

Unearthing the psyche of the disabled in *Peranbu*

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Declaration

I, Anjana Rose Raju, hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *Unearthing the psyche of the disabled in Perambu* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Ms. Anupa Reji. and Ms. Lissy Kachappilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakkara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

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Certificate

Certified that this is a bonafide report of the project entitled *Unearthing the psyche of the disabled in Peranbu* done by Anjana Rose Raju (Register No. 180011002127) for the fulfilment of the requirement for the M.A. degree in English under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2018-2020.

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Chapter 1

History of Portrayal of Disability in Media

Portrayal of disability in literature is something that has always reflected the changing attitudes of the society since the 1970s. The movement to include children and youth with disabilities into mainstream society has led to new approaches on the part of authors, as well as educators. From 1940 to 1970, around 311 books for children were published in the United States that included characters with disabilities. Some of these books romanticized disability, some were infantilized, while others portrayed the disabled characters as avoiding the world. Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness amongst the general public. While several entities have tried to bring about this awareness, their reach has been rather limited. Given this lack of awareness amongst the general public, media representation can provide a powerful medium for dissemination.

Cinema is considered to be a powerful medium that reflects the happenings of a society. While it is caught up between the real and reel life, it still serves as an important medium of entertaining people, educating them and bringing a behavioral change in their practices and attitudes. Given the reach of the Bollywood industry in India and across the world, it has been particularly effective in changing people's perception and uprooting societal stereotypes. This is perhaps the reason that the Nehru government funded Hindi films as early as in 1948 with the objective of disseminating the ideas of a free Indian nation that possessed its own identity free from Western influences (Dissanayake).

The portrayal of the disabled in the media also attracts and raises debate about the mode of language used. The role played by language in the representation of these vital issues

is an important part of the discussion on inclusivity in cinemas. It could be purely in text or visual, or a mix of the two. However, the meaning remains the most important for the readers or viewers. The representation or discourse of language has umpteen bearings on the society. It can even bring discourse, change and hegemony to one table (Fairclough,91-94). Hence, the representation shows the mode and direction of discourse, change and hegemony of a given society. This dissertation attempts to prove that eco narration is an effective tool for changing people's perceptions and uprooting social stereotypes about disabled individuals through the Tamil film, *Peranbu*. The language used in *Peranbu* is "love" and Eco-narration.

Peranbu is a Tamil movie written and directed by Ram and produced by P. L. Thenappan. It features Mammooty, Sadhana, Anjali, and Anjali Ameer in the lead roles. The film's score and soundtrack are composed by Yuvan Shankar Raja. *Peranbu* premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam on 27 January 2018, and was later screened at the Shanghai International Film Festival, China on 17 June. Ram is an Indian film director, who works in Tamil cinema. After assisting Hindi directors Rajkumar Santoshi and working under Balu Mahendra, he made his directorial debut with *Kattradhu Thamizh*(2007), which fetched him strong critical acclaim. His second film *Thanga Meengal*(2013) also won critical praise and three National Film Awards. His fourth film *Peranbu* starring Mammooty was premiered at International Film Festival Rotterdam in January 2018. The film tells the story of a single father who tries to raise his daughter, who has cerebral palsy, even as she is beginning to wake up to her sexuality. Amudhavan's daughter Paapa is spastic. Unable to cope with this, he goes to Dubai to work. When his wife elopes, he has to return to take care of Paapa. He struggles to take care of his daughter while society constantly rejects him. When Paapa attains puberty, he addresses her biological needs but then loses himself and his assets in an affair with a maid.

When his daughter starts exploring her sexuality, he can't bear it. Hope comes in the form of a transgender who enters their lives and helps them start afresh.

This dissertation explores the narratological aspects of the film *Peranbu* and how eco-narration equates the disability of Paapa that balances with nature. The earlier portrayal of disability in Indian cinema followed a heteronormative path toward “fixing” disability, i.e. a disabled person meets an able-bodied person who helps them look past their disability to live a happy life. Disability has been seen as a punishment in Indian media for quite some time. Disability is an important issue that is widely misunderstood even today in India. Research has consistently found substantial social marginalization of people with disabilities and a lack of sensitization and awareness in the general public. Unfortunately, the traditional concept of "disability and karma" where disability is often perceived as a punishment for misdeeds in the past lives or crimes committed by the parents, continues to be a common belief amongst not only the less educated, but also well-educated urban dwellers. Several other similar stereotypes and taboos abound in our society.

While several disability NGOs and activist groups have employed different strategies to break these stereotypes and bring about awareness, it is evident that their reach has been limited. This narrative not only shows disability as a punishment but also highlights the desexualisation of the disabled. Given the lack of awareness and direct experience with disability, media representations such as film representations can provide powerful and memorable definitions for the public. Apart from this narrative, more powerful representations have been shown where disability is portrayed as a punishment

worse than death. There have been two trends in film-making insofar as Indian films are concerned. While several film-makers have used disability as a comic interlude or to give a dramatic twist to their script with scant regard for the rights of a large group of people with disabilities, there have been some film-makers who have been able to build a tale around the insensitivity of society towards the disabled.

As Dr. Atanu Mohapatra notes,

portrayal of disability in films swings primarily between two extremes – pity, fun, caricaturing, sympathy, and awesome heroism are at one end of the spectrum while discrimination, coping-up, emotional swings and aspirations of the human soul are at the other end. (Mohapatra, 127).

In the film *Koi... Mil Gaya* (2003), an alien helps a child with learning and intellectual disabilities by restoring “normalcy” to his life and also helping the child to get a girlfriend. In such movies, disability is understood as a block that is necessary to be removed to have a normal life worth living. Such movies heighten the desires for normalcy of the general public, influencing the way disability is seen. In films that depict a character with a disability, the character rises to the occasion in order to exemplify people with that particular disability – showing the audience how individuals with that disability behave, feel, communicate, exhibit symptoms and experience life. It, thus, becomes important that disability is presented responsibly.

Disability has been widely regarded as a punishment in India for quite some time, and this has been the most popular representation of disability in our films as well. The most enduring portrayal of disability as a punishment is that of Thakur, the protagonist from possibly the most-watched film in India, *Sholay* (1975). In this film, Thakur, the

police officer (Sanjeev Kumar) has his arms amputated by the bandit Gabbar (Amjad Khan). Unable to avenge himself, Thakur employs two mercenaries to destroy the bandit's gang, but sets up a climactic duel between himself and Gabbar. He begins the duel by noting that even without his arms, Gabbar is no match for him, and concludes it not by killing Gabbar, but by crushing his arms with spikes. The punishment for the evil is not a swift bullet, but an enduring disability similar to the one imposed on him.

