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## Exploring Mutated Depictions of Rapes and Justice Distrust in Contemporary Indian Cinema

Smita <sup>a</sup>, Amit Sharma <sup>b,\*</sup>, Amitabh Srivastava <sup>c</sup>, Avneesh Kumar <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Manipal University Jaipur, India

<sup>b</sup> University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, India

<sup>c</sup> Central University of Rajasthan, India

### Abstract

Media consumption includes a lot of movies. Film and culture interact in complex ways. Although art is meant to challenge established structures, mainstream Bollywood's profit-driven objective sometimes requires it to fulfil specific promises to a wide audience, minimizing disruption of traditional conceptions. A recent Indian film offers promise, though not much. They dare to raise social taboos to challenge normative beliefs. Sameer Sanjay Vidwans' *Satyaprem Ki Katha* and Behzad Khambata's *A Thursday* offer a fresh take on the topics of date rape and the failures of the system in addressing the pleas of survivors, highlighting concerns of neglect and conspiracy. This study analysed films about rape and related issues and compared them to real-life data. The study also involves an examination of how society attributes rape instances and the experiences of survivors. It asserts that the Bollywood business has just started undertaking initiatives to create a platform for discussing taboo issues that have previously been devoid of free discussion. The observation suggests that contemporary films focusing on taboo issues are grabbing larger audiences and thus achieving commercial success, in contrast to their predecessors. This also signifies a shift in contemporary culture and attitude towards rapes and related occurrences.

**Keywords:** date rape, sexual violence, justice distrust, assault, stigma, Indian films.

### 1. Introduction

An estimated one in four American women may experience sexual assault sometime throughout her lifetime, making this a serious and widespread social problem. 47.3 % of sexual assault victims were victimized by someone they knew intimately (Leemis et al., 2022) Due to the widespread stigma around reporting sexual assaults, these estimates are likely low. The Indian scenario for the aforementioned statistics is not distinctive. As per the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) 'Crime in India 2021' report, among all the reported rape cases, the culprit was known to the victim in 96.5 % of rape cases. Out of 31,677 rape cases, in around 28,147 (89 %) cases, the offender was either a friend (including online friendships), a love interest (live-in partners on the pretext of marriage), an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend, family friends, an employer, or just acquaintances (National Crime Records Bureau, 2022).

An American philosopher and author, Kelly Oliver, wrote an opinion column in the New York Times in November 2016 titled "There is no such thing as non-consensual sex, its violence" (Oliver, 2016), discussing the concerns about the rise of these issues among college-going young adults in

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [jmcamit@gmail.com](mailto:jmcamit@gmail.com) (A. Sharma)

the US and about the role of society in not pertaining 'date rapes' or 'acquaintance rapes' as seriously as forceful rapes. It is essential to have a solid understanding of the fact that films, just like any other form of artistic expression, are a reflection of society. The depiction of touchy subjects shifts along with the development of society as a whole. When it comes to encouraging ethical storytelling and campaigning for positive change in the film industry as well as society as a whole, advocacy, awareness, and constructive conversations all play an essential part. It is imperative to recognize that certain Hindi films, particularly those of earlier times, like *Zakhmi Aurat* (Bhogal, 1988), *Mera Faisla* (Babu, 1984), *Gunda* (Shah, 1998), and *Bhagyawan* (Subash, 1993) have faced criticism for portraying attitudes that blame victims of sexual assault. The aforementioned film depictions are indicative of the retrogressive and detrimental societal conventions that were prevalent during specific time periods (Chuggera, 2023).

The recent Bollywood release *Satyaprem Ki Katha* (Vidwans, 2023) has picked up the very same issue of 'Date Rape' or 'Acquaintance Rape' as the main drive of the story line. Director Sameer Vidwans and writer Karan Shrikant Sharma bring out the important point that a woman's "no" is still a "no," regardless of how many times or to what extent one has been physically intimate with the person before. The above mentioned-statistics are out of the reported sexual crimes against women, but in many such cases, as pulled up in the movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha*, the incident goes unreported, and the victim is forced to keep mum and is blamed for her own sufferings. Earlier in 2016, the Bollywood movie *Pink*, starring Tapsi Pannu and Amitabh Bachchan, also voiced a similar kind of issue, sensitizing the importance of women's consent for physical intimacy. This was well conveyed through the film's renowned dialogue, *No! means No* (Chowdhury, 2016). Mainstream cinema is a form of commercial art that is made, distributed, and shown with the intention of making profit (Kumar, Sharma 2023). But the movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha* has given enough food to the mind to think about a serious but less talked-about issue of acquaintance rape or incidents of dates ending up in sexual assaults. Although the film's director Sameer S. Vidwans has shown his faithfulness more towards the entertainment quotient of the film, he has failed to give the required importance and limelight to the real issue driving the storyline. The objective of the present study to know the depictions of rapes and justice distrust in contemporary Bollywood films.

