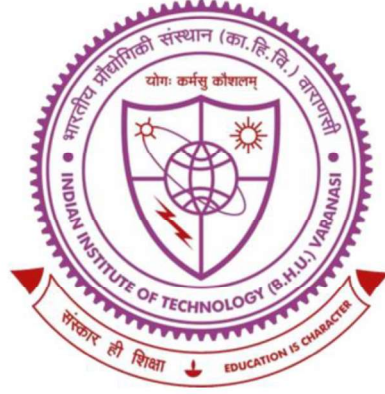


From Maternal Paradox to Empowered Mothering:
Reconfiguration of Motherhood in Contemporary
Hindi Cinema



**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
for the Award of Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

by

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ROLL NUMBER:18191001

YEAR OF SUBMISSION: 2023

Chapter-6

Conclusion: Redefining Motherhood

Far from being an unchanged static category, motherhood is capable of many permutations, refracting some of the major stratificatory categories. The position of motherhood in our understanding and experience of everyday predicaments is quite complex. Motherhood cannot be unduly glorified nor minimized in our commitment to feminist explorations of it.

Jasodhara Bagchi, Introduction to *Janani: Mothers, Daughter, Motherhood*, 2013

As women engage with the myth of motherhood and the lived experiences of mothering, they oscillate between power and powerlessness, public and private, personal and political, tradition and modernity, resulting in a maternal paradox. This maternal paradox can be attributed to the distinction between reproduction and production, which has been well-established and naturalised over generations and accepted in cultures across the world (O'Brien, 1981; Bordo & Jaggar, 1989). This act of reproduction, by means of childbirth and maternity, has been unanimously considered an “inferior animal activity and the biological curse of femininity” (O'Brien, 1982, p. 104). Women are expected to adhere to their gender-assigned roles and reproduce motherhood and mothering to maintain the patriarchal structure of society, thereby ensuring the “world-historical defeat of the female sex” (Engels, 1972, p. 20). Women are perceived to have neither existence nor identity except as a mother, and they can rarely hope to escape motherhood if they were to wish. Patriarchal motherhood essentialises motherhood by expecting all women to aspire for it; it naturalises motherhood by assuming that all women have the innate ability to do motherwork, and it idealises motherhood by necessitating that all women find joy and purpose in it. Thus, motherhood becomes a tool through which the patriarchal society has regulated women's bodies. Even though reproduction, i.e. conception and childbirth, are

relegated to the private sphere, birth control and abortion are some of the most publicly debated and institutionally controlled realms, steered by public policies (Bagchi, 1990). Thus, whenever the ancient and the modern system of social organisation tries to separate the public from the private, as soon as it comes to taking a close look at women's agency and what it can produce, the iron curtain between private and public, between reproduction and production breaks down to produce a continuum" (Bagchi, 2013, p. 15). Even though the site of reproduction is the private sphere, it is as much a part of the public sphere as the political debates and state policies equally impact the civil society. This maternal paradox is further intensified when other social and political identities assimilate to create different modes of privilege and discrimination such as one's class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, disability, and others. Often these social and political identities are assimilated to create a homogenised ideology of motherhood to perpetuate the myth of motherhood and the image of the good mother. This myth and image become an ideological tool through which dominant ideas are communicated to the masses and are used to fashion the public imagination, especially through the means of films, television, and other popular media. Eventually, this leads to compulsions, policing, and performativity, which determine women's actions and desires, ranging from their decision to mother and mothering practices and their attitude to socio-economic structures, institutional support, and public arrangements. Anyone who fails to adhere to the social prescriptions is policed as a bad mother by their immediate family and the society. This also gives rise to the feeling of guilt among women who choose an unconventional mothering strategy. The purpose of such hegemonic ideas of good mothering is to deny women their right to choose between the various possibilities of practising or even rejecting motherhood. The multidimensional maternal paradox that women encounter while exploring motherhood, is socially

constructed and needs to be successfully negotiated to attain empowerment. This thesis has examined the several means which women adopt to reconfigure motherhood while practising empowered mothering as it has been represented in Hindi Cinema. In the process, the thesis has studied the various social and cultural changes which have influenced such reconfigurations while also identifying a few other cultural and institutional changes that might promote empowered mothering.

