

Gender Minority and its Changing Portrayal in Bollywood Films

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Abstract: *This paper outlines how the sexual minorities like LGBTQ are represented in Bollywood films. Cinema is the most important medium that influences people's opinion and it has contributed a lot to the spread of queer awareness and queer movement. This paper aims to give some idea about how LGBTQ is portrayed in cinema and how such portrayal influences peoples' perceptions about them. The paper talks about how Hindi films have represented different discourses on the LGBT theme over time. It took almost 40 years for Indian cinema to portray a homosexual character. Since then, there have been differential representations of the LGBT community and the audience in this homophobic society has also reacted differentially.*

Keywords: Homosexual, lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, homophobia, queer, queer culture, heteronormativity.

Introduction

One of the greatest sources of influence of media on modern life has been cinema. Cinema, on the one hand, reflects on changing social reality and impacts peoples' perceptions, on the other. It has become a powerful vehicle for communication in the fields of culture, education, leisure and propaganda. Baldoon Dhingra, in a report for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has quoted from a speech by Prime Minister Nehru who stated, "...the influence in India of films is greater than newspaper and books combined" (Dhingra 1963).

Films have a strong impact on the way people think and can influence the society. Films carry an advantage of being a part of the social reality and also a medium of portraying it. Projection of gender stereotypes in films

forms social perception of gender roles. The over-saturation of gender stereotypes in the films results in misrepresentation of gender roles which get embedded in the human mind and is passed on from generation to generation as an acceptable view (Kaur 2017). This is called normalization of the abnormal. Indian cinema has largely contributed to this task of normalization by reproducing the gender stereotypes along the line of patriarchal order. Indian cinema took a long time to make films based homosexual themes. But the portrayals in most cases have been ambivalent, reflecting a strong social division on the issue. In some cases, however, the portrayals have been sympathetic, touching the roots of the problem.

Sexual and gender minority is a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices are not generally accepted in the larger society. Sexual or gender minority is an umbrella term that encompasses populations included in the acronym “LGBTI” (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) and those whose sexual orientation or gender identity vary from the “normal”. Our culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two boxes of sex i.e., male and female, and these boxes also consist of few characteristics of what is “male” and what is “female”. Heterosexuality has been defined as “normal” and all other forms of sexuality, despite being in practice alongside heterosexuality, are labeled “abnormal”.

Homosexual relationships and unions have been a source of social discomfort since they challenge the conventional morality rooted in heterosexuality. The traditional morality had cultural, legal and religious sanctions. The homosexual movements therefore were confronted by social and religious orthodoxy. The legal acceptance of homosexuality is a recent phenomenon and a large majority of the societies are yet to legalize any form of homosexuality (Acharya et al. 2017).

Homosexuality means the same sex orientation relationship and is not a new phenomenon. Even instances of homosexuality are found in Hindu mythology. “The literature drawn from Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and modern fictions also testify the presence of same-sex love in various forms. Ancient texts such as the *Manu Smriti*, *Arthashastra*, *Kamasutra*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* have references to homosexuality. There are also reports that same-sex activities are common among *sannyasis*, and members of the Orthodox Church, who cannot marry. Thus, instances of homosexuality are available in historical and mythological texts world over and India is no exception to this” (Parasar 2010). The religious communities view homosexuality as a sin, against nature and especially against God. Religions like Islam, Christianity, and Judaism reject homosexuality

completely. Homosexuality was considered as a mental disorder until 1970s. Societal attitudes towards homosexuality differ from culture to culture and over historical periods. Homosexuality is not a taboo but a tradition in India, which has been in practice in different forms. Ancient India never defamed homosexuality; instead, it has been a part of its traditional spiritual consciousness. Ancient India was quite tolerant to homosexuality although the Hindu law book *The laws of Manu* took a very conservative position on the issue.

Homophobia entered into Indian society with the British and when they came to India, the *Laws of Manu* was one of the first texts to which they had referred. As a result, *Laws of Manu* became the ultimate voice of authority for the British and sex became confined to heterosexual monogamous marriages. This was legitimized in 1860 when the British government brought in section 377 of Indian Penal Code, which reads: ‘whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years and shall also be liable to fine’. It was rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious morality that abhorred non-procreative sex. Based on this, homosexuality become illegal in India which was also supported by nineteenth century social reformers and the nationalists, upholding either Hindu or Islamic morality (Khatun 2018: 218). Monogamy was the ideological and moral bane of The Hindu Marriage Act of 1954, which criminalized all forms of polygamy for all Indian citizens excepting the Muslims.

