

PORTRAYAL OF SEXUAL MINORITIES IN HINDI FILMS

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Abstract: *Sexual minority or Alternative sexuality comprises of all those people who fall under the categories of Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Eunuchs. This paper basically compares the portrayal of sexual minorities in Mainstream and Alternative Hindi Cinema. It talks about how Mainstream Hindi cinema which is the most widely distributed cinema in India and abroad has traditionally adopted an attitude of denial or mockery towards LGBTQ community. Representations of sexual Minorities have veered between the sarcasm, comic and the criminal. Where as Alternative Cinema which is confined to film festivals and a handful selected group of viewers portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner and is successful in raising, expressing & suggesting possible solutions to their problems in more effective manner as compared to the main stream cinema. This is a qualitative as well as quantitative research and the methodology adopted to find out the answers to the questions is content analysis of four Hindi films and survey. Two films of mainstream and two of alternative cinema were selected randomly. Both secondary and primary data was collected, from various reliable sources like journals, websites, articles, movie reviews of different newspapers etc. Along with this, a questionnaire survey was conducted on a sample of 50 students pursuing Bachelors and Postgraduate courses in Journalism and Mass Communication. They were categorized as skilled and highly skilled groups respectively in order to find out their views regarding the portrayal of sexual minorities in the Mainstream and Alternative Hindi cinema.*

Key Words: *Sexual minorities, Homosexuals, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Ego-alien, Ego-syntonic, Alternative Cinema, Mainstream Cinema, Queer Film, Section 377*

Introduction

Homosexuality is generally considered a taboo subject by both Indian civil society and the government. Homophobia is prevalent in India. Public discussion of homosexuality in India has been inhibited by the fact that sexuality in any form is rarely discussed openly. Homosexuals face a tremendous amount of hostility, ostracism and discrimination. This is the case even among the “educated elite” of India. In recent years, however, attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted slightly. In particular, there have been more depictions and discussions of homosexuality in the Indian news media and by Bollywood. On 2 July 2009,

the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexual intercourse between consenting adults, throughout India, where Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was adjudged to violate the fundamental right to life and liberty and the right to equality as guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The High Court did not strike down Section 377 completely – it held the section was valid to the extent it related to non-consensual non-vaginal intercourse or to intercourse with minors – and it expressed the hope that Parliament would soon legislatively address the issue.

Several organizations like the Naz Foundation (India) Trust, the National AIDS Control Organization, Law Commission of India, Union Health Ministry, National Human Rights Commission and The Planning Commission of India have either implicitly or expressly come out in support of decriminalizing homosexuality in India, and pushed for tolerance and social equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. India is among countries with a social element of a third gender.

Religion has played a role in shaping Indian customs and traditions. While homosexuality has not been explicitly mentioned in the religious texts central to Hinduism, the largest religion in India, Hinduism has taken various positions, ranging from positive to neutral or antagonistic. Rigveda, one of the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism says *Vikruti Evam Prakriti* (what seems un-natural is also natural), which some scholars believe recognizes the cyclical constancy of homosexual/transsexual dimensions of human life, like all forms of universal diversities. Historical literary evidence indicates that homosexuality has been prevalent across the Indian subcontinent throughout history, and that homosexuals were not necessarily considered inferior in any way.

India is still largely in the closet, its archaic law still criminalizes homosexuality. Worse is the stringent rules clamped by the Indian censor board which doesn't allow portrayals of alternative love. But there are some brave films that have charted a new path in the queer landscape with sensitive stories. Sometimes the issue is raised in humorous manner. At times the mockery of LGBTQ community in films hurts this group. However, some award winning films have a unique style of combining Bollywood style drama with gay themes.

Objective

Objective of the study is to find out the answer of the following questions

1. Whether Main Stream Cinema portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner or the Alternative Cinema.
2. Alternative Cinema is more successful in raising, expressing and suggesting possible solutions to the problems of sexual minorities or the Main Stream Cinema.
3. Whether Main Stream Cinema portrays the image of sexual minorities in derogatory and sarcastic manner or the Alternative Cinema.
4. In Main Stream Cinema the stories and characters are developed enough to portray homosexuality as a preference or in the Alternative Cinema.
5. In Main Stream Cinema characters and their interpersonal interactions come across as authentic portrayal or in the Alternative Cinema.
6. Main Stream Cinema establishes an emotional connect with the audience or the Alternative Cinema.
7. Main Stream Cinema is successful in giving a first person look into the community which falls under sexual minority section.