Firstly, the overarching aim of this thesis has been to map the evolutionary change in the portrayal of motherhood and mothering in contemporary Hindi Cinema. It studies how over the years, the Bollywoodization of Hindi Cinema following liberalisation and globalisation has witnessed a shift in its portrayal of women in general and mothers in particular (Anwer & Arora, 2021; Karandikar et al., 2021; Paunksnis & Paunksnis, 2020; Arora, 2019; Manzar & Aravind, 2019). From the ailing, ageing, weeping, loving, and sacrificing mothers in white sarees who are mostly asexual, we have witnessed a shift towards young, attractive, glamorous, working mothers with personal dreams, desires, and aspirations, and without qualms over an extramarital love interest. Importantly enough, these mothers have a variety of choices from which they can choose to practise a form of mothering, and they are also presented with the choice of not mothering. Motherhood is no longer restricted to only married heterosexual women, as single women, homosexual couples, and others also choose to become mothers through various nonnormative means. This change in the Hindi film industry was a cultural change which was possible when women started earning, and they also came to be perceived as potential consumers of cinematic content. This, in turn, determined the kind of films that were targeted towards this ever-growing female audience who have at their exposure leisure time, disposable income, and propensity for consumption, besides also being cinephiles with a taste for international cinema (Bose, 2014).

Secondly, the thesis has located the maternal paradox within the prevalent motherhood discourses in India by problematising the myth of motherhood, which has been socially and culturally transmitted especially through the myth of good/bad mothers leading to either glorifying or blaming the mother. Because of mater-normativity and the myth of the good mother, women have to meddle with several other paradoxes, such as power/powerlessness, public/private, production/reproduction, self-interest/self-denial, and narrative/silence. The dichotomy of the good mother/bad mother has been culturally crafted to ensure that women continue in their roles as mothers and find happiness and fulfilment in the glorification of their motherhood, even if it relegates them to the private realm of silence because of their role as reproducers and leads to their powerlessness and self-denial. However, this form of mothering is being gradually renounced by mothers as they seek empowerment and fulfilment by achieving self-actualisation through means other than just motherhood. So, the third objective is to map this journey of mothers from maternal paradox to empowered mothering through an intersectional lens. The thesis has studied how mothers practice empowered mothering which enables them to perform mothering with “agency, authority, authenticity, autonomy, and advocacy-activism that are denied to them in patriarchal motherhood” (Hallstein et al., 2020, p. 30). This form of empowered mothering treats motherhood and mothering as a site of empowerment through which women can not only affect social change through feminist child-rearing and maternal activism, but also find a means to pursue their dreams and aspirations. This shows how mothering experiences can be liberating instead of being oppressive, whereby women are not solely responsible for bringing up a child, and it becomes a shared responsibility of the family and the society at large. Nor are women blamed or stigmatised for being deviant if they choose to be single mothers, working mothers, lesbian mothers, or not choosing

to be a mother, or for giving birth to a disabled child, a sick child, or a child who is sexually nonnormative (and is therefore treated as an aberration/sickness). These diverse mothering experiences cannot be captured within the homogenised definition of patriarchal motherhood, and it requires women to negotiate several paradoxes and stigmas, which then allows them to practise empowered mothering. This also gives women a voice to speak of their experiences so that more such experiences find recognition and acceptance. The thesis also studies the reconfiguration of family structures and institutional frameworks, which could be useful for mothers. Spousal support, support from family and friends, and co-mothering can help mothers to bring up a child. Institutional support in the form of maternal benefits, leaves, provision of work from home, flexible work hours, along with support facilities for mothers with disabled children can be useful. Four recurrent themes have been identified, which challenge the restrictive ideas of patriarchal motherhood and extend our understanding of motherhood to include the diverse experiences of unconventional mothers and their mothering practices. These include working mothers, mothers of disabled children, mothers of queer children, and ART-induced mothers.

