

REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDER IN HINDI CINEMA - ANALYZING SEXUAL MINORITIES

DINKY

*Research Scholar, Department of English and Modern European Languages
Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan*

Dr. TAMISHRA SWAIN

*Assistant Professor, Department of English and Modern European Languages
Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan*

Abstract

Visual images connect faster and stay in the mind's eye over a period of time. Media has enough capacity to change or influence the thought process of masses than any other art form. India produces more movies as compared to other countries around the world but issues and challenges related to transgender get minimum space on screen. Transgender are portrayed as element of fun or they act as an adviser to the main character. This paper highlights the representation of sexual minorities in Bollywood movies. By exploring the progressive representation of the third gender in world cinema, it attempts to understand how this issue has spread to Indian films. This paper also explores various concerns related to the third gender issue depicted in the films Chitrangada, Fire, My Brother Nikhil, Do Paise Ki Dhoop, ChaarAane ki Baarish and Aligarh.

Keywords: *sexual minorities, indian cinema, hindi films, transgender, concern*

Introduction

Human society is a complicated organization of relationships between people. Such an organization implies that people behave and communicate with one another in accordance with the roles they play. The status they hold further shapes their role in regard to one another. Sex and gender have historically been the primary determinants of rank and function for any individual within society. Therefore, LGBTQ+(Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender and Queer) individuals are compelled to lead solitary lives and live in isolation. They never posed a threat to society, but because of the negative attitudes that people have against them, their lives are constantly in danger.

In the current sociocultural context of Indian society, homosexual behavior is viewed as aberrant. Due to their spoilt identities and participation in abnormal activities, these individuals are thought to

be criminals, and their actions are considered unacceptable. Due to their 'exclusion' and their perceived 'odd' sexual and gender identities, they now play alternative gender roles. The Order of Discourse (1981), written by Michel Foucault, is a very good description of the politics of "exclusion." The structural support that heterosexuals have is absent for LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ people are fighting a difficult battle against the entire cultural system.

Although various issues have become the basis of filmmaking but the issues of transgender community has not taken up much room in Indian films compared to mainstream movies. The third gender is frequently depicted in mainstream Indian films, sometimes to add humor but the issue of the third gender is rarely addressed, demonstrating the lack of acceptance of the third gender in mainstream Indian cinema. There haven't been transgender

leading characters in popular Hindi films. Filmmakers in the mainstream are more excited to cast non-heterosexuals in supporting roles who may assist the main character toward happiness. There are a few "art house" movies containing LGBTQ+ themes or characters, but their influence on the audience's consciousness has been little. A select group of Indian queer film festivals, including Kashish: Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, Nigah Queer Fest in Delhi, Bangalore Queer Film Festival, Dialogues: Annual Kolkata Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Film and Video Festival, and Lesbian and Gay Film Festival at Panjab University in Chandigarh, play a vital role in bringing queer cinema to both queer and mainstream audiences. Bollywood may take some credit for at least making the LGBTQ+ community visible on a large screen, but festival-screened films are what really highlight the LGBTQ+ population's struggles as genuine, respectable human beings. Here, stories are told with kindness and are intended to touch hearts rather than take listeners on a voyeurism tour.

In terms of perceptions, interpretations, and portrayals of the transgender identity in Indian movies, some documentaries and feature films, both national and regional, show social, cultural, and emotional maturity in terms of acceptance of the transgender community's gradual integration into society. There have been efforts where the transgender identity has been portrayed with the individual as well as with sympathy and compassion. Movies continue to have a significant psychological impact, which makes representations and portrayals—whether of individuals or social groups—critical. Many Indian films have received criticism in the past for their erroneous or insensitive depictions of the life of the third gender

Transgender Community and Indian Society

An estimated 4.9 lakh transgender people who identified as "third gender" live in India. In India, transgender people deal with a variety of issues. Their basic civil rights are denied to them; they are shunned by their families and society; they have limited access to healthcare services, such as HIV care; they experience sexual harassment and violence; they are prohibited from participating in social and cultural activities; politics and decision-making are largely beyond their reach; and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalizes homosexuality, only makes their situation worse. Based on a government report submitted to the Indian Supreme Court, there are an estimated 25 lakh homosexual people in India, and 1.75 lakh of them are HIV positive. According to the Naz Foundation, an NGO that works for the welfare and rehabilitation of people living with HIV, criminalizing gay sex will discourage gay people from coming out. However, for many members of the LGBTQ+ community in India, 2014 was a year of relief and joy. According to a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of India on April 15, 2014, the Supreme Court ruled in its decision that the transgender community is entitled to fundamental rights, including the right to personal liberty, dignity, freedom of expression, access to education and empowerment, protection from violence, prohibition against discrimination and exploitation, and the right to employment, in light of the constitutional guarantee.

