

**An abstract of the dissertation entitled Representation of Queerness in
*Chandupottu and Njan Marykutty***

By

Amalu Justin

B.A. English Language and Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

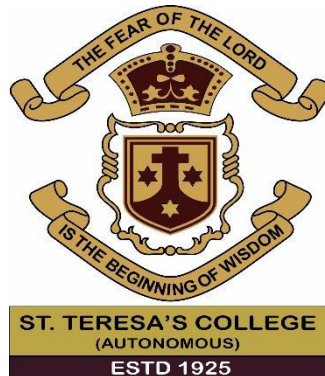
Reg. No. AB16ENG003

2016-2019

Supervising Teacher: Ms. Arthasery Magdalene

Queer theory is associated with homosexuals, bisexuals, transgenders, lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex bodies, multiple identities, gender ambiguity and reassignment surgery. It holds that individual sexuality is a fluid, fragmented, and dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities. This is applied in the comparison of two films: *Chandupottu* and *Njan Marykutty*. *Chandupottu* is a 2005 Malayalam film directed by Lal Jose. The film documents the character of Radhakrishnan, a cross-dressing man from a family of fishermen who was brought up as a girl. On the other hand, *Njan Marykutty* is a 2018 Malayalam film directed by Ranjith Sankar. It portrays the attempt of a trans woman called Marykutty to realize her true orientation in a society that stigmatizes gender transformation. These two films attempt to educate the audience on the issues and trauma faced by the members of the LGBTQ community and also to explain the difference between a transgender and a transsexual.

**REPRESENTATION OF QUEERNESS IN *CHANDUPOTTU* AND
*NJAN MARYKUTTY***



*Project submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature*

By

AMALU JUSTIN
Register No. AB16ENG003
III B.A. English Literature
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam
Cochin-682 011
Kerala

Supervisor

Ms. ARTHASERY MAGDALENE
Department of English
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam
Kerala

March 2019

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project entitled “Representation Of Queerness In *Chandupottu* And *Njan Marykutty*,” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Arthasery Magdalene, Lecturer-in-charge, Department of English.

Amalu Justin

Register No. AB16ENG003

III B.A. English Literature

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2019

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Representation Of Queerness in *Chandupottu* and *Njan Marykutty*,” by Amalu Justin is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Ms. Arthasery Magdalene

Department of English

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sajimol Augustine, Principal, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam for her help and support.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Supervisor Ms. Arthasery Magdalene, Department of English, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), without whose guidance and encouragement this project would never have been completed.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Beena Job, Head of the Department of English, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) and all the faculty members for their encouragement and support.

Amalu Justin

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|----|
| | Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1 | Understanding Queer Theory | 4 |
| Chapter 2 | Queerness in <i>Chandupottu</i> | 13 |
| Chapter 3 | Queerness in <i>Njan Marykutty</i> | 20 |
| | Conclusion | 26 |
| | Select Bibliography | 28 |

Introduction

Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies. Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorization of 'queerness' itself. Queer theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual activities and identities. Whereas gay/lesbian studies focuses its inquiries into natural and unnatural behaviour with respect to homosexual behaviour, queer theory expands its focus to encompass any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls into normative and deviant categories. Italian feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis coined the term 'queer theory' for a conference she organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990.

Queerness has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex bodies, multiple identities, gender ambiguity and reassignment surgery. Queer theory holds that individual sexuality is a fluid, fragmented, and dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities and it may vary at different points during one's life.

The acronym, LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The term has been in use since 1990s. LGBT describes distinct groups within the gay culture. The early initiatives for people who were gay focused only on men. So, in an attempt to draw attention to issues specific to gay woman, 'lesbian' is often listed first. People who are bisexuals and transgenders have been left out in research studies and initiatives. It is now considered standard to include these two groups along with gay men and lesbians. A popular variant adds the letter 'Q' for those who identify themselves as queer. The abbreviation LGBTQ has been in use since 1996.

Queer is an umbrella term which really implies “not straight”, more than it implies what exactly someone’s sexuality might be. The term ‘queer’ was originally derogatory, used to stigmatize male and female same-sex love as deviant and unnatural. Since the 1990s, however, it has been adopted by gays and lesbians themselves as a term to identify a way of life and an area of scholarly inquiry.

The first chapter deals with the development of queer theory. The theory first emerged in the 18th century. The term ‘queer’ includes homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders. Queer theory focuses to destabilize heteronormativity. Queer is not concerned with the norm of the society. It states that heterosexuality is not the only sexuality that individuals can possess. Queer theory supports the so called ‘deviation’.

The second chapter gives a detailed description about the queer aspects in the movie *Chandupottu*. *Chandupottu* is a 2005 Malayalam film directed by Lal Jose, written by Benny P. Nayarambalam, and produced by Lal. The story is about a man named Radhakrishnan who was brought up as a girl by his grandmother. The character of Radhakrishnan, a cross-dressing man from a family of fishermen is well documented in the film. It showcases the challenging situations such marginalised people have to face in their lives which demands a transformation of their sexual identity.

