Representation of LGBTQIA in Bollywood Films

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ABSTRACT

India produces more Hindi films than any other country. Film portrayals of society mirror that culture, which in turn shapes social attitudes. Hindi film, also referred to as Bollywood, exhibits strong societal roots. The Delhi High Court authorized homosexual behavior in the last ten years, but the Supreme Court later declared it to be unlawful. These modifications mirror modifications in social views. In this paper, we focus on how homosexuality is portrayed in Hindi films in relation to social attitudes about both male and female homosexuality. In India, cultural and social values and attitudes towards sexuality have historically been positive. However, during the 200 years of British colonial rule, these values and attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual men and women became extremely negative and even punishable, in line with the prevalent Victorian views on sex and sexual activity. The literature has identified and documented several sexual descriptions and identities. In this essay, we discuss a tiny number of Hindi movies that deal with homosexuality. These representations have generally been unfavorable. We discuss the reasons why this would be the case as well as the effect that these portrayals might have on viewers.

Keywords- Gender, Hindi Cinema, LGBT, Queer, Sexuality, Stereotypes, Stigma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cinema is a potent tool for igniting social change. Like other art forms, film is a means of representing social reality as well as a component of it. Films subtly affect how people believe in society. Without a doubt, the LGBT movement in India has benefited from cinema. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people are all considered to be members of the sexual minority. The representation of gender stereotypes in the media shapes how society views gender roles. The overuse of gender stereotypes in movies leads to a misunderstanding of gender roles that becomes ingrained in people's minds and is transmitted from generation to generation as a valid viewpoint. A strong catalyst for societal change is film. Like other art forms, film is a means of representing social reality as well as a component of it. Films subtly affect

how people believe in society. Without a doubt, the LGBT movement in India has benefited from cinema. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people are all considered to be members of the sexual minority. The representation of gender roles in the media shapes how society perceives gender roles. The overuse of gender stereotypes in the media leads to the misrepresentation of gender roles, which become ingrained in people's minds and are transmitted from one generation to the next as an acceptable norm. In India, homosexuality is still frowned upon.

In colonial India, the British imposed Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which still exists today and makes homosexuality a crime. Critical consideration should be given to the community that has long suffered from marginalization and a lack of representation in society's social and cultural fabric. The LGBT community

in India deals with a lot of hardships on a daily basis, including prejudice and a lack of societal acceptance. Creating a place in society where gender nonconformity is not stigmatized as abnormal is a task. Never are they portrayed as contributing members of society. They are primarily portrayed as bizarre characters that are solely present in the film for comedic effect. The sexual minority is now emerging from the darkness of their historical marginalization after centuries of being doubted, shunned, vilified, and criminalized. Realistic films depicting the LGBT community will undoubtedly have a hugely positive influence on people's views in a country like India, where cinema has the power to change the majority of people's perceptions. The portrayal of the LGBT community in Hindi films has come under scrutiny over the years.

Hindi cinema has seen a consistent display of LGBT characters, some for comedic effect and others remaining true to reality and making an effort to treat the subject in a very sensitive and realistic light. Sadly, to a greater extent, these films were unable to challenge the traditional myths and have failed to break the "taboo." It has been noted that these individuals are frequently assessed based on their sexual behavior. Violence related to sex and body concerns includes not just sexual assault but also a form of social voice and identity rejection. However, for many members of the LGBT community in India, 2014 was a year of relief and joy. The transgender community was given legal recognition as the "Third Gender" community by the Supreme Court of India in a landmark decision on April 15, 2014, and the court noted that the transgender community, also known as "hijras" in this country, is a group of Indian citizens who are treated by society as "unnatural and generally as objects of mockery and even on account of superstition." Observing that "the gender to which a person belongs is to be defined by the person concerned," the court upheld one's right to personal autonomy and self-determination under Article 21. The court affirmed that "no restriction can be placed on one's personal appearance or choice of dressing, subject to the restrictions contained in Article 19(2) of the Constitution," and further safeguarded one's gender presentation by citing the freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a)". The revolutionary Two young women from a village in Madhya Pradesh intended to get married in the village temple in 1987 but were hounded by the police, who threatened and physically abused them. This incident is credited with introducing LGBT rights into the public consciousness in India.

After that, when they got married, they took pictures of their nuptial ceremonies, which drew the attention of the media and elevated the topic of LGBT rights to the forefront of the public discourse. Second, in 1992, the AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) organized a "gay rights protest" and filed a report titled "Less than Gay," detailing police abuse of gays. When Deepa Mehta's 1998 film *Fire*, about lesbians, was set to

be released, the topic of same-sex marriage again attracted the attention of the Indian public. The movie faced numerous objections from various outlaw organizations. The fundamentalists severely physically harmed the movie theaters where it was being shown. Hindi movies have made attempts to accept the LGBT topic in their own unique ways. But regrettably, the characterizations continued to be a parody of a serious subject matter even after all these years. Bollywood stars have a reputation for avoiding questions about their sexual preferences. One of the few organizations having the ability to unite Indians and shape a new public opinion is the Hindi film industry.

