



The Portrayal of LGBTQ Community in Indian Web Series: Thematic Analysis of the “Married Woman & Four More Shots

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Abstract:

The OTT (over-the-top) video platforms are rising as the consumers are spiking in India. While local streaming services such as Hotstar and Jio Cinema have grown in popularity, global players such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have steadily increased their market share in India. The effects of media content served over the OTT platform has the elements of entertainment, raising consciousness and awareness about the issues and concerns of the society. According to PwC’s Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2020-2024, the Indian E&M industry’s long-term prospects are bright, with a 10.1 percent CAGR predicted to reach 55 billion USD by 2024. According to Denis McQuail (2000), the media content informs, shape the beliefs and values of people and the media is thought to have not only objective effects on society, but it also performs a social function. The media has repeatedly played an important role in promoting awareness regarding community problems and have featured LGBT-related content. The study aims to evaluate web series in the perspective of Indian society. Indian media has portrayed LGBT in the conventional ways, depicting them as fragile, meek, and helpless, and has oppressed them in a variety of ways but in the current scenario, they are being depicted in various shades. The objective of this research paper is to determine how the LGBTQ community is portrayed in the web series “the Married Women & Four More Shots.” The research would be qualitative, with a thematic analysis technique used to better identify the types of content representation of LGBTQ Indian web series.

Keywords: LGBTQ, OTT media content, Web series, Section 377

Introduction

Human sexuality is a complicated issue that is now being debated. Though it has been a melting pot for ages, India is a land of religious and cultural variety. However, British colonialism, and the leaders with strong political and religious views in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, transformed sexuality and homosexuality in India into an element of twisted human nature. The abbreviation LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. These phrases refer to a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The word LGBT has been in use since the 1990s; it is an adaptation of the term LGBT, which started replacing the acronym homosexual in reference to the LGBT group in the mid-to-late 1980s. Many activists argued that the phrase “gay community” did not adequately reflect all the people who were



previously referred to as members of this community. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which was enacted during the British occupation of India until 1861, renders sexual behaviour "against the order of nature" criminal and is modelled after the Buggery Act of 1533. The Supreme Court of India ruled on September 6, 2018, that the application of Section 377 to consensual homosexual sex between adults was unconstitutional, "irrational, indefensible, and manifestly arbitrary," but that Section 377 still applies to sex with minors, non-consensual sexual acts, and bestiality. Each concept of LGBT is defined in depth below. -

Lesbian seems to be a woman who is sexually, emotionally, and physically attracted to other women.

Gay: guy seems to be a man who is sexually, romantically, or physically attracted to other men.

Bisexual: Someone who is sexually, romantically, and physically attracted to both males and females.

Transgender: persons are people whose gender identity differs from what is commonly associated with the sex given to them at birth.

Over Top services of media content has grown dramatically across India over the last three years. Viewers have turned away from televisions and toward internet, platforms to watch movies or series. These OTT platforms provide a wealth of selections and genres to pick from, allowing users to watch anything, at any time, and from any location. Another significant alteration that the recent legalising of Article 377 in India. On September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India issued a landmark decision decriminalising homosexual sex under Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which had previously deemed gay intercourse to be a criminal offence in India. The Indian LGBT community was the happiest that day, having struggled for so long to establish that love is not gendered prejudiced. We live in a digital era where viewers may watch a variety of web series and other things online. The audience consists of people of various ages, ranging from a youngster to an elderly person. Many Over the Top (OTT) platforms function as digital media, providing their audience with a diverse range of genres to watch. Any streaming service that delivers its material over the internet is referred to as OTT. Gender and sexuality remain at the heart of how people perceive identity in modern life, However, technology and communication have become fundamental parts of existence. (Gauntlett, 2008) The media has a significant impact on the construction of gender identities. Furthermore, the media depicts a variety of pictures of men and women, as well as messages regarding their sexuality. These pictures shape people's perceptions of their sexuality, gender, and lifestyle choices. In contrast, the media has played a critical role in educating women about their ability to be change-makers in society. Different genres of online web series and programmes reflect and portray women's images differently, what remains generally consistent across all genres is that pictures of women represented in them are far removed from the actual world and real lives. As a result, most of the time, media will depict wants rather than facts. (Kumari Archana, 2015) Among the countless dramas and movies available on OTT platforms, there are a few whose plots focus on the LGBT population. There are several shows and movies on Netflix that feature characters from the LGBT community, whether they are being represented, accepted, or rejected. The function of the media in disseminating a social cause has always been critical. The frequency with which an issue is addressed on social media has a direct impact on its recognition among citizens. The study will investigate whether the depiction of the LGBTQ community in web series content influence people perception or not?"As even the media extensively depicts lesbian and homosexual parents, what Gamson refers to as 'paradoxes of visibility' emerge. Because of the growth in representation, gay and lesbian-headed families may see themselves depicted in the social world. Such exposure also



