



Research Paper

‘Regime of the Normal’: Heteronormativity and Queer Identity in the Movie *Mumbai Police*

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Homophobia is a term that denotes the stigma, fear and hatred that the homosexuals face while being part of a society in which heterosexuality is the norm. Across the globe it is a general tendency to corner homosexuals accusing them as persons with abnormalities. The social system is always intolerant towards deviant behaviors and thus society prescribes certain code of conduct for every individual. This code is forced upon individuals even without their conscious knowledge. This paper tries to address the politics of the representation of homosexuality in the Malayalam movie *Mumbai Police* came out in the year 2013 directed by Rosshan Andrews.

Homosexuality is considered as an abnormality by the general consensus. The discourse over homosexuality cemented it as deviant and thus an interpellation into the ideology of heteronormativity constantly occur in the society. Ideologies are perpetually disseminated into the society through various discursive patterns. These ideologies consequently establish the hegemony of one particular set over the other. The hegemony of a specific class would eventually become the unquestionable norm of the society.

In the essay “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism”, Jean-Louis Comolli & Jean Narboni quotes Louis Althusser’s vision on ideology,

Ideologies are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects, which work fundamentally on men by a process they do not understand. What men express in their ideologies is not their true relation to their conditions of existence, but how they react to their conditions of existence which presupposes a real relationship and an imaginary relationship (46).

Althusser speaks of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses of a state to maintain power where RSA being coercive threats of violence wars through the agencies like the police, the army, the courts and prisons, in the essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”. ISA work by ideology in a symbolic manner and it directly appeals to the psyche. In the work *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* Ania Loomba discusses the psychological aspects of the ISA in detail considering the visions of Gramsci and Althusser,

Gramsci had suggested that hegemony is achieved via a combination of ‘force’ and ‘consent’— Althusser argued that in modern capitalist societies, the former is achieved by ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’ such as the army and the police, but the latter is enforced via ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ such as schools, the Church, the family, media and political systems. These ideological apparatuses assist in the reproduction of the dominant system by creating subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the values of the system. Such an idea is immensely useful in demystifying certain apparently innocent and apolitical institutions and has subsequently influenced analyses of schools, universities, family structures, and (via the work of Althusser’s friend Pierre Macherey) literary texts. But it also effects a closure by failing to account for ideological struggle and oppositional ideas. If subjects are entirely the creation of dominant ideologies then there is no scope for any ideas outside of these ideologies, and thus no scope for social change (33).

The ideology of heteronormativity further creates and disseminates stereotypical images of homosexuals with all the deviant attributes. There are movies in which the theme homosexuality is openly dealt

with and there are movements that argue for the rights of the homosexuals. Still the mainstream movies failed to openly discuss the theme of homosexuality to a greater extent. In the Malayalam film industry movies like *Randu Penkuttikal*(1978) by Mohan, *Deshadanakkili karayarilla*(1986) by Padmarajan, *Sancharam*(2004) by Liji J Pullappally are some of them that have dealt with the theme homosexuality. Apart from *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* the other two are purely art movies. Though mainstream movies apparently try to discuss the theme of homosexuality as a counter discourse, they proved to be apparatuses reinforcing the ideology. Comolli and Narboni defines film as,

On the one hand it is a particular product, manufactured within a given system of economic relations...as a result of being a material product of the system, it is also an ideological product of the system...Every film is political inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing.) (45).

The movie *Mumbai Police* released in the year 2013 is hailed for moving away from the traditional depiction of a hero who strictly falls to heteronormativity. The movie projected a homosexual as the central character. Critics have appreciated the movie on this ground. This paper attempts to re-read the movie and argue that the movie *Mumbai Police* is not one that echoes the voice of the homosexuals but it is in fact one that metaphors homophobia, heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality and gender performativity. Even though the hero of the movie is a homosexual it essentially depicts homosexuality as abnormal and socially unacceptable.

