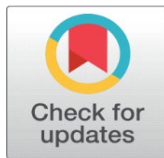


SEXUAL MINORITIES NARRATIVES IN INDIAN WEB SERIES: THE QUEER VISIBILITY AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

Web series across the globe have emerged as a significant medium for sharing diverse content and have evolved into an alternative space for sexual minorities. In India and across the globe, web series are becoming increasingly popular, particularly among youth. Historically, Indian media has stereotyped the image of transgender and homosexual people in various ways by depicting them as helpless, submissive, and victims. Today, web series in India are emerging as a space for queer representation and continue to serve as an inclusive space for queer content. In this context, it is essential to study how such web series portray the struggles, trauma, and identity issues of sexual minorities in India. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the representation and portrayal of sexual minorities, their problems, and their fight for rights in Indian web series. Using qualitative content analysis, this study analyses the four web series that were released from 2017 to 2023 with the following objectives: to identify how the web series addresses the social issues related to sexual minorities; to explore the portrayal of sexual minority characters in web series; to examine the narratives on the stereotypes, trauma, and taboos of the sexual minorities portrayed in web series.

Keywords: Sexual Minorities, Transgender, Sexual Orientation, Web Series, Queer Narratives

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, sexual minorities being part of every society are highlighted and debated in a variety of media, including cinema, radio, television, advertisements, and digital media platforms. A sexual minority is defined as a group that has a different gender identity, such as transgender, and sexual orientation or practice, such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Math and Seshadri, 2013). Along with the media portrayals, social narratives and discourses have influenced the social construction of gender binaries. Although certain groups, such as the transgender communities, have been a part of Indian society for generations, the history of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) communities

is complicated and has witnessed both struggles and transformations in the recent past. India is said to have the earliest examples of same-sex partnerships in history, as well as the most diverse records of gender identity and sexual orientation in ancient writings (Qadiri, 2023). In contrast to contemporary human society, sexuality was not stigmatised or seen as a mental illness in ancient times (Manukriti et al., 2020).

From prejudice to a lack of social acceptability, the transgender community in India faces several challenges in their daily lives (Banu and Yasmin, 2020). People identify themselves by a broad range of terminology, names, and pronouns; thus, respecting those labels is crucial. However, throughout time, most parts of the world have tried to eliminate the stigma associated with homosexuality due to ongoing struggles in history, society, and politics. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities come together under this banner to help one another and live better lives. With the addition of Intersexual and Asexual/Allies to this umbrella today, the terms LGBTQIA and LGBTQ+ were created. It is worth noting that the LGBTQ+ community in India has moved forward collectively. In a world of media representations that are predominantly heterosexual, they are coming to terms with their identity and finding more acceptance and representation. However, they are still behind in global dimensions (Khan, 2021). Gradually, people with different gender identities and sexual orientations have started coming out from the shadow of marginalisation, and through various mediums, queer content is gaining inclusivity over the years, particularly with the emergence of web series.

1.1. TRANSGENDER AND HOMOSEXUALS: THE STRUGGLES AND STEREOTYPES

The portrayal of Transgender and Homosexual people has always been problematic in the Indian media scenario. Homosexuality is a taboo subject in Indian Society and is not discussed openly (Pradhan, 2021). Homosexual characters are frequently shown in settings that are strongly stereotyped or heteronormative, which are deeply rooted in various strands of society (Streitmatter, 2009). The term lesbian conjures up negative stereotypes of women who are overweight, masculine, and possess other undesirable attributes (Schwartz, 2016). In an attempt to liberate lesbian identity from patriarchal control, the dominant form of feminist discourse has instead imposed its identity politics on the lesbian community. As a result, lesbians whose behaviours or styles do not align with the feminist agenda have experienced double oppression: once from the patriarchal culture in question and again from the movement that purported to advocate for the liberation of all women (Goodloe, 1993, as cited in Schwartz, 2016).

