

**WHERE WEDLOCKS BECOME DEADLOCKS: REVISITING THE MIXED-ORIENTATION MARRIAGES IN MAJA MAA(2022) AND KAATHAL: THE CORE(2023)**



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “Where Wedlocks Become Deadlocks: Revisiting the Mixed-Orientation Marriages in *Maja Maa*(2022) and *Kaathal: The Core*(2023)” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Lissy Jose, Supervising Teacher, Department of English.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that this project “Where Wedlocks Become Deadlocks: Revisiting the Mixed-Orientation Marriages in *Maja Maa*(2022) and *Kaathal: The Core*(2023)” by Annette Elizabeth Jefry is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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This project aims to compare and contrast the lived experiences and choices of Mathew Devassy the homosexual man from *Kaathal: the Core* (2023) and Pallavi Patel, the homosexual woman, from *Maja Maa* (2022), not only as they navigate through but also as they try to break free from the conventional married life that they have been leading. These movies force us to re-assess marriage as a patriarchal and heteronormative institution that shuns homosexual individuals or forces them to lead a closeted life. These movies evidence that although the process of coming out is assured to be complex, emotionally turbulent and agonising for any married gay man as it is for any married lesbian woman, the hurdles before the two, the factors circumscribing their choices, the limit up to which they can exercise their agency, the burden of societal expectations surrounding the two etc. will be dissimilar. Pallavi Patel and Omana serve as representative characters who both reflect the sacrifices made by women and act as catalysts for a feminism reimaged in the context of comparative literature and cinematic investigation.

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## Introduction

Women portrayed in movies often reflect societal expectations and conventions regarding gender and gender roles. Sometimes they represent the complex dance between tradition and modernity. Within the domain of Indian cinema, the motion pictures *Maja Maa* (2022) and *Kaathal-the Core* (2023) explore the lives of two engrossing female leads, Pallavi Patel and Omana, revealing stories that speak to the complexities of family obligations, conventional norms, and the individual's hapless struggles against them. These movies act as mirrors reflecting the larger conversation on feminism, autonomy, and the transformational power of altering gender norms in addition to offering a cinematic canvas for the complex portrayal of women.

*Maja Maa*(2022) an Indian Hindi movie directed by Anand Tiwari, starring the ever gracious Madhuri Dixit was premiered on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Anand Tiwari who is an Indian actor, producer, writer, lyricist and director who is well known for his work in Hindi films. He appeared in movies like *Kites*(2010), *Udaan*(2010), *Aisha*(2010) and *Go Goa Gone*(2013). He is the co-founder of the production company Still and Still media collective under which he debuted his direction in the movies *Love Per Square Foot* (2018). His hit series are the *Bandash Bandits*, which was later nominated for the Film Fare OTT Awards for the best original story. He was also a producer for the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*(2008). His movies are mostly real in content and explores the underlying problems of society in a more subtle manner showcasing a normal man's life and difficulties behind colours and lights. *Maja Maa* declines to provide easy solutions or support abandoning one's responsibilities. Rather, it opens up a complex conversation about the decisions women make, highlighting the careful balance that must be done between personal goals and family responsibilities.

Meanwhile *Kaathal: the core*(2023) directed by Jeo Baby and written by Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria is a Indian Malayalam movie starring the famous Mammootty and Jyothika Saravanan. The film was produced and released on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023. The director Jeo Baby is a scriptwriter and actor who is famous for his direction of the film *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) and had received the Kerala State Film Award for the Best Screenplay. His movies are very impactful as it silently reveals the fallen society and he does not fail to highlight the hidden hold of society on an individual. Both his films *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Kaathal: the core* showcases his impact on the social conformity and makes us understand the relevance such movies can bring to our Indian society.

