

Constructing Transness: Visual Representation and Ethics in Cinema and OTT

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ABSTRACT

In the world of philosophy, the concept of ethics and morality find a prime place. Perhaps, Ethics is the most widely used word that governs every aspect of human life. This is exploratory research using content analysis attempts to find answers to some of the fundamental questions of ethics of visual representation in cinema in the world of OTT. As we are all facing a world today with unprecedented changes and challenges, we witness a highly dynamic and to an extent volatile shift in values and ethics that once looked universal and fixed. The viewers in 2022 are a part of a new global world. They need a higher level of sensitivity and empathy to understand the literature and cinema based on marginal groups. Cinema today are about different aspects of human psyche - from the most gruesome and ugly to the most beautiful and powerful. In such a juncture, the discussion of ethics in visual representation calls for a nuanced approach and insight to study cinema on OTT platform. The first part of the study is to understand ethics from a theoretical perspective and develop an understanding about the concept of ethical representation. The second part deals with the understanding of the concept of transgender representation in cinema. In this chapter few popular cinemas of the West and popular Indian cinema where transgender characters are portrayed has been discussed. The third part is a comparative analysis of content of cinema in OTT platform and analyse them from ethical point of view. The fourth part would discuss the various parameters for judging visual representation and suggest some vital points to the filmmakers to ponder over it while choosing stories and develop content for cinema. The concluding part consists of some questions for the readers, filmmakers, and researchers.

Keywords: *OTT, ethics, philosophy, cinema, visual representation, transgender representation*

Introduction

When we talk of Cinema, the primary thought that cross our mind is entertainment. Hence the first part of the title, Cinema in OTT platform may seem to build an image of some entertaining movie scene in a reader's mind. But the next part of the topic that starts with the word 'Ethics' will change the perception and expectation of the reader. It is a serious subject and hence brings a lot of responsibility to treat it from the larger perspective of social good. This study required a lot of academic rigour and honesty of purpose. This paper is based on the results of exploratory research done by the researchers. The framework that was used was systematic and intensive literature review to understand the concept of ethics in visual representation in the fictional world of cinema, and content analysis of selected cinemas with transgender representation.

What is Ethics?

The three types of normative ethics we find in theory and practice are:

Utilitarian Ethics which is often equated with the concept of “the greatest good for the greatest number.” This form is followed by majority because it has some consequences which is safe. This form has a dangerous potential to promote the majoritarian ideology and hence can lead to injustice and discrimination of minority groups.

Deontological Ethics The second one is known as which is based on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The idea that “human beings should be treated with dignity and respect because they have right” is emphasised in reverse in deontological ethics which says, “People have a duty to respect other people’s rights and treat them accordingly.” A sense of duty and responsibility to do the right thing is emphasised here.

Virtue Ethics is based on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle who believed in human virtue for public good. Two important concepts inherent in virtue ethics are – virtue and practical wisdom. The knowledge of knowing how to apply virtue in the right way is very important in virtue ethics. Cultivating the virtue and having the wisdom of using it in the right way is the key.

Ethics in Visual Representation

In an article on Visual Integrity published by Granite Pressbooks, the issue of ethics and credibility has been discussed in details. The article brings out two important aspects of ethical concerns regarding visual representations-

- The exploitation of visual stimuli of the viewers who are controlled by their emotions. The aim is to achieve a rhetorical effect.
- Exploitation of the basic trust level of the audience and representing visual information that is either incorrect or distorted.

Cinema has not only tremendous amount of visual appeal for the viewers, but it is a dialogue between the makers and viewers where the viewers tend to believe what the makers create. The makers can represent, imitate, or construct what is real. They can easily portray something as normal and real even with their limitations. They often unintentionally may end up sending a wrong message about certain groups of people. Hence certain visual representations can unwittingly reinforce stereotypes, prejudices, power dynamics etc. Some of the areas which are culturally sensitive and hence demand the filmmakers to tread cautiously are:

- The depiction of women for very long time was according to the patriarchal standard defined in the given society.
- Depiction of minority and members of ethnic groups in a stereotypical way.
- The way dialogues are written, the language that is used by the protagonists is often seen codifying certain beliefs and power dynamics that have proved detrimental for the group.
- The insensitive reference to religion and culture of certain groups.
- The appearance of ethnocentric ideas to propagate a hegemonic ideology of one’s own nation while demeaning another nation and nationality.
- The historical legacy of evil social practices like slavery and caste system.

- Lack of representation or misrepresentation of gender and ethnic minorities
- Body shaming, name calling of disabled and mentally challenged people which are potentially insensitive but passed on as a message of accepted social behaviour and hence normal.

These points are worth pondering when we are discussing the ethical questions in visual representation of different groups of people.

“Cinema is Mass Media; it is both overtly gross and exciting. It is our great mirror of society.”

This quote given by Danish Film maker Nicolas Winding Refn refers to two opposite constructs at the same time. At one end cinema creates a fictional world with characters that are not real but, there is an attempt to project them as believable and real. On the other hand, cinema reflects the social ethos, mores, cultural practices in such a way that it reinforces even those values that are regressive and prejudiced.