Hindi Cinema and the Changing Faces of Motherhood

Hindi Cinema has normalised the glorification of the mother figure through the means of historical, political, social, cultural, and moral. Over the years, Hindi cinema has exhibited how motherhood has enabled women to find their purpose and fulfil themselves. Indian motherhood has witnessed a reconfiguration- from Nargis Dutt's Radha in *Mother India* (Khan, 1957) as the ever-sacrificing mother and embodiment of the nation to Vidya Balan's Maya Menon, the self-righteous journalist who blames her disabled son for her hardship in *Jalsa* (Triveni, 2022). Mothers continue to take care

and protect their family and the society at large, but they also prioritise their growth and self-actualisation. With the turn of the century, there has been a shift in how Hindi cinema represents mothers as glamorous and friendly; and this is also part of the overall shift in how Hindi cinema has been representing its women. The turn of the century following liberalisation and globalisation has witnessed the emergence of the new woman. The emergence of new woman in Hindi cinema which is closely linked to the transformative events triggered by India's economic liberalisation in 1991 and the growing influence of the Indian middle class. Like her predecessors, this semi-mythic, semi-historical new woman continues to inspire intense and passionate discussions across various discourses (Anwer & Arora, 2021). The new woman's essence and physicality serve as the defining parameters for both cosmopolitanism and Indianness, setting the boundaries within which these concepts are understood and perceived. She becomes the embodiment through which modern India gauges and rejoices in its involvement in global networks. However, in doing so, the liberalised nation burdens its liberated new woman with an extraordinary and daunting expectation—to demonstrate her ability to uphold the moral obligations and onerous responsibilities of safeguarding the national-cultural identity. She is called upon to act as the final defender of Bharat's time-honoured "decencies" and ancient traditional values against the surging influx of foreign influences, a task that seems formidable and unattainable. Before India's economic liberalisation, the prevailing representations of womanhood in Hindi cinema revolved around the concepts of the *bharatiya nari* (Indian woman) and Mother India. However, alongside these dominant archetypes, there emerged other cinematic portrayals of femininity that were less inclined towards promoting the ideals of the heteropatriarchal family or the nation-state. Repeatedly, these alternative forms of womanhood in Hindi cinema embodied various challenges to the traditional norms.

They expressed themselves through their attire, sexuality, professions, and choices in marriage, thus presenting both delicate and radical re-evaluations of conventional womanhood. These cinematic representations provided different perspectives on what it meant to be a woman in a changing society. Mainstream Hindi films repeatedly propagated a dichotomy that severely limited women's options for self-expression, narrowing "who they could be" to just two archetypes. They were either portrayed as impeccably pure, virtuous, and idealised figures, assuming the role of the film's "heroine.", or they were depicted as hypersexual, manipulative vamps, exuding a seductive and cunning allure on screen. This polarised representation left little room for diverse and nuanced portrayals of women, reinforcing stereotypical roles and undermining the complexity of their true identities. However, this dichotomy between the good woman and bad woman has dissipated over time, and a new brand of women came to be represented on screen (Anwer & Arora, 2021; Karandikar et al., 2021; Paunksnis & Paunksnis, 2020; Arora, 2019; Manzar & Aravind, 2019).

