AN "IMAGE-BASED" STUDY ON PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN
GAUTHAM VASUDEV MENON'S TAMIL FILMS

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ABSTRACT

Cinema has a significant impact on people of all generations, especially youngsters. As far as the Indian Cinema is concerned, it reflects on society to a considerable extent. Specifically, movies have a prodigious influence in bringing cognizance among the common people. In the previous decades, only men were playing the lead roles in the majority of the films because women usually were not interested or were not permitted to participate in the film industry. Later on, gradually, there were a lot of changes occurred in the film industry. But the one thing that did not change is the portrayal of women characters in Indian films. In fact, it didn't mean that women were not enrolled to do strong characters on the whole. According to the survey taken by the website "GD ideas," while 10% of the films were women-centric, the remaining 90% were Andro-centric. This is to be considered and observed as a significant issue. In the past ten decades, when a section of directors made the script emphasizing men, it was only in the course of the last two decades that a dared to contemplate of emphasizing women with a deep consideration of treating and placing them in main characters as a gesture of reverence in intending to dignify them. In this research paper, the study will focus exclusively on the Indian Film Director Gautham Vasudev Menon's women portrayal in some of his movies using the image-based method.

Key words: Portrayal of Women, Indian Cinema, Film Industry, Women characters.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian film industry has a huge impact on people and plays a major role in their lives. All the people, especially youngsters, get inclined by the story and the characters. Indian films top the list of objectifying women characters in many renowned films from across the world according to the United Nation's global study 2014. Women are exposed as unrealistically beautiful, like curling their hair tight, face full of make-up with perfect contouring, so they look picture perfect on-screen. Stalking and eve-teasing occur to be common aspects in the name of love, and it's also common that youngsters take it for granted and tease or bully women in the pretense of love. In Australia, an Indian guy was arrested for teasing a girl in Australia, and when the boy was interrogated, he agreed that he was inclined by a Bollywood movie and dared to do so (Team GD ideas, 2018).

The positive side is that there are a large number of women who come up in the industry not just as an actress but also take an interest in performing as a director, producer, and other such functions behind the screen. Thus, nowadays, we could also watch a lot of women-centric films and strong women roles like breaking the so-called "good girl" image who were submissive to their husbands and accepting their abuses physically and mentally. In this line, Gautham Vasudev Menon is a phenomenal director who shows women how we can see around, representing real-life characters like mother, sister, or daughter. In this article, the discussion is about the study of women characters in his select films such as Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa and Neethaane En Ponvasantham.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women are shown as submissive and docile compared to men, even in the films that are targeted to cover and influence the women audience. A few of the study analyses say that women characters in some movies are given only a few dialogues, but the men would have commanding dialogues to oblige, safeguard and save them. Women are not just underrepresented but also made as sexual and funny content in some movies. Moreover, ethnicity and race have a huge part in the objectification of women, as if it is an accepted factor to fall in love with fair women and not with someone who is dusky, and to fall in love with someone who is homely and not updated or modern. Yang, L., Xu, Z., & Luo, J. (2020). Measuring Female Representation and Impact in Films over Time. ACM Transactions on Data Science, 1(4), 1-14.

Worldwide, especially in India, men are the breadwinners of the family while women were just circumscribed to be a good mother or a housewife. It is not just at home but also in the film industry. But nowadays, it is noticed and spotted that women are shown as independent, intellectual, confident characters that does not revolve around men. If this continues, it is not just a change in the film industry but also creates a huge impact on society. Agarwal, R. (2014). Changing Roles of Women in Indian Cinema. Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies (FORMER NAME SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, AND ARTS), 91-106.

Women in Indian cinema have been portrayed in different shades in patriarchal values. All Indian films have been shown a woman in the male point of view. It is important that women should not be shown as a treat to the male gaze. Women are the 50 percent population in society, so it is

crucial to portray women in a derogatory way. Sibal, Vatika. (2018). STEREOTYPING WOMEN IN INDIAN CINEMA. Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies. 5. 10.21922/srjis.v5i43.11253.

