

Representation of Queer in Films

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Abstract: LGBTQIA+ individuals are people whose sexual orientation or identity is different from societal norms. Anything that deviates from the norm is seen as polluted and abnormal. LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and more. The LGBTQIA+ individuals often face discrimination, prejudice and violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. A gamut of issues got representation in Indian cinema from freedom to unemployment, from poverty to exploitation, from dowry to women's emancipation, from social conflict to national integration, from education to fantasy oriented entertainment. With the transformation of the society, the Issues confronting it keep on changing and so also the themes adopted for film making. The cinematic medium possesses a unique ability to evoke emotions, inspire ideas, and challenge perspectives, thereby influencing individual behaviors and collective consciousness. However in the midst of all preconceived notions and social injustices against LGBTQIA+ community, 'film' stands as a strong medium of communication and a voice for the LGBTQIA+ community who are seen as 'nobodies' in the society. They are to be seen in different roles in the society which helps them to have a space for themselves.

This paper investigates the psychological distress experiences by LGBTQIA+ individuals who remain closeted about their sexual orientation. The paper delves into historical stigmatisation of homosexuality and the challenges faced by the individual coming out and disclosing their sexual orientation to loved ones, often leading to self concealment.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+, Film, Stigmatization, Concealment, Psychological distress

The LGBTQ+ community has a rich and complex history, characterized by both oppression and resilience. Throughout history, the LGBTQ+ community has been subjected to a persistent and multifaceted trajectory of marginalization, characterized by systemic discrimination, persecution, and legal oppression, spanning ancient civilizations to contemporary times, perpetuating social stigma, violence, and health disparities. A critical point in the LGBTQ+ rights movement was the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. This series of spontaneous protests in response to police raids on a gay bar in New York City ignited a global movement for LGBTQ+ equality. The uprising inspired activists to challenge discriminatory laws, advocate civil rights, and build supportive communities.

The LGBTQ+ community has played a major role in the broader struggle for human rights. Through activism, advocacy, and legal challenges, they have made substantial progress in securing rights and protections. From the decriminalization of homosexuality in many countries to the recognition of same-sex marriage, the LGBTQ+ community has been at the frontline of social and political change.

Identity plays a crucial role in human well-being. A strong sense of identity fosters belonging, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose. For LGBTQ+ individuals, identity can be particularly complex due to societal pressures and discrimination. The internalization of negative societal messages regarding sexual orientation or gender identity can precipitate mental health challenges, including diminished self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation among sexual and gender minority (SGM) individuals.

The LGBTQ+ community has historically encountered pervasive structural, social, and institutional barriers, including heteronormative and cisnormative stigma, discriminatory practices, and legal restrictions, perpetuating marginalization, exclusion, and health disparities among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and non-binary individuals. However, through resilience, activism, and a commitment to justice, the LGBTQ+ community has made significant strides in achieving greater acceptance and equality.

Homosexuals are almost always described as a deviation or abnormality. This indeed causes a serious gap between homosexual people (gay) and heterosexual people (mostly known as 'straight'). It is unavoidable that homosexuality has become a very controversial subject in almost every country. They are everywhere over the world, even though their population is not as big as heterosexuals. Society as the most important aspect in humans' lives certainly gives

importance to homosexuals. As a part of society, gay people cannot be excluded from the social life.

In early days when homosexuality was considered a mental disease, many psychiatrists used to try to cure it by arousing homosexual fantasies and memories of the patient and then applying electric shock or other aversion therapies to erase and de-sensitize such pleasure thoughts. These types of treatments may temporarily make a man asexual due to extreme psychological damage associated with such inhumane therapies. Once the stress caused by the treatment is over homosexual impulses came back intact. This is another proof for the fact that linking sexuality to just past time memories is a fallacy.

There have been many opinions or arguments on the homosexual way of life. However, most of the homosexuals hide themselves and secretly practice homosexual activities, whereas some of them boldly face the truth that they have a different sexual orientation and fight for their rights to live in their preferred ways. But there are certainly many people who do not know about the life of homosexuals. Among the homosexuals, gays and lesbians are widely known. Gays and lesbians are now out in the public fighting for their civil rights in order to show that they deserve happy lives, though they are different in sexual orientation.

Since the inception of the Indian film Industry, the film fraternity has tried to convey social messages via experimentation across various genres. With the transformation of society, the issues confronting it keep changing and so also the themes adopted for film making. Depiction of queer and trans people have been present in the film medium since its inception more than hundred years ago, but due to censorship and varying degrees of prejudice against the LGBTQA+ community at different points in time, onscreen representation has a long, complicated, and often coded history.

