

II. QUEER STUDIES: AN ANALYSIS

The amount of literature and cultural criticism in the past two decades that concentrated on the construction of human sexuality has been abundant. Exploration of sexuality, campaigns by activists and persuasion by parliaments have garnered support for the people who are abused, persecuted and penalized for listening to their mind's voices. The two topics that have been talked about are homosexuality and heterosexuality, both inventions of the nineteenth century. In fact homosexuality as a term was in prevalence at least a decade earlier than the term heterosexuality. Heterosexual or 'straight' studies are rare compared to homosexual. The words bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender along with straight have been used to relate the connection between sexual desire and identity. Alan Sinfield has suggested that the central idea in studies about sexuality has been to resolve problems which converge on and around the notion of sexual identity. Science, both medical and technological sought after the reasons behind the phenomenon whereas literary works concentrated on social transgressions Tony Purvis says that despite the myths of silence, invisibility and isolation attached to the homosexual closet black lesbians and gay men were crucial in the literary revival associated with sexuality.

As a consequence to the production of literature about sexuality and sexual identity, theories were put forth to analyze the texts. The foundation for queer theory was first laid by feminist criticism that was gender oriented. Feminist studies question the centrality of gender as a fundamental category of historical analysis and understanding. Lesbian feminism emerged in the 1980s as a byproduct of feminist studies and gained momentum in the 1990s. Simon de Beauvoir gave an epic account of gender division and analyzed and documented the causes for the reduction of women to a second and lesser sex. The second wave feminists turned their

attention to an understanding of sexuality as a cultural construction and a political choice. The French feminists established the use of language as a means of patriarchal dominance.

Another theory that exercised a great influence on the emergence of theories relating to sexuality was post structuralism. One of the postulates of post structural work was to deconstruct binary opposition showing that, as Barry suggests, “the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute, since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of the other” (143). Barry also showed how “it is possible to reverse the hierarchy with such pairs and so ‘privilege’ the second term than the first” (143).

The precursor to queer theory was the lesbian and gay literary theory, a distinct multi disciplinary field of study, paying more importance to cultural studies than literary work. The earlier feminist criticism made sure as summed up by Barry that, “not all books about women writers are feminist; that feminist writing need not be by women and that feminist criticism is not directed exclusively at a female readership” (139). Likewise the lesbian and gay studies ensured that they are not directed solely at these people or relevant only to lesbian/gay sexuality. *‘The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader’* informs that lesbian and gay studies do for sex and sexuality what women's studies do for gender. The defining feature of this criticism, that of making sexual orientation a basic principle of analysis and discernment is the basic tenet of queer studies.

The term queer has been used as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who were not heterosexual or who did not conform to the gender binary. Earlier, this term meaning strange or peculiar denoted perverse sexual deviation and was used pejoratively. When the Gay / Lesbian studies gained currency in the 1980s the word was appropriated to assert a political

identity. This became a term, a preference to describe some academic disciplines as a descriptor of non heterosexual identities.

The word queer entered by long, even during 16th Century meaning odd, peculiar or eccentric. A Northern English expression, “There’s nowt so queer as folk” meaning ‘there is nothing as strange as people’, employs this meaning. It referred to something suspicious or not quite right. It referred to persons with slight mental derangement or who exhibit socially inappropriate behavior. The expression in ‘Queer Street’ meant someone in financial trouble. In Sherlock Holmes’s *The Adventure of the Second Stain* this term is used by inspector Lestrade, who threatens that a misbehaving constable will “find (himself) in Queer street” (lose his job). Longman's Dictionary says that, “Queer in the head meant behaving in a crazy way”. The term started to gain currency as a denotation of sexual deviance only during 1900s. The term was particularly applied to men who were believed to engage in receptive or passive anal or oral sex with other men. In cotemporary usage, several television shows have started to use them in their titles to reinforce their positive self identification message. ‘Queer Eye’ and the cartoon ‘Queer Duck’ and a British American version of Queer as Folk can be given as examples.

Much of queer theory developed out of a response to the AIDS crisis which promoted a renewal of activism, brought about by public response to AIDS. Queer theory became concerned with what effects put into circulation around the AIDS epidemic. It necessitated and mustered a new form of political argumentation, education and the arising awareness in 'queer'. The AIDS health crisis had to garner the support of the gay and lesbian communities to combat the epidemic. A new kind of alliance "in which specific communities came together across the dividing lines of race and gender, class and nationality, citizenship and sexual orientation"

(Stryker 134) was formed. 'Queer' became the name for this kind of politics which "took aim at the overarching social structures that marginalized the disease and its victims" (134)

AIDS coalition to unleash power - ACTUP groups first used the name queer in the flyers handed out by New York's gay pride marchers in 1990. 'Queer Nation' chapters that sprung up everywhere transformed public perceptions of AIDS and homosexuality and shifted internal gay, lesbian and bisexual community politics in ways that allowed transgender issues to come back into the community's dialogue.

The postulates of queer theory are indebted to the achievements of writers like Michel Foucault, Oscar Wilde, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler. The contributions of these writers were the basic framework upon which the theory has been constructed. Foucault's work, *History of sexuality* presented a totally new point of approach, challenging conventional notions of sexuality. He had made a consistent effort in his founding work to reach at an 'understanding of the formation and development of the experience of sexuality'. During his times, sex was used as an object of administration, when birthrate, legitimate and illegitimate births, age of marriage and fertility were analyzed, for solving health, economic and welfare problems. Many fields like medicine, psychiatry, law and sociology attempted discourses that aimed at the eradication of 'unproductive' forms of sexuality. Foucault's analysis of the interaction between the body and institutions has been very influential among feminists. His main aim was to arbitrate the cause of 'socially suspect groups like homosexuals and prisoners'. According to Jana Sawicki "Foucault's discourse appeared to be more activist ... and it compelled activists, feminist theorists to take a serious look at his work" (93).

Foucault's analysis of the views of sexuality in his *History of Sexuality* contrasted the openness of people in the seventeenth century around sexual matters and the prudery of the Victorian age. He felt that the nineteenth century's attempts to repress discussion of sexuality only resulted in increasing the desire to speak about sexuality, and attempts to violate these taboos. Gradually homosexuality and heterosexuality were assumed as two distinct categories and because of this categorization of sexual preference, sex and sexuality became 'the legitimate object of scientific study'. Foucault suggests that power did not prohibit or eliminate non conjugal or non monogamous sexuality, rather they were multiplied. Power, he argues has taken the form of law but has been productive instead of curtailing the proliferation of pleasures and a multiplication of sexualities. He posits in his *History of sexuality*: "It did not exclude sexuality but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals. It did not seek to avoid it. It attracted its varieties by means of spirals in which pleasure and power reinforced one another" (50).

Foucault's theories are indispensable, as he described, according to Mills, "the interaction of institutions and the individual without assuming that one of them is primary in the relation" (82). As Mills suggests, Foucault did not see individuals as stable entities and he analyzed, "the discursive processes through which bodies were constituted" (83).

Oscar Wilde in the twentieth century is presumed by many as a trans-cultural model of queer identity. Wilde's notoriety as a convicted homosexual led to his adoption as patron saint of the gay rights movement. His open allusions to homosexuality especially in his famous book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are presumed as an unconscious attempt to 'out' himself. Ellmann suggests that Wilde's "greatness as a writer is partly the result of the enlargement of sympathy which he demanded for society's victims" (526). Dollimore says that Wilde's works revealed the

anger and boredom not as 'weapons of attack' but he did it “through irony, ambiguity, mimicry and impersonation” (556).