Transgender people frequently face serious difficulties as their own family and society disown them, and due to family and societal stigma and prejudice, their psychosexual and psychosocial development is affected. Certain stereotypes have been reinforced, such as the idea that they perform songs and dances at weddings and other events, beg for money, or curse when someone rejects them (Qadiri, 2023). Discrimination against transgender individuals occurs even in medical contexts (Chakrapani, 2010). Marriage is a vital institution in all civilisations. The legalisation of same-sex unions can facilitate the advancement of equal rights for sexual and gender minorities. Same-sex marriage has been legalised in several nations worldwide over the last 20 years. Access to the freedom to marry helps lessen the stigma associated with sexual minorities by helping these persons integrate more fully into society (Drabble et al., 2021). However, there is decriminalisation of homosexuality, but marriage between the same sex is still not legalised in India. When it comes to sexual minorities, some cultures do not have words that are positive or neutral that may be used to describe LGBTQ+ people and the greater community (Bond et al., 2018). For any community to flourish and remain stable, its populace must be well-educated, but LGBTQ+ students have several obstacles at educational institutions, such as bullying, harassment, exposure to insulting remarks, assault, and so on (Kumar et al., 2023). Similarly, they are also marginalised and discriminated in healthcare facilities (Vries et al., 2020). Further, they've been stigmatised or labelled as mentally sick, aggressive by nature, and a danger to society's morals, and people refuse to acknowledge the existence of the LGBTQ+ community (Khan, 2021). Ultimately, public spaces, such as educational institutions, healthcare settings, society, etc., make the LGBTQ+ community uncomfortable and unsafe as they frequently experience victims of homophobic and heterosexist acts of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion (Barber and Krane, 2007).

The media continues to portray homosexual individuals in derogatory or ridiculing contexts. However, there are few efforts to highlight the fight for equality and the process of coming out (Bond, 2014), and these references originating from heterosexual characters were the most prevalent kind of LGBTQ+ discourse (Bond et al., 2018). In light of these difficulties, developing a sexual minority identity may prompt people to look for other resources and support, some of which may be found in popular media, especially if the media incorporates information about LGBTQ+ concerns (Winderman and Smith, 2016). Similarly, Qadiri (2023) highlighted that transgender and gender-nonconforming

persons are still vastly underrepresented in the media despite the increased visibility that may appear positive on its surface. On the other hand, when LGBTQ+ people were portrayed discussing sex, it was usually around their sexual identities rather than their sexual experiences, practices, or desires (Bond et al., 2018).

Transgenders have historically been portrayed in the media as comic, sidelined, criminalised beggars and sex workers. Through several studies, it is observed that the visual medium has a greater influence on audiences, particularly cinema. Further, its influence was significant in its portrayal of gender and sexuality. In recent times, there has been an emphasis on the visibility and depiction of transgender characters and transsexuality in web series, even though the portrayal of transgender characters in media has been a matter of controversy for decades (Qadiri, 2023). Print media have also been more vocal in covering LGBTQ issues and news related to the marginalised community of homosexuals. Following the liberalisation of Article 377, Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has been portraying the community in a way that has never been seen before, igniting a public discussion about the psychological and human aspects of being gay. Kulkarni & Hegde (2023), in their study on the impact of media portrayal and judicial intervention in changing social attitudes towards same-sex marriages in India, look for connections between the way that the media, particularly movies, web series, and social media reels, now tell the story of sexual identities and how society views same-sex partnerships. It attempts to disclose whether Indian society is ready to accept same-sex unions entirely or only in part, as well as how the legal system's progressive interpretations have affected the public's perception of the viability of same-sex unions in India. The promotion of LGBTQ+ rights is becoming a new marker for civilisation across the world; it is imperative to highlight the issues of sexual minorities (Pradhan, 2021). However, the media is working to help the community and raise awareness through positive, sensitive portrayals. Nonetheless, throughout history, there have also been a few films that questioned conventional gender standards and positively represented the LGBTQ+ community (Qadiri, 2023), and that can be witnessed in the new emerging spaces, such as web series. Web series have gained enormous popularity recently, particularly since 2015, due to the rise of OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Alt Balaji, and others.

1.2. WEB SERIES: THE EMERGING SPACE FOR QUEER CONTENT

With the emergence of digital (new) media that features tales that deviate from the mainstream, viewers are given a voice and are no longer viewed as passive entities (Sriram, 2021). Web series is the most widely used medium for communicating on OTT video platforms. These online series are frequently designed to show society in all shades—bright, drab, joyful, and melancholy (Khan, 2021). The emergence of web series led independent filmmakers and production companies to tell stories and expand their audiences in ways previously unattainable. Regarding production, web series are less expensive and have fewer entry-level barriers than mainstream television. It offers more diversified and open modes of representation and flexible means of production (Christian, 2011). Most web series allow users to actively comment on the content. Further, web series challenge traditional notions of scriptwriting because filmmakers do not require permission from traditional production companies and receive direct feedback from viewers. Professional and amateur directors have greater freedom to address contemporary issues that are not broadcast on television. Because of the emergence of web series, amateur filmmakers have a greater scope to produce their works, overcoming funding obstacles (Montoya-Bermúdez and Soto-Sanfiel, 2023).