reflects a growing acceptance of such households. On the other hand, the portrayal of gay and lesbian parents and individual is prone to normativity, sensationalism, and possible distortion. (w.Roggs, 2012) The objective of this research paper is to determine how the LGBTQ community is portrayed in the web series “*the Married Women & Four More Shots.*”

Review of Literature:

Hannah J Johnson (2016) in her study “Bisexuality, Mental Health and Media Representation” explained that bisexual community is experiencing a mental health crisis, and while concerns of mental health and media portrayal are discussed individually in bisexual literature, they are rarely discussed together. Media such as movies, television, and music are frequently used to perpetuate negative preconceptions and stigmas regarding bisexual persons. What role do these concerns play in the high rates of anxiety, despair, and suicide among bisexual people? What challenges do bisexual people confront when they decide to seek help? Further, the study discussed the contribution of its study that By first reviewing current literature on bisexual topics such as bisexual erasure, biphobia, media portrayal, and mental health, the research study contributes further bisexual literature by making linkages between media representation and mental health. Second, we'll go through the findings of an online poll to see how other individuals who identify as bisexual feel about media portrayal and its connection to the bisexual community's mental health problem. Lauren B McInroy, & Shelley L Craig (2017) in their study “Perspective of LGBTQ Emerging Adults on the Depiction and Impact of Media Representation” briefs that Over the last two decades, traditional media has increasingly portrayed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. However, research has not sufficiently focused on the substance of modern representations, how such portrayals affect LGBT young people, or how the current environment defined by the rising presence of new media affects the lives of young people. While conventional media fosters a shared conversation and confirms identification, it continues to portray LGBT people as one-dimensional and stereotyped, restricts and ignores LGBT young people's conceptions of their future paths, and provides no avenues for critique. In contrast, developing new media provides significant, novel, and valuable areas for innovation and debate.

Ana-Isabel Nölke (2018) in their study “Making Diversity Confirm: An Intersectional Longitudinal analysis of LGBT- Specific Mainstream Media Advertisement” opines that from 2009 to 2015, this study explains an interdisciplinary examination of realistic LGBT depictions across mainstream advertising. The investigation provides insights into the LGBT community's obscurity during a moment of societal transition. Advertisers are using a new commercial style to shift away from hyper-sexualization or towards actual human tales of families and love. Nonetheless, the research highlights how the removal of several oppressed groups from mainstream advertising maintains a heteronormative, domesticized picture of "gayness" and explores the negative consequences of this. It is suggested that non-LGBT customers constitute the underlying target group of LGBT-explicit advertising, resulting in non-target market impacts that alienate huge segments of the LGBT population despite their obvious presence. Vardhan Harsh in his study “Representation of LGBT Community in Web Series: A Study of Netflix” explained that the study revealed what is truly going on in the LGBT community in the real world. They also aided in understanding the factors and limits that compel members of the LGBT community to reveal their identity. The LGBT community members in the programme 13 Reasons Why were also just in supporting roles and not in the mainstream, implying that such characters aren't important. We still lack acceptance of the LGBT population in India, even after the Supreme Court's clearance on the same topic, due to our



traditional traditions and beliefs. Because they do not believe that homosexual characters will be accepted across the country, Indian programmes continue to lack LGBT characters. The research also aided in understanding how these shows assist people in knowing what they are. Internationally, shows containing LGBT characters, whether in supporting or lead roles, are still being produced. People in India still believe it is an illness or something, and they refuse to recognise that anything like LGBT exists in the culture and is a part of it.

