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FEMINISM AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IDENTITIES IN INDIAN CINEMA: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The film is one of the most popular sources of entertainment worldwide. Plentiful films are produced each year and the amount of spectators is also huge. Films are to be called as the mirror of society, because they portray the actual reality of the society through the cinematography. Thus, cinema plays an essential role in shaping views about, caste, creed and gender. There are many pieces of research made on the representation of women or gender in films. But, through this research, the researcher wants to analyse in-depth about the character representation of women in the Malayalam film industry how strong the so-called Mollywood constructs the strongest and stoutest women characters in Malayalam cinema in the 21st-century cinema. This study confers how women are portrayed in the Malayalam cinema in the 21st century and how bold and beautiful are the women characters in Malayalam film industry are and how they act and survive the social stigma and stereotypes in their daily life. All sample films discuss the plights and problems facing women in contemporary society and pointing fingers towards the representation of women in society. The case study method is used as the sole Methodology for research. And Feminist Film theory and theory of patriarchy applied in the theoretical framework.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Film, Malayalam, Representation, Feminism.

Feminismo e representação da identidade de mulheres no cinema indiano: um estudo de caso

Resumo

O filme é uma das fontes de entretenimento mais populares em todo o mundo. Muitos filmes são produzidos a cada ano e a quantidade de espectadores também é enorme. Os filmes devem ser chamados de espelho da sociedade, pois retratam a realidade real da sociedade por meio da cinematografia. Assim, o cinema desempenha um papel essencial na formação de visões sobre, casta, credo e gênero. Existem muitas pesquisas feitas sobre a representação da mulher ou do gênero no cinema. Mas, por meio dessa pesquisa, a pesquisadora quer analisar em profundidade sobre a representação do personagem feminino na indústria cinematográfica malaiala o quão forte o chamado Mollywood constrói as personagens femininas mais fortes e robustas do cinema malaiala no cinema do século XXI. Este estudo mostra como as mulheres são retratadas no cinema Malayalam no século 21 e como são ousadas e bonitas as personagens femininas na indústria cinematográfica Malayalam e como elas agem e sobrevivem ao estigma social e estereótipos em sua vida diária. Todos os filmes de amostra discutem as dificuldades e problemas que as mulheres enfrentam na sociedade contemporânea e apontam o dedo para a representação das mulheres na sociedade. O método do estudo de caso é utilizado como única metodologia de pesquisa. E a teoria do cinema feminista e a teoria do patriarcado aplicadas no quadro teórico.

Palavras-chave: Gênero, Mulheres, Cinema, Malayalam, Representação, Feminismo.

Feminismo y representación de la identidad de las mujeres en el cine indio: un estudio de caso

Resumen

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La película es una de las fuentes de entretenimiento más populares del mundo. Cada año se producen muchas películas y el número de espectadores también es enorme. Las películas deberían llamarse el espejo de la sociedad, ya que retratan la realidad real de la sociedad a través de la cinematografía. Así, el cine juega un papel esencial en la formación de opiniones sobre casta, credo y género. Se han realizado muchas investigaciones sobre la representación de la mujer o el género en el cine. Pero, a través de esta investigación, la investigadora quiere analizar en profundidad sobre la representación del personaje femenino en la industria cinematográfica malaya qué tan fuerte construye el llamado Mollywood los personajes femeninos más fuertes y robustos del cine malayo en el cine del siglo XXI. Este estudio muestra cómo se retrata a las mujeres en el cine malayalam en el siglo XXI y cuán audaces y hermosos son los personajes femeninos de la industria cinematográfica malayalam y cómo actúan y sobreviven al estigma social y los estereotipos en su vida diaria. Todas las películas de muestra discuten las dificultades y problemas que enfrentan las mujeres en la sociedad contemporánea y señalan la representación de las mujeres en la sociedad. El método de estudio de caso se utiliza como única metodología de investigación. Y la teoría del cine feminista y la teoría del patriarcado aplicadas en el marco teórico.