Hypothesis

The researcher wishes to determine whether the alternative cinema portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner and they are successful in raising, expressing & suggesting possible solutions to their problems as compared to the main stream cinema. He feels that it will be worth considering only if more than 60% students agree to the above said hypothesis regarding the main stream cinema. He selects a random sample of 50 students which includes skilled students (Pursuing Bachelors course) and highly skilled students (Pursuing post graduate course) and finds that 36 students agree the hypotheses. Should he change the hypotheses? The significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is preferred.

Methodology

This is a qualitative as well as quantitative research. The methodology adopted to find out the answers of above mentioned questions is content analysis of four Hindi films and a survey. Two films 'Dostana' and 'Honeymoon Travels' of mainstream and two films '68 Pages' and 'Darmiyan' of alternative cinema were selected randomly. Both secondary and primary data was collected, from various reliable sources like journals, websites, articles, movie reviews of different newspapers etc. Along with this, a questionnaire (see appendix 1) survey was conducted on a random sample of 50 college going students. Out of these 25 are pursuing Bachelors and 25 Postgraduate courses in Journalism and Mass Communication from Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow Campus. Those pursuing bachelor course were categorized as skilled and those who are pursuing Masters course were categorized as highly skilled groups respectively. The whole research was divided into four phases.

In the first phase the researcher analyzed the content of the sample films and prepared the survey questionnaire.

In the second phase students were shown the films which fall under the category of Alternative Cinema and Mainstream Cinema.

In the third phase in order to find out the views of the respondents regarding the portrayal of sexual minorities in the Mainstream and Alternative Hindi cinema, the researcher got a survey questionnaire filled from the two categories of respondents.

In the fourth phase statistical tools like correlation, Chi square test and hypothesis test were applied to analyze the collected data.

Films as medium of Mass Communication

Film communication may be considered as a social process whereby a transmitted signal is received primarily through visual receptors (and, often, sound receptors) and is then treated as a message from which content or meaning is inferred. Film, as a symbolic form, is a process of communication that employs film, the medium, with its technology of optics, emulsions, and cameras, to produce a piece of celluloid with a variable-density silver nitrate surface. It is man who creates film communication. This definition suggests that a piece of film, in and of itself, is meaningless-that meaning exists only in a special social and cognitive relationship between a filmmaker and a viewer. This relationship occurs when a viewer chooses to treat a film not as mere signals triggering perceptual awareness and biological responses, but as message units that have been put together intentionally and from which meaning may be inferred.

Cinema is perhaps the mainstream of all art forms, most popular and most accessible, especially in India, a country which produces most number of films in a year compared to any other country (barring Hollywood, perhaps), and a country where we have a large base of cinema-going public. Cinema, more than any other art, has the power to influence people. Therefore, it is very important to understand how the country, its people and its aspirations are represented in the cinema produced in the country.

Cinema as a medium of mass communication can be seen at different levels, serving different purposes. It can be an art form, an entertainment, a social document or a social critique. Cinema can be all of these and at the same time be a means to something else – a mirror unto our lives, showing us exactly how we function as society.

Mainstream Vs Alternative Cinema

Mainstream films can best be defined as commercial films that are made by major entertainment studios or companies that are owned by international media conglomerates. Because of better financing, these films can afford more expensive actors, wide releases or limited releases, and are sold at popular retail stores. This has become known as the studio system. Films made by major studios or companies that are not owned by a media conglomerate but are distributed by a company owned by a media conglomerate are also considered to be mainstream and are often referred to as mainstream independent films.

As a mainstream medium (cinema needs money to be produced. Therefore, it must appeal to the mainstream audience, who will pay at the box office) cinema must, first and foremost, appeal to the mainstream audience. The definition of mainstream varies from society to society, from culture to culture. Broadly, it means representing the prevalent attitudes, values, and practices of a society or group, for example, mainstream morality. A cultural construct, when applied to art, mainstream may mean something that is available to the general public, or something that has ties to corporate or commercial entities. As structuralism teaches us, an idea or a movement cannot be understood fully without taking into account its binary opposites. Again, post-structuralism tells us that when we talk about structures and binaries, there are no fixed centers. The centers are varied and the binaries can be interchanged. In this context, to understand the mainstream cinema, we have to understand where and how it places the minority identities. The mainstream cannot exist without the minority, since it is the minority that accentuates the mainstream. In the context of identities, the mainstream cannot ignore the minority identities and at the same time, cannot highlight it as well. It is interesting to see how and where minorities are placed within the context of mainstream in the tug-of-war between 'ours and theirs' (the mainstream and the minority.)

