

**NAVIGATING THE IN-BETWEEN:
EXPLORING CINEMATIC
REPRESENTATIONS OF CAREGIVING
IN SELECT FILMS**



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

By

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March 2025

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An Abstract of the Project Entitled:

Navigating the In-Between: Exploring Cinematic Representations of Caregiving in Select Films

By

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2023-2025

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The discourse within disability studies predominantly centers on the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities, often neglecting the intricate and deeply interwoven realities of their caregivers. This dissertation contends that caregivers of disabled individuals occupy a liminal space, existing between two distinct yet overlapping social spheres. While they are not classified as disabled themselves, their caregiving responsibilities significantly restrict their full participation in mainstream society. To examine this condition, the study employs the theoretical framework of liminality, as conceptualized by Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and other scholars, to analyse two films: *Peranbu* (2018), a Tamil-language Indian film written and directed by Ram, and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), an American coming-of-age drama directed by Lasse Hallström. Chapter One delineates the theoretical foundations of liminality, exploring its implications in the context of caregiving. Chapter Two presents an in-depth analysis of the selected films, demonstrating how the liminal condition of caregivers is depicted through cinematic narratives. By advancing the argument that caregivers of disabled individuals inhabit a liminal space, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and advocate for a discourse that informs policy development aimed at providing better structural support for caregivers.



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I hereby declare that this project entitled "Navigating the In-Between: Exploring Cinematic Representations of Caregiving in Select Films" is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Lissy Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title of recognition.



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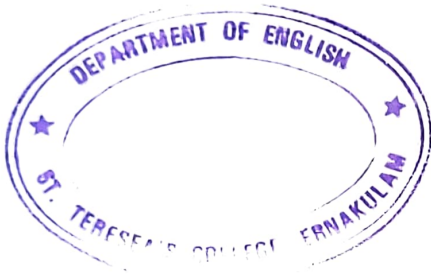
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CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that this project entitled “Navigating the In-Between:
Exploring Cinematic Representations of Caregiving in Select Films” by
Naomi Ann Netto is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my
supervision and guidance.



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A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Lissy Jose".

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Introduction

In the realm of literature, space and spatiality are considered to be increasingly important facets that have shaped the way texts are read and interpreted. There are also genres that have evolved around geographies, and the experiences and emotions surrounding them, for example, pastoral poems, travel narratives, etc. In the case of poetry, the spatial aspect can be seen in the way the poem itself is presented, for instance the poems of E.E. Cummings which showcase the poet's exuberant typographic style with words and punctuation symbols scattered across the page as though painting a picture. In fiction, the inclusion of illustrated maps in texts to denote real, imagined, or mythical landscapes have helped guide the reader in traversing the geography of the space created by the author. Regardless of whether a text makes a reference to a particular place or not, readers tend to naturally attribute aspects of spatiality onto texts as can be seen when discussing a narrative's linear structure, parallels, or framing devices. Thus, literature can be said to be intrinsically linked with the concepts of space and spatiality as much as it is linked to the concepts of time and temporality (T. Tally Jr).

The concepts of space and spatiality garnered increased attention in the field of the humanities from the mid to the late 20th century. The reassertion of space, place, and mapping was observable as these aspects had taken the forefront of critical discussions related to culture and literature. This was a marked shift from the 19th century where literature and discourse in general were dominated by the dimensions of time and temporality. This phenomenon could be seen reflected even during the modernist era, however with a fading prominence. History, time and temporality maintained their supremacy in the leading works of scholarship, while spatiality and

geography were pushed to a secondary degree of relevance. Here, time was foregrounded as it showcased change and how a narrative developed, on the other hand, space was viewed as the setting against which the narrative unfolded. However, with the emergence of approaches such as postmodernism and postcolonial theory in the late 20th century, the dimension of space gained increasing popularity and traction. This shift in preoccupation from the temporal to the spatial has been labelled as the “spatial turn” (T. Tally Jr). This phenomenon is best elucidated by the words of the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault who stated, “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space” (“Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”).

Liminality was first introduced as an anthropological concept in the 20th century by the ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in his work *Rites de Passage*. The following chapter of this study does an in-depth exploration of the concept of liminality and related terms. In simple terms, liminality can be defined as something that is “transitional” or “caught between two or more things” (Kazimir). The liminal can be used to describe both the spatial as well as temporal dimensions. In terms of the spatial aspect, “liminal space” refers to a region or zone through which one can physically move through. Architectural liminal spaces are defined by built structures found in our environment which we can physically traverse; this includes corridors, roads, airports, bus stops, waiting rooms, etc. One does not linger in these spaces for extended periods of time as they are meant to be used as an in-between place that leads one to a more significant destination.

When referring to the temporal dimension, a liminal time can also be called “liminal states” or “liminal moments”, this refers to a phase where one is suspended between two distinct periods of time. These moments are not defined by the physical

environment, but are rather described by the events in an individual's life. An example of this would be the stage of adolescence in which a person transitions from childhood to adulthood. Another example of this includes the change of status in a person's life, for instance, during a marriage ceremony, the two participants to be wed enter the ceremony as legally single and after the marital rituals are completed, leave the ceremony as a newly-married couple. In the first example, a new stage of life is attained naturally, and in the second example there is a social and legal transition from one status to another.

Generally, people are not said to permanently occupy a liminal space or be caught in a liminal state, rather people pass through them. Therefore, the idea of a person lingering in these ambivalent states of being creates a disorienting sensation to the person as it is considered to be an experience outside of the norm of life. The placement of non-liminal things in a liminal dwelling, which could be tangible or intangible, thus creates a mystifying or de-familiarising effect on the thing itself (Kazimir). A famous example of this phenomenon is the life of Mehran Karimi Nasseri, an Iranian refugee who lived in the French Charles de Gaulle Airport's departure lounge of terminal one, between the years of 1988 to 2006. Other examples of this phenomenon can include walking around a mall at night after closing hours, living in a train, being stuck in an elevator, etc.

With the rise of research in the field of liminality, it is understood that the condition of liminality can be extended to the entire existences of people as well. Researchers such as Jeffrey Willet, Mary Jo Deegan, Robert F Murphy, Jessica Scheer, etc. have found connections between the state of liminality and the condition of disability. In the paper, "Liminality and Disability: Rites of Passage and Community in Hypermodern Society", it is argued that "that individuals with

disabilities are in the potentially unending, liminal stage of a symbolic rite of passage” (Willet and Jo Deegan). The condition of being disabled can be linked to the liminal state as the disabled person is in an in-between state, where they are neither fully well nor fully sick. People who are permanently disabled don’t experience a transition to a definitive state and thus exist in an undefined status (Murphy et al.). This state of liminality has the ability to extend beyond the disabled patient and onto those around them, primarily their familial relations who serve as their caregivers.

