Abstract

Desatanakkili Karayarilla (1986) is a Malayalam movie written and directed by the eminent film maker Padmarajan. It was critically acclaimed, being one of the first Malayalam films that talked about womance which was considered taboo till then. A womance is a close but non-sexual relationship between two or more women, a form of affectional or homosocial intimacy. The word womance is a portmanteau of the words woman and romance. The movie stars Mohanlal, Karthika, Shaari and Urvashi in pivotal roles. The film tells the story of two school girls who eloped while going on a school trip in order to punish their teacher Devika who organised their trip. Their journey is soon interrupted by a mysterious man, Harisankar, who strangely befriends the girls and begins a romantic relationship with one of them. Towards the end of the movie the girls fall in to a huge misery and they commit suicide. Being first of its kind the movie is a humble attempt of the maker to bring out shades of lesbian love in a complicated relationship between two school girls. The film is an exploration of a world of freedom and independence through the love they feel for each other, the hindrances they come across and the final choice to surrender to love that they make. This paper deals with how the director Padmarajan portrays a gay relationship, way ahead of its times in a conservative society like Kerala. The core feelings of the major women characters in the movie shall also be examined in this paper.
1. INTRODUCTION

_Desatanakkili Karayarilla_ is a 1986 Malayalam film written and directed by the renowned film maker Padmarajan. It was critically acclaimed well, being one of the first Indian films that talked about womance which was considered taboo till then. A womance is a close but non-sexual relationship between two or more women, a form of affection or homosocial intimacy. The word _womance_ is a portmanteau of the words _woman_ and _romance_.

Homosexual love remains one of the great taboos of Indian cinema, to be broken only cautiously. There have been hints and side characters in many movies down the years regarding this theme. Film-makers should try to look beyond the family friendly man-loves-woman binary and venture into riskier terrain.

2. THE MOVIE IN DEPTH

Being first of its kind the movie, _Desatanakkili Karayarilla_ is a humble attempt of the maker to bring out shades of lesbian love in a complicated relationship between two school girls. The film is an exploration of a world of independence and freedom through the love they feel for each other, the hindrances they come across and the final choice to surrender to love that they make. Way ahead of its times in a conservative society like Kerala's, director Padmarajan brilliantly portrays a gay relationship in a non-label, non-in-your-face kind of story telling that those who can figure out the nuances of gay love figures it out intensely while the regular 'family crowd' sees only an innocent bond of friendship between two girls which needs to be accepted. The director's success is that it was a box office hit when it was released back in the mid-eighties and viewers accepting the wonderfully nuanced film for whatever they thought it stood for.

The movie stars Mohanlal, Karthika, Shaari and Urvashi in pivotal roles. The film tells the story of two school girls, Sally who is played by Shaari and Nirmala who is called as Nimmy (Karthika) who eloped while on a school trip in order to punish their teacher Devika (Urvashi) who organised the trip. Their journey is soon interrupted by a man, Harisankar (Mohanlal), who mysteriously befriends the girls and begins a romantic relationship with Nimmy. Sally strongly objects to this relationship and warns her friend against the suspicious nature of the man. Nimmy, who was almost convinced to leave everything behind to be with the man she loves, gets a shock when she finds out that the man was actually in love with the teacher whom she despised and ran away from. Unable to find a way out of the misery that befalls them, Sally and Nimmy cling on to each other and commit suicide.

3. RELEVANCE OF TITLE

The title of the film means migrating bird never cries. Migrating birds do not make home. They need not bother about relationships and ties. They make bonds; fly away for making other bonds. The title itself suggests the film deals with queer world. Queers like lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans genders are considered outcasts by heterosexual
community as they do not engage in marriage and procreation. They do not settle anywhere rather fly like a migrating bird from one shore to another.

4. DECONSTRUCTING THE MOVIE

The first scene of the film itself shows the bond between the two girls, Sally and Nimmy. They were coming down some steps holding hands together. There Nimmy tells Sally, "Running away always saves you”. It can be read as Sally’s inherent nature of escaping from one situation to another. She always wants to escape from one shore to another and does not want to settle anywhere. One day on ground Nimmy placing her head on Sally’s lap tells about her turbulent family life. Sally tells, "If it’s like that we can escape from here. Far away, somewhere safe”. Sally always wants Nimmy with her and she protects Nimmy overtly. Sally tells Nimmy, "I shall protect you from everyone”. The connotation Padmarajan used "Far away, somewhere safe” has a lot of significance in case of queer people. Queer people always like to conceal themselves from normal public.

