golmaal* (1979), based on comfortable family dramas. This took on an extra romantic tone in the 80s and 90s with movies such as *Qyamat se Qyamat Tak* (1988), *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989), *Hum Aap ke Hai Kaun* (1994), and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). While these thematic waves took over Bollywood at different times, the overarching umbrella was one of comfortable trajectories - good triumphs over evil or love conquers all, which have always found accepting audiences in the Indian psyche (*Social, Family Themes*, 2011). There were no films that dealt with any topic remotely considered as taboo.

Thus it came to the mid-90s and taboo topics were still not on the Indian film maker's radar. Certain issues such as family rifts, religious differences, and fanaticism had in spurts

found expression in movies such as Khalid Mohammad's *Fiza* (2000), Karan Johar's *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001) and so on at the turn of the millennium. But that was as far Bollywood seemed ready to traverse away from its usual trusted formulae for success with the masses, as the main theme of all these films was either love or family togetherness.

Most Indian directors, though censured for portraying violence and smoking on screen, are still generally minting more movies, even today, about values of society and family than any other genre. According to the Central Board for Film Certification, more than half of Bollywood's films are social-themed movies, intended for viewing by the whole family (*Social, Family Themes*, 2011).

2. Getting bolder

Art is known to imitate life. But due to conservatism so inherent to the Indian way of life, cinema art seemed apprehensive of being bold enough to talk about certain relationship issues, usually hushed up in middle class Indian society. These included issues like divorce, separation, infidelity, child out of wedlock, homosexuality, live-in relationships, and so on. Such matters, though not unheard of in society even early in the 60s or 70s, had been relegated away from expression through films till very recently.

Intermittently, certain films such as Satyajit Ray's *Charulata* (1964) had dealt with sexual attraction between sister and brother-in-law and a couple of decades later, Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom* (1983), dealt with infidelity, divorce, and an illegitimacy issue. But these directors were not part of the very fabric of Bollywood mainstream cinema and in both these films, the central plots were not the taboo topics, but something else.

For example, the main story of *Charulata* is about the complex relationship between husband and wife, in the foreground of changing social structures and industrial development of the Victorian era in India.

Within it, according to Kemp (2013), is situated the smaller, much subtle issue of Charulata's playful flirtation, as she and her brother-in-law Amal merely stray, albeit half-wittingly, across a social border that is not very well-demarcated in Indian society – the relationship between a woman and the brother of her husband. This side-story brings the main plot back to the central issue, of her almost unconscious betrayal of her much older husband. On the other hand, the main plot of *Masoom* was not the infidelity of the father of the illegitimate son, but the heart-warming way in which the son is integrated with the legitimate children and wife of his father. These could be the reasons why, in spite of touching on rather sensitive turns of relationships, there was no outcry about these films at all at the time when they hit the screens or even afterwards.

In general, film makers have not been courageous enough to broach these subjects in the mainstream earlier, dampened as they were by the double fanged reasons of the censor board's admonition and the apprehension of how the Indian masses would react to their film (which has a direct relation with how much money they will make themselves from the film).

But over the past couple of decades or so, with the change in India's economic policy and globalization, due to which the skies opened up with the advent of cable television, the cinema scene in India seems to have gotten bolder about tackling newer territories and depicting taboo topics in a non-negative light. There was Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996) that talked, for the first time, about middle class lesbianism. This was followed by the Kundan Shah film *Kya*

kehna (2000) that had the heroine giving birth to an illegitimate child and the 2004 Karan Razdan film *Girlfriend* which dealt with the issue of unrequited lesbian love.

Other films followed as well. There was the 2005 film *My brother Nikhil* that talked of homosexuality and AIDS, the 2005 Siddharth Anand film *Salaam namaste* that dealt with a live-in relationship leading to pregnancy, and finally the 2006 Satish Kaushik film *Tere sang* that focused on a teen pregnancy. With these, Bollywood seems to have been gradually opening its doors to open depictions of topics hitherto considered as taboo. So what exactly is meant by the word taboo?

B. Taboo as the Forbidden

Starting from the origin of the word ‘taboo’ to its dictionary definition today, this section talks about how various scholars describe the function and acceptance of taboos and the manifestation of the same. It ends with specific focus on relationship taboos and the placement of the same in the context of Indian societal norms.

1. Definitions and functions

Originating from the Tongan term “tapu” or Fijian term “tabu”, and related to the Maori term *tapu*, meaning disallowed, prohibited, or forbidden, the use of the English term “taboo” can be traced back to the year 1777. It was then that the British explorer Captain James Cook visited Tonga and came in touch with the language and customs of the place (Dixon, 1988). Translated to the sailor as "consecrated, inviolable, forbidden, unclean or cursed" (Cook & King, 1821, p. 462), the roots of the Fijian *Tabu* is derived from *ta* which means “mark” and *bu* which means “especially”. The current use of the term includes “sacred” and “holy”, mostly relating to protection by law or custom.

The *Oxford dictionary* defines taboo as “a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing” (*Taboo*, n.d.). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (*Taboo*, n.d.), it relates to an intense embargo of an action due to the conviction that such activity, deed, conduct, or manner is too accursed or too sacred for common man to embark upon.

Various researchers have looked at the word from various angles. Tannenwald (2007) believes that a taboo is a specific kind of norm that involves a sensation of danger. Taboo is usually concerned with traits associated with absolute concepts, unthinking action, and an attitude that takes everything for granted. According to Tannenwald, the authority of such taboos rests on people who generally do not think about it in detail, such that the idea has its fundamentals on revulsion rather than reflection.

Another definition of taboo comes from Akerlof (1976, 1980), who implies that each time a taboo or sturdy social norm is broken, an individual's actions deviate from a norm. This has an effect on society's other members, who take it upon themselves to penalize the taboo-performing, aberrant individual, thus making taboo a concept that is supported by stern punishment imposed by societal elements. The associated penalties are restricted not only to the performance of the action that goes against the norm, but extends also to the thinking about the behavior that might lead to such a deviance (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997).

So, while the *Encyclopedia Britannica* associates taboo with the risk of supernatural chastisement, Fershtman, Gneezy and Hoffman (2008) imply taboos as the performance of the "unthinkable". Under this explanation of taboo as “thought-police”, merely contemplating about straying from a taboo is a challenging concept.

So what functions do taboos actually perform? Taboos can be utilized to divulge the historical stories of societies (Dyczok & Gamam-Golutvia, 2009). According to theorists of communism and materialism, in the absence of any other recorded artifact, historians have to rely on the history of taboos of a society in order to construct its actual history.

Benabou and Tirole's (2007) definition of taboos as sacred values, intimately links the function of the concept to the conservation of individuality or character uniqueness. These sanctions help protect particular convictions or fantasies, considered fundamental for the person or society, relating to actions one would never perform. For example, according to Sigmund Freud in his seminal work *Totem and Taboo* (1918), incest and patricide are the two unanimous taboos or sanctions that form the foundation of civilization. According to *the Oxford dictionary* definition, such sanctions are found in almost all societies. This underlines the function of taboos as norms that help guide the actions or manners of the members of that particular society (Freshtman, Gneezy, & Hoffamn, 2008).

In short, taboos have been described as social or religious customs forbidding a practice or association or concepts of holy values holding together convictions, or social norms conserving societies and individuals. The functions of taboos have been described as thought policing, controlling individual morals, and even acting as sole preserver of historical accounts of societies when there is nothing else available to build an imaginable history on. So how are such taboos demonstrated or expressed in the landscape of societal norms?

2. Manifestation of taboo

Expressed through a variety of cultural practices, bound by sanctions, the manifestations of taboos are rooted in social structure and psychological set ups of the people in society. Therefore, the extent to which they can be manifested in reality can differ from society

to society, based on their levels of acceptance. For example, according to Hari (2002), the concept of incest has debates on both sides, with one side wanting to regularize consensual relationships between two adults, no matter the level of kinship between the two, especially in Europe, and the other side endorsing increasing levels of banned contact, especially in the United States (Grossman, 2002).

Similarly, another aspect of the manifestation of taboo lies in the way the degree of its portrayal may change over time. For example, certain taboos may decline over a period of time or even vanish, while some others may gradually develop into more resilient and robust ones and become increasingly dominant (Freshtman, Gneezy, & Hoffman, 2008). This has been studied in detail by Zelizer (1978, 1981), who explains how child insurance and life insurance had been deemed taboo at one time in the United States and how that taboo has gradually disappeared now to make the concepts socially acceptable today. On the other hand, evolving customs and standards in a society sometimes end up creating fresh taboos, like slavery ban, embargo on pedophilia, alcohol and tobacco prohibition and even the act of being politically incorrect that runs the risk of promoting discrimination (Berlin, 1997).

But generally, most taboos in majority societies around the world are commonly centered around sex and relationships. According to Janetius and T.C. (2009), in today's world, taboos might have expanded to include numerous human social actions that control the way we conduct ourselves as far as sexual behavior, caste relationships, social structures and socio-political functioning are concerned. But they opine that there is an increasing trend for discussion and belief about relationship taboos regarding sex, such as rape, premarital sex, incest, illegitimate children, and so on. in Indian societies both modern and rural. Reference to

these relationship taboos are constantly available through portrayal of sexual innuendos on films, television broadcasts, in music lyrics, newspapers, and the Internet.

3. Relationship taboos in India

As most taboo subjects revolve around sex, it is interesting to note the particular relationship India has with the concept of taboo. It is especially interesting to follow since, India has, from ancient times, been a significant player in the history, conception, and presentation of sex, right from the Kamasutra to its modern day fixation with the cult of Osho Rajneesh (Janetius & T.C, 2009).

Surprisingly, given India's historically ancient involvement with the representation of sex and associated relationships, various concepts regarding the same are still considered taboo. To understand relationship taboos that this paper deals with, the focus must first be turned onto accepted norms that define society in India and the relationships that shape them.

India, the birthplace for Hinduism, has Hinduism as its most populous and important religion. This does not mean that Indian society values are confined to those of Hinduism only. Indian society is an amalgam of different beliefs and norms, given the various cultures and subcultures in the vast Indian sub-continent. This thesis is limited with its incapability to address the huge multi-dimensional cultural strains of the Indian society, a singular interpretation of which would be most unjust to the multi-layered connotations of its vastness of scope. So, the standard set of values referred to in this thesis are based on those of a predominantly Hindu society, for the ideals of majority of the Indian people are shaped by tenets of Hinduism, which places marriage at the epitome of significance of relationships in society.

According to Hinduism, marriage is a holy pact that had been formulated by higher power in order to ensure the general well-being, health, and prosperity of man and woman on earth (Jayaram, n.d.). The principal logic behind such an institution in Hinduism is to offer a God-sanctified structure within which to procreate and help continue life in the world.

According to the ancient scriptures of the religion, or Vedas, a father utilizes a marriage as an extension into a life in future and the world after, through the propagation of his children. This is a process in which he is aided by his wife, who carries the children conceived through a holy union, resulting in transferring of energy of the sexual kind.

It is defined as much a moral obligation as it is a social contract in which families come together and share lives with the newlywed couple. They have a responsibility not only towards each other, but also towards their ancestors, Gods, and society in general. Instances of an individual being forced into marriage with another individual whom he or she has seen in a state of undress had also been common and sanctioned by society in Indian culture. According to Jayaram (n.d.) while divorce is alien to the philosophy of Hinduism, anything that goes against the tenets of marriage and the way in which it shapes the form of society is not normal in mainstream Indian culture.

Thus, traditionally, any sexual relationship between two people that does not lead to the procreation of progeny, albeit with the blessings of Gods, is not acceptable in Indian society. So it is not surprising that relationships between two males or two females, or a relationship in which an unmarried couple live together as husband and wife and engage in sex and have a child are considered taboo. And with this notion as a backdrop, according to Janetius and T.C. (2009), it is also not surprising that most of India's below-20 sexually active individuals have no idea about safe sex, mostly due to lack of proper government initiative regarding sex

education. However, owing to liberalization and globalization, India's young population is being exposed to the concepts of premarital sex and live-in relationships. They are therefore opening up to the concept of casual sex even when the older generation might still consider the topic a taboo.

Thanks to a social tradition that used to be strictly restrictive and a rather haphazard, increasingly confusing, policy regarding some sort of ban or the other, some young people become increasingly fixated upon adventurously exploring common Indian sexual taboos (Janetius & T.C., 2009). These include public exhibition of affection, like kissing or touching, sex-oriented talk, liberties taken regarding sexual relationships, premarital sex and extra-marital sex, and homosexual relationships. Such fixation of the young generation, in the background of a restrictive moral-oriented society in the throes of transformation to modernity, is possibly making the topics more talked about every day (Janetius & T.C., 2009).

Author Khullar is of the same opinion. He mentions that “pre-marital sex is still considered a taboo” even in a “rapidly modernizing India” (Khullar, 2008, p. 27). Khullar quotes Naina Kapur, the co-founder of Sakshi, an organization that works with gender issues in India. According to Kapur, most Indian parents' views on sexuality are guided by traditional morality, which sometimes make their assumptions about their children's access to sexual information immature. Such is the scenario that numerous Indian states put an embargo on sex education at the school level in 2007, with the claim that the material being taught was too overt, it promoted children to experiment with sexuality and was anti-Indian culture (Khullar, 2008). Schools have been known to forbid physical touch between the sexes, so much so that even accidental touches were being punished.

According to Khullar's study, while political honchos and self-proclaimed morality police bodies condemn sex education as pre-marital sex promoter, the current generation of teenaged individuals have already started experimenting with sex, sans a righteous social green signal. This is thanks to their exposure to "global values" (Khullar, 2008, p. 27) through American television beaming, the Internet, and movies. He quotes a 2006 study by the *India Today* magazine that "one in four Indian women between ages 18 and 30, interviewed in 11 major cities, had had sex before marriage" (p. 27).

But the fact that conventional norms still hold sway is clear in the way various controversies are constantly stirred up in the media. For example, there was utter media madness about a kiss that Richard Gere placed on actress Shilpa Shetty's cheek during a campaign about AIDS, an embargo on showing of bikini-clad models on Fashion TV, and the making illegal of a condom that vibrates, for it was considered a sex toy (Khullar, 2008). But why are the young in India dependent on the media for their dose of information on relationship taboos and sex?

One of the reasons young India needs to turn to television and the Internet for information on certain "taboo" subjects are the unavailability of reliable information on the same in society. Khullar (2008) quotes Kapur as saying that it is a shame that topics like these will keep remaining a taboo in India, being shunned to the ghetto and being politically colored, till parents try to be better informed and treat the issues more naturally. And till then, certain relationships or situations will continue to be looked upon as taboos.

