



COLOURS OF EMOTIONS OF QUEER MEN IN KUNDALKAR'S FILM *COBALT BLUE* (2022)

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Abstract: The rainbow is the symbol of pride, signifying not only the SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity), but also telling the stories behind each colour that attaches to the psychological existence of each group within the queer community. When the rubric of masculinity within this queer spectrum is probed, it is noted that bisexual man takes the advantage of power dynamics over the gay men, while the transmen are almost existing in the periphery. But when these two masculinities of gay and bisexual men encounter each other, a sheer colour of power dynamics operates, along with emotional narrative structure of queer performativity. The adaptation of Kundalkar's own novel *Cobalt Blue* into a film propagates the morphology of queer masculinity and semiotics of colours conglomerating to create an aesthetic exuberance of phenomenological cartography of queer performativity.

The story is set up in 1996 Kochi, in Kerala, and is about a paying guest and the Maharashtrian Brahmin family he stays with. Although it convolutes beyond the loci of interactions with the family members, especially with Tanay, who is a young adult and is exploring his own sexuality, it becomes more interesting for the audience that in the entire film no name has been given to this character of paying guest, played by Prateik Babbar. The Dixit family doesn't even probe to find out his background, while the film professed his rebellious characteristics in terms of social norms and normativity, and challenges the characteristics of masculinity. The purposive unnamings of the paying guest almost juxtaposes the alter ego that Tanay, played by Neelay Mehendale, creates amidst the staunch traditional structure of his family. He deciphers his own cocooned liberty amidst a different colour that semblances with the paying guest.

The significance of blue in the title of the film depicting not only a masculine symbol but also the psychological depiction of loneliness and freedom attached to queer masculinity will be evaluated in details. This paper will probe into this colour psychology of queer masculinity in the semiotic narratological structure of the film. The narrative frame of the film moves at different levels: one at the physical reality, the other at psychological reality, and the third level is at the metaphysical reality. Kundalkar's creativity not only deals with this metaphysics of reality but also the phenomenological structure of psychological existence of queer masculinity, that he portrays that with the semiotics of colour. This paper will also discuss the theoretical understanding of adaptation while justifying the psychological mapping of colours with the protagonists in the film. The gap between the novel of 2013 in the neo-liberalised society and the film releasing in 2022 in the post-neo liberalized society deal with the whole paradigmatic shift of psychological frames of the Indian cinematic audience. The politics of releasing the film in Netflix will also be addressed.

Index Terms - Emotions, Blue Colour, Film, Gay, Bisexual.

I. INTRODUCTION

The pride colours that encompass the life of queer community as a whole may have a huge spectrum within the flag that is held high today. The colours in the flag are a visual reminder of the struggles and oppressions still faced by the community, and it represents a symbol of hope. But when the structural masculinities and its performance of this pride narratological frame are to be considered, the multiple colours reduce down to the normative fresco of existential identity. That is each colour of the pride may decipher into a philosophical understanding of emotions of the community, but when the idiosyncrasies of masculinity comes in the forefront, the colours fall into the abysmal debate of heteronormative emotions. Blue reduces to masculine emotions, while red becomes the symbol of passion and power, yellow becomes brightness while green represents the nature, and orange being the colour of optimism, and purple symbolises royalty. These kinds of interpretations of colour would be very heteronormative, theoretically it goes far beyond just mere colours of emotions and symbols. But in the pride flag these few colours carry not only the cultures of emotions, but also the hierarchical power of struggle. So it becomes important to understand the significance of colours to decipher the queer community, while dealing with the emotional structure of normative society. From literature to films, colours have been incorporated with thoughts of aesthetics and motif of different shades of emotions. Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* is one such pragmatic emblem of complex emotional structure challenging the normative pattern of symbols and meanings of the colour blue. The symbolic reference of colours exposes the nuances of socio-cultural agreements in the context of sexuality, especially queer and gay masculinity. The accuracy of representation in visual media might not be possible many a times, but queer masculinity vocalises the systematic ways of absence of development across cultures with the labelling of colour codes and its relative heteronormative positions. Colours and its representations are always objectifying human body and mind, relating to the environment and properties of physical objects. But considerations of physical objects or objectification of body as property to reflect, refract and emit colours, they disposition the role of perceptions and socio-cultural conditioning of those perceptions. The underlying factors of emotions and relating mind is always overlooked in the context of sexuality and colour.

Colours may provide classic illustrations of objects but underneath the scientific perceptions of subjects seem to diffuse with the mere physical structures and properties that produce or manifests the symbols of colour. From the heteronormative gaze, the colours of pride or queer community may seem progressive essence and existential identities of sexuality and non-normative subjects. Although the historical facts of the pride flag created by Gilbert Baker in the 1970s correspond emotions and identities together, for example red is for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, indigo for harmony and purple for spirit; but the distinguishable subjective relationality of these colours of the pride produces a sense of conscious essentialism and psychological identity that overlooks the traditional heteronormative reductionist perceptions. The subjective properties of identity experiences and the relational elimination of systematic discrimination by the heteronormative socio-cultural perceptions of colours formulate the political debate of sexuality and space in the socio-legal structures of the country. The institutional subjugation of queer people emerges through these colours of the pride flag. The positionally and the performativity of such people are made visible through such spectrum of colour display during pride marches. Henceforth, the distinctness of these six colours tries to neutralise the negativity thrust upon them by the majoritarian's normative structures of existence.