Sally and Nimmy skulk during the tour to punish their teacher Devika. They had to change their dress in some unforeseen circumstances. Sally changes her dress quickly without any hesitation. But Nimmy is shown shy, hesitant and timid. In all the scenes where Sally and Nimmy comes together gender roles are shown as that of a man and woman. Sally automatically takes the role of a man, protector and Nimmy becomes a submissive woman. After reaching a room in Nambeesan’s home stay after skulking the trip, both Sally and Nimmy feels relived. Nimmy looks through the window and asks Sally, "Is this the safe place you had said about?” to which Sally replies, "Till I find one”.

Padmarajan has wilfully selected a port city that is Cochin with sea, beaches and boats to add significance to title. It shows that these two characters are like two migratory birds getting ready to migrate. The song sequence "Vanampadiyetho”, looks like a normal duet film song with man and woman but the only difference is that here two girls are in its place. The director has carefully placed two girls in beaches, parks, film theatres, hotels and roads. They walk freely and valiantly together like any other hetero couple.

Soon Nimmy begin to work in an antic shop. On the walls of the shop it was written "Old things shall be sold”. It connotes that old life styles are updated and society needs to change for gay people. By narrating failure of different heterosexual families the director is hinting at a new form of family life.

Hari sees the girls in a restaurant and he doubts whether he has seen them anywhere else especially Nimmy who he might have seen a photo of them in newspaper. Hari tells them, we will part as friends but not as strangers. He also tells that, "I was also banished like you. May be you have done it on your own”. It hints at social exclusion of gays. Many queer people are kicked out of their houses or they voluntarily go out of homes and form families of likeminded people. At one situation sally tells Nimmy, "We haven’t killed anyone”. It goes with queer slogan love is beyond gender and it is not a crime. There are three women characters in the movie, Devika, Sally and Nimmy. All the
three are completely different from each other. The character difference of Sally and Nimmy shall be discussed in detail.

5. **SALLY MANNISH BEHAVIOUR**

Throughout the film Sally is portrayed as a tomboy, rough and tough type. Mostly she sheds or tries to shed her feminine qualities and adopts manly behaviour. She loves to wear shirts, jeans and pants and she cuts her hair short. But her feminine qualities like love and care appear in case of Nimmy. She protects Nimmy with utmost care and loves Nimmy dearly. She plans to have a life with her secretly and she wants to elope from bonded chains of traditional family. Her father and mother also live separately in Mauritius and she does not like to be stuck anywhere rather she wants to fly from one shore to another. Padmarajan does not clearly tells us that she is a lesbian. But he gives us clues through some dialogues delivered by Sally at the end of film when Nimmy tries to commit suicide, Sally tells her, "You have never really understood me my dear".

6. **NIMMY’S COMPLEX CHARACTER**

Nimmy is the most complex character among the three main women characters in the movie. This character is multi-dimensional. Every second the character changes shape like anything and it is complicated to read her mind. She is somewhat meek, tradition bound but at times she looks egotistical and aggressive. She is mostly obedient to Sally’s orders but at times she airs her own opinion. Her submissiveness to Sally and Harishanker at the same time lands her in trouble and she reaches in a puzzled state. At one end, her friendship and decision making with Sally and at the other end her love for Hari is hesitant. Nimmy was almost persuaded to leave everything behind to be with Hari whom she loves. But soon she finds out that Hari is in love with Devika which shatters her dream to have a family life with him. Unable to find a way out of the misery that befalls on her, Nimmy decides to commit suicide.

7. **CONCLUSION**

Through the movie, *Desatanakkili Karayarilla* Padmarajan brings out shades of lesbian love in a complicated relationship between two school girls. The film successfully explores a world of independence and freedom through the love they feel for each other, the hindrances they come across and the final choice to surrender to love that they make.

8. **REFERENCES**