However, the biggest film industry in the world is frequently criticized for showing no concern for LGBTQ problems. Hindi cinema has decided to fulfill its entertainment duty by mocking gay culture, despite its ability to instantly affect millions of people. Since the film's substance is legally incompatible with what the nation accepts, getting it certified by the certification board is the first obstacle. The biggest constraints are the difficulties in obtaining the funding required for the release and the possibility that viewers will avoid the film or, worse, picket it. Many actors are prohibited by the LGBT community from coming out of the closet. For actors, it might be the unease of being relegated to just playing LGBT characters and the annoyance that results when a person's sexual orientation supersedes all other identities. In queer Hindi films, LGBT characters often take the brunt of coarse jokes and are portrayed as laughing stocks. LGBT characters were typically portrayed as the friends of heroines or heroes during the so-called "Golden Era" of Hindi cinema, which ran from the middle of the 1950s through the middle of the 1960s. Some of the actors would purposefully cross-dress to make the audience laugh. Male actors who masquerade as women are frequently featured in comedic scenes or songs in commercial Hindi films. In the song "*Mere Angane mein*" from the 1981 smash movie Lawaaris, Amitabh Bachchan disguised herself as a woman to pass for a eunuch, while Rishi Kapoor did the same in the 1975 film "*Rafoo Chakkar*." In his smash hit *Kunwara Baap*, the late comedian Mehmood became the first to portray eunuchs in a respectable light. The 1990s were a significant decade for the Hindi cinema industry, as it started to see a shift away from ageless and predictable love and friendship stories towards more modern and sinister movies.

Film-induced unease, discomfort, and fears were discussed in debates. Certain types of photographs were criticized for disrespecting Indian culture and tradition and accused of being sexual and obscene. Despite widespread concerns, sex and sexuality depictions persist in many media, often at odds with traditional family values and heteronormativity. Less frequently than not, queer imagery appeared in commercial projects as comic relief, which was prevalent in a large number of Hindi movies. In Hindi movies, gay representation has been portrayed in a variety of ways. The first is in the form of

hijra, the second is humor, the third is mental illness, and the fourth is in the way it portrays the complexity of LGBT people's lives. In Hindi cinema, the third gender plays a crucial role. Films like "*Tamanna,*" "*Shabnam Mausi,*" "*Daayra,*" "*Darmiyaan,*" and "Welcome to *Sajjanpur*" tried to take the third gender seriously. For the first time in Hindi film history, director Mahesh Bhatt cast actor Sadashiv Amrapurkar as "*Maharani,*" an evil character who served as the main antagonist of the film Sadak. Although the actor's portrayal earned him a Filmfare Award, the role did little to change how society perceived eunuchs. She was portrayed in the film as a despicable brothel owner who trafficked and tormented young girls. The negative myths about the trans community were often repeated in a movie where the trans character received so much screen time, which ultimately led to the development of a stereotype in Indian popular culture. After *Sadak*, Mahesh Bhatt once again displayed bravery by producing Tamanna, which was based on the real life of a eunuch, "*Tiku.*" The transwoman who finds an abandoned girl child and nurtures her as her own was complexly portrayed in the movie. The film attempted to address both female infanticide and transgender concerns (such as prejudice, violence, and misgendering). The talented actor Paresh Rawal did a fantastic job on the part. Another movie that interestingly addressed gender fluidity was *Daayra.* It showed a transsexual individual becoming close to a young girl who assumed a male persona. By presenting actual instances of eunuchs winning elections, films like Shabnam Mausi and *Welcome to Sajjanpur* established eunuchs as honorable politicians. The Queens! Without using the cheap gimmickry that is typically used to depict the hijra minority in mainstream Hindi films, Destiny of Dance successfully captured the diversity of the hijra community. Sadly, these movies received very little media recognition. With a few exceptions, the situation hasn't really changed, whether Govinda is in *Aunty No. 1* or *Golmaal Returns* stars Ajay Devgan, Tushar Kapoor, etc. Most trans characters receive abhorrent treatment. They are frequently shown as sexually preying on the hero (almost always without their consent) or as exaggerated "effeminate" caricatures created to make people laugh. Films like "*Kya Kool Hain Hum,*" "*Partner*," "*Style*," and many more portrayed trans women in such horrifying tropes as sexual predators. The worst form of representation was possibly found in the 2004 movie "*Masti.*" Even though watching such films may be fun, it is difficult to know whether the LGBT community is fairly represented on screen in them. Through movies like "*Aligarh*" and "*Kapoor and Sons*," which were released in 2016, Hindi cinema saw some good LGBT portrayals.

