
A Sociological Study of the Quarter-Life Crisis in the Film “Dear Zindagi”¹

Neha Sewa²

Kaira, a central part of the narration who happens to be a young, talented female cinematographer played by Alia Bhatt (a Bollywood actress), suffers from emotional turmoil in the film. She struggles with personal and professional instability in her everyday life; a common experience associated with a ‘quarter-life crisis.’ This film offers a nuanced portrayal of psychological distress that is both individually and socially conditioned. Hence, I have tried to examine the film Dear Zindagi (2016) as a cinematic exploration of the quarter-life crisis through the lens of gender and emotional trauma. From a sociological perspective, I have tried to understand the quarter-life crisis not merely as a psychological condition, but have analysed it through a macro perspective as an impact of the larger social structure. As a social researcher, I have also tried to understand the popularity and importance of therapy in modern society.

Keywords: quarter-life crisis, feminine, everyday life, films, trauma, therapy

¹This article is published in *Criticality* and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License 

²Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Uttar Banga Maheshwari College, WB, INDIA.

Films are one of the primary sources of entertainment, particularly in Indian society. For a very long time, films have served as a mirror of society. The potential of cinema from the beginning has been used in such a way which benefits society. The role of cinema in society has been recognised from the very beginning of Cinema itself (Khatttri & Singh, 2021). But for decades, the characters in the films were extremely stereotypical: the males were always the main characters, showing off bravery and a heroic attitude, saving a soft, poised female character, and following the same typical love stories. However, in recent times, there has been a shift in the context of some of the Bollywood movies. Some films are actually trying to depict the real lives of people in society, similar complexities, some taboo topics like mental health issues, family issues, childhood traumas, etc. Films like *Anjaana Anjaani* (2010), *Heroine* (2012), *Chhichhore* (2019), *Tamasha* (2015), and *A Death in the Gunj* (2016) have portrayed mental health issues and personal identity crises. Even now, though, there are stigmas attached to mental health issues; media such as films are trying to remove them by sharing these sensitive yet significant issues with the public for mass consciousness. Gradually, even people have started acknowledging and accepting that this is not being so-called 'mad' but rather a phase of mental disturbance and not illness. Hence, it can be cured with support, and it should be cured so that we as humans do not create a depressed society. *Dear Zindagi* (2016), by Gauri Shinde, is one of the standout examples of a film that explores the common problems of a young woman facing relationship and family issues, and questioning gender roles and societal norms. It's a film that many young women can relate to who are going through somewhat similar situations in their lives. The film tells the story of a young protagonist, Kaira, a cinematographer by profession, suffering from anxiety, depression and also philophobia- a fear of commitment. I have tried to examine all aspects of the quarter-life crisis in the movie and reflect on its particular gendered issues, causes, and impacts.

A phenomenon that has recently gained attention, termed as 'quarter-life crisis' in both psychological literature and popular culture, is a period of uncertainty, confusion, self-doubt, and instability regarding all major aspects of life in one's 20s and mid-30s. For example, confusion in decision-making, commitment issues in a relationship, low or no

job satisfaction, or questioning the very existence of your own self. The term 'quarter-life crisis' was coined and popularised by Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner in 2001 in their book, "Quarter-Life Crisis- The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties". In this book, the authors have identified a series of emotional and existential experiences, including a fear of failure, feeling lost, financial stress, questioning one's identity, relational ambiguity, and a sense of being unprepared for adult life. Robbins and Wilner (2001) contrasted the quarter-life crisis with the mid-life crisis. A midlife crisis often springs from stagnation or reflection on past achievements. In contrast, a quarter-life crisis is triggered by instability, too many options, and the collapse of the clear "map" that schooling has provided. Wilner's interviews and case studies reveal that young adults often experience anxiety, instability, and self-doubt as they attempt to establish careers, relationships, and personal identities. The book is primarily qualitative and anecdotal rather than based on empirical, formal academic research; however, it has definitely emphasised youth culture and mental health. A quarter-life crisis may be considered a relatively recent phenomenon due to the complexities of modern life. The society has changed and is currently at an advanced stage; career choices have multiplied, making the youth more confused about their career decisions. Too many options available from offline to online make their relationships complicated. However, no matter how advanced society becomes, traditions, culture, norms, and values are still attached to it; hence, the youth are expected to both advance society and adhere to its cultural norms. For example, being economically successful at an early age, settling down through marriage, and the compulsion to have offspring are typical expectations that Indian society places on the youth. The impact becomes more crucial when it comes to gender-based dimensions.

