

# **On Screen Forbidden Relationships: The Depiction of Extramarital Affairs in New Wave Malayalam Films**

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## **Abstract**

Movies often duplicate changes in the society and they sometimes persuade changes as well. Recently, controversy on new wave films became the disputed subject of the Malayalam film industry. The issues which were formerly treated as proscribed by the societal order are now boldly exposed before the Malayali viewers with the help of these new experimental movies. Extramarital affairs are always there in our society, but now, it's become common enough that we find examples from our neighbouring circles. A prejudiced society supports men to be a polygamist, but today's independent and bold woman also says she too is capable of all this. The pretence inbuilt in our fascination with stories of affairs in novels, Television and movies where we idolize the experiences of people having affairs, while at the same time pass judgment on people in real life who engage in the same behaviour. On one hand, we go into raptures over monogamy, but on the other, we unintentionally make a payment to a milieu that supports affairs. The present study analyzes how extramarital affairs have been portrayed in three new wave Malayalam movies – Beautiful, Cocktail and Traffic through narrative analysis.

## **Keywords**

extramarital affairs, Malayalam films, Malayali audience, marriage and new wave or new generation films

## Introduction

*“The greatest marriages are built on teamwork, Mutual respect, healthy dose of admiration and a never ending portion of love and grace”. (Fawn Weaver)* Culture encompasses things which we tend to conserve and which are important to us. India is a nation which gives precedence to its civilization and inheritance and so marriage forms an important component of Indian culture and traditions. In India there is no bigger event in a family than a wedding. For the individual, marriage is a division in life - the transition to adulthood. Broadly speaking, this transition depends a little upon individual wish, but occurs as an upshot of the attempts of many people.

Marriage is a communally or ritually known legal union between spouses that establishes rights and responsibilities between them, their kids, and their in-laws. The definition of marriage varies as per cultures; merely it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relations, typically intimate and sexual are acknowledged (Tanya Evans, 2005). In the Buddhist perspective, marriage means accepting and respecting each other's beliefs and privacy.

Though marriage is considered as a sacrosanct, the mounting figure of extramarital relationships forces us to believe about the faultless of the matrimonial alliance. According to Buddhism, those who are engaged in extramarital relations are supposed to be guilty of sexual wrongdoing, because there is a rupture of social norms, where a third party is being formed to endure as a consequence of the selfishness of one or the other spouse.

Extra marital affairs have been persevering in every society from an antique period. However morally, it's wicked to have an extramarital affair, the actuality remains that millions of husbands and married women in the modern world revealed openly about their illicit love affair which may sometimes results to families' breakdown and in most cases end up in divorce. (Mike Martin, 2007).

The information on infidelity derived from the General Social Survey sponsored by the National Science Foundation shows that in any given year, about 10% of married couples (12% men and 7% of women) have engaged in sex outside their marriage and 90% of all divorces involve infidelity. University of Washington researchers has found that the rate of lifetime infidelity for men over 60 increased to 28% in 2006 from 20% in 1991. For women over 60, this rate increased from 5% in 1991 to 15% in 2006 (Barker, 2011).

Malayali who boast about their neat and long lasting cultural moral values have stunned after the publishing of reports from Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology, Trivandrum. Nearly three hundred people visits each month to verify through DNA whether they themselves are undeniably the fathers of the infants carried by their wives. The number of married people who distrust each other is increasing. "30% of men and 18% of women participants in the survey confessed that they indulge in extra-marital affairs". (Mathrubhumi weekly: 31.01.1999). Social scientists, have

warned that such violations of behavioural norms may lead to subside the institution of family.

“Extra marital affairs are not new in our society, all the time it was at that place. But, today people started accepting it more frankly or the cases are coming off more often than earlier. Presently extramarital affairs are no more a taboo in the social order; instead our youngsters are opting for an open relationship in spite of secure marital commitments. Today it has been the central reason for the increase in divorce rates”. (Dr Mini K Paul, psychologist specialised in marriage counselling).

