

Executive Summary – Minor Research Project

Title of the project:	Reconfiguring the Selves: Representation of the ‘New Woman Concept’ in Malayalam Cinema
Principal Investigator:	Chithra P S
Name and Address of the Institution:	Research & P G Dept. of English, Sree Kerala Varma College Thrissur – 680011, Kerala
UGC Approval No. and Date:	MRP (H)-1027/13-14/KLCA 039/ UGC- SWRO dated 28 March 2014
Date of Implementation:	28 March 2014
Tenure of the Project:	18 months
Total Grant Allocated:	Rs. 50000.00

Objectives of the project:

This study concentrates on the ambivalence in social and gender relationships among the men and women in Kerala. In the history of Malayalam cinema, the late 1970's and 1980's represent a transitional period. This was the period in which Kerala society, as opposed to many other Indian states, was integrated into the international labour market, as a result of which there was a change in the economic structure of the state as well as an alteration in the social relations among its people. This change in the socio- economic and political milieu invariably created new ambivalences, anxieties, confusions and contradictions in both men and women. The proposed project tries unravelling the emergence of a new female subjectivity in the wake of modernity.

Summary of the Findings:

The contemporary world is witnessing considerable socio-economic and political developments paving the way for progress and modernity. These developments have opened up many opportunities especially for women leading to a realization of new middle class sexual identity and aspirations. However, these are interwoven with powerful influences of traditional and nationalistic concepts of femininity and womanhood. There is a significant social responsibility and a perpetual demand on the middle-class woman to maintain tradition amidst an influence of modernizing processes and modern notions of appropriate female behaviour. This results in the middle class woman's identity being continuously negotiated and shaped and also raises the question of how the new expressions of female sexualities can be negotiated and realized by these emerging middle class female identities in the context of prevailing notions of femininity and womanhood. The three films opted for the present study

(*Yavanika* (1982), *Adaminte Variyellu* (1983) and *Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback* (1983)) depict how women negotiate with the public and private life, how they try to assume their own identity apart from being a daughter, wife and mother, and how they struggle to assert their presence in the male dominated society. The cinematic representation of women characters in the above mentioned films have tried to break up the traditional and conventional norms of femininity thus threatening the normative heterosexual norms put forward by the society.

Contribution to the society:

This project strives to be an eye-opener and tries to provide an opportunity to the society to rethink its attitude towards women. Cinema being a reflection of the society and the reality is an ideal instrument through which life gets represented. These three films which have been chosen by me represent a sample of the identity crisis faced by women and are in fact a microcosm of the real world. Even the Government is making all out efforts to uplift the status of the weaker sex, to educate them and to bring them to the forefront. Various incentives like exclusive reservation for women etc are being provided in order to achieve these objectives. The time has come to rethink, reread and reanalyze as to whether there is a shift in the attitude of the patriarchal society towards women.