



Politics of Quest for Identity through Cinema

Ashish Aggarwal

Research Scholar, Department of English Central University of Himachal Pradesh, India

Email - ashishaggarwal18sep@gmail.com

Abstract: Films are one of the most powerful mediums to convey a certain set of ideology and they try to depict hidden politics or motto behind the creation of every film. Movies help people to easily connect and form a bridge as they can easily relate themselves with the characters. The paper here will try to decode the politics present behind the creation of any film and will try to form a bridge between Film Studies along with Transgender and Queer Studies. Queer in itself means something which is scorned and not kept on the same page. Thus Queer becomes an umbrella term which aligns and tries to bring people of all alternative sexualities on the same platform. This in one way is like watering a dead plant and trying to give them a rejuvenating hope to blossom once again by trying to create an alternative structure for them so that their life too can get a meaning to live! The movie taken here for the research purpose is *Aligarh (2015)* directed by Hansal Mehta. The movie in itself tries to create an alternative vision for the viewers so that the rigid mentality of mind is given a jolt and the structures of orthodoxy are shaken and dismantled.

Key Words: Queer Studies, alternative sexualities, alternative structure, alternative vision, Transgender Studies.

1. INTRODUCTION:

We live in a world where one being idealizes to dominate the other. This domination, if it pertains to the human world, believes in suppressing, subordinating, hegemonizing and exploiting the people via thrusting varied typecasts on them. These typecasts which are imposed on them create deep scars and leave indelible impressions in the fold of their memories. The typecasts can be of various kinds which indirectly assigns the roles to the individuals and create the binaries or notions of distinction leading to the concept of self and the other amongst the individuals. There are certain types or degrees of typecasts prevalent in the society like girls have to be submissive and have to be passive in nature and are ascribed certain roles in a society and have to fulfill them via becoming a mother, wife, sister etc. All these typecast are so deeply entrenched in the human mind that challenging them is almost next to impossibility.

In recent years, the debate over the issues of transgender has literally been a hot topic of discussion. On daily basis, we can see that how the people belonging to this category have to face the brunt of condemnation by the society. They are devoid of their basic rights may it be medical rights or education rights and the list is endless. Thus, the life of these people at present is such that they have to fight and raise their voice for their existence.

The Supreme Court of India has recently taken a step to provide the transgender their rights by decriminalizing the homosexuality in the Article 377 on Sept 6, 2018. This very initiative taken by the government of India was to provide voice to the marginalized and deprived section and meaning to their life. Every individual on this planet is special and comes with some objective and meaning to fulfill. The very basic notion of providing rights to these people is not just a recent phenomenon, but in reality is a step which has been lingered on since ages. So, this very act of the government and similar other initiatives will hopefully be fruitful in enabling the transgender to get out of the homophobia which is generally present in the minds of these people. Through this paper of mine I have tried to unravel the life of all those people in general who try to live 'hidden identities' and a life of pretension. If we talk about our society as such it has already divided itself into a kind of binary classifications and rigid structures which do not accept the changes easily. But as it is said that nothing is impossible as even 'impossible' too says that 'I am possible.' Thus, nothing is there as such in this world which cannot be achieved. If one has the will power and firm determination then surely s/he can topple down the system, values and even turn the tables down. The paper here in itself is kind of an inspiration for the readers. Also, it tries to force us at one level and ponder upon the fact that what kind of life do we

want and what kind of life in actual are we living. It tells and lays the basic facts that it is a human being who becomes an enemy of another human being by being the puppet in the hands of the ideology of the society.

Usually, the people across the globe who do not fall into the normal binary classification are treated as 'abnormal' and are not given the same kind of treatment which in actual they should be given or they deserve to get. The people falling into this category are seen with the eye of hatred and are made devoid of certain basic rights or amenities. Mostly, when people are aware of such kinds of people they try to segregate themselves and try to disconnect from them in every possible way. They are mostly mocked upon. The entire paper here tries to highlight the basic thin line difference between what is sex and gender and also talks about the basic gender role strain or pressure. This gender role strain or pressure is nothing but the societal expectations which impact or hamper the individual growth or creates a conflict with the naturally occurring state of the individual. There are various kinds of gender ideologies which are present in the society regarding the expected roles of males and females in the society. And if one does not live up to these expectations of the gender ideologies which are present in the society, then that individual is basically considered to be a 'deviant.'