Hindi Cinema and Gender Minorities

India produces more movies as compared to other countries around the world in various genres and languages. Movies are made for every region and movie fans across India. Research on this topic reveals that movies influence the society and it is a strong medium to convey information to the society and it has been noticed that movies spread good

messages. Through film making, minorities are portrayed in the form of best friend of the lead actor or actress and it is good sign of the acceptability of LGBTQ+ community by the people of different religion and region in the country. Now, the filmmakers are capable of portraying gays in real life and the problems that surround them. Whether to replace the void left by comedians, bad guys and occasionally by the dancer. The first movie focusing on homosexuality may have been "RafooChakkar" (1975), which showcases same-sex love. Pinku, however, is the first openly gay character, appearing in "Mast Kalander" (1981). The literature research revealed that the majority of LGBTQ-themed films are stereotypical and depict homosexuals as pursuing, dancing, and laughing at manly males in the case of gays and transgender people, and as attractive women in the case of lesbians.

Review of Literature

After reading various books, articles, journals, report, some of the works of different writers are discussed:

Garry Morris (2000) *Burning Love: Deepa Mehta's Fire (1996)*: says that the patriarchal culture that suppresses female sex is being criticized in Fire. The two main female characters in the film are fearless and resilient enough to defy society.

Jhimli Bhattacharjee (2004). *Third Gender in Indian Films with a special Reflection on Chitrangada* emphasizes the significance of third gender representation in Indian cinema. It focuses on the many facets of the issues that the transgender population experiences, ranging from the problem of social rejection to legal challenges.

Harshita S Chaudhary (2012) *Representation of Homosexuals (LGBT) in Indian Literature, Media and Cinema* is aimed the socio-legal analysis of the portrayal of homosexuals in media and Indian film. Homosexuality is seen as aggressive by the media attention.

Manini Menon (2016) writes in her book "10 Indian Movies That Did Justice to The LGBT Community: Movies You Must Watch" The LGBT community is frequently mocked and denigrated in Indian movies. They are depicted sarcastically and in a stereotyped way.

Objectives

- To find out how the sexual minorities are represented in Bollywood films.
- To study the challenges faced by the sexual minorities whether discussed or not in Hindi cinema.

Hypothesis

The problems of the sexual minorities are not portrayed in mainstream cinema.

Research Methodology

This research is based on primary and secondary data collected from movies, books, magazines, reports, reviews, reports. Content analysis has been done to collect the primary data and secondary data has been studied from movies. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data have been carried out. The study investigates how sexual minorities are portrayed in Bollywood movies

Analysis of a Couple of Movies and their Portrayal of the Transgender Community Chitrangada

The film is based on Rabindra Nath Tagor's Dance-drama. The film explores many aspects of the third gender issue. The desire to become a different gender is highlighted in the film as the choreographer wishes to introduce the theme of Chitrangada as an individual's desire to change gender when he finds his existing gender identity to be undesirable and inappropriate. The film's name Chitrangada is chosen deliberately and has many dimensions. We see that

the female lead has to play a gender-reversed role according to her father's wishes. The king who wants a son, the gender most desired by patriarchal society, discovers that he is blessed with a girl. So he asks her to play the role of a boy. The princess thus continues to develop as a boy. She falls in love with Arjun when she first sees him in the north-eastern region of India. She finds it impossible to maintain her womanhood in secrecy, as a result, she chooses to cast off her manhood and confess her love for Arjun. The institution of the family's acceptance of third gender identification is the first problem. It is frequently reported that when a third gender is revealed, family members react in quite odd ways. Real experiences of the third gender, shown on television shows, tell a similar story. The film depicts the mother willingly accepting reality, while the father feels withdrawn and struggles to accept the truth.



Figure-1

Director- Rituparno Ghosh
 Genre-Romance
 Release Date-25th May, 2012
 Shree Venkatesh Films

Fire

Fire is a family drama with a progressive social foundation. Set in a middle-class home in New Delhi. Fire portrays two women discovering their lesbian desires and freedom of expression, which are in complete contradiction to society norms and the traditional family. After the marriage Sita (Das) becomes the member of new husband Jatin's (Jaaferi) family that includes her brother Ashok

(Kjarbanda) and his wife Radha their eldermother (Rekhi) and housemate Mundu (Chowdhry). The story of these two marriages details the emotional and sexual neglect of two sisters-in-law. The lack of love in Sita and Jatin's arranged marriage is established from the beginning, as Jatin clearly enjoys the company of his vivacious, Westernized girlfriend from China, who wants nothing to do with it. To marrying into a harsh Hindu family unit, Radha and Ashok's long-term marriage is difficult because of their inability to have children and Ashok's devotion to a religious swami who teaches celibacy in marriage. It is within this limited world of social rituals and customs that two abandoned wives find companionship and sexual solace in each other's arms. Although Radha moves more carefully and Sita is brasher, the effect of their resistance disrupts the family unit and threatens the belief in religion that guides their life.

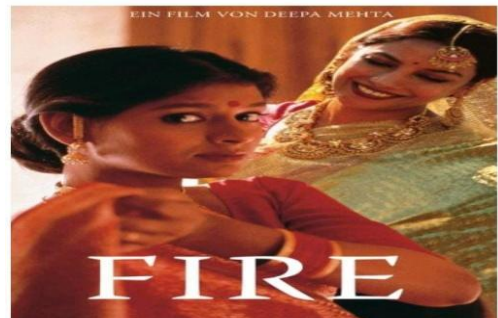


Figure-2

Director- Deepa Mehta
 Genre-Romance
 Release Date-06th September, 1996
 Kaleidoscope Entertainment.

