

Representation of the Transgender Dilemma in the Film Navarasa

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Abstract I: In India total population of transgender is around 4.88lakh as per the census of 2011. Among other countries India holds the highest transgender population as per the report of the Census Department. But still they are migrating to other countries because of the pitiful condition of isolation and insult and humiliation they face in India. Their population in Tamilnadu is around 22,364. This paper, intends to analyze aspects of the complex life experience faced by the transgender, as portrayed in the Tamil movie Navarasa(2005). From the perspective of Queer theory, an attempt is made to delve into the miserable conditions of their life and to understand the politics involved in the peculiar experience of the community. The movie was directed by Padma Shri Santhosh Sivan and it won the Silver Lotus Award for the Best Regional Film [Tamil]. The movie is presented through the eyes of a 13 year old girl Shweta, who discovers her uncle Gautham's wish to change his gender. He is a female trapped in a male's body. Shwetha follows Gautham who ran away to live his life by his choice and the way he is. It is during her journey to find her uncle that Shwetha meets other people from the transgender community and she gets exposed to their life and culture.

Keywords: Transgender, Gender Bias, Culture, Queer theory, Body, Body, Discrimination, Human rights, Democracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Film Industry is the main medium which creates awareness among the people about the regional and communal issues which crop up in the society, and contribute to bring these matters to the surface and to the consciousness of the society. In India the Transgender communities were ignored until the first decades of the 21st century. In 2011 a much discussed movie Ardhanari (Directed by Santhosh Souparnika in 2012) came as an eye opener about the pitiful plight of the transgender community. Thereafter several studies were undertaken about the issues faced by them as distinct from the larger society, which comment on the several instances of violations of human rights. In a world of heterogeneous population, people with gender-confusion, generally goes unnoticed. People take it for granted that they all quite normally belong to the category of "proud men" or "proud women". But it remains as a fact that the so called aspect of pride was given by a culturally built general notion, and this universalized outlook was given by without considering specificities in terms of the various categories in gender.

Revised Manuscript Received on May 28, 2019.

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The problem appears large only when the attention is paid to situations such as gender became a determining factor in general identity, social position and status in the larger context of culture. As Charlotte Bunch says "Sexual, racial, gender violence in a culture cannot be eliminated without changing culture".

II. OBJECTIVES:

The paper proposes to attempt an analysis of the film with the following objectives:

1. To understand the problems faced by the transgender community in Indian society.
2. To analyze the Tamil film Navarasa (Dir. Santhosh Sivan, 2005) as a case study of the dilemma experienced by the transgender in the Indian context.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The Tamil film Navarasa (2005) is a potential text for a socio-cultural analysis of the variety of problems faced by the Indian transgender community in their everyday life, and it is also an eye-opener for the society to rethink and reconsider its traditional conceptualizations and conventional practices for a change for better in terms of modern ideas of human rights, democratic values and progressive social cohesion.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is intended to be mainly getting recourse to the Queer and LGBT theories, as used widely in a variety of literary and cultural texts in the modern times. However, the focus of the present study is the nature of the dilemma experienced by an Indian transgender, based on the textual analysis of the Tamil film Navarasa, (2005).

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the foreign films which portray the issues of transgender is the 1919 movie Different from the Others directed by Richard Oswald. It is one of the oldest gay film and one of the sympathetic portrayals of homosexuals made first in the cinema. Some other films such as the 1949 movie I Was a Male War Bride directed by Howard Hawks and 2015 movie Danish Girl directed by Tom Hooper presents the struggles of transgender community. Indian Films such as Njn Marykutty is an effective emotional and powerful movie which shows the power of determination, and the main moral behind in this movie is that "our world is not belong to "male" or "female", it is the world of "talents". Santhosh Souparnika's 2012 movie Ardhanari, Viju Varma's Odum Raja Aadum Rani, all these movie shows the ill treatment and harassment faced by transgender community



throughout their life and also about the relevance of mythical believes about them.

VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Earlier transgender communities were afraid to stand out in a crowd, they were not allowed to work in any firms, they didn't have the right to own property, they were restricted to adopt a child and even the voting right was not given to them. But now huge changes occurred in their situation and it is because of the change of attitude of public. Transgender community and many supporters of the community worked hard to create awareness in public and thus the public is finally started to listen and consider the queries and worries of the transgender community. Joyita Mondal became the first transgender judge to a government deemed civil country in West Bengal of India. Now they are appointed in a wider spaces it shows the accepting spirit of the public.

FILM	DIRECTOR	LANGUAGE	YEAR OF PRODUCTION
Women in Revolt	Paul Morrissey	English	1971
In a Year of 13 Moons	Rainer Werner Fassbinder	English	1978
Paris is Burning	Jennie Livingston	English	1990
Boys Don't Cry	Kimberly Peirce	English	1999
Appu	Puri Jagannadh	Tamil	2000
Navarasa	Santhosh Sivan	Tamil	2005
Muni 2	Raghava Lawrence	Tamil	2012
MurattuKaalai	S P Muthuraman	Tamil	2012
Vishwaroopam	Kamal Hasan	Tamil	2013
Ardhanaari	Santhosh Sauparnika	Malayalam	2012
Odum Raja Aadum Rani	Viju Varma		2014
NjnMarykutty	Ranjith Sankar		2018