Theoretical Framework

Social Representation Theory

Rather than focusing on Durkheim's concepts of collective and individual representation, Serge Moscovici 1961 established the idea of social representation to match modern cultures (Wagner et al., 1999; Sammut & Howarth, 2014; Hoijor, 2011). Social representation theory is a type of social-psychological anthropology that is applied to modern civilizations. Individuals in modern societies have some liberty and accepting social representations can concurrently transform them (Hoijor, 2011). This theory also explains how psychoanalysis is spoken and understood in everyday life (Wagner et al., 1999). A social representation is a collection of wonders connected to a community that is co-created by people's day-to-day discourse and activities (Wagner et al., 1999). In shared cognitions, collective meaning processes emerge, producing social linkages that bind communities, organisations, and groups together. This theory alters societal collective thinking by emphasising phenomena such as disputes, conflicts, intense sentiments, and ideological struggle. Individuals are always associated with social, cultural, or possibly symbolic artefacts, i.e., representations of something. (Hoijor, 2011) When applied to communication, social representation theory connects people, the media, and the public.

Section 377 of IPC

According to IPC section 377, it is an Unnatural offense. —Whoever willfully engages in carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal shall be punished with 1[imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of any class for a term not exceeding ten years and shall likewise be fined. Explanation. —Penetration is enough to constitute the carnal intercourse required for the offence stated in this section. Section 377 also defined consenting sexual actions of adults in private, including as oral and anal intercourse, as unnatural and illegal. After decades of grassroots campaigning, India's Supreme Court declared in 2018 that applying Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to private consensual sex between males was unconstitutional, thus decriminalising gay behaviour. The Supreme Court's five-judge constitutional bench, comprised of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud, Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar, Indu Malhotra, and Rohinton Fali Nariman, began hearing the challenge against Section 377's validity. The Union Government did not take a stance on the matter, instead of leaving it to the "wisdom of the court" to decide on Section 377. To argue against Section 377's legitimacy, the petitioners used the rights to sexual privacy, dignity, equality, and freedom of speech. On July 17, 2018, the court reserved its ruling after hearing the petitioners' argument for four days. On September 6, 2018, the bench issued its decision. In announcing the finding, the court overturned its own 2013 decision to reinstate Provision 377, noting that utilising the section of the IPC to victimise gays was unconstitutional and would henceforth be a criminal offence. The Supreme Court ruled in its decision that voluntary sexual actions between adults are not crimes, calling the previous statute "irrational, capricious, and nonsensical."



OBJECTIVES:

- To explore emerging female protagonist character traits on Indian OTT media content.
- To explore the different themes and patterns along with gender differences and the LGBTQ community or groups.
- To study the thematic analysis of LGBTQ characters from selected Indian web series.
- To understand how women gender conditions is being portrayed in the web series content.

Research Methodology:

According to the literature review, the most popular methodologies for studying gender-related issues and characteristics were qualitative thematic analysis and discourse analysis. In this paper thematic qualitative analysis has been done. The analysis has been tested through the NVivo software. TA is a six-step analytical phase. The technique has six faces, which are as follows: Familiarization, code generation, theme search Reviewing Themes, Defining Themes, and Documentation In 2006, Braun and Clarke proposed that type of television. For this study, familiarization has been done by watching both seasons of Four more shots season 1&2 and The married women and generating codes on the basis of feminine traits shown in the web series. Later the theme has been defined to both the web series and the last step of thematic analysis has been completed through completing the presentation of the defined themes by identifying dialogues and relationships between the characters in the web series.