Disability has often been used as comic relief in action movies or light entertainment films. In movies such as *Tom, Dick and Harry* (2006) and *Pyare Mohan* (2006), the lead characters are been people with different disabilities, and their interaction with each other and their limitations has been used as a source of entertainment for the audience. *Golmaal* with Tushar Kapoor with speech disability and Paresh Rawal and his wife as blind, *Mujhse Shadi Karogi* with Kader Khan as a person with different disability everyday and *Judaai* with Upasna Singh with speech disorder are some other movies where limitations have been exploited for comic effect. Since disability is not the primary theme for these movies, these, unfortunately, have often reinforced the existing stereotypes in an attempt to connect better with the audience.

People with intellectual disabilities, in particular, have been represented as comic supporting characters that add an amusing sideshow to the central story for a long time. "The power of the mass media can never be overestimated. Film as a medium should be used to advantage to dispel the stigma associated with psychiatric disorders, and unfortunately, the contrary happens right now." (Bhugra) There are some films that have projected persons with disabilities as heroes and super-heroes. For instance, in the 1998 Bollywood thriller *Dushman*, Sanjay Dutt, a blind veteran, fights Ashutosh Rana when he

tries to rape Kajol, using his "sixth sense" to determine Rana's position and movement. Similarly, Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal and Arjun Rampal successfully rob a bank despite being blind using their "sixth sense" in *Aankhen* (2002). While these movies present people with disabilities in a positive light, they also distort the true identity of these people, helping little to improve understanding of and appreciation for the disabled.

Arguably, the persistent portrayal of people with disabilities as unable to live independently has been a very important setback to the independent living movement for people with disabilities worldwide. In Indian films, the idea of dependence on charity is quite typical. For instance, the 1964 Rajshri classic *Dosti* features two disabled protagonists, Mohan, who is blind and Ramu, who uses crutches to walk. At the start of the film, Ramu is seen distraught. Everything about the state works against him-cars cause him danger on the street, water tanks on the street have no water, and people do not respond when he speaks with them, and the only person who does speak to him insults him when Ramu asks him for work by saying "What work can be done by someone like you?" referring to his disability. Mohan, the blind youth likewise enters the film asking people to help him cross the street to no response. For most of the remainder of the film, the two youths are shown as being in situations where their disability makes them deeply dependent for their basic existence.

The movie *Peranbu*, on the other hand provides a realistic portrayal of disability and portrays the disabled individual with all their nuances and struggles, even commenting on their sexuality, something never before seen in Indian movies that urge the audience to treat the disabled as perfectly normal people. There is a lot of visual literature in the scenes of the movie correlating the individual's self with nature, paving way for eco-narration.

This enhances the change in attitude of characters within the movie as well as the viewers, to handle everything as “natural”. Everything Paapa experiences is shared with nature where the reflection of eco-ability can be seen. This dissertation explores the correlation of disability representation and eco-narration, by studying what they have in association with nature and how it can be depicted through the eco-narration of the movie. This is through the identification of Amudhavan about Paapa, which is more like the reflection of the recognition by nature on whole beings. They finally got a place along with nature far away from all humans who think they are above nature.

The second chapter, ‘Disability, Eco-narration and Crip Theory’ deals with the theories used in the dissertation from the broader areas of film theory, particularly visual narrative theory and Crip theory, correlating disability and queerness. This chapter also gives a glance to disability studies; an embracement of disability into eco-ability. Disability studies as an academic discipline deals with both mental and physical disability. The disability narration in films and animations are also dealt with in this chapter. This would also involve an analysis of another theory called the Crip theory, which considers disability to be a viable identity variable to be recognized, acknowledged and celebrated. Crip theory also recognizes the importance of the intersectionality of one’s disability identity with all other identity variables. By doing so, Crip theory acknowledges the historical exclusion of diverse groups within the disability community (e.g. persons of color, gay, lesbian, transgender) as a consequence of internalized oppression within the disability community.

The third chapter, ‘Eco Narration in *Peranbu*’ is a detailed analysis of *Peranbu*, focusing on its eco-narration and exploring how the film effectively combines its visual narrative with images and montages of nature juxtaposed along with the disabled

individual to create a positive narrative of the former. It attempts to prove how important this eco-narration is in the disability narrative to emphasize the concept of eco-ability. The journey of Paapa, the transformation of Amudhavan and the hope of Anjali are explored in detail in this chapter.

The fourth chapter, 'Analysing the Portrayal of Disability and Queerness in *Peranbu* using Crip Theory' is a discussion of Crip theory and it is embodied in the film. This chapter also discusses the main hypothesis of the dissertation, where all kinds of visual narratives employed in the movie are analysed in detail. This chapter tries to prove that everything is "natural", as suggested by the concept of eco-ability i.e. the freedom in nature is depicted through the narratological aspects. Everything that Paapa experiences is shared with nature, even the sexual desires. This is where the traces of Crip theory and eco-ability can be seen. The final chapter is the conclusion that confirms that eco-narration in disability narratives is vital in the transformation of disability to eco-ability.

Chapter 2

Disability, Eco-narration and Crip Theory

Narratology is the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways it affects human perception. It is an anglicisation of the French term *narratologie* coined by Tzvetan Todorov (1969). Its theoretical lineage is traceable to Aristotle (*Poetics*), but modern narratology is agreed to have begun with the Russian Formalists, particularly Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folktale*, 1928), and Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia, dialogism, and the chronotope first presented in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975). Heteroglossia is the coexistence of distinct varieties within a single "language". The term was introduced by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his 1934 paper, published in English as "Discourse in the Novel." For Bakhtin, this diversity of "languages" within a single language is not, in essence, a purely linguistic phenomenon; rather, heteroglossia is a reflection in language of varying ways of evaluating, conceptualizing and experiencing the world. It is the convergence in language or speech of "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values."

Designating work as narratological is to some extent dependent more on the academic discipline in which it takes place than any theoretical position advanced. The approach is applicable to any narrative, and in its classic studies, non-literary narratives were commonly taken up. Still the term "narratology" is most typically applied to literary theory and literary criticism, as well as film theory and (to a lesser extent) film criticism.

Film theory is a set of scholarly approaches within the academic discipline of film or cinema studies that historically began by questioning the formal essential attributes of ever-evolving cinematic media; and that now provides conceptual frameworks for understanding film's relationship to reality, the other arts, individual viewers, and society at large. Film theory

is not to be confused with general film criticism, or film history, though these three disciplines interrelate. Although film theory is derived from linguistics and literary theory, it also originated and overlaps with the philosophy of film. The elements of film theory include the types of film, shots, angles, lighting, colour, sound, editing etc. Films can be analysed and classified as belonging to realism, classical and formalism.