This project attempts a comparative study of two movies that portray realities of Mixed-orientation marriages, *Maja Maa* and *Kaathal: the Core*. Both these movies, depict homosexual individuals trapped in a conventional marriage with a heterosexual partner. These movies point to the shocking reality of innumerable homosexuals in India who either remain closeted throughout their life unbeknownst to their life partners or settle for a Mixed-orientation marriage with the consent of the partner due to fear of social stigma and bigotry. This project aims to compare and contrast the lived experiences and choices of Mathew Devassy the homosexual man from *Kaathal: the core* and Pallavi Patel, a homosexual women, from *Maja Maa*, not only as they navigate through but also as they try to break free from the conventional married life that they have been leading. These movies forces us to re-asses marriage as a patriarchal and hetero-normal institution shuns homosexual individuals or forces homosexual individuals to remain closeted due to the fear of societal prejudice and criticism.

The first chapter of this project delves into the painful reality of Mixed-orientation marriages in a heteronormative society like that of India. Marriage as a social institution consolidates and propagates rigid gender roles as philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Betty

Friedan have observed. Meanwhile chapter two strives to analyse and compare the coming out journey of Mathew and Pallavi, focusing on the incongruity of their experiences. Although coming out is assured to be a messy, confusing, complex, emotionally turbulent agonising process for any married gay man as it is for any married lesbian woman, the hurdles before the two, the factors circumscribing their choices, the limit up to which they can exercise their agency, the burden of societal expectations surrounding the two etc. will be disparate.

In the upcoming pages, we will explore the complex themes contained in *Maja Maa* (2022) and *Kaathal: the Core* (2023), breaking down the expectations that society places on women, the subtle dynamics of marriage, and the changing terrain of feminist concerns depicted in contemporary Indian films. Pallavi Patel and Omana serve as representative characters who both reflect the sacrifices made by women and act as catalysts for a feminism reimagined in the context of comparative literature and cinematic investigation.

## Chapter 1

### Marriage as a Heteronormative, Patriarchal Institution

When Betty Friedan quoted in her book *The Feminine Mystique* “A woman today has been made to feel freakish and alone in the world, with nothing to do, no one to do anything for, no sense of purpose except the vague sense that she is 'needed' because she is a woman”(32). She wanted to capture the essence of “the problem that has no name”(Friedan 1). She talks about the problem with the sexes and means to highlight the difficulties of the common middle class wives, who try to live according to what the society expects them to. Friedan talks about the idealization on women as wives and mothers, exposing the discontent that is hidden below the surface of marriage as an institution. Friedan challenges the notion that satisfaction as a whole for a woman can only found within a marriage, raising a family, and looking after the home. She questions everything that blocks a woman from her liberation, which includes the question of sacrifice, ‘are women the only ones who have to sacrifice the most compared to men’ and ‘does a woman only become complete within a marriage.’

Similar to Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir addressed the societal constructs that confine women to fit into predefined roles, providing a philosophical foundation to understand the challenges faced by women in the different social contexts. Mixed-orientation marriages refer to the union between a heterosexual partner and a person who is identified to be homosexual, often gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning. In such marriages, there is a difference in sexual orientation between the partners. This can often pose various challenges between the relationships. When individuals of different sexual orientations enter into marriage there occurs an intersection of personal identity, societal expectation and pressure and the pursuit

of a genuine connection can be hindered. De Beauvoir delves into the exploration of what a woman is and who she is to the society. She talks about the insistence of the predetermined roles destined for women in a society which contributes to a sense of entrapment, limiting her ability to shape her own identity and seek relationships that align with her sense of self.

In her work *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir explored the construct build by the society to understand what femininity is and it sheds light on the imposed expectations on women. They tend to adapt and learn to survive in situations regardless how hard it turns. Even in a confusing marital situation women try their best to hold on and sacrifice their needs to run the family and carry its burdens as long as possible. She suffers from the tension between societal expectations and personal authenticity.