Instead of discussing all the colours, the argument is only on the colour blue. Let us probe into the flags that are more masculine in the pride spectrum. The bisexual and the gay masculine domain of



Gay Flag



Bisexual

colours that are displayed in their respective flags have hues of blue, but not Cobalt as Kundalkar uses in his title. Cobalt in both the flags is not displayed in any form. Interestingly, the gay flag has no cobalt blue in it,

the closest blue hues are the cornflower blue and slate blue. The last colour close to the gay flag is termed as midnight blue. Both probably will discuss the characteristics represented in Tanay. These intricacies will be discussed later in this essay. But now if we look into the Bisexual flag, again blue or medium blue in the hue chart is used. Referring to these two shades, may to some extent discuss the traits of the Paying Guest, another protagonist of the novel and the film.

The chromatic properties of the blue and the blue of the title will be detailed out later in the essay. It is significant here to note that these properties that are deciphered from a normative gaze is of the physicality that may be serenity and calmness. But the homonormative definition of blue would not only be the soothing properties of soul, and the calmness derived from consumption of physical intimacy that occurs in the private. It rather justifies the socio-psychological involvement of pleasure and accomplishment of desire on bed during the night. This justification of normative gaze creates a prejudiced perception of queer community as sexually charged identities. Then the question rises, if blue represents so, then does the blue colour decipher the supervenient nomological existence or the metaphysical essence of the queer people? Is the perception of normativity similar to that of cisgendered gaze and homonormative gaze in the context of blue colour or something else? How do the blue hues of the flag fit into this novel or the film and what makes cobalt stand out not only as the title?

II. Blue and the Queer people

The cognitive categorisations of colours across cultures are internalised through experiments and experiences and reflects the perceptions and non-nominal similarity of cultural evidences of each individual who exists on the periphery of the society, like the queer people. (Davidoff, 737) The visibility of their discrimination and subjugated existence is reflected in their choices of socio-cultural behaviour and their realistic metamerism of their normative and non-normative performativity. The perceived notion of queer body may be visibly different in the context of transbodies, but in case the the masculine body within the queer spectrum apparently shifts between and heteronormativity and homonormativity. This metamerism of psychological construction of body keeps questioning the visibility of queer masculine body, and the existence of such body becomes a discrete threaten of the normative power hierarchy of the socio-cultural structure, when it challenges the conventional depiction of body and emotions of masculinity beyond the hierarchical patriarchy. Henceforth, the chromatic properties of blue in queer masculinity have the epistemological existence in physicalistically acceptable norms of the Indian society, as men and blue are primary perception of colour knowledge.

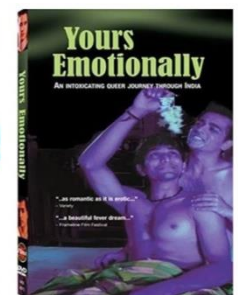
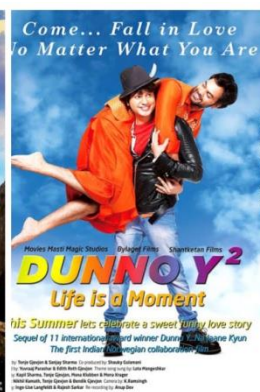
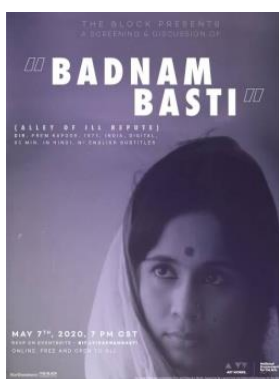
The challenge of subjectivity of such queer masculine body needs an intentional representation of queer performativity more than Cartesian understanding of mind. Blue being the colour of hierarchically and patriarchally masculine, the queer men seems to be abandoned by the metamere interpellation of subject formation and queer performativity. This problem instantiates from the mind-independence of plurality and becomes a concern of systematic and substantial perception of prejudiced subjugation of existential identity of the queer masculine people. It is important here to understand the variation of colours under the temporal space and the subject that is perceived. For example, if you see a queer man in the daytime, the behavioural pattern would be befitting into the rubric of heteronormativity, but the same would be different in the incandescent light, he would be appearing more lucid and vulnerable as if welcoming sexual favours from the perceptive gaze; and interestingly, the same queer man under a chromatic illumination of a discotheque would appear as if exhibiting his body performativity for acceptability and exploitatively welcoming physicality. It is important here to note that the depiction of the same person in different illuminated chromes has a completely distinct meaning for the homonormative gaze. It has more to do with homosocialisation, which is a process by which different members of the queer community meet, relate and integrated in the community. Probably that is one of the reasons that most of the gay dating applications of smartphones have blue chrome in their logos, like Romeo or PlanetRomeo, Blued, Happn, MagicMirror, Wapo, BiggerCity, Skout, Getmale Gay Dating, TruckerSucker, Genie, Muscl, and many others. Amidst all of these, the most utilised dating apps for queer men remains Blued in most of the cities, towns and villages, except the metropolitans, while in metropolitans and other cities Romeo or PlanetRomeo, remains the most loved ones. But the most favourite ones are Grindr, which is yellow, and Tinder, which is pink. These two logos have their own reasons for their colour chromatic structure — Grindr yellow represents friendship, optimism, and happiness, while the pink of Tinder represents trustworthiness and passion. As this article is mainly about blue, we will try to look into the chromatic philosophy of blue only. As mentioned, Blued and Romeo being the most utilised dating applications, it symbolises the hierarchical patriarchal psychology of

queer men in the non-metropolitan cities. Living a life of closeted existence, their essence of queer performativity of body language continuously shifts between the heteronormativity and homonormativity. Their struggles are not only discriminatory but also violent in many cases, which are institutionalised through family, society and state. Blue being the safest chromatic option to choose, these queer men from non-metropolitan cities favour their choice of colours to the socio-culturally acceptable conventional pattern optimally.

