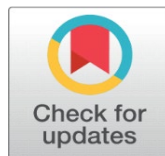# FROM CLOSET TO STREAM: THE POLITICS OF QUEER REPRESENTATION IN POST-SECTION 377 INDIAN WEB SERIES

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ABSTRACT

The decriminalization of homosexuality in India in 2018 marked a significant turning point in the legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. Since then, digital streaming platforms have become important spaces for the articulation of queer identities. This paper examines how queer representation in Indian web series has evolved in the post-Section 377 era. Using qualitative textual and discourse analysis, the study investigates five web series—Made in Heaven, His Story, Romil & Jugal, and Four More Shots Please! The analysis explores how these series portray queer characters, the role of intersectionality, and the implications of digital media as a site for both visibility and commodification. The findings reveal a complex landscape: while these platforms increase queer visibility and diversity, they also present tensions between authenticity and market-driven narratives. This research contributes to broader discussions about queer media, representation, and digital cultures in contemporary India.

Keywords: Queer, Representation, Indian Web Series, Post-Section 377

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-Section 377 refers to the period after the 2018 Supreme Court judgment in India that decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code—a colonial-era law used to target LGBTQ+ individuals. This landmark ruling recognized the rights to dignity, privacy, and equality for queer communities, marking a significant shift in India's legal and cultural landscape. Since then, there has been increased visibility of LGBTQ+ people in media, greater public discourse around gender and sexuality, and a growing movement for broader civil rights, though challenges like social stigma and the lack

of marriage equality still persist. The media landscape in India has undergone a significant transformation in the wake of the 2018 Supreme Court judgment that decriminalized consensual same-sex relations Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India,. This legal milestone catalyzed not only political and social shifts but also narrative possibilities in Indian media. While Bollywood and mainstream television have historically underrepresented or caricatured queer characters Ghosh (2016), digital platforms have begun to challenge these trends, offering a more nuanced and varied depiction of queer lives.

Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, ALTBalaji, and YouTube have emerged as new spaces where LGBTQ+ narratives are increasingly visible. However, the rise in representation raises critical questions: Do these web series authentically portray queer identities? Are they truly inclusive, or do they reinforce class and caste privilege? This paper addresses these concerns by analyzing selected Indian web series that foreground queer characters and narratives.

2. QUEER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN MEDIA

Historically, queer representation in Indian media has been marginal, stereotyped, or outright invisible. Films often depicted queer characters as comic relief or tragic figures Dutta and Roy (2014). More recent scholarship highlights how digital platforms provide alternative spaces for self-expression and visibility Banaji (2018). However, representation remains uneven, with a concentration on urban, upper-class, cis-male gay narratives. The marginalization of queer identities in Indian media has deep roots in both colonial legacies and post-independence cultural conservatism. Mainstream Bollywood films have historically relegated queer characters to the fringes, often reducing them to comic tropes, villainous deviants, or pitiable victims, thereby reinforcing heteronormative ideologies Ghosh (2016). Lesbian and transgender identities have been especially underrepresented, with few nuanced portrayals available in popular culture. Even when LGBTQ+ themes have been explored, such as in films like Fire (1996) or Aligarh (2015), the narratives have typically centered on suffering and social ostracism, rather than joy, resistance, or community. As a result, queer visibility has long been constrained by representational frameworks that limit LGBTQ+ people to stories of trauma or tokenism, rather than complex, multi-dimensional lives.

