

The Representation of Uncontested Gender in Tamil Cinema with special reference to “En Magan Magizhvan”(My son is Gay)

Dr.S.D.Selvasundari

*Head & Asst. Professor, Department of English,
G.Venkataswamy Naidu College, Kovilpatti
(Autonomous College under the Affiliation of
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)
Tuticorin District, Tamilnadu, India, Pin: 628502.*

Abstract

Tamil Cinema in its course of time has created a profound effect in Indian Cine field. Tamil Cinema has dealt with various themes and brought in a positive transformation and transition in the movie it creates. There are so many Tamil films with queer characters but, En Magan Magizhvan (My son is Gay) is the first film in Tamil to be awarded U/A in the Indian film Industry. It has received the best feature film Award at the Second Indian World Film Festival in 2018. This chapter focuses on the queerness discourse, which destabilize the statement of the heterosexual society and the Gender trouble which disorder the representation of a Gay in this conventional society. This chapter dismantles the traditional assumptions about gender and sexual norms of the society. It also describes the plight of an individual and his mother who suffer in the conservative and mainstream of the society. It suggests sexual identity is more fluid and cannot be firm and stable. It proves the words of Judith Butler who says, " Gender is not the result of nature, but socially constructed". This chapter describes the Sexual identities and trauma, Sexual sensitivity, Parental affection and Cultural attachment of a Gay character, Varun and his mother from the Tamil film, En Magan Magizhvan (My son is Gay).

Keywords: Gay, homophobia, Culture, Trauma, Gender Minority.

Tamil language is one of the oldest languages in the world. It is more than 4000 years old. Tamilnadu is known for its rich heritage and culture. From the ancient days to the present, it's literature has explored the customs and conventions of Tamilians through various medias. Tamil Cinema field, fondly called as Kollywood, is also one among those Medias. Tamil Cinema has celebrated its hundredth year a decade ago. It starts its progress in 1918 with the Tamil silent Film, “Keechaka Vadham”. Tamil Cinema industry has contributed a lot in the lives of Tamilians. Tamil films have been the influential tool in Tamil Politics since the colonial era. Tamil films played important role of Anti - British propagandas during the British rule. Major Political Parties of Tamilnadu, used extensive use of Tamil visual

medias. Tamil Cinema is full of diversity, rich content with catching stories and upcoming as the most prominent film industry. It makes great impact in the minds of its people. It is one of the versatile industries with legendary directors, actors and musicians.

Cinema is an all persuasive instrument that reaches so many people and encounters the conditioning of the Society and even in Tamil cinema, there are times when Gays are represented with a comic effect. The Indian film making culture somehow still appears confusing towards forming a universal opinion about projecting homosexual Characters. **Gay men** are male homosexuals. Some bisexual and homo romantic men may also dually identify as gay, and a number of young gay men today also identify as queer. Historically, gay men have been referred to by a number of different terms, including inverts and uranians.

Queer theory is a discourse model that destabilize the assumptions and privileges of the secure heteronormative models of study and everyday life. It politicizes and acknowledges the fluidity and instability of identities. Queer theory is a part of the field of queer studies whose roots can be found in women's studies. It provides scholar and activists the other ways of thinking and talking about identities beyond simple binaries especially in fighting homophobia and transphobia, which are the unreasoned fear and hatred towards homosexuals and homosexuality. Queer theory is the close reading of any work of art related to the third gender. It dismantles the traditional assumptions about the gender and sexual conventions. Gender and sexuality are socially constructed concepts. This chapter explores the understanding of fluid sexuality, diversity of sexual orientation and behavior of a person as represented in the Tamil film, En Magan Magizhvan (My son is Gay).

Gays are represented in ridiculous way in the traditional bound Society. Tamil Film industry is also not an exception of this portrayal. It wouldn't be fair to ignore the feminist and queer angle in this discussion as patriarchy hasn't left even this area, unpolluted. The reason why such folly representations seem to work in India is the same motive why people don't say, "He is gay, but say **HE IS A GAY**". Gay men continue to face significant discrimination in large parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Distancing from homosexual, people has got time, a cultural thumps up, a long time ago. It has glided onto the younger mind-sets saying **HE IS THAT** whenever they found someone to be gender-suspicious. What is the idea of education and worldly experience, when common Sense becomes awry? Queer interpretation rejects the cultural and conventional mainstream behaviour, including sexual identity and binary based opposites of Male/Female, Gay/ Straight and argues that there is a space outside which is queer. This chapter explores the challenges of the media which has limited the representations of gay men.

