



Same-sex love in Muslim cultures through the lens of Hindustani Cinema

Ayesha Arfeen, ayesharfeen@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper tries to explore same-sex love in Muslim cultures in India as represented in Hindustani cinema. My focus will be on Muslim female same-sex love which is generally not touched upon. Female same-sex love and male same-sex love is widely discussed and debated upon. The recent film *Dedh Ishqiya* (Bhardwaj, 2014) is taken as a case study to examine female same-sex love in a Muslim context. Other films will be dealt in periphery. The influence of language, place and peer group is to be checked. *Amradparashti* or male same-sex love is discussed in comparison to female same-sex love for which no particular term in North India is used that frequently.

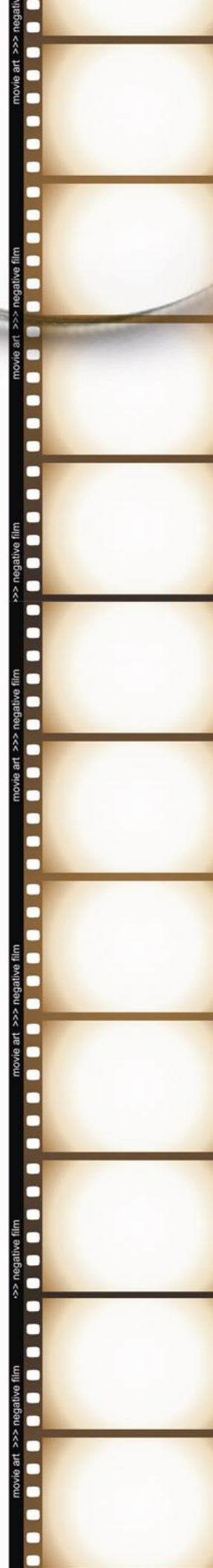
Keywords: Same-sex love, Amradparashti, Dedh Ishqiya, Laundabaazi, Muslim lesbians, Sexual Frustration, Female Sexuality



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Introduction

Even today, where there are burning debates over queer theories and sexuality finding increasing space on international agendas, there remains a drought in debates on Queer Muslims, especially Muslim lesbians. Ruth Vanita, who writes extensively on same-sex love and marriages in India, mainly deals with cultures within Hinduism and Christianity as these are the cultures she is well acquainted with. However, the book she edited with Saleem Kidwai, has certain portions dealing with same sex love within Muslim cultures. We might still get books and articles on Muslim males same-sex love and sexual encounters, but articles covering Muslim females same sex-love are few. Even according to psychologist Sudhir Kakar, homosexuality is merely a temptation of “men” living away from their women-folk. Muslim women writers like Ismat Chughtai, Mumtaz Shireen, Shaishta Fakhri, Wajida Tabbasum and Azra Masroor dealt with same sex encounters within a Muslim society. Novelist Balzac maintains through his narrator that the strongest emotion known is that of a woman for a woman.

Urdu poetry and same-sex love

First of all, I will discuss *rekhti* and later move on to *rekhta* and other Urdu poetry. *Rekhti* is a type of Urdu poetry whose distinguishing features are a female speaker and a focus on women’s lives and that *rekhti ghazal* is a conversation chiefly between women, and secondarily between women and men. (Vanita, Ruth (2012), *Gender, Sex and the City*, p.1-3). Ruth Vanita demonstrates in her work that *rekhti* disturbs well-established binary categories like courtesan/respectable woman, mistress/servants, high/low language, and lover/beloved. Both

Dedh Ishqiya and *Lihaaf*, the novel on which *Dedh Ishqiya* is based, show the relationship between a mistress and her maid. The distinguishing feature of *rekhti*, according to Rangin, Insha, Nisbat, Qais, Jaan Sahib and others, is a kind of women narrator who is not interested in marriage or having children, rather she is interested in life's pleasures and her status is often ambiguous whether she is a courtesan or a homely woman and that it focuses on women's amorous relationship with one another. (Ibid., p.4-5). Muzaffar Ali too asserts, while talking about Lucknow and Urdu poetry:

Despite the external slaughter it (Lucknow) remained preserved in the veils of the most exquisite feminine feudal culture the world has ever known, to the extent that even the male poets were drawn to writing in the feminine gender- a poetic form known as *rekhti*. (Ali, Muzaffar (2011) 'Shahr e Nigaaran' in Malvika Singh's edited *Lucknow: A City Between Cultures*, p.114-115).

