

Male Friendship, Bromance and Homosociality: A Critical Analysis of the film *Kai Po Che* (2012)

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Abstract: *The film Kai Po Che explores the male friendship and masculine bond to understand socio-cultural norms. Homosociality is portrayed with fine nuances to comprehend the gamut of social constructing cartographies of emotions that men possess. The essay probes into this emotional essence of their survivability and existence within rubric of a narrative framework that defines and critiques the socio-patriarchal notions of being men and masculine bond. It also tries to decipher the psychology of the protagonists and their relationship within the complex narratology. The essay also focuses how religion and cricket builds up masculine affinity in a lucid homosocial structure.*

Keywords: *Homosociality, Friendship, Masculine emotions, Indian culture, Bollywood.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Filmdom and friendship have been bonding together in such a manner that its representation one can see in lives everywhere in India. Films have always been replica of friendship as emotional affinity. Probably from the onset, the spectators have come across films that focus on this kind of socialization till films released recently. Before coming to any conclusion, let me say the purpose of choosing this film — *Kai Po Che* (2012). In this neo-liberal world where every individual has shrunk into their own self-engrossing cocoons, the term friendship still exists somewhere in anyone's life — maybe it might have its own parameters to define this bond of togetherness. Some men become friends because they love the same kind of recreational thoughts, some love to become close to their colleagues and share more than their professional space of life, some tend to venture those worlds together where they would dare not go alone, some tend to prefer “covert” style of intimacy through exchange of favors, joking behavior and non-verbal cues¹ (Swain, 2001: 133), and the list of reasons for friendship among males would never end. This film focusses on friendship for the same passion and zest of life, although their ambitions are different, their liking and disliking do not match, every character has their individual self-interest that binds them together, and many more characteristics that will be discussed in this chapter focusing on contemporary India. *Kai Po Che* (2012) re-defines friendship in certain frameworks and dimensions that fit into the contemporary demands of a neo-liberal man.

Masculine socialization begins in any Indian man's life in boyhood. A basic emotional orientation is seen extended in cultures of peer-groups. With the emergence of globalization, the perception about controlled emotional requirements of masculine friendships have seen a drastic change with the penetration of social pressures of existence. Power and control of emotions slowly faded away and soon men are seen in tears, and with liberalized mindsets they venture out for life. Such aspects of restrictions of emotions remained no longer a feminine domain. Self-exhibition is seen soon manifesting in certain change of behavioral patterns that the contemporary society demanded. Still the traditional thought of masculine attachment remained content that is less-verbal communication and more in “doing things together”² (Williams, 1985: 588). This germinates from the boyhood itself when experimenting and experiencing life becomes more of romance, through “daring exploits and dramatic confrontations”³ (Tolson, 2006: 121). Boyhood also envelopes structuring of one's sensibility and sentiments and the evolution of a feeling to prove oneself — this basically germinates first from the family, then from the school and lastly from the peer-group. In India, such kind of togetherness, especially

of male attachment or bromance has never been looked down upon or being close to male friends have never been questioned by the society. The gender power structure always has favored men although the society have always tended to favor patriarchy. Rather in simple words, male homosocialism has been an inevitable part of boyhood in India and the between-ness of sensitivity of men is always very well portrayed through the Bollywood films.

Homosocialism, friendship and bromance have become deep-rooted to psychological growth of men, beyond the parameters of physiological togetherness. Friendship has been intertwined into homosocial representation of masculine togetherness and bromance in the globalized era for several reasons. Internal migration from rural to urban background is one such causes and its effect of men holding hands and walking together in cities have always been overlooked. The main purpose behind such a public display is mostly for deriving a sense of social security. Rustic settings may have a different dimension for such homosociality or bromance, as social sanctity has always been there, so it's more of intimacy and interests, liking and disliking. Globalization has seen drastic changes in men's behavior very fast. Individualistic approach made men feel claustrophobic within their own prescribed norms. Masculine power shifted to masculine security when migration is taken into consideration. The other reason for rise of homosocialism and bromance is the boost of emotional graph. In the globalized world, men though liberated became its own victims as self-hood replaced social and family circles. Men tend to become lonely and vulnerable emotionally. Stresses and tensions have replaced relaxation and lethargy. Performance at every phase of life is a part and parcel of today's life. This keeps masculinity at tenterhooks all the time for best results of gender performativity. The refuge and shelter is sought out from same-sex friends in this neo-liberal India. Thus, uprising homosocial affinity and bromance in the name of friendship is prevalent in the contemporary India and Bollywood films have never shied away from this theme.

Questioning male homosocialism, bromance and masculine friendship in the same sentence at the same time is the epicenter of this film. Masculinity in this film has a different representation, which probably we saw in *Sholay* (1975) or *Dostana* (1980) where such togetherness has never raised brows as the representations fitted into a systematic socio-psychological framework for men's friendships of the contemporary society. Verbal expressions of internal feelings and concerns were considered as radicalization of masculinity, but today the neo-liberal society considers intimacy and bromance as social penetrations of men's exposition to dyadic interactions. This film does that very diligently where protagonists possess predominantly a heightened sense of self, emotional expressiveness and reciprocity, and thus the homosocial bonding between them seems to proliferate as a long-term emotional support. *Kai Po Che* almost legitimizes fraternity and nationality into the paradigmatic structure of male homosocialism, where heroic bonding, death, commemorative desire — all set the movie and build into values such as honor, courage, and emotional reciprocity. Canonizing such strings of attachment between males, make the film an example of rhetoric of closeness and intimacy, stressing personal, individual pain, rather than making it depictions of collective and primordial expressions melodramatically. All degrees of emotional outbursts have been portrayed thoughtfully.

2. *Kai Po Che* at a glimpse

Kai Po Che is a film which questions these aspects of masculinity. The film released in 2012 from the production house of UTV Motion Pictures has reached the hearts of many cine-lovers, for it touched the chords of such emotional affinity that had faded away from films for almost a decade, after the release of *Dil Chahata Hai* (2001), which depicts the same tone of male-bonding but was more to do with the contemporary liberal society. The consequence of which made it a super-hit film with an income of around 50 crores. The storyline circumvents around the three friends, Ishaan Bhatt, played by Sushant Singh Rajput, Omkar Shastri, played by Amit Sadh, and Govind, played by Rajkumar Rao (Yadav). The film involves these three characters and their actions, reactions and interactions for the main theme, i.e. cricket and politic — two masculine domains of power dynamics in the patriarchal, socio-cultural hierarchies. The most important supporting casts of the films are Ali Hashmi, played by Digvijay Deshmukh, Bittoo Joshi alias Mamaji, played by Manav Kaul, and Vidya Bhatt, played by Amrita Puri.

