



REPRESENTATION OF THE QUEER CULTURE IN INDIAN CINEMA

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DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.7757341

Abstract:

The present research paper is an overview of cinemas made about and on queer culture. It has been observed that Bollywood has stereotyped the queer culture. Hardly the Indian cinemas have featured queer culture in some of the movies. Mostly the queer culture has been shown in a poor light, therefore, the term Bollywood is not considered while analysing Indian Cinema as it includes the different industries present in India. It will throw light on the ideas in the cinema traditions in India about the love between women and the love between men.

It is an attempt to understand that parallel, experimental, and regional cinema has dealt with queer representation with more open-mindedness and its handling of the topic is more natural and with noticeable ease. The so-called mainstream cinema, on the other hand, seems to be more conservative and fearful in handling queer culture in its representation.

The researcher has preferred Indian Cinema in which Marathi, Malayalam, and Hindi cinemas are considered and explored. By Indian, mean to focus on the most experimental and parallel cinemas like Jabbar Patel's *Umbaratha*, Riyad Wadia's *Bomgay*, Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, and Jayan Cherian's *Gender Blending* and some of the Bollywood films like Anupam Kher's *Daayra* and Kalpana Lajmi's *Darmiyaan*, Shelly Chopra Dhar's *Ek Ladkiko Dekha to Lisa Lagaand Mahesh Bhatt's Tamanna*.

Keywords: *Queer Culture, Cinema, Representation, Homophobia.*

Introduction:

Homophobia and the conservative approach to deal with queer culture is the common trend in modern India. In India, a large number of Homoerotically inclined Indians throughout history have lived better life without any shame. On the other hand, they were honoured and successful members of society who have contributed in various fields. They were not regarded as shame or as something wrong with

them. Even they were not ashamed of how they feel and what they are. The law to criminalize homosexuality was inserted into Indian jurisdiction by the Indian Law Commission, presided over by Lord Macaulay. It introduced the colonial anti-sodomy statute, Section 377, into the Indian Penal Code on October 6, 1860, in British India. The incident in Indian history initiated the emergence of

homophobic and discriminatory nature in the Indian Culture.

In modern India, homophobia and discriminatory treatment towards the LGBTQIA+ community are evident. Even after curtailing the law against homosexuality i.e. section 377 of IPC in 2018, homophobia in the Indian social context is yet to have vanished from the psyche. That is the reason why the Indian society and culture prominently show homophobic aspects. As literature and cinema are the reflections of society, the homophobic and mis-interpretative nature of society is reflected in literature and cinema too.

The Bollywood Masala movies such as *Kya Super Cool Hai Hum*, *Dostnaa 2*, *Kal Ho Na Ho*, *BA Pass*, and many others have stereotyped the image of the LGBTQIA+ community of India. The way a gay character has been portrayed in *Kya Super Cool Hai Hum* gives a stereotyped; Bollywood, it seems would not go beyond the realm of their so-called ideas. Some of the scenes have been picturized in a gay bar where Ritesh Deshmukh happens to land up and gets acquainted with a gay character, and on the very next day they go to the beach where Ritesh has been tried by the other man. In the beach scene, the reaction given by Ritesh has simply been an example of homophobia. It can be called a state of ‘voluntary mental self-castration’.

The entire movie has made fun of queer culture. It shows the hypocrisy of the Bollywood cinemas. They cannot bring out the socially debarred issues. They can show movies on anything that is socially accepted but whenever it comes to shed a light upon the current gender discrimination people would not feel to stand for it. It is not an accident that most of the icons have a gay image-makers; furthermore, they are literally an invention of the gay man, viz, the dress-designer, hair-dresser and choreographer. Many renowned personalities from the cinema industry are belonging to this section of society which is in minority and not accepted by a huge number of people.

It is always claimed that the majority of heteronormative people do not even try to understand different desire, a different femininity of these certain sections of people. Sexuality cannot be understood in binaries. There is a variety of sexual behaviours, sexual patterns, and orientations. In 1948, Dr. Alfred Kinsey and his research partners published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, the first landmark study to suggest that people did not fit exclusively into the categories of homosexual and heterosexual. Kinsey proposed a scale from zero to seven, with zero being exclusively heterosexual and seven being exclusively homosexual. But the limited understanding of sexuality is been observed in the course of Indian Cinema.

We can bring out a categorical difference between these stereotyped and homosexual films. As has been said that the Bollywood masala movies use queer characters to fill the blank holes of the script and hence, most of the time we have seen the use of the Hijra community. The Hijra community has been shown either begging on the road or train. This has weakened the characters of hijras. This kind of stereotypical representation of transgender has added to their problems to come out with a new outlook.

On the other hand, the representation in parallel cinema, of the Hijra community shown in *Darmiyaan: In Between*, at least, has got some positive angle. The character played by Sayajirao Shinde in *Darmiyaan* has achieved the strength of really life hijra. I remember unlike a still from *Midnight's Children*, where Hijras have been portrayed as begging in the birth ceremony. Let's have an overview of some of the parallel and documentary cinemas.