There is close relationship between queer men and their choice of colour to blue. The scientific pattern of such choices relate to the electromagnetic spectral wavelength and the surface reflectance of their performativity and materiality of queer body. But interestingly, the spectral wavelength represents the power distribution of the subject (queer body) and the perceivers gaze or isomorphic signal to the physical limitation of reflectance of the queer body only on the surface or outward proportion of the body, which results through the relativity of psychological materiality of the perceiver. In simple terms, the queer body has different meanings for the perceivers, who may be cisgender heteronormative man or homonormative man, and their gaze carries the chromatic structural meaning according to their understanding of the colour that these queer bodies represent, for instance blue and queer would be normative to both the cisgender heteronormative gaze and the queer men's perception. Henceforth, most of the queer men from non-metropolitan places prefer to diffuse their existential SOGI identities with that of the biological identity of body.

But the internalisation of the prevalent perception of blue chromatic structure is so socio-culturally ingrained that the veridical representations of blue with queer men would correspond with the visual system of environment and its evolution of natural selection by the masculine perceiver. This emerges a significant objectivism of queer masculine body and the traditional conception of external chromatic properties of the body and its performativity. The problem begins when the anthropocentric position justifies the assertion of blue to cisgender heteronormative men only and the possession of the colour with gender performance and creating a categorical perception of a whole range of associated meanings to the colour. This discretionary behaviour of the hierarchal patriarchy of the normative domain of men creates a behavioural and operational performativity through the penetration of blue colour perception in a very orthodox anthropocentric meaning. The queer men loses it's positionally to carry an external materiality of blue chrome in their livelihood, and this externalist criterion of psychological meaning to only blue and men. But many a times, the visual scientist doesn't accept this anthropocentric meaning and exemplifies the understanding of blue colour and its philosophical properties to not only visual meaning but also to the socio-psychological comprehension of the blue chrome. This makes the postionality of queer masculine representations more meaningful in its psychological structure than just mere physical and material concept. Such kind of significance of colour can create a belief of essential identity of queer men with powerful arguments in representational theories.

In visual arts, phenomenologically the blue chrome carries an emphatic and pivotal meaning in India. All kinds of media represent blue in a distinct narrative to dilute the association of patriarchal meaning of sexuality. For example, the blue pottery or the blue city of Jodhpur carries the meaning of intersectionality of regal power and caste dynamics. The blue pottery rooted to Turkish and Persian origins is directly



connected to the Maharaja of Jaipur, Ram Singh II, and slowly it gained patronage to the Jaipur royal families. Similarly, the blue city of Jodhpur carries a religious tribute to Lord Shiva, and directly connects to the upper caste Brahmin family. This meaning became so important that the scientific reason for using blue to ward-off termites got subjugated in such heteronormative patriarchy. The most interesting usage of blue

is in the philosophy of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, who revolutionised the chromatic narrative of blue as a symbol of assertion in the context of caste atrocities in Maharashtra. His blue symbolism may be traced back to Buddhist philosophy of equality, and probably that was the reason his non-violent community of Samata Sainik Dal in blue bordered white saree propagated equality through the socio-cultural positions of caste dynamics. The media representation of Babasaheb is always in a blue suit, holding the Constitution. Taking the examples of other chromatic blue discussions of media, like the Doordarshan logo in Pantone blue, or the iconic blue Ashok chakra in the National flag of India; all talk about the chromatic properties and narratives of media through gaze of a normative structure. The examples of sexuality through the representation of blue would be Sharmila Tagore in blue swimsuit in *An Evening in Paris* (1967) or Sridevi in blue sari in *Mr. India* (1987), depicts the femininity and the scopophilic gaze of spectators on these bodies of female actors. The media to diffuse the narratology of portrayals of sexuality, men with blue are also been given equal visual importance for scopophilic pleasures, for instance, the Indian cricket team is also called Men in Blue, tautologically, or Ranveer Singh with blue attire in Grazia Millennial Award ceremony, and the traditional denim signifying masculine look, give the perception of the onlookers a voyeuristic visual pleasure. The visual experiences in normative conditions do encompass all the positionalities of any particular sexuality and fails to give prominence one over the other. Interestingly, the blue colour and the Indian cinema portraying queer male characters have lots to offer to its spectators. From the very first film, *Badnaam Basti* (1971) that depicted a non-normative protagonist in the history Indian cinema produced by the Bollywood production houses, to this film, *Cobalt Blue* (2022), many films had posters in the blue hue of its chromatic structure. The commercially released Bollywood films that portray queer masculine characters carry the significance of blue colour in its public display. For example, *my brother ... Nikhil* (2005) has aquamarine blue in the poster to signify the importance of sea water and swimming; *Yours Emotionally* (2006) has the poster designed in cornflower blue to signify the beauty of love and homonormativity; and *Dunno Y 2... Life is a Moment* and *Loev* both released in 2015, have their posters in sky-blue to describe the freedom and right to love and acceptance of homonormative love.

