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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN *MADE IN HEAVEN*

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Abstract

LGBTQIA is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (one's sexual or gender identity), intersex, and asexual/aromantic/agender. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The term LGBT is in use since the 1990s, the term is an adaptation of the term LGB, which replaced the term gay in reference to the LGBT community beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s. Many activists believed that the term gay community did not accurately represent all those to whom it referred. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is a section of the Indian Penal Code introduced in 1861 during the British rule of India. Modelled on the Buggery Act of 1533, it makes sexual activities "against the order of nature" illegal. On 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled the decriminalisation of Section 377 which has led to the public's acknowledgement of the third gender in India. Time and again media have played role in creating awareness about the concerns related to the community. Many films, television shows, and OTT platforms have also shown content related to the LGBTQIA+. In recent times, majority of viewers have shifted to OTT platforms and one can witness that with benefits of OTT, it has become easy for content producers to highlight any topic of interest and relevance. Many series on famous OTT platforms are presenting LGBTQIA+ relations in an undisguised manner so that the society also recognises LGBTQIA+ communities all across the world, their rights, and their culture and that this be marked by a spirit of resistance and acceptance as opposed to an attitude of shame by creating an awareness in the mind of the viewers. The study aims to find out the representation of LGBTQIA+ on Amazon Prime Video and their influence on society. This is exploratory research. The content analysis of web series on Amazon Prime Video has been done to understand the type of content shown in web series and in-depth interviews have been conducted to understand the influence of such content on the LGBTQIA+ community members.

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Introduction:-

This LGBTQIA is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, Intersex and Asexual. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation, preference or gender identity. These communities proudly celebrate pride, diversity, individuality, and sexuality. The term pride is used to express the LGBTQIA

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community's identity and collective strength. Pride parades provide both a prime example of the use and a demonstration of the general meaning of the term. Following is a detailed explanation of each term in LGBTQIA+:

Lesbian- a female who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to other females.

Gay- a male who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to other males.

Bisexual – a bisexual person is someone who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to both males and females.

Transgender - Umbrella term for those whose gender expression or identity is not congruent with the sex assigned at birth and/or whose gender is not validated by the dominant culture.

Queer - Reclaimed derogatory slang by many who reject gender and sexual binaries. Also used as a political identity by many who want to dismantle oppressive systems in society.

Intersex - A general term used for a variety of bodies in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit into the sex binary.

Asexual - Umbrella term for those who tend not to have a sexual desire towards others; asexual people may experience romantic attractions and engage in sexual behaviour.

The last five years in India have seen the massive growth of Over-the-top (OTT) platforms for entertainment purposes. The viewership has shifted from televisions to online portals for watching movies or series. These OTT platforms provide a plethora of options and genres to choose from and give the viewers the benefit of watching anything, anytime and from anywhere. Another major change that happened in India in recent time was the decriminalization of Article 377. On 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court of India gave the historic verdict of decriminalization of Article 377 of Indian Penal Code which earlier considered gay sex as a criminal offence in India. The Indian LGBTQIA+ community was the happiest that day that fought for so long to prove that love is not gender biased.

Among the many kinds of shows and movies on the OTT platforms, there are some whose storyline revolve around the LGBTQIA community. Be it their representation, acceptance or rejection, there are many series and movies on Amazon Prime Video which have characters from the LGBTQIA community. Media has always played a vital role in spreading any social cause. The frequency of any topic raised through social media directly affects its acknowledgment among the citizens. Now, the question arises whether the representation of the LGBTQIA community on the OTT platform has impacted the Indian viewers in any way or not?

