

The Never Ending Rain: Padmarajan and his female character's in *Thoovanathumbikal*

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ABSTRACT: : *Thoovanathumbikal*(1987) by P.Padmarajan was a movie that gave a novel experience to the audience, by staying away from the typical framework of a movie, breaking the stereotypical conventions. *Thoovanathumbikal* brings out the story of Jayakrishnan, a young man in the middle of two bold women, Clara a prostitute, and Radha, a college going girl in his village. This movie along with the other bold attempts of the 'Middle Cinema', showcases the female characters as self-actualized individuals, bold and strong, with self-respect and dignity, at a time when movies were mostly male-centric. This research work tries to project Clara the prostitute as a new woman regardless of her time, breaking the shackles of female stereotypes.

Key Words: Padmarajan, *Thoovanathumbikal*, Clara, Self-actualization, woman, independence.

The Indian Neo Wave, popularly known as Art Film or Parallel Cinema, was a movement which unfolded as a substitute to the mainstream commercialisation of films, mostly based upon Mumbai Film Industry. These movies are known for their realism, naturalism, and momentous content (Piyali).

A major development during the decades of the 70s and 80s were the growth of a novice stream of Malayalam Cinema, the 'Middle Cinema'. It was a hybrid of the artistic attributes of 'Parallel Cinema' and the popular form of the commercial Malayalam movies. This led to the creation of many films featuring down to earth stories, and also them becoming commercially successful. The movies of directors such as Bharathan, P.Padmarajan, and K.G George, have traversed trajectories of middle cinema bringing out a novel visual experience to the audience and have achieved a decent amount of success at the box-office balancing both the elements of art and entertainment. These movies stood on a different platter, with their new experiments in themes and ideas. These movies were realistic that they incorporated actual life into cinema. Themes such as poverty, working class issues, the law and order, domestic violence, and other social phenomena were discussed in such movies. Some movies of this golden age stood apart for their own uniqueness and what is most interesting in the movies of Bharathan, Padmarajan, and K.G George is that there was some sort of gender realignment, a rejection of the paternal masculinity of the earlier decades.

In the 70s and 80s, movies of Malayalam director such as P.Padmarajan carved a niche for himself with his incorporation of bold female characters into his movies. Topics such as lesbianism, prostitution, female sexuality, and their problems were coloured in a different tone and light. Other topics such as ageism, extra-marital affairs, and incest, are other topics he examined which are still considered to be taboo for the mass audience. In one of his movie, *DeshadanakiliKarayarilla*(1986), he examined the concept of womance, a word which is apartmanteau of the words woman and romance, a novel concept for the Malayalam movie audience. Being one of its kind, *DeshadanakiliKarayarilla* was a novel attempt from the director's side to visually elucidate the lesbian relationship between two school girls. In this movie Padmarajan brilliantly portrays the homosexual relationship implicitly, without making the Kerala audience feel so, where the relationship is portrayed as an innocent bond of strong friendship between two school girls which needs to be accepted. The success of the director is that it was a hit in the box office when it was released back in the mid-eighties and the viewers, including family crowd the most, accepted the beautiful relationship of Sally and Nimmi (Sophia Ponnachan 3254). It was Deepa Mehta in the year 1996 with her movie *Fire* gave the Indian audience to explore about homosexual love and relationship. Due to the explicit portrayal of the characters relationship, the film brought out a huge controversy in the world's largest film producing and film viewing nation. But only a very few film lovers might have noticed that much before Deepa Mehta, there was Padmarajan; much before *Fire* there was *DeshadanakiliKarayarilla*.