Begum Para's maid in the movie *Dedh Ishqiya*, addresses the crowd of nawabs by saying, "Tawwajah chahungi khawateen-o-hazraat" (I would like to draw your attention, ladies and gentlemen). That's a different thing that there were no ladies in the crowd. The dialogues in the film are in chaste Urdu. In the crowd, we can see the Urdu poet Anwar Jalalpuri who inaugurates the programme by reciting Dr. Bashir Badr's poetry in another *mehfil* (gathering), "wo itrdaan sa lehja mere buzurgon ka, rachi basi hui Urdu zabaan ki khusboo" where he describes the fragrance of Urdu language and the way it is spoken by our ancestors. Begum Para is floored by Khalu Jaan's poetry, who is disguised as Nawab of Chandpur, when he sings "Ye ishq hai namuraad aisa, ke jaan lewe tabhi tale hai".

According to Ruth Vanita, Islamicisation was an important aspect of the late nineteenth-century purification of Urdu poetry, and one reason *rekhti* was purged from the canon. (Vanita, Ruth. (2012) 'Gender, Sex and the City', p.39)

Lucknow and same-sex love

The film, *Dedh Ishqiya*, starts with Chandpur, which is not a fictional town [Chandpur exists in Bijnour district of Uttar Pradesh (India)] and moves on to Mehmudabaad,(the name of the railway junction being Mehmudabaad Awadh as shown in the movie) which again is some fifty-two kilometers from Lucknow, then Awadh of undivided India. It is not a co-incidence that the producer and co-writer of the movie, Vishal Bharadwaj, is himself from Bijnour district.

In Mehmudabad, Begum Para (Madhuri Dixit) is organizing a *mushaira* in the memory of her late husband every year. It is narrated to the audience that the Begum's late husband wanted her to be remarried but only with a *shayar* (a poet). So, she has been organizing this *swayamvar* in the form of *mushaira* and the winner of it would be the future Nawab of Mehmudabaad. In the background runs the eternal voice of Begum Akhtar and the *ghazal* is “*Hamri atariya pe aao sawanriya, dekha dekhi balam hoi jaye*” which literally translates to ‘come to my balcony, O my beloved, let there be some looking at each other...’ First, enters her maid who addresses the crowd of nawabs from different parts of India to lower their gaze and behave properly when the Begum enters the hall. The Begum first greets the crowd from the balcony and later comes to be introduced to each of them. She is lavishly dressed with a green *gharara* and finest of jewellery with the side *maang-teeka* which is generally worn by Muslim women even today at weddings. The *gharara* and the side *maang-teeka* are certainly a stereotype of Muslim culture in India.

Ruth Vanita maintains that “male-male attraction is one of the themes of pre-colonial Urdu poetry in general, but the unique feature in pre-colonial Lakhnavi poetry is the depiction of female-female relationships as well. The most important thing about this poetry is that it

depicts cross-sex romances and same-sex romances in the same tone, showing that all relationships face ups and downs, and all lovers experience similar emotions.” (Interview appeared in mid-day. com dated 19th Jan, 2015). She continues by saying that actual locations are mentioned in the poetry as places where lovers meet, like Qaiser Bagh in Lucknow. In the movie too, the courtyard is shown as Begum’s favourite place to chill out. Ruth is concerned that *Rekhta*, which is poetry in men’s voices that deals with many subjects including male-female and male-male romance, remains largely unavailable.

Power structure and love

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin argues, “The realm of sexuality has its own internal politics, inequities and modes of oppression. As with other aspects of human behavior, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbued with conflicts of interests and political manoeuvring, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense, sex is always political. But there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life, is in effect, renegotiated.” (Gayle S. Rubin, ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, p. 4.)