The third chapter gives a detailed description about the queer aspects in the movie *Njan Marykutty*. *Njan Marykutty* is a 2018 Malayalam-language drama film written and directed by Ranjith Sankar and co-produced with Jayasurya. The film stars Jayasurya as a transsexual named Marykutty. It portrays the attempt of a

transsexual woman called Marykuty to realize her true orientation in a society that stigmatizes gender transformation.

These two films attempt to educate the audience on various issues faced by LGBTQ community and also the plot of the these two films explains the difference between a transgender and a transsexual. In doing so, these films showcase the trauma that families go through, as well as the emotional and physical trauma that members of this community undergo at the hands of society and governmental authorities.

CHAPTER – 1

UNDERSTANDING QUEER THEORY

Since the early 1990s, the term ‘queer’ has been taken up to signify a wide-ranging and unmethodical resistance to normative models of sex, gender, and sexuality. Queer theory is often used to designate the combined area of gay and lesbian studies, together with the theoretical and critical writings about all modes of queerness such as cross dressings, bisexuality and transsexuality. The term ‘queer’ was originally humiliating, used to stigmatize male and female same sex love as deviant and unnatural. Since the early 1990s, the term has been widely appropriated into scholarly as well as common language. Philosophers, activists, and critics like Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig have suggested that a supposedly straight culture might seem queer from the perspective of socio-sexual outsiders. Queer readings involve ironic reconstructions of traditional gender roles, reimagining supposedly heterosexual characters in literature as gay/lesbian lovers, and making formerly marginal forms of pleasure and desire into perfectly acceptable mainstream ones. Queer theory attempts to dismantle dominant notions of identity, sexuality and literature, all the while keeping in mind its agenda which is to eradicate discrimination, oppression and ostracism carried out on the basis of one’s identity.

The term queer is necessarily undetermined, taking on different and sometimes contradictory meanings in different utterances. Sometimes queer is synonymous with lesbian and gay, for which it becomes a convenient shorthand. At other times, it refers to a generational or even fashion-led distinction between old-style lesbians and gays and new-style sexual outlaws. Yet again, it can signify a union of non-normative sexual identities, most often ideally rather than materially realized, which might

include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. In other deployments, queer denotes not an identity but the taking of a critical distance from the identity-based categories of modern sexuality—in particular a distance from the identity politics central to traditional understandings of the lesbian and gay communities: “instead of theorizing queer in terms of its opposition to identity politics, it is more accurate to represent it as ceaselessly interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effects” (Jagose 131–132). This last sense is taken up by queer studies, which uses the term to draw attention to various incoherencies in the supposedly stable and causal relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire.

This use of queer is reformed as new meanings and values are connected with what was once considered a term of homophobic abuse. Even in changed circumstances, the term ‘queer’ is still seen as undignified. The rapid rise of queer as a critical term reveals the remarkable impact it had on the understandings of the cultural and traditional formations of gendered and sexual identities and practices, both in activist and academic circles. Queer theory attempts at transforming the mindset and perspectives of the society on the deviance from the path put by them which is considered as human folly. It enables the society to accept the changes in the behaviour of such marginalised people and consider them as mere human beings and not a different species.

The issues regarding Queer Theory revolve basically around two schools of thought. The first group comprises of ‘essentials’ who believe that homosexuality or any kind of deviance from the normative sexuality is a biologically determined fact of existence, that is, one is born homosexual or transgender. Stories that follow this theme are usually of ‘coming out’ or of the idea that the characters were always different, followed by a discovery of the truth about oneself. Usually the discovery is

described as traumatic or anxiety-ridden since the individual has acquired the lesson from parents, peer groups or other social groups that homosexual or trans-sexual behaviour/love is bad and unnatural. This form of discovery is called 'homosexual panic' where the individual recognizes that his/her sexuality is aberrant from what society perceives to be the acceptable form of sexuality and sexual identity, but finds himself/herself helpless to do anything about it. The other school that could be called the 'anti-essentials' believes that force of social conditioning, not some amorphous or unverifiable essence, determines one's sexual identity. Sexual identities are a matter not of some 'inborn' biological instinct but a result of an mixture of socio-cultural factors, dependent on specific times and culture.

The suspicion that normative models of identity will never be adequate to the representational work demanded of them provides the conditions of intelligibility not only for thinking about the emergence of queer theory from the identity-based models of the feminist and lesbian-gay movements but also for understanding the twenty-first century and frequent announcements of the death of queer theory, most significantly from radical transgender perspectives that cast queer as complacently partisan, committed to notions of performativity that refuse cross-gender identifications in anything other than a parodic or figurative register.

