

Portrayal of Transgender in Indian Cinema, with special reference to 'Taali', an Indian webseries- A critical review

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Abstract

The portrayal of transgender characters in Indian films has been a subject of ongoing discussion and evolution. Transgender are those people whose gender behaviour or identity do not match with their biological sex from the time of their birth. Traditionally, transgender individuals, often referred to as "Hijras" have been depicted in Indian cinema using stereotypes and exaggerated characteristics, which perpetuated stigma and misconceptions. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition and representation of gender fluidity in film. This shift is a response to the increasing demand for authentic and inclusive storytelling, as well as the efforts of marginalized communities to have their experiences represented on screen. Taali, is a web series, based on the true story of Gauri Sawant, who is a popular transgender activist from Mumbai and is known as the voice of the community . It tells her journey as a transgender and depicts all the incidents from the life of the transgender activist and the struggles she faced during her fight to get transgenders recognised as the third gender on all official documents in India. This

research will examine how the third gender is portrayed in Indian cinema and explain how there is a shift in opinion about transgender portrayal in Indian cinema and why including these gender and sexual minorities in media is important in today's culture.

Keywords- *Transgender, Hijras, stigma, gender fluidity.*

Introduction

Humans are innately social beings who consider interactions an integral part of their everyday lives. They hear the thoughts, opinions and ideals of others around them which, often shapes the way they think also aside from fellow citizenry, another element which does influence their thinking is media whether that's broadcast media, medium or various sorts of new media that keep emerging. Like other art forms cinema is both a neighbourhood of social reality and also a medium of portraying it. Films have subtle influence on society's way of thinking. Cinema has undoubtedly contributed tons to the queer movement in India. Sexual minority consists of all those people that fall into the categories of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders. Projection of gender stereotypes in films forms society's perception of gender roles. The over-saturation of gender stereotypes within the films leads to the misrepresentation of gender roles which gets embedded within the human mind and is passed on from generation to generation as a suitable view. Homosexuality remains considered a taboo in India. Section 377 of the Indian legal code which criminalizes homosexuality was introduced by British in colonial India in 1861 and it still stands within the country's books. The community which has long been marginalized and bereft of their true identity and representation within the social and cultural gestalt of society deserves critical attention. The Transgender community in India faces tons of struggle in lifestyle from lack of acceptance in society to discrimination. The struggle is to seek out an area in

society where gender nonconformity isn't being condemned as abnormal. they're never portrayed as an accepted member of the society. They're majorly portrayed as outlandish characters who are only there within the movie even as comic quotient. Doubtful, ostracized, stigmatized and criminalized for hundreds of years, the sexual minorities are now stepping out from the shadow of invisibility. In the case of NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY V. UNION OF INDIA, the Indian Supreme Court acknowledged transgender individuals as "third gender." The transgender rights movement gained prominence in India on April 15, 2014. It is a well-known truth that humans are sociable animals. Every community identifies people based on their "Identity". This identifying procedure begins from the moment of birth, a newborn's journey begins as either a girl or a boy. Not only has this been a significant factor, but so has sexual orientation in addition to recognize someone as a member of this civilized society.

Objective of Study

This paper's primary goal is to draw attention to the ways that Indian cinema portrays transgender and how it has been changed over the years .

1. To study how Indian cinema manipulates Indian viewers' cultural ideas in order to get them to accept the gender identity and expression of the LGBTQ population.
2. To study the transgender community's courageous and rebellious spirit.
3. To assess the transgender people's quality of life in today's world.
4. To study the struggle of transgender people and their strength portrayed in the film 'Taali'.

Review of literature:

1. Reengagement of Transgender persons: Challenges and Opportunities by Satish Chandra.

The book sheds light on a number of transgender people's experiences. The book, written by a number of authors, goes into great detail about the situation of transgender people in India. The author has emphasized that the primary cause of their precarious situation is society's discriminatory attitude towards them. The books also provide a detailed explanation of the various gender types and their duties. Since only male and female gender roles are typically valued in society, this will aid in the understanding that there is no such thing as good or evil, right or wrong when it comes to any gender. There has been extensive discussion about the denial of education and educational possibilities, along with recommendations for creating an inclusive educational system for transgender students. Furthermore, social media's function as one.