Begum Para’s love for dance is realized by Khalu Jaan and he provoked her to dance again. While the Begum was dancing, Khalu Jaan is spellbound by seeing her dancing while Muneera (Huma Qureshi) is shocked. She never wanted her to be free or feel carefree. By this, she feared she might lose the Begum. By keeping the Begum devoid of the pleasures she could gain by herself, Muneera wants to keep her captive by providing her the pleasures of physical

and mental intimacy. Muneera wants to control her like the way men do in our society. She wants the Begum to feel her need. Now, Khalu Jaan (Naseeruddin Shah) is a competitor for Muneera. He is a kind of ‘*raaqeeb*’ (competitor in love) for her. Muneera here works as the men in our society in the patriarchal set up work, making their wives completely dependent on them like the Roman code which puts woman under guardianship and asserts her imbecility. Begum Para’s choice of eloping with Muneera even after getting Khalu Jaan’s attention and declaration of love for her justifies Jurrat’s words,

“*Aisi lazzat kahan hai mardon mein
Jaisi lazzat du-guna chapti mein*”

(Where is the pleasure in men, compared to pleasure, *du-guna*, in *chapti*.)”

Amrad Parashti and sexual frustration of the female counterpart in dedh Ishqiya and Lihaaf

“Years of passivity, of waiting while he plays the field, also lead to anger. Call it a “spite fuck.” (Friday, ‘*Women on Top*’, p.193).

Lihaaf and *Dedh Ishqiya* are not just about female-female love but these did have elements of male love for male or rather male love for younger males. Scholars have been discussing over whether same sex love is natural or cultural. I, however, do not intend to indulge into this debate and prefer one over the other. Begum Para is devoid of her husband’s love and so she finds solace in Muneera’s arms. Begum Para is quite disturbed by her past. She still has the brunt of her husband’s neglect of hers and giving preference to other young men. The Begum is shown with the family album where she seems to be an extra and not-so-wanted while her husband was in the company of other males. However, Muneera seems to be naturally inclined to Begum Para or she might have her own share of story or past which we are not acquainted with. Begum Para is not allowed to go out as she is the Begum and hence the

family's honor. Queens in Lucknow were not allowed to move around the city. Vijay Khan describes the *zenana* quarters and the lives of Begums in Lucknow as,

Having to live within a restricted space, however spacious, for all their lives, seemed to have made women the guardians of culture, of its traditions and customs and also of language...The begums did not share the freedom of their husbands and sons who could make rules as easily as they could bend or break them. ('Behind the Purdah' in Malvika Singh's ed. *Lucknow; A City Between Cultures*, p.34)

Khan further maintains that the *hakims* or the doctors were even not allowed to see the begums. At the most, they were allowed to check their pulse, that too through the curtain. If the begum is tired, women would massage her body. Usually, at the begum's bed sat another woman who attempted to induce sleep in her mistress by her talent of story-telling.(Khan, Vijay (2011) 'Behind the Purdah', in Malvika Singh's ed. *Lucknow: A City Between Cultures*', p. 37). In such an atmosphere, it is quite likely for a lonely woman to satisfy her physical and mental needs by another woman. Simone de Beauvoir too talks about environmental circumstances which might influence such choices. There is a scene where Muneera is portrayed combing the Begum's hair and kissing her head symbolizing a comforting and understanding relationship, at once nurturing, caring and intimate. Beauvoir writes, and that is applicable to the *zenana* quarters of Lucknow too:

Today the two sexes still live largely separated lives: in boarding schools and seminars for young women the transition from intimacy to sexuality is rapid; lesbians are far less numerous in environments where the association of girls and boys facilitates heterosexual experiences. Many women who are employed in work shops and offices, surrounded by women, and who see little men, will tend to form amorous friendships with females: they will find it materially and morally simple to associate their lives. The absence or difficulty of heterosexual contacts will doom them to inversion. It is hard to draw the line between resignation and predilection:

a woman can devote herself to women because man has disappointed her...
(Beauvoir, Simone de (1997) *The Second Sex*, p.437-438)