Ishaan had been a district level cricketer who could not rise above that due to the politics in the cricket selection fraternity. Omkar is the son of the chief priest of a local temple, played by Amitabh Srivastav. Govind had been into some kind of business that sells local cuisines, but the spectators don't come across the enterprise ever in the film, except in a frame where he mentions about his business. The three friends wanted to start a business together for which they needed the capital. Here Mamaji enters. As his nephew, Omkar, asks his help to which he immediately agrees, because his mind keeps revolving to include Omkar as one of his prodigals, political cadre for he was the son of a priest. The three starts up a sports shop and converts it into a sports academy. The focus of all sports is curtailed down to cricket, as Ishaan was a cricketer, so the Sabarmati Sports Club starts training talented budding cricketers. Soon Ali, who has a

rare talent, comes to Ishaan's eyes and Ishaan whole-heartedly starts dreaming the ambition (which he couldn't achieve) through this boy and trains him vigorously. Govind also starts dreaming to own a big sports shop in the upcoming Navrangpura Mall, for which once again he takes help of Omkar's Mamaji, and soon Omkar gets tied up for the political activism. Meanwhile, Ishaan requests Govind to teach his sister, Vidya, mathematics as her exams is coming up. Govind is reluctant at first but agrees eventually. Vidya and Govind gradually fall in love with each other and keep their clandestine affair to themselves. But Omkar discovers their relationship and warns Govind of the consequences, as Ishaan is very protective about his sister.

A destructive earthquake hits Gujarat and their upcoming sports shop in the mall gets destroyed. Govind is shattered as the amount of money for such a huge investment had been given to them as loan. Omkar is reluctantly compelled to help his Mamaji's political party due to the money they owe him. When relief camps of Mamaji's party declines to give Muslims shelter in troubled times, Ishaan and Omkar had a fight due to their differences of ideologies and temporarily breaks off their friendship. Ishaan becomes impulsively concentrating on Ali's future so helps his family with the money that they have accumulated from their profits. This leads to a fight amongst the three friends. Govind and Ishaan patch up with the help of Vidya's intervention when Ishaan tries to help Govind to proliferate their business through training, even school children. All the three again reunite after India's surprise win in the test match against Australia. Ishaan and Govind get busy with Ali and Vidya respectively, while Omkar in political activism. Tension arises in the political sphere when Bittoo loses the elections in his constituency to his opponent secular party leader, whose main aide turns out to be Ali's father, Naseer Hashmi, played by Asif Basra. As a part of their campaigning, Bittoo sends only Hindu pilgrims to Ayodhya on Sabarmati Express, to visit the Ram Temple. Omkar's parents also take the pilgrimage. On the returning day, the shocking news of the Godhra train massacre reaches the people. Omkar loses both his parents in the riot and is shattered, but his uncle contrives him to take revenge on the murderers, as conceptualized to be the Muslims opponent secular party.

Soon communal riots break out. Gory bloodshed, violent brutality and killing each other resulted as the Godhra massacre. The film shows Bittoo leading a mob storms the Muslim locality, Jhopur. Ishaan and Govind hide Ali in Ali's house. A scuffle between Naseer and Bittoo, breaks out in which Bittoo dies. Naseer rushes to save Ali, pleads Ishaan to save them, and Naseer and Ali take shelter in their attic. Already the travails of losing his parents outrages Omkar, with the death of Mamaji it strengthens so much that he becomes desperate to kill them. Amidst this volatile situation, Ishaan comes to know about Vidya and Govind's relationship, when he reads Vidya's text message in Govind's mobile phone about her pregnancy tests. He starts fighting with Govind, and Omkar enters the scene. Both Ishaan and Govind forget their own differences and try to stop Omkar. Finally, he aims and shoots targeting Ali in an amateur way, instead the bullet pierces through Ishaan's chest, and he dies on the spot. The film ends with a grown-up Ali debuting for the Indian cricket team against Australia. He plays his first shot by hitting the ball to the boundary with a cover drive just like his teacher, Ishaan, had taught him.

3. Germination of Bromance and Homosocial Relationship

The first few frames of the film, the main theme is introduced to make cricket as the game of top priority in this country, where it is mostly compared to religion for its fanaticism. As religions bind everybody, cricket in India binds many males of the globalized and liberalized India. More than religion, cricket builds up an affinity of bromance and homosociality among males in this patriarchal India. Masculine engagements ranging from handshakes, hugging, caressing to backslapping⁴ (Kaplan & Yanay, 2006: 131) — all are characteristics of this game and generally never considered as form of desire and has any dynamics of seduction. Keeping in mind the polemics of friendship among three male protagonists, the film sets up with the perfect background score by Hitesh Sonik, and name casting. The frames that flow immediately after that shows movements of boxes of lights travelling towards the spectators, as if the journey to go back in a different time begins, conquering the temporal space through such movements seems to be the main motive of such a shot. Prevailing darkness and bright yellow light suggest that human life is like a travelogue, where each yellow light resembles one new page representing one life. Then the frame comes, where the introduction of commemorative friendship through photographs, as memorabilia unfolds the emotional bond between the three friends. Another protagonist is introduced here, Omkar whose eyes are filled with a deep penitence for some loss, an unhealing wound comes out profusely in the close-up shot, where the fuzzy background showed only males around. The names of the two protagonists are screened inside such morose and grim setting. Soon a car is seen coming out of a tunnel into bright daylight and the name of the main force of the trio's bond flashes out, signifying his importance as most primordial for their friendship and bromantic relationship. The dialogue that follows preferably proves the point of male togetherness in a congested room and then becomes clear to the spectators about the surrounding to be a prison

cell, authenticating male homosocialism as the significant point of focus in the film. As he steps out of the prison, a specter of spearing sunrays suggests new hopes for him where his penance may have been forgiven by the divine power. Omkar turns around to see the high erected barbed-wired wall where his eyes feel the suffocation that he had been undergoing for being conglomerated and squeezed into a cell behind those walls, still the cinematographer surrealistically touches the chords of hope. He sees his friend, Govind, is waiting to receive him, the exchange of gaze between them takes a deep focus into each other's eyes to explicate the depth of their affinity.