The plot of the movie revolves around three young police officers, ACP Antony Moses, ACP Aryan Joseph and CP Farhan, performed by Prithviraj, Jayasurya and Rahman respectively. The movie starts in medias res and moves back to the past of these people. As it is evident from the initial scenes, Antony Moses, who is in charge of the investigation team of the murder case of his friend Aryan Joseph, recently met with an accident and recovering from it. The following scenes give the audience the idea that he is suffering from a severe memory loss after the accident and unable to remember his past. The memory loss of the central character is crucial in the movie as it determines the major junctures of the plot. Due to his memory loss Moses is not able to recollect the murderer of Aryan though he informed Farhan that he had found out who the murderer is. Thus Moses is again destined to find out the murderer of his friend Aryan. He is undergoing an Oedipus like journey because he himself is the murderer of his friend and this is completely erased from his memory after the accident. The new Antony Moses' investigation journey to find out the culprit forms the core of the movie. Moses' journey to the past life of the three friends unravels their relationships with each other and their capacity as police officers. In the past Moses was a rough, masculine figure who is brave enough to take up any mission yet in the present he is more a soft person with a dilemma in his mind. The movie presents the new Moses as more humanitarian and fit to the society rather than the rebel and ruthless old Moses. The strict contrast in the personality traits of the same person before the accident and after the accident is to be scrutinized. As the movie ends Moses closes the case by finding out the culprit who is none other than himself. The reason behind him murdering his close friend is another important factor for analysis.

The basic motive behind the murder of Aryan was that he came to know about the sexual orientation of Moses. The intense fear that Aryan would let the world know his closeted personality prompted Moses to carry out such a ruthless crime. In the essay "Epistemology of the Closet" Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick explains the nature of the closet in which the homosexuals are trapped unwillingly and preserves it for the dominant society persuades them to be closeted,

...people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure (68).

Secrecy for homosexuals is attributed by the society as a mandatory factor upon them and it is erected as a wall of closure everywhere. Getting out into new realms of society proves to be claustrophobic to them as they are forced to remain closeted. Antony Moses and his partner are closeted and they feared a coming out. This closet eventually made Moses a murderer.

Epistemology of the closet contributed a huge share to the modern western culture and history. New walls are erected everywhere as if it is an obligation of the society to maintain the homosexual orientation of individuals in secrecy. "The image of coming out regularly interfaces the image of the closet, and its seemingly unambivalent public siting can be counterpoised as a salvational epistemologic certainty against the very equivocal privacy afforded by the closet" (71). The closet thus became a metaphor for the homosexual identity by all means. The oppressive feature of the closet forced Moses into a crime. Both he and his partner were closeted and never dared to come out of it and declare their true identities. The process of "coming out" never happens in them or rather they keep their secrecy because its disclosure could turn them outcasts, even though both are in reputed careers and hold an upper middle class status. "Vibrantly resonant as the image of the closet is for many modern oppressions, it is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions"

(75). The closeted identity of the homosexuals cannot be paralleled with any other mode of oppression for its unique nature. The most ironical side of the issue is that the closet which is created by the society for homosexual forced Moses to kill his best friend only because he came to know about his closeted identity and thus the closet is now at risk. The emotionally charged scene towards the end of the movie in which the couple confronts Aryan echoes how terribly they want to be closeted for the 'coming out' would risk their personal as well as public life.

The second aspect of the movie to be analysed is the characterization of Antony Moses. He is given two extremely different faces, one before the accident and the other after it. All the personality traits including sexual orientation of both these phases are entirely different. Antony Moses till the accident was homosexual, arrogant, masculine, merciless and brave. After the accident he is depicted as more a fragile person with no homosexual lineages and more brilliant than brave and also one with more values and morals. These personality traits are to be read under the conceptual framework of heteronormativity, gender performativity and homophobia. Michael Warner popularized the term Heteronormativity in the early 1990s. The term signifies the fallacy of considering heterosexuality as normal and inbuilt in human beings. This makes the binary heterosexual/homosexual and concretizes homosexuality as abnormal and deviant. This in turn develops homophobia in the public consciousness. Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* observes the performativity of gender as,

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (180).

