

# The South Indian Myth and Folklore in Transgenderism: A Review with the Lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnavalesque

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## Abstract

This paper attempts a folkloric study on the South Indian cultural creeds and rituals practiced by the transgender and transvestite people during their annual carnivals in the temple of Koothanadavar which lies in the Koovagam region of Tamil Nadu and, the Kottankulangara Bhagavathi Devi temple in Kerala region. It unravels the unification and identification of gender-benders in spreading the folkloric performances through these ritualistic carnivals nationwide towards social acceptability of their gender and practices through the trope of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque. Though the members of the community have been spurned for their biological abnormality by their own family and society, they form their own group to share and follow their self-established socio-cultural norms and practices for their consecutive generations. The members never give up their own cultural practices, folk songs, dances and other performances during the Koovagam and Kottankulangara carnivals at any cost. Thus, this paper scrutinizes how the members of transgender and transvestites of Tamil Nadu and Kerala worship these deities during these carnivals in order to receive acceptance and validation in society by following their own rituals and credos which is considered to be unique across the globe and also interprets the hybrid forms of Hindu Gods and Goddesses for understanding the inherent and inevitable biological aberrations in the creation of species.

**Keywords:** Carnival and Carnavalesque, Cross-dressers, Culture and Rituals, Folk, Hayavadana Myth, Transgender

## 1. Introduction

'Gender' and 'sex' can be viewed from both biological and cultural perspectives. An individual's anatomy is referred to as biological sex whereas, gender is a social concept which has some defined human characteristics, norms and behaviors that differ from culture to culture and can evolve over time. Culture and environment have a stronger influence on gender than biology. Social practices and rituals that are specific to men and women exist in most civilizations. What is considered standard for male or female attire or conduct in one culture may be

viewed as strange in another. Regardless of any religion and culture, transgender members worship all gods and goddesses and they celebrate all the carnivals. But, this paper aims to throw light on the South Indian folklores of Hindu religious customs and rituals of transgender and transvestite members practiced during the annual carnivals in the regions of Koovagam Koothandavar temple in Tamil Nadu and Kottankulangara Bhagavathi Devi temple in the Kollam region of Kerala through the trope of Mikhail Bakhtin's<sup>1</sup> carnival and carnivalesque.

Human knowledge has an amazingly vast history. Knowledge is drawn from two sources- indigenous

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and epistemological. The former one is intuitive and metaphorical whereas the latter is cognitive and procedural. Indigenous knowledge is embedded in the umpteen micro cultural traditions of our ancestors in a given community/territory. What could be knowledge was decided by the powerful and the influential in each social system and several forms of ancestral knowledge remained non-privileged due to socio-cultural political selection of establishing knowledge. (Vanitha 37)<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Bakhtin's 'Carnival and Carnavalesque'

An expert in literary theory, ethics and the philosophy of language, Mikhail M. Bakhtin<sup>1</sup> is a Russian philosopher, literary critic and academic. His publications, which covered a wide range of topics, have influenced academics in many different traditions, including marxism, semiotics, structuralism and religious criticism, as well as in fields as disparate as literary criticism, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and psychology. He is widely acknowledged as one of the key twentieth-century literary theorists. He is well known for his unconventional linguistic philosophy and novel theory, which are based on ideas like dialogism, polyphony, carnivalesque and heteroglossia. Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>1</sup> used the term 'carnival' in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and he later developed the term 'carnival' as 'carnavalesque' in his *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque' concept is inspired by the sly and jovial spirit of the carnival, which plays with power structures, mocks authority and attempts to build a new world by putting a strong emphasis on the body, laughter and role-playing. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explores the relationship between the 'carnavalesque', the social interaction and the literary mode 'grotesque realism', the degradation, which brings down the level of matter of everything that is abstract, spiritual, noble, and ideal.

