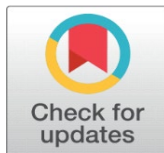
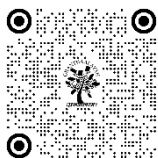


## EROTIC CAPITALISM IN PADMARAJAN'S *THOOVANATHUMBICAL*

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### ABSTRACT

Erotic capitalism is a concept that describes the intersection of sexuality and capitalist economic systems. The 1987 Malayalam film "*Thoovanathumbikal*" explores this theme through its portrayal of a wealthy, sexually liberated man named Jayakrishnan and his relationships with two women, Radha, and Clara. Since of his riches and social standing, Jayakrishnan is able to indulge his cravings without suffering any repercussions, while the women are obliged to have physical intercourse with him since it is necessary for their financial well-being. The film highlights the power dynamics at play in such relationships and raises questions about the commodification of sexuality and the objectification of women in capitalist societies.

Through its portrayal of the characters' struggles with love, desire, and economic pressure, "*Thoovanathumbikal*" offers a critique of the ways in which capitalist systems can perpetuate inequality and exploitation, particularly with regard to women's bodies and sexuality.

**Keywords:** Erotic Capitalism, Social Standing, Capitalist Societies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"P. Padmarajan, film maker, author, and scenarist, continues to inspire all those in love with the magic of cinema. He had charted out unexplored territories on celluloid and had given a fresh and timeless visual experience through his stories, frames, and characters." The realistic depictions of human life in Padmarajan's paintings have won him widespread acclaim. His creations exuded an air of

sincerity. His writings have touched on a variety of subjects, including mental illness, love, and bereavement. [Hakim \(2010\)](#)

*Thoovanathumbikal* is one of the most romantic ever green movies, which was released on 31st July 1987. The mastermind behind this movie Mr P. Padmarajan is one of the greatest legendary directors that the Malayalam movie industry has ever had. His other movies are *Innale*, *Nammuku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*, *Njan Gandharvan* and many more. He has directed eighteen movies in his lifetime; all his movies broke the stereotypical plots of Malayalam movies. The film is a romantic drama that explores the themes of love, desire, and societal norms. The story revolves around Jayakrishnan, a well-educated man from a middle-class family who falls in love with Clara, a sex worker who lives in a brothel. Initially, Jayakrishnan is reluctant to admit his love for Clara due to societal pressures, but eventually, he confesses his feelings to her.

Even though his movies weren't women centric, we get to see many real, self-compassionate, complex, and brutal women characters. The film follows their tumultuous relationship as they try to navigate their feelings for each other, while simultaneously dealing with the judgment and scrutiny of society. The film also delves into the complexities of human relationships and the choices people make in pursuit of love and happiness.

Throughout the film, Padmarajan skilfully blends elements of romance, drama, and social commentary to create a thought-provoking and emotional experience for the viewer. The film is widely regarded as a classic of Malayalam cinema and has become a cultural touchstone in the region. [Menon \(2011\)](#)

The audience remembers Clara as being one of the most powerful female roles in Malayalam films. Clara is a strong, independent, and intelligent woman, who is full of spirit and joy. She is someone who lives on her own terms and chooses a profession that no girl will choose willingly just to get away from the miseries of her life and she has no guilty feeling about it. Clara has a very charming personality, and no one would ever forget her even if they have met her only once and she was also beautiful. Clara is one of the very few woman characters that have all elements of erotic capital and also who had monopoly over it.

Erotic capitalism is a theory proposed by Catherine Hakim, who is a well-known sociologist. Despite the fact that the idea was developed decades earlier, Catherine is credited with giving it the term Erotic Capitalism. Many people rejected this notion since it was subject to heavy scrutiny.

The male-dominated culture rejected a notion that would have helped women see their strengths and how those qualities would enable them to achieve greatness on the social and economic fronts.

