



THE 5th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON **SOCIAL SCIENCES 2018**

“Global Harmony and co-existence through International Dialogues”

20th - 21st SEPTEMBER 2018 | COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

CO-HOSTING PARTNERS



جامعة قطر
QATAR UNIVERSITY



ACADEMIC PARTNERS



Book of Abstracts
5th International Conference on Social Sciences
(ICOSS 2018)

20th and 21st September 2018

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Committee of the ICOSS - 2018

The International Institute of Knowledge Management (TIKM)

Tel: +94(0) 11 3132827

info@tiikm.com

Disclaimer

The responsibility for opinions expressed in articles, studies and other contributions in this publication rests solely with their authors, and this publication does not constitute an endorsement by the ICOSS or TIIKM of the opinions so expressed in them.

Official website of the conference

www.thesocialstudies.co

Book of Abstracts of the 5th International Conference on Social Sciences (ICOSS 2018)

Edited by Prof. Charmalie A.D. Nahallage

ISBN 978-955-3605-08-5

Copyright @ 2018 TIIKM

All rights are reserved according to the code of intellectual property act of Sri Lanka, 2003

Published by The International Institute of Knowledge Management (TIIKM), No: 531/18, Kotte Road, Pitakotte, 10100, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94(0) 11 3098521

Fax: +94(0) 11 2873371

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN TAMIL FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN: A
FEMINISTIC READING**P.Balagobalan¹ and S. Raguram¹¹*Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka***ABSTRACT**

The world we live in is clearly permeated with media. Films are the twentieth century's definitive medium of mass communication. In that powerful medium, the representation of women in films is highly complex and popular on movies and is increasingly more demands. The women portrayal continues in local cinema with other formulas throughout the history. The aim of this study is to determine the portrayal of women representation in Indian Tamil films; which were directed by women directors. The prime objective of this study is to analyse how the films of women directors having specific approaches on portrayal of women in their films. And, the secondary objective is to investigate significant differences between the men directors and women directors when they portray the women in their respective films. The sociological approach employs in this study through the feministic reading and three films which are recently directed by women are selected by the researcher as samples. The content analysis was used by the researcher in both qualitative and quantitative ways to find out the answer for the research questions: how women portrayed in Indian Tamil films, films were directed by women and how women directors handled gender issues in their films. The findings of the research exposed that the most part of the scenes portray the women as smart, energetic and able to make their own decisions and not in stereotypes. Further, the findings revealed that, even though, the women characters show the innocence, they become stronger when the male dominant society put pressures on them. While the male directors portray the women character as dependent largely, the women directors produce them not depending on anybody. On other side, the study made known that the portrayal of women in the scenes involve with physical affections and the exposure of female body were elaborated and illustrated in detail of the point of view of the women by female directors than male counterparts.

Keywords: Indian Tamil Cinema, portrayal, female directors, feministic reading



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN TAMIL FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN: A FEMINISTIC READING

Poongulaly Balagobalan, Lecturer, Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna.

poongulaly02@gmail.com

Sivasubramaniam Raguram, Senior Lecturer, Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna.

ragunadu2003@yahoo.com

The world we live in is clearly permeated with media. Films are the twentieth century's definitive medium of mass communication. In that powerful medium, the representation of women in films is highly complex and popular on movies and is increasingly more demands. The women portrayal continues in local cinema with other formulas throughout the history. The aim of this study is to determine the portrayal of women representation in Indian Tamil films; which were directed by women directors. The prime objective of this study is to analyse how the films of women directors having specific approaches on portrayal of women in their films. And, the secondary objective is to investigate significant differences between the men directors and women directors when they portray the women in their respective films. The sociological approach employs in this study through thefeministic reading and three films which are recently directed by women are selected by the researcher as samples. The content analysis was used by the researcher in both qualitative and quantitative ways to find out the answer for the research questions: how women portrayed in Indian Tamil films, films were directed by women and how women directors handled gender issues in their films. The findings of the research exposed that the most part of the scenes portray the women as smart, energetic and able to make their own decisions and not in stereotypes. Further, the findings revealed that, even though, the women characters show the innocence, they become stronger when the male dominant society put pressures on them. While the male directors portray the women character as dependent largely, the women directors produce them not depending on anybody. On other side, the study made known that the portrayal of women in the scenes involve with physical affections and the exposure of female body were elaborated and illustrated in detail of the point of view of the women by female directors than male counterparts.