Carnival is a public event packed with cultural practices where everything is permitted except violence. It is a type of existence that is formed in accordance with a pattern of play and occurs at the border between art and life. It is typically characterized by extravagant and grotesque displays. There is no boundary between artists and audience in this sort of performance, which is

communal in nature. As a result, barriers between different viewpoints are broken down and true conversation is made possible. By highlighting the relative nature of everything, it opens the door to new perspective and different system of priorities. Carnival serves as a link between holism, which must inevitably absorb its other and the urge to reject authority, which must inevitably re-establish the exclusions. It does this by absorbing its authoritarian and other in a way that eliminates the threat that it represents. Thus it is ecological and social and at the same time, entangling the 'self' in a web of connections. According to Bakhtin, it rejects both naturalism, the notion of a stable natural order and notions of stable social structures but, he believes that universe might not exist without carnival because it would not be aware of its own relativity and contingency. He makes a deliberate contrast between 'official celebrations' and 'folk celebrations' in *Rabelais and His World*. Folk celebrations serve a crucial centrifugal societal purpose, whereas formal celebrations seek to leave a legacy for authority and in this view, Bakhtin classifies carnival as a folk festival.

For Bakhtin, carnival is a temporal festival that destroys and regenerates everything. Mikhail Bakhtin in his concept of 'Carnival and Carnavalesque' makes the claim that mediaeval people led double lives. On the one hand, there was the everyday routine that was formal, sombre and serious, subject to a rigid hierarchical order and it was filled with fear and dogmatism. On the other hand, there was the carnivalesque existence, which was unrestricted and free and was characterized by ambiguous laughter, sacrilegious behavior, the desecration of sacred objects, humiliations and close contact with everyone and everything. These two life forms were both legitimate, but they were cut off from one another by sharp temporal limits. He claims that understanding this dualism is essential in the concept of carnival and carnivalesque to comprehend mediaeval cultural consciousness. Thus, by applying Bakhtin's concept of carnival and carnivalesque this paper tries to show how this trope celebrates the liminality of the members of transgender and their carnivals in Koovagam Koothandavar temple and Kottankulangara Bhagavathi Devi temple. Transgender people are an integral part of Indian society like other gender. But, by losing their true public space, they are rendered invisible and as a result, they exist both inside and outside of the society.

### 3. The Transgender Predicament in India

The term 'transgender' is a collective term where some transgender members identify themselves as trans-men or trans-women and others may recognize them as non-binary, gender queer, gender non-conforming, agender, bigender or other identities that are relevant to their particular identities. Transgender community can be of any sexual disposition since they are in their hybrid state. In India, transgender history extends back to the epics. They were regarded as beings with exceptional abilities and held powerful positions in ancient culture. But after the arrival of British people to India, this stance changed, and ever since, they have violated humane compassion and considerations. Most of the older generation with blinkered view is not holding up them, but things are changing now where the postmodern society starts to accept the members of the transgender community in the society with love and empathy, which is what they are longing for. This is the upshot of education in schools and colleges and the social awareness programs, seminars, workshops and rallies by the LGBTQIA+ organization. Before the mid-20th century, occidental countries tagged transgender people as 'transsexual' and later, they stamped them as 'transgender'. Though the term 'transsexual' has attained its reach across the globe, the term 'transgender' has been widely used and preferred over 'transsexual'. Transsexuals are those who physically change from being male to female or vice versa. In the light of culture and time, there is no rigid definition for the terms 'transgender' and 'transsexuals'. Some transpeople believe the term 'transsexual' should not always be used in relation to bodily changes. Even after completing their transition, some transsexuals stop identifying themselves as such but as either men or women.

In the medical text *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology*, which was published in 1965, John F. Oliven<sup>3</sup> used the term 'transgenderism' where he used this term to denote a desire for gender transition. Virginia Prince coined the term 'transgenderal' in 1969 to set herself apart from transsexuals or people who change their gender by undergoing hormone therapy and physical surgery. She made a clear distinction between trans-ing gender (masculine or feminine) and trans-ing sex (male or female) by using the term 'transgenderal'. Currently,

the term 'transgender' is used to describe a wide range of gender identities and expressions like cross-dressing, gender queer, transsexual and many others. Transgender people have other names such as hermaphrodite, eunuch, third gender, two spirit, third sex, etc. In India, this third sex is also described in other words depending upon the locality, such as ali, aravani, aruvani, hijra, kinnar, thirunangai, kojja, sikhhandhi, etc. Due to the underprivileged state of that community they become passive or helpless in the society. Though, they are suspended from their own family and society due to their biological abnormality, they form their own transgender clan where they also add gender non-conforming members to share their self-established cultural credences for their upcoming generations. The word *Jamaat* comes from the Arabic language which means 'group' and the members have *Jamaat* in India where they adopt their community who are experiencing the transgender life. The sufferings and pains of the transgender among the convention bound Indian society are inevitable where the words are inadequate to express their quest for fulfillment or completeness. In such situations, religion did grant some freedom to transgender people's existence through myths, epics and sacred writings, which they fervently clung to. And in countries like Germany and Canada, the government provides financial support for their gender reversal surgery and some members of the transgender community undergo a castration process to attend or to feel the completeness in them like cis genders.