Methodology

This paper is based on the method called “content analysis”. Content analysis is a research method for studying documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video. For this paper I have done content analysis of some selected Hindi films which feature sexual minorities. I have tried to capture the varying discourses that find reflection in the portrayal of homosexuality in the Hindi films in recent decades.

Conceptual framework

Queer is the term used by and for those persons who are gay, lesbian, transgender and bi-sexual. Queer theory suggests that identities of individuals, especially their sexual identities, are not stable and straight forward as the socially given identities sometimes do not match the self-identities constructed by the grown-up agencies.

Though the context of heterosexuality is the origin and foundation of society's heteronormative stability, the concept of queerness focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Queerness has been associated with bisexual, lesbian and gay, and its analytic framework and includes topics like cross-dressing, intersex bodies, gender ambiguity and gender-confirmation surgery. Queer theory holds that individual sexuality is fluid, fragmented and dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities and it may vary at different points in one's life time (Jagose & Genschel 1996:47).

Queer theory is a part of the field of queer studies whose roots can be found in women's studies, feminist theory, in gay and lesbian studies, and in postmodern and poststructuralist theories. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis used the words "queer theory" to describe a way of thinking that did not use heterosexuality or binary gender constructs as its starting point; instead, argued for a more fluid concept of identity (Giesecking 2008: 737). Queer theory has represented a different way of thinking and discussing about gender identity which is not based on heteronormativity. Queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire (Spargo 1999: 9).

LGBT studies as a form of discourse has challenged the dominant notion of sexuality, i.e., heterosexuality. When one category is designated as "normal", it automatically makes its opposites as "deviant". The practices relating to deviant category are marked by less prejudice and these practices are liable to different forms of social condemnation and punishment. "Queer theory emerges from gay/lesbian studies' attention to the social construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior. But while gay/lesbian studies focused largely on the questions relating to homosexuality, queer theory expands its realm of investigation to a wider field. Queer theory looks at, and studies, and offers a political critique of anything that falls into normative and deviant categories" (Harris 2005: 1). The term also describes representation of same-sex relationship in literary texts, films, and music. This describes the power relation in sexuality. It reverses the process of designating heterosexuality as a norm.

Heteronormativity is defined as a world view that promotes the idea that heterosexuality is the default, preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation. It assumes the gender binary (i.e., that there are only two distinct, opposite genders) and argues that sexual and marital relations between people of opposite sex are the most desirable forms. This belief system is harmful for sexual minorities because it creates a hierarchy among sexual practices that reinforce heterosexism and homophobia. This term was coined by Social theorist Michael Warner in 1991, and further examined this ideology in his book *Fear of a Queer Planet*(1993), one of the building blocks of queer theory.

Heteronormativity is problematic for its assumptions and beliefs for all societies. As far as heteronormativity is concerned, any non-confirming sexual orientation is a passing phase and an individual will eventually grow out of it to be “normal”. LGBTQ people may face healthcare discrimination; the transgender people face struggles when trying to receive healthcare services.

Heteronormativity informs the normativity of daily life, including institutions, laws and regulations that impact the sexual and reproductive lives of members of society as well as the moral imperatives that influence people’s personal lives. Heteronormativity refers to the practices, norms governing those practices, institutions that uphold them and effects produces by those norms within individuals. These effects can be seen in the behaviour and feelings as well as in the aspirations for the future that the narrators nourish for themselves and their children (Wieringa 2014:28).

Journey of the Hindi Cinema

The scholars started taking interest in the depiction of homosexuality in cinema in the 1970s with the spread of feminist awareness and we could notice increasing representation of diverse issues relating to race, ethnicity, gender and even LGBT groups.