The poster of *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (2020) has the fonts in azure blue representing the stability of relationship between the protagonists and the homophobia as depicted in the film. Lastly, the movie poster designed by The Block of Northwestern University of *Badnaam Basti* (1971) was in cornflower blue, depicting the emotional turbulence and seeking tranquility and convey a sense loyalty, trust and stability through the protagonists. Henceforth, blue has a pivotal role to play in the Bollywood movie posters of queer films in India; and this public display of blue chrome and queer masculinity critiques the Kantian insight of denying sensory experiences and captures the realist understandings of possibility of perception in chromatic narratives.

Interestingly, *Cobalt Blue* released in April, 2022, on the Netflix India OTT platform, also have one of the hues of blue chromatic structure in its promotional posters. One



official poster, released by Netflix of the movie, explains both the subjective and objective performativity of queer masculinity as the unnamed character occupies the spectator's gaze, along with the visual pleasure of masculine body, while the other poster displays Tanay in natural hue with cobalt blue backdrop not only justifying the friendly characteristics of both, but also symbolises the peace and trustworthiness of each other with reference to relational human perception of the spectators and the characters of the film. Tanay wearing pilot goggles or one can say eye masks, to signify his

closeted identity as a queer man, while the unnamed protagonist with his sexual identity fits into both the heteronormative and homonormative identity. Therefore, colours in the posters became almost the identity of a title, through which everyone recognises subjective and objective meanings of the film.

It is important to note here that the psychological primary of space that colours create through film posters tend to give validity and positionality to subjugated topics of discussions in everyday socio-cultural descriptions. The relative proportions of blue as a chromatic light make reflectance surface more structural and validates the authenticated categories of existential identities when it comes to queer men. The simplicity of the blue colour internalises the natural ecology into the psychological space and carries the physicality of essence with subjectivity of queer masculine performances. The chromatic magnitude of cobalt blue as a psychophysical hue, matters to the teleological defence of existential physicalism, and subjective essence of materiality that queer men's body is represented through the cinematic art of this particular film.

Cobalt Blue as a cinematic art

The queer masculine culture that gets represented through cinematic art of Bollywood unfolds the dereliction of openly depicting secret homosexual encounters and queer masculine bodies. Such bodies of men have germinated curious but intense desires as subjects more than the normative masculine body, whether portrayed in fragmentation or wholeness. It is interesting to see that mainstream Bollywood films that depicted queer masculine body stem senses of intense eroticism and surreal ephemerality; and have evolved into aesthetic cinematic vision of queer intimacy more than the intense palpability of just objective body of flesh. (Edwards, 61) Probably, the queer film studies have move much ahead of Lacanian philosophy of queer body as an object of socopophilic gaze and corporeality; the queer masculinity in Indian cinema is now not only demarcating erotic desires, but also voicing the core issues of socio-legal and politico-economic spaces of homonormativity, homoaffectivity and homosurvivability. The body politics within the domain of queer studies is not only with the trans-studies, but also queer masculinity and queer femininity. The temporal spaces that the queer men is now occupying in the mainstream Bollywood cinema conjures up narrative aesthetics of contestations, complexities, and historiographies. The colour of queer resistance to counter the heteronormativity that carries the nuances of negativity is strategically blue, and the ensemble narratives that get configured through several facets of queer masculine body are such cultural productions of queer temporalities and queer notions of futurity. Henceforth, *Cobalt Blue* as a film politicises such non-normative attractions and intimacies far beyond representations of spectacular obscenities and eroticised carnalities of queer men and their desires of normative relationships.

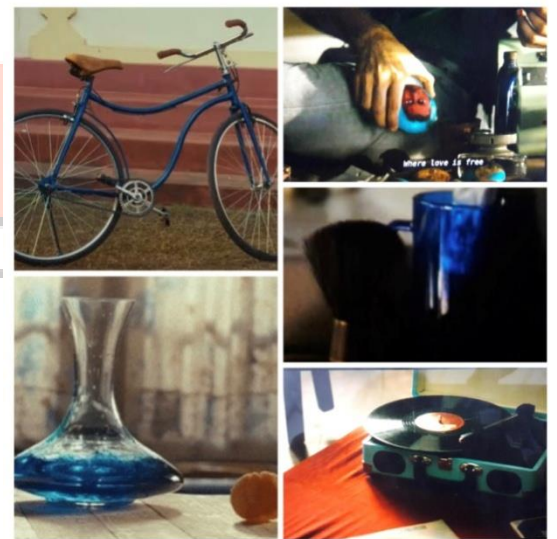
Blue, as a metaphor of characteristics of queer masculine emotions, does create an illusionary perfection of closeted idealisation of normative coalitional gestures, and metaphysical compatibility of human perceptions. Butlerian interventions of body and its symbolisations are a formula of processing mechanisms of acceptance and non-acceptance of scheduled spectatorships of colours with queer emotions. The fact that queer male body gets attention from all in the society do germinate the feeling of uncertain reality and dissociated fantasy through its vicissitudes of portrayals, almost on the lines of Jungian philosophy of ineffectual representations of abreaction of queer trauma. The whole idea of abjection and representation of queer emotions do make the chromatic structure of blue very significant phenomenologically. The narratological frame of blue in this film has depicted the transcendental freedom of emotions and desires of queer masculine body through their articulation and transubstantiation of it. The film doesn't in any frame divulge into creating an alternative cultural configuration to fit into the powerful patriarchal notions of the blue chrome. Rather the film legitimatises and resignifies the homonormativity with symbols and motifs to signal the possibility of queer positionally of its masculine subjectivity.