C. **Bollywood and Relationship Taboos**

As films are not only mere pieces of art, but also tools for expression of the tenets of contemporary society (La Salle, 2004), Bollywood too, is an apparatus through which the slowly transforming principles of Indian society find hearty portrayals.

Woven into the plots, in most cases, is a commentary on the existing social mores, the nature of change society is going through, and the effect of the change on various kinds of people, sometimes also topped off with a reflection on the way things should be, according to mainstream India.

To begin with, the concepts of homosexuality and premarital sex and illegitimate children were, and to some extent still are, considered taboo in Indian society – represented predominantly by a conglomerate culture that takes into account people all religions in the country. But with Hinduism as the most populous religion in India, society, as we know it, is heavily influenced by Hinduism and its traits.

There had always been a shadow of negativity around the issues and portrayals, which not only were unflattering, but also either clouded over with either a comical or a shaming flavor (Kumar, 2016). Bollywood films, from the very inception till, in most cases, very recently followed that social narrative. They had the tendency of not touching the topics at all or shying away from any kind of positive or natural portrayals of such topics.

Let alone homosexuality or premarital sex, the discussion or portrayal of sex itself in any form on screen was frowned upon till a few decades ago. Throughout the 70s and 80s Bollywood was home only to dark shots to represent lust (Jha, 2004) in movies like *Julie* (1973) and *Ankur* (1974), in which sex was always associated with sin. According to Bhattacharya-

Mehta (2011), with the opening up of India's economy in the early 90s and the advent of cable television, India finally started to rethink its stand on sex itself, including some previously taboo subjects like premarital sex and homosexuality.

Consequently, there entered films like *Salaam Namaste* (2005) and *Dostana* (2008), in which homosexuality and premarital sex and pregnancy were dealt with in a positive light for the first time. This meant that instead of treating premarital sex as a sin or not shying away from portraying a homosexual couple, the films dealt with these issues head-on, even though there was a slight tinge of comic farce associated with the gay couple (Kumar, 2016). The fascinating thing was the change in the nature of portrayal. Let us now see how the concept of sexuality taboo, be it homosexuality or premarital sex, in India has gradually undergone a change.

1. Sexuality taboo

The Indian psyche's reaction to the taboo subjects has been conspicuous by its absence in any print or electronic media or academic journals. This points a finger at the cloak of invisibility that society in India thrusts upon it, as homosexuality is known to be a Western phenomenon (Bhaskaran, 2004) – practiced in public eye and condoned by society, only in America and Europe.

Though proofs of some display of sexuality are found in some form or other of heterosexual love on Indian screens, homosexuality has, till recently, been a strict no-no. Homosexuals have for long been isolated and stereotyped because of myths and ignorance regarding the same. No wonder, talking about these topics in public used to be usually avoided.

This had always led to an aura of invisibility of homosexuality in the Indian subcontinent. This held true not only for the people who are homosexuals but also of the rest of

the population, whose perception, support, and acceptance of homosexuality were clouded by unfamiliarity too. This was not surprising for, in India heteronormativity is present in each and every corner of society and life and the power of the same is dictated by religious, legal, educational, medical, and media orders (Bhaskaran, 2004). The author also observed that women more than men have been more affected by such homophobia.

So lesbians in India have, for ages led a double life and suffered in guilt. For example, in the state of Kerala alone, a high rate of lesbian suicides has been reported. This is owing to the pressure thrust upon homosexual women by a society that is patriarchal to say the least. It not only tries to control them and psychologically quarantine them, but also leaves their desires seriously wanting. This leads them to take drastic measures to end lives that they find unbearable (Bhaskaran, 2004), as society refused to talk about it.

Just like Indian society prefers to not talk about homosexuality or premarital sex (La Salle, 2008), Bollywood, as a loyal sounding board of India's value system, had shied away from portrayals of sexuality taboo topics on screen as well. But since the early 90s, when the Indian audience woke up to American and British television programs and globalization (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2011), Bollywood- the conservative cousin of Hollywood (Howard, 2009) started to undergo a new coming of age as well.

According to Howard, Bollywood is a place where values and ethics of the Asian family system rules supreme. Yet, thanks to the liberalized beaming of western programs into Indian living rooms, the industry had to suddenly rise up to being a mirror of the sea of fast changes taking place in the Indian psyche for real.

One of the first films with mainstream actors portraying homosexual relationships was director Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, which was released in India in 1996. For the first time on the Indian screen, this film tried to focus the camera on the topic and brought to mass visibility the rather difficult topic for India – lesbian desire. This was the first attempt at depicting the theme within a traditional Indian middle class family. While mainstream Bollywood had clearly given the topic a miss, this Mehta film, for the first time, brought the concept to life for mainstream viewers in India.

Though the screening of the film was stopped within three weeks of its opening in India, it indeed set the ball rolling for discussions and debates on a subject that had been considered a strict taboo to Indian mentalities. Apart from the agitation and attacks against the screening of the film by the radical Hindu party of Shiv Sena in Mumbai, some eminent right wing politicians were heard saying that the theme was “alien to Indian culture” (Jain & Raval, 1998, para. 7).

Some more said that the film would be spoiling the characters of Indian women who would now be thoroughly informed about perverted acts like homosexuality (*Activists slam attacks*, 1998, para. 13). Not to mention, that it might have been the inspiration for moviemakers in India, like director Onir of *My brother Nikhil* (2005) fame, who consequently could garner enough courage to start making films on similar topics in the subcontinent.

Another Bollywood movie worth a mention here is *Dostana* (2008). In this film's storyline, two macho Bollywood stars, while being sexually straight in the movie, are shown forced to act as gay partners, in order to get an apartment lease in the US. This film might have

utilized all kinds of clichés to make a mark in the box office, but even then it has been described as the promoter of a crucial age in the vista of Indian cinema-making (Dudrah, 2006).

As Howard (2009) quotes Rodericks, the arrival of the mid-90s beauty contest winners Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai brought forth a huge change in Bollywood. For, included in their retinues were various artists such as designers, stylists and make-up people who were homosexuals. Working with the beauty queens acted as a jumping board for them to step into Bollywood, where earlier they would never even dream of working. Rodericks feels that this gay culture which started to be popular off the camera slowly started to spill over on camera.

So while *Dostana*, which means friendship, dealt with pretend homosexuality (two straight guys portray themselves as a gay couple, to allay fears of a typical Indian lady who was worried about possible romantic entanglement between the young men and her young niece, who were to share an apartment in a foreign locale), the 2007 *Life in a Metro* actually has a scene where a homosexual man is shown to take a girl to meet his parents who want him to settle down, only to later get caught by the same girl while having sex with a man. This is when the desperate Indian gay male tells his 'girlfriend' that he cannot have a relationship with her as he likes men (Howard, 2009). Howard tracks the continuing level of awareness of homosexuality in real life in Indian society, with the mention of the 2008 introduction of the Queer Media Collective. A group of Indian intellectuals got together in an organized way to aim for a balanced depiction of the gay community on screen. They instituted awards called the Queer Media Awards which are given to newspaper, magazines, television channels and the like, based on how true or realistic their coverage of LGBT issues are. The courage to even think of starting an organization like this earlier would have been unthinkable. Howard quotes

Nitin Karani, QMC convener, as saying that in India, homosexuality has often been portrayed as a mockery. For example, *Dostana* utilizes the idea that all homosexual males are man eaters.

According to Karani, quoted by Howard (2009), another Indian film that stands out for its very sensitive, but tiny, portrayal of the issue is *Honeymoon Travels Private Limited* (2007). This movie, which examines the complicated truths of human desirability and allure (Howard, 2009), has a just-married gay character. Bunty, the non-resident Indian man, who is yet to come out of the closet, to his family and his newly-married wife, desists from intercourse with his wife, yet is attracted to his co-passenger, a bubbly honeymooning husband Vicky, whose reactions to Bunty point at his being bisexual (without Vicky perhaps knowing it himself).

When Howard (2009) spoke with Reema Kagti, the director of this movie, she claimed that she was not merely trying to depict gay people on screen, but was trying to bring forth something as real as it could get in India. Kagti speaks of censorship rules in the Indian subcontinent which have relegated the portrayal of lovemaking or even kissing on screen to clichés represented by flowers and birds. Kagti also brings up an interesting issue, pointing out the irony here that allows rape to be depicted on screen in a violent manner but not the portrayal of two consenting adults making love. As Howard (2009) quotes Kagti who laments the fact that because of such rules one has the scene in *Life in a Metro* where a casting guy forces a wannabe actor to perform sexual action on him in return of a favor, but sensitive versions of similar situations with consenting adults are so conspicuous by their absence on the Indian screen. According to Howard, the blossoming of gay issues in Bollywood has followed a step behind in the path the West has laid down for it for a while.

Howard talks of jesters from the times of Shakespeare or almost asexual figures from Kenneth Williams who were always utilized for comic relief in art portrayals of theater or movies. This is echoed by Dudrah (2006) who agrees that in the 1970s or 80s the same thing happened with Bollywood characters who were depicted as homosexuals.

But Dudrah (2006) also points out a rather progressive aspect of Hindi cinema by pulling up the example of the 1913 movie *Raja Harishchandra*, in which all the parts were portrayed by male artists, giving the movie a distinct queer feel. But this was because, at the time of the second decade of the 20th century, female actors were unheard of. According to Chakravarty (2013), it was socially unacceptable or even a taboo for women to play parts in cinema or theatre in the beginning of the 19th century. According to her, Dadasaheb Phalke was not able to find female actors for *Raja Harishchandra* and that is why he had to cast a man as the female main role in the film.

On the same vein of using males to play female roles in Indian cinema, according to Dudrah (2006), Bollywood has always been open to examining men who act like women and women who are like men. This has been more so because the macho heterosexual man hero concept of Hollywood does not, mostly, have the same effect or importance in Bollywood, where metro-sexuality is gaining open prominence and pretty males are comparatively much easier to come by.

2. Legislation regarding homosexuality

Stemming from her interest in the portrayal of homosexuality on Indian screen, Howard mentions the most major milestone in the queer movement in India. It was in 2008,

when New Delhi held its first gay parade, attended by hundreds of supporters, who gyrated to beats of Bhangra music and swayed with rainbow hued flags.

Yet the author is quick to point out that most of these supporters had to resort to wearing masks. This was a sure sign that hiding their real identities was a necessary act in a country like India, where only the heterosexual concept of the family structure was accepted and section 377 of the Indian Penal Code deemed homosexuality as unnatural.

However, July 2009 saw the heralding in of a new era of the gay movement in India when the High Court of Delhi removed various parts of the Section 377 as being unconstitutional. The reason offered was that not only does it criminalize consensual sex between adults, it also stood in strong violation of any person's fundamental right to equal status in front of the legal system, his or her right to freedom because of the dastardly act of discrimination, and his or her right to live his or her life with personal choice.

As the Amnesty International website mentions, everyone, no matter what their individual gender identity and sexual preference is, should be free to exercise their basic rights as human beings. It mentions that though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights avoids referring directly to these issues of identities and orientations of sex, slowly developing ideas of an all-encompassing law on human rights now is beginning to have in its embrace a more inclusive stance regarding LGBT rights all over the globe (*About LGBT human rights*, n.d., para 3).

3. Premarital sex and illegitimate child and taboo

Like in case of sexual orientation taboos, researchers have explained taboos regarding premarital sex and illegitimate children in myriad ways. According to Jayson (2005), living together without being married to each other was earlier thought of in a derogatory way as

shacking up. Ramsey (n.d.) opined, that from a Christian perspective, this phenomenon of cohabitation by two adults of opposite sex without entering into wedlock, was thought of as life in sin.

Though now this phenomenon has become popular in the West (Jayson, 2005), objections focused around reasons like social norms, religion, and effect on child's life, have not completely died away. Even in America and Europe, pressures from families, along with religion-tinted reprove, have been instrumental in the way living-together had earlier been viewed as a tainted form of lifestyle (Newman, 2011). One of the reasons why western society and religion used to condemn a live-in relationship was the issue of sexual intercourse of the pre-marital kind.

However, this taboo went through various stages of evolution through centuries in which it travelled from stigma and illegitimacy associated with sex before marriage to a situation in which incidences of cohabitation are on the rise currently in the West. According to the U.S. census, between 1960 and 2000, there has been an increase of 10 times in the number of unwed couples who are living together (Jayson, 2005).

There are multiple reasons why live-ins have been on the rise in the West, owing mainly to a transformation in opinions which are affecting couples' decisions to live-together before marriage (Thornton and Axinn, 1993). A fall in religious authority, alterations in ways people follow their faiths, financial comfort, and so on, have also led to the gradual removal of the taboo tag from living together.

While this is the situation of the West, India still has a long way to go. India is still a country that places marriage at the center of the practical and philosophical functioning of its society (Sharma, 2007). The prevalent idea here, behind the concept of living in, is the ulterior

motive of getting to escape taking responsibility of the other half of the couple. Sharma (2007) links it to other aspects such as refusal to commit, disrespect for accepted or traditional social relationships, and the increasing depletion of the level of tolerance in people.

According to Bhatia (2012), in India, the concept of lovers living together with all the strappings of having sex frequently, but without the obligatory commitment of marriage is still a fantasy of “neighbors, relatives, and milk vendors alike”. And, naturally, the nod from society for these kinds of liaisons is still a long way away.

She quotes a New Delhi Judge Surinder S. Rathi for whom such relationships are still “infamous product of Western culture” and therefore “immoral” (Bhatia, 2012, Live-in relationships still a taboo, para. 1). She talks about how couples today still have to resort to various ploys and strategies in order to keep their living arrangements secret from their families. This is most specifically because such arrangements involve the notion of sex outside marriage – still a taboo in India.

Bhatia (2012) quotes various young women who have hidden their relationships not only from families but also from landlords in order to rent a house together. Some others had to maintain a second rented flat in the city just to be safe if the parents paid a sudden visit. But despite the stigma, says Bhatia, urban India is gradually warming up to the concept.

She talks of how young men and women who move from semi-urban or rural areas to cities gain from economic liberties and securities of jobs and utilize the logistic independence to mix, live, and have sexual relations freely. A freedom from a typical Indian family’s constricting influence and interference and the chance to test waters before actually tying the knot are making the idea of living in more and more lucrative to couples today.

According to Adamczyk and Hayes (2012), Hindus and Muslims are much less likely to engage in premarital sex than Jews and Christians. This is owing to the fact that within these two sects, the idea of affiliation to a particular religion and the need to belong to a community and have its support are of tantamount significance.

