

Effect of Queer Film on Women: An Analysis of 'Kaathal - The Core'

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Abstract

The term “Queer” mainly refers to anything having to do with sexual identity, conduct, or personality that deviates from accepted heterosexual or social norms. Many people in society viewed being gay as abnormal, and they still do. Films with queer subject distinguish themselves from other genres that often feature themes like crime, hegemony, patriarchy, and [heterosexual] love. The focus of this research paper is to investigate the impact of the queer ‘Kaathal - The Core’ on women, focusing on the effects, acceptance, and potential transformative influence on their perception of the LGBTQ concept. The study comprises three main objectives: Firstly, it aims to understand the effects of queer films on women comprehensively. Through questionnaires, the research explores how exposure to ‘Kaathal - The Core’ influences women’s attitudes, awareness, and perspectives regarding queer relationships and identities. Secondly, the thesis examines the reception of the LGBTQ concept portrayed in the film among women. It investigates whether the film’s representation of queer characters resonates with the attitudes prevalent among women, delving into the nuanced responses and potential variations in acceptance. Lastly, the research assesses whether ‘Kaathal - The Core’ catalyses promoting acceptance of the LGBTQ concept among women.

Keywords: *Queer Films, Films, Women, Acceptance, LGBTQ, Kaathal – The Core*

1. Introduction

The evolution of queer film in India is a testament to the country's complex social, cultural, and political landscape. From early representations steeped in stereotypes and stigma to

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the emergence of bold, authentic narratives, queer cinema in India has undergone a profound transformation, reflecting shifting attitudes towards sexuality and identity. Historically, depictions of queer characters in Indian cinema were often relegated to the realm of caricature and ridicule, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing societal taboos surrounding homosexuality. Characters were typically portrayed as comic relief or villains, and their identities were often reduced to mere punchlines or plot devices.

However, the late 20th century witnessed the beginnings of a gradual change, fueled by the efforts of pioneering filmmakers and activists who sought to challenge mainstream narratives and give voice to marginalized communities. One of the earliest notable instances of queer representation in Indian cinema can be found in the film "Fire" (1996), directed by Deepa Mehta. The film, which depicted a lesbian relationship between two women in a traditional Indian household, sparked controversy and ignited debates about censorship and freedom of expression. Despite the backlash, "Fire" marked a significant milestone in Indian cinema, opening the door for more nuanced and authentic portrayals of queer experiences. Subsequent years saw the release of films like "My Brother...Nikhil" (2005) and "Fashion" (2008), which addressed LGBTQ+ themes with greater sensitivity and depth.

It wasn't until the 2010s that queer cinema in India truly began to flourish, thanks in part to the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized consensual same-sex relationships. This landmark legal victory paved the way for a new wave of LGBTQ+ storytelling, with filmmakers embracing greater artistic freedom and exploring a wide range of queer narratives. Films like "Aligarh" (2015) and "Margarita with a Straw" (2014) offered poignant reflections on the struggles and triumphs of LGBTQ+ individuals in Indian

society, while also challenging prevailing prejudices and stereotypes. These films not only provided much-needed representation but also sparked conversations about acceptance, equality, and human rights.

The past decade has also witnessed the emergence of queer filmmakers who have brought their unique perspectives and voices to the forefront of Indian cinema. Directors like Onir ("I Am," 2010) and Ritesh Batra ("The Lunchbox," 2013) have tackled LGBTQ+ themes with sensitivity and nuance, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse cinematic landscape. Furthermore, the rise of independent cinema and digital platforms has provided greater opportunities for queer filmmakers to tell their stories and reach wider audiences. Web series like "Made in Heaven" (2019) and "The Married Woman" (2021) have explored LGBTQ+ themes in innovative ways, challenging traditional norms and narratives.

2. Significance of Study

The significance of the study lies in its exploration of the impact of the queer film 'Kaathal - The Core' on women and its potential to influence their attitudes, awareness, and acceptance of LGBTQ relationships and identities. In a society where traditional norms often marginalize and stigmatize the LGBTQ community; films serve as a powerful medium to challenge such prejudices and act as a voice for the marginalized. This research addresses a gap in the understanding of the influence of queer cinema on women specifically, shedding light on whether exposure to such content can contribute to a transformative shift in perceptions. By employing questionnaires, the study aims to comprehensively analyze the effects of 'Kaathal - The Core' on women's attitudes, awareness, and perspectives regarding queer relationships.