The contemporary postmodern society tries to understand the hormonal changes of the transgender and accepts that it is not their fault to have been born as genderless people. Many laws have been emerging in India to support the members and the laws are permitting the marriage of same-sex people. Most of the foreign countries are open and broad-minded in their views on them but it is regrettable that in India viewing transgender as objects for male sexual gratification is still prevalent. In most of the states in India, the gender discriminations and harassments make the members of the transgender community as prostitutes for their sustainability. Since it is a libertine time for them during the *Koovagam* carnival, all the gender-neutral, non-genders and cross-dressers mingle with allied groups for physical intimacy which affect the normal lifestyle of common people around that *Koovagam* locality. But, Indian countries are slowly and

steadily changing their biased mind and attitude towards them.

## 4. Transvestites

The term 'transvestite' was coined by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910 where he applied this term to those who would voluntarily dress in attire meant for the opposite sex. There were male and female transvestites in his group, as well as those who identified as heterosexual, gay, bisexual and asexual. Hirschfeld himself did not like this phrase because he thought that clothes were merely an 'external symbol' selected as a result of many interior psychological circumstances so, his team chosen the word 'cross-dressers'. For religious, customary or ceremonial purposes transvestism is practiced in various cultures and it is transient and entirely situational. It is given to understand that humankind is divided based on gender, but the feelings, emotions and thoughts which are expressed and shared by every individual is interconnected and universal. The difference between the members of transgender and transvestites is the 'internal' and 'external'. Transgender people were assigned either a male or female at birth and later they realize the internal feeling which is permanent that they are the third sex whereas, cross dressing is an activity where men or women cross dress temporarily for different reasons. The members of transgender want to 'be' like normal people and the transvestites want them to 'look' like opposite sex for entertainment purposes.

India, the land of diverse ethnicity stands as an icon of unity and integrity. Yet, the consciousness raised by the social activists and the transgender people themselves go unheeded by and large since the stigma attached to them as being sexually perverse is still a matter of contention. Today, they are the ones who rightly give importance to traditional art forms and they contribute to social welfare such as creating awareness during pandemic lockdown in 2020 through some folk performances for which their awareness campaign is a standing testimony in Chennai. Currently transgender community is making its forward strides to get recognized and acknowledged for their ingenuity and intellect far and wide. A good example for this is the Madurai based trans activist cum Bharatnatyam dancer Narthaki Nataraj. She is the first transgender person in India to get the prestigious Padma Shri Award who performs Bharatanatyam dances in the Tanjavore tradition of Nayaki Bhava style. Her spellbound dancing

performances established herself as a spokesperson for the transgender community. Through her Bharatnatyam dance she defies gender expectations and captivates the audience with gestures and actions. Chitra Swaminathan<sup>4</sup> in *The Hindu* says "Narthaki Nataraj speaks about how dance healed her scars which is why she believes that art can empower the transgender community" (Swaminathan).

## 5. The Myth behind Koovagam Fest

Koovagam is the village that lies in the Ulundurpet taluk in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. Koovagam carnival is a massive transgender community carnival where the statue of Koothandavar comes alive for eighteen days in the Tamil month of Chithirai, the month of April or May. This carnival is solemnized by the transgender and transvestite members to connect the transgender persons across the globe with their normal counterparts. During this carnival, more than thousands of transgender people and some normal men who vowed to marry Koovagam deity Koothandavar assemble every year. The mythological origin of Aravan or Iravan is found in the Tamil version of Perundevanar's Bharatha Venba, a 9th century Tamil version of the great epic Mahabharata. In this version, Aravan is born to Arjuna, one of the Pandavas and Ulupi, the Princess of Naga, who deified as Koothandavar in the Koovagam region of Tamil Nadu. When the Kurukshetra war was happening between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the Pandavas need to sacrifice a warrior who has in him unparalleled arrow shooting skills to Goddess Kali. Unfortunately Arjuna, Lord Krishna and Aravan are the glorious archers who match these criteria. Arjuna could not sacrifice himself in this case because he is the one who has all warring skills to defeat the Kauravas and so the Pandavas need him. Lord Krishna is the one who controls the entire universe by his power, so the world needs him. That apart; Lord Krishna is the indomitable charioteer of Arjuna. Finally, Aravan stepped forward to sacrifice himself to goddess Kali under three conditions. The first demand placed by Aravan to Lord Krishna was that his death should be prodigious and the second boon asked was he should be blessed to watch the entire battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas even after his demise and the third was that he wished to marry a woman before his death. No woman was ready to marry Aravan because

