

MISREPRESENTATION OF ASEXUALITY: A STUDY OF THE MOVIE

SATYAPREM KI KATHA



Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

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I hereby declare that this project titled "Misrepresentation of Asexuality: A Study of the Movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha*" is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of, Dr Niveda Sebastian, Assistant Professor, Department of English.



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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Misrepresentation of Asexuality: A Study of the Movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha*” by Ishitha Jose is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



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Introduction

Asexuality is a sexual orientation characterized by the absence of sexual attraction to another individual. It differs from celibacy, which involves intentionally restraining the attraction and suppressing the associated urges. Additionally, it is distinct from abstinence, where individuals may choose to wait until marriage or for other personal reasons. While asexuals may not face the same issues as others in the LGBTQIA+ community as they are not committing any 'sin'. In the discussion about asexuality, individuals who identify as an asexual are often labelled as attention seekers or mentally ill. The need for awareness is evident. It is crucial to respect those who choose not to engage in sexual activities and extend support rather than judgement. Assigning a term to the repulsion from sex allows these persons to connect with themselves and the rest of the society, reassuring them they are not alone. This is particularly significant for those who feel isolated to discover a community that helps them overcome the feeling of abnormality, sometimes even preventing serious emotional distress.

Despite India having a long history of homosexual identities and gender minorities, with invasions and colonial rule unfavourable attitudes emerged towards the community. Over the last decade, there have been incredible strides toward securing equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people in India. In 2009 The Delhi High Court ruled that Section 377 and other legal restrictions on private, consensual, non-commercial same-sex conduct among adults violate the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India made a landmark decision by decriminalizing consensual same-sex relations by striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized homosexuality. While legal strides were made, societal acceptance is still at question and challenges persist.

Only a small portion of the society acknowledges and embraces the challenges the community face. The major challenge for asexual individuals in India, are the pressure from Indian parents to get married, along with issues like corrective rape and denial of their sexuality. Additionally, there are ace exclusionists pushing for their exclusion from LGBTQIA+ spaces for their lack of interest in sexual advances. As asexuality remains invisible within the sexual and gender minorities the conventional society accepting and perceiving them becomes a question. Rather than allowing time to assess and understand grave themes like sexuality and several orientations associated with it, the fast-paced world today heavily rely on mass media. These media outlets significantly shape and individual's perception of various aspects in society, moulding their opinions and assessments.

Mainstream media lacks sufficient visibility of diverse representation in many aspects of society. Better representation is crucial for the acceptance of marginalized sections. The Indian media hang back even from portraying women, queer individuals, and other subaltern sections of society. Even in shows featuring asexual characters, there's a tendency to reinterpret or depict them as something different. They are sometimes portrayed as being cold or unsocial. It appears that society often attempts to diminish or overlook asexuality, treating it as if it's inherently negative. In her book, *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives* Sarah E.S. Sinwell quotes that:

When asexuality is represented within contemporary media, it is often limited to representations that blur the lines between asexuality and desexualisation. These representations misname and misrepresent asexuality as a lack of (normative) sexual attractiveness rather than a lack of sexual attraction. (qtd. in Sennkestra)

While the society have made progress in gaining representation for the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly for gay or transgender individuals, the progress has been hard fought and slow. Asexual representation lags behind, partially because asexual individuals did not face as severe discrimination historically as other identities, leading to fewer advocacies for their visibility.

This research aims to highlight the absence or misrepresentation of asexuality in Indian mainstream media by analysing the movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha* which was released on 29 June 2023. It is a Bollywood movie directed by Sameer Vidwans which is his directorial debut. Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment and Namah Pictures collaborated in the production of the film. Although the movie may not explicitly portray asexuality, its intentional exclusion and disregard significantly contribute to the discussion in this project. The movie's principal focus is on the concept of consent in relationships. The female protagonist experiences a horrendous situation in her former relationship and is bound to trauma which makes her unable to be sexually intimate with the male protagonist after marriage. The film tries to bring out the importance of consent and the tendency of Indian society to keep under wraps a dire situation concerned about their honour. However, the project centres itself on a particular instance in the film where the female protagonist provides an excuse to evade a sexual encounter. Her trauma and aversion to intimacy are mislabelled as asexuality. Even if she genuinely identifies as asexual, this possibility is entirely overlooked in the movie.