The film "*Dear Zindagi*" has depicted all the aspects of a 'quarter-life crisis'- from career dissatisfaction, fear of rejection and abandonment, failed relationships, pressure from family due to societal norms and emotional fatigue. These are all the significant patterns that Robbins and Wilner referred to as a 'quarter-life crisis'. *Dear Zindagi* has shown the contemporary Indian version of Quarter-life crisis, where a woman's anxiety revolves around the expectations from the family regarding career, getting married at a

specific age, and what society calls being “settled”. Kaira, the lead character, goes through career dissatisfaction, which is clearly shown from the beginning of the film. In her career and her relationships, she always takes new tolls on herself. Her fear of being rejected or abandoned makes her a philophobic, who fears committing to a serious relationship. She also hustles to maintain a relationship with her parents. She develops the character of a messy girl, fed up with parents, boyfriends, and relationships. The film has shown how external situations affect an individual's mental health. The continuous battle within oneself is clearly visible in Kaira. The regular questioning of oneself about existence, career choices, and relationship choices is what we call the quarter-life crisis. Hence, the researcher tries to understand the gender-biased quarter-life crisis in the film *‘Dear Zindagi’* and also understands the ‘therapy’ as a safe space and generalises it in everyday life.

The Stages of the Quarter-Life Crisis in the case of Kaira

The quarter-life crisis is often neglected, dismissed as just a by-product of a complex modern society. But only someone who goes through this transition period can understand. A quarter-life crisis is not just a phase but rather a restructuring of one's life. It is the time when one realises that the entire script of life since childhood, i.e., to study hard, get excellent marks, crack an entrance exam or a dream job, get married, etc., is failing to deliver a sense of fulfilment. Kaira's journey of navigating through the quarter-life crisis went through all five stages of awakening. For Kaira, the crisis did not come all of a sudden on one fine morning, but rather it was a crisis that came up gradually by piling up all the emotions and situations. One would clearly see at the beginning of the film that Kaira was portrayed as a young, rising female cinematographer- a successful individual who is great at her job. She is passionate about her job. She has friends with whom she shares close connections, and they are reliable too. Her social life is great, but behind a happy, successful life, there is a profound dissatisfaction that Kaira never accepts. She often tries to rationalise her problems and logically reasons them.

Kaira's navigation through the quarter-life crisis was through various stages, where the

first stage was denial- a coping mechanism. And when Kaira's mind cannot resist accepting that there is a problem, it begins to leak. This stage is neither dramatic nor explosive in nature; it comes slowly and works in micro conditions in everyday life, like betrayal of self-interests, often misinterpreted as laziness, which is actually an involuntary revolt by the mind. When the mind is revolting, destruction happens. It is seen that Kaira starts picking up fights with her close friends, stays irritated all the time because her mind wants a change, while her consciousness is afraid to initiate and accept the reality. When the mind cannot take it anymore, the second stage begins, which can be called the Vulnerable Stage, where life feels like it has been disoriented, and there is a lack of alignment. After this stage, a clear effect of the quarter-life crisis is shown where Kaira loses her sleep, her appetite and wants to cut herself off from the world. And after Kaira has an emotional breakdown, she accepts the discomfort. This is the stage of Acceptance, where one kills the ego and tries to analyse the problems. Here, Kaira looks within herself- her true self, away from parental and societal expectations. Kaira started prioritising her own interests and the little things that she missed about her childhood.