The last quarter of 20th century witnessed the America and Western Europe-driven globalization and the subsequent increase in transnational mobility, especially from East to West. Developing nations like India reacted and responded to the ‘liberal project’ of the globalized modernity in multiple ways. The western discourses around newly felt sensibilities and identities such as non-heteronormative sexualities are seen as significant, certainly not the only marker of this project. Sexuality has become a decisive factor of individual’s identity. Moreover, the idea of community started building

around sexuality. Expression such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘bisexual’, and ‘transgender’, ‘queer’ for individual identity and LGBTQ or queer community for collective identity which are originated in western societies, achieved international currency and the rights-based projects supporting the anti-AIDS and-discrimination campaigns of NGOs in non-western societies (Ramesh 2016: 63).

With the changing society, the world of cinema has also changed. The audiences have become more tolerant about the queer sexualities. The Indian cinema is still perplexed about the projection of LGBT characters. The discussion on queer love stories has been a long one with twists and turns, ups and downs. It still has a wave of awkwardness, shame, mockery and the fear of the public condemnation and stigmatization. Hindi films have tried to include gay themes in their own way. But in such movies the gay characters are far from reality. The mainstream movies invariably show a caricature in the name of a homosexual or LGBT character and the audience too expect these characters to bring some comic relief. The Hindi film industry is one of the powerful forces to create new opinions. But unfortunately, one of the largest film industries of the world is often seen lacking a sense of responsibility towards LGBT community.

India has seen cinematic brilliance with films like *Fire* (1996) to *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) and also seen shameless depiction of a queer character and ridiculing gay culture. *Fire* was directed by Deepa Mehta and she was one of the early and brave directors who brought the concept of homosexuality, especially lesbianism on the screen. She eventually faced a lot of public wrath. *Fire* was one of the most controversial films and it set the cultural landmark in Indian cinema which was both loved and hated. Previously, the queer characters were only effeminate character that added zero meaning to the plot of the movie but were only kept to add insensitive humour.

Mooji has captured this changing mood of Hindi films saying: “More film school graduates are getting their first break in an industry where the big stars have typically passed on the baton to their children, regardless of their talent. These educated first time directors are bringing new stories to Bombay or new ways of telling stories” (Mooji 2006: 32).

Featuring the LGBT characters in any Hindi film means that they are just an object of ridicule and joke. The directors never dare to bring different sexual characters under one screen. Earlier, in the 1960s and 1970s the characters of LGBT were depicted as companion of hero or heroine. The

characterization of LGBT was far from reality as they were just represented in the form of transvestite or cross dressed in order to evoke laughter. Commercial films had a long history of using cross dressed male actors in songs in order to add a comic scene, like in “Mere angane mein” number from the 1981 super hit *Lawaaris*, where Amitabh Bachchan cross dressed as woman to be mistaken as a eunuch (Fig: 1)



Fig:1

Hindi film industry began to witness a noticeable transformation during the 1990s, from the old school love stories to more challenging and audacious stories. But these adventurous movie plots mostly backfired as the restlessness and discomfort devised by films were represented in debates. Few images and scenes were accused of being obscene, vulgar, against the Hindu tradition, against Indian culture and faced public wrath.

Queer images rarely found significant space in commercial ventures and whenever they did, it was in the form of comic relief which could be found in large number of Hindi films. Gay representations have been made in different ways in Hindi films. The first in the form of Hijra, the second is in the form of humour, the third is in the form of mental sickness and lastly, in the way which shows the complexities of the life of the gay people (Kaur 2017: 27).

1990-1999

It was the last two decades that the filmmakers are in a dilemma to choose the themes of the films, which is publicly accepted and does not hurt the morals and traditions of any community. As cinema is one of the most powerful, popular and accessible form of art which leaves a strong influence on the people. *Saadak* (1991) portrays a transgender character, which is depicted as completely evil. *Raja Hindustani* (1996) represented two homosexual characters Kammo and Gulab Singh as comic characters in the film. *Tamanna* (1997) is a national award-winning film which touched upon many social issues like female infanticide and third gender. The film was based on actual life of a eunuch. In this film the character of eunuch 'Tikku' played by Paresh Rawal who faces a lot of humiliation from neighbourhood but also his brother and his family because of his gender. At first, Tikku was not involved in the traditional way of living of hijra community, he was a hairdresser and worked for Bollywood actresses. But at certain point when he lost his job, he turned towards this traditional path like begging, dancing in marriage parties, on occasion of new born baby etc.

