



## **Cinematic Resistance: *The First Wedding* as a Protest Narrative against Heteronormativity**

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses Akshay Parvatkar's short film *The First Wedding* (2020) as a protest narrative against heteronormativity. The film, which was created for Ravindra Bhavan, Margao's 60 Years in 60 Hours Short Film-making Challenge, depicts a heterosexual couple's decision to marry in a world of same-sex couples. By reversing social attitudes, the film explores the hardships of a heterosexual relationship in a society that dictates who may love whom. This analysis argues that the film's celebration of heterosexual love, at the expense of same-sex couples, is a powerful act of rebellion. It emphasises the need for acceptance and preparedness to deal with the social consequences of one's choices. Therefore, this study is a confluence of gender expression, sexual orientation, and the notion of cinema as cultural resistance.

**Keywords:** Couple, film, heterosexual, love, marriage, minority

### **Introduction**

*The First Wedding* (2020) is an unusual mockumentary written and directed by Goan filmmaker Akshay Parvatkar. It was created on a tight budget for the "60 Years in 60 Hours" Short Film-making Challenge organised by Ravindra Bhavan, Margao, Goa. Produced by Tissue Paper Films – Porvorim, *The First Wedding* went on to win the Best Film Award at the competition. With a running time of eight minutes, it features Anuj Prabhu and Purti as Akash and Bhumi, respectively, who are heterosexual lovers in a world of same-sex couples. In an interview with journalist Frederick Noronha, Akshay reveals that his film was inspired by the American mockumentary *Zelig* (1983), starring Woody Allen as a "chameleon man" who can transform into the personalities around him (Noronha).

### **Synopsis of the Short Film**

*The First Wedding* commences with a photoshoot of Akash and Bhumi at Miramar Beach, much to the disgust of a same-sex couple passing by. The scene cuts to a documentary-style interview ahead of their wedding. Akash and Bhumi answer questions by an unseen interviewer while conveying their feelings for each other. Their confidence, pride and happiness are evident through their body language and responses. Viewers learn that they are making a bold choice – "being the first one of opposite sex and that too deciding to marry" (Parvatkar 1:58–2:03).

They describe their attraction to the opposite sex since childhood, eventually realising that anyone can like anyone. This was a matter of preference, and they had grown tired of hiding their respective identities. Bhumi, who was Akash's electronics teacher, inspires his analogy of a transmitter and receiver to illustrate their love. "If I transmit, I like you; if you receive, I like you as well! I ended up getting zero in the viva, but I think I got a hundred out of hundred in life" (Parvatkar 2:40–2:57).



Given the lack of a support system, the couple decided to set an example with their unapologetic love, willing to risk it all for each other. However, their privacy is invaded by unseen assailants who barge in and drag them away. The short film concludes with a chilling revelation: “Bhumi and Akash were arrested for unlawful activities a day before their wedding. They are currently serving a ten-year sentence in the national jail” (Parvatkar 7:29–7:35).

### ***The First Wedding as a Protest Narrative***

*The First Wedding* critiques the societal pressure on individuals to justify or apologise for their romantic attractions. It suggests that the legally recognised union of lovers is sometimes distorted by social expectations and familial pressure. The short film argues that the opposition to love limits individual autonomy and expression. Further, it suggests that marriage should not be reduced to a people-pleasing agreement where everybody presses with contradictory demands on every last detail.

The short film reverses the foundational premise of compulsory heterosexuality, a theory advanced by Adrienne Rich (1980), which posits that heterosexuality is not a natural inclination but a phenomenon that is assumed and enforced upon people by a patriarchal, allonormative and heteronormative society. The film also draws on Judith Butler’s concept of the performativity of gender and sexuality, which demonstrates how social conditioning influences the construction of identity. Thus, *The First Wedding* revisits aspirations and apprehensions of love, while reframing them as a space of radical subversion.