<u>Female Traits</u>
Bisexual
Independent
Emotionally Strong
Ambitious
Helpful& Nurturing
Vulnerable
Fearless
Career Focused
Married
Open minded
Physically Strong

Table 1.1



Female traits for examine Feminine characters

This table will be used as codes for the thematic analysis of the protagonist in the web series and to understand how different gender-specific traits have been visualised in the web series.

The Justification for the coding themes:

For this study, a pattern was detected after watching all the episodes from both seasons of the selected series, and a theme pattern was observed, which was then structurally coded. The common coding themes used for this study attempt to encompass all the important events, topic matter, and character attributes of the female characters shown in the web series. As a result, the coding patterns were identified in order to approach the datasets confidently and assess the growing female features of the show's lead female characters.

Analysis:

Qualitative Thematic Analysis:

In this 'Thematic Analysis,' the overall presentation of the three feminine characters has been discussed on the three identified themes - sexual penetration, Indian feminism double face reality and individuality vs conditioning. This table depicted the pattern of showcasing LGBTQ community women in the OTT media content visually and orally through dialogues and behaviour.

Umang - Gym Trainer

Bisexual
Self-dependent
Vulnerable
Emotionally weak
Physically strong

Astha- Professor

Wife
Mother
Independent
Focused
Helpful and Nurturing
Compromising

Peeplika- Painter

Head strong
Passionate
Fearless
Bisexual
Open Minded



Sexual Projection:

From the start of the web series, the other three characters are aware of Umang's sexuality and have openly embraced her identity. Damini, for example, backed Umang in a scene by informing her about the images that the media had of her in a compromising situation with Samara Kapoor, her love. Umang, on the other hand, is physically powerful since she works as a gym trainer, but she is emotionally delicate. This is clear in a scenario in which all four girls are hanging out at Truck Bar, and Anjana tells her not to escape her issues, but to face them. Umang's character exemplifies the series' difference. The fundamental topic around her character is that she is a lesbian with male features, and the programme has attempted to mainstream alternative sexual orientations by stressing little parts of her character such as a tomboy, macho traits but generating contrast with her sensitive side. Her family struggled to comprehend her sexuality because she came from a middle-class background. It can be concluded from this that income class plays an important role in understanding and accepting different gender identities, as it was not difficult for Samara (a wealthy and well-known actress) to reveal her identity, whereas it was difficult for Umang to reveal her identity in front of her family. Some of the dialogue of Umang's character also reinforces this situation:

Umang: "I am a lesbian, and Lesbian is not a disease." (Four More Shots Please, Season 2)

The narrative analysis of Peeplika's dialogue- *Peeplika said: "Rachna Aunty ye paintaing dekhte mujh par lesbian hone ka acquisition laga dengi kyunki mein sirf aurtoon ko he paint karti hoon na."*

She's well aware of her sexuality yet she didn't want to people talk about her sexual identity, or she belongs to the LGBTQ community Yet, she always get lesbian acquisition by others because of her profession she only paints women and take interest in the women sculptures. Society always questioned her sexuality as she's open-minded. She's fearless in accepting herself in front of society and bold enough to express herself and her opinion.

Her bond with Astha has been described well with these dialogues

Peeplika to Astha: "Tum caterpillar se butterfly ban gayi ho waapas cocoon mein kaise jaaogi"

After Astha and Peeplika share a moment and Astha refuses to accept her emotions for Peeplika, she shows Peeplika parts of her history that might prove she is a straight woman and not a lesbian. Peeplika, on the other hand, informs her: *"Astha wake up, ye memories ka baksa ab tumhe contain nhi kar skta"* Astha took so long to admit her sexual identity as a "Bisexual" as she was happily married before and a mother of two kids. Moreover, before Peeplika in her life, she wasn't aware of her identity. It reflects through this dialogue Astha to Peeplika: *Aesa lagta hai aaj tak aise kabhi kisi ne chhua he nhi jasia tumhare chhune k baad laga.*

