

Representations of Women in Premkumar's Film Sayoojyam

[Contentment"(Sanskrit) "Satisfaction" (Malayalam)]

Dr.Jayashree Premkumar

Qassim University, Buryadah, KSA

Abstract

Cinema has been playing a vital role in forming and framing the society. It sheds light on our lives, provides catharsis from the mundane life and opens our eyes if and only we have an open mind. Cinema ought to have shaped billions of Indians since India has been one of the top five largest film Industries in the world. But unfortunately, though much attention has been drawn to the lack of diversity in Bollywood, Tollywood, Gollywood, or Mollywood many minority groups including women, still lack equal opportunities in the film industry. The number of Female characters decline far below proportionality. This study looks at the representation of women in one of the top-Emotional Family-Drama Malayalam movies directed by G. Premkumar in 1979. Based on background quantitative data as well as a qualitative content analysis, this paper found that portrayals of women are much more positive in the movie, Sayoojyam and the Director has managed to try his level best to provide equality for women-folk in the film.

Key words: Gender, film, representation, women, equality

Introduction

Cinema, one of the greatest influences in our modern life, a form of art, a visual art of story-telling with rich inputs of music and script and the combination of technology, business, entertainment and aesthetics has a very important role in present day world. No doubt, it mirrors the contemporary society and also creates a surrogate world for us to live in. Though foreign films are also at one's threshold, in no time due to the advancement in Technology, the role of regional language films have a big say in changing the society since its origin in 1895. It is undeniable that "motion pictures largely reflect prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles, norms, attitudes and expectations" (Simonton, 2004, 781).

In spite of making important headway on global policies, we are not able to save billions of women who are the victims of male chauvinism. Cinemas have persistently dealt with the problems of the society, and revealed the darkest secrets of the world elegantly at its stride.

This study focuses on the topic of gender and the investigation of G. Premkumar's portrayal of women as it emerges from the film Sayoojyam'. This film is selected randomly specifically from a language and year so as to explore how women are treated in films of India.

While men can, and sometimes do, tell female stories successfully, they often fail to empower women. Male filmmakers who are perceived to be unbiased still fail to tell truly feminist stories (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017). Compared to filmmakers like Sofia Coppola, male filmmakers almost never tell truly successful female stories (Kennedy, 2010). But, Indian directors know the pulse of their audience and they have been trying their level best to draw the female crowd to the theatres. And G. Premkumar who has been in the film industry for almost eight years before making of this film was successful to depict how and what of the Keralite women of that period -1970s and in my opinion their state hasn't improved an inch further till today though the modern films proclaim that they present liberated women. They end up with a modification of traditional feminine identity is the reality, though.

Literature Review

Von Trotta's film, 'Marianne and Juliane (1981)' showcases a female perspective on a turbulent period in the postwar history of West Germany and the contribution of female militancy as well. At the time of its release, 'A Question of Silence (1982)' which charts the psychiatrist's gradual journey from complete incomprehension to knowing identification with the three defendants., audiences were divided along gender lines: women understood it, men hated it! Varda's who always feature strong women, in Vagabond (1985) she created the most revolutionary one, Mona who represents gender trespass. In this radical reversal, the traditional image of the female is sliding over matriarchal order [25]

Bollywood's globalization has arguably affected the portrayal of Indian women in Bollywood films (Anujan et al., 2012). Anujan and colleagues (2012) noted that globalization has led to the emergence of alternate modes of Indian femininity, as expressed in popular Hindi films that depart from the portrayal of Indian women as upholders of moral code. In an informal survey of Bollywood movies released during 2006 and 2009, the portrayal of women was found to be increasingly Western (e.g., Western clothes, depiction of sexuality), conforming less to traditional gender-role expectations for women in India (Anujan et al., 2012).

Premalatha Karupiah (2016) explored the portrayal of femininity in 40 Tamil movies {1961–2012} She opines that Tamil movies are cautious about challenging the deeply rooted traditional feminine ideals of Tamil society. The strong maintenance of traditional femininity is the major reason for naming it as hegemonic femininity.

Methodology

This report is the outcome of the following processes:

- (I) An analysis of the
 - a. No. of lead characters in every sex
 - b. No. of appearance by male and female lead characters in scenes
 - c. No. of scenes without male or female characters
- (II) critical scrutiny of the gender roles with regard to
 - a. Feminist Theories in general, .
 - b. The Mako Mori test,
 - c. The Sexy Lamp test,
 - d. Bechdel–Wallace test,
 - e. Critical Mass and
 - f. Critical Actor Theories

Results and Discussion

- I. A close scrutiny reveals that there are equal number of lead characters in both gender.
 - a. There are two heroes and two heroines.

While the heroine's father fills the screen with his appearance as the employee, villain the hero's mother appears in more scenes than him as a kind-hearted mother.