3. 'Kaathal - The Core' Film

"Kaathal – The Core," directed by Jeo Baby and released in 2023, stands as a significant milestone in Malayalam cinema, offering a poignant exploration of identity, acceptance, and social change. Set against the backdrop of a rural village in Kerala, the film delves into the complexities of human relationships and societal expectations, particularly within the context of LGBTQ+ experiences. The research paper tries to analyse study the impact of the queer film 'Kaathal - The Core' on women and its potential to influence their attitudes, awareness, and acceptance of LGBTQ relationships and identities.

4. Review of Literature

The study by Maya S. Reddy explores the impact of queer representation in media on social change, highlighting the importance of narrative research in highlighting the negative effects of restrictive policies. It highlights the connection between harm and agency from discriminatory legislation, the public's identification with LGBT characters, and the historically inaccurate portrayals of minorities. It emphasizes the importance of narratives in connecting audiences with social issues and highlighting the value of meaningful narratives in depicting discriminatory legislation. Audience identification with queer characters fosters a passionate community, breaking down ignorance.

The study Bradley J. Bond & Benjamin L. Compton explores the link between television exposure to gay characters and heterosexual viewers' endorsement of gay equality. Results show a positive correlation, particularly for those with few relationships with gay individuals and racial minorities. The study reveals a positive correlation between television exposure to gay characters and endorsement of gay equality,

particularly among racial minority and those with limited relationships. It further suggests future research to understand the role of television messages in public opinion about gay sexualities.

The study by Megan May van Meer and Monique Maria Henriette Pollmann explores the link between media exposure, stereotypes, and attitudes towards LGBT individuals, specifically Dutch television representation. Results show that exposure to stereotypical TV shows leads to negative attitudes and higher stereotypes about gay men. The study emphasizes the need for diverse representation to improve psychological well-being and prevent exaggeration of stereotypes. Age and ethnicity also influence perceptions. Future research should include more diverse participants. The study reveals that exposure to television programs with stereotypical portrayals of LGBT individuals (LGBTQ) is linked to negative attitudes and higher stereotypes about gay men. Age and ethnicity influence these perceptions. The research emphasizes the need for nuanced portrayals to prevent exaggeration and serve as positive role models. It also emphasizes the need for diverse representation to positively impact LGB individuals' psychological well-being.

The study by Marie-Diane Grouchksxa examined the influence of positive media representation on LGBTQ+ women through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, involving participants from diverse backgrounds, considering cultural differences, and using a quantitative approach. The research, based on semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ+ women, identified themes and patterns in their stories, highlighting the impact of media representation and cultural differences on their experiences.

The research by Bryson K. Hamamura investigates the impact of television viewing habits and programs on sexual

behaviours of LGBT adolescents, addressing a gap in literature. The study is significant due to high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents and lack of research on this topic. The study found that mature-rated television viewing significantly influenced sexual behavior engagement among LGB adolescents, explaining 32.49% of the variance. However, the study's limitations include not asking participants about their sexual orientation and its small sample size from a Northern California University.

5. Objectives

- To understand the effects of queer film on women in Ernakulam.
- To analyse whether the LGBTQ concept in 'Kaathal - the core' has been accepted by women in Ernakulam.
- To examine whether 'Kaathal - The Core' has brought about more acceptance to the cause of LGBTQ.

6. Hypothesis of the Study

H0: There is a significant effect of queer films on the perceptions and attitudes of women in Ernakulam.

H1: There is no significant effect of queer films on the perceptions and attitudes of women in Ernakulam.

7. Research Methodology

The research is undertaken using a quantitative methodology, employing a questionnaire to comprehend the impact of queer films on women. For this study, a sample of 100 women from Ernakulam is selected through a simple random method, ensuring a fair and unbiased representation of the population. The questionnaire method involves asking these women

structured questions to gather numerical data and analyse the effects of queer films on their perspectives and attitudes.