Review of Literature:-

Paradoxes of visibility': Lesbian and gay parents in the Australian print media

Damien W Riggs

Jindal Global Law Review 4 (1), 201-218, 2012

Damien W Riggs in his study in 2012 concluded "As media is increasingly representing lesbian and gay parents, with this comes into the picture what Gamson terms 'paradoxes of visibility'. The increase in representation means that gay and lesbian headed families can see themselves being portrayed in the social realm. Also, such representation signifies increasing acceptance of such families. Looking at the other side of the coin, the representation of gay and lesbian parents is prone towards normativity, sensationalism and potential misrepresentation. This article tries to look into this paradox by going through a sample of articles taken from popular Australian magazines featuring gay and lesbian parents."

The presented analysis suggests that normativity dominates across all representations examined, occurring especially through:

- 1) The evocation of 'loving families' to account for lesbian-and gay-headed families in highly normative ways,
- 2) An emphasis upon biological relatedness to the exclusion of all other family forms,
- 3) A failure to recognize the racial and class privilege of white middle-class lesbian and gay parents, and
- 4) A primary focus upon coupled parents. This article suggests that while the appearance of the articles analyzed is positive for what it potentially signifies about public acceptance and the intelligibility of lesbian and gay parents, the articles function to exclude as much as they include.

b) Making diversity conform? An intersectional, longitudinal analysis of LGBTQIA-specific mainstream media advertisements

Ana-Isabel Nölke

Journal of homosexuality 65 (2), 224-255, 2018

This study explains an intersectional analysis of accurate LGBT portrayals in mainstream advertising from 2009-2015. The analysis gives observations of the invisibility of the LGBT community over a period of social change. Using a new ad format, advertisers move away from hyper sexualization, towards real individual stories of families and love. Nevertheless, the analysis points out how the deletion of multiply marginalized groups in mainstream advertising continues to preserve a heteronormative domesticized version of “gayness” and discusses the adverse effects that lie herein. It is proposed that non-LGBT consumers are the underlying target group of LGBTQIA-explicit advertising, causing non-target market effects that alienate large parts of the LGBTQIA community despite their undisguised inclusion.

Beyond the pink curtain. Everyday life of LGBTQIA people in Eastern Europe

Ioutwe Come

The idea of this book was born in the Intimate/Sexual Citizenship conference in October 2005 in Ljubljana where scholars focusing on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in post-socialist Eastern Europe were gathered to discuss the everyday experiences of LGBT people regarding the functioning of political, social and cultural boundaries that separate the “good heterosexual citizen” from the rest. The 21 articles of this volume illustrate the increasingly evident ways of LGBT existence being specifically characteristic to Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, East-Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

d) Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation

Lauren B McInroy, Shelley L Craig

Journal of Youth Studies 20 (1), 32-46, 2017

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people have been increasingly represented in traditional media over the past two decades. However, research had not properly focused on the content of contemporary representations, how such depictions impact LGBT young people, or how the experiences of young people are affected by the present context characterized by the increasing prevalence of new media. Results indicate that while traditional media creates a common dialogue and validates identity, it continues to represent LGBT people as one-dimensional and stereotypical, limits and ignores LGBT young people’s perceptions of their future trajectories and offers no opportunities for critique. In contrast, emerging new media offers important, new, and valued spaces for creativity and discussion.

e) Bisexuality, mental health, and media representation

Hannah J Johnson Journal of Bisexuality 16 (3), 378-396, 2016

There is a mental health crisis in the bisexual community, and though the issues of mental health and media representation are analyzed separately in bisexual literature, they are rarely put side by side. Media such as film, television and music often contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and stigmas about people who are bisexual. How do these issues contribute to the high rates of anxiety, depression and suicide among individuals who are bisexual? What issues do individuals who are bisexual face when they choose to seek help?

This research project contributes to bisexual literature by drawing connections between media representation and mental health by firstly checking existing literature on bisexual issues such as bisexual erasure, biphobia, media representation, and mental health, and secondly discussing the results of an online survey to determine how other people who identify as bisexual feel about media representation and its relationship to the mental health crisis in the bisexual community.

