

## DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER IN INDIAN CINEMA

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**Abstract :**

*Cinema is a reflection of society, both past and present. It is a powerful vehicle for culture, education, reality and leisure. Cinema has the power to mould the opinions and attitudes of masses. Portrayal of mental health and mental illness has been of importance in Indian cinema. The way the psychological disorders are portrayed decide the way these disorders will be seen by the entire population. The purpose of this study is to analyse the portrayal of dissociative identity disorder (DID), also known as split personality or multiple personality disorder, in the movies of Indian Cinema. For this, three movies are being discussed. The movies have shown the dissociative identity disorder in varied ways. The causes, symptoms, treatment and understanding of the disorder is different in all the movies. In conclusion, it can be said that even though it is a long way, Indian Cinema is working towards creating awareness about mental illness in the right direction.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Cinema, Dissociative Identity Disorder, Movies, Mental Health*

**Indian Cinema :**

The cinema of India consists of motion pictures produced in India, which had a large effect on world cinema since the late 20th century. Major centers of film production across the country include Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack, and Guwahati. For a number of years, the Indian film industry has ranked first in the world in terms of annual film output. Indian cinema is composed of multilingual and multi-ethnic film art. In 2019, Hindi cinema represented 44% of box office revenue, followed by Telugu and Tamil film industries, each representing 13%, Malayalam and Kannada film industries, each representing 5%.<sup>[31]</sup> Other prominent languages in the Indian film industry include Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Gujarati and Bhojpuri. As of 2020, the combined revenue of all other language film industries has surpassed that of the Mumbai-based Bollywood Hindi film industry. As of 2022, Telugu cinema leads Indian cinema's box-office revenue. The first full-length Indian films released in India were the Marathi-language silent films *Shree Pundalik* (1912, Dadasaheb Torne) and *Raja Harishchandra* (1913, Dadasaheb Phalke). The ancient epics like Mahabharata, Ramayana, etc., Sanskrit drama, traditional folklore, Parsi theatre and Hollywood movies and musicals have shaped the Indian Cinema.

Indian Cinema has played a major role in our lives in innumerable ways. But good and bad are two sides of the coin. On the one hand it has contributed hugely towards the society but on the other hand, it has led to many new crimes too. In a nutshell, Indian Cinema has played a vital role in our lives and our society. Sometimes it does show some bad content and glorifies crime, but it is ours and no one else's job to distinguish between good and bad. And the day we make this judgment, everything would become good about the Indian Cinema. Indian Cinema with its far-reaching appeal has the power to influence the thinking of the people. They have the potential to change the society and social trends.

### **Dissociative Identity Disorder :**

Dissociative identity disorder (DID) is a mental health condition. People with DID have two or more separate identities. These personalities control their behavior at different times. Each identity has its own personal history, traits, likes and dislikes. DID can lead to gaps in memory and hallucinations (believing something is real when it isn't). Dissociative identity disorder used to be called multiple personality disorder or split personality disorder. **DID is one of several dissociative disorders :**

DID is usually the result of sexual or physical abuse during childhood. Sometimes it develops in response to a natural disaster or other traumatic events like combat. The disorder is a way for someone to distance or detach themselves from trauma. The attitude and personal preferences (for example, about food, activities, clothes) of a person with dissociative identity disorder may suddenly shift and then shift back. The shift in identities happen involuntarily, are unwanted and cause distress. People with dissociative identity disorder may feel that they have suddenly become observers of their own speech and actions, or their bodies may feel different (e.g., like a small child, like the opposite gender, huge and muscular).

### **Movie I – Bhool Bhulaiyaa :**

Bhool Bhulaiyaa is a 2007 Indian Hindi-language comedy horror film directed by Priyadarshan and produced by Bhushan Kumar and Krishan Kumar under the T-Series Films banner.

### **Summary :**

Badrinarayan "Badri" Chaturvedi heads a former royal family of Varanasi whose ancestral palace is believed to be haunted by the ghost of Manjulika, a classical dancer from Bengal. Siddharth, son of Badri's elder brother, and his archeologist wife Avni return to the palace from the United States. Avni develops an interest in the legend of Manjulika. She has a conversation with Janki. Manjulika loved Shashidhar, another dancer of the court. The king, who had learned of their affair, publicly beheads Shashidhar on the night of Durgashtami and imprisons Manjulika, who swore vengeance before hanging herself. Priests locked up Manjulika's and Shashidhar's spirits. Avni gets a duplicate key and opens the

