

Streaming Freedom: Lesbian Visibility and Narrative Liberation in OTT-based Hindi Content

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Abstract

The decriminalization of homosexuality in India in 2018 marked a pivotal moment for queer representation across media. Digital streaming platforms, relatively unrestrained by state censorship, have since emerged as transformative spaces for the depiction of marginalized identities. This study explores the visibility and narrative construction of lesbian identity in Hindi-language OTT content between 2018 and 2025. Employing a qualitative research design grounded in queer theory and feminist film criticism, the research analyses the selected web series and films such as *Made in Heaven*, *Four More Shots Please!*, *Bombay Begums*, and *The Married Woman* to examine how lesbian desire, intimacy, and agency are articulated on screen. Through textual analysis, supported by audience focus group discussions and interviews with media practitioners, the paper investigates whether OTT narratives signify genuine liberation from heteronormative cinematic tropes or merely reframe them within commercial aesthetics of inclusion. Findings indicate that while OTT spaces have expanded the representational vocabulary of lesbian experience, they continue to negotiate visibility within socio-cultural and market constraints. The study contributes to the growing discourse on digital media's role in shaping queer subjectivities and reimagining the politics of representation in post-Section 377 India.

Keywords: Lesbian Representation; Hindi Cinema; OTT Platforms; Queer Theory; Feminist Film Theory; Narrative Freedom; Digital Media; Audience Reception; Post-Section 377 India; Cultural Studies

1. Introduction

The landscape of Indian visual culture has undergone a marked transformation in the wake of the digital revolution and the subsequent proliferation of over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms. Unlike traditional Bollywood cinema long governed by state censorship, commercial pressures, and patriarchal moral codes OTT media have emerged as relatively open spaces for the articulation of marginalized and previously silenced identities. The 2018

decriminalization of homosexuality under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code further catalyzed this shift, enabling new modes of representation for queer narratives, including those centered on lesbian subjectivities. Yet, despite this apparent progress, the question persists: does the digital domain truly liberate lesbian voices, or does it merely relocate them within the familiar boundaries of heteronormativity and commodified diversity?

Historically, the representation of lesbian identity in Hindi cinema has been fraught with erasure, sensationalism, and moral panic. Films such as *Fire* (1996) and *Girlfriend* (2004) provoked intense controversy, revealing deep-seated cultural anxieties about female sexuality and same-sex intimacy. The subsequent decades witnessed limited yet notable interventions, such as *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) and *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019), which attempted to humanize lesbian relationships within more empathetic frameworks. However, it is the arrival of digital platforms Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Sony LIV, and ZEE5 that has significantly broadened the scope of narrative experimentation and thematic inclusion. Series like *Made in Heaven* (2019–2023), *Four More Shots Please!* (2019–2022), *Bombay Begums* (2021), and *The Married Woman* (2021) have foregrounded lesbian characters and relationships with varying degrees of openness, nuance, and authenticity.

This research examines the representational politics of lesbian visibility within OTT-based Hindi content produced between 2018 and 2025. Anchored in queer theory, feminist film criticism, and cultural studies, the study employs a qualitative methodological framework combining textual analysis with audience-focused inquiry. It seeks to understand how these platforms negotiate creative freedom and marketability while engaging with themes of desire, intimacy, and selfhood. Furthermore, it explores whether such portrayals signify a radical departure from the heteronormative gaze or perpetuate its subtler manifestations through sanitized, commercially viable representations.

By interrogating the interplay between digital media liberalism and cultural conservatism, this study situates OTT narratives within broader debates on gender, sexuality, and media ethics in post-Section 377 India. It argues that while streaming platforms have indeed expanded the discursive boundaries of lesbian representation, they also reflect the persistent tensions between visibility, authenticity, and audience acceptability. Ultimately, the paper contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on the politics of representation in Indian screen culture and the evolving role of digital platforms as agents of both liberation and limitation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 National Studies

Research on gender and sexuality in Indian cinema has long reflected the nation's cultural paradoxes oscillating between modernity and moral conservatism. Scholars have observed that Indian films, particularly Hindi cinema, have historically marginalized or distorted non-heteronormative identities.