## 2. Materials and methods

The broad objective of the study is to explore the depictions of rape and justice distrust in contemporary Indian Hindi cinema. The study is analytical in nature. We adopted a qualitative approach to conduct this research study. We used textual analysis to meet the objectives. The film has been selected on the basis of the purposive sampling method.

## 3. Discussion

The majority of scholarly investigations differentiate between instances of sexual assault perpetrated by individuals known to the victim and those perpetrated by unfamiliar individuals, with the latter referring to acts of rape performed by those with no prior acquaintance with the victim. The term 'acquaintance rape' refers to a form of sexual assault that can be committed by a wide variety of individuals; it could be someone the victim has only recently met (Grubb, Turner 2012).

An influential American feminist journalist, novelist, and activist, Susan Brownmiller introduced the phrase 'date rape' in her seminal publication titled '*Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*.' She is one of the pioneering individuals who originated this terminology (Brownmiller, 1975). The concept of 'date rape' gained visibility through the efforts of Ann Olivarius, a notable American-British lawyer and feminist. During her time as an undergraduate at Yale University, Olivarius delivered a series of public lectures where she discussed a specific incident involving the assault (Goldhill, 2015). The aforementioned phrase has been documented in a handful of newspapers and scholarly articles in the past; however, it is worth noting that these sources had a narrower audience reach. The term 'date rape' was first documented in 1980 when it appeared in *Mademoiselle Magazine*. Subsequently, in 1982, the magazine featured an article titled *Date Rape: A Campus Epidemic?* Furthermore, English novelist Martin Amis, in his novel *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) also used this term (Gold, Villari, 2000; Simpson et al., 1993). Mary Koss, a renowned researcher in the field of sexual assault, conducted a pioneering study in 1987 that examined the prevalence of rape in the United States. This

nationwide study involved a substantial sample size of 7,000 students from 25 educational institutions. Koss is often acknowledged for coining the term 'date rape', which has since become widely recognized (Kuersten, 2003).

A sexual activity enforced on someone without assertive consent is considered sexual violence. Sexual assault affects all communities, genders, sexualities, and ages. Sexual assault can happen to anyone. Sexual assault, if committed by a friend, spouse, co-worker, neighbour, or family member, falls into the category of acquaintance crime. Acquaintance rape is perpetrated by someone who knows the victim. As a form of sexual assault, acquaintance rape encompasses sexual contact that is forced, manipulated, or coerced. Having intercourse against one's will is a form of rape, even if they know the perpetrator (Chatterjee, 2019). Sexual assault can happen in person, online, or through technology, such as non-consensual sexting. According to American researcher Mary Koss, 'date rape' is a kind of 'acquaintance rape' that occurs when there is at least a little bit of love attraction between the offender and the victim, and when sexual activity would have been usually considered suitable if it had been consensual (Koss, 2011).

In her scholarly article, Sarah E.H. Moore examines the evolving connotations associated with the term 'date rape' as depicted in American newspapers over a span of fourteen years. This article examines potential factors contributing to the evolving interpretation of the term 'date rape', specifically exploring the relevance of the risk thesis and criminological theories. Ultimately, she proposes that adopting a feminist standpoint enables us to acknowledge that the concept of 'date rape' has evolved from being solely about the disempowerment of women to becoming a vague and relatively insignificant ideological concern (Moore, 2011).