2. Psychosocial and Educational Problems of LGBTQ Community in India: Satish Chandra.

The researcher views the question of transgender marriages as a critical first step toward inclusivity. The book's discussion of an Indian marriage sheds light on the issues related to similar unions, and how a few courageous and committed couples made it public and demonstrate to the community that transgender persons have the same rights to a dignified existence. Transgender rights campaigner Akkai Padamshali's (a trans woman) marriage and Vasudev is motivating since Akkai was the first trans lady to be granted legal status. By she faced a lot to get a accommodation despite of knowing her rights. At last, she launched a fundraising effort on a web-based platform. The desire to have children was another problem. She couldn't conceive since she was transgender, and no adoption agency would be prepared for her to adopt a child and deliver it to a transgender lady and her spouse. Since the law says nothing, this is the largest obstacle for a

trans couple to adopt a kid in India about this matter. But the couple overcome that issue and adopted a baby boy and they named him Avin. She believes that society will eventually come to accept us for who we are. In addition, she talks about her experience shopping for baby clothes, where the store owner gladly gave her the items knowing their situation. Savita, a transgender woman who married Prasannam, encountered hostility from the groom's family due to her gender identity. Sanjay Muhury and Shree Ghatak both had the same tale to tell. Shree was accepted by her in-laws as soon as she underwent a sex change procedure. Madhuri Sarode and Jay Nath Sharma elevated the occasion by being married in front of a sizable gathering of relatives and friends at a temple.

The goal was to convey to the community and society at large that transgender people have the same rights as everyone else as long as they know how to use them.

3. *Me Laxmi Me Hijra*: Laxmi Narayan Tripathi.

In India, there are both educated and uneducated transgender populations. Some of them have their families accept them for who they are, while some do not. Though they both have challenging lives, it's possible to argue that individuals who have received family acceptance have an advantage over those who do not. In her memoir "*Me Laxmi me Hijra*," well-known transgender campaigner and social activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi shares her personal life. In her book, she describes her experiences as a transgender person. Even though she came from an educated family that supported her in her hijra ways, she was still able to understand the negative aspects of living as a hijra or transgender person in the mainstream. Her upbringing and education equipped her with the fortitude to stand up for her rights.

4. *A life in Trans Activism*: Revathi.

The researcher learned that transgender people's lives are essentially an ongoing struggle that they must wage every

day of their lives in order to survive after reading “A life in trans activism” written by trans woman Revathi. According to Revathi’s account, she has dealt with everything – from friends and relatives to NGOs – the list is endless. No one could have even attempted to force her to leave her home, recognize what she was going through while imprisoned in a male body with a spirit that from a woman. Her transformation into a trans woman was a horrible trip that she took. underwent minimal post-operative care after surgery to become a trans woman, subsequently how she experienced constant bleeding from that private area in public due to her stitches coming undone during the train journey.

5. A Brief History of Transgender Issues: Prof. Stephen Whittle.

The utilization of various terminologies for transgender persons is revealed in the current investigation to be an extremely interesting fact. How and when this terminology came into existence is a crucial piece of information. The term “transvestite” first appeared around 1910, by a German sexologist. The Berlin Institute was the first to perform sex change surgery. Around 1971, we first learned the term “transsexual.” Polygender is a term that originated in California. The Criminal Laws Act, which made homosexuality illegal in the UK, was passed in 1885. Ernest Boulton and Fred were detained for acting indecently in the first occurrence of public trial that was recorded in 1870. Due to these rules and their effects, individuals began to panic and seek medical treatment. Probably Krafft-Ebbing (1840-1902), a professor of psychiatry at Vienna, was the first sexologist to take a serious interest in the sexual desires of Trans people.

6. “Status of transgender in India”: A review-Pinki Poonam Malik Krishna Duhan and N Pavithra

The current study highlights that in order to mainstream transgender people, the public must take the lead and that the government should simply act as a facilitator. Transgender

individuals experience high levels of stress and lack a support system as a result of being shunned by society. Due to this, they are forced to turn to drug or alcohol abuse, which may be very harmful to them, society, and other people because those who are under their influence may commit crimes. In order for transgender people to participate in community development on an equal basis with everyone else, they must be liberated from the stigma associated with their identity.

7. “Transgender and the Main Stream”:

The research indicates that while most Indians are obsessed with the idea of gender dualism, they don't seem to want to acknowledge this community. The study addressed the drive for ration cards, passports, and voter identification cards spearheaded by transgender activist groups in Tamil Nadu. The only state that formally acknowledges this population as belonging to the third gender is Tamil Nadu. The state's Social Welfare Department established the Tamil Nadu Aravanigal Welfare Board in May 2008 with the goal of concentrating on issues related to education, sources of income, and spiritual security. The study primarily focuses on the fact that transgender persons in Tamil Nadu have begun to operate independent business with the assistance of the government and self-help groups. Previously, they faced numerous obstacles in the private sector of employment, primarily related to their gender identification. In addition to this, the government has actively and continuously fought to improve the lives of transgender persons in the fields of education and health.