Gillett 2012, in his book ‘Film and Morality’ studied the concept of morality in a nuanced way. He had three important objectives in the book that he wanted to highlight. One of the objectives that is directly linked to this research was to examine how films often lean towards a predetermined moral position. But he was also aware about the role of films as a catalyst of social change. He cited David Frampton’s book ‘Filmosophy’ where he adopts the default liberal position of accepting film as an art and considers films as the starting point of a paradigm shift among audiences. He had said, “What is significant about film is that it shows us a new reality, and that engenders new thinking, new experiences, new emotions.” Frampton took a position that cinema audience are more voyeuristic than theatre audience. When they watch a film, they experience a make-believe drama enacted for them but they watch what the film makers want them to watch. This is a kind of manipulation that is possible. The question is what the filmmakers want to showcase?

In a special issue of Gender and History, Craig, S., Donelan, C, & Lifshitz, F (2018), initiated a discussion on written and visual history where many scholars from different disciplines looked at films and television programs with a critical approach and different epistemological frames. They looked at various types of representations and gender was one of the most prominent representations they discussed. Some foundational questions were raised about the process of knowledge creation and representation through gendered past. In those discussions, we can see the reflection of our society’s majoritarian dominant patriarchal narratives promoted through popular mainstream cinema. They also brought into their discussion those strands of thought-provoking cinema with a sensitive approach that stems from social responsibility of individual filmmakers which become catalyst for social change through alternative narratives promoting powerful egalitarian ideologies. Craig et al. (2018) concluded in the following words, “the relation of written and visual histories are representations, constructing and mediating the process of our knowing. Throughout history, there has been a marked tendency found with scholars and academicians to privileging of written over visual history as a source of historical knowledge. The cultural hierarchy of putting ‘logos over mythos, science over art, mind over body, reason over emotions, public over private, histories over herstories, and so on’ is evident.” They advocated a holistic approach to knowledge and emphasised the notion that the binary terms are no longer conceived unchanging, stratified and absolute. They are in fact, extremely dynamic, interdependent and integrally linked.

Visual history according to them are not only at par with the written history, but may be rather more important in certain context.

Theoretical Framework of Prejudices and Stereotyping

“Stereotypes are problematic because they are negative, inaccurate, and unfair.” Writes Stagnor Charles in an incredible compilation of scholarly articles dealing exhaustively on various aspects of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. Nelson (Ed.) (2015). Stereotypes are brought in by a process of socialisation that takes place in a subtle way while we interact with our parents, with our peers, and consume what the media offers. Film, television, and the Web are the most followed media that no one can escape. They play an important role in creating and strengthening stereotypes. The book deals with a very fundamental aspect which focusses on the formation of Attitudes and Social Cognition as an automatic process where very often values are transmitted and etched unintentionally and become deep-seated.

Attitudes as Allport puts it, results in gross over simplification of experience. In social psychology, pre judgments, assumptions, inhibitions, and various other forms of attitude are given a great importance. These are commonly called Biases, Prejudices, or Stereotypes. Because Stereotype is a less normative term, academicians use it more than the other two terms. (Allport, 1935 P-809).

Lippman, (1922) wrote ‘Public Opinion’ in 1921. He focussed on the role of “stereotype” in forming public opinion. He defined stereotype as, “a distorted picture or image in a person’s mind, not based on personal experience, but derived culturally.” He gave an example of a young girl in Pennsylvania who cried inconsolably when she saw a window pane shattered. The behaviour was strange for Lippman who probed deeper and took the help of a psychologist to understand it. It was found that the cultural belief of breaking of a glass window was considered a bad omen in the girls’ community and she had internalised it deep enough to disturb her and project it in her behaviour. After discussing many such examples, Lippman reasoned that the Stereotypes are formed by interaction of three factors – social, economic and political. These interactions are passed on from one generation to another. The pervasiveness of the stereotypes is often more conspicuous due to their resistance to change. Lipman brought a very important aspect that can be used to understand Visual Representation. He emphasised that any analysis of public opinion must begin by recognizing that a triangular relationship exists between the scene of action, the people who are in that scene, and the response of those people.

Social stereotypes exist and that is a fact. The example that stereotypes have an overwhelming presence whether it is about sex, age, bodily appearance, race, ethnicity or it is about national origin, religion, sexual orientation, occupation, and social class. As all these researchers have mentioned, it has to be remembered that very often, these stereotypes are highly inaccurate. He emphasizes that erroneous stereotypes can profoundly affect the course of social interaction and interpersonal relationships. (Synder, 1977, p 183) The stereotypes and prejudices about transgenders continue through negative representation of Transgenders in various forms of media like Cinema, TV series, Books, and magazine articles etc.

The Study of Transgender representation in cinema

Through this exploratory research, the researchers have tried to search how cinema has been a medium to strengthen the prejudice against transgenders by stereotypical character building often wrongly representing transgenders. The researchers will also try to analyse the possibility of cinema as a tool to sensitise audience. Cinema where the representation of transgenders has been weaved in a way that evokes healthy emotions of love, compassion, humanism, have to be identified. By citing research that has been used successfully to change attitude of viewers, the researchers have tried to build an argument that Cinema with ethical representation of transgenders has the potential to spread humanitarian messages to a wider audience and challenge and change the prejudices against the transgenders.

