

Inherited Wounds of Womanhood and Becoming a Killjoy through Indian Cinema *Haq & Bulbbul*

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the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that.

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Approval

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Abstract

This research will explore how female protagonists of Indian Cinema in *Haq* and *Bulbbul* are portraying female resistance in a positive light while showcasing the narrative of the society. Both the protagonist has become a killjoy by choosing resistance over endurance. In Indian culture women are often seen suffering and enduring violence in their own households But when they finally try to resist, they become the Killjoy of the society. This paper will mainly showcase how feminist resistance appears in contemporary Indian cinema. It will explore the ideas of inherent trauma, domestic violence, patriarchy and feminist resistance in our culture. *Bulbbul* (2020) presents a gothic myth which is based on child marriage, sexual violence and revenge in supernatural form whereas, the movie *Haq* (2025) is inspired by a real life case of Shah Bano of 1985, this movie deals with unrealistic expectation and emotional negligence in marriage in a realist manner.

The objective of this study is to show how women's suffering is normalised as tradition and virtue within family structures. This study has used mostly quantitative methods for the research. For instance, thematic analysis of the films focusing on narrative structure, character development and visuals. Research papers that are relevant with the theories like gender performativity by Judith Butler, Sigmund Freud's theory about and Sara Ahmed's feminist theory of Killjoy are also read thoroughly for a deeper understanding of the concepts. This research argues that both the female leads eventually become disruption of the society as they fail to sustain in imposed environments. They choose to resist in their own ways. *Bulbbul*'s changing into a supernatural avenger uncovers the violent roots of patriarchal order. Meanwhile, Shazia Bano's choice to leave her marital home shows a quiet but radical act of withdrawal from exploitation. Although their forms of resistance differ both challenge the social systems that romanticize women's endurance. This paper will try to demonstrate how contemporary cinematic narratives are also exposing the harsh realities of the society by portraying women's resistance, challenging the harmony of the society by being a Killjoy.

Keywords: Cinema, inequality, killjoy, woman, systematic oppression, *Haq*, *Bulbbul*, patriarchy, women's agency, Trauma .

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Chapter: 1 Introduction and Methodology

We humans love to abide by our ideologies. These ideologies are not constructed overnight. These are years of beliefs, practices and lived experiences that shape every one of us. Cinema is one of the influential ideological apparatus shaping our consciousness. We gradually become what we believe, practice, nurture and consume within us. These things have a greater impact on building our personalities and perceptions about life. Over time we function believing that these things are natural and not socially engineered within us. A critical yet subtle aspect can be seen in our law, system, language and culture. But we often overlook these not even realising how greatly these ideologies are being embodied within us. From many of the social issues this paper is mainly concerned with female resistance and representation shown through Indian Cinemas. While putting Feminist killjoy in the spotlight this paper will mainly work with how female resistance is regulated and interpreted in the society through two films named *Bulbbul* and *Haq*. As cinema is not only a cultural artifact but also can work as a critical site for exposing gendered power dynamics, violence against women, female resistance and female agency. These analyses can help us to rethink and ask questions about the reality we are fed to believe.

1.1: Statement of Problem:

Films made within our subcontinent have a strong role and influence in our system and society. The beliefs and power structures are so systematically rooted in our brains that we often take them as a regular practice and subconsciously normalise them without questioning. Have we ever considered how a woman's identity in society is defined by 'Ms' and 'Mrs' and a man from his birth to death remains as 'Mr'. Meaning a woman is known for her ability to be a Man's wife or her relationship with marriage whereas a man is known for his ability to contribute to society as an individual regardless of their marital status. This linguistic distinction clearly indicates the patriarchal system of our society. We call women widows when their husband dies but we are not even familiar with the word 'widower' as men are never known for their roles in a woman's life. These structures are socially constructed through years of practice. The primary goal of this

paper is to examine how gender roles are learned, imposed, and ultimately resisted, and how this resistance is seen as a disruption to society. As years of sacrifices, endurance and obedience that women made to maintain their positions in family and society are seen as a virtue. Years of being oppressed and dominated by their own male acquaintances who are apparently responsible for their safety and security made women question their pain, agency and identity. As in most cultures often women are raised and told to be patient and sacrifice or never complain while being oppressed as if it's their responsibility, by their own mothers and grandmothers in the name of being a virtuous woman. As Indian cinema is transitioning from traditional ideas to finally represent the hidden realities and uncomfortable truths of our society, films like *Haq* and *Bulbul* are made. Even to this date where people are being educated and aware about their social conditions still these ideas are so relevant and being practiced in some parts of our societies. Moreover, In most cases, women are character associated or viewed as disruption when they stand up against oppression. As Sara Ahmed has talked in her feminist theory of killjoy. These women are considered as problems as they expose the reality without being a participant of this illusion that they are satisfied and happy in this dominating structure. Cinemas are a great medium for social construction and exposing realities through their work. For decades, the media was only focused on showing these problems in a stereotypical manner but a lot has been revolving. People have finally started working on finding the reality rather than focusing on the traditional practices and norms. Now these mediums have started focusing on difficult parts of the society like, emotional negligence, domestic violence and gender inequality rather than just glorifying women as sacrificing loving mothers and wives. As this practice has been started this stage has become a prominent medium where gender roles are being questioned and reimaged through different lenses.

This research is exploring how female resistance is shown through Indian cinema focusing on two films *Haq* (2020) and *Bulbbul* (2025). Both of these films have different narrative styles and genres but the main ideas are showcasing the horror of our society. How women respond to oppression and how they are portrayed when they take a stand against injustice. *Haq* deals with emotional negligence and unreal expectations from women in marriage whereas, *Bulbbul* deals with a gothic myth which is based on child marriage, sexual violence and revenge in supernatural manner. The setting of this film was in colonial Bengal. In both of these films the female protagonists fall victim to the society as they resist and become a disruption for not playing the

part imposed on them. As this research is concerned with how female sufferings are being normalised and gender performativity has become a thing in Indian culture both of these films will help to analyse and identify the root causes and how it is being demonstrated in our society without our knowledge. The research mainly shows how patriarchy is not only demonstrated through the male or the society but it is a continuous process that is systematically enforced through generations and years of oppression. The films are showing how some ideologies that are practiced and maintained in our culture should not be normalized and how female resistance is very important for a positive change in our society.

This paper will try to seek answers from how women become a 'killjoy' when they refuse to perform in the script structured by the society. When they defy the narratives they are often associated with being selfish. No matter how small the act of resistance is they are always questioned and challenged as they disrupt the stability of the society. In both of the films the protagonists not only tolerate violence but also trauma for standing up for themselves. Bulbbul's supernatural transformation symbolises a burst of repressed trauma and the effects of a system that silences and exploits women on a regular basis. While Sajia Bano's continuous resistance showcases her determination to stand up against injustice. She almost spends her entire life fighting against what is her right. Characters like Sajia Bano and Bulbbul are not only part of the movie, they are representing all the women standing up against oppression and fighting for their dignity. This paper aims to find out how these problematic structures are blended in our society, how it operates and the root causes of patriarchal structures. So that the hidden ways of maintaining power can be exposed and women do not feel reluctant to use their voice against dominance, violence and inequality.