The semiotic motifs of blue chrome used in the film carry the coalescence of queeraffectivity and creates the effervescent energy of homonormativity. It is important here to note that how blue occupies the major thematic structure of the film through its different hues. The constant positionally of cinematic space and the distinct constitution of a particular psychology of emotions is what this blue chromatic structure does through its creation of paradigmatically perceptual and culturally conditioned scenes in the film. This picture is the first emphatic scene in the film which carries a lot of blue tinges, creates distinctly a cartographic explanation of Kochi livelihood, where the film is situated, through the distribution of objects in the film. Kundalkar tries to give attentive recognition to the subjectivity of queer body in more normative representations of body, through the other humans in this particular scene. The boat may only symbolises the mobility of people residing in the city of Kochi in a common person's gaze, but when it gets the cinematic aesthetics the meaning shifts to a philosophical plain to establish the relational symbolism with all characters and objects in the particular frame. In the heteronormative gaze, the patriarchy just obliterates to duty and responsibility thrust upon each individual through the symbol of a blue boat. Probably that is the reason, each one is necessitating their own duty, like the nun and the balloon seller carry the hues of blue chrome. The metaphor of duty accentuates further through the other human figures of responsibilities, for example the couple with a white goat and a basket of fish signifies the simplicity and purity of local livelihood not being corrupted with the nuances of new advancements of lifestyle. It is also important to note that Kundalkar tries to bring in the fact that most of the people in Kerala are non-vegetarians, whether Muslims, Christians or Hindus. (Osella & Osella, 171-172) The sitting older man and the other standing



man with the white *angavastram* (stoles) create a portrayal of caste dynamics, as such piece of cloth are only worn by higher caste people; but in today's connotation, the signification of white *angavastram* makes the emphasis on gender based clothing traditions. What stands apart is the portrayal of Tanay, played by Neelay Mehendale, in the black outfit at the background of blue sky and the blue backwater. It is important here to note that the characteristics of seriousness and recognition become more pivotal than the loyalty and wisdom represented through the blue chrome of sea and sky. Accentuating the perceptual exclusion by the spectator in the first go will be making him stand-out of the crowd, which clearly focuses the traits of a queer masculine body, but the psychological prowess of wearing black attire makes Tanay establish his struggle for recognition of his sexual identity in the unfolding of the storyline in the film. This kind of casual compatibilism and indirect representation of queer men do signify the list of attributes of subordination, subjugation and abjection through constitution of symbolic metaphors that colours portray in representational space and time of cinematic art.

Blue continues to be used in the film to produce the symbolic emphasis of different objects of consumable materiality. The objects of blue chrome belong to the unnamed Paying Guest which carry the entire aesthetic beauty and artistic creativity, for example, the bicycle, the LP player, the paperweights, the mug, and the vase with blue liquid. These several objects may point to one prevalent character of masculinity and their choice of blue as matter of emotional identity, but choosing in this manner of several blue hues not only dilutes the structural properties of colours, it also diffuse the complexities of masculine emotions. The blue bicycle depicts the symbol of renewal of emotions and promises the unfolding of better times by a trusted relationship, may or may not be romantic in that manner, as the bright prospects are promised by a man, whose emotions are yet to be unveiled. On the same structure of psychological portrayals, the emotions that relate to a blue drink, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic, freshness and clarity, as the symbol of water denotes; but interestingly the blue drink categorically emphasises the ban of morally objectionable behaviour of men on Sundays leading to banning of sales of alcohol and gambling, gives the birth of the trend of cocktails both alcohol and non-alcohol amidst both heteronormative and homonormative men. Contradictorily, the blue cup/mug in the picture denotes the exemplifying fun or enjoyment in relationship without alcohol can have. In these contexts, the film depicts the blue drink or the blue cup/mug to denote the metaphor of relaxation through over-indulgence of sexual intimacy and emotional affinity between Tanay and the Paying Guest. The blue paperweights with human figurines in natural tones symbolises the powerful cycle of life, where the attempt to reconnect with the past is signified in a very strong manner. In fact, the film portrays the Paying Guest watching himself to his past with either photographs or paintings of the people he interacted with. In the reference, the blue cup/mug also brings another psychological aspect of a character as it deciphers into something that has been hidden or closeted. In scenes prevailing and sufficing later, show Tanay asking incessant questions to the Paying Guest to know more about his life and his emotional cartography. But the best motif used by Kundalkar as a trope of sexuality to unveil the clandestine relationship between the two queer masculine protagonists is the blue LP player, manifesting the quest to build a companionship between the two through it. The jazz music playing on it rather strengthens and authenticates the masculine emotions of love and desire, joy and excitement, in circumstances of abjection of being non-normative masculine identity.



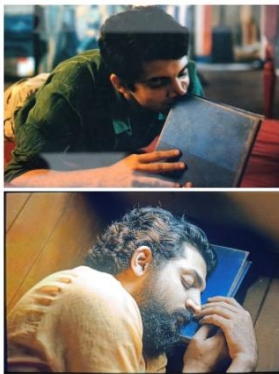
The other significant motif to discuss the emotions of men in the film is the blue attire that they wore in many frames. Although blue clothing symbolises dependability and stability of emotions in men, but in this film, the blue clothes depict as a colour of compromise, barring trust and consistency vis-a-vis authority and strength. Probably, Kundalkar wants his spectators to not only decipher tranquility and relaxed emotions of men, but he deliberately creates the blue chrome as the psychological characteristics of queer men. He discusses the seriousness and controlling nature of the Paying Guest over Tanay not only emotionally, but also his body through the assurance of safety and stability. The continuous effort from Tanay to give a constitutive formation to the relationship he presumes to develop with the Paying Guest seemingly repudiates the natural and purity of queer love through abjection and negation at many sequences in the film. Both of them are shown with blue attire and both portrayed the queer masculinity in a different way to

establish each one's individualistic emotions. A continuum of phantasmic pleasures between both the masculine bodies seems to signify the transfiguration of sexual pleasures more than mental companionship. One reason of such could be, Tanay being younger in age is portrayed as more vulnerable to emotional exploitation, and being the ideal soft queer masculine body can be ruled and controlled through power of homoarchy or homonormative patriarchy. Kundalkar represents all these psychological cartography through the motifs and tropes colours in different hues of blue chrome.