This study aims to create a link between the caretakers of disabled people and the concept of liminality as introduced by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal text *Rites de Passage*. The hypothesis to be proven by this study is that caregivers to disabled people occupy a liminal state as they cannot seamlessly integrate themselves into mainstream society due to the unique challenges and circumstances they experience as part of their caregiving responsibilities. This dissertation shall discuss the various concepts related to liminality such as those introduced by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, as well as the connection created between liminality and disability studies as explored by Robert F Murphy, and Jeffrey Willet. The theories of the above mentioned figures will be applied to the two films that have the theme of disability at their core.

Cinema is considered to be one of the most influential forms of media as it helps shape the understanding and knowledge related to its subject matter, whilst also promoting narratives about it. Films can be viewed as a visual medium that translates the social realities of different groups of people, which in turn, helps facilitate discourses and discussion about them. Representation in film is highly encouraged today as it provides visibility to the often marginalised or forgotten groups of people in society. Therefore, films that are based on characters with disabilities are often

lauded when they manage to convey the reality of their subjects in an accurate, true-to-life manner. In both Indian cinema and the Hollywood scene, films related to disabilities have been a staple fixture throughout the decades; however, there have been many instances of mainstream films from both industries that feature disabled characters who are reduced to harmful stereotypes which have the tendency of either romanticising their struggles, or presenting these personalities as comic-relief or even tragic figures. It should also be noted that most contemporary films related to disabilities have made positive strides in an effort of representation, examples of this include films like, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007), *Temple Grandin* (2010), *Margarita with a Straw* (2014), *Sound of Metal* (2019), etc. Amongst the films that deal with persons with disabilities, there are narratives that focus primarily on their caregivers. Such films help uncover the realities of these individuals who are often overshadowed or forgotten by representing their life experiences and the challenges faced by them. When it comes to disabled individuals with caregivers who are their own family members, there is a difference in dynamics and an emotional weight involved in the caregiving process, such caregivers have different experiences with the caregiving process as compared to paid professionals. Film that depict this unique reality of caregivers to disabled people who are also their relatives include, *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (1994), *Mar Adentro* (2004), *Lucca's World* (2025), etc.

This study which revolves around the concept of liminality and the theme of disability uses the medium of film to support its argument. The study is composed of two chapters which are as follows. Chapter One of this dissertation deals with the presentation of theoretical facts related to the field of liminality, as well its purported connection to the field of disability studies. This chapter lays the foundational tools

for analysing the chosen films in chapter two, whilst also tracing the historical development and the evolution of the concept of liminality. Some of the concepts that will be delved into include the ‘rites of passage’, ‘liminal’ & ‘liminoid experiences’, the concept of ‘communitas’, ‘liminal beings’, etc. Chapter Two presents an analysis of the two films – the Tamil-language film, *Peranbu* (2018), and the English film *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993), both films deal with characters that live with disabilities. *Peranbu* is the Tamil film, written and directed by the Indian director Ram, which was released in the year 2018. The film features the actors Mammooty and Sadhana as a father-daughter duo who together attempt to navigate a world unforgiving towards neurological disorders, whilst grappling with the reality of female adolescence. The film showcases the evolution of the relationship between Amudhavan and Paapa (played by Mammooty and Sadhana respectively), which initially starts off as turbulent before gradually becoming harmonious. Amudhavan, a former taxi-driver in Dubai, has returned to his hometown in Tamil Nadu only to find out that his wife Stella has left him and his daughter Paapa due to his prolonged periods of absence in their lives. This leaves Amudhavan as a single father who now becomes the sole caregiver to Paapa, a fourteen-year-old girl who lives with cerebral palsy. The film focuses on the lives of the pair as they try to make sense of a world that pushes them to the edges of society. It features their struggles to fit in as they move across Tamil Nadu multiple times in hopes of finding a fixed place to call home. The challenges associated with the caregiving process to a teenager with cerebral palsy is foregrounded as Amudhavan attempts to navigate his new role as a caregiver during a transformational stage of Paapa’s life, whilst also trying to foster a bond of trust with her.

The film *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* is an American coming-of-age film, directed by Lasse Hallström which was released in the year 1993. The film features Johnny Depp as the titular character Gilbert Grape, and Leonardo DiCaprio as his younger brother Arnie Grape. The film is set in the fictional sleepy town of Endora, in the American Midwestern state of Iowa. The plot revolves around the lives of the Grape family members, specifically the life of the protagonist, the twenty-four-year-old Gilbert Grape, who serves as the narrator. The narrative unfolds through Gilbert's account of his town in general, and his family in specific. The young man serves as the Grape family's patriarch after the untimely death of his father, and he's also the primary caregiver of his younger brother Arnie who has an intellectual disability. The film focuses on Gilbert's life, as well the lives of the remaining Grape family members and how they deal with raising Arnie, a young, free-spirited boy with a love for life and a penchant for mischief. The film ruminates over its titular question of what plagues the life of its protagonist; as the oldest male in the family, Gilbert has to fill in the shoes of a father-figure for his younger siblings, whilst ensuring the health and well-being of Arnie at the same time, on top of being the breadwinner of the family. His sense of disillusionment with his stuffy hometown and his own family, coupled with his caregiving responsibilities leave him feeling trapped and unable to pursue his ambitions and live a life of his own. This creates a sense of disharmony within Gilbert where he is suspended between his responsibilities on the one hand, and his own stagnating life on the other.

The above mentioned disabled characters and their experiences play a significant role in the narratives of the films, but for the purpose of this study the focus is placed on the caregivers of the disabled characters who in these cases are their closest family members. The second chapter highlights the differences in

experience that is felt by caregivers who are of blood relations to the disabled person as compared to paid professionals who are unrelated to their patients. An emphasis is placed upon how the former is more than likely to fall into a liminal space due to the unique circumstances and challenges they encounter. As able-bodied beings, these caregivers do not fall into the category of persons with disabilities, but at the same time, they cannot be neatly categorised as a part of mainstream society either. Thus, they can be seen as caught between two states of being, not quite here or there, this is due to the fact that these caregivers, who are family members of the disabled characters, are held back from participating freely in society due to the responsibilities they have to their disabled relative. These responsibilities can become challenging and burdensome when there's a lack of proper support system in place to help such individuals who are expected to lead "normal" and regular lives due to their disability-free status. This dissertation seeks to highlight the lives of these individuals, the challenges they face, and the struggles they endure, in order to foster empathetic discourse that can lead to positive change in the policy making structures of society.

Chapter 1

Conceptualising Liminality: Theoretical Foundations

The term “liminality” can be defined as “a quality of being in between two places or stages, on the verge of transitioning to something new” (“Liminality”). The inception of the notion of “Liminality” can be traced to the Dutch-German-French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, who coined the term in his seminal work *Rites de Passage* published in 1909. Charles-Arnold Kurr van Gennep, born in the year 1873, was an influential and respected ethnographer and folklorist. The theoretician is remembered today for his work regarding rites of passage ceremonies as well as his contributions to modern French folklore. He is even recognised as the founder of folklore studies in France. The term “liminality” originates from the Latin word ‘limen’, which means “threshold” (“Liminality”). According to van Gennep, the “liminal”, in relation to anthropology, can be defined as a period of change in an individual’s position in a ritual setting. When inserted into a timeline, van Gennep observed that rituals in civilisations all over the world could be demarcated into three stages: the first stage being the ‘before’, the second stage being the ‘after’, and the third stage being the ‘in between’ or the “liminal condition” (Le Hunte).