With the rise of digital platforms and independent media, there has been a gradual yet significant shift in how queer lives are portrayed. Platforms such as YouTube and Netflix India have enabled the production and dissemination of alternative narratives, often bypassing the censorship and commercial constraints of traditional media Banaji (2018). Web series like Made in Heaven and The Married Woman have introduced more empathetic and layered depictions of queer characters, offering visibility to previously silenced voices. However, these gains remain uneven. Representation tends to favor English-speaking, urban, upper-class gay men, while the lived realities of queer individuals from rural areas, Dalit and Adivasi communities, and trans or non-binary identities remain largely absent Narrain (2020). Thus, while digital media holds promise for expanding the spectrum of queer representation, it also risks reproducing existing hierarchies unless efforts are made to center intersectional and community-driven storytelling.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a combination of textual analysis, discourse analysis, and audience ethnography to explore queer representation in selected Indian web series. Textual analysis allows for a close reading of key episodes, focusing on elements such as narrative structure, character

development, and thematic content, with particular attention paid to how queer characters are introduced, developed, and positioned within the storylines. Discourse analysis provides insight into the underlying cultural and social narratives that shape the portrayal of queerness in these series, including the use of visual representation and the way that genre conventions—such as romance, drama, or comedy—are deployed to frame queer identities. This multi-layered approach enables a nuanced understanding of both the overt and subtle ways in which queer lives are represented, as well as the socio-cultural assumptions that inform these depictions Baker and Andrews (2020). By integrating textual and discourse analysis, the study offers a holistic view of how queer characters are constructed and interpreted within the specific context of Indian media, especially within the increasingly influential realm of digital platforms.

In addition to textual and discourse analysis, this research incorporates audience ethnography by examining online spaces where viewers engage with these series, including reviews, YouTube comments, and Reddit threads. This approach allows for the collection of audience reception data, shedding light on how viewers from various socio-cultural backgrounds interpret and respond to queer representations. By analyzing audience discussions, the study aims to capture the diversity of reactions to queer narratives, providing a counterpoint to the creators' intentions and uncovering any disparities between mainstream portrayals and grassroots perceptions of queerness Chakravarty and Reddy (2021) Furthermore, the selected web series—Made in Heaven, His Storyy, Romil & Jugal, and Four More Shots Please!—were chosen for their explicit inclusion of queer characters and their popularity among urban, middle-to-upper-class Indian audiences, ensuring that the sample reflects the current trends in digital media and the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ narratives in mainstream Indian content. The data collected from both the series themselves and their audience reception will be analyzed to identify patterns, challenges, and possibilities within the evolving discourse on queer representation in India.

3. POST-SECTION 377 MEDIA TRENDS

Since 2018, Indian media has seen an uptick in content explicitly addressing queer themes Chaudhuri (2020). Web series have emerged as a significant form, partly due to the relative creative freedom afforded by digital platforms. Yet, scholars caution that such representations often align with neoliberal ideals of respectability, limiting the scope of radical or intersectional queer politics Rao (2021).

Since the decriminalization of homosexuality in India in 2018, media representations of queer identities have become increasingly prominent, particularly on digital streaming platforms. This shift marks a significant cultural moment, as web series begin to challenge the erasure and stereotyping of LGBTQ+ individuals in mainstream Indian cinema and television Chaudhuri (2020). The emergence of platforms such as Netflix India, Amazon Prime Video, and ALTBalaji has facilitated the production of queer-centric narratives by offering creative freedom beyond the constraints of traditional censorship. However, this increase in visibility is often strategically curated to appeal to a liberal, upper-middle-class demographic, resulting in representations that center around urban, affluent, English-speaking queer characters Rao (2021). As such, these narratives tend to project queerness as cosmopolitan and consumer-friendly, reinforcing dominant socio-economic hierarchies while neglecting intersectional dimensions such as caste, class, or regional identity.

Furthermore, the framing of queer characters within these web series often adheres to what scholars have termed "neoliberal respectability politics," wherein LGBTQ+ identities are rendered acceptable primarily through their assimilation into heteronormative structures—such as monogamy, marriage, and professional success Misri (2022). These representations emphasize individual struggles, self-realization, and romantic fulfillment, often at the expense of collective, community-based, or activist-oriented portrayals of queer life. While such portrayals may serve to normalize queerness in the public imagination, they simultaneously sanitize it, stripping away its political and disruptive potential. Consequently, even in the post-Section 377 media environment, queer visibility remains circumscribed by commercial imperatives and sociocultural respectability, raising critical questions about the limits of representation and the politics of inclusion Narrain (2020), Rao (2021).