These days, even in soap operas we came across stories of extramarital relationships. Obviously, in films it reflects what is passing on in the world. Cinema depicts an image of the society in which it is born, hopes, ambitions, aggravation and contradictions present in any given social order. The Malayalam film industry once had an adamant view to portraying extramarital intimacies, stating it can be disastrous threat to family values. But the success of recent new wave Malayalam movies indicates the change in viewers taste.

New wave or new generation films are characterised by new narrative techniques; eschews superstars and fetches new faces in unusual themes. The heroes are no more Mr Perfects and nor do they carry the signs of conservative masculinity. The heroine, too, has changed beyond recognition. While the new generation film plots and styles are deeply influenced by global and Indian trends, their themes are firmly rooted in Malayali life and mindscapes.

“There has been a shift in the receptivity of Malayalam filmgoers. It is a new movement where new thinking and styles are accepted. There was a strong section of people who refused to see Malayalam films simply because they can’t relate themselves with the content. This cross-section has now reverted to the cinema halls,” says Director Aashiq Abu.

The intent of my article in relation to theory of masculinity is to analyze how extra-marital affairs have been constructed in the three New Wave (New generation) Malayalam film sand how the movies with the plot of illegitimate relationship were received by the Malayali audience for whom marriage is sacred. The necessities for a strong family bond and the after effects of illegal relationships within the frame work of a family were also examined through this study.

### **Theoretical overview**

Freudian theory on masculine and feminine, states that adult sexuality and gender are not typeset by the nature: but created through a long and through conflict ridden practice (Connell, 1995). Masculinity is made further intricate because it also embraces the power disparities that subsist between men and women. Thus, it is not just the precise behaviours and deeds of the human being that describe masculinity;

rather, masculinity is a reflection of power formation and men's association for women in the social and cultural discourse (Allwood, 1994).

Mike Leach (1994) says that "Unlike the biological state of manliness, masculinity is a gender individuality structured socially, traditionally and politically. It is the cultural version of maleness, unearthed through participation in society and its institutions". Thus, masculinity is a still evolving process that needs the individual to be intimately connected to the social and cultural discourse. The male is expected to identify with the social institutions that create masculinity and respond in a manner that is appropriate with what these institutions view as acceptable behaviour.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle portrayed women as naturally men's inferiors in terms of intellect. In the long enlightening and theoretical tradition that honoured his authority, masculinity was thus rendered both imperceptible and normative: Masculinity was equated with the human rationality of men and women; were exhibited by sexuality, emotion, and their bodies. Kimmel (1994) views masculinity as "a continuously varying collection of meanings we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world". He indicates that the hegemonic description of manliness "is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, and reliable and in control."

### **Previous studies**

The universal assumption in all human culture is that once an individual is romantically devoted to another, he or she will detain sexual activities to that relationship (Fisher, 1992; Frayser, 1989). Schwartz & Rutter (1998) identified some of the key factors that lead to infidelity and in turn ruptures the marital bond: Emotional incompatibility with the spouse, Boredom, Sexual incompatibility, Anger (Harder to love your partner), Flattery and a Desire to end the marriage. Schwartz states that men tend to look for sexual variety while women look for an emotional connection.

There are several forms of extramarital relationships and these forms vary, ranging from a strong emotional devotion to sex as a game with a petty or no emotional feeling (Emotional continuum) and from simply envisaging about sex with someone else, a trivial sexual activity such as kissing to actual intercourse (Physical continuum). (Willetts, Sprecher, Beck, 2004). There is substantial evidence that, all through the human history men are more open to short-range sexual affairs than are women (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Symons, 1979).