After few frames, a car is seen passing through open land where dried leaves held onto the flowers they nurtured. There is an olio of different senses, one of lifelessness signified through dried grasslands representing their togetherness a fragile one and vulnerability is noticed on the face of Omkar; and on the other green trees replicating zest of life and ray of hope suggesting their bromantic attachments couldn't result in futility on the smile of Govind. The name of their third friend, Ishaan, makes both react differently. Culpability of proving oneself of his masculinity has been well manipulated here – Govind very formal and analytical in approach and Omkar very emotional and susceptible to the words like *stadium*, which follows with a cricket match being telecasted in a coffee outlet. Here the Fellinian and Kieslowskian philosophy of looking back to the sequential events that lead to such a psychological penitence and remorse and destruction of deep-rooted homosocial bonding as the friendship and bromance of the three protagonists. With the trope of television and metaphor of cricket, the director, unfolds his theme behind the film. The primordial character, Ishaan, is introduced here as being excited, impulsive, and fanatic about his own game. The conversation that takes place between Govind and Ishaan's father, Jagdish, played by Muni Jha, talks volume about ambitions where the metonymy of temple and cricket is camouflaged into one another — both as dedication, devotion and religious in nature. The distrust of a father on his son follows in the next few frames and then the impulsive nature of being perturbed with a telephonic conversation of Ishaan's sister, Vidya, falls into the place with perfection to match the characteristics of the pivotal role of Ishaan in the film.

The impulsiveness and getting annoyed at once leads the other frames smoothly. As a sedan car honks near their house, Ishaan rushes out with his cricket bat and smashes the headlight of the car and starts thrashing the person on the wheel. As Ishaan hands over the bat to Omkar, he also follows the same routine smash — a big bang upon the front windshield — proving the point of love and trust in his best friend. The homosocial bonding between the two is well seen as Jagdish and Govind interfere into the brawl, Omkar tries to protect his friend from a scold of his father, just strengthening the close affinity and intimacy between the two. The distrust of the father also conglomerates with homosociality between the three friends, where he says "*Teeno ek dusre ki tarafdari karte rehet ho, koi kisi kaam ka nahi... [You three keep on praising each other, none of you are worthy of any work...]*". The conversation that follows highlights Ishaan in self-pride, egoistic, and sharp in his approach, the gaze of his eyes shows him being, too, emotional and impulsive. He takes refuge in a cricket ground, where kids are shown playing cricket in teams, for his emotional upheavals. He is even shown with twinkling eyes, seemingly crying, breaking the norms of masculinity in the prevailed society. The other refuge he takes is under the feelings of Omkar, while Govind is shown more pragmatic and futuristic, so his emotional refuge there seems in a different degree altogether. It seems that Govind could guide him practically through conventional methods of establishing himself, proving his talent and winning the trust of his father back, which he lost as he has been sitting idle at home except watching cricket matches and doing nothing for last three years. These two kinds of distinctive dependence of emotional refuge on his friends seem interdependent on each other as the film unfolds further. The constraints of prescribed social norms of homosocial interactions and intimate emotions in public⁵ (Kaplan, 2005: 573) are always thoughtfully measured and mediated among male friends, for the participants are always concerned about not creating a disavowal form and radical portrayal of their masculinity. Obviously, Ishaan also followed this and tried to choose one distinctively among the two for his emotional and pragmatic refuge.

The frames that follow these intensify the homosocial intimacy between Ishaan and Omkar and homosocial dependency upon Govind. Govind, as a prudent and an analytical person, has calculated that they must prove the world their passionate desires through interiority of normative social surrounding as apt men. He has planned to open a sports equipment shop which would enable him to utilize the space as his tuition center, and both, Ishaan and Omkar, would be running the shop. As Ishaan has played cricket on the district level, people have a different kind of esteem for him. Henceforth, such a kind of shop would attract a lot of customers; along with it the shop that Govind thought of buying is adjacent to the local temple, whose main priest is Omkar's father, Shastriji. For the booking amount Govind had made Jagdish Bhatt, but due to the ego clashes between the father and son, Jagdish himself tore the cheque that he signed for helping the three friends to establish themselves. In one frame when the emotional interdependency is portrayed through a ray of streetlight, where the three sit together to share their feelings of being taken as worthless sons. Govind comes

out with a solution of Omkar talking to his father and keeping the shop for them from being sold off. Slowly it unfolds that Omkar's maternal uncle, Bittoo Joshi, turned out to be a local politician, and he barter with him to make him join the political party in exchange of the shop. Omkar without even understanding the repercussions of such an ordeal, agrees to it thinking about the happiness that his best friends would be experiencing with. Such risk factors have always enhanced and strengthened the bond between friends. The emotional reliance among each other leads to plunge into sea of odds without even thinking of consequences. Omkar also does that. The non-verbal communication that takes between him and Ishaan provides him a sense of exclusiveness and drawing boundaries for their intimate feelings within themselves. Such sensitivity of between-ness rather questions the conventional thought of male friendship and intimacy and proves their bromance to be stronger. Taking risks for friends is just a form of showering love that fits into the paradigmatic structure of male homosociality in India. The director basically tries to prove a point that the homosocial continuum⁶ (Vincent, 2012, 1) still exists even in neo-liberal era of globalization that has been portrayed in the narrative structures of films for a long duration. The frames of ordeal have been pictured in such different kinds of angles that encompass emotional exuberance of Omkar at one hand and sadism of maternal uncle on the other, both at close-up and deep focus with the keys of the shop in between. The background of the set is a typical political official set-up with banners of the party festooning everywhere.

The director very thoughtfully introduced the first song of the film keeping the local flavor of Gujarat, although the entire song is being played at the background. The song depicts how colors can create vibrancy and happiness at every different phase of life. The whole song focuses on the mirth and divine blessings where the whole scene moves onto developing a barren and discarded land into prosperity. The song deliberately shows the physical and emotional affinity between Ishaan and Omkar. They together build the barren field into a proper cricket ground. While in the process of such a laborious task, their physical intimacy is shown keeping the homosocial continuum in mind. Along with it, the muscular objectivity of male bodies is also depicted in these frames. Govind is shown here, too, as more prudent and concerned about the financial part of the shop, which is a deliberate portrayal to depict the individualistic psyche of self-development. When Ishaan is shown teaching the kids about cricket and its philosophy, Omkar is screened to be beside him and believing in each word he delivers. The shop starts with immense exhalation where students of the cricket coaching start buying their personal sports equipment. The shared non-verbal communication between the three here has been intensified with joy and ecstasy. Along with his shop, Govind opens his private coaching classes. In fact, the name of the shop has been also named as Sabarmati Sports Club, keeping the thematic structure of the story as Gandhian philosophical roots being focused on Gujarat.