The term alternative cinema has certain connotations. To many, it is not alternative, instead it is the way cinema was meant to be viewed, in that the viewer should be able to define the film in their own personal terms. The word alternative is described in Collins English Dictionary as: "Denoting a lifestyle, culture, art form, etc., regarded by its adherents as preferable to that of contemporary society because it is less conventional, materialistic, or institutionalized and often, more in harmony with nature." (Makin, 1992) This is an extremely useful definition, as the word 'alternative' has been used to describe a form of medicine or therapy, and even forms of energy. 'Alternative medicine' examines the persons physical well-being, and uses acupuncture,

feng-shui, massage, and many others, as techniques to alleviate disease. 'Alternative energy' is energy created from what surrounds us, such as, wind, the sea and the tides; it is energy that brings us in alignment with nature. The word 'alternative' in these forms looks at natural processes found in nature. A number of Hindi films can be pigeon-holed as alternative cinema, that is, the cinema that rejects the mainstream approach of film making. It is not a particular method of making films because many of these films are very different from each other and use differing approaches. Alternative cinema does not look at a particular way of doing things but a particular way of not doing things.

Alternative cinema is also termed as Independent Cinema. The not so technical and somewhat more difficult to apply definition of the phrase independent film or Indie films is: any character-driven film that is made outside the traditional film system with a very small budget and keeps the artist/filmmaker's original vision intact without corporate corruption, with an emphasis on character development and a strong, original and/or controversial storyline. The heart of the independent film industry has always been in the film festival circuit. Some small independent films achieve nothing more than critical acclaim at film festivals while others achieve that, as well as financial success. This can happen if a "buzz" is created about a small film. Independent film distribution companies can offer a decent deal for independent films that do well at film festivals. They need to supply movies to hundreds of countries and thousands of cable and satellite TV channels all over the world. The film festival circuit provides them with a lot of good, yet cheap films to purchase.

But every once in a while a small independent film gets so much media attention at a film festival that it is purchased by a major film studio and screened in major theaters all over the country. While the term independent film may be defined only in the eye of the beholder there is one certain characteristic that all true independent filmmakers possess that the large studios will never have, and that is the willingness to take risks when they tell their stories. Independent films are ultimately about original and creative storytelling by independent filmmakers who are not afraid to try new techniques or put their creative and financial necks on the line.

Sexual Minorities and Indian Society

Ashok Row Kavi, the most vocal gay activist in the country, estimates that there are over 50 million homosexuals in India. He goes by the Kinsey formula, which says that five per cent of the sexually active males in a country are permanently practicing homosexuals. Projected figures indicate that India will have around 2.3 million men alone who have sex with men. Gays argue that the law gives policemen the excuse to harass, assault and even blackmail them. When Debonair magazine conducted a survey in 1991 among 1424 male respondents, nearly 37 per cent said they had had sex with men while 8 per cent said that their first sexual encounter had been with a man. The same year, a survey of four lakh people in Calcutta revealed that two per cent of the city's population was gay while 160 of the 22, 000 women respondents admitted that they were involved in lesbian relationships. Another study conducted in Kerala read out at the World Sexology Congress in 1985 said that nine per cent of adult males in Kerala were practicing homosexuals.