The rites of passage experienced in a person’s life is essentially concerned with the shifting of an individual or individuals from one social status to another; usually the shift is to a more valuable or respected social status. An example of this would be the transition from being an undergraduate student to being a graduate student. The changes in status can refer to a variety of rituals or phenomena concerned primarily with the human life cycle, i.e. birth, adolescence, adulthood, in

most cases marriage, and death. The phrase “rites of passage” can also be described as “transition rituals” with an emphasis being placed on the midway stage of the transition, wherein an individual who is a part of the ritual neither fully belongs to their previous social status or to the new social status (Forth).

The primary manner in which rites of passage differ from other types of rites is through their structure. They can be divided into three different classifications known as “rites of separation”, “rites of transition”, and “rites of incorporation”. Van Gennep further categorised these rituals and the phases they correspond to as “preliminal”, “liminal”, and “postliminal”, thus conjuring an image of society as a home divided into rooms, where individuals can traverse from one room to another and in the process must cross over thresholds (Forth).

Van Gennep’s contributions to anthropology were largely underappreciated during his time, however his work experienced a surge in interest during the 1960s after it was rediscovered by the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner. It was Turner who was said to have rekindled interest in the niche field of liminality and brought out its importance.

Victor W. Turner, born in 1920, was a cultural anthropologist known for his work related to symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. His work is often referred to now as symbolic and interpretive anthropology. Turner, who stumbled upon van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage* by chance was himself in a “state of suspense” or a liminal state after having sold his home in Manchester but was still awaiting his visa to America. After having read the findings of van Gennep, Turner was inspired to pen the essay “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage”, which

formed an integral chapter in his 1967 book *The Forests of Symbols*. This marked Turner's initial explorations into liminality (Thomassen, 10).

According to Turner, 'liminality' is any circumstance or thing that is "betwixt and between". Turner's proposals on liminality allows for numerous possibilities and uses of the concept that go well beyond what he had originally intended. Liminality can be applied to both space as well as time. When it comes to the temporal dimension, liminality can be extended to moments, periods or epochs; whereas when it comes to the physical realm, liminal zones can encompass not only precise thresholds but also expansive regions such as "borderlands" or even nations situated in transitional areas between more established civilisations (Thomassen).

Turner, in his essay, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology", published in the year 1974, coined the term "liminoid" which is derived from the Greek word 'eidos' meaning "form or shape". The term "liminoid" was used by Turner to refer to real-life experiences which have similar or shared characteristics of liminal experiences but are different from them as they are voluntary and do not necessarily lead to the resolution of a personal crisis. A liminoid experience does not entail a permanent change in status, as in liminal experiences, rather it resembles fleeting moments in time. The liminoid occurs in more secular and voluntary contexts, such as art, leisure, and play; these phenomena are characterized by individual creativity and expression, rather than collective ritual, as in the case of the liminal which is usually associated with social or religious rituals. With the rampant progression of industrialisation, leisure has increasingly become a more recognized aspect of "play" distinct from work and liminoid experiences have become comparatively more prevalent than liminal rites. This phenomenon could be due to the fact that there has been a significant shift in culture from the once prevalent

agrarian/tribal society to the now dominant industrial/modern society. Turner underscores how in industrial societies, the concepts of work and play have become separate entities, but in agrarian societies, the two are almost indistinguishable; play and work are intertwined in these primitive cultures and appear as symbolic gestures or rites which are believed to promote fertility, abundance, and the passage of certain liminal phases. Turner elucidates this fact by using examples of play from tribal societies, such as trickster tales, riddles from Mayan and Cherokee cultures, sacred ball games, etc. It is due to industrialisation that there has been a distinct break between the previously interwoven concepts of work and play which have subsequently been placed into separate boxes to almost never intersect. Turner explains the reason behind this change as, the shift of emphasis being placed from the collective to the individual. This now meant that societies were turning away from community-based activities or ritual obligations to more individualistic choices in activities, where work and leisure are not intermixed but rather are optional. The work one does for earning a living has now become separate from their other activities, it is “no longer natural, but arbitrary” (Turner). Turner’s key observation is that the industrial revolution helped usher in the era of having “free time”, something that had not existed in archaic societies, and something that helped create a space for liminoid experiences to exist (Turner). Examples of liminoid experiences include attending music concerts or large sporting events like the Olympics, carnivals, or even flying in an airplane. There’s usually a shared sense of community felt by the participants of these activities. In the book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, the concept of ‘communitas’ is introduced by Victor Turner. The anthropologist defines ‘communitas’ as a feeling of heightened solidarity which is witnessed specifically during the liminal moments of rituals where the participants of the ritual step out of

their usual social roles (“Communitas”). Here social hierarchies and structures are temporarily suspended which allows for there to be an equal playing field, this thus creates a heightened sense of belonging and unity amongst all those part of the liminal period.

The term liminality can also be used on the macro-level to speak of entire societies or even civilisations at large, and it can also be used on a micro-level to refer to individuals (Thomassen). It should be noted that liminal spaces or periods can be tangible (like a border or a twilight period) or intangible (such as a state of mind) (“Liminality”). Liminal experiences can occur spontaneously as in the case of natural calamities, or unanticipated absence of loved ones, or they can be artificially produced as in the case of rituals. People can deliberately look for a liminal position to exist in, outside so-called normalcy, as is the case with certain artists and writers. On the flip side, entire social groups can be granted the status of being liminal even if they never wished for it (Thomassen 14).

Liminal people, or individuals who exist within transitional spaces, are essentially at a threshold of society – they are frozen between just entering and being just outside of the boundaries. This social state can be used to describe children undergoing puberty and various rituals associated with the transition between childhood and adulthood (such as ‘bar mitzvah’ and ‘bat mitzvah’ in Jewish tradition, or the ‘quinceanera’ in Latin American cultures), these individuals are no longer children but they are not yet grown men or women; as such they have lost their old status but are yet to acquire a new one. This is however a temporary state of being. Victor Turner also helped develop the concept of “Liminal beings”. According to Turner, these entities can be seen as representations of the co-existence of contrasting concepts such as good/evil, high/low in the liminal experience (Turner). Turner states

that liminal beings often appear in the form of “monsters” or creatures that appear to be transitioning from one state to another when it comes to mythology. These legendary liminal entities are seen as hybrid beings that combine two distinct states of being into a single physical body, for example, centaurs, sphinxes, minotaurs, etc. Liminal entities in general are considered to be “socially invisible” as they have left one stage of classification but have not yet entered the next stage (Quartier).