While earlier representations of the queer community were frequently restricted to caricatures and stereotypes, recent web series have adopted a more nuanced approach to explore deeper into the identities and experiences of LGBTQ+ people. By addressing negative assumptions and biases, the diverse and authentic portrayal of queer characters contributes to raising awareness and understanding of LGBTQ+ people. As a result, LGBTQ+ people are now more visible and represented in audience consumption of content (Dey, 2024). Examining the audience of the web series, Gupta (2021) noted a notable correlation between gender and preference: women mostly choose television series, whereas men primarily watch web series. Another significant influence on choice is age. The age group that enjoys watching web series the most is children aged 10-19. Meanwhile, TV shows are preferred by elderly consumers over 60 and in the 40-60 age range. Exploring the primary reasons why Indians watch web series instead of television, Gupta noticed that individuals gravitated towards web series for better content and thought that web series' content was considerably superior to that of TV series. Meanwhile, Khan (2021) noted that, as a genre/medium, web series offer producers and viewers greater creative flexibility than cinema. Because of the greater flexibility and the fact that it is a primary facilitator of socialisation, the web series has started to give more importance to various social issues and concerns, particularly those of the sexual minorities in India. Hence, it is important to examine these emerging spaces, particularly for queer content. This paper argues that web series can serve as an inclusive space for queer identities in the evolving

digital media landscape and contribute to awareness of the struggles and rights of sexual minorities. In this context, this study examines the narratives of sexual minorities that have been portrayed in the recent Indian web series with the following objectives:

- 1) To explore the portrayal of sexual minority characters in web series.
- 2) To identify how the web series addresses the social issues related to sexual minorities.
- 3) To examine the narratives on stereotypes, trauma, and taboos of the sexual minorities portrayed in web series

2. METHODOLOGY

To examine the sexual minorities beyond the queer visibility narratives in Indian web series, this study uses qualitative content analysis to analyse recent web series using the queer theoretical framework. The queer theory enables the researcher to challenge or question the dominant notion of the construction of gender identity and sexual orientation (Butler, 1999). The study focuses on four web series released primarily in the Hindi language in order to incorporate the varied gender identities and sexual orientations, the following web series has been chosen such as 'Romil and Jugal (2017), directed by Nupur Asthana and produced by Ekta Kapoor & Shobha Kapoor, streaming on ALTT Balaji', and 'His Storyy (2021), directed by Prashant Bhagia and produced by Tanveer Bookwala, streaming on Zee 5' based on gay. 'The Married Woman (2021), directed by Sahir Raza and produced by Juggernaut Productions, streaming on Zee 5' is based on bisexuality and pansexuality. 'Taali (2023), directed by Ravi Jadhav and produced by Arjun Singh Baran, Kartik Nishandar & Afeefa Nadiawala Sayed, streaming on Jio Cinema', based on transgender. With the aim of examining sexual minority narratives in Indian web series, this study attempted to determine how the selected web series portray the struggles, trauma, and identity issues of the sexual minority community in India. These web series are discussed within the various categories identified in the existing literature. While this study uses qualitative content analysis, the narratives are based on multiple categories through the lens Queer Intersectionality, such as (a) Reimagining Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (Math & Seshadri, 2013; Qadiri, 2023), (b) Reframing Family (Qadiri 2023), Society (Kulkarni and Hegde 2023), and Marriage (Drabble et al., 2021), (c) Emphasising Gender Neutral Space (Barber and Krane 2007) (d) Countering Stereotypes (Schwartz, 2016; Qadiri, 2023) (e) Fighting and Advocating for the Rights (Pradhan 2021). Below is a brief synopsis of the web series used for the analysis.

2.1. SYNOPSIS OF THE WEB SERIES

Romil and Jugal (2017) is a web series that represents homosexuality. The main characters, Romil and Jugal, belong to Punjabi and Tamil families, respectively. The homosexual relationship faces family pressure, societal challenges, and personal insecurities. The series has portrayed gay relationships sensitively, addressing acceptance of identity in the family and society.

