



A SCREENWRITING WORKSHOP

**FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT**  
**SEPT 2021 – JUNE 2022**  
**MUMBAI**

Organized by



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**About Us:** The Humsafar Trust (HST) is a community-based organisation (CBO) working on health and human rights of LGBTQ since 1994. Through targeted HIV interventions, we currently reach out to 2800 Gay identified, Men Having Sex with Men (MSM) and TG/Hijra communities in Mumbai every year through its outreach work on physical sites, social media and online programs. We build capacities of CBOs in 27 Indian states on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. We currently work in the field of health, advocacy, research and capacity building of LGBTQ+ communities across India.

**Background:** There has been a dearth of LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema. Culturally its considered taboo to have conversations around issues of sex and sexuality in cinema and / or in daily lives. Media and specially films are a major communication tool that can initiate a healthy dialogue in the society. HST believes that if correct representations are to be made that will create enabling environments for the communities than affirmative representation through films is a powerful means that can communicate positive messages. However, whatever, little representation of queer communities that is available in films invariably promotes the stereotypes. It has also been observed that there is a felt need to nurture communities as budding filmmakers that will take forward the message of LGBTQ+ acceptance in the society.

**Introduction:** STUDIO DHANAK(RAINBOW) is an initiative of HST which brings together 20 enthusiastic, aspiring script writers/ filmmakers from the LGBTQ+ community and nurture them, guide them and train them to write their stories, which can be adapted into short films. Stories that present authentic personal feelings, stories that express real life experiences, stories that become agents of social change.

### **PHASE I: Process**

The STUDIO DHANAK workshop was held from 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021 was conducted in English and Hindi by group of 4 prominent professionals from the Film/ Television and Digital industry: in various aspects of script writing and film making. The process began with an announcement of the workshop and a Call for applications on social media. The entries were collected with the help of a Google Form. Information requested included background details of the participants, any previous work/ experience, a short summary understanding the applicant's expectations from the workshop and a story idea that the candidate would like to develop to understand their writing skills and creativity.

The participants were exposed to various aspects of short film writing and film making procedures. At the end of the workshop each participant presented an idea of a fiction or a non-fiction short film that expressed the experiences, desires and challenging of being queer in a conformist world.

The participants left the workshop with instructions on the further process of STUDIO DHANAK Fellowship. This included guidelines on communication with mentors, the timeline of submission of the final screenplay. The participants signed a contract which that ensured all IPR lies jointly with The Humsafar Trust and DHANAK FELLOWS

## **PHASE II: Process and Outcomes**

After the first phase of STUDIO DHANAK was over, the second phase of the workshop STUDIO DHANAK FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM started in Nov 2021. In all there were 19 participants as 1 participant dropped out at the eleventh hour. The participants of the workshop worked from home and developed their synopsis into a full-fledged screenplay with dialogues over a period of nearly two months. The Mentors constantly guided them online through this process. At the end of two months all the participants submitted their scripts on Dec 10/20, 2021. By now the Mentors were very familiar with the skills, inputs and sincerity of the participants, hence a Selection Committee comprising of the Mentors went through the developed scripts and recommended two best scripts from their own mentees and judged the work of overall participants. Through a process of moderation 5 best scripts were chosen collectively. The scripts were judged based on originality of the idea/thought, relatable characters, engaging screenplay, feasibility/do ability of the project and marketability of the film.

The selected five scripts were awarded the DHANAK FELLOWSHIP. HST took the process forward and identified 5 young LGBTQ+ film makers (Directors) and made a team of 5 DHANAK FELLOWS and 5 young aspiring film makers to work on the selected scripts. A series of meetings were held to discuss the scripts that resulted in forming 5 teams of DHANAK FELLOW script writers and film makers who came together to produce the first round of STUDIO DHANAK films.

The remaining 14 scripts that could not be produced by Humsafar Trust for lack of adequate resources, the young DHANAK FELLOWS reserved the right to identify a collaborator who would be willing to make films on their scripts and take it forward. The only requirement that Humsafar made in its contract was that credit be given to HST and Project CONNECT in its opening titles if the scripts were to be produced by some other partner.