The final stage- Acceptance is not a total resignation from one's present life but rather a conscious participation. Kaira neither changed herself completely nor left everything, but rather she understood that not everything has to be perfect. All she started was taking little steps towards the cycle of growth. The dialogue of Dr Jehangir well defines the life of youth, i.e

Hum hamesha mushkil raasta kyun chunte hain? Zaroori nahi hai ki har cheez ko paane ke liye pehle mushkil raasta hi chuna jaye. Kabhi kabhi aasan raasta bhi toh sahi ho sakta hai na?"- Why do we always choose the difficult path? It is not necessary that whatever we choose to aspire to can be found only in difficult paths; sometimes, we can get things in easy paths as well.

She accepted that career or relationships are not everything, but a part of her life. As Dr. Jehangir says in one of the scenes,

Genius is not someone who has all the answers ... Genius is someone who has the patience for all the answers.

Institutional Decay: The Family and Workplace as a Site of Conflict

The transition of an individual from an infant to adulthood is quite a predictable one in education, and then they enter the workforce, marriage, etc. This is a linear progression in an individual's life. However, India as a country has significantly shifted from a traditional country to a more modern one. The modern Indian youth are facing a different scenario, i.e., competition in the modern world, while keeping the traditional values rooted, leading to experiencing a severe quarter-life crisis. Social Institutions are a core part of society. Social Institutions are established to regularise all the members of society. Institutions such as family, marriage, and religion have their own crucial role to play. Family, as a social institution, plays an important role in regularising a child's behaviour. Family also plays a primary role in the process of socialisation. Giddens and Sutton (2014, pp. 263-264), defines socialisation as a process that transforms a quite helpless human infant into a self-aware, knowledgeable person who is skilled in the ways of their society's culture. Family is the place where the first process of learning takes place. Family dictates the paths of duties, norms, values and conformity. In the case of Kaira, the institution of family was, however, ruptured during her childhood itself. Patterson et al. (2015) have rightly argued that a greater number of separations from primary caregivers or greater numbers of residential moves are more likely to have problems in adjustment. A similar pattern was seen in the case of Kaira when she was a child. First, she is left in her grandparents' house, and while she gets comfortable there and attached to her grandparents, she is once again separated from them, causing a deep wound subconsciously. And because of this past experience, Kaira had a strained relationship with her parents, creating an emotional wound. In one of the scenes, Dr Jehnagir has rightly said,

Don't let your past blackmail your present to ruin a beautiful future.

The entire idea of family as an important institution failed to provide the stability and emotional labour that was necessary for Kaira as a child. Kaira's struggles project how parents burdened her with their unfulfilled desires. Family is shown as a place where Kaira hesitates to sit and is not comfortable. Kaira's crisis is a

reaction against her upbringing and social conditioning, where she was never prioritised. While during the therapy taken by Kaira, her therapist explains how it is important to look at our parents just as other human beings who can make mistakes. As he quotes:

Hum apne parents se itni umeedain kyun rakhte hain? Hum bhool jaate hain ki woh bhi toh kisi ke bachhe hain ... aur unhe bhi life jeene ka koi manual nahi mila tha.....Parents ko bhagwan ka darja diya jata hai ... par woh bhagwan nahi hote. Woh sirf do insaan hote hain, jinhone humein paida kiya hai. Aur insaano se galtiyan hoti hain.

After the primary socialisation done by parents in childhood, adult socialisation takes place in colleges or the workplace. In modern society, where the grasp of parents is a little loose, it is the workplace that gives an identity to the individual. This film offers a sharp critique of the contemporary labour market. This movie depicts the creative industry as high-pressure, exploitative, and favouritism-driven. Sociologically, in the terms of Karl Marx, we can call it a Structural Alienation. Kaira's work was subsequently changed at the whims of her clients, making her feel disconnected and alienated from her own creativity. When she fails to find stability in both her personal relationships and her career, she internalises it as a 'systemic failure'. She blames herself for being at fault, leading to anxiety and depression that define a phenomenon of quarter-life crisis.