The other significant blue chromatic representations in *Cobalt Blue* are the wall paints and paintings. From the beginning of the film towards the end, the blue chrome has been depicting different haptic cartographies of body. But the significant ones are the aesthetically artistic walls of Kochi shown in the film talks about the peaceful calmness of the city. The hand prints and footprints through a blue paint on the white wall and the wooden floor explain the emphatic semblance of body's presence of an inanimate object for a long time. Such tropes in films carry the attributes of power, subordination, and historicity. Prints on walls or floors talk about how convergent modalities of subjectivity and performativity can be, but in this film beside these psychoanalytical understandings, they depict the hegemonic perpetuity of emotional affinity of queer men in the lure of emphatic normativity. The other blue chromes of backwaters and sky resemble the discipline, calmness and immortality of temporality or timelessness. From the beginning till the end the blue water and sky have been chromatically and phenomenologically to germinate the sense of vulnerability and homoaffectivity among the spectators.



The last symbol of blue chrome is a blue notebook that Tanay has. The diary has the emotional secrets of Tanay, his desires to be a creative artist, and many other closeted feelings. Beside symbolising the domain of individualistic knowledge, the essence of imagination and the metaphor of beauty and love, this blue notebook also records the everyday activity of psychological engagements, gender performativity of a queer men's body, and the haptic geography of sheer judgments and criticisms of the everyday socio-cultural ambience of his existential identity and his observations of human beings around him. The notebook has been with him since his childhood, but forgot it in a friend's place when Dixit family was migrating to



Kochi. It is interesting to ponder, how did the the Paying Guest get the notebook, the screenplay is crafted in such a way, that the secret remains closeted throughout. But after Tanay gets it, the notebook remains in his possession til the end of the narration of the film. The partiality of perception of the spectators may be affecting to look into the soft masculine characteristics of Tanay, but the morphological imagination of the same spectators may be governed by the heteronormative traditions where negation of softness or queer masculinity is overshadowed by the chromatic structure of blue. Kundalkar plays with this symbolic signification of blue chrome impregnating the narratological structure of his *Cobalt Blue*. Henceforth, the blue notebook and Tanay make a strong companionship of not only emotional geographical essence, but also decipher the morphological queer

masculine characteristics through performativity of body and homonormative sexual affinity, both ontologically and phenomenologically.

The other prominent colours that are used in the film is red and yellow. Red becomes significant in Tanay's life, as the unnamed English professor in his college, have been depicting passionate physical love with red chrome at many frames. Their relationship of student and teacher dilutes into another semblance of queer masculine men. The Professor is not open about his gender identity and sexual orientation, but Tanay could sense it as he also carries the similar existential gender identity. In many frames in the film, courage is shown through the red tee-shirt of the queer masculine protagonists, but sacrifice and the symbol of danger are portrayed wherever it is required. Kundalkar thoughtfully uses the chrome to unfold the psychological activity of these characters in the narrative of the film. While yellow in the chromatic philosophy denotes youthfulness and happiness, but in this film it has been thrust upon the cisgender heteronormative protagonists,; like Tanay's parents, Sharada and Vidyadhar, played by Geetanjali Kulkarni and Shishir Kumar, or his elder brother, Aseem, played by Anant Vijay Joshi. They have been wearing yellow clothes in many frames, or driving a yellow Lambretta scooter. Towards the end, after craftily escaping from the heteronormative conventional environment, Tanay is shown wearing a yellow *kurta* and sleeping on a berth of train's compartment. Kundalkar tries artistically to impose normativity on Tanay's portrayal through such

yellow motifs. Such penetrative strategy of creativity probes into the material contiguity and mimetic exposure of masculinity of both queer and cisgender. But for the spectators, these chromatic structures of red and yellow translate into an embodiment of queer masculine performances in the film.

III. Queer masculinity in *Cobalt Blue*

The silence of intimacy and companionship among queer men has been a common trait in Indian socio-cultural families. In this context, Tanay's family has been portrayed as upper caste Maharashtrian, although settled in Kochi. Kundalkar doesn't want to focus much on this intersectional characteristics, except few nuances by showing them as strict vegetarian family, women not going to the Hindu burial or burning ground, men must study either creative art or pure sciences, and maintaining the social dignity and respectability that Vidyadhar Dixit acquired through his tenuous labour in the spices company, Thomas and Chenetra. It is important to note that Vidyadhar is strict and conventional, but has no restrictions for his daughter, Anuja, played by Anjali Sivaraman, playing hockey, keeping short hairs, and having eggs or chicken, or Tanay wanting to be a writer. Kundalkar probably has these progressive socio-cultural and psycho-political understandings of equality, and may be for this reason he chooses to show Fathima, played by Shruti Pradeep, driving Yezdi bullet, or Aseem shown in tears after his Ajji, or grandmother, played by Deepa Lagoo, passing away. Although Tanay is portrayed in a soft masculine trait and studying Literature, he has to befit himself into the cisgender heteronormative frame for the family, and this is what makes him keep his sexual orientation closeted.