In the essay, “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality”, Bjørn Thomassen describes how liminality as a concept can be extended to human beings. Thomassen states that the notion of liminality can be applied to “a whole series of minorities”. According to him, immigrant groups or refugees can be seen as liminal as they are “betwixt and between home and host, part of society, but sometimes never fully integrated”; the label of liminality can also be applied to transsexuality, or any form of the transgender identity (Thomassen 13).

Liminality can extend as an entire reality for certain groups of individuals, namely those with disabilities. People who are handicapped have long been othered or recognized as being apart from the norm due to their particular conditions. Millions of people in this community are essentially removed or detached from the mainstream society and are made to live cloistered existences due to their physical or cognitive impairments. In the case of the physically disabled (such as blind or deaf individuals), they are unable to interact with the world in a manner where they can fully exchange meanings. In the case of paralytics, they are often inhibited from meaningful exchanges with society due to their inability to venture into the world as they may please. Thus the lives of many individuals with disabilities are often marked by a sense of isolation or alienation, which leads to “normal” or non-disabled people finding them to be enigmatic or alien which further worsens their ability to connect

with others. It should be noted that in the contemporary world, there's an increasing number of disabled individuals who are able to integrate themselves into regular society and are capable of living independent lives with economic autonomy. However, there's still a large population of the community who dwell in the margins or the "twilight zones of social indefiniteness". This social condition can be recognised as being in a state of liminality. Disabled individuals can be seen to occupy a liminal state, or as having an undefined status, as they are neither fully ill nor well, and neither do they get many opportunities to be active participants in society nor are they completely removed from it (Murphy et al. 238).

Caretakers to disabled people, be it paid-professionals or family members, play an integral role in the maintaining of the health and well-being of these individuals. In the case of medical professionals who are trained and paid to handle handicapped individuals, there is a close relationship formed between patient and caretaker due to the nature of caregiving activities that often render the patient extremely vulnerable. The relationship between staff and patient is usually authoritative and permits little to no favouritism. Though both parties are in continual close contact for periods of time at a stretch, the medical staff usually keep themselves distant through the veil of professionalism (Murphy et al. 238).

The situation is however dissimilar when it comes to caregivers of disabled people who happen to be of familial or blood relations to the patient. The lack of professional barrier between patient and caregiver in this situation poses special issues for the caregiver as there is a sense of familial obligation that ties them to their differently-abled relative. In this situation, there's no concept of taking a break or being compensated for one's efforts. Here the process of caregiving is absolute and extended and can affect the caregivers themselves on various emotional and

psychological levels. These facilitators of well-being are themselves prone to experiencing liminality. This is due to the fact that their close and prolonged relationship with their relative-turned-patient leaves them with a minute understanding of their particular condition of disability and what it entails; these caregivers become an intrinsic part of their relative's life so much so that they become well-versed with the struggles and inhibitions that plague the life of a disabled person without actually being one. These caregivers may increasingly embody a sense of non-belonging to the able-bodied world due to the nature and frequency of their responsibilities which often keeps them from being able to freely or actively participate in society, but on the other hand they are aware that they cannot be fully integrated into the disabled community as they themselves are not disabled. Thus, these individuals can be understood to occupy a liminal space where they are suspended between the state of disability and able-bodiedness. This can lead to feelings of psychological distress, burnout, or even a sense of displacement on the level of personal identity. The concept of liminality can be used to understand the unique challenges faced by not only disabled individuals but also their caretakers. It can be employed to help develop more compassionate and supportive policies and practices in the caregiving practice.

Chapter 2

The Liminal Space of Care: A Comparative Analysis of *Peranbu* and

What's Eating Gilbert Grape

The condition of liminality is enigmatic in nature as it is ambiguous and often difficult to encapsulate as it is an experience that affects an individual on various levels, and the experience itself varies from person to person. When examining persons with disabilities and their caretakers, it can be observed that the condition of liminality entraps both parties but in different ways. This sense of being liminal first arises in the disabled individual and then can be understood to extend beyond them and unto their caregiver. This situation arises not because liminality is a contagious experience, rather it is due to the fact that these caregivers to disabled people do not have the right support systems in their societies that can aid in the monitoring of their well-being. To elucidate the argument that caregivers to disabled people inhabit a liminal space, this chapter will explore and analyse two films that deal with disabled characters and the involvement of their respective families in the caregiving process.

The film *Peranbu* (2018) serves as a realistic depiction of the life and struggles of both a young girl living with cerebral palsy, as well as her father who serves as her primary caregiver. Although Paapa is an important figure in the film, it is Amudhavan who is at the core of the narrative. The story is conveyed through his narration and it his choices that affect both his life as well his daughter's. Early on in the film it is established that Amudhavan lives a life separate from his family; this gap is not just induced by the physical distance between him and his wife & daughter, but also by his emotional unavailability to them.

As Paapa's primary caregiver, Amudhavan can be said to occupy a liminal state as he is unable to fully integrate himself into mainstream society due to the nature of his caregiving responsibilities. He is essentially caught in a state of suspension between two realities – the life of his disabled daughter, and his own able-bodied existence. This is exemplified in the film through many instances. Firstly, Amudhavan's life itself can be categorised into two out of the three stages as prescribed by Arnold van Gennep in his book *Rites de Passage* – the protagonist's life in Dubai before moving back to Tindivanam aligns with the 'preliminal' stage, while his life after moving back to India and having to take custody of Paapa aligns with the 'liminal' stage (Van Gennep). In the preliminal stage, Amudhavan experienced no personal ties to his daughter and her existence was totally independent of his; however, in the liminal stage, Amudhavan becomes Paapa's sole caregiver and parental figure and finds himself steeped with newfound responsibilities that ties his daughter's life intricately with his. In the preliminal stage, Amudhavan wasn't as nearly as involved in the supporting of his child, he was strictly a part of the able-bodied world and didn't experience a sense of ambiguity. However, in the liminal stage, Amudhavan is essentially caught between being an able-bodied being who has the opportunity to meaningfully interact with mainstream society, but at the same time is inhibited to due to his responsibilities as a caregiver which leaves him with unique experiences and challenges that can dictate against his own personal wishes.