Primarily through an extended reading of Butler but with reference to de Lauretis and Sedgwick among others, Jay Prosser notes that queer theory's foundational texts have figuratively relied on the concept of transgender—an identification across genders—in order to destabilize received understandings of sexual and gendered identities. Queer theory's annexation of transgender for its own critical project has, Prosser notes, tended to recuperate it "as the sign of homosexuality, homosexuality's definitive gender style" (30). Even when queer is

understood not as a synonym for homosexuality but as a term that denotes the performativity, non-referential, and incoherence of the dominant sex-gender system, the queer theoretical valorisation of transgender works against the legitimization of the specifically transsexual subject:

What gets dropped from transgender in its queer deployment to signify subversive gender performativity is the value of the matter that often most concerns the transsexual: the narrative of becoming a biological man or a biological woman (as opposed to the performative of effecting one) in brief and simple the materiality of the sexed body (32).

Noting that transgender negotiates its significance in delicate relation to both "transsexuality's investment in the materiality of sex and a queer refiguring of gender into sexuality," Prosser suggests that queer theory pay more attention to the lived differences of the constituencies it might be expected to represent (176).

Similarly calling for a sensitivity toward the material practices of queer sex, not simply their allegorical formulation, Jacob Hale references the North American leatherdyke scene in order to argue that queer theory should complicate its own, less nuanced models of sex, gender, and sexuality by studying those elaborated within specific sexual subcultures:

Here's the lesson, in a nutshell: if, minimally, you don't understand the personals and other sexually explicit expressions of desire in queer and transgendered sex radical/leather queer publications (including homegrown ones), you don't understand the margins, the edges, of our dominant cultural expressions of sex, gender, and sexuality.... if you

don't understand gendered life on the edge, you don't understand gendered life at the centre (118).

While these recent debates about the relevance of queer theory to marginalized sex-gender identities and practices are sometimes represented as territorial disputes, queer theory's reluctance to specify its proper object means that its future directions might be productively determined by its present tense omissions or paradigmatic weaknesses.

A number of queer theorists have adopted the deconstructive mode of dismantling the key binary oppositions of western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and natural/unnatural, by which a spectrum of diverse things is forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power and centrality, while the second is derogated, subordinated and marginalized (Abrams 328).

Queer reading has become the term for interpretive activities that undertake to subvert and confound the established verbal and cultural oppositions and boundaries between male/female, homosexual/heterosexual and natural/unnatural. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that “gender is not an innate or an essential identity but a contingent and variable construct that mandates a ‘performance’, that is, a particular set of practices which an individual acquires from the discourse of his/her social era and strives to enact” (22).

While speaking about the identity of a person in terms of his/her sexuality, Butler points out that:

The coherence and continuity of the person are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. As far as the identity is assured through stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, if the person in question fails to conform to the norms of cultural intelligibility, the person is considered incoherent and discontinuous (23).

Another way in which political activism has historically informed queer theory can be seen in the influential critiques of the identity politics that customarily underpin traditional leftist social movements. They argued for the importance of thinking about the inextricable ways in which race inflects sexuality and vice versa, a perspective that continues to both inform and challenge queer theorizing in important ways.

So far as it assumed that sexuality was determined principally or solely by the gender of one's sexual object choice, lesbian and gay identity politics naturalized the dominant system of sexual classification and its unexamined reliance on the reified categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This model was challenged in different ways from the perspective of various non-normative sexual identities or practices that had been further treated as psychologically abnormal by the legitimization of lesbian and gay paradigms. In arguing for the validity and significance of various marginalized sexual identities and practices, articulated around such things as bisexuality, transvestism, transsexuality, pornography, and sadomasochism, such critiques pushed for recognition of what Gayle Rubin describes as "a pluralistic sexual ethics" organized around "a concept of benign sexual variation" (15).

From the perspectives of racially marked and sexually non-normative subjects, it can be seen that the very processes of stabilization, consolidation, and mass recognition that enabled such marginalised people to represent themselves as a relatively coherent and unified community generated disaffection among other populations newly disenfranchised from the struggle for sexual rights. The limitations or even failures of identity much debated across the 1980s largely hinge on the inevitable insufficiency of any single descriptive rubric to articulate the complex affective structures that constitute identity. Frequently enough, the initial demand for recognition of marginalized or plural identity categories was rearticulated as dissatisfaction with the categories of identification themselves. This questioning of the efficacy of identity categories for political intervention was a major inspiration for queer theory.

The self-evidence of identity has also been profoundly questioned in post structural thought with its decentring of the Cartesian subject, the rational and autonomous individual, its emphasis on the plurality of interpretation, and its insistence that there is no outside to the lengthy structures that produce cultural meaning. Destabilizing the common sense assumption that identity is a natural and self-evident characteristic of any human subject, post structuralism is a significant intellectual context for queer theory's anti-identitarian critiques.

Although queer theory is prominently organized around sexuality, its critical pursuit of non-normativity means that it is potentially attentive to any order of difference that participates in the regimes of sexual normalization and deviance. Rather than separating sexuality from other axes of social difference—race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, and so on—queer theory has increasingly structured inquiry into the ways in which various categories of difference inflect and transform each

other, an approach that considers "all the disparate factors comprised in the registration of various social identities and in their adjudication against the standard of social normativity" (Harper 24). A vital strand of this discussion is concerned with the capacity of queer theoretical models to address substantive questions of race and ethnicity in the constitution of the queer subject.