Research Design

Objectives of the Study:-

- To study the portrayal of LGBTQIA+ characters in web series.
- To find the influence of content on viewers
- To find out the effect of web series on the community members.

Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the study are proposed on the objectives and literature review.

The experimental methodology was chosen using different statistical and methods to test the hypotheses.

The formulation of the hypotheses is as follows:

Hypothesis

H1₀ The portrayal is negative in web series. (Null Hypothesis)

H1_a The portrayal is positive in web series. (Alternate Hypothesis)

H2₀ The content has not influenced the viewers. (Null Hypothesis)

H2_a The content has influenced the viewers. (Alternate Hypothesis)

H3₀ The effect is negative on community members. (Null Hypothesis)

H3_a The effect is positive on community members. (Alternate Hypothesis)

Research Techniques:

For the respective research, there will be two sources for primary data. The first source is taking in-depth interviews of various community members where they have to answer some of the questions. The second source is the content analysis of Amazon Prime Video show *Made in Heaven* based on portrayal, appearance and story line. The interviews have to be done because this will provide the true experiences of the community members which is required for the research. Content analysis will help in getting the portrayal of the community on OTT platforms.

Data Collection

In-depth

Ques. What is your take on the representation of LGBTQIA+ community on Amazon Prime Video shows and are they really having impact on society?

Answer 1 - So there is lack of representation, but you can't disregard shows like *queer eye* as well. There is always them playing in stereotyped roles such as the best friend. Big mouth, for me gives the best representation and explains sexuality well. Doosre Indian shows mai toh kuch nahi hai. Literally. We need India to make their audience aware. And it becomes a special issue if it's on the LGBT community. They ask me if I like women, I say yes. Then they say are you sure I say yes. Sometimes they go like have you ever been with anyone. Sometimes I end up going out with them and sometimes they get disgusted from the fact that I am gay and stop talking to me.

Answer 2 – I was in a lot of confusion before I came out even to myself. One day my friend recommended me to watch a LGBTQIA+ show which she has already watched, after watching that show that I realized that how much I can relate to the character and I am indeed a lesbian. I was bit hesitant to talk to anybody about that, but I wanted to express what I was feeling so I talked to my friend who recommended me to watch that show in hope that maybe she will be able to understand and surprisingly she did in a beautiful way and helped me to see my own reflection through the spectrum. She is not a person who belongs to LGBT community but with the help of that show she understood my feelings and my ways. So yes I believe that these types of shows do make great positive change in the thinking of many people out there and help them to understand people from my community.

Answer 3 - I don't really watch Amazon Prime Video zyada so I don't know how much I'll be able to help you out here but from whatever I know, representing the LGBTQIA community in media plays a big role. Depends na like if you represent it the stereotypical way then it's going to have a negative impact and increase homophobia bit if there's a true representation, which normalizes in a sense or teaches people to be accepting of people who identify as a part of this community, it can help a lot Like okay see I don't know if you've seen it or not but Ruby Rose in that was my calling that helped me a lot in realizing that I was in fact bisexual.

Analysis of Responses on Representation:

Anonymous 1 has said that the representation is not accurate. These shows are just presenting the community in stereotyped ways as a best friend or some supporting roles. They aren't focusing on any LGBTQIA+ character in lime light in India. Our country is lagging far behind in the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community. Plus, people start to ignore the LGBTQIA+ members once they come to know about their identity.

Anonymous 2 has expressed how he came out to himself about being gay. Contradicting to Anonymous 1 answer in the case of Anonymous 2, his friend actually respected and accepted his feelings really well. He also agreed with the fact that if a show is made positively representing LGBTQIA+ community, it can bring positive changes in the society as well.

Anonymous 3 believes that if the representation is in a correct way, consequences will also be correct. If the representation is in a wrong way, the consequences will also be wrong.

