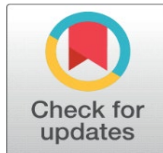
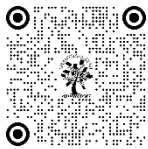


# QUEER LIFE - A STUDY BASED ON THE CHARACTER 'MALLI' IN THE NOVEL RAM C/O ANANDI

Sreeja K S<sup>1</sup>✉, Dr. Jaison Jose<sup>2</sup>✉

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Catholice College, Pathanamthitta, Kerala.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor and Research Guide, Department of Malayalam, St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, Kerala.



## Corresponding Author

Sreeja K S, [sreejaks161975@gmail.com](mailto:sreejaks161975@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

The changes in the socio-cultural sphere play a crucial role in shaping literature. sexual minority communities and their problems like marginalization, lack of acceptance, social segregation, sexual harassment and the survival, their 'atypical' (peculiar) sexual behaviour, all become the themes of Modern Literature. Sexual minorities such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender are collectively referred to as the LGBTQ community (or queer community). Among this group, the character Malli, a transgender individual, occupies a significant role in the novel Ram C/o Anandhi by Akhil P. Dharmajan. Malli's internal and external conflicts regarding identity, denial of acceptance, familial and social segregation, sexual harassment and survival, all are beautifully written in this novel. The primary aim of the study is to analyze Malli's identity conflicts and struggles for survival within the theoretical framework of queer life concepts.

**Keywords:** Queer, Transgender, LGBT Theory, Identity, Conservatism, Dissident Sexuality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual attraction refers to the feelings and desires that draw one person to another. It can occur between individuals of the opposite sex or the same sex. Attraction between opposite sexes is termed heterosexuality, while attraction between members of the same sex or gender is referred to as homosexuality. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals are collectively known as the LGBT community. Historically, they were marginalized in socio-political and cultural contexts, facing threats and harsh criticism for their relationships, which were labeled "unnatural." However, the situation has evolved significantly in recent times.

The term "Queer" was first introduced by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991. She used the word to reclaim it from its derogatory connotations and to emphasize a non-normative approach to gender and sexuality. Prior to the emergence of this theory, members of the sexual minority community were excluded from power structures and denied the ability to question societal norms. Queer Theory, also known as LGBT Theory, emerged in the 1990s as a form of resistance. It advocates for an end to injustice toward the LGBT community and seeks to integrate them into the mainstream. "The societal prejudices, biased attitudes, and preconceived notions were at the forefront of marginalizing individuals belonging to

dissident sexual communities. However, the deliberate interventions of governmental and religious institutions played a significant role in systematizing this marginalization" (Resmi G., Anil Kumar K.S., 2016:9). The Queer community's demand is for a restructuring of society that aligns with their sense of identity and stands in opposition to such power structures.

## 2. TRANSGENDER

Transgender is one of the LGBT groups. Transgenders are those individuals whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the sex they are assigned at birth. The feminine behaviours with masculine appearance and Masculine behaviours and mannerisms with feminine appearance help to identify them easily. The reference of such people are seen in epics, vedas and myths.

By disrupting the socially accepted binary of male/female, they are labeled as outcasts and relegated to the status of third-class citizens. Terms such as *Hijada*, *Pingala*, *Shikhandi*, *Chantpottu*, and *Napumsakam* are often used to refer to them, which serve to demean their dignity. "Society, having embraced derogatory terms like 'Kaṭṭavaṇṭi' 'Anum Pennum Kettavaṇ,' 'Onpath', 'Manugunanchan', 'Theyyaro', 'Piṇḍi,' 'Guṇḍ,' 'Peṇṇāṇu,' and 'Aruvaṇi,' celebrates these insults while cruelly humiliating them" (Resmi G., Anil Kumar K.S., 2022:55). Tamilians refer to them as Thirunangai. Living according to their gender identity, which differs from their physical state, they seek authenticity in their lives. "*Napumsakatvam* is a mental state. The birth of neutrality occurs when an individual successfully undertakes the arduous effort of aligning the body to suit that mental state" (Surendran P., 2011:82). Even as they strive to build their lives through survival efforts, they often lack legal support. Frequently, those responsible for implementing laws stand against them. "Strong platforms advocating for transgender individuals have emerged in many parts of society today. However, the reports of bias against them remind us that the marginalization of transgender people is far from over. Families, perceiving *hijadas* as a stain on their reputation, often inflict mental and physical abuse on them to quell their anguish. To escape this abuse, some choose to undergo gender-affirming surgeries to align with the gender they wish to live as" (Sukumaran V., 2016:71).

