

The Construction of Mentally Disabled in Malayalam Movies: Study Based on *Chotta Mumbai* and *Mizhi Randilum*

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Abstract

Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary area of study which tries to understand disability with reference to culture, society, and politics rather than conceptualizing it in terms of Medicine or Psychology. It explains the meaning, nature and the consequences of disability. This field of study tries to interpret disability and tries to understand the feeling of ashamedness and loss of reputation because of the disease, illness and impairment, including those that cannot be healed or explained by biological sciences. It also looks up how 'normal people' behaves towards the people with disabilities. The society has constructed several norms and it expect people to abide by the same. When an individual deny to accept these norms, the society brand them as freaks or mentally disabled. Through the course of history, one could find how women were claimed to possess fits of madness in their blood when they deny the patriarchal authority.

This paper tries to analyse how mentally unstable characters are created in a movie. The paper understands the sanity hid behind the veil of insanity in the characters in the movies *Chotta Mumbai* and *Mizhi Randilum*. In both these movies certain characters are branded as mad and is used for comic relief. This paper also tries to understand the inconsiderate nature of the society of such fragile situations. This paper tries to prove how madness is imposed upon certain characters and later on the costumes, dialogues and mannerisms are used in a such a way to concrete the imprinting of madness in them.

Keywords: Disability studies, madness, patriarchy, social norms, women.

The Creation of Mentally Disabled in Malayalam Movies

The disabled population is always marginalized all across the world. These people are considered to be inferior in comparison to the 'abled population'. Indian society, with its idea of pollution in accordance with individuals, has been in the forefront in keeping these populations away from the mainstream. Indian movies play an important role in the creation of perception of the society as a whole. The portrayal of mentally disabled characters as laughing stock without a tinge of sensitivity towards them is a dangerous phenomenon.

Critical Disability Theory (CDT) is a theory concept for the study and analysis of disability issues. CDT analyses the possibilities and limitations of critical theories of Disability. CDT's central theme is that disability is a social construct, not the inevitable result of impairment. Disability is a complex inter-relationship between impairment, an individual's response to that impairment and the physical, institutional and attitudinal (together, the 'social') environment. The social disadvantage experienced by disabled people is the result of the failure of the social environment to respond adequately to the diversity presented by disability. (Hosking, "The Theory of Critical Disability Theory")

Disability theory is also helpful to differentiate between materialist and idealist explanations. "Disability theory refers to people with impairments as disabled signals, that they belong to that group of people who cannot engage in 'normal' activities because of their 'abnormal' bodily or intellectual 'deficit' or 'incapacity'." (Thomas 38) According to Thomas, disabled people cannot engage in 'normal activities' because of their 'abnormality'. Even if they have the confidence to do or show their ability the society or their family members make them more disabled.

In addition to disabled characters, scholars have called attention to the frequent metaphorical use of disability, which adds to the meanings of disability in texts. Early literary disability studies critics sometimes expressed misgivings about figurative uses of disability, pointing out how such tropes frequently are quick ways vividly to depict something bad, broken, or wrong, even if that thing is unrelated to disability itself. (Mambrol "Disability Studies")

Our society has constructed several norms and it demands people to follow those norms. If a change happened, the society brands them as disabled. The significance of Disability theory and practice lies in its radical challenge to the medical or individual model of disability. The latter is based on the assumption that the individual is 'disabled' by their impairment, whereas the social model of Disability reverse the casual chain to explore how socially constructed barriers have disabled people with a perceived impairment.

Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* studies, in much detail the various methods with which certain people would be decided as mad by various discourses of reason during different eras. This essentially draws attention to the similarities that emerge during such a study: herein, madness is consistently considered as the 'other' of reason, as well as something to be analysed and corrected by reason. The methods for this have consistently involved either reformation, exclusion or confinement (Rodrigo "How can Foucault's Discourse on Madness Describe "madness" as Neither a Subject nor an Object")

If a person made an objection to anything that is the accepted social concept or norm, then the society brand them as mad, because the person is different from social norms. Mental illness can be constructed using family issues, social issues, moral values, integrity, individual perspective, choices etc. All these are materialized from the societal normativity. There can be people who are not disabled but some of their behaviors seal them as mad person or a disabled person. Our society is not considerate towards the needs of such specially-abled persons and disability studies tries to enlighten the masses towards the inequality faced by these groups.