Palabras clave: Género, Mujeres, Cine, Malayalam, Representación, Feminismo.

INTRODUCTION

Film, Gender and Representation

Gender representation in popular films is also one of the main concern in the present scenario. It is a fact is that women characters in popular films are underrepresented. Women characters lack screen space and time. Majority films portray women as an object for doing item dances and seducing the hero and entertaining the other lead characters. At the same time, many women-oriented plots and women-centric films are releasing and they discuss gender issues and social issues. Not only in Bollywood but regional languages also many women-centric films hitting screens and becoming a critical and commercial success. But, because of the ill-treated writers and directors, the characters of women in popular films will be stereotyped mother or wife of the hero or heroine who loves the local goon or the heroine who doesn't have any significant scene and used only for romantic songs and intimate scenes. The majority of women characters tends to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.

History of Malayalam Film

The first full-length Malayalam cinema was *Vigathakumaran* directed and produced by J C Daniel in 1930. J C Daniel and P K Rosi played the main characters in the film. For his contributions, J C Daniel was regarded as the father of Indian cinema. *Balan* directed by S Nottani in 1938 is the first Malayalam talkie. Malayalam films were mainly produced by Tamil producers until in 1947 and in the first major film studio, Udaya Studio was opened in Kerala. *Neelakkuyil* (1954) directed by P Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat is the first authentic Malayali film and won the presidents silver medal. *Chemmeen* (1965) directed by Ramu Kariat was based on the story by Thakazhi, became the first South Indian film to win the national award for the best feature film.

Malayalam film industry, the so-called Mollywood always attracts critical acclamations both at the national and international podiums. Because of the role of literature played in the cinema. Malayalam writers played a vital role in the growth of Malayalam cinema. Their notable works were taken as the scripts for films. The prominent figure includes M T Vasudhevan Nair, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Thoppil Bhasi, Uroob, S K Pottakkadu enriched the Malayalam film industry with their invaluable contributions with scripts and stories.

Many of their works made into classics. For example *Chemmeen, Ningal Enne Communistakki, Neelakkuyil, Kutti Edathi, Oru Penninte Kadha*. Their literature was the unavoidable

thing in Malayalam film industry and the power of their scripts were the reason why Malayalam cinema acquired a special status in the country's celluloid.

Women in Malayalam Film

For *Vigathakumaran*, first-ever Malayalam film, director J C Daniel had to search for around six months for women lead character in the film. That search finally ended up by finding P K Rosi, the first-ever women actress in Malayalam. Even though the acting of P K Rosi and the film was a hit, the impacts she had to face was so hard. P K Rosi was a Dalit, purportedly a Christian. When the film *Vigathakumaran* was released, the members of the feudal Nair community, refused to come and inaugurate the screening of *Vigathakumaran* in capitol theatre in Thiruvananthapuram, because a Dalit was portrayed as Nair women. There were outbreaks against P K Rosi and her family. People from the high class attacked and beaten her father.

During the 80's and 90's there many bold women-centric characters created by directors such as P Padmarajan, K G George, Bharathan and I V Sasi. Actresses such as Sheela, Sarada, Seema, Karthika, Jayabharathi portrayed in bold strong and charismatic roles. The present actresses are deeply inspired by the acts of them.

22 Female Kottayam (2012) directed by Aashiq Abu and starring Rima Kallingal was a new wave women-centric film in Malayalam. The film was about the revenge and survival of a 22-year-old girl who was cheated and raped by her boyfriend and his boss. After the critical and commercial success of the film, there was a flood in women-centric films and female-oriented subjects in Malayalam. Shobhana's *Thira* (2013), Manju Warrier's return film *How Old Are You* (2014), *Rani Padmini* (2015) starring Rima Kallingal and Manju Warrier, Parvathy Thiruvoth's *Charlie* (2015), *Take Off* (2017), and *Uyare* (2019) were super hits in the box office and got wide critical acclamation. These films contributed many female-oriented scripts and socially committed films. The films are enriched by spreading awareness and social commitments. The films played a vital role in empowering women through the on-screen and off-screen. Malayalam cinema is unique in the stances of scripts and representation of women.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the representation of women characters in the sample films
2. To study the characteristics of two women characters in the sample films
3. To explore whether the film reflects the problems faced by women in daily life