As the main reason behind the taboo of live-in relationships is the idea of unwed couples indulging in sex, stigma follows the same logic in a society that raises eyebrows at children of unwed mothers, or illegitimate children. In the American context, while in the 70s, it was mainly teenagers who were giving birth to children out of wedlock (Nelson, 2010), the demographics have changed largely today with unwed motherhood having risen by 26 percent in five years, especially for 20 something women or older women (Ventura, 2009), according to statistics available in 2007.

In India, the situation is far graver. There are still thousands of instances in which mothers who give birth outside of a marriage are known to voluntarily or forcefully abandon their babies. They do so in order to avoid stigma associated with the concept of an illegitimate child. Though pre-marital sex and live in relationships are rather common in modern, up market societies of urban India (Chatterjee, 2013), societal structures in India still raises eyebrows at both. According to Aravind (2010), such permissiveness is still the exception in India where any relationship, let alone a child, is not endorsed without the sanctity of the stamp of wedlock.

According to Boudreaux (2009), founder of the Miracle Foundation, which works with orphans and unwed mothers in India, the taboo associated with an unwed pregnancy in the country can lead to disastrous consequences. These could include ostracizing the entire family from society and even death of the person performing the taboo, in order to hide or punish the same, and preserve the family's honour.

Premarital sex had always been prevalent in Hindi movies with “dark cavernous shots denoting a deep sense of longing” (Jha, 2004, para. 2). Jha also insists that the concept of premarital sex in Bollywood flicks was always associated with the concept of sure and instantaneous fertility and impregnation. He mentions the 1969 film *Aradhana* as one of the firsts of numerous elaborately scripted melodramatic films in which the topic of unwed motherhood had held prominence. Other examples include V. Shantaram’s *Pinjra* (1972) in which a stoic school teacher played by Shreeram Lagoo and an entertainer, brought to life by actress Sandhya, involve in a premarital relationship with sex as the mainstay. In the next couple of years, there was *Julie* (1973) in which the character of Lakshmi engages in sex with her neighbour during the absence of other household members, followed by Benegal’s *Ankur* (1974) in which Shabana Azmi, married to a handicapped man, sleeps with her landlord. In all the above examples, the concept of premarital sex, in many cases associated with pregnancy outside of a marriage, had been depicted in a way that was “furtive, sinful and filled with retribution” (Jha, 20004, para. 10).

Additionally, Bollywood had for long been fixated with the concept of unwed mothers. “*Main tumhare bachhe ki maa bannewali hoon - I am about to become your child’s mother*” (*Unwed Mothers and Hindi Cinema*, 1997) has been the main earth-shattering line from the mouth of unwed girls. These girls, portrayed in an innocent light, could possibly never have committed a shameful act as delivering a child out of wedlock.

This is because the concept of an honorable birth seems to be of huge significance in Bollywood films. According to a newspaper piece, no potboiler Bollywood flick is complete with a minimum of one protagonist with “questionable procreation” who is berated at least once

somewhere during the film with a “*tum kiss eke naajayaz aulaad ho* – you are someone’s illegitimate child” (*Unwed Mothers and Hindi Cinema*, 1997).

This has been quietly changing since the year 2000, when, according to Chatterjee (2013), the hushed sex and virginity scenario changed “its onus to couples in love or in adulterous relationships who did not blink an eye before getting into a live-in relationship underscored by sex” (Chatterjee, 2013, para. 7). She uses examples of films such as *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Bachna ae Haseeno* (2008), and *Wake Up Sid* (2009), in all of which, the common factor of a live-in relationship (with *Salaam Namaste* even showing the birth of a child out of wedlock) is shown to be a non-eyebrow raising element in current urban and high-end Indian society.

D. Bollywood Narratives and Society: Rationale for Study

Chakravarty (1993) traces the clear relational connection between Indian societal discourse and popular Bollywood narratives. At the same time, Bhattacharya (2004) and Jha (2003) are sure about the function of Bollywood movies as an instrument for ideological contemplation for Indian society which views mainstream Hindi films as a compelling influence for political and cultural establishment of norms. This influence, according to Uberoi (1998), is centered majorly on the relationship between the sexes. Because Indian society seems to be very paranoid about it, at the base of it all were relationships that constitute the family. It is through these that Bollywood cinema wove the idea of an “ideal moral universe” (Uberoi, 1998, p. 306). This was connected with ideas about convention and tradition, and the idea of purity associated with the same.

This idealism, coupled with the notion of acceptability and tradition, had most likely been the reason why critics and scholars of the subject had maintained their comments about irrelevance of the genre. This was in the face of a burgeoning distance they identified between the moralistic world portrayed in the films and the real-time transformations that were taking social life in India by storm (Anjaria, 2008). With the focus of this thesis on portrayal of two taboo subjects—homosexuality and premarital sex and illegitimate children—in Bollywood films after the 1990s or over the last 25 years, it makes sense to look at the various tenets of the representation of the taboo topics on screen. Examination of the storylines and plot structure of the films becomes crucial to find out how new ideas are being portrayed on screen in the form of exploration of taboo themes. It is also important to find out how these might be elucidating a change in acceptability notions of previously-considered taboo topics by society, hinting possibly at a transformation in Indian society as well.

III. METHODS

Textual analysis provides an empirical basis to seemingly intangible observations about language's social nature and social theory's cultural purposes (Fairclough, 1995) at the time of seeking a meaningful clarification of symbols and artifacts by the method of observation and chronicling repetitive designs portrayed in any mediated text.

As Schutt believes, the implication of a text, is brought about by a whole plethora of interpretations, with the analysis seeking to explain data from texts to bring about the situation or protagonists who gave birth to this particular text by themselves as opposed to doing the same on the basis of pre-described hypotheses. So, “qualitative data analysis (that) tends to be inductive—the analyst identifies important categories in the data, as well as patterns and relationships, through a process of discovery” (Schutt, 2015, p. 322), is going to be a mainstay of this research. Schutt's contention is that the specific social basis of any event, any idea, or even people's actions is critical for good qualitative analysis and interpretation.

The thesis looks for themes and patterns that emerge from the storylines of the films that work towards exposition of the subject of relationship taboo on screen. Taking a leaf off from Schutt's method and Todorov's narrative theory of structural analysis (see below), I conducted an in-depth discourse analysis of six films—*Fire* (1996), *Kya kehna* (2000), *Girlfriend* (2004), *My brother Nikhil* (2005), *Salaam namaste* (2005), *Tere sang* (2006).

It tries to explore and interpret the strategies utilized to elucidate the concept of homosexuality and pre-marital sex such that the issues portrayed in the films are suitable for the Hindi film-watching audience. The final objective of examining the reasons behind such

expressions, leading into reasons behind changes in Indian society as well, is achieved through exploration of juxtaposed ideas and consideration of the multifarious threads of discussion that arise around the topics of taboos portrayed in the films.

A. Todorov's Narrative Theory of Structural Analysis

1. Bringing together structure/arrangement and "operation/process"

According to Todorov (1969), structural analysis of any body of text should be more than just theoretical/external or descriptive/internal – “in imprecise usage, ‘theoretical’ and ‘external,’ on the one hand, and ‘descriptive’ and ‘internal,’ on the other, are synonyms” (p. 70).

He goes on to describe how Marxist or psychoanalysis ideologies look at literature through the lens of the grasping of the abstract psychic or social structure, which is revealed through that body of work. Todorov goes on to pit this external-theoretical approach against an internal new critic approach which aims to comprehend the very essence of the text, which would, in turn, for certain, include a paraphrase and divulge the inner meaning of the text better and in a clearer way.

Todorov's (1969) theory of structural analysis veers away from both these approaches. His point of view is neither content with a pristine descriptive version of the text nor by sociological, psychological, or philosophical interpretations of the same. Todorov's objective is “literary discourse rather than works of literature, literature that is virtual rather than real” (p. 70).

This analysis does not merely paraphrase or put forth a logical synopsis of the work, but instead it proposes a theoretical approach of the study of the discourse of the literature, with respect to both the structure or arrangement and operation or process, in order to lead the study

to represent a gamut of scholarly possibilities. This entire procedure, according to Todorov, should be conducted in a way in which already extant bodies of work will be presented as distinct moments that have been made real and understood.

2. Exactness of data and criticality of plot

Additionally, Todorov's narrative theory of structural analysis (1969) also makes references to works of literature in real life, for according to him, the finest springboard in the way of theory is exact, experiential, practical data. According to Todorov, such structural analysis will definitely take into account patterns that the work being studied has in common with others of its kind, related to similar periods, genres, and also with any other body of work.

Todorov's theory mentions the plot as the simplest literary concept, though undoubtedly any text is not only about its plot. But just like the way Todorov felt that plots should be given more importance, as ordinary readers look at a work of literature as more than anything else, a plot narration, minus the problems of complicated theoretical issues, the analysis of the films was conducted with a specific interest in the working of the plots in particular.

3. Plot as shift of equilibrium

According to Todorov, the basic comprehensive plot can be viewed as a shift from one state of equilibrium to a different one. This "equilibrium", which Todorov says, he borrows from genetic psychology, refers to the presence of a steady, but not necessarily stationary, relation among society members, in keeping with a social legality, a norm, or a distinct exchange system. The two instants of equilibrium are disconnected from each other by some phase of disparity from the equilibria. This period constitutes a progression of disintegration and collapse, followed by a second phase of advancement and reparation of that disintegration.

This narrative structure of analysis, as marked by Todorov (1969), was found to hold true in all of the films studied, they take the course of a total cycle after they “begin with a state of equilibrium which is broken by a violation of the law” (p. 75). In some cases, Todorov says, punishment is avoided while in some others conversion brings the state to another equilibrium. While in the first case, direct punishment might have brought back the state of balance the plot had started with, the concept of avoidance of penalty gives rise to a new state of equilibrium, while in the second case, the imbalance is brought about by a character flaw, and the story progresses towards correction of that flaw, till it is removed or the character is converted completely (Todorov, 1969). Analyzed from that perspective, Todorov suggests that the “minimal complete plot can be seen as the shift from one equilibrium to another... The two moments of equilibrium ... are separated by a period of imbalance, which is composed of a process of degeneration and a process of improvement” (p. 75).

B. Texts to be Analyzed

The six films—i.e., *Fire* (1996), *Kya kehna* (2000), *Girlfriend* (2004), *My brother Nikhil* (2005), *Salaam namaste* (2005), *Tere sang* (2006)—were chosen to explore the representation of taboo subjects like homosexuality and pre-marital sex. These Bollywood films not only touch upon taboo themes, but they are actually centered on the exposition of the same through the course of the films. They have as protagonists who, in some way or other are involved in the performance of the taboo.

Specifically, the 1996 movie *Fire*, directed by Mira Nair, talks about two sisters-in-law involved in some sort of lesbianism in a conservative middle class household, while the 2000 Kundan Shah film *Kya kehna*, is centered round a young protagonist, falling in love, getting pregnant and giving birth to her illegitimate child. The 2004 Karan Razdan film *Girlfriend* deals

with two women, one of whom is in romantic love with the other, while the 2005 film *Salaam namaste*, directed by Siddharth Anand involves a couple who have a live-in relationship. The other film from 2005, director Onir's *My Brother Nikhil*, deals with the ordeals faced by a closet gay man who is infected by HIV, while the 2006 Satish Kaushik movie *Tere sang* deals explicitly with the story of a teenaged couple's involvement in pre-marital sex leading to pregnancy.

Most of the makers of these films are known for their sensitivity to social issues and their deft ways of handling them on screen. For example, *Fire* director Mira Nair is known for her association with socially poignant films like *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which wove into the storyline the issue of child sexual abuse. This film, probably for the first time in India, "broke (this) relative calm, with its nuanced detailing of child sexual abuse in the 'elite' circles of society" (*Banerji*, 2011, para. 1).

Another example can be found in Onir, the openly gay director of *My brother Nikhil*. He is also known for focusing on issues such as displacement, single motherhood, same-sex relationships, and child sexual abuse (*Onir's next ventures*, 2009, para. 1) like in his film *I am* (2011). Kundan Shah, the director of *Kya Kehna* is known for providing touching social commentary in his work. From his classic comedy *Jaane bhi do yaaron* (1983), which introduced satirical comedy as opposed to the conventional slapstick to Indian screens or his television series *Nukkad* (1985-1986), that dealt with routine social life of young people on the street or sitcom *Wagle ki duniya* (1988-1990), based on the common man character, drawing inspiration from cartoonist R.K. Laxman creation. Incidentally, Satish Kaushik, director of *Tere Sang*, though mainly known as a powerful actor, was a co-collaborator of Shah's for the film *Jaane bhi do yaaron*.

Siddharth Anand, the director of *Salaam Namaste*, is known on the other hand for his involvement in films that deal with Indian new age topics, such as live-in relationships and premarital sex, like *Bachna ae haseeno* (2008). Then there is Karan Razdan, the director of *Girlfriend*, who is known for his penchant for controversial subjects like lesbianism and adultery like in *Sautan: The other woman* (2006) (*Karan Razdan packs sensitive theme*, 2005, para. 1).

The choice of the time frame, that is post 1990s, is tied to the time when Indian economy begun a new journey in an era of liberalization, participation, and growth in the global scene (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2010). As the Indian skies opened up, viewers came face to face with the West's liberalized notions of gender, society, and sexual habits, which they now probably could expect to be dealt with in Bollywood, India's mainstream cultural arena. It is therefore logical to speculate, with the overhaul of idea changes that policy and economy in India went through at the close of the Cold War and start of the global capital, examples of its effect would be found in the country's biggest industry for cultural expression (Bhattacharya-Mehta, 2010).

There have been other films such as Anurag Basu's *Metro –Life in a City* (2007), Reema Kagti's *Honeymoon Travels Private Limited* (2007) and Madhur Bhandarkar's *Corporate* (2006) in the same time period which touched upon taboo subjects of homosexuality and premarital sex leading to pregnancy.

The reason these films were not chosen for analysis is because the taboo issues do not lie at the heart of the stories, they are mere side plots. For example, the premarital sex between the married Ranjeet and Neha in *Metro*, or the live-in arrangement, leading to the illegitimate child

of Nishigandha and Ritesh in *Corporate* or the closet homosexuality of Bunty in *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Limited* do not change the course of the stories which deal with other issues such as the intricacies of modern urban lives, corporate dynamism and politics and relationship dynamics between couples of various kinds.

C. Analytical Methods

The six movies were watched repeatedly in order to examine the storylines in general and dialogues or screenshots in particular. Emergent themes and methods of mediation of representation of the themes of taboo were studied. This was conducted to lead into assumptions about the reason behind such representation and look at Indian society's possible transformation in order to be able to receive such material on screen. The investigation is grounded in Todorov's (1969) narrative theory of structural analysis, which places utmost importance on the significance of the plot of a narrative. He believes that though literature cannot be reduced merely to the workings of plots, for the common reader "uninterested in theoretical problems" (p. 72), a narrative is in essence merely the narration of the plot. The process follows the basic steps of Schutt's (2015) qualitative analysis method. This includes data documentation and collection, organization of the same into concepts and linking of data to portray the effect of one concept on another, ending with final reportage of all the findings.