Foucault and Wilde exercised a great influence on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler who are most often credited with the formulation of queer theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also talks about the fluidity of identity in her highly influential *Epistemology of the closet*. Sedgwick considers how coming out of the closet -openly revealing one's sexual orientation is not a single absolute act. Hence being in or out is not a simple dichotomy or once and for all event. Both concealment and openness coexist in the same lives. To her identity is made up of several factors like allegiances, social status and professional role and does not concern only the fixed inner essence.

Sedgwick offers a summary of what queer theory aims to cover, "Queer", she writes, can refer “to the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent element of one's gender or anyone's sexuality are not made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (443). She felt that homo/hetero sexual definition did not take place in the context of 'analytic impartiality'. She spoke about the homophobia which devalued but at the same time valorized them. Sedgwick, according to Purvis, opined that critical exposition of the dubious nature of the discourses of sexuality to be a valid attempt to "contest and challenge heterosexual hegemony. The subject is alienated by the identity which seems fractured or a desire that remains unsatisfied or unclear" (443).

Judith Butler who worked on Simon de Beauvoir's statement ‘one is not born but rather becomes a woman’ also concluded that gender is fluid. By deconstructing the pair man/woman, she proved that the opposition within this pair is seen as 'inherently unstable'. She argued that

masculine and feminine-the two opposing and mutually defining positions were artificial constructs supported by imposed heterosexuality. She claimed in her book *Gender trouble*, according to Fiona Tolan that by subverting gender norms and by refusing the characteristics socially assigned to a particular biological sex binary, gender categories could be deconstructed and a multitude of possible gender positions would then be available. Judith Butler further analyzed anti essentialism with respect to sexual identity in her contribution to *Inside/ Outside* that “a stable essential 'identity' can become a site of contest and revision” (19).

As a result of the achievements of the writers and activists, queer theory has evolved into a dominant force, may be as a legacy of earlier gay/lesbian studies. It has become a field of study, which might explore what is at stake for people identified in terms of a range of sexualities troubling not only the opposite and categories of hetero/ homo sexuality but also those of the apparently stable same sex labels of gay and lesbian too. Queer theory is also alive to its own paradoxes. Harper White and Cerullo say that "Queer includes within it a necessarily expansive impulse that allows us to think about potential difference within that rubric" (50). Beemyn and Eliason's collection, *Queer Studies : A lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology* says that "Queer theory allows us to view the world from the perspectives other than those which are generally validated by the dominant society" (165). Queer theory, as the authors suggest, can by "including the voice of people, whose lived experience involve non normative race, gender and sexual identities/practices, queer theory can stretch the limits of current thought and possibly revolutionize it" (166) .

Alan Sinfield, a sceptic of queer theory adopted the name in his book

Cultural politics - Queer Reading, though he found the term too distressing. As he suggests:

The aggression and ambition in the readoption of 'queer' are directly proportionate to the degree to which its use proposes to overturn the historic, hostile meaning. It plays for much higher stakes than if we tried to reinstate, say, the third sex ... 'Queer' says, defiantly that we don't care what they call us. Also it keeps faith with generation of people before us, who lived their oppression and resistance in its initial terms" (204)

Judith Butler talks about the usage of the word queer:

It will have to remain that which is never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. (21)

Jane Goldman is sure, in her, *Introduction: Works on the Wild(e) side - Performing, Transgressing, Queering*, that the term "so unruly and so alive to its own provisionality and mortality is perhaps paradoxically better equipped to survive than most" (536) since as Butler says, "normalizing the queer would be after all, its sad finish" (21). She wonders how a term that signaled degradation has been turned 'refunctional' to signify a new and affirmative set of meanings. The term which was used as a linguistic practice to shame the subject it names, Butler opines:

It derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond

among communities is formed through time and the contemporary redeployment enacts a prohibition and degradation against itself spawning a different order of values, a political affirmation through the very term, which, in a prior usage had its final aim, the eradication precisely of such an affirmation.(22)

Queer theory emerged as a critique of the way power works to institutionalize and legitimate certain forms of sexuality while stigmatizing others. It is interested in understanding the ways identity categories are created. It challenges rigid identities, categories, sexual norms and the violence-physical, economical and emotional, that rigid norms justify.

Queer theory questions the prevailing truth regime of sex. The 'inside', truth which is the actual feeling, does not correlate with the 'outside' truth that of appearance of a person which results in contradictory formation of gender. Hence no truth can be arrived at. Gender cannot be merely a psychic truth nor is it perceivable as outside appearance. In fact, it cannot be decided and can only be interpreted as the play 'between psyche and appearance'. In psycho analytic term the relation between gender and sexuality is equated with identification and desire. If a woman identifies herself as a woman she has to desire a man and vice versa is the ruling of the hetero sexual matrix. If one identifies as a given gender, one must desire a different gender. But queer theory is a set of ideas based around the idea that identities are not fixed, since identities consist of so many elements, that to assume that, people can be seen collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic is wrong. It proposes that all notions of fixed identities are challenged. Queer theory extends its ambit to any activity that falls into normative and deviant categories.

There have been changes in the terms and definitions used in the discourse about queers. Though negative attitude lies as an undercurrent many different terms are used, recently, to

express ideas of homosexuality as behavior and activity. In the article titled Language, Violence, and Queer People: Social and Cultural Change Strategies, Dean Pierce has tabulated the terms that have been used down the ages to signify behaviors.

Table 1 - History of Language

MALE			FEMALE		
DATE	WORD	RULE	DATE	WORD	RULE
1175	Sodomite	(3)what labeled: behavior and individual sin	Middle Ages	Gomorrhean	(3)what labeled: behavior and individual sin
1533	Bugger	(3)what labeled: behavior (4)Unspeakable and Untouchable	Eighteenth Century	Romantic Friends (Non-sexual)	(1)Polite Usage
Eighteenth Century	Pederast (BoyLove)	(3)what labeled: behavior and individual sin	Nineteenth Century	Boston Marriage (Non-sexual)	(1)Polite Usage

Mid-Nineteenth Century	Homosexual (Group illness Or deviance)	(2) Symbolic Opposite of Hetero-Sexuality and Family (3) From Individual Behavior To group Illness (1) Later Usage	Mid-Nineteenth Century	Female Homosexual (Group illness or deviance)	(2) Symbolic Opposite (3) From Individual Sin to Group Illness (1) Later
Mid-Nineteenth Century	Sexual Invert	(2) Symbolic Opposite	Mid-Nineteenth Century	Female Sexual Invert	(3) Symbolic Opposite
Early Twentieth Century	Faggot	(3) & (4)	1870-1890	Lesbian	Now (5) up to 1775 = Wine
1930s-1950s	Homophile	(4) Symbolic Opposite			
1960s	Gay	(5)	1930s	Dyke	(5) Political Stance
Current	Queer	From 3 & 4 to 5		Queer	From 3 & 4 to 5

What is important to keep in mind now is that the hegemony of the older discourse and its labeling is being challenged and the word queer has emerged to replace these terms. There are activists who strongly resist the term, as it is associated with oddity and eccentricity. But Pierce feels "young radicals increasingly prefer queer and nation. Homosexual connotes a plea for toleration and legal reform, gay a term of liberation demanding respect, and queer an expression of defiance and community" (57). Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence that demonstrates a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. Queer studies indicate the range and seriousness of problems that are embedded deeply in a wide range of institutions. It aims not just at toleration or equal status but challenging those institutions.

Queer theory's main project is exploring and contesting of the categorization of gender and sexuality and to establish that identities are not fixed and cannot be categorized by using one characteristic. Queer theorists challenged the validity and consistency of heteronormal discourse and focused to a large degree on non heteronormative sexual practices and sexualities. The term is used to build up and tear down the boundaries of identity for gender queer people who do not identify with any solid gender. The non specificity of the term is a liberty for them. Queerness becomes a way to make a political move against heteronormativity while simultaneously referring to engage in traditional essentialist identity politics.

