

Hed:	Romantic films in India and the shifting boundaries of taboo love
Dek:	Going beyond the poor-boy-meets-rich-girl trope to explore stories about kinds of love that are still taboo—be it queer love, a mother’s desire, or self-love independent of toxic masculinity—films on MUBI are attempting to normalise love in all its forms
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Facebook title:	From forbidden to fearless—how Indian cinema is rewriting the rules of romance.
IG headline:	Forbidden love has been India’s favourite film genre. But in 2025, something’s changed
Instagram caption	<p>What does love look like when it’s not filtered through clichés? On MUBI India, romantic films are breaking free—from poor-boy-meets-rich-girl tropes to stories of queer love in Indian cinema, female desire in Bollywood, and self-worth beyond toxic masculinity.</p> <p>Films like <i>The Booth</i>, <i>Girls Will Be Girls</i>, and <i>Thank You For Coming</i> don’t just entertain. They validate. They normalise. They remind us love isn’t one-size-fits-all.</p> <p>Romantic films in India are evolving. And perhaps, so are we.</p>

	<p>Read more:</p> <p>https://www.theestablished.com/culture/romantic-films-in-india-and-the-shifting-boundaries-of-taboo-love-9777747</p> <p>#IndianCinema #MUBIIIndia #TabooLove #QueerStories #BollywoodNow</p>
IG Carousel	<p>Slide 1: Forbidden love has been India’s favourite film genre. But in 2025, something’s changed</p> <p>Slide 2: Mainstream Indian cinema has always sold love, but the kind of love it shows has been boxed in</p> <p>Slide 3: Once, forbidden love meant poor-boy-meets-rich-girl or a widow’s desire. Now, it extends to queer intimacy, age gaps, and indie subversions</p> <p>Slide 4: Portraying intimacy between two women, the release of <i>Fire</i> in 1998 sparked nationwide protests and theatre vandalism</p> <p>Slide 5: “Today, films like Shuchi Talati’s <i>Girls Will Be Girls</i> (2024), are addressing a mother’s desire, with the daughter feeling jealous of her own mother” - Abhimanyu Mathur</p>

	<p>Slide 6: In <i>My Mother's Girlfriend</i> (2021), filmmaker Arun Fulara explores taboo desire through a widowed mother finding intimacy with another woman</p> <p>Slide 7: “Art can only spark conversations about normalisation of all kinds of love” - Rohin Raveendran</p> <p>Slide 8: “Cinema can make a difference because it’s a reflection of society” - Anmol Sidhu</p> <p>Slide 9: Films like <i>Animal</i> (2023) and <i>Kabir Singh</i> (2019) have sparked debate, as both glorify men whose behaviours risk being normalised</p>
IG tags	
LinkedIn caption	<p>How OTT platforms are rewriting India’s love stories</p> <p>For decades, Indian romance in cinema was boxed into caste, class, and heteronormative tropes. Now, streaming platforms like MUBI are reshaping the script.</p> <p>From queer relationships to women’s desire, these aren’t just films—they’re cultural shifts playing out through the intimacy of an algorithm. What once struggled at the box office is gradually finding scale and resonance online.</p>

	<p>For professionals, it's a live case study in disruption and representation. The future of storytelling—and the business of culture—is being written here.</p> <p>Read the full piece on The Established.</p> <p>#StreamingCulture #RepresentationMatters #OTTIndia #StorytellingStrategy #CulturalLeadership</p>
LinkedIN visual	
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Pullquote:	<p>Karishma Kuenzang</p> <p>“We’re a country of heartbroken men who don’t know how to take rejection well. Even most of our songs are about not getting love, and hence, songs of lament.”</p> <p>– Arun Fulara</p>
Tags (3 or more):	For website - Karishma Kuenzang pls add

Article body:
<p>Romance sells. Even in our situationship-stricken era, romantic films in India continue to redraw the boundaries of love. What was seen as forbidden once—whether it was the poor-boy-and-rich-girl archetype or a widow’s desire—now extends to queer tenderness, age-gap intimacy, and indie cinema that refuses easy tropes.</p> <p>Mainstream Indian cinema has been trading on romance for decades. In the 1990s and 2000s, its hallmark was the story of forbidden love between a man and a woman, or an Indianised version of the <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> trope. From <i>Dil</i> (1990) to <i>Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam</i> (1999), the appeal of Bollywood romantic movies lay in the class and caste divide highlighted by the ‘poor-guy-meets-rich-girl’ love story. While it reflected the social anxieties of its time, the theme continues to resonate, as seen by the recent success of <i>Dhadak 2</i> (2025) at the box office.</p>

“We’re a country of [heartbroken](#) men who don’t know how to take rejection well. Even most of our songs are about not getting love, and hence, songs of lament,” says filmmaker Arun Fulara, who grew up in the ’80s and ’90s, when actors like Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, and Shah Rukh Khan all played to the stereotype.

With *My Mother's Girlfriend* (2021, available on MUBI), Fulara broke away from the stereotype while still engaging with the idea of forbidden love. He set his story in 2025 and turned to a kind of desire that remains taboo even as conversations about sex and sexuality are far more open today. In Fulara’s film, a widowed mother’s desires and search for intimacy leads her to another woman.

Audiences can watch how he frames this narrative through the eyes of the protagonist’s grown-up son. “It’s based on the notion of a grown man seeing his [mother](#), an older woman he hasn’t imaged as a sexual being, suddenly indulging in an intimate act. I wasn’t trying to break a taboo but I was aware that this isn’t a kind of love usually spoken about,” explains Fulara of the 15-minute film, which he based on a memory from when he was 11 years old and overheard his mother and her friend discussing their sex lives. The details were unclear to him then, but the impression stayed.