Betzig (1989) compared 160 cultures and found that infidelity was the single most quoted cause for divorce. In Western countries, studies on recently separated and divorced individuals found that 52% of men and 46% of women had marital problems due to their partner's illegitimate affair (Kelly & Conley). A study on

infidelity in heterosexual relationships suggests that around one-third of men and one-quarter of women engage in extra dyadic sexual relationships, at least once in their lives (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948). Laumann, Gagnon and Michaels (1994) using nationally representative samples, found that approximately 20 – 25% of men and 10–15% of women were reported to have forbidden relationships. Agreeing to some studies, the immense majority of men and women believe that it is always improper for a married person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Smith, 1994). However the available literature implies that extramarital affairs in supposedly monogamous relationships are mutual.

One of the most popular causal ascriptions regarding the extramarital relationship is that unhappiness or conflict in the primary relationship leads to an affair. Buunk (1984) study on 218 men and women from the Netherlands finds that the majority of participants (85%) had been involved in an affair themselves. Respondents of the study reported that the attraction to the affair partner, the circumstances and the need for variety as the most common reasons for their illegal affairs. Few participants indicated problems in their relationship as a reason for their partners' affairs.

### **Methodology and sample choice**

The present study uses narrative analysis to assess how new generation Malayalam movies construct the image of a married individual having an affair. Amid 2006 – 2012 nine movies with the depiction of extra marital affairs either all over the plot or as a sub plot was released. It compresses movies like *Vasthavam* (2006), *Ore Kadal* (2007), *Lalitham Hiranmayam* (a segment from *Kerala Cafe*, 2009), *Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathirakolapathakathinte Katha* (2009), *Cocktail* (2010), *Beautiful* (2011), *Traffic* (2011), *Diamond Necklace* (2012) and *Njanum Ente Familiyum* (2012). After the compilation of the sample population through purposive sampling three new wave Malayalam films - *Cocktail* (2010), *Beautiful* (2011) and *Traffic* (2011) which received wide critical appreciation were chosen for the current study.

### **On screen unlawful relations**

The three films chosen for the study fits into the category of thriller genre. The 2010 released *Cocktail* portrays the life of Ravi Abraham his wife Parvathy and daughter Ammu. The subject of extramarital affair is portrayed as a sub plot in the 2011 musical drama thriller *Beautiful* where the main crux is the intense bonding of two friends. *Traffic*, a multi-narrative thriller released in 2011 links multiple stories around one particular incident. In *Cocktail* and *Beautiful* the story rolls around the illegal relationship of married men were in *Traffic* married woman is engaged in unfaithful liaison.

All the characters put their own justifications for creating an affair outside their nuptial life. In *Beautiful* Alex retained an illegal bond with an unmarried woman for taking hold of the wealth of his millionaire cousin, who considers him as

trustworthy and to set free from his wife who controls the family. He is drilled with his marital life where his freedom is curtailed and opted for a relationship where he is reputed. The instability of marital life led him to a forbidden relation. Through this film Richardson findings on extramarital relationships, where single adult females develop a relationship with married men and the married man takes command over the extramarital relationship is stressed.

According to Farrer and Zhongxin (2003), extramarital affairs have become more acceptable and people are more likely to justify their extramarital affairs. Men and women's accounts of extramarital affairs differ. While, according to Farrer and Zhongxin (2003), sexual passion was the most common motive for an affair for both men and women.

Those who spend time together for a long period have a natural tendency of being attracted and the movie *Cocktail* supports this argument. The protagonist confesses that even though he loves his wife and is happy with her, for sexual pleasure and variety he opted for the unlawful relationship. The main protagonist of this movie is a representative of those whom are competent to handle both their matrimony and illegal relations alike.

In the movie *Traffic*, the rapport of Dr. Abel and Swetha generate a feeling of made for each other pair. But the precise nature of the relationship is presented through a montage sequence in protagonist point of view shot where she ditches her husband by keeping an affair with his best friend just for the sake of sexual variety and pleasure.

Fair (1978) argues that relationships with other people are an integral part of a person's life, with the most important relationship being with one's spouse and children. In the entire movies the directors' emphasis the beauty of family relationships and the frustration a family endures due to forbidden connections.