Defining LGBTQ+ and Finding difference between Sex and Gender

We often come across the term LGBTQ+ which is basically an acronym for Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and + means others who have not defined themselves but are not bound by the gender binary. Because Transgenders are the most talked about socially discriminated group, the researchers have attempted to define them. The following questions and answers are taken from APA's brochure "Answers to Your Questions About Individuals with Intersex Conditions". Their wide acceptability in academic circle gives these definitions the much-needed credibility. One can find all the vital information in this link <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/transgender.pdf>.

Have Transgenders always been found everywhere?

There have been different types of documented and undocumented evidences to trace the presence and history of transgenders in every society. Though they have been present since antiquity, their approach to gender non conformity differs from one culture to another, one society to another.

Basic categorisation of Transgenders

As we know, Transgender is an umbrella term. Few words that we come across can be defined in the following way.

- Transsexual - It refers to people who are born as male or female but are not comfortable with their bodies. For example, when a person born male feels he should have a woman's body or vice versa. Transsexual people often alter or wish to alter their body to suit their inner gender identity. Transitioning through medical procedures like surgery, hormone treatment etc. is known as gender reassignment or gender affirmation.
- Transsexual men or Transmen – People who were born female but transitioned through medical intervention as Male to feel congruent with their gender identity. They are also known as FTM (Female to Male).
- Transsexual women or transwomen - People who were born male but transitioned through medical intervention as female to feel congruent with their gender identity. They are also known as MTF (Male to Female).

- Those who call themselves as Men or Women – There are people who transition from one gender to another and don't want to be called a transman or transwoman. They prefer to be recognised only by their new identity.
- Cross Dressers – People who cross dress believe in dressing up as another gender wearing clothes, accessories worn by the other gender in a given culture. They are usually comfortable in their assigned sex and do not wish to change their sex. Thus, cross dressing may or may not be indicative of a person's sexual orientation. It is a form of gender expression.
- Drag Queens/ Drag Kings – There has been a lot of examples in entertainment industry across globe where usually men dress up as women in bars, pubs, clubs etc. there is a new trend of drag kings too where women dress up as men for entertainment purpose.
- Queer or Genderqueer - When some people identify their gender as falling outside the binary constructs of "male" and "female", they are called genderqueers. They are the people who question the stereotypical gender binary to the extent that they define themselves as neither masculine nor feminine. They do not define themselves as Transgender either. They use different pronouns such as zie instead of he or she and hir instead of his or her.
- There are certain other categories of transgenders. Terms like third gender, gender non-conforming, multigendered, Androgynous etc. it is difficult to provide exact definitions of these terms because they may vary from person to person and may change over time. However, they all indicate a sense of blending of genders.
- Whatever these categories are, but, one common factor that is common amongst all these categories are that they find binary concepts of gender as restrictive.

Defining the Term Transgender in Indian Context

Hijra is the most common term used for transgenders in India. Apart from the MTF and FTM category, people who are born with ambiguous outer genitalia that is neither male nor female called as Hermaphrodites or Congenital eunuchs usually are known as Hijras. Other terms used for transgenders are Kothis, Jagappas, Aravanis, Kinnars etc. There is a lot of evidences in scriptures, early literature and temple architectures of India that Transgenders have always been a part of the mainstream social fabric. It was during the colonial period, people who showed deviance from the gender binary behaviour – were treated as mentally ill. Transsexualism, transvestism, and gender identity disorder were some medical and psychological categories used for the Transgender people to label them as abnormal. The stigma attached to the Transgenders in India can clearly be traced back to the colonial period when Hijras were put under Criminal Tribes Act, 1871.

After a long arduous battle by the LGBTQ community worldwide, many countries made changes at policy level and gave them the right to live with dignity. In India the year 2014 came as a milestone for Transgender Community. The famous NLSA (National legal Service Authority) versus Union of India judgment brought a huge transformative change in favour of LGBTQ community. The transgender individuals got the legal status and recognition as a third gender. The Supreme Court of India, in this 2014 judgment declared that Indian citizens are free to choose their gender identity regardless of gender affirmation surgery. When the 158-year-old draconian colonial law of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code was scrapped and decriminalised, it brought a lot of relief to the

transgender community of India. After this judgment was passed, every state in India have formed Transgender Welfare Boards. For the safeguard and protection transgender people against any kind of discrimination, the Protection of Rights bill of 2018 was passed and it is considered a major step taken by the government. “Any discrimination on basis of sexual orientation amounts to [a] violation of fundamental rights”, this powerful line of chief justice Deepak Mishra on 6th September, 2018 became an empowering tool for the transgender community. (Joshi A. et al., 2022 pp -137-144)

From the discussion cited above, it can be deduced that law alone cannot guarantee them the dignity and security they rightfully deserve. The hatred, stigma, and discrimination that has deeper roots need to be altered through sensitisation. Cinema has the potential to play a positive and instrumental role to bring social change and alter social perception. This is an ethical question that has to be addressed by the filmmakers. The trend that has been marked in the world of cinema for a very long time has been from complete invisibility to wrong representation. The filmmakers in the past were either constructing a negative image of transgenders or to carry forward the social discrimination and stereotypes of transgenders in the narratives.