No. of Lead Characters	Male	Female
	3	3

Table 1 Lead Characters

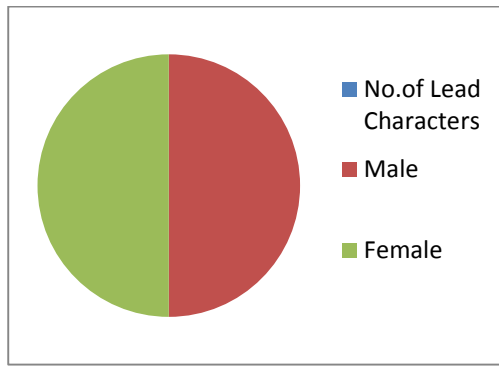


Fig. 1 Lead Characters

b. No. of appearance by male and female lead characters in scenes

No. of appearance by male and female lead characters in scenes	Male	Female
	184	85

Table .2 Appearances

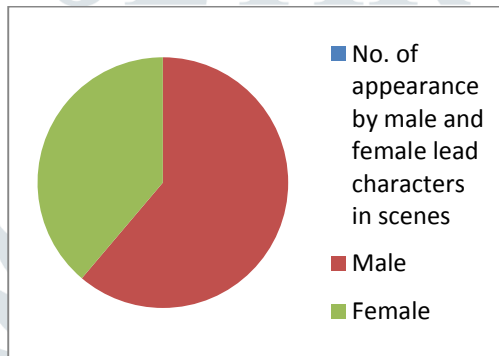


Fig. 2 Appearances

c. No. of scenes without male or female characters

c. No. of scenes without male or female characters	Male	Female
	7	15

Table. 3 Scenes without Women compared to Men

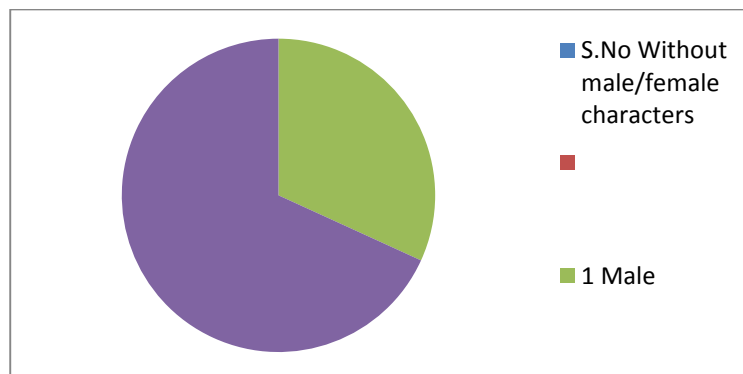


Fig. 3 Scenes without Women compared to Men

II.a. Feminist theories can be categorized into three broader perspectives:

- on difference-men and women are socialized differently and experience social life differently, principally because of their gender.
- on subordination -the ways in which women are not treated as equals of men in virtually all aspects of social life
- on oppression -women are being denied their basic rights and freedoms on account of their gender

We illustrate this analysis with findings from India. Shanthi(1999) has observed that in tribal societies of the past which practiced shifting agriculture as their main mode of production (supported by hunting and food gathering), women's social status was almost at par with men. There were no providers or dependents, as both men and women were equally recognized as providers.

When these indigenous societies in India changed from shifting to sedentary agriculture and ploughing became the central activity, Shanthi observed that this was carried out almost exclusively by men while women performed most other agricultural activities. Taboos against women touching the plough and roofing the house emerged, making women dependent on men for housing.

Let us look at the characters in the film

Male	Female
Doctor	Doctor
Jobless(Hero)	Cook(Hero's mother)
IAS Officer (Heroine's husband)	House -wife(Heroine's Mother)
Employer (Heroine's Father)	Jobless(second Heroine)
Tea-Seller	Jobless(Rama, the first Heroine)
Manager(Hero's neighbor, villain)	
Driver	
Priest	Nun
Postman	
Servant 1	
Servant 2	

Table4. Economis Status of Men and Women

As economic independence is needed to make one to be independent, decision makers, here we find most of the lady characters are jobless.

However, we should appreciate Premkumar, for making the hero's mother as the bread-winner of the family and who dictates him and is able to criticize him when he comes home being dismissed from the college. She keeps on advising him how to behave himself. She's the boss of the family.

When the heroine Rema's father denies providing the cook with the money, the heroine's mother supports the cook and is sending money through her daughter to the cook without the husband's knowledge. Also in the very first scene when the father calls the heroine to go with him when he was about to buy an estate, the daughter denies to go with him saying that her dad is the one who always makes his decision.

Once the father tells the heroine at least once to act as per his wish. He can win over her to get married to a groom of his choice only by trying to commit suicide and not by being an authoritarian.

Thus, the women's independence, their freedom of speech, freedom of acts is vouchsafed by the director. Though they yield it's only due to their love and affection and not by force in this film.

The films attempts to show some changes from the patriarchal representations of women in terms of marriage, family and motherhood. The heroine isn't forced to get married against her will because of male-domination, but because her lover is missing and her father tries to commit suicide. In the end when she meets her first love, she doesn't give a single thought about reunion with him, the father of her child, since she has already started loving her husband which she reveals by cleaning his shoes by herself and also she tells the priest that she loves her spouse and her child equally. After all, 'Frailty, Thy name is woman!'