4. INTERSECTIONALITY AND DIGITAL QUEER CULTURES

The lens of intersectionality—considering how caste, class, gender, and region affect lived experiences—is crucial in understanding queer representation in India Narrain (2020). Digital platforms tend to amplify elite voices, leaving out those at the margins of caste and class hierarchies. This research seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how intersectionality is handled in selected queer Indian web series. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories like caste, class, gender, and sexuality, which together shape unique experiences of marginalization or privilege Crenshaw (1989). In the Indian co ntext, queer individuals from historically oppressed communities—such as Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims—face compounded forms of discrimination that are often invisible in mainstream queer media representations Jain (2019). While digital platforms have provided more spaces for queer visibility, these platforms tend to privilege urban, upper-class, English-speaking queer identities, leaving the diverse lived experiences of those from lower castes, rural areas, and other marginalized groups underrepresented. For example, web series like Made in Heaven (2019) or His Storyy (2021) primarily feature urban, cisgender, gay men, and their narratives often revolve around romantic or professional aspirations that align with neoliberal values of success and respectability. This results in a narrow and exclusionary understanding of what it means to be queer in India, failing to capture the complexities of caste, class, and regional identities within the LGBTQ+ community Chakravarty (2020).

The absence of caste and class considerations in queer digital media becomes even more pronounced when examining narratives within web series such as Four More Shots Please! (2019), where queer characters are largely framed within a cosmopolitan, upper-class context. In this series, the central characters are affluent, well-educated women, and their queer desires are framed as part of their overall empowerment and personal growth. While this aligns with mainstream feminist discourses of individual freedom and self-expression, it often glosses over the fact that queer individuals from lower castes or marginalized backgrounds might not have access to the same social or economic privileges Ganguly (2021). Moreover, this representation risks reproducing neoliberal ideals that celebrate personal success while ignoring systemic inequalities. The lack of intersectionality in these portrayals contributes to a hegemonic understanding of queerness that erases the specific struggles of marginalized queer individuals, particularly those who are Dalit, Adivasi, or from economically disadvantaged communities Basu (2021).

In contrast, some alternative queer narratives have started to challenge these limitations by centering voices from the margins. The web series Raat Rani (2021) and Panchayat (2020) provide more nuanced representations of queer identities, particularly those that grapple with rural or class-based limitations. In Raat Rani, a queer woman from a small town navigates both her sexual identity and the oppressive social structures of her community, offering a glimpse into the intersecting struggles of queerness, caste, and gender. While these portrayals are still limited in scope, they open up space for more intersectional queer storytelling that reflects the realities of a larger portion of the LGBTQ+ community Narrain and Sharma (2022). Such series reflect an important shift in digital queer cultures: the growing demand for narratives that engage with the complexities of caste, class, and rurality, providing a more inclusive and representative picture of queer life in India.

This study explores the evolving portrayal of queer identities in Indian web series following the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018. Analyzing select shows, it highlights how digital platforms serve as both empowering spaces for visibility and sites of commodification, reflecting a nuanced representation of LGBTQ+ lives in contemporary India. Below are the following findings and discussion of the study:

5. VISIBILITY VS. AUTHENTICITY

Series like Made in Heaven and His Storyy present gay male protagonists whose narratives revolve around elite urban settings. While these portrayals challenge older stereotypes, they often align with neoliberal ideals—successful, handsome, English-speaking gay men navigating professional spaces. This visibility is important but limited in scope. The increasing visibility of queer characters in contemporary Indian web series like Made in Heaven (2019) and His Storyy (2021) signifies a crucial shift from the historical marginalization of LGBTQ+ identities in mainstream media. These series feature gay male protagonists who navigate elite, urban environments, marking a departure from traditional stereotypes. In Made in Heaven, Karan (played by Arjun Mathur) openly navigates his queerness while working as a wedding planner in Delhi's high society. A key dialogue from the series encapsulates this shift: "I don't need to hide who I am anymore, and neither should anyone else" Mathur (2019). This statement reflects Karan's journey of embracing his identity within the professional, cosmopolitan world. Similarly, His Storyy presents a narrative of emotional and relational complexities, exemplified in the line: "I was never living for myself, now I want to live my truth" Pankaj (2021). These portrayals challenge the earlier portrayals of queerness as merely tragic or comic, presenting more nuanced, relatable individuals. However, while such representations are undeniably significant, they are also marked by a certain elitism. These characters predominantly occupy upper-middle-class spaces, primarily involving cosmopolitan gay men living in cities like Delhi or Mumbai, which limits the scope of representation to an urban, affluent queer experience.

Despite the positive visibility that these series offer, their representations often align with neoliberal ideals that valorize individual success, respectability, and integration into mainstream, heteronormative spaces Ganguly (2021). Karan's character in Made in Heaven is portrayed as a successful, articulate wedding planner, whose queerness is not just accepted but also becomes a part of his professional success. This aligns with the neoliberal narrative of queerness as a marketable, aspirational identity. His assertion, "This is a society of appearances, and I know how to play the game," reveals the tension between authenticity and conforming to mainstream expectations Mathur (2019). While such visibility

normalizes queerness, it tends to perpetuate the notion that queer individuals must fit into a specific, palatable mold—intelligent, successful, and cosmopolitan—to be accepted. Similarly, in His Storyy, the character of Sakshi (played by Satyadeep Misra) expresses, "I always thought I was different, but now I realize that being different is what makes me whole" Misra (2021), highlighting a personal journey of self-acceptance, yet one that still revolves around conforming to certain societal expectations of success and happiness. These portrayals, while important, often ignore the lived realities of queer individuals outside the urban, upper-middle-class sphere.

The focus on affluent, English-speaking, cisgender gay men in these narratives reflects a broader trend in digital media, where visibility is framed within the context of neoliberal values and respectability politics. This approach frequently excludes marginalized voices from lower castes, working-class backgrounds, or rural areas. For example, Made in Heaven primarily features characters from elite families who attend upscale weddings, a setting that fails to reflect the intersectional nature of queerness in India, where caste, class, and religion heavily influence one's experience of sexuality. A key moment in the series when Karan says, "For someone like me, there's no place in this world that feels safe enough" Mathur (2019), hints at the alienation and struggles that LGBTQ+ individuals face, but it is quickly resolved within the confines of elite, urban society. This portrays queerness as primarily an issue of personal acceptance rather than systemic inequality. While His Storyy delves deeper into emotional conflict, it similarly does not address the class-based and caste-based exclusions that often affect queer lives, especially in rural or lower-income settings.

Thus, while these series provide important queer visibility, they do so through a lens that emphasizes individual achievement and success rather than addressing collective, political struggles or the intersectional factors that shape queer life in India. As Made in Heaven portrays Karan's struggle within an affluent professional space, it ultimately suggests that queerness can be normalized when it conforms to elite standards of respectability, leaving the broader and more politically radical possibilities of queer activism unexamined. The need for more authentic representations, ones that engage with the complexities of caste, class, and rural realities, becomes evident when one considers the vast diversity within India's LGBTQ+ community. Ultimately, these narratives reflect the limits of queer representation in a neoliberal digital media landscape, where visibility often translates into assimilation rather than resistance Rao (2021).

6. INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS ABSENCE

Most series fail to depict queer characters from marginalized castes or rural regions. For instance, Romil & Jugal, an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, reimagines a same-sex romance in an upper-class, urban context, erasing caste or regional struggles. The absence of intersectional perspectives is a missed opportunity to reflect the diversity of queer lives in India. Despite the growing visibility of queer characters in Indian web series, most portrayals remain limited to elite, urban contexts, overlooking the complex intersectionality of caste, class, gender, and regional identities that shape queer experiences in India. This absence is particularly evident in series like Romil and Jugal (2016), a reimagining of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, which positions its central characters within an upper-class, urban setting, far removed from the realities of caste-based discrimination and regional diversity that affect many LGBTQ+ individuals. In the series, the protagonists, Romil and Jugal, come from affluent, educated backgrounds,

and their relationship is depicted as a love story constrained primarily by familial rejection, not by the broader social, cultural, or economic constraints that often define the queer experience in India. As one of the characters, Romil, says, "It's not just about love; it's about being true to myself" ALTBalaji. (2016). While this line emphasizes personal autonomy, it simultaneously overlooks the structural barriers imposed by caste, class, and rurality that shape the queer experience for those from marginalized backgrounds.

The lack of intersectional perspectives in Romil & Jugal and similar series highlights a critical gap in queer representation, as it fails to acknowledge the ways in which identity markers like caste, class, and region intersect with sexuality to create unique forms of discrimination. For example, in many rural parts of India, queer individuals often face not only homophobia but also caste-based and class-based exclusion, which is rarely explored in mainstream digital narratives. The representation of a love story set in an affluent, urban environment implies a universality of queer experience that erases these intersectional realities Jain (2019). As Banaji (2018) argues, "The lack of class and caste consciousness in queer media depictions in India perpetuates a homogeneous, elite representation of queerness, thus excluding the narratives of those who exist on the margins." This omission is not merely an oversight; it is indicative of how neoliberal ideologies in media production often prioritize stories that align with urban, middle-class sensibilities, sidelining the experiences of those most marginalized within both queer and wider Indian society.

Moreover, the absence of caste and regional identities in these portrayals also reinforces a limited understanding of what it means to be queer in India. For instance, Romil & Jugal presents its protagonists' love as a matter of personal fulfillment and individual choice, largely disconnected from the historical and social struggles that marginalized queer communities face Chakravarty and Reddy (2021). This focus on urban, individualistic narratives reflects a neoliberal framework that centers on personal success rather than addressing collective struggles for justice and equality. As such, these portrayals miss the opportunity to reflect the diversity of queer lives across India—where queer individuals from rural areas, lower castes, or marginalized religions experience systemic discrimination and violence not only due to their sexual orientation but also because of their social positioning. By excluding these intersectional voices, mainstream queer media not only limits its cultural reach but also contributes to the marginalization of the very individuals whose stories are crucial to understanding the broader landscape of queer India.

7. FEMALE AND TRANS REPRESENTATION

Four More Shots Please! includes bisexual and lesbian characters, but often frames them within a broader narrative of urban female empowerment, diluting their queerness. Transgender representation remains virtually absent or tokenistic across the sample. While there has been a marked increase in the visibility of queer characters in Indian digital media, representations of female and transgender identities remain both limited and problematic. Four More Shots Please! (2019), one of the more prominent examples in this regard, includes bisexual and lesbian characters, such as the character of Umang (played by Bani J), who is depicted as a bisexual woman navigating both romantic relationships and her own self-discovery. However, the show often frames her queerness within a broader narrative of urban female empowerment, which tends to dilute the complexity of her identity. The focus on her romantic entanglements and personal growth often overshadows the social and cultural realities that bisexual and lesbian women face, such as societal

stigma and discrimination. One pivotal moment in the series occurs when Umang exclaims, "I'm tired of explaining who I am to everyone" ALTBalaji. (2019), which serves as a nod to the emotional labor of constantly navigating one's identity in a world that privileges heteronormative relationships. Yet, while the dialogue captures the tension of being a queer woman, the series rarely explores the societal pressures and marginalization that these characters might face, especially within the context of class, caste, or broader social structures.

