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PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER GENRE IN INDIAN CINEMA

Gauribhushan C. Holkar, Krupa Dinesh Deshpande
"MA - FTNMP, Deviprasad Goenka Management College of Media Studies"
Under the Guidance of: Miss. Kanchan Luthra

Abstract
The occurrence of the 'Psychological Thriller' genre in the description of film has become common. Psychological issues have been mispresented in front of the audiences. Filmmakers have a responsibility to present these psychology issues in correct light, in their respective piece of work. They often manipulate, omit, or ignore the facts regarding the subjects included in the films and mould them according to their own preference. Informing people about certain issues through films is necessary but as time went by, filmmakers began to concentrate more on the Entertainment aspect rather than presenting audiences with factual information. Descriptive research design with mixed methodology has been used for this research: combination of qualitative research and quantitative research. This paper uses semi-structured interviews of professionals from the field of Psychology. Also, a survey was conducted by the researchers to study the data and to find out the gap between Psychology Thriller and the interpretation of it by the audiences. Movies from the 2001-2022 era were selected to encompass the audiences of the current generation. It was found that in trying to achieve commercial success the filmmakers lose touch with the key element, i.e., the Psychology and Thriller aspect of the story.

***Keywords**:* Psychological Thriller, Genre, Indian Cinema, Psychology, Mental Illness.

I. Introduction

1.1 Mental Health in India

The scale of Mental disorders in India contributes to approximately 15% of the global Mental Health Burden (Mental health and well-being in the workplace, 2022). Awareness regarding Mental Health has recently began emerging among the people of this country. In 2020, WHO (World Health Organization) estimated that around 7.5% of Indians experience some form of mental disorder and predicted the number might rise to 20% by the end of 2020 (Bhatia, 2020). By the end of 2022, close to around 60 to 70 million people in India experience mental disorders ranging from common to extremely severe. With a staggering number of 2.6

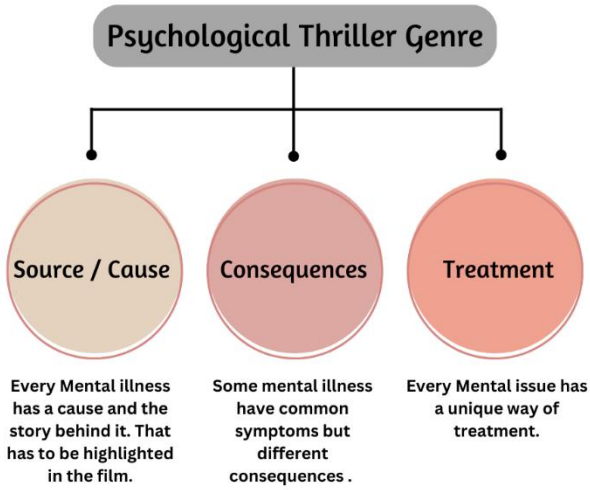
lakh cases of suicide, India is considered to be World's Suicide Capital. WHO statistics show average suicide rate in India to be 10.9 for one lakh people (Jerajani, 2022).

1.2 Psychological Genre

It is crucial for the writer to know the settings of their film, its characters, their unique characteristics which set them apart from other people established in the film. Even the genre in which the writer is dabbling in, should be well known by them.

Each genre has its own flavour which attracts the audience of the concerned genre niche to theatres. Likewise, if a writer desires to write a story which has Psychological Thriller as its genre, the aspect of any mental illness used in the plot should be explained to the audience, to enlighten them regarding the subject matter.

1.2.1 In a psychological thriller movie, the following elements play a vital role:



highlighting these 3 factors completes the necessity of psychological thriller in a movie.

The mental illness used in a plot of a psychological thriller should have the flow of above mentioned three elements. As every mental illness varies from disorder to disorder and even person to person, the story containing these subjects should define these adequately.

The factors contributing to the illness, like reason of its onset, the triggers revolving around them, the care needed for the same, is unknown to the general audience. The ignorance of such topics creates stigma around mental health and people make such patients into outcasts. Films can, in reality, can serve as the springboard for open conversations, when used in a therapeutic and open environment; where orthodox notions of society can be challenged and help people in processing their emotions without attaching shame to the idea (Portrayals of Mental Illness in Film and the Impact on Viewers, Individuals with Mental Illness, and Mental Health Treatment, 2023). Writers and filmmakers want to make movies that sell, even if they are filled inaccuracies and misinformation.

1.3 Research of Psychology in Films

Amid rise in the consumption of content on OTT platforms, producers and makers obtained the liberty to release films and series without the censorship. They referred to this as 'obtaining creative liberty.'

Filmmakers concentrate more on the action and suspense involved in these thrillers. They completely abandon the responsibility to educate and highlight these mental illness aspects, which add more credibility to the story and provide justice to the genre in question.

Lack of research is one of the main reasons the psychological element is not well defined in the films. Filmmakers choose entertainment without credibility over enlightenment with information.

1.4 Relevance

Relevance of this research is to examine the impact of Indian Psychological Thriller movies project on the minds of audiences. As films in this genre are being created and enjoyed by audience, it is crucial to see that accurate representation of psychology is incorporated in its narrative. This will help the aspiring filmmakers in creating movies that are both informative and entertaining.

II. Literature Review

In a survey conducted by Alekha, Sahitya & Simon, response of 120 individuals was tabulated and a common pattern was revealed in their impressions about mental disorders; when asked about sources of information of mental disorders, 60.24% named cinema as their most pronounced source (AIekha, Sahitya, & Simon, 2014).

Mentally ill characters in movies are usually a general representation of the disorder. No specific disorders or symptoms are demonstrated but rather serve the purpose of eliciting fear, anger, or amusement (Stuart, 2006). Audiences often mimic the performances they see on screen and carry them on in to their real life (Beachum, 2010). Majority of the population reports 'movies' to be primary source of information regarding psychotherapy and mental illness (Orchowski, Spickard, & McNamara, 2006).

