

Deficiency and excess: Representation of intersex and transgender identities in Sri Lankan cinema

Hettiarachchi, Aparna
Post Graduate Institute of English
The Open University of Sri Lanka
aparna.hettiarachchi@gmail.com

The present study analyses the aesthetic portrayal of intersex and transgender characters in 3 selected Sri Lankan movies, namely, *Maya* directed by Donald Jayantha (2016), *Flying with One Wing* directed by Ashoka Handagama (2003) and *Frangipani* directed by Visakesa Chandrasekaram (2013), in order to unearth patriarchal ideologies that inform the narrative logic of these films. The study identifies recurrent motifs used in the cinematic representation of transgender and intersex identities and explores the functions that these characters perform in the plot development of the selected movies. The political soundness of the cinematic agency of these characters and the motifs used in their representation are tested against a theoretical framework that is based on Judith Butler's insights into gender performativity and abject as well as Richard Ekins' conceptualization of "male femaling" and Judith Halberstam's theoretical insights into "female masculinity." The qualitative content analysis of the movies based on this theoretical framework indicates that in Sri Lankan cinema, sexually and gender-wise ambiguous identities are represented as carrying both a deficiency and an excess. It is observed that while these characters are silenced by patriarchal discourses, they can also be deployed to identify the anxieties of the Sri Lankan society regarding definitive categories of gender and sexuality. Thus, the study addresses a deficit of literature and research observed in the Sri Lankan context regarding marginalised sexual identities such as intersex and transgender and their aesthetic representation.

Keywords: Sri Lankan cinema, intersex, transgender, male femaling, female masculinity