Furthermore, the show's focus on female empowerment often positions Umang's queerness as part of a larger, more commercially palatable narrative of personal freedom, success, and self-actualization—key elements of neoliberal ideology. Four More Shots Please! tends to portray its female protagonists as largely autonomous, empowered individuals who can break free from societal restrictions, but this individualism risks overlooking the collective struggles that many queer women face, particularly those from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds Sharma (2020). As Banaji (2018) notes, such portrayals often present a sanitized version of queerness that aligns with neoliberal values, allowing for the inclusion of queer identities in ways that don't challenge dominant societal structures or question the inequities faced by less privileged queer individuals. This lack of deeper engagement with the socio-political dimensions of queerness diminishes the impact of queer female representation, ultimately reducing it to a trope of empowered women in control of their destinies, without examining the complexities of their identities beyond their relationships and professional achievements.

In addition to the incomplete representation of queer women, transgender characters are conspicuously absent or treated tokenistically across the selected series. In Made in Heaven, for instance, the show introduces a transgender character in the context of a wedding, where she is featured briefly but without much narrative depth or focus on her personal journey. This limited inclusion reflects a broader trend in Indian media where transgender representation remains marginalized and often reduced to symbolic roles. As His Storyy similarly shows little to no engagement with transgender lives, it further contributes to the erasure of trans identities in mainstream queer media. When transgender characters do appear, they are frequently confined to secondary roles or are depicted in ways that reduce their identities to mere plot devices, rather than fully realized characters. This lack of authentic transgender representation in these series underscores the ongoing exclusion of trans people from the mainstream media narrative, a gap that has long been noted in queer studies and media research Nanda (2021). The tokenism surrounding transgender portrayals in Indian media perpetuates harmful stereotypes and fails to reflect the rich diversity of trans experiences.

The absence of meaningful transgender representation and the tokenization of female queerness point to a deeper issue within queer media in India: the tendency to cater to an affluent, urban, and cisgendered audience, while marginalizing those whose queer identities intersect with other forms of social exclusion. In particular, trans individuals and queer women, especially from marginalized backgrounds, are often relegated to the margins of mainstream media, where their stories are either absent or oversimplified. As Chakravarty and Reddy (2021) argue, "Queer media in India continues to prioritize the voices of those who conform to hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality, while leaving out those who challenge these norms at the intersection of caste, class, and gender."

8. PLATFORM POLITICS

Streaming services benefit from global viewership and algorithm-driven visibility, but also navigate censorship and market pressures. As such, queer content is often curated to appeal to progressive, upper-class urban consumers while avoiding overt political messaging. Streaming services in India, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and ALTBalaji, have transformed the media landscape by enabling a more visible queer presence. However, the platform politics that shape these streaming services have implications for the representation and reception of queer content. While streaming platforms enjoy the benefit of a global audience and algorithm-driven visibility, they also operate within the constraints of market demands, censorship regulations, and political pressures. As a result, queer content on these platforms is often curated to cater to a progressive, upper-class, urban audience, while minimizing political messaging that might challenge dominant societal norms. This curatorial process ensures that queer narratives remain palatable to mainstream viewers, but it simultaneously limits the scope of radical or intersectional queer representation.

A key example of this phenomenon can be seen in the portrayal of queer characters in series like Made in Heaven (2019) and Four More Shots Please! (2019), which maintain a focus on issues of personal empowerment, self-expression, and relationship dynamics, while avoiding deeper, politically charged content. These series often present queerness within the confines of urban, affluent spaces, reflecting the interests of a consumer base that is predominantly upper-class and urban. In Made in Heaven, for instance, Karan's narrative revolves around his personal struggles with family rejection and the complexities of his professional life as a wedding planner in Delhi's high society. While his queerness is made visible, the series never ventures into topics of political resistance or the systemic inequalities faced by queer individuals from lower caste or rural backgrounds. As Rao (2021) observes, "Digital media in India often aligns itself with neoliberal market dynamics, creating queer representations that are sanitized to avoid confronting issues of class, caste, and systemic oppression."