These films will strengthen the advocacy program and the capacity building initiatives of The Humsafar Trust, the initiative also brought to notice a bunch of young aspiring film makers who were keen to become the voices of their fellow community persons and tell the stories that were not told earlier. The shortlisted scripts were an effort of Dhanak Fellows, with support of their mentors and Directed by Queer film makers.

**Tushar Dalal** is a 20-Year-old young self-identified gay man who comes from the city of Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, a state of North India. He was Mentored by film maker and artist Pradipta Ray who helped the young man to shape his thoughts and crystalise them into a film

script titled **JAAYAZ** (Justified). Tushar is a Technology bachelor student and says “I brought myself to understand that I could develop this interest into a skill, something that I could use to tell my stories. After I came out as gay, and I decided to use my technical understanding and creativity to bring out the deepest of emotions onto the surface, so that no one feels left out. His script was directed by a 26-year-old gay man Pratap Harode who is from Nagpur and Mumbai in Maharashtra and who likes to take up the projects of societal relevance. As a teenager, he experimented with his first gay themed short film 'Innocence' which got him the first recognition.

**Vedant Rumi Mishra**, 24 identifies as a transgender man. He is from Hyderabad city that is in Southern state of Andhra Pradesh in India. His pronouns are he/him/his. He is a Coder by day working on cool projects and a writer by night building stories and verse. His wish is to write and tell powerful stories from the LGBTQ+ community - of hope, resilience and struggles and drive meaningful conversations around them. But he also hopes to learn to entertain along the way. An extra smile has never hurt anyone. Vedant was nurtured by famous film maker Hitesh Kewalya and his story **BEACH** describes the inhibitions faced by a Trans man in his final act of self-acceptance.

**Rohit Yadav**, 25, from Mumbai. identifies as a gay man and his pronouns are he/him/his. Writing has always been his passion, and sharing relatable stories, connecting with the audience by giving them hope especially about love, relationships, life in general is what he feels drawn towards. He was nurtured again by film maker Pradipta Ray and his story **A TOUCH** was directed by Saahil Gada a young gay man who has worked on projects that deal with disability and A touch brings to us a story of a disabled man and his desires to meet a partner of the same sex.

**Abdul Rehman Khan** is a 28-year-old scientist by profession with art being his oxygen. He thrives for purpose. He is original from North India but now in Bengaluru, Karnataka. He was nurtured by award winning documentary film maker Prabal Baruah and his script **TU YAHIN HAI (You are here, somewhere)** is striking comment on the mental health issues of LGBTQ+ communities and need for interventions. His script is directed by young gay man Vaibhav Hatkar who began his life as a film maker with an award-winning Marathi language film that dealt with issues of coming out faced by young man who comes from a lower economic segment of society

**Kartika Dubey** is a 29-year-old queer woman and has the over nine years of work to her credit. She has written and directed a short film – DAAYAN which was selected for screening at the Cannes Short Film Corner 2018. Kartika was nurtured by famous LGBTQ+ film maker Sridhar Rangayan and her script **OAS (Dew Drops)** is a story of two women who broke up some time back but are still in love. One has moved on and the other has not. It is their last conversation that sums up dreams, and expectations they had in a surrealistic way before they finally part ways. She is only DHANAK FELLOW who wrote and also Directed her own film. The film aims to further conversations around queer women in India.

The 5 teams worked together on the selected scripts to make films under the supervision of mentor, co-founder and Chairperson of The Humsafar Trust Suhail Abbasi, for the next three months and presented five short films that address issues affecting the queer community of

India. The stories dealt with issues faced by persons with disability and being queer, mental health issues, challenges faced for gender affirmation processes and life ahead for Trans communities, dilemmas of two women in love and a young gay couple negotiating their relationship dealing with coming out and telling their truth to the world that takes its toll on these beautiful individuals.