All the features that are attributed to a specific gender are regulatory measures adopted by the society in order to maintain a strict divide between both the genders. These attributes sustain social performances and thus man and woman are established as two watertight compartments with specific functionalities. Heterosexuality is one among the strict performances that the regulatory principle forces upon individuals.

The hero while he was a homosexual before the accident was portrayed as a rough inhuman police officer who is ready to kill even his closest friend in order to maintain his social positioning. After the accident losing his memories of his past life and his sexual orientation he is moral upright and humanistic. The movie ends with Moses in his present condition as a heterosexual person completely acceptable to the society. It ends as if the past is immoral and a time that should not happen anymore. The audience too takes the present as real and the past as something gone and immoral.

In the homosexual phase of Moses' life he wore a mask of an over masculine and arrogant person that made his colleagues and media call him 'Rascal Moses.' According to Judith Butler, gender is what we perform and it not inherent. Moses in order to hide his homosexual orientation tries to perform his gender on a greater degree. "...gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (11). Butler further elaborates on how the performative aspect create an illusion of a 'gendered self',

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality (179).

Being a homosexual in a heteronormative society Moses takes in the ideological postulation that having a male sexual partner is not a performance that his gender abides. In order to make a balance for not performing his gender when it comes to sexual orientation, Moses perform the other attributes at a greater degree.

The traditional strict binary in gender create two kinds of performers the man and the woman both perform in accordance with the demands of the society and act according to its presupposed codes. As Butler says, "There is no reason to assume that gender also ought to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (10). Sexual orientation of a person too is strongly inscribed in the performance as heterosexual orientation. Hence Moses performs his gender extraordinarily in order to mask the fact that he deviates from one of its strict codes which is heterosexuality.

Though Bobby and Sanjay, the script writers of the movie have taken up challenge of portraying a homosexual hero figure in a commercial movie deviating from the general tendency of evoking comedy from

the same theme, knowingly or unknowing they too became part of propagating the ideology of heteronormativity. The present life of Antony Moses is clearly not of a homosexual. After the accident which had thrown him into an amnesia erases his true sexual orientation also. As movie ends it becomes rather clear that the new transformed Moses is unable to accept the fact that he was a homosexual. At the moment of realisation about his past sexual orientation he too acts as per the norms of the heteronormative society.

Antony Moses is not a homosexual when the movie ends. In a society where heteronormativity is in play and homophobia is central to the general consciousness of everyone it is obvious that the movie cannot end keeping a homosexual hero figure as such without any transformation. After all, cinema is yet another ideological state apparatus indebted to keep the hegemonic structure intact.

The prevailing ideology of heteronormativity and homophobia is what is getting propagated through the movie. Cinema takes its material from the society and gives it back to society in the form of a discourse to strengthen the dominant pattern of thinking. Comolli and Narboni clearly put it as,

The cinema 'reproduces' reality: this is what a camera and film stock are for – so says the ideology. But the tools and techniques of film making are parts of 'reality' themselves, and furthermore 'reality' is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology... What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of dominant ideology. Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology (46).

Silver screen reproduces ideologies and intensifies its effect upon the society. Individuals become agents of the ideologies unknowingly. Literature and art forms most often carry ideologies even without the conscious agency of its creators. Ideologies are deeply rooted in the society in such a way as it gets expressed through various forms. They further claims,

The majority of films in all categories are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them. Whether the film is commercial, or ambitious, modern or traditional whether it is the type that get shown in art houses, or in smart cinema, whether it is belong to the old cinema or the young cinema it is more likely to be a re-hash of the same old ideology (46).

The two versions of Antony Moses and accident which changes the sexual orientation of him makes the movie yet another medium to propagate the ideology against the marginalized and perpetuate hegemony. In a heteronormative society the hegemonic class would be the class of heterosexuals and dominant ideology would keep the cornered in its suppressed status. In the contemporary world of media culture cinema becomes highly efficient channels through which ideologies can be propagated without any effort.

Film is ideology presenting itself to itself, talking to itself, learning about itself. Once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the film maker's first task is to show up the cinema's so called 'depiction of reality'. If he can do so there is a chance that we will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function (46).