In visual narratives where some characters are disabled, they are mostly portrayed as comical and neglected. Like feminist, critical race and queer approaches to literature and culture, disability studies relate to a specific group. Disability studies began to emerge in the west in the late twentieth century as a result of the success of the disability rights movement. In American literature, disabled characters are often portrayed as that “other” and used to generate fear, pathos, and hatred. This affects how variously-abled individuals are perceived and accepted by society. While writers are being more inclusive and broadening their inventory of characters, many characters are simply a negative plot tool. The dominant feelings held by non-disabled persons toward disabled persons are so very often sympathy, fear, or distaste; these reactions are often accompanied by avoidance or patronization. These terms also describe how disabled people are treated in American literature—that is, the subject of disability is avoided or the individuals are generally presented in a stereotypical, and often negative, manner. They are portrayed as helpless, super-abled (pure and good), or evil monsters.

At the intersection of disability, gender, and sexuality, one finds the Crip Theory. Crip Theory exists as an interdisciplinary approach to the critical disability theory. The term "crip theory" was first used in Carrie Sandahl's article "Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance". Crip Theory attends to the contemporary cultures of disability and queerness that are coming out all over.

Both disability studies and queer theory are centrally concerned with how bodies, pleasures, and identities are represented as “normal” or as abject, but Crip analyze thoroughly the ways in which these interdisciplinary fields inform each other. Crip is considered to be an inclusive term, representing all disabilities; people with vastly divergent physical and psychological differences. Crip represents the contemporary disability rights wave and is an “insider” term for disability culture. Not to be confused with a gang name, the term Crip within the disability community reflects the political reclaiming of the historically derogatory term “cripple,” which not only diminished the person to an image of ugliness but also excluded those with non-physical disabilities from the disability community.

To identify as a Crip or with the Crip community means you identify as a member of the disability community or as an Ally to the disability community. Crip theory considers disability to be a viable identity variable to be recognized, acknowledged and celebrated. Crip theory also recognizes the importance of the intersectionality of one’s disability identity with all other identity variables. By doing so, Crip theory acknowledges the historical exclusion of diverse groups within the disability community (e.g. persons of color, gay, lesbian, transgender) as a consequence of internalized oppression within the disability community.

Disability literature can be seen via fictions, short stories, plays, poems and in particular graphic novels and movies. Majority assume that comics and disability exist in two completely different worlds. Comics we consider to be funny and lighthearted, as in the old time “funny papers”, the cheap often furtively pleasurable lowbrow comic books, or the witty elitist insider cartoons in newspapers. Hyperbole makes comics a welcome home for mutants, monsters, freaks, and all manner of people with disabilities, even if the characters themselves have difficulty being reconciled to their status.

In television and other media, disability served to intensify the comic element of cartoon characters: Mr. Magoo was blind, Elmer Fudd stuttered, Sylvester the Cat had a speech impairment, Porky and Petunia Pig were obese, Daffy Duck had a developmental disability. Almost all the Disney characters (the Seven Dwarves, Captain Hook, Nemo, etc.) had disabilities that stood for character traits such as foolishness, malevolence, or heroism. The Muppets of the later twentieth century all departed from fully human characteristics in quirky, oddly endearing ways. They were human animal hybrids or engaging freak show figures. The conventions of representations in comics and graphic narratives align with disability. All representation does the cultural work of affirming received understandings and challenging them to create new stories, and this collection of analyses reveals this work admirably. Whether centered on a famous superhero like Superman or an unnamed amputee and her anthropomorphized apartment building, the collection finds disability everywhere and expands any narrow understandings of what we think of as disability to more capaciously address the range of human ways of being we think of as illness and trauma, as well.

Disability, as both a social construction and a lived experience exists in the spaces out of the normal scale. As a violation of the normal and expected, disability is disorder embodied; the enormous or diminutive, the misshapen or disordered, the reckless or sluggish, the flamboyant or silent, the profligate or insufficient—always either too much or too little. Most of the books offered bland depictions of disability, outcomes were predictable, the characters were one dimensional, and the content was often more like a sermon than a story. The idea that different is evil was true in adult literature as well as literature for children: Captain Hook was replaced by Captain Ahab. Not so long ago, missing limbs, twisted bodies and chronic illnesses were all attributed to witchcraft in both children's and adult literature. When evil was marked, or made

visible, it was easier for the audience to understand. In the past, the list of misunderstood physical and mental characteristics (disabilities) was endless; perhaps attributing the cause of these disabilities to evil could be seen as justifiable from a social, physical, and knowledge-based timeline. Disabled villains, raging against their fate and hating those who have escaped affliction, often seek to retaliate against those who are not disabled.

Other works like Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth Mark" depicts a foolish doctor's attempt to remove what he sees as a physical imperfection (a birthmark) from the otherwise perfectly beautiful face of his beloved wife. In Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Haddon uses a first-person narrator, 15-year old Christopher, who is autistic. In Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People", O'Connor suffered from lupus; this is one of her many stories portraying disability. In it, the character Hulga has a prosthetic leg and wears glasses and a traveling salesman makes off with both her physical aids. Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" revolves around interactions between a blind man and a sighted man.

In Susan Nussbaum's *No One as Nasty* from *Beyond Victims and Villains: Contemporary Plays by Disabled Playwrights*, a white woman in a wheelchair has numerous physical assistants who work for her and she develops a long-term relationship with one, an African-American woman. The play wrestles with problematic relationships in race and class, in addition to portraying her struggle to live a "normal" life. In Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face*, Grealy's face was severely disfigured as a result of treatment to save her from cancer at age nine. Her memoir describes her struggle to live in a culture obsessed with physical beauty. David B's *Epileptic*, a graphic novel is another example. David's brother had epilepsy. In this graphic novel/memoir, David B. portrays the struggle of his entire family to find treatment and appropriate accommodations for his brother's increasingly painful and uncontrollable seizures.

The shelves of bookstores and libraries are lined with copies of *Midnight Cowboy*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Flowers for Algernon*, *Rain Man* (Johnson & Levinson, 1988) and dozens of other books that use the disabled to frighten, amuse, or sadden readers. Rare indeed is a novel's central character disabled unless there is an overriding purpose for that disability, a purpose that drives the story, a purpose that tugs at the heart, educates, frightens, or provokes laughter. It is as if authors see the disabled as a type of prop.