4. Nicknames and Codes as part of Masculine Homosocial Bond

The three friends — Ishaan, Omkar and Govind — address each other with nicknames. Ishaan becomes Ish, Omkar becomes Omi, and Govind becomes Govi. The philosophy of such address is explicit expressions of closeness on verbal expressions in, from, of the society. In the context of private, heterosexual dyad, a nickname is a basic signifier of affection and intimacy⁷ (Kaplan, 2005, 579). But the director thoughtfully crafts his skills and makes all of them give a different connotation while conversing with others in the film. Only Ishaan and Omkar maintain their masculine coding of addressing each other with poise and strength, as they are lovingly and fondly being addressed by other characters, also. This sanctions their emotional affinity and continuum of homosocial friendship in public contexts. But Govind remains away from this. He isn't being addressed as Govi by anyone else except his friends, and later his girlfriend. The director thoughtfully crafts these names keeping in mind to portray Govind's heterosexual normativity in the film, later. Men tend to employ a unique discourse of idiosyncrasies for their emotional homosocial friendship and nicknames become a part of it⁸ (Kaplan & Yanay, 2006: 131177).

From the outset of their portrayals of togetherness, these nicknames reflect each other's position amongst the trio of this film. Somehow it shows that each of them has accepted the other into their homosocial psychology. In this film, we don't find the nicknames offensive or derogatory as they are aware of the weaker qualities of their friends. Closting this factor strengthens their friendship and communicate to others that their relationship is marked with conformity and acceptance emotionally. At one frame, when Govind could locate the money he kept in his cash box of the sports shop, the three starts arguing. Ishaan comes with optimistic positivism that something drastic is going to change as India-Australia cricket series will be starting soon. But both Govind and Omkar reject his dreams with sheer materialistic thought of losing the money, which at no cost Ishaan could retain from the place he donated. A twist of affectionate closeness is seen among Omkar and Ishaan for they maintain the secretive mechanism of their masculine friendship from others. While Govind couldn't keep it to himself as his heterosexual affinity with Vidya compels him to share that

pain. This semi-public disposition breaks the homosocial norms of their emotional affinity making it more susceptible to situational ambivalence. This angst against each other also is a kind of open-ended form of expression depicting the emotional intensities of each other. The hostility with which Ishaan comes over to Omkar expresses a sense of animosity and yet attraction and affinity between the two. Later in the film, we see them drawing close to each other manifesting homosocial resemblance and emotional contentment, through encouraging each other at crisis. So, nicknaming is used with this purpose in the film to portray Ishaan and Omkar more socializing in nature, and this kind of anecdote is usually misinterpreted by others who aren't part of the masculine homosocialism.

The shared masculine jingoism and clashes of ideologies are depicted when Govind blatantly denies from attending the forthcoming political cadre's meeting. Their exclusivity of masculine language entails privacy and secrecy, so the scene is shot in low tones of light and the conversations are recorded in a low pitch. The specificity of each one of them is different — Govind is busy in his money and protecting it, Omkar is trying to defend his Mamaji for whom they can rent a shop, while Ishaan busy in thinking of his frivolity and fun through some means as Sunday is coming. This shows homosocialism among males also has various degrees within its paradigmatic structure — Govind prudent and analytical, Omkar sensitive and protective, Ishaan zealous and passionate. The unison of uttering "*Kal Sunday hai daru peene ka day hai Sunday hai... [Tomorrow is Sunday so it's a boozing day]*" clamors Omkar and Ishaan again in the same thread of sentimentality and creating a sense of alliance and unity among all three when Govind agrees to give them money from the profit they earned in their partnership sports shop-cum-coaching center. This kind of shared linguistic codes specifies exclusiveness for utilizing private spaces and permeates intimate homosocial bond between the male friends. At one frame, we see when Omkar gets denial from his political uncle for the support of financial support for the new shop in the mall, he comes back and tells his friends. Here Ishaan jokingly says, "*Unko kya hum Hasan se le ya Haseena ka le le... [How does it matter to him whether we take from Hasan or Haseena]*" At another frame, Ishaan and Omkar is seen glimpsing through a women's magazine where bikini-clad models are printed. They together call Govind, who is busy in doing the accounting, to check once. Seeing such semi-nude models, Govind depicts a sense of hatred, and Ishaan and Omkar take the fun of it.

The director very magnificently uses another background song to portray the intensity of their homosocial bromance and friendship through adventurous spirit and zeal of enjoying life to the lees. The plunge into the sea from the turret of the fort symbolizes the trope of taking risks as masculine characteristics — Govind is being dragged and made to jump by Ishaan, while Omkar already jumps first on the words of Ishaan. The high angle shot shows that rippling effect of life can bring back and forth the adventurous enthusiasm among homosocial friendship in liberalized masculine world. The second frames show them inside a new car, where their three different ambitions are depicted profusely. Govind touches the car, and his eyes show a dream of materialistic acquisition and consumer fetishism with a close-up shot for few seconds. Ishaan and Omkar are shown with more bromantic mood where Ishaan asks Omkar when he becomes a political leader what would he do with so much power, and his reply was what Ishaan had expected. He says he would open a cricket academy in Ishaan's name. The exchange of gaze between them depicts a plutonic love and care authenticating homosocial bromance between two neo-liberal males, where affection and intimacy is more than mere physical affinity.