1.2: Methodology:

To explore these themes this study uses a qualitative method combining with textual, thematic, visual and comparative studies that looks closely at analyzing the movies. This method is good for analyzing movies because it helps the researcher look at story meaning, symbols, character growth and visual representation in detail. This approach focuses on understanding how ideas and themes are built within the movies. The main sources for this research are the movies *Bulbbul* (2020) and *Haq* (2025). Both of these movies are analysed to find themes related to men controlling women, domestic violence, emotional neglect, family trauma and women fighting

against patriarchy. Highlighted scenes of violence, systematic politics and resistance are also closely read to analyse how trauma is transmitted through generations and refusal makes a woman Killjoy of the society. Specific scenes are picked for analysis to understand how movie elements like dialogue, camera work, symbols and story structure help showcase these highlighted themes. These thematic analysis will help to understand the reoccurring patterns in the film which are relevant ideologies of our society. In *Bulbbul* we see how violence and child marriage is something that is normalised as the man plays a prominent part of the society. We also look at the symbols in the movie like the colors, the lighting and how things are arranged to understand how the film shows power and trauma. We look at how *Bulbbul* uses these symbols to tell its story.

Similarly, the analysis of *Haq* will help seek answers about how marriage affects people emotionally and the pressure women face to keep their families happy. It takes a look at what the characters say and do to see how society's expectations influence Shazia Banos decisions and how she fights against these expectations. By looking at the two movies the study shows the ways that women can stand up for themselves in movies. The research also looks at sources, scholars have written. Academic writings secondary sources about the relevant theories and discussion on similar topics. how men and women have very different positions, how movies are made inspired by different ideologies from society. These sources give us ideas that will help to further elaborate and understand the movie's thematic structure, main ideas and how it is connected with the theories like gender performativity, Feminist Killjoy and people being a product of their trauma. The ideas of Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed and Sigmund Freud are really important to understand how people are expected to act like men or women, how people see those who resist and how trauma can be passed down from one generation to the another. Close reading of these theories will be done to connect them with the ideas of the movies. As all of these theories are interconnected and relevant with each other which will help to do in depth research and different perceptions of the situation. Combining both textual and thematic ideas from the movie will help us to find out where the Indian film Industry engages with this sensitive feminist issues and ideologies. The qualitative technique also helps to find out what the themes represents but also how the visuals, settings, narrative and film making has a big impact on meaning making.

1.3: Rationale of the Study:

This research critically reflects how patriarchal structures affect female agency. It is a continuing shaping of women's life and their lived experiences in society. These oppressive structures are forced upon women from a very early stage of their lives through family structures and relationships. These systems are so deeply rooted within the society that oppression against women might seem very normal practice. Through these findings from the films these structures can be exposed, explained and challenged. This research is particularly useful for using cinema as a method to influence and investigate social realities and perceptions. From the old time women's characters were developed as naive, sacrificing and submissive and those who opposed them were seen as villains or cunning. But in contemporary times these ideologies are being challenged by the modern cinema as they are exposing the uncomfortable realities through films like *Bulbbul* and *Haq*. These films not only shed light on systems of oppression but also why female resistance is often considered a social threat.

The second significant rationale for this study is the lack of attention given to how women's resistance to patriarchy is perceived. Although there are many feminist studies on oppression and resistance, there are fewer that explore why women who refuse to conform to gender roles are socially demonised as troublemakers or killjoys. This study draws on Sara Ahmed's notion of the Feminist Killjoy in an effort to grasp how the women resist practices that maintain the status quo of happiness, obedience, and harmony through female sacrifice. By incorporating this analysis with theories of gender performativity and generational trauma, this research seeks to expose how patriarchal ideology is reproduced and naturalised through cultural training. In essence, this study is important because it adds to feminist literary, cultural and film studies by using film as a medium to expose invisible systems of power. It aims to raise awareness of the normalisation of oppression and the demonisation of resistance, and the need for women's voices challenging inequality for progressive social change.

1.4: Objective of the Study:

General Objective:

The general objective of this research is to use the figure of feminist killjoy to employ how resistance is seen in Indian films. Critically engaging with the idea of female protagonist representations in Indian contemporary cinema while exploring how this resistance creates problems for deeply rooted social structures, politics, trauma and cultural values.

Specific Objectives:

1. Examining the hidden politics and patriarchal structures embodied within the culture.
2. Analysis of female agency, oppression, trauma and resistance through *Bulbbul* and *Haq*.
3. To investigate how women who resist become Feminist Killjoys for society as they create disruption in the social order.
4. Exploring the role of generational trauma, gender performativity and law to maintain and legitimize social oppression.
5. To research, how Cinema is one of the strongest mediums to expose these issues while questioning existing ideologies.

1.5: Scope and Limitations:

This study explores the portrayal of female oppression, resistance and empowerment in patriarchal societies from a feminist critical perspective through the analysis of the films *Bulbbul* and *Haq*. The main research question of this study is to investigate how the films depict women's experiences of emotional abuse, domestic violence, social oppression, gender-based violence, and cultural expectations placed upon them by patriarchal society. Simultaneously, the study examines how female characters challenge these oppressive social structures and are seen as outsiders when they do not align with socially acceptable roles of submission, sacrifice and passivity. In doing so, the study aims to understand how women's resistance is constructed as rebellion or selfishness, as opposed to a search for justice, respect and equality.

The study is confined to a thematic and textual analysis of the films. It focuses on particular scenes, conversations, symbols, character building, and filmmaking techniques to explore representations of oppression, trauma and resistance. It also explores the theoretical frameworks of Gender Performativity by Judith Butler, Feminist Killjoy by Sara Ahmed and ideas of trauma

and generational learning from Sigmund Freud to understand how patriarchal values are socially constructed, reiterated, naturalised, and reproduced. These theories provide insights into how suffering of women is culturally normalised and how resistance from oppression causes a disruption in social structures of silence and compliance. But this study does have limitations. As this research is limited to only two films *Bulbbul* and *Haq* it is confining the broader context. The Indian film industry has more such films that need attention for their own purposes. As it is only focused on specific cultural and timeline it is lacking to provide insight for other cultural contexts as the study is lacking behind those ideas. Moreover, this study would have been more effective if audiences' perspectives could be provided apart from the qualitative part of the study. The survey, interviews and quantitative aspects would have made the research more effective and strong. As it will give an idea about the audience's view on female representation and resistance. And the study is constrained by its focus on particular feminist and psychoanalytic theories, which determine its focus. Other theories, such as postcolonial feminism, Marxist feminism, or intersectional feminism, could be applied, but are not discussed in this study, the research is important in identifying how film is a strong medium for revealing invisible patriarchal structures, challenging oppression as normalised, and how women's resistance is represented as a vital means of social awareness and change.

Chapter: 2 Research Questions & Theoretical Framework

2.1: Research Questions:

1. Why are the protagonists of *Haq* & *Bulbbul* portrayed as Feminist Killjoys?
2. How do Gender Performativity, Feminist Killjoy, and Trauma theories help to identify hidden gendered power structures in these films?
3. How do the protagonists of *Haq* and *Bulbbul* resist differently while getting similarly socially stigmatized?
4. How does society's reaction to female resistance reinforce patriarchal gender norms in both of these films?