The Russian author Anton Chekhov established the idea that every element in a play or story must be necessary to the story: if there is a gun hanging on the wall in the first act, it will fire in the third act. In the case of a disabled character, it seems the handicap must be either necessary to the story, or at least a prop that must be used. For example, author Jean Jenkins said that she chose a disabled young man as a primary character in a young adult novel because,

I need somebody who was appealing but vulnerable. And also, it is part of the crux of the whole story that the main character, whose name was Dee Dee, sees this really 'hot' guy in a really 'hot' car. She falls for him. She's seen him around town and everything, but doesn't find out until the first day of school when she encounters him in the hallway that he's disabled. So, it becomes an issue at that point. (Beauchamp et al. 70)

There is still the use of sentimentality, pathos, and fear while portraying disabled characters in literature. While those portrayed in these ways are often central characters, their disability is usually also just as central. Continuing the theme of opposing idealized norms and reconstructing human difference through productive disability encounters with wilderness is "Bodies of Nature" by wheelchair trekker Alison Kafer. In her essay, Kafer highlights how "social arrangements are mapped onto natural environments" as she

negotiates her own disabled embodiment with a disability discourse of outdoor adventurism which she argues needs to accommodate human failure as a valid part of grappling with the environment (). Importantly, Kafer advocates that environments that are adapted to facilitate able-bodied person's access to nature, *must* be fully inclusive, providing access to *all* humans. Alison Kafer is an associate professor of feminist studies, and is the author of *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013). Her work has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, including *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Feminist Disability Studies*, *the Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, *Sex and Disability*, and *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

Narratives of space confront and complicate environmentalism's ableist narratives that equate physical and cognitive difference with environmental problems in need of fixing. This work examines how the emotions of the disabled characters are narrated in Indian films by analysing how the presence of nature intensifies their emotions. Disability narration in the film *Peranbu* is analysed here to explore the correlation between eco-ability and disability through eco-narration.

Chapter 3

Eco-Narration in *Peranbu*

Unlike other disability narratives, *Peranbu* is a bold societal film, that stands for its own unique style narration that is highly enrooted in nature and the film neither develops only around the flaws of disabled child, nor indulges in melodrama that is common to most of the disability narratives. The thesis that the director uses in the film is the thesis of nature. *Peranbu* is a 2019 Indian Tamil-language film written and directed by Ram and produced by P. L. Thenappan. It features Mammooty, Sadhana, Anjali, and Anjali Ameer in the lead roles. The film's score and soundtrack are composed by Yuvan Shankar Raja and cinematography by Theni Eswar. *Peranbu* premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam on 27 January 2018, and was later screened at the Shanghai International Film Festival, China on 17 June. The technical crew, Yuvan's score hits the right emotional notes while Theni Eswar, comes up with visuals that wonderfully complement the narrative.

Amudhavan is the narrator of the story and he narrates it in twelve chapters. The twelve chapters are named after the twelve dimensions of nature. The chapter titles are Nature is Hateful, Nature is wonderous, Nature is cruel, Nature is miraculous, Nature is mysterious, Nature is dangerous, Nature is unbridled, Nature is ruthless, Nature is thirsty, Nature is lawless, Nature is endless, Nature is compassionate. Amudhavan was working abroad and hardly visited his home after the birth of his spastic child, Paapa. When the film begins, we see Amudhavan moving into a house by a lake with his daughter. His wife has left him for another man, and he is forced to look after the daughter whom he has tried to avoid since she was born. Unable to live peacefully in the society, the father and daughter move into a secluded house in Kodaikanal. The place is as beautiful as he one that could even dream of.

The house is made of wood, there is no electricity and nothing that is a part of commercial life. However, the land mafias intruded their life soon and they started to threaten him. Due to the harsh realities of life, Amudhavan has to care for his mentally and physically challenged daughter single-handedly and what makes it worse is that she misses her mother too much and cannot bond with her father.

Even as he makes attempts to bond with her, he realises that Paapa needs a female caregiver, especially because the teenage girl is waking up to her sexuality. The role played by Anjali, the Tamil actress, enters into the scene as Vijayalakshmi and starts to take care of Paapa all of a sudden. She gradually insists Amudhavan to take Paapa to the city so that she could mingle with other students. But he does not agree as people never treated his child as a 'normal' one. One night, he breaks down in front of Viji about his wife and from that moment, they start to love each other. The audience understands that Viji has already been married once. Later Amudhavan marries Viji and she insists on completing her job given by those land mafias. Amudhavan dispossesses Viji and he tries to kill Paapa. Later, he is forced to give his land to the mafia in order to avoid the police case and further compensation. However, Viji was sorry about what she had done to him and they tried to explain, which he refuses to hear.

He then moves back to Chennai and starts going to work after locking Paapa inside. Slowly Paapa starts to befriend with television and other sources of the world. That inspires her to become a more 'beautiful woman'. She stops Amudhavan from changing the sanitary pads in the thought that she is not a 'paapa'(child) anymore and she starts to see Amudhavan as another man. He meets a gynaecologist and she advise him to meet a doctor who specialises in spastic child health. He informs Amudhavan that it is better to take Paapa to a residential home for the sake of her mental health.

He puts Paapa over there. He then meets Anjali, a transwoman and becomes friends with her. One day, the authorities of the residents hit Paapa when she masturbates in public. Amudhavan takes her back home where he finds that Paapa's sexual desires were something that he could not handle. So he decides to kill himself and Paapa in the sea. Anjali comes to save them from death and in the end, Anjali becomes the wife of Amudhavan as well as a mother to Paapa. This story is narrated with the help of symbols of nature such as birds, water, snow, rain, trees, animals etc.

The social narrative of disability sees it as negativity, and the social world excludes disabled people through environmental and attitudinal barriers. Language and narrative represent disability as pain and tragedy. These markers and meanings help to determine the knowledge of disability in the disabled and non-disabled individual's psyche. As we have seen, disability, like trauma, is a concept on the border line of private and public, an experience that is problematically represented in language called nature. (Kuppers, 77)

In the opening shot, watching Amudhavan on a boat with Paapa, it is a wonder as to what is in store. Through a voiceover, we get Amudhavan's matter-of-fact answer- A few incidents from my life ("Envazhkaila nadantha silavishayangal.."). The first half of *Peranbu* is set in the middle of nowhere, and in the midst of nature. It is a place filled with bird calls, rolling mists and soft shafts of sunlight. In the introduction itself, the background of the scenes was of chirping of birds. These symbols are used here to convey their emotions. The very first symbol in the narrative technique is place. The place where Paapa lived since her birth was not a happy place for her. She hates when the sparrows die. From there to the wood house, the journey is more like the journey from ignorance to knowledge. He wanted "a place where humans never

intrude and sparrows never die” (*Peranbu*19:34-19:38). The walls of the house in which Amudhavan and Paapa begin to live are made of wood, the place where nature is in its natural state, far away from human interference. There is no electricity, no mobile connectivity or anything that resembles the outside material world. Even the father-daughter bonding occurs not through toys made of plastic, but over birds, a horse and countless stars. In his interview, Cinematographer Theni Eswar says,