The first chapter incorporates queer theory and its emergence which is the foundational aspect of all subsequent studies and discussions on various sexualities. The chapter delves into the history of LGBT activism, highlighting key pioneers and the movement's upsurge, which challenged established traditional beliefs. Numerous organizations dedicated their efforts to improve conditions for sexual minorities. However,

asexuality, often misunderstood and overlooked, struggles for recognition as a valid orientation within the LGBTQIA+ community, with limited representation in the media. The second chapter discusses the basic plotline of the movie and there is an attempt to analyse the profound themes appearing in it. The central point of discussion becomes the movie's treatment or exclusion of asexuality, highlighting instances where it either misrepresents or neglects this integral aspect. The theories and discourse regarding asexuality is employed to identify the flaw within the film's narrative on its treatment of asexuality. The misrepresentation is dangerous as it serves a circumstance for increased confusion and prejudice against asexual orientation.

Queer theory, the history of LGBTQIA+ movements, and the predicament of sexual minorities in Indian society are emphasized to thoroughly examine and analyse the movie. These elements collectively contribute to identifying the problematic aspects in the film and highlight how it misrepresents the frequently overlooked asexual orientation. It is also a challenge when reluctance lies within the LGBTQIA+ community to acknowledge asexuality as a valid sexual orientation, further making it complicated. To combat the aversion against asexuality, a largely influential factor like mass media is necessary. As a movie, which serves as a major form of mass media, shape opinions and change attitudes of the public, an accurate portrayal on significant notion like asexuality is vital.

Chapter 1

Asexuality and the Queer Theoretical Evolution

A sexual orientation where the individual does not experience sexual attraction or experience a low level of sexual interest in others is termed as asexuality. In the acronym LGBTQIA+, the letter A stands for asexual or asexuality. Even though asexuals have existed for long as humans have, true language was only given to these identities through recently emerged terminologies and expressions. Asexuality itself is a novel idea in the recently developed concept of queer theory and the rising LGBTQIA+ movements. Homosexuality, cross-dressing, and other deviant behaviours were widely considered unacceptable considering the societal norms and religious beliefs. Overturning of political structures, questioning and toppling of religious beliefs and the enlightenment era viewed homosexuality in a new perspective. The struggle for freedom and acceptance rose during the twentieth century. A few veiled or semi-secret organizations were established specifically to advance the rights of homosexuals, and communal spaces surfaced. 'Society for Human Rights', the first homosexual rights organization was founded in 1924 in America. From the organisations, publications, and other activities associated with the sexual and gender minorities queer studies emerged, resulting in the formation of queer theory in the 90s.

Queer theory is interdisciplinary in approach, which explores the individual differences and interactions between gender, sex, and sexual orientation. It makes an effort to provide a more accurate depiction of people and their social roles by describing these interactions using labels or identities. Its origin is associated to queer studies, literature, and writing. The theory's emergence is also closely linked to the advocacy for homosexual rights

throughout human history. It drew inspiration from feminist and poststructuralist theories, among others, and aimed to deconstruct fixed categories and challenge societal norms.

Homosexual activity or deviance from established gender roles existed from the dawn of time. The ancient societies of India, China, Greece, and Egypt had nuanced attitudes towards the sexual and gender minorities, influenced by their respective cultural and religious contexts. For instance, in various Hindu and Buddhist texts recognises a range of sexual orientations, diverse genders, and sexual expressions. In ancient Greece, homosexual relations between adult men and young boys were common. Attitude towards homosexuality took a turn with the emergence of Abrahamic religions, as they upheld traditional gender roles and condemned same-sex relationships. With colonisation the Europeans imposed their sexual norms upon the inhabitants as means of civilising them and gaining religious and social control over them. Objection against these social and religious norms were the somewhat the initial homosexual rights advocacy. The ban on of consenting sexual behaviour was criticized by writers who were influenced by ideas associated with the Enlightenment. Scientific study on homosexuality began by the second half of nineteenth century. Their writings were sympathetic to the concept of a homosexual or bisexual orientation occurring naturally in an identifiable segment of humankind.