The Married Woman (2021) represents a bisexual and pansexual relationship. Astha is a responsible wife and mother, and Peeplika is an artist. Astha is trapped in a patriarchal society where she has many boundaries, but Peeplika is an independent woman. Astha's relationship with Peeplika makes her feel free and self-discovered, challenging societal stigma.

His Storyy (2021) represents a gay relationship. Kunal is a married man whose married life seems perfect, but it ends as his same-sex relationship with Preet is revealed. This web series deals with the struggles and challenges of coming out with their actual sexual orientation due to social stigma and homophobia, which leads them to live a life according to heterosexual norms. The narrative reflects their challenges within family and society, as well as their acceptance and understanding of sexual identity.

Taali (2023) is a biographical web series that chronicles the life of transgender activist Gauri Sawant. This web series portrays her journey as a fearless transgender woman who fights for the rights and identity of her community. It sheds light on the challenges, trauma, and stereotypes faced by the transgender community and the battle for acceptance and a dignified life.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. REIMAGINING GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The web series *Taali* (2023) explores narratives of non-binary gender identity, focusing on the life of transgender woman Gauri Sawant and the challenges faced by the transgender community. Gauri's journey of self-realization, understanding her gender identity, and her desire to become a woman and mother. The series challenges the traditional binary gender norms by portraying how Gauri's psychological feelings about being a woman do not match her physical traits, showcasing the internal conflict many transgender people experience. While the web series *Romil and Jugal* (2017), *The Married Woman* (2021), and *His Storyy* (2021) represent narratives on sexual orientation, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual.

In *Romil and Jugal* (2017), from the very beginning of the web series, it can be seen that Jugal Subramaniam knew about his sexual orientation and that he was gay. However, the other character, Romil Kohli, is confused by his sexual orientation, and, at the same time, he knows that he has feelings for people of the same sex but tries to suppress his feelings by conforming to macho stereotypes. This reflects a common issue where men feel pressured to meet certain gender norms. As the story unfolds, both characters explore their relationship and confront their insecurities and fears while fighting prejudice and discrimination, highlighting the challenges of self-acceptance in a heteronormative society. In *The Married Woman* (2021), the character Aastha Kapoor realises in the later part of the series that she is bisexual when she meets another character, Peeplika Khan, who is Pansexual. Peeplika identified her sexual orientation from the beginning and had to face many difficulties in her family and society. They are both in heterosexual marriages. When Aastha's husband realises her sexual orientation, she is taunted and has to choose between her family and him. She knew this world was not ready to accept this version of love, but she chose Peeplika. The challenge of accepting one's sexual orientation in light of the context of existing marital and familial commitments is reflected in Aastha's journey. The series portrays how societal rejection and family expectations complicate the acceptance of bisexuality and pansexuality. *His Storyy* (2021) is a web series where Kunal, a married man, knows that he is gay and falls in love with Preet, who is also gay and unmarried. The series highlights the challenges of being a closeted homosexual in a heterosexual marriage. Kunal's elder son, Shivaay's character, has been depicted as homophobic to an extreme level, but his younger brother is very understanding and accepts his father's choice. In the series, another character who stays in the same society is Ved; he is also gay. When Shivaay explores Ved's sexual orientation, he uses derogatory and abusive words for him and expresses his hatred towards him. Ved's father blames Kunal for this, but his mother supports him. While Indian society does not embrace a wide range of gender identities, firstly, these web series have attempted to normalise different gender identities and sexual orientations through the various characters that have been portrayed. Secondly, these web series have tried to accept the non-binary gender identity and various sexual orientations. Though these web series attempt to reimagine various gender identities and sexual orientations, they have only focused on individuals belonging to upper-middle-class urban settings and neglected other socio-economic and regional backgrounds of queer lives.

3.2. REFRAMING FAMILY, SOCIETY, AND MARRIAGE

For any individual, family support and acceptance are essential; they play a vital role in a person's life. The denial by the family and society leads them to a problematic situation. In the beginning, it can be seen that in the web series *Romil and Jugal* (2017) and *His Storyy* (2021), the lead character's sexual orientation leads to homophobia and not being accepted by their families, friends, and society. However, later, they are accepted by their families.