Individuality vs Conditioning:

Ye ladai individuality vs conditioning ki hai , ye linein humein ek dusre se alg krte hain , in lines ko blur karke mita dena chahiye, Some of Aijaz's statements stick with Astha long after her college day is through and she is alone to reflect. She learns to like his thinking and the way he thinks. She is completely smitten by the way he perceives the world. Astha suddenly transcends from liking to deeply loving Eijaz. Astha felt stuck between her married life and as an individual who has a desire for being loved and getting attention. This theme explained that these three individual female characters stuck between societal conditions and individual self-identities. However, Astha had to sacrifice and compromise her own needs, desires and



pleasure for the sake of her family and her children future and that is the major reason for her to not understand or recognise her sexual identity. Peeplika well said after sharing a romantic time with Astha “*Line to blur ho chuki hai ab bass inhein mitana hai*” When Aijaz meets Astha for the first time in college, he says her Hindi rendition of Romeo and Juliet is really depressing. She warns him that he is going too far with her since he is so honest and gets personal. “*Jab tak boundary cross na karo tab tak aapko pta kaise chalega ki boundry hai kaha?*”

Astha is torn between their own happiness & her children’s future.

In a scenario where Umang went out for dinner with her family members to meet the family of a boy whom her mother picks for her to marry, she loses her anger when they push her to marry a man, and her family disowns her as a result. Umang individually accept the real fact about her sexual identity but due to family pressure and social conditions, many times she had denied her own identity and lived as per society made rules and regulations which make her feel so annoying and angry and an in last in the fight between society conditional norms and individual identity, she chooses herself which is a very bold step and lives her life as per own conditions.

Indian Society Feminism or a Myth:

As we are very much aware of the fact that India still is a male dominating society and the patriarchy never changed from this culture. Both webseries portrayed the male dominating society very well where a man has all the rights to do anything but when it comes to women there are boundaries as Astha sister in law said “*Ghar ki bahu ko itni chhut nahi deni chahiye ,kuch to boundaries rakho bahu ke liye usko apni limits pta honi chahiye*”. It is tough to understand why a bold, strong, and independent woman needs to be portrayed as an alcoholic and debauched in the Indian web series content. For Indians, it is very difficult to accept a woman as she is she still must fight for her rights and normalize the social traits to accept the bisexual woman and accept her under the feminine rights. In Indian society, a woman should be responsible for her duties and role assigned to her as a stereotypical wife, a mother who is advised to sacrifice for her family. This typical nature of Indian feminist society is shown in both the web series. Umang, (four More Shots Please) is portrayed as a fighter who fought with her own parents and society to make them understand that LGBTQ also has the right to be treated properly and to be loved and let them be lived their own sexuality. Moreover, she makes no apologies for her poor background in Punjab and her profession as Gym trainer.

However, these web series break the stereotypical image of women but in terms of portraying feminist rights to the LGBTQ community or groups again, it’s a cliché depiction. Peeplika is depicted as an independent, self-assured lady and a widow too who mourns by drinking wine at breakfast, lunch and supper and has casual encounters and relationships until she falls in love with Astha.

Discussion:

Four More Shots Please season 1&2

This series is only available on Amazon Prime Video. The tale follows four unapologetically imperfect women, two in their thirties and two in their early twenties, who are dealing with four common concerns. In millennial Mumbai, they live, love, make mistakes, and discover what makes them tick via friendship and glasses of tequila. The plot concentrates around female friendships, their lives as single parents and single women, their successful and unsuccessful occupations, their romances, and their daily lives. The series centred on breaking taboos via the character Umang Singh, a P.T teacher from Ludhiana who went on to become a gym