The platform politics that shape queer media content also extend to the issue of censorship. Though streaming services benefit from less stringent regulatory oversight than traditional television networks, they are still subject to the broader political climate and the whims of state censorship, particularly when it comes to content deemed "offensive" or "subversive." For example, queer relationships and identities are often depicted in ways that reinforce traditional, albeit liberal, notions of respectability, avoiding overtly radical portrayals that might challenge mainstream cultural values. This trend is exemplified by the series His Storyy (2021), which, while representing queer male love and emotional depth, stops short of exploring how such relationships may be politicized or destabilize heteronormative structures. The show avoids depicting queer characters in positions of socio-political activism or resistance, instead focusing on their personal, emotional arcs. This approach fits within the framework of neoliberal media, which prioritizes personal narratives over collective political struggles.

Moreover, the algorithmic nature of content distribution on streaming platforms further shapes the visibility of queer media. Algorithms tend to promote content that fits within popular trends or successful patterns, often favoring queer content that aligns with mainstream tastes or expectations of "respectable" queerness (e.g., non-threatening, assimilated narratives). This can limit the diversity of queer representation available on these platforms, as more radical or subversive

queer media may not be as widely promoted or easily discoverable. While streaming platforms provide a space for increased queer visibility, they simultaneously constrain the type of content that can emerge by focusing on market-driven choices rather than the full spectrum of queer experiences.

In conclusion, the platform politics of streaming services in India reveal a tension between increased visibility and the commercialization of queer narratives. Queer content is curated and presented in ways that appeal to a particular urban, upper-class demographic, while simultaneously avoiding controversial political themes or representations that might challenge the status quo. As the market for queer media grows, it is crucial to examine how these platforms navigate the complex interplay between market demands, political pressures, and the potential for queerness to function as a site of social change.

9. CONCLUSION

Post-Section 377 Indian web series represent a significant step toward normalizing queer identities in mainstream media. However, these narratives are often shaped by market imperatives and fail to capture the intersectional realities of queer lives across India. Digital platforms offer visibility, but this visibility is frequently limited to those who already occupy privileged social positions. To build a truly inclusive queer media culture, future content must broaden its lens to include diverse voices from across caste, class, gender, and regional lines.

The growing visibility of queer representation in Indian web series is a significant development in the broader media landscape, reflecting the changing dynamics of gender and sexual politics in contemporary India. However, as this research has demonstrated, such visibility is often shaped and constrained by the neoliberal imperatives of digital platforms, the commercial priorities of streaming services, and the intersectional realities that remain largely unaddressed. While series like Made in Heaven, Four More Shots Please!, and His Storyy represent a shift away from the stereotypical portrayals of queer characters in mainstream Indian cinema, they also reflect a selective, sanitized, and often politically neutral form of queerness. This queerness, situated within the urban, upper-class, and cosmopolitan spaces, risks marginalizing more complex, intersectional queer narratives that engage with caste, class, gender, and regional identities.

Moreover, the absence or tokenization of transgender characters and the failure to engage meaningfully with the struggles faced by queer individuals outside urban centers underscore the limitations of current queer media in India. The tendency of these series to focus on personal empowerment, individual narratives, and neoliberal ideals of success rather than addressing collective political struggles or social justice issues further diminishes their transformative potential. Additionally, the curatorial practices of streaming platforms, driven by algorithms and market pressures, often prioritize content that conforms to mainstream sensibilities, making it harder for more radical or subversive queer voices to find visibility.

In essence, while the proliferation of queer content in Indian web series signals an important shift towards greater visibility and acceptance, it also highlights the ways in which digital platforms, market dynamics, and cultural norms can limit the scope of representation. For a truly inclusive and radical queer media landscape to emerge, future media productions must move beyond the current focus on respectability and assimilation, engaging more deeply with the intersectional nature of queerness and addressing the complex socio-political realities that shape queer

lives in India. Only then can queer media in India fulfill its potential as a platform for social change and broader cultural transformation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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