Disruption of the 'Traditional' Social Script

Sociologically, the quarter-life crisis that Kaira was going through was due to the conflict between herself and the social structure. There was a clear presence of generational conflict between Kaira and her parents. Kaira desired to be an autonomous individual guided by her own terms and principles of life, while her parents and surroundings pressured her to adhere to traditional roles, such as a stable career and marriage. There is a particular scene in the film where Kaira's mother is talking to another female character, and they discuss that if Kaira does not marry soon at a young age, all the good guys will get married. This sort of stereotypical mindset causes immense pressure in the mind of a young individual who wants to succeed, not in traditional roles but rather in their career. Her

parents assumed that her major milestones of life were delayed, as she had not yet achieved domestic markers of her adulthood. While Kaira has a conversation with Dr Jehangir, she mentions:

Gharwalo ko lagta hai ki agar ladki 25 saal ki ho gayi toh bas, uski shaadi karwa do ...
jaise koi expiry date aa gayi ho.

My family thinks that if a girl turns 25 years old, then she should be tied up in marriage as if it's an expiry date.

Kaira also had an earlier encounter with the narrow-mindedness of the people, where she was refused an apartment for rent as she was unmarried. Marriage was necessary even to have a home, that too in a metropolitan city. Giddens (1991) calls this "the burden of choice". She knows what she wants out of her life and career, but the pressure makes over burdened with other choices, causing existential anxiety. Kaira faces an internalised stigma when she shames herself about her multiple failed relationships. Her mental health reflected how she was not traditionally an 'ideal' woman who is calm, submissive, emotionally composed, docile and family-oriented. With all these stigmas due to societal expectations, Kaira isolates herself. Isolation is one of the key features of Urban centres. People often have weak social ties that are often replaced with professional relationships. Durkheim (1893) has rightly talked about the features of traditional society guided by mechanical solidarity based on likeness and a collective conscience. While the urban society is bound by organic solidarity based on interdependence with individual conscience. Organic solidarity gives an individual more freedom, but also gives potential to anomie. Kaira's internal crisis is exactly that of a victim caught in this transition of two different states, causing emotional fluidity as a form of social failure.

Trauma, Memory, and the Feminine Psyche

The feminine psyche is shaped by many factors, including biological, hormonal, environmental, social, mental, and cognitive processing. These factors are equally important in shaping a woman's attitude. In the history of psychology, many theorists proposed variations on the feminine psyche, one of which is Toni Wolff's

"Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche." Her essay *Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche* was written with the express intention of helping "modern" women on their road to better "self-knowledge and self-realisation". She strongly encourages women to get to know their innermost priorities and to be aware that not every cultural period offers optimal conditions for the realisation of one's true inner nature (Vermeesch, 2021). She gave four distinct types of feminine psyche: Mother (and spouse), Amazon, Hetaira (companion, lover, wife, friend), Medial woman. Each type has a distinct feature, but Amazon (a career-driven woman) is the one Kaira resembles. Throughout the long history of human civilisation and the establishment of society, deliberate efforts were made to ignore or exclude women in every situation. Women actively participated, but were never mentioned in history. It is a sad reality that in a patriarchal society, women remain subordinate to men. Their feelings and sayings never really mattered. They were respected and accepted in society only if they played the roles of passive wives and mothers. While society never accepted or appreciated women who were career-driven, opinionated or tried to find equality in a male-dominant society. All these external dominances of men had somehow made women either passive or extremely rebellious. As mentioned earlier, Kaira resembles the feminine psyche 'Amazon'-career driven, independent, the boss lady character, but due to external factors of childhood trauma and career issues, she became stubborn and rebellious.

- All the mental health issues and internal conflicts within oneself are mostly due to external situations. Kaira's mental problems were deeply rooted in the childhood experiences she had as her parents abandoned her, leaving her in her grandparents' house. The event became encoded as emotional memory, creating patterns of fear of intimacy, difficulty trusting, and anticipatory rejection. This was the primary reason why she faced problems while forming relationships, as she believed that she was an "inconvenience". She always detached herself before anyone could leave or hurt her. According to Caruth's theory of trauma (1996), the pain of trauma does not show right away. It returns later through emotional pain and behaviour, which was clearly visible in the

behaviour of Kaira. Her childhood trauma subconsciously stayed with her, causing issues with her everyday life, with sudden breakdown of emotions, which were confusing for her as well. Trauma does not stay in the past; it is remembered by the nervous system, not just the mind. In one of the scenes, where one of the characters of the film quotes a saying from William Faulkner's novel, *Requiem for a Nun*, "the past is never dead" (Faulkner, 1951, p. 156).