Content Analysis of Amazon Prime Video Show *Made In Heaven*

'Made in Heaven (MIH)' is a masterpiece created by Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti which was released in 2019 on Amazon Prime India. This 9-episode web series chronicles the protagonists' lives and unmasks harsh realities of the Indian society by exploring (but not mocking) the inner recesses of Delhi's upper-class elite. Written and directed by women, *MIH* follows a team of wedding planners who have to navigate their clients' outrageous desires. Much like one would imagine wedding planners would anywhere - but add to that the cultural aspects of arranged marriages, dowry transactions, virginity tests, and week-long celebrations. The cast is stylish, the colours are exquisite, and the weddings themselves are nothing short of cinematic extravaganzas. *MIH* is not just a satire on the ostentatious big fat Indian wedding; it is a satire on humanity and its inherent need to keep up social appearances. The weddings are an overarching trope creating a solid foundation for addressing almost every issue that our present day Indian society is facing but is too uncomfortable to discuss. From class related politics to real politics, ageism to sexism, dowry to rape, homosexuality to infidelity, the show exposes lies that have been fed to us consistently through the norms of our patriarchal society. It calls out the hypocrisy that has been imbibed in us and is being fought by every individual that is trying to cope with it.

MIH can be and has been commended for so many things – its dissection of weddings as a concept in modern India, layered female characters, depiction of class struggle, and most importantly, the dignified treatment of queer characters outside of the stereotypes we're so used to seeing. The show depicts the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and highlights the struggles of queer individuals and the discrimination they face in society, as well as the fight for equal rights and acceptance in a conservative Indian society.

In the past, Bollywood's treatment of homosexuality has been both over-the-top and under-the-belt. Queer men have been packed in bright florals and skintight trousers, only to become cookie-cutter caricatures of themselves. No offense to the flamboyant stereotype, but contrary to (most of) Karan Johar's films, there are more queer subcultures that are waiting to be voiced.

True, the 2019 cycle of representation has been iconic – from Shelly Chopra Dhar's *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* exploring a lesbian love story, to Sridhar Rangayan's *Evening Shadows*, a touching tale about a city-bred man coming out to his small-town mother - but they came with their fair share of triggers. Take the former, for instance – where the central voice of the reason in a queer narrative is still a cis heterosexual man. A nice understanding man, but a cis man still the same.

However, *'Made in Heaven'* is far more queer and feminist than Bollywood's usual fairy-tale romances.

The analysis of *MIH* has been done based on the following criteria –

Portrayal

There are 5 characters representing the LGBTQIA+ community namely-

Karan Mehra – S1, all episodes : a gay character whose identity is known to people, shown with a positive and helpful personality.

Nawab – S1, E 1,2,6,7,9 : another gay character whose identity is known to people. After being dissociated from a fellow gay character (Karan) in school, he left the school and later got married to a person of same-sex.

Utsav – S1, E 1,3,4 : another gay character whose identity is not known to people.

Mr. Ramesh Gupta – S1, E1-6,9 : a gay character whose identity is known to the people as a landlord in Delhi.

Sam – S1, E 2,8 :a gay character whose identity is known to people as a foreigner, as Karan's friend.

Appearance

Karan Mehra –A closeted gay man drowning in debt and personal conflicts, Karan's identity is beyond the stereotypical gay men Indian filmmakers have often thrown at us. Despite being aware of the taboo he has to live with every single day, he doesn't perceive his sexuality as a burden. Karan's character is never a bumbling sidekick or the token comic relief; he's the main lead. As a protagonist, Karan makes an important statement for the rights of homosexuals in mainstream entertainment. The representation of Karan's character is notable for its honesty and empathy, portraying his character as a fully-realized, multi-dimensional person, rather than a stereotype or one-dimensional representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. He is not a typical gay character who is soft and afraid of coming out to people, rather he is a strong personality who is confident enough to let people know that he is gay.

Nawab – Karan's high school boyfriend who was forced to leave and move away because Karan chose to keep his identity a secret. And the guilt of him not standing true to himself eats him for years until he meets Nawab in person. He plays sports and is also a member of the school's basketball team alongside Karan. His identity is known to people.