All films were inspected through the main tenets of Todorov's theory. Specifically, the following questions were explored. What do the stories start with—what is this state of calm and equilibrium? Is there any mention of taboo from the very beginning? How is the topic of taboo introduced? Then there is the question of disturbance and/or chaos, represented through the introduction of a relationship taboo. So, what happens to the story with the discovery or introduction of the taboo concepts into the film? What effect does it have on other characters in

the film and the audience? Are the other characters sympathetic to the practitioners of taboo? What lies in store for the main protagonists of the taboo? Do they face resistance or shunning? Are they accepted by everybody? How do these protagonists respond to the challenges from society—hiding themselves; acting out boldly; or any other measures? How do they garner support, if any, from society? Finally, there is the question of how the problem of handling the relationship taboo can be resolved: Does society accept the relationship taboos in the end? How does the story/film end and why did it end the way it did? Does the story end with the suggestion of a state of order after earlier tumult; end like a fairy tale with "happily-ever-afters"; or have surprise endings? Overall, what tone—for example, a sense of justly deserved recompense or retribution or any other suggested quality—underlines the representation of the relationship taboos?

To answer these questions, the narrative structure of the six films was analyzed under the broad umbrella of Todorov's theory (1969). Specific focus was placed on the development of storylines and treatment of taboo topics to reveal themes and their significance was established through a process of collection, refinement, and categorization of textual data. This, according to Schutt (2015), is the most crucial aspect of qualitative analysis.

For a better understanding of the way the portrayals might have changed over time, the films were watched in two groups, one group consisting of films dealing with the topic of homosexuality and the other group, dealing with the premarital sex, leading to pregnancy, following the chronological order of their release dates. The main ways in which the analysis was done follows most of Schutt's (2015) techniques of qualitative data analysis, which entail, among others, the following steps:

- Documentation and collection of data
- Organization/categorization of data into concepts
- Connection of data to exhibit how concepts influence one another
- Reporting of findings

In this process, the data collection will be documented, and organized into concepts, with various perspectives such as geographic settings of the story, the usage of language, the situation of characters with respect to their socio-economic status, symbolisms, imageries, and so on, will be considered and connected to one another, in order to show how they influence one another (Schutt, 2015). Following Schutt's words regarding a good qualitative analyst, ideas regarding the film's meaning will be noted as the films are watched and ideas will be formed about how each person/event might be connected to other person/events/situations in the films. And this process of studying the data, collecting them, and interpreting them will continue through the project, and the process of collection of data will be adjusted if it begins to seem that extra concepts require to be studied or new connections require to be examined in greater detail.

How relationship taboos are represented in Bollywood films lies at the foundation of the research. Through examination of the plot and underlying themes, the study seeks to explore how homosexuality and premarital sex are introduced, exposed, and negotiated in a society where values are in constant shift in the age of globalization.

IV. ANALYSIS

An analysis of the six films was conducted to look for patterns in storylines, in general, and dialogues or screenshots, in particular, in order to underline subjects and techniques of arbitration and interpretation of the common themes of taboo, portrayed onscreen. Using Todorov's narrative theory of structural analysis (1969), which places the maximum importance on the significance of the plot of a narrative, I explore how these films may have converged or diverged in how relationship taboos are handled in the films. The geographic settings of the films, the kind of language used, the socio-economic situation of characters, and other symbolism and imagery were considered during analysis.

The analysis is further divided into three broad sections, namely thematic analysis of the films, further analysis on Indian society, vis-à-vis the portrayal of the taboo scenarios in the films, and cultural globalization. In the first section, the topic of discussion centers around the films' common thematic plot threads – surprise arrival of taboo disturbing equilibrium, violation of taboo, studied from the aspect from shunning by society and protagonists' reactions, and final acceptance/self-realization, when the plot shifts back to a new equilibrium, with secondary focus on the morality angle. In the second section, further exploration of these films was conducted under the broader umbrella of analysis of Indian societies, with topics of discussion including aspects of legislation, hidden sexualities, homophobia, and heterosexual backgrounds, and complexities within homosexuality, problem with illegitimacy, abortion, and the notions of premarital pregnancy and sense of independence and motherhood on one hand and premarital pregnancy and marriage on the other. In the third section the theme of cultural

globalization in India post 1991 is discussed, along with focus on how that is tied to the increase in ease of acceptance by Indians of the themes of taboo in Indian films.

A. **Thematic Analysis**

According to Todorov's (1969) theory, stories start with a state of calm and equilibrium or status quo. They are disturbed by some event of discalm or chaos that sets off a series of happenings. At the end of this, the central problem of the plot is solved, resulting in a solution that leads to the achievement of order again in the end.

1. **Surprise arrival of taboo disturbs equilibrium**

In line with Todorov's observation, all six films studied started with a state of equilibrium. The taboo topics, be it homosexuality or premarital sex and pregnancy, were introduced only much later on in the films. The introduction of the topic of taboo comes with a distinct element of surprise, either for the protagonists themselves, or their families, or even both. As a result of the introduction, the equilibrium is disturbed.

Let us talk about the first group of films, dealing with homosexuality. *Fire* starts with images of the Taj Mahal - undoubtedly a symbol of love, albeit heterosexual - and the honeymooning couple, Sita and Jatin, wandering the grounds. They are shown to return home to be welcomed with traditional regalia by the members of their joint family in Delhi. This is followed by a group photo being taken of all of them, concluding with talk of an heir being born soon. This underlines the so-called normalcy of the family, bound together by heterosexual love. There is no talk or even hint of lesbianism at the beginning of the film. It is shown that the newly-marrieds and the brother Ashok and sister-in-law Radha, together with their aged mother, form a very commonly known unit in the Indian family scenario (Mullatti, 1992).

In this situation of equilibrium, the notion of taboo is introduced almost suddenly, when the new bride Sita, rejected repeatedly by her husband, still enamored with his Chinese lover Julie, finds solace and companionship in the arms of Radha, her sister-in-law. Radha, on the other hand, has agreed to be part of her own husband's abstinence experiment. The women are left alone by themselves to do the housework and take care of their mother-in-law for the major part of the day, as the men go out to work at their family business. With sexual frustration playing on their minds (both being repeatedly rejected by their husbands), the two women first get close one morning, when Radha finds Sita in tears after a fight with her husband about his extramarital affair. Radha goes in to comfort the younger girl, who sobs in her arms, and while pulling away at the end, kisses Radha fully on her lips.

Gradually, over the course of the film, they are found sharing stories in front of their mother-in-law, oiling, combing and tying each other's hair, and even exchanging bangles, which could be taken as symbolic of exchanging vows or rings in the Christian concept. Mundu, the servant, watches this, and his expression is one of dire confusion. Radha herself confides in Sita that this lesbianism and Sita's forwardness regarding how traditions should be thrown away, scares her a lot and surprises her too.

That the equilibrium has definitely been disturbed, finds proof in the fact that Sita and Radha, after they get a taste of their new found feelings of pleasure from each other's bodies, have to meet clandestinely. And even while they do that, true to the mental conditioning of the Indian social norms that they have grown up with, they are shown to be unsure of what is happening to them. This is because they talk about it with each other, quite a few times. They keep telling each other, and their own tumultuous hearts, that it is not wrong.

Whenever Radha expresses uncertainty, Sita, the more courageous of the two, brings up her ideas about how conventions are not always appropriate for every one and that they must tried not to be pushed around by a traditional sense of duty or responsibility. But even then, neither are fully courageous of taking the step out of their marriages. The chaotic fallout of the sisters-in-laws' tryst with lesbianism and traditional Radha's inhibitions are characteristic of the Indian scenario, where heterosexual relationships are the norms of the day and any aberrant ones are looked down upon as abnormal. So much so that queer authors like Bhaskaran (2004) mention that she probably had to travel to study in America to "escape compulsory heterosexuality in India" (p. 1). This mental chaos in the minds of the protagonists later translates, not unsurprisingly, into a matter of full-blown scandalous indignation, for the house servant Mundu, and then Ashok, the elder brother, when they discover it.

Girlfriend starts with two female friends, Tanya and Sapna, sharing a house and rent, protecting each other from the lecherous advances of the landlord's relative, and partying together. Tanya's tomboyish-ness, and her constant fawning over Sapna as her caretaker, and indeed Tanya's almost obsessive love for Sapna, had ticked off Sapna's boyfriend Rahul. For example, he had decided to take Sapna away to London after their wedding, he would repeatedly tell Sapna to be careful about Tanya. Sapna, who was earlier completely oblivious, was taken by complete surprise, when she suddenly discovered, from Tanya's own admission, during a face-off about her sexuality with Sapna, that Tanya was a lesbian. When the discovery of Tanya's lesbianism comes to the fore, she puts on a disguise, roughs up Rahul and hurts him. Later, when Sapna discovers the truth about Tanya's sexuality, Rahul and Tanya have a showdown, when Tanya comes to Rahul with the specific intention of causing him bodily harm.

In the ensuing scuffle, Tanya tries to throw Rahul out of a window, but he moves at the last moment, leading Tanya to crash through the window and meet a fatal end.

In this film, the primary state of equilibrium of the two girls living in harmonious peace is thrown into a tumult when Tanya comes out to Sapna as a lesbian. As queer activist Obeid (2013) puts it, in the Indian context, not being specifically closeted does not mean that one is out of it. It is easy to not talk about it and remain blind. Because everyone tends to ignore the very obvious in front of them, being a lesbian is not difficult at all. The problem arises when you talk about it and specifically tiptoe out of the closet. The same thing happens in this film. This surprising taboo discussion throws the situation into total chaos, with everyone around mentally disturbed and lost.

My Brother Nikhil starts with a description of how the Kapoor family was a very happy one, with parents Navin and Anita totally in love with each other and the brother-sister duo of Anamika and Nikhil spending a lot of time together. The whole family is seen laughing together and having meals, amid much friendly banter. There is also the character of Leena, with whom it is suggested that Nikhil possibly had some sort of a relationship earlier. His sister teases him about Leena, who she claims was his girlfriend earlier. The film also shows a scene where Leena tries to kiss Nikhil, and Nikhil almost rejecting her, causing Leena to be taken aback, because it was as if she had kissed him earlier as well, and he had reciprocated then. All in all, the plots started with a sense of equilibrium (Todorov, 1969) in the form of a traditional Indian family, where again, heterosexuality seems compulsory (Bhaskaran, 2004) and therefore goes without saying.

Given the Kapoor family's camaraderie, the sudden intrusion of the taboo topic of homosexuality indeed came as a surprise for the parents. It happened when they were first thrown out of their social club, because everybody else knew that their son, who they were planning to get married off to Leena, was HIV positive. This condition was known and shunned by then society in Goa, as a homosexual condition. There is total chaos and the disruption of the equilibrium comes in the form of shunning from various factions of society, of Nikhil in particular, along with his family, in general. For example, Nikhil was thrown out the swim team, his co-swimmers got out of the pool as soon as he jumped in, his parents were asked to leave their club, among other incidents.

This utter disturbance is not surprising, given Indian society's stance towards homosexuality – thought of as a heinous crime, punishable by law even a few years ago (Mahapatra, 2013). Journalist Heaven (2009) mentions in a blog the words of contemporary India's most famous yoga guru, Ramdev who equates homosexuals with anti-socials performing unnatural acts, with a negative influence on the young generation, leading to prevalence of HIV and Aids. India's intensely traditional stance towards homosexuality is based deep in the country's cultures, values, and norms, along with the nation's ancient religious texts. These talk about men losing their high caste and becoming outcasts from society as a result of their practicing homosexuality (Heaven, 2009). Nikhil and his family bore the entire brunt of this attitude in the film.

The second group of movies, dealing with premarital sex and pregnancy, also start with states of equilibrium, only to be thrown into disarray by the discovery of a pregnancy out of wedlock. *Kya Kehna* starts with the entire Bakshi family getting ready to receive their daughter and sister Priya, as she returns from boarding school. With the father Gulshan's outpouring of

love for his only daughter, the scene is again of familial love and harmony, with the whole family sitting down to eat and sing – a quintessential state of bliss and happiness, Bollywood-style. It is a surprise for her parents when they discover that she is pregnant. She faints during a wedding dance, most likely because of morning sickness, and the doctor announces her condition in front of the entire gathering at the wedding. Similarly, it is also a surprise to the father of the baby, Rahul.

After the equilibrium is rudely overturned by the discovery of the taboo, chaos follows. Everybody boycotts the Bakshi family at the reception of Priya's brother – there are no guests at the reception, as the family and catering staff wait to receive them. And right after the discovery is made, when Vicky and his father are literally thrown out by the Rahul's mother, saying that they are aiming for monetary benefits of their enormous wealth. Priya's father, in a fit of rage, asks Priya to leave home, and tells everyone never to mention her name again, as she is "dead" for him. Priya, so far protected by the love of her family, spends the night alone in a neighboring barn.

This is a natural reaction from Indian society and Indian parents, given that the unwed mother in India is still stigmatized, in a big way (Loewen, 2016). In a scenario, where parents usually arrange their children's marriages or in the least, look for suitable partners for them, if a girl becomes pregnant before her marriage, it is not surprising then that she is shunned the community and faces immense discrimination in all spheres. This stigma is prevalent across all classes of Indian society, castes, and even educational qualifications (Loewen, 2016).

In *Tere Sang*, Kukku and Maahi are seen to be leading normal happy teenaged lives, going to school, attending football matches, and dances at school. Their love blossoms, much like any other couple's at that age of 17 and 15, respectively - a state of equilibrium (Todorov,

1969). The discovery of her pregnancy, via a home pregnancy test, is surprising for Maahi and her boyfriend. Needless to say, the news of the impending parenthood of their teenaged children came as absolute shockers for the two sets of parents as well. Kuku tells his parents about Maahi's condition, because he doesn't know how else to help Maahi. Kukku's mother faints and later, the father throws a massive fit, telling Kukku that he has ruined the little girl's life. Kukku's father, in turn, breaks the news to Maahi's parents. Surprised and shocked, they turn their wrath on to Maahi, making plans for her to get her baby aborted in the US and continuing her studies there. All these prompt the teenagers to run away from home for the entire term of the pregnancy.