Modern means of activism surged during the twentieth century. The world wars and the way it changed how world till then perceived things made impactful differences on the view of sexualities as well:

World Wars were a critical turning point that provided opportunities for men and women to experience and act on same-sex attractions; John D'Emilio described the era as a 'nationwide coming out.' After World War II men and

women who had discovered their homosexual desires and had begun to form relationships, create communities, and fight for their civil rights. (Alpert)

Magnus Hirschfeld was one of the early notable activist, who was a German physician and sexologist. In May 1897, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was established by Hirschfeld in Berlin with the goal of promoting women's and LGBTQIA+ rights in Germany. In the mid-20s, LGBTQIA+ rights organisations began to surface in the US. The Mattachine Society, founded in 1950 by communist and labour activist Harry Hay and The Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian rights organization in the US founded in 1955 in San Francisco, California by activist couple Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were luminaries in the field. These organisations formed in the 50s were collectively called 'homophile organisations'. They preferred the word homophile instead of homosexual to deemphasize the sexual aspect and rather focus on the love. One of the notable achievements of the homophile movement was its efforts to publish literature that challenged prevailing stereotypes about homosexuality. Magazines like *ONE* and *The Ladder* provided a platform for dialogue and helped build a sense of identity and solidarity within the gay and lesbian community.

A more radical movement surfaced, challenging the tranquillity of the homophile movement. The Stonewall riots were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the LGBTQIA+ community in response to a police raid that took place in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood of Manhattan, New York City. Patrons of the pub, including transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, lesbians, and gay men, fought back, resulting in many days of protests. A year later, to commemorate the anniversary of the rebellion, hundreds of people marched along Christopher Street in what is largely acknowledged as the first pride parade. The emergence of radicalism within LGBT groups in

the 1970s gave rise to the Gay Liberation Movement. This extremist approach shaped the present form of activism and perspectives.

Feminist movements throughout the Western world inspired LGBTQIA+ activism. The second wave of feminism was more radical in nature where women took upon the streets. Since the 1960s, the histories of feminism and LGBTQIA+ politics can be entwined in the West. Amid the fast cultural changes brought about by the sexual revolution, both arose as radical, broadly based social movements. Cultural transformations of sexuality and gender sprouted during the peak of feminist movements, that challenged what was “natural” incited the homosexual activists as well.

Queer theory emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as an interdisciplinary field of study that questioned and challenged traditional understandings of sexuality, gender, and identity. The activism in the 20th Century significantly shifted perceptions of homosexuality, prompting the development of studies and writings that explored the unique experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. While organizations and gay rights movements have played a crucial role, academic and literary contributions have further enriched and deepened the understanding of queer identities, experiences, and cultures. This gave rise to the emergence of queer theory, a conceptual framework that critically examines societal norms and challenges traditional ideas about gender and sexuality. “The term ‘queer theory’ itself came from Teresa de Lauretis’ 1991 work in the feminist cultural studies journal *differences* titled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*” (“Queer Theory”). In the 1960s, following the success of the gay rights movement, members of the queer community began to reclaim the term ‘queer’ as an umbrella term for those who doubt identity with heteronormativity, which in the past was used as a derogatory term.

Redefining heteronormativity is one of the primary concepts of queer theory:

Heteronormativity is the notion that heterosexuality is the only ‘normal’ sexual orientation and that romantic relationships exist only between the opposite sexes. It is also the belief that people fall distinctly into two genders, male or female, and that their dress and behaviours reflect their biological sex assigned at birth. (“Queer Studies”)

It emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of identities, acknowledging that they are not rigid or stable. Queer theory also attempts to incorporate the homosexual experiences into the mainstream realms of society. The theory acknowledges the multiple forms of oppression faced by sexual minorities and the diverse ways in which each of their experiences vary from each other. Queer theory has delved into the processes by which sexual identities are formed within contemporary culture. It advocates for the development of policies that recognize and accommodate a wide range of gender and orientations. This includes inclusive healthcare, representation in politics and law-making, and fair incorporation into various institutions and organisations.

Michel Foucault is regarded as one of the prominent historians and poststructuralist, who had an immense influence in the development of queer theory. The first volume of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* was written in 1976, where he argued that sexuality is wandering, rather fluid than an essential part of human beings. He linked how sexuality is controlled by power structures and societal norms:

The question I would like to pose is not, Why are we repressed? but rather, why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment... that we are repressed? By what spiral did we come to affirm that sex is negated? What led us to show, ostentatiously, that sex is something we hide, to say it is something we silence. (Foucault 8-9)

Judith Butler one of the most prominent and influential contributors to queer theory who focuses on gender and challenge its standardised notions. Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* which came out in 1990 challenges the inherent and accepted identities. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's groundbreaking book *Epistemology of the Closet* examines the works of many great authors like Charles Dickens and Henry James and brings in the binary views of sexuality. Sedgwick is considered as one of the pathbreakers in queer theory as her studies and contributions fundamentally enriched it. Gayle Rubin's essay *Thinking Sex* published in 1984 is recognised as a foundational text which extends Michel Foucault's critique of biological explanations of sexuality. She depicts how certain sexual orientations are assigned greater value than others, highlighting social construction of sexual norms and the unequal power dynamics inherent in these classifications.