Doors, windows, glass were all conduits to embody that consciously maintained space between them...It also proved to be a source of light as we didn't use artificial lights for the entire shoot. It is okay to use artificial lights, in general. But using a generator in a place that is brimming with flora and fauna would have disturbed the eco-balance there. That was also one of our reasons. (Aiyappan, *The New Indian Express*)

Throughout the first half, the chirping of birds and the sound of flowing water can be heard in the background score. When Amudhavan finds Paapa crying for the fall of the bird, he says that he will take that bird to the doctor and give her life back. But when the residents came to visit Amudhavan and informed them that they could no longer tolerate Paapa, he threw that bird on the floor out of anger which resulted in its death. This is what made them come this far away from the outside materialistic world. Amudhavan tried hard to be friends with Paapa, but she never showed any kind of affection to him. In an emotional scene depicted by Ram, Amudhavan mimics many forms in order to make Paapa happy, but he failed. Soon after the day, a bird helped him to bond with Paapa. This shows that a tiny bird is enough and more to bind the sky and earth. “Everything my Six months wait didn't conspire, everything

my efforts conspire, a tiny bird from a faraway land with its tiny flaps conspired, shying away the past.” (*Peranbu*31:23-31:35).

Another symbol used here is that of the snow and sun. Snow is often portrayed in several opening shots of the scenes. It shows that troubles seem to vanish, only to reappear soon. The bond between father and daughter is equated with mist and sun at the initial stage. Mist and sun cannot live together with each other. Likewise, Paapa and Amudhavan lived like two entities. If Amudhavan is at home, Paapa spends most of the time at her room or outside the home. This is portrayed in the chapter “nature is wonderful”. The understanding between Paapa and Amudhavan begins when she counted the stars in “one two three, one two three” and Amudhavan tries to teach her that after three, it is four. But then, he thinks and understands that, “whether we know to count till three or three million, we can't count the stars! Then what is the point in knowing the number that can't be counted.” (*Peranbu*25:31-25:37) He concludes that “my regrets that Paapa didn't know many things became tinier than the stars shone at the farthest horizon” (*Peranbu*25:39-25:44). The imagery of fire and its sound along with the reflection of water are also used in this narrative technique. The mental breakdown of Viji, her husband and the purpose of her stay were depicted through this imagery. Images of fire are shown when Amudhavan recollects his past life as well as life after Viji's presence, hinting that everything that he imagines or even the harmony that he gains will burn in fire. Theni Eswar notes,

For the Kodaikanal portion, the characters are in sync with nature. The composition of the frames is also like that. But when they came to the city, we used more abstract imagery. There's fencing to indicate distance, more lights and also a liberal, heightened usage of red (Aiyappan)

The lyrics of the songs too brings out several imageries used in the film. The very meaningful words that describe the epitome of love is portrayed through the lyrics.

Rivers where the sparrows swims, forest where the fishes fly
fire that unfurls the snow. . .

I lost the directions and floated over the waves. (*Peranbu*33:00-33:19)

In the second half, the film moves away from this Eden to the city. Paradise is truly lost. “This nature taught me that anger, regret, irritation, revenge and all such emotions within me is so meaningless. I don't know what more nature has in its kitty for me” (*Peranbu*1:13:29 -1:13:44). A couple is caught kissing. A television set makes its appearance with suggestive songs and dances from the kind of films Ram does not make. But this is not an empty exercise in “the big city is bad” school of filmmaking. Urban space is an extension of nature, too. It is just that this version of nature -which also depicts man's nature - is built with brick and cement. The picture of the place changes from here. The thesis of the film is nature. The shot from the crow to television indicates that life is going to be more practical from previous instances. From chapter six, ‘nature is dangerous’, the life of Paapa began to change.

We can't always be explicit about the problems these characters face.
Here's a father of a special child, who doesn't know how to connect
with her. To convey this and more in film language, we had to use
such devices. (Aiyappan)

This includes light patterns, colour palettes and also the angles they chose. The symbols of nature become limited in the city life. Instead of fire lights, the nights were portrayed in street lights. The happiness that Paapa gains is gradually limited to a pot of water that reflects her insecurity. The compassion that Paapa showed towards

birds gradually flips to the fast running metro trains. The land mafia that threatened them at the first half shifted to the authorities of the residential home who beat up Paapa for masturbating in public. The image of a room boy who takes away Paapa to calm her down denotes an insecurity in the city life. The picture of Paapa who is locked in the room while Amudhavan goes out and gives an image of a caged bird. Rain is another symbol that reflects the sexual desires of Paapa and her fear of isolation when Amudhavan leaves her at the residential home. Sea gives away the conflicting emotion of happiness when the lady on the beach side tells the future of Paapa and the fear of death.

In the second half, the appearance of Meera is shown. Meera is a transwoman who worked as a prostitute and started to love Amudhavan from the day they met. Director Ram's films have dialogues that usually make the audience to stop and think. *Peranbu* has a lot of such elements that will make the audience question themselves. Not many directors can portray transwomen and sex workers in a dignified manner, but Ram does it effortlessly. When Meera comes on screen, one can empathise with her and why she chose her life. Meera enjoys freedom from Amudhavan when he takes her in the taxi. She rolls down the window and enjoys the breeze from outside. The lyrics of the song in the background depicted freedom in nature.

The lives like mine have no place to retreat
the breeze on the face is dampened with sins.

The gently beating heart..! (*Peranbu*:48:09-1:49:02)

At the same time Paapa suffers physical and emotional torture at the residential home. She gets beaten up by the warden of the home. The life of Paapa over there is highlighted in the lyrics of the background music juxtaposed with these scenes.

The mind is dead. The earth is deaf. And I am blind.

Whom will I ask in this entire universe!

And it is dark here. The moon is unseen Whom will I ask?