It's not even the past," terrifically makes us understand that the memories, events or experiences are not settled within a period separately, rather it continues to influence the present as well as the future in profound ways.

Therapy in Everyday Life

Therapy is still not very popular, as most people think it's not required, since we need other doctors in our everyday lives. As the character of Dr Jehangir states:

Humare samaj mein agar koi thoda sa pagal ho jata hai toh log usse doctor ke paas le jate hain ... lekin agar koi thoda sa udaas ho jaye toh log kehte hain 'chalo koi baat nahi, movie dekh kar aate hain, theek ho jayega'.

In our society, if anyone gets mentally sick, then he/she is taken to the doctor, but if someone is depressed, then it is taken casually. Therapy is finally getting recognised in the arena of mental health issues. People are slowly believing in therapies and are seeking professional help to get through the difficult phase of their everyday lives. A 15-year analytical study of public discourse on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) demonstrated a profound change in how society views psychological disciplines (Domingo-Espiñeira et al., 2024). The data revealed that public sentiment has grown increasingly collaborative and positive, creating an environment that actively encourages early intervention and timely help-seeking behavior rather than hiding distress (Domingo-Espiñeira et al., 2024). In a quarter-life crisis, people may not require professional help if the symptoms are mild and temporary, as they can be tackled through meditation, journaling, talking out with friends and family. But if persistent sadness or anxiety is lasting up to weeks or months, trouble in functioning daily, like focusing, working, sleeping or maintaining

routines, feeling of overwhelm, hopelessness and unable to cope, therapy is thus required. Other issues, like repeated patterns of conflict, fear of commitment or avoidance in one's relationship, persistent impact of past trauma, like old memories of childhood wounds, resurface and feel unmanageable, and loss of purpose or direction, like feeling disconnected from life or feeling of numbness, therapy is required as it provides clarity, coping tools and emotional support. Other than mental symptoms, there are physical symptoms of a severe quarter-life crisis, like headaches, fatigue, panic, or changes in appetite. *Dear Zindagi*, as a movie, has depicted almost all the aspects of a severe quarter-life crisis that Kaira faced, from traumas related to her childhood to coping with the challenges of settling into her career and forming a stable relationship. Her crisis brought sudden panic attacks, sleepless nights and loss of appetite. However, one day, when she sees Dr Jehangir Khan, a psychologist who talks about the differences between a psychiatrist and a psychologist. He clearly defined it in a very simple manner, that common people have a preconceived notion about mental issues.

Therapy is usually understood as a common practice done in a clinical setting under four walls. However, it should be understood that it's not a matter of one day or one session, but it extends beyond into everyday life. Psychological research shows that therapy supports individuals by improving their overall functioning in everyday life. It regulates individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that occur in daily situations (Corey, 2017). The development of 'Self-awareness' is regarded as one of the key contributions of therapy. Many daily reactions are shaped by past experiences and learned patterns that operate automatically, which was also seen in the case of Kaira's actions and reactions. Therapy encourages individuals to reflect on these patterns that operate and recognise how earlier experiences influence present behaviour (Beck, 2011). There was a slow and steady shift in Kaira's behaviour after she started therapy. There was no sudden change but a gradual progress of 'self-awareness' after her self-assessment through proper guidance and therapy sessions. This allowed her to respond more thoughtfully rather than react impulsively in all the interactions of her everyday

life- including her family, friends, relationships and work. Therapy helps to support emotional understanding in one's life. Research suggests that the ability to identify and describe emotions is linked to improved emotional regulation and psychological well-being (Gross, 2015). Therapy helped Kaira to let go of the baggage of emotions that she carried unwillingly, which always stopped her from maintaining her relationships.