they were not ready to suffer widowhood for their entire life and in order to meet Aravan's conditions, Lord Krishna transformed himself into Mohini, 'the enchantress' and married him. The very next day of their marriage, Aravan sacrificed himself to goddess Kali and Mohini mourned for her husband's death. After that, Mohini turned into Lord Krishna and the aftermath of this incident is that the members of transgender to celebrate this Koothandavar carnival every year in Tamil Nadu since the myth sanctifies and celebrates transgenderism.

The life of transgender persons is strewn with slight and neglect, so to cope with their lot, they seek some divine power to sustain themselves in a hostile and indifferent society and thus folklores speak of their marriage with Koothandavar. For these eighteen days, transgender people are free from the lifelong prejudice and marginalisation and they can fully experience their mainstream life. The feelings associated with marriage, being a wife and widowhood are felt and played out by transgender people without embarrassment or prejudice. On the first sixteen days, they celebrate this carnival with great grandeur and they decorate the temple with lights, flowers and welcome their members across the globe with rangolis at the entrance. They engage themselves with consciousness raising speeches and folk performances during the first fifteen days. A beauty pageant, the 'Miss Koovagam' contest would be held and the winner of this pageant would win the title 'Miss Koovagam' and they consider this title as the symbol of their pride and self-acceptance and they also consider this golden ticket as a token of acceptance by the society.

The *Cami*, Aravan's head is carried around the streets of the Koovagam hamlet for the first six days and each house performs a pooja for Aravan with coconut offerings and aaratiis. The head of Aravan is repainted after his soul is ceremonially transferred from his head to a pot on the thirteenth day. Kambamniruthudal, a high post is built on a procession chariot on the evening of the fourteenth day, where it supports the head and body of the Aravan during the procession. On the fifteenth day, they receive the thaali, the sacred wedding chain and the members bedeck themselves as brides where each transgender person marries Koothandavar with the help of priests by considering themselves as Mohini. The members of transgender deem this wed off to the Aravan or Koothandavar as a pride to the community. They consider themselves as the wives of Aravan after their marriage and that is why the term Aravani, the wife of Aravan came

into practice. They get married in front of the fire goddess Agni, as witness of their marriage and they use camphor to light the bonfire, where the camphor dissolves the impure and the unchaste after which the members break 108 coconuts. They enjoy their last minutes with Aravan by performing *Kummi* dance, an Indian folk performance to make Koothandavar happy before his death and they are the diva of the day. In certain regions of Tamil Nadu, even normal people adorn the local gods and goddesses and temples with lights, flowers and festoons during transgender carnival. They too will break coconuts and light the lamps and camphor in front of the deities during their prayers and offerings like transgender members. The repressed feelings of the transgender people due to harassments and discriminations are relieved during this carnival and it is a comeback for those who were suppressed. Thus, this carnival turns into a ritual reenactment for transgender people to step out from the trauma and suppressed emotions.

The car procession which carries the idol of Koothandavar sets off to the place called Kalapali, where the sacrifice is to be held and they remove the body parts of the Koothandavar, where it symbolically denotes his sacrifice to the goddess Kali. The wives of Aravan drape themselves in white sarees to celebrate the widowhood after the death of Koothandavar on the eighteenth day of the carnival in Alukalam, the weeping ground. The members sing the Oppari song for the death of Aravan. This Oppari song is a folk song of South India sung by women for the death of any kith or kin. They dance with their disheveled hair by beating their hands in the chest and in Tamil it is called Maaradi, performed by folk groups of Tamil Nadu in the death house. After the death of Koothandavar, the sacred yellow rope in the neck of his 'wives' and the *sindhoor* or thilagam in their foreheads will be removed by priests and their glass bangles will be broken. This marriage shows how transgender people exhibit their feelings for the death of their mythical husband, Aravan and how they are longing for love, care and validation. The ritualistic marriage of the members to the deity Koothandavar is still considered as a weird custom by the people around. In Hindu mythology, people celebrate and hail the marriage of mortals with Supreme Beings but it is a matter of concern that accepting the marriage of transgender members with their deities is deemed with scorn and mockery. None can perceive that they are also vulnerable to pain and sufferings like other human beings.

