



Swami Vivekananda Advanced Journal for Research and Studies

Online Copy of Document Available on: www.svajrs.com

ISSN:2584-105X

Pg. 109 - 113



Representation of Desires in the Geriatric Population: Analysis of the Indian Cinema

Dr. Megha Pushkarna

Counselling Psychologist, Couple and Family Therapist

Email: meghapushkarna@gmail.com

Abstract

Society has served as a crucial institution for human existence. Societies differ in their internal organisational structure, degrees of autonomy, and taboos that uphold and sustain them. The challenges of ageing and isolation in older persons are rarely acknowledged within societal conventions. Moreover, significant disparities exist in gender-based expectations among the elderly. Sexual intimacy constitutes a fundamental aspect of the human experience for all individuals. However, sexual closeness seems to be considered appropriate for younger persons, whereas elderly adults are frequently perceived as asexual. Individuals who partake in sexual intercourse at an older age must confront the societal consequences of what is regarded as age-inappropriate activity. The concepts of human touch and the necessity for affection are extremely pertinent, particularly for those in the later stages of life who encounter diminished opportunities for unconditional love and care. Hence, understanding the relevance of sexuality and its expression among the elderly in India through films is important.

Objective

This research aims to examine the representation of ageing and stigma in Hindi cinema, concentrating on the elderly and their socio-emotional challenges.

Approach

Bollywood films were examined to discern representations pertaining to widowhood, the establishment of romantic relationships, challenges to stereotypes, and family dynamics, with particular emphasis on the elderly's reliance on their relatives. This study examines a critical problem of sexuality and ageing within the Indian context, as little research has investigated the psychosocial implications of societal expectations.

Outcomes

This paper addresses key issues affecting the aging population, such as loneliness and stereotypes. Gender influences old age people differently; women typically manage domestic tasks, while it is acceptable for men to seek companionship. Widows may turn to religion or domestic activities to cope with solitude, while elderly men are more socially accepted in expressing their need for companionship.

Keywords: old age, sexuality, stereotyping, loneliness, media representation.

Introduction

The contemporary world has enabled prolonged and healthier ageing. Improved socio economic development correlates with a global increase in the geriatric population. This is attributable to improved healthcare services, leading to an enhanced life expectancy. Nevertheless, we observe a persistent stigma associated with the senior population regarding their sexual behaviour. While we persist in enhancing diets and addressing robust ageing through physical exercise, intimacy never receives adequate attention in discourse. This study aims to examine stigma and ageing within the Indian community. The objective is to examine representations of sexual encounters in media, particularly Indian cinema.

Evolutionary scientists have explained that sexual needs are crucial for our existence and vitality. Not only does it have reproductive significance, but intimacy is also seen to be associated with finding meaning in life and feeling accomplished with successful partnering and creating a family. Due to the loss of a spouse or partner, there is a void in a person's life, and there is little or no discussion around it.

Socially, it is assumed that people are prepared to spend their remaining years grieving silently or accepting and moving on with their fate. Not realising that along with the change in family dynamics, there is a constant need for emotional gratification for that void, and none can fill that gap. It may sound embarrassing to discuss the lost comfort of sexual pleasures when no one wants to talk about loneliness in the widowed geriatric population. The family assumes that widowed partners will keep themselves busy with household chores and occupy themselves with watching TV, being with friends, and religion, as now they have time to reflect on their lives and retire.

This expected change in lifestyle—perception of life, change in dressing, and social conduct— may feel isolating. This demeaning attitude towards widowhood is a burden for someone who is already struggling with an ageing body and financial dependence on their families.

Review of Literature

The work of Boissier et al. (1973) has been seminal in this field. They believe that society typically perceives the sexuality of elderly persons as constrained. Winn et al. (1982) examine the persistence of sexual activity among the elderly across several countries, suggesting that cultural influences may significantly influence their sexual behaviour.

Bauer et al. (2007) investigated sexuality in older

adults and noted its status as a “neglected area in research” in their study titled “Sexuality, Health Care, and the Older Person.” Like other contemporaries, Sinkovic et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative analysis of sexual ageing, highlighting the socio-cultural dimensions of intimacy among older individuals. They want to emphasise the influence of closeness on “personal significance and relevance” in the final stages of human life.

Lee et al. (2016) conducted longitudinal studies on ageing and affirmed that sexual health is a fundamental aspect of well-being in later life, since older individuals maintain their sexual impulses despite the physiological changes associated with ageing.

Orr et al. (2019) emphasises the necessity of elucidating the sexual demands and unfulfilled experiences of the elderly, dismantling stigma, encouraging help-seeking behaviour, and integrating the findings into healthy ageing policy measures.

Stigma is a detrimental view of an idea aimed at a specific group of individuals, influencing their behaviour towards that group. This topic has garnered significant attention in both research and therapeutic approaches worldwide.