In the case of *His Storyy* (2021), acceptability is complex, as Kunal, a married man and a responsible father, has many responsibilities and commitments toward his family. It challenges the binary depiction of coming-out narratives, in which individuals are unable to freely express their identities due to societal norms and expectations. He was aware of his sexual orientation, but due to the social stigma and taboo, he followed the standards of heteronormative society, and eventually, his sexual orientation led to a divorce. *The Married Woman* (2021) represents Aastha, who struggles to balance her life between work and her responsibilities towards her family. Married to a patriarchal family, Aastha confronts the patriarchal mindset that curbs women from being modern and says free culture has destroyed everybody's mind. As a result, she has little freedom to express herself. On the other hand, the character Peeplika is an independent woman and has been given enough space to express herself in her married life. Since childhood, Peeplika knew about

her sexual orientation, but was not accepted by her mother. Kunal (*His Storyy*, 2021) and Aastha (*The Married Woman*, 2021) are depicted as being restricted to traditional familial roles. Family structure usually maintains social norms that prevent individuals from having the freedom to express their sexual orientation.

In the web series *Taali* (2023), Gauri Sawant, a transgender woman, was not accepted and was discriminated against by her family and society, which led to many challenges and struggles in her life. Despite being discriminated against by her family, society, and her own community members, she comes out and fights for the rights of the transgender community. There was significant resistance; people were jealous of her progress in the early stages. However, in order to gain acceptance within the transgender community, she further undergoes Sex Affirming Surgery to become a member of that community. It also questions the rigid demands even within marginalized groups, indicating that embracing oneself can have societal repercussions. In *His Storyy* (2021), the female partner is open about her husband's marriage to his partner. However, one of the male partners denies the marriage and provides no specific reason. In the web series *Romil and Jugal* (2017), they get married in New Zealand, where same-sex marriage is legalized, and celebrate their wedding party in India with their family and others. At the conclusion of the web series, they are getting divorced. There is a dilemma or uncertainty about marriage. With the aim of reframing family, society, and marriage, these web series sparked discussions about the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in these spheres. Secondly, it challenges the dominant narratives of heterosexuality, family structures, and societal expectations. Thirdly, it offers alternative representations of love, marriage, and acceptance. While these web series attempt to reframe family, society, and marriage, they once again reinforce certain notions of patriarchal society with regard to marriage as "Butler argues that the heteronormative foundation of marriage cements the idea that any family formations that do not fit this logic are dangerous and thus, that marriage equality further reinforces this logic" (McCann and Monaghan 2020:161). It has been observed that the families featured in these web series are largely from upper castes.

3.3. EMPHASISING GENDER NEUTRAL SPACE

The lack of gender-neutral space impacts the lives of LGBTQ+ people. The web series *Taali* (2023) demonstrates the absence of separate columns for transgender individuals in the admission form, no allocation of a separate queue, and the absence of a separate washroom, ultimately pointing out the non-existence of transgender individuals in the country. They are constantly discriminated against in many spaces; even when it comes to health facilities, they are being mistreated and neglected. Continuously, such instances can be noticed in *Taali* (2023) when they encountered the incident in the hospital where a transgender person was not allocated a bed after her death and was kept on a floor by the hospital staff purely because she identifies herself as transgender. It reflects a broader reality of how healthcare for sexual minorities is not just about access to medical treatment but also about being treated with dignity. Similar incidents can be noticed in *His Storyy* (2021) as well, when Preet is admitted to the hospital while the police come for an investigation, where, once again, identity is being questioned, and the police say there are many cases where heterosexual people have fought with people who are engaged in a sex relationship and considered it a hate crime. While the families of *Romil and Jugal* (2017) refused them, they moved to another city and faced challenges, such as the place where they were staying, where they were instructed not to reveal their sexual orientation; otherwise, the other members of the society would not allow them to stay there. Ultimately, these web series demonstrate that public spaces such as hospitals, colleges, and society are more inclined toward a binary-established system and are not gender-neutral. Secondly, these web series point out how these places are still homophobic and transphobic, and they are reluctant to open up such spaces.

3.4. COUNTERING STEREOTYPES

These web series have challenged various stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community. The notion that homosexuality emerged in the West and was exported to other cultures is a misconception, especially in conservative societies like India. *Romil and Jugal* (2017) counter this idea by normalizing gay relationships within an Indian context, stating that homosexuality is not exclusive to Western societies but is a natural aspect of human diversity across cultures. However, while the series may help dismantle this myth, it's important to note that there are several examples of same-sex love and transgender identities in Indian culture, such as in ancient texts. Hence, it advocated that homosexuality is not a disease that needs to be cured; it is also a different version of love. Their relationships are just as normal as those of heterosexual people. In *His Storyy* (2021), the series explains that society does not want to understand or accept

