

Understanding The Presence Of Violence In The Lives Of The Queer

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ABSTRACT

India is a democratic country which vows to provide Right to Equality to all its citizens irrespective of caste, sex, race, colour, religion and place of birth as per the Constitution of India. However, even after attaining independence from British rule in the year 1947, India and her children are still fighting a battle to achieve their own rights to live in this country in peace. Indian society was primarily divided into two parts pre Independence - the higher castes and the shudras or the untouchables, with the Constitution of India being prepared by Dr. B. R Ambedkar untouchability was abolished constitutionally but in terms of ground reality they are still considered untouchables and therefore they are marginalised as earlier. The lower caste individuals are not the only ones who face discrimination and marginalisation at the hands of the society, the queer community are equally mistreated as they are considered misfits in the heterosexual world. This discrimination at times leads to violence against homosexuals and it's a sad reality that this violence most of the time comes in the form of psychological and physiological abuse from family members, peer groups and even from partners. In this paper I would be discussing the presence of violence in relationships with reference to two movies- Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui and Nagarkirtan.

Keywords- Queer studies, violence, Indian movies.

Man is a social animal and therefore he needs to be a part of this society which is made up with people belonging to different cultures, castes and religious sects; and in terms of economic stature the society is further divided between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots. However, in this very social structure we get to witness another two kinds of marginalisation that is prevalent-the rigid caste system that still exists both in the rural and urban areas of India; and marginalisation of people who are considered abnormal as they are queer. Homosexuality is a sexual or romantic desire between two people of the same sex just as heterosexuality which also deals with romantic desires, both deals with the desire for a partner of the same sex or the opposite as they want to be with someone in love. As the common man says "love is blind" to protect his choice of (heterosexual) partner we can even put this very simple saying into our understanding of choosing a homosexual partner as well. As the desire for love, sex and companionship is equal for everyone, then why are we stopping the people of the LGBT community from choosing their partner on moral grounds? The term Queer is an umbrella term which "allows for various identities surrounding sex/gender/sexuality that are not included in the LGBT acronym" as many are not included in this community based on their identity. Before the use of this acronym, people displaying a liking towards same sex people were tagged as "homosexuals". They are considered as a different being who are seen as a misfit in this cultural society as they projected a completely different version of love and affection (sexual love) which is different from yaarana (friendship) that was seen between two male friends or "sakhi" between two female friends that was seen in the old days. In Ruth Vanita's text Same- Sex Love in India she has mentioned about the story of Shiva falling in love with Mohini, a disguise taken by Lord Vishu to fight the asuras. The legend goes on to state that "Shiva and Vishnu's union do not try to avoid these implications, but rather emphasize them by stressing that Ayyappa is the son of two males." Indian mythology has spoken of same sex relationships and has shown the purity that existed then in their

relationship. In contrast to the relationships spoken of in the mythological stories, the relationships have come to become ones that society is ashamed of accepting and speaking about.

The paper aims to talk about the presence of violence in the lives of the queer community and as we do so we cannot ignore the presence of violence in every relationship be it heterosexual, homosexual or among family members. Violence against the queer in the form of physical and emotional violence or abuse is a result of the phobia that people have against them, but that doesn't answer the violence that is meted out against women in heterosexual marriage, the downtrodden of the society and many others who are considered weak by the powerful ones. Most of the cases of domestic violence of heterosexual couples go unheard as they get hushed within the four walls of their apartment and unfortunately the same goes with the homosexual couples, but the only difference is that people are not bothered about them at all as they are not considered as a part of the main society. Therefore, people don't believe that as there is love between homosexual and queer couples, there is abuse or violence as well. This violence that is meted out against the queer is beautifully depicted in many movies, but I have selected the movie *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*, directed by Abhishek Kapoor which is about Manvinder (Manu) Mungal, played by Ayushmann Khurrana, a body builder and runs a gym. He meets Maanvi Brar, played by Vani Kapoor; she joins Manu's gym as a zumba instructor and as time progresses we see both of them in love with each other. Everything goes right until Maanvi decides to reveal her secret about her past life as they were planning to get married. Manu on hearing that she is a trans woman he gets enraged and disgusted having loved the wrong person. The scene gets intense as Maani tries to open up about herself saying "I was born a boy but I was always a girl inside. I lived a lie for 20 years". This very self discovery was made by Chapal Kumar Bhaduri as he speaks about his life in the movie *Arekti Premer Golpo* directed by Kausik Ganguly. He recalls, it was the year 1953 when he took up the dress of a woman for the first time for the role of Marjina. He speaks about his desire when he says