Economic and cultural capital are combined in human capital, which is made up of valuable credentials, training, and job experience that may be exchanged for money. Social capital is the total of assets, real or potential, that are gained by an individual or organisation as a result of membership in a group or access to a network of connections—who you know as opposed to what you know. Good social connections can be essential to some economic operations, and social capital can be utilised for financial gain, the exercise of power and influence, or social mobility. A person's political networks, possessions, and resources are referred to as their political capital, which is a specific type of social capital. Catherine Hakim, a British sociologist, coined the phrase erotic capital. As the fourth personal asset, she described it. In contrast to the 'fields' approach, which places more emphasis on sexual attractiveness, this term encompasses a variety of aspects of physical and social appeal. [Nair \(2006\)](#)

The first of the six components of erotic capital are beauty, which is unquestionably a crucial component despite cultural and historical variances in perceptions of what beauty is. Sexual attractiveness, which can be quite distinct from traditional beauty, is a second component. While a gorgeous physique is a component of sexual attraction, facial attractiveness plays a role in beauty to some level. The capacity to make people like you, feel at ease and content, want to know you, and, if appropriate, desire you, are unquestionably a third component of erotic capital. This talent includes grace, charm, social skills in interaction, and the ability to make others like you. Liveliness, a combination of physical health, social vitality, and humour, is a fourth component. The fifth component focuses on social presentation, including clothing choices, cosmetics, fragrance, jewellery, and hairstyles. The fifth component is social presentation, which includes the way individuals dress, how they look, what jewellery or other adornments they wear, how they style their hair, and the many items they carry or don to show off their social standing. The sixth ingredient is sexuality itself, including sexual prowess, vigour, erotic imagination, playfulness, and all other characteristics that contribute to a fulfilling sexual encounter.

Erotic capital therefore has a growing influence in wealthy modern cultures, most notably in the markets for marriage and procreation, but also in the labour market, the media, politics, advertising, sports, and the arts. Erotic capital has therefore evolved into a valuable commodity on par with economic, social, and cultural capital as physical beauty and sexuality gain importance in contemporary groups. This is most clearly shown in the processes of mating and marriage, as well as in social relationships in many other circumstances. [Padmarajan: A loss in January. Padmarajan: A Loss in January. \(2005\)](#)

## **2. EROTIC CAPITALISM IN PADMARAJAN'S WOMEN CHARACTERS IN *THOOVANATHUMBICAL***

With his use of strong female characters in his films, P. Padmarajan has made a name for himself. Lesbianism, prostitution, female sexuality, and related issues were discussed in a variety of tones. He studied issues that are still seen as taboo for the general public, such as ageism, extramarital relationships, and incest. Padmarajan created one of the vibrant eras in Malayalam film by travelling a new route. His films, which transcended the boundaries of his period, became his trademark. His characters are realistic, and it's fascinating to see how he uses an excellent storytelling flair to map their animalistic psychological conduct to the spatial domains of social consciousness. Perhaps the strongest of his female characters. Perhaps more than his male characters, his female characters are what people remember and talk about. He is one of the few filmmakers in Malayalam cinema who has crafted strong and influential female characters, creating a new place for women in the field.

*Thoovanamthumbikal* is a movie that conveys an unconventional story in a conventional way; it was a revolutionary movie in the 80s.

Clara is a young girl who has decided to live her life on her own terms. Clara had her own motives for entering the profession of a prostitute, including bad treatment from her stepmother and a lack of financial means. Clara pondered prostitution as a means of escaping the tragedies of her life. And she believed she deserved a better life, and she was prepared to go to any length to acquire it.

Unquestionably, Clara is one of the film's most intriguing characters. She is independent, strong-willed, and unafraid to follow the route that she feels is best for

her. She turns to prostitution to get away from the burden of pointless parental ties before marrying a widower to support Jayakrishnan. Clara stands for the modern woman who aspires to independence and a life of her own choosing.

Such a character is normally expected to be a sob tale woman, with a significant amount of sadness and pity underpinning her persona. But Padmarajan develops Clara, a character devoid of negative or depressing stereotypes, with whom you feel a sense of connecting. She isn't really plainly shown to be a prostitute, so to the spectators, she continues to be a mystery. She continues to be autonomous, capable of making decisions without hesitation or any sense of shame. Clara is a beautiful, charming, and graceful woman who stands out from other ladies in every aspect. When Padmarajan's women characters are taken into consideration, Clara seems to stand apart. [Sathyendran \(2019\)](#)