Kathryn Babayan is of the opinion that separation from the object of desire may lead to mystical love. She gives the instance of the famous love saga of Layla and Majnun where while Majnun was refused as son-in-law by Layla's father, he went on a Hajj to remedy his lovesickness. However, while discussing about the Muslim culture of veiling and seclusion, she asserts that in seventeenth century Isfahani society husbands felt threatened by their wives' female friends. The practice of *siqahyi khwahar khwandagi*, which involve a vow of sisterhood that two women exchanged with each other (Babayan, Kathryn. 'In Spirit We Ate Each Other's Sorrow' in Babayan and Najmabadi's *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, p.249-50) is quite similar to the concept of 'Saheli' prevalent in certain parts of North India and the concept of 'Makara' in Odisha which might be called something else in other languages and dialects in other parts of India. Babayan mentions Aqa Jamal's book '*Aqa'ad al-Nisa*' where he ridicules and talks about female friendships that are relationships portrayed to have involved more passionate emotions than matrimony itself has. Ruth Vanita writes that Nazir's woman speaker addresses her female neighbour, suggesting that they have sex, because the male lover she was waiting has not arrived. She laments his absence throughout, using graphic heterosexual images: "*The sheath is here, the sword elsewhere, what fun and enjoyment can there be?*" (Ruth Vanita in *Gender, Sex and the City*, while referring to *Kulliyat-i-Nazir*, p.36). She continues by saying that the reference to sex with a woman occurs only in the refrain, and as an entirely unsatisfactory substitute, fuelled by petulance, not desire. However, in Jurrat's "*Chaptinama*", women speakers openly declare their preference for women over men, celebrate the joys of lesbian sex, gather like-minded

women and enjoy the accoutrements (*pan*, flowers, perfume). (Vanita, Ruth. (2012) ‘*Gender, Sex and the City*’, p.37).

The concept of *amradparashti* is not a new phenomenon. It existed in the past. It exists today also. *Amrad* is a young male adolescent and *amradparashti* is extreme liking for an *amrad*. He is not regarded as a man and he is not a woman either. Afsaneh Najmabadi, while discussing about the regulation of sexuality in nineteenth century Iran, maintains in relation to Qajar province that the recording of sexual inclination does not record some innate homo- or heterosexuality, as all men are assumed to be sexually inclined to both women and *amrads*. She gives examples from Vali Khan’s *Risalah-I fujuriyah* (an essay on debauchery written in 1872) that in his manuscript, Vali Khan records his sexual adventures with twenty-eight Qajar princesses, fifteen female prostitutes, sixty-five *amrads*, twenty-seven male and ten female servants, and eight virgins (this virginity is in term of anal intercourse). This manuscript is believed to be written for the king’s entertainment. (Najmabadi, Afsaneh (2008) ‘Types, Acts or What? Regulation of Sexuality in Nineteenth-century Iran’ in Najmabadi and Babayan eds. *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal geographies of Desire*, p.277). Najmabadi claims that there are records from Qajar Iran of male –male sexual practices, including *adam’dari* which is a well-known practice of adult men keeping younger men as their companions. The older man was sometimes referred to as “the cover” of the younger one. The 1921 city census of Tehran suggests that the practice of *adam’dari* is continued into the twentieth century. (Ibid., p.284). Though these are instances of nineteenth and twentieth century Iran, my point is that *amradparashti* is not a new concept among Muslim cultures in India. This prevails today too. Instances from North India include Ismat Chughtai’s ‘*Lihaaf*’ and Abdul Bismillaha’s ‘*Shaadi ka Joker*’. Chughtai writes,

“He (Nawab Saheb) kept an open house for students- young, fair, slender-waisted boys whose expenses were borne by him...But the nawab didn't have a moment to spare for her (Begum Jaan). He was too busy chasing the gossamer shirts. Nor did he allow her to go out.’ (Chughtai, Ismat (2001, 2011) *The Quilt*, translated by M. Asaduddin, p.16-17).

As Simone de Beauvoir herself admits:

The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some important truths. Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an antiphysis - in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf. This arrogation is not an inward, subjective operation; it is accomplished objectively in practical action.

Thus the 'natural' is not necessarily a 'human' value. Humanity has begun to transcend Nature: we can no longer justify the maintenance of a discriminatory sex class system on grounds of its origins in nature. Indeed, for pragmatic reasons alone it is beginning to look as if we *must* get rid of it. (www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/firestone-shulamith/dialectic-sex.htm).

Abdul Bismillah starts by mentioning the culture of *amradparashti* in among Arabs and Iranians. He describes *amrads* (though he did not mention the term ‘amrad’) as having long hair, kohl in their eyes, rose on their cheeks and they were so sensuous that men would drink one peg after another looking at them. These ‘beautiful’ young men were called ‘*saaqi*’. Bismillah says that these ‘beautiful’ young men in India (read North India) were called ‘*launda*’. They were in demand at the time of marriages for singing and dancing. They were also the ‘keeps’ of certain zamindars. They were so much in demand that men would die and even kill for them. (Bismillah, Abdul (2013) *Shaadi ka Joker*, p. 67). Bismillah traces the

Islamic history of these young men and gave the instance of Hazrat Yusuf who was ‘bought’ by Zuleikha in the market of Misr (Misr being the Romanized Arabic name for Egypt). (Ibid.).