Tamil films till now crack jokes on male characters who don't explicitly identify as gay but appear to express stereotypical gay mannerisms. "It is used as a mockery", says Sneha, Creative producer with Neelam Social, a web channel run by director Pa Ranjith that focuses on anti-caste Politics. The Comedy we see on screen is often about pulling, gay people down and body shaming, says Moulee, a veteran Tamil actor. In a 2020 anthology, Paava Kadhaigal jokes were made about queer life and caste based violence, the two issues, people quarrelsome are with every day in India. In one of the stories in the Anthology, two female characters (play-ed by Kalki Koechlin & Anjali) fabricated to be in love only to prevent one of their boyfriends, who belonged to an oppressed caste from being killed. This blatant "Queer baiting" (it refers to a marketing technique that uses same-sex love to lure in the audience in the garb of being, progressive) does little to nothing to further, the ongoing struggle of the LGBTQ+ Community. Instead of exploring the same-sex relation from the lens of realism, the film ends up ridiculing two deeply problematic struggles of minorities in our society. According to Peter Barry, A queer researcher is expected to "Expose the Homophobia of mainstream literature and criticism, as seen in ignoring or denigrating he homosexual aspects of the work of major canonical figures (143)

The treatment of the characters and the queer love is similar to how one would expect love is similar to see two heterosexual characters in love on the

screen. The two characters sing together, and embrace each other- as if challenging the traditional and out dated binaries of their forerunners (queer characters displayed on the screen over the years). Among LGBTQ+ perhaps only trans representation is "Somewhat Okay while gay, and lesbian roles, could be counted on fingers, especially in Tamil film industry", says Negha! Scientifically, Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbians, gay, bisexuals and transgender. It has been defined as the contempt, prejudice, aversion, hatred and antipathy. May be based on irrational fear and may also related to religious beliefs.

Film Industry saw its queer characters as nothing but flamboyant laughing stocks who were just there to establish a restless note within the films. Conventional sexual behaviour between the same sexes was not accepted on the silver screen and was only used to typify homosexuality as a mental illness. "Sissy" looking man or the "hard boiled" woman in a film came only to enrich the negativity as perceived by the middle class culture). The concept of queering challenges scholars to interrogate that which is normative (M. Warner, 1999). Peter Barry says, Lesbian/gay criticism of the recent Queer theory phase tends to favour texts and genres which subvert this kind of familiar literary realism, like thrillers, comic and parodic fiction and sexual fantasy (142).

The reason we are shedding light on the history of homosexuality in Tamil cinema is to determine how far we have come in disinfecting it off its ridiculousness and Subjugation towards gay. Somehow, it is assumed that people belonging to LGBT community can't have a normal life like everybody else - that, directors with their limited understanding of the concept of homosexuality take morbid authorizations bordering on exciting irrational and diabolical depiction of such roles. Film making is an art from where a creative mind can find multiple ways to show off their craft. Great stories, innovative cinematography or inspired directing made Gay topics popular in Indian Cinema and rarely witness cinematic excellence.

My son is gay, is an upcoming Tamil film, directed by Lokesh Kumar, that encapsulates the struggle between a mother and her son, when she realizes that he's a gay. Studies of queer families must also be designed to capture the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression these individuals and families experience ([Bowleg, 2008, 2013](#); [Moore, 2008, 2011](#)). The plot of this film, explores a new issue that fills a major of this gap - The Parents. The

guardian generation of India, stays in denial when it comes to accepting their children sexuality- especially when oriented towards the same sex. My son is gay is a crowd funded project and Lokesh talks about how people sympathized with the intension, but didn't want to become a part of the project. They (funders) would say, "being a part of a gay film would damage their image".

As a society, we are programmed to view films on LGBT Community only as a depiction of their lives - as it is - an oppressed, isolated and outcast life. Unfortunately, we are living in a society where normalcy has become very misunderstood. A significant amount of films that have dealt with LGBT topics has been made by one of the members of the community. Tamil film Director Lokesh Kumar has taken strenuous effort to portray the strives and struggles of the main Gay characters in his film "En Magan Magizhvan".

My son is gay is written and directed by Lokesh kumar, starred by Anupama kumar, Ashwinjith and Abishek Joseph, George in lead roles. The story is about a Gay man and his relationship with his mother and about acceptance, tolerance and the right of marginalized people to live with dignity in mainstream of society. The film was completed by early 2017. It was released on August 19, 2017 in Indian Film festival of Melbourne. In 2018, the rights of the film were acquired by a Mumbai based company called Select Media. It was dubbed in Hindi and released on 4th October 2020 and the original Tamil version was released on 4th November 2020 in Youtube.