There are numerous instances in the film that couple with the above mentioned circumstances that leads to Amudhavan occupying a liminal state in his life. The setting itself which Amudhavan chooses to relocate Paapa and himself to reflects a state of liminality. By moving to a house located in a remote forest in Kodaikanal, Amudhavan chooses to close Paapa and himself off from the outside world that

rejected them in the first place. Being a gulf-returnee, divorcé, and a single father to a child with cerebral palsy has made Amudhavan a much-discussed and gossiped about figure in his hometown much to his chagrin. This prompts him to leave from his home at Tindivanam and move to a peaceful territory of seclusion, free from prying eyes and disparaging tongues. This shift from a more urban background to a rural setting, which is ultimately not long-lived, creates a liminoid experience for the father and daughter. The house they stay in is itself a relic of the past, being the former home of a colonial officer, and is maintained in a manner to preserve its old-world charm as can be seen in the house's deliberate lack of electricity. The house and the nearby bridge stand as the sole signs of civilisation and human inhabitation in contrast to the otherwise ubiquitous naturalness of the forest. The liminoid, as elucidated by Victor Turner, refers to the individualistic, creative, and recreational form of liminality that has increasingly begun to replace traditional societies' rites of passage which are community-based and mandatory. The relocation to Kodaikanal can be considered to be a liminoid experience as it was a voluntary choice by Amudhavan; he sought to use the move to be able to bond better with Paapa and to allow her to express herself creatively through art, as well to enjoy the natural world (Turner). Forests are generally considered to be liminal spaces themselves as they serve as a kind of threshold between civilisation and the unknown that lies beyond. In many cultures, forests are considered to be places where one may go to in order to seek rejuvenation, isolation, wisdom, or gain enlightenment or a sense of self-discovery (Turner). These natural landscapes can serve as a transitional space, for eg. *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri begins in a dark forest which symbolises the spiritual confusion of Dante before he is ultimately transformed. The forest setting serves the purpose of showing the growth of the relationship between the father and daughter, and how the

two slowly but surely come to better understand each other, thus solidifying their relationship.

In his personal life, Amudhavan, at the beginning of the film is presented as the husband of Stella; however, it soon becomes evident that his status as her husband is in jeopardy due to his negligent attitude. Although it isn't explicitly depicted in the film, it can be understood that Stella and Amudhavan undergo a divorce which leaves him single again after over a decade. The divorce between can be ascertained by the fact that both Stella and Amudhavan eventually go on to remarry in the future. This transition from being a married person to being a divorcé is considered by theoreticians to be a liminal experience in one's life (Bergmann). This is due to the fact that during the process of a divorce, one's exact marital status is quite unclear, as is suggested in the film with Amudhavan and Stella; the couple are in the process of being separated legally, therefore, they aren't exactly still spouses, yet they haven't crossed the threshold into being divorcees either. Since the film doesn't delve into detail about their divorce it adds a level of ambiguity to Amudhavan's marital status. The protagonist does go on to remarry after he forms a relationship with Vijayalakshmi. This marital alliance is unfortunately short-lived due to the fact that Vijayalakshmi was conning her so-called "husband" Amudhavan as part of a grand scheme to gain ownership over his property. It is revealed that Vijayalakshmi was already married to another man while she began working for the father and daughter at their home in Kodaikanal. This pre-existence of an actual marriage between Vijayalakshmi and her real husband overrules the second marriage between Amudhavan and Vijayalakshmi. It can be observed here again that Amudhavan's marital status is ambiguous as he is married to an already married woman which fails to make Vijayalakshmi his actual wife. Amudhavan leaves Vijayalakshmi and once

more enters a liminal state of being caught in-between being married and un-married. The deceit from Vijayalakshmi's side creates a chasm of hurt and emotional pain in the life of not only Amudhavan but also Paapa, and the two are forced to leave their Kodaikanal residence. At the end of the film, it is revealed that Amudhavan has married once again, this time it is Meera who becomes his wife. In this relationship, there's a clear crossing of the threshold between being unmarried and married by both parties; here Amudhavan goes from being a divorcé to being a married man again, and Meera goes from being a single woman to a married woman. This marriage resolves Amudhavan's liminality in his marital status.

During the second half of the film, which begins after the interval card, the father and daughter are seen trying to find a place to live in the city. The two are ushered around between potential dwellings and are initially unable to find a suitable place that meets their needs and is within their budget. The two experience being homeless, albeit for an extremely short period of time; it is during this time the pair enter another liminal state of being in-between finding a permanent residence and living on the street. The unexpected shift from a remote and tranquil setting to a bustling city also creates a jarring effect on the two, especially for Paapa, who lacking proper social skills is on the one hand slightly anxious, yet excited by the stimulating environment. The multiple changes in residence within the city itself marks an extended liminal experience for the pair which only ends once they settle down for good in a permanent residence, as can be seen at the end of the film.

Before moving back to Tindivanam, Amudhavan worked as a driver in Dubai, and even later on in his life he takes up work as a driver to make ends meet. Being a driver would entail constantly being on the move, that too not dictated by one's own will but rather by the fancies of the client. This constant movement between places

and not having a fixed position can induce the state of a liminal experience for the driver. Taxi drivers can be said to exist in a state of in-betweenness as they are constantly transitioning between locations and passengers. They get to experience fragments of the lives of their passengers without becoming a part of them. Driving at night is also considered to be liminal experience as the world may appear surreal and detached in the night-time, this is showcased in the film during the scene where Amudhavan is driving about at night before he meets Meera. The scene depicts the cityscape as an unfamiliar space that differs greatly in the shadow of the night than in the light of the day; there's a sense of dissonance and lack of safety, the presence of prostitutes lends to the feeling of illicit activity and a sensation of weighted mystery.

In Victor Turner's book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, the concept of "communitas", as elaborated in the previous chapter, is mentioned. In the film, the concept of communitas is displayed through Paapa's interactions with the other youngsters at the special-needs home for children with cerebral palsy. For the first time in her life, Paapa gets to live amongst others who are similar to her, and amongst a group that wouldn't judge or discriminate against her. It is in this egalitarian community that Paapa is truly seen by others apart from her father and she gets to be understood by her peers in a meaningful manner. Although the children at the home are abused fairly regularly by their handlers, they develop a sense of solidarity and camaraderie. The song sequence "Setthu Pochu Manasu" provides a montage that shows Paapa interacting with her peers; the shot in which she raises her hands in the air in imitation of the surrounding children illustrates her growing openness to the community and her willingness to learn (*Peranbu* 01:43:37-01:43:47). Amudhavan comes to understand the importance of such a community for Paapa and realises his mistake in hiding her away from society. He also realises that he does not

fit into this *communitas*, and therefore exists outside of it. This coupled with the fact that he realises he cannot cater to his daughter's growing needs that stem from adolescence, such as her sexual awakening, leads him to come to terms with the fact that he cannot truly fully provide for her as he would like to.

As Paapa's sole caregiver, Amudhavan is tasked with the gargantuan task of not only providing for his daughter financially, but also taking care for her in every possible manner so as to ensure her growth, comfort, and well-being. Amudhavan, who eventually becomes weighed down by his responsibilities, can be seen to occupy an ambiguous "betwixt and in between" status which essentially threatens his social stability – he is not viewed favourably by his family who are disappointed by his divorce, and are keen to distance themselves from Paapa who they view superstitiously as they feel she might spread her condition.

The constant unpredictable changes in his life that induce multiple different states of liminality ultimately have a great and grave impact on Amudhavan. The constant sense of uncertainty and having to face the unknown diminishes his sense of effectiveness both as a parent and a caregiver to his daughter. Being the victim of the consistent tossing and turning of life's forces leaves him feeling helpless and not in control of the circumstances that continually plague his and Paapa's lives. These negative feelings of helplessness and disillusionment become extremely pronounced in the psyche of Amudhavan, which culminates in the seed of suicide being planted in his mind. The realisation that he cannot provide the required care for his daughter, something only health-care professionals can effectively do, which is also something he cannot afford, leads him to feel dejected and like he has failed his child.