Scientists believe that there are two kinds of homosexuals – the ego-alien homosexuals who believe they are doing 'something wrong' and the ego-syntonic homosexuals who have no qualms about relationships with members of the same sex. An Austrian clinical psychologist reportedly coined the word 'homosexual' to explain same-sex relations in 1887. "Cary Grant used the word 'gay' for the first time in a Hollywood film *Bringing Up Baby* (1939) in a role that needed him to cross-dress and move about in a transparent negligee,"

Psychiatrist Dayal Mirchandani says that homosexuality is a part of human experience. Anthropologists have found that homosexuality existed among primitive tribal cultures. It is not as if modern society has created it. "One has to accept it rather than look at it as normal or abnormal. As a doctor, I would look at it from the point of human suffering. Homosexuals suffer because of social prejudice. There is nothing wrong with them" sums up Mirchandani. A study on the sexuality of medical personnel in North India found that

nearly 60 per cent of the doctors in the study had some homosexual experience. In the USA, a similar study revealed that 26 per cent of heterosexual men without ever having been exposed directly or indirectly to a homosexual act did have homosexual fantasies. This proves one strong contention of psychiatrists across the world. Homosexuality is more often the result of one's social and sexual environment than a genetically constructed psyche one is born with. Individuals primarily homosexual reportedly constitute less than five per cent of the Indian population, according to Mirchandani. Seventy per cent of the population would be reasonably labeled heterosexual. Most people, however, have the capacity to be aroused by either sex. Our cultural and social conditioning stops us from expressing our sexuality openly. Homosexuality thus, is still largely stigmatized.

"I have seen many lesbians who have had bad relationships with men. Their husbands have either beaten them, or abused them, or neglected them. They felt lonely, depressed, without passion in their lives. Someone comes along, pays attention to you, there is warmth, comfort, which is more important than sex, for women. For lesbians, sex is often secondary. For homosexual men, sex is usually more important," says Mirchandani. Free heterosexual relationships are largely proscribed in India. This has made women almost invariably seek warmth, companionship and comfort in their relationships with female relatives and friends. Therefore, not all close female relationships need be termed 'lesbian.' Often, they may lead to sexual contact, reasonably as a 'natural' extension of the relationship.

A Mumbai-based lesbian couple was asked to leave their apartment after they were quoted in a newspaper. Kavi was short listed some years ago for a government job. It would have required him to be part of a panel that liaised with NGOs. He was dropped from the list because he was gay. A woman IAS officer on the panel refused to sit on the same table with a homosexual. No one questioned her and Kavi lost the job. "She was legally in the clear because according to Indian law, homosexuality is illegal," says Kavi. So, homosexuals wishing counseling and guidance from lesbian and gay support groups throughout the country, such as the Humsafar Trust at Vakola in Mumbai, register themselves openly with false names like Madhuri Dixit or Manisha Koirala. The thrust of these support groups is to encourage safe sex rather than to help them assert their homosexual identity.

Homosexuality is common among natural heterosexuals who are not exposed to the other sex at all. Examples are -- single-sex boarding schools, nunneries, single-sex ashrams and prison wards that rigidly practice sex segregation. Even heterosexuals have had some homosexual experience in their lives, probably in their growing years, either through experimentation, or exploitation, or abuse. Mirchandani recalls his experience of meeting men who have been sexually abused in childhood and have become homosexual. For women, even married women, homosexuality could generate from sheer loneliness. Or, from a lack of an empathetic life environment, from a bad or an abusive marriage.

Sexual Minorities in Hindi Films

Bollywood cinema has a long tradition of having comic sequences or songs featuring cross-dressing male stars such as Amitabh Bachchan lampooning a eunuch in a sari in *Laawaris* (1981) or any number of songs featuring hijras. It is now quite trendy to read Bollywood films as 'gay' or 'queer'. Hoshang Merchant mentions the *Andaz* (1949) and *Sangam* (1964) 'love triangles' where "the real love plot is friendship between the two heroes.... The female lead is there only to lessen the homosexual sting." Shohini Ghosh reads *Dosti* (1964) as dealing with "the intense friendship between two poor and physically-disabled young men who struggle to survive in the city", an "allegory of homosexual love expressed through the metaphor

of physical disability.” R Raj Rao, Gayathri Gopinath and Ashok Row Kavi have all queered Bollywood in a similar vein.

Mast Kalandar (1981) featured Bollywood's 'first' out and out 'gay' character Pinku. If Hollywood's first gay characters were either comic or villainous, Pinku was both and the critics had a field day! Pinku is a new generation gangster. In his flaming yellow or pink suits, Pinku is both pansy and comic rolled into one. A gay little tune strikes up whenever he enters. And just to make really sure that you are left in no doubt about him, Pinku in his opening scene runs his fingers over his father's brawny body and asks 'Daddy, hamara body aapke jaise strong aur muscular kyon nahin hai?' ('Daddy, why isn't my body as strong and muscular as yours?') When Pinku isn't plotting fell murders and kidnappings, he pleads for a motorbike ('Daddy, I want to live dangerously'), or chases men. And when all the thugs are finally rounded up in the police lock up, Pinku exults at what he sees as a heaven-sent opportunity. Before that, in Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975), one of the inmates openly makes passes at other men, revealing his fondness for men. This small sidebar was overlooked by most or perhaps, not understood. But it was there for those who were observant enough.