Similarly, there has been a shift in how Hindi cinema represents its mothers. There is no longer a dichotomy between the good mother, played by Nirupa Roy in *Deewar* (Chopra, 1975), and the bad mother, played by Aruna Irani in *Beta* (Kumar, 1992). Besides the ailing, ageing, weeping, loving and sacrificing mothers in white sarees who are mostly asexual, there has been a shift towards young, attractive, glamorous, working mothers with personal dreams, desires, aspirations, and often also having an extra-marital love interest. One of the factors which led to the glamourisation of mothers in Hindi cinema is that the yesteryear actresses who played the roles of transgressive glamorous heroines such as Sridevi, Madhuri Dixit, Kajol, or Rani Mukherjee are now making a come-back in the films after themselves becoming mothers. In their heydays, Madhuri and Sridevi initiated the harmonious, non-conflictual process of modernising

the Indian woman through their portrayal of roles expressing sexual and consumer desires while also overcoming these desires to become the ideal wife and mother; they made “traditional Indianness look modern and sexy” (Anwer & Arora, 2021, p. 10). Their return to the big screen highlights the transformation of their once rebellious spirits, as their provocative dance moves have been subdued and adapted to resonate with middle-class neoliberal Indian sensibilities and self-improvement technologies. In Madhuri's post-comeback films, like *Aaja Nachle* (Mehta, 2007) her dancing prowess still takes centre stage. The once daring and unsettling performances are now rendered more palatable and in line with the values of the conservative middle-class audience. Similarly, *English Vinglish* skilfully redefines Sridevi's pre-liberalisation star image, making it relevant and appealing in the context of the neoliberal age. Her ability to embody both traditional and contemporary elements is embraced by neoliberal feminism which reconciles the fusion of old and new, as well as the blend of local and global influences, all while embracing the nuances of modernity and marital life. This portrayal allows her character to resonate with the diverse audience of the evolving world, where cultural and societal boundaries are intertwined with the dynamics of a changing global landscape. In this process, there has been a reconfiguration of the cinematic mothers, which also corresponds to the development of women in society. The other phenomenon which led to the reconfiguration of motherhood in Hindi cinema is the trend set by actresses like Vidya Balan, Swara Bhasker, Kriti Sanon, and others in the prime of their careers choosing maternal roles to portray matricentric narratives, as in *Kahaani* (Ghosh, 2012), *Nil Battey Sannata* (Tiwari, 2015), and *Mimi* (Utekar, 2021). Such films have also helped to bring forward the diverse experience of mothers without homogenising them and treating them as a grand narrative. Each of these mothers have different experiences to share, they not only come from different parts of

the country belonging to different class, caste, religion, and ethnicity, but not all of them are married and living with their spouses in a heterosexual relationship, some are unmarried, or single, separated, widowed living alone, or with mother or other family members, and sometimes just a house help. Vidya Balan and the range of mother characters she has played in from *Paa* to *Jalsa* have contributed to this diversification and development (Pramanik & Mishra, 2023).

The third factor which has brought a significant change to the portrayal of mothers, besides the popularity of women-centric films, is the industry that has also witnessed the surge of women-created films. Women actors, directors, producers, and other technicians are no longer an exception but have become a norm in the industry. Although we cannot say that the industry has become women-dominated, women, after years of struggle are gradually receiving the due recognition of their talent. The industry is now telling women's stories from their perspectives and through their own voices (Anwer & Arora, 2021; Vishwamohan, 2023). With the turn of century, the industry has also shifted from single screen theatres to multiplex and in recent years to online streaming platforms (Viswanath, 2007). The experience of cinema has changed, and so has the demands of the audience and cinephiles watching the films. The powerful director-producers have to have a sound economic sense, and they want people to pay to watch their films, however much they see themselves as romantic artists expressing themselves through cinema. Most of them imagine their audiences and speculate what will and will not work with this imagined audience in mind.... the younger generation of mainstream film-makers, who may seem distant from their audiences as mostly an educated, metropolitan elite, have an emotional understanding of their audiences which is essential to their success (Dwyer, 2010, p. 25). It is these filmmakers and their multiplex, OTT audience who are ushering in the way Hindi Cinema is representing its