The film starts with two teenage boys playing football near the sea shore. The main character is Varun around whom the whole story revolves. Varun's mother, Lakshmi, is a school Principal, who is portrayed to be very sincere in her work. She was shown as a single mother. The director conveys the mother's conventional thoughts through a scene where she advises a parent, not to compel a boy student to wear female dress for fancy dress competition. She also advises the Parent that everyone will start ridiculing the small boy for his female dress. This incident shows that the mother character has very strong faith in conventional culture of the normal Tamil society. She wants to go along the main stream of Tamil culture where male members' dress code is completely different from the females.

In the first segment of the film, Varun was seen with his friends near the seashore. The other friends played and Varun was just watching them. He saw a man with a fit physique, which fascinated him. He couldn't avoid his looks towards the bare body

which exhibits healthy and masculine features. He also found that this attraction found to be weird. He was confused by his attraction towards male sex. He realised that he is different from his other friends (11.25). He consulted a psychiatric Doctor, Ram. He patiently listened to Varun and advised him that a male having sexual attraction towards another male is not against nature and not a mental disorder. It is the nature of Gays (14.30). Even though Dr. Ram explained everything in a positive manner, Varun was not ready to accept this truth. Dr. Ram advised him that Gays are not culprits and sinners. He also encouraged Varun to accept himself with this character.

Dr. Ram gave Mr. Karthik's (a gay) number to Varun. Varun met Karthik in a meeting hall, where he found so many gays, who shared their stories and experiences in that meeting. He was inspired by Mr. Karthik's speech, which gave him a moral support that he is not the only human, who undergoes this trauma. He saw all the gays, and found that sexuality is not by choice. Karthik and Varun became good friends. (24.34). Karthik took him to his home, where he comes to know that Karthik is Dr. Ram's only son.

Karthik's family accepted him as he is. His father is a Psychiatrist and mother also understood Karthik's position. She even teased her son whether he would teach cooking to his boy- friend. This incident was observed by Varun which made him long to discuss his gay issues to his own mother. But he couldn't. Karthik said even his mother was also homophobic in the beginning and now she accepted him open minded. Varun felt proud of Karthik 's mother. He also came to know that Gay is not only sexual urge. They have other talents also. They have other talents also. They have other talents also. The have achieved in so many fields. Regarding love, Karthik says, "Some boys sight other boys. Some boys have a hook up or one night stand as their Lifestyle. Some boys sincerely love another boy and remain faithful to that partner. Some others are still single like me". He also says, "But forcing to marriage is a common thing in this society. I am happy because my parents and friends accepted me". Varun while trying to disclose about him to his friends, felt nervous, shown in twinning fingers and shaking legs. (37.15). He could not open up with his friends. Next day Karthik and Varun went to the sea shore. After returning to Krthick's house, Varun requested Karthik's mother to talk to his mother. (43.48)

Varun's mother Lakshmi was very confident that she knew everything about her son very well. But she didn't know Varun's gay instinct and about Karthik and Varun's friendship. (45.44). Varun's mother was heartbroken when she came to know

that her son is a gay. (48.57). She was in utter shock. She started to hate Varun. Varun didn't know how to handle that situation. He could not digest the fact, that his mother had hated him. He cried and pleaded his mother to talk to him. (50.37). He also explained that he didn't choose to be a gay. It was his situation that he had that weird sensation. He cried repeatedly saying sorry. He also said that he will try to change. But Lakshmi stayed adamant and did not bother to talk to her son. Varun left his home and reached Karthik's home. (53.20). Karthik explained everything to his parents. Dr. Ram and his family took care of Varun.(57.10) . Lakshmi heard hallucinated voices which tell that she is not capable of bringing up her son.(01.01.45). She was a single mother and till now she was proud of her son. Now she was shattered. Varun heavy heartedly left home and stayed with Karthik. Karthik looked after Varun with great care.

Varun's friend Maya and other friends accepted Varun. They thought that Varun was miserable. Maya also said, "Gayness is natural. We have to accept it. Don't get stressed for this common issue. She even talked to Varun's mother, but could not convince her. Lakshmi had a strong thought that, "Gay is a bad habit like drinking and smoking." His mother felt that someone has brainwashed him to be Gay! She was bothered about the society than Varun. Varun's cousin Rohith shared everything to his father, Gopi, who was the twin brother of Lakshmi. Lakshmi reveals that she could not accept Varun's deed. (01.28.26). Gopi scolded Lakshmi and said, "You are the one who couldn't understand Varun." Rohith and Gopi left Lakshmi, blaming that she was not a deserved mother to rear children.Gopi said, "You were his whole world and he followed you like a shadow. What crime did he commit?" (01.30.10).

