

POSITIVE PORTRAYAL OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN BOLLYWOOD

Abstract

Hindi cinema, or Bollywood, is growing at a tremendous rate. In recent years it has gained an audience from all over the world. With rapid growth, Bollywood has started including non-conventional topics such as the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community in its movies. The recent films aim to explore the challenges faced by the queer community, such as lack of acceptance from family, societal stereotypes, and lack of empathy. This chapter seeks to understand the driving force behind this positive change. This research examines the influence of this positive approach on Indian society.

Keywords: Social sciences, Bollywood industry, film.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bollywood is a booming industry with around 1000 movies released every year. It has undeniably impacted people of different cultures and beliefs around the country and the world. However, to gain more profit and audience, the film industry has been accused of painting LGBTQ+ characters in stereotypical colors. It has, time and again, reinforced harmful practices while portraying queer characters. However, there has been a notable transition in how Bollywood represents sexual and gender diversity in its cinema in recent years. This study aims to shed light on this positive change by identifying elements contributing to a more uplifting characterization of the LGBTQ+ community in Bollywood.

Historically, Bollywood has used LGBTQ+ characters as cliched comedic relief in films. Gay people were represented as fashionista best friends of the lead, whereas lesbians were shown as only experimenting. Transgender people were reduced to caricatures of stereotypes without sensitivity to their issues. These prejudiced portrayals have only isolated and alienated the queer community in society.

The impact of this misjudged depiction extends beyond the screen. Bollywood's cultural influences reach people nationwide, including younger, impressionable audiences. When queer characters are constantly put in a negative light and ridiculed on the screen, it gives rise to an endless cycle of ignorance and injustice among the audiences. It ultimately leads to increased discrimination and a hindered understanding of LGBTQ+ issues.

However, in the last decade, Bollywood has significantly shifted from this promiscuous and inaccurate portrayal towards a more positive and authentic one. Societal developments and awareness are the driving cause behind this positive transition. Indian society is becoming more accepting and aware of queer rights. LGBTQ+ activism and advocacy have played an essential role in diversifying public opinion and educating filmmakers about the importance of respectful presentation.

Furthermore, film industries from across the world have considerably impacted Bollywood's queer storylines. International films such as "Brokeback Mountain," "Moonlight," and "Call Me by Your Name" has shown the potential for complex storytelling focusing on LGBTQ+ experiences. Several critically acclaimed French LGBTQ+ movies, such as "Portrait of a Lady on Fire," "Stranger by the Lake," and "Tomboy," have also brought the public's attention to the issues of the queer community. These films have gained a cult following and provided a need for diverse narratives focusing on the varied topics of the LGBTQ+ community. As an industry with a significant audience in foreign, Bollywood couldn't remain untouched by this trend.

The upcoming generation of progressive and accepting filmmakers and story writers has also brought an essential change. A new generation of socially aware filmmakers is trying to break away from conventional storytelling and explore overlooked themes. Many renowned actors have stepped up to play LGBTQ+ characters, using their stardom to dismiss prejudices and stereotypes and foster understanding and empathy for the queer community.

As a result, Bollywood has seen an increase in quality films featuring LGBTQ+ stories that are presented with sensitivity, authenticity, and empathy. Filmmakers and actors have

undertaken projects that show same-sex relationships, gender identity, coming out, and self-discovery with the same sensitivity as their heterosexual counterparts. The contemporary movies show love stories that allow the audience to connect with characters on a human level rather than treating them with neglect and hate. Such films have helped the general public to connect with the LGBTQ+ community, creating an understanding and respect.

Recent Bollywood movies such as "Kapoor & Sons" (2016), "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" (2019) or "Subh Mangal Zyada Savdhan" (2020) are notable examples of this positive shift in the film industry. These films have managed to portray same-sex relationships without relying on clichés and stereotypes. They have gained an appreciation for telling stories people can empathize with and relate to. These films have explored the intricacies of same-sex relationships in a traditional Indian family setting, normalizing love between the same sexes.

II. MOVIES PORTRAYING THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN A POSITIVE LIGHT

- 1. Ek ladki ko dekha toh aisa laga:** "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" is a 2019 Bollywood movie portraying the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in society. The story follows Sweetie (Sonam Kapoor), a young woman who struggles with her love for another girl in a conventional Indian family. Shelly Chopra Dhar, directed "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga," handles the narrative of lesbian love with empathy and sensibility.

The film portrays queer characters with depth and authenticity. It explores the complexities of traditional values, family dynamics, and one's struggle to embrace their sexual identity in a conservative society. The film gives a striking portrayal of the challenges same-sex couples and their families face in India.

"Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" is subtle and sophisticated in its storytelling and avoids clichés. The film breaks away from the sensationalism of LGBTQ+ issues in typical Bollywood films. It focuses on the character's emotional journey, allowing the audience to connect with their problems.

Towards the end, Sweetie's family understands and accepts her love for a girl. The film celebrates the power of love and acceptance. Handling the issues faced by the queer community with sensibility, this film is powerful and empowering for LGBTQ+ people and allies.

