

PORTRAYAL OF *HIJRA* (LGBTQAI) IN MARATHI CINEMA

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Abstract: Why should we seize with a tunnel-vision that spots just black and white, and fail to notice the shades of grey? The development of marginalized community is a global concern in this new millennium. In this respect, gender mainstreaming has been approached as a key requirement in the social inclusion process and gender equality policies of many developed and developing countries.

The attempts are made in Indian cinema to portray the transgender identity. But it has been portrayed either sensitively or with the person's desperate longing to belong, to be accepted for what the person is. In many Indian cinemas, the members of hijra/ LGBTQAI community get casted as manipulative, negative and fearful characters. It simply emphasizes the existing hatred in the real world. Hijra/ LGBTQAI people don't need sympathy but understanding, acceptance and dignity just as all other human beings. The paper is an attempt made to take this 'Queer' forward through the medium of Marathi films. It highlights the various myths associated with hijra/ LGBTQAI people in Marathi cinema. It will explore how hijra/ LGBTQAI people, their queer desires and aspirations are made visible through Marathi films.

Key words: Gender/sexual minorities, Sexuality, Queer, hijra/ LGBTQAI, Marathi cinema.

Introduction: Reflecting the norms, laws, and social values of society, the differences in the status of men, women and LGBTQAI have profound implications for how they participate in community life as a whole. These differences embody social, cultural, media and power relations that constitute the setting for the development and these differences therefore influence the society.

A gender stereotype in films shapes public's awareness of gender roles. This, sometimes, may lead to the distortion of gender roles which gets rooted in the human mind. The transgender or LGBTQAI community in India faces many obstacles in lifestyle from lack of acceptance in society to discrimination. Their struggle aims to find a space in society where gender

nonconformity is not being condemned as abnormal. They aren't depicted as an honoured personality of the social order. Indian cinema has witnessed a gentle display of transgender characters some for the comic effect and a few, however, stayed faithful to reality. But unfortunately, these films couldn't challenge the normal myths and did not break the taboo.

In a revolutionary judgment 8 on 15th April 2014, the Supreme Court of India legally recognized the transgender community as '*Third Gender*' and observed that "The transgender community, generally known as "hijras" in this country are a section of Indian citizens who are treated by the society as "unnatural and generally as objects of mockery and even on account of superstition". Protecting one's right to personal autonomy and self-determination under Article 21, the court observed that "*the gender to which a person belongs is to be determined by the person concerned*". The court also protected one's gender expression by invoking the freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) and held that "*no restriction can be placed on one's personal appearance or choice of dressing, subject to the restrictions contained in Article 19 (2) of the Constitution*".

Research Objectives:

- To examine the portrayal of *hijra* (LGBTQAI) in Marathi cinema .
- To review *hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters, their problems and issues as raised and discussed in Marathi cinema.
- To research the common myths allied with the depiction of *hijra* (LGBTQAI) community in Marathi Cinema.

Hypotheses:

- Marathi queer cinema portrays stereotyped *hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters.
- The Marathi movies fail to render intensely *hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters and their issues as in Marathi cinema there are always side stories and are used for comic relief to entertain audience.
- Marathi movies on *hijra* (LGBTQAI) themes fail to break the taboo and promote myths.

Research Work Method: The study adopts three methods of research. An analytical technique analyses content of the Marathi movies featuring *hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters. An interpretative

technique verifies the Marathi films made on *hijra* (LGBTQAI) themes. An evaluative technique is used to highlight various themes and features of Marathi cinema having LGBT representation. *Hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters were depicted in past as Transvestite / Cross dressing. It also shows myths associated with the representation of queer in Marathi cinema.

Concept of Hijra (LGBTQAI): It is an abbreviation for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Genderqueer, Queer, Intersex, Agender, Asexual and other queer-identifying community. Queer incorporates lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans people, intersex persons, the radical sex communities, and many other sexually transgressive (underworld) explorers.

The term *hijra* is usually translated as ‘eunuch’. The conventional hijra is lifted up as a one who has gone through a ceremony of genitals removal. However, anthropologist Serena Nanda explains that a lot of hijras come from other sexually indistinct milieu. She further noted that these hijras will become intersexed, convert themselves either male or female and fail to grow fully at puberty, or be males who give priority to breathe as hijras without undergoing castration. The “hijra” seems to be a magnet for a selection of sexual and gender conditions: “ambiguous sexual anatomy, impotence, infertility, homosexuality, et al. , which cannot have an analogue in Western cultures”.

Marathi Cinema and Queer / *hijra* (LGBTQAI) Identity-Analysis:

KASHISH has come into view as a ground-breaking programme to display standard Indian LGBTQ films, by screening them at National and international festivals. Sridhar Rangayan , Kashish’s festival director and founder has started Kashish in April 2010 with modest grants from two United Nations agencies and an Amsterdam film fund. He says, theatres were wary of hosting *hijra* (LGBTQAI) film festival. Bollowood, the world’s largest film industry situated in Maharashtra is often seen lacking a sense of responsibility towards *hijra* (LGBTQAI) issues. Problems of getting the finances and the certification board are the greatest limitations. In mid of 50s to mid of 60s, *hijra* (LGBTQAI) characters were generally shown as companions to heroines or hero. Some of them cross dress deliberately to call up laughter.