2000-2020

It was after 2000 that the Indian Cinema was conscious about not mingling up the gay characters with the transgender. Film like *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) created a comic gay plot between two lead characters. The scene was actually of mistaken identity. It is about a love triangle, both Rohit and Aman are in love with Naina. Rohit's housekeeper, Kantaben mistakes Rohit and Aman as homosexuals which made her appalled. This exaggerated reaction to the mere implication of homosexuality gives a visual image of *Visceral Homophobia* (Holtzman 2010:123 cited in Webb 2018), spilling the tray of orange juice; fainting; screaming. Largely silent, she is denied a voice in which to vocalize her objections (Webb 2018). Karan Johar made an attempt to introduce gay themes into popular films, but he chose to do it through homophobic humour which, soon turned into a trend.

Male homosexuality is established through implication and innuendo with Rohit and Aman, embodying a "buddy" or *dosti* role of "barely disguised same-sex desire" (Gopinath 2000 cited in Webb 2018). Neither character is explicitly queer, yet homosexuality is framed as a disjuncture to heterosexuality. Rohit is established as aggressively heterosexual, harassing

a woman in an elevator before being confronted by a security guard (Webb 2018).

The film *Girlfriend* (2004) has shown that being homosexual is not natural process. In this film, one of the lead characters was sexually abused in her childhood and this is the reason that she becomes comfortable with same-sex relationship i.e., lesbianism. The director intended to throw some light on homosexual relationship but he ended up representing that queer sexuality is not natural but it is due to social circumstances or misfortune, where one changes their sexual orientation.

A breakthrough film was *My brother... Nikhil* (2005) directed by Onir. This film was well directed and it took great care in representing homosexuality with utmost sensitivity and it did not focus on the sexual life of Nikhil. The film primarily focused on HIV theme and about its awareness. Another film by the same director *I am* (2010) focuses on how gay people are abused and used in a country where homosexuality is considered as taboo. Some other films like *Dostana* (2008), *Straight: Pinu Patel ki tedhi medhi love story* (2009), *Ek Ladki ko dekha toh aisa laga* (2019), and *Shubhmangal zyada sabhdhan* (2020) have also dealt with different themes relating to homosexuality. *Dostana* marks a cynical appropriation of an increasingly public discourse on sexuality for the purpose of comedy while *Straight* is a brave exploration of what it means to be gay, who is really gay or more accurately who is not. And yet Pinu Patel's journey towards self-realization ends in an overwhelming validation of heterosexuality, which does justice neither to the idea of homosexual love and nor to the woman who ultimately wins the race (Srinivasan 2011).

The third gender

Hijra characters always had some presence in Hindi cinema. It was the late comedian Mehmood who, for the first time, portrayed eunuch in a respectable manner in his blockbuster *Kunwara Baap* (1974). The films like *Tamanna*, *Shabnam Mausi*, *Daayra*, *Darmiyaan*, *Welcome to Sajjanpur* attempted to take a serious take on third gender. There were many actors who grabbed eyeballs playing eunuch character on the silver screen.

Sangharsh (1999): *Sangharsh* is a 1999 Indian psychological action horror film directed by Tanuja Chandra. Ashutosh Rana played the role of Lajja Shankar Pandey, a religious fanatic, a psychopath transgender who

sacrificed children to attain immortality. This role of transgender won him several accolades.

Sadaak (1991): Sadashiv Amrapurkar played Maharani, a eunuch who was the lead villain of the movie. Maharani was a brothel owner who tortures and traffics young women. The film was directed by Mahesh Bhatt and it did its bit to improve the image of eunuch in the society. The performance of the actor fetched him a Filmfare award.

Tamanna (1997): Mahesh Bhatt once again showed courage by making another film which involved transwoman as an important part of the film. This film was based on actual life story of a eunuch 'Tiku'. The movie represented a transwoman played by Paresh Rawal, who finds an abandoned girl child and raises as her own. This film was an attempt to represent the struggles of a transgender and female infanticide.

Daayra (1996): This film explored the male-female relationships, the preconceived notion of love and the changing attitudes towards them. The plot includes a romantic relationship between a transvestite dancer and a gang raped woman who begins to dress up like a man.

Laxmii (2020): *Laxmii* is a comedy horror film directed by Raghava Lawrence. The story revolves around Asif played by Akshay Kumar who is possessed by transgender ghost. This film represents the issues and struggles faced by a transgender. They are discriminated against by the society on all grounds be it social, educational or economic.