Every creation of God when takes birth is born into the garden of innocence or that Edenic state which is slowly and steadily corrupted by the kind of values and ethics imbibed by the society we live in. Therefore, there always remains that sense of nostalgia to go back or return back to that garden of innocence. This quest of attaining that state of purity which once existed is not that easy as when compared to the 'Bible', eating of that forbidden fruit that led to the fall from the grace which was difficult to restore or return to. Similarly, it is here acquiring that fruit of knowledge of society which is none other than the fixed and rigid ideologies which lead to the ultimate sin or fall from the grace there by making humanity commit a sin and crime which cannot be overlooked and is difficult to overcome forever.

Homophobia i.e., fear from the homosexual people is considered as a threat in society which is totally wrong. Because they too have life of their own and until and unless they are harming you, I don't think we have the right to question the kind of life they are living. Everyone has the right to life and the right to privacy. Our constitution provides us various fundamental rights but in actual those rights remain confined only to the papers or remain just as laws and in reality they do not work or count anywhere. Labeling someone on the basis of gender, sex or class is totally wrong as before pointing a finger towards someone we should see in how much deep water do we stand.

Thus, the sole objective behind working on this movie throughout is to see things from a different angle or perspective and broaden our horizons of mind that we become liberal minded individuals and shun all kind of beliefs which make things complicated for the people around and must follow the golden mantra of 'live and let live.'

Usually the norms of heterosexuality are laid by the society. The concept of normal, straight and abnormal is constructed through an ideology which creates distinction between the self and the other. Thus, it is this queer theory which challenges the centrality of heterosexuality as a norm or hierarchy of sexual values which are constructed through various discourses. Article 377 of Indian Penal Code or Constitution which was recently accepted on Sept6, 2018 does not see the third gender with an eye of hatred or contempt anymore. The very fact that being homosexual is not a crime as sexual orientation is natural and people have no control over it thus finally Supreme Court of India decriminalized this Sec 377 by creating equality through this very initiative.

Michael Foucault has made a significant contribution in lesbian and gay studies through his *History of Volumes* in which he talks about the so called natural marginalization of queer sexuality by categorizing – certain form of sexuality as evil and unnatural. Mary Mackintosh in his essay 'The Homosexual Role' (1968) too talks about social building up of gender by labeling some people to be deviant and criminal other than heterosexuals. In nutshell, the queer theory aims to reconsider, reread and rethink and dismantle the heterosexist thinking. It breaks the dichotomy between the 'gay' or 'straight.' It states that there is no fixed identity and this concept of gender and sex keeps on changing according to the milieu and situation and the people around. Thus, queer is an umbrella term now in present for those who are not only sexually deviant but who also feel marginalized at various levels. This term was basically introduced in late 1990's and was used for homosexuals but now it is used as an umbrella term for the sexual identities that are marginalized. The queer theory constantly tries to provide voice to the marginalized and tries to broaden the narrow mindset of individuals by broadening the horizons of the minds of the people.

2. Quest for Identity

Identity in simple words is defined as the capacity to brand or connote someone "who's who." It is the basic ability to understand or is rather a parameter to judge a person in how much deep waters a person is or what sort of personality the other fellow is. It is a two-way traffic or process and in this way it becomes a process to know each other rather than just simply a thing. When we live in a society or any sort of geographical space it is the identity which in actual becomes the platform to judge the people and pass a remark on them. It is a label or a tag we apply to ourselves and to others in order to distinguish ourselves from others and vice versa may it be on the basis of gender, sex, class,

ethnicity and many other things. In this way we can also say that this classification of defining someone also rather makes it to be hierarchal in nature. People associate one's identity as "one's truth." Whenever you try to cross those limitations or space which is provided to you in actual then this becomes intolerable and people start raising questions on you and you become abnormal or perturbing element for them.