Review of Literature

According to Kapoor (2011), in his book, Media, the fourth estate of the country, have a Brobdingnagian socio-cultural influence on society. The film plays an important role in our culture. Films can easily pertain the audience mind. Majority films lack screen space and time for women characters, but, the women-centric films much accepted by the society and audience and creates a healthy revolution in our society. Women-centric films play a significant role in stimulating public judgements and opinions. Through the women-centric films they have played a vital part in eradicating socio and cultural stereotypes and now the print and visual mediums need to follow those footsteps for a non-stereotypical society.

Singh (2007), States in her study that, Films adapted from texts to silver screen reflects the socio-political and cultural environment and of course it reflects the gender relations also. The media is one of the powerful weapons for stabilising gender relations and gender neutrality and film plays an imperative role in shaping society's views about caste, creed and gender. Cinema still is one of the vital media through which one can unswervingly dealt with society and bring about a change. When these films and media's act as a tool for propagating gender equality and fairness to the women who have been kept in the walls of the dark cage can break the chains and relish the renaissance.

Pillai (2010), in her study, opines that, Even as a large number of women from the middle and working classes step out of their homes to make a livelihood, there is a visible hurry to get back and reemphasize their roles as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law as though to gain sanction and sanctimony for their further forays into the outer world. In this context, one can perceive an imperative need in Kerala's society today to look at and integrate representations of women, especially in the wake of knowledge of the problematic nature of representation itself, which can only be incomplete and partial interpretations rather than 'objective' description of 'reality'.

Vijayan (2018), in her study, says, Malayalam film industry, the so-called Mollywood is on the track of conversion. From the commercial and male-dominated films, there is a huge rise in women-centric films and female-oriented subjects. The study focuses on analysing two women-centric films in Malayalam, Rani Padmini (2015) and Ramante Edanthottam (2017). The representation of women in modern society is closely analysed and examined. Gender patriarchy is an unavoidable fact. So, in a Male patriarchal society, the life, goals, future and concerns of women have less importance.

Seena, Niveditha (2016), in their study clarifies, Malayalam film industry always contributed many female-oriented scripts and socially committed films. The 20th century had many astonishing scripts and stories and they have portrayed in the big canvas. Many women-centric films came to light in those years and continue. Out of the 1083 full-length Malayalam feature films released in theatre between 2004 to 2014, only 29 films come under the broad definition of women-centric films. In each film, there is a transformation from a survival to a struggle. The women characters were represented as strong independent and self-empowered women. These films portray women's opinions, willingness and sturdiness to stand and being independent. The eight films seriously portrayed women plight and concerns in our society and showed us how there become self-empowered and survived.

Methodology

The study was conducted through two phases. The researcher has watched two women oriented sample Malayalam films *22 Female Kottayam (2012)* and *Uyare (2019)* to know in-depth about the representation of two women characters in the films and understanding the characteristics of two women characters.

The case study is used as the sole methodology for the research because the researchers want to get down and indulge the representation and social relevance of the sample films and picture of the women portrayed in the films and explore the how the films reflect the problems and concerns women face in their daily life.

Information about the films was also traced from other sources that helped the researcher to be enriched of the pertaining information of the films.

Case Study

The case study method is a qualitative method of data collection by observing and investigating a person, a group, an organization or a whole community. The case study deals with the processes that take place and their interrelationship. Thus, a case study is essentially an investigative of the particular unit under consideration.

The case study also investigates the unit within the real-life context. They are an in-depth investigation and if you are doing a case study method you have to be a keen observer of the unit.

Sampling and Selection

The study uses purposive sampling for sample selection. The films chosen for the study was Malayalam oriented films which women character played the lead role in the film. And the sample films were women-centric and reflected women empowerment.