According to Sedgwick it is "about trying to understand different kinds of social desire and how the culture defines them" (8). Queer theory is a prism through which literary texts are examined. "It is about trying to understand different kinds of social desire and how the culture defines them" says Sedgwick. Queer theorists scorn traditional definition of homosexual and heterosexual. There is no clear demarcation between the sexes. Queer theorists argue that sexuality exists in a continuum. They take the cue from Foucault and argue that only since nineteenth century has sexual definitions become rigid and along with this rigidity have come anxiety, panic and homophobic attitudes. Looking literary works through the prisms of queer classifies the homophobic fears and anxieties and explains these mysteries. Labels like heterosexual and homosexual constructs are fluid. Sedgwick says "I think it is ridiculous to say that queer theory is not about ethical responsibility. There is an ethical urgency about queer theory that is directed at the damage that sexual prohibitions and discrimination, do to people"(9).

Queer theory explores the issues of sexuality, power and marginalized population in literature. Critics working with queer theory are interested in the breakdown of male/female

binary and are interested in the in between. Queer theory maintains that the cultural definition of sexuality and what it means to be male or female is in the state of flux and the distinction between masculine and feminine activities and behavior is constantly changing .

Queer theory foregrounds the margins and breaks silences in order to question the hegemonic social realities. Breaking the silence is the essential feature of queer texts. Queer studies reveal the power of voice and the repression that is involved in silencing or smothering queer identities and the alternative forms of sexuality. Political possibilities are achieved through the exposure of this queer and marginal through literary text and thus engage in an important movement of historical liberation and emancipation. The hegemony of Euro American understanding of sexuality is challenged by focusing on alternative sexualities. This is especially relevant as the process of globalization has imposed Euro American signifiers as the blue print of sexuality. With the advancement in biological knowledge they establish that binary classification is not permanent and defy attempts to prove that heteronormativity is the norm

The structure of the queer text is as given under:

1. Does the text support gender binary?
2. What elements in the text exhibit the tracts of both the genders?
3. How are the facts presented in the text?
4. What is the politics revealed in the content of the text?
5. What addition to knowledge about LGBT Queer is added, including the literary history?
6. What are the Social, political and psychological operations?
7. How does the work address the question of sexuality?

The three books chosen *The Truth about Me*, *I am Vidya*, *The Third Gender* for analysis show the transgressive commitment to inversion and the critique of authenticity. Their works bring to lime light gender confusion, cross dressing and hierarchical inversion. They are indignant to sexual repression as enforced by the ideology of authentic normal sexuality that is now ratified by state laws and medical profession. They do not intend to outrage but insist that gender roles are socially ascribed, that they are arbitrary rather than naturally given. They express the central motif in the sexual politics of the times. They have presented facts that have helped to understand about queer people and thereby have contributed to the addition of knowledge. They state that people should not be classified by appearance. They highlight the inadequacy of current understanding of sexual orientation. They explore and question the categorization of gender and sexuality. They argue that identities are not fixed and cannot be compartmentalized into fixed categories. They fight for the cause of the sufferers. By pioneering to voice the angst of the marginalized people, the writers have carved a niche for themselves in social activism.

Revathi, in her work pursues an ephemeral shadowy path to live a life of her own. She is not hesitant or modest, in narrating the gory details of her sufferings in the hands of both the police and the goons. She narrates her escapades from a coy boy in Namakkal to a jet setting activist in Bengaluru, all the while speaking up for the community amongst elite and erudite audience. Doraisamy born in a caste Hindu family was normal till his class five. But as he reached his tenth year, he began to feel his difference from the boys of his age. He began to relish being friends with his neighborhood girls. He went to school and came back in their company. The queerness is seen in his behavior quite early, "I played only girls' games I loved to sweep the front yard clean and draw the kolam every morning I even helped my mother in the

kitchen, sweeping, swabbing, washing vessels”(3). He did all these household chores, with a confidence that belied a boy. When he dressed up in his sister’s clothes and tied a towel around his head to denote a braid, people dismissed it as childish prank and they felt that "He will outgrow all this when he gets older” (4).

The outside world which did not have emotional bondage or familial ties with him began its ridicule quite early by calling him 'Number 9', 'female thing' and 'female boy'. When they began to ask if he wasn't a boy and why he should act like a girl, Doraisamy understood that he was indeed different and he “wanted to be so” (4). From quite early, he was infatuated with a college boy who lived near their house. He liked the boy kissing, hugging and pinching his cheeks. He was ‘painfully shy’ like a girl, when he called him ‘the female thing’. Though he climbed trees and dived into tanks, he always derived a strong happiness only when he "danced to my heart’s content, imagining myself to be a girl” (5).

Agricultural labor in his village was clearly differentiated by the genders. “The men dug and raised the bunds and watered the fields, whereas the women planted” (5). But despite being a boy, Doraisamy always "stood along with the women and helped with the planting” (5) though he was shooed away by women.

As he began to grow older, he moved closer to girls than to boys. When the boys played boys game like cricket, football, gilli-danda, he was always with the girls, playing hopscotch and hide and seek. Though he was a regular source of amusement and curiosity to boys, he was “faintly gratified and even happy that the boys actually conceded that I was somehow a woman” (6). When his patience was tested too far, he "hurled obscenities at them, as I have heard women

do" (6). He knew he was different but he could not conform himself to the expectations of others:

I did know that I behaved like a girl; it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me - just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so. (7)

Gender Performativity, a concept promoted by Judith Butler is central to the understanding of transgender people. That is true of Doraisamy too. He did not believe in actualizing for others his gender identity but his body language, dress, looks and speech oozed out gender changes happening within him. When he enacted the role of Chandramathi in Harish Chandra in his class seven, everyone praised him for looking and acting like a real woman and his seniors taunted him asking "when you played Chandramathi, what did you stuff your chest with" (11). Yet another proof of his performativity was when he danced at the Mariamman temple. The villagers could not see through his disguise of a kurathi, (a gypsy) that is why the exclamation, "who's this kurathi? From this village or from outside? Is she a real woman or a dressed up as one?" (13.) He was troubled by the emotions that men incited in him. Just like a teenage girl he was "drawn to young men and felt humbly shy and lowered my head" - whenever I saw young men I automatically lowered my head. I felt drawn to them" (14). When he danced for two songs, his competence was appreciated by the chants of the boys but Doraisamy knew he had not worn a disguise but had "given form" to his feelings. Only when he emerged in 'man's garb' he felt that he "was in disguise" and that he "had left the real self behind" (16). He lived with doubts and questions buried deep inside him longing for someone who could understand him.

Doraisamy knew about his ilk only when he was at Namakkal, when he saw four men dressed in lungies(a male attire) climbing up. "I noticed that they swung their hands as they walked and that one of them had grown his hair long" (17). He could "hear them address each other as girls do" and "began to dance a woman's dance" (17). His gut feeling suggested that they were also like him "female inside and male outside"(17). He learnt about hijras and their life style from these 'thozhis' (girl friends). When he boarded a bus to Dindigul for the temple festival Doraisamy was troubled by their strange behavior. His friends never betrayed their inner feelings anywhere else but on the hill fort but on that day they gave public exhibition of their emotion by casting "blushing glances at men and from time to time dusted powder on their face and applied lipstick" (20). They were merely venting out their pent up desire to be women, since they could not do so before people who knew them. Even the fear of being teased cannot withhold them from daring to express their feelings. One of the friends makes himself very explicit, "We can't ever live if we fear being teased, or dare express our feelings" (21).