As soon as a child is born he is basically innocent by nature and he is unaware of the kind of stratification which is present in the society. Slowly and steadily as the baby grows up he is sent to the school and school through ideological state apparatus tries to shape that child up and tries to teach him those basic rules and regulations of the society which are apt for living. Here from this very point we are taught the concept of self and the other as we are taught what is good for us and what is bad by our parents and teachers and with what kind of people to associate, what kind of friends to make and what are the things one is expected to do. Thus all rules, regulations and structures are built in the very starting or initial stages of life only. We are taught how to behave in our personal space and how act in social domain or space. Thus this preconditioning of the mind starts at the very early stages as soon as one comes into being and finally this society turns you from a typical 'being' into a cycle of 'becoming' something which you are not.

According to the theory of *Tabular Rasa* mind is like a blank slate which literally refers to the emptiness of this slate prior to it being scribbled. Man when he is born; is born with a mind which is totally like a blank slate. It does not have any ill will or preconceived notions before coming in contact with the society and forming opinions regarding people which make him quite prejudiced and biased in his day to day practices while dealing with the people. Thus humans in this world are born free and are born in edenic state, but this state is corrupted or loss of this innocence occurs as soon as one tries to come in contact with the society and form certain notions which lead to the distinction and creating of self and the other concept by judging people on certain parameters.

Identity as a term has become quite debatable in the present scenario as people have started seeing others with fixed notions or parameters which are suitable according to them. This further means that there is no fixed definition of identity because in this hyper real world, there exists 'hyper reality' or 'simulacra' according to Bauderillard. With the change in perspectives with the time and space, there is no fixed definition of reality but there exists multiple versions of realities and truth. Every person has different perspective of seeing and defining their truth due to their experiences and the kind of world they have lived in and experienced. This further means that in postmodernist world, there is no fixed notion or space for one specific thing as it ruptures the narratives or frameworks which existed before and tries to equalize things rather than creating hierarchies in the society.

Quest for identity in general is equivalent to quest for democracy and is deep rooted in the history of western civilization. Plato in his *Republic* was the very initiator of the very same process in which he demanded every single person to be treated in the same way and given equal importance and further with the coming up of Renaissance as revival or rebirth of learning this very fact or quest for democracy was strengthened and substantiated. This coming up of Renaissance or Enlightenment was indicative of desire for democracy and moving away from the feudal world towards democratic world which resulted in creating modernity or dream of creating democracy which would treat everyone as equal without any kind of distinction.

In the 15th century, there was creation of Anglican Churches in England and further in 16th century, a shift came from Theocracy to Monarchy in 16th and 17th century where Divine Rights of King came and which treated king to be supreme. King was treated akin to God standing unchallenged and whatever he said was the final verdict. After this came a shift and there came aristocratic set up in 18th century and with that came an alternate way to achieve democracy through philosophic perspective but this too proved to be a failure in actual because of ideas being in the air and not applicable in the real or corporeal world. In Victorian period too, people came with certain compromises like women compromising with their identities and people working through erroneous ways to mint money and getting successful by being utilitarian in nature thus quest for democracy being hung into the air. With the coming up of various scientific inventions and discoveries, the faith in religion became quirky and human started to question the centrality of the narratives, thus, creating alternative structures and possibilities.

With the coming up of 'Communist Manifesto' in 1848 by Karl Marx and by challenging the 'have's' and realizing the kind of discrimination which was there along with them since ages, and fraternizing for the basic rights; all this sowed the seeds of rebellion in the people. This further coerced them to think in the kind of atmosphere they lived in, which led to bring their senses back on track and retaliate against the wrongdoers. Initially various notions were there in the heads of the people like women were the weaker counterparts and they came from the ribs of the Adam, they were physically weak and were chattels of men, but slowly and steadily with the realization and by speaking against the malefactors things started falling in their right place thus creating hope for a new democratic world and a new feeling to create alternative structures for the marginalized voices like the gays, lesbians, women etc., thus carving their own identity and creating space for themselves in this society. Mainly this quest for democracy came with the World War 1,



as it was the war to end all the wars but things happened exactly the opposite which led to this basic quest. Thus, in this way modernism becomes a new perspective to create identity and give voice to the marginalized.