Understanding Prejudice against transgenders in cinema

“Invisibility is indivisible from visibility; for [those who are] transgenders this is not simply a philosophical conundrum—it can be the difference between life and death.” Lana Wachowski. This thought-provoking quote makes sense when the argument made by the author is about the visibility of the transgenders. Wibke, (2020) argues that the visibility of transgenders in films have been an ongoing process where a clear shift can be marked. Taking the examples of the content of Western films like *Psycho* (1994) and *Ace Ventura – The Pet Detective* (1998), where there was a clearly offensive representation was made. Off late, there has been a shift towards trans-affirmative approach. The author goes on to cite series like *Sense 8* (2015-2018), *Orange is the New Black* (2013- 2019). What looked nearly impossible three decades ago is very much a reality now. There are a number of trans and non-binary actors who are cast on popular shows and have even been playing cis roles. Such changes contribute in reducing the marginalisation.

The independent and underground films made by transgender actors and producers which are mostly characterised by a low budget, minimal plot, blended genres and occasionally shot without a script (Ford 2014; Jacques 2018) can better engage the audience with the nuanced experiences of transition from a valuable position of transgender subjectivity. The examples given by the author are – A full-length feature documentary *Sexing the Transman* (2011), which compiles interviews and personal dialogues from transmen and Sean Baker’s *Tangerine*. *Tangerine* is classified as a widely successful, low-budget comedy shot on an iPhone 5 (Bradshaw 2015). The author uses an article by Ford (2014) who rightly argues that rather than reproducing normative understandings of gender and embodiment, and constructing subjectivity along these lines, ‘Trans New Wave’ filmmakers frequently working on low production budgets address significant social justice issues and attend to the specificities of living as marginalised subjectivities. There has been a lack of critical inquiry into the ways that the transition narrative might simultaneously restrict intelligibility and close viewers off to diverse experiences of gender embodiment and gender-crossings.

Riis, B. (2014) in his research primarily focussed on two questions “how are trans people represented in the media?” and “how do trans audience members respond to these representations?”. Though the research focussed on two prominent aspects of gender representation, the social consequences, reasons, and effects of these depictions have not been studied. It was qualitative research done through interview method and content analysis. The research urged media companies to accurately and fairly represent trans people in clear unequivocal words, “It is plain from this study that action needs to be taken to address widespread prejudice against transgender people within the media, and to tackle a perceived lack of accountability.”

There is an importance to engage with the prevalence of the phenomena of male hegemonic patriarchy running across most of the cultures where the violence towards trans characters in media reflects a cisgendered heteronormative world view which is threatened by the characters that don't adhere to the established gender norms. Bode Riis (2014) analysed the following movies and television shows - Boys don't Cry (Kimberly Peirce, 1999), The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, 1992), The Badge (Robby Henson, 2002), Grilled (Jason Ensler, 2006), A Girl like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story (Agnieszka Holland, 2006), Ticked-Off Trannies with Knives (Israel Luna, 2010), Romeos (Sabine Bernardi, 2011), and Gun Hill Road (Rashaad Ernesto Green, 2011). Only in Romeos, a domineering gay man is outraged when he finds out that his crush is a female-to-male trans person. But, even here the threat was for the homosexual masculinity.

History of Transgender representation in Indian Cinema

It is a statistically substantiated claim that India produces the greatest number of films in a year. The most widely watched and distributed are Hindi films. Transgender identity has been perceived, interpreted and represented by film makers that are subjective and often lacked the sensitivity and research required. If we look into the normal portrayal of transgender characters in popular cinema of Bollywood, they would either be blink and miss inconsequential appearances or some outlandish, obnoxious comical cross dressing of heteronormative male characters like Rishi Kapoor in RafooChakkar (1975) or Amitabh Bachchan in Laawaris (1981).

It is a sad reality that the only way most popular mainstream cinema thought of including transgender characters was to portray them either as dangerous villains, social psychopaths or obnoxious comic characters often used as butt of jokes and ridicule. They are never shown as an integral part of the mainstream society which in fact is a true reflection of our social reality. But a continual othering that takes place is problematic. For example, Mahesh Bhatt's film, Sadak (1991), where ShadashivAmarpurkar as a scary brothel owner 'Maharani' creates a strong and negative mental picture in the viewer's mind. Such characters remain etched for long and influence the general perception about the entire community. Who can deny the chills sent by the character of Lajja Shankar Pandey in Sangharsh (1999)?

However, there were also films like Daayera (1996), Darmiyan (1997), and Tamanna (1997), where there was a positive representation of the Transgenders.

Ironically, after almost a quarter century, we come across mainstream Bollywood movies like “Laxmii” (2020), “Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui” (2021). It becomes difficult to understand what

exactly are the intentions of the filmmakers. In the film “Laxmii,” Akshay Kumar is the main protagonist who starts acting “effeminate” when he is possessed by a female ghost. Such a film not just perpetuate gender stereotypes but reinstates the idea that transwomen are basically men. They dress up in feminine clothes and act effeminate.