Clara is a woman who has all the elements of Erotic capital. Beauty is the first element of Erotic capital and Clara is exceptionally beautiful. Padmarajan has portrayed her beauty in a mesmerising way that she is still a symbol of exceptional beauty in the minds of people. Jayakrishnan falls in love with her in the first sight itself. Beauty is not just about physical appearance but it's also about character and the person who you are. Clara is much more beautiful when comes to her character. Clara is a woman who lives on her own terms; she is strong and unapologetic about being herself. She doesn't feel guilty for choosing a profession like prostitution; she is someone who wants to travel the world and saw prostitution as a best way for it. Clara is not someone who we could easily understand; she is intense and stays mysterious throughout the movie. This intensity and mystery about her character dragged Jayakrishnan more towards her.

Clara is a very independent woman, and she doesn't want any strings attached to her, and that is the reason why she turns down Jayakrishnan's marriage proposal. She knew that Jayakrishnan was very sincere towards and genuinely wants to marry her and since she couldn't refuse the proposal she chose to disappear. Again, she chose her dreams and get away with it rather than getting married and get settled. She loved her dreams was not ready to give upon it over anything that came to her life. Clara is a woman with charm, grace and beauty and she is also free spirited that makes her stand out from other women.

Radha is not someone who lacks all the elements of Erotic capital, but a woman who doesn't have the monopoly of it. Radha is also bold and beautiful, unlike Clara Radha is educated, even though her family is a traditional one, yet they are supportive. Radha was bold enough to reject Jayakrishnan's proposal on that spot that too in front of her college mates as she didn't like him at the time. Radha's boldness has a security of her family, whereas Clara doesn't have any such security it's her life experience that made her bold.

The second element is sexual attractiveness, and it is different from classic beauty. Sexual attractiveness is all about having a sexy body. Clearly Clara is sexually attractive. Sexual attractiveness is also about a person's personality and the way they walk, talk, and conduct. Clara does have an attractive body and personality. We can clearly say that Jayakrishnan have fallen for her personality than her physical attractiveness, it doesn't mean that she is not sexy or physically attractive. Throughout the movie her beauty is portrayed, yet not in an exaggerated or vulgar way, whenever Clara and Jayakrishnan meet the meeting is accompanied by rain. The elements of rain act as add on to her beauty and attractiveness.

The third element is social grace, charm, and social skills in interaction and evidently Clara strongly acquires this skill of social grace, the skill of making people like her and wanting to know her more. It is this element that carries the movie

forward. It is evident from the first meeting of Clara with Jayakrishnan, while Jayakrishnan pretended to be a rich contractor and lied about him Clara was honest with him even though she knew that he was lying. This skill has also helped her in professional life, it helped her gain more customers and these customers never left and some of them even wanted to get married to her. Clara is a person who is warm and full of spirits, and this always attracted people towards her. [Schmitz & Blossfeld \(2012\)](#)

Radha too possesses social skills, yet being a girl from a traditional family she doesn't mingle well with everyone she meets. She always keeps a safe distance from everyone who she meets for the first time. She is also someone who doesn't entertain over friendly nature from other towards her; this is very evident from the first meeting of her with Jayakrishnan. Her traditional bringing up is a boon and curse for her, while she has the security of a family, she is also being a typical girl who lives by abiding the rules of the family. She lives inside the protected walls of tradition and never makes any move to break through it.

The fourth element is liveliness; the movie shows this trait in Clara more evidently in her second meeting with Jayakrishnan. In the second meeting she is so excited to meet Jayakrishnan, she wanted to go somewhere else and spend few days with him. She was excited to share her experience and people she met till then. Even Jayakrishnan was surprised to see her liveliness and excitement that she had till the day she left. This liveliness is something that she gained from her freedom she has been experiencing. As she got out the miseries of her, she started enjoying her life and became happy and independent. On the contrary, Radha is someone who has nature of a typical village girl. Comparatively she is not that lively as Clara, we don't see any transformation in her character. She remains the same throughout.

The fifth element is social presentation, it concerns with dressing style, hairstyle and jewellery that announce their social status. At first Clara is presented as a typical village girl from a fishing community, typical and simple dressing. We could see a transformation in her way of dressing or presenting herself in the second meeting. In the second meeting we could see a very modern Clara; she looked totally like a city girl. She was well dressed when compared to the first meeting. Jayakrishnan was astonished with her transformation and that shows how drastic transformation she had from a typical village girl to a modern girl. Radha is presented as typical college girl, where we don't get to see any transformation. She remains the same throughout.