Like oppressed people in society these disabled are oppressed and marginalized, this has led to the minimal attention to the historical, political, legal dimensions of the disability. Because of these distinctions they are neglected from the economic or common rights which are equal to or the basic right of people. And if a person is disabled it will be a shame for their family also, even if he/she do not have any problem with it, they are branded as 'disabled' in front of society. People are ashamed to see psychiatrist. There are many reasons to see a psychiatrist, but people will not think about it.

Malayalam movies have always sidelined the disabled characters and sometimes make use of the disabled population in order to arouse a sense of sympathy in various movies. Physical disability is shown as irredeemable and constant cause of trouble for them. A realistic portrayal of acceptance of their life and abilities and their potentiality are usually excluded from mainstream cinema. In case of mental disabilities, such characters are mostly used as comic relief or as objects of entertainment in the screen. The society has already sidelined them by constructing various norms and belief systems. This attitude of society gets reflected in movies.

Chotta Mumbai and *Mizhi Randilumare* two movies released within a span of a decade, from 1997 to 2003, which has the presence of a mentally disabled characters in it. All these characters are a part of either protagonist's or antagonist's family. These two characters are similar to the each other and a comparative study of their behavior and the representation of the same, enables one to understand the cultural nuances of the society, which imposes madness upon them.

In the movie *Chotta Mumbai*, the mad character is the mother of Sadeeshan, who is the antihero of the movie. The movie gets a new turn when Sadeeshan's character is introduced, even though his family and mother fail to find such an importance in the movie. In the whole movie whenever Sadeeshan's family or house is shown there is no hint of his wife or children. Still his mother, played by Vijayakumari, gets a screen space for comic relief her character offers. The character herself plays no important role in the storyline except for the fact it was her presence and her shouting that helped the hero Thala to save his father from imminent danger. It was a scene which could be played by any character in the movie. The presence of this character and the elimination of her from all prominent scenes related to her children itself proves her negligible identity in the society.

The woman's name was not getting expressed anywhere in the story. This can be considered as the negation of identity of the person. This also points out the societal norm that the identity of a woman should always associated with her roles in the family. Even though she is depicted as the mother, there is no scene where she gets the respect and love that a mother deserves. In the whole movie, the woman is never addressed as 'Amma' or gets pampered by her sons. She is just for fun so the name is not important for these kinds of people in movies. In the whole movie, she appears only in some scenes but her scenes entertain people. The character is getting used for entertainment but the audience fails to recognize that more than that she had her own life and her own problems.

The main character of this movie named Thala and his friends came to the antihero's home to warn him of the consequences if they dared to fight them. At that time, there was this lady praying for her son's destruction. She gets her first scene about the middle of the story. There we can see that the mother is praying for destruction of their sons. "Narayana avannashichu pone entamonnashichu pone eejanmamrekshapedalea" (God...he must perish, my son must perish, this should not succeed in his life) (Rasheed 1.50.42-1.50.55).

The scene showcases a mother disrupting the societal norms that a mother always prays for the goodness and wellbeing of her children and not for their devastation. But here she consciously breaks that norm. Due to this reason, she is labeled as mad or mentally unstable. There is this unwritten rule that 'As a mother's mind the lady should pray for goodness of their son'.

Mothers are praying warriors. They know there isn't a problem, issue or situation that God can't handle. My mother embodied this spirit. She taught us the power of prayer. If we were sick, she prayed for our healing. If we had financial problems, she prayed for God's provision" (Diaz, "The Power of a Mother's Prayer).