5. Taking Risks as Masculine Characteristics

We have discussed the risk factors amongst the three protagonists, but here the explanation about the risk factor of this natural bond between a teacher and his disciple will be discussed later when the politico-religious scenes take place. Here what is important to note is the affinity between Ali and Ishaan, that has several dynamics of the society — beyond male homosocial compassion. It is an innate love for hidden natural skillful art that they are attached to each other for. After the doctor's words are delivered, the camera moves in deep focus on Ali and Omkar are shown sitting near pictures of Goddesses pasted on a wall, proving that Ali is God-gifted. The stoic courage, the equation of physical prowess and moral strength⁹ (Whitson, 1990: 305) between the two are significant to be noted here. But the movements of camera from high-angle to low-angle (as required) proliferate the gaps of masculinity on muscle power and morality. Very interestingly, when the challenge of six sixes in an over between Ishaan and Ali takes place; as a mute spectator one comes across the differences of idealism of friendship between Ishaan, Omkar and Govind. Ishaan was the bowler, while Omkar plays the wicketkeeper, and Govind becomes the umpire. With the first six hits the boundary, jaws of the entire on-lookers fall. Ishaan's masculinity is challenged openly with immediate effect, and Omkar keeps his sympathetic gaze upon Ishaan, while Govind seems very excited to see Ishaan lose the battle of his exuberant impulsiveness. This excitement of Govind reaches the pinnacle when the third six is scored. The angst of defeat is seen in Ishaan's eyes as

well as Omkar. This symbolic interactionism¹⁰ (Whitson, 1990: 312) between the three protagonists of the film can be equated to gender performativity and social restrictions of intermingling of the trio in a hegemonic framework of homosocial male relationships.

Now taking risk factors for Govind is not shown in Omkar, where Govind thinks him to be pessimistic. This conversation erupts when Govind plans to buy another shop at a new mall which was under construction — Navrangpura Mall. Govind's insistence of buying a shop in the mall is a live example of globalization taking a shape of localization and occupying the infrastructural development of the place. The differences between two friends of the same group are a normal and natural depiction of love, as love cannot be hegemonic in its depiction when masculine friendships are considered. Rather in simple words, Omkar's love for Ishaan is more of a homosocial bromantic kind, while with Govind is more masculine friendship, where physical intimacy is lesser. Intruding between them, the political cadre, Mamaji, comes and exhibits a power game on the subtle divisional tact of using religion as the main armor to instigate the three to plunge into the polemics of patriarchal socio-political scenario. Soon a scene is portrayed where a loaded pistol which Mamaji brings to show that in politics self-defense mechanism needs to be applied all the time. Ishaan with inquisitive curiosity takes the pistol to have a look, and in one frame where Mamaji is trying to persuade Omkar, Ishaan points the loaded pistol at Mamaji and Govind with amusing shock exclaims out. Mamaji leaves with his pistol and Omkar, and Ishaan is shown once again to share the same intimacy where their mental vibes being well-matched and seemingly appears as inter-related.

6. Sexuality in teacher-student relationship

Govind's heterosexual inclination is shown with perfection when he is being requested by Ishaan to teach his sister. Mathematics, as the entrance test is drawing closer, and Govind had once scored cent percent in the subject. The teacher-student relationship begins with sexual innuendoes of eye contacts and both verbal and non-verbal communications. His sexual affinity is portrayed as an ingredient of Bollywood commercial movies, as the film's main theme is male friendship in contemporary liberalized world and without heroines, film lose the face of commercial success. That is one of the reasons to introduce Vidya as the heroine or sub-narrative of the main narrative. The other and most important reason for showing Govind with a heroine is to maintain a balance and not questioning the homosocial affinity of the three and bringing the other two into a strong plutonic, bromantic relationship. Henceforth from the onset, we see Govind not being very physically close with the other two and maintaining a distance to be tagged in the homosocial frame. Govind and Vidya's relationship seems to be more of the liberalized structure that may have laid down foundations of emotional bond to physical intimacy — more to do with rationalism and eroticism, while Ishaan and Ali's love is to do with a traditional foundation of surrealism and socialism. Their liberal structures are different one gives space for eroticism, the other gives space for plutonic one. One deals with freedom and breaking conventional thoughts, while the other enhances faith and trust upon the traditional norms.

Let's now discuss the other of teacher-student relationship — of Ishaan and Ali. There is much above masculine affinity; it is an innate bond of emotions and divine plutonic love and trust of one unto another. At every sequence of crises depending on each other is very well portrayed throughout the movie. Ishaan calls him 'goti-master' with such adulations that Ali loves that address from Ishaan. Ali Hashmi, a young adolescent kid belonging to a different area or 'pol' and a different religion, is introduced here as one of the prominent protagonists and meta-narrator. Bringing into a different tinge to the story is the main purpose of such a character. From the very beginning where Ishaan and Ali compete against each other through scoring sixes, a distinctive attachment between the two germinates. Being a young kid challenging adult Ishaan seems to be a clash of masculinities of several degrees — one of age, the other of experience, and the last is of religion. The feeling of superiority and ego clashes here are depicted through these three tropes on the onset, but soon these feelings are replaced by compassion, concern, care and once again the risk factor. Ishaan also has compassion for cricket as Ali is shown to have, but the acquisition of the skills for the game is different — while Ishaan acquired through rigorous practice and experiences and Ali has been 'god-gifted'. Ishaan realizes this innate talent of Ali when he scores three back-to-back sixes in Ishaan's ball but fainted on the fourth stroke. They take him to the nearby doctor, who says, "*Kuch log god-gifted hote hai, Ishaan. Tez aati huyee gendh bhi unhe football dekhti hai. Ab isse aap hyper-reflection bolo, hand-eye coordination ya fir uparwale ki den...*" [Some people are God-gifted, Ishaan. Even when a fast ball comes, it seems like a big football to them. Now you call it hyper-reflection, hand-eye coordination, or divine blessings...] These words of the doctor take Ishaan's mind into a different paradigm. He starts feeling concerned about Ali and care for him till the climax of the film.