women and are subverting one gender role at a time (Anwer & Arora, 2021). A large section of this audience are also women who are part of the urban, upwardly mobile, technology savvy Indian youth population who have at their exposure leisure time, disposable income, and propensity for consumption, besides also being cinephiles with a taste for international cinema; they are thereby determining the types of films that are being produced by Bollywood (Bose, 2014). Thus, the shift in the type of cinema being produced is not only a reflection of the society and its demographics but is also a record of how Hindi cinema “shape(s) elements of people’s understanding of themselves and their lives in different ways” (Dwyer, 2020, p. 30). It can be seen that several factors have led to the reconfiguration of motherhood in contemporary Hindi cinema, resulting in noticeable social and cultural impacts while corresponding to the changes in society.

Negotiating the Maternal Paradox

As the modern new woman, contemporary mothers have the privilege of choice, and this privilege also brings her face to face with the maternal paradox. The most common maternal paradox that women as mothers face is that of power and powerlessness, production, and reproduction, public and private, personal, and political, tradition and modernity. All these lead to the predominant paradox of being a good/ bad mother. Her choice to assume the role of the modern producer over her traditionally assigned role of the reproducer, or her choice to bring the personal and private into the realm of public and political determine the label of good mother or bad mother. Therefore, these mothers need to be located in the larger discourse of the new woman, who finds herself delicately balanced between tradition and modernity. She skilfully navigates through feudal *havelis* and exotic transcontinental holidays, embraces both arranged marriages and newfound careers, and dutifully cares for her elderly parents while exploring non-

monogamous romantic and sexual escapades. At times, she demonstrates keen awareness of the contradictions in her existence, while other times, she exudes an oblivious panache that only the most privileged can afford. As the new age heroine graces the theatre screens with her free-spirited and bold demeanour, she symbolises the progress, confidence, and delights of the neoliberal era. However, deep within, she also serves as a moral compass, highlighting the boundaries and limitations of neoliberalism's influence and acceptance. This complex portrayal of the new woman captures the intricacies of her evolving identity in a world of shifting values and societal norms. These intricacies are also evident in how women practise mothering, they can no longer be confined in their traditional role as nurturers and caregivers, instead, they have a multitude of other possibilities.

The thesis, therefore, identifies four unconventional mothering patterns among the wide-ranging themes and agendas that have been a recurring trope in contemporary Hindi cinema. The patterns identified in this thesis are based on two primary parameters which society uses to determine the position of women; firstly, whether a woman is able to perform her socially and biologically determined role as a reproducer, and secondly, whether on becoming a mother she is able to perform the duties of preservation, nurturance, and training. If and when women fail to perform either of these duties successfully, they are ostracised as bad mothers. The thesis discusses the working mothers, mothers to the disabled, mothers to the queer, and mothers through ART- these are women who have failed to adhere to the two parameters mentioned above. They have reconfigured the prevalent norms of motherhood through their unconventional mothering practices.

To begin with, there is a set of biological mothers and a set of non-biological mothers. The working mothers, the mothers of disabled children, and the mothers of queer children are biological mothers who adhere to the first societal obligation of being the reproducer. However, they problematise the social obligation of being good mothers thus challenging the naturalisation tool of patriarchal motherhood. The working mother's maternal paradox divides her between her desire for self-actualisation and her maternal responsibilities as her home becomes work, and work becomes home. The mother of the disabled child and the queer child is labelled as bad mothers because they fail to reproduce socially acceptable citizens for the nation-state. For the mother of a disabled child, the maternal paradox stems from the blame that is inflicted on her because of the child's disability while she is simultaneously glorified so that she continues as the primary caregiver of the child. She also has to go through parental burnout and chronic sorrow from the prolonged care work of the disabled child and the anxiety of the child's uncertain future. Mothers who discover the nonnormative sexuality of their children are faced with a similar plight; their dilemma to accept or not to accept their children is the primary cause of their maternal paradox. The traditional and cultural values embedded in the mothers not only blame them for producing a socially unacceptable citizen who is incapable of continuing the family lineage, but also prevent them from accepting the child; but her socially prescribed role also expects her to unconditionally love the child irrespective of how the child is. The thesis also explores how the burden of infertility is always on the woman. Women who are infertile and childless are stigmatised, and ART enables them to become mothers through technologically induced means, but even the adoption of ART can cause maternal paradox. ART has been beneficial for certain women, but it has also led to the peril of underprivileged surrogates, who rent their wombs for money and are often exploited