Although the journey of experimenting with different themes on the Indian screen has not been smooth with passing time people have accepted male sex relationship. It evolved as a celebration of masculinity and exclusion of women. To make my point clear about the portrayal and its changing nature through the passage of time, I have discussed below three films in greater details.

Fire

Fire, released in 1996, is the most controversial film in the history of Indian Cinema. It was written and directed by Deepa Mehta and is an Indo-Canadian romantic drama film. It is the first film of her trilogy, the other two being *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005). It was the first transnational film which was commercially released in various global cities. After release it had a negative impact on the main stream audience. The film got banned in Delhi and Mumbai, where its screening stopped after two violent

demonstrations. The film was described as “unconventional”, “sumptuous” and not “lesbian” or “homosexual”.

The film is about two daughters-in-law of a family, who are not happy in their respective marriage. Radha (Shabana Azmi) is the wife of elder brother Ashok (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and Sita (Nandita Das) is the wife of younger brother Jatin (Javed Jaffrey). Ashok had no intimate relation with his wife, as he was under the influence of a Swamiji. Jatin, on the other hand, had a Chinese girlfriend and thus had no interest in Sita. These denials brought both the daughters-in-law closer and they, as an alternative exploration, started having an affair. Having been caught red handed by Ashok, Radha confesses that she loves Sita and wants to be with her.

Deepa Mehta’s *Fire*, no doubt, is considered a cultural landmark in the history of Indian cinema, which has been both loved and hated for its portrayal of lesbian desire. Responses to the film have veered wildly between unqualified appreciation and destructive rage. The rage displayed in India, soon after the release of the film through violent, Hindutva-inspired protests, was directed at Mehta’s audacity to represent a lesbian relationship that appears to develop as a result of the crippling pressure of Indian middle-class patriarchy (Bose 2007). Those who expressed anger against the film were Hindu right-wing activists, who took a clear position in support of Article 377 of the IPC, which criminalizes any form of homosexual relation. In their perception, in a country like India, where woman is seen as goddess, mother, daughter, daughters-in-law, the idea of woman having sexual desires ruin the so-called Indian culture and morality.



Fig:2

Mehta has taken a huge and bold step to introduce Lesbianism in Indian cinema as a realistic alternative to heterosexuality, the only form of sexuality endorsed by patriarchy. As the film was a Canadian production, it was claimed that Lesbianism is a Western concept. The film portrayed love relationship between two sisters-in-law of one family. This movie focuses on unhappy heterosexual relationship with their husbands. The protagonists never thought of having a love affair with same sex until they met each other. The protagonist Sita and Radha were not lesbians from birth, and they were not aware of their different sexual orientation prevailing within themselves. Sita and Radha were the two sides of the same coin as both of them were sufferers of alienation and denial from their respective husbands. This is also an acknowledgement of the fact that neither men nor women have just one sexual identity, which is fixed for life. The monolithic fixation of heterosexual identity, which perfectly endorses patriarchy, has been challenged in *Fire*.

The act of physical intimacy is not perceived merely as a contact of two female bodies. The bodies become territorialized with inscription of nationality, in being Indian (defined by borders), of religion in being Hindu, probably upper caste and kinship, in being sisters-in-law. Hence, the act of physical intimacy does not remain just a contact between two female bodies. Many critics described *Fire* as the story of “the two unhappy housewives compelled to seek emotional and sexual satisfaction from each other because their husbands provide none” (Kishwar 1998: 3).

Deepa Mehta did not portray the negative stereotyped of their looks but has represented the negative but authentic outlook of people, when they come in terms of lesbian relationship. The moment Ashok (husband of Radha) came to know about the love affair of Radha and Sita, he got devastated and got furious. He asked Radha that it is only for sexual desire that she has committed this sin. He wanted her to apologize for her sin and so that he can forgive her and continue life as usual. But Radha had a clear idea of what she was doing and her agency spoke when refused to apologize about her deeds. Their argument became violent and Radha’s saree caught fire. Ashok saw and left the room. This behavior portrayed the homophobic attitude of almost all the people in this country who are trapped in heteronormative ideal. People cannot accept the female love relationship, Ashok left her to burn and die for committing this sin.

