

Bollywood Shows Lesbian Women as Stereotypes & Male Fantasies: A Case Study of Lesbian Characters in Hindi Cinema

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Abstract

When a baby born the first question that everybody asked is who is a baby? A Girl or a Boy. This reference will last till the last breadth of the person. This is a bitter truth of the society that we not only have decided but expect this from all the people that act accordingly i.e. a women or a man. Throughout the life both the genders keep on fighting that this is your job not mine. Furthermore, there are many souls which are made differently by the nature as a male soul in a female body and a female soul in a male body. Hence, they are at the worst stage that would not be accepted by the society as it is.

In this regard what Hindi Cinema is doing? this paper deals with the same. Because the cinema of any country is the reflection of its society. Here in this paper, the researcher will try to find out that how the Hindi film industry think about the Gender minorities. Here gender Minority is an Umbrella term used for LGBT people (Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender). As, in India talking about LGBT is still a taboo. Thus, in this orthodox kind of society how these lesbians can raise their voices? Therefore, the paper will try to find out that how the reflection of our society i.e. the cinema (Hindi Cinema) of our country will deal with the expressions of Lesbians.

Keywords: *Lesbians, Hindi Cinema, LGBT, Gender*

1. Introduction

Homosexuality is romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same sex or gender. As a sexual orientation, homosexuality is "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions" to people of the same sex. It also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.



Gregory M. Herek, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of California, Davis defined homosexuality as a variety of phenomena related to a same-sex sexual orientation. Although definitions of the term often focus mainly on sexual acts and attractions between persons of the same biological sex, homosexuality also refers to patterns of same-sex romantic

and emotional bonding, identities and communities based on same-sex desires and relationships, and the shared culture created by those communities. He further adds that homosexuality is usually understood as the counterpart to heterosexuality, with bisexuality applied to individuals who manifest both heterosexual and homosexual behaviour, represent an oversimplification. The significance of homosexuality in our society has been minimalized and obscured by the force of social taboo. Yet there is evidence that homosexuals are distributed throughout all geographical areas and socio-economic strata. Furthermore, the subjection of homosexuals to legal punishments and social condemnation has produced a complex structure of concealed social relations which merit sociological investigation. The psychological isolation of the homosexual from society, his dependence upon other deviants for the satisfaction of sexual needs and self-expression, the crystallization of social roles and behaviour patterns within the deviant group, the reciprocal obligations and demands within the homosexual community, and their significance for the larger society in which they occur, are but a few of the areas of theoretical interest to the

sociologist. Sexual minorities are a group whose identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society. Usually gender minorities comprise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. *According to the National Institute of Health, USA*, the Sexual and Gender minority is an umbrella term that encompasses **lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender** populations as well as those whose sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, or reproductive development varies from traditional, societal, cultural, or physiological norms. Sexual minorities are a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society. Usually, Sexual minorities comprise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Male-female dichotomy in hetero-normative societies has created havoc in the life of sexual minorities thus obscuring the fact that they are also human beings. As per the Act for Action organisation, we can have the following categories of Gender minority: -

- 1.1. Queer:** is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender.
- 1.2. Gay:** The word gay is generally used to describe men who are romantically and sexually attracted to other men. It is sometimes used to refer to the general GLBTQ community.
- 1.3. Lesbian:** The word lesbian is generally used to describe women who are romantically and sexually attracted to other women. This term originates with the female poet Sappho who lived in a community comprised predominantly of women on the Isle of Lesbos in ancient Greece.
- 1.4. Bisexual:** The term bisexual is generally used to describe people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender.
- 1.5. Trans or Transgender:** The words trans or transgender is an umbrella term used to refer to people who transcend the traditional concept of gender. Many feel as though they are neither a man or a woman specifically, and many feel as though their biological sex (male, female, etc.) and their socialized gender (man, woman, etc.) don't match up. Some opt to change/reassign their sex through hormones and/or surgery and some change their outward appearance, or gender expression, through clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc. Many people who identify as transgender feel as though they are confined in a binary system (male-female, man-woman) that does not match who they feel themselves to be. If we look

at gender as a continuum and not an "either/or" concept, we have a better idea of understanding this issue. Other terms people might use to describe themselves include "gender queer" or "gender other".

- 1.6. Transvestite:** More appropriately referred to as "crossdressing," the term transvestite most often refers to males who dress in the clothing of women. The term drag usually refers to dressing in the clothing and styles of another gender for entertainment purposes. Transsexual: Transsexual is used to describe.