This film shows, true to the Indian social mentality, there are actually no workable solutions for an unwed girl carrying an unplanned baby (Loewen, 2016). According to the author, in many cases, the preservation of the family's honor takes priority. In such situations, the girl is sometimes sent to some other place, away from her immediate known social community. Here, she is expected to stay during the entire pregnancy term, keeping her condition secret from those back who know her. Maahi's parents are shown to think of just that option for their daughter.

In *Salaam Namaste*, the two protagonists are shown to be successful young professionals, one an architect-turned-chef, the other a surgeon-in-training, who moonlights as a popular RJ. They are shown to be leading rather charmed lives, taking bike rides and having drinks with friends, and attending weddings, where they flirt with each other. This equilibrium is shown to be disturbed, when Amber, discovers, by way of a home pregnancy test, much to her and Nick's surprise, that she is pregnant, in spite of using contraception. In this film, the disruption occurs not because of the taboo, but because of the sudden inconvenience of Amber's

decision to have the baby, without Nick's support, who tells her pointedly and repeatedly, that she should abort the child, as it would cramp their style. The other part of chaos in this film, after the discovery of the pregnancy, is the inconvenience of their living together, since now the two protagonists are at logger heads. They find it impossible to share a house, but are forced to do so, because of logistical problems like already having paid the rent for the whole year and eight more months remaining. So the disruption comes in the form of the end of their friendly cohabitation ends.

This nature of disruption, different from the other two of this genre, is most likely because this is the only film to be set outside the Indian subcontinent. Set in Australia, it can be assumed that the protagonists did not have the entire Indian society to keep at bay. With Australian society more open to situations like cohabitation and pregnancy, leading to children out of wedlock, it is not surprising, that the societal implication of dealing with the news was not an issue for the protagonists. Bell (2013) recounts how Western society has grown more and more open to ideas of unwed mothers. So she shows how the first part of the 20th century still might have regarded illegitimate children as a problem for the society.

But with scientific explanations overriding moral angles, the situation of the unwed mother had started to change – they were no longer deemed guilty of a lapse of morality on their part. Instead, with the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s, popular culture and heightened sexual activities of the younger generation tipped the scale against stigmatization of unwed motherhood, leading to many women who gave birth to children outside marriage (Bell, 2013). This holds true in the case of immigrant Indians Amber and Nick, whose disturbance is relegated to the realm of logistical problems like rent and money, as opposed to a social stigmatization for the unplanned pregnancy.

2. Violation of taboo – Shunning by society and protagonists’ reactions

The disruption in most cases is followed by instant shunning by society and family in a majority of the six films analyzed. For the protagonists of the films dealing with homosexuality, acting out their sexuality, especially in the initial stages of the movie, was shown as impossible, so they had to hide it. For protagonists of the films dealing with unwed pregnancies, it was shown unanimously, that the pregnancies were carried to full term, and in full view of society, bar one film, in which it takes place away from the couple’s families, but in a new community nonetheless.

Within the group of three movies dealing with homosexuality, in *Fire*, Sita and Radha are first warned, by way of blackmail, by the servant Mundu, who takes a moralistic stand and says he will reveal their “hanky panky” to others, if he is fired. But the sisters-in-law, while keeping up the act of heterosexual housewives, carry out their duties to the household, like cooking, serving food, helping manage the food joint, and taking diligent care of the silent paralyzed mother-in-law. Sita even lets her husband, who openly has a relationship with his lover outside the marriage, have intercourse with her, and does not protest when the family members mention the probability of her having a baby.

With Mundu’s threat hanging over their heads like Damocles’ sword, the sisters-in-law have to steal time for their homosexual activities on the terrace or in the privacy of their bedrooms. This they do when their husbands are not around and during their visits to the Nizamuddin Dargah. Finally, when Mundu discovers, for the second time, through the keyhole, the scene in which the sisters-in-law are making love, he goes and tells Ashok, the elder brother. Catching them in action, Ashok erupts in anger and shock. This forces Sita to feel shunned

enough to leave the household. The most literal instance of shunning comes from Biji, their mother-in-law. After the discovery by Ashok, while Sita is getting ready to leave the home, Radha is called to Biji (with an incessant ringing of her hand-bell, since she doesn't speak). As soon as Radha leans in to figure out what is troubling her mother-in-law, Biji also raises her head, brings it close to Radha, and with a look of disgust, spits on the face of her most devout caretaker.

Needless to say, the protagonists get no sympathy from anybody in their family, except from each other, as they find love and solace in each other's arms. This is as opposed to finding the same in the companionship of their respective husbands, who shun them, physically and psychologically, for different reasons. This situation reflects the nature of Indian society where marriage is very little about sexuality and most often, as was the case with Radha and Sita, to do with duties and responsibilities to the family of the husbands, and preserving the honor of the same (Kotak, 2014). Anything outside of this norm will obviously question the basic nature of Indian societal norms and the basic traditional structure of the family. According to Kotak (2014), any aberration from this format makes weak the most important aspect of Indian society – the concept of family honor and bloodlines, which are intimately related to respect within the community.

In *Girlfriend*, Sapna was initially sympathetic towards Tanya, even when Rahul shuns Tanya and insinuates that Tanya loved Sapna as a lover or husband would, not as a mere friend. Tanya is shown to be openly in love with Sapna, fawning over her, taking care of her, and even cuddling her when she is asleep. Sapna even confesses to Rahul at one point, that she and Tanya indeed had a one-time homosexual encounter in college. But, in the current scenario, Sapna is shown to be in deep heterosexual love with Rahul, while Tanya, is shown to be privately

extremely jealous of that. She tries to break them up, telling Sapna that Rahul is not worthy of her, and is shown to be angry whenever the couple spends time together. She is shown to dream of times when Sapna is only with her, and nobody else. She later confesses to Sapna that she had apparently become a lesbian because of her intense hatred of men, leading from instances of sexual abuse, suffered as a child. But when the discovery of Tanya's lesbianism is flung on them both, neither Rahul nor Sapna is sympathetic towards her. This lack of sympathy might have something to do with Tanya's violence towards Rahul and her unrequited obsession with Sapna as well.

This rejection by her close friends is true of any strata of Indian society, where venturing out of the closet comes closely entwined with the real and immediate risk of rejection, leading to utter shunning in almost all cases (Greene, 1996). Almost similar to the Latina world, in India too, no one bats an eyelid when women, especially young women, are close to each other, emotionally or physically. It is not thought of as lesbianism. The fact that open forum conversations of sexuality or sex itself is not permitted by Indian culture and women are culturally expected to be naïve in the matters of sex, is reflected in Tanya's closeness to Sapna and Sapna not totally aware of the extent of Tanya's obsession with her. According to Greene (1996), women avoid coming out with the truth in order to save honor and stay from conflict with by acting indirectly. The same can be seen in the case of Tanya.

In *My Brother Nikhil*, Nikhil is shunned from society and feels a lot of resistance from all quarters. Other swimmers step out of the pool, when he steps in, his parents are thrown out of their club and he is thrown out of his home by his father. While his former friend Kelly says that Nikhil has AIDS because he has gone against nature (because he is gay), his boss at the bank does not give him his job back, as he fears others in the bank are afraid of working

alongside a gay, HIV-positive colleague. He is arrested by the police, abused by policemen, doctors, and nurses who are scared of contracting a deadly disease by coming in contact with him, and finally, he is thrown in to an abandoned sanitarium, where he is kept confined for months. His parents feel shunned enough to leave their home, not being able to go through the humiliation being meted out to them from various corners of society, Leena also leaves for Mumbai, because everybody thinks she is 'tainted'. It is also shown that Nikhil and Nigel, though lovers, are never able to even talk about their relationship, let alone show their affection in public towards the beginning of the film.

For Nikhil, this fear to keep his sexuality hidden reflects the nature of the society he was born into. As Bedi (2011) reports, most urban Indians still feel that homosexuality is alien to the country's culture and they would avoid renting out their houses to any couple practicing homosexuality. Just like Nikhil and Nigel, most gay and lesbian couples prefer to call their partners mere friends, because they are scared their families would disown them. And that is exactly what happened in the case of Nikhil. According to Bedi (2011), most closeted homosexuals in India are married off to straight partners, where they remain stuck pretending and deceiving everyone and themselves, out of fear of societal malice and ridicule if they show their true sexual colors. In the film, Nikhil was about to fall into this trap by way of his impending marriage to Leena.

Also to be noted, the homosexual individuals were shown as integral parts of heterosexual society and were portrayed against the conventional background of marriages, talk of children, and families. Sita and Radha of *Fire*, were initially shown as active parts of heterosexual couples, there was even a lot of conversation about Radha's not being able to conceive, the family's waiting for Sita to get pregnant with a baby boy, and Jatin's idea that Sita

have a baby to keep herself busy. In *Girlfriend*, Tanya is shown in stark contrast against the heterosexual coupling of Rahul and Sapna, much in love, engaged to be married. In *My Brother Nikhil*, towards the beginning of the movie, there is talk of Nikhil getting engaged to Leena, his childhood friend, and probably even a childhood sweetheart, their wedding date getting fixed, and Leena trying to steal a kiss with Nikhil, and Anamika's teasing of her brother after having caught Leena and Nikhil in action. All these situations are what heterosexual society would have wanted from the protagonists. But this state of normalcy was overturned in all three movies, leading to the protagonists being shunned by society in one way or the other.

Coming to the group of films dealing with premarital sex and pregnancy, it is seen that in two cases, because of family and societal pressure, the woman/girl is forced to escape from her immediate society, but in all three cases the protagonists carry their babies to full term.

In *Kya Kehna*, the protagonist initially faces a lot of shunning from society. Her father throws her out, she spends a night in a barn, back home nobody wants to sit next to her in class at college, nobody turns up at her brother's wedding reception, and the college annual play makes a mockery of her unwed pregnancy, which is wrapped up with a theatrical ending where the character resembling Priya is shown to commit suicide. Though her father had asked her to leave in fear of dishonor in society, Priya is finally shown to carry her baby to term in the full glare of society, in her own home.

In *Tere Sang*, the young couple receives a lot of pressure from the parents, especially from Maahi's, who even lodge a complaint of rape and kidnapping against Kukku. But the young protagonists simultaneously get a lot of support from their friends, one of whom, offers them the Mussorie home of a relative, when the expecting couple decides to run away from the

society they know. In *Tere Sang*, though Maahi carries her child to full-term, she does so, away from Delhi. They run away to the hills, where they can escape their parents' wrath and maybe the shaming glare of society as they knew it back home.

In both the films, the temporary escape from society for the unwed mother is not uncommon at all in the Indian scenario. As Loewen (2016), in many cases the expecting mother has hardly any control over the pregnancy and in the face of all societal ridicule and scandal, many families are known to send the girls away for the pregnancy, in order to save face in society. This is exactly what happened at the beginning in the films.

In only one film, i.e., *Salaam Namaste*, there is no shunning of the protagonists, indeed the unwed, pregnant heroine finds sympathy in the arms and words of her friends, Kathy and Randeep, who offer their home and hearts to her. It is also shown that her Indian doctor in Melbourne had provided Amber with a lot of support, having known that she was going through the pregnancy by herself. And of course, she does not have to run away like the other two protagonists, she is able, throughout her pregnancy, to stay in her own community and act out her taboo (in the Indian context), so to speak.

The representation of Amber's case is also true of the society in which her story is played out. She and Nick live far away from the glare of a judgmental Indian society and are spared its viciousness and stigmatization towards unwed mothers (Loewen, 2016). In Western societies like the one in Australia, where sexual liberties are more rampant than closed, conservative societies like India, it is not surprising that today there is no scandal stigma associated with an unwed motherhood. For with broadening of scientific reasoning and popular culture of sexual freedom, today there is albeit no more moral panicking of society at the earlier

identified sin of an unwed mother (Bell, 2013). And true to that society, the film shows no shunning by society of Amber and therefore, no need for Amber to react to any negativity resulting from her being pregnant out of wedlock.

3. **Final acceptance/self-realization, back to equilibrium, morality angle**

The turning of the tide, so to speak, by which the stories come back to a new state of equilibrium of some sort is brought about by various kinds of rather dramatic realizations.

Three out of the six films - *My Brother Nikhil*, *Kya Kehna*, and *Tere Sang*, end with hope, not only for protagonists or people immediately around them, but also hint at a positive change that came over the society they lived in, leading to a new state of equilibrium. The sense of optimism comes veiled in a layer of complexities, with an element of retribution of some kind for protagonists or people around them. For example, Nikhil dies in the end, Priya rejects the father of her baby, and Kukku is sent to a juvenile home. But a more detailed study of the plots will show that the overarching message at the end of the films is one of hopefulness and promise – altogether a new state of equilibrium. Let us start with *My Brother Nikhil*. Here, the tide turns gradually, with the efforts of campaigning of Anamika (Nikhil's sister), Sam (Anamika's partner), Nigel, and Anjali (Nikhil's lawyer), who try to make people and authorities see sense. The most important turning point was the visit to Nigel's place by Nikhil's mother Anita, who asks him to come back home. This is followed by his father's request, which is when Nikhil finally goes back home in a wheelchair to spend New Year's Eve with his family, which had once abandoned him. Though Nikhil finally dies in the movie, a sense of equilibrium is restored from the scene towards the end, in which the family lets Nigel and Nikhil spend some private time together, before his death.

This film ends with hope for society and almost a new changed order, with support in the society for homosexuality, as Nigel and Anamika keep working for People Positive, successfully. This social turning of the tide is shown clearly through Nikhil's parents. They were earlier highly critical and embarrassed of Nikhil's homosexuality and HIV-positive condition. This changed to a state of acceptance, which can albeit be equated to the reaching of a happy equilibrium. This is made further explicit, with Nikhil's parents accepting Nigel (someone they earlier called a no-good friend) as their son, a year from Nikhil's death. Interesting to note though Nikhil finally dies towards the end, the happy times of acceptance and hope regarding the taboo and the journey towards a new order of equilibrium had started before his death. Nikhil's death, though not representative of hope itself, was depicted as the launch pad for positive steps that were taken to address the problems of homosexuality and AIDS in his community.

Though there are a lot of dialogues which elicit morality towards the beginning, such as – Nikhil's HIV positive state was directly linked to his going against God and normal ways of nature (according to Kelly, his swim rival and reluctant friend) and being gay, in spite of having been taught to be well cultured and behaved (according to Navin, Nikhil's father), and his tainting the name of his family and dear ones, because of the sin he had committed (according to Leena). But in the end, the film's message is one of a reverse morality of acceptance and tolerance of all people of all kinds. Given Bollywood's penchant for happy endings and grossing money at the Box Office, Nikhil's death could well be a symbolic gesture of redeeming his sin, the price he had to pay, thereby bridging the gap between the new order of tolerance and traditional morality.