According to philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom and choice are two important requisites for an individual. Without freedom of choice and will, any human is a caged animal without purpose. Where does a woman's freedom lie? Is it in marriage? At least that's what the Indian society tells women. When little girls ask their parents for permissions, the typical Indian-parent reply is ask them to do it after marriage. Only after entering into this institution, most women realise, marriage is just more sacrifice and less freedom. Sartre's philosophy underscores the idea that individuals define their existence through their choices. And when these choices are restricted to that individual, they suffer from validation and existential crisis. When it comes to marriage, people are actively searching for a reason to love and be with their partners, especially women, as they are denied individuality. They thrive in that relationship only because of their identity in their husbands.

In Indian society, tradition and values are given great importance and play a significant role in a person's life. It is easier to call marriage a patriarchal institution. When it comes to the topic of marriage, especially a mixed-orientation marriage, the Indian

community purposefully supports the idea of such an institution because of their denial of the idea of homogeneity within their community and for the purpose of reproduction, thus promoting heterosexuality. Individuals willingly enter such an institution due to the societal pressures and the pressure to conform to heterosexuality which is mostly due to the limitations imposed by the existing norms. For a few it is also due to the denial of their own sexual orientation or because of the lack of awareness of who they are, which might only be clear to them in the latter periods of their marriage. Individuals choose to remain closeted due to the fear of rejection from their family, community or society. The society is least bothered about the individual's need or what they truly want. It is evident to notice how only heterosexual marriages are legalised, while being a homosexual is 'just' not treated as a crime. The society prioritizes conformity against the needs of an individual. The collective expectations dictate the way things are prescribed to unfold and these often disregard an individual's own needs and wants. These expectations were the result of generational norms passed on and are woven together to confiscate a person's uniqueness. The society views this uniqueness as a threat and deviation that could harm the rest without recognising the beauty that lies within the difference.

In India, the societal expectations surrounding marriage, family and gender roles act as factors that contribute against two people entering into union and it does not align with their sexual orientations. For a homosexual woman in a heterosexual marriage, the challenges are profound and she will often have to face the conforming gender roles, which in turn intensifies the struggle to break her sexuality free. The woman will be forced to sacrifice her true identity and will be forced to take up the role of a mother and a dutiful wife, all the while suppressing her needs. The internal struggle and conflict between one's sexuality and the expectations from the society, can lead to emotional breakdown and a sense of entrapment.

To take note of a heterosexual woman married to a homosexual man, she can face challenges not too different from that of the homosexual woman. The societal stigma attached to a person's sexuality can intensify the difficulties. The woman might experience feelings of betrayal or inadequacy and constantly might need assurance for herself to find reasons to stay within the walls of such a false marriage. The potential challenges in maintaining a false face throughout the conventions of a heterosexual marriage is very high. The woman has to still keep up with the marriage as it is the conventional thing to do.

Albert Camus once said, "Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better." In this context, the quote can be seen to resonate with a potential to confront the existing societal norms and challenge these norms to pursue authenticity in orientation and support the idea of genuine connection without enforcing what the norms say is right. Homosexuality is as equally relevant and important as heterosexuality.

The narrative of Mixed-orientation marriages reflects a wider and broader discussion on sexual freedom and the evolution of society's attitude towards such concepts. Michel Foucault was known for his exploration of the power dynamics and social authority and it helped analyse these marriages as sites where societal power structures manifest its authority. The negotiation between personal desires and societal expectations become an important aspect that reflect the power dynamics at play.

Marriages in general encapsulates a complex clash between an individual's identity and society that conspires against genuine connections. What we are and who we want are predestined for us. Especially as women, our birth decides our future and it is interwoven and laid in front of us by the society itself. Drawing insights from philosophers like Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, an overview of the tension between societal norms and an individual's sexuality can be evident, especially in the case of women.