Tanay develops a 'protective sanctity' (Sedgwick, 56) for his sexual orientation and diverts his emotions to his creative skills. The performative subjectivity that Tanay adheres to seems almost dialectically heteronormative. The queer criticisms that emerge in such portrayals create transcendental qualities of structural hetero-patriarchal objectivity, rather than the dominant subjectivity which the homo-normative cultural intelligibility of queer masculine body represents. The hegemonic assumptions of soft masculinity to effeminacy and machismo physique to heteronormative masculinity have been described in the film in deflected phantasmatic characteristics. The transformation of gendered masculine body into a consummate and intimate sexual body destabilises the queer comprehensions of masculine body. The mere existence of bisexual or gay men as penetrators emerging in heuristic desires through voyeuristic gaze cannot be disavowed the non-productive objectivity of queer masculine body. Such authentic identifications culminate the assimilation and abjection in a symptomatic acceptability among queer people. The materiality of queer masculine body is not only for mere consummation, but is also sanctioned by the characterisation of Tanay, whose emotions are coloured through the exact chromatic structure required.

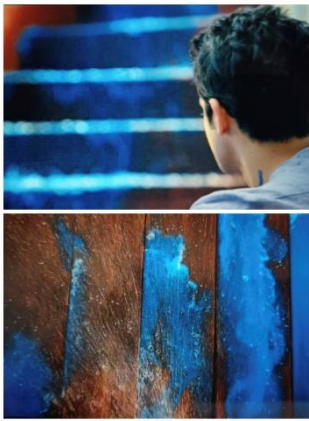
The portrayal of loneliness and isolation always has been painted in the blue chromatic structure in cinematic art. This film doesn't stand apart in that way, rather the tropes of other blue signifiers are diffused in the free to discuss the haptic cartography of queer masculinity. This image deciphers not only into the performance of indelible icon of relational loss, but the depiction of pain and melancholy gets inserted into the separation of not only queer bodies but queer dependency. Such representations of isolation depict the failure of concealment both objectively and subjectively, through different frames of emotions. The night when the Paying Guest refuses to sleep with Tanay, is the same night when he elopes with Anuja. After Anuja returns, Tanay composes his emotional cartography in the exactitude of affective obligations of relational orientations of performativity in family. The disruption of trust fosters more mistrust, (Svendsen, 32) and that is why the assemblages of angst and empathetic discomfort is depicted between the brother and sister for the same lover, and this circulates the normalisation of intimacy to a masculine body that crosses the temporality and spatiality of emotional geographies. Such language of intimacies deducing to consummation only in a reductionist point of view, the loneliness and isolation germinating from the separation of lovers for both create an obvious encounter of heteronormative and homonormative affectivity of dualism of mind and body.



The non-disclosure of sexual orientation of Tanay remains in the constitution of haptic cartography and morphology of desires. The tussle of emotions that Tanay undergoes after the Paying Guest leave

reconfirms into orienting power over his own body, and this is the reason he goes to his English professor and gets sexually intimate. Soon the realisation of mistake and a sense of guilt envelopes him, and the taken-for-granted assumption of one's own body and its utilisation depends on the onus of the individual forces Tanay into the emotional loneliness. The corporeality of queer masculine body do borne the feeling of failure to live up to the expectations of family, and this envelopes Tanay completely. His immersion into a self-isolation does give the spectators a feeling of imaginary sobbing for the loss of passionate attachment, while Kundalkar doesn't follow the mainstream formula of sadness with songs and music. He rather prefers to compose it with a Jazz music at the background to compose Tanay's emotional turbulence and tries to justify that can have an healing affect on the body. The familial intimacy of love, care and support seem to be excluded from further aggravating the negativity and loneliness inside him, for example when the family discusses the details of Aseem's marriage on the dining table, Tanay gets up with his plate and goes away. His brother obliges the affectivity of Tanay to the artistic characteristics of haptic crests and troughs. There doesn't seem any manipulation of emotional obligations, rather it culminates into a fraternal support and care of an elder brother. The assimilative sympathy of the family towards Tanay is not about his melancholy of separation, but the heteronormative outlook is of responsibility and affective obligations that usually most of the Indian families tend to practice.

With the matrimonial celebrations emerging in the family, it becomes almost mandatory to cleanse the house, especially the focus of Kundalkar was cleansing the filth and stains of the deceitful Paying Guest that tarnished the family reputation and dignity. Conglomerating the loneliness and cleansing of the house definitely create a symbolic essence of emotional mapping. Probably in simplistic understandings of the spectators, the separation of interpersonal interactions through the disruption of trust can be depicted through self-perpetuation. The perception of their social surroundings as threaten for queer emotions hinders the decrease of human contact, and thus undermines all social relationships. Kundalkar does this very artistically by washing the blue footprints and drawing the symbolism of blue chrome to loneliness. Tanay looking at the chrome blue being washed away has two significances in the film; one is to give a re-birth to his consciousness of being different, and the other is to cleanse his attachment to the blue chrome, rather wiping out the memories of the blue chrome germinated in his mind with the Paying Guest. The insurmountable distance between his love and him engulfs Tanay completely into the assertion of his self-identity and individualised existential