instructor in Mumbai. She is also bisexual and continually attempts to recover from the agony of a breakup caused by her girlfriends. Umang is physically powerful since she works as a gym trainer, but she seems to be emotionally sensitive. Umang's character exemplifies the series' difference. The fundamental topic around her character is that she is a lesbian with male features, and the programme has attempted to mainstream alternative sexual orientations by stressing little parts of her character such as a tomboy, macho traits but generating contrast with her sensitive side. The narrative emphasises the genuine meaning of love, friendship, and how a woman may establish her own life without the help of a man. The web series also depicts powerful, ambitious, and career-minded women, as well as the prejudice that women encounter. The programme attempts to address LGBTQ rights while emphasising the need of deviating from cultural conventions. This show attempts to find various female characters through shattering stereotyped ideas of women. It has been observed that there are several programmes and online series that depict topics of gender inequality and discrimination such as body shaming, diverse sexual identities, Feminism, and others.

The Married Women:

This web series streamed on Alt Balaji and Zee5. If you're an Indian woman, chances are you've been lectured or 'advised' to sacrifice for the family, to keep your spouse happy while putting your personal aspirations on hold, and to always put your children first. She most likely had similar 'gyaan' as all typical Indian girls received and for being a stereotypical devoted wife, daughter-in-law, and mother at the expense of her own contentment. Despite being married to an indifferent husband Hemant who has customary sex with her every second Saturday, she is pleased in her domesticity. When she meets artist Peeplika Khan, everything changes, Peeplika touches her in a way that no man ever has, and she discovers herself as a very different person. Her self-discovery, however, would come at the expense of her relationships. The married woman story is a story that portrayed the life of two love-starved women who are bluntly different from each other. The story revolves around these two women that how would they break or make themselves free from the usual gender-defined roles that society has assigned to them and find consolation in one another? The story portrays how women work is been taken by others when she only painted women images. Society questioned her sexuality and raised lesbian acquisition against her. The series is based on the time of 1992 when the country was ravaged by communal riots. The narrative focuses on Astha's life and how she is taken for granted in her 11-year marriage. First, she draws away from her husband and embraces Aijaaz Khan, a theatre director. Her affection for him originates from the fact that he encourages her to live free of her inhibitions and to embrace her impulses, which her family dismisses. However, it is Aijaaz's wife Peeplika who finally 'clicks' with Astha. The second part of the show brings Astha and Peeplika together and puts their friendship and their relationship to the test as both characters battle with emotional pain.

Findings:

In terms of gender inclusion, OTT media platforms are experimenting and striving to dispel myths about the LGBTQ community through equitable and reasonable portrayal. Nonetheless, Indian OTT platforms remain tardy in their efforts to become inclusive media platforms. Furthermore, the appeal and audience for gender-inclusive material are still restricted. While portraying strong and developing women, the media is still behind in questioning traditional



gender roles and promoting gender equality. While attempting to represent strong, independent, and powerful women, the Indian media ends up displaying the same age-old clichéd stereotypes of women. Such depiction of women on numerous media platforms further influences audience perceptions of women and, as a result, underlines women's conservative image. Women are frequently portrayed as compromised and liable characters. Despite depicting positive and forward-thinking women, the media has yet to rethink outdated gender stereotypes to reflect upgraded and current Indian women. The thematic analysis leads to the conclusion that strong and independent women are defying conventional concepts of gender and sexuality. The ending topic regarding women's portrayal in the web series is that the series has portrayed qualities and issues that LGBTQ encounters in a patriarchal society.

Conclusion:

Several incidents from the web series demonstrated that perhaps the series intended to represent easy-going, responsible, freeing, and free-spirited women who accept full responsibility for their mistakes. On other hand, it also shows that women of any sexuality stills require marriage and beloved from Men to complete their lives regardless of their strength and independence. The women character is shown as torn between her own happiness, desire, and her children future. The study's findings also concluded that representation of LGBTQ community in media influences people's perception regarding various gender roles that society has set for the individuals. The series has attempted to represent the microscopic aspects of women's struggles in Indian society by presenting distinct layers to the many characters featured in the web series. The thematic analysis leads to the conclusion that strong and independent women are defying conventional concepts of gender and sexuality.

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