The films taken for the study are;

- *22 Female Kottayam (2012)*
- *Thira (2013)*
- *How Old Are You (2014)*
- *Uyare (2019)*

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Film Theory

Feminist Film theory discusses women's role and involvement in the universe. Women are not just someone isolates in the norms and stigmas of society. They are a part of the world and they have the power and responsibility. This is the modern era and women and not restricted in the walls of inequality. In each field, women's involvement and participation are needed. If it is Film, Arts, Science, literature, Sports and even in Politics also women are ready.

Feminist Film Theory criticises the traditional cinema for its stereotyped representation of women. Female characters are not getting an equal representation of male actors. Women shrink only for a few shots and irrelevant scenes. The women characters need to be portrayed as strong, independent and charismatic characters. They criticised the sexually-oriented portrayals of the characters also.

Theory of Patriarchy

Betty Friedan led against the patriarchal norms in society and stood for career-oriented independence for women and men instead of domestic life. Betty Friedan stated women who seemed to lead meaningful lives as mothers and wives, were miserable; they were sleepwalking through a meaningless life they had not chosen. Friedan's central thesis was that women suffered

under a pervasive system of delusions and false values under which they were urged to find personal fulfilment. She believed the future of civilization depended upon women choosing a new career-focused way of life.

Data Analysis and Discussion

22 Female Kottayam (2012)

Tessa K Abraham (Rima Kallingal) is a nursing student who works in Bangalore. She hails from a middle-class family in Kottayam. Her dream is to work in Canada. She meets Cyril (Fahad Faasil) who works in a travel agency who works for her Visa. They soon fall in love and started to live in together in Bangalore. One day when Cyril was not at home, Cyril's boss hedge comes to their home and forced Tessa to have sex with him. When she disagrees he beat her and forced to the bed. She gets raped that day. When Cyril knows about that he became violent and want to kill Hedge. Tessa calms him and beg him she doesn't want the thing getting worse. Once Tessa recovers, Hegde come to meet Tessa for forgiveness and he again forced her and raped again. Tessa with a broken mind plans to kill Hegde.

One day Cyril and Tessa went outside, that time the police came and arrest Tessa for finding drugs in her bag. Soon she realises that Cyril was cheating her. He was the one who put the drug in her bag and he aids his boss Hegde to find happiness, and rape Tessa.

After the court verdicts, she gets imprisoned. When the court sets her free, Tessa takes revenge to Cyril and Hedge. She with the help of her friends kills Hegde by poisoning him with a cobra. After that, she comes to Cochin, where Cyril is attending a fashion show. Tessa speaks to Cyril and the have a mutual agreement, after that, they both shared the bed. But, that night, Tessa sedates Cyril and executes her revenge. She removed his male organ through a medical surgery. When Cyril has himself intense pain and bound to his bed, Tessa taught him the true lesson and realize his faults and the real crime he has committed to a girl.

Tessa K Abraham is a woman of dreams. While she is working in Bangalore, she has a dream to go and work in Canada and explore a good life. That's why she is meeting the Visa agent Cyril and she fell in relationship with Cyril.

Her background is sort of grey, with her younger sister Tissa depicted as her only relative. She stays in a posh and spacious apartment with two other girls, both of who are nurses, all working in the same hospital. She is a purely innocent girl who has a strong commitment toward her profession and people around her.

When the tragedy occurred and imprisoned, she faces many harsh experiences in prison. The personal experiences gave her the courage to go to any extent and take revenge. For revenging and killing Cyril and Hegde she goes through many annoying paths but, the only target in her mind was avenging them and to let feel the pain and the agony she faces which reminds us not the way, the goal is important.

Thira (2013)

In the film *Thira (2013),* Dr. Rohini Pranab (Shobana) a doctor and a social worker who runs an NGO called Arpana; a harbourage to destitute girls. One day the girls in Arpana became shanghai

by a gang who involves in human trafficking. In another corner of the city, Naveen (Dhyan Sreenivasan) who came to meet his sister Riya and she has been kidnapped by a passel of human trafficking nexus in front of Naveen's eyes in the middle of the city. Rohini and Naveen meet by chance and come to know that they have the same bourne and they focused on their mission.