From 1971 till 2018 these films portrayed a gradual development of the condition of transgender community in all fields. Navarasa is the story of Shwetha, a 13 year old girl, who in her contact with her uncle Gautham notices that day by day sort of skeptical incidents are lurking behind his life, which she could not understand. A predominant incident in the movie is his liking towards antique ornaments which girls of each generation inherit from their ancestors. And she overheard his desire to become the wife of Aarvan in the biggest Koovagam festival. Koovagam is a marriage and widowhood ceremony of transgender; they can marry Aarvan [a character from Mahabharata] and later become the widow of Aarvan. Eventually, they lead a life of Aarvan's widow till their death. Swetha gets to know his secret plans and she tries to find him as he is missing from home. Finally, with the help of another transgender friend Bobby Darling, she went to find her uncle. Through Bobby, Shwetha comes to understand the several hurdles, which array in the course of their life. She even learns that Bobby Darling is publicly harassed by men, who endeavor to shed her clothes. As far as transgender identity is concerned, the public at large, ill-informed of the unique issues surrounding them. Public looks at them as something strangely divergent from the normal gender hierarchy. After Gautham's widowhood, Shwetha brings back Gautham as a girl to their home but he is stubbornly unwelcomed by his brother and wife. Shortly, when his brother hears the truth and the whole mystery behind Gautham, the burden of communal hierarchy strikes his brother's mind. Gautham finds it so suffocating that he decides to run away from his place to somewhere in the world where Gautham can live as a woman. The plot of the film can be analyzed from the point of view of Queer theory. Queer theory is a Poststructuralist critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the field of Queer studies and Women studies. It is heavily influenced by the work of Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, David Halper, and Jose Esteban Munoz. Queer theory builds both upon the feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon Gay/Lesbian studies of close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexuality and identities. Film, being a comprehensive art form, can definitely take up such complicated issues with their subtle nuances, both as education and art. In Navarasa, Gautham is inclined to become Gauthami as a consequence of the realization of the actual gender that he is born to be. As a silent, calm, suspicious boy, Gautam by birth was made to break the barriers of family and social hierarchy of status to emerge as a new individual with attendant sense of integrity and fellow-feeling quite befitting to the like of him. From the time of his puberty onwards, Gautam's one and only dream, which does not let him sleep was that to become a woman. But being a boy by birth, the society in which he lives gave him an identity and existence and the society cannot cope with such an idea of personality shift. So in order to fulfill the urges of his mind and soul Gautham absconds from his native place to a world of liberty in all sense. As A.P.J Abdul Kalam says, "Dreams/ Is not what you see in sleep/ Is the thing which doesn't let u



sleep”Society is the main opponent of the transgender, since they are a category which questions the conventional structures. Society is not welcoming of anything that creates ruptures the order of society. This dilemma of non-acceptability, born out of non-understanding-as social aversion and antipathy- is clearly visible from the dialogue of a transgender in the movie “They are also human possess the same blood and flush born out of a mother’s womb not born out of mortuary”. The society quite simplistically and derogatively tags them as commercial sex workers, and treats them so. Because of the mental agony caused by social ostracism from the family and the physical harassment from the society, they are left with no choice but to abscond to nowhere. As Natalie Clifford Barney states, “My Queerness is not a vice, is not a deliberate, and harms no one”. Gautham at last says, white is “purity”, white reflects widowhood; “It’s time to show isolation”.

VII.FINDINGS

The transgender communities are isolated human beings from the mainstream of society.

1. The transgender are subject to mental agony, social ostracism, and physical harassment.
2. There is strong social and cultural aversion and antipathy towards the transgender.
3. Tradition and convention hold that sexuality and identity are socially constructed.
4. The film Navarasa can be seen as a powerful case study of the dilemma experienced by the Indian transgender in their everyday life.
5. Though the transgender attempt identity assertion and community formation, they are always at loggerheads with the mainstream society.
6. The problem of the transgender needs to be addressed from the perspective of modern conceptualizations of human rights, and democratic values.
7. Film as a comprehensive art form and media has a crucial role in progressively addressing the problems of the transgender and other marginalized groups.
8. The case of transgender miseries has entrenched within it an obvious case of body politics.
9. Issues pertaining to the transgender and other marginalized groups call upon us to think of the need of concerted reform activities in the country.

VIII.CONCLUSION

Though ‘gender’ traditionally refers to either of the two sexes, there are also categories among humanity which needs to be accommodated within the semantic field of gender, as the case of transgender prominently make out nowadays. Born out of mother’ womb, they are also part and parcel of humanity and so are entitled to equal rights and privileges as are becoming of the members of the conventional male/ female categories. This needs to be recognized officially as well as in the general conduct of affairs. The transgender also needs to be endowed with the prestige of identity at par with the other two gender categories. The film Navarasa(Dir. Santhosh Sivan, 2005) by portraying the everyday life experience of the transgender community makes a strong case for that kind of

a mindset from the society and recognition from the part of the official system. Rhetoric apart, concepts of justice, equality and opportunity should be translated as realizable ideals for all human beings, irrespective of obsolete notions, and orthodox conventions. This is vital to democratizing the principles of social cohesion, and cherishing the ideals of human rights, which are central to the conception of a progressive culture and society. The film calls upon the people to think over its systems and rules, so as to bring about necessary shift in perspective, as a change for the better, in the actual human sense. It is also a comment on the power of film as an effective media and an art form to instruct and enlighten the people, in the true spirit of socio-cultural reform, which still remains to be an unfinished project in the country.

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