homosexuality, as we live in a society where a heterosexual structure binds people. The web series *The Married Woman* (2021) has broken the stereotype of being within boundaries. It also showed that a relationship can form between people of any gender, as they all need love, respect, and space to express their thoughts and feelings. For a very long time, transgender people have been portrayed as illiterate in mainstream media narratives. However, the web series *Taali* (2023) attempts to show the lead character, Gauri, as well-educated, successful in her career, and able to provide livelihood opportunities to her community, and also tells them the importance of education for a dignified livelihood that breaks the stereotype of transgender people being limited to begging, crime, or sex work. Some transgender individuals shown in this web series choose not to pursue education or other professions because they believe they can earn better through their traditional choices. It is important to note that such choices are often not made freely but are shaped by systemic discrimination, lack of opportunities, and exclusion from formal education or employment. In the process of countering the stereotypes, these web series tried to normalise homosexual relationships and break the stereotype that same-sex relationships do not exist in India, and also challenged the notion that homosexuality is a disease and is not natural. Further, *Taali* (2023) highlighted the importance of education for dignified livelihoods and offered a positive portrayal of integrating transgender people into mainstream society.

3.5. FIGHTING AND ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS

The right to freely express one's gender identity and sexual orientation is often suppressed due to societal expectations and norms. In *Married Woman* (2021), it has been shown that the Right to one's true self transcends the patriarchal norms imposed by society. A woman has the right to express her thoughts and feelings, should be treated equally and respected, and should possess freedom. When women get the understanding and freedom outside their own house, irrespective of gender, they gradually get attracted emotionally towards the same gender, which also leads to same-sex relationships. The rights portrayed in the web series based on homosexuality seek the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals, as they also want a normal life like heterosexual people lead in society. In India, it is taboo to discuss same-sex relationships publicly; marriage is not legalised, and they cannot adopt a child. *Taali* (2023) discusses the fight for rights for the transgender community, such as the right to self-identification, survival, and equality. Gauri is a transgender activist who is represented in a web series who goes to court and asks permission to build a home for the rescued and sex worker's children, she is denied by saying that there is no such provision and rights to marry, adopt kids, can't avail of the schemes which are meant for male and females, can't drive, can't buy a house and can't take any medical facilities and can't demand an education or job. For an individual, they should have the right to choose their own gender identity. Her first battle is to be called a citizen of India. Firstly, the web series *Married Woman* (2021) challenges patriarchal family norms and follows her own decisions. Secondly, the struggle for survival is observed in the *Taali* (2023) as transgender community's existence is legally avoidable, and they are not provided with national identification. As they are also human beings, they should always have equal rights as the binary genders, such as male and female, are getting. Thirdly, these web series have fought for and advocated their rights, breaking the stigma and taboos that surround them.

4. CONCLUSION

Examining gender and sexual inclusivity in India, not many people are ready to acknowledge and accept the various gender identities and sexual orientations. However, emerging web series are experimenting and attempting to break misconceptions about the LGBTQ+ community by offering positive portrayals. The LGBTQ+ community continues to face the stigma around their orientation and acceptance in family and society. Closely examining the selected web series, they attempted to dispel the stigma associated with gender identity and sexual orientation by highlighting the actual issues that homosexual and transgender individuals encounter. Giving different layers to the various characters shown in the web series has attempted to portray the difficulties of transgender and homosexual people. The portrayal of a woman is positive, as she expresses her desires and identity, discovers a newfound sense of liberation and self-discovery, challenges societal norms, and celebrates the courage to embrace her true self. These web series portrayals of transgender, homosexual, and female characters have highlighted their issues, discrimination, and challenges in society and have given them more visibility. However, it is observed in the web series that acceptance of sexuality differs with social class and economic status. The analysis clearly identifies that these representations are largely limited to the dominant elite class and the social class of the existing economic order, which continuously attempts to silence the voice of the sexual minorities belonging to the lower economic status. Further, the web series challenged preconceived notions

of relationships and marriage and acknowledged same-sex marriage by accepting same-sex families. Though these web series have also emphasised Gender Neutral Space, it can be noticed that it is more inclined towards the binary established system. The web series builds a discourse to counter stereotypes attached to the LGBTQ+ community. To conclude, the web series has highlighted sexual minorities' fight for equal rights at different stages in their lives. Ultimately, these web series attempt to open the space beyond visibility to challenge deeper values of homophobia, transphobia, and patriarchy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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