The impact of the visuals they see on the screen is long-lasting on their mind, without them realising. Inaccurate representation of characters with mental illness can create negative and harmful stereotypes, isolating individuals with mental disorders, in turn contributing to the lack of treatment seeking behaviour. Depiction of mental illness in movies and television should be factually accurate along with being entertaining. There are some positive depictions in existence that contains the potential of educating the public and being implicated into clinical change. Sometimes, these movies can help medical practitioners in making patients and their families in understanding mental disorders in layman languages and eradicating fear and their misconceptions. Multiple authors and researchers have made lists of movies that might aid in therapy and how they can be used for example, Hesley

& Hesley 1998 and Neimics and Weeding 2003 (Portrayals of Mental Illness in Film and the Impact on Viewers, Individuals with Mental Illness, and Mental Health Treatment, 2023).

A few mental illnesses are extensively used in films to create a melodramatic storyline and to make audience either sympathize or hate the character carrying the disorder. Disorders such as dissociative identity disorder (DID), Anterograde Amnesia, and Schizophrenia, fall under this category and are shown more common than they are. Filmmakers need to understand movies with psychological element not only serve as entertainment but can be educational as well. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical professionals can use this medium as a means of introduction to a mental disorder to the patients and their families (Pirkis, Blood, Francis, & McCallum, 2006).

McFarquhar and Thompson conducted surveys of the general population and medical students to learn more about their perceptions of electroconvulsive shock treatment (ECT). Both medical students and general public had reservations about the topic and how their kin and society would think of them if they were to mention that they are receiving ECT (McFarquhar & Thompson, 2008).

Films have been portraying ECT for quite some time now. But the information given on screen is nowhere near the actual facts (ECT: Disrupting the Stigma Around An Essential Treatment Option, 2022). Films like Kyon Ki (Priyadarshan, Kyon ki, 2005), Pyaar Diwana Hota hai (Kumar K. , 2002), 3 (Rajnikanth, 2012) have scenes where characters are receiving ECT but the circumstances of before and after and the reasoning given are way off. Such examples set by filmmakers made people fear ECT and attached the factor of shame to a perfectly normal and helpful medical practice. Entertainment Media portals that incorporate mental illnesses in their content, target audiences between the age group of 15-24 years old. However, this is the age group that is most susceptible to mental health issues (Beachum, 2010).

Audiences have habit of drawing conclusions on their existing knowledge. When such audiences experience movies with mental illness, the conclusions reached are based on what was presented in the film (Beachum, 2010). The early portrayals of ECT depicted the procedure as a severe although an effective one; but as mentioned above as well, recent renditions of films ECT is shown in negative light as a cruel, abusive means to control and punish disruptive patients (McFarquhar & Thompson, 2008)

While some studies suggest that the degree of influence of media depictions of mental illness increases influence on public attitudes; others have indicated that the perceived realism of the film holds more importance (Pirkis, Blood, Francis, & McCallum, 2006). Films hold control on human psyche more than we realise. Even with formal education, research showed majority of medical students who covered ECT during their training, quote films as their key source of knowledge (Walter, McDonald, Rey, & Rosen, 2002) (McFarquhar & Thompson, 2008).

Around 10% of 317 Academy Awards between 1929-2009 were awarded to films that had connection to the topic of mental illness in some way or other. Mental health themes do not feature in 10% of all films, and nine of these winning films also received the Best Picture Oscar (Byrne, 2010).

Films often incorporate characters with mental illnesses who have some association with violence and exaggerate the aspect for entertainment purposes. Classic examples for this phenomenon would be – Schizophrenia, Manic Depressive Disorder (Bipolar), Anti-Social Personality Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The depictions of medical professionals like Psychiatrists, Psychologists, and therapists have also been problematic in nature. Many times, the health workers and medical professionals are shown being manipulative and deceiving with a patient (Kondo, 2008).

Recently with rise in mental health awareness among general audiences, movie makers are heavily using mental health issues in the narrative. But for the sake of pleasure and lack of research they end up creating characters who are heavily based on common stereotypes known to viewers. This in turn is disservice to the people who are fighting mental illness in their lives. Common mental illnesses portrayed in films and other media include – Schizophrenia, Major Depressive Disorder (Depression), Manic Depressive Disorder (Bipolar), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), dissociative identity disorder (Multiple Personality Disorder), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Anxiety Disorders, Eating Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and Personality Disorders (Hanley, 2015).

Not having enough knowledge about mental illness and nevertheless putting out content on the sensitive subject, is irresponsible. Films hold this responsibility of incorporating accurate information or the media's portrayal of mental illness might end up becoming a negative factor as individuals primarily rely on the media as the source of information. Media frames a concept introduced by Goffman, in simple terms means, media presents and organizes information for the understanding and consumption by a viewer (Goffman, 1986).

To keep the profits in the plus side, movie makers often present characters who are violent. Violence is known to be associated with mental illnesses. While mental disorders have some percentage of violence linked to them, but media often exaggerates this, for sake of entertainment and keeping the audiences hooked on the content (Sieff, 2003). Taking an example from Sieff's research, it was discovered that films and television were showing characters with mental illness in a negative light, to keep the audiences entertained and engaged (Sieff, 2003).

Researchers over the years have carried out various surveys, experiments and research work, in which they have concluded that media has done disservice to people with mental disorder as often describing them as the 'problem' and using their illness for the entertainment of others (Byrne, 2010) (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005) (Hyler S. H., 2003) (Klin & Lemish, 2008) (Kondo, 2008) (Owen, 2012) (Sieff, 2003).

Hyler categorised the stereotypes existent in films and television into 5 categories. According to Hyler (2003), they include the following: the Homicidal Maniac, the Narcissistic Parasite, the Female Patient as Seductress, the Rebellious Free-spirit, and the Specially Gifted. The most prevalent and maybe most harmful stigma associated with mental illness is the Homicidal Maniac (Hyler, Gabbard, & Schneider, 1991) (Pirkis, Blood, Francis, & McCallum, 2006).