Yasin Z, Batool S. and Naseer I. (2020), analysed the portrayal of transgenders in Bollywood movies in their research paper. As Pakistanis watch Bollywood movies, they focussed on the impact of these movies in society. They deliberated on the fact that people learn conservative attitude from societal belief system that looks at transgenders as parasites. Though the government of Pakistan safeguards the civil rights of all the citizens, Transgenders face discrimination at several spheres - legal, official and social. Using Content analysis, Survey, and Intensive interview method in their research, Yasin et al (2020) reached at a conclusion that most Bollywood movies neither represent the realistic picture of Transgenders nor show basic sensibility in depicting Transgender characters. They are projected as comic figures, sex workers, violent criminals, beggars, and dancers. These projections influence the perception of people who become hesitant to interact with them. Young generation show negative and derogatory behaviour towards them.

Chopra, (2017), in his research examines how queerness is represented in popular Hindi Cinema. According to him, films like “Bombay Talkies” actually started a new trend of glorifying negative aesthetics in portraying queer characters. It was not a pathbreaking trend even if some critiques argued it that way. It was actually creating a new orthodox culture of creating an idea that queerness is normal and non-threatening because the good queer characters seek acceptance and assimilation into the existing patriarchal social set up. Hence the traces of defiance are repressed. As in various platforms the hostile representations of homosexuals as oddly effeminate, self-deprecating, or predatory have been questioned for being offensive, there is a counter trend of replacing them with positive images. This research brings out some fundamental questions on representation and how should it be?

The marginalisation of the Hijras is a fact and a social reality we cannot deny. The role of mainstream Bollywood movies’ in portraying the transgender characters negatively and inaccurately results in the strengthening of one’s beliefs and prejudices toward Transgender community as a whole and often perpetuates the myth and prejudice resulting in further marginalization of hijras. Two movies, Tamanna (Bhatt, 1997) and Murder 2 (Suri, 2011) were chosen by the researcher to understand the issue of transgender representation employing semiotic analysis and reception analysis. Shewade (2020) on her MA level thesis, pointed out that films with positive representations of transgenders generally belong to the art genre. They are much more sensitive than popular Bollywood movies which are urban centric.

Transgender representation in other Indian language films

Compared to the mainstream Bollywood Films, Content of Films in other Indian languages like Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, and Marathi have proved to be more progressive in recent years. There is a marked sensitivity in portraying Transgender characters. Tamil film ‘Paava Kadhaigal’ (2020), Thiagarajan Kumararaja’s ‘Super Deluxe’ (2019), ‘Naanu Avanalla Avalu’ (2015), Malayalam film like ‘Njan Marykutty’ (2018), Marathi films, Mitrachi Goshta (1981), Aamhi ka Tisare (2012),

Natrang (2010) etc. speak a great deal about the progressive nature of these films in regional languages. Special mention about small budget Marathi film Jayjaykar (2014) is relevant because it is based on the topic of treating hijras and transgenders humanely and giving them equal opportunities in education and employment. Bengali films like Rituparno Ghosh's Chitrangada (2012) and Kaushik Ganguli's Nagar Kirtan (2019) are excellent examples of good cinema in every sense especially concerned with sensitive portrayal of transgender characters. The bilingual "Peranbu" (2018) (Tamil and Malayalam) film directed by Ram was a milestone in Indian Cinema because the heroin cast against Malayalam superstar Mammooty, Anjali Ameer was the first Transgender woman in a main lead.

Natarajan (2020), took a focussed approach to study the representation of transgenders in Tamil Cinema. We can find a very pertinent argument that comes from a pragmatic observation of the researcher. According to this study, cinema is made for entertainment of the mass and hence mostly represents the mass culture. Popular cinema caters to the sensibilities of mostly the majority community. Because of this, the minority groups often get underrepresented or even worse, sometimes misrepresented. This tendency is marked even in Tamil cinema. The problem with Popular cinema is it blurs the real image of transgenders and mostly gives a false idea about their lifestyle, habits, ambitions and affects their personal life and dignity. Most transgender characters are mere depiction of a cis normative society that accepts some deep-rooted stereotypes.

From all these researches, what comes out clearly is the representation of transgender characters in films and other media have been negative and derogatory for long. This in turn can raise an important question regarding the role of films in marginalisation and prejudiced behaviour of people towards the transgenders in society. The content of the stories lacks sensitivity and authentic research-based data on transgenders.

Can cinema change public perception?