The distinct challenges faced by a homosexual woman in a heterosexual marriage and a heterosexual woman with a homosexual man underscores the need for societal acceptance, recognition, and an utter need for a re-evaluation of the conventional norms that surrounding marriage especially in the Indian society. As days grow older people evolve in thoughts and the society has to learn to evolve with this change. The discourse on Mixed-orientation marriages provides an opportunity to challenge and question these expectation and redefine society to promote a more accepting environment. It is important for society to understand the harm it causes to itself. Every individual constitute a society and if these individuals as a whole don't recognise what is it needs to form healthier and strong connections, that society might collapse just within the blink of an eye.

## Chapter 2

### Strait is the Gate: Pallavi's Path to Freedom

Who are women? Are they idols of worship or a patronised figure meant to support the idea of a family? Women, throughout history, have been idealised as quasi-divine figures in the cast of self-sacrificing mothers, devoted wives, dutiful daughters etc. Especially in the Indian cinema, the image of a beautiful, graceful obedient wife is pictured, she stands as an epitome of what the society expects women from within a marriage. Marriage is an institution build between two people that is grown out of love, trust, patience, understanding, and above all freedom of individuality. *Maja Maa*(2022), a movie that reveals the depth and importance of the role played by a woman, Pallavi Patel, who is a mother, a wife, a lover, a friend and above all a symbol of sacrifice. She is the quintessential, middle aged woman who showcases the basic lifestyle of any other life giving figure. The movie is a complex and layered film that tackles themes of family, societal expectations and sacrifice. Pallavi does not solely choose to make sacrifices for herself. Her choices are greatly influenced by expectations of being a "perfect" wife and mother as well as societal pressures. The movie gently challenges this social norm, emphasising how it can cause a woman's uniqueness and sense of self to be undermined. Pallavi rarely expresses her displeasure openly, but the movie does a fantastic job of capturing her inner turmoil through her conversations, wistful looks, and subtle facial expressions. She is a sympathetic and relatable protagonist because many women who have experienced comparable hardships can relate to her unsaid agony. *Maja Maa* does not promote shirking one's obligations or provide a straightforward answer. Rather, it fosters a more nuanced discussion about the decisions women must make and how crucial it is to strike a balance between their duties and personal goals.

The movie *Kaathal: the Core* (2023) has made a lasting effect, especially with the way the character Omana has come to represent women. Like Pallavi Patel, Omana dedicates

her life to providing for and tending to each member of her household within the walls and limits of her kitchen. She can only play the parts of a mother, a loving wife, a sympathetic daughter, and an obedient sister. Like Pallavi Patel, Omana has given up twenty years of her life, sacrificing what she wants in order to live a selfless life for others. The narrative is resonant with this poignant concept of self-sacrifice throughout. In *Kaathal: the Core* (2023), Omana's character serves as a representation of resilience and unwavering commitment, her life is like that of any every other women who are constrained by the ideological roles that the society has forced upon them. Just like Pallavi Patel, Omana too is a silent personality who works day and night in the constructed boundaries she live in to make sure her family does not face their problems alone and does everything possible to maintain the joy and happiness within the walls of the house.

Virginia Woolf writes in one of her novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*, "As she watched the taxi cabs, she had the perpetual sense, as she was out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day"(Woolf 6). This quotation captures a sense of loneliness and the challenges of following social norms, maybe addressing and marking the sacrifices mothers make in order to fit into predetermined roles that were engraved into them as women. Virginia Woolf frequently voiced her displeasure and strong dislike towards the restrictions placed on women by the society and these social forces potentially weakens an individual's sense of self and identity. This feeling is reflected in the situations of Pallavi Patel and Omana, who are caught up in a web woven to trap women under constraints and regulations that supposedly regulates nothing but uses it as weapons to keep control of everything. The basic query being raised is why does society still limit and confine women to a range of expectations? In the modern social structure, everything about each of our personal lives appears to have been predetermined, even before we were born. Every aspect of our live, including our names, our aspirations, our dreams, our