door. Unnatural events start taking place. Siddharth suspects Radha has become mentally unstable after her heartbreak and gets his psychiatrist friend, doctor Aditya Shrivastava, to treat Radha. One night, Aditya hears the sound of a Ghungroo and the voice of someone singing in Bengali from Manjulika's room. Posing as Raja Vibhuti Narayan, he converses with Manjulika, who vows revenge on the next Durgashtami. During the engagement of Nandhini to poet Sharad Pradhan, Sharad mysteriously disappears along with Avni. Siddharth and Aditya find Avni being sexually harassed by Sharad. Settling the confusions, Aditya reveals that Avni has dissociative identity disorder and associates herself with Manjulika. Aditya started suspecting her after she showed a little too much enthusiasm in Manjulika's room, and visited Avni's hometown to gather information about her. She associates Siddharth with Raja Vibhuti Narayan and Sharad with Shashidhar, for he resides in the same house Shashidhar used to live in.

Aditya intends to cure Avni by using an unconventional method of psychiatry. Aditya explains that DID is a lifelong condition, but Avni might be cured if they satisfy Manjulika's purpose for existing. Aditya puts a pair of ghungroo on Avni's legs and sees her assume Manjulika's identity, dressed as her and dancing in the courtroom. Sharad appears in front of Avni, who sees him as Shashidhar and dances to Manjulika and Shashidhar's song. Sharad lures Avni to Yagyaprakash, who makes Manjulika promise to leave if she gets the opportunity to kill the Raja and gives her a sword. She sees Siddharth as Raja Vibhuti Narayan and tries to kill him before Yagyaprakash blows smoke and ash on her, and Aditya opens a trapdoor to let Siddharth escape and trick Manjulika into thinking she is killing the King, whereas she is slaying a dummy. Avni gets cured after the orchestrated murder, thinking Manjulika has taken her revenge.

## Movie II – Anniyan :

*Anniyan* is a 2005 Indian Tamil-language psychological action thriller film written and directed by S. Shankar and produced by V. Ravichandran of Aascar Films.

## Summary :

Ramanujam Iyengar alias Ambi is a straightforward consumer protection advocate. He expects everyone to follow the law, prosecutes those who violate it but his efforts fail. Frustrated at his inability to bring about a change in society, his suppressed anger manifests itself in an alter ego named Anniyan, a grim reaper-themed vigilante who murders corrupt and indifferent people. Anniyan creates a website, compiles a list of wrongdoers in it and kills them using punishments described in one of the ancient Hindu scriptures Garuda Puranam.

Ambi is secretly in love with his neighbour Nandini but she rejects him. Distraught, Ambi attempts suicide, almost drowning himself before having second thoughts. Subsequently, he develops another personality named Remo, a metrosexual fashion model. Nandini is smitten by Remo and falls in love with him, unaware that Remo is one of Ambi's split personalities.

Their marriage is eventually fixed.

While purchasing a plot of land for her dowry, Nandini decides to undervalue the property to evade stamp duty. Ambi refuses to help her on learning of her intention to skirt the law. Later, when Nandini and Remo are on a date, Remo transforms into Anniyan and attempts to punish her. As he is about to kill her, Nandini calls out for Ambi. Anniyan then reverts to Ambi, who collapses and loses consciousness. Nandini takes Ambi to NIMHANS where he is diagnosed with MPD. The chief psychiatrist uncovers Ambi's past. It is revealed that when Ambi was ten years old, he witnessed the accidental death of his younger sister Vidya due to civic apathy. The incident left a deep emotional scar. It is also discovered that while Anniyan and Remo are aware of Ambi as a separate person, Ambi is oblivious to their existence within him. Nandini accepts Ambi's love and Remo disappears.

On investigating the phone records and IP address of Anniyan's internet activity, Prabhakar discovers that the connection belongs to Ambi. Prabhakar arrests Ambi and subjects him to a polygraph test to make him confess to his crimes. The officers see that he is telling the truth and is oblivious to killing anyone, believing his innocence. The near-death experience and pain triggers Anniyan's reappearance. Ambi's personality alternates between Ambi and Anniyan; he brutally subdues Prabhakar as Anniyan, while begging for mercy as Ambi. Later, when Ambi is tried for several murders, Vijaykumar testifies to Ambi's mental condition. Ambi is acquitted, but is directed to undergo psychotherapy in a mental hospital and will be eligible for release when cured.

When Ambi is released two years later, he appears more open and accommodating. He marries Nandini. Ambi notices a man (an electrician who was indirectly responsible for his sister's death several years ago) drinking. Moving himself and Nandini away from the man, he secretly transforms into Anniyan; makes his way back to the compartment and throws the man off the train, killing him. However, he hides the incident from Nandini, revealing that instead of Ambi eradicating his other personality, both have blended into one identity.