The gay sidekick emerged as a staple comic character from the 1990s onward, in films like Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke (1993), Raja Hindustani (1996) and Taal (1999), offset by rare instances of somewhat complex gay characters in films like Bombay Boys (1998) and Split Wide Open (1999). There were also 'sensitive' hijra portrayals in films like Bombay (1995), Tamanna (1997) and Darmiyaan (1997), a villainous hijra turn in Sadak (1991), Tamanna and Murder two. There was a film called Shabnam Mausi (2005) a biopic of a high profile Indian hijra who was elected as a member of the legislative assembly in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh

Mainstream films which raised LGBT issues in different forms can be categorized as-

Na Jaane Kyon (2010): Though this film directed by Sanjay Sharma was screened at various international film festivals, it disappeared from our multiplexes soon after its release. It apparently features the first gay kiss (between Aryan Vaid and Kapil Sharma) in Indian cinema.

Dostana (2008): Close on the heels of Fashion, came another film starring Priyanka Chopra along with Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham, who pretend to be gay. There are scenes showing John Abraham sweeping Abhishek off his feet and into a kiss in the film. Though the gay and lesbian community has not liked the film for the 'pretension' the two hunks put up, paying pretentious lip service to their community, director Onir is happy. "I am happily surprised that the multiplexes went housefull with Dostana. With a whole lot of Bollywood-ism and a little gay humour, the film made for perfect family viewing," he says. Onir feels the acceptance of homosexuality in Indian films will happen only when the characters are portrayed without fussing over them. However, the film was a mockery on gay relationships.

Fashion (2008): Let's not discuss Madhur's Bhandarkar's story-telling skills and creativity — or the lack of that — here. Instead, let's look at the gay fashion designer played by Samir Soni, who eventually settled for a marriage of convenience (to please society and all), with a college buddy played by Mugdha Godse. The film raised the hackles of several gay communities in the country for Bhandarkar's 'caricature and moralizing' of their way of life and sexual choices. Every fashion designer in the film is gay, they charged, and all of them are effeminate. "The only guy not shown as a pansy is the one who succumbs to family pressure and ends up marrying a girl".

Honeymoon Travels (2007): This film has six couples on a bus heading for their respective honeymoons. A couple of gay married men (the openly gay hubby played by millionaire hotelier Vikram Chatwal and the not-so-openly gay one by Karan Khanna) are part of the kahani mein twist.

My Brother Nikhil (2005): This film by Onir is a touching depiction of strong yet fragile bonds between friends, family and lovers. A breath of fresh air, it deals with the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS as well as the coming out of a closeted gay relationship. Based on the real-life experiences of Dominic D'Souza, a champion swimmer who was gay, one discovered that Onir, a new director, had tackled homosexuality without treating it as an ugly joke, a dirty alliance or an aberration. The gay relationship between the swimmer and his partner was treated as normally as one treats a normal couple on celluloid. They were shown to be as intimate, as insecure and as jealous in their interaction as any other couple would be. They were happy but had their share of tiffs and squabbles, the one trying to gear up to bear the imminent loss of the other to HIV/AIDS.

Girlfriend (2004): In Girlfriend, Tanya (Isha Koppikar) and Sapna (Amrita Arora) are housemates who have been friends since college. Tanya is a hard-working jewellery designer who moonlights as a street fighter to make ends meet. Once, when she returns from a business trip to discover that Sapna has fallen for a man, Rahul (Ashish Choudhary). An enraged Tanya battles Rahul for Sapna's love. This film was found to be offensive by politico-religious fundamentalists, the gay community and any human being with an iota of intelligence. With titillating posters, a storyline that defied logic and caricaturist characters played by Isha Koppikar, Amrita Arora and Ashish Choudhary, we can only call this Karan Razdan film a mockery of a lesbian (or any other) relationship... a painful masquerade of so-called "stereotypes" that continue to exist. Girlfriends hardly cared about arguing the case for lesbians or for relationships of similar nature. Nor did it bother to probe into the psychological or emotional connotations of the woman-to-woman relationship, reducing it to a crudely put together soft-porn thriller. Girlfriends was just a clever ruse to use the subject of lesbianism as a political strategy to arouse the audience through a different kind of titillation. It was perhaps, one more way of hitting the jackpot at the box-office through camera-voyeurism. Thankfully the ruse failed to deliver. The film however, unwittingly did two things – it made people aware that such relationships can and do exist. At the same time, it brought about this 'awareness' in an ugly, unimaginative and derogatory manner, thus effectively demolishing whatever little it might have 'achieved'.