The mind is dead.! (*Peranbu* 1:39:11-1:39:43)

Two kinds of emotions are conveyed through the single song lyrics and its infinite varieties of nature, of which Paapa and Meera are but two manifestations. Animal imagery is brought out in several scenes in the film. Horse is an image that helps in breaking the ice between Amudhavan and Paapa. Amudhavan names the horse as Nail Polish, which Paapa is always fascinated about. Another imagery is the mother hen which feeds its children. The image of the hen is shown when Amudhavan meets the father of the spastic child who saved Paapa and the image of a mother bird feeding her children is what Paapa sees through her window. Cat, known for its loveable character is always shown to accompany Meera. Meera is the one who teaches Amudhavan what love is. There is always the presence of black cat (which is considered a bad omen) at the place where Meera lives- both in her home as well as at their new home where they started a new life. "I had to plunge into an ocean and emerge out of it to discover something there is called compassion. And the person who made me discover this is my wife., Meera." (*Peranbu* 2:21:49-2:22:01)

The film closes with the shot where Paapa freely walks through a long path in the middle of a farm and is accompanied by Meera, who is now the mother of Paapa and wife of Amudhavan. These are huge upheavals, but the way he describes them – the line – is quiet. Mammooty's performance is powerfully quiet. Theni Easwar's cinematography is quiet - in a series of frames within frames, shots of Amudhavan and Paapa come to resemble an album of still lives. Yuvan Shankar Raja's music is quiet, with the barest acoustic guitar strumming. Ram appears to have expended all

his angst on his globalisation trilogy (*Kattradhu Thamizh*, *Thanga Meengal*, *Taramani*). Here, he is almost meditative. In terms of tone, it is the closest to heart; one moment, she is counting the stars, and the next, she is crushing over a star. Ram beautifully encapsulates this idea visually, by repeatedly giving us shots of mist enveloping or lifting off from the lake by which Amudhavan resides during the first half of the film. We also get black comedy when Amudhavan ends up inviting a man to his house not realising that the woman he is living with is actually the guy's wife. Even the name Paapa seems like a stab at dark humour, given that the movie keeps telling us that she is actually a girl who is turning into a woman right in front of her father's eyes.

The film narrates with a voice-over by Amudhavan, narrating a few significant episodes from his life, urging us to realise how gifted we are. It is like taking a peek into someone's deeply personal journal. For every chapter in Amudhavan's life, Ram uses nature as a metaphor to show the character's transition — his state of mind, for instance, mirrors nature's various moods, such as its beauty, cruelty and surprises. The hill station house naturally lends itself to this, but more impressively, even the congested, non-aesthetic rooms Amudhavan and his daughter live in, later in the film, are shot with much love. Be it the lively yellow mornings of Chapter two or the dark desolation of the beach in Chapter eleven, *Peranbu* is evidently the result of high craft in "Nature". Director Ram notes in an interview,

The people I've met in life were not perfect. They've done good, but they've also committed small mistakes and are sorry for it. Our minds are controlled by Nature, seasons and climate. At the end of the day, every human being wants another. I think we are unfit biologically to

live alone. We survive better as a unit. And, for that, we need people to be graceful in victory and defeat. (Rajendran, *The NewsMinute*.)

Nature is also a character, the driving force and that is how Ram contextualises the film that adds more heft to it. He infuses a non-linear narrative with a leisure pacing that fills the frame with meaningful silences. These elements come together like poignant poetry. At first impression, might think the film is about Paapa but is just as much if not more about Amudhavan's coming of age too. Or rather, his journey of making peace with his reality. This transition is portrayed effectively. It feels pensive to see the father-daughter duo bonding in a cottage that is one with nature. There is no electricity, no mobile phones and not another house in sight. But there are other heart-warming things like a sparrow that flies into their home and a horse that brings them together. Nature heals the rough edges in their relationship and it is so cathartic to watch. The second half gives you a jolt. As they return to the city, you are told, this is nature too. Indeed, it is. This is the nature that has been twisted and turned to serve a man's ego. This nature knows no pity and is undeniably harsh. Stuck in a match-box sized room, Paapa is now growing up. She is almost a woman. The scene flips into reality over here. The entire first half is set in the middle of nowhere, and amid nature. Not many Indian films or filmmakers have handled the topic of sexuality as sensitively as Ram, and he treats it with respect. The film unabashedly talks about a young girl's sexuality and makes us realise there's nothing wrong in discussing it as it is quite natural. It's both shocking and extremely disturbing. A child with cerebral palsy is not abnormal for nature.

They finally reached a place along with nature away from those who think they are above nature. As Amudhavan gazes into the peaceful life he expects in front of him, two birds are seen chirping, enjoying and celebrating life in their own way.

That is the freedom they have in the company of nature just like Paapa and Meera who are finally set free from the society which even denied their sounds. Thus, nature is miraculous and compassionate.

Chapter 4

Analysing the Portrayal of Disability and Queerness in *Peranbu* using Crip Theory

Women with disabilities are frequently the object of a man's sympathy or protection. A disabled man has a much more complex fate in terms of dependence. Women with disabilities are also shown as at risk of sexual exploitation. Unless there is the presence of a strong male, she is not sufficiently protected. In films like *Imaan Dharam* (1977), *Insaaf* (1987), *Brashtachar* (1989), *Khuddar* (1994) and *Humko Tumse Pyaar Hai* (2006), blind women are threatened or sexually abused. The act of being with a woman who is disabled is made out to be an act of social service.

Crip is considered to be an inclusive term, representing all disabilities: people with vastly divergent physical and psychological differences. Crip represents the contemporary disability rights wave and is an "insider" term for disability culture. To identify as a Crip or with the Crip community means you identify as a member of the disability community or as an ally to the disability community, and that you recognize a distinct disability culture. As a Crip, you are also fighting to challenge and reclaim the negative words and terminology historically used to objectify and pathologize the minds, bodies and souls of disabled individuals.

Finally, the term Crip extends beyond and to explain further, consider the realities faced by disabled persons: Every day, disabled individuals are abused and exploited (physically, sexually, verbally, medically and financially). And yet, disabled people are less likely to be believed when they try to report such abuses. Even when they are believed, their reports of abuse are less likely to be acted on when compared to reports from non-disabled people. Disabled persons continue to be sterilized against their will or without consent or due process, particularly those cognitively or

developmentally disabled. Sexual health and sex education are not equally or accurately provided to disabled individuals, leaving them at higher risk to be victimized sexually and at risk for sexual health diseases. Finally, sexuality is a part of our human existence and everyone has a right to sexual expression. Disabled people should be no exception; however, disabled people are routinely assumed to be asexual, unable to have sex, and assumed to have more important things to worry about.

Embedded within sexuality are societal paradigms of images of beauty, attractiveness and even normal sexual functioning. These paradigms are exclusive and oppressive to most members of the disability community. In the light of these situations, Crip theory is formed. Crip theory and practice entails sustained forms of coming out, and the recognition that another, more accessible world is possible in which disability is no longer the raw material against which imagined and sometimes liberationist worlds are formed. Crip theory has its own radical and critical agenda, draws much upon personalized narratives, and has generated illuminating readings of films and other popular cultural forms.