Kondo (Kondo, 2008) and Owen (Owen, 2012) specifically dedicated their researches towards Schizophrenia and its portrayal in films and other media. Kondo (Kondo, 2008) had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, therefore her study paper included her opinions on how the condition was portrayed in films based on her own experience. In her paper she mentioned about how films are depicting relationships between patients and their therapists, which evolving into romantic in nature. This tendency allows mental illness to be romanticised so making the plot of the content more interesting, rather than one with accurate facts. Here we can observe one of Hyler's (Hyler S. H., 2003) categories – Female Patient as Seductress, being proven. As someone who had suffered from mental disorder herself, Kondo (Kondo, 2008) stated in her conclusions that her relationships with her therapists were nothing but professional and anything crossing that boundary would hinder the process of the patients' treatment.

In a study carried out by Owen in 2012, a supposed correlation between violence and mentally ill patients was observed in the films she reviewed as the study material. 35 out of 42 Schizophrenic characters had association to some type of aggressive behaviour. Around 83% of the characters in those movies were involved in violent actions, while only 18% diagnosed with mental illness partake in violence in real life (Owen, 2012). Serious issues such as suicide and self-harm too are shown in almost 24% of characters, whereas the number is around 10-16% in reality (Owen, 2012).

The experiences of people with mental illnesses are frequently distorted to represent shock and entertainment rather than reality (Kimmerle & Cress, 2013). Kimmerle and Cress (2013) researched on 'Knowledge about and attitude towards Mental Disorders. For this paper, they carried out two separate studies.

In study one, 77 participants were handed a questionnaire with basic biographical information, number of films and television they have seen and their knowledge about mental health issues.

And in study two, 39 participants were involved. Two experimental conditions were added in the questionnaire. One required them to watch a documentary on Schizophrenia and other was to watch film on Schizophrenia. Before starting both content they were asked to fill a biographical questionnaire asking basic questions and their existing knowledge on Schizophrenia. After viewing the movie, they were asked to fill another survey to measure their knowledge of Schizophrenia and assess the changes that happened from viewing the movie.

These studies found out that people's knowledge of mental illness was impacted by the number of films and television they had consumed. However, there was no direct relation between amount of television, streamed by the audiences, and negative attitudes towards the mentally ill patients (Kimmerle & Cress, 2013). Kimmerle and Cress' study further revealed their exists, a relationship between people's knowledge of mental disorders and their assessment of violence accompanied with the disorder. General audiences seemed confident about their information of Schizophrenia after watching the movies. People who watched documentaries were more confident in their knowledge on the subject (Kimmerle & Cress, 2013).

Kimmerle and Cress found out the influence of films and television on adults who possessed stigma due to their previous knowledge of mental illness. The fact that the documentary included actual people who were living with schizophrenia was credited to viewers' increased confidence in their understanding of the condition after seeing it. The fictitious films, however, were written

by authors who may or may not have had personal experience with schizophrenia, which lessens the plausibility of a character's portrayal (Kimmerle & Cress, 2013).

Wahl and his colleagues (Mental Illness Depiction in Children's Films, 2003) had set adolescents as their sample age group for the research. The reason for this is that children obtain more information and are formulating their independent opinions during this age period. Depictions of mental illness on knowledge and eradicating any stigmas around the same is more salient during this time (Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, 2003)

In the research (Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, 2003), 49 films between 2000-01 with G and PG ratings were selected and viewed by 3 different raters. The task was to view and identify the existence of the characters with mental illnesses. During their 2nd watch, the films with such characters were instructed to be further categorised into the following sub types – Demographics (Age, Gender, Marital status, etc); Attributes (i.e. Physical and Personality characteristics); Association with violence; Response of surrounding characters; Treatment (Psychological or Biological) and lastly Overall impression of the character (Positive or Negative) (Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, 2003).

The result of the above-mentioned study was 12 films had characters with mental illness and 21 had references to mental health issues. Around 2/3 of the films reviewed had material or references to mental illness confirming children can be exposed to learning about mental health disorders through media content (Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, 2003). Many films contained few positive characters with mental illness who were successful, helpful, and sympathetic. On the other hand, majority had links with aggression and were feared by others (Wahl, Wood, Zaveri, Drapalski, & Mann, 2003).

Literature concerning mental illness has more times negative perception and stereotypes surrounding it (Hanley, 2015). Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1974) believed was moulded by the environment, through observational learning known as social learning theory. This belief would entail – observing others' behaviour, people would replicate what they had seen from modelled behaviour (Bandura, 1974). Subsequently individuals from modern day generation learn from media outlets. If media depicts mental health issues in a negative format, according to the social learning theory, observers would more probably have a negative mindset towards the disorders.

Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005) coined the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis after conducting a survey on college students and their perceptions of minority groups based on their exposure to different television genres. The concept commands people to have more knowledge of other para-socially (through media outlets, TV, film) rather than through personal contact. According to this theory an individual's knowledge of mental illness will mirror as to what they have seen in that film.

Hanley's (Hanley, 2015) primary goal in her research was to determine whether there is any relationship between watching films that feature representations of mental illness and viewers' perceptions of such conditions. It was discovered that people agreed to stereotype surrounding mental disorders more than the factual data. No significant relationship between the number of films with

depictions of mental health issues and knowledge of illness, indicating that the participating subjects could tell the difference between reality and fictionalised film's story (Hanley, 2015).

More knowledge of the topic of mental health leads to less agreement to stereotypical statements and vice-versa. One of the hypotheses of the research that was proven to be incorrect was that the respondents had stereotypes in mind as they disagreed with statements related to stereotypes on average (Hanley, 2015). A limitation to the study was the possibility of respondents being aware on these topics regardless of if they have watched films. Also, the majority of the respondents were college students; they are more in contact with various diverse groups and with more resources available at their disposal. This improves and refines their information on such sensitive topics (Hanley, 2015).

While past resources of gender differences in empathetic emotion inducing situations (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, & Miller, 1989) indicated women might be more sympathetic towards such illnesses. Hanley (Hanley, 2015) research did not show such results as responses included, majority of women and a smaller number of men. This factored as there were a smaller number of men compared to women.