Key words: Indian Tamil Cinema, Portrayal, Female Directors, Feministic Reading.

Introduction

The twenty first century is considered an information age. Everyone exposed to some sort of media and its influences.¹ Film has been a powerful as well as popular form of media for millions of people in all over the world which influences people's lifestyles and their behavior. Nowadays films take the prominent place among the society to convey the ideas rather than news.

The film communicates not only the ideas but also portrays the representation of different types of human beings: male or female. Male characters are often represented as isolated, as not needing to rely on others. But, the female characters portrayed as subordinates as house wives and dependents in films.

But, on other hand, Women in Indian film industry have played an important role in the success of individual films. Their roles however have changed overtime, from being dependent on their male counterparts to very independently carrying the production forward as directors.

Before referring the changes it is must to understand the importance of the role of women and the existence of them in Indian cinema in the world today. Women are thus very sparse in number behind the scenes of this film industry. In

¹ <http://www.directessays.com/student-completed.html>
[Accessed on 25th of June. 2016].

an industry with so few women working within it, it seems fair to assume that the portrayal of women onscreen by male directors and other male professionals will have gender biases and constraints and may not necessarily explore their world views, perceptions and subjective realities.

The Tamil cinema industry named as 'Kollywood', refer to the main city which has number of studios and relevant institutions in Chennai, Capital of Tamil Nadu contributed notable share in Pan Indian Filmmaking industry. Like parental industry, Indian Tamil cinema also highlighted for the male dominated and women used only on screen not in beside the screen or in the decision making positions as directors or cinematographers largely. However, there is an opportunity to see the upcoming women directors in the field. Especially, studies in film and visual communication as well as the technology gave a chance to the women to learn the professional filmmaking in institutions, colleges and universities and created the environment to the women to enter the field as directors with the high exposure level. Thus, might create the chances to the women in filmmaking as well as in portray their own perceptions in onscreen.

Methodology

According to the above expectation, this study is tried to analyse the 'Portrayal of Women in Indian Tamil Films Directed by Women' through a feministic reading by the works of three different women directors. Those are Sripriya's '*Malini 22*

Palayamkoddai' (Name of the women of her Jail No. 22), Lakshmy Ramakrishnan's *'Aarohanam'* (An ascending order), Sudha Kongara's *'Iruthi Suttru'* (Final Round).

The analysis on the above films basically dealt with auteur theory as a theoretical background, because the movies are mainly based on filmmaker or director's consciousness, perception and process with the sociological approach.

The prime objective of this study is to analyse how the films of women directors having approaches on their film making on portrayal of women. And, the secondary objective is to investigate significant differences between men directors and women directors when they portray women in their films in a comparative look. Though this study dealt with "*Portrayal of Women in Indian Tamil Films: Films Directed by Women Directors*", the researcher specifies the area that to focus only on three women directors who made their films recently. Recently means 2012, 2014 & 2016 respectively.

As the methodology of this research, the researcher has employed the content analysis for this study both in qualitative and quantitative ways. Further, the sociological approach has used to analyze the qualitative data. For the quantitative analysis, the researcher used the coding sheets —Y for YES and —N for NO, then highlights all Number of —Ys and percentage of depiction of female using the following sum.

$$\begin{aligned} & \% \text{ of Women Portrayal} \\ & = \frac{\text{Total no. of Ys in the film}}{\text{Totalno. of scenes in the film}} \times 100 \end{aligned}$$

The characters of the films are analyzed through the following operational definitions which are categorized by the researcher.