Early works such as Shohini Ghosh's essay on *Fire* (1996) underscore the film's role as a watershed moment in bringing lesbian desire to the cinematic forefront, while also exposing deep societal resistance to female sexual autonomy. Ghosh (1998) notes that the backlash against *Fire* revealed not only the discomfort with same-sex love but also with women asserting agency over their own bodies. Similarly, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2000) in *Same-Sex Love in India* trace indigenous traditions of female homoeroticism, challenging the notion that lesbian identity is a Western import. Their work laid the groundwork for reclaiming same-sex love within Indian cultural history.

Subsequent analyses, such as those by Brinda Bose (2007) and Shohini Chaudhuri (2008), focus on how post-liberalization cinema commodified sexuality while keeping lesbian identities peripheral or sensationalized. Films like *Girlfriend* (2004) epitomize this pattern, where lesbian desire is portrayed as deviant or threatening to heterosexual order. Sangeeta Datta (2010) and Rohit K. Dasgupta (2017) extend this argument by exploring the tension between representation and reception pointing out that while Indian audiences are increasingly exposed to global queer narratives, local productions continue to negotiate sexuality through a lens of cultural respectability.

Recent scholarship, particularly in the OTT era, highlights a partial shift. Works by Anuja Agrawal (2021) and Madhavi Mallapragada (2022) emphasize that web platforms offer relative freedom from censorship, allowing for more layered queer storytelling. However, they also caution that such representations often cater to urban, English-speaking audiences, thereby reproducing class and cultural hierarchies. Dasgupta (2020) argues that Indian digital narratives, though progressive in tone, remain shaped by neoliberal aesthetics where "inclusion" becomes a branding strategy rather than a transformative act.

Thus, national scholarship reflects a tension between representation and commodification a tension this paper seeks to explore further through the lens of lesbian visibility in OTT-based Hindi content.

2.2 International Studies

Internationally, queer media studies have interrogated the politics of representation and the power dynamics inherent in cinematic narratives. Foundational theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) in *Epistemology of the Closet* provide the conceptual groundwork for analyzing sexuality as a performative and socially constructed identity. Their insights inform the understanding that media not only reflects but also constructs gendered and sexual norms.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" introduced the concept of the *male gaze*, explaining how mainstream cinema privileges heterosexual male spectatorship. Subsequent queer and feminist critics such as Teresa de Lauretis (1991), B. Ruby Rich (1992), and Alexander Doty (1993) extended this framework to analyze lesbian visibility, arguing that cinema historically either invisible lesbian desire or coded it through subtext and symbolism to evade censorship.

In Western scholarship, Richard Dyer (1993), Steven Cohan (1997), and Chris Straayer (1996) have examined how queer desire is simultaneously made visible and regulated within popular media. Lisa Henderson (2008) and Shohini Chaudhuri (2015) later explored the commercial co-optation of queer narratives in global streaming contexts, suggesting that digital liberalization often coincides with market-driven "pink capitalism."

Recent studies in the global digital context, such as those by Ron Becker (2019) and Julia Himberg (2020), analyze how streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime have become key players in shaping global queer visibility. They note that while these platforms promote inclusion rhetorically, their narratives often remain confined to palatable, urban-centric representations designed for cosmopolitan audiences.

This international scholarship provides a theoretical and comparative framework for examining India's OTT ecosystem. It highlights that while digital media can expand

representational boundaries, it also operates within capitalist and cultural constraints that shape how queer identities are framed, circulated, and consumed.

1. Research Gap

While Indian scholars have explored queer representation in mainstream cinema and Western researchers have critiqued global digital platforms, there is limited research focusing specifically on lesbian representation in Hindi-language OTT content post 2018. The intersection of *digital liberalism*, *queer visibility*, and *cultural conservatism* in India remains underexplored. This paper addresses that gap by analyzing how Hindi OTT narratives construct, negotiate, and commercialize lesbian identity within evolving socio-cultural and media landscapes.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design to analyze how lesbian identities are represented, negotiated, and received within OTT based Hindi content produced between 2018 and 2025. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for this research because it enables an in-depth exploration of symbolic meanings, narrative structures, and socio-cultural contexts that cannot be captured through quantitative analysis. The research is interpretive in nature and grounded in queer theory, feminist film criticism, and cultural studies, allowing for a nuanced understanding of both text and audience within the Indian digital media landscape.