Attentive to the ways disabled people were consistently represented in film, in particular, as either angry and evil villains or inspirational figures for able-bodied characters and viewers, directors initiated what might be understood as a “Crip” tradition of critiquing, from within disability culture, the impoverished representations that dominant filmic and media forms have bequeathed us. Disabled villains are generally defeated and eliminated at the film's end, whereas inspirational figures tend either to “overcome” their disability or to end up dead after dutifully changing for the better the lives of everyone around them. Neither filmic tendency, of course, could offer more than a two-dimensional engagement with disability, although the promise for a more textured engagement with disability that attended other visual forms,

including television and even advertising. ‘To Crip,’ like ‘to queer,’ gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted. “Crippling” also exposes the ways in which able-bodiedness and able-mindedness get naturalized and the ways that bodies, minds, and impairments that should be at the absolute centre of a space or issue or discussion get purged from that space or issue or discussion.

This visual imagery, which is a globalised cultural product and narrative prosthesis, holds a crucial position in addressing two socially considered incongruent identities; disability and sexuality. McRuer, in his work on Crip Theory elaborates on how the inability to accept the disabled as a sexual being perpetuates disillusionment about sexual identity in their minds. Gender and disability are categorised as social constructs, but cinema has had an integral role in fetishising the psyche about what is to be constructed as desirable. For these reasons, narrative prosthesis helps demonstrate the constructed category of deviance, which has become a discursive field of study, and how a societal perception of disability is generated.

Predominantly, there is a widespread uneasiness in acknowledging sexual identity or even recognizing sexual desires of women with disability. There is an increased tendency to marginalize and ‘otherise’ their body as they do not meet the demands of normative conduct and expression. The implication of this is not that the bodies of women with disabilities are always distinctively susceptible but rather that in their peculiar differences of capabilities, they reveal the queerness and instability lingering under the notion of sexuality. Such theoretical reflections are essential to investigate the ways in which Indian cinema, belonging to different geographical and historical contexts.

Here, the analysis of tools for the naturalization of differently able-bodiedness and differently abled-mindedness have contributed greatly to the normalcy that is lack or hesitate to do by. From the second half of the film, Paapa is going through her bodily changes and Amudhavan is trying to cover it. In the beginning the director depicts a confused father, who is unaware about what to do, when his daughter is menstruating. He is trying to find a solution in order to not accept reality as it is very 'normal'. Later, he is doing everything he can for his daughter. But that became difficult when Paapa understood that her father is a 'man' and slowly many changes appeared in her due to this revelation, which confuses Amudhavan. The journey to acceptance of this normalcy is portrayed in this film.

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The identification of women with disability as sexual beings is picturized in this film. The portrayal of disability within the narrative structure of Indian cinema has seen an obvious transition from the stereotypical helpless mother as well as father, to the projection of an intellectual acceptance to normalcy. Paapa's mother eloped with another man and Amudhavan never cursed her for that. Even though the audience

could justify her as she was completely ignored by her husband as well as their family for years. The presence of the mother figure is completely vague, at some point she appeared before the camera but we could not see her face. The camera shot back from her hip, so that the audience feels the presence of a woman. Ram notes,

I feel that hers is a very beautiful character. She had taken care of the kid for 13 years and this guy came just a year back. She's far superior than him, and she's suffered a lot because of him. He didn't visit for several years, he came only for short periods of time, and just sent money. She was living in a joint family - inhibition was there, depression was there, sexual problems were there...despite all that she'd taught the child to do everything. But she's also human, she's also part of nature and it troubles her. She also needs a shoulder for support. She doesn't choose a young man or a handsome one - it's just a normal man, someone she felt will take care of her. Or she might have killed herself long ago. That's my perspective about Thangam. (Rajendran, *The News Minute*).

Later when Paapa started her menstruation, he helped her to change. A father changing sanitary napkins is something people cannot easily imagine. Ram did it, in order to yell at this world that menstruation is natural. Paapa is a girl and that is a natural thing to menstruate. At some point, Paapa realizes that her father is another man and she refuses his help while changing. She wants to do it privately like every girl. "For children like Paapa, activities of a normal child are like Everest climbing. I felt I have nothing more to achieve if she does this one thing by herself" (*Perambu*). His happiness is reflected in these lines as Paapa gives a try to being natural.

There are some instances where Paapa explored the feminine side in her. These scenes signify the development of the child-- she is coming of age, but she does not know how to express it. Hence, she paints something she has seen on herself on a doll. She paints her lips with lollipops, she puts makeup on her face and she loves Viji because of the nail polish in her hand. All these shots allude to the inner urge of Paapa to be a woman and embody the sexual urges that comes with it.

Paapa shows interest in men who are walking down the lane and stares at the half naked posters. Eventually, she starts to masturbate and kiss the heroes of the films in order to show her sexual desires. As for Amudhavan, he goes around looking for a male sex worker, because he is not able to understand or handle what his daughter is going through. This is a most common, yet not discussed much problem that the parents of such children face. Many “normal” people were unaware about such problems or may even not think about it until *Peranbu* picturized that aside from the pleasure, sex is considered a form of physical and mental therapy, and has the ability to fulfil the needs of self-esteem, validation and intimacy, a world that sees them as sexual beings and prospective partners.

When Paapa gets beaten by the residence warden for masturbating in public, he justifies his actions saying that “this can be cured” only by beating (*Peranbu*). He possesses a notion that sexual urges of a teenager are not a common thing and is something that should be cured. This is the mindset of most people, who deny such desires of ‘normal’ teenagers, let alone differently abled children. Later, through the doctor, the audience get an idea of how to handle the growing sexual urges and desires of growing children. Meanwhile, Amudhavan watches a documentary where parents talk about how they gratify the sexual needs of their children. Thus, he goes in search of a male sex worker in order to gratify her needs, rather than looking a groom for her.

Once he decides to end their lives, he decides to fulfil her wishes, be it her desire to wear a uniform or her sexual urges; his exposure to these complicated issues are limited to these. He is confused and does not have the clarity nor vision to comprehend the emotions of his daughter. The character of Meera on the other hand helps them to make realistic choices. In the beach shot where Meera saves their life, the conversation between Amudhavan and Meera is muted to amplify the struggles they are going through. Specifically, as a transgender, people often recognize them as the third gender, despite them living their life hopefully to be in either gender (men/woman). Amudhavan could understand her, only because he has Paapa.

Amuthavan is transforming from his selfishness, stupidity, ignorance. He's changing from his self-centric, egoistic existence, one by one. If he didn't have Paapa, his daughter, he wouldn't have ever understood a trans woman. For example, in the film, he asks Meera why she came to his home. He asks what she was doing with another man in front of his daughter. That is his perception of transgender people. He's not a noble or a great man. He is learning life, he is not an idealistic hero. He's not a hero at all; he's a regular man who also looks at transwomen like others do. (Rajendran, *The News Minute*)

The next chapter, the last one, does not start the day after. It starts after some time. And Amudhavan says that Meera was the one who taught him what compassion is. Meera was in love with him even before this, and he was able to understand that love and care, the fact that she is a woman, with time. This is when the situation changes for the better for everyone involved. Peranbu thus, is not just about the changes in Paapa, the film addresses woman's sexuality in the most dignified manner. Ram's characters are always flawed, but they are still beautiful. In Peranbu's world,

each and every character is flawed- either physically or mentally. The screenplay is such that one can comprehend with the characters while making one introspect on their personal lives.