Subordinate role function (Lead actress role defined in relation to male lead):

- Protagonist's Mother
- Protagonist's Wife
- Love interest of the male protagonist/girlfriend
- Aids male protagonist to achieve his goal
- Screen-time less than the male lead

Alternative role function:

- Vamp/courtesan dancer
- Night club dancer/bar dancer/cabaret dancer
- Prostitute/call girl

Role of women characters:

- Social activist
- Singer
- Fiancé
- Working women
- Athletic/Non athletic
- TV actress
- Patriot
- Other

Costumes:

- Traditional as per the reference to the Tamil culture
- Non traditional
- Traditional + Non traditional

Family ahead of self:

- Compromises personal interests at least on one occasion for the sake of family

- Willing to put spouse/male protagonist ahead of her own interests
- Non-rebellious to established customs/social patterns
- Sacrifices for the sake of family honor/family's social status
- Does not appear in an 'item' number (a cabaret dance, a night club dance)
- Appears in traditional Indian costumes for majority of her role screen time

Career orientation:

- Home maker: Takes care of children, Takes care of in-laws
- Performs household chores
- Lives in a joint family
- No specific mention made of her career interests

Purity/chastity:

- Never had a pre-marital affair/never has more than one lover in the movie
- Portrayed as on following customs and rituals of her respective religion
- Always conforms to set traditional values pertaining to marriage, prayer, religion, rituals
- Pious/devoted

Very religious/God fearing:

- Shown as performing religious rites/offering prayers in the "Puja" (prayer)room/temple

Symbolism of virtue (Presence on screen):

- Does not smoke
- Does not drink alcohol
- Non-flirtatious
- Not highly interactive with men (except her family or her love interest)
- Does not make sexual advancements

Symbolism of Non-virtue:

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Sexual advertisements
- Kidnapping & Using drugs

Languages/ wording used by woman characters:

- Good
- Vulgar
- Abusing
- Mutual

Economic status:

- Rich
- Middle
- Poor
- Not mention

Living style:

- Marital
- Single
- Engaged
- Live in relationship
- Widow

Through these operational definitions researcher tried to find out the answer for research questions as how women portrayed in Indian Tamil films, films were directed by women, how women directors handled gender issues in their films and are there any significant differences between

men directors and women directors when they portray women in their films.

What roles women play onscreen is more often than not, the male director's notion of what roles women ought to be playing. This notion is based on the director's beliefs, attitudes and values, combined with what the director thinks viewers want to see. What viewers want to watch is something that conforms to their beliefs, attitudes and values, which come from the social framework within which they live, which is the same social framework in which directors, live.

Discussion and Results

As per the first operational definition, researcher pointed out the subordinate role function in the film *Aarohanam*. The female subordinate role function had shown throughout 32 scenes out of 61 scenes, it is nearly about 52.45%. Through the scenes the director tries to portray her lead actress as most subordinate than alternative role in the film. While, the alternative role function had shown throughout only 02 scenes out of 61 scenes. It is nearly about 3.27%. In the film, the main character Nirmala portrayed as more stereotypical way with a subordinate function to her husband and son too. In most of the scenes director portrayed her as a stereotypical and a religious woman. Even in some scenes, director portrayed her as an alternative role through showing her as a mobile vegetable seller with a vehicle. The vehicle is very hard normally as

a female she can't push it out alone. But she is doing intentionally to save her family.

Reviewers reviews that director Lakshmy Ramakrishnan should be lauded for taking a serious subject in her very first film and handling with such a fine sensitivity.² In scene number: 59, the doctor praises about Nirmala and her life. He praises about Nirmala's attitude and says, "*She is amazing, without any medical treatment she managed these days and grow up you two as well. It is really her positive side. She had the incredible bipolar advantage. That's what she had the more energy and more confident to manage all. Certainly you will be more proud about your mother*".