Theoretical Framework

This paper focuses on examining the ways women are represented, oppressed and violated when they choose to express their views and stand against patriarchal oppression. In the film *Bulbbul* and *Haq* we see the protagonist becoming a killjoy for society. To elaborate on this we need to first elaborate theories like gender performativity by Judith Butler, Sigmund Freud's theory about generational trauma and Sara Ahmed's feminist theory of Killjoy. These theories are important to identify and analyze how the society constructs roles for different genders, how females sufferings are normalized because of years of cultural norms and finally how the society reacts when someone oppressed tries to break the toxic cycle of repression and starts to resist. These theories are different from each other and come from different time frames and circumstances but they compliment each other by elaborating each other's ideas. For instance, Judith Butler's Gender performativity is a theory that came from his book named, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in this theory he mainly talks about how gender is a made up illusion by society. It's not real. Society has constructed some ideas about each gender and they should act on that. These qualities are not something people are born with; rather it is some kind of script we all are trying to follow and make a good performance to satisfy the expectations of the people. We are forced to believe that these gender identities are important for building a stable society and the one who refuses to act upon becomes a disruptive influence for it. This concept was formally introduced in the year 1990. These ideas were further refined in Butler's 1988 essay named "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*". Moreover, another theory developed by Sara Ahmed is called Feminist Killjoy. It was initially developed in 2010. She wrote a book *The promises of Happiness*. In this book she talked about the idea of people, especially women becoming a killjoy when they challenge the narrative about happiness. She further explains how in different cultures the narrative about happiness is already set. People who defy the script directly contradict that idea. She mainly focuses on the relationship between language, bodies and emotions. For instance, women are always bound to maintain family unity or show obedience. It is taught in some cultures that obedience brings prosperity and happiness rather than questioning. A virtuous woman always follows the rules and makes sacrifices for her family. So when any individual chooses not to do it they become a problem more effectively a Killjoy, a person who disturbs and destroys everyone's happiness by being selfish. Sara Ahmed further elaborated this theory in her 2017's book named *living a feminist life*. In this theory she emphasizes on how women are

taught to do emotional labor in the name of being a good mother, wife and family member. Furthermore, Sigmund Freud's theory about psychoanalysts describes how men are the product of their own trauma. This theory was developed in the 1980s. Although he focused on childhood trauma he also developed a theory about how men are driven by their inner desires. Later on, inspired by his ideas, the term generational trauma was introduced by Vamik Volkan in 1960-1990.

2.2: Gender Performativity by Butler:

In Butler's theory he challenges the assumption that gender is natural selection of roles. She argues that gender is made up of an illusion by performing repetitive functions and actions. People are not born into it, rather they are shaped by repeated experiences and performing in society. She believes the idea of masculinity and femininity is developed by society and in order to meet that expectation individuals are forced to accept those norms and accordingly. There is no raw individualism in people because of these practices. Most of the people are losing authenticity because of this constant pressure and acting according to societal expectations. As these acts are constantly repeated these behaviors are considered as normal and gender is seen as something stable and neutral. Butler contradicts with this idea. She believes men and women are bound to learn how to act like men or women by the society from the time they understand anything. For instance we often see how girl babies are encouraged to play with dolls whereas baby boys are encouraged to play with cars or other objects associated with male population. But if girls and boys defy to do so they are highly criticized by their own parents and corrected to choose differently. These subtle but effective practices are the core reason behind why gender performativity is a thing in our culture. Then when these children grow up, men are told to show less emotions, be stronger and tough whereas, women are told to be emotional, obedient and soft spoken. Whenever the script is not followed people show displeasure. In Indian culture there is a profound proverb called “Mard Ko Dard Nehi Hota” meaning men are not supposed to feel pain. This proverb provides a powerful reminder how the culture is building mentality and unrealistic expectations. The reality is far from it. People are supposed to feel pain and emotions; it does not have anything to do with their gender identity. In addition, in women's cases they are told to endure pain oppression from very early ages by their own mothers. Not only their behaviors are often influenced by the culture but also they are expected to feel emotions accordingly. A woman

who sacrifices is always seen as a good mother but a woman who chooses herself is seen as a selfish person. A woman's character is directly associated with her family's reputation but when men do the same actions they are not questioned as brutally as the woman facing the same circumstances. These performances are the examples of gender performativity imposed by the society and proves how gender is not a natural identity rather its a repeating pattern practiced and constructed by the society in the name of creating a stable system.

2.3: Feminist Killjoy By Sara Ahmed:

In Sara Ahmed's theory Feminist killjoy she mainly discusses the reaction of the society when the roles designated by them are not maintained. While Butler focuses on how these roles are constructed Ahmed explores what happens when the roles are not performed accordingly specifically by women. To elaborate, in our culture we often see how children are taught not to say any unpleasant things while eating with the family. Because when they do the father or the guardian of the family may get offended and create a conflict about that. But the reality is the family member was simply trying to put her point across. But the mother was trying to convey a message more like if somebody has authority you are bound to follow his authority without questioning and giving your own opinion. But as human beings we all have different ways of thinking. But from a very early stage girls are told not to talk about their feelings or opinions. We are taught to follow through without questioning our authorities. Most Indian families are built like that. In most cultures the narrative of a happy family depends on a woman sacrificing her happiness or doing emotional labor for that family. The killjoy becomes a killjoy when she stands up against this stigma pointing out how it should not be normalized. Instead of accepting these oppressive notions they chose to openly express their mind. That's when the real problem arises as according to the society they are disturbing the stability by not abiding by the regular or normalized norms. But this creates discomfort and by addressing such things she is directly standing against patriarchy. As they expose the reality of inequality and injustice they are mostly dismissed and portrayed as a problem so that the society can easily do their hidden politics in the name of harmony and stability.

2.4: Sigmund Freud's idea of trauma and psychoanalysts:

In addition to Sara Ahmed's theory, Sigmund Freud's idea of trauma and psychoanalysts also plays an important role for understanding the generational trauma. To understand why women abide by these rules even after being oppressed for years. Why do they teach the exact same norms to their daughters without making them aware or telling them to break the cycle? People become the product of their lived experiences. Some experiments suggest that there is a high chance where bullied people turned into bullies. Also sometimes the fear of being rejected also makes these women the way they act. In Indian culture it's pretty common to neglect and character assassinate women who are no longer with their husbands. The society makes it so hard for them that in most of the cases they remain shut and endure everything for the security. This theory also gives ideas about how painful experiences influence individuals choices in life. Not only that but these traumatic experiences also always remain in people's unconscious mind if not treated. Most of the time these experiences become repressed as it becomes too overwhelming for an individual to process. Much later in life these experiences can shape people's perceptions and reactions to different incidents. Although Freud did not use the term 'generational trauma' in his theory, a lot of the scholars have used his ideas to describe this form of trauma. For instance, if a certain form of oppression or violence is normalized in a culture for a very long time it becomes an embodied part of the society without even being realized. This is why a mother who is oppressed for most of her life in most cases tells their children to endure because of the fear of being rejected. As they have been living in fear most of their life and they don't want to break the cycle in the name of survival. In patriarchal societies women often get oppressed, emotionally neglected and abused. These things are normalized in the name of being tradition or norms. Practices like child marriage, domestic violence and women silenced in the name of obedience is a pretty common practice in Indian culture. These things are happening from generations. That is why it is being transmitted and expected from women to suffer in silence without questioning and endure, reproducing the same pattern that has been happening for years.