Third gender played a significant role in Marathi cinema. There is transition in terms of visibility of *hijra* (LGBTQAI) in Marathi cinema. This is a paradigm shift towards inclusivity. Some Marathi short films showcased gay characters. When they see movies exploring gay

themes in their language, the impact is much stronger. But the regretting fact is that we do not see considerable gay stories in Marathi films.

Marathi film, *Mitrachi Goshta (A Friend's Story, 1981)* is based on Vijay Tendulkar's play. The movie managed to swirl the societal norms about sexuality and identity. It was about lesbianism in a time. This movie was not given its due appreciation because of its controversial theme but undoubtedly it paved a way for homosexuality into Marathi films.

The Marathi film *Aamhi ka Tisare (We the Outsiders)* by Ramesh More is about a gay boy who gets kicked out of home by his family but finds love and protection among the hijras in Mumbai. *Amhi Ka Tisre (We The Outsiders)* is a version of the Paro Naik's novel *Mi Ka Nahi*. The film is a poignant tale of the stigma and discrimination faced by transgender among their families and in society. It also shows how with the help of a support structure, they can be empowered too. Bablu come upon a eccentric feelings of being a woman confined in a man's physique . And with this, begins his painful journey. Abandoned by the community, Bablu takes refuge in the community of eunuchs which is a different world altogether, with a differing process and different conventions. But here he finds affection, valour and encouragement from Anu, a rebellious transgender activist who is struggling with the society for assertion of identity and rights. Anu and her followers challenge the society and system and seek recognition and respect for their existence within the social mainstream.

The movie, *Koti* showcases the childhood of poor, innocent third gender, Sham. It throws light on childhood of a transgender. The film has presented a very sensitive subject, where a brother comes forward to fight against the society for injustice done on his brother. The two brothers share a sensitive relationship.

Rajiv Patil's film *Jogwa* exposes the hypocrisies and exploitations of marginalized community harrowed by conventional systems. It depicts the story of a man forced to be hijra under certain circumstances. It is a tale of woman's inspiring journey to break free from the shackles of discrimination, sexual oppression and servitude and find true happiness. The film intended to bring to light the accursed custom of sacrificing children (devdasi) at the altar of Goddess, Yellama .

Ravi Jadhav's *Natrang* revolves around the life of Guna, a tamasha artist, (Nacya) from Maharashtra and the challenges he faces while pursuing his passion. It is based on Dr. Anand Yadav's novel, *Natarang*. Guna . a village worker develops an intense passion for Tamasha. He played a role of Navhya (a man who portrays a woman in theatre) . But he becomes a man to mock at. He is deserted by his wife and society proclaims him as a eunuch(hijara) for emoting a female.

Ravi Jadhav's short film, *Mitraa* depicts a boy in love with a girl who is indifferent. Later, he finds out that she is a lesbian.

Nishant Roy Bombarde's film, *Daaravtha* (The Threshold) depicts a story of a boy caught between a patriarchal upbringing and his longing to recognize as a girl.

The short film, *Pudhakar-Ek Paul* (Initiative – A Step) deals with the topic of acceptance. A gay come out to his family and society and surprisingly accepted. The cinema was produced by Anand Gokhale and Prachi Kathale. Many people are afraid of talking openly about their gender identity and sexual orientation because of the fear of discrimination by the mainstream society.

Rakhi Sawant's first Marathi production, *Jayjaykar* is based on the topic of treating hijras and transgenders humanely and giving them equal opportunities in education and employment. It is an account of an eccentric and restless Akhande's striving to make things better for the four underprivileged humans. At a time when eunuchs are looked down upon, feared or treated with disrespect, a retired Army Major named Akhande struggles to change the mindset of many people. The film shows how a determination coupled with a small amount of help can bring changes in the lives of outcasts. There is the group of eunuchs- Mausli, Rani, Champa and Lajjo who earn their living by begging in trains. After a small dispute with the passengers, the group takes shelter at Akhande's house. Later Akhande brings four eunuchs on the path of upliftment. He makes them realize that they can do much more than just begging for a living. There is a beautiful dialogue like " *Jo kashtaane kamavto to pakka aani jo aayta khato to chakka*" (The one who earns by hardwork is a man and the one who sits idle is an eunuch).

Conclusions: Unfortunately, mainstream Marathi cinema couldn't do much justice to the queer identities. There are a lot of alternate Marathi films that made an effort to understand the queer but there still remain so many things unexplored. The commercial failure of *hijra* (LGBTQAI)

films raises a big question-whether the attitude of the people towards the *hijra* (LGBTQAI) community is changed or changing or yet to change?

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