Padmarajan took a different journey through a different path creating one of the colourful periods of Malayalam cinema. He made his signature with his movies that travelled beyond his times. His characters are life-like and it is interesting to watch him map the animalistic psychological behaviour of his characters to the spatial fields of social consciousness with an amazing flair of storytelling. His female characters

perhaps are the most remembered and discussed than his male characters. He is one of the few directors who created strong and powerful female characters in Malayalam cinema thus opening a new space for women in the industry. In the narratives of Padmarajan, male and female sexualities, though fatally attracted towards each other, follow different paths, often tragic. While male sexuality easily tends towards violence and aggressive possession, female sexuality is almost always enigmatic and mysterious, breaking out vigorously into freedom, liberty and ebullience. Characters like Clara or Sally, Nimmi, Sophia or Savitri, Maluamma or Chakkara or Gouri rebel and invoke, and are never afraid of taking control of their lives and destinies. In movies such as *Novemberinte Nashtam* (1982) and *Koodevide* (1983), it is men who come into their lives and coerce them into violence, and also force them to run away to freedom like in *Nombarathippovu* (1987) and *Parannu Parannu Parannu* (1984). More than relationships themselves, what Padmarajan's films deal with is the mayhem that these fatal attractions inflict upon individuals. And in movies such as *Prayanam* (1975), *Arappatta Kettiya Gramathil* (1986), *Thoovanathumbikal* (1987), *Namuk Parkkan Munthiri Thoppukal* (1986), and *Oridathoru Phayalvan* (1981), it is the female desire that unfolds the narratives into triangles, as they break and open out of their shells.

His last film *Njan Gandharvan* (1991) was a lyrical romantic movie that amalgamates and celebrates all his favourite themes such as 'transgressive' divine love, romance and sexuality. Here, a young maiden is touched by divine love of a celestial being who comes to earth. But the Gandharva gradually loses himself in this mortal love. Such a deep divine love proves to be impossible and is tarnished out of the earthly world. No movie lovers can escape the parallels with Padmarajan and his never ending fascination with women, words and images.

Kerala is both culturally rich and conservative at the same time. The traditional society is built upon a rigid social framework that adheres to many value systems and ideals. The pressure to adhere and confirm to such a social set up and ideal is high since the codes and norms of conduct, morality, and gender roles are rigidly defined. The lines between light and dark, between right and wrong, are impossibly sharp. It is therefore not surprising that Kerala has one of the highest suicide rates in the country. Some of the films that belong to the directors such as Padmarajan, Bharathan and K.G George, in one way or the other have tried to break the social taboos and gave a new perspective of cinema to Malayali audience. These movies are thus born out of a need to rise and come out of this pain and suffering that was common to human life in the society. Literature and cinema as always, have helped in liberating the trapped notions and conceptions of the society. Cinema was directed at familiarising and sensitizing the common man to the inner realms and potential of his mind. Cinema thus moreover here becomes a companion to man in defining the higher meanings life.

The "Self-actualization" Theory as propounded by Abraham Maslow, has found its place in a good number of Malayalam cinema in the past. According to this theory, Self-actualization is a key to man's internal happiness, satisfaction as an individual, and peace. For in the self-actualized state, man becomes all that he is capable of becoming. If one person plans on being anything less than he thinks is capable of being, that person will probably end up unhappy all the days in their life. It also tells that an individual enjoys high experiences and

peak points in life when the individual is in synonymous with himself and his surroundings. Such a concept of Self-actualisation has been incorporated in Malayalam Cinema through various characters such as that of Ammini in *Aranyakam*, Clara in *Thoovanathumbikal*, Bhadra in *Mazha*, Balamani in *Nandanam*, Sreedharan in *Sreedharante Onnam Thirumuriv*, Sophia in *Namukku Parkkan Munthiri Thoppukal*, Ambili in *Yamanam* and Manikutty in *Sneham* (Chathoth). In the present study the focus is to project Clara as a new woman regardless of her time, breaking the shackles of female stereotypes.

Padmarajan as a moviemaker has incorporated the concept of the Self-actualisation theory into many of his movies. In his evergreen classic hit *Thoovanathumbikal*, the character Clara is a self-actualized individual who unlike other women characters in the movies of those times, is a

liberated free woman who wants to explore and enjoy life. Though Clara is a prostitute, the character does not cling to a conventional way of portraying prostitutes generally in cinema. On the other hand, Clara represents the new woman who wants to be independent and live a life of her own will. Prostitution, most often in movies is portrayed in its grey shades. But in *Thoovanathumbikal*, it is romanticized, and the character Clara is portrayed in such a way that the audiences never feel that she is a prostitute as they are usually portrayed in movies. This movie is based on his own short story of the name *Udakapola*, juxtaposing the characters Jayakrishnan, Clara and Radha, played by Mohanlal, Sumalatha and Parvathy respectively.