Asexuality as a distinct sexual orientation began to be recognised when people challenged and expand the traditional notions of sexuality. The orientation came only to be associated and included within queer identities much later in the 21st Century. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), founded in 2001 by David Jay, played a significant role in raising awareness about asexuality and creating a community for asexual individuals. Asexuality is often misunderstood and not recognised as a valid sexual orientation even within the LGBTQIA+ community. Asexuality is usually regarded as a phase that will go away when the individual finds the right person to be with. Asexuals are associated with poor socialization, fear of public, and deemed as low sex drive. Sex and sexuality have always been fundamental concepts associated with or central to human experiences thus anything deviant is considered abnormal. So, the asexual element within the sexual minority groups and experiences are oftentimes left out.

As asexuality is still an emerging field of study there is a lack of prominent scholars and noteworthy studies made. *Understanding Asexuality* by Anthony F. Bogaert is significant in its status as the inaugural publication addressing asexuality as a distinct sexual orientation. The work quotes the prevalence research in the sexual orientation field that has centred on gays and lesbians, who constitute a more visible and well-known sexual minority than asexual people. He asserts that asexuality is primarily characterized by the absence of sexual attraction, distinguishing it from mere abstention from sexual behaviour. Asexual individuals may still participate in sexual activities for reasons such as pleasing a partner or relieving physical tension. He explains that there is a distinction between the concepts of sexual attraction and romantic attraction. In the survey he conducted in 2004, one per cent of the population identified as asexuals.

K. J. Cerankowski's notable work *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives* (2014) gives particular emphasis on study of asexuality. Julie Sondra Decker's book *The Invisible Orientation* serves as an introductory resource for those who are interested in asexuality:

Asexual people are often told they will one day find "the one" and develop sexual feelings and the values society attaches to them. Many asexual folks have to hear this over and over and over again, which thrusts a perpetual image of immaturity upon them. Asexuality is not a signal that a person is necessarily stunted emotionally or physically, and feeling sexual attraction or inclination is not the line everyone must cross to be treated like an adult. Maturity should not be measured by willingness or inclination to seek out or accept sexual experiences. (7)

She further highlights the need for awareness as it may be dangerous to mislabel asexuals while trying to figure out their identity. It delves into the fundamental aspects of what asexuality is, dispels misconceptions, and examines prevalent challenges that individuals identifying as asexual might encounter.

Asexuality is a spectrum so it's different for everyone. It does not necessarily mean a lack of sexual interest, but experience closely related to it comes under the notion. The grey sexual, demi sexual, sex-negative and sex-neutral all belong to the people in ace-spectrum. There is also an emotional side to these experiences and how they are categorised. It is incredibly difficult to truly represent the asexual experience in a way that is defined as asexual in a formal manner. That is because asexuality is not simply just someone who does not have sex. The idea of not wanting to have sex isn't unhealthy, as many suggest.

Asexual representation in media, however, is generally scarce and not openly acknowledged or validated by creators or authors. The portrayal of asexuality in the media varies, marked by notable biases and instances of erasure of asexual characters. When more familiar queer identities struggle to gain visibility and recognition, addressing asexuality becomes challenging. The pride and joy of witnessing a character you relate to in the mainstream media and public expanses indeed cater to a safe space and awareness foregoing stereotypes and prejudices. Thus, the notion of representation becomes essential. In a circumstance where hyper-sexuality and prominence are given to patriarchal perspectives, the deviant sexual aspects tend to be side-lined. Asexual representation that exists only showcases sex-repulsed people and that too with valid reasons. The asexual individual is not portrayed in an appropriate manner. When the time is proper or the right person appears, asexuality within the individual is hauled up, curing the person of the aspect they are lacking. Media absolutely plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions. While theories are inevitable for representation, the increasing impact of media forms an effective image.

Positive and accurate representation of asexuality is essential to serve increased awareness and understanding, fostering a more inclusive environment for individuals identifying with this orientation.