In everyday life, emotional stability helps individuals to regulate their emotions precisely without leading to conflict, withdrawal or prolonged distress. It helps to communicate clearly and manage emotional responses more effectively. People often respond to difficulties with self-criticism, which can increase emotional distress (Whelton & Greenberg, 2005; Beck, 2011). Therapy comes in useful here as it affects how individuals see their challenges and mistakes. Kaira was in her extreme self-criticism stage; she highly criticised herself for not being her parents' favourite child, for being in multiple relationships, and for not achieving well in her career. In her conversation with her therapist, Dr Jehangir, she accepted how she feels about herself. Therapy helped her process the mistake and positively acknowledge herself. The song 'Love You Zindagi' in the film aptly describes, through visuals, how Kaira's life has changed after therapy. She has been seen acknowledging herself and her surroundings, including her family. This clearly shows how therapy influences individuals' consciousness, self-compassion and less-judgmental attitude, decreasing anxiety and depression (Neff, 2003). Over time, therapy provides a balanced self-view, contributing to emotional stability in everyday life. The role of Dr Jehangir is sociologically important to understand "therapy" in modern society.

Zindagi ek jigsaw puzzle ki tarah hai ... main toh sirf thode pieces sahi jagah par lagane mein tumhari madad kar raha hoon.

Life is like a jigsaw puzzle; as a therapist, I am just helping to put some pieces in place. When social institutions fail to provide comfort and stability, more individuals are turning to therapy and normalising taking therapy to navigate through crisis.

The Feminine Self Beyond Stereotypes

Traditions occupy a central place in Indian society. These traditions hold a complex and contradictory set of expectations for women. For ages, women have been suffering due to these traditions. Over the years, modernity has infiltrated society, empowering women through financial and emotional independence, granting them equal rights and status in society. Despite all evolving modern influences, the women of India still struggle with the patriarchal mindset and stereotypes of society in their everyday lives. For centuries, the traditional role of women in our Indian society has been closely tied to the four walls of domesticity. Women were primarily seen as free labour who cook, clean, raise children and care for elders without any economic benefit. And after all of these, women were celebrated only when they embodied qualities such as obedience, modesty, and sacrifice without questioning. Marriage, too, was the ultimate destiny for women and was considered a “good woman” only if she was dutiful towards her home. Although managing a household cannot be equated with managing a business, it similarly demands substantial mental resources and time. However, unlike a manager who typically maintains some emotional distance from the enterprise, the person responsible for a household is often deeply emotionally invested, which intensifies the strain and fatigue associated with the role (Barigozzi et al., 2025). Times have changed, but the expectations placed on modern Indian women are far more complex now. As India is developing, gradually becoming more modern and urban, women are encouraged to pursue education, build successful careers, and contribute economically, but without leaving the traditional roles of a perfect “home maker”. Women carry a disproportionate burden of domestic tasks, and this burden may be linked with their health and well-being. In particular, the dimension of cognitive household labour—planning tasks, anticipating needs, and delegating responsibilities—tends to fall particularly frequently to women (Aviv et al., 2024; Daminger, 2019). Women in modern society face a double burden – to excel professionally while still handling almost all the domestic responsibilities. In most Indian households, the independence of women is acceptable only within limits.

Women are encouraged only up to certain levels unless they challenge existing power structures.

In this film, similar instances were seen. Kaira's career as a cinematographer was not taken seriously by her relatives, who asked her to do something serious. And her mother herself was more tense about her marriage, making it the most important thing in any woman's life. In another scene in the movie, it reminds us that a woman cannot have an individual identity in society if she is not married. Her landlord asks her to leave her flat because the committee decides that an unmarried woman cannot stay in those rented flats. Societal expectations are one of the greatest hurdles in women's lives, restricting their mobility. Due to gender norms in a patriarchal society, women often have little or no decision-making power, access to education, or job opportunities. Despite modernity and years of struggles to achieve equality in society, women even now face gender discrimination in the workplace, unequal pay, harassment, and low positions. Even in their own household, daughters are regarded as a "burden" and a debt that needs to be paid off during their marriage. Many parents do not invest in their daughters' education due to a stereotypical belief that investment in a daughter is "temporary". In modern society, problems have become far more complex. Women are now more burdened due to the pressure of balancing both household chores and excelling in the professional world. Modern beauty standards have also raised the bar, with laser hair removal technique, false extension of nails, and picture-perfect no makeup- makeup. Women are also often expected to manage emotions flawlessly while providing stability for others. Kaira's breakdown challenges the stereotype of the "emotionally resilient woman," revealing how trauma fractures internal confidence and relational security.