Director Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is an actress and producer too. She expresses a new theme in her very first film. She expressed that, "*if male director portrays character which is a youngest woman, or elder woman, they were portrayed from the kitchen or inside the room only. But the male especially they can be youngest or elder, they would be from the hall or outside of the place. And as basic thing and usually, if any problems or issues in the home, the father and son are fighting but mother is in the floor with crying. But in the society, there are more females with*

² <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-movie-reviews/reviews-2/oct-12-04/aarohanam-review.html> [Accessed on 17th of July 2017].

stronger. But those will not be shown in the screen. Because, male society mostly likes to see the dependence of female."³ Meanwhile, in *Irudhi Suttru*, the female subordinate role had shown throughout 23 scenes out of 105 scenes, it is nearly about 21.9%. Through these scenes, the director portrays her female character as an alternative role and not a stereotypical character. The female character portrayed as a tomboy character, she exhibited as a character reflects the attitudes of a boy and not a soft hearted girl. In the scene number 17, the main character Madhi sells fish at the market. That time she was wearing a non-traditional dress, and calling people (buyers) very loudly. Then says to Prabhu, the lead male characters *"If I hit you the cigarette will be there. But the mouth would be nowhere"*. Through this dialogue the character portrayed as more violent.

In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the subordinate role function shown throughout 45 scenes out of 100 scenes and it portrays the 45% of subordinate role. The director portrays the female character as more stereotypical in the first half of film, and then in the next half of film she portrays her character as non-stereotypical. In the scene number 33, the lead character Malini, as a nurse delivered a dialogue

³ <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-movie-reviews/reviews-2/oct-12-04/aarohanam-review.html> [Accessed on 16th of June 2017].

and it expresses the portraiture of a non-stereotypical character. While she was on duty, her phone is ringing, at the first attempt, she is not answering the call, then later answer the call and says to the main lead character as *"when am in duty, I will never answer the call due to the responsibility I'm carrying."* It shows her career orientation.

In the scene number 38, the main character Malini and her friends talking with Varun, a male lead character about hiring a home for the rent. While Malini's friend suggests her to stay at Varun's home, Malini rejects the idea and says *"society will think and talk in a different way"* and it was the evidence of showing lead female character reflected the role in a stereotypical way.

In the important scene 97, Varun lies on the bed and Malini sat in front of him and says that *"I did a surgery to you. After some hours, the affect of anaesthesia will be reduced. Then you will understand what happened. I cut off your male organ. Now I put a tape to you pass the urine. Nothing to worry. You have to feel what is pain?. Till these days you did sex as a business. But hereafter, sex will not be in your life anymore. You can't stand as a male in front of female. The punishment is you have to live in this world, but you can't be a male anymore. God made male society to protect girls. Why I got these much confident and*

strong. You gave me all the things to me. You created this new Malini. The punishment of death penalty is not enough for you. I thought much about the punishment. Then only I came to this decision”.

Throughout this, the director stands out and portrays the lead character Malini as a non-stereotypical, non symbolism of virtue, non purity.

The alternative roles of the lead female character portrayed in three movies are respectively 3.27%, 52.38%, and 19%. In the film *Aarohanam*, the female alternative role function had shown throughout 02 scenes out of 61 scenes and it is nearly about 3.27%. Through this, the director portrays her female lead character as more stereotypical than the alternative. Meanwhile, in *Irudhi Suttru*, the female alternative role had shown throughout 55 scenes out of 105 scenes and it is nearly about 52.38%. Through this, the director portrays her female lead character as an alternative and not much a stereotypical. In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the alternative role function shown throughout 19 scenes out of 100 scenes and it portrays the 19% of alternative role. In this film, the director portrays the female character as more stereotypical in first half of film, and then in the next half of film, she portrays her lead female character as non-stereotypical.