“In the past, India had films like *Water* (2005) that addressed the taboo topic of widow remarriage, but it had to be shot in Canada. The Amitabh Bachchan, Rani Mukerji-starrer *Baabul* (2006), also helped normalise the issue to an extent. Today, films like Shuchi Talati’s *Girls Will Be Girls* (2024), are addressing female desire and a mother’s desire with the daughter in the film feeling jealous of her own mother. Thinking of your own mother as a romantic competitor is a very brave idea in India that’s not been seen [in cinema] before,” says Mumbai-based film critic Abhimanyu Mathur.

How queer love is reshaping romantic films in India

The normalisation of [queer love](#) in Indian cinema is still in its early phases. There was a time when showing intimacy between two women was so controversial that when Deepa Mehta's *Fire*'s released in 1998, it was met with protests and vandalism across the country.

“Queer love is something Indian films are exploring. But it's still considered offbeat, not as mass-y, and is being seen more on OTT platforms like MUBI, because there is space for it and makers don't have to worry about the box office. So, they can afford to be a little more audacious,” says Mathur. He points out how the addition of Trinetra Halder's character in season 2 of Amazon Prime's *Made in Heaven* in 2023 was a breakthrough. “Especially when a lot of the angles of queer love in shows and cinema today still feel tokenistic, or are being used for shock value,” adds Mathur.

Delhi-based engineer and drummer Samarth Grover, who began binge-watching films on MUBI three years ago, observes that queer cinema risks being pigeonholed. “[[Queer](#) cinema also risks becoming] too much of a genre in itself. Or, when it becomes too much about queerness and not universal truths about human feelings or just love,” says Grover.

This is where Rohin Raveendran's *The Booth* (2018), now streaming on MUBI, differs. His 15-minute film tells the story of a romance between a female mall-security guard and a young woman who's a customer. Raveendran insists he did not approach it as a queer love story, even though it is one. “The story was about two women who might not even know the terminology; they just know what they're feeling,” he explains. The stereotype he wanted to dismantle was that love stories are only told about people of a certain social class. “*The Booth* challenges that notion by focusing on people usually not addressed, like a female guard in a shopping mall. There needs to be a normalisation of love just being love,” says Raveendran, adding, “Art can only spark conversations about normalisation of all kinds of love.”

The film also points to what should be considered as forbidden today. A scene in *The Booth* shows a man filming a woman without her [consent](#)—a disturbing reality with reports of such behaviour surfacing in metro trains and malls across India.

“And yet, it’s this consensual exploration of sexuality between two women that is frowned upon. The discovery of their relationship could have grave consequences for the female guard who is married, besides losing her job,” adds Raveendran.

Masculinity as gatekeeper of romance in Indian cinema

The portrayal of the hero in many Bollywood romantic movies was also the epitome of what society imagined as “being a man”. Amitabh Bachchan’s ‘Angry Young Man’ might have been much loved, but it left little room for men to be emotionally vulnerable or react with any other emotion but anger.

“The idea of masculinity earlier was all about what seems cool on screen. Like John Abraham in *Dhoom* (2004), a glorified macho man. Or, the notion that drinking alcohol makes you [manly](#), as seen in *Sholay* (1975). Today, thankfully, Indian content is focusing on more emotionally aware male characters, not blindly following some norms of what it is to be a man,” says Grover.

Case in point: *Jaggi* (2021, on MUBI), a Punjabi-language film that addresses bullying, lack of self-empathy, and the burden of “manning up”. Director Anmol Sidhu based the film on a boy in his village who killed himself after being forced to marry. “Bullying is common in villages. Especially if a man wasn’t manly enough/had sexual issues. Plus, the lack of sexual awareness and the taboo associated with a girl and guy meeting leads to frustration in men. This eventually builds up and is taken out (violently too, at times) on men who’re ‘less masculine’ even if all they did was speak softly or have a high-pitched voice, says Sidhu, who admits he only became familiar with words like masculinity and misogyny after *Jaggi* released and audiences responded to it.

For Sidhu, cinema's role is to hold up a mirror to society. "Cinema can make a difference because it's a reflection of society. Just like how, when I look in the mirror, I fix my hair that's out of order," he says. This is why films such as *Animal* (2023) and *Kabir Singh* (2019) have sparked debate—both glorify men whose behaviours risk being normalised. "Painting them as heroes will motivate people to follow such behaviour," says Sidhu.

The representation of patriarchal and [toxic masculinity](#) is starker in those films, especially given the recent shift towards more sensitive portrayals of men on screen. "Even Shah Rukh Khan in *Jawan* (2023) or *Pathaan* (2023), despite all the action scenes, comes across as sensitive. OTT also offers more space for male characters to come across as gentle and emotionally vulnerable characters," says Mathur.

Other **taboo romance films** are emerging in subtler ways. "Take Bhumi Pednekar's character romancing Anil Kapoor's, who is about 20-30 years older, in *Thank You For Coming* (2023); this wouldn't have happened in Bollywood a decade ago. Sometimes, makers add an element of comic relief in the content to make forbidden love more palatable, like that of Shefali Shah and Roshan Mathew in *Darlings* (2022), which isn't part of the crux of the plot," observes Mathur.

Cinema has the power to normalise all kinds of love because representation matters. "When youngsters see more of different kinds of love and personalities on screen, they believe they aren't outcasts. The more offbeat love stories and [forbidden love](#) you portray, the greater the representation and hope of change," concludes Mathur.