The sixth aspect is sexuality itself, including sexual prowess, vigour, and all other factors that contribute to a fulfilling sexual relationship. Clara is very much a sexually satisfying partner; this element of sexuality is one of her strong points that helped her in her profession that is of a prostitute. It is evident that she has been a great sexually satisfying partner as she had many men as her customers, and some of them even wanted to marry her. One could say that both Clara and Radha sexually satisfying partners, yet its more evident only in Clara's case.

Erotic capital plays a major role when comes to mating and marriage, in marriage usually men trade their economic condition with women's sex appeal. Appearance is given importance at least initially when come to marriage and usually women are given more weightage to it. While men look for attractive women, women look for men who pays expenses and buys them gifts, this is the usual criteria in most places when comes to marriage. [Storyteller Beyond Compare \(2010\)](#)

This movie shows that both the heroines break this stereotype of mating and marriage. As said above men exchange their economic condition with good looks or sex appeal of women and women looks for men who can pay expenses and buy them

gifts. Both the heroines break this stereotype when comes to their marriage. At first Radha rejects Jayakrishnan's proposal, even though he was well settled and good looking. Radha had a wrong image of him or a misunderstanding about him that lead to the rejection of his proposal. Here Radha was not looking for a life partner who is well settled and good looking moreover she was looking for someone who is well mannered. Later on, as she realises that she misunderstood Jayakrishnan she started liking him and eventually fall in love with him and she again makes a proposal for marriage to him.

In the case of Clara, even she rejected Jayakrishnan. Clara found it hard to say no to him, so she disappeared from there. Clara chose her dreams, freedom, and independency over Jayakrishnan's proposal. She even chose such a profession just to live in her own terms and liver her dream of travelling and to get away from the miseries of her life. Later own towards the end we could see that she getting married to a widower and having his child, she did it because not that she wanted but to save the marriage life of both Jayakrishnan and Radha. Both these heroines are breaking the stereotypes for their own reasons.

Throughout the movie it is visible that Clara with her erotic capitalism she has greater edge over both Jayakrishnan and Radha. Clara is one of the strongest and most independent woman characters in the Malayalam movies. Clara forever stays as a mystery, as he chose a profession that no girl would want to. Even then she has no guilt about the way she chose to live her life. She is intense and hard to read. Clara lived a life in her own terms, she is full of spirit, and she is fearlessly herself throughout. [Team \(2023\)](#)

Clara is the other word for beauty for men and all the women would want to be like Clara, strong, independent, and live a life in one's own terms. Clara respects herself enough to pursue and succeed in her goals in life. She doesn't allow the social mores to make her feel terrible about the direction she gave the situation.

Her capacity to love and care for others is unaffected by her ability to esteem herself. She is afraid of hurting her family. She appreciates the man who paved the way for her career in this field and harbours feelings for a customer who entered her life. [Writer \(2018\)](#)

### 3. CONCLUSION

P. Padmarajan as a director broke all the stereotypical female roles in Malayalam movies; in every Padmarajan movie we could see a woman character that stands out from the others. No other director has portrayed women and their struggles, hopes, desires and their perspective like him. In most of his movies we could see that the women characters in the movie do have their own opinion and they do raise their voice to make their stand clear. All of them were different from each other and each of them still remains in our minds today. That is the impact his characters have on the audience.

*Thoovanathumbikal* broke the stereotypical love stories, no movie till then have gave a prostitute such a positive shade; moreover, this movie had only given the audience a whole new perspective about the profession and also about man-women relationship. The movie to a great extent lifts the stigma that is given to the profession by the society, as Clara as a prostitute is not portrayed in a vulgar way and so her profession. Clara was and still remains as a symbol of beauty to the audience and this shows how well she have been portrayed throughout the movie. One could definitely say that this movie that was released during the 80s broke all

the stereotypes and gave the audience a whole new perspective about love and now also *Thoovanathumbikal* stays fresh in the minds of the audience.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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