Race-based critiques and activism have long been part of the feminist and lesbian-gay contexts crucial to the evolution of queer theory, particularly in their persistent challenge to the reification of allegedly foundational identities such as women or homosexuals. Recent work on the formation of sexuality alongside race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and diasporic identities challenges queer theory not only to consider the significant ways in which sexual and racial identities are inextricable but also to abandon its self-representation as "the neutral ground on which the identities, cultures, and social movements of people are 'explained'" (Quiroga 135). Reciprocally, queer theoretical models have sometimes effected significant transformations in the traditional formations of academic fields organized by the rubric of racial or ethnic identities.

In *Language and Cinema*, Christian Metz says that "the cinematic institution... is also the mental machinery – another industry – which spectators accustomed to the cinema have internalised historically" (279). Representations of queer have been introduced in literature and literary genres like movies, books, etc. However, cinema and other literary genres' attitude on the queer community has not evolved beyond the cis-gendered perspectives. The film makers and the authors attempt to change the attitude of the people towards the queer people to a great extent. They try to transform the prejudices against such marginalised people into an acceptance of the queer aspects in them through their literary and creative

expressions. Through literature and literary genres like films, they are able to make people aware of the deviances present in society and through this create both understanding and acceptance.

CHAPTER - 2

QUEERNESS IN *CHANDUPOTTU*

Cinema has become an important tool in the study of identities and sexualities today because of its ubiquitous presence as a popular medium and a powerful ideological apparatus negotiating subjectivities and pleasures. *Chandupottu* is a 2005 Malayalam film directed by Lal Jose, written by Benny P. Nayarambalam, and produced by Lal. Dileep, Gopika, Indarjith, Lal, Biju Menon and Bhavana play the lead roles in the film. It is the story of a transvestite who is a man with a woman's mannerisms. The story is an adaptation in part, of a play written by Benny P. Nayarambalam and directed by Rajan P. Dev.

Chandupottu is a typical Malayalam movie that is different for its characterisation of the protagonist as a transvestite. *Chandupottu* is a character-driven film. The film was also conspicuously different from mainstream cinema in its representation of an 'effeminate male' as the central character. The film tried to undermine one of the strongly established conventions of mainstream Malayalam cinema – the machism of the male hero. The movie fights the stigma and prejudices attached to such people. The film was criticized by members of the LGBT community for its distorted portrayal of transgenders.

The character of Radhakrishnan (Dileep), a cross-dressing man from a family of fishermen is well documented in the film. There are certain elements, the so called 'feminine traits' in Radhakrishnan that stop him from being the bold hero in the beginning. Radhakrishnan, the hero of the movie possesses the traits of an effeminate man. Radhakrishnan's grandmother (Sukumari) who had strong desire for a girl grandchild was disappointed and frustrated when he was born. She even refuses to see

the boy and eventually she comes to terms with the situation and Radhakrishnan is brought up as a girl by his grandmother. His grandmother even dresses him like a girl and calls him “Radha” a feminine name. His parents don't intervene, probably fearing the wrath of the grandmother. This induces a kind of femininity in him, even his mannerisms are similar to those of women. Thus he becomes effeminate and timid.

In addition, Divakaran (Lal), Radhakrishnan's father goes to jail for a murder that he accidentally commits leaving Radha to grow up with his femininity and transvestism. Radha is ridiculed by the people in the village but he is not worried. Instead of going for fishing like other men, he chooses to dance. He loves to paint his nails, uses make-up and is always found in the company of girls. He plays their games and also gets teased by the people of the village.

In Omanapuzha, the place where Radhakrishnan was brought up, he was identified as a eunuch. Komban Kumaran (Indrajith) is portrayed as the universal villain in the film. He is the typical macho figure, who is rather proud of this masculinity. The character of Kumaran makes a strong contrast with the character of Radhakrishnan. Radhakrishnan's childhood friend Malu (Gopika) is fancied by Kumaran, a local money lender and the son of the man whom Radha's father had killed.

Divakaran comes back from jail and shockingly realises that his only son is a good for nothing transvestite. He goes through the pain and humiliation of having a son laughed at by society. He is symbolic of the typical patriarchal society. Some hooligans try to molest Radha and his mother advises him that loving and marrying a girl would prove his manhood. Radha discovers that his deep affection for Malu, is actually love. The possessive and jealous feelings of Radha become dominant when

Kumaran tries to woo Malu. The subtle elements of his masculinity is present in his affection for Malu. The conflict in Radhakrishnan's life arises when he falls in love with Malu. Malu loves him back, and they engage in sex. Even that doesn't change his feminine behaviour.

