

"THE PORTRAYAL OF THE SAME SEX RELATIONSHIP IN 'SHUBMANGALZYADASAVDHAN'."

Abstract

This paper outlines how the sexual minorities like gays are represented in a recent Bollywood movie. Cinema is the most powerful medium that influences people's minds and perceptions. It has contributed considerably to the spread of awareness of ideologies and movements. This paper aims to give some insight on how gay relationship is portrayed in 'ShubMangalzyadasavdhan' and how such portrayal influences peoples' viewpoints about them. The paper talks about how this movie simply depicts a relationship and does not attempt to preach or dictate. There have been various attempts to portray homosexual characters onscreen and this portrayal has elicited different reactions from the audience and has also influenced them.

Keywords: Patriarchy, , media influence. Homosexuality, Homonormative, Hyper – masculinity.

Authors

Ms. Usha Srikanth

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Presidency College
Kempapura, Hebbal,
Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes to explore the approach of the portrayal of gay relationship in Shubmangalzyadasavdhan. Media has been the most effective tool in influencing people and in turn the society from time immemorial it has become a powerful vehicle for communication in the fields of culture, education, leisure and propaganda (Ankita Chowdhury – Social Trends). Baldoon Dhingra, in a report for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has quoted from a speech by Prime Minister Nehru who stated, "...the influence in India of films is greater than newspaper and books combined" (Dhingra 1963) Many researchers have been done in this direction. For example, the Social Cognitive Theory advocates that while devouring media, individuals create desires and set standards for their real lives after observing the social constructions in the media. Apart from the mainstream cinema the new normal of COVID has popularized the OTT platforms to our homes which have become the new favourite among all age groups. These platforms have become a good podium for new genres which explore the hidden facets of society and also the changing face of Indian society. This is not a source of entertainment alone but also that source which provides the audience with ample food for thought through many of the movies that it showcases.

ShubMangalZyadaSavdhan – translated as 'Be extra careful of marriage' is a Hindi Romantic Comedy released on 21 Feb 2020. After the theatres shut down due to covid it was released in the OTT platform Amazon Prime. The movie is written by Hitesh Kewalya and the star cast comprises of AyushmannKhurrana, along with The Viral Fever stars Jitendra Kumar, Neena Gupta, GajrajRao and MaanviGagroo .

The protagonist AmanTripathi is from Delhi and is from a humble middle class family. The economic background of the family has been chosen well as India comprises mostly of the middle class and the target audience are the majority who follow and encourage heterosexual relationships as opposed to homosexual one in the name of culture and societal norms. The father Shankar Tripathi is an agricultural scientist who is very happy about his latest invention black cauliflower. The opening scene of the movie playfully introduces us to the lovers taking a bike ride through the busy streets of the city. Karthik decides to lovingly embrace his love from behind as they navigate the busy roads. There is no element of satire or parody introduced through the background music score or shock factor associated with this behaviour as can be seen in the famous 'Kantha Ben' scene in 'KalHo Na Ho'. The normalising of the homosexual relation is significant to send a positive image of a relationship that is not heterosexual. The movie introduces us to a joint family where the mother Sunaina loves her son unconditionally. There is a cousin 'GoggleTripathi' whose wedding has been fixed and Aman needs to go to his hometown to attend it. Aman's parents have also decided for Aman to be married to their friend's daughter 'Kusum'.

Aman and Karthik board the 'Vivaah Express' which is very symbolic of the customs in an average Indian household. When it is a certain age that is considered marriageable age the boy and girl have to board the metaphorical 'Vivah Express'. This should ideally be an express train as many biological factors and the custom of progeny determine the ideal marriageable age. Here both the heroes Aman and Karthik are of the ideal age to board the 'Vivaah Express'. This is also a satire on how Indian society perceives the idea of marriage. It is also a tick mark that should be checked at the appropriate age and the concept of

companionship and compatibility which should be the foundation of a marriage are most often disregarded and it is just another milestone to be achieved.

On board this Vivah Express Aman and Karthik who are soul mates and are 'married' to each other by the bonds of love share an intimate kiss which is witnessed by Shankar. The family then plays the stereotypical villain role as in any romantic love story. The two lovers are ordered to separate. They share a kiss publicly which shocks everyone. Our society is averse to public display of affection when it comes to even heterosexual lovers. This is a bold portrayal on the part of the actors. The best part of the relationship that is projected here is that this gay couple wants the consent of the family exactly like how we see in the relationship of a heterosexual couple. It normalizes homosexual relationship like the other wherein the idea communicated is that it is normal to be in love and the sex or the gender of the people involved in this relationship should not be a matter of concern exactly like how money, power, caste, religion should not be a deterrent to love. The mainstream movies have seen heterosexual couple fight for this acceptance from the family as society begins from family. Through a 2009 research which was based on the analysis of the portrayal of intimate relations in super hit rom-coms, authors Holmes and Johnson substantiated the Social Cognitive Theory when they ascertained that individuals "look to relationships presented in the film to learn what to expect from real-life relationships". Bussey and Bandura (1999) stated that the comprehension of one's gender development, gender advancement and self-conception is heavily influenced by our societal observations, prescribed by societal gender typing which in turn is also influenced by the media that we consume.