Regardless of these challenges, a significant transformation has taken place. Education is one of the key factors that empowers millions of women. Women are now in the fields of engineering, law, medicine, politics, and business, which were once dominated by men. Even the Constitution of India have strengthened the right of women in the domain of inheritance, marriage, and workplace equality.

Awareness camps and movements regarding domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender equality have helped a lot. Along with mass movements, the media and popular culture have played a tremendous role in uplifting the position of women in society. Modern films, advertisements, popular characters, and social media platforms increasingly portray women as independent, having major roles, and ambitious. These women are breaking stereotypes and are influencing many young girls. In urban areas, women are now aware of their rights, receive education and are doing great in their careers. But the change is uneven. While urban areas are growing towards equality, rural areas, marginalised communities and economically backward groups continue to face obstacles. Patriarchal values and norms are even now deeply rooted, making equality struggle harder. In Indian society, though modernity has been adopted, traditions are still deeply rooted, playing a crucial role.

Conclusion

Dear Zindagi, as a film, holds a great sociological significance as it served as a perfect medium that captured the complexity of the modern Indian society, its social structures, mental health issues and individual identity. This film is more than a story of a young girl witnessing a quarter-life crisis phenomenon. It helps to understand the conflict between the collective conscience shifting towards individual consciousness. This film breaks down many stereotypes, such as how Bollywood often portrays an idealised family as a nurturing unit while ignoring all the empirical facts, like parental abandonment and divorces among the parents, etc. It deconstructs the idea of a perfect family where a child should always be forgiving of their parents. Kaira expresses her issues and anger to her parents and sets boundaries, actually depicting the honest familial love. This film also normalises the idea of seeking therapy for clarity in life. This film acts as a mirror of society, which portrays how the young generation living in modern society is unwillingly tied to traditional expectations, causing anxieties and an identity crisis. But it also gives hope that when traditional social structures fail to provide stability, one can always seek external help to recycle one's life.

References

- Aviv, E., Waizman, Q., Kim, E., Liu, J., Rodsky, E., & Saxbe, D. (2024). Cognitive household labour: Gender disparities and consequences for maternal mental health and wellbeing. *Archives of women's mental health*, 28(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-024-01490-w>
- Aziz, M. (2023). Women's double burden in the family between culture and discrimination. *Potret Pemikiran*, 27(2), 227–244.
- Barigozzi, F., Biroli, P., Monfardini, C., Montinari, N., Pisanelli, E., & Vitellozzi, S. (2025). Beyond time: Unveiling the invisible burden of mental load. *arXiv Preprint*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2505.11426>
- Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behaviour therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Chesley, N., & Johnson, B. (2024). Cognitive household labor: Gender disparities and consequences for maternal mental health and wellbeing. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 38(4), 112–124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-024-01490-w>
- Domingo-Espiñeira, J., Varaona, A., Montero, M., Lara-Abelenda, F. J., Gutiérrez-Rojas, L., Fernández del Campo, E. A., Rodríguez-Jiménez, R., Pinto da Costa, M., Ortega, M. A., Álvarez-Mon, M., & Álvarez-Mon, M. A. (2024). Public Perception of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Mental Health Professionals: A 15-Year Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1369579>
- Durkheim, É. (1893). *The division of labor in society*. Free Press.
- Faulkner, W. (1951). *Requiem for a Nun*. Random House.
- Giddens, A. (1971). *Capitalism and modern social theory: An analysis of the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology*. Polity Press.

