

Queer Narratives in Indian Cinema: A Comparative Study of Traditional and Modern Depictions' Films Like Taali, Haddi, Super Deluxe, Margarita with a Straw and Aligarh

Anindita Dey

Research Scholar, The Assam Royal Global University

Abstract

Indian cinema has historically reflected societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities, with early portrayals often confined to stereotypes and marginal roles. Traditional films frequently depicted queer characters as either comedic caricatures or tragic figures, reinforcing societal biases and limiting authentic representation. This study examines the evolution of queer narratives in Indian cinema, highlighting the significant shift towards more nuanced portrayals in contemporary films. Films such as *Taali* (2023) and *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) showcase a move towards depth and empathy, reflecting broader societal changes and greater awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. *Taali* offers an authentic portrayal of a transgender activist, while *Margarita with a Straw* provides a ground-breaking depiction of a bisexual woman with a disability. Similarly, *Aligarh* (2015) and *Super Deluxe* (2019) demonstrate a departure from superficial portrayals, focusing on the complexities of queer experiences. Despite progress, Bollywood still grapples with outdated stereotypes, underscoring the need for ongoing advocacy and reform. This study emphasizes the importance of these evolving portrayals in fostering a more inclusive cinematic landscape and contributing to societal understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences.

Keywords: Cinematography ,Intersectionality , Queer Representation , Stereotypes, Thematic Shifts

Introduction

Indian cinema has historically been a reflection of the nation's social, cultural, and political milieu. The portrayal of queer identities in Indian cinema has evolved significantly over time, mirroring the changing attitudes and awareness surrounding LGBTQ+ issues in society. Traditionally, queer characters in Indian films were often relegated to stereotypical or marginal roles, reflecting broader societal discomfort with non-normative sexualities and gender identities (Ganti, 2012). The portrayal of queer individuals was frequently limited to comedic caricatures or tragic figures, lacking depth and authenticity. This historical context is essential for understanding the current landscape of queer representation in Indian cinema and underscores the importance of analysing these shifts in portrayal over time.

In traditional Indian cinema, queer characters were often depicted through a narrow lens, which reinforced societal prejudices and stereotypes. Early films tended to portray LGBTQ+ individuals in a manner that was either exaggeratedly comedic or patently villainous. For instance, queer characters were sometimes used as comic relief or as embodiments of societal fears about deviance from heteronormative norms

(Kaur, 2016). These portrayals were not only limited in scope but also problematic, as they contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ communities. The emphasis was often on the perceived "otherness" of queer individuals rather than on their lived experiences and complexities. Analysing these traditional depictions provides insight into the ways in which societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities have been reflected and reinforced through cinema.

Contemporary Depictions in Indian Cinema

The shift in queer representation in Indian cinema marks a transformative period, reflecting broader societal changes and an evolving understanding of LGBTQ+ identities. With the advent of contemporary filmmaking, films like *Taali* (2023) and *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) stand as pivotal examples of this change, offering richer, more nuanced portrayals of queer characters. These films benefit from a broader societal discourse on LGBTQ+ rights, which has made it possible for filmmakers to explore queer narratives with greater empathy and depth (Sharma, 2018).

Taali (2023), directed by Ravi Jadhav, is a notable film in this new wave of queer representation. It tells the story of a trans woman, exploring her journey with authenticity and respect. Unlike many earlier representations that often relied on stereotypes or sensationalism, *Taali* focuses on the personal and emotional aspects of the protagonist's life, portraying her struggles and triumphs in a way that resonates with the audience (Jadhav, 2023). The film's approach reflects a growing sensitivity towards trans experiences, showcasing how contemporary Indian cinema is increasingly engaging with LGBTQ+ narratives on a more personal and humane level.

Similarly, *Margarita with a Straw* (2014), directed by Shonali Bose, offers a groundbreaking representation of queer identities by centering on a young woman with cerebral palsy who embarks on a journey of self-discovery and love. The film's portrayal of a queer protagonist with a disability is particularly significant, as it challenges traditional narratives and expands the scope of queer representation in Indian cinema. By intertwining disability with queerness, *Margarita with a Straw* highlights the intersectionality within LGBTQ+ experiences, emphasizing the diversity within the community and advocating for a more inclusive representation (Bose, 2014).

In contrast to these newer films, earlier representations of queer identities in Indian cinema often relied on clichéd portrayals or were marginalized to the fringes of storytelling. However, films like *Aligarh* (2015) and *Super Deluxe* (2019) represent a shift towards more complex and empathetic narratives. *Aligarh*, directed by Hansal Mehta, is based on the real-life story of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a professor whose sexuality led to a scandal and personal tragedy. The film delves into the professor's struggles with societal and institutional discrimination, offering a poignant exploration of the isolation and prejudice faced by LGBTQ+ individuals (Mehta, 2015). This film's critical portrayal of the systemic barriers faced by queer individuals highlights a significant departure from the more superficial or exploitative depictions of the past.

Super Deluxe (2019), directed by Thiagarajan Kumararaja, features a subplot involving a queer relationship that is integrated into the film's broader narrative. The film's portrayal of queer characters is marked by its naturalness and its integration into the larger fabric of the story, avoiding the sensationalism often associated with queer narratives. By presenting these characters as integral parts of the narrative rather than standalone or stereotypical figures, *Super Deluxe* demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of queer experiences (Kumararaja, 2019).

The evolution of queer representation in Indian cinema reflects a broader societal shift towards greater inclusivity and recognition of diverse identities. This change is supported by an expanding discourse on LGBTQ+ rights, which has influenced filmmakers to approach queer stories with greater depth and respect. Contemporary cinema's ability to depict queer experiences with authenticity and empathy marks a significant advancement in how LGBTQ+ identities are represented on screen, moving away from outdated stereotypes and towards a more inclusive and nuanced portrayal of the queer community. This progression not only enriches the cinematic landscape but also contributes to a broader societal understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences and struggles (Sharma, 2018).

Beyond the Surface: Unpacking Queer Stereotypes in Bollywood Cinema

Bollywood, India's dominant film industry, has long grappled with representing queer identities in its narratives. Traditionally, queer characters in Bollywood have been subjected to a range of stereotypes, from comedic relief to tragic figures, reflecting both societal attitudes and cinematic conventions. Historically, queer characters in Bollywood were often portrayed through exaggerated and one-dimensional stereotypes. Films like *Hum* (1991) and *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996) exemplify this trend. In *Hum*, the character of the effeminate, comic villain epitomizes the use of queer stereotypes for humour (Chakraborty, 2019). Similarly, *Kama Sutra* depicts queer identities in a sensationalized manner, focusing more on exoticism than on authentic representation (Saxena, 2020).