Fire is an advance film with a different theme that was released in 90s, which would require broad mind people to understand. This film did justice to the representation of homosexual character and being a 90s film did not

stereotype homosexuality. But the same sex relationship was seen emerging only after the two women failed in heterosexual relationship and not as a preferred choice.

Aligarh

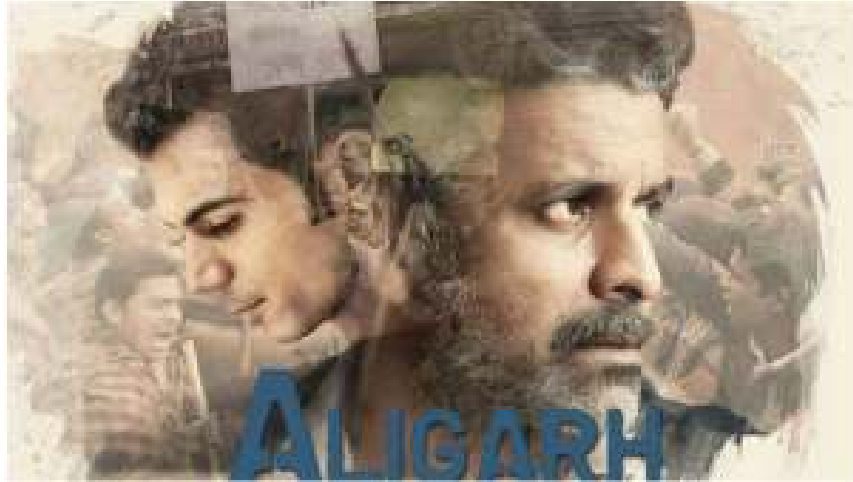


Fig 3

Aligarh is an Indian biographical drama film released worldwide on 26 February 2016. This film is directed by Hansal Mehta and written by Apurva Asrani. This film is based on the life of Ramchandra Siras, who was an Indian Linguist and author and was a professor at the Aligarh Muslim University. He got suspended from his job just because he was homosexual.

This is a true story of Ramchandra Siras (played by Manoj Bajpayee), a professor in Aligarh Muslim university. He worked in that university for 20 years and suddenly got suspended because of his different sexual orientation. His intimate video with a rickshaw puller was released in the internet which resulted in many protests resulting in his suspension from his job. After this a journalist Deepu Sebastian (Rajkumar Rao) helps him and the court gives verdict in his favour.

This film is in fact the best gay-themed film in Indian cinema. Thanks to the directors like Hansal Mehta and many others, Bollywood has come to accept homosexuality as a serious mainstream theme. Some of the well-known filmmakers in the industry were otherwise interested only in the “funny” portrayal of gay people. This film is more significant because it has boldly represented the attitude, pressure, prejudices towards gay people. Riggle et. al. (1996) stated in their paper that being homosexual is associated with prejudice. Even contact with homosexual people is looked down upon

in society. They have referred to Devine’s model of prejudice to support their statement. In discussing the model, Devine et. al. (1991) have stated that “the change from prejudice is not viewed as an all-or-none event but as process during which the low prejudice person is especially vulnerable to conflict between his or her enduring negative responses and endorsed non prejudiced beliefs” (Devine et. al., *Prejudice with and without compunction*, p. 515).



Fig:4

The film was released with a #comeout campaign. The campaign asked people to come out about their sexuality, discuss it and accept more openly about being homosexual. Coming out to the world is the most difficult task as it will have a negative impact on his/her life and those who are related to him/her. Society is divided into a masculine-feminine binary, and all those who do not fall in this binary have to face “othering”, humiliation, violence and isolation. This binary system of gender is a social construct and not biological, and is forced on people. Heteronormativity is declared as default sexual orientation and anyone falling outside this is unacceptable.