As it is an indelible part of Indian society, we have seen the representation of the homosexual in films from the black-and-white era to the present. The state of Kerala, having the highest literacy rate among all the other States in India, also happens to be one of the states which still look at queerness as an illness and an abnormality, which has to be dealt with and 'cured' through counselling and medication. However, in the midst of all these preconceived notions and social injustices against the LGBTQ communities, cinema stands as a strong medium of communication and the voice of the LGBTQ communities who are seen as 'nobodies' in our society.

The traditional narrative cinema usually employs queer roles as sidekick characters or laughing stocks, ridiculing their existence in a homophobic society. This shift reflects a growing awareness of LGBTQ+ rights and a desire to challenge societal stereotypes. While the representation of homosexuality in Malayalam films has evolved significantly, it's important to note that there is still room for improvement. The Malayalam film industry, with its ever-revolutionary directors coming to the forefront with appealing and progressive thoughts and challenging these outdated narratives and offering more nuanced portrayals of LGBTQIA+ is an achievement unexplainable through words.

Representatives of the changing Malayalam cinema, Geetu Mohandas's *Moothon* and Jeo Baby's *Kaathal- The Core* have broken the traditional heterosexual hero image and brought in a realistic picturisation of a homosexual man falling in love with another man of his choice. The film "*Moothon*" (2019), directed by Geetu Mohandas. This coming-of-age story follows a young boy who travels to Mumbai to search for his older brother. The darkness which pervades all through the movie is figurative of the darkness in the lives of LGBTQ community. *Moothon* is more engaging and politically aware than other recent queer offerings such as *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, which is more about the rites of coming out. The Bollywood film fails to communicate passion in the way *Moothon* does effortlessly and without melodrama. It is not a poetic take like *Call Me By Your Name*, nor does it have the lightness of *And Then We Danced*; it is more a dark tale strewn with poetic and profound moments. The queer love story explored in the film alone makes it worth a watch, because in the world of to kenism, we can surely do with a passionate, tender representation of queer romance. The film features a tender and intimate relationship between the protagonist and his brother, which is explicitly portrayed as romantic.

"*Moothon*" is significant because it not only acknowledges the existence of same-sex relationships but also celebrates them as a valid form of love.

Another significant film is "*Kaathal – The Core*" (2023), directed by Jeo Baby. This romantic drama explores the complexities of a same-sex relationship between two men from different backgrounds. *Kaathal- The Core* have broken the traditional heterosexual hero image and brought in a realistic picturisation of a homosexual man falling in love with another man of his choice. The film delves into issues of societal acceptance, family pressure, and self-discovery. "*Kaathal – The Core*" is notable for its sensitive portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters and its willingness to challenge societal norms. The gay protagonists of the films *Moothon*/*The Elder*

One and Kaathal-The Core, Akbar and Mathew Devassy, demand the rise of gender fluidity in the modern world. Assimilating insights from Queer theory enables us to understand the queer nature of these sexual minorities who live life like a dead carcass as it is necessary to redefine their identity in the mainstream public space.

A proper and elaborate definition of the term queer is mandatory to comprehend the concept of queer space around which the plots of the selected films revolve. While these films represent a positive step forward, it's important to recognize that the representation of homosexuality in Malayalam cinema is still evolving. There is a need for more diverse portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters, including those who are transgender, non-binary, or from marginalized communities. Additionally, it is crucial to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or tokenizing queer characters.

As Malayalam cinema continues to mature, it is hoped that the representation of homosexuality will become even more nuanced and inclusive. The trajectory of homosexuality encompasses profound themes of acceptance, self-discovery, and societal progress. The act of coming out represents a courageous and sincere personal journey that confronts societal norms, fostering increased acceptance and comprehension. Despite ongoing efforts needed to achieve full inclusion and respect, substantial strides have been made in advancing equality for LGBTQ+ individuals through advocacy and representation. The ongoing dialogue regarding homosexuality reflects an evolving process of change, emphasizing the importance of advocacy, education, and empathy in cultivating a more equitable and inclusive society for everyone.

The present analysis would contribute to the deeper understanding of films that portray the life of homosexuals. The behavioral traits and public gaze of society on these people is considered as the main focus of this analysis. This film have been able to point out the approach to homosexuals, the change in society brought about by them. This film clearly captured that their lives are distinguished by the marginalization and barriers of society over them. In the current Scenario, every transgender and homosexuals has experienced their own life and also focuses on the film as an effort for resistance against the societal norms and pressures. It is hoped that this study would provide introspective ideas to the public regarding the life and existence of homosexuals in society. Such study is deemed important as the movie is recognised as effective medium of communication at present.

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