The comedic portrayal of queer characters has been prevalent in Bollywood. Characters such as those in *Biwi-O-Biwi* (2009) and *Double Dhamaal* (2011) often rely on exaggerated mannerisms and situations for humour. These films perpetuate the stereotype that queer individuals are inherently humorous or absurd, reducing their identities to mere punchlines rather than exploring their complexities (Ghosh, 2020). This trend has reinforced societal biases, positioning queer identities as something to be laughed at rather than understood.

Tragic portrayals of queer characters also persist. In *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002), the queer character's tragic fate aligns with the trope of the 'doomed' queer, a stereotype that suggests that queer individuals are fated to suffering and isolation (Gupta, 2018). Such portrayals contribute to a narrative that queerness is inherently tragic, rather than a legitimate and multifaceted identity.

However, recent Bollywood films have started to challenge these stereotypes. *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) and *Aligarh* (2015) represent significant shifts in this regard. *Margarita with a Straw* portrays a bisexual protagonist, Laila, with depth and nuance, exploring her complex identity and experiences (Goswami, 2021). Similarly, *Aligarh* presents the story of a gay professor, focusing on his personal struggles and societal rejection without resorting to sensationalism (Singh, 2022). These films mark a departure from traditional stereotypes, offering more authentic and empathetic portrayals. Another example is *Taali* (2023), which portrays the life of a transgender woman in a manner that seeks to humanize and normalize her experiences rather than sensationalize them. The film's approach contrasts with earlier Bollywood depictions, providing a more nuanced perspective on transgender issues (Verma, 2024).

Despite these positive developments, Bollywood's representation of queer identities remains a work in progress. The persistence of outdated stereotypes underscores the need for continued advocacy and reform in the industry. The shift towards more nuanced portrayals is a crucial step in fostering a more inclusive and accurate representation of queer identities in Indian cinema (Dey, 2022).

Research Objectives

- To Identify Stereotypes in Traditional Depictions
- To Determine Changes in Contemporary Representations
- To Analyze the Impact on Audience Perceptions
- To Compare Narrative Techniques and Themes

Research Questions:

- In what ways do narrative techniques differ in queer portrayals?
- What shifts occur in thematic concerns of queer representation?
- How is character development altered in queer narratives?
- How do traditional and contemporary queer portrayals compare?

Methodology

Five movies which are related to queer representation from the year 2014 -2023 namely “Taali”, “Haddi”, “Super Deluxe”, “Margarita with a Straw” and “Aligarh” Based on these five films, visual content analysis method is applied to the study and data from secondary sources such as movie reviews, articles on films, books and film theories to understand the Examines the portrayal of queer characters and themes through visual elements such as cinematography, mise-en-scène, and character portrayal in the selected films.

Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory: Queer theory examines how non-normative sexualities and gender identities are represented and understood. It challenges conventional notions of identity and explores the fluidity of sexual and gender categories. By applying queer theory to films like *Taali* and *Margarita with a Straw*, you can analyze how these films portray queer identities and how they challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms. This theory allows for a critical examination of the representation of LGBTQ+ characters and themes, and how these depictions reflect or subvert societal attitudes.

Cultural Studies Theory: Cultural studies theory explores how cultural products reflect and shape societal values and ideologies. It provides tools to analyze how films engage with and comment on cultural norms and social issues. Using this theory, you can examine how films like *Margarita with a Straw* and *Super Deluxe* engage with and critique cultural attitudes towards queer identities, and how they contribute to broader cultural conversations about sexuality and gender in India.

Narrative Theory. This theory examines how stories are constructed and how narratives shape our understanding of identities and experiences. Applying narrative theory to films like *Aligarh* and *Haddi* can help you explore how these films structure their queer narratives, the role of storytelling in framing queer experiences, and how these narratives influence audience perceptions of LGBTQ+ issues. This approach allows for a deeper analysis of how narrative techniques—such as plot development, character arcs, and point of view—impact the representation and reception of queer identities in cinema.

Overview of the films

1. **Taali (2023):** tells the story of a transgender woman, Gauri Sawant, who fights for acceptance and respect in a society that often marginalizes her. The film explores her struggles and triumphs as she battles for her rights and strives to live authentically. Through her journey, Taali sheds light on the

challenges faced by transgender individuals in India and highlights the personal and social obstacles they must overcome to gain recognition and dignity.

2. **Haddi (2023):** In *Haddi*, a transgender person seeks revenge while dealing with societal bias and discrimination. The film focuses on the protagonist's quest for justice and their struggle to be accepted in a world that often views them with prejudice. As they confront various challenges, *Haddi* explores themes of identity, resilience, and the fight against systemic oppression.
3. **Super Deluxe(2019) :** intertwines several stories set in a small town, including one about a queer character. The film presents a rich tapestry of lives intersecting, each dealing with societal expectations and personal dilemmas. Through its multiple narratives, *Super Deluxe* offers a look at the complexities of human relationships and the societal norms that shape them.
4. **Aligarh (2015):** is based on the true story of a gay professor who faces discrimination and harassment due to his sexual orientation. The film depicts his struggle for dignity and acceptance in a conservative society. *Aligarh* addresses themes of social prejudice and the quest for personal and professional respect amidst adversity.
5. **Margarita with a Straw (2014):** follows the life of a young woman with cerebral palsy who embarks on a journey of self-discovery. As she navigates her own sexuality and relationships, the film portrays her experiences with love, independence, and personal growth. The story highlights her determination to live fully despite the challenges she faces.

Analyses of Research Questions

1) In what ways do narrative techniques differ in queer portrayals?

Taali and *Aligarh* use biographical narratives to highlight personal struggles, while *Super Deluxe* employs intertwining stories to show diverse queer experiences. *Margarita with a Straw* uses a first-person perspective to offer an intimate view of the protagonist's journey. *Haddi* integrates revenge drama to explore queer identity through conflict and resilience.

2) What shifts occur in thematic concerns of queer representation?

Taali focuses on activism and acceptance, *Haddi* on revenge and systemic bias, *Super Deluxe* on intersectional identities and societal norms, *Margarita with a Straw* on personal growth and love, and *Aligarh* on dignity and social prejudice. The shift reflects a move from mere representation to nuanced, multifaceted explorations of queer experiences and issues.

3) How is character development altered in queer narratives?

Taali and *Aligarh* depict character growth through societal challenges and personal battles. *Super Deluxe* shows diverse development through intersecting lives. *Margarita with a Straw* highlights internal development and self-discovery. *Haddi* emphasizes transformation through conflict and revenge, showcasing different trajectories of queer characters as they navigate personal and social obstacles.