In the movie, the past of this lady especially the sufferings that she might have gone through because of her sons, never gets a screen space. The bitterness that might have arisen in her due to the illegal and immoral activities of her sons forced her to ask for an ill fate upon her sons. She doesn't want her son to be a scoundrel and want her sons to turn back to good life. She didn't have the guts to punish her sons and turn them back into innocence, so she relies upon the divine forces to act up and show the right path to her sons. Maybe the mother was scared that she might fail in stopping their son from these activities so she prays, as individual, not as a mother. She thinks that the death of her sons may make people relax and have a problem free life. The lady also was frightened that Sadeeshan will kill her. It is another reason for the mother to pray like this.

A person good at heart and with logical reasoning can never allow the propagation of these criminal activities and will try to stop them. It was the same being done by this lady. But just because she was their mother the 'social norms' expected her to support her sons and bless them with a prosperous life, but when she chooses righteousness over expected behavior she gets termed as 'mad'. This breaking of the social norms seals her fate as a 'mad woman'.

When Thala and his gang visited Satheeshan's home she hit one of the friends of Thala and he thinks it was done by Susheelan, he turns back and slaps Satheesan. Then she says "very good. Prathanaeattuthudangi(good... the prayers have started to come into effect)" (1.51.10-1.50.12). God that her prayer started to have impact as it was heard by the God. This scene shows the anger and frustration towards the son by the mother. It's all against the norms which are created by society, if we don't in accordance with these norms we are branded as mad. All people have their own likes and behavioural patterns but people put up an act for the society. They are not living for themselves; they are living for society.

She is shown as a widow and it never gets mentioned when she had lost her husband. But one of her sons was a police officer and clearly, she has some credit to share for the success of her son. The son being educated also makes one question the fact that she never gets any kind of medication for her 'mental disability'. This movie was released at a time when mental disability was being accepted and treated but this indifference by her son gives more strength to the fact that she was not mad but was assumed to be mad. In the whole movie there is no scene where she takes a tablet or any kind of medicine nor there any kind of compassion expressed by the sons which again point out her sanity rather than insanity.

Another reason for sealing her as mad is because of her physical appearance. Her hair is bent like a curve and tied with a ribbon in the tip. And she walks like doing a march past. But still when the northeastern tribal people have this type of stylizing as an accepted tradition and when the same is being imitated by another woman who is separated from that culture spatially, she gets branded as abnormal. A person can dress or walk as they like, but the society never loses the reigns upon the people so easily. The world claims that we can dress as we please but when one's styles doesn't converge with the majoritarian idea they are termed as freaks. There was no one helping the women to do her hair. She likes her hairstyles so; she always prefers to keep it the same. In most of the movies one gets identified as an 'alleged unstable person' from their physical appearance itself. It can be assured that these appearances are mostly funny; properly serving the agenda.

In the end of the movie, she becomes the reason for finding Thala's father inside the Santa Claus which was about to be burnt. The director wanted to entertain people in end also. Thus, she gets an important scene to play. Before

the climax, when Thala's friend says that there is a snake in the ground so, please don't step on it where he was actually talking about Thala's father's friend who is nicknamed as 'pambu' (snake), she screams like a normal person when she hears about the snake. Even a normal will make a sudden reaction when they hear about a snake. From these instances it can be proved that she was mentally stable.

In this movie scene, there is no scene of her taking medicines or treatments going on and no one calls her as mad. The movie also shows that the lady is never restricted, she is free. If her sons want her mother to be restricted, they can easily do that. They need a mother who shares their ideology. They just tries to eliminate her from their life and is inconsiderate towards her. They wanted someone as their mother who will support them in all their actions, but when she never does that. Because of this, they just ignore her as a broken object in their home.

Even though she wants the complete destruction of her sons, she still trusts her sons. In the end of the movie, she immediately agrees to travel with her son when he asked her to come with him. When she finds the car was over crowded, she chooses a space in the trunk of the car. She knows her space in her family. She herself understands her lifestyle. It is a reason for choosing the space in trunk of a car. And when she tries to escape from the snake, she goes inside the Santa Claus and there she finds a man inside the Santa. She feels Michael is a thief as she finds him in an unexpected place. The lady also screams which in turn helped the hero to save his father.