Viewing this Koovagam carnival with the lens of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, it helps the members of transgender community to abate the harassments and discriminations they face in the society in which they have to subsist and at the same time this carnival helps them to create a rejuvenated life till the advent of next carnival. The carnival of Koovagam is held during Chithira Pournami, the full moon day in the Tamil month of *Chithirai*. The transgender members believe that celebrating this carnival during the full moon day would dispel the darkness and murkiness of their life. Thus, this festival is important for the members since they can acknowledge themselves in the society and this transnational carnival helps them to convey their feelings and emotions with other people. When these rites of passage are missing, a strong sensation of fragmentation and alienation would be suffered by the members of transgender community. Carnavalesque, according to Bakhtin, is a transcendence of the world in which the possibility of 'being' or 'becoming' might be accepted as an exalting potential (qtd. in Robinson 2011). Carnavalesque is still a viable counter-force in activism and daily life. Thus, in order to build a new world with an unbiased spatiality where the marginalized like transgender members might flourish, it is necessary to recompose the capabilities of resistance. The transition period in the life of transgender people may affect their lives, but Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque helps them to glorify their life by breaking the gender stereotypes by way of celebrating the 'other'.

## 6. Iconography and the symbolization of Koothandavar

Koothandavar's icon is present in the temple with his head and without the body. With his eyes wide open, Koothandavar in Koovagam appears resplendent. His devotees obtain a complete energy boost from his physical features alone. The iconography of Koothandavar is painted in red, a color that is intensely evocative of strong emotions such as anger, love, joy and heat and also a color that is often used to represent sexuality, activity and passion. Transgender people who want to live a blessed and prosperous life in the society worship the deity of Koothandavar to get happiness and good fortune. In Mahabharata, as requested by Aravan, the Pandavas hung the head of Aravan (who is originally the son of Arjuna) in the battlefield to witness the war after his demise. The

splashed blood of warriors would have smeared the face of Aravan; which speaks for the redness in Aravan's face.

## 7. The Folklore and the Rituals Observed in Kottankulanagara Bhagavathi Devi Temple

Even in the Kollam region of Kerala, the local men and transgender members participate in the Chamayavillaku carnival at the Kottankulanagara Bhagavathi Devi temple as cross-dressed. Bhagavathi Devi is another name of goddess Durga or Kali. This Chamayavillaku gives the meaning 'makeup-light'. This is a local folklore of how cowherd boys tried to hit the coconut by stone when it started to bleed. They conveyed this incident to the local villagers in Kerala and they also hired an astrologer to unravel the mystery. The local folks believe that the stone has some supernatural powers bestowed by Goddess Vana Durga since the stone is picked up from the dense forest near the Boodhakulam. This Bhagavathi Devi temple is the one and only temple in Kerala without roof above its sanctum sanctorum and this shows its unique architecture. The Devi established herself as Swayambhu, the idol which exists by its own. Here, the action of breaking coconut in the stone by the local cowherd boys makes the village people to form a new ritualistic custom. In Hindu mythology, coconuts represent the trinity gods and they also symbolize good luck and fortune. Thus, coconut in this folk story helps to break the gender stereotypes of transgender community and the obstacles of the ordinary people. People around the Kottankulanagara region constructed the temple for the deity Durga with the help of poles, leaves and tender coconut leaves. Usually young girls and women string flowers into garlands for the deities in India and they are the one who lights the lamp during *poojas*. Accepting this tradition, men around that locality cross dress as women and they offer similar services to Bhagavathi Devi.

