

**Gender Dissidence in Contemporary Indian Films – The Role of LGBTQ****Community in Claiming Space in Indian Cinemas**Verma, Ramendra Nath<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Department Of Mass Communication (Ssmfe), Sharda University, Greater Noida, U.P.Sabharwal, Dhruv<sup>2</sup><sup>2</sup>Associate Professor Department of Mass Communication (Ssmfe), Sharda University, Greater Noida, U.P.**Abstract**

The outdated Section 377 has been repealed by the Indian Supreme Court, giving the marginalized LGBTQIA++ group more freedom and space. For a very long time, the LGBTQIA++ community has been fighting for its identity and rights. They have endured derision, mockery, and even denials of their very existence. This community has been shown with a great deal of contempt in the majority of Indian cinema. This essay thoroughly examines every facet of LGBTQIA++ representation in Indian cinema. But Indian cinema has turned a new page recently, with many of these films attempting to show these characters in a more positive light as well.

This essay will make an effort to locate such films that, in general, deal with issues of gender inequality, queer culture, and LGBTQ+ rights. This article would strive to conceptualize and reveal a utopian society through the use of queer film theory and a critical approach to feminist and trans-feminist film theory. The majority of the methodological instruments employed in this study are a component of the multisensorial approach to queer studies and visual culture in general.

*Keywords:* film theory, queer theory, queer studies, LGBTQ, transfeminism, and cinema

**Introduction**

India is a country with many different cultures, customs, beliefs, and false impressions. Indian society has changed with

the times and made an effort to unlearn the backward customs that have been ingrained in the collective consciousness of its people for ages. "Human rights are

rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, etc." states the United Nations. The freedom from slavery and torture, the right to life and liberty, the freedom of speech and thought, the right to employment and education, and many more rights are examples of human rights. Without exception, everyone is entitled to these rights. The official reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code took place on September 6, 2018. The chief judge ruled that "Section 377 insofar as it criminalizes consensual sexual acts between man and man, man and woman or woman and woman is unconstitutional and is struck down." In contrast to contemporary human society, sexuality was not stigmatized or viewed as a mental illness in ancient times. It wasn't until later in history that homosexuality was called a "sin," a "deviance," or occasionally even a "criminal" (Bullough, 2019). In this sense, India has arguably experienced a cycle. Although the classical and conventional views on alternative sexuality were progressive, there was a significant downturn during the middle colonial era; as a result, it appears that we are currently confronted with the task of recovering the more positive

aspects of our past.

### Methodology

This essay aims to examine Indian cinematic works in which LGBTQ characters have rightfully reclaimed their spaces. Using methods from Gender and Queer Studies, Film Studies, and Cultural Studies, a thorough study of the stories and ideologies in a few chosen films and theoretical works is used to produce an assessment of the many forms of production and consumption of these media. The result of qualitative analysis is this paper. The list of all the chosen Indian films that need to be examined and debated is as follows:

- *Sancharam;*
- *Aligarh;*
- *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan;*
- *Chitrada: The Crowning Wish*

These shows have been selected due to their widespread appeal, favorable reviews from critics, linguistic accessibility, and positive audience response. They are merely thought to be representative and not all-inclusive. This essay aims to evaluate the significance of diverse media portrayals for LGBT identities. It makes an effort to put the LGBTQ+ community's media presence in India into numbers.

### 1. The repeal of Section 377

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and a host of other gender identities and sexual orientations are all included under the umbrella term "queer" (LGBTQ+).

The homosexual community was nothing more than a laughing stock prior to the Indian Penal Code's outdated, harsh Section 377 being repealed. This legislation stipulates that anyone found engaging in sexual activity "against the law of nature, with any man, woman, or animal" will face consequences. Due to their unique sexual behavior, LGBTQ people are typically viewed by society as isolated, and as such, they have been denied a place in this heteronormative society. Despite the fact that lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are typically indistinguishable from straight or cisgender people—a perception that is highly unlikely to be reflected in the general heteronormative society—the media frequently fails to accurately portray LGBTQ+ people and instead ends up portraying them in a way that is both observably and behaviorally different. For example, gay people are frequently portrayed in popular media as flamboyant, effeminate, and dressed in vivid colors, but lesbians experience the exact reverse. We

will go into more detail about a few more examples later in this paper.

### Literature Review

"Queer cinema" can be classified in three general ways (Benshoff and Gryphon). One approach is to consider the status of the filmmakers: films directed by homosexual men and lesbians are referred to as "queer cinema". The second is to consider the films' content: "Queer cinema" refers to films that deal with topics that are important to gays and lesbians. The third method is to consider how the films were received: films that homosexuals and lesbians watch are referred to as "queer cinema" (Leung, 2008). As film and queer studies started to attract scholarly attention at the turn of the millennium, the "coming out" of cinematic queerness gained momentum. Queer Studies' rise allowed us to revisit both classic and obscure works, which changed the way we thought about pleasure, desire, and the politics of "looking."