4.2 Sampling and Universe Selection

The universe of this study comprises select Hindi-language OTT series and films that feature lesbian characters or explore same-sex female intimacy as a narrative element. Using purposive sampling, the study identifies representative examples across major streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, and ZEE5. The following titles have been selected based on their thematic relevance, popularity, and critical discourse:

| S.No. | Hindi-language OTT series and films | Year of Release | Platform | Directed By |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| 1. | <i>Made in Heaven</i> | 2019-2023 | Amazon Prime Video | Nitya Mehra, Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti, Prashant Nair, Alankrita Shrivastava, Neeraj Ghaywan |
| 2. | <i>Four More Shots Please!</i> | 2019-2022 | Amazon Prime Video | Anu Menon, Nupur Asthana, Joyeeta Patpatia |
| 3. | <i>Bombay Begums</i> | 2021 | Netflix | Alankrita Shrivastava, Bornila Chatterjee |
| 4. | <i>The Married Woman</i> | 2021 | ZEE5 | SahirRaza |
| 5. | <i>Class</i> | 2021 | Netflix | Ashim Ahluwalia, Gul Dharmani, Kabir Mehta |

4.3 Data Collection Methods

The research utilizes three key qualitative methods to generate and interpret data:

(i) Textual Analysis

A detailed examination of selected OTT narratives focusing on plot construction, dialogue, character arcs, camera language, costume, and symbolism. Attention is paid to how lesbian identity is visually and narratively articulated whether as subtext, confession, normalization, or spectacle.

(ii) Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are proposed with scriptwriters, directors, and creative producers involved in the selected OTT projects. These interviews aim to understand their creative intentions, censorship negotiations, and perceptions of audience reception. This step provides insider perspectives on how market logic and social sensibilities shape lesbian representation.

(iii) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus groups are conducted among diverse audience groups, urban youth, women viewers, and LGBTQ+ individuals to capture their interpretive responses. Discussions center on questions of authenticity, relatability, and social acceptance. This helps to understand how different audience segments decode and engage with lesbian narratives.

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, symbolic contradictions, and emergent meanings within both the textual corpus and audience/interview responses. Using manual coding and NVivo-based categorization, the analysis progressed through three key stages:

(i) Initial Coding

In the initial phase, each selected OTT text *Made in Heaven*, *Four More Shots Please!*, *Bombay Begums*, *The Married Woman*, and *Class* was closely examined at the level of language, visual style, and narrative structure. Segments of dialogues, scene descriptions, and character interactions were coded to identify representational motifs related to lesbian desire, self-expression, and societal negotiation.

For instance, in *Made in Heaven* (Amazon Prime, 2019–2023), the storyline of the character “Pallavi” subtly introduces same-sex attraction through intimate gestures and silences rather than overt declarations. This subtextual treatment was initially coded under “*implied desire*” and “*narrative caution*.” Conversely, *The Married Woman* (ZEE5, 2021) portrays the protagonist Astha’s emotional awakening through an explicitly romantic relationship with a woman artist. Here, initial coding highlighted motifs such as “*emotional self-discovery*” and “*spiritualized intimacy*.”

These early codes helped map how lesbian identity oscillates between visibility and concealment depending on genre conventions, target audiences, and platform sensibilities.

(ii) Axial Coding

In the second stage, the initial codes were clustered into broader thematic categories that revealed relationships among recurring ideas. Three dominant thematic clusters emerged:

- a. **Visibility and Containment:** While OTT narratives display greater openness compared to mainstream cinema, lesbian relationships are often framed within *aesthetic respectability*. In *Four More Shots Please!* (Amazon Prime, 2019–2022), for example, the queer subplot involving Umang and Samara is celebrated for its visibility yet ultimately resolved through tragedy and emotional instability. This pattern reflects a *narrative containment* of lesbian identity, where representation is permitted but constrained by heteronormative closure.
- b. **Desire and Performativity:** Across several narratives, female-female intimacy is depicted through stylized visual codes lingering gazes, artistic montages, and voiceovers that perform desire while minimizing physical realism. In *Bombay Begums* (Netflix, 2021), the relationship between two women is constructed through professional camaraderie and subtle emotional tension rather than explicit affection. This aligns with the theme of *performative femininity*, where the portrayal of lesbian desire remains carefully aestheticized to ensure social acceptability.
- c. **Commercial Liberalism and Marketability:** Interviews with creative professionals indicated that while OTT platforms promote “inclusive storytelling,” they also encourage narratives that are visually glamorous and emotionally accessible to urban audiences. This theme, coded as *commercial liberalism*, underscores how queer visibility becomes a form of *market capital*. For instance, in *Four More Shots Please!*, Umang’s character embodies empowerment through fitness, fashion, and cosmopolitan aesthetics markers of neoliberal consumerism that align queerness with privilege rather than resistance.