way of life, our religion, and especially in the Indian society, the people we choose to love or hate are prearranged, and society's indirect influences shape everything about who we are. Pallavi Patel and Omana's circumstances are similar to Woolf's notion about ensnared and trapped women. Their limitations are not just on a personal level, they also reflect a larger cultural conformity that restrict women's independence. These limitations show up in several areas of their lives, such as personal decisions and employment choices, and they are a reflection of how ingrained and rooted societal expectations are. The question of why society puts these restrictions on women are strictly raising issues that lead us to analysing the profoundly founded patriarchal systems, traditional gender roles, and ingrained preconceptions. In her criticism of these limitations, Woolf called out on society to identify and eliminate the structural impediments that prevented women from realizing their own potential and restricted them from achieving their sense of identity within the society. The experiences of Pallavi and Omana demonstrate how Woolf's observations are still relevant today and it emphasizes the ongoing fight against cultural conventions that restrict personal expression especially for women. Woolf's criticism of a planned existence or a pre-planned notion of a human being's existence and life which are poignantly echoed by the remark that society determines people's destinies even before birth. In an environment where roles and expectations are predetermined, there is far less room for individual agency or self-identity. Women are especially affected because of how much expectation society has laid on them, which affects everything from their schooling to their roles in their homes. The predetermining character of society is a reflection of a culture that values conformity and order, without considering its destructive characteristics. When it comes to choosing their educational and professional routes, people frequently find themselves following pre-written scripts, just as in *The road not taken* by Robert Frost we can see how people are determined to follow the path already taken by the many rather than choosing to deflect from what is

already there. There is minimal room for deviation from this predestined path of life, which also affects relationships, societal duties, and personal goals. Women in particular struggle with the expectations placed on them by society to take on the responsibilities of homemakers, caregivers, and career professionals. In order to balance these challenging obligations, women either resort to complicated juggling techniques or kneel in the face of these adversities and follow what is handed over to them. Applying Woolf's critique to the modern world highlights the necessity of a paradigm change. It advocates for a more inclusive and democratic framework and asks for a re-evaluation of society norms that uphold gender-based limitations. Pallavi Patel and Omana's experiences serve as heart-breaking reminders that, even in the face of societal change, deeply ingrained conventions still remain and appear evidently in the ongoing discourse and the deliberate efforts to deconstruct them is just very difficult. The similarities between the lives of people like Pallavi Patel and Omana and Virginia Woolf's criticisms of societal restrictions on women, highlights how persistent the fight for gender equality has been. The analysis of fixed social norms points out the necessity of rethinking social institutions in order to create an atmosphere that is more welcoming and empowering for all people, regardless of gender.

Pallavi Patel and Omana have a remarkable resemblance in that they both personify the paradigm of unwavering resilience when faced with social expectations. These cinematic tales challenge the constrictive social norms that assign women to specific positions while acting as a mirror through which to see the larger conversation about personal fulfilment and autonomy. The films create an expectation-laden framework that dictates mother's every move in the family sphere, painting a vivid picture of the social scrutiny they confront. Their duties as nurturers, caregivers, and emotional anchors are mandated by the society script, which ties them to a set of demands that go beyond the typical difficulties of family life. Paradoxically, though, many women experience a sharp isolation when personal struggles

surface and the weight of these expectations becomes too much to bear. It is evident that they lack a mutual support structure, which reveals the social injustice that deprives them of the compassion and comfort they so kindly give to their families. It turns into a perceptive remark on the contradiction of society in which moms are held up as strong role models yet do not receive the same assistance when they face difficulties of their own. While taking a closer look at the male protagonists, Manohar Patel in *Maja Maa* (2022) and Mathew Devassy in *Kaathal: the Core* (2023), it is apparent that they are privileged to have wives who are devoted and loyal to them. Within the boundaries of a married relationship, these women shower their husbands with love and care while offering support and stand as a strong pillar of consideration. Wives who empower their husbands by supporting them are advantageous to both the characters, Manohar Patel and Mathew Devassy, proving that a happy marriage through the male gaze, is one in which the wife respects and maintains their partner's autonomy.