Yet at another frames, both Ishaan and Ali exchange the same affectionate glances of a blissful and divine relationship one while Ali is making a *rangoli* in the style of their cricket in a Hindu festival, and Ishaan comes to pick him up at the mosque where Ali usually goes for his prayers. But the best frame, whereas a cricket coach, Ishaan, trains the students. The students most of them being Hindu makes fun of Ali and teases him with mischievous pranks, Ali wants to leave the training little early that day as his 'goti' (glass balls) tournament is to be held. Ishaan gets furious as they are all trying to improvise his off-side skills of batting and in argument, Ishaan pushes Ali, and he falls. He runs away from the field. But the scene where Ishaan comes for forgiveness to Ali, the shots show the director's and the whole unit's perfect representation of cinematic craft. Ishaan's convincing, emotional outburst to Ali's father, Naseer, played by Alok Basra, depicts his exaltation of joy talking about Ali's cricket performance. When he comes to Ali's room, his pleading voice modulations erupt with such finesse of pure love that it transcends their attachment to a spiritual level. The ancient *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) relationship seems to be portrayed in the contemporary liberalized world where no relationships can be that intense and pure. The surrealistic scene of forgiveness is done with perfection. A blue glass ball comes out of an ajar door along with a ray of light representing hope and trust between the two. The scene that follows is an innocent and tranquil exchange of glances intensifying their bond. Ishaan looks with pleading love and repentance, while Ali looks with sheer faith and trust of pardoning gaze. The scene depicts certain purity which is hard to believe in neo-liberal world where love is a fine balance of profit and loss and depends on technological advancements. This scene seems to be the pinnacle of plutonic love between two males, crossing the boundaries of religion, age, and class.

7. Framing Religion, Cricket and Politics as Homosocial Affinity

The most important portrayal of homosocial masculinity in the film is the comparison of politics with cricket, and both are tainted with religion in the film. The three protagonists are interlinked with both. Politics and religion are directly linked to Omkar. His father is the chief priest in the temple of the locality, while his maternal uncle is a political cadre. Ishaan has been a cricket player till the district level, while Govind as being the person to tabulate them into a formal boundary – Sabarmati Sports Club. To open the shopping-cum-coaching center and even to buy a shop in the new mall, the main fund comes from the political activist uncle. Now the most important factor to proliferate the politico-religious context of the film, the director and the writers of the screenplay team thoughtfully crafted the story with two major historical events that becomes so evidential about the vividness of its storyline that it almost appeared realistic to the spectators. One of them is the earthquake that stroke Gujarat on 26 January 2001 and the other is the Godhra riot that broke out in 27 February 2002. The film, thus, makes spectators very emotionally vulnerable to every scene after that.

Both these incidents create an atmosphere in the film of tensions and trauma that pertains to one's emotional vulnerability of being swayed away easily for each other. We see that happening with our protagonists, who get devastated and concerned about their losses and protection of self-ambitions. The natural calamity destroys the city's infrastructure drastically. Govind's shattering dreams are well-captured when he wakes up to the earthquake. He completes his social duties well by saving his mother first, and then rushing to have a glimpse of his upcoming shop in the new mall, under construction. As expected from the outcome of the calamity, his shop collapses along with his dreams and aspirations of rising higher in the ladder of his income source. The expressions that the director displays seem so natural, and Govind's enactment makes one feel the turbulences of his devastation. Soon to accompany by his side, Ishaan and Omkar come. Their expressions were expectedly understandable as both were not much materialistic and depended upon Govind to look after all the nitty-gritty of their joint venture. Seeing their collapsed dream, the director portrays each frame thoughtfully. Soon Ishaan's concern about his dream is depicted when he goes to Ali's home. The entire family looks for his helping hand to take them out of the rubbles of destruction, both emotionally and rationally. But Ishaan succumbs to the emotional frame much faster than the rationality. This is where the local politics enter vigorously gushing into the narrative structure of the film.

The political party of Bittoo Joshi uses religion to exaggerate their rival embattled factions¹¹ (Hunt, 2012: 223) against religious borderlines. After few frames, the political dynamics of utilizing religion as trope to win battles of election become obvious and the director doesn't leave any stone unturned when this religious rivalry is portrayed. Joshi and his political cadres build up camps for Hindus only to showcase their ideology profoundly. Sharing the self-centered concern for Hindu families in crisis becomes main intention of meeting each wounded person in the hospitals personally. Here the director uses his magnanimous skill to depict the germination of ideological differences between Omkar and Ishaan. At one frame, Ishaan takes Ali's family and the other Muslim families to the camp for sheltering them with necessities of life. But the ideological differences between the two crops up with political coloring of religion, Omkar supporting his uncle as being obliged to do so for getting the financial benefit to start their joint venture and Ishaan supporting Ali

and his community for not letting Ali's *god-gifted* cricket talent go in vain. In pursuit of acquiring badges/tags for sheltering them into the camp, a scuffle between the political cadres and Ishaan breaks out. Omkar tries to intervene in between, but outrageous Ishaan pushes him away. For the first time, a fight between the best friends is portrayed in the film. Although Ishaan doesn't succeed in acquiring the badges/tags, but his impulsive futility ruins and collapses him, which he overlooks as his mind is filled with avenging rage. The political party very shrewdly draws the dividing line of factions between the emotional homosocial bondage of the two best friends, as it didn't fit into the selfish political developments in their advancement of non-patriarchal rights based on their religious ideology. So, using the religious tapestry for foundational aspects¹² (Hunt, 2012, 223) forged by Bitto Joshi create rivalry and emotional disputes to win over Omkar, as he was the son of the chief temple priest of the locality. As a drastic consequence, the intimate homosocial bondage between them gets into tenterhooks and subtle divisions start germinating. All the frames that follow in the narrative structure so far in the movie scuttle out from its paradigmatic form and create another meta-narrative within the structure in a syntagmatic manner.

Indian politico-religious scenario is so penetrative that sometimes they bring down the whole social system and dismantle all the conventions and norms. Here the director does the same with his film and the best friends — Ishaan and Omkar — turn out as victims of such aggressive approach. After the scuffle at the camp, Vidya informs Govind to take care of his friends for their homosocial unity is at stake. Govind tries to persuade Omkar, but he becomes emotionally shattered as it was in front of public. His male ego gets hurt, which have never been an issue between him and Ishaan. His reaction for the unison with Ishaan proves his egoism devouring him slowly. At such a juncture, the director craftily uses the audiography and dialogue to balance the meta-narrative of his film. Omkar says, "*Ek jhaat badabar launde ke liye sabke samne bhed gaye mujhse... Toh soch usse jab teri aur Vidya ke bare mein pata chaelga kya karega?*" [For a trivial and insignificant boy, he fought with me in public... Then think, how will he react when he comes to know about you and Vidya?] Before this outburst, he still confesses that he knows Ishaan much better than Govind and so he doesn't need anyone's intervention to understand Ishaan's emotions. This utterance of Omkar still shows that his emotional affinity hasn't perished at all, but when his masculine ego got hurt in public, he could not take that in the same spirit. In simple terms, Omkar's bromantic emotions gets in a diabolic frame of mind — one side his homosocialism and on the other his masculine ego.