"Majhe majhe bhabi thakur ekdum amake mon diye banai ni..uni sob dilen, sorir ta dite parlen na? (I sometimes wonder if God had no mind on his work when he made me. Gave everything except the right body.) The very act of accepting the truth about one's orientation is painful and difficult at times but the harassment that one goes through after coming out of the closet is much more leading to a traumatic experience.

The year 2018 remains memorable in the lives of homosexuals because of the historic verdict that the Supreme Court passed which legalised same-sex relation which was a punishable offence since British rule in India. Homosexuality was considered unholy as it was seen as an unnatural and uncivilised act by society. The basic rights being denied by the society to the queer community makes the situation even more complex for the homosexual couples. But the situation of the queer has not improved much. According to an article published in *The Hindu* a survey was conducted by 4 academicians in the metropolitan cities which showed " ...that 78.7% gay men and 44% bisexual men have faced some sort of violence – be it verbal, physical, or sexual violence, comes amid growing concerns about safety among the community with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) replacing the Indian Penal Code. Unlike the IPC, the BNS does not have a Section dealing with the rape of men or transgender people." Though this paper deals with the presence of violence in same sex relations, we cannot ignore the fact that queer people face violence outside their relation at the hands of society. The verdict of article 377 has legalised same sex relations but individuals who try to come out of the closet as their real self has the probability to be victimised more than those who chose to be behind the mask of heterosexuality. In the movie *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* Maanvi faces humiliation at the hands of her lover who gets agitated on hearing about her past, she being a boy and the way he reacted saying " You cheated me.I had sex with a man? I had sex with a man! Oh, God! Kill me now" is hurtful but it is the truth about how people react with the queer. Manu being a man living in a heterosexual society understands what societal views are about gender and what Judith Butler once discussed in her work *Gender Trouble*. In her work she said that society identifies individuals as 'real individuals' when they perform their roles according to their gender. As an ordinary man, Manu Mungal understands that there are only the real woman and man born as natural beings; therefore he is dumbfounded when Maanvi says she was born as Manu Brar and lived as one since childhood. Manu reacts as any man would react when he says "Forgive me, God.", but Maani tries to convince him that she is not a boy anymore. The emotional abuse from her partner leads to a traumatic experience when her love goes to the extent of stating that he wants to vomit on thinking that he had sex with a man and refuses to communicate with her any further. Maanvi is seen going through emotional trauma for many years as boys broke up with her on learning about her sexuality, about her being a trans- woman but this time Manu or Manvinder Mungal broke her when he said "Take your ugly, manly face and get lost!.. Imagine how it feels to have touched you." The intimate partner violence here was an emotional one between Maanvi and Manvinder, but the embarrassment faced by her at the hands of Manu's sisters Preet and Meet became a public affair as she was humiliated in front of everyone which ultimately led to the heart attack of Maanvi's father. Societal violence arises from the ignorance of people who believe same-sex relationships are unethical and unnatural.

Violence against eunuchs are seen almost everyday, the way people treat them at traffic congestion and even on other occasions is depressing. Eunuchs or hijras have existed in society since ages like homosexuals and they were mentioned even in the Puranas, and also in the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. As discussed previously about the curse that befell on Arjuna mentioned in *The Mahabharata*, we realise that they were not looked down by the society. During the colonial era of India, "British administrators claimed that Hijras – or 'eunuchs' in colonial parlance – were 'habitual sodomites', beggars, an obscene presence in public space and the kidnapers and castrators of children. In 1865, the NWP declared that its aim was to 'reduce' the number of