He makes Karan confront his own ghosts of hiding his homosexuality when he sends a Facebook message to his schoolmate Karan supporting his fight for LGBTQIA+ equality. Via flashbacks, it is made apparent that Karan denies his homosexuality when Nawab's written love note for Karan is mocked at by his classmates during a locker room meet. When Karan is confronted by his friends, he states that Nawab is trying to impose his homosexuality on him and then leads a homophobic attack on Nawab, terrorizing him. This causes Nawab to leave school with Karan guilt ridden for being the aggressor against him. Bringing this memory to light, Karan meets up with Nawab, who is now in a same-sex marriage. Karan apologizes to Nawab and then two engage in a passionate night of sexual intercourse that never materialized when they were teenagers with mutual affection. Karan shares his emotional vulnerability with him and tells Nawab that he is his first true love. Nawab forgives him and the two continue to bond.

The meet, the confrontation and the unspoken love that still existed among them feels like the cold breeze on a warm day. The one that touches our soul. What makes the scene worth talking about is how it was handled. When we watch it, the scene is not about two men having sex, it is about two long lost lovers finally meeting and embracing love in its truest form. "I can't believe I have only loved you" is enough to melt any stone-cold heart.

Utsav – a short-heighted and reserved person, who is not very confident to talk to people. He was ditched by Karan after a one-night stand. Much to Karan's horror, he (Karan) finds out that Utsav is now engaged to his former classmate, Bubbles. Utsav deliberately tries to make people believe that he is straight. Later, Utsav tries to convince Karan to sleep with him but Karan refuses.

Mr. Ramesh Gupta – He is Karan's landlord. He doesn't look gay by appearance, is shown as muscular gentlemen who is married to a woman and has a daughter. But, Mr. Gupta has an unceasing curiosity regarding Karan's sexuality. Unbeknown to Karan, he has installed a camera in Karan's room and secretly watches him make love with Sam, a foreigner. Karan's landlord's wife finds videos of Karan on her husband's laptop. He tells her he was gathering evidence to file a police report when she confronts him, following which Karan gets arrested, spends a couple of nights in prison. What follows is a heartbreaking chain of events that includes (Karan's) sexual abuse by a police officer, Karan's coming out and his acceptance of himself.

Talking about not being true to themselves, Mr. Gupta is another example of how the want to be considered normal makes him want to shy away from being who he really is. The person who Karan assumes to be homophobic for violating his privacy and getting him arrested soon turns out to be just another gay compressed into a box acceptable to society. The scene where Karan decides to confront him ends on an empathic note as we all get a glimpse of the tragedies that Mr. Gupta might have gone through to be recognized as any other human being by people around him. He is an example of how, despite all the efforts to bury their true self, it is indelible and hurtful. "Everyone isn't like you. You're brave. You have courage. I envy that. Here your whole life can go by hiding from yourself."

Sam – He is Karan's friend who's from abroad. He met Karan at a bar. They were together caught by a policeman on road in a car, for engaging in a passionate kiss. Later at Karan's home when Sam offers him (Karan) to come

abroad with him, he tells Sam that in India, people do what they want to do anyway. Later, he also tells Sam about his previous business venture (a jazz bar) which failed, prompting Karan's mother to force his father into financially rescuing him. After Tara bails out Karan, the latter finds him (Sam) surprisingly at his doorstep, and they together reflect on the nightmare he (Karan) suffered.