Few frames later, we see another proliferation of the clash of egoism vs. bromanticism. During the crisis of natural calamity, Ishaan had taken some money from their sports shop and given to Ali's home for repairing work, and it happened in such a situation that he didn't get the opportunity to inform his friends. When he comes back to the shop, Govind was in tumultuous mindset. As he sees Ishaan, he asks him if he has seen the money, but Ishaan keeps quiet, as his expression had a sense of penance and apology. His sacramental emotions were to such an extent that he couldn't even see eye to eye with Govind for such a gross mistake. He confesses his impulsive blunder, for he was aware that there is a financial dagger hanging on their heads as their business capital was acquired through a loan from the Hindu political party. When Omkar hears about that, he doesn't even turn to see his best friend and comments derogatory abusive word for Ali — *teda* (dissident). The argumentative emotional outburst of both at this situation of crises becomes obvious — Ishaan is frustrated because Omkar didn't come as his refuge which he always yearned for in time of such devastations, and Omkar remains emotionally hurt as Ishaan has raised his hand on him in public. They come to a context where verbal arguments turn into quarrel as Ishaan supported humanitarian ideology, while Omkar supported the religious ideology. But Govind comes in between as catalyst and tries to pacify the situation, and soon gets annoyed at the same degree Omkar was pissed off with. Ishaan tries to submit himself for his fault, but still a ray of hope sparkles in his eyes as he was sure that the forthcoming India-Australia cricket series will help them to revive again. Instead of looking into the emotional affinity and homosocial attachment of Ishaan, Govind remains as prudent and pragmatic as he was portrayed from the very beginning. His rationality of the immediate situation fails to investigate Ishaan's impulsive gaffe, and he literally pushes him out of the shop. Ishaan's expression while leaving shows his finesse of talent and the skillful creativity of the director. He looks at them with a sense of defeat, loss, denial, remorse and sorrow, but still the twinkling eyes had some hope within himself, and he was pretty sure after the crisis fades out the religious and political tarsal, the ideological differences of his friends would erase off and their bromantic masculine depiction of homosociality would revive again.

Ishaan's hope turns out in a positive note in the film, despite the cruel hands of Hindu political party smashes the social affinity of the three friends. Omkar is dragged into political activism in full-fledged tenor. As the India-Australia series begins, Mr. Urvashi Mehta comes with a proposal for supply of sports equipment and coaching for school. When asked for a presentation by them, Ishaan denies accompanying Govind for he is busy in watching the match. In fact, Ishaan

simply was trying to confront once again with the same denial and remorse angst borne in him. The brother and sister lands up in a squabble at home regarding the cricket match telecasted on the television. In spur of the moment, Ishaan pulls Vidya's hairs and is interrupted from further scuffle by their father, Jagdish. Jagdish slaps him tightly and makes him realize that Ishaan has lost his capability to stand up alone and prove his caliber to the world. Ishaan understands the dearth of his emotional weakness, and the director very well captures this masculine trait of emotional vulnerability in the context of bromantic and homosocial roles of men in Indian society. When Ishaan feels he has lost all battles of life, his sister, Vidya comes with the moral and emotional boosting dialogues to inspire his brother, "*Come on bhailu, gussa toh itna gussa aur jab maaf ka time aaya, toh itni kanjoosi! Achhe se ja kar sorry bolo maan jayega... Fan hai woh aapka... Hum sab fan hai aapke. [Come on brother, when you are angry, you get so high and when it comes to forgiveness, you become miser! With adoration go to him and say sorry, he will pardon you...he is your fan, we all are your fan.]*" He does follow the instruction. He goes for forgiveness to Omkar in the temple, where Omkar refuse to forgive him and rather says that he is very self-centered. This hurts Ishaan again and he emotionally breaks down, but still doesn't give up his hope. He lends his helping hand to Govind for preparing the presentation in the school. The light falling from a high angle on Ishaan's face depicts his ray of hope aesthetically. Soon the scenario changes into positivity, as Ishaan had faith in his emotions. India wins the series, and all again become friend. Omkar forgets his grievances and grudges and goes to get his Ishaan back into his life. The celebration of joy begins, and Omkar comes to congratulate Ishaan for his hope into blooming back their strong masculine affinity. Once again, the homosocial relationship between Ishaan and Omkar rejuvenates. Ishaan saying that he missed him a lot, Omkar hugs him and takes him upon his lap and participates in the celebration of winning the series. The director purposely brings here cricket as the main trope of his narrative structure to overrule the dynamics of political activism. The film shows that in India how fanaticism defunct all social conventions when cricket comes into the scenario, all ideologies, all differences, all hatred — everything fades in front of it, especially when India wins. Celebration and festivity become a social character. Despite everyone in the film is aware of the politics that happens in higher level cricket, Ishaan is a victim of that. Through their presentation about sports in the school makes both Ishaan and Govind become much closer than on the onset of the film.

The inter-club cricket tournament begins and at the same time Omkar gets busy with his forthcoming election political campaigning. Both the sides, we see a coincidental religion being used as trope for both cricket and politics in *Kai Po Che*. As Bollywood always comes with a fixed formula of making good win over evil, we see that happening. Ali becomes the superstar in cricket as he leads the Sabarmati Sports Club win all the matches of the tournament, and on the other his father supporting the rival party of Omkar and his Mamaji loses the local election. This strengthens the ideological differences between Omkar and Ishaan once again — his politics of Hinduism fail to even take refuge for his bromance with Ishaan. He still obstinately believes in the rivalry and enmity of the Muslims. Then comes the Godhra riot, a realistic incidental occurrence that proliferates Omkar's orthodox abhorrence towards the Muslims. Bitto Joshi's party arranges a *shobha yatra* for their *kar sewaks*, a train journey to Ayodhya in Sabarmati express for all the Hindu families who are supporting their Hindu political ideology. Bittoo subtly splits Omkar drastically when he makes him agree to send his parents for this journey. On the onset, Omkar's dad wasn't very keen as he didn't like the idea of his son joining the political party, but when the journey begins, he forgives him for his mistake. While returning, two coaches of the train were burnt down around 8:00 in the morning at Godhra on 27 February 2002. 59 people including women and children were dead and many injured as depicted in the film. Camouflaging this real event with fictional episode, the director makes Omkar's parents die in this incident as the coach they were travelling – S6 – happens to be one of the coaches that was set ablaze. Omkar is totally shattered and takes refuge under his political uncle. When Ishaan and Govind come for giving him emotional and moral support, his political uncle stomps their attachment by intruding into that homosocial space among the three friends directly. The scenes of both these themes running one after the other chronologically have been depicted very well semiotically — when Ishaan and Govind enter their reflection is shown on the glass of the table, signifying the emotional vulnerability in such a masculine domain of politics cannot be overt and needs to be closeted, while his uncle's entry to the frame is more patriarchal in structure as his age and power claims him to be. The director uses two different shots here to portray vulnerability and sternness of masculinity.