The transgenders often face discrimination in form of denial of services, verbal harassment and physical violence. From commonly seen behaviour like name calling to serious offences like sexual abuse all are a part of the transgender person's life experience. It has been found that media's role in perpetuating the stigma had not been given the desired attention from researchers. Hughto et al (2018) brought out a comprehensive report through their multistate study on mental health outcomes through negative transgender related media messages. Some of the important points made by them are: - Stigma for Transgenders occurs in every setting be it school, home, workplace, or places of healthcare and other public places. They bring forth behavioural expressions to define Stigma. Their study acknowledged it in clear terms. They argued that despite increasing efforts to showcase positive, gender-affirming images of transgenders, there have been a persistence of a number of stigmatizing depictions and messages in media. The diversity and vibrance of transgender community are often underplayed or ignored while the negative stereotypes of transgender people continue. They are shown as criminals, villains, or sexual predators etc. which doesn't do any good. At times, crimes against them are trivialised and that is a dangerous trend. The two most important fall out of it are: 1 – Prejudices are formed and reinforced as stereotypes continue in media and this leads to further discrimination and marginalisation of transgenders & 2 - when transgenders get exposed to these

negative media depictions, they often internalise these stigmas which results in their low self-esteem and other mental health diseases.

Singh et al (2017) have tried to locate the homophobic tendencies in Indian society. They have selected the content of few parallel Indian cinema to show how homophobia is represented in them. They chose Indian cinema “Aligarh” as a case study. The mysterious death of Professor Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras provides the researchers to prepare the ground to explain homophobia contextually. They analyse the aftereffects like the public uproar, unofficial ban, and violence against the film post release of the film. These developments were also taken into account to develop their argument. In this insightful anthropological study, it has been established that Homophobia is a reality. The authors have done excellent literature review pertaining to the subject and build the argument. They have pointed out that throughout history, ‘Alternative Sexualities’ have been completely ignored or looked at with derision. They identified that the strong acceptance of gender roles in a heteronormative world is the main cause of Homophobia.

Only recently the rights of LGBTQ community after a long struggle have been gaining attention but that too in fits and starts. Post 1973, in both in literature and cinema, there has been inclusion of LGBTQ rights and their acceptance or rejection by a society. This certainly helped in opening a dialogue on the hushed-up subject. Films made on this subject give an insight into the social psyche of the people of a given society and their attitude towards the LGBTQ community in their vicinity. Though there is a lot to be done, but such films definitely have helped in sensitising people even with all the protests and sloganeering against them by certain sections. Films reflect the reality present around them in varying degrees since they are influenced by the society which sways and modifies the themes of films by its acceptance or rejection of the content conveyed in them. In this regard the authors brought in the parallel cinema with Gordon’s observation that “Third Cinema films had not only to depict a reality, but also serve to transform that reality” (Gordon 2010). This makes a very pertinent point regarding the impact of films on society. Parallel cinema or alternative cinema attempts to change the reality that it encounters, which has long been there but is constantly hushed up owing to its non-conformist nature.

A well reputed poet of India Kumar Vishwas had admitted on a TV program that he had some deep-seated prejudices against homosexuality and he carried antagonism against homosexuals. But he admitted that after watching the film “Aligarh”, he got a new perspective to look at the reality and tried to analyse his own prejudices against certain minority groups.

How has Cinema changed with the OTT platform?

OTT or Over the Top platforms have taken over a major chunk of internet using viewers who use their personal computers to smartphones along with set top boxes and smart TV to access content of their choice. Netflix, Amazon prime, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLiv, Zee5, HoiChoi, Hulu etc. are the popular platforms for video on demand services.

The Cinema shown on OTT platforms are not controlled by any international or Indian regulatory bodies like CBFC. They are rather given a self-regulatory guidelines and code of ethics under information technology rules 2021. A three-tier grievance redressal system has been recommended as a mandatory feature for these OTT platforms.

Seymour, (2019), in an article identifies how the Amazon television series “Transparent” deploys narrative of home, belonging and importantly, a journey to becoming, to stage a limited representation of transgender lives within a heterosexual economy. It was pointed out that transgender studies have long been preoccupied with the transition narrative as a primary tool of representation. The argument made by the author that the transition narrative, which aims to make transgender lives visible (and consumable) to an audience of trans and non-trans folk, is limiting in its representational scope and may impede, rather than mobilise, this agenda. The transition narrative constructs transgender lives within normative frames of time and place, and in the codes of textual conventions that compulsively render transgender transition into the narrative. While doing so, it fails to confront its audience with the daily cultural and social transgressions that make up the lived experiences of transition. Outside of scholarly inquiry, themes of gender transition have been explored in current cultural and commercial spaces, namely in television, theatre and contemporary fiction, but also in advertising and news media. In the last three decades, the transition narrative has become a familiar epitome, accessible to a wider audience. This paper rightly focuses that the transition narrative can limit transgender representation and reinforce the primacy of binary forms of identification and gendered belonging. Taking a cue from Film studies scholar, Ford, A. 2014, the author reinstates the possibility that transgender narratives in film and television act as ‘public texts’ that are integrated into an evolving discourse on trans issues. The independent and underground films made by transgender actors and producers which are mostly characterised by a low budget, minimal plot, blended genres and occasionally shot without a script (Ford 2014; Jacques 2018) can better engage the audience with the nuanced experiences of transition from a valuable position of transgender subjectivity. The examples given by the author are – A full-length feature documentary *Sexing the Transman* (2011), which compiles interviews and personal dialogues from transmen and Sean Baker’s *Tangerine*. *Tangerine* is classified as a widely successful, low-budget comedy shot on an iPhone 5 (Bradshaw 2015). The author uses an article by Ford (2014) who rightly argues that rather than reproducing normative understandings of gender and embodiment, and constructing subjectivity along these lines, ‘Trans New Wave’ filmmakers frequently working on low production budgets address significant social justice issues and attend to the specificities of living as marginalised subjectivities. There has been a lack of critical inquiry into the ways that the transition narrative might simultaneously restrict intelligibility and close viewers off to diverse experiences of gender embodiment and gender-crossings.