Approximately 40 % of rape incidents in India are officially recorded, primarily due to the deeply entrenched conservative mentality within the cultural framework (Bhalla, 2013). The socioeconomic and demographic markers of the victim are taken into consideration by the media in India when determining whether or not a rape case is worthy of being reported on (Fadnis, 2023). This prevailing mind-set discourages numerous victims from disclosing their experiences. They fear the potential consequences of social stigma, degradation, and isolation from their families and communities. The percentage of sexual attacks that are recorded varies greatly from country to country; just 11 % of all sexual assaults are said to be registered internationally, according to a survey by UN Women. This estimate pertains to only 2 % of India's population (Hill, Marshall, 2018).

Due to the widespread stigma around reporting sexual assaults, the rate of reported rape cases is low. People or society usually does not approve of a term like 'date rape' because of the relationship the victims and perpetrators have shared for the time being. The pervasive culture of shame surrounding sexual assault is also a considerable factor in the non-reporting of acquaintance sexual assaults. Films have the potential to impact persons' perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes, especially about relevant societal issues. Film, as an expression of culture and medium, has a crucial role in creating and interpreting meaning (Karmakar, Pal, 2023). The movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha* has not only highlighted the issue of date rape but has also emphasized the issue of victim blame. In the movie, the rape survivor *Katha* (played by Kiara Advani) is blamed by her father herself for the miseries because the perpetrator was her love interest. The father of the rape survivor underlines the freedom given to the girl as the root cause of the sexual assault committed by her boyfriend. The burden of social standing is of such magnitude that the father, filled with anger and disappointment, expressed dissatisfaction with his daughter's survival following her suicide attempt. Instead, he desired her demise just to evade the potential slander from society. Not only the rape survivor's father but her father-in-law also states that nobody is going to believe the story of her rape by her boyfriend, as she went with him willingly. It has been seen that films shape people's thoughts, stereotypes, and attitudes. Movies can affect gender and ethnic stereotypes, attitudes toward particular groups, and opinions on certain problems (Kubrak, 2020).

In another Indian film, the issue of victim blame has also been raised. The movie *Humara Dil Aapke Pass Hai* was a story about how people in India feel about women who have been raped. In the movie, it was clear that a woman who has been raped will be shunned by her own family and by the rest of society. She would never get married because her father would be too ashamed to think of her as 'spoiled goods' (Kaushik, 2000). In this context, Film narratives serve as epistemic objects, drawing viewers' attention to the need to learn new things, abandon old ideas, and relearn certain themes (Pal, Karmakar, 2023).

According to the study by Hockett and Saucier (Hockett, Saucier, 2015) rape survivors experience only negative physical and psychological effects, whereas the literature on rape survivors indicates that they experience both positive and negative effects. Much of the research on rape victims has focused on the potential short- and long-term negative physical and psychological health effects. The film has also represented the same thing by depicting the psychological dilemma and difficulty of the rape survivor, *Katha*, in starting a normal married life with her husband. The film has clearly shown that despite all the love, care, and support of her newlywed husband, she is not able to forget the unfortunate incidence. Consequently, the victim is failing to return normalcy.

It is worth mentioning that two scholarly reviews have significantly contributed to the systematic expansion of knowledge regarding attributions in rape cases. One study investigated the influence of rape myth consistency and gender on the assignment of blame in rape cases (Hockett et al., 2016). Another review provided an overview of the various individual, situational, and societal elements that contribute to the attribution of blame towards victims in cases of acquaintance rape. Both reviews have made substantial contributions to the systematic advancement of knowledge on attributions in cases of rape. Based on the findings of these researches, it can be observed that victims who possess some level of familiarity with their attacker are more prone to experiencing blame compared to victims of rape perpetrated by strangers. The prevailing belief that women who voluntarily spend time alone with men should anticipate receiving sexual attention, along with conventional understandings that downplay the possibility or severity of rape (Gravelin et al., 2019). The same kind of situation is highlighted in the film, which clearly reflects the societal factors influencing victim stigmatization, where the victim *Katha* is blamed by her own family members for being wrong in making choices and decisions about her boyfriend, resulting in the unfortunate date rape and even worsening the situation with the unwanted pregnancy.