(iii) Interpretive Synthesis

In the final phase, an interpretive synthesis was conducted through the lens of queer theory and feminist film criticism. This stage integrated the thematic findings with theoretical frameworks to generate broader insights into the politics of lesbian representation.

The analysis revealed that while OTT platforms have expanded narrative possibilities for depicting same-sex love, they frequently re-inscribe *heteronormative paradigms* through aesthetic and moral containment. For example, *The Married Woman* frames Astha’s relationship as a path to personal enlightenment rather than as an enduring partnership thus transforming lesbian desire into a metaphor for self-realization, not identity. Similarly, in *Made in Heaven*, lesbian desire is portrayed as “respectable” only when embedded within narratives of professionalism, emotional restraint, or tragedy, reinforcing what Butler (1990) describes as the *regulatory ideal of gendered performance*.

Despite these constraints, there are also moments of authentic desire and resistance. The intimacy between Umang and Samara (*Four More Shots Please!*) or the subtle queer undertones in *Class* (Netflix, 2023) signal a shift toward more complex, intersectional representations that acknowledge sexuality as fluid and lived rather than deviant or decorative. These counter-narratives illustrate the gradual but uneven movement toward what could be termed *narrative liberation* in digital Hindi content.

Table 4.4: Summary of Emergent Themes

| Theme | Description | Illustrative Example |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Performative Femininity | Lesbian desire is stylized to conform to beauty and respectability norms. | Bombay Begums – Emotional tension coded through workplace aesthetics and gaze. |
| Narrative Containment | Queer relationships granted visibility but denied stability or closure. | Four More Shots Please! – Relationship ends in emotional turmoil. |
| Commercial Liberalism | OTT queerness framed as fashionable inclusion for urban audiences. | Made in Heaven – Liberal settings, sanitized intimacy. |
| Authentic Desire | Genuine emotional connection and self-identification beyond stereotypes. | The Married Woman – Lesbian identity linked to self-awareness and liberation. |

In essence, the thematic analysis reveals that lesbian visibility in OTT-based Hindi content is both progressive and precarious marked by increased representation yet persistently mediated through aesthetic, moral, and market filters. The findings suggest that digital platforms, while

expanding the scope of queer expression, continue to negotiate between authentic representation and commercial acceptability, reflecting broader socio-cultural tensions of post-Section 377 India.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of selected OTT-based Hindi series and films reveals a complex and often paradoxical landscape of lesbian representation in contemporary Indian digital media. While streaming platforms have undeniably expanded the narrative space available to queer identities, the portrayal of lesbian characters continues to oscillate between visibility and containment, liberation and regulation, authenticity and commercialization. The findings are discussed below in light of key theoretical perspectives from queer theory, feminist film criticism, and cultural studies.

Post-2018 Hindi OTT narratives demonstrate a marked increase in the visibility of lesbian characters, signalling a shift from cinematic invisibility toward representational acknowledgment. Series such as *Four More Shots Please !* and *The Married Woman* place lesbian desire at the narrative center something largely absent in mainstream Bollywood. However, this visibility often arrives with conditions. Lesbian characters are frequently contained within moral, emotional, or aesthetic boundaries that prevent full normalization of queer identity. For instance, *Four More Shots Please !* presents Umang's relationship with Samara as glamorous yet fragile, culminating in emotional breakdown and separation. The storyline mirrors what Shohini Ghosh (1998) termed "the politics of containment," wherein lesbian visibility is allowed only within limits that reaffirm heteronormative order. Similarly, *The Married Woman* frames Astha's relationship with Peeplika as a phase of self-discovery rather than a sustainable partnership. This narrative strategy aligns with Butler's (1990) idea of *gender performativity*, where sexuality is allowed to surface as performance but not sustained as identity. Thus, OTT visibility becomes a "safe liberalism" where lesbian representation signals progressiveness but remains narratively tamed to protect mainstream comfort zones.