Amudhavan's mental health and psychological well-being are truly compromised at the climax of the film. This leads the protagonist to decide upon taking his own life as

well as Paapa's to escape from the cruelties of nature and life as he truly believes that death would be far more forgiving than a society that cannot cater to his and his daughter's special needs. The pair wading into the sea symbolises their journey to attempt crossing the threshold between life and death, a liminal experience in itself. Their journey is abruptly cut short by the intervention of Meera, who drags the pair back into the metaphorical preliminal stage of life.

The final chapter of the film is titled as "Nature is Compassionate" (*Peranbu* 02:21:09-02:21:13). This chapter serves as an epilogue to the story of Amudhavan and Paapa. In this concluding scene, it is revealed that the father and daughter have finally found a sense of stability in their lives all thanks to Meera who has now become the wife of Amudhavan and a step-mother to Paapa. Amudhavan narrates "I had to plunge into an ocean and emerge out of it to discover something called compassion. And the person who made me discover this, is my wife Meera" (*Peranbu* 02:21:55-02:22:08). This final line of narration in the film is impactful as it shows how both Amudhavan and Paapa have finally found a place in the world they live in. They are no longer floating between liminal experiences aimlessly, rather they have become grounded and have gained a sense of peace and satisfaction with life. Amudhavan still remains as a caregiver to Paapa, however, he is now more well-adjusted in his position as he has found happiness and love in his life again. By finally embracing Meera into his life, Amudhavan is granted with the love and compassion he has sought after for so long. Here, it can be seen how an outcaste from society helps another in a similar position by sharing a sense of empathy with them. It can be understood that both Amudhavan and Paapa's lives have improved significantly by the very end of the film, this can be ascribed to the fact that they have both received the much-awaited and much-deserved love and kindness they severely lacked earlier

in the film. Their world has seemingly transformed from a place of cruelty and harshness to a place of possibility and light.

Through the film *Peranbu*, the audience gets to witness a first-hand account of the estranging effect that tends to engulf family members of disabled people who also serve as their primary caregivers. The film perfectly showcases how in many parts of Indian society disability is seen as “unnatural” or the result of sinful acts from a past life. In a scene early on in the film, Amudhavan’s sister-in-law informs him that it would be best if he and Paapa moved to another house as she fears her own daughter might get influenced by Paapa and potentially develop her condition in the future. His sister-in-law says “My daughter keeps imitating your daughter. I fear one day she will turn like her” (*Peranbu* 00:14:31–00:14:36). This scene is evocative of how large populations of the country remain uneducated on the lives and conditions experienced by disabled people, thus creating harmful narratives that besmirch their image. These kinds of narratives also negatively impact the caregivers of the persons with disabilities as they too become stigmatised by association. This makes it harder for both the disabled person, as well as their caregiver to assimilate into the society in which they live in.

The second film that is utilised by this study for illuminating the argument is the English film, *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape*. The film *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993) is based on the novel of the same name written by Peter Simpson Hedges, published in the year 1991. The film casts its focus on the life of the eponymous Gilbert Grape and it meditates upon his relationships with his family members, as well as his town’s inhabitants. The second most prominent character of the film is Gilbert’s younger brother Arnold “Arnie” Grape. It is Gilbert’s relationship with his

brother, and Arnie's actions, caused as a consequence of his intellectual disability, that drive the plot forward. In this narrative, Arnie's primary caregivers consist not only of his older brother Gilbert, but the remainder of his family as well. Through this film, it is observed how the members of the Grape family, especially Gilbert, become engulfed in a liminal space created as an outcome of Arnie's disability.

It can be ascertained that the structure of the Grape family is built around Arnie, whose needs take the centre stage of the family's concerns. Each member featured in the film, serves a differing degree of importance in the caregiving process for Arnie. Ellen, the youngest member of the family, is the least involved in the caring for her brother; this could be due to her age as well as the fact that she harbours a minor sense of animosity against Arnie for consuming most of her family's attention. However, Ellen does work part-time, and presumably does financially provide for the family. Amy, the oldest sibling present in the film, plays a major role in maintaining the general well-being of the family through her housekeeping duties. She takes care of Arnie as much as she can, and as much as her workload allows her to. Bonnie, the matriarch of the family, may not seem to be as involved in the upkeep of her family due to her limited mobility caused by her obesity. However, on the contrary, she plays a vital role in supporting her youngest son emotionally whenever he gets overwhelmed, and often disciplines him when he is being difficult. Bonnie also extends her motherly prowess to her other children and tries her best to ensure they aren't too overburdened. Gilbert, is the family member who serves as the most significant caregiver to Arnie. He spends a majority of his time ensuring the well-being of his brother and even has permission to allow the young boy to accompany him at his full-time job so that he can keep an eye on him. Gilbert is responsible for a number of duties related to his brother's wellbeing, which include but are not limited

to – bathing, feeding, and rescuing him whenever his behaviour goes haywire. Each member has their own role to play in the caregiving process and does their part as well as they can. However, the prolonged nature of the caretaking activity has created a strain on the family, especially on Gilbert, whose life is adversely affected. Gilbert's, as well as his family's existence in a liminal state can be seen portrayed through many instances in the film.

The setting of the film plays an integral part in conveying the overall atmosphere of the story – one of stifling confinement. Endora, the fictional town in the Midwestern state of Iowa, is the hometown of the characters of the story. Gilbert, the narrator, describes Endora as: “it's a town where nothing much ever happens, and nothing much ever will” (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape* 00:03:10–00:03:13). This comment reflects Gilbert's sense of disillusionment and introduces the viewer to Gilbert's sense of discontent that stems from his hometown. He prefaces this statement by saying, “describing Endora is like dancing to no music” (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape* 00:03:05–00:03:07), during the opening montage, stills of the town are shown which include shots of the various locations such as the town's pharmacy End of the Line Drugs, the ice-cream parlour Dairy Dreme, and Lamson's Grocery. The shots of these locations all have the common feeling of desolation and being run-down; there is an acute absence of any humans or animals during this scene which lends to the tone of isolation and abandonment. Here, Endora is presented as a town that not only features the liminal aesthetic, as can be seen through its bare structures and the sensation of sterility and loneliness it lends, but it can also be viewed as a liminal space. The town can be said to be a liminal space as it is caught between the opposing forces of tradition and modernity. The town and most of its inhabitants are quite set in their ways, but at the same time the world outside of Endora can be seen

rapidly advancing and keeping up with the modern age – this is portrayed through the FoodLand supermarket, located miles outside of the town, near the interstate.

FoodLand can be seen as representative of modernity and is a constant threat to

Endora's old world values, which can be seen portrayed through Lamson's Grocery.

Gilbert works at Lamson's and has no real sense of connection or loyalty to his

workplace, his boss Mr. Lamson ensures that his employees never set foot in

Foodland as it pushing the small-scale grocery to the brink of closing; this can be seen as a controlling tactic that dictates Gilbert's feeling of discontent and disconnect with his town.