Anneke Meyer (Meyer, 2010) conducted a critical analysis of the prevailing discourse surrounding rape cases involving drinking dates in an active daily newspaper in the UK. The study revealed that the newspaper framed instances of rape involving alcohol as a consequence of female drinking rather than acknowledging the underlying issue of male sexual violence. Furthermore, the newspaper obscured women's responsibilities and risks by presenting them as rights. This situation is defended by the previous studies as well. They have shown that victims who are acquainted with their abuser are more likely to be held responsible for the crime (Begum, Barn, 2019). This is not the case with those who were sexually assaulted by a complete stranger. The delayed criminalization of marital rape may have contributed to the perception that rape is not possible or severe within heterosexual relationships. Along with this is the traditional notion that women who voluntarily spend time alone with men should expect sexual attention (Grubb, Harrower, 2009).

Rape myths are a collection of persistent and prevalent beliefs and attitudes that serve to clear up the offender while blaming the victim (Burt, 1980). Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) is the extent to which certain attitudes are held. Rape myths include beliefs about the victim's personality, looks, and conduct; the offender's drives and behaviour; and the situational factors surrounding the offense, for example, area and time (Sleath, Bull, 2012). It can be classified broadly into four distinct groups: accusing the victim; acquitting the perpetrator; the notion that rape is not very common or grave; and the conviction that only certain types of women are raped. It was discovered that rape myths are prevalent throughout both community and professional groups, and men consistently demonstrate higher levels of rape myth acceptance than do women (Hine, Murphy, 2019; Persson et al., 2018). Importantly, a significant body of literature suggests that RMA correlates with victim blame in rape cases by framing women as the perpetrators, and it appears to play an especially crucial role in assigning blame in acquaintance rape cases (RAINN, 2020). The same pattern was observed in the subsets of the rape victim and rape survivor literatures with a perceiver emphasis, or studies that looked at people's thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to rape victims and survivors. When compared to the literature written by rape survivors, which acknowledges oppression but focuses on the potential, short- and long-term negative physical and psychological health consequences (Hockett, Saucier 2015b).

Patriarchy has long dominated power and gender interactions worldwide. Patriarchal ideology affects many facets of life, including families and beyond (Hazarika, Dowerah, 2023). A rape victim in India faces not only social stigma but also the difficulty of seeking justice in a

system that typically assigns blame to the victim. Rape survivors, who demonstrate courage by reporting the crime to law enforcement, encounter a multitude of obstacles in their pursuit of justice. When powerful people give marginalized groups a lesser epistemic position or credibility, they perpetuate structural hermeneutical injustice. Thus, their contributions to public debate on specific practices and experiences are ignored (Altanian, El Kassar, 2021). Snags include encountering unsupportive police officers, undergoing insensitive forensic exams, experiencing a dearth of counselling services, encountering substandard police investigations, and facing inadequate prosecutions within the judicial system. Insufficient allocation of resources towards the establishment of courts, the appointment of judges, and recruitment of prosecutors has resulted in a significant deficiency. Consequently, legal proceedings endure for prolonged periods, victims and witnesses face intimidation, and a considerable proportion of cases are dismissed prior to reaching a verdict (Bhalla, 2013). There have been reports of victims being harassed and coerced at police stations, leading them to drop their complaints. However, once a case reaches trial, resolution may not come for years. All those years of delayed justice are not less than any trauma to the assault victims. Along with this, in the due course of getting justice, not only by the prosecution but also by the society itself, the victim is convicted several times. According to the NCRB's report for 2021, heinous crime, like rape has a very low conviction rate of 39 percent. In rape cases, over 43,000 investigations were initiated during the year 2020, and only in 3814 rape cases was the accuser convicted by the court (Times News Network, 2021).

Sexual assault, domestic violence, rape (including date or acquaintance rapes), acid attacks, etc. are only some of the various forms of violence against women that we see every day. The societal institutions of sexism and patriarchy are to blame, as they maintain the status quo of gender inequality and subjugate women. Because of ubiquitous and normalized gender-based violence in society, this 'rape culture' continues to thrive. In April 2010, Tehelka magazine, in conjunction with the NDTV news channel (India), conducted an inquiry that revealed that a majority of the interviewed police officers harboured biases. These biases were manifested in their tendency to attribute blame to the victim's attire or her decision to be outside after night-time, insinuating that she bore responsibility for the incident in question (Bhalla, 2013).