8. “De-Identifying the Distressed in the Transgender Community Related to Their Identity Formation and Discrimination in India”:

Though LGBTQAI is becoming more and more accepted around the world, especially in The present adoption of Western culture is significantly different in India, where the culture is varied and dispersed over rural, semi-urban, and

metropolitan areas. The transgender population in India continues to face marginalization and rejection because of their gender expression and professional decisions, even if transgender women are essential for the purpose of blessing births and weddings. As opposed to this they enjoy a higher status within the larger society, where they encounter discrimination in their little town. From a personal, social, and health standpoint, as well as from the variety of previous narratives provided by the respondents, it is evident that trans women face discrimination in the semi-urban environment due to their gender identity and expression. The majority of people experience further stigmatization and social rejection as a result of this widespread discrimination. This also limited their ability to publicly express who they were sexually. The irony is that, although though they live with us, they are not a part of us. The community accepts them only at designated events in order to uphold the traditional significance and accompanying beliefs.

Portrayal of Third gender or Hijras in Indian cinema.

An important part of cinematic representation has been the way hijra characters are portrayed in Indian films; these portrayals capture the nuanced social and cultural issues that surround the hijra population. The hijra inhabits a space that is not simply a “third gender” between men and women, but also a space that lies between identity and performance, myth and reality, and society’s interior and outside. It is evident from watching these movies that how the hijra characters are portrayed mirrors how the story handles other oppressed communities. It is possible for a movie to have a theme that is inclusive of marginalized characters, including transgender people, and to show respect for them; it is also feasible for a movie to uphold the dominant culture and maintain transgender people as secondary characters with no agency. Sadashiv Amrapurkar plays Maharani, a eunuch/transgender figure, in the Mahesh Bhatt-directed film “Sadak”. The difficulties Maharani and other hijra characters encounter in

society are examined in the movie. Although some prejudices have been pointed out in the representation, this was one of the first times in Bollywood history that a hijra character had a prominent role. “*Tamanna*,” helmed by Mahesh Bhatt, is the moving tale of a eunuch, played by Paresh Rawal. The movie explores the protagonist’s challenges as they try to accept themselves and deal with prejudice in society. In Indian cinema, “*Tamanna*” is regarded as one of the most subtle depictions of a hijra character. The first transgender person to be elected to public office in India, Shabnam Mausi, is the real-life subject of this Yogesh Bharadwaj-directed movie. Actor Ashutosh Rana plays the title role. Shabnam Mausi’s journey, struggles, and struggle for social acceptability are all explored in the movie. Four short stories make up the anthology film “*I Am*,” which was directed by Onir. “*Abhimanyu*,” one of the segments, delves into the lives of a transsexual individual portrayed by Sanjay Suri. The film deftly tackles the difficulties the character faces, helping to forward a more complex portrayal of hijras in Indian cinema. Starring Akshay Kumar as a transgender character, “*Laxmi*” is directed by Raghava Lawrence. It is one of the popular Bollywood films that tries to address transgender issues, including the violence and discrimination experienced by hijra people, despite criticism for its casting and portrayal.

Two volumes featuring the proceedings of a symposium on transgender wellness organized by C. Subramanian and M. Surgitha were published in 2015 by Annamalai University in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. In a study, T. Balaji concentrated on depictions of violence against transgender individuals and proposed that the Indian government outlaw such depictions in accordance with the Cinematograph Act of 1952. This seems to be a reaction to a Tamil movie that Balaji purposefully chooses not to mention. Before the opening title of every Indian movie, a black-and-white card serves as a reminder that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting certifies all movies. This government agency has the author-

ity to request that movies be edited or changed before they are released. "The government's hyper-sensitivity towards any reference to people's struggles, particularly in the cause of socialism," as noted by Mir, has been reflected in the censor board since the 1950s (212). Balaji's argument for the same censor board to ban anti-transgender violence in movies contrasts with Mir's assessment that government control stifles progressive messages. There is some doubt as to whether the government's decisions will advance the interests of the marginalized or rather serve to uphold the status quo. The potential to shock, upend the current quo, and reject the norm is what gives queer representation its power. There's a concern among many LGBT producers and viewers that these representations might become trite and standard. According to Ghosh, "[A]s the narrative logic of visibilizing the queer may, at times, run counter to the logic of sexual politics, looking at queer cinema may be particularly fraught" (20). Communities like the hijras could not accept being normalized in this narrative because marginalization is a part of queer history. The real employment of hijra actors is conspicuously absent from the positive representation of hijra characters, nevertheless. The transgender role in each of the aforementioned films was portrayed by a male actor dressed in costume. Due to the difficulty transgender actors have in finding employment, American media has been grappling with this problem as cisgender actors continue to play admirably nuanced portrayals of transgender characters. There's not much proof that hijras work as actors in the Hindi film industry. Yash Raj Films' youth-focused department did, however, develop a band named Six Pack Band for their internet video commercial with Brooke Bond tea bags (Gangal). The band's six hijras have done publicity at the Cannes Film Festival and have collaborated with A-listers like Sonu Nigam and Hrithik Roshan. There are movies in the Hindi film industry that dispel pre-conceptions and movies that uphold them. While some Hindi movies are frivolous and forgettable, others have significant substance. It would be a mistake for any investigation into