4) How do traditional and contemporary queer portrayals compare?

Traditional portrayals in films like *Aligarh* often focus on struggle and societal rejection. Contemporary portrayals, seen in *Taali* and *Super Deluxe*, explore more diverse and nuanced aspects, including activism, intersectionality, and complex personal journeys. While traditional films often highlight external conflict, contemporary ones offer richer, multifaceted representations of queer lives and identities.

Findings

TAALI(2023) : *Taali* presents Gauri Sawant, a prominent transgender activist, portrayed with exceptional

depth and nuance. The film stars Sushmita Sen as Gauri Sawant, whose performance has been critically acclaimed for its authenticity and emotional range. Sen captures the struggles of the transgender community with sensitivity, highlighting both the personal and societal challenges Gauri faces. Her portrayal is marked by a deep empathy that resonates with viewers, providing a powerful representation of the resilience and determination of transgender individuals in India. The film is a biographical drama based on the real-life experiences of Gauri Sawant, a leading figure in the fight for transgender rights in India. *Taali* strives for accuracy in depicting Sawant's life, including her activism and personal journey. The film addresses various real-life issues such as discrimination, societal rejection, and legal battles. However, as with many biopics, there are dramatized elements intended to enhance narrative engagement, which might deviate slightly from exact events. Despite this, the core of Gauri Sawant's story is presented with respect and fidelity to her real-life struggles. Director Ravi Jadhav employs a straightforward narrative style, focusing on Gauri's life from her early struggles to her achievements. The film uses a mix of flashbacks and present-day scenes to illustrate Sawant's transformation and activism. Cinematic techniques such as close-ups and intimate dialogues help convey the emotional weight of Gauri's journey. The use of real-life footage and documentary-style elements adds a layer of authenticity, bridging the gap between cinematic portrayal and real-world events. *Taali* stands out for its departure from stereotypical portrayals of transgender individuals in Indian cinema. Instead of focusing on victimization or melodrama, the film emphasizes Gauri's agency, activism, and achievements. This contemporary approach contrasts with traditional depictions, which often reinforce negative stereotypes or present transgender characters primarily as victims. The film's portrayal of Gauri Sawant as a resilient and empowered activist reflects a progressive shift in queer narratives. The reception of *Taali* has been largely positive, with audiences praising its heartfelt depiction of Gauri Sawant's life and struggles. The film has been recognized for its contribution to raising awareness about transgender issues and its respectful portrayal of the transgender community. The nuanced character representation and engaging storytelling have resonated with viewers, making it a significant film in the context of queer narratives in Indian cinema.

Haddi (2023): *Haddi* features a powerful performance by Nawazuddin Siddiqui as the transgender protagonist seeking revenge. Siddiqui's portrayal is intense and multifaceted, capturing the character's pain, determination, and quest for justice. The actor's ability to convey complex emotions and the internal struggle of the character enhances the film's dramatic impact. The representation of the transgender lead is both compelling and empathetic, providing a fresh perspective on queer narratives.

While *Haddi* is not based on real-life events, it draws on real issues faced by transgender individuals, such as discrimination and violence. The film constructs a fictional narrative around these themes, aiming for authenticity in its portrayal of the transgender experience. Although the plot is dramatized for cinematic effect, it reflects real. The film employs a mix of thriller and drama genres, with a narrative centred around revenge. Director Akshat Ajay Sharma uses suspenseful sequences and dramatic storytelling to engage viewers. The film's use of stark visuals and intense music heightens the emotional and psychological tension. Cinematic techniques like close-ups and dramatic lighting are used to emphasize the protagonist's inner turmoil and the gravity of their quest for justice. *Haddi* challenges traditional stereotypes by presenting a transgender character who is not merely a victim but an active agent of change. The film explores themes of vengeance and justice, which are uncommon in typical queer portrayals. This approach provides a more nuanced and complex representation of transgender individuals, moving beyond the typical victimization narrative. The film has been well-received for its bold narrative and Siddiqui's outstanding performance. Viewers appreciate its fresh take on transgender issues and its departure from

conventional portrayals. The film's dramatic and engaging storyline has resonated with audiences, highlighting the challenges and resilience of transgender individuals in a compelling manner.

Super Deluxe (2019): *Super Deluxe* features an ensemble cast with diverse characters, including a queer individual. The film's portrayal of the queer character is nuanced and integral to the overarching narrative. The performances are marked by authenticity and depth, with actors skilfully conveying the complexity of their roles. The film avoids reducing characters to stereotypes, instead offering a rich, multi-dimensional view of their lives. *Super Deluxe* is a work of fiction, but it reflects real-life issues and societal norms. The film's portrayal of queer identity is embedded within a broader narrative that explores various social themes. While not based on specific real-life events, the film captures the essence of queer experiences in contemporary Indian society, presenting them with a blend of realism and artistic license. The film's narrative structure is non-linear, weaving together multiple storylines that intersect in meaningful ways. Director Thiagarajan Kumararaja uses a combination of dramatic and subtle visual styles to depict different facets of the characters' lives. The use of interwoven narratives and layered storytelling provides a comprehensive view of societal issues, including queer representation. *Super Deluxe* avoids stereotypical portrayals by presenting its queer character within a complex, intersecting narrative. Unlike traditional films that might focus solely on the struggles of queer individuals, this film includes queer identity as one aspect of a broader social commentary. This approach offers a more balanced and integrated representation of queer lives. The film has been praised for its innovative storytelling and realistic portrayal of diverse social issues. The queer character's depiction has been appreciated for its authenticity and depth. *Super Deluxe* is seen as a significant contribution to contemporary queer cinema in India, offering a fresh and thoughtful perspective.

Margarita with a Straw (2014) : *Kalki Koechlin* delivers a remarkable performance as Laila, a young woman with cerebral palsy exploring her sexuality. Koechlin's portrayal is both heartfelt and authentic, capturing the complexities of living with a disability while navigating personal and romantic relationships. The film's representation of Laila is both empowering and nuanced, providing a sensitive portrayal of her experiences. The film is a fictional narrative but provides a realistic depiction of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. While not based on a true story, it draws on real experiences to explore themes of disability and sexual identity. The authenticity of the portrayal is achieved through detailed character development and an empathetic approach to the protagonist's journey. Director Shonali Banerjee uses an intimate, character-driven approach to storytelling. The film's use of close-ups and first-person perspective enhances the viewer's connection with Laila's experiences. The cinematography and soundtrack are employed to underscore the emotional depth of the narrative, creating a deeply engaging and personal film. *Margarita with a Straw* challenges stereotypes by presenting Laila as a complex, multifaceted character. The film focuses on her desires, independence, and relationships, rather than solely on her disability. This approach provides a more empowering and realistic representation of disability and sexuality, contrasting with traditional portrayals that often focus on pity or victimization. The film received critical acclaim for its honest and empathetic portrayal of disability and sexual identity. Koechlin's performance was particularly praised for its depth and authenticity. *Margarita with a Straw* is recognized for its contribution to queer and disability representation in Indian cinema, offering a fresh and empowering perspective.