The film has also voiced another sensitive issue related to acquaintance rape or date rape, i.e., hindrances in the reporting of such crime cases, especially within a bourgeois family setup. This ultimately leads to distrust in justice among the victims. The disappointment in India's judicial system has led to the problem of less reporting of case related to date or acquaintance rapes. This is not the first time that the film *Satyaprem Ki Katha* has voiced the issue of justice distrust by showing that the date rape survivor *Katha* didn't want to lodge a complaint against her perpetrator as distrust in the system that nobody will believe her story of being raped by her own boyfriend. The movie *Pink* also shifted the audience's attention towards this issue of how difficult it is for girls to report and get justice against an acquaintance's sexual assault. In the movie, a molestation charge against *Rajvir* (played by Angad Singh Bedi) is dismissed as harassment, and *Minal* (played by Tapsi Pannu) and her pals are accused of attempted murder and prostitution. Due to the fact that *Rajvir* is the nephew of a powerful politician, he employs the legal system in his battle against *Minal* and her roommates *Falak* (played by Kriti Kulhari) and *Andrea* (played by Andrea Tariang). Another film *A Thursday* also revolves around the story of a rape victim who is eventually failed by the system. In the movie, parents of the victim protagonist *Naina* (played by Yami Gautam), made extensive efforts to seek justice for their daughter, a raped survivor. *Naina* was raped in her teens, while returning from school in her school bus. The father succumbed to emotional distress and his failure to get justice for his daughter. Her justice gets delayed by 15 years. In one of the dialogues, the victim says, 'Unless she screams in their faces, no one will pay heed to what she has to say' (Khambata, 2022).

Although gender depictions are nuanced, major cinema producing countries like the U.S., India, and China continue to produce mass entertainment films with heteronormative roles that serve patriarchal societies (Divya, 2023). But in contrast to that the reel situations in these Bollywood movies are so much in sync with the real situations of rape victims when it comes to getting justice. The film *Damini* (Santoshi, 1993) is entirely based on the issue of failing to get fair and easy justice for a rape victim. The film examines witness intimidation, mistrust in the legal system, and the struggle for justice against powerful offenders in the judiciary battle. It's mandatory to mention the movie *Maatr* (Sayed, 2017), in which Raveena Tandon plays a mother who wants justice after her daughter is raped by a gang. The film shows the difficulties the mother

encounters in her pursuit of justice and the widespread distrust of the judicial system. Another Indian film in this row is *Mom* (Udyawar, 2017), the plot hinges on a mother's pursuit of justice after her stepdaughter is raped by her boyfriend and his gang after a date night. The film shows how the family of a sexual assault victim struggles to get answers and finds that the court system and society as a whole do not treat them with the respect they deserve.

There are incidents and allegations in which the rape survivors and their families themselves were humiliated, marginalized, and prevented from receiving justice. A civil court in the Araria region of Bihar placed a 22-year-old woman who had survived gang rape under arrest and sentenced her to jail for causing unrest. The Hathras gang rape case is not an old tale to add in this regard to how police incinerated the body of a rape victim in the hurry of diffusing the nation's interest in the case without letting her family offer her a dignified cremation (Shikha, 2023).

According to a report published in 2022 by the Public Health Foundation of India, there has been a 70.7 % increase in India's rate of rape-related crimes over the past two decades. Based on the findings of the report, it can be observed that in the majority of instances, the perpetrator had a pre-existing relationship with the victim (cases of date or acquaintance rapes). Nevertheless, the completion rate of trials for cases by the year 2018 stood at a mere 10 %, and a significant majority of these cases, approximately 73 %, resulted in acquittals (Sharma, 2022). It makes it very clear that the issues films have chosen to produce for society are in line with the actual scenarios of mistrust in the justice system by sexual crime's victims. For social progress, films' role in moulding and spreading information through different narratives is crucial. Although disappointing, but the global film industry itself is shaped by gender disparity. Women are systemically underrepresented in creative and economic decision-making jobs (Ehrich et al., 2022). Society promotes the performance of gender roles that accentuate femininity and sexuality in girls, while also penalizing them for conforming to these norms (Ramirez et al., 2022)

If we talk about the psychological bearings of date rape survivors, rape is not solely an isolated act perpetrated by an individual but rather a persistent social stigma that feeds on an on-going cycle of silence. According to a comprehensive survey encompassing 185 countries; it was found that just 77 out of these nations have enacted legislation specifically criminalizing marital rape. This data was collected in the year 2018 (UN Women, 2019).

