



Discourse of Queer Identity: An Analysis of Queer Self in selected Malayalam movies

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Abstract:

The representation of homosexuality in Malayalam movies has always been seen as timorous. This paper is an attempt to bring out the potentials of queer readings in Malayalam movies through discourse analysis. The films selected for this study include RanduPenkuttikal (Two Girls) by Mohan (1978), Padmarajan's Deshadanakili Karayarilla (Migratory Birds Don't Cry, 1986), Ligy J Pullappally's 2004 movie Sancharram, Rithu (2009) by Shyamaprasad, Mumbai Police (2013) by Rosshan Andrews and M B Padmakumar's My life Partner (2014). The selected movies are noted for their queer aspect and these films make a soft and tactful treatment of queer elements in their projection of sexual identities.

The practice of compulsory heterosexuality deforms the narrative dynamics of queer movies and movies in Kerala, one of the highly acclaimed film industries in the country, are not excluded from this homophobia. In Malayalam film industry, it's tricky to have a straight queer movie by breaking the stereotype images of heterosexuality that passes as a continuance of an age old tradition and with which the viewers are readily recognized.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Gender, Identity, Third Gender, Malayalam Cinema, Queer Movies

Introduction

Like any art form film can be used as a critique of modern society and as a means of social change. Simultaneously, it tends to sketch its ideas and thoughts from that culture, and also fortifies the societal norms. What makes the films of Kerala special is its reflection of the society at the same time being an influence. Movies are habitually used to emphasize traditional ideas or certain concepts seen vital by the filmmakers or writers, especially when it is perceived as an apolitical film. Political and Social transformation were once unearthed in commercial Malayalam cinema, but this has rarely been seen recently.

Despite the fact that the filmmakers were trying to step outside the trodden track of conventional Indian themes, no favourable reception for the portrayal of homosexual themes, a subject matter still deemed as taboo in the country where the discourse on sex itself is wrapped by moral restriction. The Indian film industry still resides in a potent ideological notion that criticizes non straight subjectivities and gratifications (Warner, p:27). Thus gender identity turns into an effective instrument in the hands of hegemonic social genre that make use of identity to underline the existing power supremacy. Queer Cinema, an umbrella term for the queer themed independent movies describes about the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identity and experience in an inclusive way, also defines a mode of sexuality that was subversive of long-established ideals of sexuality through the visual media (Halperin, p: 418). B. Ruby Rich in Sight and Sound magazine in 1992 defined Queer as whatever is peculiar with the usual, the legitimate, the dominant and an identity devoid of essence (Halperin, p:426).

On the standpoint of discourse analysis and social constructivism approach this paper analyses the prospect of queer reading. Discourse analysis is the system of principles and values reflected in discourse and it is an instrument that enacts and disseminates the power relations and processes of discrimination (by gender, social class, etc.) and categorization. This indicates that there exists a complex relationship connecting the social structure and the discourse, it represents (Fairclough, p:63). The general perception about social constructivism is that the world is socially constructed and the social directive via which we sense the world, what is correct and incorrect is in a changing state. Meaning is created out of the interaction among various persons and their association towards the objects and with other people. Conceptions and definitions are varying frequently, based on the current culture, and also it changes from condition to condition (Bryman, pp: 19-20).

The majority of the film makers are dared not to shatter the images of heteronormalcy that appear as an extension of an age old tradition and with which the spectators are effortlessly identified. Movies in Kerala, although considered as the most acclaimed film industries in the country, are not an omission to this homophobia and it's quite hard to have a straight queer Malayalam movie that celebrates a difference. The typecast depiction is intended at gaining consensus of people that comprise both who frame the discourse and those for whom it is framed. Because sexual discourses like any other discourse rely on recognition, approval and regulatory agency. The heterosexual is related with the expected and desired personalities in the culture while the non heterosexual are treated as outcasts and abnormal. The non heterosexuals are viewed as the property of the heterosexuals and in the course of utilization the third sex fails their control over their body, individuality and subjectivity. From time to time their body is written and re-written by bossy discourse and people of the third sex falls victim to the marginalized and step motherly dealing from the hands of filmmakers (Muraleedharan, p:167).

An overview of Queer Identity in Malayalam Movies

A representation, a social process evolves due to the interaction with viewer and a text creates signs which mirror the underlying sets of attitudes and ideas. In cinema, representation is organized by means of signs of mise-en-scene, sound, editing, and narrative patterns (Jones, pp: 258-260). The queer attempts made by the middle stream and parallel filmmakers in Malayalam film industry left an open stage for the discourses that may potentially accompany the given elements of deviant sexual identities. This paper brings out the possibilities of queer readings in Malayalam films and goes through the potentiality of the queer discourse over the non-queer normative structural pattern. Malayalam mainstream movies, plays a crucial stand in moulding the Malayalee cultural psyche all round the structural and cultural institutions of nature and culture; feminism and heroism; patriarchy and matriarchy; fashion and tradition; gender and sexuality; family and modernity; love and sex.