There are a few clearly gay-themed movies with recognizable LGBT characters; therefore, the question of why arises. Almost all Hindi movies either show trans people as scary villains or in a lighthearted manner with harmful transphobic humor. The transgender person might also be perceived as being outside the parameters of what is considered "normal"—as a sexual predator, a child abuser, or someone who is out to prey on (cis) heroes or heroines. The film *Mast Kalander* from 1991 is a classic. It was the first film in Bollywood to publicly showcase the first gay character, Pinku. The release of lesbian-themed films like *Fire* (1998), in which two sisters-in-law who have been abandoned by their respective husbands find solace in one another, and *Girlfriend* (2004), in which an obsessive lesbian is willing to do anything to win her girlfriend back from a man, generated a lot of controversy. whereas *Gulabi Aaina* (2003) holds the distinction of being India's first Kothi film, it is India's first gay film. Despite the positive press they received, these movies have only been seen in private or at film festivals (they were either denied a censor certificate or didn't bother applying), which limits their audience. In more contemporary Hindi films, there has been a shift and transformation, with gay themes and depictions becoming a little more visible and fluid. In the 2004 Sudhir Mishra film *Chameli,* Aman (Rahul Bose) and Chameli (Kareena Kapoor), who are both seeking shelter from Mumbai's torrential rain under the same archway, have a discussion as they come to know one another. Aman at first seems shocked to learn that Raja, one of Chameli's pals, is gay and in love with Hasina, a male cross-dresser. Chameli asks Aman if he thinks it's inappropriate for two males to be in a relationship together during their talk. Aman hesitates before answering "no," adding a qualifier that he has gay male pals. As long as there is love present in a relationship, Chameli continues, "*bus pyaar hona chayen,*" there is nothing "weird" about being in a gay relationship. The emergence of queer politics in India is largely to blame for the notable gay depictions in modern Hindi films. But more research is needed to determine whether there are queer alternatives emerging here or if they are just being absorbed by the main hegemonic masculinity mechanisms at play in Hindi cinema. Unfortunately, gay identities weren't well represented in popular Hindi films. *Page 3* by Madhur Bhandarkar. The same LGBT clichés that should have been avoided were spread by Anurag Basu's "*Life in a Metro,*" Reema Kagti's *"Honeymoon Travels,*" Karan Razdan's "*Girlfriend,*" "*Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke,*" "*Raja Hindustani,*" "*Taal*," and "*Kal Ho Na Ho*." Numerous alternative Hindi movies have attempted to comprehend the LGBT movement. IAM, Yours Emotionally, Water, I Can't Think Straight, Luck by Chance, *68 Pages*, *The Pink Mirror*, and others are just a few examples. Activists for LGBT rights and filmmakers like Rituparno Ghosh, Onir, and Sridhar Rangayan have contributed significantly to this genre.

II.   CONCLUSION

As times change, the homosexual minority is gradually gaining acceptance in Hindi cinema. Another for the community has been the favorable portrayal of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, hijras, and other

people who are recognized as "queer" in movies. The thinking of the populace is transforming along with Indian civilization. Few filmmakers have attempted to create films on LGBT people and their issues, but there are still a lot of unanswered questions. The subject of whether people's attitudes towards the LGBT community have changed, are changing, have been modified, or will change in the future is also raised by the commercial failure of LGBT films. Whether the gender discourse has taken them into account or not remains a difficult topic. The community is looking for a more complete portrayal of humanity in the movies. It is critical to acknowledge and emphasize these fresh difficulties facing our society. Because they are concerned about being discriminated against by the majority community, many people in India are reluctant to openly discuss their gender identity and sexual orientation. In order to provide people who are still in the closet with a much-needed platform for engagement, there needs to be a lot more representation in the film industry. This research paper tried to highlight the plight of the LGBT community in India, which has long been denied their identity and representation in the social and cultural sphere of society, as well as the active role that Hindi cinema can play in mainstreaming them through their believable and authentic screen representation. The LGBT community is a victim of gender violence and other human rights violations since statutory laws are invisible to them. Only when LGBT characters in movies receive a fair portrayal will the community begin to feel accepted. The future is both exciting and terrible at the same time. While it is intimidating because we are being pushed back by the irrational forces of all religions, it is exhilarating because LGBT rights represent the frontier of the fight for equity and justice for all people on this earth. According to Ruth Vanita, a well-known Indian hagiographer of homosexuality, "The British did not bring homosexuality into India; what they imported into our society was homophobia." The LGBT community must take the initiative to connect with the political class, as well as with artists and filmmakers. They won't be able to obtain equal rights until they go out and demand that the political parties back them. Why is there such a void when we discuss sexuality? Why is it necessary to conceal one's sexual orientation? Why should someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender hide if they are heterosexual? This is fundamental to living a dignified life and to the existence of humans.

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