The majority of individuals who have experienced rape encounter a more pronounced psychological impact during the immediate aftermath of the assault (Tripathi, 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to note that a significant number of survivors may endure lingering psychological consequences. The extent of psychological trauma experienced by survivors is directly correlated with the quality of the healing conditions they receive (Gravelin et al., 2019). The psychological impact on the victim is significantly influenced by the identity of the perpetrator involved in the crime as well as the nature of the relationship shared between the victim and the perpetrator (intimate or acquaintanceship). The psychological consequences experienced by survivors of sexual assault encompass a range of distressing outcomes, such as dread and anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, diminished self-esteem, challenges in social adjustment, and sexual dysfunctions (Resick, 1993).

Based on the study of 185 countries in 2019, women have a decreased propensity to disclose incidents of sexual abuse due to concerns regarding potential reprisals, social exclusion, the assignment of blame onto the victim, and the associated social humiliation (UN Women, 2019). Many a time media reporting reinforce narrow and stereotypical ideas about gender roles. Women were seen as mainly responsible for controlling sexual situations, while men were seen as "naturally" aggressive people (Hindes, Fileborn, 2020).

The number of new rape cases filed each year far exceeds the number of cases that are resolved. Because of the difficulty of the process and the potential for more traumas for victim, they may give in to pressure from their own or the offender's family. Despite the fact that there is at least one special Fast Track Court (FTC) in every district and trials are to be completed within the year, the pendency of POSCO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) cases has gone up by over 170 % since 2016—from 90,205 cases till December 2016 to 2,43,237 cases till January 2023 (Thakur, 2023). The aforementioned statistics show a clear picture of the scenario faced by sexual assault victims when it comes to the timely disposal of the cases and the conviction of their assaulters. The findings of the study on attribution of blame revealed that male participants exhibited a higher tendency to assign blame to the victim compared to their female counterparts (Shelby, 2020). Furthermore, the participants consistently assigned the highest level of culpability to the victim in

the context of the seduction rape scenario, with the date rape scenario following closely behind (Grubb, Harrower, 2009).

In a similar kind of incident that also appears in the film *Satyaprem Ki Katha*, the father of the rape victim blames and condemns her victim daughter *Katha* only for the unfortunate incident and to bring shame to his reputation in society. Consequently, the victim decides to take her life and attempts suicide. The mental trauma of the date rape survivor *Katha* not only ends with this incidence, but later she was forced to get married against her will. The film has elaborately shown the difficulty a survivor faces in forgetting her unfortunate past experience and returning to a normal life. The date rape survivor *Katha* also deals with the pressure and fear of indulging herself again in another intimate relationship (Vidwans, 2023).

The film *A Thursday* (Khambata, 2022) subsequently gives more profound illustrations of psychological bearings of the rape survivors. The rape survivor, *Naina*, later in her life underwent therapeutic intervention to address the psychological distress resulting from the abusive experience of her teens. A dialogue in the film by the victim's mother, who says that she won't shed a tear for her daughter because her eyes have dried up, shows the level of distress and trauma a victim's family faces in order to seek justice for a heinous crime like rape.

The movie *Pink* is a courtroom drama that revolves around the aftermath of a sexual assault involving three women. However, the film is more focused on the legal complexities of fighting against influential assaulters but it also delves into societal attitudes, victim-blaming, and the psychological impact on sexual assault survivors (Chowdhury, 2016).

The film *Bhoomi* demonstrates the presence of patriarchal prejudice within the court system, shedding light on the societal shaming of rape survivors. This stigmatization worsens the challenges faced by survivors in their journey towards healing, ultimately compelling them to resort to illicit means of seeking justice. The film highlights that the perpetrators of the key character *Bhoomi*, who is a victim of rape, were her acquaintances (Kumar, 2017). Although *Astitva* is a film that examines how a victim of intimate partner assault perceives herself and her place in the world. Yet it does discuss the psychological repercussions of sexual assault, especially when perpetrated by a trusted companion (Manjrekar, 2000). The prestigious Kim Jiseok award winning film *The Rapist* depicts *Naina's* (played by Konkana Sen Sharma) struggle with the ingrained stigma associated with rape in India, as well as the societal and psychological sufferings she experiences as a result of the unfortunate incident (Sen, 2021).