Chapter 2

Analysing the Movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha*

Considering the prevailing intolerable mind-set towards the queer folk in India, it remains challenging for them to find representation in mainstream platforms such as literature and media, or to step into the forefront of society. Increasing awareness of sexual minorities can occur mainly through their representation in prominent and visible spaces. The mainstream media in India plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, circulating information, and influencing the socio-political elements of the nation. Creating a positive, pragmatic, and constructive content with accurate information becomes essential, considering that the Indian audience often develops an emotional connection with the content they consume through mass media. Portrayals of the queer communities in Indian media have always leaned towards negativity and stereotypes. The media or film industry has been called out for its lack of diversity and inclusivity, most often depicting queer individuals in a comedic light or adverse image. The Indian society perceives queerness as a Western influence that allegedly conflicts with the traditions and moral systems. However, certain contemporary films, like *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, *Badhai Do*, and *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, and the web series *What The Folks*, strive to challenge this perspective by emphasizing that queerness is not a matter of choice. The progress is evident when considering these occasions.

Over the last few years, the societies have witnessed improved representation in the media, as there have been growing tendencies to call out inadequate portrayals in the media. The transition from repetitive and ridiculing stereotypical portrayals signifies a new beginning. A precise and increased depiction is crucial to normalizing diverse realities and

relationships. As there is still a lack of proper representation for the LGBTQIA+ community, achieving adequate visibility for asexuality poses a larger challenge. It is literally impossible to point out an asexual orientation, or a character associated with the identity in Indian media. Current discussions revolve around ensuring precise portrayals of the queer community in media, meeting the diverse audience's expectations. The inclusion of a few asexual characters on television could have spared countless individual's years of uncertainty and anxiety. Proper representation of any form will only lead towards the understanding and acceptance of those who are discriminated against.

Satyaprem Ki Katha is a romantic comedy encompassing all the features of an excellent commercial movie. Beyond its entertaining aspects such as the stellar cast, groovy music, and appealing cinematography, the film delves into a serious topic worthy of discussion. While it may not overtly depict asexuality, its deliberate omission and dismissal contribute significantly to the underlying serious theme discussed in this thesis. The film addresses a crucial and relevant theme, the significance of honouring the word 'No'. It delivers a compelling message that no should always mean no regardless of what situation it might be. The film centres around Satyaprem, portrayed by Kartik Aaryan, and his love interest Katha, played by Kiara Advani. Satyaprem, a middle-class young man, falls deeply in love with Katha, a talented and vibrant woman dealing with the aftermath of a painful breakup, leaving her emotionally scarred and wary of love. Circumstances lead Satyaprem to marry Katha. He sets out on a journey to win her heart, showcasing his determination, sincerity, and commitment to Katha, forming the core of the narrative. However, the movie also explores a vital societal message regarding consent and the significance of respecting boundaries within relationships. It tackles the sensitive issue of non-consensual encounters within relationships, emphasizing that consent is imperative, even within the context of relationships. Katha was sexually assaulted by her former boyfriend and was forced to

conceal it, aggravating her trauma. The film aims to educate the audience about the importance of understanding and honouring their partner's choices. It asserts that any non-consensual activity, even between individuals in a relationship, breaches trust and consent. The film's conclusion underscores the unfortunate reality of numerous unreported instances of non-consensual encounters, driven by societal pressure, fear, and concerns about family reputation. This sheds light on a pervasive issue in Indian society where victims often hesitate to report such cases, sustaining a cycle of silence and injustice.

Even though the movie attempted to address the overlooked sexual abuse in intimate relationships, in one instance it brought in the topic of asexuality which is the primary focus of this project. The movie when addressing asexuality, had a shallower approach, offering only a brief introduction without delving into its complexities. This is a missed opportunity to explore asexual identities and it leaves the audience with limited awareness of the challenges an individual belonging to the sexual orientation may encounter. Traumatized by the assault, Katha recoils from sexual intimacy and uses the label of asexuality as an excuse. Satyaprem responds to her revelation in an insolent way. He retaliates and says, "How is that even possible" (01.08.11). The narrative suggests that asexuality is portrayed as an excuse, overlooking the possibility that disinterest or avoidance of sex could stem from trauma or deliberate choices, rather than solely being indicative of an individual identifying as asexual. Another notable flaw in the movie is feeling entitled to sex merely because someone is legally married. This problematic representation again turns a blind eye to the crucial concept of consent or individual preferences, providing a deceptive notion that marriage does inherently grant entitlement to sexual intimacy. When Katha, reveals her asexuality, Satyaprem responds with frustration and anger. He denies that asexuality does not exist. He then confronts Katha's father, accusing him of deceiving him by not revealing Katha's asexuality. His sense of entitlement advances when he feels that through marriage his

physical and emotional needs are to be fulfilled. Satya remarks “I have some expectations from my marriage and my wife, emotional as well as physical, and if those can’t be fulfilled... We can get a divorce” (01.13.50).