Doraisamy tried to live the life of a boy, as was expected of him by the family. But the pressures of his feelings and the roles he was playing became too much to bear. He could not bear the constant pretence he had to do and so decided to run away to his mentor at Delhi. His friends who could hide their feminine feelings, expressing them only on the hill-fort saw him off at Salem. After great struggle he found his 'guru' at Wazirpur, where he learnt the ways of the hijras. He befriended a Keralite tea shop owner, whose address he used for writing letters to his parents. When he received a telegram informing about his mother's illness, he rushed home with the consent of his guru and he boarded the train back home in a sari. But when he decided to change into a man's attire, he faced stiff challenge. He decided to go to the woman's toilet, the man who stood there to receive money for the pay and use toilet "dismissed me as a pottai and

would not let me in. When I tried to get into the men's toilet section I was shooed away from there as well” (54). It was such a mess that he could not for sometime decide on his next course of action. But this indecisiveness did not dissuade him, when he wanted the operation done. He makes explicit his inner longing, “I want to live as a woman, who is why I wanted this operation. Please make it like it is for a woman” (73). Despite being innocent of a woman's physique, revealing his passion to be a woman, he subjected himself to pernicious pain and peril. The looks he got after the operation and the things he heard, hurt him more than his wound. The scorn in the eyes of the onlookers aggravated his suffering and that has made him speak for the community; “If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared for both by the family and by outsiders who come to know of it. But we - we are not considered human.” (83).

Doraisamy's exultation at becoming a woman made up for all the humiliation and pain he faced. Though the operation had been performed crudely, it had fulfilled his yearning to become a woman. From here onwards her face, "had changed... and felt like a flower that had just blossomed” and she felt that his "earlier male form had disappeared and in its place was a woman" (88). The fear and the sense of unease that had haunted her so far had gone and she began to recognize herself ‘deep within’ as a real woman. The full blossoming did not stop here. She was troubled by the desire ‘the hankering of the flesh’ which made her change her house to fulfill her sexual longings and her life at Matunga had driven her "to treat sexual experiences as work" (106).

The inability of the hijras to defend themselves against local thugs brings out the inhuman condition in which they live and the insecurity they face in society without any help from any quarters. They are not spared even to sleep peacefully on the road and they are jolted awake by the heat of the lighted match sticks on their 'bodies'. They know that the police would

give them no support. This fear and feeling of vulnerability results in loss of sleep and ultimately forces them to take to liquor. They are compelled to fulfill the unnatural carnal desires of the people. It should be the political concern of the state to protect its citizens. But they and their problems are over looked both by the State and Society like an ostrich buries that its head into the sands of insensitivity and this makes them wonder, "Would, a time come when we would be freed from being humiliated thus?" (109).

As a text exposing the feelings of a queer personality '*The Truth about Me*' succeeds in expressing the inner conflicts faced by the protagonist. When she decides to go back to her village, after the assault by the thugs, several nerve wracking questions come in a torrent to her.

What was I to expect at home? What would my friends from school have to say? What would my neighbours think? I had wanted to become woman and had become a woman. Yet my village knew me as a man. It knew nothing of my feelings, the reasons why I wanted to become a woman, the relationships I have with hijras...what if my family accepted me, but the village did not. (111)

The courage with which she encounters her brother, speaks volumes about her final choice, which was going to be her ultimate way of life :

'Disguise? Costume? What're you all accusing me of? What I'm wearing now is real, true. Everything that happened before, the clothes I wore the life I led, the way I had to be - that was when I was in disguise when I wore a costume... I shall remain what I am now. (112)

Revathi had to lead a life of solitude and silence for fear of bringing dishonor to her family as she was "petrified of being exposed and teased" (P119). She was afraid that she might get angry and fight back when people mocked her. To escape from this predicament, she 'lived in the silent shadows, half hidden'. Though she loved to be teased as a prospective bride to her cousin she knew that "none of this would come to pass in real life" (121).

Even the lure of wealth and property do not succeed in making her give up her desperation to be a woman:

I desperately wanted to be a woman. I put up with a lot for that, got beaten by all sorts of people, got abused, and grew my hair... I even agreed to have my cock cut off. I felt that even if I am to die, let me die after having been a woman for a day atleast. Now, for property's sake I am not about to become a man. None of that please. (169)

The lawyer's insistence on making her appear in men's cloth in the court elicits a bitter feeling in her and she wonders if the lawyer would appear in the court wearing a woman's cloth. Caught in a quagmire of abuse by the public and apathy from her relatives, she is made to wonder if there would be any one at all, who could respect and understand her inner feelings but there is a ray of hope, as those who "understood what this was all about... even if they mocked me or gossiped" (174), addressed her as Revathi.

The treatment meted out to these individuals, whose desires questioned the binary pattern, which is construed as 'normal' by the society finds expression, when Revathi describes about the 'hamam'. They were viewed as oddities and pointed out to others, "as if we were a spectacle, something to be gawked at" (193). When they went to buy grocery or vegetables, they

were harangued, pelted vegetables and rotten tomatoes. Often they do not react with anger but the bitterness finds vent at some junctures:

What do you think I am? A waste bin? You think pottais are nothing that we are like waste? I have come here to buy vegetables. I pay for what I purchased. I am dressed as others are. What have I done that you should pelt tomatoes at me? Am I walking around naked or did I come and ask you for money or did I call you to me? (193)

Even the ones who speak with civility and politeness complete the conversation with a question, "Amma! Did you have an operation and those- he pointed to my breasts - are they real" (194). They had to bear with these people, for fear of being harassed, when they go alone to market. But she is ready to put up with any insult till the world thought of her as a woman and "spoke to me as they would to their women" (195).

One of the aspects of queer writing is to share the torments the writer faced due to their difference from normal people and also to highlight the pangs of pain faced during and after their crossing over. In *'The Truth about Me'* Revathi gives vent to her emotions and also goes on to caution new entrants into their order. "I did not want them to endure all that I had suffered. So desisted from giving them that information about the operation and sent them off with more advice" (233). These words of caution could not restrain them from undergoing the surgery. They come back to her in great pain. Despite other hamam residents' advice and protests she empathizes with them "I felt their pain and hurt and recalled my own operation.... I decided to take them in, come what may" (234). She over looked even the hijra's customs and traditions in not demanding money, love or labor from her chelas and performed the adoption ceremony at Hyderabad on her own. "I lived in the world of hijra community, with all its particular sorrows

and joys. My chelas wanted to live in the wider world, and I wanted them to live as they wished” (237). Hijra customs prevent them from wearing anything apart from a sari or salwar but she allowed her chelas to go to bars, in jeans, sowing seeds of freedom within the community and she in turn was rewarded with an introduction to an organization – Sangama, which collected information on kothis and hijras , which "provided a space for them to be who they are" (239). This place taught her to voice her thoughts, “We want to acquaint the world with our lives and we wish to live like others" (242) and this made *‘The Truth about Me’* a possibility, as a documentation that “will be useful for posterity” (239).