Self-actualized individuals like Clara are pragmatic and centred towards reality and are able to differentiate what is fraudulent from what is genuine. They are also problem-centred, treating life's difficult circumstances as problems that demand solutions. Clara as portrayed by Padmarajan, is comfortable being alone and have healthy interpersonal relationships. She is not bound too strictly to social conventions. She has got a better insight of reality and deeply accept herself, which is evident in her escape from Jayakrishnan's life when he confesses his love for Radha. Despite her loneliness and intense need for companionship, Clara retains her sensitivity to Jayakrishnan's conflict and encourages him to marry Radha. As a result of this confession, Clara disappears from his life until she sends a telegram for their last meeting. This movie also teaches that the drive to surpass pain and suffering is one of the strongest drives in every human being. Such movies also teach the viewers to look at social labels from different perspectives, as to look at them as challenges. Clara never regretted of being a prostitute, a profession which was highly controversial and socially unaccepted. She is a bold woman who always gave importance to her own satisfaction above public acceptancy. There is a dialogue in the movie by Clara where she tells to Jayakrishnan that "*enthayalumnashikkum. Pinneanthassayitnashichoode, aashatheerthunashichoode*" (anyway we will get destroyed. Then why can't we get destroyed after fulfilling our desires). (Thoovanathumbikal1987). The SelfActualisation Theory applies here and this particular dialogue shows the boldness of the character and her desire to live life to the fullest. Clara is not from a rich family nor is highly educated. She is a girl who has seen all the harsh sides of life but still wants to celebrate it. The boldness and openness within her and her attitude of never giving up and the desire to celebrate life in its entirety makes Clara one among the modern independent young woman of today. The other female character in the movie Radha, enacted by Parvathy is a girl brought up in a traditional Hindu family unlike Clara, but is educated, and bold too. Radha's character is a homely girl who is brought up traditionally and unlike Clara has got a supportive family.

Radha's boldness can be an attribute of her bringing up. When Jayakrishnan proposed Radha, she was bold enough to reject it on his face and that too in front of her college mates and say that, "*..enikkuningaleishtamalla. Ningalepattinjanorupadkettit und. Kettathinekattumkashtamaankandappol. Enthenkilumsoiryakkedvenamennalleollu. Enneang*

ozhivakkियekku please." (I don't like you. I have heard so much about you. It was worse when I saw you than what I heard. You said that you need some peace, then please leave me alone). (Thoovanathumbikal 1987).

Clara on the other hand was not brought up in a way as Radha. But for Clara also, it was because of her life that she led till becoming a prostitute, that made her bold and as an individual of self-actualisation, she has the will power, strength and courage to live a more fulfilling life ahead. In a dialogue by Jayakrishnan to Radha, gives a clear picture of both the women characters and their differences, where he states that,

"Randaalumennod no ennthanneyaparanje. Ore oruvethyasam, Radhaparayumboorukudumbathinteseurityilninnparayunnu, Clara onnumillathaidathninnparayunnu. Ennitavalkpolumnischayamillathaengottodipokunnu.

Pinneaalojichappoavalodipoyathendeaduthninnalla; avaldeathuwareullajeevithathilninnan, aa shreeyilninnan, Thangaludeclutchesilninnan. Athokkeavaluderakshapedalthanneya. Brilliance thanneya. Njanumsammathichu" (Transliteration: Both said no to me. Only one difference, when Radha told, it was in the security of a family and Clara told it without the backup and support of anything and ran away somewhere where she herself did not have any clue of. After thinking, I realized that she did not ran from me; but from the life she lived till then, from that woman, from the clutches of Thangal. Those were all her escapes. It was her brilliance. I Agree).