One can also investigate non-heteronormative arguments and the ways that queer images of desire, gaze, and pleasure are permeating popular culture through deconstructive readings of the queer diaspora in film (Gopinath, 2000).

Following the repeal of Section 377 of the

Indian Penal Code, there has been a noticeable increase in the representation of LGBT subjects in commercial cinema. In This move appears to have made it easier for gay subjects to be constructed and dismantled in Bollywood, where the parameters of such representation are nonetheless set by traditional, conservative "identitarian tropes." Sakshi and Sen (2012).

### Discussion and Analysis

#### 1 *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*

Rituparno Ghosh (born 1961) was a writer, songwriter, and filmmaker who first gained recognition in Bengali culture in the 1980s while working as a copywriter for Response, an advertising agency with offices in Kolkata. He established himself in the business industry and brought his company multiple accolades. The now-famous "queer trilogy" of *Arekti Premer Golpo*, *Memories in March*, and *Chitrangada: A Crowning Wish* (2012) ushered in the last stage of Ghosh's career. Ghosh was conceptually engaged in the first two, albeit he only directed the final one.

Ghosh participated creatively in the first two and appeared in all three, although he only directed the final one. During the period

when Ghosh publicly disclosed his gender identity and sexual orientation, these films were released, coinciding with a tumultuous queer political movement in Bengal. His entry into the film industry with the highly regarded *Hirer Angti* (Diamond Ring, 1992) and, more importantly, *Unishey April* (19th April 1995) profoundly altered the Bengali cinema scene for the Bengali bhadrolok ('gentlefolk'). In their film *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, Rituparno Ghosh said, "In this world, everyone respects one another, but hardly anyone who dares to love." With that statement, they uncorked a massive emotional canister from the audience. Some of the most exquisite films our nation has to offer are directed by the man everyone in the film industry knows by heart, Rituparno Ghosh. This movie, which Ghosh released, is an adaptation of another adaptation (that's how classics survive and never go out of style). The *Chitrangada* character from the Hindu epic *Mahabharat* served as the inspiration for the original storyline of this movie. Rituparno Ghosh adapted Rabindranath Tagore's play, a dance drama of the same name. The main character of this movie is Rudra, who lives his entire life defying social rules and customs in an effort to free himself from

society's bonds. Rudra battles his gender identity while pursuing a career as a choreographer. In Chitragada, the relationship between Ghosh's real life and the homosexual

people he portrayed on screen is particularly evident. "Isn't it becoming much too autobiographical?" Shubho (Anjan Dutt) asks Rudra about the new movie project they are discussing early in the movie. Rudra says, "You think so because you already know my story." This discussion has deep significance because it gently unites Ghosh's portrayal of Rudra with Ghosh the individual, who by that point had undergone hormone therapy, an abdominoplasty, and cosmetic surgery to seem "womanlier."

## 2 *Aligarh*

The film begins with an appeal to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling on the Naz Foundation. The scene that follows shows two unidentified individuals going into Siras' (Manoj Bajpai) bedroom. The next scene, which follows a quite chaotic one, depicts a newspaper office attempting to disseminate the news. One of the local journalists, Deepu (Rajkumar Rao), became interested in this news report and decided to look into it more.

After being kicked out of AMU residence and having his professorship terminated, Siras searches for legal assistance. He received assistance from a group of activists and solicitors who provided him with a strategy for winning his case. They cited the well-known Naz ruling as an example, in which Section 377 was interpreted to decriminalize homosexuality. His legal team requested that in order for him to prevail in this legal struggle, he submits a petition outlining his sexual orientation—a fact that was known to him long before he became conscious of it.

A situation where the audience can see both sides is then built up after that. The person opposing Siras' case claimed that the university had suspended the former professor because his presence had compromised the university's moral standing and violated the institution's norms of behavior.

Nonetheless, Siras's attorney stated and reminded the court that this was a violation of Article 21—the Right to Life—a fundamental constitutional right. In the midst of all of this, Siras was depicted as having his head down low in embarrassment and shame, as though he was the criminal prepared to serve the court's sentence for his offence.

### 3 *Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhan*

The coming-of-age love comedy *Shubh Mangal Zyada Svdhan*, which centres on homosexuality, stars Ayushmann Khurrana as Kartik Singh and Jitendra Kumar as Aman Tripathi, two actors who portray gay characters. The story of "coming out of the closet" and defending real love against homophobic parents and other relatives is the central theme of this Allahabad-set movie. They both choose to go to the latter's cousin's wedding, where they intended to inform Aman's entire family of their purported connection. Before the wedding festivities had started, Aman's father, Shankar Tripathi (Gajraj Rao), caught the couple kissing on a train, thus ruining their plan to come out to their parents. His father immediately began to throw up, losing all control. When he witnessed the two of them dancing quite close to one another during Aman's cousin's wedding, his unease only intensified. Shankar could not have imagined the entire act of bringing two men closer together.