Revathi's experience at Sangama brought a sea change in her attitude. Before she joined Sangama, she was hesitant to admit that she did sex work and that she was a hijra and felt that it was wrong to be a hijra and to do sex work. But after joining Sangama, she:

was beginning to realize that none of it was my fault - the way the world perceived me and refused to accept me, the manner in which it snatched away my rights and made it difficult for me to earn a living except through begging and sex work, the violence it contemptuously inflicted on me. (244)

This realization was the eye opener which made her expose the cause of the sexual minorities who had faced violence and discrimination. When hijras dissuaded her attempt, she decided to expose the:

instances of violence against homosexuals, the consequences they face when their families find out they are gay; also, how they are denied their rights, of how society disregards their feelings, refuses to accept them for what they are... there are some who do not understand their sexuality and so end up in committing suicide.(239)

So she asks them “If each one of us think that this is none of my business, then how are we going to get people to understand hijras?” (246). Her consciousness raising efforts want to dispel ignorance about this social group. Through her work she poses a challenge to the society:

Do we not have the right to change our sex? Aren't we human too, born of mothers, as others are? We have not descended from the sky, have we? We have rights just like the others. We are citizens of this nation. Don't we want all those rights that are granted to other citizens: the right to have a ration card, to hold property, to have a passport, the right to work, to marry, adopt or raise a child? (247)

Queer is by definition is whatever at odds with the patriarchal binary of male and female. Queer studies establish that sexual identities are fluid and not fixed. Queer theorists encompass any practice or behavior that a person involves in without regard for social normalizations. This book too focuses attention on undermining the heterosexual and homosexual opposition. It explicitly gives a vivid of picture of life of a hijra, who does not fit into the socially constructed categories of gender and sexuality. By lying bare her inner thoughts and emotions to the world, Revathi makes a conscientious effort to shake the foundations laid by the hegemonic Euro-American views about sexuality. Her book, along with her services has shocked the society and has opened its eyes to its shortcomings. She has achieved the politics she wanted to, as one of the members of Parliament, Mr. Shiva from Trichy has moved a Private Member Bill in Parliament to create a National Commission for transgenders which has been passed by the Parliament of India.

The second book chosen for study '*I am Vidya*' too exposes the indignities a transgender has suffered in the world due to her 'deviant' feelings. The protagonist, unlike that of the other

book, is educated, strong in self belief and firm in her convictions but that does not make her transformation easier. This book too can be subjected to analysis as a queer text that expresses the 'strange' thoughts and feelings of an individual. The very first chapter titled 'Nirvana' suggests the difference from ordinary line of thought. The word Nirvana is a Hindu religious jargon that suggests a state of bliss, free from all emotions, whereas in the hijra parlance it stands for the excision of penis and testicles which gives Vidya, "The Ultimate Peace!" (16). Though her friend Sathya groaned in pain, to Vidya it was a huge relief, because now she was a woman, for which she yearned. She was not Saravanan anymore but a sister to Radha, a daughter to her mother

There is perceivable difference between the two books, because here Saravanan plans for his surgery and reserves tickets for his travel. Even when he went in for the operation he felt that "Tomorrow would dawn the fruition of my desires, the fulfillment of my dreams" (11). She recollects her feelings, "What humiliation I had suffered! Obsessed with it, I had mortgaged my pride, my anger, my honour - even begged on the streets to achieve that end" (11). On the other hand Revathi's surgery was decided by her guru without even consulting her.

Saravanan had a very stifling atmosphere at home, because it had become a virtual prison due to his father's over zealousness to make him a District collector. In a neighborhood, where education was not a priority, his father was different. He thrashed his son black and blue for getting the second rank in school. He could never understand, how his father could be so cruel and even when he grew up the question lingered within him "Why didn't I have a loving father like other children" (24).

Like Doraisamy, Saravanan too enjoyed the lilt and tenderness of songs even when he was six or seven. He used to put on girl's clothes and danced like a girl. The leading ladies of Tamil cinemas attracted him. He liked masquerading as the heroine. He began imitating girl's activities. He was helped by his sister's skirts and accessories. At first the family did not recognize this strange behavior as deviant but as an innocent prank. Even his mother's dead body lying in the other room did not prevent his frenzied dancing, putting on his sister's clothes. When he asked his father to buy him a midi and a gown, the same clothes that he bought for his daughters, he expected his father to oblige him. He hoped that his father, who indulged his whims, when he did well in his studies, would get it for him. But what he received in return was only a terrible thrashing. Saravanan exclaimed "What's wrong with my preferences? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses. Why can't I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what came to me naturally? (29)

Saravanan himself began to realize that his behavior was unusual. His habit of wearing drag, bathing with towel wrapped around him chest high, tying a towel around his head to dry his hair, all these evoked criticism from others. But that did not prevent him from blushing, gesturing and walking like a woman. This made the people call him 'girlie'. But unlike boys who felt it an insult to be called a 'girlie', Saravanan relished it. It made him "happy to know that at least some onlookers understood what I felt inside" (30). Unlike other boys of his class, he was always in the company of girls and joined them in their own games like thaya kattam and pallanguzhi. He loved 'being one of them'. Even kids in the lower class taunted him. A change of school after his tenth class did not better his situation. His irrepressible femininity exposed itself despite his extra carefulness. Crude puns using the word 'ali' made life at school intolerable. Ali is a derogatory slang used to refer to transgender people. The boys used it as a suffix with

other words to give them an offensive twist. No amount of teasing could alter his behavior of wearing women's clothes but age had taught him a trick to escape from this trouble by making him choose unisex clothes like jeans and kurtas.

Unlike a teenage boy, who is aroused at the sight of a girl here was Saravanan who fell for Ilango, who shared with him the news about his lady love and other girls whom he admired. He began to be thrilled by the thought 'of the many men who might enjoy looking at' him, He began to wish that Ilango enjoyed watching him. Ilango aroused his womanliness and made him "feel whole as a woman" (35). If Ilango aroused him, his brother in law was the one who always chided him for "traipsing like a girl, coo like one? Why can't you speak aloud and clear like a man?" (39). The freedom in his sister's home allowed him to visualize himself as a woman. That is where he fully realized that "I was a girl unfortunately the world saw me as a boy" (39). He made efforts to hide his femininity but the deviation from the normal was quite obvious to everyone who saw him.

Saravanan's queerness is best expressed, when he was overcome by fear and apprehension, when he had to stay with his classmates. The thought, that he was not male, made him nervous. His nights were hell, as he was afraid like a girl to stay in men's room. This experience and the feeling inside him, made him to be a 'new woman' and so he put all his thought processes into his step mother's head and made her bold enough to face her husband who was like a tyrant. The awakening inside Saravanan, helped his step mother to voice her feelings and face her husband boldly.

Just like Ilango, Senthil too played an important role in Saravanan's life. He was the one who told him about the NGO, where people like him thronged. There were some like him who

acted and spoke like women in the office and when they left its portals, they were back to their original male attire. There were also tirunangais who had become women. Senthil had earlier warned him to be careful with them :

"Whenever my friends probed me, I managed the situation by claiming to be on a visit to research on kothis and tirunangai I controlled myself enough to act like a man when I went out with them...When I could not consistently fool the world, how could I do that to my friends? They did see the real me now as I involuntarily revealed my femininity every now and then" (54).

Saravanan had no qualms about people recognizing his femininity. But he could not bear when they imagined that he was a man, who was sexually interested in a woman. To everyone he seemed a man alright, but "I am a Woman at heart. How can I tolerate any suggestion that I am in love with a woman?" (56) Saravanan was very happy to enact the role of a woman in the college plays. When he was dressed as a girl he derived great pleasure. He stood long before the mirror in self admiration. When all the people see it to look at their external appearance, Saravanan peeped at it to see his inner perception. Those who do not understand his passion, cannot understand his feelings

A flaming desire raged in Saravanan to parade as a tirunangai, before those who had teased and harassed him. This was, as she herself, says a "reaction an overreaction may be" (60). She was ready to expose her desires, having bottled them up all these years. She enjoyed leading her followers into a wild goose chase as revenge against the society "which had reveled in teasing me for my effeminacy" (60.) Despite a grave warning by Sri an educated kothi, he could no more lead a double life. He was determined to take his next course of action, "No I couldn't

live any longer as a man. If I would not become a woman I'd rather die. I wasn't confused now" (62). To become a woman was his felt need "It was a want. It was my existence, my very survival. I was a woman not a man. Why couldn't they understand that?"(69.) So he did not pay heed to the suggestion given by Sri:

'Look at me', he said 'Am I not a kothi? I am educated too. I have a steady job. Don't I take time out every now and then to lead a woman's life? Why can't you follow my example? Why do you want to undergo so much suffering? 'With all your qualifications do you want to end am educated too. I have a steady job. Don't up as a beggar?' (74)

He understood the sentiments and care behind these words but he :

hated to be a man in public and woman in private. I found wearing men's clothes disgusting. Nobody's advice could shake my resolve. I was a woman and I was nothing without my passion to be a woman. It was more than a passion, it was an obsession. My womanhood was raging to destroy my manhood, incinerating all the advice I was receiving. (74)

Education has made a world of difference in the case of Saravanan. It had made him practical and helped him understand people around him better. He knew that it was very difficult to demand a change of mind in his family. So he decided to move away from them, who could not accept his gender as he felt it. He had some confidence. "I am educated and can survive; I am worldly wise and know how to live; I can learn how to live" (87). The negative attitude of the people in the south made her decide to go away. All the misfortunes directed at her by the society had only made her heart go numb and when she went out to beg she had the pervert happiness of revenging by claiming compensation from each and every member of society.