Aligarh (2015): *Aligarh* features Manoj Bajpayee as Professor Siras, a gay academic who faces discrimination and harassment. Bajpayee's portrayal is deeply moving, capturing the professor's vulnerability, dignity, and resilience. His performance is central to the film's impact, providing a poignant

representation of the struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in a conservative society. The film is based on the real-life experiences of Professor Siras, focusing on his battle against societal prejudice and institutional discrimination. While the film remains largely faithful to the real events, some dramatic elements are included to enhance the narrative. The depiction of Siras's life and struggles is handled with sensitivity and respect. Director Hansal Mehta employs a realistic and understated approach, using a straightforward narrative style and naturalistic cinematography. The film's focus on dialogue and character interactions provides an intimate portrayal of Siras's life. The use of minimalistic visuals and subdued lighting enhances the film's emotional impact. *Aligarh* avoids stereotypical portrayals by presenting Professor Siras as a dignified and multi-dimensional character. The film's focus on his personal and professional struggles offers a nuanced view of LGBTQ+ issues, contrasting with traditional representations that often emphasize victimization. The film's portrayal is both respectful and empowering. The film received critical acclaim for its sensitive and realistic depiction of LGBTQ+ issues. Bajpayee's performance was widely praised, and the film's exploration of social prejudice and personal dignity resonated with audiences. *Aligarh* is considered a significant contribution to queer cinema in India, providing a powerful and thought-provoking portrayal of LGBTQ+ experiences.

Key factors for analysing film elements include variables such as

Taali

1. Representation of Queer Identities

Characterization:

Taali portrays Gauri Sawant with depth and complexity. She is not merely depicted as a victim of societal oppression but as a resilient, strong, and compassionate woman fighting for her community. The narrative avoids common stereotypes often associated with transgender people in Indian cinema (such as the portrayal of them as beggars or sex workers). Instead, it focuses on Gauri's leadership, activism, and personal struggles. Sushmita Sen's portrayal of Gauri is layered, highlighting her emotional vulnerability and strength. The series humanizes the transgender experience, going beyond simplistic portrayals to present a full-bodied character.

Intersectionality:

The series explores Gauri's identity not just as a transgender woman but also as someone navigating her role in a patriarchal and class-conscious society. While her primary struggle is for transgender rights, her journey intersects with issues of womanhood, class, and caste as she battles discrimination not only because of her gender identity but also because of societal hierarchies. Her adoption of a daughter from a sex worker further addresses the complexities of motherhood, queerness, and social stigmas.

Type of Queer Identity:

Taali focuses on the transgender identity. It documents Gauri's transition and her fight for the rights of the transgender community in India, including her pivotal role in the landmark Supreme Court judgment recognizing transgender individuals as a third gender.

Traditional vs. Contemporary:

In contrast to earlier depictions of transgender people in Indian cinema, which often bordered on caricature or victimization, *Taali* presents a more empowering and humanizing portrayal. Traditional films like *Aligarh* depict queer individuals as oppressed by societal structures, but *Taali* shifts this narrative, showing a contemporary queer character with agency and influence. Gauri Sawant is not merely a subject of pity

but a leader and activist, reflecting a shift in contemporary Indian cinema toward more empowered and realistic portrayals of queer characters.

2. Themes of Acceptance and Marginalization

Societal Reaction:

The series captures the wide range of societal reactions to Gauri's identity, from outright rejection and hostility to gradual acceptance and respect. Gauri's journey from being ostracized by her family and community to being recognized as a leader in the LGBTQ+ movement showcases the evolving attitudes in India toward transgender people. However, it also starkly highlights the prejudices that continue to persist.

Oppression vs. Liberation:

While the series doesn't shy away from showing the oppression faced by Gauri and the transgender community (including violence, discrimination, and systemic exclusion), it also emphasizes liberation and resilience. Gauri's legal battle for transgender rights and her efforts to create a more inclusive society represent her personal and political victories, marking the series as one focused on liberation rather than victimhood.

Visibility of Struggles:

The narrative foregrounds the struggles of transgender people in Indian society. It deals with issues like societal violence, exclusion from families, and lack of legal recognition. However, it also focuses on empowerment — particularly Gauri's fight for transgender rights through the legal system. This dual focus on struggle and empowerment distinguishes *Taali* from older queer narratives, which tended to focus predominantly on victimization.

3. Cultural and Legal Context

Social Context:

The series is deeply embedded in the socio-political landscape of India, particularly around the time of the 2014 Supreme Court ruling that recognized transgender individuals as a third gender. It engages with the cultural stigma associated with being transgender in India, while also showcasing the growing legal and social acceptance that has emerged in recent years. The fight for the rights of transgender people in *Taali* is emblematic of the larger LGBTQ+ rights movement in India, particularly post the decriminalization of Section 377.

Legal Issues:

Gauri Sawant's legal activism, particularly her role in the NALSA judgment of 2014, is a central theme in *Taali*. The series highlights the importance of legal recognition for transgender people, focusing on the landmark judgment that granted legal recognition to the third gender. This emphasis on legal victories is a key distinction from older films like *Aligarh*, which dealt more with personal rights and privacy, whereas *Taali* addresses legal recognition on a broader societal level.

4. Cinematic Techniques

Symbolism and Visual Representation:

Taali uses visual symbolism effectively to represent Gauri's struggles and triumphs. The act of clapping (or "taali") becomes a recurring motif, symbolizing both the traditional representation of hijras and their transformation into empowered figures who clap back at societal norms. The series employs intimate

close-ups and personal spaces to represent Gauri's internal struggles, while larger, more public spaces are used to depict her activism and leadership.

Dialogue and Script:

The dialogues in *Taali* are sharp and poignant, often reflecting Gauri's sharp wit and resilience. The series uses language to express both vulnerability and defiance, with Gauri's speeches and dialogues about transgender rights resonating with strength and clarity. The script doesn't dwell on explaining the transgender experience but allows the characters to express their identities naturally, without excessive exposition.