From time immemorial to till date the ideal Indian women had to be pure because their reputation depended on their sexual status that was indicated by virginity and chastity. But, in Scene 84 the husband Rajan accepts his wife though he knew that she begot a child in her premarital affair. He goes on further to declare that he can't live without her and her child is hereafter his child. He carries the child and they walk together.

In the same climax scene the heroine Rama goes to the extent of foregoing her marriage for the sake of her child. Earlier in scene 83, when the husband threatens her that she can't come back home, if she goes to meet the child, her love for the child makes her go against her husband's words and run to the orphanage to see her sick- child. In scene 43 when her father brings home a lady doctor to abort the child, She stands tall, strong and firm in sending the doctor away and is ready to deliver the child. The character is bestowed with independence and, therefore, indicated emancipation. "A feminist perspective on research ethics calls for directing our attention to features of the social and institutional context related to the research enterprise, including contextual features that may perpetuate patterns of inequality or power imbalances." Examples cited are " norms and unquestioned assumptions in science and society, economic structures and processes of decision making that structure research with humans that could compromise ethical ideals of social equality and self-determination" (p162) In scenes like 62, 75, she is presented as The New Woman who drives herself to wherever she wants to go. Thus the director accepts social change

b.The Mako Mori test

- i. there should be at least one female character
- ii. who gets her own narrative arc
- iii.that is not supporting a man's story

This is a love story, and both the heroines have their own narrative but since the story evolves around love we can't completely evade men from the scenario.

c.The Sexy Lamp test

It is designed to check how relevant a female character is to the plot of a film.

As the story revolves around Rema, the heroine, the film passes this test too.

d.Not just a Pass, but Obtained a Distinction in "Bechdel-Wallace test"

The rules now known as the Bechdel test first appeared in 1985 in Alison Bechdel's comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For. In a strip titled "The Rule", two women, who resemble the future characters Mo and Ginger,[10] discuss seeing a film and one woman explains that she only goes to a movie if it satisfies the following requirements:

- i. The movie has to have at least two women in it,
The first Hero Balan is loved by the first and the second heroine as well.
Hero's mother is depicted almost like a heroine who also appears in most of the scenes

- Heroie's mother also plays a major part in the story.
So, there are four female leading characters.
- ii. who talk to each other,
Heroine and her mom always have conversations
The first and second heroine converse in three scenes
The second heroine is with the hero's mom throughout, trying to help
 - iii. about something other than a man.[11][12][13]
Heroine and her mom talk about everything under the sun
The first and second heroine appear in three scenes
The second heroine is with the hero's mom throughout, trying to help Hero's mom with her jewels, cooks for her and when she has hallucinations when her son gets lost, she tries to handle the hallucinations.
The first heroine also lends money to their cook, she visits her and gives her hope that her son will be back soon.
 - iv. Several variants of the test have been proposed—for example, that the two women must be named characters,[21]
Ofcourse they are
Rema, First Heroine Radha, the second Heroine Gowriamma Hero's Mom
 - v. or that there must be at least a total of 60 seconds of conversation.[22]
This film has more than 30 minute conversation among women characters.

e & f. Application of Critical Mass and Critical Actor Theories

Some scholars in Critical Mass Theory suggest a certain proportion of representation – perhaps 30% – is necessary before a minority group can see real change within the film industry (Dahlerup, 2006). According to the theory, a considerable minority is much more likely to make an impact than a few token individuals (Childs & Krook, 2009). Once a critical mass has been achieved, women will theoretically be able to push for substantial changes and legislation. In addition, a greater focus on feminist issues can result in men and women in the industry paying more attention to women's issues (Childs & Krook, 2006).

Other than two dance masters and one Hair-stylist there isn't much women behind the screen of this film. While critical mass theory may not play a role in this positive depiction, critical actor theory is possibly more indicative of positive portrayals of women across the movie.

Critical Actor theory, on the other hand, suggests a different solution to gender inequality in the industry. The theory rebukes critical mass, citing that individuals, not the mass, bring about change. Essentially, change depends on the acts of individuals within minority groups. According to the theory, critical actors are those who push forth change and inspire others to join in. Critical actors do not need to be a part of the minority group, with men playing a crucial role in the advancement of equality (Childs & Krook, 2009). Premkumar fiving by setting more scenes for women by giving them roles of independent women who are better than men virtue –wise, makes this film pass Critical Act Theory.

Conclusion

We can do nothing but hail G.Premkumar for his endeavor for the emancipation of women even in 1979. But in 2020, the recent judgement that a daughter married against father's will, will have no rights to his property is a humiliation on women proves true freedom for women is nothing but a myth to Indian women. Hence at least film makers should raise voice louder for women's rights.

More films of every Indian language should be studied, can be compared with one another. While a vast amount of quantitative research exists in regard to gender equality not much qualitative analysis exists. Future studies could also expand upon more specific elements of the representation of women in popular films. There can be comparisons between films by the same director, different directors or male and female directors or directors of different periods.

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