His homophobia was becoming unbearable for him. Kartik and Aryan fought their family, reminding them that every Indian citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the

Indian Constitution, which they have both exercised and will continue to do in order to love and be with their "chosen ones."

*Shubh Mangal's* main lovers express this viewpoint in support of their relationship. Kartik's reference to the homophobic mindset of the patriarch serves to reinforce the claim of being gay. Kartik is questioned by Aman's uncle about his decision to "become" gay in the first part of the movie. Kartik asks him again, seeming annoyed, when the uncle made the decision to "not be" gay. Without delay, the uncle yells, "What's there to determine in this! This is innate."

### 4 *Sancharram*

*Sancharram* (*The Journey* 2004), written by Ligy J Pullappally, is a sensual and lovely tale of forbidden love between two young ladies set in a chronological coming-of-age story. The film, which is visually poetic and has a powerful musical score, immerses the audience in Keralan rural life while highlighting the negative effects of social expectations. The director's subliminal goal was to "bring positive visibility to marginalized individuals" through the film. Pullappally makes it clear that she intended to create a film on female same-sex love in India in order to dispel the unfavorable

perceptions that were previously attached to the films *Girlfriend* (2004) and *Fire* (1996/1998). While *Sancharram* was launched in October 2004, *Girlfriend* was released in June 2004.

#### *5. The story in a Nutshell*

The sole child of Delhi-returned Priya (Ambika Mohan) and Narayanan is Kiran Nair Kurup. The family returned to Kerala in order to settle in Priya's opulent ancestral home. Living just across the street is Delilah Jacob Valiaveetil, the sole daughter and fourth child of Catholic Christian widow Thressiamma (K.P.A.C. Lalitha). Even though Kiran and Delilah are so different from one another, they are pulled to one another the instant their eyes contact when they first meet as kids.

Despite the restraining eye of her hardworking widowed mother, Delilah (Shruti Menon) develops into a scorching mischievous beauty with the unconditional affection of her grandmother, Valsala Menon. As the sole child of aristocratic mother Priya and scholarly father Narayanan, Kiran (Suhasini Nair) develops into a reflective young woman. Theirs is a perfect life filled with community, family, and, above all, a lasting relationship. However,

Kiran's previously comfortable and idyllic existence is upended when she acknowledges that she is drawn to Delilah on a sexual and emotional level and that she cannot control it. Kiran, feeling ashamed of her feelings for Delilah and seeing that she will never be able to meet the person she loves, decides to assist her common friend Rajan (Shyam Seethal) in pursuing Delilah by composing romantic love letters on his behalf.

Amazingly, Delilah gives Kiran a positive response. She says she has loved her all along. A romantic relationship that benefits both young ladies much ensues. As time goes on, their forbidden and hidden love begins to develop beneath the pretense of friendship. On the other hand, the secret is revealed in three dramatic stages. It's Delilah's grandmother who initially notices the blossoming bond between the two. She would rather not reveal it or even talk about it, even if she is worried. The second occasion is when Kiran writes a message to Delilah, perhaps a poem expressing her deep feelings, and the teacher discovers their developing fondness for one another. All the teacher does is caution them. However, controversy erupts in the hamlet when Rajan, Delilah's suitor, finds out about the girls' secret.



However, controversy erupts in the hamlet when Delilah's socially conscious mother demands that the couple break up after Rajan, her suitor, finds out about the girls' secret. Even worse, Delilah is set up for an arranged marriage in an attempt to preserve the family name and reputation. Kiran, however, is threatened by her mother to be rejected if she tries to flee with

Delilah. Despite being the story of two people, the narrative covers up the greater community that is suppressed by the hetero-patriarchal economies that are currently in vogue. This is addressed through addressing the problem of lesbian suicides, which afflicts the homosexual community in general and women in particular, who are denied the opportunity to be together by society and family due to their sexual orientation. Therefore, by employing a local language and aesthetic idiom, Sancharram enables us to think about the emergence of a transnational lesbian/feminist subject.

### **Conclusion**

A film is an expression that is full of numerous artistic elements, as stated by Friedrich Nietzsche in his statement that "art is the proper task of life." The number of mainstream films featuring LGBTQ stories is

surprisingly few. Despite the fact that Indian cinema has been around for over a century, there hasn't been much good representation of homosexuality and the queer population in films or television shows. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to ascertain how the LGBT community is portrayed in mainstream Hindi cinema, specifically in relation to the way homosexuality has been portrayed in the past two years. The goals encompass character analysis and narrative craft, encompassing the depiction of characters' inner conflicts, the manner in which homophobia and its associated stigma are tackled, the extent of society acceptance, and the human rights viewpoints embedded therein.

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