
The Portrayal of LGBTQ+ Community in Hindi Cinema

Who Belongs to LGBTQ+

According to Wikipedia, the LGBT+ community is a loosely defined grouping of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and LGBT-supportive people, organizations, and subcultures, united by a common culture and social movements. These communities generally celebrate pride, diversity, individuality, and sexuality. People often use LGBTQ to mean all of the communities included in the "LGBTQQIAA":

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Transsexual
- Two-spirited
- Queer
- Questioning
- Intersex
- Asexual
- Ally
- + Pansexual
- + Agender
- + Gender Queer
- + Bigender
- + Gender Variant
- + Pangender

The Role of Mass Media in Fuelling the Stereotypes

Sexual orientation and gender identity are largely taboo topics of discussion, especially in a conservative and orthodox society like ours, has majorly contributed in the stereotypical portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community, in mainstream media like Bollywood movies and television shows, which has in turn fuelled denigration of the community and its members, to an extent.

It is self-explanatory that the erstwhile criminalization of sexual activities 'against the so-called order of nature', arguably including homosexual activities, played a vital role in determining the public's general outlook of disgust and ridicule, with regard to the community. But, as we know, that media also plays a significant role in the makings of the public narrative so the oft-shown demonization and mudslinging on the LGBTQ+ community, as a whole, has added fuel to fire and resulted in furthermore blackening of the character of the community and its members, who are considered bizarre and deviant because of their sexuality, gender identity and other choices.

Warped Ideas and Polarities

The Indian filmmaking culture somehow still appears confused towards forming a universal opinion about projecting homosexual characters. On one hand, there exist movies like 'Fire' and 'Margarita with a Straw' that empower the community members through their bold and taboo-breaking depiction of the characters, while on the other hand, movies like 'Masti' and 'Humshakals' throw major shade at the community by showing gay men who are 24/7 horny and throwing themselves at the male leads, and are ridiculed and joked upon by the whole cast, because of the stereotypical waving of hands while talking, or the clichéd way of walking.

Hence, the contemporary pop culture consumed in India, is bound to give some warped ideas about gender identity and sexuality to its audiences. Historically, Indian cinema — and especially Hindi cinema — hasn't had the best record in terms of illustration of gender and sexuality. Heteronormativity in India unceasingly prevails for the sole purpose of oppressing homosexuals as a whole. Cinema is an all-pervasive tool that reaches so many people at once and challenges the conditioning of the society – and even in cinema, if members of LGBT community get cast as manipulative, negative and fearful characters, it simply augments the existing hatred in the real world. There has generally been two polarities of representation — either the person is a demonized, horrifying villain; or the worst kind of comic stereotype, with really offensive and homophobic humor directed at them. There is a sustained othering which takes place here, where the trans person is constantly seen as outside the bounds of 'normal' — as a sexual predator, a child molester, or someone who is out to prey on or deceive the unsuspecting (cis) hero or heroine.

Lack of Equitable Depiction

But, for once, if one moves away from the so-called 'famous' works of Bollywood, one would find that there has been some kind of positive portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community as well, through movies like 'Parched', 'Daayra' that have dared to put an equitable depiction of the characters, be they cis or trans. However, the number of such movies is quite small. Films that depict reality is of supreme importance, in the realms of making people aware, it is also quite crucial that we start to desire for films that have characters belonging to the community, living an accustomed life, facing normal societal or personal conflicts and not discriminatory/oppressing ones.

Conclusion

How many of us, filmmakers, audiences alike, knew beforehand that LGBT is in fact short for LBGTQQIAA+ (as mentioned in definition on the first page)? An in-depth comprehension of all these terms and the '+' in the end of the acronym shall give us the idea how fathomless sexuality really is. While we have only touched the first two to three letters and that too with an immense struggle coupled with extreme homophobia and transphobia, we still have a long way to go before we sketch the deeper untouched expressions. While there is still so much confusion regarding what constitutes gender and what is one's sexuality, and how it is not interchangeable, filmmakers hold supreme responsibility in being sensitive, empathetic and rational while attempting to make films on the said theme. And as complex as it may seem, the underlying principles of treating people respectfully and equally is a no-brainer and requires no special education!