Stigma for Transgenders occurs in every setting be it school, home, workplace, or places of healthcare and other public places. They bring forth behavioural expressions to define Stigma. The transgenders often face discrimination in form of denial of services, verbal harassment and physical violence. From commonly seen behaviour like name calling to serious offences like sexual abuse all are a part of the transgender person’s life experience. It has been found that media’s role in perpetuating the stigma had not been given the desired attention from researchers. Their study acknowledged it in clear terms. They argued that despite increasing efforts to showcase positive, gender-affirming images of transgenders, there have been a persistence of a number of stigmatizing depictions and messages in media. The diversity and vibrance of transgender community are often underplayed or ignored while the negative stereotypes of transgender people continue.

Showing transgenders as criminals, villains, or sexual predators etc. doesn’t do any good. At times, crimes against them are trivialised and that is a dangerous trend. The two most important fall out of

it are: 1 – Prejudices are formed and reinforced as stereotypes continue in media and this leads to further discrimination and marginalisation of transgenders & 2 - when transgenders get exposed to these negative media depictions, they often internalise these stigmas which results in their low self-esteem and other mental health diseases. The transgenders often face discrimination in form of denial of services, verbal harassment and physical violence. From commonly seen behaviour like name calling to serious offences like sexual abuse all are a part of the transgender person's life experience. It has been found that media's role in perpetuating the stigma had not been given the desired attention from researchers.

An article by journalist Arjun Nair was published on June 13, 2019 on how OTT platforms ushered in a new wave of queer representation in India. This article was based on facts and trends of changing content of cinema and web series. He very rightly pointed out that film makers often don't want to touch these sensitive subjects even if they themselves have been queer themselves because it is a commercial medium and the experience of violence and boycott against films like *Fire*, *Aligarh* etc. forced them to tread cautiously. However, Roopa Rao's film "*The Other Love Story*" in 2016 uploaded on open-source platform You Tube was a bold initiative in many ways. It was made with crowdfunding and received an award at the NYC Web fest in 2016.

Devika Vatsa, a budding actor brought a very important point about representation. She had said, "I have no problem in doing a lesbian role or intimate scenes but it needs to flow organically as a part of the story and not an intention of bringing unnecessary sensationalism."

Screenwriter Aditya Basu brought another important aspect saying, "The portrayal of an LGBTQ+ character doesn't have to be limited to issues around sexuality. It's distasteful when people sensationalize with an intent to exploit. Infact, such problematic portrayals can be harmful when an uninformed viewer watches it."

Amazon Prime's web series "*Made in Heaven*" was a leap forward in more than one way. Not only the content was good, but the main protagonist's sexual orientation was not exploited or sensationalised in this series. One of the writers of this series Alankrita Shrivastav believes that the empathetic gaze of the women writers who wrote that character portrayed it extremely sensibly. They could do it because they were working in a free space.

Another character Kuckoo in the series *Sacred Games* was also about a transgender character portrayed sensibly. A Netflix spokesperson wrote, "In *Sacred games*, Kukoo is a character with motivations, desires, and expectations similar to any other character in the series and in real life. Her gender is a lens through which her lived experience is portrayed, but it is not the only factor that shapes the audience's view of her character."

In an article by Sugandha Rawal in *Hindustan Times* published on February 26, 2022, the visibility of LGBTQ+ on OTT was discussed at length. It is a point expressed by many film makers who have contributed to bring those invisible sections on screen unanimously that the best way to tell their stories are just to tell them as they are without any exaggeration or making them overly dramatic.

Filmmaker Onir feels that "accurate representation, even on the Ott is still at a questionable stage." The reason he gives is people who are writing are mostly heterosexuals and they have not fully understood the issues of the other gendered communities beyond the binaries.

Faraz Arif Ansari, the director of “Sheer Qorma”, says, “most of the representation in Indian films and OTT is missing that sense of truth and hence, always falls short of encapsulating real queer lives and stories and hence doesn’t resonate deeply or does what it needs to do – to open a larger dialogue beyond the queer community.”

However, looking at the new trend with hope filmmaker Apurva Asrani says, “from pathetic characters who were used for humiliation, laughs, or villainous purposes, the LGBTQ+ characters today have a larger purpose in the scripts. They have an identity; they have beating hearts.”

Though these changes that the OTT platform has brought in, there is still a lot to be done in order to create a healthy ecosystem for LGBTQ+ people especially the transgenders in our society. The prejudices against them will not go just by bringing changes in the law. A platform of acceptance and respect in educational institutions, in work place and in society has to be created.