In *Traffic* Dr Abel realizes her deeds out of anger and embrace the value of matrimonial life. In *Cocktail* Parvathy says that she had lost the trust in their relationship and he had lost a wife who believes her husband blindly. Though their daughter loves her father deeply she was ready for a compromise. Nearing to climax of the movie, Venky takes care of his wife who was paralyzed after a suicide attempt. In *Beautiful* materialism and their secret affair have ruined the life of both Alex and Annie. Abal, Parvathy, and Venky were forced to bear the aftermath of these relationships.

The initial attraction to the lover, a need for sexual variety, sexual circumstances, exploitation and pressure from the illegal partner and marital deprivation indicating a discontentment or boredom in the marital relationship were the influential drives behind the forbidden connection.

A study by Buunk (1984) in Netherlands reported that 70% mentioned they need extra marital affairs for variety, meaning that “she/he had a need for sexual variety”. According to Farrer and Zhongxin (2003), extramarital affairs have become more acceptable and people are more likely to justify their extramarital affairs. Men and women’s accounts of extramarital affairs differ. While, according to Farrer and Zhongzin (2003), sexual passion was the most common motive for an affair for both men and women.

The adulterous partner admits the fact that knowingly or unknowingly they had chosen an immoral lane by cheating their legal spouse. The most intriguing finding was that the legal partner ends up sticking with their spouse at the final stage. In *Cocktail* (2010) wife concurs for compromise only for their daughter. Though the wife excuses her husband, the illegal lover - a married woman attempts suicide when she realizes that her husband has found out her affair. In the movie *Beautiful* wife is not ready for a compromise and she leaves her husband. In *Traffic* though husband had attempted to kill his wife for his betrayal, at the climax he is all ready to begin a new life by forgiving his wife.

In *Cocktail* the husband was shown as very paranoid and uneasy when the wife questions him about his extra marital affair and was vexed about the upshot. As far as the amount of shame shown by the partner after being caught in an affair, they were shown as depressed, upset, stressed and nervous.

When the characters come out with volatile statements regarding marriage and loyalty the question of morality arises. “Marriage is a license to have extra marital affairs” the reference to marital infidelity uttered by one female character has annoyed many. As a counter, Actor Anoop Menon said that “We mask the reality with flashy elements so that you don’t have to deal with it openly.” It is factual that infidelity exists in society in spite of high moral values and opposing the reality is idiotic. These movies have presented the topic of forbidden relationship just aware the viewers about the disaster it creates in a household. In films, a happy ending is possible, but in real life most of the marital bond ruptures due to Infidelity.

Though it is not apt to set the box office earnings as a parameter to examine the adoption of these pictures among the Malayali audience, total negligence also is not fine. *Traffic* had a box office collection of 4.5 crore compared to its total cost of one crore. The official website of Kerala Film Producers Association claims it has collected one crore for *Cocktail* and for *Beautiful* 6.4 crore in five weeks, thus recovering the budget of 3 crore. This figure shows a clear mark that Malayali audience started accepting previously sidelined themes.

## Conclusion

Lawson states two central myths around romantic relations. The first is “the myth of Romantic Love,” which incorporates traditional beliefs regarding love and marriage. The second is “the myth of me,” which is seen as a universal openness

among people that may lead to extramarital affairs; a sense of “self-actualization and self-exploration” (Gordon, 1990).

After analyzing the new generation Malayalam films, it is evident that the disloyal spouses always prefer to have a variety in life, which leads them to engage in an extramarital affair. Many, who are engaged in affairs, carry out it with no guilty feeling as long as they are meeting errands in the domestic space.

The legal wife or husband has the first claim on partner’s social life. Forbidding nights, secrecy, strain, guilt and fantasy may become impossible for both to sustain forever. When the thrill of an affair begins to tire out, in all odds, they will get back to their family. It will become hard to stand the poignant, physical and fiscal strain of leading a double life. Indirectly these films convey this valuable message to the audience.

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