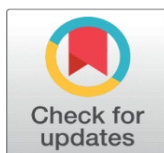
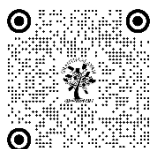


THE NUANCES OF PORTRAYING WOMEN CHARACTERS IN MOVIES-A STUDY OF PA. RANJITH'S MOVIES

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ABSTRACT

Cinema, in general, is a global enterprise. In particular, the Indian films have a wide viewership with a fan base covering most of South Asia while also extending into international borders. Cinema portrays the reality of the world through stories and thus is able to create a huge impact on the society. They play an important role in shaping peoples mentality. In addition, cinema introduces us to various art forms and also helps in gaining knowledge about many other unknown things. In this context, movies directed by Pa. Ranjith have found a separate fan base and encouragement among the audience. His movies bring to light the unseen side of people's lives. He is known for his realistic depiction of caste oppression that is very much prevalent in the society. Besides the story and direction, the backdrops in his movies also work to drive home messages. Among others, the portrayal of women and Dalits in his stories have created a greater impact among the audience. This study aims to analyse how women and the marginalized people are portrayed in director Pa. Ranjith films.

Keywords: Cinema, Ranjith Movies, Portrayal of Women, Dalit



1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema means different to different people; for some it is the greatest and most appreciated medium of entertainment, while for others it is just a medium that disseminates moving pictures. The art of cinema was first demonstrated in India in the year 1896. Since then, Indian cinema has evolved with its own set of parallel terms and rules, which are largely isolated from cinema in the rest of the world. The predominance of the aesthetic impact of Indian films has seen a change since the post-independence era. The films have evolved to become content oriented. This reflects a changes in the way of entertainment, instruction, motivation, and construction of society. Indian cinema often blends entertainment with controversial themes, delving into various aspects such as languages, politics, religion, and culture. Cinema not only reflects the society, but also shapes and influences the society. In the contemporary culture, cinema provides an opportunity for learning and fosters an environment that encourages thoughtful reflection among viewers. The important values of human feelings, actions and attitudes impact people's emotions and their real life. For instance, during the Indian freedom struggle, films played a key role in inspiring a sense of nationalism among the general public. While movies underwent drastic changes in several aspects with changing times, the progress in the portrayal of women in Indian cinema still lags behind the societal progress that has been achieved. India remains a patriarchal society and the Indian film industry reflects this as well. Even with changing times, men's ideals and fantasies continue to dominate

much of the space in Indian cinema. Most of the mainstream movies are male-centric. Certain aspects of cinema in today's world are regressive and derogatory towards women.

It is a common trend in Indian movies to treat the lead actresses as glam dolls. Several movies of the present times needlessly sexualize female characters. In addition, incorporating vulgar lyrics and dances under the guise of item songs is highly degrading to women and negatively influences the youth. These songs have begun to normalize derogatory acts such as teasing women, looking at them voyeuristically and asking them for sexual favours.

Further, heroines were portrayed as submissive, preferring to be homemakers, not career oriented and silently bearing the brunt of abusive husbands. Most movies portray women as mere sexual objects whose roles are limited to creating onscreen visual pleasure that attracts the opposite gender. However, recent times have witnessed a change in this pattern, with more and more women joining the film industry as directors, producers, actresses, etc. Consequently, the trend has shifted in favour of strong female characters in movies with a subsequent increase in the number of movies offering meaningful roles for women. The linguistic characters of Iyal, Isai, Naadagam (prose, music, drama) emerge in the Tamil cinema and incorporate entertainment stands which all take part in the theatre. Later, around 1918, the Tamil film industry also known as Kollywood, witnessed the emergence of reality movies. Tamil reality movies began to influence the language. Subsequently, the cultural expressions of religion, politics and socio-culture were made open to the audience. The technical aspects concerning sounds, effects, animation, and production quality in good films are highly challenging and are a cause of concern among movie directors. Tamil cinema satisfies its audience in providing both the content and the entertainment features.