Clara though has got her own opinions and clear cut ideas about life, she at times ends up mysterious. When Jayakrishnan proposed Clara, she didn't reject it. But she disappeared the next day leaving no clue behind. Later she appears days later and meets Jayakrishnan. By the time Radha's and Jayakrishnan's marriage proposal is almost in its full swing. Another instance in the movie where the Self-Actualization Theory can again be applied is, in a dialogue in the movie by Clara, when she hears the cry of a mad man in pain of the wounds on his leg infected by the chain on his leg, "*enik aa bhranthante kaalilemurivaakankothiaavua. Chngalayileottakkaniyyumaayimathrambandhamullaunangatha muriv.*" (I want to be the wound in the leg of that mad man. The unhealed wound that is connected only to a single loop of the chain). This dialogue shows Clara's desire to be connected to Jayakrishnan, though she wants to stay away from the rest of the world and its entanglements. In this situation, the deep desire within Clara is to live a happy life with Jayakrishnan, which she knows is not possible, and hence refers that she wants to be connected with him though she will stay away from other commitments. She is a woman who does not want any strings to get attached onto her. It is her deep love to Jayakrishnan that makes her wants to get connected, and that too only to him. This instance makes her mysterious when she

leaves and go after Jayakrishnan's proposing her, without giving any valid reason of her disappearance, and later appears and tells her wish to stay connected to Jayakrishnan. Radha seems an important connection between them. Also she was one of the reasons they met. Clara also tells Jayakrishnan that, people who are only blessed will get to live the rest of their lives with the ones whom they fall in love for the first time, indirectly indicating that they don't have the good fortune to live the rest of their lives together.

When Padmarajan's women characters are taken into consideration, Clara seems to stand apart. Clara and Jayakrishnan meet in short intervals of time, where one can find female sexuality in all its glory that makes the man a sense of wanting as well as satisfied. Jayakrishnan till the end of the movie can be seen as someone craving for that pleasure and companionship from Clara. The woman, lover, and prostitute in Clara changes faster than the desires within a man. The woman as a mystery kind of sense is almost complete in Clara. Even in sex, Clara is able to establish her dominance. Above all what this character certainly represents is the fact that sometimes in life the destiny of certain relationships can indeed be very cruel. None of the characters in the movie were justified for their deeds, and no clarifications to backup why they are so. That was indeed the beauty of the movie. It throws light to the fact that 'Destiny is not always what we choose'. It was obvious when Radha rejects Jayakrishnan's proposal and says she will never marry an anti-social like him and later she falls in love with him and gets ready to forgive all his ways. It also happens when Jayakrishnan breaks his vow of 'never come across the virginity of a girl and if it happens he will marry that girl'. And so, much of the story depends on the decisions taken by the mysterious Clara, who chooses her own destiny, from time to time, on contradiction. Clara becomes an example and symbol of love that is not reachable, that is so near yet so far. She is a strong willed, free spirited and has no pang of fear or guilt in traversing the path that she believes is the best and apt one for her. She escapes and moves away from the shackles and clutches of a useless parental relationship by getting into prostitution and later getting married to a rich widower. Such a character with such a background can be portrayed as a typical sob story woman. But, Padmarajan has woven the character Clara with whom the audiences feel a sense of bonding, without stereotypical negative or depressive shades. Now, such a character could typically be a sob story woman, with a strong element of pathos and sympathy underlying her character.

Padmarajan has beautifully incorporated rain as a kind of character in the movie, and the association of rain with the character Clara has only made the character as well as the movie more unique. Clara is like a dark cloud on the verge of breaking apart and she is a woman who enjoys peak experiences and high points in life, like rain when it is in harmony with itself and its surroundings. Throughout the movie rain acts as an integral part, as a metaphor for Clara and her love. When Jayakrishnan first wrote a letter to Clara, it rained. It also rained during their first meeting and a deep bond of love and respect is developed between the two. Rain acted as an emotion in the movie. There is a dialogue in the movie between Jayakrishnan and Radha about Clara, which shows the beautiful relationship associated with Clara and rain.

"Enikormayundaadyamjanavalkkathethumbomazhapeytherunnu. Aadyamnjangalmeet cheyyumbozhummazhapeytherinnu". (I remember when I first wrote a letter to her, it rained. It also rained when we met for the first time).