III. Research Methodology

a. Research Design

The research has a combination of both quantitative and qualitative styles and uses a descriptive approach as a design framework. Psychology experts were chosen to be the interviewees and a semi- structured interview was carried out, guided by a set of questions designed by the authors. Additionally, a survey was put out for audience, irrespective of their knowledge in psychology, to gather the quantitative data needed for the paper. As the films are targeted for these audiences, we needed information on their current knowledge and how they view Psychological Thriller in general.

b. Aim, Objective & Hypothesis

Aim - The aim of this study is to find out how the Indian film industry portrays psychological disorders leading to misinterpretation of mental illness in society, as well as what psychological experts and the audience may expect from films in this genre.

Objective – The objective of this study is

- To examine how mental diseases are portrayed in Indian cinema.
- To determine whether Indian filmmakers make an attempt to investigate the psychological aspects of the subgenre.

c. Sample

Random sampling was selected by the authors to get the freedom of selection and expand the sample limit of the group. The sample included subjects from all genders ranging from ages 16-60. This is a sampling strategy in which each sample has an equal chance of being selected. A random sample is meant to provide an unbiased representation of the complete population.

The selection of movies was done through a concise process. Things taken into consideration were –

- The mental illnesses they showcase,

- The popularity of the movie throughout its run, and

- Whether accurate representation and information was imparted or not.

For the survey purposes researchers have selected movies that either are Indian Psychological thriller or are marketed as one. The movies in the survey given out, are as follows - *Bhool Bhulaiya* (Priyadarshan, Bhool Bhulaiyaa, 2007) *Anniyan / Aparichit* (Shankar, 2005), *Talaash* (Kagti, 2012), *Athiran* (Vivek, 2019), *Kriti - short film* (Kunder, 2016), *Spyder* (Murugadoss A. , 2017), *Forensic* (Paul & Khan, 2020), *Freddy* (Ghosh S. , 2022), *Chup* (Balki, 2022), *Highway* (Ali, 2014) , *Blurr* (Bahl, 2022), *Cutputli* (Tiwari R. , 2022), *Dhoka* (Gulati, 2022), *Ratsasan* (Kumar R. , 2018), *and Kartik Calling Kartik* (Lalwani, 2010)

d. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The survey sent out required the respondents to fill their basic biographical information such as their name, age, gender, whether they are a student or a working professional. The age group observed here was in the range of 16 – 60 years. As movies are universal for everyone, setting limitations would be like ignoring a demographic's opinions. As the movies included were of Indian origins, the sample was naturally all Indian nationality.

e. Procedures

Descriptive Research Design was chosen for the research as the motive of the paper was to present the data obtained as it is without changing anything. two types of studies were designed to get as accurate data as possible. A descriptive research design seeks information to characterise a phenomena, situation, or population in a methodical manner. It especially aids in addressing the research challenge's what, when, where, and how questions rather than the why. Hence, data was collected both qualitatively and quantitatively under this framework.

In study no. 1, researchers conducted informal sessions with the professionals, to gather their insight on the topic.

In survey no. 2, participants were asked to list select their favourite genres and all the Indian psychological thriller films they had seen. Other questions were asked to get a better understanding about their existing knowledge of mental disorders, and their narrative in films. Prior to the survey, consent was obtained.

The interview with the professionals was conducted on one-on-one basis and the survey was conducted through a form prepared by the researchers.

f. Tool: Semi-Structured Interview

A structured interview was constructed by the researchers to maintain a certain extent of uniformity in responses. It allowed the researchers to gain freedom in the answers obtained from the interviewees. The answers of the professionals in the field of Psychology were an important contributing factor in the collection of data. These questions included topics such as their outlook on representation of mental disorders in Indian as well as Cinema abroad, their expectations from the psychological sub-genre, elements lacking on these subjects and if such films are helpful to budding professionals as well as common man.

A survey was conducted to further the data and have a clear understanding of the audiences, for whom the films are made. The survey included people from different walks of life, answering questions set by the researchers. These were formed to have a clear idea of their knowledge on the topic, their psyche towards Indian psychological thriller films, and whether the psychological element portrayed in the movie was put forth in an accurate and understanding manner. They were asked if they knew main motto of any movie, about the correct interpretation of the term 'Psychological Thriller,' and which in their opinion, could be considered 'Best Psychological Thriller.'

A set of movie genres was listed and respondents were asked to select the ones which they like, the same was done with Indian psychological thriller movies. Respondents were questioned if the expectations of this sub-genre were fulfilled. People were asked which of a list of mental illnesses they have seen depicted in Indian cinema. From a checklist of stereotypes of mental illness, people were required to choose the ones they had heard previously. Also, respondents were required to tell their primary source of information regarding, mental health disorder

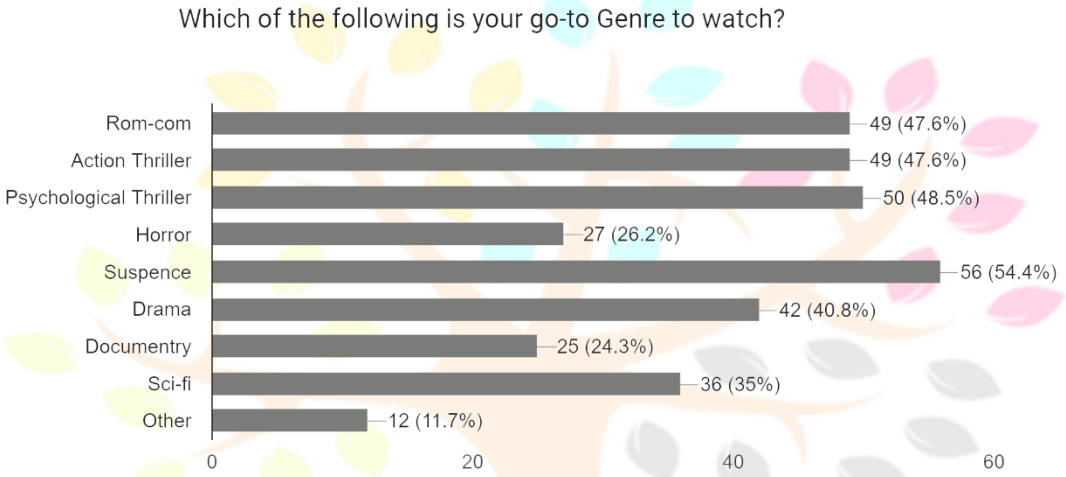
Further questions included, if Indian filmmakers lack in research when addressing such sensitive topics, if misrepresentation of mental illness is happening in films and if inclusion of subjects like these can help medical professionals in treatment of patients in future.