Link and Phelan (2001) provide a comprehensive definition of stigma in “Conceptualising Stigma.” They propose that six essential conditions for stigma exist: labelled disparities, stereotypes, alienation, status loss and discrimination, power, and emotional reactivity. **Stereotypes** are exaggerated views linked to a category that are prevalent and deeply ingrained in verbal, written, and visual contexts within society. Stereotypes of ageing encompass preconceptions and generalisations regarding the expected behaviour and experiences of individuals at or above a specific age, disregarding individual variances and unique circumstances, as elucidated by Ory et al. (2003).

Ageing is the time-related decline of physiological capabilities essential for survival and reproduction. The traits of ageing, as differentiated from age-related disorders, impact all members of a species.

Intimacy is the sensation of emotional and physical proximity between two individuals over time. From a sociological standpoint, closeness augments emotional well-being and is a systematic construct like to family. Intimacy is a personal experience of demonstrating affection, ranging from caregiving to sexual intercourse. The yearning for intimacy persists with age, and there is no age at which closeness, encompassing physical intimacy, is deemed improper.

The Influence of Cinema on Perspectives

Mass media serves as a global source of entertainment. Films have been recognised to affect

mood and emotional control across all age groups. Bollywood cinema plays a substantial role in the film business, attracting a large following both in India and beyond.

Dwyer (2020) asserts that Bollywood cinema has emerged as a global phenomenon, with films attaining a worldwide following. The films depict Indian culture and traditions and have profoundly influenced global perceptions of India.

In 2022, Luan et al. investigated the impact of cinema viewing on social cognition, discovering that watching films can improve individuals' empathy and perspective-taking skills. In the Indian context, this conclusion was corroborated by Chakraborty and associates (2023), who examined the influence of Bollywood cinema on cultural attitudes and values in India, discovering that films can affect public opinion on several social issues. The research underscores Bollywood cinema's capacity for social commentary and cultural critique.

Purpose

This paper intends to examine the portrayal of stigma and ageing in Hindi films, focusing on the elderly and their intimate needs. Films illustrate a prevalent societal interest in exploring emotional connections among the elderly, particularly during widowhood. Societal myths serve as psychological obstacles for the elderly in articulating their needs to loved ones. They also perceive themselves as burdens to their families. The sexuality of the senior population requires more examination.

Methodology

Bollywood movies were analysed to identify pertinent stigmas associated with widowhood, rebuilding romantic relationships, confronting stereotypes, and family dynamics, particularly as they pertain to the elderly's dependence on their families.

Discussion

Our social conditioning expects old age to be associated with asexual preferences, especially for women much against to their wishes. Physically comforting intimacy is desirable irrespective of the age. But social norms make it easy for men to fulfil their desires, whereas women must hide and seek love in the face of loneliness. The decline in libido and desire over time can be attributed to various factors such as routine, familiarity, hormonal fluctuations, health concerns, or monotony. However, a significant portion of the decrease in sexual behaviour among older individuals is perpetuated by societal norms and cultural expectations. **Kapoor and Sons**, a Hindi movie released in 2016, stars the late actor Mr. Rishi Kapoor. The story is about two brothers (Fawad

Khan and Sidharth Malhotra) who visit their dysfunctional family for their grandfather (Rishi Kapoor). He lives joyfully at the age of 90 and wishes to get a family photograph mentioning Kapoor and Sons and frame it in the hall of his house. His son and daughter-in-law have an estranged relationship, which their sons and father-in-law largely ignore. The actor is seen as "the happy-go-lucky daddu," who is shown as a weed-smoking, porn-watching octogenarian. He is acting as the glue for a family slowly crumbling under the load of anger and resentment.

He desires to connect with his grandsons, who stay away, but does not have a connection with his daughter-in-law or son, with whom he stays. Though he is dependent on his son and daughter-in-law for physical care, he is emotionally distanced from them and suffers from physical ailments.

Lipstick Under My Burkha, a Hindi film produced in 2016, narrates a tale of liberation from a strict environment. Four women embarked on a quest for liberation and pleasure. Set in the congested alleys of Mumbai, *Lipstick Under My Burkha* explores the clandestine lives of four women seeking some form of independence. Despite being constrained and confined within their environments, these four women assert their aspirations through subtle acts of bravery and covert defiance. In the bustling streets of Mumbai, a 55-year-old widow reawakens her sexuality through a connection by phone romance. She is presented as the protagonist of an erotic pulp fiction novel entitled *Lipstick Dreams*. In her everyday life, she functions as the elderly matriarch and has adjusted to being referred to as "Buaji" (Aunty); she has nearly forgotten her own name and often contemplates a self-portrait from her youth. The character cultivates a desire for uninhibited sensuality, influenced by the raunchy pulp fiction she secretly consumes and a muscular swimming instructor who captivates her interest. This film does not pertain to ladies of any faith. It pertains to all women existing under the oppression of a rule of law.