When analysing the dynamics of these relationships, one point to be noted is the absence of aggressive acts of violence or rebellion on the part of the men. Unlike the common perception of toxic men as violently aggressive or even rebellious against their wives, these husbands take a different move, although it is no less harmful, approach. Instead of using physical force, they preferred to remain silent throughout the stories which is utterly devastating that brings an empty space in their conversations. It is important to understand that a relationship cannot be fulfilling or healthy just because there isn't huge disagreement. Actually, the stillness and the silence within the family is a powerful force and a strong contributing factor that can subtly erode the emotional fabric of a marriage. This subtle silence takes the shape of a refusal to recognize and accept their wives' feelings, which leaves an emotional space between the partners that can be just as harmful as more visible forms of abuse. The atmosphere of these marriages are defined by the lack of real participation,

inclusion and communication, and not by the absence of conflict. The husbands' subtly dominant behaviour makes their wives feel alone and unheard as they withhold their ideas and feelings.

Women are typically expected to marry by a specific age due to societal norms and expectations. One significant subject that emerges from these movies are the possibility of homosexual woman and men being scrutinised by the society and having their relationship status questioned. These complex societal expectation surround the sexuality of these people especially women. When it comes to freely displaying their identity or even talking about a difference in their liking women could encounter discrimination and be held to a different standard than men. Conversations concerning women's autonomy and sexuality maybe discouraged by traditional conventions. These qualities are associated with being unfeminine, aggressive and even deviating from what the society expects.

One important notion to examine is how Pallavi was accepting of her sexuality even though it was with a little hesitation, she did not deny any of the questioned facts. Meanwhile Mathew Devassy displayed his hesitancy in accepting his reality which shows his insecurity that grew out of fear from the potential rejection as a male figure in the public eye. In comparison, Pallavi's strength as a women is highlighted in her ability to confront reality and chose to accept her reality rather than choosing to stay in denial unlike Mathew Devassy. This divergence in their responses projects the complex hold of society towards gender identity and sexuality and how men and women are supposed act, walk and talk in this society. Even men are provided with a set of unspoken rules and norms they have to follow. These regulations can be seen to be passed down from generations of patriarchal rule which was very prominent going down history while now it took a very silent yet not less painful form. Such unspoken norms can crawl into marriage as a institution, which comes to this

question, is marriage a space meant only for heterosexual couples who tend to respect and follow the ways of the society?



Fig. 1. Pallavi's acceptance of her sexuality (00.19.30)



Fig. 2. Mathew's denial of his sexuality (01.14.30)

Pallavi's story uncovers as narrative of resilience and self-acceptance within the construct of a heterosexual marriage. Being a homosexual woman, she faces suffocations of being trapped in societal structure that does not align with her identity, which stands a strong allegation that marriage is a nightmare for homosexuals, especially in India. Despite the challenges, Pallavi stands strong in her identity instead of remaining in denial. Ultimately, she is accepted by her family, but the freedom to choose her life partner and live according her identification was denied to her, constructing her within the boundaries of a heterosexual marriage. Contrast to this situation, is Mathew Devassy's life as a homosexual within a heterosexual marriage. Initially he is denial of his true sexuality and hides away and remains closeted due to societal fears and the weight of his internal struggle which in turn burdens his wife, Omana. The narrative takes a different turn when Omana, who remained quiet for so many years, decides to take a stand and intervene which becomes a catalyst for a change in Mathew's story. Unlike Pallavi, Mathew is been presented with a choice and opportunity to choose to be with the one he wants and escape the confines of a heterosexual marriage.

The difference between the two stories are the divergent experiences of homosexual male and a homosexual female trapped in two different heterosexual marriages. The absence of choice in Pallavi's story questions the strong societal expectations imposed on marriage. It is evident how society is only in support of a heterosexual marriage, making homosexual marriages a space of fear and confusion. The contrasting resolutions highlight the varied nature of navigating a life where once sexuality clashes with the thoughts of the society.