This attitude shift might not be totally untrue of Indian society today, as more and more homosexuals are finding the strength of mind to come out of the closet and consequently, more and more parents, some grudgingly at first, are becoming more accepting of their children's sexual orientation (Das, 2016). As she explains, a traditional Indian mother's viewpoint of never wanting anything like this to happen for her ward, but with logical reasoning she grows to accept her son's choice, as nothing wrong. With more parents treating their gay children's preferences as individual choices, they are growing to see the truth in supporting them while they embrace the paths of their choice (Das, 2016).

In *Kya Kehna*, Priya's emotionally charged, morally-tinted speech at the annual function again was the harbinger of a new order of hope and support from others in the society, which now helped the unwed mother in any way it could. The college's annual function had on its agenda a skit performed by students, enacting a story with an unwed young mother, who takes to suicide to escape the shame of her situation. That is when Priya, with permission from the principal, requested to speak a few words from stage. She did so, turning the tide of the situation in her favor.

Through the speech she cited her own reasons for not being able to abort the child, and made clear her reasons for deciding to keep the baby and performing her full responsibility as a mother to the hilt, while fully acknowledging that she had made a mistake. This earned her immediate accolades from the father of her unborn child, who had earlier clearly told Priya's father that he would not be able to take responsibility of a marriage or a child, and from the father of Priya's sister-in-law, who had earlier told off Priya's father about not instilling proper values in his children. Equilibrium is brought back, first with society openly accepting Priya and her condition, followed by Rahul's realization of his love for Priya and asking her to marry him,

and finally with Priya's acceptance, not of Rahul's proposal out of compulsion, but of Ajay's proposal of marriage, out of love and respect for the man who had stood by her, through thick and thin, and was ready to accept someone else's child as his very own. A new equilibrium is reached through society's forgiveness of the protagonist's condition and acceptance of her new happy, hopeful situation.

In this film, perhaps the second most well-received Bollywood movie in the group studied, Priya's speech is all about morality – how she turns it on its head and decides to defy society and become an unwed mother to fulfill her duties as mother to her child-to-be. The retribution comes in the end, when she has the opportunity to reject Rahul's proposal and go with her higher instincts, which make her accept Ajay's proposal. The plot of the film goes against dictations of traditional morality, which would have seen the mother marry the biological father. In its place, the action of a feminist voice in the protagonist Priya, who doles out retribution to the father of her child by rejecting him could be interpreted as a method of bridging the gap between convention and a new order. The marriage shown to be on the cards (this will legalize the existence of the child) means that the film does not veer far from accepted ways of society, yet the new equilibrium, stable and full of hope, holds a sense of newness in society, with the removal of the father of the child from the scene.

In *Tere Sang*, the tide turns, when after Kukku's arrest at the behest of Maahi's advocate father, Kukku's father asks Maahi's father to fight for Kukku. This is when the lawyer has a self-realization that the children had indeed come to him for help, after discovering the pregnancy, and he had pushed them away. He fights his best for Kukku and keeps him out of jail, instead getting for him a three-month stint at a juvenile home. As the parents forgive the young couple, it is shown that symbolically the rest of society also pardons their mistake of

having a child so young and receives them with open arms. Though Kukku is taken away from his family at the end of the movie to fulfill his stint at juvie, the film's ending leaves the audience with a feeling of positivity.

Though the ending is not entirely happy for everyone, Kukku's being sent away can also be interpreted as a new equilibrium achieved through penalization or retribution for the one who violates the social order, just like in *My Brother Nikhil* and *Kya Kehna*. Though Kukku pays the price, the new equilibrium in general, has everyone in a spirit of general forgiveness and acceptance of the relationship of Kukku and Maahi in future, and the welcoming of the grandchild, while the young lovers' love seems to be as strong as ever.

In *Tere Sang*, Mohit Puri, Maahi's father, has a morality speech about abortion choices and then raises legal issues about the age of permission about marriage in his court room spiel, but the underlying tone of the movie's message is one of the victory of true love, even if it is of the puppy variety, as underlined by the movie's tagline 'a kidult love story'.

There are similarities in the way new equilibrium of an all pervading love and acceptance is portrayed in *Kya Kehna* and *Tere Sang*. But there is doubt behind how true this portrayal is of traditional Indian society. The protagonists, Priya and Maahi were able to come back to their families and were accepted whole-heartedly by society in a neat, happily-ever-after method. This probably does not happen very often in reality in India. Like Loewen (2016) mentions, most of the time the unwed mother in India is forced to give the child up, out of fear of a number of aspects. With limited options for the unwed mother, the stark reality of an illegitimate child would include stigma from every corner of society, starting from admissions in schools to where the mother might later be able to find jobs to support herself and the child.

According to studies by Loewen (2016), the most viable option is to have the baby and then relinquish rights and give him or her up adoption. This does not happen in the films, which in true Bollywood style end happily with messages of love, and then a wedding or reunion that includes the new babies in the families. As Dunnigan (2004) puts it, the film-going audience likes to look ahead to a complete happiness, in anticipation of a future outcome that is full of hope.

In totality, in the three films just discussed – *My Brother Nikhil*, *Kya Kehna*, and *Tere Sang*, the realization of one's own truth or the act of making others realize the truth paves the way for strains of a new changed mindset and a glimmer of hope for protagonists or their families, in particular, and society, in general. This new equilibrium includes people around the protagonists who now accept the protagonists back within the fold of society. The social pardon and welcome-back angle is common to these three films, most likely because the immediate families of the protagonists – their own parents and siblings – played important parts in the plots. As representatives of society, the families – more lenient because the protagonists were their very own, paved the way for forgiveness and acceptance that symbolically were shown to go beyond family ties and pervade the greater social order in the long run.

As for the other three films – *Fire*, *Salaam Namaste*, and *Girlfriend*, the equilibrium at the end comes in the form of a general feeling of hope or relief at the end of an ordeal, but there is no real social upheaval of values or norms at the end (like the other three films). Let us first discuss *Fire*. Radha and Sita's final acceptance of their situation and walking out together does not hint at any changed society or support from the same. It is Sita's bold walking out on the family, albeit prodded on by Radha, after Ashok's discovery of their relationship that sets the ball in motion. Radha realizes that she needs to live life on her own terms, and not merely be a

prop in Ashok's experiments with celibacy. She was finally able to burst out saying that she has desires and that she desires life. Incidentally, her sari catches fire in the kitchen by accident, right after the meltdown. This could be symbolic of the trial of purity by fire of Goddess Sita, forced on by her husband, the God Rama in India's epic Ramayana (which was mentioned in various ways in the course of the film). In the Ramayana, Sita appeared unscathed by fire, proving that indeed she was not tainted during her imprisonment by the demon-like king of Lanka, Ravana.

Symbolically then, Radha too appears unscathed, though a tad disheveled when she finally is seen to be meeting Sita in their favorite haunt of Nizamuddin Dargah. The pouring rain in which they meet, might have signified a washing away of their previous lives of bondage, both sexual and spiritual. But the situation of the meeting at night time, probably symbolizes that though this is a new equilibrium of freedom and love, away from husbands and family, they might still need to hide the true, full nature of their relationship from the bright daylight glare of conventional Indian society. No matter what, this new equilibrium comes through their contented realizations, after much inner struggle, which gives them a new sense of confidence and strength to defy conventional norms and be inspired enough to try to live life on their own terms. This was reason enough for the experience of personal hope and liberation for two women who had found no joy in their respective marriages. Point to be noted here is though the story is acted out within a family set-up, it is not the women's own, but their respective husbands'. There is a sense of their being outsiders in their in-laws' family, who do not stand up for them. So the family/society forgiveness and acceptance does not arise here and the women are seen to venture out on their own, with no support from the family.

On the topic of morality in the film, there are a few instances when Mundu mentions the scandalous activities between the sisters-in-law, which will definitely lead to the family name being dragged in mud and bring dishonor to the family. While Ashok also mentions words to that effect upon his discovery, the final tone of the film's message is hardly a moral one. Indeed, it is of the ultimate breaking of bondage and of the welcoming of the freedom of spirit and love, albeit unconventional, but definitely true.

In *Salaam Namaste*, Nick feels pangs of remorse when he views the sonogram video of his unborn children. This makes him want to have a conventional family with Amber, and he proposes to her, right before she gives birth. That, and the last scene, with the new parents, holding the twins in the delivery room, speak eloquently about the sense of restored equilibrium in the plot, where the fairy tale king and queen realize their true feelings for each other, and show promise of a conventional family set up in the near future with their children. But because the story unfolds in Australia, away from the family of the protagonists and the judging eyes of conventional Indian society, the new equilibrium of hope is entirely the couple's very own. In this case, like that in *Fire*, the new equilibrium is symbolized by the gaining of individual happiness, sans a stamp of approval from society (albeit, society or family as a judge does not appear in this plot at all).

Salaam Namaste, which is the most popular among the group of movies studied, in true, 21st century Bollywood style, does not offer any moral message. The message in the end is of adults owning their responsibilities and realizing that they have to grow up and fulfill them.

In *Girlfriend*, the tide turns with Sapna's realization of the true nature of Tanya's love for her. After Rahul dumps her, Tanya expresses her jubilation by saying that finally they are

alone to celebrate their love, without men. She confesses that she indeed had wanted to kill Rahul and that is when it dawns on Sapna that Tanya's love for her is not an asexual one. She then follows Tanya to Rahul's place and in the ensuing scuffle, Tanya jumps accidentally to her death (she tried to push Rahul out of a window and Rahul moves away at the last moment, and Tanya meets a fatal end) while trying making clear the way for Rahul and Sapna to be together.

This symbolizes the return of an order again, the return to happy, heterosexual love, as opposed to an evil homosexual attraction that had been spiraling out of control, making the performer of that love want to cause bodily harm to another, out of jealousy. In this film, there is no tone of morality about homosexuality, but a distinct message that sufferers of child sexual abuse might get totally turned off men altogether, so much. The final message is one of the victory, not necessarily of heterosexual love over homosexual love, but of good over evil. The point to be noted in these three film – *Fire*, *Salaam Namaste*, and *Girlfriend*, the immediate families, namely parents, of the protagonists are not involved in the plots in any way, it is only friends and in-laws or husbands. This could be the reason why an upheaval of social thinking or change is not shown in the films.

The Bollywood films studied for the purpose of this thesis all begin with a state of equilibrium, get disrupted by the introduction of the concept of taboo, which comes as a surprise to some people, followed by some amount of shunning from some quarters of society and support from a handful, followed finally by an action by one of the protagonists or event brought about by somebody close to the protagonists, which turns the tide of disruption, leading to the return of the plot to a new state of equilibrium.

This movement from equilibrium to chaos and then back to a new, altered state of equilibrium, which is revealed through the progress of film plots, is an example of how the complex machinery of Bollywood helps to build society up in a new way, as the audience gets increasingly comfortable with hitherto uncommon reactions to relational taboos. The chaotic disturbance of a conventional situation in society, leading to a new, convention-breaking one probably lead not only new perspectives and analyses of events, but also act as triggers to self-examination by society itself (Bapis, 2008).

From the detailed analysis scripted above, it is also clear that Bollywood is indeed coming to terms with homosexuality and pre-marital sex, leading to pregnancy, in a rather bold way. While the histories or the actual acts of the protagonists performing the taboo are not, in all cases, analyzed in great detail, the storylines mostly examine, rather explicitly, the fall out of the practice of the taboos. The movies talk about the hurdles faced by the protagonists, mostly due to the shunning in various forms by various people in society are possibly a true mirror to Indian society at large, which still has not been able to accept the rather rapid changes that urban or semi-urban youth in India.

B. Further Analysis of Indian Society

The two taboos being discussed in the thesis are better understood if examined against a background of the human rights movement that started to take the world by storm from around the middle of the 20th century. From the establishment in America of the Congress of Racial Equality in 1942 and the establishment of the Committee on Civil Rights in 1946 to the Supreme Court declaration that segregation in American schools were non constitutional (Trueman, 2015), to the rise of the concept of Black Power by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, the civil rights movement – an important arm of the holistic human rights movement underwent a

lot of upheavals through the assassination of Malcom X in 1965 and Martin Luther King in 1968. The equal rights movement in America laid the seeds for more acceptance in all spheres of life, starting from gay rights to women's rights, all over the world.

Right after the Second World War – between the latter part of the 1940s through to the 1960s - homosexuals became vocal about their rights all across the West – in countries like the USA, UK, the Netherlands, and some Scandinavian nations (Miller, 2006). With the election of Maureen Colquhoun in 1974 as the Labor Party's first lesbian Member of Parliament in the UK and the election to public office of Harvey Milk in 1977 as the first homosexual man in US, the movement gathered more speed all over the world, with the idea spreading wings in Asia with the first Gay parade in the Philippines in 1994 (Ellis, 2009) and then the Netherlands being the first nation to legalize marriage between the same sex in the year 2000 (Netherlands legalizes, 2000, para 1). Similarly, the women's rights movement, starting from the late 19th century, gathering pace over the middle of the 20th century, reached its crescendo towards the end of 1900s (Gerhard, 2001). With liberation and equality on the minds of people everywhere, it is no surprise that India also latched onto its own version of a movement on human rights, as far as homosexuality and premarital sex leading to pregnancy are considered.

According to Patel (2010), with nudges over the years from the world over, it was for the first time during and after the period of the Emergency (1975-1977), that the radical nature of the human rights advocacy movement in India, post-Independence in 1947, first gathered momentum. Greater democracy and transparency were asked of the government, while dealing with oppression and suppression of all kinds now mandated a healthy, tolerant method following the basic tenets of human rights.

A wave of this feeling of tolerance and inclusion was meted out gradually to the treatment and acceptance of taboo subjects like homosexuality and premarital sex, leading to pregnancy, on screen. Add to this, that most of the films studied grossed well at the Box Office in India. And collections at the Box Office have a direct relation with feedback from the audience, regarding their preferences (Thussu, 2007). With a background set in such scenarios, the following discussion takes into account the various aspects of the Bollywood portrayals of the two taboos studied in this thesis.

1. Homophobia and the Need for Acceptance – *Fire, Girlfriend, My Brother Nikhil*

Take the cases of homosexuality dealt with in the movies studied. According to Rao and Jacob (2012), individuals who are oriented homosexually, have to fight numerous obstacles, which also include some amount of struggle while coming to terms with and expressing their sexuality, as everybody is aware of the far reaching effect that disclosure of the truth might have, and the further problems that might come with the event of disclosure. This was found true in homosexuality portrayed in the three movies (*Fire, Girlfriend, and My Brother Nikhil*). Radha and Sita, Tanya, and Nikhil – all had tried to hide their sexuality from society and indeed fought an uphill battle after the disclosure of their sexuality in a largely heterosexual society.

a. Legislation

While the American Psychiatric Association accepted homosexuality as a normal variant state in the year 1973, the World Health Organization followed close to two decades later in 1992. The transformation in the perception of homosexuality from something pathologically criminal or sinful to a human sexuality variant might have taken place in the

latter half of the 20th century elsewhere in the world (Drescher & Byne, 2009), it did not happen in India till much later, only to be overturned in another four years.