Directorial Approach:

The directorial approach in *Taali* is character-driven, focusing on Gauri's personal and public life. The series intertwines her private struggles with her public activism, offering a balanced portrayal of her as both an individual and a leader. It avoids melodrama, instead opting for a more realistic and grounded tone, particularly in its depiction of legal proceedings and personal confrontations.

5. Narrative Tone and Outcome

Tone:

The tone of *Taali* is largely celebratory, focusing on Gauri's victories rather than her victimization. While the series does depict the many challenges she faces, it maintains a hopeful and uplifting tone, highlighting the progress made for transgender rights in India.

Ending:

The ending of the series is optimistic, focusing on Gauri's successes, both personal and political. It ends on a hopeful note, with Gauri being recognized for her activism and leadership. This is in contrast to more tragic endings in traditional queer narratives like *Aligarh*, where the protagonist meets a tragic end.

6. Audience Reception

Critical Reception:

Taali received praise for Sushmita Sen's powerful portrayal of Gauri Sawant, as well as for its sensitive and empowering depiction of transgender lives. Critics appreciated the series for avoiding stereotypes and for portraying Gauri as a multifaceted character with depth and agency. The series has been seen as a step forward in the representation of transgender people in mainstream Indian media.

Cultural Impact:

The series has contributed to increasing visibility for transgender issues in India, particularly in light of Gauri Sawant's real-life activism. By focusing on a real-life transgender leader, *Taali* has helped raise awareness about the legal and social challenges faced by transgender people in India, making it a culturally significant contribution to queer narratives in Indian cinema.

7. Role of the Queer Character in the Storyline

Protagonist or Side Character:

In *Taali*, Gauri Sawant is the central protagonist. The entire series revolves around her journey as a transgender activist and mother. Unlike earlier films where queer characters often occupy side roles, *Taali* places a transgender woman at the center of the narrative.

Agency and Empowerment:

Gauri is depicted as a character with immense agency and empowerment. The series portrays her as a

leader of the transgender movement, fighting for her rights and the rights of her community. This stands in contrast to traditional queer narratives where queer characters often lacked agency and were at the mercy of societal forces. Gauri's leadership, her legal battles, and her role as a mother all reflect a character with control over her life and decisions.

In conclusion, *Taali* presents a contemporary and empowering portrayal of transgender identity in Indian cinema, breaking away from traditional depictions of queer characters as marginalized and victimized. It offers a hopeful and nuanced narrative that celebrates resilience, leadership, and activism, making it a rich text for analysis in the context of queer narratives in Indian cinema.

Haddi

1. Representation of Queer Identities

Characterization:

In *Haddi*, the main character, Haddi, is portrayed with significant depth and complexity. Played by Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Haddi is a transgender woman whose life is marked by trauma, but she is not depicted merely as a victim. Instead, she embodies a multifaceted character—fierce, determined, and driven by revenge. This characterization challenges stereotypical portrayals of transgender people as either hyper-feminine or helpless, offering a more nuanced and layered individual navigating the criminal underworld. The film does not shy away from showing the violence Haddi faces, but it also presents her as resourceful and powerful, demanding agency over her own life.

Intersectionality :

Haddi's identity is not explored in isolation but intersects with issues of class and gender. Coming from a marginalized and economically disadvantaged background, Haddi rises through the ranks in the violent world of crime. The film touches upon the intersection of queerness with class struggle and societal rejection. Her transgender identity also interacts with the rigid gender norms of the environment she is in, highlighting her fight against patriarchy and classism. This intersectionality adds to the complexity of her character.

Type of Queer Identity:

The film focuses on transgender identity, specifically depicting Haddi's experiences as a transgender woman. This narrative is central to the film, making Haddi's transgender identity an integral part of the plot. The film takes a contemporary approach by giving agency to Haddi, who is not just navigating personal struggles but also seeking justice and retribution.

Traditional vs. Contemporary:

Haddi marks a shift from earlier portrayals of queer characters in Indian cinema, such as *Aligarh* (2015), where the protagonist's life is defined largely by societal oppression. Unlike *Aligarh*, which focused on the passive suffering of a closeted gay professor, *Haddi* gives its protagonist agency and power. This reflects a more contemporary approach to transgender narratives, where characters like Haddi are not just victims of their circumstances but active participants in shaping their futures.

2. Themes of Acceptance and Marginalization

Societal Reaction :

Society in *Haddi* is depicted as largely hostile and violent toward transgender people. Haddi faces rejection, violence, and marginalization throughout the film. However, unlike many older films that solely focus on societal rejection, *Haddi* also portrays moments of reluctant respect that Haddi garners through

her strength and actions. The film contrasts public rejection with personal resilience, showing how Haddi navigates a world that often seeks to erase her identity.

Oppression vs. Liberation:

The narrative of Haddi begins with oppression—violence, rejection, and systemic injustice. However, as the film progresses, it shifts toward themes of liberation. Haddi is not content with merely surviving; she seeks revenge and justice, taking control of her destiny. Her journey is one of empowerment, as she transforms from a marginalized individual into a figure of power and authority.

Visibility of Struggles:

Haddi does not shy away from showing the brutal realities faced by transgender individuals. The struggles of violence, societal rejection, and discrimination are graphically portrayed, making these issues visible in a stark and uncompromising manner. The film contrasts earlier works like *Aligarh*, where the struggle was more about internal suffering and societal gossip, with *Haddi*, which focuses on overt and violent societal rejection.

3. Cultural and Legal Context

Social Context:

Haddi engages with contemporary India's social landscape, where transgender individuals still face significant challenges despite recent legal advances, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality post-Section 377. The film captures the lived reality of many transgender individuals who are forced into marginalized communities, where they are often relegated to lives on the periphery of society. The film reflects the slow pace of social change, even as legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals evolve.

Legal Issues:

While the film does not explicitly focus on legal battles, it implicitly highlights the lack of legal protection for transgender individuals in the informal, violent spaces of society. It contrasts with a film like *Aligarh*, where legal issues of privacy and discrimination were central. In *Haddi*, the legal system seems distant, with justice being sought through personal vengeance rather than institutional reform.

4. Cinematic Techniques

Symbolism and Visual Representation:

Haddi uses grim and gritty visuals to symbolize the harsh reality of life for transgender individuals in a violent society. The dark colour palette, urban decay, and constant threat of violence serve to underscore the struggles that Haddi faces. The film's violent and unforgiving world is a metaphor for the constant marginalization of transgender people.

Dialogue and Script:

The dialogues in *Haddi* are raw and powerful, reflecting the pain, anger, and resilience of the protagonist. Haddi's conversations often reveal her internal struggles and desire for respect and dignity. The language is unapologetically direct, avoiding the sanitized dialogues often found in older queer films.