essence. The cohabitation relationship with the unnamed man brings out another query into the spectators' mind, why is that both the lovers unnamed? It may be simply because he wants to protect the identity of his lovers as he is in closet, his clandestine affairs therefore fits into the dynamics of his protective sanctity. The other reason may also be that he wanted to show conviction that his love has made him complete and a strong essence of trust is build within him, as after the separation from his Paying Guest. The endurance of pain that the bisexual Paying Guest has thrust upon both the brother and sister seem to be naturalising the promiscuity of queer masculine psychology. Such characterisation establishes the queer men within the rubric of visual pleasure and scopophilic gaze of cisgender heteronormative men. These kinds of portrayals of bisexual men propagate the rhizomatic attributes of queer men and fail to create the alignments within the queer spectrum of normativity and performativity. Kundalkar probably fails in his attempt to justify the emotional cartography of a bisexual masculine psyche. His portrayal of the Paying Guest is prone to non-monogamous relationships, and his other relational companions whom he photographed or painted, literally justifies his promiscuousness and taking advantages of soft and vulnerable masculine queer people, like Tanay.

The most significant trope that Kundalkar creates is Pablo, a conceptual tortoise that has conversation with him and makes him realise that he is not alone and there is someone who would beside him always. The name itself has a symbolised structure of artistic versatility of the famous Pablo Picasso or Pablo Neruda, become a postulation of performative power of multitudinous subjectivity and romantic eternity from both of them, and interestingly both these philosophies fit into the narrative structure of the film. Thus, creating an alter ego of Tanay engulfing him so much, that he cannot even think of his existence of happiness and closeted self-identity, without Pablo's presence. This reinforces the stereotypical homonormative gender inversion (Benshoff & Griffin, 25) in cinematic aesthetics to represent a queer masculine self-understanding and homoaffectivity. The dependency on one's own alter ego gets into Tanay so much that the paradigmatic structure of the narration of the film seems to be following the syntagmatic structure of the blue chrome.

Lacanian and Lyotardian philosophies of alter ego entangle so aesthetically in the film that reinforcement of identity and visualisation becomes vehemently evident. (Rich, 40-41) Kundalkar creates the effectiveness of alter ego through the blue chromatic metaphors of wisdom and knowledge and the conceptual existence of a tortoise in a blue pond. The cultural depictions of tortoise in Indian traditions are to keep away negativity and create sustainability of longevity of life. Interestingly, through the film Kundalkar doesn't let his spectators know the tortoise doesn't exist at all, it is towards the last few frames, he clearly vocalises the existence of a strong alter ego to subdue or conquer Tanay's vulnerability.

IV. Conclusion

The politics of representation of sexuality in Bollywood mainstream cinema has diluted the queer masculinity in the portrayals of all queer men and invisibility of other queer identities through the conventional method of filmmaking. The dilution is purposively attempted to keep away the controversies that may emerge amidst the cisgender heteronormative spectators. *Cobalt Blue* tries to break these prejudices and notional biases created with patriarchal mindset by the socio-cultural traditions of Indian cinema. The queer analysis of masculinity implements the intangible cognisance of emotional cartography and gender performativity. The whole transformative public discourse of understanding the queer masculinity of mainstream Bollywood cinema identifies the dialectical epistemology of non-western impact on Indian culture. Thus, the morphology of visualisation of queer men on films do tend to create an emphatic identity and evolve into a cultural landscape of mainstreaming normativity. The depiction of queer masculinity in *Cobalt Blue* expresses the artistic productive permeability that reconfigures the affective expressiveness within the boundaries of spectators and the filmmaker. The identification of visual pleasure may work theoretically or the scopophilic voyeurism may work if the film would have released in theatres, but the economy of creativity and social recognition of queer masculinity just made the visual pleasure confined to digital technology. Such politico-economic factors do control the visual pleasure and interrelation of democratic viewership, and purposes the contemporary demands of cinegoers and cinelovers. But when lockdown was declared to control the contagion of coronaviruses, cinema theatres and auditoriums were shut down.

Only the multiplexes and cineplexes alone could not have resolved this complex matrix of existential identities of non-normative identities. Due to the global pandemic, the popularising impact of OTT platforms in India has rearticulated such sexuality being represented in exactitude. The limits of gendered performances have been normalise to quite an extent through these platforms, as it emphasises on individual spectatorship, the choice and the freedom to like or dislike depends entirely on the individual. The release of films on these platforms gives a feeling of satisfaction to the creative artists responsible for the final product. No overruling of the freedom of creating art through censorship, and this gives the privilege to the Bollywood production houses to create the exact picture of any theme or issue that can otherwise be censored. For this reason, *Cobalt Blue* got released globally on Netflix India on 2nd April, 2022, after the film was commissioned by the same platform. Interestingly, the primary chrome of red makes the platform charged with all censoring emotions of gory violence, passionate love, sacrificial wars, courageous fights, perilous anger, anything in extremity that could have been axed easily, if their contents and commissioned films and series are released in cineplexes and multiplexes. So, this release has ritualised the sense of freedom from censorship and individualistic choice of prevailing mindset, like which film to watch and when to watch. The upsurge popularity of OTT has made the space and time move into the hands of the viewers. Henceforth, this creates and naturalises the complex historicity of spectatorship and constitute the subjectivity of queer masculinity into the limits of gender performativity almost making it citational and figurative through the queer masculine body and its depicted trajectories of emotions and the blue chrome as in the film *Cobalt Blue*.

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