2.5: Theoretical Integration:

Taking a close inspiration from Judith Butler's concept of Gender Performativity, Sara Ahmed's idea of Feminist Killjoy, and the psychoanalytical explanations of trauma associated with Sigmund Freud, this study critically investigates how women's oppression, defiance and identity are represented in *Bulbbul* and *Haq*. While the theories may arise from diverse intellectual

spheres, they cumulatively provide us with an adequate framework for discerning how patriarchal orders are socially constituted, affectively internalized, and finally challenged by women who defy submission. Judith Butler's concept of Gender Performativity highlights how gender is not an innate or fixed identity, but a socially performed act and the repetition of this performance, on the basis of prescribed notions of masculinity and femininity, determines it as natural. While men are associated with authority, power and control, it is believed that women inherently exist as obedience, sacrifice, softness and silence. Both Bulbul and Shazia Bano of *Bulbul* and *Haq* appear to inhabit prescribed roles imposed by their respective patriarchs. However, they reject their performative roles to effectively challenge the patriarchal structure and demonstrate gender roles as being socially constructed rather than a factual occurrence. Moreover, this form of resistance is deeply related to Sara Ahmed's idea of the Feminist Killjoy, where those who defy normative structures appear as objects whose presence "ruins" the collective satisfaction of men. Patriarchal structures largely thrive upon the semblance of peaceful existence where women's silence and emotional labors are considered imperative for its continuation. When a woman revolts against the atrocity, she is invariably categorized as a selfish rebel whose act of rebellion disturbs the societal order built upon injustice and pain. Both Bulbul and Shazia Bano seem to be a manifestation of the feminist killjoy; they defy the order created through their suffering. Instead of accepting suffering as destiny, they engage directly with the domestic, emotional and cultural violence that confines them and exposes the insidious workings of the patriarchal regime. Their revolt is also intertwined with the notion of trauma, as analyzed from psychoanalytical perspectives in Freud's psychoanalysis, particularly his concepts of repression, unconscious memory and affective inheritance. According to Freud, suffering or trauma does not die a natural death, rather it remains hidden in the realm of the unconscious and affects the functioning of a person's thought, feeling and action. In *Bulbul*, her rage and resistance seem to be the outburst of her repressed past, be it her childhood marriage, abuse or abandonment. Shazia Bano of *Haq* too appears as someone who, after bearing the long emotional torture of cruelty, unfairness and silencing, now cannot possibly sustain herself any further in an unacknowledged life.

Chapter 3: Literature Review & Research Gap

In previous academic research, Feminist studies are mostly focused on how patriarchy is formed and practiced in our society or how women resist it. But there are very limited studies on how society reacts when women resist. It is important to understand what kind of beliefs are being manifested around us. Also, Indian Cinema is going through a great transition. As the media plays a huge role influencing and representing culture and society. While the entertainment industry was more focused on showing sacrifice as a virtue for women they are finally showcasing real issues and what happens when a woman finally resists and how the society reacts to her resistance through movies like *Haq* and *Bulbbul*. The fact that these movies are released in 2025 and 2020 shows how relevant these stories are even in the twenty-first century. This research tries to demonstrate resistance as a disruptive force rather than an act of survival through analysing contemporary Indian Cinemas.

3.1: Feminist Resistance as a disruptive force:

Sara Ahmed's theory about Killjoy is a significant invention of feminist theories. This theory is mostly connected to a feminist criticism of happiness. Here she talks about "*The History of Happiness*", an article written by M. McMahon's. Ahmed focuses on the fact that happiness itself is a conditional and constructive idea by society. When we think of happiness we mostly refer to depending on someone else's satisfaction rather than happiness being an individual force. Spatially from feminist perspective the idea of happiness is very vague as mostly women are responsible for the happiness of people around them. In M. McMahon's article named, "Happiness: A History" he implies that such histories would be told from more specific viewing points, as "histories not only of the struggles of the peasants, slaves, and apostates . . . but of early-modern women and late-modern aristocrats, nineteenth-century bourgeois and twentieth-century workers, conservatives and radicals, consumers and crusaders, immigrants and natives, gentiles and Jews" (xiii). Connecting to this same idea Ahmed says when the pleasure of one individual is contingent upon that of another, to investigate how, for some, happiness means conforming to the desires of others. According to the article, feminist consciousness is an awareness of sadness and the things that are sacrificed or lost when pursuing happy routes. This kind of awareness does not always entail self-consciousness, but rather a worldly awareness in which the familiar is disturbed by misery. This theory is relevant for understanding the

protagonist of the films. While there is a rich scholarly literature exploring the images of women on screen in India, popular films may also reflect changes in the way women are perceived in everyday life. While Indian cinema has so far narrated the stories of women mainly as archetypes of selfless endurance, (Datta 71). In recent years, there are more stories of women who refuse to succumb to circumstance and fight for change. A related discussion, made by Pavitra Sundar, in her article named “*Meri Awaaz Suno Women, Vocality, and Nation in Hindi Cinema*” is that when women are able to find a vocal expression, the issue becomes how they can use this voice to resist a host of oppressive structures that dominate public discourse (Sundar 144).

3.2: Social Legitimization of Patriarchy:

Patriarchy continues to be a central focus for feminist analysis across a range of literature. For Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is a set of interconnecting structures which comprise the basis for the continued subordination of women and the material expression of gender differences (Walby 213). Veronica Beechey develops this argument further by suggesting that patriarchy operates both materially within the workplace and domestic sphere and ideologically in terms of images of women that are established in society. Similarly, patriarchy is reinforced through culture and representation as well. In this volume, Gita Rajan examines how Indian cinema constructs the masculine subject and argues that mainstream films embody and naturalize an hegemonic form of masculinity which legitimates control and authority over women. Sanghita Sen argues in her work named “*Indian Masculinity: An Important Intervention in Gender and Masculinity Studies. Anthropological Quarterly*”, in India, masculinity is conceptualized in terms of dominance and power, and this concept of masculinity is deeply implicated in the subordination of women. This axis of analysis highlights how patriarchy is not simply a system of social structures and relationships but also an influential cultural narrative. As films are one of the biggest mediums through which these narratives are set, these ultimately lead to normalisation of violence and patriarchal domination in the name of culture and societal norms.

This paper focuses on the thematics of violence in film, with particular emphasis on gender relations in Indian context. In Indian Cinema violence, Subjectivity and Gender Relations examines a range of cinematic narratives concerned with violence in a variety of contexts. The contributors employ a number of analytical approaches to explore the cinema and, as Laikwan Pang suggests, ‘such films render visible various social tensions and inequalities particularly

those relating to gender and power thus critically engage with issues of everyday life' (Pang, 159). Researches analysing the representation of violence in Indian cinema have mostly focussed on gender previously. Masculinity has become so normalised that it is often portrayed as natural and acceptable. The way masculinity is represented in recent Indian films like *Haq* and *Bulbbul* is not neutral, it has a specific role to play in critiquing the power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality and patriarchy. Sangeeta Datta discussed a change in the way violence against women is shown within the genre of the traditional Indian films. Gone is the more sacrificing a woman is, the more virtuous she is portrayed. The suffering of women that was once a staple of Indian cinema and in its culture, we find a more realistic portrayal of domestic and social violence toward women and the growing awareness of the need to challenge structures of oppression in contemporary Indian films. This in turn, is a great transition for creating a healthy environment and demands that both men and women be viewed from a neutral perspective.