Fire is an odd fusion of Western themes of sexual role-playing and social hierarchy with the floridly elaborate traditions of Indian cinema (the most effective national cinema in the world, largely sees women as sex objects in a crowd of sinister yet strange films). In fact, one of the problems the film raises is that Hindi has no official words to describe what the two women are doing. Fire's truthful depiction of middle-class existence in New Delhi is revealing; the inherent absurdity of the story's

incendiary melodrama may be due to the country's highly stylized cinematic tradition. However, for a film with such volatile subject matter, the performances are restrained and naturalistic.

My Brother Nikhil



Figure-3
Director: Onir
Genre: Drama
Release Date: 25th March, 2005
Four front films.

This movie is based on homosexuality and this is the first mainstream Indian movie which explores this subject boldly. The story of this movie focuses on Nikhil Kapoor and his sister Anamika, who is portrayed by Juhi Chawla. In the film, Nigel, portrayed by Purab Kohli, and Nikhil, who is gay, meet at a party and fall in love with one another. However, Nikhil's life is shattered when his swim team doctor calls to inform him that he has been diagnosed with HIV. This news spread quickly, causing him to be kicked off the team, abandoned by his friends, and kicked out of his house. Nikhil eventually moves in with Nigel, who takes care of him, and Nikhil's sister also supports him. One day, he is arrested for being HIV positive and is forced by law into quarantine as the Goa Public Health Act allows the government to quarantine people with HIV during this period. Nigel and Anamika save him despite threats from the community and in the end, his parents reconcile with him.

Do Paise Ki Dhoop, Chaar Aane Ki Baarish

This movie is inspired by a true story where strangers meet by chance and change people's lives with their perspectives. But there's more to the strangers in this story than meets the eye. Their lives are not simple. Rajit Kapoor (Debu) and Manisha Koirala (Juhi) meet

in the most cliché manner, in a taxi, and the film begins to unfold on many levels about sexuality, gender roles and intimacy. The film attempts to portray the gender roles and exchanges between Juhi and Debu through dialogue. The film is criticized for its stereotypical depiction of Debu as a homosexual. But the good thing is that it also highlights the reversal of gender roles. The smiles and laughter echoing throughout the house create a joyful note in the film. In such a cozy moment, Juhi finds herself attracted to Debu despite knowing his sexual orientation. One time she even tried to get Debu into bed and he gave her an ultimatum to do so. Such a delicate moment is handled with care without sensationalizing or judging Juhi. She finally accepts Debu's sexual orientation and gives up her own desires. His understanding of consent is highlighted in a humorous way. She also took on the role of Debu's "stylist" and showed him off when he came to meet his ex-boyfriend. Even though they were heartbroken, Juhi and Kaku let Debu come see him, knowing that he might never come back to them.

Aligarh



Figure-4
Director- Deepti Naval
Genre: Drama
Release Date: 22nd May, 2009
Kite Films.



Figure-5
Director- Hansal Mehta
Genre- Biographical Drama
Release Date: 26th February, 2016
Eros Entertainment.

Aligarh is a human rights story that reveals the plight of gay people in a conservative Indian society. It is a fascinating tragedy, sandwiched between two historic judgments, first the Delhi High Court decriminalizes and then the Supreme Court reinstating the criminalization of Section 377 of the Penal Code. India. Aligarh is based on the actual incident of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a Marathi professor and the dean of the faculty of classical and modern Indian languages at Aligarh Muslim University who was expelled for moral reasons. The first scene of the movie shows several miscreants forcing their way into the professor's home and filming him having a private moment with a rickshaw driver. What keeps you glued to the screen is the focused storytelling and natural acting, giving you a glimpse into the main character's life. Writers Ishani Banerjee and Apurva Israni ensure that there is no unwarranted or unnecessary excitement considering the sensitive subject. They cleverly incorporated the trail of Deepu Sebastian, a journalist working for the India Post in Delhi, to advance the story.

Conclusion

Sexual minorities' issues are being discussed positively on different platforms. People are more aware about transgender rights due to the impact of social media and films. They have started accepting them as they are. Times are changing and sexual minorities are portrayed and getting a place in mainstream movies but the important question is still about justice and equal treatment of transgender. Gay and Lesbian characters are gradually finding their way into films, and debates about the rights of marginalized groups are also appearing in popular culture. Even the Censor Board was first hesitant to approve films with topics relating to sexual minorities, homosexuals, and the like; this is fairly obvious in the cases of films like *Fire*, *Unfreedom*, and

Kabodyscapes. At present Censor Board approves the movies which highlight these sensitive issues. Apart from this, the Supreme Court's landmark decision decriminalizing Section 377 brought about reforms to the laws relating to sexual minorities, which were unfavorable and discriminatory; these changes have been brought due to the positive impact of media and movies.

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