Shubmangalzyadasavdhan has given reasonable portrayal of the gay couple as a couple in love fighting for acceptance first of their love and then their gender. The plot progresses further to show that Goggle's would be husband rejects her as her cousin is gay. Aman's parents confront him and they are not convinced of his sexuality or his sexual orientation. The characters are not portrayed as sissy or effeminate as is often the prejudiced manner in which Bollywood has presented homosexuality. Here the protagonists are represented as the boys next door.

Karthik is taken to the railway station and he sees Goggle there who wants to commit suicide as her wedding was called off. Karthik convinces her that her family will support and accept her and she should not take this extreme step and she convinces karthik to get Aman back. This scene is a direct message to the older audience that the younger generation is more accepting of love in any form or body as they are still not influenced by the norms set by the society. Meanwhile kusum tells Aman that she is in love with another and suggests that the only escape would be that both can marry for the sake of the society but can live with their lovers. The movie attempts to show the audience that the non-acceptance of the society may force people to take measures that are drastic. Aman is cleansed of his 'sins' and is renamed so that he is disillusioned about his sexuality and that he becomes 'normal'. Sexual or gender minority is an umbrella term that encompasses populations included in the acronym "LGBTI" (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) and those whose sexual orientation or gender identity vary from the "normal". Our culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two boxes of sex i.e., male and female, and these boxes also consist of few characteristics of what is "male" and what is "female". Heterosexuality has been defined as "normal" and all other forms of sexuality, despite being in practice alongside heterosexuality, are labeled "abnormal" (Gender Minority and its Changing Portrayal in

Bollywood Films Ankitachowdhury)karthik wears a rainbow cape which is symbolic of the fact that there is a hero in anyone who fights for what is right and against injustice. The idea of hyper masculinity as portrayed in many Bollywood movies is shattered in this depiction of hero in an ordinary man who fights for himself first. kusum and Karthik return and Aman agrees to the wedding with Kusum as he feels defeated in his fight against his family, like a hero who is most often beaten up by the girl's father here Karthik is beaten up by Shankar. The shame is on the audience who mock such relationships and this is depicted by Aman's family.

There is no portrayal of hyper masculinity in the way karthik gets beaten up. It is shown quite painfully as a man who is simply limited because he is human. He is not the one who can rescue his damsel in distress like the heroes of the 80s did. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra were constantly fighting off villains and saving their mother, sister, lady love, or wife on screen. Blockbusters like Sholay (1975) glorified men who were tough, aggressive, rowdy and 'masculine' enough to fight off villains. (Bollywood's Toxic Masculinity: The Problematic Portrayal of Men & Women in Popular Hindi Cinema, SAURABH SAMRAAT) the strength in karthik's character is seen in his natural display of weakness and display of love.

Kusum runs away with the jewellery and karthik dresses as the bride but is discovered by Shankar. Goggle helps out and Aman finally decides its enough and confesses his love for karthik. The scene is quite emotional where Aman questions the meaning of relationships if it were to change into hatred because of his sexual orientation. He tells his mother that she is worried about the lost jewellery but what about losing her son whose mistake was love. Did he become less of a man or less of a son? To add on to this drama the police arrive as they've been informed about a gay couple. It takes the appearance of the law at their doorstep to realise a simple fact that they love their son beyond all reason. They try to stop the police from arresting them. Much to the relief of the audience, the Supreme Court announces its judgement of decriminalizing of homosexuality.

The couple depart to Delhi with the consent of the family. The father can be heard saying that he is happy on if his son is and he cannot understand this love. The movie again reiterates the fact that everything need not be logical but if it brings about a happy existence in the society it should be as it is.

The movie ends on a happy note where Shankar tells his son to go live his life.

II. CONCLUSION

The movie was a through rom com from start to finish. It is a refreshing love story interspersed with humour. There is neither trace of insensitive humour that is used to degrade the minority homosexual community nor the intent of showcasing the gay community in a negative light. The movie is a good attempt at normalising the homosexual relationship and also sending a positive message to the society that individual happiness is more important. Acceptance of the minority is essential to create an inclusive and harmonious community. The movie reiterates time and again that love can blossom irrespective of people's sexualities. The movie focuses on the concept of love more than trying to edify or impose on its audience. "*The normalization... fell like a canopy over the former images of homosexuals shown as criminals, mental patients and the like*" (Kuhar, 88). The movie is a step ahead in its portrayal of the relationship and can certainly bring about a positive change in the

society. As Goran Madžarević and Mari'a T. Soto-Sanfiel (2018) say, "Narratives can be a useful tool for changing attitudes towards social issues." Visual representation of (something) can "cause an emotional impact resulting in a change in attitude."

In ShubhMangalZyadaSavdhan the characters are very aptly portrayed as boys next door, playful, trying to find their foothold in the professional world. By such a normal portrayal of the protagonists the movie is successful in facilitating the bond with the audience and the characters. This fosters a better understanding and acceptance as opposed to preaching or imposing of any ideology. Research has proven that when the audience identifies with the characters that belong to a minority community, they shed their prejudices and fears and develops a more favourable outlook towards them (Madžarević and Soto-Sanfiel, 2018).

Media will remain having a strong hold on people and in turn in being the most prominent influencer on the society. The content on media like the movie play an important role in bringing about a positive change in the mind-set of the society by normalising the same sex relationships.

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