While, soon after the US and WHO, many countries had removed the tag of criminality from homosexuality and went ahead to recognize marriage and civil unions between members of the same sex, India's landmark judgement (Kumar, 2009) regarding the same topic came only in the year 2009. This is when the Delhi High Court stated as 'unconstitutional', with respect to sex between consenting adults, the Chapter XVI, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, dating back to 1860, which was introduced by the British during their centuries-long rule over the Indian subcontinent. This Section 377 had been made to criminalise activities of the sexual nature which went "against the order of nature".

In short, it deemed acts of homosexuality as criminal. Not surprisingly, activists promoting rights of homosexuals, had celebrated all over the country, as the 149-year old law, dating back to colonial times, had been routinely resorted to by the country's police force to hold, hassle, and intimidate sexual minorities for ages (Broch, 2009).

But this joy of throwing away the yoke of criminalization was short-lived. This Delhi High Court judgement was overturned on 12 December 2013, by the Supreme Court of India, which held that "amending or repealing Section 377 should be a matter left to Parliament, not the judiciary." And according to analysts, and both opponents and advocates of the law, there is hardly any chance that legislators will now act in a case where the country's highest court did not, which means the prospect of any change from the Parliament, regarding this law, happening in the near future is very unlikely (Harris, 2013).

According to Harris (2013), though people like Anjali Gopalan, founder of Naz Foundation, which had asked for the repealing of Section 377, found the new ruling shocking and believed it to be a backward step, there was another side of the coin as well. The fact that the Supreme Court ruling was in tune with a pulse in modern India became clear from the attitude of people like S.Q.R. Ilyas of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which had filed a petition backing the reversal from the 2009 ruling, that finally led to the 2013 ruling. While people like him consider homosexual relationships unethical and unnatural, they are also sure of the direct fallouts or moral problems that arise in society as a result (Harris, 2013). Much like the character of Kelly in largely Christian Goa, in *My Brother Nikhil*, who disses Nikhil as one who had gone against God, and this sin has been punished with him becoming HIV positive, Mr. Ilyas believes that it is sin, according to the religion of Islam.

b. Hidden sexualities and homophobia

In the face of national surveys showing that Indians are largely disapproving of homosexuality and remain still very conservative about such issues (Harris, 2013), it was very natural that the protagonists examined in the analysis had tried to keep their sexual identities hidden from the rampantly homophobic Indian society. Not surprisingly, therefore, that when their sexualities were out in the open, Sita and Radha from *Fire*, Tanya from *Girlfriend*, and Nikhil from *My Brother Nikhil* had to face some sort of shunning or banishment from society as they knew it. While Sita and Radha left home in the face of family shame and scandal, Tanya was dissed by Rahul constantly, and Nikhil was actually banished from the swimming pool, fired from his job, arrested by the police, and then banished for two months in a sanatorium.

Herek's view that this *homophobia* (the concept introduced as far back in 1965 by heterosexual Columbia University psychologist George Weinberg, who was trained in psychoanalytic techniques) comes from a psychodynamic perspective which spells that attitudes of prejudice actually help in the reduction of tension which is caused by conflicted minds of people in society. The characterizations of gay males as mentally sick and promiscuous, and that of lesbians as aggressive men-haters (Herek, 1984), find resonance in the portrayals of Radha and Sita and Tanya, who believe and say that they do not need men to be happy (Tanya actually hates men), while Nikhil's character, who is probed, in an extremely rude violation of his privacy, to find out about his supposed promiscuity and mental perversion.

Cory (1951) expounded that society's negative attitude towards homosexuals of the opposite-sex stem from the heterosexuals' inner feelings of being rejected as prospective sexual partners of the homosexuals being outwardly condemned. Another explanation could be that of Weinberg (1972) whose hypothesis that because most "normal" people aim for something similar to mediated immortality by becoming parents to their biological children, and because homosexual men and women are seen (albeit incorrectly) as rejectionists of this method of escaping the harsh conclusiveness of inevitable death, the non-heterosexuals are thus instruments that trigger an automatic, reflexive dread of death. It is not surprise that a conventional society like India's will still look for stereotypes as categories of cognition in order to bring about predictability and stability in the world it knows (Herek, 1984).

c. **Indian society perspective**

No matter what the exact reason behind society's rampant homophobia, according to Broch (2009), it is without doubt that Indian society, with its very traditional

communities, is notoriously known for the constant pressure it puts on men and women to get married, procreate, and obey the publicly practiced conventional rules of family. With Indian weddings being famous for being vibrant affairs involving the whole community (Harris, 2013), it is not any surprise that homosexual men and women are habitually required to live a lie, being residents of an Asian nation, typically with more limiting perspectives on homosexuality than most nations of the West.

But according to Broch (2009), fueled by the growing strength of the gay rights movements in other part of the world, Indian activists as well, have tried their best in the recent times to fight for their rights and assert them. This they have been doing by way of conducting marches in favor of gay rights and pushing the legal system for enhanced recognition and rights for the cause. So even after the remarkable 2009 Delhi high Court ruling, which said that Section 377 desecrated constitutional rights to privacy, equality, and freedom to expression, and the consequent cancellation of that by the Supreme Court of India, the movement has not lost its verve.

According to Rao and Jacob (2012), anti-homosexual perspectives, at one time taken as the norm, have transformed over the years in numerous settings, of the institutional and social kinds, in Western countries. However, like in various pockets of the world, in India too, heterosexism, which considers heterosexuality, as the ideal form of sexuality, attaches a sense of denigration and stigmatization on all any identity, behaviour, relationship or community that is not heterosexual in nature (Rao & Jacob, 2012). For example, in *Fire*, the love between Sita and Radha is considered as “hanky panky” by Mundu, who tells Ashok that it will bring dishonour to the family name for sure. In *Girlfriend*, Rahul tells Sapna off, trying to open her eyes against

Tanya's abnormal ways, by saying that Tanya does not love her in the normal way, like friends, she loves Sapna like a lover, a husband, who owns her.

In My Brother Nikhil, Nikhil's homosexuality is seen as a personal failure by his father, who wondered where he had gone wrong while bringing him up like a normal boy, with traditional values, while Nikhil's friends think he is abnormal as well, having gone against God and the natural way of things.

d. Complexities within homosexuality

This results in innumerable hurdles that homosexual individuals are faced with in every step of the way as they lead their lives in a heterosexual society. This is made worse by complexities arising from the differences in gender, sex, ethnicity, age, and religion of the individual (Drescher & Byne, 2009). According to Rao and Jacob, the homophobic perspectives of numerous leaders of social and religious communities reflect the presence of extensive bias in India (Kalra, Bhugra, & Gupta, 2010; Narrain & Chandran, 2012). Such biases against various lifestyles are intrinsic to India's numerous cultures, which are in turn assimilated into the practice of various religions, and remain a constant source of discord in society.

For example, while the younger Sita seemed to be at comparative ease in embracing her new identity as a homosexual lover, the older Radha was not that receptive to the idea at first. She had been unsure at first, and only much later, did she seem to have the courage to let go of her traditional trappings and accept her new sense of desire and longing. Also, it was noticed that the characters of Nikhil and Nigel in *My Brother Nikhil*, and the character of Tanya in *Girlfriend*, belonged to the Goan Christian community, while Sita and Radha (the meanings of these names have intimate ties with Hindu mythology and religion – both being treated as

goddesses) of the movie *Fire*, are from a traditional Hindu household. Which highlights the fact that no matter which religious sect you belong to, societal norms regarding the treatment of homosexuality are pervasive.

e. Need for acceptance

However, according to Rao and Jacob (2012), such complexities in such identities necessitate broad mindedness, acceptance, and a careful grasp of sexual issues. Aiding other people to understand their own sexualities and helping to provide support for existing in a majorly heterosexual society should be the order of the day.

In the films analysed, it was noticed that apart from *My Brother Nikhil*, where some of this acceptance is achieved in the end, Indian society, as portrayed in the other two films, *Fire* and *Girlfriend*, the protagonists suffer with no one but themselves privy to the turmoil of their hearts, desires, and sexualities. There is a dearth of data, relating to the Indian perspective, on the prevalence of emotional turmoil faced and availability of support groups for help and clinical aid for treatment, in the sphere of homosexuality. As Arora (2014) puts it, just technological modernization in various spheres will not help India, it is high time the total welfare of each and every member of the society is taken into account. According to him, acceptance, though a complex phenomenon, is the key to the solution of many of India's religious and cultural problems. With increased acceptance, life should be easier for all in India.

It was clear from the analysis of the three films dealing with homosexuality that sexuality, by definition, is a complicated phenomenon. Like with all complex manners and comportment and characteristics of various people's personalities, while various environmental and biological factors come together to lead to a distinct identity and orientation of sexuality,

Indian society now needs to change its attitude to one of acceptance and tolerance, in order to concentrate not on the aspect of sexual preference or orientation but rather on the aspect of basic humanity, bound by rights and choices (Rao & Jacob, 2012). Films such as these help to intensify the experience of change, rather than showing it as being kept bottled up (Bapis, 2008). According to the author, in this way, a new flavour of viewing and understanding newness is introduced in society, deconstructing its previous notions and reconstructing novelty. Consequently, people get exposure to new debates and negotiations regarding issues such as relational taboos and the success of the films with the audience is proof enough of raised awareness and possible path of alteration of society. Like in the films, Nikhil was shown to benefit from such attitudes of tolerance, but it is hinted that Sita, Radha and Tanya could have fared better with some more understanding on part of society of which they were a part.

2. Premarital Sex (Leading to Pregnancy) and Existing Social Support – *Kya Kehna, Salaam Namaste, Tere Sang*

Now, take the cases of performance of pre-marital sex dealt with in the films studied. In all three films, *Kya Kehna*, *Salaam Namaste*, and *Tere Sang*, the female protagonist indulges in premarital sex, albeit at a young age, and gets pregnant as a fall out. The films deal with how they tackle societal and personal issues while sticking to their decision of not hiding the pregnancy, or saying no to abortion, and carrying the pregnancies to full term, mostly in a society which largely looks down upon unwed mothers.

a. Prevalence of premarital sex, leading to pregnancy

According to Sharma (2001), a National Institute of Health and Family Welfare study, suppressed by the country's health ministry, has found that one fourth to one third of the

youth population in India take part in premarital sex. This study, overseen by V.K. Tewari, took into account the concepts of sexuality before marriage and unrequited needs for contraception among students of schools and colleges and other young people.

According to Sharma (2001), it was found that around one third of survey respondents had no awareness of safety measures during their encounters of the sexual kind. In situations like these, it is not surprising that the young women portrayed in the films studied end up getting pregnant, and have to bear the full brunt of having to live with their decision of non-termination by themselves.

According to research done by Katke, Saraogi, and Pagare (2014), though earlier it was the Western countries, such as the USA and UK, where people would generally hear about common incidences of premarital sex leading to pregnancy, it is now not only the playing field of the West when it comes to this scenario.

The researchers feel, that owing to the critical significance of various demographic and social reasons, today there is a steady rise in the number of unwed mothers in developing countries like India.

b. Problem with Illegitimacy

Even in the face of such a scenario, a traditional society like that of India still has a long way to go, in terms of being completely unruffled by the occurrence of premarital sex, leading to pregnancy, which brings us to the discussion of illegitimacy. According to Vincent (1966), the basic, non-specific issues of social import in the concept of an illegitimate birth is the utter threat it poses to the traditional idea of the family as the basic institutional unit of the social fabric. The preference that society shows for the act of reproducing only within marriage

or within some kind of relationship that is recognized socially or regulated legally between the opposite sexes, is bolstered by various social norms and laws that render sex and births within those stipulated relationships legitimate. It is within the boundary of such customs that society tends to judge sex and birth outside marriage as some kind of a problem (Vincent, 1966, p 22).

This is exactly the case in two of the films studied. In *Kya Kehna*, an unwed, pregnant Priya suddenly becomes the one person in her loving family that her father cannot bear to tolerate, given the fact that the disclosure of her pregnancy has brought him inordinate shame and totally dishonoured the name of his family. That the problem lies further than Mr. Bakshi himself, is explicitly shown by the ways in which Priya is treated by her colleagues in college, her brother's wedding reception is boycotted by the town, and Mrs. Modi, Rahul's mother, is able to instigate a whole management board of the college into orchestrating a play at the annual function, portraying a girl in a situation similar to Priya's, with the last message that, because of the immense shame that she has brought to herself and her family, there is no way out for her, other than committing suicide. This is the extent of problem that society thinks Priya has brought in their midst, by deciding to carry her illegitimate baby to full term.

In the film *Tere Sang*, the young parents-to-be are so scared of the shame they have brought on to their respective families, that they are unable to tell their parents about it for a while. When the boy Kukku finally does, his mother faints at the thought of the dishonour, while his father has a far worse reaction. When the girl's parents come to know, the first thing the father suggests, after the initial bout of rage, is that the girl needs to be removed from present society, taken far away to America, and there she needs to undergo an abortion. The sense of threat posed by the unborn illegitimate baby is such that Maahi is almost confined to a room with no contact with the world outside. While the situation of the protagonists and indeed

the plot of the stories turn later in the films, these initial reactions of society are clear instances of the ways in which Indian society uses instant value judgments to trigger the various layers of the problem of premarital sex, leading to pregnancy and illegitimate births (Vincent, 1966).

c. Unwed mothers and abortion

Because of the immense threat posed by a premarital pregnancy, it is not surprising that the initial reaction to most cases in India, is to abort the baby. Like in Japan, where there is a much low occurrence of child-bearing outside wedlock (Hertog & Iwasawa, 2011). According to them, there are many complex social perceptions in Japan, which have an immense impact on marriage, premarital pregnancy, abortion or child outside marriage. The authors say that when a Japanese woman has a child outside wedlock, she is tainted as a morally inferior person (Hertog and Iwasawa, 2011). Such perceptions, also in India, tend to make it difficult for women to veer from the norm of child bearing within wedlock.

In all three films studied, the initial reaction of people around the protagonists has been to ask the mother for an abortion. In *Kya Kehna*, Priya is asked by her parents, as well as Mrs Modi, Rahul's mother, to consider abortion. This is an unsurprising reaction from the perspective of Indian society where the problem lies in the family's concern that if the baby is carried to full term in the full glare of society (as Mrs Modi puts in "roaming around shamelessly in society with a swollen belly"), inordinate shame and dishonour would be brought to the family name, and they won't be able to show their face in society.