Across the analyzed content, lesbian desire is frequently represented through aesthetic mediation rather than physical or emotional realism. Scenes of intimacy are stylized expressed through glances, metaphors, or voiceovers to maintain an acceptable balance between expression and decorum. In *Bombay Begums*, emotional intimacy between women is

conveyed through professional mentorship and shared vulnerability rather than open affection, producing what B. Ruby Rich (1992) described as the “*new queer visibility without touch.*”

This aesthetic restraint reflects what this study identifies as performative femininity, where lesbian characters must remain visually and behaviourally aligned with normative femininity to be culturally legible. Such representations challenge the stereotype of the “predatory lesbian” found in earlier Hindi films like *Girlfriend* (2004), yet they simultaneously limit the spectrum of gender expression and sexual freedom. Hence, desire becomes aestheticized visible but sanitized allowing audiences to consume queerness as *artistic difference* rather than social disruption.

The research also identifies the emergence of what can be termed commercial liberalism, where queer inclusion operates as part of a branding strategy for digital platforms. Interviews with creative professionals indicated that OTT networks encourage diverse representation but within commercially viable frameworks appealing to urban, English-speaking audiences. For example, *Made in Heaven* integrates lesbian characters into cosmopolitan spaces marked by luxury, global aesthetics, and emotional restraint. This representation positions queerness as a marker of modernity and sophistication, aligning with Dasgupta’s (2020) argument that Indian media increasingly equates diversity with neoliberal consumer culture. Such portrayals foster symbolic acceptance while marginalizing intersectional realities working-class, rural, or non-English-speaking queer experiences remain largely absent. Consequently, while OTT platforms have enabled representational inclusion, they also reproduce class and cultural hierarchies under the guise of progressive storytelling.

Despite these limitations, the analysis identifies moments of authentic desire and resistance that gesture toward genuine narrative liberation. In *The Married Woman*, Astha’s emotional and physical connection with Peeplika transcends moral binaries, suggesting a redefinition of womanhood and selfhood. Similarly, in *Class* (2023), lesbian desire is depicted within a youth-centric, intersectional framework that challenges upper-class dominance, reflecting an emerging shift toward inclusivity and realism. These counter-narratives reflect what Eve Sedgwick (1991) describes as “*queer leakage*” moments where heteronormative structures fail to contain the multiplicity of desire. The presence of such scenes marks a gradual cultural opening, where OTT spaces, despite commercial constraints, provide a terrain for experimentation and subversion.

The findings collectively suggest that OTT platforms in India function as sites of negotiation rather than outright liberation. They offer creative latitude to portray lesbian subjectivities but remain tethered to audience expectations, advertiser sensibilities, and global market aesthetics. The paradox of OTT liberalism lies in its simultaneous empowerment and domestication of queer narratives reflecting what Stuart Hall (1997) calls the “double-edged nature of representation,” where media can both empower and discipline marginalized voices. The study’s synthesis indicates that lesbian visibility in Hindi OTT content marks progress, yet it remains mediated through aestheticized desire, moral moderation, and class privilege. This aligns with Mulvey’s (1975) critique of cinematic gaze, wherein women here lesbian women continue to be represented through lenses of idealized femininity and consumable difference.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies the emergence of a new queer aesthetic one that integrates introspection, layered storytelling, and affective realism. OTT narratives are gradually evolving beyond tokenism, allowing lesbian characters to possess emotional depth and narrative purpose independent of male mediation. Such portrayals, though limited in scope, signal the early stages of what could be termed “narrative liberation” a slow but significant process where lesbian representation transitions from marginal subtext to normalized screen presence.