Kal Ho Na Ho (2003): Actors Shah Rukh Khan and Saif Ali Khan in suggestive contortions while the maid seems to suffer convulsions with the Kantaben track playing... we don't know if it's supposed to allude to homoeroticism or plain homophobia.

Mango Soufflé (2002): Written and directed by Mahesh Dattani, who has quite a few theatre plays to his credit, this film stars Atul Kulkarni and Rinkie Khanna —Dimple Kapadia's younger daughter. Story line- When a gay fashion designer invites various "friends" for a dinner party, it's time for various secrets to come out of the closet.

Fire (1996) : One of the first films to depict a lesbian relationship, Deepa Mehta's film starring Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das remains somewhat synonymous with the subject of homosexuality, even 15 years down the line. It is a poignant portrayal of complicated relationships by fine artists. Here, two women come together to fulfil their passions not out of choice but due to the lack of acknowledgement from their spouses. Hindu fundamentalists rioted in certain movie theaters because the "culprit" characters had Hindu names (Radha and Sita) and not Muslim names, which led to an eventual ban for religious insensitivity.

Films belonging to Alternative cinema category, which portray sexual minorities in a serious manner and is successful in raising, expressing & suggesting possible solutions to their problems in more effective manner as compared to the main stream cinema include -

Bomgay (1996): In the same year as Fire, came a 12-minute gem of a short film called BomGay by late activist-director Riyad Wadia. Inspired by R. Raj Rao's gay poems and featuring Rahul Bose and Kushal Punjabi, it's poetry on celluloid. This film questions complex gay identity and the burgeoning gay community in 1990s India via six vignettes.

The Pink Mirror (2003): Directed and Written by Sridhar Rangayan Produced by Solaris Pictures (India) it is India's first kothi film. The story of Gulabi Aina revolves around four characters, two drag queens Bibbo and Shabbo, Mandy, and Sameer. Bibbo is a fashion designer and she considers Shabbo, a performing artist, her daughter. Mandy, the new queen on the block is a westernized gay teenager being groomed by Shabbo to become more 'Indian'. The straight-appearing Sameer is an aspiring actor, hoping to get a break in films through Bibbo's contacts as costume designer. Most of the action of the film deals with the machinations of the two queens and young Mandy to get the attention of the hunky Sameer. In terms of structure, the plot follows the clichéd Bollywood filmy norms of introducing the characters, quickly alternating between humor, pathos, song-and-dance sequences and romance, introducing conflict, resolving it and having a happy ending.

68 Pages (2007): Directed and Written by Sridhar Rangayan, Produced by The Humsafar Trust and Solaris Pictures 68 Pages is the story of Mansi, a counsellor whose ethics demand that she has to maintain confidentiality of her counselees. She has to be objective in understanding their problems and give them options that would help them come to terms with their status. She cannot get emotional about any person she is counselling. But is it possible for a sensitive young woman to remain unaffected by the suffering that she witnesses around her? Mansi is after all human. She gives vent to true feelings by sharing it with her diary. Her pain and anguish are reflected only on the pages of her diary. There are some counselees whom she cannot leave behind in the counselling room. She carries their stories home and they become part of her diary. It is through the pages of Mansi's diary that we see the stories of Payal, Kiran, Nishit and Umrao, marginalised by the society, stigmatised for being themselves and not being able to find a place in the mainstream society. The film makes an effort to address issues of minority communities and their status as HIV positive people. Paayal (played by Jayati Bhatia) is a sex worker in the red-light area of Mumbai. Born in the lanes of Kamathipura, sex work is all she knows. She is now 35, and has to face competition from a younger sex worker, Neelu. Her life revolves around Lalli, her eight-year-old daughter whom she wants to educate and give a bright future. Her anchor in life is Shetty, who is not just her regular customer but also her friend and in many ways she looks at him as her support system. Paayal's life changes dramatically when she tests HIV positive. How does Shetty react when he comes to know of her HIV status? What happens to her dreams of educating Lalli and see her grow up? Will she live to see her dream come true? The heart-rending story of Paayal reveals an unseen aspect of the life of a sex worker.