Describing today’s scenario, Abdul Bismillah asserts that *laundas* today disguise themselves as jokers and entertain people at marriage functions. However, they are still in demand. Earlier they had respect, and some were preferred over women. Now they are kidnapped and sodomised. Narrating one incident in his story, Bismillah describes the sodomised *launda* as having red on his cheeks, not of rose but of blood; thick and deformed lips (Ibid., p.75).

The nawab in *Dedh Ishqiya* is from Mehmoodabad, which is near Lucknow and his being a *laundabaaz* is no surprise for us as Lucknow has instances of the culture of laundabaazi. Saleem Kidwai, while writing about his experience of his hometown Lucknow and his being surrounded by scholars with questions centered on lesbians in a seminar on same-sex love, he feels the need to revisit the notion of Lucknow as the home of nawabi *shauq* for *laundas*. (Kidwai, Saleem (2011) ‘My Lucknow’ in Malvika Singh’s edited *Lucknow: A City Between Cultures*, p.128)

Utilization of female sexuality in *Dedh Ishqiya*

It can be argued that because of the patriarchal structure of our society in general and the patriarchal-like structure of marriage in Muslim households in particular or at least the fear of it among Muslim women, men seem to have had the favorable chance to lead a carefree sexual life with multiple partners at a time and also a carefree union with same sex, though religion does not permit this but society does not seem to mind. This is quite possible that due

to jealousy in the first instance and lack of attention in the second, same sex fantasies develop within women.

Homosexuality in women can be a threat to masculinity. Rather it can be said that women's sexuality can be a threat to masculinity. As Nancy Friday writes that the late 1960s and 1970s was the period of sexual curiosity and that women's lives were changing at the rate of a geometric progression and the exploration of women's sexuality ranked right up there with economic equality. She agrees to the point that men fear women's sexuality. In support of this, she writes:

If man did not fear women's sexuality so much, why would he have smothered it, damning himself to a life with a sexually inert, boring wife, forcing him to go to prostitutes for sex? To combine sex and familial love in one woman made her too powerful, him too little. (Friday, Nancy. "Women on Top", p.15, 1991)

Begum Para and Muneera, both utilized their sexualities time and again in the film to get away with their work. While dealing with the kidnapper, Muneera deliberately shows a bit of her boobs to Faiz and asks him for some time to give him the required amount. Faiz understood the situation and his helplessness and says, "*Bas ke dushwaar hai har kaam ka asaan hona*", (Just as difficult for everything to be simplified) which is a famous couplet by Mirza Ghalib.

Yet again Muneera uses her sensuality and body to get works done from Babban (Arshad Warsi). She made love to him and in return asked him to kidnap Begum Para, which was a part of Begum Para's and Muneera's joint plan. Begum Para could sense the previous night's act and asks Muneera to take a bath. While Khalu Jaan and Babban were discussing about the seven stages of love, Muneera and Begum Para were busy making their own plans and making fun of the two jokers-Khalu Jaan and Babban. Begum Para was enjoying the

company of Khalu Jaan in the garden and Muneera could be seen watching them with interest but her reaction changes when the Begum rests her head on Khalu Jaan's shoulders.

According to their plan, the Begum chose Chand Mohammad Khan as her partner as the late nawab's property was under his seizure because the nawab in his lifetime became a bankrupt and was living lavishly on borrowed money. Meanwhile Babban was 'used' for kidnapping the Begum so that Muneera and the Begum elope together with the property and live elsewhere happily. When Babban proposes Muneera of his love, Muneera makes a bold statement by saying that "Having sex and love are two different things. Why is it that when you sleep with someone, the other day you find his heart beating for you? Look brother, it's my fault that I had sex with you. Do not bother my soul in the name of love and all. So do me a favor and stay away from me". Such statements are generally made by male members of our society and hence are a part of our films too. But, Muneera's portrayal and dialogue in *Dedh Ishqiya* are unique. She is unique and her statement bold because of her sexual orientation. She is powerful and here, the male is threatened by her sexuality. He is in a shock. He feels cheated and inferior at the same time. He fires back, "*Raand samajh rakha hai mujhko?*" (Do you think I am a prostitute?) and that I helped you because of money? This statement is again an example of role reversal, coming from a male member of our society. Jasbir Jain maintains that they (directors such as Basu Bhattacharya, Rituporno Ghosh, Satyajit Ray, Aparna Sen, and the like) too use the female body but use it differently. It is not possible to avoid the body. She further quotes Susan Bordo and says:

The body is not only a text of culture. It is ...*practical*, direct locus of social control, it is a metaphor of culture. Therefore, specially in a visual medium, it is important how women look at their bodies, how men look at them, how they dress and behave, the manner in which they are used by the director, by the narrative and by

women themselves. The body, the will controlling it, its sexuality or the violation of it through seduction...all acquire meaning which can either reinforce conventional perspectives, or produce a counter discourse. (Jasbir Jain and Sudha Rai ed., *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*, p.120-21)

The two ladies got hold of the two men-Khalu Jaan and Babban. While Begum Para and Muneera were playing with each other, Khalu Jaan asks Babban to ask them for a 'lihaaf' or the quilt, hinting that he has discovered the relationship between the two ladies, which is similar to the characters of the story 'Lihaaf' written by Ismat Chughtai.

Firestone explains Engel's definition of Historical materialism as that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historic events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction, and the struggles of these classes with one another; in the changes in the modes of marriage, reproduction and child care created by these struggles; in the connected development of other physically-differentiated classes [castes]; and in the first division of labour based on sex which developed into the [economic-cultural] class system.

The probable cause of female same-sex love in Muslim cultures

Maitrayee Pushpa somewhere maintains that boldness and independence of women came with the invention and reach of cooking gas and mobile phones. Cooking gas decreased the time of cooking and hence, females of the household got some free time. Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) is used for cooking in many countries for economic reasons, for convenience or because it is the preferred fuel source. The history of LPG can be traced back to the beginning of 20th century. However, LPG was launched in the Indian markets in the mid-sixties and brought a kitchen-revolution in Indian households, rural and urban. It led to a substantial improvement in

the health of women, especially in rural areas by replacing the smoky ‘*chulhas*’ (traditional cooking ovens made of clay where coal was used as a fuel).

The world’s first mobile phone call was made on April 3, 1973. (Goodwin, Richard in ‘The History of mobile phones from 1973 to 2008: the handsets that made it all happened’, dated 16th April, 2015 at knowyourmobile.com.)

The first cellular call in India was made on 31st July, 1995. (<http://www.nextbigwhat.com/cellular-mobility-in-india-15-years-297/>). Communication gap is bridged with the invention of mobile phones and their reach in India. It freed the women from the suffocation they faced within the four walls of the house. Their world was broader now. This, however, never happened with the men. The outside world was always open for the males. They were always free and would go out for refreshment and chat in the neighborhood.

The films before the 1980s show the female protagonist within the company of her female friends. They would not spare a moment to celebrate, sing and dance. There were songs to celebrate love, with females, always. Muslim females observe purdah but they do not keep purdah among themselves. They dance with each other with close proximity; they sleep on the same couch, chatting; they talk of their love, laugh and tease each other. Within strict purdah, this was the only choice of recreation available to them. However, men keep purdah among themselves. No man is seen dancing with his other male friends only. They dance either in group of males and females together or with the actress but never in the company of just males. Nancy Friday (Friday, “Women on Top”, p.41) too writes that while the boys has been learning to be brave and independent outdoors, the girl has been inside practicing togetherness, learning to dance with other girls, rolling up one another’s hair, exploring the warm closeness of sleepovers. In these tight friendships, girls retain the symbiotic oneness they had with mother,

keeping it warm, rehearsing it over and over again until boys are ready for them. Many of the Mussalman ladies entertain women companions, whose chief business is to tell stories and fables to their employer, while she is composing herself to sleep; many of their tales partake of the romantic cast which characterizes the well-remembered 'Arabian Nights' Entertainments', one story begetting another to the end of the collection. When the lady is fairly asleep the story is stayed, and the companion resumes her employment when the next nap is sought by her mistress, observes Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali in the *zenanas* of nineteenth century Lucknow.