And, there is another version of this folklore where a group of little cowherds dressed themselves as women and prayed Goddess Durga to bless them. They playfully offer Kottan, the coconut milk and flowers to the deity and the Goddess appears in front of them and blessed the boys. This festival is held annually where men, women and some transgender members attire themselves as women to obtain the blessings of Devi. Like the eighteen-day carnival of Koothandavar, this Kottankulanagara temple

carnival is celebrated for two days in the month of March where men and transgender people bedeck themselves as women by wearing sarees, half-sarees and chudidhars adorning themselves with accessories. They believe that grooming as women in that carnival will bestow blessings and fortune upon them. Homosexuals and transvestites across India attend this carnival to seek the blessings of Devi. According to Bakhtin, carnival and carnivalesque produce a different kind of social order in which social hierarchies do not exist and everyone is considered equal. The carnival, according to Bakhtin, was constrained by time rather than space. It does not only exist in the public realm; it also enters into one's home. But the public square and the streets around it served as the festival's focal point since they personified and represented the carnivalesque notion of belonging to everyone and being universal.

## 8. The Quest for Completeness in Myth and Religion

Most of the transgender people worship goddess Kali to obtain completeness. The play *Hayavadana* by the eminent Indian playwright Girish Karnad also portrays how a strange creature with head of a horse and body of a man named Hayavadhana along with the main characters seek for completeness. Bhagavata opens this play by praying Lord Ganesha, the god of completeness for the successful ending of the play. Lord Ganesha with his human body and elephant head represents the state of hybridity and a mouse, the mount of Lord Ganesha symbolizes that every species of God's creation is unique and equal. But, Bhagavata in the play *Hayavadana* suggests Hayavadana to visit the Kali temple at Chitrakoot instead of asking him to pray to Lord Ganesha. This is because Kali, the avatar of Parvathi, is the one who brings back the life of Lord Ganesha by fixing the elephant head on him. She is the mother of this universe and that might be the reason of Bhagavata suggesting Hayavadana to visit her temple at Mount Chitrakoot for the purpose of becoming a complete man. Thus, it can be perceived that hybridity is engendered in mythologies to lend authenticity to the trans members which reinstates that they need to be accepted and democratized by the society. Carnivalesque concept frequently employs what Bakhtin called 'grotesque realism,' which is based on the grotesque. By incorporating bodily functions into the sphere of art, this style transcends the line that separates physical

existence from the creative realm. Through parody and degradation, the amorphous concerns are brought 'down to earth,' made into something relatable that can be conquered and freed of their metaphysical pretensions. Bakhtin claims that the grotesque is pervasive in folk culture, from mythical giants and demons to everyday profanity and insults. Incompleteness, transgression, and the shattering of expectations are celebrated in the Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism.' It frequently engages in a type of symbolic debasement designed to bring exalted phenomena 'down to earth' - to the tangible, corporeal or sensual level.

A religious procession takes place in the Bhagavathi Devi temple for the peace and well-being of the devotees. They celebrate this carnival with *thattudukkal*, a traditional dress of Keralites and during *Jeevatha Ezhunnallathu* performance the transgender and transvestite members dance together to get the blessings of Devi. Even in the Ganga Jatra festival in Tirupathi and in Bahuchara Mata temple in the state of Gujarat, the transvestite groups gather to express their choices and these rituals and customs of cross-dressing help the transgender people to break the gender stereotypes. The festivals of *Koovagam* and *Kottankulangara* help gender dysphoric members to mingle with their group comfortably as they do not have any discomfort or embarrassment in revealing their mixed identity. Here is where Bakhtin's carnivalesque helps to break the barriers between people. *Kulasai Mutharaman* temple is located near the coastal area of Tiruchendhur in Tamil Nadu. People around the region fast for 41 days to get the blessings of Mutharaman, where transgender members, men and women deck up themselves as goddess Kali, *vagabonds* and *Kurathi*, an indigenous fortune telling woman. Even men during this festival cross-dress as women where they imitate the qualities and behavioral patterns of women by wearing studs, nose pins, *thaali*, anklets, bangles and toe rings and they use turmeric during bathing to normalize gender stereotypes. By dismantling the meta-narratives of sex and gender, these carnivals foster a public space where these marginalized perspectives can collide and converge. These celebrations create an opportunity for new perspectives and different system of things by exposing the relative nature of mainstream and marginal cultures. These cross-dressing carnivals and ritualistic practices of transgender people are considered to be unique and deemed with regard and respect across the globe. These carnivals and

customs provide a space for the marginalized people to step out from the typically constructed stereotypes. Most of the western countries celebrate a similar fest in the month of June by performing parties and rallies with rainbow colored flags with their community. They believe that rainbow colored flag is their pride and symbol, and it was designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978. Each colour in the pride flag or rainbow flag symbolizes the attributes of the LGBTQ+ community.

