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PRIDE

World over, the month of June is celebrated as pride month by the LGBTQIA+ community. It is a forum for expression, increasing awareness, and celebrating love.



WHY JUNE?

Pride is held every year in the month of June to commemorate the Stonewall Inn riots, which was essentially a pushback against police repression on members of the LGBTQ community in the US.

QUEER RIGHTS IN INDIA

The queer community faces oppression in multiple forms even after the 2018 Supreme Court judgment that decriminalised queer relationships in India. They are often met with discriminatory practices, exclusion, and ridicule.

PRIDE IN INDIA

India's first pride parade was held in Kolkata in 1999 with the participation of 15 people. From there we have moved to pride marches in most cities such as Hyderabad, Bhopal, Chennai, and Delhi, with participation in huge numbers.

(Mis)represented LGBTQIA+: A gimmick population for the Indian entertainment industry

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Bollywood, one of the world's largest film industries, is notorious for stereotyping and misrepresenting several, if not all, communities. Wives constantly complain about their mothers-in-law and gossip; gangsters are usually from Mumbai, Dubai, Uttar Pradesh, or Bihar; South Indians are dark-skinned; and Punjabi families are loud, boisterous, and drowning in alcohol. Among these, a heavily misrepresented community in the industry is the LGBTQIA+: a community that includes people of all genders and sexualities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies. One would remember movies where effeminate gay men with exaggerated gestures are used as a subject of ridicule or transgender people are shown as scary characters, either dancing or extorting ransom from people. This article briefly discusses this hollow and horrendous (mis)representation of the community in this entertainment industry and the promise that the future holds.

For years now, Bollywood has capitalized on the intentionally offensive and homophobic representation of the community. Within the community, gay men have been most commonly presented on screen as a subject of ridicule, performing offensive

stereotypes. Most gay men are portrayed as feminine, rarely muscular, with a quirky wardrobe, and seemingly "funny" mannerisms (in contrast to the hero who is usually macho, brawny, cis-gendered, and heterosexual). Such characters naturally lack depth and are immaterial to the storyline of the movie, merely providing comic relief for the audience. Funny background music plays whenever they are on screen. Shiny clothes and odd accents are essential to their character. Roles performed by Suren Menon in *Partner* and Rishi Kapoor in *Student of the Year* are even more problematic as these characters convey that gay men have no sense of physical boundaries in the presence of other cis-gendered men. This unthoughtful and derisive presentation of the LGBTQIA+ community could not be farther from reality.

Additionally, the tone of language used in these movies has rarely been respectful to the community. To make the content "funny," inappropriate pronouns are often used while addressing gay men and transgender people. Using highly problematic lyrics in songs is not new either. For example, the popular song *Maa da laadla* from the movie *Dostana* goes "Chadd ke saariya eh kuaariya, dil nu laaiya ki bimaariya? munda munde naal paunda yaariyan", which translates to "Leaving aside all the bachelorettes,

what kind of disease does your heart have? A male is sharing love with another male!". It is even more appalling that such content received certification from the regulatory authorities who possibly posed no objection to such an ignorant, homophobic portrayal of a community that has been fighting for their acceptance and existence for long.

Naturally, it also has consequences for the community and its presence on social media. Such spaces, instead of liberation, become a platform of oppression for them. Hatred brews and sexist slurs are casually made on social media for those who defy the societal expectations of how one should dress, talk, mate, and with whom. The recent online trolling and abuse met out to an IIMA alum on an online platform for crossdressing is yet another example of this. An individual's identity is reduced just to their expression of gender, and that too, within stereotypical norms. Individuals who do not conform to the popular gendered expectations are belittled, threatened, marginalised, and their identity vilified. While the entertainment industries thrive on such "funny" portrayals, members are ridiculed on social media.

Of course, the producers and directors will create what sells. After all, it is purely business for them. Hence, one must deeply contemplate the deep-rooted heteronormativity in the Indian society that makes such content even remotely funny. This poor construction and depiction of roles is a serious problem as it nullifies efforts to sensitise the masses towards a diverse set of gender identities, gender

expressions, and sexual identities.

So, is all bad within the industry and such spaces? We hope not. Some movies have attempted to create sensitive and appropriate representations of the community and its struggles. Movies like Aligarh, My Brother... Nikhil, Margarita with a Straw, Kapoor & Sons, Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhaan, and Badhaai Do have beautifully captured the intricacies of LGBTQIA+ lives. The portrayal of the characters and their lives in several web series on OTT platforms such as Made in Heaven, Four More Shots Please!, Bombay Begums, and Guilty Minds are a promise of what the future holds. And although, over time, the reluctance to play such roles has reduced, Indian actors should be mindful of what they perform. Voicing in support of the community over social media is meaningless if the roles played by the actors mock the community's very existence.

Moreover, to ensure a deeper integration of the community with the entertainment industry, such roles must be opened up to the LGBTQIA+ community members. The Indian web series, Paatal Lok, took a step in this direction by ensuring that the role of the transgender person was actually played by someone from the community. This could lead to greater visibility and hope that the content shown is more believable or realistic. There is a need to move beyond their overtly funny portrayal and represent the community in its truest sense for what it is.

Contrary to popular belief, the ostracism of members of the LGBTQIA+ community is not grounded in Indian culture. Ancient Indian texts and architecture reflect that homosexuality was acknowledged in society. It becomes pertinent that one challenges the discriminatory practices met out to the members of the community. The responsibility of the Indian entertainment industry along with that of the legal and political stakeholders in shaping the narratives and ensuring basic dignity for the community cannot be emphasized enough. It is high time that the community gets what is their due and what they relentlessly fight for— acceptance and truthful representation.



Illustration: Pixabay

If you feel you have been subjected to sexual harassment or if you would like to make any suggestions to us regarding curbing sexual harassment or gender bias on campus, please reach out to us at:

Email: chr-cmgi@iima.ac.in

Phone: 97129 15533

Please note that any communication with the CMGI is strictly confidential.

The monthly newsletter from the Committee for Managing Gender Issues (CMGI) is an attempt to initiate conversations on discrimination, gender bias, sexual harassment, and related issues. We would love to have the community participate. Please reach out to Therese Abraham at theresea@iima.ac.in for submissions, queries, and/or feedback.