- Giddens, A. and Sutton, P.W. (2014). *Essential concepts in sociology*. Polity Press
- Giddens, A. et al. (2014). *Introduction to sociology*, 9th Edition. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Polity Press.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>
- Ali, I. (Director). (2015). Tamasha Film.
- Khatttri, N. & Singh, A. (2021). Role of bollywood cinema in shaping youngsters for social awareness. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(2), 6243–6247. <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.3145>
- Konkona Sen Sharma, K. (Director). (2016). *A death in the gunj*. MacGuffin pictures.
- Kubrak, T. (2020). Impact of films: Changes in young people's attitudes after watching a Movie. *Behavioral Sciences*, 10(5), 86.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer.
- Lukes, S. (1973). *Émile Durkheim: His life and work*. Penguin Books.
- Lütolf, M. (2026). What remains? Gendered patterns of unpaid work two years after the covid-19 outbreak in five OECD countries. *Journal of Family Studies*, 32(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2026.2618676>
- Madhur Bhandarkar, M. (Director). (2012). *Heroine*. Bhandarkar entertainment.
- Moratti, S. (2025). The home as a normative space: Working from home and the persistence of women's 'Mental Load'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 34(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2025.2604207>
- Varghese, M. A., P., & Patwardhan, M. (2024). Public perception on artificial intelligence–Driven Mental Health Interventions: Survey Research. *JMIR Formative Research*, 8, e64380. <https://doi.org/10.2196/64380>
- Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-Compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101.

O'Callaghan, E., Belanger, H., Lucero, S., Boston, S., & Winsberg, M. (2023). Consumer expectations and attitudes about psychotherapy: Survey Study. *JMIR Formative Research*, 7, e38696. <https://doi.org/10.2196/38696>

Patterson, R. E., Laughlin, G. A., LaCroix, A. Z., Hartman, S. J., Natarajan, L., Senger, C. M., Martínez, M. E., & Villaseñor, A. (2015). Intermittent fasting and human metabolic health. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 115(8), 1203–1212. [https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(15\)00205-1/abstract](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(15)00205-1/abstract)

Patterson, C.J. et al. (2015). 'Socialisation in the context of family diversity'. In Grusec, J.E. and Hastings, P.D. *Handbook of Socialisation: Theory and Research*. Pp-206.

Popa, D., Nechita, F., Liu, Y., & Wei Lee Chin, S. (2021). Linking positive psychology and intercultural competence by Movies: Evidence from Brunei and Romania. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 750904.

Robbins, A., & Wilner, A. (2001). *Quarterlife crisis: The unique challenges of Life in your twenties*. Tarcher Perigee.

Rösener, R. (2025). Independent Movie theatres as cultural institutions – Toward a sociology of Cinema management. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*.

Sangwan, R. K., Kansara, D., Matoria, S., Ali, H., Khetan, M., Singh, V., Thakor, M., Huda, R. K., & Babu, B. V. (2024). Perceptions of primary healthcare providers for screening and management of mental health disorders in India: A qualitative study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1446606> Varghese,

Shinde, G. (Director). (2016). *Dear Zindagi* [Film]. Red chillies entertainment; Dharma productions; Hope productions.

Siddharth Anand, S. (Director). (2010). *Anjaana Anjaani*. Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

Srivastava, S., & Patel, J. K. (2023). Cinema and society: Disturbing realities of animals and advocating for media accountability. *Doing Sociology*.

Stojetz, W., & Brück, T. (2024). The double burden of female protracted displacement: Survey evidence on gendered livelihoods in El Fasher, Darfur. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 60(12), 1879–1906.

Tiwari, N. (Director). (2019). *Chhichhore* "[Flim]"

Vermeesch, P. (2021, August). *Toni wolff's structural forms of the feminine psyche*. Jungian Psychology Space.

Weaver, L. J., Jagielski, A., Ningaiah, N., Madhivanan, P., Jaykrishna, P., & Krupp, K. (2024). Coping strategies and perceptions of mental health services among women in South India. *PLOS Mental Health*, 1(1), e0000142.

Whelton, W. J., & Greenberg, L. S. (2005). Emotion in self-criticism. *personality and individual differences*, 38(7), 1583–1595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2004.09.024>

Wolff, T. (1995). Structural forms of the feminine psyche. *Psychological Perspectives*, 31(1), 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332929508404852>

Yüksel, H. (2024). The nexus between cinema and pedagogy: Using movies in sociology and social policy classes as 'Educational' instruments. *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 15(29), 367–378.

Zhamaliyeva, L. (2025). Global research trends on depression-related stigma in the 21st century: A bibliometric analysis. *Global Health Action*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2025.2612390>