

## UNVEILING THE CONTOURS OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN DEEPA MEHTA'S *FIRE* AND ABDELLATIF KECHICHE'S *BLUE IS THE WARMEST COLOUR*

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### **Abstract:**

*The present paper attempts to delineate how homosexuality has been used as a narrative strategy to represent the liberation and exploration of self in the protagonists of Deepa Mehta's *Fire* and Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue is the Warmest Colour*. It also encapsulates the different perspectives and gazes the society has on homosexual relationships. The study brings to attention not only the erotic component in such relationships but also the beautiful life such couples have.*

**Keywords:** *Homosexuality, deviant Other, eroticism, marginality, sexuality.*

Homosexuality has always been looked upon as derogative and demoralizing. The society sees man-woman relationship as normal and homosexual relation as perversion. The psyche of the community is so adulterated that they marginalize the so-called homosexuals who are even deprived of a gendered existence. Thus homosexuality is rather “a perception created through various discourses and representations” (Nayar 188). The label impinged on them as the “deviant Other” assumes a societal control over their lives. Moreover “homosexual is... a socially created identity or label that leads to specific legal, cultural, medical consequences for the person labeled as such” (Nayar 188). Breaking the normality of representing the homosexual minorities either in films or in fiction has always given room for controversy. In spite of the hullabaloo such narratives created, there is greater concentration on the erotic sexuality and the conjugal relationship of the sexes rather than on their contrived marginality. The hostility towards them remain which actually intensified their attempt “to redefine identities and carve out a cultural/political space within the dominant heterosexual paradigm” (Nayar 184). In fact, the rhetoric of liberation is a canopy for empowering themselves thereby proliferating their struggle to survive, “which includes a struggle for the means of continuing visibility” (Dollimore 25).

The celebration of homosexuality has emerged very lately in the Western films like *Boy's Don't Cry*, *Anders als die Anderen*, *The Children's Hour*, *Celluloid Closet*, *Born in Flames*, *Death in Venice*, *In and Out* etc. which in fact paved its way into the minds of the Indian filmmakers such as Deepa Mehta, Shekhar Kapur, Mira Nair and so on. The celluloid narrated the obnoxious realities of the so-called denigrated community and how the narcissistic perceptions of the society have unruly categorized such interrelationships as obscene and obsolete. Thus films showcases and familiarizes the unfamiliar world of these individuals on screen. Though the recognition that the Gay or Lesbian narratives received were warm, there is still a diminutive minority as viewers across the globe.

In Deepa Mehta's *Fire* and Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, homosexuality has been used diversely. The protagonists of both the films suffer the pangs of homosexuality and inclusively delineate the gratification of man's libidinal or instinctual wants. Radha and Sita of *Fire* are neither homosexuals nor amorous but are the victims of familial commitments and patriarchy. It is, in fact, the rejection from their husbands on account of filthy reasons that they ended up in an erotogenic relationship. The abstinence of Ashok, Radha's husband, is the result of his pursuit of salvation under the guidance of his guru. To him, women must be confined within the four walls of the house and are entrusted with the duties of looking after the needs of the family. He also foresees his wife to be docile and submissive which Radha

has played really well without complaining his celebration of celibacy. For Sita, her marital life with her husband Jatin is unsatisfying and loveless. Jatin is enticed by his Chinese girlfriend and sees Sita only as an object of his partial sexual satisfaction. When Ashok silences the dutiful Radha by playing the ritual of testing his carnal earning by sleeping beside her motionless, Sita out rightly decides not to accept her fate as such. The film describes the intimate friendship of the sister-in-laws Radha and Sita, their homosexual affinity towards one another and the extent to which their sexuality helps them to liberate from the clutches of patriarchy. Sita overcome the defiance and violence of her husband by turning her affection and attraction towards Radha thereby resisting the negligence of their husbands. Their eroticized behavior and actions lends them the power to see themselves as individuals from their prejudiced existence. When their sexual relation is discovered by Ashok, Sita leaves the house and Jatin with the bearing of an invigorated identity, breaking away the shackles of womanhood and patriarchal control. On the other hand Radha stays back to talk to Ashok. Radha is no longer the submissive and the loyal Indian wife who remains obedient and respects her husband no matter how long he abuses her. She outpours her emotions and feelings which have been hidden for ages. She did not beg her husband for forgiveness instead she assertively remarks that:

Without desire I was dead... Without desire there is no point in living... I desire to live. I desire Sita. I desire her warmth, her compassion, her body. I desire to live again.