## 9. Purusha, Prakrithi and Tritiya Prakrithi

The Hindu deity Ardhanareeshwarar, another form of Lord Shiva, is neither man nor woman. Ardhanareeshwarar is the combination of Shiva, the Purusha and Sakthi, the Prakrithi - embodiments of matter and energy. Purusha symbolizes consciousness or matter, the masculine principle, whereas Prakrithi symbolizes energy or power, the female principle. Prakrithi stands for motion, energy, nature and vitality. Purusha stands for unshakable observer. Prakrithi will not function without Purusha and vice versa, so, both the principles are needed for the functionality of the universe. Conflicts arise when sexuality is interconnected with spirituality. Sexuality is mere physicality whereas the fusion of human and divine consciousness is spirituality. Purusha and Prakrithi exist within each of us with the masculine and feminine aspects. If these elements stay in right proportions, there is no abnormal sexual attraction between same sexes. However, if a man or woman has a propensity toward the masculine or the feminine, this leads to an inclination towards the third sex, Tritiya Prakrithi. Thus the concept of Ardhanareeshwarar can be alluded to the creation of transgender people and so they are deemed as the manifestations of Ardhanareeshwarar in the Earth. Carnavalesque imagery is consistently contradictory and equivocal for Bakhtin. The carnival brings together the opposing poles of birth and death, change and crisis, old and young, wisdom and foolishness, etc. Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque denigrates the other but not the self; or it denigrates both, but in a way it tries to maintain the bridge between the people. The dualistic motif is one of the characteristics of carnival. Hindu mythology believes that Ardhanareeshwarar with both the male and female attributes denote gender equality which is inseminated through the Hindu religion.

## 10. Conclusion

Kollywood transgender movies like Kanchana, Super Deluxe and "Thangam" story in the Paava Kadhaigal Series have an impact on the viewers making them sympathize with the characters. These films are an attempt to highlight the discriminations and harassments faced by the transgender community by the political and lascivious men. Transgenderism which is hailed by the Hindu mythology, sensitized by the media and a prerequisite during ceremonial occasions is still considered a taboo or an aberration by the Indian society at large. These festivals and the related rituals performed for the presiding deity Koothandavar and the Supreme Mother, Bhagavathi Devi help the transgender and transvestite members to get connected with the Divine thereby sharing their emotions and feelings which leads to the alleviation of their angst. These carnivals help the transgender people to get relieved of their pains and sufferings they face in the society. These ritualistic carnivals and traditions of Koovagam Koothandavar and Kottangulangara Bhagavathi Temple claim that all are God's creations where no species is isolated and marginalized with prejudice and scorn. "As there has been an extensive destruction of local knowledge which for eons had laid strategies for humankind's subsistence and survival, it is discreet to revive and revitalize it to restore to humankind its vanished balance and harmony" (Vanitha 38). When the hybrid forms of Hindu gods like Lord Ganesha, Hanuman, Arthanareeshwarar, Narashimar and Hayagreeva are recognized by the society, it is a matter of concern that society is not recognizing and accepting the transgender community which is a byproduct of some genetic aberrations. In Madurai, a city in Tamil Nadu, transgender community has started trans-publication in which they publish and recognize the writings of transgender community. This is a great initiative by them to be empowered and be acknowledged in the society and such ventures ought to be encouraged and recognized. The Tamil Nadu government is about to announce the regulations protecting LGBTQIA+ rights and prohibiting conversion therapy and classifying it as a criminal. In India, Tamil Nadu is the first state to initiate this reform. According to Bakhtin, the carnival is an occasion where all laws, restraints, regulations, constraints and social humanity that govern one's daily life are suspended. The folk perspective which is reflected in carnival and carnivalesque, as well as associated speech-genres like



cursing and popular humor, contradicts and subverts the vision of 'cosmic fear'. The fear induced by cosmic horror is combated by folk culture. Bakhtin's trope of carnivalesque has the tendency to lead the total freedom subject to total fearlessness. Thus, these carnivals of transgender members and transvestite group in Koovagam Koothandavar and Kottankulangara Bhagavathi Devi temple encourage an unbiased and a truly democratic world by breaking the gender hierarchies and socially constructed stereotypes.

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