GAUTHAM VASUDEV MENON

Gautham Vasudev Menon is an Indian Film Maker who was born on February 25 1973, have directed, acted, and produced a few films. He is the founder of Ondraga Entertainment, a YouTube channel. He has also conquered his prestigious Kalaimamani award recently. His films have won awards like the National film award, Film fare award, Nandi award, Vijay award, etc. His different way and approach in screenwriting have created a lot of magic in his films. He is one director who tells his story in a narrative method. Since Minnale till Enai Noki Paayum Thota, he had constantly followed his pattern of film narrating style and dialogues, which has never put his audience down. He remakes his own film in Telugu and Hindi.

When it comes to women's portrayal, he always sets a benchmark for budding directors and to the whole film industry to how to show a woman on screen. His films are an example of showing women with dignity respect, and anyone can relate or see in real life. He depicts real-life characters with casual and familiar names like Aaradhana in Vettaiyaadu vilaiyaadu, Jessie in Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa, Nithya in Neethane En Ponvasantham, Maaya in Kaakha kaakha, and many more. He himself said in an interview that 70 percent of his films are inspired by his real life. Kaakha Kaakha story is also a true police story with a few amendments to suit the screenplay and to go with the audience's taste. Though he is a commercial director, his films are critically acclaimed more than a commercial success. This research paper focuses on some of his directorial ventures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the portrayal of lead women characters in two selected Gautham Menon films through the image-based method. This method is chosen to analyze the data collection of the selected films through qualitative research. Even if the two films revolve around women, the difference between these two characters is not similar, especially in decision making. So the selected two films show how these independent female characters break the stereotypical women portrayal.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How the lead women character has been depicted and designed in the movie?
2. How is that role connected to the plot of the movie?
3. What is the psychological perspective of the women's character?

OBJECTIVES

- To know the projection and positioning of the lead women character in the movie.
- To assess and dissect how the role is connected to the plot of the movie.
- To understand the psychological perspective of the women's character.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION
DISCUSSION (Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa)

The movie "Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa" is a breezy love story that delineates the love between Karthik, a Mechanical Engineering graduate who is passionate about doing films, and Jessie, who holds an MCA degree and works at Polaris. The theme of this movie is based on the incidents the director has come through in his real life. According to the director, 70% of the output of all his films is inspired by real-life incidents that he had come across. The film was first shot in Tamil and Telugu simultaneously, titled in Telugu as "Ye Maya Chesave," which was a huge box office hit. The movie was later remade in Hindi in the name of "Ekk Deewana Tha."The film didn't manage to create an appeal amongst the North Indian audience, says "behindwoods review."

INTERPRETATION

Jessie (Trisha) is a Malayalee Christian girl who was born in a traditional family where women were not supposed to say no to their parents and were brought up in Chennai; because of her love towards mathematics subject, she did her B.Sc Mathematics followed by Master's in Computer Applications, who is an upper middle class, 23 years old Independent girl work at Polaris. Her character is portrayed as Independent, Forward-thinking, but just because of her eternal love towards her family, especially his father, she'll do anything to make them happy and curious about not hurting them.

The whole film revolves around Jessie (Trisha), the Christian girl, and Karthik, a Hindu guy who becomes her tenant until he moves to his own house. He falls in love with her the first time he sees her. Just because they belong to a different religion, Jessie's parents are not comfortable with her marrying Karthik, and she is one year older than him too. In spite of all the problems in her family after she called off her wedding when she met Karthik before he left Goa, Jessie told about the problems in the family, and Karthik asked her to convince her father and went Goa; meanwhile, Jessie's family again arranged a meet up with the person with whom she called off the wedding, she cried and called Karthik to take her to Goa, just because of the complicated situation Karthik refused, so she backed out the plan and married the guy arranged by her parents.