Malayalam cinema deconstructed the linear flow of sexual discourses and the structured linearity of gender discourses doubted the base of its own existence with the movies like *Randu Penkuttikal* (1978), *Deshadanakili Karayarilla* (1986), *Sancharram* (2004), *Rithu* (2009), *Mumbai Police* (2013) and *My life Partner* (2014). Though these movies bring forth the queer issues, they tactfully

address the problem in order to place it in a secure area. The potentiality of the queer discourse may defy the established standardized patterns of the hetero-normative beliefs and the conception of male-female love affair as Straayer points out:

Women's desire for women deconstructs male-female sexual dichotomies, sex-gender pluralism and the universality of the oedipal narrative. Acknowledgement of the female initiated lively sexuality and sexualized activity of lesbians has the potential to renew a liberty where lesbians as well as heterosexual women can exercise self-determined bliss (Straayer, p:331).

Depiction of queer elements in the selected movies

The picturization of homosexuality in Malayalam movies has always witnessed a timorous manner. The 1978 movie *RanduPenkuttikal* (Two Girls), directed by Mohan shows the deep psychoanalysis and the intricacies of the female mind as well as their mental and physical constructions. Stirred by the novel *RanduPenkuttikalude Katha* (The Tale of Two Girls), about the lesbian theme, the movie analysis the possessive relationship Kokila (**Shobha**) has for Girija (**Anupama Mohan**) the *danseuse*. The obsession comes to its essence when Kokila showers Girija with gifts and also makes it evident about the nature of the relationship and its future. The movie concludes with the note of Girija saying that “this was a phase in one’s teen years and like any other woman; she has to be married and should lead a blissful, productive life”. The climax denotes the reliance of the queer factors to the non-queer elements. The characters of the movie ultimately revert to the normative structures of the sexual identities and responsibilities.

Padmarajan movie *Deshadanakili Karayarilla* (Migratory Birds Don't Cry) in 1986, hinted at a lesbian relationship of the lead characters; the two runaway school girls, Sally (Shari) and Nirmala (Karthika). The sight of Karthika’s closeness to a man makes Sally emotionally distressed. This movie also passes through the track of the intricacies of the female bonding. The movie was critically well praised, for expressing the shades of lesbian love and a journeying of a world of liberty and independence through the love they feel for each other, the obstructions they encounter and the ultimate decision to collapse their life. In an orthodox society like Kerala, ahead of its times film maker Padmarajan superbly portrayed this homosexual relationship in a non-labelled way; those

who can comprehend the tones of same sex love figures it out deeply, while the normal family audience sees only the chaste bond of friendship of two girls which needs to be granted. The diplomacy of *Randu Penkuttikal* is obviously the conceptualized perception of love, wedding and family setup whereas in *Deshadanakili Karayarilla* the director alters the susceptible bond of affection by finishing the relationship forever. The significant reality is that the hetero-normative texts have the benefit of taking freedom over the queer elements.

The first parallel stream feature film in Malayalam Ligy J Pullappally's 2004 movie *Sancharram* (The Journey) which never appeared in the mainstream makes homosexuality the crux of the narrative. *Sancharram* delineate the female bonding and visibly perforate the concepts of love and sex that erstwhile regarded as the traditional right of the heterosexuals and structured outline of the socio-cultural well being. The movie is all about Delilah (Shruthi Menon) and Kiran (Suhasini V. Nair), and their rampant passionate love for each other as they grow from their childhood to adulthood. The noteworthy fact is that Delilah is a passive lesbian heroine while Kiran is an active one. The exchange of look and the physical involvement takes place when they both take a bath in the pool that disturbs the hetero normative beliefs of male- female love and desire. A further instances that match up with the female bonding and trespasses the notion of divine love is the lip-lock scene and the physical involvement of the two heroines in the jungle. The situation gets tougher when Delilah is compelled to marry a man out of family pressure and she claims that anyhow, we have to marry someone, but we can sustain our relationship even after the marriage also. The audience might doubt the genuinity of the lesbian discourse especially when Kiran insists Delilah to flee with her. However, just before the climax the movie hints that Delilah can lead a straight life regardless of her lesbian association.