Aligarh became an important film not only for its homosexual theme but also for its stand on the LGBT rights. Everyone has the right to right to freedom, right to live their life in her/his own way and it does not change with anyone’s class, caste, status, race, ethnicity or gender. As, the whole society is bounded by heteronormativity, which is forced on the members;

homophobia prevails in peoples' mind. Earlier, in movies gay people were presented as "girlish", "feminine" or "less manly". Their dress up, walking style, and personality were presented in a feminine way. But Indian cinema has travelled a long distance to make a gay main plot film. Like in this film Aligarh, Prof. Siras was represented as a normal man, he was masculine and was a married person. This film also depicted the impact of criminalization by section 377 of the Indian Penal Code on the homosexuals. The court case against Siras gets delayed day by day, after many days of struggle when Deepu finally succeeds to bring justice to Siras, drunk Siras tells Deepu on the phone that he strongly believes he should move to U.S, where no one will humiliate or torture him for being gay.

This film carries social relevance but also has importance of religious institution. Since heteronormativity aims at ensuring a utopian society, scenes where the protagonist was portrayed following conventional Hindu practices such as not sharing food with a non-Hindu, or referring to his Muslim partner as 'friend' established the symbolic violence which is perpetrated in the name of religion. Therefore, religious moralities control not just sexual but individual expression (Bhatia 2017).

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan

This Hindi movie, directed by Hitesh Kewalya, portrays queer people in a more realistic and dignified manner, although through humour. *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* is a story of Kartik Singh (Ayushmann Khurana) who overcomes all the social obstacles to be with his lover Aman Tripathi (Jitendra Kumar). The main characters of this movie do not hide their masculine and gay identities.



Fig:5

This is a film about two gay men Aman (Jitendra Kumar) and Kartik (Ayushmann Khurana) who unwittingly come out of their homophobic families to be together for their whole life. Both try to convince Aman's family at his cousin's wedding. The next day, the Supreme Court decriminalizes homosexuality. Aman and Kartik reconcile with family and leave for Delhi.

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan makes a serious effort in throwing some light on the experiences of LGBT groups and the abuse and violence that they are subjected to, even in their families. This film is a significant step towards right direction in the light of growing social acceptance of the rights of the LGBT members. The fact that this film was allowed to be released in a homophobic society without any cuts was a sign that we as audience is going towards right direction; the otherwise conservative decision makers on the Censor Board are also changing their perceptions.

The film portrayed the alternative sexuality with empathy and the representation of homosexuality was quite open. This movie, however, holds one thing wrong – the struggle of being a queer individual in India was played down; the treatment is too safe for a gay couple living in India. The queer community in a place like India, is unquestionably marginalized. The same sex marriage may not be a big problem, but their different sexual orientation itself creates problem. The homosexual couples face difficulties in walking in the streets, in finding accommodation and are often victimized in the domestic realm. The film focused on Aman's dad discovering them kissing in train. The film does not give any illustration of the difficulties the couple faces in their living situation. Kartik's family background was never disclosed. The struggle and pain that he has taken to grow into a gay personality, who can declare his gayness and attack homophobia, has not been adequately depicted. Overall, this film is a good step for any mainstream movie to portray same sex relationship, but still there is a long way to go, in order to establish the LGBT rights and give them a "normal" life like that of the heterosexuals.

Conclusion

Cinema was and will remain one of the strongest media for influencing peoples' perceptions especially on emerging issues of an ever-changing society. Therefore, it is the duty of the all the directors and actors to make films on the LGBT subjects being well-informed about the changing course of the movements for alternative sexuality and legal reforms. A progressive

and humane treatment of the subjects can contribute positively to freeing the society from heteronormativity and homophobia. Sexual minorities are slowly finding place in Hindi films. Their representation has changed with the passage of time. The shift from negative to positive representation of the “queer” in the films has helped to change the societal attitude towards the LGBTQ community. Some of the young directors have challenged heteronormativity through their projection of gay themes. The reaction of audience of these films also holds a touch of patriarchy. People are gradually becoming sympathetic towards gay relations but still find difficulty in accepting lesbian or gay relationships wholeheartedly. After the decriminalization of section 377 of the IPC by the Supreme Court on 6 September 2018 it can be expected that the filmmakers would be able to make films on queer themes in an ambience of tolerance and more freedom. The films being popular can do a lot in bringing about the necessary discursive changes in giving the LGBT communities their rightful place in society. Many people have different sexual orientation but they are still in their closet because of the fear of discrimination heteronormative society; they will come out in the open and claim their identities when the overall ambience in the society changes. Films like *Aligarh* and *Shubh Mangal zyada saavdhan* capture the changing moments of a major social transformation.

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