Michele McGovern argues that media presentations directly affect the public's viewpoint about the homosexual characters. The influence of mass communication is all consuming, flooding the opinions of society with images carrying both positive and negative connotations. Further, they stated that true to life representations of

homosexuals are more prominent in popular media outlets in America. she concluded that the outreaching capability of the media and the influence it maintains over the public has proven to shift the perception of homosexuals from disturbed deviants to celebrated members of society through popular broadcasted outlets. Whether portrayed as flamboyant, prancing, feminine male or an average blue-collared working individual, the public will continue to gain the knowledge and understanding of the homosexual community through media exposure.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Gendered Minority in Indian Mythology

Homosexuality is not all about sexual relationships between two people having same sex. However, it is the moral support, emotional bonding, mental and physical satisfaction and the love that a couple shares between them. Ancient texts such as the *Manu Smriti*, *Arthashastra*, *Kamasutra*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* refer to homosexuality. Also, there are reports that same sex activities are common among sannyasins, who cannot marry. Thus, instances of

homosexuality are available in historical and mythological texts world over and India is not an exception to this. According to *Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai* in their book "*Same-Sex Love in India*", the Rig veda Samhita (ca.1500 B.C) presents an ideal of friendship as a very sacred relation. This preoccupation with friendship continues in the epics. Krishna and Arjuna are perhaps the most famous pair of male friends from any ancient Indian text. The mystical oneness of Krishna and Arjun in a previous or eternal form is thus used to explain their inordinate love for one another. In another example of sex change in mythology is the **Amba** into **Sikhandini**.

In *Mahabharata* story the king Draupad raises his daughter Amba as a boy even he gets her married to a woman. During the first night the wife of Shikhandini came to know about her real Gender. It is in forest that Amba performs austerious and receives a boon, when she is reborn as Sikhandini. In another example when the sex change takes place in order to enable the man to bear a child, it is temporary, as in the case of Aruna.

Bhagwat Puran in one of the incident it is mentioned that Ayyappa, emerged from the fusion of a Dravidian god of tribal provenance with the Puranic story of Shiva's sexual interaction with Vishnu. In one account of the birth of Sugriva and Bali, their parent is a male monkey who plunges into pool in search of his own reflection, which he takes to be another monkey. He emerges as a beautiful woman, has two sons by Indra and Surya, and changes back to a male monkey next morning.

3. Rationale of the Study

In this research the researcher will focus on the problem of gender minority (LGBT) and their portrayal in the Hindi Cinema. Besides being popular in Indian Diaspora the Hindi Cinema is watched and enjoyed worldwide. Therefore, the researcher has chosen the Hindi Cinema as the research universe. Further, this topic is being selected to draw the attention of society and policy makers and NGOs that this community of LGBT is facing a severe discrimination in the society leading to figure out more suicidal cases in India and worldwide. Therefore, it is required to study about their portrayal in Cinema. As films do have effect upon the masses.

4. Statement of the Research Problem and Objectives

This study examines the portrayal Lesbians in Hindi Cinema by analyzing the mis-en-scene, Camera angle, shots, costuming, Facial expressions, body movements, transitions, cuts and camera positioning. In this study the researcher worked on the following objectives: -

- To explore that whether the Hindi films are raising the issue of Socio-Economic and political concerns of Lesbians or not.
- To examine the involvement of Lesbian character/s portrayed in the Hindi Films I.e. Integral or peripheral.

4.1 The Hypotheses of this study are

H1: Hindi Cinema is significantly playing the role in constructing a positive visual image of Lesbian characters.

H0: The Hindi cinema is not playing any major role in constructing a positive visual image of Lesbian characters.

5. Research Design and Methodology

This is a descriptive research, through this researcher record information about the subjects without manipulating the study environment. In our study we would simply analyze the portrayal of Lesbians in Hindi Cinema. The defining feature of descriptive study is that it can compare different population groups at a single point of time. This would help the researcher to compare many different variables at the same time. This research is both quantitative and qualitative.

In this study the researcher has selected the feature films on the basis of commercial success, Box-office report and the suggestions given by film critics.

5.1 Sample

For this study, the films which are included as samples must have a Lesbian character. The sample covered the Hindi movies released from 1996-2006 in India and Abroad. Through purposive sampling those films were selected which have depicted Lesbian character/s in the plot. The population of feature films was identified using the power search feature on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), an online movie reference website from 1996-2006 (10 years).

5.2 Universe of the study

For this study the researcher has selected the Hindi Cinema as this is the most dominating cinema among the Indian Diaspora. The time period 1996-2006 has been selected because the voices of LGBT rights has been raised in India in 90s.

5.3 Unit of the Study: For this study 02 films were selected. Each film was studied thoroughly to interpret the portrayal of eunuch character/s.