Utmost care was taken by the researchers to keep the authenticity and transparency in the answers of the interviewee. However, there are certain limitations to this method, as the answers were based on the memory of the people on the subject matter. The movies selected were chosen based on popularity, as audiences might be more familiar with them. This interview helped the authors to understand the perception of the audience towards the genre and its lack thereof.

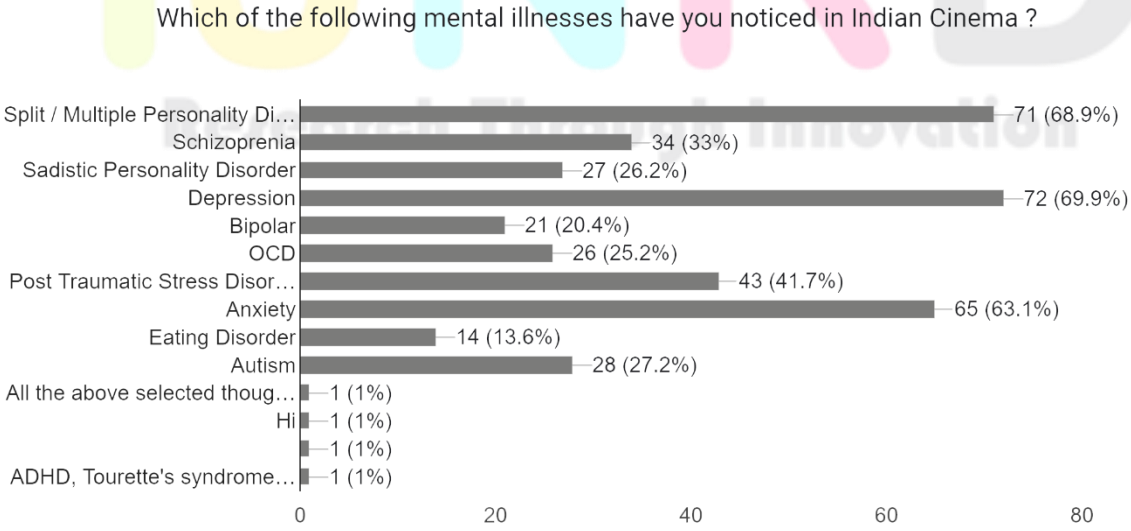
IV. Data Interpretation & Analysis

In the survey, among 103 respondents, 55.3% were male and 44.7% were female. The age demographic obtained ranged from 16 – 60 years old. When asked about their lifestyle, 58.3% were working professionals and the remaining 41.7% said they were students.

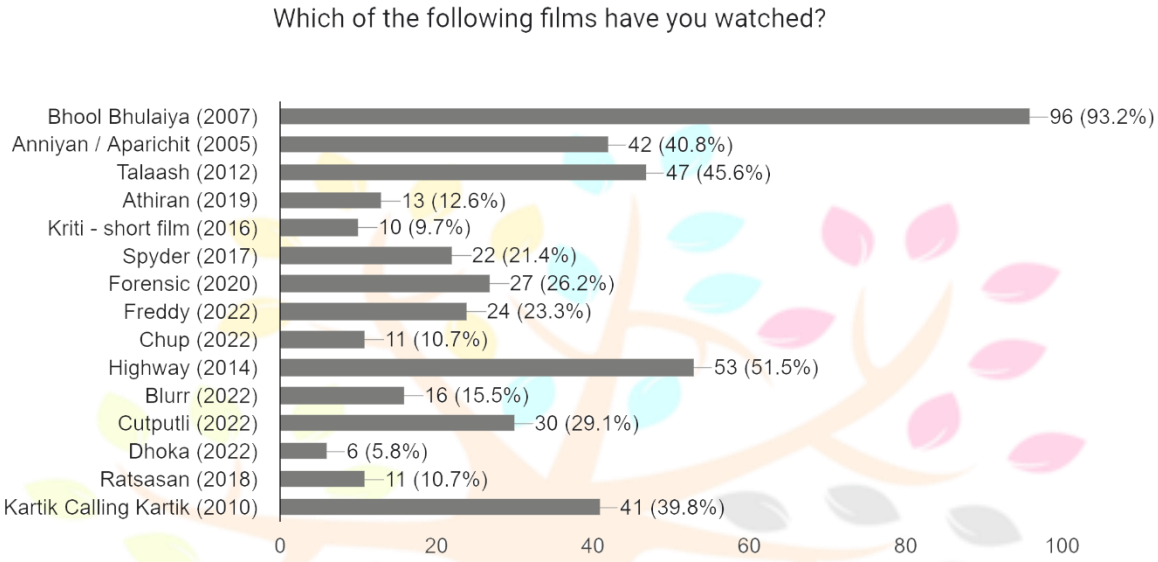
Every individual has their own opinion and preferences. The pollee was required to select their favourite genre from the checklist given in the form. The top spot was grabbed by Suspense with 54.4% with psychological thriller coming at second place with 48.5%. These were followed by Romantic comedy and Action Thriller with 47.6%, Drama with 40.8%, Science fiction with 35%, Horror with 26.2% and Documentary ranking last with 24.3%.