because of their lack of agency and authority. Those who benefit from ART-induced motherhood continue to live with the guilt of not being a good-enough mother, and they try to make up for it by over-caring, over-protecting, being over-emotionally invested, and over-expecting themselves and others. Thus, besides negotiating the societal expectation of being a good mother, these mothers also negotiate the dichotomy of production/reproduction, public/private, personal/political, and tradition/modernity, all of which collude to become the maternal paradox. Each woman has a different maternal paradox and depends on the life experiences she has, and this determines how she negotiates the maternal paradox to practice empowered mothering.

Towards Empowered Mothering

Over time and across cultures, motherhood is perceived as an essentially externally directed act. A mother has this ‘feminine capacity for work’ which is always in the interest of people around them, and for the patriarchal system-

“The friendliness, submissiveness, being-always-at-others’-disposal, healing-all-wounds, being-sexually-usable; the-putting-everything-again-in-order, the sense of responsibility and self-sacrifice, frugality and unpretentiousness, the renunciation in favour of others, the putting-up-with and helping-out-in-all-matters, withdrawing-oneself and being-invisible and always-there, the passive being available and the active ‘pulling-the cart-out-of-the-mud’-the endurance and discipline of a soldier” (von Werlhof, 1988, p. 179).

With this kind of disciplined selflessness, it is difficult for a woman as a mother to care for herself and prioritise her needs because society sees motherhood as a form of renunciation where one effaces one’s self and subjectivity. To be a mother is a woman’s “repudiation of her being” (Gilbert & Gubar 1994, p. 378). If a woman does develop a means to care for herself, she is vilified and runs the risk of being labelled as a bad mother. So, for a mother to care for herself, she identifies ways which also allow her to care for others- her partner, her children, and her society. But most importantly, it is

important for mothers to adopt strategies that allow them to fail before the societal standards of good mothering. They have to delegate their responsibilities to other family members and friends without being burdened with the guilt of having failed as a mother. It is equally important for her to reclaim her identity as a woman beyond her role as a mother, thereby directing the care she invests in others also towards herself and into her self-development. As a mother, she will not be able to pour from an empty cup, so even to become a good mother who shares a healthy relationship with the child, it is equally important that she tends towards her needs and desires. This will also demand her to possess sufficient knowledge of herself and master the perception that others project on her selfhood. Thus, as a mother it is important for her to reclaim the agency, authority, authenticity, autonomy, and advocacy-activism that patriarchal motherhood has denied to her. Andrea O'Reilly's framework of empowered mothering empowers women to exercise their autonomy, enabling them to reconfigure motherhood in manners that defy and rise above the traditional patriarchal norms associated with it. Empowered mothers have the choice to parent beyond the boundaries of heterosexual relationships. They can nurture children within same-sex or transgender parenting dynamics, separate from their husbands while single-handedly raising their children, defy traditional gender roles imposed on them, relinquish the notion that they are solely responsible for their child's care and upbringing, and challenge the assumption that they must conform to patriarchal or mainstream expectations in raising their children. Further actions could include empowered mothers acting as exemplars for their children and others. They might exhibit different mothering methods by addressing cases of sexual discrimination, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism within institutions and families. They could also become activists championing legal matters concerning the rights of the queer community including marriage, adoption and child support. Additionally,

they may also advocate the rights of disabled children, even extending to issues like euthanasia.

