



RE-QUEERING QUEER SPACES: MEDIATIZATION AS A NEO HETERONORMATIVE TOOL IN KERALA QUEER NARRATIVE SPACE

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ABSTRACT

Narratives often constructed spaces for numerous less discussed and debated, social, ethnic and sexual minorities. It often reconstructed social reality by manipulation and distortion of facts to satiate the dominant ideologies of patriarchal - heteronormative society. Mediatization, though have played a pivotal role in the upliftment of Kerala LGBTIQ community, has a long history of misrepresentation of sexual and gender minorities in various print, digital and visual narratives to safeguard the hegemony of heteronormativity intact. My paper tries to analyze how popular print, digital and visual narratives manipulate, distort and misrepresent the gender and sexual identities of queer community, by re- queering and hence alienating them from the socio- cultural milieu. It celebrates queer existence as the significant Other (the less accepted and unauthentic version) of the heterosexuality by strictly placing homosexuality within the rigid framework of gender binaries. Mediatization here hijack the queer spaces as it project 'heteronormative rendering of homosexual issues, and thus become a neo heteronormative tool in socio- cultural space of Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Main stream narratives being an effective tool of heteronormativity believed in the mimetic relationship between gender and sex wherein gender mirrors sex and consciously neglected the fact that gender is a cultural meaning that a sexed body assumes. It often produced narratives from marginalized section with an intention to create a binary to celebrate the

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‘privileged- cultured- accepted’ against the underprivileged- uncultured- less accepted ‘other’. Thus any alternative narrative became manipulated, distorted, misrepresented rendering of consciously silenced group from above, as the subaltern can never speak. Mainstream narratives of gender and sexual minorities have a long history of misrepresentation as they were barred from the public domain and had been ‘represented’ by the heterosexual agents who tried to equate queer experience with theirs’. Thus the narratives often became heterosexual definitions of homosexuality whereby certain images and notions were created, celebrated and cemented. This efforts resulted in creating ‘queerness’ around rainbow lives and treated them as an unauthentic– distorted and impoverished version of heterosexuality which questioned religious absolutism and cultural purity . Mediatisation though have increased the visibility of queer, has a major role in the creation of hostility towards LGBTIQ community due to the lack of scientific knowledge and political correctness. It tried to address the queer issues within the duality of gender and on the axis of heterosexuality.

Media dealt with the issues of queer as though it is a universal sect, wherein each sub sect within the larger whole have various set of issues, trauma and crisis. Vaikhari Aryat, a Malayali queer feminist and social activist in her article, *Exploring the Subaltern Colours of the Queer Rainbow* narrates the discrimination a subaltern queer undergoes within the larger spectrum of gender and sexual differences. She observes how marginalization within the marginalized section exists, by projecting certain ‘acceptable bodies’ within the unacceptable section on the basis of colour, social status, caste and economic stability. She points at how the subaltern transgenders who are denied a bed space and social space and are prone to greater indifference and osticisation than the others. Visual- print media judge a queer person on the basis of ‘skin tone’ and ‘beauty’ and it determines the chances of being heard and accepted in a public space. She observe that the transgenders who were featured in major Malayalam magazines like *Vanitha* and *Grihalakshmi* possess ‘ideal heterosexual beauty standards’ which qualify them to considered acceptable among the society and how media turn a blind eye towards those self-identified transgenders who doesn’t resort to crossdressing, creating a wrong notion that all transgenders are crossdressers. Mainstream media thus makes a filtering before projecting LGBTIQ activists regardless of what queer beings from different social economic mileu undego . The major Malayalam media celebrate queer pride march with ‘acceptable transgender’s’ photographs blurring the existence of dalit/ subaltern bodies or even other sections of the community thereby making it a transgender movement . Often the existence of gay, lesbian, intersex, transmen and gender fluid people are unacknowledged and the discussion revolve around the struggles of transgender women.

A conscious invisibility of certain sections of the community is evident in Malayalam main stream spaces as talk shows rarely invite gays or gender fluid person. Lack of scientific

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knowledge usually alter the facts in news, end up creating a distorted image in the mindset of the audience. Thus segregation within the discriminated section make the lives of doubly marginalized sexual and gender minorities even worse. They are barred from the public space and hence go unnoticed.