Story line

Made in Heaven is a binge worthy show about rich society wife Tara Khanna (Sobhita Dhulipala) and her gay business partner/friend Karan Mehra (played effortlessly by (a rather straight) Arjun Mathur, who plan weddings, while dealing with the trials and tribulations of their own personal lives – philandering husbands, snoopy landlords and bone-breaking loan sharks, to name a few. Another noteworthy sight in *MIH* is that one sees not just men propagating patriarchy but also women (Tara's mother telling her and her sister that they only have their face and youth to their credit, Mrs. Gupta telling her daughter (Mital) that no one wants to marry an intelligent girl; Karan's mother who breaks his hand when she catches him in the shower with another boy as compared to his father who actually accepts him), and at the same not just women as victims of patriarchy but also men (Gupta Ji and all the gay men, from Karan to Nawab). Thus, while seducing audiences with the undeniable exuberance of the parties; it reveals the broken and vulnerable men and women hiding behind all the gilded ensembles. It dares to look inside modern India's many closets, offering a piercing insider's portrait of a society very few journalistic books or articles on "new India" can capture.

And this is where Arjun Mathur steps up and completely changes the game as an actor playing a strong, sensible gay man (Karan). For a character to shine in such a giant crowd is commendable, especially since it has been such an all-encompassing cast. Because he could be anybody. He could be your brother. Your friend. That popular kid from school. The class bully. The owner of your favourite jazz bar. For all we know, he could even be your wedding planner. And Karan Mehra is all of them. He's your everyday gay man. So how does his queer representation appeal to the author?

The everyday gay man plays video games with the same enthusiasm he shows in attending queer soirees. He flits in and out of V-neck tees, but wears bespoke designer kurtas to engagement parties. He loves his wine, but he drinks beer too. He struggles with coming out to his parents, but he's also struggling with debt. He has sex with almost all of his dates. But hold on, the show isn't just about aesthetically pleasing queer men having (aesthetically-pleasing) sex with each other. It's about so much more. Because *Made in Heaven* doesn't just toy with the idea of a queer storyline; it polishes it and puts it up on the mantelpiece proudly, for the whole world to see (and give coveted looks at). And there's no token gay man here, there's a spectrum of gay men – gay men who are about to be married, gay men who are already married, gay men who are in same-sex marriages, and gay men who never want to get married. For a show that's heavily built on the premise of wedded bliss, this seems like an inside joke that we are all privy too.

Even in the era of Section 377, Karan's character is as unperturbed as can be. In fact, in one of the earlier episodes, he even tells a foreigner he met at a bar that in India, people do what they want to do anyway.

Made in Heaven's writers ensure a proper journey for Karan. From rejecting his identity back in school, feeling guilty of disassociating himself from a fellow gay person, sexual abuse to filing PIL against Section 377; Never have I ever seen such an applaud-worthy growth of a queer character in Indian entertainment. Karan as a protagonist of *Made in Heaven* makes an important statement for the rights of homosexuals in mainstream entertainment. His arrest under Section 377, sexual abuse by the policeman and baggage of guilt from the past evolves his storyline. By the final episode, I was completely in love with his character. Thus, the makers of *Made in Heaven* have created a milestone for queer representation in Indian entertainment.

But for Karan Mehra, who is the lead character (protagonist) of the show, the four other characters are in the supporting role, though each of these characters are worthy of their on-screen time. Two of them are portrayed as confident LGBTQIA people who have no shame in accepting their identity and proudly lead their lives, while the other two don't want to reveal their identities due to societal pressures, stereotypes or other biased factors.

While Karan is the epitome of *Made In Heaven's* queer depiction, he's not the only one. Karan's relationships with other gay men are refreshing, unabashed, multi-dimensional and most importantly, a reminder of how necessary it is

to avoid lazy writing even when it comes to the most minor characters. Had Karan's gay relationships not reflected the kind of depth that is vividly depicted in his character, the impact would not have been this great.

Made in Heaven is indeed the torchbearer for queer representation in Hindi entertainment industry.