## 3. STRUGGLES OF SURVIVAL

The survival of transgender individuals are quite challenging and complex due to the socio-political and cultural factors. They often face many obstacles that affect their well-being, safety and opportunities. However many transgender people have come to the forefront thinking that they also have all the rights and freedom to enjoy their life like other gender groups. The Social Department has already issued directives to specify their gender as 'Transgender'. There are around 25000 transgenders in Kerala. "The monthly income of this community is just below Rs.5000/-. In addition to that, only 11.6% of the population have permanent jobs. While 52% transgenders suffer from the torturing of the police, 70% are afraid of even facing the police. Furthermore, around 89% are facing ill-treatment at their place of work. While 28% face torture and getting raped by their partners, 96% are hesitant to complain to the police. About 51% of them are not ready to disclose their sexual identity even to their family" (Resmi.G, Anil Kumar.K.S. 2022:61). In conclusion, in their struggle for survival most of the time, it is a case of failure.

Ram C/o Anandhi

The novel Ram C/o Anandhi by Akhil P. Dharmajan begins with Ram traveling from Alappuzha to Chennai to pursue studies in film making. From his lodging at Ayyappan Thangal, Ram commutes to his college by taking both a train and a bus. The novel develops through the numerous relationships Ram forms at home, college, and during his travels. It portrays the transformations in human relationships, encompassing friendship, love, revenge, compassion, and sorrow. The novel vividly captures the essence of Chennai city, including locations such as Guindy Railway Station, Dhanashree Lodge, Kathipara Bridge, a godown, rain-soaked streets, Aligraama, the backwaters, the sea and waves, unspoken love, longing, and death. The central characters include Anandhi, Raj, Vetri, Reshma, Paatti, Malli, and Soumya. Among them, Malli, a transgender individual, holds a significant place in the narrative.

During a train journey from Ayyappan Thankal, Ram first meets Malli. Malli, who introduces herself as an Aruvani (a transgender woman), initially bothers Ram by asking for money. A fellow passenger tells Ram that Malli is a *hijada* and a very bad person. In the first part of the novel, the author marks the presence of a group of transgender people who have created their own world amidst the chaos. When Malli asks for money, and Ram refuses to give, she snatches the money from his pocket, takes it, and shouts insults at him. There is a moment in the novel when Malli falls to the ground due to a police officer's strike. Later, Malli returns the money she took from Ram, and tells him to buy a shirt with it. Over

time, Ram's understanding of Malli changes, and he tries to approach her more closely. Anandi tells Ram that the boy, Kalidas, has now transformed into Malli. When Ram asks Malli about her past, she explains her previous life in detail. Transgender is a state between male gender and female gender. Kalidas was born as a boy and his childhood sexual experiences make Kalidas different from other boys. He faced his first sexual assault from a friend of his father who was a drunkard. Later on he was sexually abused by many grown-up people. Gradually, he is started to be addressed by calling names of beautiful ladies. That moment he started to assume himself as a girl, even if he was masculine in his appearance. When he grew up he was so careful in such situations of abuse and he tried to escape from such situations. But the impact of his childhood sexual experiences still haunts him. While his peer group gets attracted towards beautiful girls, he unaware of himself, gets attracted towards other boys and started loving them.

When a boy recognized his transgender identity and tries to exhibit his femininity, his family forces him to give up his femininity and stick on to the masculinity. The society does not acknowledge them. As a result, they feel lonely, dejected and segregated from the family. He completed his twelfth education with 90% mark and it was his dream to become a graduate. He himself collected money for his educational expenses and he used to play female roles in temples and other public celebrations to meet his educational needs. Actually he was not capable of doing other jobs. He would meet the household expenses and educational expense of his younger brother as well. He expected to save the balance amount for his future education. In the beginning his mother supported him but later on, all other family members prevented him from doing this job and made him confined in the four walls of his home. Later on, he realized that his family members do not acknowledge his transgender identity and he left his home with a bearded man whom he loved. Initially he showed love towards him, but gradually Kalidas could realize that his love was not sincere. This man, along with his friends, started abusing him sexually. Consequently he was thrown to the street of 'Aruvanees.' That moment he lost all his hopes of a secure and peaceful life, yet he started to earn money for his livelihood by joining with these 'Aruvanees'. Meanwhile, memories about his family made him come back home. But contrary to his expectation, his family was not ready to accept him. This made him come back to Chennai again. In a paternal-family oriented system both the family and the society do not accept such people whoever they are whether children or siblings. Instead of giving care and protection, the society exploits them by denying their rights. "Transgenders have been here in the society for centuries. But they have not given a deserving position or acknowledgement. On the other hand, they are being exploited by the so called 'civilized society'. While we are the part of the so called 'civilized society', they become the untouchables, uncivilized and humiliated community" (Reshmi.G., Anilkumar.K.S. 2022:10). For those who are accustomed to the socially constructed male/female forms, the woman in the male form and the man in the female form seem strange in some way. Malli also faces the society's neglect towards transgender people.