A closer analysis of queer news in Kerala point to the fact that there is imbalance in representation within the community as transgender community within LGBTIQ has more visibility and space and in the course of time have even become an umbrella term for the entire queer community. Often Kerala queer march's is depicted as a transgender movement whereby visual and print media adorn their pages with the 'ideal' transwomen's photos. Even media have turned a blind eye towards transgender men and term transgender for them and for the society have become synonym for transgender female. Recent interview by Arundhadi. B, a queer activist and PhD scholars in UoH shows how heteronormativity manipulate the news to satiate public psyche. When Arundhathi vividly mentioned about how a recent Malayalam movie *Mumbai Police* has wrong portrayal like one would forget one's sexual orientation when an accident occurs the reporter quoted it as the film has wrong portrayal about transgenders. The lack of political correctness have always questioned the identity of homosexuals and transgenders alike. Mediatisation has normalized politically incorrect terminology which reduce queer people as either sexed or non-sexed objects ripping them off any other identity. Vijayaraja Mallika, a Malayali transgender poet who has underwent Sex Reassignment Surgery points at the underlying politics in the use of *bhinnalingam* (alternative gender) for transgenders by both print and visual media and how 'alternative' or 'different sexuality' makes her less acceptable and alienated in the society. She points out that the term questions her self identification as a woman and reduces her as an inferior version of woman. IFFK 2017 when tried to be queer inclusive came up with a third category in the registration form as 'third gender' which was later corrected as transgender as a result mass dissatisfaction. Society even today believe and normalize the hierarchical order of gender which place men at the top as first gender, women as second and the transgender as even below. Media here consciously draw a wedge between a perfect and less perfect, ideal and the other. Rather than creating a sense of belonging media here inculcate a sense of alienation and difference between the queer community and heterosexuals. Therefore the attempt to empower the community backlashes itself. Contemporary talk shows and debates speak volumes about how lesbians and gays are made invisible in a social space and how society tolerate gender difference but not sexuality. As it remains a taboo, which forces lesbians and gays to lead a closeted life. The existence of sexually fluids, pan sexuals and asexuals go unaddressed as every discussion on gender revolves around duality of sex.

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Sep 14, 2017 edition of the New Indian express supplement discusses homosexuality sans any scientific knowledge exemplified how the celebrated newspapers of Malayalam approach LGBTIQ issue without any ethics and basic dignity. The write up analyses the ‘unnatural’ sexual attraction among gays, lesbians and bisexuals and even distorts and mixes the identity of intersex, homosexuality and transgender issues in the same palette inducing homophobia and ambiguity in the minds of the readers. It traces reason for this ‘behaviour’ under the most ironically titled article Other Chromosomes. Even the usage of he o she for gender queer person is an explicit expressions of questioning their identity which have transcended the age old conventions of binary gender where pronouns like zhe or rhe etc exist. Kerala being a space which advocates the gender duality thus ostracize gender queer people. Even when celebrities like Asia Kate or Ruby Rose or Alok Vaid Menon have come out and proclaimed their gender fluidity which enable them to identify sometimes as male, sometimes as female sometimes as both and sometimes as none, gender fluidity remains an unheard term for the India’s most literate population. Lack of clarity regarding the existence and essence of queer lives affect narratives which aim to ensure solidarity for the community. Language essentially a heteronormative and masculine agent to propagate power within the hierarchical structures of social institution become insufficient to address the existence of people who question the stability of gender binaries. Lack proper of support from schools and colleges have resulted in dropout of LGBTIQ students, which might have resulted in scarcity original works from the community. Politics of displacement is evident in the discourse queer studies as often homosexual desires, struggles and identity crisis as usually displaced or equated with that of heterosexual experiences.

Though mediatization have misrepresented the lives of transgender and queer, its role in accelerating visibility the community is undeniable. Instead of promoting the idea of speaking ‘for’ the queer community it should provide a platform for the queer community to speak for themselves. Transgender inclusive programed by Asianet, Kairali and Mazhavil Manorama have succeeded in its attempt to ensure acceptability to transgenders. It has foregrounded the issues of rainbow lives and constant write ups and awareness have helped many closeted sexual and gender minorities to walk out of their closet and to assert their identity in public and socio cultural spaces. Constant awareness as a result of visual and print culture has enabled schools and colleges to be LGBTIQ friendly thereby enabling them to continue their higher studies thereby helping them secure a respectable job. Homophobia to a great extend was vanished as a result of their venture. Mediatization rather hijacking their space has to emerge as a platform wherein first hand experience and trauma is heard and discussed.

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