The opening shot of the film is poignant and features the long and winding road that leads to Endora, this shot highlights the significance of the road and the connection it has to the two brothers of the story. The road can be seen as reflective of the condition of the siblings, specifically Gilbert – the road, just like their lives, appears to be endless, winding, and relatively lonely, and is marked by ups and downs. The road can also be seen as representative of the much dreamed of route of escape from Endora for Gilbert. In the book, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* by Marc Augé, the concept of “non-places” is introduced by the author; these spaces include airports, public transport stations, highways, etc. These kinds of places represent spaces where people exist disconnected, albeit for a short time, from having a stable identity, as these spaces are anonymous and transitory in nature and do not belong to anyone per se (Augé). This can be connected to the idea of liminality and how roads serve as an in-between space of passage and not a destination in itself, they typically symbolise uncertainty, journey, and transformation, all aspects that are experienced by the protagonist by the end of the film. The closing scene of the film mirrors that of the opening and features

the brother duo waiting by the side of the road for Becky and her grandmother; however, this final scene is not marked by a sense of confinement or a longing to leave as the pair are finally free to traverse the road less travelled by and can finally escape from the clutches of their small hometown.

Another significance that can be ascertained from the motif of the road is the celebration of the annual Airstreamers' Club gathering that passes by Endora via the same road seen at the beginning and end of the film. The vehicles that pass by reminds the Grapes of the world that exists outside of Endora. Though the campers pass by the town, they never stop at Endora, rather the town just serves as an in-between space that is passed by in order to reach the final destination, further lending to the idea that Endora itself is a liminal space. This annual event can be seen as a liminoid experience in the lives of the Grapes, as it is something that they look forward to each year. As per Turner's definition, the experience is liminoid in nature as it is voluntary, and recreational, and allows the brothers to bond; it is a short-lived event that serves as a temporary escape, after which the two return to their regular lives.

Thus the setting of the town influences Gilbert and leads to him feeling helpless and pinned down. Endora is essentially a trap for people like Gilbert who strive for something more in life. He is weighed down by his responsibilities to his family, especially Arnie, and possibly fears eventually conforming to the routine and mundaneness of Endora after all hope for a brighter future are gone.

Gilbert's fairly repetitive and mundane life is challenged with Becky's arrival in the town. Becky presents a new-found world of opportunities for Gilbert – her lithe spirit, and her lust for life and adventure inject a fresh breath of air into Gilbert's

otherwise stale life. Becky, being an empathetic person, recognises Gilbert's sense of despondency and demonstrates an interest in helping improve the young man's emotional and mental state of being. She encourages him to better process his emotions, whilst challenging himself so as to not fall victim to the town's dullness. Becky is one of the few characters to actually "notice" Gilbert; this attention that is cast upon the young man feels foreign to him and he is grateful for it as his familial issues, personal dilemmas & longings, and his life in general finally have a chance of being acknowledged in a world where he doesn't have the freedom to live just for himself. With Becky's arrival, Gilbert is given his long-needed attention, and through his relationship with her, he is finally able to open up and traverse through a previously unknown emotional terrain (GradeSaver).

Gilbert's overall fairly downcast demeanour can be assumed to be caused due to his ambiguous state of being as someone caught between being Arnie's caregiver & big brother, as well as being his own person. The title of the film itself, suggests that something is "eating" at, or consuming the protagonist from the inside out; the title, presented as a question, presents the possibility of there being a number of factors that have led to Gilbert's current state of being. His youth is being expended before his very eyes, yet there isn't much he feels he can do about it as his responsibilities are far too important and his love for his brother is immeasurable. The Grape family in general also share this sense of despondency; this is portrayed through the dinner table scenes when the family is seated for supper. There is a strong air of chaos and disharmony at the dining table environment as can be seen through the yelling, arguments, snide comments passed, and attempts at discipline; thus, the dinners which are meant to bring the family together, actually showcase its dysfunctionality and woes. This general atmosphere of disagreement amongst the family members stems

from their prolonged individual efforts in attempting to sustain each other, take care of Arnie, and of course themselves. With Bonnie's condition of obesity, her children save for Arnie, are expected to alter their lives and change their behaviour in order to accommodate their mother. Thus, Gilbert, Amy, and Ellen have to mould their lives around those of Arnie and Bonnie.

If the Grape family were to be inserted into van Gennep's tripartite structure of the rites of passage, the family's experiences would coincide with the liminal stage as they have been in a state of flux since Arnie was diagnosed as a young child. Their pre-liminal stage would have ended with Arnie's diagnosis being revealed, whilst their post-liminal stage can only begin if for some reason they no longer have to take care of the boy, either because they have hired a professional to take care of him, or because Arnie got better (which has a low likelihood), or if the boy succumbs to death.

Death is a recurring motif in the film that hangs over the characters, although in a fairly translucent manner. Death can be considered as a liminal experience as it marks the transition between life and the unknown reality beyond life. In most cultures around the world, deaths are followed by ceremonies or rites of passage that mark the passing of a person, for example funerals, last rites, mourning periods, abstinence, etc. The experience of death is capable of creating a liminal experience not just for those who have passed, but also for their loved ones who usually undergo an emotional transitional period (Van Gennep).

The idea of death is introduced early on in the film with relation to Arnie. The celebration of the boy's 18th birthday is viewed as a great event as it marks his feat over his presumed short life span. Gilbert reveals how doctors believed that Arnie

wouldn't live past the age of ten years – “Doctors said we would be lucky if Arnie lived to be ten. Well, ten came and went. Now the doctors are saying “Any time now. Arnie can go at any time”” (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape* 00:03:37–00:03:45). Thus, there's a lingering sense of death that surrounds the boy unbeknownst to him; his family is aware of this situation and live their life in a state of constant tension. Arnie can be seen to inhabit a liminal space too, as he is suspended between having a regular healthy life and also having to live under the veil of a premature death. However, turning eighteen marks Arnie's crossing over into adulthood, a significant rite of passage in the boy's life, made even more important due to his condition. The first actual death in the film is that of Mr. Carver, the husband of the woman Gilbert was having an affair with. His death is ironic as he is an insurance broker and he repeatedly attempted to get Gilbert and his family on one of his family-insurance policies. Ultimately, Mr. Carver suffers a heart attack and drowns after falling face first into a kiddie pool. His death shocks the town's community and his wife is looked at with suspicion, which prompts her to move out of the small treacherous town. Bobby, a friend of Gilbert's, is the local funeral director. He is a character that openly embraces the idea of people dying as it means his business, which is usually quite dormant, will thrive. He tries to gauge whether any members of the town are close to dying, and makes jokes about the idea of Gilbert being murdered by Mr. Carver if his affair with Betty Carver is found out. Bobby also reveals that as a funeral director, he and his employees sometimes crack jokes about the grotesque bodies they encounter. This thought troubles Gilbert later on after his mother has passed away and prompts his and his family's decision to burn her body instead, so as to protect her from being humiliated after death. For Bobby, death is a spectacle and for both the funeral director and Mr. Carver, death is something they can profit from. The death that