In *MizhiRandilum* also, Vijayakumari acted as the mad character. In this movie she has a name, Yashoda, but in *Chotta Mumbai* she doesn't have a name. In this movie she is the aunt of the protagonist. They live in an ancestral home. From the beginning of the movie, she makes the audience feel that she is mad. She put the rice vessel in the well, because of rice was over cooked. She says engana "venthucheenalthinnankolluvo...veraundakaam" (how can we eat this over cooked rice? Let make another one(Ranjith, 17.44-17.50).This itself shows that she is not very fond of 'kanji' or porridge. Even though her actions were incorrect it is just an impulsive reaction by the character. Some persons with Impulse Control Disorder can act in the same way. In her case these expressions of her can be understood as one particular form of ICD, named Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

Oppositional defiant disorder: A person with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) frequently loses their temper, is easily annoyed, and often becomes angry or resentful. They challenge authority figures, flout rules, bother other people on purpose, and blame other people for their problems. As a result of these behaviors, the person suffers problems at work and school, and socially. (Wagener, "Impulse Control Disorder & Addiction")

She lives her life as she wishes, which is the reason why her family members were jealous or might be vary of her and were scared about of her. Her behaviour is like a child. It is a widely approved idea that when people get older, they behave like children. The protagonist Bhadra, also treats her as a child. She takes care of Yashodha and never scolds her for her impulsiveness; neither she let others harm her. She always tries to protect her event though she fails certain times. The way Bhama takes care of her is like taking care of a naughty and impulsive child.

In the movie, Yashodha is an older character. Even though she is old, she is physically harassed by her nephew. She is getting attacked by a person who might be the age of her son. Indian family system gives equal importance and respect to an aunt as received by a mother. The Indian culture holds aunt equal to mother while uncle to father. But here, she never receives that sort of respect; she even fails to receive the acceptance and reverence that should be given to an elder. She is doing everything for her family, even though she is getting harassment as a reward.

All the other characters in the movie love her except her nephew and her brother. The both always harass and punish her. Yashoda even attacks her brother because she has certain hallucinations that her brother is not good for their family. She was also superstitious and had a strong belief in God, which was to that extend that it was problematic. That belief makes her think that her brother is bad for the house. So, she decided to push him into the well for the betterment of the family. "Kutty maarinilku. Iyale aa kinattilittuathmoodanamenaleatharavadintasamasthapreshnavum maru..."(You move away, I want to put him inside the well and close it, this will solve all the problems in the house) (30.32-30.37). Even she is happy to kill her brother for her family. His death will make prosperity in family, so for others she is doing that. But then she gets beaten up by her nephew. But all the family member are against the nephew's behaviour to Yashodha.

Yashodha is also seen feeding her niece when she was mentally distressed. No one in family think about Bhadra or that she might be hungry, except Yashodha. So, she knows how to behave in such situations and how to pamper and

take care of the traumatized Bhadra. This reveals that she knows everything and understands things around her, like the lady in the *Chotta Mumbai*. When Bhadra falls into trauma, Yashodha says something while lying in the lap of her sister. Here one can realise the sadness in her eyes. She is sad about her family. If she was mad, she will not think sensibly about the family. She was very fond of her family and have always taken impulsive decisions behalf of her family.

The physical appearance of the lady is also something that helps to tag her down as mad. She gets dressed in 'Kavi' like a man. Even she wears 'blouse and mundu' and she behaves like a man. The men in the family were not having proper job. So, the women were supposed to do job and earn for their house and look after the family. So, she adopted the supposed masculine mannerism to symbolise her taking up the authority of the family as expected from a man. The burden of the house made her to have an aversion towards her brother and nephew. This anger and problems that she might have faced made her to ask for revenge against the men in the house.