The use of Malu to prove Radhakrishnan's sexual powers is another part of his transformation to 'masculinity'. In mainstream Malayalam cinemas, the male protagonist looks at and desires women as objects, while women are to identify with female figures passively. Woman's own desire and identification with an active figure becomes effaced. The same pattern follows in *Chandupottu*. This portrays the cliché that every man must have a love in his life.

Kumaran and Malu's father, Thurayil Ashan (Rajan P. Dev) become revengeful towards Radha when they come to know about the relationship between Malu and Radha. In his native shore Omanapuzha, Thurayil Ashan who is a local astrologer tells the people that Radha was the reason why they got no catch from the sea and they believed it. He was the bad omen there because of the dilemma about his sexual identity. Kumaran beats up Radha and dumps him in deep sea. But he is saved by Freddy (Biju Menon), a restaurant owner in some distant shore. Freddy takes him to his native place which is more developed and there he is exposed to the outer world. He becomes a blessing in the new island while he was seen as a curse in his native shore Omanapuzha. He lives with Freddy (Biju Menon) and Rosy (Bhavana), who consider him as their dead brother. He soon becomes a part of their family. He is called Krishna, not Radha. He was addressed as a male in the new place. With a change in environment, he also discovers the manly element in him and starts to transform from his female mannerisms slowly. After several attempts by them, he sheds his transvestism but his femininity still hangs on.

Once, he gets involved in a fight with Cleetus (Sreejith Ravi), Cleetus gets severely injured on the head. Radhakrishnan is forced to return to his native place to escape the police. On the way, he discovers that his family, along with his house was brutally burned down by Kumaran. He also learns that in this time, Malu gives birth to his son. He has proved his potency by impregnating her. His arrival in Omanapuzha is followed by a fight with Kumaran. Radhakrishnan proves his physical prowess by overpowering the villain Kumaran. Radhakrishnan emerges victorious over the macho villain and thereby wins his love. However, when Radha sees his child, he vows to raise him as a boy, ripping off the ribbon tied to his hair. This deed of his proves that he does not want his son to go through his experiences in life.

Immediately the sea is loaded with fish and the fishermen get a good catch for the day. This means that he was not a bad omen because of his multiple identities. Instead of going back to teach dance, he decides to go for fishing which was his ancestral job. Perhaps the cycle is completed and then the people see him as a 'real man'. The music 'aellello' identifies with the folklore of the fishermen. It heightens the effect of completeness in a 'real man' who goes to the sea to fend for his family. It is notable that even in the end, Radha keeps his feminine mannerisms, though to a milder range. At the end, Radhakrishnan and other characters are freed from their trauma.

The screenwriter Benny P. Nayarambalam was sensible enough to avoid an immediate switchover to a manly Radha, and to portray his gradual transformation to manhood. He goes into the finest details of the character, bringing out his desire for manhood and the constraints that his past lifestyle imposes on himself.

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty, the critic suggests that cultural texts offer the potential for focus on connotative rather than denotative

meaning to find credible readings hidden in the text. There is also a need to differentiate between the literal representation of femininity and ideological reference. In the movie *Chandupottu*, feminine backdrop is created by various supernatural forces like ‘kadalamma’, various goddesses of Hindu mythology, etc. Frequent allusions to the moon, moonlight, gold, the colour ‘white’ etc. in the movie could easily bring forth associations with peace, purity and hygiene. Such submissive traits symbolises the effeminate character of Radha. Synecdoches such as the bangles, anklets and skirts are also used as a literary tool. These feminine elements chain him down. The relationship between the anklets and the chain prove that he is trapped in the web of femininity.

The mannerisms of the woman man is kept intact through out the film. The use of contrasting characters to bring forth the femininity in Radhakrishnan is seen in the film. The characters like Komban Kumaran and Freddy are the two representatives of the typical macho men used to further certify this. Names like Komban Kumaran, Divakaran, Bhaskaran etc emphasize this. The title *Chandupottu* stands for the colour ‘red’ which symbolises passionate love, seduction, violence, danger, anger and adventure. Radhakrishnan’s strength, vigour, passion, love, pain and virility are communicated through the pervasiveness of the colour ‘red’.

Masculinity implies the conventional images of big guns, big hard muscles, the ability to fight and win, images of aggression, strength and power, which depicts the idea of the “real man”. This “real man” is the macho man. However conventional ideas of this macho man have been fluctuating with time. Once it was Jayan, who undoubtedly was the hallmark for machismo and now he is being mocked at. Today’s unchallenged heroes could also meet with the same fate. The concept of masculinity must be deconstructed if it is to change. Representations of masculinity express the

link between strength and aggression. But aggression is a form of weakness, not strength. Aggression is never a solution to problems.

True strength comes from perseverance, rationality and ability to deal with situation in a calm and fair manner. Scholars suggest integrity and equality as masculine virtues. Men must begin to learn that true masculinity may not be particularly true after all and that they too are confined within a gender box. The masculine gender must be broadened enough to accommodate the effeminate. In the Indian context too, Lord Shiva is exemplified as the fiercest of all gods. Yet we call him “Ardhanareeshwara”. He is not complete without the feminine counterpart within himself. The character of Radhakrishnan too is thus incomplete. As long as masculinity and femininity are poles apart, the problems will persist. Masculinity and femininity should not be against each other but should accommodate each other.