3.3: Generational Trauma within Women:

Studies on representations of trauma, in particular trauma from a gender perspective, have become increasingly common in academic studies of literature and culture. Yet, within these contexts, trauma is not confined to the individual who experienced it, nor to the immediate aftermath; rather, it can be transmitted to new generations through history, cultural narrative, myths and tales. As Philippe Codde states, "trauma, or the memory of a significant past event or events, can affect generations of women throughout history" (Codde 62). Also, J L Freed argues that the problematising of trauma through the narratives of women's experiences, especially in the setting of sexual violence and historical injustice, enables them to maintain agency and show resistance (Freed 409). She also argues that, "women's experiences of trauma constitute a history and a cultural pattern" (Freed 409). These studies of gendered trauma support the idea that such experiences are inseparable from the construction of trauma itself as an overarching transgenerational phenomenon. In addition, Michelle Oberman writes of the gendered psychological responses to oppressive control. When women are pushed to the breaking point by the expectations of society, they may turn to their own children and commit violence. Her study of infanticide in medieval and early modern Europe helps to explain why women who committed these crimes acted and supports the author's argument that medieval women's trauma often

manifests within a patriarchal society. These studies demonstrate that trauma and its forms are very gendered and often integrated into a culture's structures. The trauma that pervades Bulbul's life is a prime example of how and why women are embedded within patriarchal society, subjected to violence and brutality. Bulbul's entry into the world of patriarchy is through child marriage. The film's portrayal of this experience was problematic, and helps us to understand how, according to J L Freed, trauma does not only come from one incident or one perpetrator but from systemic gendered violence. It is her relationship with Satya that is at first presented as a source of comfort and freedom. However, when her husband Indranil discovers them together and misinterprets their relationship, he attacks Bulbul. This act of violence has an important impact on Bulbul and is described as the reason she becomes 'demonic'. To this point, J L Freed's argument is supported. Also, Philippe Codde's study of transmitted trauma highlights the idea of trauma as a form of cultural memory. The way in which Bulbul is transformed into a chudail (witch) can be understood through Codde's analysis of the way trauma is transmitted through generations, as a cultural phenomenon rather than an isolated event. In *Bulbul*, Bulbul's trauma is transmitted through folklore and folklore-based supernatural narratives. Throughout the film, there are frequent references to past storytelling about Bulbul and Satya. There is no clear history or setting of the legend but it suggests that Bulbul's transformation is part of a transgenerational cultural memory. The use of genre-in general and the gothic in particular-has long been a productive way to approach women's experiences. According to Claire Kahane, gothic narratives can be seen to represent the particularities of female identity and repression as well as female transformation, and to map specific female experiences within and beyond narrative fiction. These narratives often map the psychological effects of women when they are living in an oppressed reality and face violence for a long period of time. Exactly what is shown in the movie '*Bulbbul*' Additionally, researchers have explored the connection between gender and genre in narratives written by women scholars and writers. Robyn R. Warhol, one of the writers, writes about the relationship between gender and genre with specifically focusing on female subjectivity (Warhol 857). This study addresses how genre influences representations of and resistance by women.

3.4: Butler's Gender Performativity:

The theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler offers a critical approach to the comprehension of the nature of gender as not a predetermined or inherent identity, but as a series of repetitive performances that are influenced by society. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests gender is an identity that is constructed tenuously in time, for instance, that it exists only as a result of constant performance that is governed by the rules of culture. These acts do not occur in a free manner, but rather are limited by systems of power which establish what behavior is acceptable. Such a theoretical approach is especially applicable when considered through the prism of legal and social institutions where gender roles are not merely culturally imposed, but are also institutionally supported. The connection between gender and law plays a significant role in the discussion of the modern narratives, including *Huq*, when the main character, Shazia Bano, has to maneuver her way through a system that controls her identity and self-image by both social norms and laws. The law in this regard is not a neutral construct, it is a mechanism, which tends to strengthen the patriarchal norms. Nayer Honarvar believes that women are often restricted in their rights and autonomy by legal frameworks, particularly those that are affected by religious and cultural traditions (Honarvar 355). This indicates that gender performativity not only occurs through everyday performance but also through the influence of institutional forces which determine the roles that women are supposed to play.

Shazia Bano has to play the part of the ideal wife in *Haq*, meaning submissive and patient, and sacrificing herself. Her identity is created through repetition of compliance, which shows that gender is created through repetition and not pre-essence as Butler asserts. Nonetheless, these performances are highly controlled and governed by the family and the society, which reflects the collaboration of the law and social norms to sustain patriarchal order. When Shazia starts doubting her role and finally decides to abandon her marriage she interrupts this performative cycle. Her opposition shows how weak gender norms are, as these roles are merely maintained by constant repetition. This disturbance may also be interpreted in the framework of the theory of a feminist killjoy, developed by Sara Ahmed, who accentuates the fact that women who do not want to act according to social norms are seen as a danger to the overall happiness (Ahmed 571). In *Haq*, Shazia refusing to accept the role assigned to her does not only go against her family members, but also the social order that relies on the obedience of women in the society. Her behavior demonstrates the fact that the balance of patriarchal order depends on the continuity of the performance of gender roles. Moreover, the theory of patriarchy as a network is an

interrelated structure. Sylvia Walby also helps to understand the institutional aspect of gender performativity (the state, family, and cultural institutions) (Walby 213). Law, which is one of the significant components of this system, is very important in strengthening gender norms. The legal environment of marriage and the rights of women in *Haq* shows these structural inequalities, with the choices of women, in most cases, being limited by the law, religion and social pressure. This is in line with the argument by Veronica Beechey that patriarchy exists both at the material level and the ideological level as it determines not only the actions of women but also how they see what they can do (Beechey 66). Besides, emotional and psychological aspects of gender performativity can be observed in the case of Shazia with her traumatic experience. According to J. L. Freed, gendered trauma is closely related to systematic oppression where recurrent incidences of control and restriction define the identity of women (Freed 409). This process is reflected in *Haq* when the main character is slowly becoming aware of her submissive role as expectations imposed by her family cause her to become emotionally drained and willing to change. Her subsequent choice to quit can therefore be regarded as a disruption in the performative cycle, a rejection to play a role that deprives her of agency.

The other, more cultural, implication of such resistance is not insignificant either. Sangeeta Datta informs us that "Indian film traditionally saw women in the guise of struggle and sacrifice as symbols which reinforced prescribed feminine identities." But contemporary narratives stray from these images to include women actively contesting repressive traditions. Pratiksha Menon also claims that in contemporary Hindi cinema, female characters are shown as multidimensional figures, who negotiate and challenge their status in the society. *Haq* is one such example of how this change is happening by making resistance not merely rebellion but a deliberate reinvention of identity. Masculinity and its contribution to the maintenance of these structures should be transmitted in mind as well. Both Gita Rajan and Sanghita Sen emphasize that "South Asian masculinities are produced in a manner that bolsters power and domination" (Rajan 1099; Sen 1105). In *Haq*, these expectations are embodied in the male characters, which helps to sustain gender hierarchies. Their actions are indicative of the wider societal values that constitute masculinity against female independence, which continue to limit the options of self-expression by women.

Unlike '*Bulbbul*' violent depictions of resistance, '*Haq*' gives a less violent manifestation of resistance. This does not however render it any less important. According to Sampada Karandikar, "in modern Bollywood, different types of female rebellion, both dramatic and subtle, are highlighted, including refusals" (Karandikar et al. 149). The fact that Shazia withdraws her marriage is a strong protest against the conventions that define what womanhood is, and shows that resistance may be of various forms. Finally, the theory of gender performativity by Butler shows that gender roles are not natural, but created through repetitive acts that are backed up by legal and social institutions. *Haq* shows how these performances are controlled and how they could be disrupted with the acts of resistance. In refusing to carry out her designated role, Shazia reveals the unstableness of gender conventions and demonstrates her agency in a confining regime becoming a killjoy for the society.