In the movie *Chotta Mumbai*, the 'mad woman' had an importance, but in this movie is just for fun and to show that the madness was passed from generation to generations. "Entacheriyammakthurachayaiivalmarunnennvechasaahikillanjan" (I can't tolerate the thought of my sister having the same fate as of my aunt) (1.55.18-1.55.23). When Bhadra falls into mental trauma after knowing about her lover's death, her family members were telling that and the madness was getting passed on from generation to generation by pointing out the lady. She behaves differently when she is angry and differently otherwise. She was always ill-treated by her nephew and her brother so she has ill-feelings towards both of them. She is not angry on other family members. So, the behaviour of this lady depends upon the treatment that she receives from her family. Her frustrations and anger towards her family is just a part of the impulse control disorder that she has. But this is getting converted into something malicious and undesirable in the movie. The way Yashodha is portrayed make the audience feels that she is broken and mentally disabled.

Throughout these movies they depict these characters as similar to another one. So, through these films they construct an idea about mad person and inject it to the audience. This makes people to think that, the physical attributes and various characteristics of an individual as a proof of their instability. Certain scenes make people believe that the mentally disabled population are a material for entertainment for the others.

Like in the movie *Chotta Mumbai*, the mother prays for destruction of her son, this seems to seal as her mad. The sons are trouble for the society. They are killing people without any mercy. Keeping aside the fact that she is a mother, she is also a women or person. She had the anger and guilt that her sons kill people. She is loyal to the society and as the sons' behaviour affects so many families, she had to pray like this. It could also be possible that she thinks that the death of her son will ensure peace.

Society has enforced the idea that a mother should be praying for the prosperity and of their son and leaving her life for the family etc. There is no any rule that the mother should do like this or perform like this. She is a person who had all the rights like others. When her sons became a threat to her life she reacted. In this movie she was consciously admiring this mad life, in the whole movie there no affection and love given to her by the sons. She knows that this mad life is helpful for her survival. As a mother she is not getting any love and affection from her sons. Both are ignoring her. So why should she pray for them.

In the movie *MizhiRandilum* also, Yashodara faces lots of struggle to make her home complete. Yashodara happens to be the shadow of the lead character Bhadra. Both Bhadra and Yashodara's brothers are not earning anything. Both are socially committed and gets involved in politics or want to uphold the social hierarchy, they conveniently forget their responsibilities towards home. Thus, mad with anger towards the male members of the family made her behave like that. Even she thinks that her behaviour may create a sense of fear towards her in her brother and her nephew and it can reduce the burden upon Bhadra. Her brother was scared of Yashodara but her nephew physically hurts her. She is the one who feeds Bhadra when she became depressed which proves that she is not mad. Some of her behavioural patterns are questionable but that doesn't prove a mental disability in her.

Yashoda uses the madness forced upon her by the society as an advantage. She tries to kill her brother to ensure happiness to her family. In the olden days, people had presupposition that a man should work and women should cook. But in this movie these norms are broken. Here women are going to job and earning money themselves and also take care of household chores. Even when a woman earns, men cling on to be head of the house. This patriarchal system can be seen movie itself. Still in the society women are doing jobs and are forced to do household chores too. They have to struggle in

home as well as office spaces. Even when she earning her own the decision of life were taken by her mother. The men are not earning anything. She is one who take all responsibility of the house as well as the liability of her brother also, but he takes all the decision. So, the ancient culture or ancient norms are being performed here. Men should always take decisions; women should accept all that.

Even though an individual is not comfortable in going with the rules of the society, they need to follow it because people will construct them as wrong when they try to deviate. The society neglect people's rights and puts the norms on high position. In movie from the children to the elders everyone was teasing him. Somehow his frankness had made him titled as mad. When his open mindedness became a problem to the family, they made him as mad in front of others. The behaviour of the elder people toward his liberal ideas feels like he is doing an error.

In these two movies, Yashodara and the mother of Sadheeshan are labeled as mad. There is no scene where they treated with medicine or they are consoled. They are free, so they are choosing the own lifestyle as they wish. They chose their lifestyle which was not acceptable to the society. They did not confirm to the norms of the society. This non-conformity resulted in labelling them as mad. When people break the norms and of the society they tend to be claimed as mentally unstable. So, the paper proves that these people are not mad. It is the society and the rules set by the society that labeled them as mentally disabled characters because these characters tried to challenge the constructed ideologies to the society.

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