‘eunuchs’ and thus ‘gradually lead to their extinction’.” There were several laws to erase the hijra community completely in countries like India and its neighbours but fortunately they fought their fates and survived to be in the present eras. However, as time changed, the perspective of humans changed, but not completely; now they are not regarded as criminals but they are regarded as ones who are only eligible for being beggars and for taking ‘badhais’ on several occasions. Speaking of occasions, hijras or eunuchs are seen at weddings and at homes where babies are born, and it is an irony of their lives as both these are denied to them by nature. Kaushik Ganguly’s *Nagarkirtan*, released in the year 2019 speaks about the life of the transgenders in a very subtle and sensitive way. The protagonist, Puti, played by Riddhi Sen is seen living with a group of eunuchs where later Puti meets Madhu, (Ritwick Chakraborty), a flute player and a deliveryman of a Chinese food joint. Puti, a trans woman like Maanvi of *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* was originally Parimal, a young boy of rural Bengal who fell in love with her private teacher and proposed the idea of eloping to America to live a life where same sex relationship was not a crime. Unfortunately, her private tutor abandoned her and got married to her sister which traumatised Parimal so much that she ran away from her house to Kolkata. Parimal remembers one of her childhood experiences where she dressed as Maa Sarada and won a prize in ‘Go As You Like’ competition but was not appreciated by her father. He reminded his wife saying; “This is the hundredth time I’m saying this, don’t make Parimal wear women’s clothes...Why not dress up as a boy then?” He is scared like any other father would be as he notices that “the way he walks and talks, everything is different. Like a girl... If you allow this now, his future will be ruined later”. The very first blow in the form of emotional abuse came from her family, in particular her father who recognised his sexual orientation is different from others and that’s why he wanted her to behave like a boy and not like a “ladies”. The second blow came when Puti was abandoned by her private tutor. The pain of rejection from family and her lover forced her to leave her home and live a completely different life, a life where she could be herself without pretence. Puti always desired to be a complete woman and this is portrayed beautifully when she and Madhu meet Manabi Bandhopadhyay who was previously Somnath. Manabi spoke to both of them and told them about her journey and the harsh reality of people towards her as she was a trans woman. In fact, she added that being the principal of a college she did not receive respect from her colleagues, on the contrary her colleagues felt disgusted by her and hated working under a trans woman. Violence always does not appear in the form of physical violence or abuse, it at times comes in the form of emotional abuse from family, society, friends. Amidst all these we cannot forget their desire of being accepted by society and their desire to live their lives in their desired bodies. There is a scene in the movie where Madhu’s sister-in-law changes her saree in front of Puti (Parimal) and the intensity that we see in Puti’s eyes speaks of the deep desire of her being a complete woman through sex alignment operation. The pain of being locked in the wrong body is seen also in the life of Puti just like Chapal Kumar Bhaduri. Puti who left the kirtan in distress as her identity as a trans gender got revealed amidst the people sitting there. Again she had to run away from her family, not her own but that of her lover’s in the fear of being unaccepted and being mistreated. Tragedy was awaiting her as she reached a new place in Nabadwip; as a ghetto of eunuchs confronted her as she approached some shops for money. When she was asked about this deed she said she had no money to have her breakfast even that’s why she had approached some. But they were unwilling to believe her words and kept beating her and undressing her in public and sadly this was witnessed and recorded by all who did not feel the need to help her save her dignity. Due to the embarrassment that Puti had to go through she no longer could think of living and committed suicide in the jail where she was taken by the police. Gay thrashing, disownment by family, social ostracization have all been a part of the lives of the queer. The end of Puti was tragic unlike Maanvi but it reminds us of the harsh reality of the lives of the queer which does not even come to the surface like any other crimes.

Violence is a tool that is used by heterosexuals who try to control the lives of the queer according to their rules of the heteronormative society. Loving someone is not a crime if it suits the whimsical rules of the society, but if the love is between same sex couples it is regarded as a sin. Even though the Puranas have spoken about the existence of same sex relationships as a normal part of Indian society, people still distance themselves from them. The fates of Maanvi, Chapal Kumar Bhaduri and Puti remain the same even though they are from different backgrounds. The lives of the transgenders are more miserable than other queers as they are seen as the lowest form of queer.

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