Kiran (played by Joy Sengupta) is a gay man who works in the same NGO where Mansi is a counsellor and is her best friend. Kiran is confident, cheerful and full of life. He shares a wonderfully cozy relationship with Mohit, his lover of four years. They have promised to be faithful and loyal to each other. Their mutual affection revives Mansi's faith in love and she starts redefining her concepts of love, loyalty and relationship. Kiran helps her come to terms with her past relationship. Kiran trusts Mohit and their love beyond all reasonable limits. It's a risk Kiran took but was it worth taking the risk? Nishit (played by Zafar Karachiwala) is an ambitious youngster who has made it big early in life. He is 27 and has everything. His life is an unending round of parties with friends and his girlfriend, Neha. He is slowly getting addicted to drugs and the use of intravenous drugs infects him with HIV. The truth hurts. He has to face discrimination

at the workplace, he has his education loans to repay and he cannot reveal the truth to Neha for fear of rejection. His journey from denial to acceptance, from fear to hope and final determination that life does not stop with becoming HIV positive but can mark a new beginning in life – it's a story of courage.

Umrao/Umesh (played by debutante Uday Sonawane) is a young 24-year-old boy who believes that he is a woman trapped in a male body. He supports a family of four people, including his mother, his alcoholic brother and a younger sister who is yet to finish her education. Umesh dances to Bollywood numbers at Shetty's bar as 'Umrao'. The ban on dance bars brings his life crumbling down and he is forced into prostitution at truck terminals in Mumbai. Though aware of the fact that not using a 'chocolate' (condom) puts him at risk of being infected with HIV, his family conditions force him to do as the customer says and he turns HIV positive. Is there a life ahead for Umesh? Where does he go and what does he do? Hope does he cope with the double stigma – of being a transgendered person and a HIV+ person? This forms the crux of his story in the film.

Nathu (played by Abhay Kulkarni), is a man who has no voice. He is the nameless person whom Mansi meets everyday on the street outside her house. He cleans the streets and that's his only identity.

Yours Emotionally (2006): Directed and Written by Sridhar Rangayan. Produced by Wise Thoughts (UK) and Solaris Pictures (India) Two Brits, Ravi and Paul travel to India where they meet Murthy and Anna an older gay couple that has managed to form a partnership and live together for over 20 years. When Ravi meets and falls for Mani an Indian national who is betrothed to be married. He turns to the older couple for advice and help but traditions die hard in India.

Darmiyan(1997): Kalpana Lajmi's Darmiyan is a fantastic film. The film has all the characteristics of what makes a film work. It is sorrowful, classy, and entertaining. Set in the Bollywood scene in the 1940s, it deals with issues such as alcoholism, eunuchs, depression, and failure. The film features Kiron Kher whose character, Sardari Begum, plays actress Zeenat Begum, a person who has everything she could possibly want in life including fortune and fame. Unfortunately, Zeenat's happiness is shattered when she finds that her son, Emmi (Arif Zakharia) is a eunuch. She avoids him at all costs and neglects him until Zeenat's mother steps in and adopts the child. Emmi finds the love and care that he needs with Zeenat's mother, and eventually Zeenat loses her No. 1 position in the film industry to Chitra (Tabu) along with her lover, Indar (Shahbaaz Khan). All of this pushes her to alcoholism and forces her into depression because she simply cannot cope with her failure. She begins to reject the people who love her and is scared to love again. Meanwhile, Emmi tries to help his troubled mother and shows her that he has confidence in her. He adopts an abandoned child but is forced to give her to Chitra because of society's cruel ways. Finally, Emmi returns to his mother's home and tries to help make what's left of her shattered life more peaceful.