These women have used their homosexual relation to defy and justify their actions in order to ramify the entrenched culture and to assert their freedom. Mehta has used fire as the most poignant symbol in the film to inculcate the Indian myth of purity and loyalty. In the final scene amidst the emotional outpouring, Radha's saree catches fire. Ashok remains numb and carries his paralyzed mother from the kitchen. Nonetheless, the fire purged Radha of all the impurities and of her hitherto subservience. She later rejoins Sita. Mehta has made a dig at the Indian customs and traditions, in particular, the norms which a married woman should follow. When the so called conservative patriarchy disparagingly condemns homosexuality Mehta's film challenged their ideology of sexual relationship. She has even deliberately used the names Radha and Sita to illustrate the virtues and purity of her heroines.

In *Blue is the Warmest Colour* Adele and Emma celebrate their erogenous homosexual relation without the hindrances of French law. Adele is a teenager who is erotically drawn to a blue haired and blue eyed Emma, the daughter of a bohemian couple. It is not the system that delimits their idyllic love but the social status and the hypocrisies of class. The scenes of sex and nudity in the film has prolonged for more than ten minutes to exemplify the freedom such couples enjoy in the recent scenario and that the limitations set forth by class can be dismissed altogether. Nevertheless it is their class differences and expectations arising out of their love-life separate them apart. The differences in their class are evident even from the appearances of the heroines and how they carry themselves throughout the film. The nose dripping, open mouthed and uncultured Adele is regarded as the muse of Emma's paintings, who wants her always to be unsophisticated and innocent. On the other hand, for Adele their homosexual relation has given her a new kind of freedom and the opportunity to explore herself and identify her own potentialities. Emma's parents welcome Adele and encourages their relationship, whereas Adele's conservative parents believes that they are just friends. The dinner scene in Emma's house shows a sharp contrast to that in Adele's house. Emma's parents present wine and oysters for dinner while for Adele's parents food brings happiness and love. At the close of the film Adele is seen walking away from the exhibition conducted by Emma, where she feels all alone and alienated in the midst of Emma's sophisticated friends circle. Both are separated and this has affected Adele more than Emma herself. To Adele their amorous relation has added colour to her life. Their breakup caused hallucinations at night and Adele is seen losing her charm and presence of mind.

The colour blue has much significance in the film. Emma's hair and eyes are blue and in the last scene the coat that she wore was also blue. The colour blue has emotional affinity and sensual intensity for Adele. She perceives the colour as indicative of her sexual passion, love and loss and even the different

stages of depression that she undergoes. When their relationship ceased Emma changes her hair colour which in fact deciphers the emotional dryness and the vanity of their love life. She remarks: "Existence precedes essence". Kechiche has presented how desire and eroticism in a homosexual relation can be fruitful and devastating at the same time. He narrated the story entirely from a male perspective with all its rawness and without negotiating with the existing critical gaze.

Both the films are critically acclaimed for its profundity and destabilize the social stigmas associated with sex and sexuality. Though the films are representative of two different periods and two different cultures, they more or less elicit the same kind of relationship and experiences. The filmmakers have taken a very sensitive issue and dealt it profoundly with ease and perfection. The viewers are mesmerized by the craft and the acting potentialities of the actors. The new experience and the new approach has proliferated applause and the audience carried with them a deconstructed notion of the "deviant Other".

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