The filmmakers have to ask themselves the question that which ethical standard they will follow. Do they want to follow the Utilitarian ethics and use these minority groups just as tools of cheap entertainment for mass or carefully portray them as an integral part of the story to give them visibility and bring in a change in the perception and attitude of the viewers, following the virtue ethics and do the right thing because it needs to be done.

Limitation of this study

Ethics is a vast topic with strong philosophical overtone. There are many overlapping issues that come up while studying visual representation in cinema. For particularly this study, a meta-analysis on Transgender representation was found to be ineffective because there were a large number of articles lacking any expertise and authentic knowledge. Therefore, the researchers relied on Content Analysis and Systematic Review. The researchers reviewed relevant literature pertaining to the topic in a systematic way only to find that a greater number of researchers who have tried to look at the issue of transgenders are from the Western countries. United States has highest number of researches on Transgenders but very often the researchers were found to be using a single lens. Though there was a unanimous agreement on the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Transgender communities across the globe, a psycho social understanding of Transgender representation at a macro level was missing.

The researchers tried to study three interrelated questions

- What kind of stereotypes and prejudices about Transgenders have been promoted by mainstream cinema?
- What visible significant changes have come in the content of Cinema and web series on OTT platform?
- Can Cinema be used as an effective tool to sensitise viewers towards transgenders?

While the first two questions that were descriptive in nature could be done partially but satisfactorily by putting the subject of study within the theoretical and conceptual framework, the third question that is normative in nature, required an experimental method to corroborate the

assumption. However, many psychosocial research in the past have confirmed that Cinema considerably influences the behaviour of the audience. Cinema can create two opposite constructs at the same time. One, we can see the reflection of our society's majoritarian dominant patriarchal narratives promoted through popular mainstream cinema. Two, we also can see cinema as a catalyst for social change through alternative narratives promoting powerful egalitarian ideologies. That is why as a Mass media, Cinema has tremendous potential to spread humanitarian messages to a wider audience to bring in social change. Kubrak (2020) studied the attitude of young people through experimental research using psychosemantic technique. She found that the young people of experimental group showed considerable positive change in their attitude towards the elderly people after watching the film with positive social message. Such social experiments could be done to substantiate the argument that cinema can be used as a tool for social change.

Conclusion

Supreme Social relevance of the topic was the most important drive for this research. While undertaking this research, the researchers aimed to make an honest attempt to understand the influence of cinema on some critical components of human behaviour towards the marginalised section of Transgenders in Indian society. Cinema is a dynamic medium of mass media with wider reach and connectivity that has been proven by researchers to have impacted attitude and behaviour of audiences. Moreover, there is also a big challenge of balancing between individual responses and the social connotation of those responses. When the focus is to study intangible aspects of human perception and behaviour through socio psychological experiments, the results can't be concluded with certainty of a scientific research because the human behaviour and attitude is a dynamic aspect that is governed by different types of stimuli. But, even with that limitation, there is an onus on the academia to study attitude.

This research is important because there is a need to create a healthy and inclusive social ecosystem for the transgenders in India. Though the government of India has made it a law, a change in social perception can come only when people are sensitised and there is greater social acceptance for transgenders. Academic research in social science or mass media will be meaningful only when the research is aimed at bringing some positive change or spread awareness about important social issues.

Transgenders have been facing marginalisation and discrimination because of large scale social apathy, and prejudice against them. There have been several psycho social researches that have been taken up by social psychologists to understand human behaviour. But, the need of the hour is to find ways and means to change negative perception and discriminatory social behaviour. The social experiment with Cinema for sensitizing the young students towards the Transgender community can be done even at institutional level. This will contribute towards building a healthy and inclusive ecosystem in educational institutions.

There is also a need to sensitise the filmmakers and writers who are writing fictions to develop the characters of transgenders and queers with an empathetic understanding of their lived experience and their reality. Heterogenous males and females are habituated to look at Gender binary as the only normal that is seen and accepted. It is important to think beyond these binaries and understand different genders and sexual orientations to portray the characters in a sensitive and sensible way.

It took a long battle for women to be portrayed as humans and equals in the cinema even when women consisted half the population. Patriarchy runs so deep, that even today we see archetypes and regressive content passed on as a part of some mainstream cinema. However, today, it is not uncommon to find stories where a woman protagonist plays the central character and people accept it, watch it without any inhibition. Therefore, there is every chance that the voice of minority groups like Transgenders will be heard and represented in a powerful way not as an exception but as an accepted phenomenon. That will be in true sense ethical visual representation of transgenders in cinema.

The title “Cinema in the world of OTT and the Ethics of Visual Representation in a fictional world.(An exploratory study of transgender representation in cinema)” of the study gave a challenge to trace the ethical part of the journey of visual representation. For heuristic purpose the researchers focussed only on the representation of LGBTQ+ focusing more on transgenders. The first part of the research was to explore the theoretical framework to understand ethics and ethics of visual representation. The next section dealt with an understanding of prejudice and stereotypes. The study then focussed on various phases of transgender representation in mainstream cinema and cinema and web series on OTT. Despite the limitations of this study, the researchers have tried to build a holistic approach to understand the topic.

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