Rohini is a self-confident woman, who is a social worker who redeemed many children from human trafficking passages. She also rescues and protects victims of sex trafficking. *Maayi*, as she is fondly called by her young wards, is an impresa of hope and intrepid. They have the credence that *Maayi* will be there to save them from all hitches. She is a woman of daring and caparison and she is ready to take offence and take up violence when a situation is needed. Rohini is audacious, venturous and classy and she is at the forefront for doing something toward the society and fighting against demarcation, injustice and discriminations.

Rohini leads a full life with a plethora of assistants helping her in freeing girls caught in the racket, running the home and her career. The powerful women in her engulf all dares in front of her and she reflects the true identity of women empowerment.

"Everybody has eyes. But most of them are blind to things that don't concern them". These words were spoken by the character Rohini that throws light on the present-day social issues and one of the gravest concerns that our society faces in the present scenario. The film Thira shakes up the sleeping consciousness of our society and makes us think about pertinent issues and do something about it.

How Old Are You (2014)

In the film *How Old Are You (2014)*, Nirupama Rajeev (Manju Warrier) is a 36-year-old woman who works in the Revenue Department doesn't have many ambitions in her life. Her husband Rajeev is working in All India Radio station. They have a teenage daughter, Lachu. She always flounders to meet the expectations of her husband and daughter.

She is not always a bewitching and captivating character, she is indolent, egoistic, less ambitious and aflutter about her age, 36. She is a mirror of an average Malayali woman who is shuttling between the kitchen, her workplace and between the families. The 36-year-old married women have forgotten to love and live for herself in the scatterings of her family. The starchy cotton saris, dreary government job, indifferent husband, and a willful teenage daughter who has little respect for her mother making her always dullness and she has less chimaera for her life and future.

Nirupama's friend Susan reminds her and she was aware that on Nirupama's calibre and fire band in college days. And she stimulates and motivates Nirupama to have a dream and become independent. Her character is transforming from a depressed woman to a sturdy and energetic lady who now thinks that she has something to do in her life. Nirupama had a habit of having a vegetable garden on her roof, without the usage of chemicals or pesticides. For this Nirupama encourages all her neighbours to cultivate vegetables on their rooftops as well, which turns out to be a huge success. Susan encourages her to have a seminar with the topic bio-farming and her presentation ameliorate, amend and influenced the audience thus the officers give her the job of making it a reality.

Nirupama Rajeev is the reflection of an educated, employed middle-class woman in Kerala who has kept digression all her teenage ambitions, dreams and aspirations for the sake of her family, or rather the two important people in her life, her husband and her daughter. The film questions

this 'adjustment' that a woman makes when she has a family of her own – of forgetting who she is or used to be.

Uyare

The film is about the life of Pallavi Raveendran (Parvathy Thiruvothu) who wants to become a pilot. She is in love with Govind (Asif Ali) who is highly possessive about her. And she gets admission to the pilot training centre in Bombay. When she became break free and enjoying life the relationship with Govind become hurt. Govind feels Pallavi is lost he became angry and insults Pallavi in front of her friends, she is ready to end up the relationship with Govind. However, the next day she gets attacked by Govind who throws acid to her face as revenge. Pallavi's face is disfigured and her eyesight is damaged, and her flight license got cancelled.

The mentally and physically down Pallavi became gets supporters, not saviours. Her friend and classmate Sariya (Anarkali Marikkar) and newly found friend Vishal Rajashekhar (Tovino Thomas) keeps a heart-warming relationship with Pallavi and soon she gets courage and confidence and steps back to normal life with the half-burned face. With the help of Vishal, she is back into the flight as Air hostess. One day the captain of Pallavi's flight going unconscious and Pallavi takes over, even though she is still unable to see in one eye. And her bravery finds able to emergency land the flight and everyone are relieved. Her avenge to Govind ended up with the court, and the court directs five-year imprisonment. The self-confidence and heartbreak courage paved the way for the survival of Pallavi Raveendran who is an inspiration and motivation.