Hindi cinema to ignore the diversity and divergence of these works, as well as the enormous potential that Hindi filmmakers continue to explore. There is room in this world for the voiceless to be heard.

Portrayal of Transgender in “Taali”

Taali is an authentic and sincere endeavor to portray the politics and classism present in the transgender community.

In the beginning of Taali, we see Ganesh sitting in his school, with a pink hairband and long nails. His teacher is seen in the next scene asking her students what careers they would like to pursue. She makes the assumption that Ganesh, like his father, would likely want to work as an inspector. His peers gasp in shock as he stands up and declares, “I want to be a mother.” Ganesh’s trip from “Gaal to Taali” is portrayed in the series. Ever since she was a young child, Gauri Sawant had a desire to have children.

Once at home, we witness Ganesh, much to her mother’s dismay, envisioning himself as a girl in front of a mirror. After witnessing Ganesh perform Lavani, his father makes him swear he will never again dance like a lady. You will undoubtedly be moved by the backstory of Gauri Sawant, also known as Ganesh, and his quest to comprehend what, how, and why he feels the way he does. He is gradually realizing that he is not at all like a boy. The web series chronicles Gauri’s early years, the strain in her father-child connection, her early mother loss, her path of transition, and her longing to become a mother. It also demonstrates her struggle for legal rights. She desires that she and other transgender persons be accepted as citizens of this nation and treated with dignity. “Identity, survival, and equality” are the things Sushmita’s character is fighting for in a scene where she is sitting in a lawyer’s cabin. We witness Gauri’s journey following sex-change surgery in a different sequence.

His mother, who died when he was still a child, was the only one who truly understood him. His father, or dada,

was unable to comprehend his predicament his sister's marriage. Without realizing his predicament, he persisted in making him act manly. He forced Ganesh to take unpleasant medications and other things, and he also took him to sex physicians. Sushmita Sen skillfully captures, without mocking, the difficulties faced by transsexual people. Taali also discusses the importance of employment, education, and social acceptance for the community. We don't hear much about Gauri's fight for the right to adopt children, but we can't help but grin at Sushmita Sen for being such a "bindaas" mother to her kids. A peek of Ganesh's sex reassignment operation to become Gauri is also shown to us. At this point, she begins advocating for transgender rights, which ultimately prompts her to seek the Indian Supreme Court for the recognition of third genders as legitimate citizens. Taali is an effective attempt to portray the life of transgender individuals. The show will force you to consider things, and you probably won't instantly roll up your car glasses the next time you see a transgender person at a stop sign. The director of "Taali," Ravi Jadhav, is a well-known Marathi film director. The national award-winning filmmaker has directed pictures like "Balgandharva," "Natarang," and "Balak-Palak" that deal with strange issues. Gender identity is a recurring theme in his works, which helped him direct "Taali" to the best of his abilities. It's not overly dramatic or preachy.

Conclusion:

As India's society develops, so do people's attitudes. Third-gender films portray, how film reflects society because of their creation and showing. Movement for acknowledgment of a Third Gender in society was accompanied by creation of a film about Third Gender. This is often noticed worldwide, e.g. in Spain following the legal recognition of the third gender category in 2003, showing the prominence of LGBT people in cinema production and viewership. Other third-gender films in other countries also exhibit a similar tendency in India. In India, too, we saw a similar trend. Ho-

homosexuality's legalisation in India has been a key factor in developing and exhibiting third-gender films. The problem was as prevalent in the movies as in real life. In this day and age, "Taali" is a highly significant movie. Eunuchs were not even recognized in the nation until 2014. Their existence was not substantiated by any legal documents. They were ineligible for government aid of any type, adoption, marriage, or driving. In the modern era, application forms always include a 'other' option in addition to the options for male and female. Only when Shreegauri Sawant filed a request for legal recognition with the Supreme Court did this occur. The transgender community's rights were recognized by the Supreme Court in 2014 as a "third gender." Gauri has made it possible for transgender persons to determine their gender identification and have dignified lives.

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