Another common reaction in families with financial strength would be to get rid of the baby and send the woman/girl packing, away from India and any possible scandal that might have been drummer up. This is shown in *Tere Sang*. Maahi is asked by her father to get her bags

packed for the USA the next day, where they will get the baby aborted, and she will be able to carry on her studies minus the glare of Indian society, that might have got wind of her so called shameful pregnancy.

Another common reason for prodding the mother to abort the child could come in the form of the father of child's reluctance or unpreparedness in shouldering the responsibility as a husband or parent. For example, in *Salaam Namaste*, Amber is asked by Nick to get an abortion, not because of the shame of an unwed pregnancy, considering the film is set in Melbourne, a western society, where such occurrences are not as taboo as in India (Hertog and Iwasawa, 2011), but because he is anti-marriage and cannot see himself burdened with fatherhood at that time. The couple actually visit the doctor together as well, in order to get the baby aborted. But in neither of the three movies, do the unwed mothers-to-be, actually abort their foetuses.

d. Premarital pregnancy and sense of independence and motherhood

This brings us to the discussion of how in society, especially in the West, there is the idea of independence and motherhood that is associated with carrying a premarital pregnancy to full term and being the child's caregiver. Hertog and Iwasawa (2011) talk of how in the United States, where, compared to traditional societies like Japan, there is a considerably high number of children born to unwed mothers, and how such mothers, instead of being looked down upon as persons with low or loose morals like in Japan, are actually looked upon as mature women, who know their minds and bodies, and can take full responsibility of their actions, instead of rushing head long into a marriage, just for the sake of a child.

In the films studied however, it was found, that the women protagonists were made to react in rather “Western” ways, according to definitions set by Hertog and Iwasawa (2011). For example, in *Kya Kehna*, when Priya is asked by her parents to abort her unborn foetus, she refuses. With her impending motherhood, she is overwhelmed by her desire to provide everything for her baby. She wants to study herself and give her baby the opportunity to do higher studies and give him or her everything required to facilitate that. This sense of motherhood and maturity, triggered, among other things, by the figure of the baby God Krishna, who speaks to her from a photograph on the walls, calling out to her as “Ma” brings her closer to Hertog and Iwasawa’s concept of the mature, unwed American mother, than to the sad, loose-moral Japanese unwed mother. This is another example of how a Bollywood film reconstructs the conventional truth of Indian society, which would perhaps have triggered Priya to abort the child or be ashamed about her pregnancy. In the transformed society portrayed in the film, the protagonist Priya, much like her possible Western counterpart, gives the audience a glimpse of the independence that a guilt-free unwed mother can have in order to give her child a socially unencumbered life.

In the film *Tere Sang*, Maahi and Kukku, though very young to make mature decisions, decide anyway to not abort their baby and instead carry it to full term. They make sure nobody gets to disturb their plans by moving to a secluded place in the hills, without informing their parents, during the course of the pregnancy, such that nobody can force them to get rid of the child. In this way, Maahi, as well as Kukku, though not married, show immense sense of responsibility towards their unborn child. It is the sense of parenthood that propel the young protagonists to carry themselves in a highly responsible fashion, earning their keeps, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the health of the mother-to-be.

In *Salaam Namaste*, even though Amber initially goes to the doctor's clinic with Nick, with the intention of getting the foetus aborted, she finally cannot make herself go through with it. She is swayed by the ultrasound of a woman she meets at the clinic, and thinks of her baby growing in the same way in a few months, and she cannot bear the thought of getting it killed. She decides to keep it, telling Nick that the baby's responsibility will be totally hers. She eats well, does yoga, asks Nick to take a thalassemia test to rule out the condition for the baby, and does everything she can, all alone, to take care of her unborn child.

e. **Premarital pregnancy and marriage**

While Hertog and Iwasawa (2011) contrast Japanese and American women, regarding the concepts of abortion to avoid shame in society and the concept of giving birth to a child outside marriage, in a display of maturity and independence, Indian women, as represented in the films studied, show a combination of both value systems. They are shown to reject abortion like the Americans, but in the end of all the films, instead of showing the mother with the possibility of bringing up the child alone, Bollywood negotiates the topic in its characteristic manner – happy endings. For in all the films, the endings mention the marriage between the unwed mother and the biological father. Which means, the audience goes home happy, meaning better business for the producers (Dunnigan, 2004).

In *Kya Kehna*, both Ajay, Priya's childhood friend and Rahul, the biological father of her new born child, propose to her. She rejects Rahul, because he had rejected her once, and settles for Ajay, who had been by her side through thick and thin, and who readily wants to bring up her and Rahul's child as his very own. This news of the upcoming marriage brings much happiness around, including that of Priya's father, whose concern about the baby having a "father's name" is now taken care of. This had been one of his earlier reasons for concern, when

he had requested Rahul to marry Priya, right after the discovery of the pregnancy, in tune with the idea of Vincent (1966), that illegitimate children outside marriage are aberrations which threaten society.

The film *Tere Sang* ends with the notion that though Kukku is for the moment being sent to a juvenile home, there are enough reasons for happiness all around, as Maahi is still in love with him, but more importantly, both sets of parents have now reconciled with each other, and are happy with the new born grandchild – the typical picture of a happy Indian family, with parents, grandparents and such, the dominant strand in the life of an Indian person and the community he or she inhabits (Mullatti, 1992). And this importance of the functioning of society with family as the basic unit, comes from the notion of India's traditional society that attaches much importance on family unity and integrity, with the central idea of collectivism, which is defined as “a sense of harmony, interdependence and concern for others” (Hui & Triandis, 1986, p. 244).

In *Salaam Namaste*, though Amber is shown as an independent woman, studying to be a surgeon, working as an RJ to be able to pay rent, take care of herself and her child, and put herself through school, in the end, in typical Bollywood style, the notion of marriage is introduced. Nick makes it a point to propose to Amber on the delivery table, in fact, making the doctor wait, till she said yes, because, as he puts in, her saying yes to the marriage has to happen before the children are born. This might be his typical mentality of helping her out from a situation where she, with a premarital pregnancy, and thereby probably the label of a woman with loose morals (Hertog & Iwasawa, 2011) and might be spared, with the notion of marriage or engagement made final before the pregnancy literally comes to fruition.

In short, through the storylines of the films and consequently by the ability to receive such plots on the screen by the film audiences, Bollywood is gradually helping society to deconstruct its moralistic positions on relational taboos and then helping reconstruct a mass mental shift in which society is able to view and accept previous taboos in a more receptive frame of mind.

C. Cultural Globalization

According to Mohammada (2007), the complex mechanism of the Indian society is at base a blend of a plethora of ancient, regional subcultures. It is, on the background of such a scenario, that norms and customs in Indian society have acted as beacon to the people's practices of their varied cultures, which have under their folds everything from the practice of various languages and the arts to the myriad faiths, habits, and rituals.

But the onward march of time brings about transformations in the old custom and practices. As Inglehart and Baker (2000) said, modernization, defined by overpowering forces of political and economic strains, triggers changes in culture, leading to novel, fresh bunches of tenets and beliefs that can result in a total overhaul of traditional ethics, morals, and principles, and substitute them with more modern ones. And this, inevitably, results in a society almost caught unawares amidst the opened floodgates of change, much like it happened in India, towards the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century.

It was in the year 1991 that the cultural scenario in India started to change with an economic upheaval. Derne (2005) propounds that while India had been pursuing economic progression in an autonomous manner with very regulated global participation till the middle of the 1980s, it was the Rajiv Gandhi administration, which around this time, started on the path of

a certain amount of liberalization in the economic sphere. Soon after, with the Gulf War leading to a hike in the price of oil, India got caught in a “foreign-exchange crisis” (Derne, 2005, p. 34). This forced the government to take a bail out deal from the IMF, as part of which the country had to lessen investment restrictions, devalue the rupee, relax controls over foreign exchange. According to Shurner-Smith (2000), within a span of merely half a decade, imports became more than twice the earlier amount, exports more than thrice the earlier amount, and investment from foreign entities increased by more than five times.

Derne (2005) strings this economic globalization with its cultural counterpart. “Until 1991, Indian television and film constituted one of the world’s most protected media markets, but deregulation transformed the media landscape” (pp. 34-35). Propelled by advertisers’ dire desire to reach out to the maximum number of audience groups in the newly opened market scenario, India’s single state-controlled television channel in 1991 was joined by more than 70 by the end of 1999. While in the year 1990, only about 10 percent of the Indian population in urban areas has access to television, the percentage increased to 75 by 1999. Derne (2005) continued his explanation with more fantastic numbers – in 1991, only 300,000 homes had access to cable television, this number increased to 24 million in the year 1999. Similarly, as Thussu (2000) put it, because of foreign exchange restrictions, only a few Hollywood movies were screened in India in the year 1991, but this number increased by a huge margin in the next nine years.

This exposure to Western media definitely had its effect on the Indian population. “The advent of globalization has introduced new cultural celebrations of autonomy and individual choice” (Derne, 2005, p. 37). In the Indian socio-cultural context, such concepts of sovereignty and personal choice led to young people – the biggest group in the newly opened up audience

market in India- opening up increasingly to topics of dating, premarital sex, abortion, and premarital pregnancy, along with homosexuality, which were till then shoved under the carpet, as a phenomenon of Western origins, which did not concern Indians or happen in India (Pande, 2013).

And all of these issues, previously acknowledged to be predominantly Western, are performed by various protagonists in the six films studied. To be noted, that the films were all released post 1991 and the ease of acceptance of the notions of taboo increases with the passage of time. It also needs to be remembered that the Gay movement really gained momentum in India in 2009, with the first Gay Parade of the country held in Delhi. Since then the gay rights movement has been a critical human rights movement in the country. But all the films studied were released before 2009, so the message of the movement did not have a chance to affect the production or reception of the films. Yet, most of these films have received commendation from the film-going public, as is evidenced by their results in the Box Office.

Among the group of movies dealing with homosexuality, while in *Fire*, released in the year 1996, the lesbian couple have no other option but to leave home, in *Girlfriend* (2004), Sapna, Tanya, and Rahul are shown to accept very normally the gay character of their friend Jojo, and the final shunning of the lesbian Tanya is done not because of her homosexuality, but because of her evil intentions of causing harm, and sympathy is shown to her when she says she has her hatred of men, and consequent love for women, stems from the sexual abuse she had suffered as a child. *My Brother Nikhil*, released about five years later, portrays a more liberal outlook from the very start, as the sister Anamika is shown to be aware and appreciative of the relationship her brother shares with his partner Nigel, and though Nikhil underwent a lot of

torture during the duration of the film, at the end of the film, everyone from his parents to the headmaster of the school, and their friends are seen accepting of the notion of homosexuality.

Among the other group of films, in *Kya Kehna* (2000), Priya faces banishment initially, but is later embraced by all, even in the semi-rural hamlet that is her home. *Salaam Namaste*, which released five years after *Kya Kehna*, shows hardly any taboo associated with a couple living in, having intercourse, leading to pregnancy, and then a couple having a child out of wedlock. What helps this more, is the setting of the story in urban Melbourne, away from India. But what ties the story to the Indian psyche are the thoroughly Indian characters who play the main roles. In *Tere Sang*, which released a year after *Salaam Namaste*, similarly the taboo or sense of scandal that forced the protagonists to run away, might have had more to do with their fearing their parents' wrath than their understanding of societal pressure. Even in this film, it is shown in the end that parents readily accept the new grandchild, and thereby the relationship between the new parents. In this way, Bollywood helps Indian to take a step ahead, reshaping reactions to previously taboo subjects. But, a baby step nonetheless, as interestingly, the films help also seem to sustain a flavor of the old, by the mention of union of the new parents by way of marriage, which somehow probably adds the legitimate mark to the child born out of wedlock,

But no matter when these movies were released, the protagonists were shown to be urban, or semi-urban, in mindsets, and with the exception perhaps of protagonists of *Fire*, which was filmed entirely in English, the main protagonists of the other movies, which were filmed in Hindi, were shown to be fluent in English or at least Hinglish, a hybrid of south Asian languages with English (Coughlan, 2006), which shows that they are part of the upper middle class of society, as opposed to those who use incorrect English or vernacular, which “denotes

lack of social or cultural capital” (Gera Roy, 2013, p. 31). English is also the tool of globalization—that the main characters of these films speak fluent English means that the players are those who have access to the outside world and have become globalized, and hence their encountering of traditional Indian relational taboos must confront the cultural challenges and alternative perspectives.

V. CONCLUSION

India's boldness with onscreen taboos seems to be reaching a crescendo, as mainstream movies get more and more courageous in their portrayal of love and relationships, in their various forms. The thesis has tried to examine the commonalities behind these portrayals through the detailed study of six films that best express the taboos through the storyline and dialogues.

India, with all her trappings of an ancient civilization with age-old social and cultural norms has been on the brink of social change for the past few decades, especially with the opening up of the Indian skies in the 90s (Bhatt, 1994). Though there has been the odd bold movie in Bollywood since the 70s, the sudden spur has been observed only towards the end of the 20th century. The analysis came to the conclusion that while most films dealing with taboos dared to speak boldly of subjects hitherto not so familiar on screen to Indian audiences, the makers of the films had in all cases shown a happy ending, where love, in some form or the other, wins – which in fact, is the typical story denouement for any conventional Bollywood film.

The Indian audiences may be more receptive to ideas of taboo on screen today, but the fact that all the stories keep the audience happy and might have veered from what most likely happens in real life, shows that India still has a long way to go. At best, the message portrayed in the films act as a bridge between India's traditional sense of morality and its recent brush with involvement in ideas previously considered taboos in society. While dealing with taboo ideas at the core of the plots, the films might have an overarching happy ending to keep the audience pleased, but in almost all the films there is a hint of some sort of unhappiness or discomfort, expressed through the death of a protagonist, protagonists having to leave homes,

being sent to juvenile homes, ending up marrying someone not traditionally expected of them, and so on. In this way, the films possibly try to portray some sort of retribution or paying of a price for the practice of taboo in today's society. This can be interpreted as - if not a totally open society yet, India is on its way to making baby steps towards more openness, starting with bold flirtation with taboo ideas on screen.

Because the analysis was done by only one researcher, such a study was most likely prone to a subjective lens of analysis, which might have taken away some value from its merit. Absence of a quantitative aspect of research in this study also adds to its limitations. For future research, such discourse analysis of six films could be provided with critical support from the utilization of a content analysis method simultaneously. A content analysis of the number of times various strategic words or phrases or cinematic devices are used would provide additional insight.

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