Jessie (Trisha) is an Independent, mature, forward-thinking girl who has been brought up by an orthodox Christian family who doesn't even watch films. She just watched five films in her whole life. Her love towards Karthik is true, but when it comes to love versus family, family is her preference. Even after Karthik denies taking her to Goa, he asks permission and comes all way to talk to her; that is when she'll break up with him. When she breaks up, she tells Karthik that "you hate me better than my family hates me."This is the final word to him, and she leaves him. The psychological perspective of her is nothing but to gain respect and love from her family.

DISCUSSION (Neethaane En Ponvasantham)

The movie "Neethane En Ponvasantham" is a romantic, breezy love story wherein the conflicts between the lovers arise not because of the interference of their parents – as depicted in most of

the love stories – but due to the different options and priorities that they fantasize in their individual lives. Nithya and Varun get into true love, and even after the conflicts that arise due to their ego and reluctance, they wish to get together. This film was eventually shot in Telugu as "Yeto Vellipoyindhi Manasu". Since it's a film with a lot of relatable factors and shows the different phases of love, just because of the slow pace, the movie made a test on audience's patience, says "Times of India Review".

INTERPRETATION

Nithya Vasudevan (Samantha), the second daughter among the three daughters in her family, is energetic, brilliant, talented, and a beautiful girl who was born and brought up in an upper-middle-class family who is also an egoistic girl. Once she finishes school, she is pursuing her B.Sc in Psychology which is considered a boring course, but still, she pursues it with a light of interest. From schooling to college, her only constant is her love for Varun. Her only weakness is him, and she loves him at the same time argues with him all the time.

The whole movie is about Nithya(Samantha) and Varun, their on and off relationship. Since Nithya is so egoistic, she expects Varun to come and apologize all the time. In their childhood days when they were eight years old, Varun's brother asks, "you wanna play with Nithya or me" he chooses his brother over Nithya, there begins their first fight, then after seven years they meet at a tuition centre when they were in 10th standard, Varun initiates to talk to Nithya and also apologizes for not choosing her over his brother. Then again they get back together, and because of his possessiveness he suspects her with her classmate, and after a huge argument, they again get separated. She expects him to talk, but he won't. Then after a few years, when they were in college, they meet at a cultural and get back together again. When they had a difference in career choices, Nithya initiates the break up again, and they'll move on with their businesses.

Even if Nithya (Samantha) is portrayed as a psychology student, her character is portrayed as a rude, angry, and egoistic person, but her love towards Varun is eternal. After all the fights, Varun again comes back to her after the accomplishments of his duty; he comes and sees Nithya again. Nithya, who was building a school for poor kids in a rural area, refuses to talk to him, and after all the arguments, he'll go back and move on. After so many days, when she calls Varun, he tells her that he is going to get married to someone else, then Nithya cries and visits his wedding reception, talks to him, and wishes him. After all her ego and anger, she shows him how much she was in love with him. But still, she'll not confess that she wants him. Finally, when Varun calls off his wedding and goes back to her and shouts at her for attending his reception, that is when she cries and confesses that she is so in love with him. Thus finally, her ego, rudeness, anger vanishes in front of her love towards Varun.

CONCLUSION

Thus, through analysis and interpretation, Jessie's (Trisha) character and Nithya's (character) were set up as a benchmark in the film industry. Any woman can relate to the characters Jessie and Nithya because those characters are realistic. In Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa and Neethaane En

Ponvasantham, both the characters are strong, but the difference is about the decision made by an independent woman who doesn't want to hurt her family and a woman who loves her boyfriend more than anything in this world. In both films, the characters are neither positive nor negative but represent the real-life character. In Vinnaithaandi Varuvaayaa, Jessie chooses her family over love. In Neethaane En Ponvasantham, Nithya chooses Varun as her priority over her friends, studies, and family. Both characters revolve around men, but these women are shown with dignity and respect.

In the history of Tamil cinema, there are a lot of directors who portray women with dignity; in that list, Gautham Vasudev Menon is a notable director. In the upcoming films which are to be directed by existing or future directors, should understand the fact that the role could be protagonist or Antagonist, that doesn't matter. But showing with respect and dignity as resembling the real-life characters is all matters.

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