Conclusion:-

The survey showed what is really happening in the real world with the LGBTQIA community. All three of the interviews provided different experiences, aspects and perspectives. They also helped in understanding what are the things and constraints that actually force the people from the LGBTQIA+ community to disclose their identity. Generally, the homosexual characters on the screen are subdued and mocked by the protagonists with intent to serve humour to audience. But *MIH* chose a different path. The show not only had the majority of LGBTQIA+ community members in the supporting role but also in the mainstream (as Karan's gayness has not been limited to a fringe issue, and the web series successfully steers away from stereotypes), which directly or indirectly shows the dignified treatment of queer characters outside of the stereotypes we're so used to seeing.

All the three answers had mixed responses; some of them were treated like normal people while others were ignored when they disclosed their identities. In India, we still lack the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community; we don't want to accept them even after the Supreme Court's approval on the same issue because of our rigid cultures and beliefs. According to the results of the survey, Indian shows don't really have gay characters because they don't think that those characters would be accepted across the country. The research also helped in understanding how these shows help people to understand what they exactly are.

So, this show, *Made in Heaven* is a milestone in the depiction of gay characters or the members of LGBTQIA+ community in a broader sense. In fact, the show was able to play with the staccato of multiple stories and was able to hit the right pitch with Karan's story.

After his experience in the local police station, Karan's trauma becomes an integral part of his evolving identity. We're not only witness to his present-day courage but also his journey back in time. As he revisits his childhood trauma while dealing with the circumstances at hand, Karan's character takes centre stage in a way very few Indian queer characters have done in the past. Even though we cherish at the moment that fact that Nawab talks about how he has a normal life and is happily married, gives us another picture of how some of the people in the community still try to push away their true selves so they can be accepted by society they live in.

In many ways, *Made in Heaven's* writing is bold and risky. Allusions to the "ruling party" and its "orange colour" are only proof of the fact that the directors wanted the show to be a social as well as political comment. In fact, having become a victim of police brutality and the media's ruthless ridicule, it's only once Karan is out of jail that Karan is emboldened to file a public interest litigation (PIL) against Section 377 (the law that criminalized homosexuality in India) - an act of dissent so powerful that the rival party is willing to silently endorse it by letting Karan and Tara organise a wedding in their family. In one of the scenes, the makers openly hint at the grave (and very real) possibility of mob violence.

Internationally, still there are shows being made with gay characters, be them in supporting roles or in the main roles. In India, people are still thinking that it is a disease or something; they are not accepting that there is something like LGBTQIA+ community present in the society and is very much a part of the society.

However, it can be rightly said that Amazon Prime's new series, *Made in Heaven*, a groundbreaking Indian drama made for global audiences. This show has set a new benchmark for portrayal of queer narratives as *MIH* brings queer culture (and rights) front & centre in a way very few movies (or Indian television shows) have done in the past. *MIH* makes gay people what the media has never managed to do – it makes them real. And if this is the path they have chalked out for a second (and hopefully, future) season, I'll gladly walk the aisle with them.

Besides this, a conflicting plot-point use of the transgender hijra community in the final episode, the show seems like a good start in what could be a trend in creating 'woke' television for a new streaming platform with an even newer and younger growing audience base.

Thus, the show is full of subtleties and yet speaks strong, loud and clear. From the beautiful mise-en-scene to important dialogues, great music score and the correct dose of drama, *Made in Heaven* is one of the most important

shows today, not just for its craft but for its engagement with and presentation of our current society for all that it is. The show is unapologetic and fearless in putting a mirror to our society and exposing all the chinks in its armour. It dismantles regressive norms and raises questions that we need to answer if we call ourselves progressive. In the end, reality bites, this is also, quite aptly, the name of the last episode. In conclusion, the last visual of Tara and Karan, laughing together, having faced their demons and sitting amidst their well formulated heaven in tatters, sums it all up. Their laugh is the laugh of the post modern subjects, now well acquainted with the absurdity and tragedy of their lives and deciding to accept it and move forward. *Made in Heaven* succeeds remarkably at marrying the polish, bravado and experimental nature of the “golden age of television” with Indian stories.

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