

**A lot of popular culture and narrative is formed by the media that people consume. This is true when it comes to the stigmas surrounding abortion as well. How does the media influence the narrative around abortion in your community? Watch any one such movie that deals with the topic of abortion and analyse it on the basis of the parameters listed below. You can present in the form of a short essay in not more than 200-300 words.**

- **How accurate was their depiction of accessing healthcare support for a pregnant person seeking abortion?**
- **What did they get right?**
- **What did they get wrong?**
- **Does the movie help build more awareness about rights-based abortion?**

For the purpose of this (rather long)essay I have chosen the famous 2018 film, '*Badhai Ho*'. This movie is set around a couple in their 50s who experience a pregnancy. The moralistic and societal views on the couple's sexual behaviour are the frame in which I want to set the discussion on abortions. The couple, by virtue of being a cis-het, married and particularly middle aged, are immediately offered the option of surgical abortions by their service providers. I would, however, refrain from considering this as a progressive depiction and would like to complicate it further. I believe that it is the judgement around the couple's sexuality that frames such a provision of the service.

### **Counselling around Abortions :**

It is very interesting to note, that the couple is asked to take a pregnancy test to confirm the pregnancy at the clinic. This was a clear advertisement for Pregakem pregnancy kits, in which the so-called counselling scene starts with the couple sitting with a positive pregnancy test in their hand. The service provider, a female gynaecologist, tries to reassure the couple that such cases of being unable to identify the pregnancy are 'common' and refers to a YouTube video on a case where a pregnant person only realised they were pregnant during their delivery. Other than the factual errors with such a statement, the entire narrative, for me, sidelines the seriousness or even the importance of sexual and reproductive health services/providers.

Further, the service providers have been known to the couple for a long time. While discussing the pregnancy and the 'options' with the couple, both the Family Gynaecologist and Family General Physician (who are also a couple) sit together. There has been no attempt to make the situation more friendly or safe for the couple, rather the conversation is steeped in judgement. Immediately, abortions is prescribed. There is no discussion on socio-economic or medical complications arising out of continuing with the pregnancy or even with undertaking abortions. Other potential options, choices or leave alone a discussion on the mental disposition of the pregnant person are nowhere near discussed. The service providers give the couple '2-4 days' to come to terms with I would call the 'eventuality of abortion', rather than the situation itself. The pregnant person is to 'come to terms' with this, on their own.

Further, surgical abortions are offered as the only option. The number of weeks of pregnancy is not revealed to the couple or anyone in the plot, it is also not clear if initially there is a bump visible or not. I assume that it is a very early stage of pregnancy, which could have been prescribed a medical means of termination. This is, surprisingly, not even discussed.

### **Internalised Belief Systems of the Pregnant Person :**

The discussion between the couple begins and ends with the pregnant person proclaiming that she will not be able to terminate the pregnancy since she considers it a sin. Such a negative view remains unchallenged by the film makers entirely. This is not an exercise of 'choice' by the pregnant person, rather a clear stigma or negative view of abortions that has clearly eliminated the option for her. The pregnant person's spouse, raises a momentary objection to her decision to continue with the pregnancy as being stubborn, but later agrees with her - stressing that it is going to be her 'difficulty' and she can decide. The words used around this entire discussion are entirely normalised.

### **Conclusion :**

This film has been hailed in mainstream media as starting an important discussion on middle aged persons' 'sexuality' in general and also 'choice' with the so-called bold decision to continue the pregnancy. Earlier, I had also looked at it as a rather different and realistic plot line. However, the underlying moralistic and negative attitudes surrounding sexual and reproductive health or justice frame the movie. The availability of the abortion service, its possible provision or even a discussion around it are steeped in socio-cultural, moral dictates which are visible through the language, vocabulary and the narratives employed. All of this goes unchallenged. I often see problems in the ways a so-called 'realistic' plot line on a subject, such as pregnancy for a middle aged person, is shown. This attempt at 'realism' remains so problematic, and takes over any possibility of discussing or bringing in a progressive/positive lens on the subject. This realism becomes an excuse for perpetuating stigma. The plot line here, could have easily discussed abortions positively, and displayed the decision to continue the pregnancy as a 'right'. Instead, it does the exact opposite.