5.4 Sample technique: A non-probability sampling technique is used to identify the Hindi films with Lesbian character/s.

5.5 Tool of Data collection

For the data collection, the researcher has taken the help of content analysis of the selected Hindi films.

6. Analysis of the Data

6.1 Analysis of the film Fire, 1996 (Dir. Deepa Mehta)

The film is all about Radha and Sita who are married to a joint family having business of CDs and running a restaurant. Radha is married to Ashok the elder son of the family and Sita is married to Jatin, the younger son of the family. Jatin is having extra marital affair with a Chinese girl and spent most of his nights with his girlfriend only. Whereas, Sita and Radha spend most of their time in serving the family and the house hold jobs.

Because of the Jatin behaviour and affair with some Sita is living a frustrated life. On the other hand Radha is also having the same problem but she is calm and has adjusted with the situation of the life and the house. Radha's husband is under the influence of some saint who advises him that sexual contact is permitted only as a means for procreation, that all together proved that Radha is not able to produce the offsprings. Further, Ashok has not slept with Radha since the last thirteen years. Radha is racked with guilt over her inability to have children and driven to frustration by the ritual. Accordingly, the director showed that the Sita and the Radha both have the same life and they have sexual desires. One evening, shunned by their husbands and driven to desperation by their unfulfilled longings, Radha and Sita seek solace in each other and become lovers. Overjoyed at finding satisfaction in this manner, they continue it in secret. They eventually realise their love for each other and start looking for ways to move out. The pair's daily antics and adventures are witnessed by Biji, who disapproves, but is unable to stop them. The film simply conveys that the disapproval by the husbands dragged both Radha and Sita to be the homosexuals.

6.2 Analysis of the film *Girlfriend*, 2004 (Dir. Karan Razdan)

A bitter truth of the society that we are still not ready to accept i.e. Lesbianism. After *Fire* (Director: Deepa Mehta) , this is yet another step to showcase the hidden truth of our society. The film is a step to feature that Hindi Cinema is not all about romantic sagas between a Hero and a heroine. Through *Girlfriend*, Razdan is making his audience to think about alternate sexuality. Ironically, it is tough for the patriarchy society to accept this reality and excessive use of openness of any female character. Although in this film the Director has portrayed a lesbian in a negative shade which can create a negative perception of this Gender minority upon the society. Nevertheless, in our society there are very less number of lesbians who are open up about their relationship. Film *Girlfriend* is a love triangle between two girls and a boy i.e. Isha Koppikar, Amrita Arora and Ashish Chaudhary. But actually the film has shown sex relationship between the same genders that is between two females. Lesbians or homosexuality is not only about sex relationships but it about is "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions" to people of the same sex. In this film Tanya (Isha Koppikar) is madly in love with her friend, Spna (Amrita Arora) but on the other side, Sapna loves Rahul (Ashish Chaudhary). And Tanya do not like her girlfriend Sapna in the arms of Rahul. Hence, being so possessive, Tanya tried to create misunderstandings several times between Rahul and Sapna. But finally she fails as Sapna love Tanya as a friend only and want to spend her entire life with Rahul. Eventually, Tanya dies accidently in a fight with Rahul and the duo unite forever.

Since the beginning the film tries to establish that Tanya is a very strong girl. The first shot of the film showed that she is running on the sea shore. The film breaks the typical stereotype gender roles that a female cannot be a sturdy as in the film Razdan showed Isha Koppikar mending the wash basin of the house. In the film it is showed that Tanya is very caring and possessive for Sapna. Sapna is jobless but Tanya is bearing all the expenses of her and the house. In a conversation Tanya said to Sapna, "Tum paision ki phiker kyun karti ho? Mai hoon na! The film depicted that Tanya is working in a diamond showroom. where one day her colleague asks her for a date with him but she denined saying that she has no time for the date but her colleague tont her that you do not have time or you hate men. In this scene Sapna gazed him angrily and utter that," Have I ever looked you with hatred?" Then her colleague further asked her that," than what is the reason why she is not interested in the date?" Tanya replied that because of her past

experiences she does not like dating with the men. On the otherside Razdan showed that Tanya is very soft, sweet, gentle and childish.