#### 4. Results

All the above-mentioned Bollywood films have done a fair job of bringing out the psychological repercussions a rape survivor has to face along with her loved ones. These films have successfully encroached within the dark walls of the unfortunate incidents of date or acquaintance rapes, incest and domestic sexual violence against women to give those taboo subjects an open debate.

According to the *Indian Express*, 31.8 % of crimes against women were cases registered under 'cruelty by husband or his relatives', 20.8 % of cases were under 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty', while kidnapping and abduction accounted for 17.6 % of cases and rape cases for 7.4 %. The crime rate (10 cases registered per one million female population) was 64.5 % in 2021, compared to 56.5 % in 2020 (Roy, 2022). The scenario of acquaintance rape is nothing different than this around the globe, too. Specifically talking about Asia-Pacific region, Pakistan exhibited the greatest incidence of domestic violence against women as of 2019. An overwhelming majority of 85 % of women in Pakistan reported experiencing physical or sexual violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. Afghanistan ranks second on the list, with a prevalence rate of 60.8 %. Contrary to popular belief, despite having one of the lowest crime rates globally, Singapore has reported that roughly 6 % of women had encountered incidents of sexual violence as of the year 2019 (Kameke, 2022).

The bio-psychosocial consequences of rape might manifest in the survivor, who may experience both physical and psychological effects of trauma and post-traumatic stress. It is an unfortunate truth that female survivors of rape in India frequently encounter significant barriers when seeking justice and help, including limited access to healthcare, counselling services, and legal aid (Karmakar, 2023). With the increasing number of sexual crimes against women, the government has also tightened their seat belts to help and support rape survivors. The women and child development ministry has just unveiled a new initiative aimed at offering assistance to underage victims of rape who have been forsaken by their families or lack the

necessary resources to sustain themselves. This program aims to offer legal assistance to minor victims, ensuring their access to justice as well as providing essential care. A budgetary allocation of INR 740 million has been designated for the implementation of the scheme (Iftikhar, 2023).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Nirbhaya Fund program has been in existence since 2013. This initiative aims to establish a non-lapsable corpus fund dedicated to enhancing the protection and security of women. The administration of this fund is entrusted to the Department of Economic Affairs. The Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF) is also a government aid that offers monetary support to individuals who have been victimized by a range of criminal offenses, including rapes, as outlined in Section 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). As to the Usha Mehra Commission's recommendations, One Stop Centres (OSCs) offer a range of integrated services to women impacted by violence, in addition to offering financial assistance. The range of services provided included medical assistance, police support, legal aid, counselling services, and temporary housing. The Mahila Police Volunteer (MPV) is also a similar kind of program that aims to establish a direct connection between the police and the community at the grassroots level. This is achieved through the involvement of female volunteers who serve as intermediaries, providing assistance to women in need, and fostering a stronger relationship between the police and the public (Indian Government Schemes, 2023). Apart from government initiatives, many non-profit organizations are also rendering great service to rape survivors.

PARI is an organization in India run by young individuals as a non-profit institution. The organization strives to combat rape and the phenomenon of victim-blaming. It takes initiative to implementing education and awareness-raising campaigns across multiple platforms, including social media. Additionally, the organization offers psychosocial treatment and support to individuals who have experienced sexual assault. Majlis, an NGO founded in Mumbai, collaborates with individuals affected by sexual violence to offer legal assistance and counselling services. The team assembled by Majlis, consisting of female lawyers and social workers, has rendered social and legal assistance to around 50,000 women and children who have encountered instances of violence, thereby facilitating their access to the judicial system.

The establishment of the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC) took place in 2001 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The organization creates and implements programs aimed at providing assistance to women who have experienced sexual or any kind of violence (Azim Premji Foundation, 2022). In 2012, Elca Grobler founded the 'My Choices Foundation' in Hyderabad, India. The primary objective of the organization is to eradicate instances of domestic violence and combat the issue of sex trafficking within the context of India (Medvedkina, 2023).