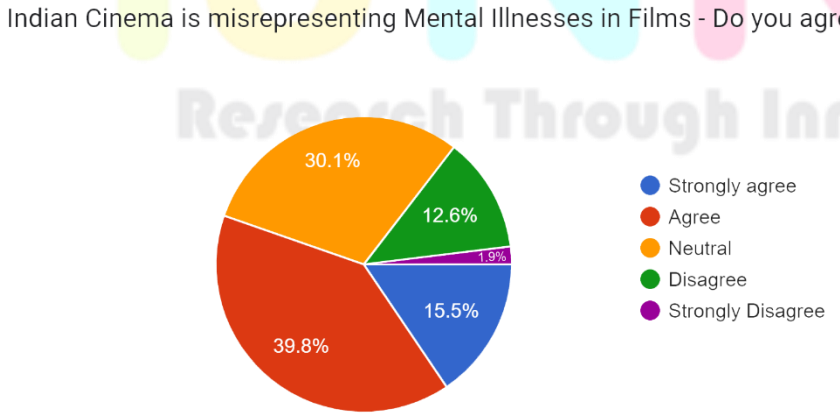
Films have been using mental illness as plot point for quite a while now. Authors of the research jot down few mental illness and asked respondents to select the ones they noticed in Indian films so far; depression ranked highest with 69.9%, followed by split personality disorder with 68.9% and anxiety with 63.1%. Other illnesses include PTSD – 41.7%; Schizophrenia – 33%; Autism – 27.2%; Sadistic personality disorder – 26.2%; OCD – 25.2%; Bipolar – 20.4%; and eating disorder – 13.6%. Respondents also included attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and phobias in the mix.



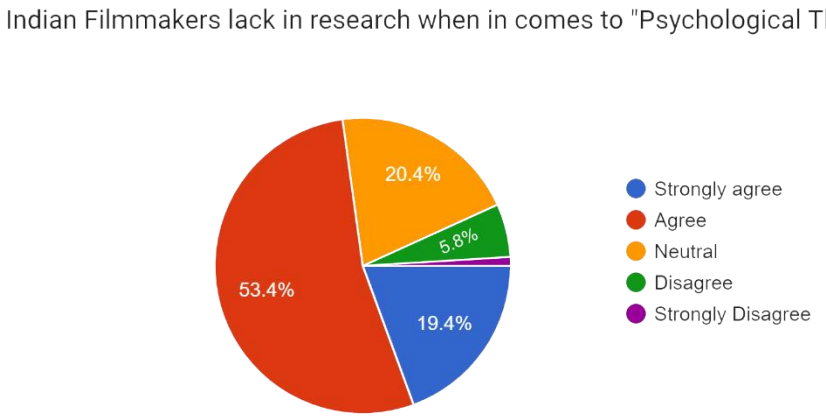
Like, researchers mentioned before, some Indian psychological thrillers and the ones marketed as such, were recorded in the survey. Audiences were asked to mark the ones they have watched before. 93.2% had watched *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* (Priyadarshan, Bhool Bhulaiyaa, 2007) which highlighted DID (dissociative identity disorder). Other films included *Highway* (Stockholm syndrome) (Ali, 2014) – 45.6%; *Talaash: The answer lies within* (Insomnia) (Kagti, 2012)– 45.6%; *Aparichit* (Multiple Personality Disorder) (Shankar, 2005) – 40.8%; *Kartik Calling Kartik* (Schizophrenia) (Lalwani, 2010) – 39.8%; Athiran (Schizophrenia with Delusion) (Vivek, 2019) – 12.6%; Kriti – short film (Schizophrenia) (Kunder, 2016) – 9.7 %; Spyder (Sadistic Personality Disorder) (Murugadoss A. , 2017) – 21.4%; and Forensic (Sadism) (Paul & Khan, 2020) – 26.2%.



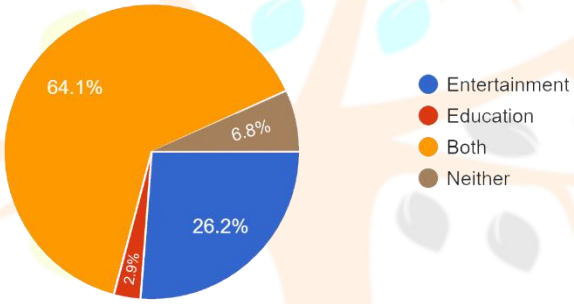
Some Indian films are presented to the viewers as psychological thriller but do not have any psychological narrative in the plot or rather has an unexplained plot point. Freddy (Ghosh S. , 2022); Chup (Balki, 2022); Blurr (Bahl, 2022); Cuttputlli (Tiwari R. , 2022); Dhoka (Gulati, 2022); and Ratsasan are examples of films in this category. According to the survey, 55.3% of the audience thinks that the "Indian Cinema is misrepresenting Mental Illness in Films" (15.5% - strongly agree; 39.8% - agree) and 30.1% audience are neutral about the statement. 14.5% viewers disagreed with the statement (12.6% - disagree; 1.9% - strongly disagree).



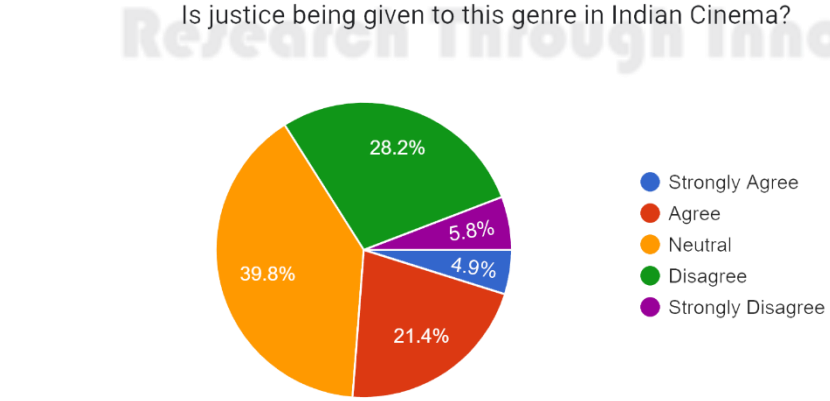
72.8% audiences think that Indian Filmmakers lack in the research when it comes to 'Psychological Thriller Genre' (53.4% - agree; 19.4% - strongly agree) and 20.4% are neutral. Around 6.8% audiences disagreed with the statement.



26.2% audiences think that the main motto of a film is entertainment, while 64.1% people agreed it is to entertain as well as to educates.



When enquired if proper justice is being given to psychological genre in India, majority of audience, 39,8% to be exact, were of neutral opinion. 26.3% (4.9% - strongly agree; 21.4% - agree) thought the statement to be correct, while 34% (28.2% - disagree; 5.8% - strongly disagree) thought the statement to be incorrect.