3.5: Research Gap:

Feminism is a great conceptual theory when it comes to gender identity and literature. A lot of critics have pointed out gender performativity, patriarchy and women in cinema. However, this paper seeks to address some more critical aspects of the society focusing on the institutional authorities, social boundaries and legal structures that are interconnected with these ideas. This paper is concerned with how women are treated in society when they decide to rebel against the system. Through Indian contemporary films I will try to explore the institutions like marriage, family, legal issues and how all these aspects are connected and being practiced in our society. Moreover even though feminist scholars have studied women's oppression and resistance there is a gap in understanding the different ways women resist in movies. Most studies focus on dramatic acts of rebellion or on how women are victims. They do not fully explore non violent ways of resisting like refusing or disengaging. Movies like *Haq* show these forms of resistance, which challenge the idea that resistance must be loud and visible.

Another big gap is that, Sara Ahmed's idea of the Feminist killjoy has not been used much in film studies, for Indian movies. Ahmed's work explains how women who break rules are seen as threats to happiness. This idea has not been applied to how movies show women resisting. The killjoy figure helps us understand how women who refuse to follow rules. Whether they do it in a gothic way like in *Bulbbul* or in a quiet way like in *Haq*. They challenge the foundations of patriarchy. Moreover, there is not enough research done to compare different ways women resist

within the same cultural and movie framework. This paper wants to work on these gaps by doing an analysis that brings together ideas like how women act out their gender, how laws and society control them connecting it to the idea of the feminist killjoy. By addressing subtle ways that women resist in modern Indian movies this study helps us understand better how women deal with, fight against and change systems that try to control them and define their identity. Women in cinema are able to negotiate, resist and disrupt patriarchal systems that try to define and contain women's identities and this study is about how they concur it by being a 'killjoy' for the world.

Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis of *Haq* & *Bulbbul*

The main argument of this chapter is that the portrayal of female characters within Indian contemporary Bollywood cinema has undergone a significant transformation in terms of representation, shifting away from earlier narrative constructs of women depicted as subjects of suffering to more complex and deeper interpretations involving constructs of female agency, resistance and moral revolt. Drawing on literary close readings of *Bulbbul* and *Haq*, this chapter illustrates how women are being presented not as symbolic victims whose suffering brings closure to valiant male story arcs, but rather, central actors who craft a new subjectivity around experiences of violence through redefinition of justice itself. But unfortunately it is not linear or strictly liberating. Both films show us that female agency within contemporary Bollywood is still very much connected to trauma, social constraint and institutional justice. What emerges now is a cinema space in transition, whereby the woman is no longer a mute object of representation but is negotiating visibility within the resistance which requires them to be an individual with their own mind. This chapter depicts three main arguments. To begin with, the two films both show that structures of domestic spaces are violent buildings as opposed to a neutral space. Similarly, female protagonists shift towards disruption rather than impasse as silence and obedience are replaced by forms of refusal. The films together reflect that Indian cinema is undergoing a change where women are being portrayed as moral agents capable of unveiling injustice and capable of exposing systematic oppression which often gets neglected by the formal legal or social institutional rules.

4.1 Domestic Space as a Form of Hierarchy:

In *Bulbbul*, the domestic space isn't merely a backdrop for the story but the primary 'site' for the production and enforcement of gendered power. The film shows Bulbul as a child bride in a big aristocratic house where the mise-en-scène builds hierarchy. In the initial scenes, she is framed in oversized architectural spaces, doorways, corridors or courtyards, which overshadows her. This visual strategy is by no means incidental; rather, it constructs her to appear diminished, spatially or socially. One of the most significant early sequences concerns her presence in the marital home which is subjugated by silence. Most of the time, she doesn't speak, and when she does, the voices are visually and sonically quiet in the Sound Design. The lighting design in the household creates a sense of containment due to the muted tones and static framing. The presence of violence in the scenes might not be explicit. It may exist as an atmosphere; as an inherent condition of domestic life. The implied violence committed by Indranil is the most important rupture in the domestic structure. Instead of showing the violence in the slums, the film uses off-screen space, the distortion of sound, and silence. Not seeing this is crucial because, in real life, domestic violence hardly ever happens out and about. Instead, it occurs behind closed doors and does not get fully witnessed or acted on by other systems. The domestic space itself is disturbed after this rupture. A once-controlled environment becomes disrupted. The audio-visual colours change, while silence becomes charged rather than passive. The house no longer symbolizes security, it begins to operate as a location of unprocessed trauma.

In contrast, *Haq's* domestic space is social rather than feudal or private. In a number of important scenes, the protagonist is depicted in family meetings where decisions are made about her life without her consent. Rather than the violence in *Bulbbul*, which is intense and symbolic, *Haq* presents control as procedural and conversational. A key sequence involves a family discussion in which the protagonist tries to voice her opinion but is constantly interrupted, diverted, or ignored. The camera work here is low key medium shots including multiple family members in coordinated compositions and she is often singled out. The camera does not dramatise violence but rather its normalisation. This contrast is important. In Indian society, domestic control is not only physical but also emotional, mental, familial and cultural. *Haq* captures this by showing control as an ongoing and regular process. Both films re-establish the home as a site of gendered

regulation. But they differ in how that regulation is visually and narratively presented. One through mythic disruption, the other through realism.

4.2 The Transformation from Silence to Disruption:

Transformation of Female Subjectivity is one of the major themes of director Anurag Basu's *Bulbul* and is depicted drastically through the changes that occur in the protagonist after the traumatic events. Our last visit to this alternate version of Bulbbul is possibly the most potent. We witness her gliding freely through the forest, trees swaying and vines draped majestically above her. For the first time in the movie the audience sees her as who she really chooses to be. All along we only see her surrounded by her home's architecture. The audience see her finally being able to move about freely and be at peace after so many years of hardship, oppression and emotional torture within her suffocating marriage. The cinematography evolves from mostly static shots of her dingy home to Tracking shots capturing her newfound serenity. The cinematography elegantly transitions from static framing within her modest home to lush tracking shots embracing her tranquil existence. Her feet and movement are also a large focus in these transformations. Often she's depicted in a rather awkward or slow position. Here the body is reversed from its containment within the domestic space and moves beyond the boundaries of human physicality. The camera work has also changed from an objectification of her body to a focus on her as a subject in motion. One of the most powerful scenes are those in which women encounter men associated with violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking. There is almost complete silence in these scenes, with no spoken words apart from sound environment and minimal physical expression. Speech is thus displaced by presence, and violence is not articulated through words but through the disruption of social norms and spaces.

Far from representing feminine empowerment, *Bulbbul*'s transformation into monstrous form signifies a breakdown of legible femininity. In a society in which Indian women's anger is frequently delegitimized and, worse, rendered pathologized, *Bulbbul*'s anger and her actions are finally readable only in monstrous terms. Satya, Sudip Batabyal, and Pankaj Kumar's film thereby lays bare the mechanisms which seek to contain female anger.

Haq is a film about gradual change, and in that it is no less transformative than its more explosive companion piece. We see the heroine of *Haq* slowly grow into her full humanity through a series of quiet refusals to submit to the expectations placed upon her. One of the most powerful sequences in the film is of the protagonist finally beginning to speak up in

conversations that she had previously let pass her by. The camera's gaze gradually shifts to focus more and more on her, moving from an initial inclination to include all of the film's characters in the frame, to tightly-focused two-shot compositions that convey her growing confidence.

In contrast to *Bulbbul's* journey which culminates in a supernatural transformation while refuting the socially imposed solution to her conflict, the tension in this moment emerges not from the act of speaking but from who can speak and have their words acknowledged. While the two female characters in films embody distinct modes of cinematic agency mythic disruption and social articulation they both function to subvert the spectator's expectation of feminine submission to patriarchal power structures.