Directorial Approach:

The director of *Haddi* takes an unflinching approach to depicting queerness. The film doesn't treat Haddi's transgender identity as a singular defining trait but rather as one aspect of a deeply complex character. The narrative structure gives ample space to explore Haddi's journey without making it only about her gender identity.

5. Narrative Tone and Outcome

Tone:

The tone of *Haddi* is dark, tragic, and at times, cathartic. The film is unrelenting in its depiction of violence and marginalization but offers moments of empowerment as *Haddi* fights back against those who have wronged her. While not celebratory, the film does not allow its protagonist to remain a victim, presenting her as a force to be reckoned with.

Ending:

The ending of *Haddi* is ambiguous, leaving viewers unsure of *Haddi*'s ultimate fate. This contrasts with more optimistic endings in contemporary films, such as *Margarita with a Straw*, where the protagonist's journey ends on a note of personal liberation. *Haddi* presents a darker, more complex resolution, reflecting the ongoing struggle for transgender individuals to find a place in a hostile world.

6. Audience Reception

Critical Reception:

Haddi has been noted for its bold portrayal of a transgender protagonist, particularly in the context of Indian cinema, where such characters are often sidelined or stereotyped. However, some critics have pointed out that the film's excessive violence might overshadow the more nuanced aspects of *Haddi*'s character.

Cultural Impact :

Haddi contributes to the growing conversation around transgender rights and representation in Indian cinema. By centering a transgender character in a gritty, mainstream revenge drama, the film helps break new ground, although its grim tone may limit its broader cultural appeal.

7. Role of the Queer Character in the Storyline

Protagonist or Side Character:

Haddi is the central figure in the film, with her transgender identity integral to the story. The narrative revolves around her journey, making her queerness a key aspect of the plot.

Agency and Empowerment:

Haddi is depicted as a character with considerable agency. Unlike earlier films where queer characters were often passive or victimized, *Haddi* actively drives the plot, seeking revenge and reclaiming power over her life. This marks a departure from traditional portrayals of transgender characters as helpless victims of societal oppression.

In conclusion, *Haddi* offers a complex, contemporary portrayal of a transgender character, reflecting both the ongoing struggles and the potential for empowerment within marginalized communities. Its themes of violence, revenge, and resilience make it a significant departure from earlier queer narratives in Indian cinema, offering a more nuanced and empowered vision of transgender life.

Super Deluxe

1. Representation of Queer Identities

Characterization:

In *Super Deluxe*, the queer identity is represented through the character of a transgender woman, who is portrayed with considerable depth and complexity. This character, played by Vijay Sethupathi, is not

confined to stereotypes but is shown navigating various personal and societal challenges. The film provides a nuanced view of her struggles and resilience.

Intersectionality:

The film addresses intersectionality through the character's experiences as a transgender woman, engaging with themes of gender identity and societal acceptance. While it primarily focuses on gender, it also touches upon class and societal expectations, reflecting a broader range of identity issues.

Type of Queer Identity:

Super Deluxe features a transgender character. The depiction is significant for its authenticity and avoidance of clichés, marking a departure from traditional portrayals of transgender individuals in Indian cinema.

Traditional vs. Contemporary:

Compared to older films like *Aligarh*, which focused on a gay professor and dealt with themes of societal rejection and personal struggle, *Super Deluxe* presents a more contemporary and layered portrayal of a transgender character. The narrative provides greater agency to the character and integrates her story into a broader, more complex narrative.

2. Themes of Acceptance and Marginalization

Societal Reaction:

The film depicts varied societal reactions to queer identities. The transgender character faces both direct discrimination and subtle social rejection, illustrating the complex dynamics of acceptance and marginalization in Indian society.

Oppression vs. Liberation:

While the film does highlight the oppression faced by the transgender character, it also emphasizes personal liberation and resilience. The character's journey is marked by moments of empowerment, reflecting a balance between the struggles and victories in the quest for acceptance.

Visibility of Struggles:

Super Deluxe portrays the struggles of coming out and facing societal violence with sensitivity. The film addresses these issues as part of the character's broader narrative, reflecting on both the harsh realities and the moments of personal triumph.

3. Cultural and Legal Context

Social Context:

The film engages with India's socio-political landscape indirectly by depicting societal attitudes towards queer individuals. While it does not explicitly reference legal changes like the Section 377 judgment, it reflects the ongoing societal debates and challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

Legal Issues:

Legal aspects are not the central focus of the film, but the narrative does highlight the privacy and discrimination issues faced by the transgender character. This is more implicit, reflecting the broader context of legal and social challenges rather than specific legal battles.

4. Cinematic Techniques

Symbolism and Visual Representation:

The film employs rich visual symbolism to represent queer identities, using framing and imagery to und-

erscore the character's internal and external conflicts. The portrayal is integrated seamlessly into the film's overall aesthetic, enhancing the depth of the character's experience.

Dialogue and Script:

The dialogues are crafted to reflect the genuine experiences and emotions of the transgender character, avoiding melodrama while capturing the essence of her journey. Conversations about queerness are interwoven with the broader narrative, contributing to a more authentic portrayal.

Directorial Approach:

Kumararaja's directorial style integrates the queer narrative into a multi-layered storyline, giving it significant attention without making it the sole focus. The film treats queerness as an integral part of the character's identity rather than the central theme, allowing for a richer, more contextual exploration.

5. Narrative Tone and Outcome

Tone:

The tone of *Super Deluxe* is both serious and contemplative, with moments of dark humour. The film navigates the queer narrative with empathy and respect, balancing the portrayal of struggles with an emphasis on personal agency and resilience.

Ending:

The film's ending is open and reflective, offering a nuanced conclusion to the queer narrative. Rather than providing a simple resolution, it leaves the character's future ambiguous, reflecting the ongoing nature of their journey towards acceptance and self-discovery.

6. Audience Reception

Critical Reception:

Super Deluxe has been praised for its bold and nuanced portrayal of queer identities. Critics have highlighted the film's innovative approach and its contribution to broader conversations about LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema.

Cultural Impact:

The film has made a significant impact by presenting queer identities in a more complex and respectful manner, contributing to the visibility and discourse around LGBTQ+ issues in Indian society. Its approach to queer characters has been seen as a progressive step in Indian cinema.

7. Role of the Queer Character in the Storyline

Protagonist or Side Character:

In *Super Deluxe*, the transgender character is one of the central figures, with her narrative being integral to the film's broader storyline. Her experiences and challenges are crucial to the film's thematic exploration.