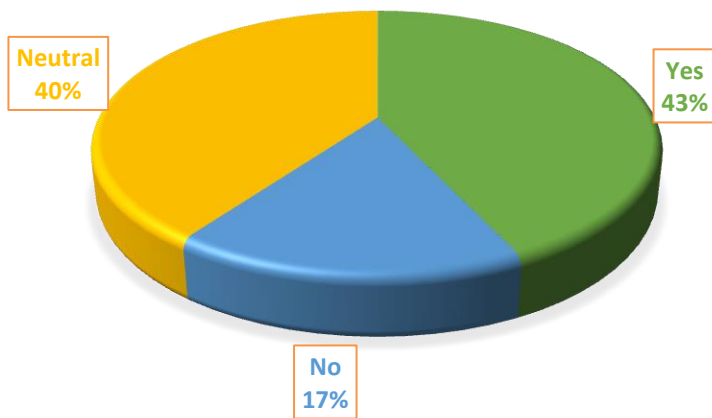
8. Results and Discussions

The research reveals that queer films, particularly "Kaathal - The Core," significantly impact the perceptions and attitudes of participants in Ernakulam. The majority of respondents, are particularly interested in Malayalam films, including LGBTQ-themed works. They watched the film, expressing satisfaction with its representation of LGBTQ characters and themes. They also believe the film successfully challenged stereotypes and increased awareness of LGBTQ experiences.

8.1 Stereotypes or Preconceived Notions about LGBTQ Individuals

The film's impact on LGBTQ individuals' perceptions varied significantly, with the majority having challenging pre conceptions, indicating a significant range of opinions.

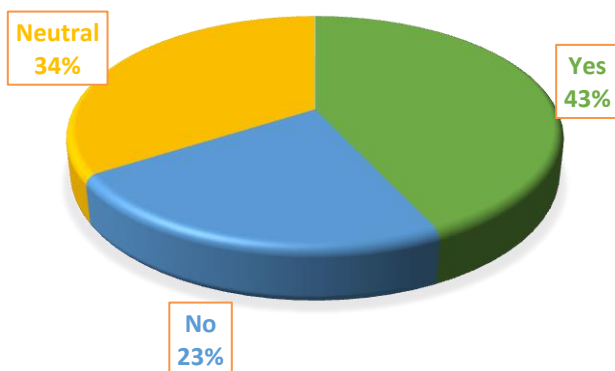
Figure 1. Notions about LGBTQ Individuals



8.2 'Kaathal - The Core' film influenced respondents' perception of LGBTQ individuals

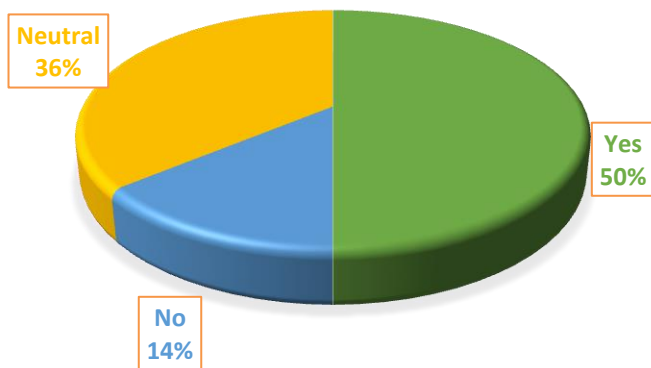
Majority of the respondents believe the film positively impacted their perspective, while a few remained unchanged as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. Influenced respondents' perception of LGBTQ individuals



8.3 'Kaathal - The Core' has increased awareness about LGBTQ issues in Ernakulam

Figure 3. Increased awareness about LGBTQ issues in Ernakulam



The film has raised awareness about LGBTQ issues in Ernakulam, with majority, 55% of respondents believing so, 14% skeptic, and 36% neutral, suggesting uncertainty among the majority as shown in figure 3. The research supports the hypothesis that the film positively influences societal attitudes, demonstrating its impact on fostering inclusivity and understanding of LGBTQ experiences.

9. Conclusion

"Kaathal - The Core," has a transformative impact on the perceptions and attitudes of women in Ernakulam. The demographic profile of respondents, predominantly 18-24, indicates a receptive audience for modern media representations. The interest in Malayalam films, including LGBTQ-themed works, suggests openness to diverse narratives. The film successfully challenged stereotypes and increased awareness of LGBTQ experiences among women in Ernakulam.

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