45.6% people agreed that films can help psychiatrist and psychologists to introduce the mental disorders to the patient and their families. 38.8% were on the fence about this, while 13.6% were sure that it will not be of any help.

Respondents were asked 'what is the meaning of psychological thriller' in their opinion. While analysing the responses, authors found the most common answer to be – 'combination of psychological and thriller aspects.' People were aware that this genre had a component related to mental illness. However, they appeared to be struggling to clarify in words or perhaps didn't understand the concept because the filmmakers didn't showcase it in a suitable way. An excellent statement in these responses was 'Exploring darkest corners of human mind.' A common misconception found here was 'thriller with twists and turns' or 'thriller with suspense till the end or 'film which keeps you at the edge of the seat.'

According to the survey, the major source of information of mental illness is Films, Internet, and social media. And the most common stereotypes of mental illness are 'Mentally Ill patients are MAD' & 'Mental illness can be cured by Love and care.'

V. Discussion

Amid rise in the consumption of content on OTT platforms, producers and makers obtained the liberty to release films and series without the censorship. They referred to this as 'obtaining creative liberty.' But under this 'liberty,' filmmakers lose the touch with the key element, i.e., the Psychology and Thriller aspect of the story. They often manipulate, omit, or ignore the facts regarding the subjects included in the films and mould them according to their own preference. Informing people about certain issues through films is necessary but as time went by, filmmakers began to concentrate more on the Entertainment aspect rather than presenting audiences with Factual Information. These psychological issues have been mispresented in front of the audiences. Filmmakers have a responsibility to present these psychological issues in correct light, in their respective piece of work.

Indian cinema in the early 2000s, created films under the psychological thriller genre. Their theme in the film was clear and prominent. It highlighted the mental illness at hand and created awareness of the disorder among the audiences. But since then, this practice has declined and filmmakers are not creating such content anymore. Till date, movies marketing themselves under this genre lack the basic necessity; to deliver accurate information and guidance about the disorder in the movie.

Films which are related to Psychology or Psychological issues could be used for educational purposes. According to school and college counsellors, these films may be used to investigate or identify primary symptoms in students. Not only counsellors but the parents also get to know about the new mental issues and unidentified traits in the student's behaviour with the help of these kinds of movies. For Example, movie "Taare Zameen Par" 2007 (Khan & Gupte, 2007) directed by Amir Khan and Amol Gupte. Before release of this film parents were unaware of "Learning Disability or Dyslexia" but today parents can identify the symptoms and they take their child to counsellors or the psychologist.

A semi structured interview was conducted by the researchers, with the Psychology Professors, Counsellors, and Psychiatrists to get a better understanding about their expectations from Psychological Thriller films in Indian Cinema. According to Prof. Shaila Kulkarni, a Psychology Professor at GVM's College, Goa University (Kulkarni, 2023), the information distributed

by Indian Psychological Thriller, was dramatized more than necessary, and lacked clarity. She felt that psychological category films ought to be factually accurate, without any dramatization, and that they should be careful to play with the audience's emotions. Many films make false promises regarding psychological illness, which can create stigma in the audience. She also mentioned that psychological drama helps them to create awareness amongst young students and their parents as well. However, there should be a few restrictions on some psychological thrillers, as these films can have diverse effect on their mentality. Prof. Shaila Kulkarni shared an incident with the authors where one of her female students watched Kriti – Short film (Kunder, 2016) and complained of being unable to differentiate between the reality and her imagination.

Dr. Melvin Silva (Silva, 2023), a renowned Psychiatrist from Goa stated Indian Cinema depicts all psychopath killers as being mentally ill and vice versa. Because of this wrong interpretation, stigma has been formed in the minds of audiences. Additionally, he said that less than 1% of people worldwide are psychopaths.

Prof. Akansha Tiwari, a faculty member of Psychology department of Fatima College, Goa University (Tiwari P. A., 2023), explained that she expects detailed explanation of the mental illness being highlighted in movies. According to her, each mentally ill patient is different and so the treatment process also varies from patient to patient. She adds, it is, at times, difficult to diagnose the exact cause of the problem, so sometimes movies might help professionals to get a path of diagnosis. But again, relying entirely on these movies is not an option as they emphasize on the drama around the illness rather than the illness itself.

According to a renowned director Mr. Dnyanesh Moghe (Moghe, 2023), Indian Filmmakers are lacking in research when making any psychology related film. 'Filmmakers focus on the entertainment part rather than the reality of the mental illness. Entertainment is one of the major reasons for which audiences like to watch films. The audiences want to escape their reality and spend their free time being entertained while viewing these films. They would much rather watch some massy films than be bombarded with accurate information in a movie theatre. As a result, viewers, unknowingly carry misinformation about topics like chloroform, land mines, mental illnesses, etc.' he said in the interview. He also states that Indian audiences are not mature to enough to think on facts rather want something which is appealing to our eyes.

Priya Sabnis, HOD of Psychology Department, PES College; Pooja Rajpurohit and Anushka Estibeiro, Counsellors of PES College, Goa University (Sabnis, Rajpurohit, & Estibeiro, 2023) strongly thinks that history of the character and mental disorder must be highlighted in the film. "Every individual suffering from mental illness, including psychopath killers, has a past, which may be the source of their unstable cognitive processes. That history must be included in the film, which then can be related to Human Psychology. The main objective of making a film based on psychology should be, 'how we can help them.' One of the treatment methods for such patients could be one-on-one interaction. They are confused in their own minds and want someone who can hear them and help them in achieving a clear and stable mind. These are the elements that Indian makers forget while producing a film which ends up creating a stigma that every mentally ill patient should be admitted in the hospital." They said in the interview with the authors.

According to many Indian Psychologist, Psychiatrist and Psychology scholars "A Beautiful Mind" (Howard, 2001) is one of the best films which had depicted the Schizophrenia Disorder. It had shown character's going through three stages in the movie - When the character is unaware of his illness, when he got to know about his mental condition and when he accepted the fact that this disorder is going to stay with him for rest of his life.