Thus, crip theory is applicable in different stages in the film. The presence of disability need not be viewed as negative; something to be pitied, feared, hated or devalued. Rather, disability should be seen as a valued aspect of human diversity bringing value to the world. Finally, sexuality is a part of our human existence and everyone has a right to sexual expression. Disabled people should be no exception; however, disabled people are routinely assumed to be asexual, unable to have sex, and assumed to have “more important things to worry about.” This movie provides an awareness to people to see the differently abled as sexual beings, through its frequent attempts of normalising the lives of disabled women in India, it also addresses how the binaries of normal and abnormal, able and disabled, heterosexual and homosexual, transgenders are created through the notions of ideal and desirable within *Peranbu*. The film also points out how important it is to take measures to run a sexual health service and promote the rights of people whose presence is often ignored by the community.

Chapter 5

From Disability to Eco-Ability

Literature and cinema have had a very long close and reciprocal relationship. Ever since the conception of the latter, filmmakers have been going back to literature, which acts as a rich reservoir to pick up narratives from. The association, of course, has an obvious logic. Both, at the end of the day, as Starn puts it, are forms of “narratology”. Literature and film have the ability to see the themes in a new manner. Disability studies considers disability in political, aesthetic, ethical, and cultural contexts, among others. In literature, many critics examine works to understand how representations of disability and “normal” bodies change throughout history, including the ways both are defined within the limits of historical or cultural situations.

Disability studies also investigates images and descriptions of disability, prejudice against people with disabilities (ableism), and the ways narrative relates to disability. Here the dissertation explores how the film, *Peranbu* provides a refreshing technique to present disability and their desires. A teenage girl who is suffering from cerebral palsy is looked after by her father, providing a silent picture which stabs at the stereotypical depiction of disability. *Peranbu* charts the personal growth of Amudhavan, as he gets purged off a lifetime of acquired prejudices and mistaken notions. From running away from humanity — literally, as he, along with his daughter, seek refuge in a lonely cabin on the hills — he realises that escaping is not the solution, at least not for the development of his daughter’s social skills. It is the story of a selfish man who neglects his wife, slowly coming to terms with the deep contentment drawn from being selfless. It is found that the sound of running water wildflower meadows and the life of the entire neighbourhood have great

effects on the social and psychological behaviour of children. There is a sense of positive effects on children where birds and butterflies filled the air with their beautiful sound and colours.

The dissertation began by examining how nature is connected with the child. A child with cerebral palsy is not abnormal for nature. Nature created every being as they are. Everyone has some sort of disabilities. Some are smart enough to hide it or ignorant enough about them. This illuminates that the struggles that people with disabilities share with the environment reflects the eco-ability in the movie, *Peranbu*. This means that the underlying presumption of normalcy is itself a flawed social construction, not a well defined criteria for judging one's suitability for inclusion into moral and social consideration. The theories implied in this dissertation rejects disability hierarchies which promoted the fragmentation of the disability community, eroded disability culture and excluded many from full participation in the disability community and society.

The film is also beautiful to behold. The hill station house naturally lends itself to this, but more impressively, even the congested, non-aesthetic rooms Amudhavan and his daughter live in, later in the film, are shot with much love. Be it the lively yellow mornings of Chapter 2 or the dark desolation of the beach in Chapter 11, *Peranbu* is evidently the result of high craft.

Peranbu is about an infinite emotion called love. This is a bold societal film in which the thesis is nature. Nature is not inherently good or bad; it is simply what it is. And humans, beings of nature, are not good or bad; we are what we are. This reluctance to judge, to label people, is a striking feature of *Peranbu*. *Peranbu* is not just about a single father learning to care for his spastic daughter; it is about what it is to become capable of true love. He has to learn how to be with people again, how

to engage again with the world and its infinite varieties of nature, of which Paapa and Meera are two manifestations. It is about what it is to look past constructs like gender and sex. And as Amudhavan discovers, sometimes, loving another person even means hurting oneself.

Among other things, the film posits that sexuality is among the most natural things and it cannot be locked behind bars as the framing of Paapa near windows so often suggests. Female sexuality of disables is so rare in Indian cinema. Another fascinating point is to see the film never has a depressed tone nor is there any significant melodrama and the film treats the subject of sexual urges of the differently abled as a “matter of fact” topic and not something that has to be shoehorned.

The film is the reflection of stages into one’s normalcy. Through eco-narration, the director effortlessly expresses the emotions of the characters. He then slowly, tenderly landed his character in the midst of realities, where a father knows about the sexual desires of his spastic child but unable to handle it. Amudhavan is portrayed as a growing man, who loves his daughter so much that he does not mind helping her change sanitary napkins when she is on her period. On the other hand, he is yet to come to terms with his child-like daughter, who struggles not knowing how to deal with sexual desires. He could not believe that his daughter was no more a ‘Paapa’. *Peranbu* is all about the discoveries of Amudhavan, as he associates every significant event he had encountered in his life to the mother-nature. From being disowned by the family members and the society, to his journey to the inches close to death, this journal of compassion highlights how society had wickedly interpreted nature. The changes from hiding everything or thinking that these desires and changes of her body as a curse, to everything that is considered a very

natural and normal thing Amudhavan arouse to the level of selflessness.

Peranbu teaches one to look at life differently. It establishes the supremacy of love without romanticizing it. Because love in the purest form cannot be romanticized. The film is about how the ray of love manages to creep through the smallest of crevices amidst daunting obstacles. It is important to understand disability as part of one's identity, much like race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. This dissertation analysed the representation of disability and sexuality in this Tamil film. By effective portrayal of disability using eco-narration, this movie successfully transforms disability into eco-ability. The intersection of disability and sexuality discussed in the movie, adhering to the fundamental principles of Crip Theory provides a new dialogue in the discourse of Disability Studies.

Peranbu posits the philosophical notion that life is like nature, it exists eternally and forever. One could conclude that the narrator is suggesting that somehow, our lives are better than his, and that would be wrong. *Peranbu* does not judge. It is not saying our life is more blessed than Amudhavan's. It is saying that our lives, our respective journeys, are all equally important, not one more than the other- "*Aasirvadhikkapattavaazhkai*," in the words of Amudhavan.

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