The family ahead of self portrayed throughout the main characters in particular three films are respectively 62.29%, 52.38% and 51%. In film *Aarohanam*, the main character was portrayed as a family ahead of self throughout 38 scenes out of 61 scenes and it is nearly about 62.29%. The lead character portrayed as a mother, wife and daughter too. In most of the scenes in the film, the character portrayed as ready to compromise her personal interests for the wellbeing of family members. In the film of *Irudhi Suttru*, the character was portrayed as a family ahead of self throughout the 55 scenes out of 105 scenes and it is nearly about 52.38%. In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the female character was portrayed as a family ahead of self throughout the 51 scenes out of 100 scenes; it is nearly about 51%.

In *Aarohanam*, the female character was portrayed as a career oriented woman in 35 scenes out of 61 scenes; it is nearly about 57.37%. In film *Irudhi Suttru*, the female character was portrayed as a career oriented girl in 66 scenes out of 105 scenes; it is nearly about 62.85%. In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the female character was portrayed as a career oriented in the scenes of 22 out of 100 scenes. It's nearly about 22%. In the film of *Aarohanam*, the lead female character portrayed as an uneducated woman even she earns for her own family. Accordingly, she is doing all type of works, including selling vegetables, cleaning city and an agent of policy insurance to make her children to

continue their studies without any interruptions. In *Irudhi Suttru*, the female character was portrayed as a career oriented in first half as a fish seller, then in the other half of the movie she was portrayed as an athletic. In the film of *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the lead female character was portrayed as a Nurse.

The research analysed further the types of costumes, languages/wording, economic status, living styles of lead women in the above three films. Accordingly, in *Aarohanam*, all the women characters including Nirmala; the main character, her daughter and her husband's second wife are wearing traditional dresses as per the reference of the Tamil culture. While these characters wearing saree and shalwars, the character Sandy (business women) only wears non traditional dress. In *Irudhi Suttru*, the mother character only wears traditional dress in all the scenes where she appears. Other the main character Madhi; the lead female character and her sister lux wear traditional in much scenes and non – traditional dresses occasionally. The main character Madhi wears traditional dress saree for only in one scene. In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the all female characters wear non-traditional dresses such as jeans with tops, shorts, and night dresses throughout the whole film.

In *Aarohanam*, the female characters are always using standard language deliveries. In *Irudhi Suttru*, the main character using her dialogue deliveries reflects her slum life; some of them much vulgar. In the film of *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the main character Malini is using

standard language while another important character Janaki using vulgar occasionally.

As per the family status of main female characters, the films selected for the study represented them differently. In *Aarohanam*, while the female character Sandy belongs to a rich family and doing a successful business, the main character Nirmala portrayed as she belongs to middle class and doing hard works and earns for her family. In the film of *Irudhi Suttru*, the main character Madhi and her sister Lux belong to a very poor family and live in a slum area. In *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, the main character Malini portrayed as she belongs to a middle class family.

Through the main significant observations, it's noteworthy that the women directors show their lead female characters are not depending on anyone and earning for themselves and sometimes even for their family too.

Another significance in comparison with male counterparts is portrayal of physical affections and the exposure of female body were elaborated and illustrated well in films directed by female directors. The directors of these films not only show the emotions of the lead female characters from the point of view of women.

Conclusion

The role of women in the women director's cinema (in Tamil) though it is said that women directors have changed all the stereotypes of women and the directors are equally treat the male – female lead

characters in the common perspective, the reality is largely different and its proved that the women directors also influenced by the same ideology what male directors have in portrait female characters.

Further, it's highlighted from the research that the female directors are portrayed their lead female characters not as a dependent to anyone in certain extend and the way of portrayal of women in expressing feeling and emotions the female directors are giving more significance to the point of women rather than male in their productions.

References:

1. Moti Gokulsing, M. & Wimal Dissanayake (1998). Indian Popular Cinema, A Narrative of Cultural Change, Trentham Books, India.
2. Velayutham, S. (2008). Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry, Routledge, UK.
3. Diwakar Sharma (2004). Mass Communication: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century, Deep and Deep publication, New Delhi.
4. Arthur Berger. (1998). Media Analysis Techniques, New York: Sage Publication, USA.