For Clara life is a celebration and she represents any modern woman who is independent and goes with the flow of life. She is always charming and enthusiastic like the new rain. Finally it is at the climax where Jayakrishnan and Clara meet for one final meeting that she introduces him to her husband and explains to him that if she had not married it could have possibly destroyed the lives of the three of them. It is through this heartbreaking climax once

again that the strong pragmatic nature of Clara comes to the forefront when although it is evident that she is truly in love with Jayakrishnan, yet she decides to marry so that he can move on in his life with Radha. Jayakrishnan and Clara are incomparably romantic and have a relationship which is hard to explain and understand. It is a kind of relationship that will be difficult to digest by a conservative society. Padmarajan gives this relationship very strong romantic overtones, especially when compared to the other relationship of Jayakrishnan with Radha, by using rain as a beautiful metaphor that creates a natural aura driving their relationship forward.

Thooanathumbikal, is a screenplay that is poetic where one can find a woman's delicate feminine nature in all its glory. Clara is a woman who completely reveals both her mind and body before her love. She is a fragrant woman who moves worlds like pollen of flowers. She does not stick onto a single man forever. She keeps floating and drifting, celebrating her life fulfilling all her desires. But an ordinary woman with similar tastes will not be accepted by the society in general, where she is bound to certain codes and norms. Padmarajan's concept of femininity was one that went beyond the horizons of Kerala. Padmarajan has

created Clara in such a way that the audiences feel a special attachment and emotional bonding with her. The real boldness and beauty of a woman is shown by the director through Clara who is delicate yet strong.

"*Thoovanathumbikal*, illustrate powerful female characters that rises above the labels of orphan, woman, or prostitute that society confers on them. Their behaviour is not coloured by the wounds that society has inflicted on them. Instead, they retain their sensitivity to society, demonstrating the lack of rebellion on them" (Chathoth). Irrespective of the backgrounds circumstances and conditions, many movies educate the audience on how a man's happiness lies in rising out of the pain and suffering that characterizes one's life by exploring the larger meaning of an individual as well as that of life. These movies also tell us that how these films teach us that the key to self-actualization lies in the acceptance of our individuality and our circumstances, for only then can we reduce the conflict in our minds.

Padmarajan travelled ahead of his times. He and his contemporaries created movies that traversed trajectories which were far beyond the concepts and thoughts of Malayalee audience. Their movies focussed on the stark realities of life portraying human emotions and feelings unlike portrayed in commercial cinema. The way that was paved by film makers like Padmarajan, by providing a space for women on the silver screen was not always the forte of filmmakers of later times. There were only a handful of movies or less movies that could portray women as depicted in the movies of Padmarajan. Thus women used to be objectified for mere pleasure of looking at her body or as the love interest of the male protagonist. This has stopped in making any major impact upon the audience and is not essential anymore for the success of a movie.

But it also has to be noted that Clara marries the widower is only for the sake of moving away from Jayakrishnan's life or for the goodness of the three of them. But Clara too had to get into a marital bond at the end to put everything into shape. This brings the very idea of a patriarchal society coming into play where she had to adhere herself to a marital bond and convince the society. It is never told directly in the movie that whether it was Clara's own wish to get married and have a child, rather than as a Clara who moves places celebrating life. This very climax brings the whole idea of the social notions into action, that in order for a better life, a woman has to confront marriage. Clara who was portrayed as an epitome of independent woman is shown in the climax as a happy housewife, giving a scope for further studies.

Recent times Malayalam cinema witnessed the rise of movies with strong characters and genuine plots. But there still have not been a paradigm shift like the one Padmarajan brought into the industry. This might be due to the comfortable risk-averse status quo that Malayalee audience love so much and true experimentation might be difficult to stomach. But even then an industry that could boast of having paid witness to movies such as those by Padmarajan should have taken quantum leaps in the last three decades. Like a snake eating its own tail Malayalam movies have relegated to family friendly affairs like those made during the sixties, adapted to the modern context. While these movies manage to be entertaining, most of the movies of today lack boldness in stepping out of their comfort zones. They are hesitant to make an attempt to throw light on those stories that need to be told, those stories that make the Malayali audience squirm in their seats, and those which they are content to ignore. It is as if the golden age of cinema when Padmarajan reigned was captured in a bubble, untouchable, unattainable, and maybe, forgotten.

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