Analysis/ Findings

Correlation - Alternative Cinema - (See appendix -2 and 4)

Mainstream Cinema - (See appendix –3and4)

Hypothesis testing - Since the decision rule suggests that the null hypothesis should be rejected, we can conclude that the sample gives sufficient evidence that more than 60% students agree that the alternative cinema portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner and they are successful in raising, expressing & suggesting possible solutions to their problems as compared to the main stream cinema. (See appendix - 5)

Chi-Square Test - In a survey of students, 44 skilled students favored to alternative cinema and 7 highly skilled students favored to main stream cinema. Do these figures support the hypothesis that highly skilled students accept alternative cinema is successful in giving a first person look into the community which falls under minority section? Given that X^2 for 1 degree of freedom at 5 % level is 3.84

The value of X^2 comes out to be 19.26 this value is much higher than 3.84, the given table value, and is significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and consequently accept the alternative hypothesis. Thus, the given data support the hypothesis that highly skilled students agree, alternative cinema is successful in giving a first person look into the community which falls under minority section.

(See appendix - 6)

Conclusion

Sexual minorities are slowly finding place in Bollywood themes. Portrayal of life stories and issues faced by lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, hijras, kothis and others identified as “queer” in films in a positive manner has acted as a balm for LGBTQ community. This is rather an attempt to focus on the lives and experiences of the community rendered invisible by systemic homophobia and transphobia. In history’s weave of cultural tapestry, the films presented life stories that are missing and left untold. And yet it is the queer movement in India and elsewhere that is providing much-needed challenges to heteronormativity, which means the stereotyping definitions within which words like ‘marriage’ and ‘family’ remain trapped, the gendered roles that work within these institutions and so on. At a time when we are surrounded by shackling definitions of the ‘ideal family’, ‘ideal husband’, ‘wife’, daughter-in-law’, etc. it is felt important to recognize and highlight these new challenges society is now having to encounter.

Another point which should be highlighted is that homosexuality in Indian films will happen only when the characters are portrayed without fussing over them. When a majority of filmmakers can concentrate on heterosexual relations why can’t a few filmmakers create more awareness on gay issues through our cinema? Onir whose film ‘I Am’ was declared the Best Hindi Film at the 59th National Film Awards said, “It’s not just a personal triumph. It’s a victory on a much larger level for gay filmmakers and films who have been so far sidelined not just from the National awards but also the popular awards.” Filmmakers would be able to function in an atmosphere of more tolerance and freedom, now that the government clearly says that a film about homosexuality is not sinful.

Suggestions

Sexual minorities like hijras, kothis, double-deckers, gays, lesbians, transgender and other minorities are oppressed solely due to their sexual orientation or gender expression in India. Cutting across class, gender, language and caste, Hindi films should tell the stories of such persons living in our country in a realistic and emotional manner in order to sensitize the society. Films should suggest possible solution to their problems. Stories should be crafted in such a manner that our society starts accepting them as they are. Films should portray sexual minorities in an authentic and genuine way so that our society, instead of ridiculing them comes forward and stand for their cause.

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Appendix : I

QUESTIONNAIRE

PORTRAYAL OF SEXUAL MINORITIES IN HINDI FILMS

Name:

Age:

Mobile No. :

After viewing the films answer the following question:

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
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1. Main Stream Cinema portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner.

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2. Alternative Cinema portrays sexual minorities in more realistic manner.

3. Main Stream Cinema is more successful in raising, expressing and suggesting possible solutions to the problems of sexual minorities.

4. Alternative Cinema is more successful in raising, expressing and suggesting possible solutions to the problems of sexual minorities.

5. Main Stream Cinema portrays the image of sexual minorities in derogatory and sarcastic manner.

6. Alternative Cinema portrays the image of sexual minorities in derogatory and sarcastic manner.

7. In Main Stream Cinema the stories and characters are developed enough to portray homosexuality as a preference.

8. In Alternative Cinema the stories and characters are not developed enough to portray homosexuality as a preference.

9. In Main Stream Cinema characters and their interpersonal interactions come across as authentic portrayal.

10. In Alternative Cinema characters and their interpersonal interactions come across as authentic portrayal.

11. Main Stream Cinema establishes an emotional connect with the audience.

12. Alternative Cinema establishes an emotional connect with the audience.

13. Main Stream Cinema is successful in giving a first person look into the community which falls under sexual minority section.

14. Alternative Cinema is successful in giving a first person look into the community which falls under sexual minority section.