During the day, society treats them with disdain, mocking and driving them away. Yet, under the cover of darkness, many exploit them to fulfill unquenched sexual desires. In one instance, a local sub-inspector, Farooq, along with his companions, uses Malli without her consent to satisfy their lust. Afterward, they abandon her in a helpless state near the Kathippara Bridge. It is the transgender community that steps forward to care for her in her weakened condition. This community itself struggles with a lack of secure housing, often living in makeshift arrangements hidden behind sarees used as curtains. Despite these hardships, they remain united, always ready to comfort and support one another in times of need.

Though he secured a high score (90%) in his twelfth standard, Kalidas did not get admission anywhere for his higher studies. With a strong desire of learning dance he approached a dance school in Chennai. But he was denied the opportunity, citing his transgender identity. His protest found no result. Later on, with the intervention of Ram and Anandi, Malli got an admission in the dance school. But, unfortunately, leaving all her dreams unfulfilled. She surrendered to death. This incident reflects the fact that about 58% of transgender students are forced to be drop outs, before they complete their 10th Class. Physical and mental tortures, bitter experiences regarding their transgender identity are cited to be the main reasons (Reshma.G, Anilkumar.K.S. 2022:61) Malli is only one among them.

Like any other human being, transgender individuals also yearn to be loved and accepted. However, they face significant setbacks both within their families and in society. Rarely do people truly understand and treat them with empathy. Ram initially approaches Malli with preconceived notions but eventually changes his attitude. He offers her love and care, spending more time interacting with her. Malli, in turn, shares with Ram the significant events of her life, subtly expressing her love for him. She finds joy in imagining her name joined with his. Eventually, weary of her life in Chennai, Malli decides to return to her hometown, driven by her desire to love and be loved. However, disappointment awaits her there too. Those who should have supported her instead ostracize and push her down, leaving her life more vulnerable and helpless. The systems of politics, religion, gender norms, governance, society, and family relationships often suppress and silence individuals like Malli. The abuse and rejection they face within their families and communities

often force them to migrate to bustling cities like Chennai, Kolkata, Bombay, or Bangalore. This reveals the deeply conservative mindset of society. Without understanding the factors that lead an individual to identify as transgender, and without accepting their physical and emotional differences, society often cruelly oppresses them. Yet, they strive to survive such oppression. Some resist societal structures by forming partnerships and maintaining marital relationships. Mally's life followed a similar path. Her relationship with the bearded man was brief, as he eventually abandoned her on the streets of *Aruvanis* leaving her to fend for herself.

In our society, transgender individuals often do not receive the protection of law enforcement or judicial systems. The current system oppresses sexual minorities in alarming ways. Although the Constitution guarantees civil liberties to all citizens, these rights are frequently denied to them. Living in a state of physical and economic insecurity, and lacking collective strength or adequate recognition from judicial mechanisms, they are often targeted by anti-social elements, both individually and in groups.

In Guindi, Sub-Inspector Farooq and his associates repeatedly exploit Mally to fulfill their deviant sexual desires, disregarding her health or consent. The novelist portrays Mally's suffering as follows: *"If they take me away, I won't even be able to walk for three or four days afterward. My body will be covered with belt marks and burns where cigarettes were pressed into my skin"*. This highlights the horrific abuse Mally had to endure. After being left in a helpless state near the Kathipara Bridge, it is the transgender community that takes her in and cares for her.

When law enforcers themselves become lawbreakers, justice becomes an unattainable dream for ordinary people. The so-called dignitaries of mainstream society, moral guardians, and anti-social elements alike exploit transgender individuals for their perverse desires. This systemic and societal failure underscores the grave injustices faced by transgender communities. Mally, overjoyed at being admitted to a dance school, was dancing in celebration when Sub-Inspector Farooq and his associates forcibly dragged her to a godown. Despite her pleas and cries of agony, expressing that she could endure no more, they did not stop their sexual assault. They continued to abuse her and stomped on her chest with such force that she succumbed to her injuries. Her lifeless body was dumped on the other side of the Kathipara Bridge. Mally's death did not stir any reaction from society. "Just another Aruvani has died," someone remarked dismissively about her demise. Even though similar incidents had occurred before in the area, no one had ever raised a complaint, reflecting the harsh reality.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Akhil P. Dharmajan, in *Ram C/o Anandhi*, chronicles the life of Kalidas, who later became Mally. The narrative explores her experiences of rejection from her family and society, her struggles for survival, her quest for love and acceptance, the oppression she faced from those in power, her shattered dreams, love and heartbreak, moments of escape, and ultimately, her tragic death.

*Ram C/o Anandhi* exemplifies how literature can act as a mirror to society. It is a reminder of the importance of creating spaces for marginalized voices in the literary and cultural mainstream. The novel emphasizes the human emotions and interpersonal relationships. By addressing the lives and struggles of transgender individuals, the novel encourages readers to question societal norms and advocate for equality. Through the character of Malli, Akhil P. Dharmajan masterfully delves into the complexities of gender identity, societal alienation, and the relentless pursuit of dignity. The novel resonates as a clarion call for inclusivity, urging readers to embrace and celebrate the profound diversity of human existence.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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