4.3 Reimagining Justice through Establishing Female Agency:

A core concern of both films is how gendered violence is handled by institutions of justice, in *Bulbbul*, it is the home that is the system, its rules imposed by those who live there. Within the home, violence is often neither caused nor addressed outside of that space. This is in line with broader socio-historical currents in India where despite the presence of detailed legal codes domestic violence continues to remain a vastly underreported issue. While the transition in *Tales of the Datta Family* to a supernatural avenue of justice may seem to be mere narrative contrivance, it in fact indicates an ideological commentary. *Bulbbul's* violent persecution of the demon introduces a form of justice that replaces institutional accountability with moral retribution. Yet this supernatural justice is not rendered as unproblematic or universally legitimate. Instead, it operates entirely outside of customary institutional bounds and has no social legitimacy, existing merely as a narrative space beyond the grip of formal institutions. Within this cosmos, such justice has legitimacy only insofar as institutions of proper justice have failed.

In *Haq*, a damning visual metaphor in the film is the black paint sloshed onto the house of Shazia's family following her divorce, an indelible social brand of dishonor. The family home becomes not just a private site of pain but a public display of society's condemnation, a testament to the ways in which divorce, and women who initiate the divorce proceedings are ostracized from public space as bearers of contamination and dishonor. Perhaps more significant than the loss to the individual or the family in Shazia's case is the loss of livelihood experienced by Shazia's father when he loses his teaching position after he comes forward to support his

daughter. This demonstrates how patriarchy not only restricts women's individual space but it also manipulates social pressure to force individual compliance from males who challenge its framework of male privilege, proving the cost of demanding justice is high. the story of Shazia Bano's quest for justice is presented through a series of profoundly symbolic, agonizing vignettes which expose the ways in which patriarchy penalises female defiance of patriarchal dictates. The starkest depiction of this punishment is the death of Shazia's father. He is a man unwilling to allow his daughter to be taken advantage of while she fights for justice and recognition. He is the embodiment of moral courage when opposed with the pressure of family and society against his daughter and their well-being. However this defense of his daughter's reputation would result in him becoming out-casted from his community, he would die under the weight of emotion and body in a system not of his doing, becoming a martyr in this patriarchal fight against his daughter, which ultimately led to his death. He is a representation of how a society can harm not only the woman but the men who ally with them. The most powerful scene within the film and its greatest example of the brutal force of patriarchal control occurs in Shazia's visit to the Shariyah court. Where, her appeal for institutional redressal of grievances only brings a dismissive disregard and a rigorous cross-examination that centers not her suffering, but her womanhood and compliance. Herein, institutional representatives who are supposed to offer justice reify patriarchy, expecting her to demonstrate her suffering in a way that preserves patriarchal interests, and demands nothing less than the degradation of women as subservient citizens. In this regard, Shazia's humiliation at court echoes Sara Ahmed's argument that the. In terms of the plight of its central character.

Unlike other films in the collection, *Haq* engages directly with the formal and semi-formal spaces in which the protagonist has to negotiate her position through dialogue, argument and procedure. These spaces are not ostensibly neutral. Another notable scene is where she tries to demand her rights in a formal environment; here her words are constantly cut off and steered in a different direction. The way this scene is shot and cut is focusing a lot on the aspect of scale and hierarchy. The institutional spaces that surround her are quite massive and impersonal which stands in stark contrast with how small she is in that scene. The pacing is quite slow, transpiring a feeling of frustrated resistance. The film raises an interesting question as to whether justice is being denied, or if it is simply being unevenly distributed through unequal access to its machinery. While the legal system exists and is technically available to all, it functions to a large

extent through societal norms that circumscribe how these institutions will treat individuals differently on the basis of status and social class. The two films suggest that justice is fractured in Indian socio-cultural zones and does not exist either entirely within the framework of the law or entirely outside of it.

4.4 Politics of Gender Representation in Cinema:

The way women are portrayed in both of these movies are really interesting. In the movie *Bulbbul* the visuals are highly concerned with colors. The color red is used to show violence, desire and change. When the scenes take place in the parts of the house where women spend time the colors are more subdued and natural. When something big happens and things get disrupted the colors change and red becomes more prominent. The lighting in the movie is also worth noticing. At the beginning the scenes are lit softly which makes the house feel like a safe place but also a place with a lot of rules. The lighting changes and becomes more stark which creates a sense of uncertainty and discomfort. The sound in the movie also adds to this feeling. When something tense is happening the sound gets really loud. Then suddenly changes, which makes you feel even more uneasy. The use of color and lighting and sound in *Bulbbul* really makes you pay attention to the way women are shown in the movie. The movie *Bulbbul* uses all these things to create an atmosphere and to show how women's lives are changing. The color red in *Bulbbul* is used to show moments and the lighting and sound help to create a sense of tension and uncertainty.

The film *Haq* follows an extremely realistic cinematographic approach, which utilizes the use of lighting and not much color as well. The camera angles used to shoot the film remain static in order to give the impression of authenticity. The editing process in *Haq* has been carried out meticulously with each shot being extremely important since it contributes to the dialogue as well as the emotions of each character. The sound employed for the film comprises only those sounds which are taking place in the shot thereby making each location authentic as well. The production of the film demonstrates the two approaches to depicting violence against women. Symbolic depiction of the issue as well as realism. Each of these techniques aims at highlighting

the issues that are generally unnoticed by others. The disparity between men and women in society and in their behavior.

4.5 Reformation of Female Protagonist in Contemporary Bollywood:

The analysis of *Bulbbul* and *Haq* highlights a greater transformation in the portrayal of women by Bollywood. While in previous eras women were considered passive characters with their victimization used for the development of male emotional conflicts or restoration of balance in society, here these two movies portray women as active players in moral and social struggle. But, obviously, this is not a radical transformation because women's agency in both cases is conditioned by a certain structural frame. Thus, it should be regarded as a transitional phase when a transformation takes place. Firstly, *Bulbbul* can be viewed as representing the mythic agency of women with a symbolic act leading to a transformative change in life, while *Haq* is based on realistic agency, where women are active participants negotiating the existing conditions. It is crucial that women's agency in both films is a product of certain transformations in culture and the role of women in Indian society. Secondly, these two examples of Bollywood show that women's liberation is an unfinished process, as *Bulbbul* has justice beyond social order, and *Haq* has protagonists who negotiate inequality.

This chapter has demonstrated that contemporary Bollywood film narratives have changed their depiction of women to include female characters who are more than just victims and can challenge various social constructs. In other words, the two studied films show the evolution of women into complex subjects that are able to influence their environment and disrupt the existing norms. Nevertheless, the change does not imply that there is equality between genders. Instead, it shows that the transition from traditional values to modern concepts takes place. Violence, control, and institutionality play an important role in the process as well. In general, the analyzed films present a society where women challenge existing norms and question traditional representations, although the transformation is still ongoing and the new order is not yet established.