In the first fight sequence, he cannot fight back. But the second fight is a crucial stage of his growth. He fights, dancing while countering the robust men with his smooth moves and mudras. In third fight sequence, it is noticeable that he has shed most of his effeminate traits. This represents the way he is transformed.

When Radhakrishnan identifies with the male instinct, he looks at himself differently in the mirror. The image in the mirror establishes a relation between Radha, the subject and his identity. It symbolises the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes a different role. He cannot accept the effeminateness that might prop out from his progeny. The Lacanian theory of identification (Barry 114) or the ‘mirror stage’ can be interpreted in this context by stating that Radhakrishnan’s identity is developed from the reaction of the society. His identity is an ideal likeness reflected back from everyone else. It also appears as if

effeminate man can be fixed up with a couple of blows hinting that the effeminate man is always a misfit. Here Radhakrishnan had to change from Radha to Krishna because the society forced him to and the circumstances were challenging.

The title *Chandupottu* is tagged onto anybody who appears out of line with the conventional macho man. The internal criticism of the movie splits it apart. If the film is read obliquely and is looked beyond the apparent coherence, it is found 'riddled with cracks'. The movie challenged the autonomy and attempted at changing the prejudices of the society which was politically progressive.

CHAPTER - 3

QUEERNESS IN *NJAN MARYKUTTY*

Transsexuals and transgenders were forced to remain 'closeted' if they wished to lead normal persecution and harassment free lives. Coming out, or revealing one's identity can be one of the most difficult parts of the journey of a transgender or transsexual. The boundaries among them or queer criticism remain somewhat fluid. A sexual and gender liberation movement is based on ideas which encompass everyone who shares the goal of free choice in the areas of sexuality and gender expression, regardless of their personal, sexual or gender identity. In *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says that:

Our own society is brutally homophobic; and the homophobia directed against both male and female is not arbitrary but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class and race relations (698).

Njan Marykutty is a 2018 Indian Malayalam-language drama film written and directed by Ranjith Sankar and co-produced with Jayasurya. The film stars Jayasurya as a transsexual named Marykutty, with Jewel Mary, Jins Baskar, Suraj Venjarammoodu, Aju Varghese and Joju George in other prominent roles. The film was released on 15 June 2018.

A transsexual man's attempt to realize his true orientation in a society that stigmatizes gender transformation is the main theme of the film. The film attempts to educate the audience on various issues faced by the LGBTQ community and the plot of the film explains the difference between a transgender and a transsexual. In doing so, the film showcased the trauma that families go through, as well as the emotional and physical trauma that members of this community undergo, at the hands of society

and governmental authorities. Ranjith Sankar's *Njan Marykutty* might not be the first Malayalam movie to have a transperson as the main character, but it surely is the first to treat such a character with dignity and respect. The movie narrates the hard work and hardships faced by Marykutty to achieve her dream and to set a respectable identity in the society.

Marykutty, the central protagonist of the story, was born a man called Mathukutty, but aspires to be a woman. The story begins when Mathukutty wants to get out of the pressure of being a man. Mathukutty leaves home to transition into Marykutty. He says, “My sex is male but my gender is female”. He is in the process of a sex change, which is not an overnight process though. He finally undergoes the reassignment surgery and becomes a woman. He renames himself as Marykutty. She thus becomes a woman both mentally and physically.

Her problems start when she comes back to her native place. Though her family disowns Marykutty, it is the parish priest (Innocent), who gives her all the confidence. She is determined to become a Sub Inspector of Police and joins a coaching institute to prepare for the exam. The story is about Marykutty's ambition of becoming a cop, that is, Kerala's first transgender police officer. She feels that for someone like her, being a Police Officer would gain respect and social acceptance in the public. She has a loyal circle of friends in support. She faces many obstacles in the society. An example of this is the character of the police officer, Kunji Paalu. (Joju George). Marykutty is sensitive by nature but determined to fight it out and refuses to take the insults and humiliation thrown her way, more often than not, she is referred to as 'that thing'. However, it is the hostility from her own family that causes real heartache for Marykutty, something she is determined to overcome as well. The trauma of the family of trans people is also something the film explores.

The inner trauma of a transperson has been presented in an intense, yet subtle and beautiful manner. Marykutty dresses in starched cotton saris and is educated just like any other independent woman. She lacks the usual clichés associated with the transgender community, that is, the exaggerated feminine gestures and promiscuity. The film also talks about the problems faced by a transperson in Kerala, like the issue of washrooms and the violation of rights.