The presence of two males Rajan, who adore Kiran and Sebastian, who wishes to marry Delilah signifies the heterosexual normative structures of male-female bonding. The homosexual desires are often intervened deliberately by the constructed structures of the hetero society and the movie uses these heterosexual reserves in order to project the inconsistency between sexual identities. Delilah runs from the church to the entrance while Kiran stands on the rim of a waterfall telling the audience about the suicide. At last Kiran cuts her hair and walks away. The open ending of the movie adds more potential to the diplomatic treatment of the event. The movie authenticates the diplomacy structure that the heterosexual viewers can draw the conclusion of a normal marriage, whereas the homosexual audience can conclude about female bonding.

Rithu(Seasons) by Shyamaprasad(2009) discusses the gay identity of Sunny (Asif Ali) that just adds an ephemeral layer to the character. As per Richard Dyer, in a good number of mainstream movies homosexuality is viewed from a heterosexual perspective. As examples he cites the depiction of homosexuality as a disease or as a problem in various movies and an endless succession of gay and lesbian characters as vampires, psycho and criminals which still continues. However, as Dyer points out, ideology is contradictory and ambiguous, full of what he calls 'gaps and fissures' through which film makers and audience can make new alternative meanings (Dyer, p:264)

Psychological crime thriller Malayalam movie *Mumbai Police* (2013) written by Bobby-Sanjay and directed by Roshan Andrews features Prithviraj (as Antony), Jayasurya (as Aaryan John Jacob) and Rahman (as Farhan Ashraf) in the lead roles. The movie that talks about the tender friendship of three police officers has scores of non-straight potential homosexual deposits. Towards the end it is revealed that Antony is secretly gay, and had a sexual relationship with another gayman who is a pilot by profession. The memory-impaired Antony snubs his sexual advances and collapses knowing the truth about his sexuality and violent traits with criminal tendencies which was in fact a masquerade to his sexual orientation.

The climax of *Mumbai Police* is a foggy shot of lovemaking among two male actors. The act that leads to the murder of Aaryan, a turn on which the whole tale hangs. Ultimately, it is out that since the truth about his sexuality (gay identity) was revealed, Antony murdered his friend Aaryan. By no means before Malayalam cinema had portrayed a hero as gay; so the movie and the character of Anthony Moses have sparked a matter for discussion. Heroes in mainstream cinema have always personified macho perfection where they fight for virtuous and romance beauties. Based on the Freudian theory individual who exhibits too much manliness is concealing something, and the instant there is any chance of revealing his secret, he will go to any extent, including murder. Through the language of cinema, the filmmaker has attempted to establish the queer identity of the central character. In the last part he shows the troubles the protagonist confronts in his later life, once his identity is unveiled in front of the society. He clearly illustrates how the society reacts to his concealed personality. Thus the movie had made an effort to deconstruct the outlook of queer identity in the mainstream Malayalam movies.

My Life Partner (2014) by M B Padmakumarnarrates the intense and complex emotional bonding of two pals turned lovers Kiran (Sudev Nair) and Richard (Ameer Niyas) who were born and raised in diverse settings. Rather than depicting the sexual relationship the film sheds light on the psychological attachment of the two friends in a sensitive manner. The intensity of their relationship grows and changes both their lives. Though they had bitter childhood experiences the holy tie of marriage is just a sarcastic tale for both Richard and Kiran. Both of them realise the genuine affection and care between each other, and they decided to share their lives together for the good. For fortifying their mutual bond they plan to adopt a baby in their lives, but the Indian law does not allow a man to adopt a child on his own and thus the real problem sets off. As a way-out, Richard, also a bisexual, ties the knot with an orphan, Pavithra (Anusree). Shortly their life takes drastic turns, when Pavithra finds out Richard's relationship with Kiran.

Conclusion

Cinema, as a medium of both constructive and destructive concepts, admits the queerness of sexual identities. The global celebration of queer identities also influenced Malayalam cinema. As a small section makes an effort to break the ice, it remains the job of the influential sector of the cinema industry to push for modification and renovate the writings to familiarize the sensitive queer narratives. The queer components in the Malayalam movies instigated the mass cultural psyche of the Kerala society, which follow the established norms and views on gender and sexuality. Over the last few years queer theory has been instrumental in changing the cinematic landscape – not just from a production stand point but also from a reception standpoint (Benshoff ,p:211).

In broad terms, queer theory asserts that there exist common characteristics between all forms of human sexuality and it is shaped by the words, actions and images that we use to describe them. From these movies it is clear that Malayalam film industry is no longer closing its eyes to an issue that always existed in our society. While homophobia and hetero-sexism still persist, the closet door is not as firmly latched as it was once. More importantly many mainstream denominations are beginning to welcome homosexuals into their congregations and even into their clergy (Benshoff, pp: 194 -195).

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