- 2. Subh Mangal Zyada Savdhan:** "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" is a 2020 romance-comedy Bollywood film addressing the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India. Directed by Hrithik Kewalya, the film follows Kartik (Ayushmann Khurrana) and Aman (Jitendra Kumar), a gay couple fighting for love and acceptance.

The film beautifully combines humor with a hard-hitting social message. The film delicately addresses same-sex couples' issues, such as societal pressure, lack of acceptance from the family, and pressure to marry within societal norms. The film uses humor to highlight the sensitive issue while conveying the message to a larger audience.

"Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" genuinely approaches same-sex relationships and marriage. In addition, the film addresses homophobia, pushing the audience to question society's rigid heteronormative beliefs and attitudes. The film sends a strong message of love, acceptance, and inclusivity of queer couples in traditional Indian culture.

- 3. Badhai do:** "Badhaai Do" is a 2022 Bollywood movie depicting unconventional family settings. Through Shardul Thakur (Rajkumar Rao) and Sumi Singh (Bhumi Pednekar), the film portrays the challenges queer couples face in traditional Indian society.

The film follows the story of Shardul and Sumi as they try to find love and acceptance while questioning society's traditional beliefs and biases. "Badhai Do" delicately shows the struggles of coming out and the hurdles queer people face in the conservative setting. The film tries to mainstream LGBTQ+ rights and activism to support same-sex relationships.

"Badhaai Do" shatters conventions of mainstream Bollywood while addressing the pressing issues of present times. The film combines comedy with LGBTQ+ representation in a traditional household, challenging stereotypes and discussing love and inclusivity.

- 4. Chandigarh kare aashiqui:** "Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui" is a 2021 romantic drama directed by Abhishek Kapoor. The film follows the story of Maanvi (Vani Kapoor) and Manvinder (Ayushmann Khurrana) as they try to explore their relationship. The film aims to challenge society's perception of a trans woman.

The film aims to educate the audience about unconventional love stories while challenging toxic masculinity. It is a beautiful tale of a man and woman struggling to find their true identity within their natural bodies. "Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui" discusses themes of the LGBTQ+ community that are usually swept under the rug.

III. FUTURE OF LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION IN BOLLYWOOD

The upcoming films in Bollywood will be more inclusive and diverse. This change will be driven by changing perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community in society, open-minded artists, and a need for authentic storytelling. As Bollywood becomes more representative and reflective of the queer community, the number of such movies will only increase.

The perception of the Indian audience towards the stories of the LGBTQ+ community has evolved in the last decade. The public has become more accepting and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. With this positive shift, filmmakers have started creating more realistic and empathetic stories catering to broader masses.

The advent of filmmakers and artists supporting the LGBTQ+ community's rights will considerably accelerate this positive development. They are progressive and supportive and continue challenging the clichéd and established narratives about LGBTQ+ concerns. In the future years, the range of LGBT characters will further broaden, leading to more realistic and rational depictions.

The success of films such as "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" and "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" shows that the audience is embracing LGBTQ+ representation. The

success of these films points towards the inclusivity of queer characters and the evolution of Hindi cinema. Because of these trends, the upcoming movies will have more authentic narratives challenging the stereotypes.

Furthermore, Bollywood stars and directors have become more involved with LGBTQ+ activism and advocacy groups. Conversations and collaboration between filmmakers and the LGBTQ+ community provide critical insights and compassion when creating tales that reflect the experiences of sexual and gender minorities.

It is safe to assume that in the coming years, a greater diversity of LGBTQ+ stories being explored. While current movies deal with romantic stories, future films may focus on other aspects of LGBTQ+ life, such as family ties, job issues, and personal growth. Intersectionality, or the portrayal of LGBTQ+ persons with many identities, is expected to grow increasingly common, reflecting the complexities of human experience.

LGBTQ+ people are becoming more frequently cast as leads in popular Bollywood films. LGBTQ+ characters may no longer be relegated to supporting or comedic relief parts, thus mainstreaming their involvement in the film industry.

However, obstacles to more inclusive representation remain. Tokenism and shallow portrayals of diversity should be avoided in Bollywood. Instead, it must embrace the complicated narrative that accurately depicts the lives and emotions of LGBTQ+ people.

LGBTQ+ presence in Bollywood appears to have a bright future. The industry is prepared for more honest, empathetic, and diverse storytelling due to changing cultural views, the work of filmmakers and activists, and a worldwide trend toward inclusiveness. Bollywood may foster compassion, tolerance, and acceptance by reflecting the ideals and struggles of Indian culture, eventually leading to a more accepting and empathetic world.

IV. CONCLUSION

Finally, through promoting positive depictions of LGBTQ+ people, Bollywood has the potential to be a tremendous catalyst for cultural change. As one of the world's largest and most prominent film industries, Bollywood's immense reach may transcend boundaries and challenge prejudices worldwide. By presenting honest and compassionate pictures of LGBTQ+ people, the industry can foster empathy and understanding among its massive audience. Positive depictions of LGBTQ+ people in Bollywood films can help to break down biases and disprove long-held ideas in society. Through current and varied stories, audiences may gain insight into the difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ persons, sparking much-needed dialogues about acceptance and inclusiveness.

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