One important finding in the dynamics of these marriages are the dual roles that both husbands play. They are both people with authority but are being dependant on their wives to maintain the stability of the separation of their positions. Their authority is self-contradictory,

this can be seen demonstrated in Matthew Devassy who is forced to accept his role as a public figure and Manohar Patel who is fortunate to hold such a position. Both husbands are deeply tangled with the power and encouragement their women possess. Matthew Devassy is a living alibi for the crime society commits against homosexuals by pushing them to live a heterosexual life not knowing the consequences it causes the other person, in this case Omana, who is struggling in silence for years by bearing her husband's closeted identity and losing her freedom to live her heterosexual life. She was denied basic human needs like love-making, communication, understanding, recognition and quality time. He never loved her the way she loved him. On the other hand, Pallavi, being a homosexual, reciprocated all her feelings and fulfilled her responsibilities as a dutiful wife in a heterosexual marriage. Throughout her life, she sacrificed her basic human needs to fulfill her husband's desires and wants. She put others ahead of herself which indicates the utter necessity of a change in societal thoughts towards accepting homosexuality and homosexual marriages. Trapping a homosexual woman with a heterosexual man caused her utter distress and nothing more. She was denied her freedom and right to live her life on her own course and will. She had to make sacrifices in her life so a heterosexual marriage can thrive. The question still stands, is such a marriage benefiting anyone? This insight invites a more thorough examination of the complex ways that marriage affects the relation between a man and a woman. It is evident how differently society influences heterosexuality and homosexuality.

The fact that men rely on their wives to provide stability and emotional support highlights how important this strategic reliance men have on woman in overcoming the challenges of their roles. Be it a homosexual man like Mathew Devassy or a heterosexual man like Manohar Patel, their reliance on their wives Omana and Pallavi Patel questions the basic ideas of marriage. Even if it is a heterosexual marriage the absence of equal respect and marriage can cause such an institution to fail miserably. The obvious inability of the

husbands to carry out their basic responsibilities as partners within the institution of a marriage is a repetitive issue in these movies. The characters Manohar Patel and Mathew Devassy, respectively, fails to fulfil their fundamental responsibilities in *Maja Maa*(2021) and *Kaathal: core*(2023), thereby exposing an imbalance between their acknowledged roles of authority and their real contributions to marital dynamics. When cracks in the walls starts to appear in the house of Manohar Patel in *Maja Maa*, stands as a moving example of the ignorance of the husband. Manohar doesn't take practical measures to resolve the matter or try to put efforts into patching up the gaps; instead, he stays passive and places the entire responsibility indirectly on his wife Pallavi. Pallavi uses paint to hide the flaws in her house, demonstrating her resourcefulness and will to keep up the appearance of a pleasant happy household. But rather than admitting that he has fallen behind in the accustomed tasks as a husband is supposed to fulfil in terms of housekeeping, Manohar just offers compliments. This attitude not only reveals a lack of understanding but also validates his insensitivity and contributes to the proof of passivity in the home making process. Likewise, in *Kaathal: the core*, Mathew Devassy struggles with an alternative but no less important surface of marital duties. The story that the movie shows how Mathew is unable to perform simple tasks, such as engaging in emotional and physical intimacy. We can notice how it triggers him when his wife says she misses making love, which is a crucial part of marriage and to being close to her husband. Mathew's inability to reciprocate and participate in this close relationship exposes a serious weakness in his understanding of the emotional dynamics of marriage and what makes it even worse is when he kept his wife silently and indirectly hostage within the marriage to satisfy the expectations of the public. The gap between the two reveals a sharp contrast between the concrete contributions he makes to promoting emotional intimacy and his supposed control inside the home. Taken as a whole, these stories provide a powerful portrait of husbands who, in spite of their positions in the family, appear to sit on thrones