The films made by director Pa. Ranjith talk about the socio-culture, religious and political values of the people and depicts the connection between people and the society. Most of his films depict the society's reality, origin of myths, and its development. In doing so, the director presents the importance of women in all his movies. The women characters in his movies are very beautifully and strongly written. Pa. Ranjith is vocal about caste oppression and the intersection of caste with other identities especially with the gender. This influence is illustrated by beautiful and strong female characters in his movies, which appear to surprise the audience given the prevailing levels of misogyny. In a conservative state like Tamil Nadu, women face restrictions in the guise of protections provided by their family and society. They are expected to be modest, traditional, familial, including publicity, sexuality, modern, on the whole, a 'proper Tamil woman'. The common women were unable to openly connect with the characters portrayed in most films. However, Ranjith has broken this barrier by providing a refreshingly different perspective of women from the usual ones seen in Tamil cinema with his unique manner of screenplay writing and direction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kusuma, K. S. (2018) discusses the representation of female bodies and male heroism in South Indian cinema. The objective of their study was to analyse and understand the representation of the female lead roles in the midst of a male-dominated industry in Telugu cinema as well as in other South Indian movies over the years. Only a very few female actors could achieve the status of female lead roles leading to stardom on par with male actors. The paper exposes the fact that heroism that exists in regional cinema in India is highly characterised by male dominance.

Patowary, H. (2014) investigated the portrayal of women in Indian mass media. Their article provided the view that the media's role towards women is becoming a growing concern of the feminist writers, basically regarding participation, performances and portrayal of women. The research on different circumstances relating to the media's role towards portraying the fair sex have opened up a new angle by leaps and bounds to think precisely about it.

The portrayal of sexual violence in popular Hindi films between 1997 and 1999 was explored by Ramasubramanian, S. et al (2003). The findings of the study on randomly selected films suggest that moderate sexual violence is depicted as fun, enjoyable, and a normal expression of romantic love. The films had a common element of sexual violence committed by heroes. In particular, moderate violence such as harassment of women was glorified. It was with these women the heroes ultimately became romantically involved. The victims of such portrayal were more likely women than men. The authors of the study discuss their observations in terms of script theory and social learning perspectives.

A study conducted by Derné, S. (1999) reported on how forceful or violent love was promoted in Hindi films. The article concluded that Indian films go far beyond depicting violence against women; they eroticize such violence asking male viewers to identify themselves with heroes who use force to win the affections of their beloveds. According to the study, observation of audiences in theatres shows that the cinema halls that are usually male dominated spaces are

arenas for generating women affection by way of sexually harassing them. Thus, popular Indian films play a role in generating and propagating sexual violence among public.

Another study by Ram, A. (2002) focuses on the ways in which Indian immigrant women actively engage and interpret Indian cinema. The study demonstrates that Indian women viewers/readers simultaneously comply with and resist the dominant patriarchal representations that permeate Indian cinema. This analysis moves between readers' readings and film texts in order to locate how Indian cinema mediates the constitution of gendered identities in the diaspora.

2.1. BACKGROUND OF THE MOVIES

1) MADRAS

This movie is the story of an ordinary youngster from a locality in the Chennai city who is caught in an extraordinary situation. It is the story of local politics surrounding a wall. While most people are familiar with the underlying emotions in this story including friendship, romance, betrayal, politics and revenge, the colorful setting is splendidly realized on screen. The movie captures attention by its portrayal of cramped living rooms, peeled-off walls, narrow by lanes, busy playgrounds, corporation water pumps, flirting people, quick tempers, loud conversations, and proud people. A feeling is generated among the audience of having stepped into the colony where the action takes place with terrific detailing adding to its realistic depiction. The towering wall has such an ominous presence throughout the film. On the whole, the movie contains elements of joy and fun as well as portal of Dalit women. Madras is an atmospheric film set against unique backdrops.

2) KAALA

In this film, the director uses Superstar Rajinikanth to convey his message. The movie emphasizes the claim that land is a common man's right. The story of the movie is as follows: Migrants from Tamil Nadu who have settled in Dharavi help build the city and run it. They revolt against an evil politician and land mafia don who sets his eyes on their land. The movie begins with an animated story-telling device, wherein the importance of land and the suppression of the downtrodden by the power-hungry is shown. The film quickly shifts to the present day, in live-action multi-colour (with black being the prominent hue). Evil politicians and land mafia who hatch plans to destroy the slums of Dharavi to make it Digital Dharavi and Pure Mumbai (an obvious reference to some of the actual government schemes) are shown. Ranjith gives a spin to the classic white-is-pure-and-black-is-evil logic. This film is a high-voltage action-packed one with a strong political core.