### **Movie III – Housefull 3 :**

*Housefull 3* is a 2016 Indian Hindi-language action comedy film co-written and directed by Sajid-Farhad and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. The film is the third instalment of the *Housefull franchise* and is distributed by Eros International.

### **Summary :**

Batook Patel, a wealthy and successful businessman, disapproves marriage of his three beautiful daughters, Ganga, Jamuna, and Saraswati, as he believes that the previous ladies in his family were doomed because of marrying.

The girls reveal to their friend that they each have a boyfriend. Ganga, Jamuna, and

Saraswati are respectively smitten with Sandy, Teddy and Bunty. Sandy has a self-destructive split personality "Sundy", who awakens whenever Sandy hears the word "Indian". When the girls tell their father about them, Batook takes help of a restaurant owner Aakhri Pasta who dresses up as the family's fortune teller who claims that when the girl's husbands first see, speak to, or set foot into Batook's house, Batook will die. The girls, wanting to keep their boyfriends, make them pretend to be disabled. Sandy pretends to be crippled, Teddy blind and Bunty mute. At Pasta's restaurant, Batook reveals to Pasta that his daughters are actually the daughters of Urja Nagre.

The girls take their boys to church, for confession because they felt that they were mocking disables by having the boys act as if they were disabled. They go to the warehouse of Madame Tussauds to meet their girlfriends. They instead find Batook's sons whose goons attack them. While Teddy and Bunty fight them, Sandy hears Teddy say "Indian", and Sundy arrives, trying to kill Sandy. Batook also arrives who is blackmailed by the boys to divide Nagre's fortune into 7 shares. More people come as shares increase considerably. Nagre arrives, and attempts to kill everyone in the warehouse, while the lights turn on and off. As the girls arrive, Rishi, Rohan, and Rajeev see them, and hold them at knifepoint in front of Nagre. Sandy, Teddy, and Bunty then rush to save the girls, injuring themselves in the process. The girls forgive the boys.

### **Discussion :**

Cinema is the mirror of the society. Cinema shows as well as shapes the thought process of the society. Psychological disorders are highly prevalent in the society and mental health is gaining a lot of importance and awareness. Dissociative Identity Disorder is one such disorder where the person may have two or more identities which they may or may not be aware of. Some movies have shown the protagonist suffering from DID.

In Bhoor Bhuliyaa, the cause of DID to the protagonist is associated with the separation from an attachment figure in the childhood. As soon as she hears a story that resembles her story of separation, her trauma is triggered and she assumes a different personality she is not aware of. She starts speaking a different language and performs a dance form which she was not earlier aware of. This shows that people can do completely different things in different personality states. The treatment is a combination of psychiatric as well as traditional therapy. The movie shows the cause, the symptoms and the treatment method of DID properly.

In the movie Anniyan, childhood trauma (losing a sister) becomes the cause of origination of one personality. Rejection at a later stage in life leads to emergence of third personality. The movie shows that all the three personalities can be so different from each other. The three personalities have different traits and desire completely different things. The diagnosis of DID is shown in good light. Acceptance can lead to vanishing of one personality. The movie also considers the legal aspect connected to disorders. The law takes into



consideration the psychological aspect of the the crime done in altered states and orders rehabilitation in mental asylum rather than punishment in jail. The end shows that many a times, the personalities may not complete vanish but get sublime into one another and exist as one identity or personality.

Housefull 3 gives DID a little funny and dramatic effect. The disorder is used only to add a fun element to the movie. The only thing that the movie gets right is that the characteristics of the person changes as the identity alters. Also, the presence of a 'trigger word' shows how quickly identity shift can take place.

The three movies have tried to create awareness about the dissociative identity disorder in some way or the other. The cinema has a huge impact on the population's perspective.

### **Limitations :**

The research considers a limited number of movies from the Indian cinema for drawing conclusions. Also, only one specific disorder, i.e., dissociative identity disorder is considered.

### **Scope :**

There should be more such researches to understand the portrayal of various psychological disorders and mental health issues. The movies, documentaries, television-shows, dramas from various sources like cinema, OTT, theatre, etc., should be considered.

### **Conclusion :**

Cinema is a form of communication with the basic purpose of delight and instruct. It is a mirror to the society. The informed and proper showcasing of psychological disorders and mental health issues has a positive influence of the mindset of the people watching it. It is a duty of the movies to put forward the difficulties associated with mental health issues in front of everyone in an informative as well as entertaining way. The cinema has evolved as multiple movies have depicted various disorders like dissociative identity disorder, schizophrenia, depression, etc. On the other hand, it is equally true that cinema has miles to go to cover and show the exact essence of mental health issues and psychological disorders. Cinema is a powerful tool to create awareness about disorders and generate acceptance for all.

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