Though her tongue spoke sweet words, she was "simmering with rage against a formless and nameless society" (100). But it is her reasoning that helps her analyze her situation, "We are women at heart and desperately want to delete or erase out our male identity"(105) and makes her accomplish her mission.

The metaphor that she uses for conveying her freedom is also different. She says that, after her operation, "My experience was akin to spring cleaning. It was like cleaning an old house removing the cobwebs and dust, swabbing the floors and white washing the walls. My woman's body no longer had a male protuberance"(107). Another illustration of her usage of metaphor is found when she talks about her being a tirunangai as natural, "just as men are men, women are women and cats are cats" (135). What she wants is equal opportunity to work and earn a livelihood and to be treated as she wants herself to be treated and a sense of belonging.

The concluding chapter of the text is an outburst of Vidya's feelings. Her decision to leave Madurai, which gave her economic security, was to fight against ridicule and oppression and get legal sanctions for transgenders. She does not 'ask for heaven', but, "I beg to be spared from living hell" (143). Some light is seen at the end of the tunnel. Through her writing she has made some of her readers think. Her bold expression has earned popular support, as can be gauged from the responses received, proving her decision to write her feelings right. One can discern Vidya's devotion to the cause of upliftment of transgenders, which is best exhibited when she refuses to accept the job offered by an NGO, despite being at the brink of frustration, because the NGOs concentrated only on the HIV/AIDS awareness while their objective should be the welfare of transgenders, the redress of their grievances, providing them job opportunities and economic freedom overall"(128). Vidya did not believe in the kind of rehabilitation that preached safe sex without ensuring the provision of basic human rights. Though she got a job in

a micro credit institution, she felt that “social acceptance of tirunangais did not end with my rehabilitation” (137). She has begun to be recognized by popular media in Tamil Nadu and several articles have featured her and others like her. Hello Vikatan, a program by the weekly magazine Ananda Vikatan, has arranged for its readers a week long interaction over phone with her in, ‘indru ondru, nandru’ which translates nearly into ‘a good thing today’.

The next book *The Third Gender* taken up for study is different from the earlier ones. It is not an autobiography but an admixture of fact and fiction. It is a novel written by a person who had not personally suffered the trauma but who had perceived the passions of these 'queer' people and hence commands respect. The author, Su. Samuthiram has brought out the internal strife of the character and at the same time as an outsider he could comment on the impression made by the characters on others around them. The highlight of this book is the foreword given by a character that has featured in the earlier work. *I am Vidya*. P.Asha Bharathi, the Director of the NGO who counseled Vidya, declares about the author in the foreword, “Writing is an art. But identifying oneself with one’s character is a blessing granted only to a few creative writers”.

The author was among the very rare few, who really sympathized with the 'objects of ridicule and play things' and resolved to write about their strange plight for survival. He serialized the story of their experiences and atrocities perpetuated on them both by the state and the public. As an adolescent when he needed the security and comfort of a home most, the individual was discarded, hounded and cast out into the world as an orphan due to his 'queer' ways and this made Su. Samuthiram explore their world and induce the reader "to render some kind of service to these much maligned and much neglected children of a lesser god”, as he states in his preface.

Su.Samuthiram creates an eerie atmosphere in the very first chapter, a highway, where dense darkness prevailed and the wind howled as the angry clouds bared their teeth in flashes of lightning, when he introduces his chief character. The name chosen for the character, who cannot be termed as the hero, is Suyambu. The name most of the times is associated with Lord Shiva who had no beginning or end. It means one who had originated of his own. The meticulous care taken in creating the atmosphere and choice of name continues throughout the text where the author interprets, the emotions and feelings of the main character. The extraneous situations and events that have been incorporated in the book is one of the structures of the serialized novels to which genre this novel belongs. *The Third Gender* appeared as a serial in a popular Tamil weekly.

Suyambu was standing in the middle of the road, which action speaks of his indecisive and strange ways "as though he was struggling to release his body"(1) imprisoned in that something. "He stuck his head out as if there was no connection between his body and self" (2). He was coming back home from his college unable to bear the inner urge, with a devil may care attitude, not even bothered about death approaching in the form of a lorry. When a bus stopped to pick him up, his instinct took him near a young girl who was sitting alone. But nobody in the bus could 'read' his inner feelings. He had felt safe next to a girl and derived confidence as a girl would from another girl. Moreover he was attracted by her ornaments as a girl would be. But he was beaten and hurled out of the bus for the outrage he committed. He himself could not understand, why he was so and hence with a bleeding heart screamed "Who Am I? WHO AM I" (10). He was exhausted screaming on and on and even the animals, which dread human scent dared approach him. His inability to comprehend his feelings results in anger towards his parents, "Mother! Why did you beget me?" (9).

Suyambu was given a chance to board a lorry. The feelings evoked in him as he entered the cabin and saw the cleaner's hand suggest his queerness. Unlike a man he is too shy to hold the "hard and nodular hand, each finger like an iron rod" (12). Moreover when he was sandwiched between two men he was very happy, "seeing the broad shoulders and heaving chest" (12). Suyambu experienced heaven when he 'pillowed his head on that man's chest and relaxed'. But suddenly when the men rubbed against him he began to feel uneasiness, as his womanly sense of coyness, did not like the men's squeezing. He began to cry and he was thrown out immediately by the lorry driver and the cleaner. He decided to walk his way home 'not conscious of himself and without becoming unconscious' like a mystic and "like one disembodied" (13).

Suyambu was not received well by his family, which was surprised to see him there at such an odd hour. The nephew called him 'sethapa' a pun used by the writer. The word means an uncle, a father's brother and also a father who is dead. Yes. Suyambu did not feel he was an uncle to him anymore but an aunt. His parents, his sisters, his brother's family were all flummoxed, when he announced his intention of not going back to college. Their woes were insurmountable when he spoke to his sister Maragatham "Akka, I can't go to college. Don't forsake this thangachchi" (18). (akka and thangachchi meaning elder and younger sisters respectively).

After a lot of cajoling by his sister and his family he decided to leave to college but his gait was laughed at by all the women, "What's happened to this fellow? Look at the way he's staring at us. Why is he swaying his buttocks like that? Why is he shaking his hands and legs as if he is dancing? (27). They thought that he was doing so to call the attention of his fiance Malarkodi, but they failed to understand that he was imitating their ways. Even Malarkodi who

at first was excited to see him, could not fathom him, when he wound the strand of flowers around his own head and nape instead of putting it on her hair. Suyambu, who was at odds with everyone else, "lifted the suit case from the ground and stroking the flowers around his nape, began walking away" (30).