without actively being involved in the simple tasks of emotional bonding and household management. Manohar Patel and Mathew Devassy, the husbands, are major examples of how there is a gap between their social positions as the heads of the household and the real-world duties that go along with them. The inability of these husbands to carry out their responsibilities as husbands highlights the necessity of re-evaluating conventional gender norms. The notion that some duties or emotional fulfilments are exclusively the responsibility of the woman defends an outdated conception of marriage. Seated on their figurative thrones, the husbands seems to be blind to the changing dynamics of modern partnerships within the relationship, when emotional involvement and shared responsibilities are seen as essential components of a fruitful marriage. Furthermore, these gender-based expectations in the media make society as a whole focus more broadly on how people are portrayed in the movies, especially the Indian cinema. The inadequacies of these men demonstrate how important it is to challenge stereotypes about gendered roles in marriage and promote a more equal division of duties. The emotional observation on the difference between supposed roles and real contributions within marital dynamics found in *Maja Maa* and *Kaathal: the core* is a result of the depiction of husbands failing to fulfil their basic tasks as partners in marriage. The failures of Manohar Patel and Mathew Devassy highlights the necessity for a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles, stressing the significance of emotional commitment and shared responsibility for a successful marriage. The previously mentioned cinematic storylines stand-in as a critical analysis of cultural norms and advocate for a transition towards more equally involving marriages, wherein both partners actively participate in the diverse facets of married life.

Fundamental to the evolution of society is the knowledge that social norms are dynamic constructs that are always just revaluated and does not seem to change. The

combined efforts of many people and encouragement groups highlight a continuous effort to question and rethink existing norms, especially with respect to gender roles and expectations. The main goal of these group efforts is to create more comprehensive and equal communities so that women have the power to direct their own lives according to their own goals and dreams. But even in the middle of these admirable advancements, it is necessary to recognize that these programs, though important, might not be totally sufficient to bring about the all-encompassing change that is desired. The growing effort to promote equality and undermine long-standing gender conventions is a symbol of a larger social change. It is also important to acknowledge what the basis of marriage are. The society has to recognise the existing identities of both men and women and not force heterosexual marriage considering the possible outcomes that could cause denial of any individual's freedom.

## Conclusion

Exploring cinematic narratives of mixed-orientation marriages through a feminist perspective, adopting philosophical insights from writers such as Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Virginia Woolf etc. revealing the clash between societal expectations and individual aspirations. The stories of Pallavi Patel from *Maja Maa* and Omana from *Kaathal: the core* stand as important examples that deliver the struggles faced by women within the constructs of gender roles and societal expectations imposed by the society especially in the context of a Mixed-orientation marriage.

Betty Friedan's concept of "the problem that has no name" captures the essence of isolation, fear of acceptance and discontent that women experience within the conventional mould of marriage. This can be evidently seen in the Indian societal context. The experiences of Pallavi Patel and Omana echo Woolf's notion for deconstructing the already existing structural norms that hinder women and their thoughts and that which restrict them from realising their potential and identity.

In terms of marriage, women are restricted from living their individual lives as they have to depend on their husbands. Their identity lies hidden in their partner's names. Pallavi Patel and Omana draw the attention towards the framework of how this society is built. These cinematic representations challenge the basic conventional roles assigned to women and question the balance between fulfilling societal duties that are imposed on women and pursuing their wants and remaining firm in their identity.

The marital stories of Pallavi Patel and Omana further highlight the challenges faced by individuals in a Mixed-orientation marriage. The lack of Pallavi's choice within the heterosexual marriage and the fight for freedom of Omana from a homosexual man, raises

questions about societal expectations of women. While Mathew Devassy's journey started in denial Pallavi's firmness in her identity is a noteworthy contrast between two different individuals in the Indian society.

In conclusion, the reality of on mixed-orientation marriages in India presses us to re-think the to foster a more inclusive and understanding society that accepts homosexuality and legally recognises homosexual marriages as a right of the gay/lesbian communities.

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