Lakshmi was seen alone in the house, thinking of her olden days and viewed all the Photos taken in the past. Lakshmi came to the seashore alone and laid herself in the sea. She became sick. The servant maid saw the trauma of Lakshmi and advised, "Some things cannot be decided by us. They are beyond our control. We will feel the loss of our dear ones only after, they leave us. A mother can never forget them." The servant maid also insisted, "Don't leave Varun", (01.42.14). She added that she had lost her son 20 years back. But could not come out of the grief even now. The Camera plays a significant role at this juncture, showing the fish in the pot is found dead. The wall picture with the words "Ego - Attitude – Ignorant" is focussed by the camera with a close shot. The shows the audience that the fish is dead without the mother's care. She was full of ego to understand her son. This made her

exhibit bad attitude towards her son. She was also ignorant about Gay issues.

Lakshmi's heart moved in her loneliness. As a single mother she felt that it is her duty to take care of her son. Lakshmi immediately went in search of Varun, and found him in Karthik's home. (01.45.27). She saw him sleeping peacefully. The very sight of her son's safety gave her a sense of relief. She returned home in the rain. There the story ends with the words, "Many countries in the world, including India, consider homosexual acts as criminal offence. Members of LGBT community are mostly treated as criminals in the eyes of the law. Mere words cannot express the guilt and anguish of the parents and the children due to the so called society's norms and this law. We believe, that one day in the near future, their rights will be respected and laws will be rewritten". Lokesh kumar, the director of this film has a very strong faith, that India and Tamilnadu will recognize the trauma and plights of Gays.

The mental suffering and trouble of the restrictions of this conventional society was in the verge of separating a loveable Mother and a Son. They both understood Sexuality is not stable. The mother character is the best example of the people of Tamilnadu where the mind-set is completely submerged in the conventional values. The media has made them to laugh upon the gays and this gender trouble disturbs the gays and make them the uncontested gender. No one like to have the gay instinct in their community. The media should give the awareness that Gayness is strongly an individual's normal wish and exhibit to break through the traditional gender and sexuality norms framed by the traditional society. The Director Lokesh Kumar has confidently portrayed a queer issue which should be understood by all the people of Tamilnadu. His sincere effort should be appreciated. Thanks to the Censor board who has issued U Certificate to this cinema.

As a society, we are programmed to view films on LGBT Community only as a depiction of their lives - as it is - an oppressed, isolated and outcast life. Unfortunately, we are living in a society where normalcy has become very misunderstood. A few amount of films that have dealt with LGBT topics has been made by the members of that community and was certified as A category film only. Only some directors choose this topic to give moral message to the society. Visual media should take charge to inculcate the Film making is an art from where a creative mind can find multiple ways to show off their craft. Great stories, innovative cinematography or inspired directors can make Gay

topics popular in Indian Cinema, which is rare in this category for cinematic excellence.

The existence of gay in the society is an interdisciplinary study which includes historical, sociological aspects in studying gay films. Gay Characters are often used for laughter. They are mostly shown effeminate and shown in a comedy genre. They are people with no hope, rejected by Parents & Society without doing any mistake knowingly. Gay is a symbol of promiscuity in most of the Tamil films till now. This statement is firmly labelled in Gay life because of the stereotype constructed taboos in society life, which ultimately leads to pessimism in Gay life. Films in Tamil in previous days portray Gay character in a derogatory manner. After the release of *En Magan Maghizhvan* (My son is Gay), it has become an eye opener in this conservative society. Tamilnadu now has received a knowledge that there were people who desire same gender sex, imposed by society to lead the normality, will have the confidence to voice out their inner desires. Society will slowly wake up from the age old, conservative norms if such films are released.

Jimmy Cage, a foreign you-tube reviewer says, "My son is gay is really a touching and courageous film about acceptance and tolerance. Here and there a little rough around the edges and a bit too direct, but in the end, it is incredibly sensitive and compassionate". He also gives 7/10 marks for this film. Lois Tyson in *Lesbian, Gay and Queer Criticism* says, "Sexuality is completely controlled neither by our biological sex nor by the way our culture translates biological sex into gender roles. Sexuality exceeds these definitions and has a will, a creativity, an expressive need of its own (335). Tamil cinema has bared the responsibility of uplifting the uncontested, sexual minorities, Gay and their equal representatives by started portraying as the protagonist and this will lead to a positive trend in future Tamil films.

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that the above article is my original work and has not been published elsewhere.

Author Biography:

I am Dr.S.D.Selvasundari, at present working as Head & Asst. Professor, Department of English, in G.Venkataswamy Naidu College, Kovilpatti, Tuticorin District, Tamilnadu, India. I have 10 years of teaching experience in National Engineering College, Kovilpatti. There I was the staff coordinator of Business English Certificate course for the engineering graduates. I have four years of teaching experience in this present Institution. I am interested in ELT and Feminist studies. I have published 7 articles in national and international journals. I have completed 6 short term courses from various international Universities. I believe in life-long learning.