As soon as Suyambu reached college his attention was drawn towards the athletic volleyball player in whose appearance he lost himself and wanted to be a ball in his hands. But he recovered himself quickly to dispel the doubts of his friends regarding 'Ohms Law'. As he was talking to them he fell into the lap of Muthu, who had broad shoulders and sought comfort in it. Even that did not last long. Suddenly he jumped up "stamping his feet on the floor and swinging his hands this way and that he shouted "Muthu how dare you touch me" You may be handsome. That does not mean you can take liberties" (35). The girl inside him cropped up unexpectedly making himself incomprehensible to his friend. "Swaying his buttocks, dangling his hands, whining and giggling simultaneously" (35) set him apart from the boys' world in the college.

Suyambu's strange behavior landed him in trouble everywhere he went. When he escaped to the play field, he was moved by the physique of the wonder boy David who played volleyball, and his heart danced in tune with the other's shoulder movement. These lusts made him forget all the thrashes and taunts he had received earlier and felt that his heart would break if he did not share his admiration for this boy. He saw a girl, the player's classmate, waiting for him. Suyambu totally demented, went near her touched her shoulder and enquired about the athlete. But the girl, who only saw his physical self, began to raise a hue and cry. Without realizing the storm that was brewing Suyambu still gazed at his hero and then was totally humiliated with blows by almost all the boys. It was his 'hero' who came to his rescue covering him from the blows that rained. David, for whom he coveted, became a source of comfort to him. Even when

he was taken to the doctor, his strangeness was made explicit by his admiration for flowers and anklets worn by ladies who were waiting in the clinic.

Suyambu's alienation from the men's world and leaning towards the women's world is seamlessly executed by Samuthiram. When he went to see his future brother in law, his gait and manner of talking induce curiosity in them. To cap it, he met the girl, who was the cause of the trouble in his bus journey. He did not betray her love affair to the family because, "If a girl can't help another in distress it is shameful" (54) was the reason behind his goodwill. The girl was bewildered to hear this. "The grace with which he stood, the way he winked and the softness of his voice appeared rather strange to the members of that family" (56). His future brother-in-law was astounded at the 'way he boarded the bus'.

At college too things began to move from bad to worse. Suyambu challenged his friends for not asking why he was late, "Won't you ask where a 'female' has been? What kind of men are you? (57). He refused to answer when he was addressed as 'da', a suffix used to denote men. When David - his love examined him he squirmed like a girl but when he called him thambi he was quick to say "Don't call me thambi call me by any name, if you please!" (60). The feeling that he was a girl had sunk in so much, that Suyambu had forgotten his masculine appearance. He landed in trouble because of this conflict. When he sat on the pillion of a girl, who was riding in a scooter to cast her vote and addressed her 'akka', all hell broke loose and he was mercilessly thrashed with slippers by all and sundry. This incident was manipulated dexterously by his political rival Ponmugan and this led to his dismissal from college. The Registrar of the college could not show his sympathy to a student who dared face him with a lungi just because he "didn't have a sari" (72). Even his dismissal from the college, the disappointment of his father and rage of his brother did not deter him from feeling feminine. When he bid farewell to David, his

request was for a photo of him and his reply was "I am not a 'thambi'. (brother) My mind is Okay. But others are not willing to understand me" (80).

Being a piece of imagination, *'The Third Gender'*, unlike the other two books provides the readers, multiple points of view. In the other two texts where only facts are divulged, in this book the society's interpretation of the freakishness of the character of Suyambu is delineated in detail. The text amply demonstrates how these queer individuals are assessed. For instance, in the case of Suyambu, some attributed his love for Malarkodi as the reason, where as a few others wondered how a simpleton could behave so and they were clarified that only simpletons could never be trusted. The sentimental and rustic few attributed his behavior to be the outcome of his possession by the dead and dissatisfied demons. But everyone was sure that he was a 'Brazen flirt', as he was always with the girls.

The letter given to Suyambu by Malar awakens his bottled feelings. He imagined himself as the bride led by David around the sacred fire. His strange feelings for David "burst forth not only from his heart but also from his body. His eyelids fluttered, his face softened, his waist arched, his big toe drew circles on the floor, his tongue rolled, his heart palpitated and his brain brightened" (86) is quite singular even for a woman to nurture towards a man. To crown this singularity, he resolved to write a letter 'properly' clad and not in 'disguise'. So dressing himself up in a sari and adorning all his sister's jewels, he powdered his face and chanting the name of David applied 'kumkum' on his fore head and began to gyrate as if to give vent to his imprisoned femininity.

Suyambu's over eagerness to be dressed in women's costume and the ensuing problem not only affected his ties with his family but also resulted in bringing disharmony in the marital life

of his brother Arumugapandi, and his wife Komalam. Earlier she was anxious that her husband had not challenged others but meekly pleaded with them. She was tempted to believe, that probably queerness ran in the family. She felt that her fears were compounded by the fact that her father in law Pillayar "not once has raised his hand to beat" (120) his wife whose tongue wagged every now and then and she derisively remarked to her husband that after all "He is Suyambu's father is n't he? (120)

Another inexorable fact of Suyambu's cross dressing results in his total cut off from his natal home. When he was discovered dressed in all the finery of his sister's costumes her marriage was cancelled. Suyambu was beaten to pulp by the father and son duo and was branded with a hot iron rod on his legs, knees, hip and nape. The smell of burnt flesh from the singed parts filled the room. Only when his sister snatched the rod from her father and scorched herself did the rain of blows stop. His pearl of his eye, his sister, chided him, when the bridegroom's family cancelled the wedding "Chee! Who is your akka? You are a congenital disease, born with me to ruin my life. Are you happy now" (132). This acted as the last straw that broke the proverbial yoke and made him decide to go away with Pachaiamma who expressed concern for him "You are the cuckoo's egg laid in my nest. It is my responsibility to hatch you and rear you till the end" (136). He was happy that he had got what life had denied him and he felt he was anchored to a new mother. Moreover he was admonished by his friends in the slum that "fireflies that emerge from anthills can never return to their holes" (150). Not only was suyambu made to understand reality but also his father, who is advised about the irrevocable nature of Suyambu's ailment and was suggested "It is we who have to change our attitude" (157).

Suyambu moved forward from the slums on to Delhi, reminiscing about his action "for his father, disgrace; for his elder sister, disappointment; for his mother, endless pain; for his

younger sister, degradation; and for his brother, humiliation. For him all this and more” (185). But life at Delhi was more a fairy tale than reality. Being a fiction, unlike the earlier stories, the author presents a glowing picture of love, affection, courage and fortitude and transforms Suymabu into the picture perfect person of the third gender working for the welfare of her ilk, the legendary Manimekalai.

Suyambu had transformed on his own, true to his name. No amount of violence could alter his “urge to become one with the ladies” (135). When Pachaiamma was ready to fulfill his heart’s yearning, “Every cell in his body appeared to have been rejuvenated. That which had been tormenting from within, now pervaded his entire body soothingly” (137). The moving account of his inner trauma is the best that can be given by any member of the community:

He told her of how he had conquered the femininity that raised its head when he was twelve. By the time he reached XII Grade, it had captured half of him and lay like a crouching tiger. But within a month of his entering the Engineering College, the tiger had leaped on him and seized him. Amidst tears, he told her how, not satisfied with its feed it had ‘killed’ his sister also. (138)

The lack of support from the society stifles their voices and dreams. Society lends a helping hand to other disabled persons but only scoffs at these people. That is why Suyambu finds everyone’s eye in the slum where people like him sought refuge ‘to be loaded with the world’s sorrows’. These denizens are “born to be ridiculed in real and reel life and to satisfy ruffians’ desires” (150).

‘The Third Gender’ being the commentary on the marginalized life of the hijras, analyzes the scientific and medical reasons behind the birth of these people citing examples from the

animal world. When the society understands this that such people cannot change, it will know that it is we who have to change our attitude. Su. Samuthiram sums up, “Eunuchs are the third kind of human beings” (158) that is why he makes Suyambu transform into Mekalai who had “transcended the gender distinctions of he, she, it”(158). Mekalai’s leadership appears utopian in nature. But is there anything wrong in expecting a heaven in earth?