Coming close to the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality the ideological undercurrent is as strong as even a person who acts as a heterosexual as per the codes of the society fails to recognize the homosexual desires in him/her. Homosexuality in this context is considered a taboo and stigmatized. The fear of being an outcast restricts individuals to freely exhibit their sexual orientation and hence they repress it and perform according to the norms of the society. At times the strong interpellation into ideology even hinders them finding their true identities.

The interpellation into this ideology is an unconscious act which is evident in any person. Thus the interpellation into heteronormativity and homophobia become the core of the movie *Mumbai Police*. In the movie when Antony Moses goes to consult his doctor after the accident she says, that was Antony Moses A and the one in front of her now is Antony Moses B. Both are two different personalities and both do not know each other. The most interesting fact is that the audience too perceive both of them as two entirely different personalities and that's the way in which the movie is crafted. The audience travel with Antony Moses B, the one after the accident, the one who is not a homosexual and the one who is acceptable to the society.

The script of the movie makes Antony Moses B to avoid alcohol and smoking. There is a scene in which Moses comes to his office for the first time after the accident and wishes 'good morning' to one of his colleagues and he immediately get shocked for the old Moses was not a friendly character. The new Moses is not arrogant, not a rascal, not disrespectful, not uncouth to the culprits and his colleagues and above all he is not a homosexual. Hence in fact the script associates all the negative qualities with homosexuality and let the 'hero' escape from it along with the other illnesses through an accident and following memory loss. There were only two good demeanours that 'Rascal Moses' exhibited those were his courage and the value he gives to his close relationships. The script is so keenly crafted as to maintain these two in Antony Moses B. By the end the audience are not in any way disturbed because the ideology of heteronormativity is well preserved in the movie. In a homophobic society people would never accept a mass hero to be a homosexual for the audience identify themselves with the central character of the movie as Laura Maulvy puts it in her essay "Visual Pleasure and

Narrative Cinema". The scopophilic effect of the theatre would never agree a homophobic hero because for the spectators homosexuality is a taboo. Thus it's a burden upon the director to somehow make the hero free from such a stigmatic existence. Here in the movie *Mumbai Police* the director achieves it by keeping the impression that he spoke for the marginalized.

From the moment when the audience realise the pathetic situation of Moses being a police officer with no memory about his past, they begin to sympathize with him. The stress, dilemma and agony of the situation are evident in the character in most of scenes. Yet he keeps himself stable till the very moment he realise that he was a homosexual in his past life. He completely breaks down at this revelation and that's the only moment in the whole movie in which the hero cries, though he had many other stressful and painful situations in his life. As the movie ends it is clear that Antony Moses is now a better human being, or rather he is no more a homosexual. Furthermore the homosexual partner of Moses is not given any voice in the movie. He too breaks down when he realises the fact that Moses doesn't need him anymore (he is not aware of the memory loss). When Antony Moses B shuts his door at his partner the spectators too felt as if justice done. In the final speech of Antony Moses B to his friend Farhan he says, "I come back to a new life in which Farhan and Aryan were unknown to me. But now I will miss both of you". This dialogue proves that even though he does not remember both his friends he values them and will miss them. But about his sexual partner, he says nothing. When he reaches him to get statements he keeps a complete detachment, as in the way a heteronormative society treats a homosexual. Adrienne Rich in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" writes about the institutionalized aspect of heterosexuality, "The failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness" (27). Rich parallels the cornering of homosexuals to the same in capitalism and racism. In all these oppressive institutions people are discriminated on the basis of factors of which they are in no way responsible.

The movie furthermore does not portray any character in the grey shade other than the old Moses. There is clearly no villain in the story upon whom the audience can direct their negative feelings, which is a central feature of commercial movies. And also there isn't any other homosexual character other than Moses and his partner. Thus the villain of the movie is the homosexual Antony Moses and the hero is the transformed him. Thus the script converted the homosexual Antony Moses to a new person who is a perfect member of the homophobic society. Along with all the other bad habits Antony Moses B bids bye to his homosexual orientation as well. Hence the movie *Mumbai Police* too propagates the ideology of heteronormativity and assures the 'regime of the normal'.

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