Results

The first movie breaks the stigma of an elderly man wishing to lead a carefree life and express his loneliness openly. In the second movie, an elderly woman must suppress herself as she is unable to come out in public and seek the companionship she is desiring. She must pretend to be a different person on calls to lure companionship and feel good about herself.

A clear distinction in gender comes from research done by Leiblum (2002) that explains causes for women's sexual problems, especially in old age, including shame, guilt, sexual abuse, interpersonal conflicts, depression, and religious and cultural

prohibitions. Life span Psychologists clarify myths around age and sexual desires in human beings. Many people may be astounded by the idea that, like young adults, people beyond their sixties are capable of being sexually active. It could be assumed that after 60 years, there is a drop in libido, and thus people become asexual. Pfeiffer et. al. (1972) examines how older men fear losing their sexual prowess, while older women fear being judged as disgraceful if they express themselves overtly. Fear of judgement comes more from the immediate family than from society at large. If at all intimacy becomes a concern, it could be due to compelling factors like chronic illness, depression, and the incapacitation or death of a partner.

Limitation

This study focused only on the socio-cultural (gender, marital status) aspect of geriatric expression towards pleasure seeking and did not consider any medical history. This study focused on film analysis as a methodology.

Conclusion

Movies depict a normal social interest in finding emotional connectedness in the elderly population, especially post-widowhood. Societal myths act as mental barriers for elders to explain their needs to their close ones, as they feel like a burden on their family. To normalise sexual seeking activities, older people see any forms of sexual expression as an outlet for affection, renewal of romance, and a general affirmation in life to avoid boredom and loneliness. And just like youngsters, elders affirm a sense of meaning and self-confidence in themselves to prevent feeling socially isolated through inducing sexual pleasures. Sexuality in the geriatric population needs to be further investigated.

References

- Bauer M, McAuliffe L, Nay R. Sexuality, health care and the older person: an overview of the literature. *Int J Older People Nurs* 2007 Mar;2(1):63–68. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-3743.2007.00051. x.
- Boissier, J. R., Gessa, G. J., Heimann, H., Hollister, L., Lehmann, H., Munkvad, I., ... & Vinar, O. (1973). Psychopharmacology, sexual disorders, and drug abuse. T. A. Ban (Ed.). North-Holland. Chakraborty, G. D. (2023). New Feminist Visibilities and Sisterhood: Re-interpreting Marriage, Desire, and Self Fulfillment in Mainstream Hindi Cinema. In *Gender, Cinema, Streaming Platforms: Shifting Frames in Neoliberal India* (pp. 131-160). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- da Cunha, A. M. S., de Almeida Lima, A. B., dos Santos, I. M. R., Gomes, N. M. C., & de Souza, E. M. S. (2019). Conversando sobre sexualidade e afetividade entre pessoas idosas. [TESTE] *Gep News*, 2(2), 153-160. Dwyer, R. (2020). New Myths for an Old Nation: Bollywood, Soft Power, and Hindu Nationalism. *Cinema and Soft Power*, 151-165.
- Gewirtz-Meydan, A., Hafford-Letchfield, T., Benyamini, Y., Phelan, A., Jackson, J., & Ayalon, L. (2018). Ageism and sexuality. *Contemporary perspectives on ageism*, 149-162.
- Kalra, G., Subramanyam, A., & Pinto, C. (2011). Sexuality: Desire, activity, and intimacy in the elderly. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 53(4), 300-306.
- Leiblum, S. R. (2002). Reconsidering gender differences in sexual desire: An update. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 17(1), 57-68.
- Ory, M., Hoffman, M. K., Hawkins, M., Sanner, B., & Mockenhaupt, R. (2003). Challenging aging stereotypes: Strategies for creating a more active society. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 25(3), 164-171. Sinkovic M, Towler L. Sexual Aging: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research on the Sexuality and Sexual Health of Older Adults. *Qual Health Res* 2019 Jul;29(9):1239–1254. doi: 10.1177/1049732318819834 Luan, L., Liu, W., Zhang, R., & Hu, S. (2022). Introducing cognitive psychology in film studies: Redefining affordance. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 2(3), 70-78.
- Lee DM, Nazroo J, O'Connor DB, Blake M, Pendleton N. Sexual Health and Well-being Among Older Men and Women in England: Findings from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *Arch Sex Behav* 2016 Jan;45(1):133–144. doi: 10.1007/s10508-014-0465-1.
- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual review of Sociology*, 27(1), 363-385. Orr J, Layte R, O'Leary N. Sexual Activity and Relationship Quality in Middle and Older Age: Findings from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA). *J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci* 2019 Jan 10;74(2):287–297. doi: 10.1093/geronb/gbx038.
- Pfeiffer, E., Verwoerdt, A., & Davis, G. C. (1972). Sexual behavior in middle life. *American*

journal of psychiatry, 128(10), 1262-1267.

Winn, R. L., & Newton, N. (1982). Sexuality in aging: a study of 106 cultures. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 11, 283-298.