haunts the Grape family from the onset of the narrative is the death of Mr. Grape, the former patriarch of the family. It was his suicide that left a deep scar on the family, especially Bonnie, who descends into a downward mental spiral and eats as a coping mechanism to numb her pain and suffering. Bonnie's own death marks a major shift in the life of the Grape family. Her death marks the end to an era of life that the siblings had only ever known of, and simultaneously signals the beginning of a new future. The Grape children are freed from the metaphorical confines of their home after the death their house-bound mother; the house itself has a great emotional weight attached to it, not only is it the childhood home of the family, it also happens to be the place where Mr. Grape took his own life, and subsequently the same place where Bonnie breathes her last breath. Gilbert even reveals that it was his father who built the house – "My dad built the house and it's my job to keep up the repairs." (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape* 00:03:30-00:03:33). The burning down of the house near the end of the film is symbolic of the destruction of the Grape family's past life, a life where they were relegated to the margins of society as they were viewed as anomalies to the traditional image of a family. The destruction of the house by fire cremates Bonnie's body and frees the siblings from the large emotional burden they were carrying around that prematurely aged them; the fire that destroys the house also sets them free and ushers in a new age of freedom from the past.

As stated earlier, the Grape family can be said to inhabit a liminal space that is created out of their caregiving responsibilities to Arnie. The family clearly does belong to the mainstream society of Endora, a society which views the family in a condescending manner as they do not adhere to a traditional family structure. This is again brought on due to special challenges faced by them in relation to raising Arnie and protecting Bonnie from the outside world. Gilbert who plays the most impactful

role in caring for Arnie, acts as a stand-in for the paternal figure in the lives of his brother Arnie and little sister Ellen. The film focuses on the long-term effects that being in this position has left on the twenty-four-year-old. Gilbert embodies a great sense of selflessness when it comes to caring for his family, particularly his younger brother, this results in the repression of his own desires. Being pushed into the role of the family's breadwinner and Arnie's caregiver at the young age of seventeen, that too under the traumatic circumstance of his father's suicide, has left Gilbert emotionally stunted and unable to properly process his emotions or understand his own life due to the constant stress he faces. In a manner similar to Mr. Carver, Gilbert too is weighed down by his duties to his family. Mr. Carver's death, which greatly impacts Gilbert, demonstrates how the pressures of taking care of and maintaining a family can have its negative consequences. Through the death of Mr. Carver, Gilbert learns that he must create a balance between living for his family as well living a life for himself. He had to prematurely become an adult in order to cater to his family's needs; thus when he begins to fall for Becky, it can be seen that Gilbert finally has the opportunity to behave like his own age and enjoy an age-appropriate relationship, unlike his affair with the older Betty Carver. This relationship also encourages him to take the reins of his life into his own hands.

The condition of disability has become an increasingly visible and much discussed topic in society through strides made by visual mediums like film. These kinds of films when made in accordance with the reality of persons with disabilities can be said to help create a more empathetic audience who might otherwise be ignorant of the various types of disabilities as well the challenges associated with each one. Through films like the ones discussed in this chapter, it can be observed that the challenges faced by disabled people need to be discussed increasingly, but at the same

time, there needs to be new discourses that cater specifically to their caregivers as these individuals are often left behind while it comes to the discussion of such topics. The profound and pervasive sense of uncertainty felt by the caregiver characters in the films mentioned above reflect the reality of millions of people around the world who are in a similar situation. Therefore, it can be understood that there's a serious need to incorporate a more inclusive approach when it comes to understanding the lives of caregivers to persons with disabilities as their needs and issues are left unaddressed which makes their lives more strenuous than it already is with their caretaking duties.

Conclusion

Liminality as an anthropological concept can be understood to be universal in nature, this is due to the fact that the phenomenon of change and transition are common to the experiences of all human societies. During the phase of liminality, individuals or even groups of people exist in a state of being “betwixt and in-between” which is marked by the feelings of instability and confusion. As suggested by Arnold van Gennep in his *Rites de Passage*, these changes can take place through rituals that mark the transitions of one’s life. Liminality was initially used to describe the rites of passage one experiences in their life, however, it has now come to encapsulate broader concepts such as social, psychological, cultural, and political transitions that reflect the universality of this phenomenon across human societies. The most universal of liminal experiences would be the transitional phase of adolescence, where individuals cross over a threshold from childhood into adulthood. These experiences mark important changes in one’s life that shape their overall being.

The condition of liminality can be observed to coincide with the experiences of caregivers to disabled people, specifically caregivers who are directly related to the person they are caring for. These caregivers can be said to inhabit a liminal space as they are caught between two realities. On the one hand, they are able-bodied beings with an intimate knowledge of the condition of disability that they provide care for, however, since they are not disabled themselves, they cannot be considered to be a part of the disabled community. On the other hand, the lives of these caretakers are usually spent immersed in the act of caregiving, so much so that they are unable to integrate into mainstream society and meet the demands required of them by it. These caregivers rarely have the opportunity to engage in their own lives in a meaningful

manner as they are caught up in ensuring the overall well-being of their loved one. These individuals are expected to perform their caregiving duties at all times as they do not have the luxury of taking a break from their work, from which they gain no remuneration. These caregivers are often in the position of having no choice or say when it comes to the caregiving process, they are faced with an additional pressure of having to live up to the expectations placed upon them as they are expected to care for their disabled loved one despite the personal challenges or setbacks they may face. This can lead to the development of stress, amongst other negative side effects, which can together culminate in burnout, leaving the caregiver emotionally spent.

This reality that is faced by caregivers to disabled people is often overlooked as their struggles are side-lined or are viewed as lesser than those of the person that they take care of. These individuals are figuratively rendered invisible as their entire existence is often equated to just caring for their disabled relative. These individuals can be said to occupy a liminal space as their existence is spent between being a caregiver to someone with a disability, whilst not being disabled themselves, and being an able-bodied person who does not get the same opportunities to integrate into and function in mainstream society like someone else who is able-bodied but free from such duties.

Through this dissertation, the requirement for a more inclusive approach when it comes to the examination of disability on the lives of individuals is highlighted. Caregivers to disabled people are a vital component in the care-facilitating process for persons with disabilities and should therefore be foregrounded too when it comes to discussions based on the topic of disability. The unique challenges faced by them as a consequence of their duties should be brought to light; a more empathetic approach to policy-making should be gauged so as to ensure the emotional, mental, and

psychological well-being of these individuals. The improvement of their life's circumstances by easing the burden of constant caregiving can help them pursue their personal ambitions and dreams. The overall improved well-being of the caretaker would no doubt be reflected in the life of their disabled relative in a positive manner. Thus, implementing inclusive policies which can be reflected primarily in the workplace domain, can help create a society where its various members are given the opportunity to participate freely and further their lives.

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