Agency and Empowerment:

The character exhibits considerable agency and empowerment throughout the film. Her story is told with a focus on her personal strength and resilience, rather than through the lens of a heteronormative perspective. This marks a significant shift from traditional portrayals where queer characters often lack control over their narratives. Overall, *Super Deluxe* stands out for its respectful and multi-dimensional portrayal of queer identities, offering a contemporary perspective that contrasts with earlier films and contributing meaningfully to the discourse on LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema.

Margarita with a Straw

1. Representation of Queer Identities

Characterization:

In *Margarita with a Straw*, the central queer character is Laila, a young woman with cerebral palsy who discovers her bisexuality. Laila is depicted with significant depth and complexity, breaking away from stereotypes by portraying her as a multi-dimensional individual with diverse experiences, desires, and aspirations. Her journey of self-discovery and acceptance is central to the film's narrative.

Intersectionality:

The film powerfully addresses the intersection of queerness with disability. Laila's bisexuality is intertwined with her experience of living with cerebral palsy, showcasing how her disability influences her relationships and self-perception. This intersectionality enriches the portrayal by highlighting how multiple aspects of identity intersect and affect each other.

Type of Queer Identity:

The narrative primarily focuses on Laila's bisexuality. The film explores her romantic relationships with both men and women, providing a nuanced portrayal of bisexuality and challenging the conventional binary views of sexual orientation.

Traditional vs. Contemporary:

Compared to older films like *Aligarh*, which focused on a gay professor and largely depicted queerness through the lens of societal rejection and personal struggle, *Margarita with a Straw* offers a contemporary perspective. It portrays queerness with more agency and realism, integrating it into the broader context of Laila's life and experiences rather than making it the sole focus of the narrative.

2. Themes of Acceptance and Marginalization

Societal Reaction:

The film depicts a range of societal reactions to Laila's queerness. While there is some acceptance within her close circle, she also faces challenges and discrimination, particularly related to her disability. The film provides a nuanced view of acceptance and rejection, reflecting the complex nature of societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities.

Oppression vs. Liberation:

The narrative emphasizes personal liberation and self-discovery. Unlike *Aligarh*, which focuses on oppression and societal rejection, *Margarita with a Straw* centers on Laila's journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment. The film highlights her struggles but also celebrates her resilience and personal growth.

Visibility of Struggles:

The film addresses several struggles, including coming out, societal violence, and discrimination, with sensitivity. Laila's experiences of societal indifference and prejudice are depicted alongside her efforts to forge meaningful relationships and assert her identity.

3. Cultural and Legal Context

Social Context:

Margarita with a Straw engages with India's socio-political landscape by depicting the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities. Although it does not explicitly address legal changes such as

the Section 377 judgment, it reflects broader societal attitudes and the ongoing struggles for acceptance and equality.

Legal Issues:

The film does not delve deeply into legal aspects but does touch upon issues related to privacy and discrimination through Laila's interactions and experiences. The focus is more on personal and social challenges rather than specific legal battles.

4. Cinematic Techniques

Symbolism and Visual Representation:

The film uses visual symbolism to represent Laila's inner world and her journey. The cinematography often mirrors her emotional state and personal growth, with symbolic imagery reflecting her struggles and aspirations.

Dialogue and Script:

The dialogues in *Margarita with a Straw* are crafted to capture the authentic experiences of Laila and her relationships. Conversations about queerness and disability are integrated into the narrative with honesty and respect, contributing to a more genuine portrayal.

Directorial Approach:

Shonali Bose's directorial style focuses on Laila's queerness as an integral part of her overall identity. The film presents queerness as a natural aspect of Laila's life rather than the central theme, allowing for a holistic exploration of her character and experiences.

5. Narrative Tone and Outcome

Tone:

The tone of *Margarita with a Straw* is both heartfelt and uplifting. While it addresses serious issues related to disability and queerness, it also conveys a sense of hope and celebration of Laila's journey. The film balances emotional depth with moments of joy and triumph.

Ending:

The ending of the film is both hopeful and empowering. It reflects Laila's continued journey towards self-acceptance and fulfilment, offering an optimistic view of her future. Unlike the more tragic endings of some earlier films, *Margarita with a Straw* concludes on a note of personal victory and self-discovery.

6. Audience Reception

Critical Reception:

Margarita with a Straw received acclaim for its ground-breaking portrayal of queer identities and disability. Critics praised the film for its sensitive and multi-dimensional depiction of its protagonist, noting its contribution to the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities.

Cultural Impact:

The film has made a significant impact by highlighting the intersection of queerness and disability, contributing to greater visibility and understanding of these issues in Indian cinema. It has sparked conversations about the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities and has been celebrated for its inclusive approach.

7. Role of the Queer Character in the Storyline

Protagonist or Side Character:

Laila is the protagonist of *Margarita with a Straw*, with her queer identity being central to the film's narrative. Her experiences and personal growth drive the storyline, making her queer identity a crucial aspect of the plot.

Agency and Empowerment:

Laila is depicted with significant agency and empowerment. The film portrays her as an active participant in her life and relationships, allowing her to navigate her identity and desires on her terms. This marks a departure from traditional narratives where queer characters often lack control over their stories. Overall, *Margarita with a Straw* stands out for its sensitive and nuanced portrayal of queer identities, particularly in the context of disability. It offers a contemporary and empowering perspective, contrasting with earlier films and contributing meaningfully to the discourse on LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema.

Aligarh

1. Representation of Queer Identities

Characterization:

In *Aligarh*, the queer character is Professor Siras, played by Manoj Bajpayee. He is depicted with significant depth and complexity, avoiding stereotypes. The film portrays his experiences with a mix of empathy and realism, focusing on his internal conflicts and external struggles. Siras is shown as a dignified, educated individual whose sexuality becomes a source of public scandal and personal anguish.

Intersectionality:

The film primarily focuses on Siras's queerness and its impact on his life and career. It touches on the intersection of queerness with his professional identity and societal expectations. However, it does not deeply explore intersections with other identities like class, caste, or religion, although these factors subtly influence the narrative.

Type of Queer Identity:

Aligarh centers on the gay identity of Professor Siras. The film provides a nuanced portrayal of his experiences as a gay man, examining the isolation, societal rejection, and personal turmoil he faces. The depiction is focused on the challenges of being gay in a conservative society.

Traditional vs. Contemporary:

Compared to more contemporary films like *Haddi* and *Taali*, *Aligarh* presents a more traditional view of queer characters. The film reflects a somber and tragic portrayal of queerness, highlighting societal rejection and personal struggle. In contrast, more recent films often offer portrayals with more agency and complexity, focusing on themes of personal liberation and resilience.