This thesis reveals how mothers take up three distinct strategies to practise empowered mothering- reclaiming their agency, being maternal activists, and practising co-mothering. Working mothers prioritise their higher-order needs over their maternal responsibilities. By claiming her rights at the workplace, she reclaims her agency and authority while also following her dreams and aspirations. Besides, she also delegates the motherwork to her family or spouse and co-mother the children with her mother or a house-help. In the second and third chapters, mothers take up the role of the activists in the interest of their disabled or queer children, which allows them to assert their agency and contribute towards building a more inclusive society. Here, indeed, mothers as activists do perform the role of nation-builders who care for their marginalised disabled and queer children while also caring for themselves. Mothers find solace in their roles as activists who voice the needs of their children and empower themselves through the acceptance and knowledge of their children's disability or nonnormative sexuality. Mothers of disabled and queer children very often experience stigmatisation; overcoming this ostracization and empowering oneself through activism is an act of courage. These two chapters explore the role of mothers as activists who become the sympathisers to voice the concerns of their children and their rights; this ranges from the rights of the disabled to the right to euthanasia, the right to marriage for homosexuals, the right to adopt children and other rights. The fourth chapter explores how in ART-induced mothering, the genetic mother, gestational mother, and social mothers are, in most cases, different individuals opening up a greater scope for co-mothering and rearrangement of the family structure through non-traditional division of labour. Thus, it can be seen that in each of these chapters, the experiences of the

mothers are very different from that of the homogenised idea of mothers Hindi cinema produced in the past decades. Even amidst the maternal paradox that these women encounter, they not only manage to change their stories, but they are also able to reconfigure motherhood for other women as well. Besides, on account of sustained efforts by rights activists, there has been a growing acceptance and public awareness about disability, queer, and commercial surrogacy, which has also made them the focus of several cinematic narratives. More such cinematic narratives about unconventional mothering may help to highlight the changing social and cultural gender dynamics.

In the films which have been discussed, none of them shows a creche at the workplace, or mentions the need for it, even when the mothers are juggling among their multiple roles. It is important for workplaces to provide care facilities for employees and their child; maternity benefits, paid leave, and mandatory creche at the workplace will enable women to continue working even after becoming mothers. Care facilities for mothers of disabled children is also a major requirement, and there is an immediate need for the society to acknowledge that the caregivers themselves require care for their prolonged caregiving duties; so mental health support and health care facilities for these mothers will offer these mothers much needed relief. Similarly, queer activists also need to take into concern the difficulty of parents in general and mothers in particular, to accept their coming out, given the general lack of awareness about the gender spectrum. They need to treat them with care and educate them through spreading awareness, which makes the coming out process easier for queer children and helps parents accept their children. Additionally, it may also be noted that women still have very few choices when it comes to their reproductive health, and when they do, it is still driven by societal norms and biased medical practitioners, so spreading awareness about infertility and adoption is also necessary.

This reconfiguration of motherhood in Hindi cinema is a result of the changing status of women in society and their emerging role as consumers of Hindi cinema. The past decade has problematised the patriarchal ideology of motherhood, which essentialises, naturalises, and idealises motherhood for women. This thesis has expounded this argument by analysing diverse cinematic narratives and exploring the variety of possibilities women have beyond their roles as mothers. When women practise motherhood with agency, authority, autonomy, and advocacy-activism, it not only helps reconfigure motherhood through a negotiation of the maternal paradox, but it also provides a feminist childrearing to the future citizens of the nation. They begin to respect their mothers not only as their mothers but also as individuals in their own right and recognize their many sacrifices and hardships. Additionally, when cinematic narratives begin to represent other mothers like the disabled mothers, Dalit mothers, trans mothers, and lesbian mothers, it would further enrich the discourse of motherhood studies in India and open avenues for more inclusive mothering practices.