Another movie which was recommended by most of the psychology scholars were "Split" (Shyamalan M. N., Split, 2016). Psychology scholars appreciated the depiction of Multiple Personality Disorder and the observation of switching from one personality to another. In an interview with Good Morning America, (James McAvoy talks about his 23 different characters in New Film Split, 2017) actor James McAvoy shared his sources for the preparation of the role. He mentioned having worked with medical professionals to understand the nuances of the syndrome. Unfortunately, the only interaction of the actor with people suffering from this illness was through Youtube. He mentions the disappointment of not interacting with a DID patient as he could not find someone who was ready to sit and talk.

Despite the efforts and quality performance of the film and actors, the DID (dissociative identity disorder) community did not like the negative portrayal of the illness. They had a strong opinion that the portrayal created a stigma in the minds of common folks. People felt threatened by the DID community. In an interview with Anthony Padilla, (Nin/Kyle/etc., 2020) Nin/Kyle, etc shared a personal experience regarding their encounter with the above stigma.

Psychology Professionals have expressed their contentment regarding Indian films made during early 2000s. In their opinion, a select few films like Anniyan (Shankar, 2005) and Bhool Bhulaiyaa (Priyadarshan, Bhool Bhulaiyaa, 2007), are the ones that managed to successfully master the psychological subgenre. Bhool Bhulaiyaa directed by Priyadarshan tells the story of Avni who grapples with Multiple Personality Disorder. The makers did a good job of introducing the syndrome to its audience through the movie. It showcased the illness and tried to highlight the medical narrative of it. Anniyan (Shankar, 2005) directed by S. Shankar on the other hand, highlighted the past trauma of the character that instigated the alters to appear at the forefront.

For Example, "Cuttputlli" (Tiwari R. , 2022) directed by Ranjit Tiwari. The makers say it is a Psychological Thriller film but in the entire film not a single dialogue is related to any kind of psychological illness that the antagonist has. Indian Cinema portraying Serial killers as the Psycho killers but these are two different categories. It is not necessary that every Serial killer must have some Mental illness or every Psycho killer is a Serial killer. Filmmakers mix them together which leaves a wrong message on the society.

VI. Conclusion

People's growing need for classy and edgy entertainment is probing filmmakers to produce movies with suspense, thrills, mystery, drama, etc. Their desire to make psychological thriller is growing but the lack of knowledge and research among people,

spreads ignorance and stigma about the mental illnesses. Despite the attempts of making good and entertaining psychological thriller films, it ends up becoming a show of inaccuracies.

At the end of the survey, people were asked to recommend a psychological thriller. Responses included movies such as *Haseen Dilruba* (Mathew, 2021), *Drishyam* (Kamat, 2015), *Mardaani* (Sarkar, 2014), *Maficha Sakshidaar* (Rajdutt, 1986), *Kusum Manohar Lele* (Apte, 1998), *Kahaani* (Ghosh S. , 2012), *Andhadhun* (Raghavan, 2018), *Error 404 – not found* (Raman, 2011), *Ghajini* (Murugadoss A. R., 2008) among others. International movie mentions include – *Shutter Island* (Scorsese, Shutter Island, 2010), *Gone Girl* (Fincher, Gone Girl, 2014), *Memories of Murder* (Joon-ho, 2003), *Joker* (Phillips, 2019), *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000), *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *Kill Me Heal Me* (Kim & Kim, 2015), *The Sixth sense* (Shyamalan M. N., The Sixth Sense, 1999), *Orphan* (Collet-Serra, 2009), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980), *Taxi driver* (Scorsese, Taxi Driver, 1976), *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1920), *Midnight* (Oh-seung, 2021), *Forgotten* (Hang-jun, 2017), *Freddy* (Ghosh S. , 2022), *Wednesday* (Charles Addams, 2022), *Glass* (Shyamalan M. N., 2019), *Us* (Peele, 2019), *Drishyam 2* (Pathak, 2022), *Phobia* (Kriplani, 2016), *Black swan* (Aronofsky, 2011), *Dear Zindagi* (Shinde, 2016), *Talaash* (Kagti, 2012), *Forensic* (Furia, 2022), *Kudrat* (Sippy, 1998), *The girl on the train* (Taylor, 2016), *Mardaani 2* (Puthran, 2019), *Asur* (Sen, 2020-2023), *Darr* (Chopra, 1993), *Death Note* (Ohba, 2006-2007), *Chup: The Revenge of artist* (Balki, 2022), *Bhram* (Kaul, 2008), *Code Geass* (Taniguchi, 2006-2007), *Steins; Gate* (Hiroshi Hamasaki, 2011), *Psycho (Tamil)* (Mysskin, 2020), *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020), *Gaslight* (Kripalani, 2023), *Uncut Gems* (Josh Safdie, 2019), *Blurr, Secret Window* (Koepp, 2004), *The Accountant* (O'Connor, 2016), *Kaun* (Varma, 1999), *Ek Villain* (Suri, 2014), *Ratsasan* (Kumar R. , Ratsasan, 2018), *Kyon Ki* (Priyadarshan, Kyon ki, 2005), *Valvi* (Mokashi, 2023), *Ashi Hi Banwa Banwi* (Pilgaonkar, 1988), *Wrong Turn* (Valeri Milev, 2003-2021), *Road* (Mukherjee, 2002), *Fight Club* (Fincher, Fight Club, 1999).

As observed by the data collected from the survey, some people know the accurate meaning of the psychological thriller genre, while some still are unaware about what the genre entails. Most of the respondents of the survey also mentioned movies that do not contain any psychological element nor are psychological thriller in nature

This is an avid example of how confused common folks are when asked about their preferred psychological thriller. The solution for this is simple. Filmmakers need to approach future films with research on the topics mentioned in the movies. It is necessary to spread knowledge about things like psychology and mental illness to fight the stigma surrounding them.

Future research on this topic can focus on the differences present in the portrayal of mental illnesses and their usage in the plotlines in Hollywood or International Cinema and Indian Cinema. While this paper focused on the Indian filmmakers' approach to these movies and Psychologists' takeaways and opinions on such movies, more studies are required on other genres such as horror comedy, black comedy, horror, sci- fi among others and how different ours is compared to the rest of the world.

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