Going by the norm, the couple’s families assumed they were homosexuals, and were arranging for them to marry same-sex partners. Despite these conflicts, the couple’s love for each other stayed steadfast. They did not require an institution to validate or authorise their love; yet they were keen to exchange vows and prove their commitment through marriage. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, they were ready to make it work. Clearly, they would rather accept their identities than repress them. Instead of attempting to live a lie, they pledged to be their true, unfiltered selves.

The short film is an attempt to follow one’s heart and tackle the system by resisting flawed ideologies. Its provocative act of interchanging the minority with the majority intends to spark conversations on the social privileges and problems that are often taken for granted. By marginalising heterosexual lovers, viewers experience the unease of being ‘the other’ and begin to question their own attitudes towards same-sex couples.

The film poses a powerful question: if love is a display of affection, when and why does it become an act of rebellion? As Bhumi says, “Our mere existence is a problem” (Parvatkar 5:07). The couple’s simple desire to hold hands, walk in public and freely be themselves is framed as a defiant act against a society that sees their being as an offence. The couple is made to question if their thoughts and actions were problematic. The fact was that *they* were not the problem; society was. Everything the couple said and did was seen as defiant, stubborn and anti-establishment.

*The First Wedding* exemplifies how being authentic can be perceived as offensive. Sexual minorities are often unable to lead a dignified private life because they are constantly reminded that they are different. They might easily be outnumbered by people who overtly express their disgust, be it at home, the workplace or in the public sphere. With the prevalence of prejudice, they are prone to being misunderstood, judged unfairly and physically, emotionally and verbally abused. Cases of ill-treatment often go unreported, and lack of intervention only exacerbates the damage.



The LGBTQIA+ community has long been fighting for the respect and fundamental rights they have been deprived of. By virtue of existence, they are placed at a disadvantage as compared to heterosexuals. It is imperative to address these issues and facilitate change. Humankind needs harmony, not just tolerance. Efforts should be directed towards reducing discrimination and promoting the normalisation of sexual orientations. Awareness of human rights and the accommodation of each other's needs should be our priorities. A pluralistic and inclusive society requires advocacy and engagement.

*The First Wedding* also considers the social apprehensions of coming out as a sexual minority. By sharing it openly, will one's prospects change for the better? What will people say? Will it worsen the feelings of guilt and shame? How a person copes with outright rejection is significantly contingent on the response of their immediate family and friends. It is important to celebrate such stories of courage because they need to be shared. However, one cannot deny the possibility of adverse consequences and the pressure of dealing with them. Navigating through each day could be a challenge. Sexual minorities may find it difficult to remain optimistic and not get provoked by triggers. While there is discourse about such minorities standing up for themselves, actual support is far from sufficient.

Sexuality constitutes a fundamental aspect of individual identity, and it is imperative that people of all sexual orientations receive validation, acceptance and social support. Arguments against the full recognition of queer sexual expression are ideologically and ethically indefensible. Public displays of affection should be granted the same status for same-sex couples as for their heterosexual counterparts. The goal should be to empower marginalised communities to achieve their full potential. While educational reforms are necessary to foster a more dialogic and inclusive curriculum, the implementation of such initiatives is fraught with significant challenges. It is crucial to dismantle prevailing prejudices and dispel misconceptions about the LGBTQIA+ community. Although conservative attitudes are resistant to change, there is evidence of a gradual, progressive shift in societal norms. Significant work remains to be done to normalise homosexuality, countering its stigma as a disease or "mistake" (Trivedi).

## Conclusion

*The First Wedding* is a humorous yet thought-provoking short film that emphasises the need for belongingness and loyalty while navigating social hurdles. By reversing the sexual dynamic, the film documents a fight for equal and inclusive opportunities for all. It tries to sensitise viewers about same-sex marriages and contributes to the movement for legalising same-sex marriages. Even today, homosexuality is yet to be decriminalised in many cultures. Mass campaigns are needed to revoke discriminatory laws and to safeguard the rights of marginalised communities. More social acceptance and substantial measures are needed.

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