The consequences of this Godhra rampage take a communal turn and riots because of religion emerge. Violence and sense of fear crop up at this juncture at every nook and corner of the city. Ishaan was still concerned about his dreams on Ali, which compels him to land up at Ali's home, amidst the politico-religious turmoil. Ishaan knows it well that he will not be able to confront his dreams once again in life if the riots devour his Ali. A sense of fear emerges in his heart, too. He was aware that Omkar won't be by his side as he has been politically instigated for revenge against the whole community who killed his parents. So as a result, Ishaan seeks shelter under Govind, the pragmatic person till now. But very intelligently, the scriptwriters make him another epitome of emotional victim. He comes as refuge for Ishaan despite

all communal tensions in the narrative plot. Ishaan calls him and says, “*Achha sun tu aa sakta hai kya iha pe? Thoda dar sa lag raha hai, yaar. [Well, can you come over here? I’m feeling bit scared dear.]*” The atonement carries a sense of fear of Ishaan’s emotional trait, seeing him for the first time in such condition, Govind couldn’t deny his support. The portrayal of his fear is shown in his eyes and his heavy trembling breaths at a deep focus shot. Govind’s prudence changes in front of such gory sequences. He, too, becomes emotionally weak. Somehow, he manages to reach Ishaan, and their exchange of conversation depicts both being engulfed with terror. Sequentially the scenes that follow are filled with violence and bloodshed. Slaughtering men and destroying the material properties with closed grouping portray political homosociality. Communal terrorism breaks out here in the film and the defeated Hindu political party overpowers their rivals. With a scuffle between Ali’s father and Omkar’s uncle, the political uncle succumbs to death in the hands of Naseer. Omkar eyewitnesses that and his fury of taking revenge reaches the pinnacle and decides to kill him. Omkar enters Naseer’s house with few men to take revenge with the same pistol that once Ishaan had held pointing it towards Bittoo Joshi. Meanwhile, Naseer along with Ali comes to Ishaan for saving their lives. Ishaan tells them to go upstairs and take shelter, giving them his phone. The director re-introduces the sub-plot of clandestine affair between Govind and Vidya. Ishaan starts handling Govind’s phone for informing others, but he comes to know about their sexual relationship. He gets annoyed at him and starts thrashing him. The mutual accommodation of Ishaan and Govind in such a turbulent destruction collapse for few seconds. The director makes use of low light in all these frames of communal tensions. The dim light makes the shot perfect as Ishaan’s eyes glitter with an olio of betrayal of his faith and fear. Soon they are intervened by avenging Omkar. Ishaan forgets his personal differences with Govind and tries to stop him by denials of Ali and his father’s presence in the home. But gets collided when Vidya calls up at Ishaan’s phone, the bromantic attachment gets neglected here, despite Ishaan tries to use it to save his dreams on Ali. He tries to plead Omkar to let them go, but his revenging emotion overpowers his homosocial affinity and friendship with Ishaan. This makes both victim in the hands of religion in politics and cricket — one taking revenge for political destruction and losing his family blaming it on religious rivalry; and the other trying to protect his aspirations of playing first-class cricket which he couldn’t do himself and through his student’s talent who becomes a victim of political religiosity. Omkar is shown powering over his revenge and doesn’t even hesitate to fight with his best friend. Ishaan doesn’t give up his dreams, even. They struggle through action-packed frames, and the climax of the film reaches. Omkar on pointing his gun at Ali and his father shots and by mistake it hits Ishaan right through his chest. Ishaan succumbs to the injury and dies, proving his point of homosocial attachment for Omkar at much higher ground than any kind of relationship in the film, that he can give up his life for his friends. The pinnacle of such masculine affinity among same-sex friends breaks all the conventions of social norms regarding masculine friendship, almost trending the Jai-Veeru ideology of bromance in *Sholay* (1975).

The outrageous music of actions stops at once with Ishaan’s death, only a tenor of sadness flows at the background and few utterances, like *Bhaiya* from Ali and *Ish* from Govind, take over the whole shot both at high and low angles, accordingly. Very interestingly, the director uses the light as green through the entire climax from the death of Bittoo Joshi to Ishaan, probably with the thought that green symbolizes the sacred color of the Muslims and the house happens to be of that community; but more than that the director wanted to prove his point that homosocial attachments are far beyond religion, whether that is of Omkar and Ishaan, or Ishaan and Ali. The end follows with typical Bollywood style by showing Govind and Vidya getting married and having a son, whose name they keep as Ishaan, and embracing him Omkar tries to erase of his penitence and repentance through sobbing in front of Vidya in public. Ali is shown playing his debut international match with Australia as an opener proving Ishaan’s dream a reality.

8. Conclusion :

Kai Po Che becomes the best representation of the neo-liberal mind-set of men and their relationships with other men. We rarely come across such portrayals of homosocial bromance and friendship in Bollywood. The film challenges the social conventions of restricting masculine friendship as emotional attachment to certain periphery of not being physical and emotional in their approach. It succeeds in depicting the secularization of same-sex relationship and proves the point of recognizing today’s masculine demands and its fulfilment, as they can break all norms set-up before and create their own conventional pattern for relationship, according to their desires. Ishaan, Omkar and Govind depending upon each other and intertwining them through other characters, like Ali, Vidya and Bittoo Joshi makes the film an example of homosociality and its existence amongst masculine relationship. Both politics and cricket being used as tropes to represent homosocial masculinity, the director did a perfect justification to the idea of representing masculinity in this form and chose a narrative structure that overlaps with old and new traditions of social portrayals of masculine

attachments, that is why he purposely uses cricket and religion as the main themes for both contemporary political and religious scenario and involvement of men in them.

End Notes:

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