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Future Scope for Research

5.1: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the shifting depiction of female subjectivity, resistance and agency in contemporary Indian cinema through a comparative study of *Haq* and *Bulbul*. Thematic analysis has advanced an argument that feminist resistance in cinema cannot be reduced to rebellion or survival strategies. It needs to be understood as a destabilising element that highlights the structural, emotional and institutional conditions through which gendered subjectivity is constructed and maintained. The introduction to this research set the stage for this work by noting a gap in feminist film studies. While there has been a lot of work on Indian cinema with regard to patriarchy, representation and women's victimhood, there has been less focus on the aftermath of resistance. In particular, how cultures react to women's refusal of normative roles is under-theorised. This thesis therefore positioned *Haq* and *Bulbul* as contemporary cinematic texts that do not simply represent women's suffering but foreground women's refusal, disruption, and reconfiguration of identity within patriarchal systems. The thesis introduction also positioned resistance as a dynamic and contested rather than a single moment of liberation, setting the stage for a more complex theoretical exploration. The second chapter outlined the theoretical framework. Sylvia Walby and Veronica Beechey's work was drawn on to understand patriarchy as a multi-dimensional structure that runs through institutional spheres such as family, law, culture and ideology. This enabled the analysis to avoid individual approaches to oppression, and demonstrate how gender inequality is reproduced structurally. Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity further extended this approach by showing that gender is not an essence but a repeated, disciplined act of performance. From this standpoint, the femininity of *Haq* and *Bulbul* is seen to be constituted through repetition, discipline and compliance, rather than essence.

Another important affective and political concept to emerge from this theoretical approach was Sara Ahmed's feminist killjoy. Ahmed's claim that feminist objects are seen as killjoys because they refuse to uphold happiness offered a crucial lens for interpreting both *Haq* and *Bulbul*. The killjoy provides a way of reframing resistance not as something external to social harmony but as a disruption of harmony itself - as a disruption of the violence that underpins "normal" life. Also, trauma theory, specifically that of J. L. Freed and Philippe Codde, helped to understand how violence is not contained but transferred through cultural memory, narrative repetition and somatic experience. These theories provided a multi-layered framework to understand cinematic resistance as structural, performative and effective. The third chapter, the literature review and

research gap, critically engaged with literature on gender, cinema and representations. In the field of feminist film studies, there has been a rich body of work on patriarchy, masculinity, and representation of women in Indian cinema; however this chapter highlighted three issues. First, the literature has often centred on women as victims or as moral purifiers but less on nuanced forms of resistance. Second, there is a lack of focus on non-theatrical or non-violent forms of resistance like refusal, withdrawal or silence as an act of resistance. Third, though Sara Ahmed's feminist killjoy theory has influenced feminist theory, it has yet to be taken up in the analysis of South Asian cinema.

This research gap thus identified a need for an analytical framework that can consider covert, discontinuous, and institutionalised forms of resistance. It also identified the need to focus on the cultural regulation of response to gender oppression and resistance, in addition to gender oppression itself. This thesis brought these concerns together by synthesizing theories of gender performativity, patriarchy, trauma and killjoy feminism. The fourth chapter offered a thematic analysis of *Haq* and *Bulbul*, showing how these concerns are embodied and stylistically expressed in contemporary Indian cinema. One key argument in this chapter is that the home is a site of patriarchal control. In *Bulbul*, the aristocratic home is a spatial order of hierarchy, silence and surveillance where violence is often hinted at. In *Haq*, domesticity is produced through procedural and conversational power, whereby the male characters decide the life of the female protagonist. Although genres are different, but the two films show that domesticity is not apolitical but regulatory and political. The chapter also suggested that female subjectivity in both films is constituted through transformation. In *Bulbul*, transformation occurs via a gothic and supernatural route, in which trauma results in a complete break in subjectivity that exceeds legibility. *Bulbul's* transformation into a woman of vengeance demonstrates the cultural impossibility of speaking about female rage within normative structures, so her resistance is both potent and unintelligible. By contrast, *Haq* offers a realist narrative where subjectivity is achieved progressively through refusal, voice and disengagement from roles. Shazia's metamorphosis is gradual, and her protests are ordinary acts of non-compliance. This chapter offers a critical insight into the rearticulation of justice. In *Bulbul*, justice is moved out of institutional frameworks and reconceived as cosmic or moral retribution, as an alternative to institutional justice that fails to deal with gendered violence. In *Haq*, justice is still institutional

but uneven and inaccessible and structurally biased. The films collectively imply that justice in contemporary India is fractured; it is within, outside and against the institution.

In conclusion, the feminist killjoy is a key figure in the two films. Shazia in *Haq* becomes a killjoy through refusal her refusal to submit to marriage upends the fantasy of domestic happiness. Bulbul is a killjoy due to disruption - her metamorphosis reveals the violence of patriarchy. In both instances, resistance is not only oppositional but also revelatory; it exposes the emotional, legal, and cultural work needed to maintain patriarchal happiness. The killjoy, then, is not destructive but epistemological; she opens up what structures seek to mask. In the end, the study shows that feminist resistance to cinema has to be understood not as an end point of liberation, but as a process of disruption. The feminist killjoy, as embodied in these films, is a key figure for this. She is not only the one who says no to happiness, but is the one who uncovers the conditions of its production. By refusing to be silent, obedient and emotionally compliant, she challenges the very structure of the patriarchy. then, that Haq and Bulbul do not represent women's resistance, they theorise it in cinematic form. In doing so, they demonstrate that contemporary Indian cinema is no longer just a site of representation, but also a site of feminist re-imagination, where refusal becomes a site of knowledge, critique and change.

5.2: Future Work of the Study:

Although this thesis has touched upon feminist resistance, institutional oppression, and female subjectivity in *Haq* and *Bulbbul*, there are several directions for further research. First, a broader range of contemporary Indian films may be examined for its exploration of female resistance stories about marital violence, female autonomy, sexuality or legal injustice, in the case of films centered on female rebellion-allowing a critical discussion of whether a new archetype of the feminist killjoy is beginning to emerge, or if she is only present as a transient phenomenon. It would be fruitful to explore how different genres of realism, horror, thriller and social drama differently articulate women's resistance. Second, whereas this research has focused on patriarchy and gendered resistance, further research could adopt a more intersectional feminist approach, highlighting how class, caste, religion and region influence the character of female agency in Indian cinema. Women's oppression never exists solely through a gender dimension and the intersecting realities of social identities may also produce different modes of resistance

and different social consequences. Such intersections may inform us of the extent to which feminist revolt is socially negotiated. Third, there is significant room for an examination of audience reception. Although films portray women as resistant subjects, we need to understand what that means for audiences. Are these characters viewed as empowering, as immoral, or as destabilizing and socially damaging? Audience studies, especially within the context of South Asia, will continue to offer insight into the persistence of patriarchal assumptions in viewing rebellious women and into whether these women will also come to be identified as feminist killjoys by viewers. Fourth, further research may expand the relevance of Sara Ahmed's feminist killjoy concept in film studies where it has received much less attention compared to disciplines like literature and cultural studies. The applicability of Ahmed's work to female characters that disrupt familial harmony, challenge domestic compliance or reject socially dictated femininity cannot be overestimated. It will enable feminist film criticism to develop a greater vocabulary for feminist rebellion in cinema.

Finally, future research could develop into the ways in which resistance is enacted aesthetically, audibly and visually through the use of color, silence, sound design, camera shots and space etc., pushing feminist film theory beyond merely analysis of narrative structure, toward how cinematic form produces gendered significance aesthetically. Again, this thesis should not be considered the definitive study of these issues but rather one more contribution toward a discussion of gender, representation, and resistance. The ongoing expansion and redefinition of Indian film will unquestionably continue to introduce characters who continue to defy, deny, challenge, and unsettle accepted narrative and aesthetic standards. They will continue, as Ahmed puts it, to be killjoys.

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