In an another incident when Sapna was taking bath in the tub, Tanya peep out lustfully in the bathroom to see tanya and her activities. This shows that their relationship is more than the friendship. Razdan in his film also, depicted the rest of the gender minority as in one of the song he has featured a gay boy dancing with the two girlfriends. In another incident when Tanya went for an official tour, she asked one of her friend Jojo, who is a gay. Jojo take her to the party where she met Rahul. The film showed that the females are safe in the company of gays, this can be disclosed with help of this conversation:

Jojo: *Chalo koi achchi si dress pehn lo aur let's go!*

Sapna: *Thik hai tum bahar jao mei change ker ke aati hoon*

Jojo: *Sapna tum mujh se sharma rahi ho arey me bhi to tumhari saheli hoon. You are safe with me, secured.*

Sapna: *Lekin tum ek mard ho*

Jojo: *ae ye mard keh ker meri insult mat karo.*

Finally, Jojo made her agree to join the party where Rahul Chaudhary noticed Sapna and her innocence. Through Jojo he made a way to Sapna. Jojo introduce Rahul to Sapna saying that Rahul is her boyfriend. With the help of this scene Razdan showed that the gay community has some specific traits like the frequent movements of hands, speaking like females, wearing colorful dresses etc.

When Tanya returned back to Mumbai Sapna gave her surprise by introducing Rahul to her as her boyfriend. Tanya did not except to see her girlfriend into someone else arms. The director of the film *Girlfriend* has taken the risk of showing two girls on the bed. The bed scenes are too long that is not even required there to show the lesbianism in the film. The duration of the shot was more than 02 minutes. There the film gives the message that homosexuality is all about sex, erotism and foreplay.



7. Discussion

The Hindi Cinema is very miser and seems orthodox in portraying the characters like lesbians in the films. Perhaps this is the reason that the number of films featuring female homosexuals is very less. Directors like Deepa Mehta and Karan Razdan has showed the courage to walk on the kind of path of making a film based on this rare and not so talked about issue. In the history of Indian cinema Deepa Mehta's 'Fire' (1996) is considered as a cultural landmark for its bold portrayal of lesbian desire. The film emerged when religious fundamentalism was rampant in Indian politics as the Bhartiya Janata Party, the Hindu nationalist party was assuming power. Similarly, Mehta's depiction of "female sexual desire" was objected for "disrupting the comfort levels of the so-called regular, family lives" (Bose, 2007). Although, descriptions of sodomy in Kama Sutra or references of lesbianism in Mahabharata hint at an acceptance of 'transgressive sexualities' in ancient Indian philosophy, the postcolonial rhetoric focuses on narratives of citizenship based on a monolithic Hindu religious identity, communalism and patriarchal family values (Chase, 2012). In the same manner, it is unsurprising that Mehta's 'Fire' faced vociferous criticism for employing names of reverent Hindu goddesses, 'Radha' and 'Sita' to depict a homoerotic relationship.

Indeed, the traces of homosexual relationships found in Sanskrit texts are now perceived as ancient philosophy, and sexual freedom as an obstruction to the 'normal' discourse of heterosexuality. Whereas, in film Girlfriend '2004' the directed has tried to show that the modern girls are independent, working, strong enough, fashionable and empowered. Therefore, Sapna is

showed running on the sea shore in the establishment shot of the film. The film breaks the typical stereotype gender roles that a female cannot be a sturdy as in the film Razdan showed Isha Koppikar mending the wash basin of the house. The film depicted that the lesbians prefer short hair, dressing like men, masculine body appearance etc. Isha Koppikar adopted all these traits to impress Sapna but he fails. Then finally Tanya decided to kill Rahul to get back Sapna into her life. Even during their fight Tanya said that " *she is my girlfriend*". And she uttered that "bachpan se sataya mujhe mardon ne, Nafrat hai mujhe us zaat se"(The men troubled me since the childhood, I hate this community). But as always the villain met with the death in Indian Hindi masala films, film *Girlfriend* also had the same tragedy. In an attack Tanya jumped from the window and died accidentally.

8. Conclusion

Well the analysis of the films has showed that:

1. The change in the portrayal of Lesbians in the Hindi films over the period of time.

Yes, there is a change, in the portrayal of Lesbians in the Hindi films as in the selected films, in 'Fire' the lesbians were house wives whereas, in 'Girlfriend' Tanya is working. There is one major difference i.e. the costumes wore by the protagonist of the film. In the earlier film the character is shown wearing saree and in the later film Sapna is showed as strong fighting with men, wearing modern dresses etc.

2. The Hindi films are raising the issue of Socio-Economic and political concern of Lesbians or not.

Yes, both the selected films have dragged the attention towards the miserable condition of this community. As the Bollywood is in the hands of patriarchy. Therefore, the selected films have showed the homosexuality in the negative shade.

3. The involvement of Lesbian character/s portrayed in the Hindi Films i.e. Integral or peripheral.

These plots (*both Fire & Girlfriend*) proved that now the Hindi cinema is thinking about the these struggling characters as per the society and featuring the stories which are revolving around them.

Hence, the H0 is selected that the Hindi cinema is not playing any major role in constructing a positive visual image of Lesbians, rejecting the H1 hypothesis.

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