In a country like India, where discussions on sex are often avoided, the societal stigma against asexual individuals reflects the prevailing notion that reproduction is obligatory, sidelining those who do not conform. In India, the prevailing societal norms pertain around sex as something normative, considering it as a revered and special act reserved for married couples. Being asexual can be challenging in this given situation. Being asexual can many times mean navigating a society that prioritizes sex, where books, movies, and advertisements often emphasize couples engaging intimately, and explicit content gains popularity or is ogled upon. In such a culture, serious relationships are frequently perceived through the lens of sexual connection. Family and relatives ingrain the belief that the only right path is to find the right person, get married, and have children within a specific timeframe, leaving with the impression that this is an individual’s sole option. Celibacy is traditionally considered a path to attaining “Moksha” in India or is considered a spiritually superior way of life. Within our culture people are seen proudly embracing it. While intentional celibacy allows individuals to resist acting on sexual attraction, it is important to note that asexuality entails a lack of sexual attraction altogether. Therefore, intentionally refraining from sexual activities for specific goals does not equate to asexuality. It is difficult to simply exist as an asexual.

The movie examined here portrays asexuality as an obstacle to overcome. With the right man coming into the frame, you are cured of your asexuality. In the film with the “hero’s” presence, the girl who endured agony is saved. Satya is relieved to know that his wife is not asexual, and he can be sexually intimate with his wife with the course of time, after she overcomes the trauma. Throughout the film, Katha is not seeking professional help but is cured with Satya’s intervention. Nevertheless, Satya is portrayed as sympathetic

towards Katha learning about her past trauma. But the makers of the film tend to overlook many serious aspects which can be problematic. The film is at fault when Satya discloses Katha's truth to the entire family while asserting the necessity of pursuing justice. The narrative heedlessly reinforces the notion that a woman can only be salvaged through the intervention of a man. Although Satya is portrayed as a virtuous character, it is challenging to disassociate him from the conventional patriarchal hero. Additionally, the film neglects to depict whether Katha ultimately attains justice. It is also baffling that other characters, including Katha's family, remain oblivious to the profundity of the situation.

The serious themes introduced in the film are not allotted sufficient time for thorough discussion and the exploration of appropriate solutions. Being uncomfortable with physical intimacy out of trauma or past negative sexual encounters does exist. Seeking help through counselling and professional help is the only advisable option in such circumstances. Asexuality is not a repulsive response to sex. A lack of interest or experience with sex is so often used as an insult, and the characters that experience it are seen as naive, stupid, or immature. Popular media has all the ability to establish a dignifying attitude towards a concealed aspect like asexuality. The film discards the opportunity of a relevant portrayal, despite introducing a serious theme. It falls short in further developing this aspect.

“The asexual spectrum is vast, with some asexual individuals still wanting romance and intimacy, whilst others are content with platonic relationships. Despite growing recognition of this sexual orientation, it’s still rare for anyone who identifies as asexual to be represented in the media” (Brown). Many among the general population still feel asexuality as an orientation is some kind of an excuse. The intolerance this sexual orientation faces reinforces the need for more asexual representation. Many societies grasp concepts that are familiar and frequently depicted in society. Along with increasing representation an accurate portrayal is also essential. Mass media presenting asexuality and other queer identities as

other, unnatural, or antisocial is equally dreadful. It causes more harm than visibility in recognised and accepted platforms.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, there have been incredible strides towards securing equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community in India. However, a well-aimed depiction of sexual and gender minorities is misrepresented. Aside from the severe lack of representation on screen, it is also rarely discussed in public spaces, taught in schools, or mentioned in literature.