2. Themes of Acceptance and Marginalization

Societal Reaction:

Society in *Aligarh* reacts to Professor Siras with hostility and indifference. His queerness leads to scandal and ostracism, reflecting a broader societal rejection. The film vividly portrays the stigma and discrimination he faces from both colleagues and society.

Oppression vs. Liberation:

The narrative of *Aligarh* focuses heavily on the oppression and marginalization of Professor Siras. It portrays his struggle against societal norms and institutionalized homophobia, emphasizing the difficulties

he faces in his quest for dignity and acceptance. Unlike films like *Taali*, which highlight personal liberation and resilience, *Aligarh* presents a more tragic view of queerness.

Visibility of Struggles:

The film deals with significant issues such as coming out, societal violence, and discrimination. It highlights Siras's personal struggles with these challenges and portrays the broader societal impact of his persecution. The struggles are depicted with a focus on their harsh realities and the emotional toll they take.

3. Cultural and Legal Context

Social Context:

Aligarh engages with India's socio-political landscape by reflecting on the societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The film is set against the backdrop of legal and social challenges faced by gay individuals in India, offering a critique of societal attitudes and the lack of acceptance.

Legal Issues:

The film subtly touches on legal aspects, particularly regarding privacy and discrimination. The violation of Siras's privacy and the consequent harassment he faces underscore broader issues of legal rights and protection for LGBTQ+ individuals. The film reflects the legal and social battles that are part of the broader struggle for LGBTQ+ rights.

4. Cinematic Techniques

Symbolism and Visual Representation:

The film employs symbolism and visual framing to emphasize Professor Siras's isolation and the societal constraints he faces. The use of close-up shots and muted colour palettes conveys his emotional state and the oppressive atmosphere surrounding him.

Dialogue and Script:

The dialogues in *Aligarh* are crafted to reflect the reality of Siras's situation. The conversations about queerness and societal norms are depicted with stark honesty, capturing the difficulties and prejudices faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

Directorial Approach:

Hansal Mehta's directorial approach focuses on queerness as a central theme, exploring it through the lens of Siras's personal struggles and societal rejection. The film treats queerness as an integral part of the character's identity and experiences, highlighting the tragic consequences of societal intolerance.

5. Narrative Tone and Outcome

Tone:

The tone of *Aligarh* is predominantly tragic and somber. The film conveys the pain and isolation experienced by Professor Siras, focusing on the harsh realities of societal rejection and personal struggle.

Ending:

The ending of *Aligarh* is poignant and tragic. It reflects the continuing struggles faced by Siras, offering a somber view of his quest for dignity and acceptance. The film does not provide a hopeful resolution but rather emphasizes the ongoing nature of his struggles.

6. Audience Reception

Critical Reception:

Aligarh received critical acclaim for its sensitive and nuanced portrayal of its protagonist. Critics praised Manoj Bajpayee's performance and the film's courageous exploration of queer issues. The film has been noted for its contribution to discussions on LGBTQ+ rights and representation in Indian cinema.

Cultural Impact:

The film has made a significant impact by highlighting the struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals in a conservative society. It has contributed to raising awareness about LGBTQ+ issues and has sparked conversations about privacy, discrimination, and the need for legal and social reforms.

7. Role of the Queer Character in the Storyline

Protagonist or Side Character:

Professor Siras is the central figure in *Aligarh*, and his queer identity is integral to the film's narrative. His experiences and struggles drive the storyline, making his queerness a crucial aspect of the plot.

Agency and Empowerment:

The film portrays Professor Siras as a character with limited agency, due to the oppressive societal conditions and institutional constraints. His story is largely shaped by external forces and societal rejection, reflecting the difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in asserting their identities in a conservative environment. Overall, *Aligarh* is a significant film in the context of LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema. It offers a powerful, albeit tragic, depiction of the challenges faced by queer individuals, particularly in the context of societal rejection and legal constraints. The film's portrayal contrasts with more contemporary films by focusing on the harsh realities of queerness rather than personal empowerment and liberation.

Conclusion

In analyzing queer narratives in Indian cinema, *Taali*, *Haddi*, **Super Deluxe**, *Margarita with a Straw*, and *Aligarh* present diverse approaches to portraying queer identities, reflecting shifts from traditional to contemporary depictions. *Taali* stands out for its transformative representation of transgender identities, centered around the real-life figure Gauri Sawant. Unlike earlier portrayals, such as in **Aligarh**, which often emphasize victimization, *Taali* presents Gauri as a resilient leader and activist. The series highlights her pivotal role in legal reforms and activism, reflecting a broader societal shift towards recognizing transgender rights. The celebratory tone and focus on empowerment mark a significant departure from the tragic narratives of traditional cinema, offering a hopeful vision of progress. In contrast, *Haddi* provides a contemporary yet stark portrayal of a transgender woman, played by Nawazuddin Siddiqui. The film explores themes of violence, revenge, and resilience, depicting *Haddi's* journey from victimization to empowerment within a criminal underworld. This narrative reflects a departure from earlier queer films like *Aligarh*, which emphasize passive suffering. *Haddi* presents its protagonist with considerable agency, challenging traditional stereotypes and offering a nuanced view of transgender life in a hostile environment.

Super Deluxe offers a sophisticated portrayal of a transgender character through Vijay Sethupathi's performance. The film balances themes of personal struggle and societal acceptance, integrating its queer narrative into a multi-layered storyline. It contrasts with the passive suffering depicted in older films by presenting the character with significant agency and exploring the broader societal context. The film's use

of visual symbolism and sensitive dialogue contributes to its respectful and progressive representation of queer. *Margarita with a Straw* portrays queer identity through the lens of a young woman with cerebral palsy, navigating her sexuality and disability. The film highlights personal liberation and self-discovery, offering a contemporary perspective that diverges from traditional narratives. It emphasizes the protagonist's agency and personal growth, reflecting a broader trend in queer cinema towards inclusive and empowering portrayals.

Aligarh, on the other hand, presents a more traditional and tragic view of queer life through the character of Professor Siras. The film focuses on societal rejection and institutionalized homophobia, offering a poignant depiction of the struggles faced by gay individuals in a conservative society. The somber tone and emphasis on victimization reflect the earlier cinematic approach, contrasting with the more empowered and complex portrayals seen in contemporary films.

Overall, the comparison reveals a shift in Indian cinema from traditional, often tragic portrayals of queer identities towards more nuanced, empowered, and diverse representations. Films like *Taali* and *Haddi* illustrate a move towards depicting queer characters with agency and resilience, while *Aligarh* and *Margarita with a Straw* highlight the evolution of queer narratives from victimization to self-empowerment. This shift reflects broader cultural changes and an increasing recognition of queer lives and struggles in Indian cinema.

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