Films like *Mere Mehboob* (1963), *Dil Hi To Hai* (1963), *Ghazal* (1964), *Benazir* (1964), *Palki* (1967), *Bahu Begum* (1967), *Pakeezah* (1972), etc have many scenes where there are female-female dance sequences. There are marriage songs and dances where before the night of marriage, the females of the household play the role of man and wife. They generally cherish the couple to live alone with each other abusing the members of the in-laws, especially the mother-in-law. *Shama* (1981) which stars Shabana Azmi and Girish Karnad in the main roles shows such dance when the female protagonist's marriage was going to take place. In *Bahu Begum*, there is a song to celebrate the monsoons where the girls dance in the rains, to the extent that one girl leaving her swing comes to the female protagonist's swing and make intimate gestures. While singing "...aisi rut mein hamein jhulaane aaye koi albela...thaame to chhode nahiin naazuk kalaai", each girl comes closer to the other and enact the song through direct bodily contact and sharing the same swing with the other, one sitting and one standing where the standing one plays the role of a man who is the protector according to traditional Indian standards. When the aunt of the female protagonist comes and takes her away, her friend is shown in utter disgust. In yet another incident, when the female protagonist goes to meet her lover, she is accompanied with her female friend. The male protagonist takes time to arrive and

in the meanwhile, her friend asks her to go back to home as she feels he is not going to come. To this, the female protagonist says she will wait till eternity and sings “Hum intezaar karenge...Khuda kare ke qayaamat ho aur tu aaye” (I will wait...let calamity befalls and you arrive). Her female friend is envious of her lover as if he is the one separating the two friends. She is shown making faces while the heroine sings.

In *Yahudi* (1958), while the actress is singing and celebrating the initiation of her romantic relationship, her female companions are shown teasing her by blocking her way, while the closest friend is shown playing with her cheeks.

Mere Mehboob (1963) has two female friends chatting to each other where one aspires to be a male and says, “jab bhi main tujhe sar se lekar paon tak dekhti hun to Allah miyaan pe bada ghussa aata hai...usne mujhe ladka kyun nahin banaya.” (Whenever I see you from tip to toes, I feel rage over God that he did not make me a man?). And when she asks back, “What would you have done had you been a man?” To this, she answers that she would have sacrificed ‘his’ life like the moth who sacrifices itself over the flame. The other friend replies back in whispers which gives a hint towards physical intimacy as is involved in romantic relationships.

In *Razia Sultan* (1983), Khakun (Parveen Babi) is trying to soothe her empress’ nerve by a lot of hand-holding and feather-swaying on Razia’s cheeks and singing her lullaby in soft tones. This scene can be compared to numerous classic romantic scenes of heterosexual romances, one being that of *Mughal-e-Azam* where Dilip Kumar is shown romancing with Madhubala. One other scene can be Pradeep Kumar romancing Meena Kumari in *Noor Jehan*.

In *Ghazal* (1964), the actress is always surrounded by her female friends who sing and dance with her, who would accompany her in her pranks with her would-be lover and her telephone talks with her lover. This was the only recreation for women of the *zenana* quarters.

In *Dil Hi To Hai*, while the female protagonist plays Radha, beloved of Krishna, the Hindu deity of love and Raas Leela who is mentioned in the longest epic, *The Mahabharata*, in the song, “*nigahein milaane ko jee chahta hai*”, her female friend plays Krishna. This song was played from behind the curtains for the male protagonist.

In Nancy Friday’s words:

There is something uniquely satisfying in a woman’s body that cannot be had with a man. As sexually exciting and elegant as a male body may be, it lacks the obvious physical attributes of our first source of love, mother. It isn’t just the breasts: it’s the texture of skin, the smell, the whole mysterious aura of that first body we lay against, which fed, warmed, and overwhelmed us with its power. We loved her power, we envied her power, for it was hers to give or to take away at any moment of her choosing. How could any of us, male or female, ever forget that relationship? (Friday, Nancy, “Women on Top”, p.191)

She continues by saying that men have a straighter path of psychosexual development than women. While for both sexes the first love is the same, that is, their mother. Boys continue to love their mother’s sex- the women, while they grow up. But females are expected to cross-over. She writes:

And so we look at women lying together on summer riverbanks, walking arms entwined, we stare at the countless painted masterpieces of naked women in languid, even suggestive groupings, and we accept what we see. (Friday: Women on Top, p.192)

Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali notes and says about a typical feudal set up of Muslim households in the nineteenth century which holds true even today:

The ladies of *zeenahnah* life are not restricted from the society of their own sex; they are, as I have before remarked, extravagantly fond of company, and equally as

hospitable when entertainers. To be alone is a trial to which they are seldom exposed, every lady having companions amongst her dependants; and according to her means the number in her establishment is regulated. Some ladies of rank have from two to ten companions, independent of slaves and domestics; and there are some of the Royal family at Lucknow who entertain in their service two or three hundred female dependants, of all classes. A well-filled zeenahnah is a mark of gentility; and even the poorest lady in the country will retain a number of slaves and domestics, if she cannot afford companions; besides which they are miserable without society, the habit of associating with numbers having grown up with infancy to maturity: 'to be alone' is considered, with women thus situated, a real calamity. (Ali, Mrs. Meer Hassan: Observations on the Mussalmauns of India: Descriptive of their manners, Customs, Habits and their Religious Opinions made During a Twelve Years Residence in their Immediate Society”, second edition, 1917, Letter Twelve.

Conclusion

Same-sex love among Muslim women is not talked about that widely as same-sex among Muslim men because of the idea of purdah or veil existing in Muslim societies. However, it is interesting that the purdah itself seems to be the reason of the intimacy that develops between Muslim females. Their strict segregation of female quarters or the zenana from the male quarters or the mardana is one other reason. Films as the audio-visual art form address the world in a specific manner and reach most of the masses. The hidden face of lesbianism is shown time and again but running in the periphery. *Dedh Ishqiya* is, I believe, the only film that shows Muslim female same-sex love as the central theme. Other films on female same-sex love and intimacy are there like *Fire* (1996), *Girlfriend* (2004), *Umbartha* (Marathi language, 1982), *Sancharram* (Malayalam language, 2004) etc. which deal with non-Muslim set up. Films dealing with male same-sex love are many though. Some of them are *My Brother Nikhil* (2005), *Memories in March* (Bengali Language, 2011), *Page 3* (2005), *Dostana* (not a Gay film

but is mentioned jokingly, 2008), *Bomgay* (1996), *Gulabi Aaina* (2003), *Holi* (1984), *Rules Pyaar Ka Superhit Formula* (2003), *Honeymoon Travels Private Limited* (2007), *Luck By Chance* (2009), *Fashion* (2008), *Straight* (2009), *Yours Emotionally* (2006), *Chitrangada* (Bengali Language, 2012), and many more. In most of the films, homosexuality among men is joked about and is hence stereotyped. That is why acceptable to the Indian audience. Once it talks of it seriously and deals with its emotional content, it becomes controversial. It becomes a sin when the characters are female. One reason could be that women are the ones who give birth and their lesbianism is a threat not only to the males but to the entire human race. Lesbians are regarded as a threat in general and talking about a closed society as the Muslim society is, invites further challenges. The extent could be imagined by the response of the students and faculty of Aligarh Muslim University on the recent movie *Aligarh* which deals with the inquiry into the case of the suicide of a non-Muslim homo-sexual professor of Aligarh, a town in Uttar Pradesh of India, (which is based on true events). The administration demanded the name of the movie be changed. Terming those decrying the movie as homophobic, the director of the film said, “Their worry is that Aligarh, which is famous for knowledge and locks, will be linked only to homosexuality with this movie. There can’t be a statement more homophobic than this.” (www.hindustantimes.com. Dated 28th Feb. 2016.)

Dedh Ishqiya could have been a brave attempt to show Muslim female same-sex love. However, its target audience is just the academicians of literature, cinema and performance studies and/or the educated urban population. Most of the masses including the urban educated could not understand the film and hence it flopped. *Dedh Ishqiya*’s target audience enjoyed the film as it was already into and aware of the recent queer movement going on in India. It can be concluded that it will take time to deal with this issue in a larger framework. Things would

have been difficult had the audience understood the movie as things became difficult when the short-story *Lihaaf* on which the film is made was written way back in 1941.

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