At the age of 14, the little girl searches the internet about aeroplanes and pilots and her innocent mind wanted to be a pilot. When he got interested she runs to her father's room and tells him the midnight 'Dad, I want to be a pilot' a word repeats itself. Pallavi lost her mother in Childhood. She has a father who is with her for everything. Pallavi is a young, energetic and ambitious women. She wants to chase her dream. That to be a pilot and conquer the sky. But, she knows her boyfriend it so possessed about her, but, she believes she can manage both of them without any problems.

After the incident, as usual, she became depressed, but he will never give up. Her dream of flying encourages her to go for air hostess training and move her life in with the clouds. But, her relationship with Govind loose many things includes her enjoyment and break freeness. She is ready to adjust her concerns for Govind, but, finally lost herself and talks to Govind louder. But, unfortunately, that paved the way for her acid attack.

After the acid attack, Pallavi was at mental agony and isolated at home. But, she later strengthens her mind and body and wanted to pursue her dream. And as an air hostess, she was ready to conquer the sky. She faced the problems and she had solutions also. When mental trauma arises, she made herself bold and confident and ready to face them and defeat them.

Findings and Conclusion

The films which the researcher has taken for the study shows women as strong and self-empowered character who are working and earning, which talks us about the status of women in the Kerala society. Many films are coming out of the stereotypes recently. Portraying women as significant characters, giving them voices and making them acclimate for a better charisma are

witnessing in many recent films is a good sign. Through the films, they tend women to speak louder about their problems to the public and revolt against inequality and injustice and their quest for survival. All the films have broken the stereotypical Mollywood formulae of putting the superstar hero at the centre of a tale and making him a superhero. Often voiceless and oppressed and treated as the sex-symbol; the women of the cinema transformed into strong, attitude, independent, self-esteem characters. They have changed their image and attitude to adjust to changing trends and environment of the world.

Women in these four films faced mental and physical trauma once. Their transformation and quest for a new cloud of survival is completely an inspiration for the humankind who once faced oppression and destructions from their beloved. The women characters needed the protection of man, as a friend, husband and a caretaker, but they became surrendered in their hands. But, when a situation of betrayal, they are getting dejected but not ready to give up. When the situation came they act their life as confident, self-empowered and independent women.

Dr. Rohini Pranab and Nirupama Rajeev are the specimens of the inspiring and motivational story of women's empowerment. When the children from her home found missing, she risks her life and ready to go beyond for finding and rescuing them. Many such bold, firing and independent characters in our society are not afraid of anything. Their life is dedicated to fighting against injustice and unfairness.

On the other side, Nirupama Rajeev inquires a luscious question. “Who decides the expiry date for a woman’s dreams? And does age really matter? You can still dream,”Nirupama asks to the society against their gender inequality and the cages of marriage and family. And she is encouraging her friends and neighbour women to dream their own dreams and be themselves.

22 Female Kottayam and Tessa K Abraham, stands apart for the perfect packaging and bold stands on gender and life while *Uyare* and Pallavi Raveendran is an arresting depiction of the physical and mental agonies of an acid attack survivor and challenges the audience to reconsider the conventional definition of beauty.

These women characters have been thrown by stones from their beloved. But their decision to build dreams and triumph goal with the stones thrown at her is what women need to do. All four films demurral and remonstrance women to have their own identities. Which never shall be kept under beneath of anything and anyone. All the women lead characters in the sample films show women as the sinewy and self-empowered character who are working and earning, which talks us about the status of women in the Kerala society.

By reflecting two characters, they tend women to speak louder about their problems to the public and disgust against inequality and injustice and their quest for survival. And often voiceless and persecuted are treated as the sex-symbol; the women of the cinema transformed into rugged, brawny, attitude, independent, self-esteem characters. They have changed their image and attitude to adjust to changing trends and environment of the world.

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