After the directors were chosen, they were briefed about the project. The STUDIO DHANAK team had a few meetings with each one of them and they were made to understand the scope of the project. Each director was also introduced to the writer of the stories. They interacted with each other, exchanged ideas about the story, characters, screenplay and dialogues

A detailed budget was drawn for each film, and we hired a Line Producer – Bhuvna Wadhawan who is a veteran Line Producer and has worked on several films, web series, documentaries and tv serials, to supervise the entire production of all 5 films. We hired a Production Co-ordinator, unit production managers, assistant directors and spot boys. We onboarded other crucial technicians like the cinematographer, art director, casting director, sound recordist, vendors for camera, lights, mikes and sound equipment

A recce was conducted to finalise the locations for the shoot. Each director along with their DOP, Line Producer and art director went for a recce and shortlisted locations (indoors and outdoors) for the shoot for their respective films. Each film was roughly given two days to shoot. Hence a shoot schedule of ten days was drawn to shoot all the 5 films.

The shoot for JAAYAZ was conducted on Mar 21 and 22, 2022. The shoot of TU YAHIN HAI followed on March 23 and 24, 2022. The 3<sup>rd</sup> film to be shot was A TOUCH on Mar 28 and 29, 2022. A portion of BEACH was shot on Mar 29 and the outdoor scenes were shot on Mar 30, 2022. The shoot of OAS took place on the evening of Mar 31 till April 1, 2022, morning. It was an all-night shoot. The remaining portions of OAS were shot on April 2, 2022.

For all the post-production procedures various studios were explored. The first step was to convert the entire footage to a suitable format. This was followed by the Editor doing a basic line up of the shots. This was followed by individual directors supervising the line-up and giving their feedback to the editor. Changes were made till the directors were happy with the line-up. This line up was shared with the team STUDIO DHANAK. Once they gave their approval the line-up was shared with the Mentors and other collaborators. After this step the colour grading happened under the supervision of the respective directors and the DOP (Director of Photography). At places the sound wasn't clear or had background sound disturbance, hence certain portions of certain films were dubbed. Post this the edited version went for background music and sound effects.



In the meantime, the feedback of the Mentors and collaborators had arrived. The feedback of everyone was incorporated to the extent possible and then the main credit titles and the end credit roll was included to complete the films. Post this the final sound was mixed and the films were ready.

The posters and other publicity material including the trailers were designed and will be promoted on social media for creating a buzz around these films. The 3-minute promo of all the five films was launched at the CONNECT National Dissemination that happened at The Suryaa Hotel in New Delhi on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022.

**Sustainability and Way forward:** HST intends to make STUDIO DHANAK an annual affair which will attract emerging LGBTQ+ writers and film makers from all over India and thus bring newer unexplored queer narratives and empower communities to tell their stories. We have tied up with a committed production house LOTUS VISUAL Productions based in UK. They will bring an international dimension to the project besides contributing money to enhance the budget of these films. Lotus Visual Productions will help us take these films to various international LGBTQ+ film festivals and reach a much wider audience. Participation in these festivals are prestige and may result in critical recognition, coveted awards and bring much desired visibility to the queer communities of India. They will also help us identify Sales Agents who will be able

to guide us to reach international broadcasters and publishers. Besides the film festivals, new distribution avenues are opening up through the digital world and it is becoming a trend with OTT platforms in India to broadcasting short films. They are open to sharing revenue with the content creators. This will make it more viable for us to organize DHANAK workshops and produce meaningful films on a sustained basis. DHANAK films will be part of HST advocacy tools to influence behavioral change and strengthen The Humsafar Trust's capacity building initiatives.

*This initiative was meticulously designed by HST's Co-Founder and Chairperson Mr. Suhail Abbasi and supported by CONNECT project (Amplify Change) and TRANScend. The advocacy team members became a part of the execution of the project.*

**STUDIO DHANAK** believes that the stories of the communities need to be told by the communities!

### STUDIO DHANAK Film Poster