In sum, the findings reveal that OTT-based Hindi content occupies a transitional space between cultural liberation and structural limitation. Lesbian visibility has increased both in quantity and quality, but its representation remains shaped by aesthetic caution and commercial liberalism. The digital medium’s potential for genuine transformation lies in its ability to embrace intersectional, diverse, and unapologetically authentic queer narratives that move beyond performative inclusion. Through this analysis, the paper concludes that while streaming platforms have initiated a discourse of freedom, the struggle for narrative and ideological emancipation within Indian screen culture continues.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This qualitative study set out to explore the representation of lesbian identities in Hindi OTT-based content produced between 2018 and 2025 a period marked by India’s post-Section 377

liberal turn and the rapid expansion of digital media platforms. Through a thematic analysis of selected series (*Four More Shots Please!*, *The Married Woman*, *Made in Heaven*, *Bombay Begums*, *Class*) and interviews with content creators and critics, the research sought to evaluate whether the rise of streaming media signifies genuine narrative liberation for lesbian representation or a subtler continuation of heteronormative paradigms.

The findings reveal a deeply ambivalent cultural terrain. On one hand, OTT platforms have undeniably expanded the boundaries of mainstream storytelling, enabling greater visibility, emotional complexity, and narrative agency for lesbian characters. These portrayals signify a decisive departure from the historical invisibility, ridicule, or villainization seen in earlier Hindi cinema.

On the other hand, this visibility is often circumscribed by the imperatives of commercial liberalism, aesthetic moderation, and classed cosmopolitanism. Queer desire frequently appears aestheticized but not politicized, visible yet contained, and empowered yet disciplined. The OTT space, while technologically and narratively freer than traditional cinema, remains tethered to market sensibilities and cultural respectability politics.

Thus, the study concludes that OTT-based Hindi content functions as a liminal space—a transitional arena where representation is simultaneously liberated and domesticated. Lesbian visibility here represents progress in form but partiality in substance. The post-Section 377 moment has allowed for what may be termed “liberal performativity” rather than “radical visibility.”

Nevertheless, the emergence of nuanced, empathetic, and emotionally rich portrayals marks the beginning of a new trajectory in Indian screen culture—one that gestures toward genuine inclusion and self-expression. The paper contributes to the discourse on queer representation in South Asian media by introducing the framework of *commercial liberalism* and *performative femininity* as analytical tools to understand contemporary lesbian visibility in India’s digital landscape. By combining thematic analysis with queer and feminist theoretical approaches, the study bridges textual interpretation with sociocultural critique, offering a model for future qualitative media research in postcolonial contexts. The research underscores how OTT platforms are reconstituting India’s cultural public sphere, challenging yet simultaneously reproducing traditional power relations in the politics of gender and sexuality.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on lesbian representation in Hindi OTT content can build upon the present study by expanding its thematic and methodological scope. To begin with, an intersectional focus is crucial. Subsequent studies should move beyond the current emphasis on urban, upper-middle-class settings to explore diverse contexts such as regional languages, rural narratives, and working-class subjectivities that remain largely excluded from mainstream media discourse. This shift would contribute to a more inclusive understanding of queer experiences within India's socio-cultural mosaic. Additionally, comparative analyses between Hindi OTT productions and regional or international series such as Korean, Latin American, or European content could illuminate how global streaming cultures shape local queer aesthetics, moral frameworks, and industry practices.

Further, audience reception studies would add an important dimension to the discourse by examining how viewers perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to lesbian portrayals on digital platforms. Exploring audience empathy, resistance, or identification would yield deeper insights into how media representation interacts with social attitudes and lived experiences. On the production side, research could investigate the institutional negotiations between writers, directors, producers, and OTT networks to uncover the creative and commercial constraints that influence the making of queer narratives within India's corporatizing media ecosystem. Finally, future scholars might pursue archival and historical inquiries to trace continuities between the underground queer subtexts of 1990s Hindi cinema and contemporary digital storytelling. Such longitudinal exploration would reveal how lesbian representation has evolved from coded silence and subtext to open articulation and thematic centrality within the broader trajectory of Indian screen culture. The narratives explored through this study underscore that representation alone does not equate to liberation. True narrative freedom demands authenticity, diversity, and autonomy conditions that can only be achieved when queer stories are not merely included but centered on their own terms.

OTT platforms, with their technological reach and cultural fluidity, hold the potential to democratize queer storytelling in India. Yet this potential must be harnessed with critical awareness ensuring that representation does not become another form of commodified tolerance. As Hindi digital media continues to evolve, it is through the persistent negotiation between visibility and voice, commerce and conscience, that the contours of queer freedom on screen will ultimately be defined.

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