With the public attitude towards transgenders, Marykutty would have found things difficult even in bigger cities, but in this small, patriarchal town, it is worse. The locals do not care that she used to work in a software firm or is more well-educated than most people around her. They continue to mock at Marykutty. A female Gazetted Officer criticizes Marykutty for her decision. Even Marykutty's younger sister Annie (Malavika Menon) is against her. Her sister explains, with great sorrow, that she was happy and, more importantly, proud to have an older brother. She then asks Marykutty, "Why did you do this?" What irritates all of them is the fact that she rejected her masculine privilege. The only definition of pride is probably what one feels on an accomplishment.

When a man on a bus gropes Marykutty from behind, she gently, but firmly, squashes his foot with her shoe. Obviously if Marykutty was a 'normal' woman, she would have screamed and the other passengers would have come to help her and beat up the man. There is also a chance where maybe they would not have, because Marykutty may think of herself as a woman but the others do not see her that way. At church, women move away when she stands amidst them. Two men, in her hometown, Idukki are determined to criticize her. This perhaps explains the minimalism of Marykutty's behaviour. If she allows herself to feel fully, life might become even more difficult. She did not express her sorrow too often. This could

mean that she was even afraid to raise her voice for an issue faced by a person like her. In an early scene, she puts a bindi on a Buddha and stares at it. This shows that if Buddha can wear a bindi then there is no absurdity in her transformation from a man to a woman.

Mathukutty as a young boy, dresses up in a sari and wears bangles. He gets beaten up when discovered by his father. This shows that even as a child Mathukutty aspired to a woman. As the film explains, most transgenders are either beggars or sex workers, essentially, objects of pity or ridicule. Marykutty herself is falsely charged as a sex worker. There is a prejudice prevailing in the society that all the transgenders and transsexuals do not carry out a decent job in society.

Marykutty wants to change things by becoming a dignified person. She wants to prove herself to not just men like Kunji Palu, but also to women like the female police officer who makes her strip at the police station, feeling not the slightest bit of remorse because she does not consider Marykutty a fellow-woman. Marykutty feels that she should make her parents proud of her by becoming a police officer. She wants her parents to call her by the name Marykutty and accept her for what she is.

Njan Marykutty takes care to surround Marykutty with supporters as well. Marykutty's mother (Shobha Mohan) offers a hesitant support while Marykutty's friend Jovi (Jewel Mary) is a staunch supporter. There is the lawyer who lusts after Marykutty and Alwin (Aju Varghese) who runs the local church's FM station. It is on the urging of the Priest that Marykutty hosts that radio show, called Happiness Hour. She is initially worried that she has an in-between voice due to her hormone treatments. Her speaking voice sounds male, her singing voice female. Alwin instantly reassures her, "We need a feminine voice with a masculine touch". She earns

considerable appreciation in that area, as a Radio Jockey in the FM channel run by the church. She did not disclose her identity and on air and is known as RJ Angel.

The very people who criticize Marykutty in public listen to her on air. This proves that the society was only against her sexual identity and not her as a person. If not, then they would not have listened to her advice on air without hesitation. The listeners are the symbolic representation of the patriarchal society who are reluctant to accept something new. But when she asks if her listeners agree with the way Marykutty was treated by the police, they say yes. Marykutty then realises that it is going to take more than a radio show to change the attitude of the people towards her.

Even when the supportive Collector (Suraj Venjarammoodu) says that it is enough if Marykutty makes the reservation-quota cut-off in her police exams, she says she does not need any special treatment and that she will strive for the cut-off in the regular quota. It is clear why Marykutty does not want any special consideration. She is not socially or economically disadvantaged and she does not consider the thing that makes her “different” a disadvantage at all. It is what she wants to prove. She considers herself completely normal and a mere human being. She also wants the society to treat her that way.

When Marykutty visits her parents, it is just when they are fixing a match for her sister. Her family members disowned her in front of the guests. This proves that her family is ashamed to reveal the truth about her. When Marykutty is harassed on the street, every onlooker takes out a phone to record the moment and not one person feels pity towards her.

Marykutty’s repentant father (comes to the venue of her physical test and explains himself. He is part of this patriarchal society. He was afraid to go against its

rules. He confesses to Marykutty that it was not because he did not love her that he did not support her but because he was afraid to face the people. Marykutty's initial span of life as a man did give her an advantage over the other women candidates during the physical test. She finally attains her goal and becomes a police officer. Thus she gets social acceptance. The District Collector then finds a new name to address the transgenders, "Shero", a word derived from men as heroes. Marykutty depicts the real side of a true "Shero" without exaggeration or melodrama. At the end, Marykutty and other characters are freed from their trauma.

The film achieves its purpose to a great extent and hopefully it has changed the attitude of society towards trans people. It does not make the protagonist a source of humour at any instance. *Njan Marykutty* addresses some sharp issues and it vouches for the people who are sidelined, neglected and mocked at for possessing a different sexual identity. *Njan Marykutty* depicts the difficulties which a transperson undergoes due to the mindset of the society.