In her book, *Fire: A Queer Classic*, scholar and author Shohini Ghosh writes, "Riyad Wadia's independent, experimental film *Bom Gay* (1996) inaugurated queer films in India. Wadia's next film, *A Mermaid Called Aida* (1996) is a feature-length documentary on well-known transsexual Aida Banaji. Like most documentaries, both films circulate through an expansive network of non-commercial screenings. The films of

Pratibha Parmar, a UK-based director of Indian origin, also exerted considerable influence among the emergent gay and lesbian movement in India."

Umbartha is a film directed by Jabbar Patel and starring Smita Patil and Girish Karnad, has represented a lesbian couple in a very natural manner. Smita Patil is an in-charge of the Mahilaashram where the concerned lesbian couple develops intimacy. In the cinema, these characters are socially tortured and tried to find solace in each other's company. It began with the homosocial relationship where they found comfortable with each other. In all, the film has taken a positive stand for queer culture. *Keeping the Flame Alive* was published on 20 March 2016 in the Indian Express.

Jayan Cherian a Malayalam director has some interesting documentaries on his credit. "Shape of the Shapeless" has struck my mind. In the documentary, Cherian suggests how a protagonist overcomes the organ change therapy. It is a very open and explicit cinema that clearly throws light on the issue without any hesitation.

The movies like *Umbartha*, *Darmiyan*, *Fire*, *Bom Gay*, and *Shape of the Shapeless* are considered parallel cinemas or art cinemas. In the Indian film industry, it is a very recent period that queer characters are represented as protagonists.

After decriminalizing homosexuality in India in 2018, the representation of queer characters in Bollywood mainstream cinema has changed remarkably. In mainstream cinemas like 'Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Aisa Laga', 'Shubh Mangaljyada Sawadhan' and 'Badhai Do' the LGBTQAI+ community characters are the protagonists and are shown in good light. It shows that the legal development reflects in the handling of the issue in the culture industry too.

'Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Aisa Laga' with some tension and quirks tactfully handle this crucial subject. A play within the film categorically voices the homophobic voices as well as strongly hesitating yet accepting voices. Screenwriter Gazal Dhaliwal and the director no doubt successfully touched the pulses, emotions, and the human psyche of the Bollywood audience. This film certainly helps to understand homosexuality not as a disease but as a feeling or love for each other. This does make aware of the suffocation and plights of gay people.

Another key factor to be focused on is that when it comes to lesbian relationships our patriarchy can permit an inter-religion marriage only to avoid same-sex love and shame. The vivid representative of the system, Sweety's brother would not otherwise get ready for her marriage with Sahil Mirza, a Muslim

lad. It sounds like a negotiation with the family honour. One might say a gradual honour.

This film sets after the Supreme Court read down the draconian section 377 whereas Fire and Aligarh were before it. That very difference effortlessly can be observed in the ease of handling sensitive issues. However, it is more social and none of legal. Deepa Mehta's Fire witnessed political protests here and there, while Hansal Mehta's Aligarh faced trouble in Aligarh. However, Ek ladki ko Dekha to Aisa Laga goes down smoothly. It's indeed about acceptance. After the verdict, people are quite open with the reality. There are more space and acceptability required.

Conclusion:

Indian movies have simply been categorized into two parts. The parallel Indian Cinema and mainstream Bollywood cinema. One is for the stereotypical portrayal of the queer people and the other-seeking for social changes through the movies.

The Indian mindset around the queer culture and its refusal to accept the culture whole-heartedly is also can be analysed with the help of representation of the queer culture in the Indian Cinema. Indian society is blamed for being homophobic and discriminatory in the case of queer people. In the films also the characters are shown in a comic sense or

to fill the gaps with the stereotypical attitude.

It is also observed in the Indian Film Industry, that if a queer character is involved in the film, then the whole movie is based on the queer subject. It is not very common to include a queer character in mainstream regular cinema as a part of a whole different storyline that is too in good light. People from LGBTQIA+ are also part of society and they can be shown in any random mainstream Bollywood movie as supporting characters and the movie need not dealing with the queer topic.

Parallel queer cinemas like Umbartha, Darmiyan, Fire, Bom Gay, and Shape of the Shapeless have played tremendous roles in the building up of the queer movement in India. The mainstream Bollywood Cinema has damaged the image of the LGBTQIA+ community with its stereotypical representation though the changing perspective of Bollywood mainstream cinemas is also beneficial to the awareness drive for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Filmography:

1. Aligarh. Directed by Hansal Mehta: Starring Manoj Bajpayee & Rajkumar Rao. 2016. Film.
2. BA Pass. Directed by Ajay Bahl. Starring Shilpa Shukla & Shadab

Kamal. Produced by Tonga Talkies. 2013. Film.

3. Bomgay. Directed & written by Riyad Vinci Wadia & Raj Rao. Production Company: Wadia Movietone. 1996. Short Film.
4. Daayraa (the Square circle). Directed by Amol Palekar. India. 1996. Film. Running Time-107 Minutes.
5. Darmiyaan: In Between. Directed by Kalpana Lajmi. India. 1997. Film. Running Time-150.
6. Dostana (Friendship) Tarun Mansukhani. India. 2008. Film. Running time- 142
7. Earth. Deepa Mehta. Canada. 1996. Film Running Time- 108
8. Kal Ho Na Ho. Nikhil Adwani. India. 2003. Film Running Time- 186.

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