Asexuality as an identity is still not widely understood or recognised in mainstream Indian society. Being asexual feels like being constantly deluded by the rest of the society and it can turn out to be increasingly isolating. There have been a few recent examples of sexual and gender minorities on screen, but only potential or covertly implied asexual characters. The print or online media might have done work aiming to increase awareness and form accurate representations but, mainstream films and television are the sources that are widely consumed by the people. Thus, the visibility remains low when the subaltern does not get enough space in mainstream areas.

By analysing the movie *Satyaprem Ki Katha* this research aimed to point out the lack of asexual representation in Indian mainstream media. Even if the movie brought in several aspects like consent associated with romantic relationships and seeking justice against sexual violations, it lacked consistency. It not only failed to provide a conclusive resolution to the introduced subjects but also failed to seize the opportunity to address the disregarded topic of asexuality. The movie prioritised entertainment over giving significance to the serious subjects appearing in the film. Maybe the movie might not have aimed to highlight asexuality as its central theme. The film was for sure a commercial one aiming at extravagant scenes, over-the-top dialogues, splendid music and dance, and several other aspects associated with these kinds of movies.

There is a major issue that arises when presenting a concept openly and subsequently misinterpreting it. Asexuality is depicted as an excuse, or a temporary phase one undergoes as a response to some major trauma. As seen in the movie, the female protagonist could appear asexual for a while but when she overcomes her trauma or is healed by the intervention of the right person, she turns the so-called 'normal'. A commercial movie with a misinformed and falsified subject, which caters to a larger audience makes it more difficult to introduce an aspect like asexuality to the Indian audience. There are several instances in the movie where the characters make unpleasant remarks about asexuality. This will only lead the Indian audience to carry on with their prejudiced mindset. The film has introduced a serious issue and circumvented it rather than creating some good and effective about it.

The modern society where the fascination with romance and sexuality is excessive has constantly grabbed the attention of many and fed the interests of majority of the society. Bestselling novels and poetry predominantly fall within the romance genre and romantic movies often enjoy widespread popularity. Even when romance is not the central theme of the work, the romantic interest of the protagonist or recurring characters remains a significant aspect. In cinema, the heroes' women tend to admire are desirable and exude superiority or vice versa. In a sex-centric society, asexuality stands as an invisible and often misunderstood sexual orientation. The person who identifies with asexuality as a sexual orientation finds it difficult to navigate them and always feels a sense of alienation. In a sex-obsessed society, asexuality, or factors that can be associated within the orientation, is overshadowed or dismissed. As sex and libido are considered necessary biological need for survival, individuals refraining from it are frowned upon. The wider spectrum of sexuality which includes grey sexuality, aromanticism, demi sexuality, and many other side-lining orientations are more marginalised and spited.

There may exist some ace-coded characters that are maligned, still lacking proper representation to be pointed out in Indian media and expanses. To obtain an accurate understanding of a topic, it is essential to have reliable sources and to present the available information in a positive light. Whenever asexuality is mentioned in the media it draws a lot of unwanted and negative attention. The lack of awareness and visibility is the root cause of this spiteful approach. It is natural for human beings to fear or exclude things they are unaware of or are difficult to comprehend. This fear and bias turns into hatred that may even lead to causing serious discomfort or physical pain to the deviant individuals. Knowing more about something and interacting with the unfamiliar regularly is indeed the better solution to forego the prejudices than making someone forcefully understand the subject. An optimistic perspective or approach is crucial for fostering a positive portrayal of asexuality and contributing to the well-being of individuals who identify with the asexual orientation. The article appeared on *Feminism in India* on the diverse representation of asexuality in popular culture states:

Of course, there need not be a golden, do-no-wrong character for every Ace representation in pop culture narratives but when representation is already scarce, it is important to give the characters the right language and labels so that the audience who are coming to terms with their own queerness, have the vocabulary to express and know for themselves that they are not alone.

(Ramnath)

To be included in the major domains within the society, aspects that asexual individual identifies with should be normalised. Factors an asexual associate with will also help to build a safer community for those who identify with this orientation.

In a densely populated society like India, diverse in language, religion, region, and economic conditions, conveying an idea uniformly to the masses is difficult. The Indian society rooted in tradition and biased blind beliefs finds it difficult to embrace matters that are alien to them. Even if the queer and asexual individuals existed in the society they are never included in safe spaces within the society. Films and other mass media that cater to a larger population and influence their take on certain factors at least should feel the liability to be involved in the right means of depiction. The patriarchal and heteronormative norms are yet to be challenged in media spaces and popular culture for enough and meticulous representations of a frail and pressing subject like asexuality.

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