Conclusion

Queer theory emerges from gay/lesbian studies. But gay/lesbian studies, as the name suggests, pinpoints the question of homosexuality. Queer theory expands its realm of investigation. Queer theory looks at and studies anything that falls into normative and deviant categories, particularly sexual activities and identities. Queer theory is a prism through which scholars examine literary texts. It questions the traditional definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The constructionist view has been elaborated by considering the cross-influences of race and of economic class in producing the identities and modes of behaviour of gender and sexuality.

There is no strict demarcation between male and female. Instead queer theorists say that sexuality exists in a continuum. Some prefer sex partners of opposite sex, while others prefer partners of same or both sexes. Theorists argue that it was only since the 19th century that queer theory has become so rigid. Along with this rigidity came panic, anxiety and intensifying homophobia. The world is changing, and so is the attitude of the society towards the queer community. A number of journals are now devoted to queer theory and to lesbian, gay and transgender studies and criticism. These fields have also become the subject regularly scheduled to conferences and has been established in the curriculum of the humanities and social sciences in many colleges, universities and educational institutions.

The films *Chandupottu* and *Njan Marykutty* portray the queer aspects in the characters Radhakrishnan and Marykutty respectively. It is not easy for them to establish themselves in the society. Since coming out as a queer is considered as something criminal, people refuse to open up regarding their sexual orientation to the public. Sometimes, opening up to others as well as to themselves is equally

traumatizing for a transperson. This happens due to rigid gender rules. Society refuses to accept homosexuality because no room exists for them. For people like Radha Krishnan and Marykutty, it is a daily battle. Society judges them without realizing the amount of pressure they go through.

These two characters possess multiple identities, that is, they tend to identify themselves as a man and a woman simultaneously. Initially they were somewhat in the middle of a man and a woman in terms of their sexuality and identities. Society is reluctant to accept their multiple personalities. Society wants them to either behave like a man or a woman and not a mixture of both. They are disgraced for the dilemma in their sexual identity and the people are not ready to accept them for what they are. At the end of both films, the central character is freed from trauma and both get social acceptance.

In a sense these two movies deal with issues of identity and sexuality. It shows that it is very difficult to possess an LGBTQ identity in a world that is homophobic. In a way they offer a new way of considering freedom. It shows that everything they want is within themselves and the work of freedom is to stop investing themselves in structures that only hold them back from being themselves including homophobia, rigidly defined gender roles, gender expression, racism, ignorance of mental illness in the communities and religious practices that does not embrace the questioning of everything.

Select Bibliography

Abrams, M H and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of literary Terms*. 11th ed.,

Cengage Learning, 2015, pp. 328.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.

3rd ed., Viva Books, 2010.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge Publications, 1990.

Chandupottu. Directed by Lal Jose, Lal Creations, 2004.

“Chaandupottu Review”. *Indiaglitz*, 3 Sep 2005,

www.indiaglitz.com/chaandupottu-malayalam-movie-review-7758.html.

Harper, Phillip Brian. "Gay Male Identities, Personal Privacy, and Relations of Public

Exchange: Notes on Directions for Queer Culture." *Social Text*, 1997,

pp. 5–29.

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York UP, 1996.

“Malayalam movie Review: Chandupottu”. *WebIndia 123*, 29 Jan. 2019,

www.webindia123.com/movie/regional/chandu/index.htm.

Njan Marykutty. Directed by Ranjith Sankar, Punyalan Cinemas, 2018.

Prabhakaran, Roshini and Nithya Thomas Poovathinkal. “Masculinizing Radha: the

Politics of Representation in Chandupottu”. *Language in India*, Aug 2013,

www.languageinindia.com/aug2013/roshnionchandupottufinal.pdf.

- Prakash, Asha. "Njan Marykutty Review". *Times Of India*, 15 Jun 2018, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/malayalam/movie-reviews/njan-marykutty/movie-review/64598662.cms.
- Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. Columbia UP, 1998.
- "Queer Theory." New Dictionary of the History of Ideas. *Encyclopedia.com*. 5 Nov. 2018, www.encyclopedia.com.
- Quiroga, Jose. "New Directions in Multiethnic, Racial, and Global Queer Studies." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Duke UP, 2003, pp. 123–135.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Sexual Transformation". *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Blackwell Publisher, 1998, pp. 691-698.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, Routledge, 1993, pp. 3-44.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between men : English literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Blackwell Publisher, 1985.
- Sundar, Priyanka. "Njan Marykutty movie review: Jayasurya's film questions prejudice against transgenders with élan". *Hindustan Times*, 23 Jun 2018, www.google.co.in/amp/s/m.hindustantimes.com.

Tyson. "Chapter 10: Lesbians, gay and Queer Criticism". *Thinking About Critical*

Theory, 1 May. 2006, [thinkingofcriticaltheory.blogspot.in/2006/05/chapter-](http://thinkingofcriticaltheory.blogspot.in/2006/05/chapter-10-lesbian-gay-and-queer.htm?m=1)

[10-lesbian-gay-and-queer.htm?m=1](http://thinkingofcriticaltheory.blogspot.in/2006/05/chapter-10-lesbian-gay-and-queer.htm?m=1).