Violence (physical, sexual, or psychological) perpetrated by a husband or male intimate partner is the most prevalent form of violence against women worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2021). According to the 'Women, Business, and the Law 2020 report', 50 nations lack sexual harassment laws. Those countries have laws to criminalize such acts, but most women are unaware of these regulations, making implementation difficult (World Bank, 2020). The aforementioned condition of women and legislation protecting her rights to get justice against sexual violence profoundly emphasize the need of organized support for victims. Apart from non-profit organizations putting in efforts for the support and welfare of sexual assault victims, all the developed and developing countries have introduced rape crisis centres, also known as sexual assault referral centres (SARCs), which helps victims of rape and other sexual assault in the immediate aftermath and for months or years afterward. They offer medical, psychological, and practical care to victims in a safe setting with a multidisciplinary staff.

Australia has several state and territory based rape crisis centres, including Full Stop Australia (established in 1971 as the Sydney Rape Crisis Collective). The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, a nationally recognized organization in Ireland, offers a comprehensive array of services, including training and advocacy initiatives. Rape crisis centres in Canada are state-based; however the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres is an umbrella group (Stacey, 2016).

During the 1970s, support groups aimed at assisting those who have experienced rape and sexual abuse were created in New Zealand. Subsequently, in 1986, an organization known as 'Rape Crisis and Related Groups' (RCRG) was formed. Thuthuzela Care Centres in South Africa have emerged as a renowned model of optimal care provision following incidents of sexual



assault. The term ‘thuthuzela’ originates from the Xhosa language, specifically indicating a sense of ‘comfort’ (Dlamini, 2023).

Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) are present throughout the United Kingdom, and they are established, financed, and operated by the National Health Service (NHS). In addition, there exist crisis centres that operate as charitable entities, under the supervision of Rape Crisis England & Wales and Rape Crisis Scotland. As of 2023, they function as a collective entity, incorporating 39 member rape crisis centres (Livingston, 2023).

America has established numerous Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) since the 1970s, primarily initiated by women affiliated with the second-wave feminist movement. Similar kinds of rape crisis centres and sexual assault responses services are developed around the globe to extend a helping hand to distressed sexual assault victims and survivors in need.

In numerous nations throughout Asia and the Pacific region, the prevalence of women who reveal instances of physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner during their lifetime exceeds the worldwide average of 27 %. Specifically, the rates stand at 35 % in India, 38 % in Timor Leste, and surpass 50 % in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Bangladesh (WHO, 2021).

## 5. Conclusion

The role of cinema in the development of culture is characterized by a complex and mutually beneficial relationship. Cinema (especially in India), in the broader cultural context in which film holds a disproportionately significant position, should entail more responsibility in choosing and presenting stereotypical gender representations. It is relieving that women are no longer viewed solely as decorative accessories or helpless victims in Indian films. Bollywood has started to make up stories about them – depth narratives that don't stop at the surface. Films discussed above have indeed done a decent job in bringing up a women-related issue for which society is split over its existence and severity. The film has adeptly addressed the social issues of date and acquaintance rape with sensitivity, thereby conveying a poignant message that resonates deeply with the audience. Although the film has been criticized for telling the story of a woman from a man's perspective, the filmmakers assert that their conscious choice to present the narrative from a male perspective is based on their belief that feminism may effectively accomplish its objectives by influencing the transformation of men within society.

The movie does a good job of portraying the psychological and emotional suffering that a date rape victim goes through. However, it falls short of depicting the resilience and determination exhibited by the survivor as she confronts the challenges posed by her family and society. However, the film *A Thursday* endeavours to depict the resilience of a survivor of sexual assault as she fights for justice, where her quest for justice takes unsavoury turns. Both films have emphasized the issue that many scholars specializing in gender and media studies have also consistently highlighted that women's freedoms are constrained under the guise of tradition and cultural identity. The fundamental premise posits that women serve as custodians of traditional and cultural values. The film industry, which has a significant duty to spread ideas among the general public, has consistently been motivated to increase awareness regarding gender-based violence and bias, as well as to challenge deeply ingrained societal prejudices. Bollywood has previously endeavoured to use societal taboos as narrative themes in its films; however, their appeal has been primarily confined to aficionados of art cinema and unconventional narratives. The industry has consistently expressed scepticism regarding the potential commercial success of these thematic elements in films. However, these two recently released films have challenged this premise by achieving both commercial success and critical acclaim from audiences. Nevertheless, the Indian film industry still has a significant distance to cover in terms of consistently and convincingly conveying messages that empower women and challenge their marginalized status within society.

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