The movie 'Aligarh' by Hansal Mehta is one of the best examples for providing voice to the marginalized sections and highlights how with a feeling of contempt are 'homosexuals' or gay people treated in our society. It challenges all the preconceived notions which are present in the society regarding homosexuals and the phobia or hula-baloo which is generated in the society encountering such people. The film at large is about a homosexual identity and the brunt they have to face being or belonging to that very section. The movie has a protagonist named Dr Siras who is a Marathi professor in Department of Languages at Aligarh University.

This main character is 64-year-old professor who is at verge of his retirement and lives in an accommodation which is provided by the University. He becomes the target of internal politics and many other major things and his being a homosexual is used as a weapon by the people of the University to defame him, and sack him out of his job just before three months of his retirement. Dr Siras was once having his private moments with his friend Irfan who was a rickshaw puller and without his knowing people of the media filmed him, made his footage, took photographs forcibly in erroneous poses and thus making his moments viral. The very next day his effigies were burnt in the University and he was sacked out from the University and the accommodation provided to him was taken away. It was Deepu who was a journalist who comes for the rescue and interrogates him what all had happened. Then he records his first-hand experience being the editor of the newspaper and takes his case to the Allahabad High Court. There his case was represented by Vikas Grover who had first presented Article 377 in 2009 in Delhi High Court. There Dr Siras was interrogated and finally he wins the case after many long queues of questions being hurled upon him and his lawyer Vikas defending him from various allegations which were casted upon him like he was the one who was responsible for spoiling the reputation of the University and his act of being intimate with his friend was treated like a black spot on the image of University. All this was counter attacked by his lawyer saying that morality differs from person to person and as such there is no right of the people to poke their nose in the personal life of anyone. He said why were the people who filmed him were not reprimanded instead of that why was he made the target. Also his matter was substantiated by proofs and sayings as no institution has the right to peep in the personal life of the people. Finally, after winning the case Dr Siras comes back to his home and he receives a call from Deepu as he congratulated him for his victory and asks him to meet him in his Department but the protagonist commits suicide and traces of poison were found in his blood on inquiry.

3. CONCLUSION :

The movie tries to highlight the plight of homosexual people or their identity, how people perceive them and how distinction is created and how they despise them on the basis of their sexual orientation. The movie tries to shatter or break all those prejudices or myths which are prevalent regarding the homosexuals in the society by questioning the centre and notion of being normal in general sense. Here no doubt, if the protagonist is homosexual but still he has his personal space which he is made devoid by making his 'personal' life to be 'public'. His very duty being a teacher is neglected and rather questions are raised on his personal life, and his deeds and actions are publically made fun off. Thus in this way he is bound in certain structure and rigid framework and he is made devoid of space and is portrayed as marginalized by setting barriers and frameworks; in totality making him devoid of identity. In this way, the entire movie in one way or the other becomes a quest for identity and traces the entire journey of questioning from being to becoming and the basic retaliation of the main protagonist against the rigid framework of the society.

REFERENCES:

1. *Aligarh*. Directed by Hansal Mehta. Web. <https://movieninja.io/movie/aligarh-q28rrr9x>. 2016.
2. Chun Chang, Wen. "Identity ,Gender and Subjective Well Being" *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. 69. No 1. pp 97-121. *Taylor and Francis Ltd*. March 2011.
3. "Gender Identity". Part Three. Web. www.TheNewAtlantis.com. 2016.
4. Helgeson, Vicki S. *The Psychology of Gender*. Pearson Education Inc. 2012.
5. Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. Routledge 2008.
6. Lodge, David and Wood Nigel. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. 2008
7. Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. Pearson India Education Pvt. Ltd. 2018
8. Waugh, Patricia. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Oxford UP, 2006.