Language encapsulates meaning. It is a symbol upon which we thrust our understanding. Words are redefined to have different meanings according to the need of the user. Some languages are created by groups to allow themselves to talk openly in the midst of strangers. Such of these languages permit group conversation that may not be perceived by others easily, thereby giving a sense of secrecy. Using of special language can lead to significant influence and control in the group. The words that have become symbols of inner group reckon any new entrant into the order, to learn them to gain oneness with the group.

Those who identify themselves as queer in India, use a language that is shrouded in mystery to those who align themselves with heteronormativity. The speakers of the hijra language which is called as koti or hijra farsi are glaringly visible minority though the lexicon is most invisible to the civil society despite its prevalence throughout India. The language is spoken by the hijras in North India apart from Hyderabad. Urdu or Hindi is not commonly spoken in South India. Though the language has commonality with Urdu and Hindi, it has none with Farsi or Persian.

The language spoken by these people is not a mere collection of secret code words. It has a unique vocabulary and its own syntax. The hijras use it in public to communicate with friends and other members of their community, when they do not want others to know what they are

saying. The hijras claim that the language had been created for the purpose of self preservation during British Raj, as a survival mechanism, because during the earlier regimes, they were not a sequestered and marginalized minority. They use this as a survival tool in a society which is hostile to such minorities. But can this in-group communication qualify to become a language is a fact to ponder upon. This is only a spoken language but it continues to have a living community of speakers, who exploit it actively. Just like its practitioners, it is hidden and queer. The three writers have enumerated some of the words in their works. All the three protagonists are non speakers of either Hindi or Urdu and so not many examples of the syntax of the language is to be found. Hence the most important words used in the books are explained to highlight the use of the language by these queer people.

The queer people have no support from any quarter of the society. Houses are not let out to them. Schools send them out. They do not get jobs. Social security benefits do not reach them. Law discriminates against them. They do not have secured spaces, that would protect them from abuse and prejudice. So they are forced to live in clustered groups, on the fringes of the society in extreme poverty. These reasons have made them develop a language for their own defense against infringement. The language they use, first of all, the traditional clap - flat palms striking against one another is a gesture that announces their presence to others of their ilk and to the general public.

The clap is a code conveying solidarity with others of their kind who are lurking nearby. It is also an open acceptance of their difference and probably their shamelessness developed due to the apathy of the society. But there are restrictions in the usage of the gesture. When the hijras are interacting amongst themselves in the presence of their gurus, only the gurus are entitled to clap.

The vocabulary of the queer language in India comes from some of the other regional languages too. Various regional dialects are used for their counting systems for example dasola for Rs.10. Their language has substitutes for the words commonly used. They have a whole set of matrilineal relatives from the 'parivar' (family) they enter.

Badu dadi	-	Great grand mother's guru
Daada guru	-	Grand mother's guru
Nana guru	-	Guru's guru (grand mother)
Guru	-	Mother
Guru bai	-	Guru's sister
Bada Gurubai	-	Older Sister
Chota Gurubai	-	Younger sister
Chela	-	Daughter
Nathi Chela	-	Grand daughter
Chandi Chela	-	Great Grand daughter
Sadak Nathi	-	Great grand daughter's daughter (TTAM 64)

The other relationship are dudh beti and dudh behan. Dudh beti translates into milk daughter and dudh behan into milk sister. The dudh beti is different from a chela. A ritual, imitating, nursing mother, when the mother has her child on the lap and pours milk from a cup

on to her breast and into the mouth of her child is performed. The daughters prick their fingers and let out a drop of blood into the milk and they drink it together thereby sealing their relationship.

Though they have an occasional word to describe a male companion as 'Panthi' - 'husband', they do not have words referring to male members as there is no role for them inside the 'parivar'. A 'kothi' is a person with a feminine feelings but who has not been operated yet. '*I am Vidya*' has numerous references to such members, "I thought I could be a full time kothi, working there and staying there with a fellow kothi" (67).

A 'ghori moorathan' is "a person who becomes a chela for the first time" (TTAM 63) 'reeth'/'rit' is a system of consecrating chelas. Deen, Deen, a token of acceptance is used when they approve new admission. 'Thandu' is the fee that they have to pay to put in a reeth in the specific house hold. A 'masoka' is a "Woman in good circumstances" (96). A byrupi / be rupia is used to refer to men who impersonate hijras. Janani is a very feminine looking hijra whereas Janana is a masculine looking hijra.

There are several new words connected with the emasculation procedure in their parlance. Nirvaan in its original meaning in Hindi denotes a state of mind which is marked by calmness and absence of desires. It denotes a march into higher consciousness which is considered as second birth. It means the removal of ajnana- ignorance and birth of jnana- wisdom. The hijra community uses this word nirvaan for the emasculation ceremony. They use it to mean that the ordinary male has been elevated to the status of 'real' hijra. They interpret that, through this operation a new birth has occurred, empowered with the spiritual powers of

Bahuchara Mata their deity. The person who performs the emasculation, other than a doctor is called dai ma corrupted as 'thayamma' "you might not be able to bear a thayamma operation" (TTAM 66). After forty days of confinement the woman ritual or 'chatla' "a time honored ceremony among Tirunangais" is performed (IAV 108). During this the guru gifts her Chela with a jok, "The jok comprises a green sari, a blouse and inner skirt and a nose ring, anklets and toe rings" (TTAM 86). After the performance of the rituals the jok has to be handed over to "akuvapottais - who are yet to undergo nirvana" (TTAM 90). There are words in their language that have no equivalents in other languages. They are not easily recognizable to others. For example, 'chapti' which refers to the orifice left behind after castration – a word unique to them.

The transgenders use different words to describe their professions. 'Badhai' is the job of real hijras. It means performance of dance and song which is their time honored job. But lack of opportunities has driven them to begging which they did in 'dol' or group (IAV 94). The lowly occupation of flesh trade is nicknamed 'danda' and "The house where sex work was carried out is called a 'danda kantra'" (TTAM 131) 'Hamam' are bath houses where transgenders who are not interested or who are unable to do sex work head, to earn their livelihood.

Special words are used during the performance of last rites for gurus. The rites involve both the Hindu and Muslim practices. The rites during the evening performed the muslim way is called 'roundap'. It meant that the chelas who have lost their guru should be treated like widows and will be given white saris. The 'lajja' or the necklace tied by her guru during reeth is taken away and a new one if needed is given to the widowed hijra by the new guru.

The people who could tease bridegrooms and newlywed with their humorous songs, who could bless new born with their spiritual words and who can scorch their offenders' ears with

vituperative vocabulary have thus created their own language to convey their special needs and to suit to their specific purposes.

The three authors through their works, exhibit the strangeness or queerness in different degrees and the books serve as eye openers to others about the plight of the marginalized people. They have movingly and convincingly presented the consequences of their strange feelings. Through their writing they have laid bare that the external appearances need not necessarily correlate with their internal emotions. They have espoused the cause of transgenders by presenting their hitherto unseen lives. They have shed light on their sorrows and sufferings. They have demanded justice that is due for them from a society that has thus far been insensitive to their pains.

Queer studies are closely connected to current affairs and with the movements for human rights, social justice and peace. As Ammu Joseph an eminent journalist states “while activism creates public awareness and demands official action on issues such as violence against women, scholarship provides the information and understanding necessary to ensure that the action is effective”. Since queer studies is a category of analysis and knowledge it appeals to our need to understand how power functions and who has vested interests in keeping this power, who resists and why. All these aspects have to be looked at a holistic manner. The realization that these aspects are intertwined rather than separable, makes the study along with other sources of oppression and violence of state against these people, indispensable.