3) KABALI

Kabali is an emotional drama of the life story of a gangster. Kabali (Rajinikanth), who was born in Dindigul, is the messiah of Tamil laborers working in Malaysia, after he fights for their primary rights and wages. His rise to become an influential person in the society in a short span of time, gives sleepless nights to a few, which further fuels jealousy and enmity towards Kabali. Kabali attempts to redeem 25 years of his life that he had lost in the world of crime. Set against the picturesque Malaysia, the film touches upon the conflict between Malaysians and Tamils. With Kabali set free, the film depicts his quest to redeem his lost wife and daughter and at the same time, finish his long standing dispute with the enemy. The director has made efforts to ensure that some of the signature traits of his film such as the Dalit angle and a similar supporting cast are retained.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Tamil movies are represented as realistic cinemas that portray contemporary society in different ways by using different techniques and modes. This research primarily discusses the movies of Tamil director Pa Ranjith which interrogates everything from human life. The study focuses on human values that are explored in the director's perspective and the characterization of the movie which is analysed and presented to the audience. The qualitative analysis is used to identify the dialogue which relates to the area of research.

3.1. OBJECTIVE

- 1) The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 2) To study how women in Pa. Ranjith movies voice out against defamation.
- 3) To discuss how the director portrayed gender equality.
- 4) To discuss human behavior in the perspective of their attire.
- 5) To discuss the femininity portrayal of a realistic housewife.

3.2. RESEARCH QUESTION

- 1) The study aims to find answers the following questions.
- 2) How does the director break Tamil cinema morale in his movie.
- 3) How did the movie visualize the concept of equality?
- 4) What are the socially relevant issues discussed in Ranjith's films?
- 5) How did the director breaks the age old tradition.

Hypothesis

- The study proposes the following hypotheses:
- There is a significant relationship between the importance of equality and the daily life behaviors of individuals.
- Women's perceptions of men's attire influence their judgment and interaction with them in social and professional settings.
- Breaking age-old cultural traditions positively affects the perception of gender equality in society.

3.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A movie highlights key elements and deepens the core message, offering the public a wider understanding of any related details. It observes people's interests and fancies that relate to their everyday lifestyles. It engages the audience with the themes, sound effects, colors, time gripping scenes and the portrayal of the characters, with special emphasis on the emotions that connect to the audience at a personal level. In this context, films made by director Pa Ranjith present several valuable thoughts to the audience.

In 1962, Andrew Sarris wrote notes on 'Auteur theory' and coined the term which is derived from the French word 'Author'. He states an upheaval in the academic community. The term 'Auteur' is competence of technical elements of visual, filmmaking, storytelling and camera that are focused by a director and his personal style. The director's personal creative vision is reflected in the films' criticism. Sarris states that the director's signature is definitely communicated in the costumes, sets, editing, cinematography, and music. All these are indicative of a good director's efforts whose vision creates a personal style in the movie.

3.4. SAMPLE SELECTION

The movies 'Madras', 'Kabali', 'Kaala', and 'Sarpatta Parambarai' directed by Pa Ranjith were chosen as samples for this research. This director is known for uniqueness in his creation and his concepts are debatable among the audience. His movies are discussed by the audience as well as by movie critics. His movies envision the importance of human values wherein concepts of love, care, relationship, gender, sexuality, religion, politics, society, nature, transgender, human body, feelings, social practice, family, art, murder, culture, propaganda, power, god, discipline, spirituality, the universe, technology, and civilization are portrayed by the movie characters. The screen language, screenplay and theoretical design in his movies brilliantly reveal his unique style. His movies revolve around certain main elements such as corruption, sociology and culture, which together blend into a complete creation. The movies delve in to the depth of human life problems, complications and crises showcasing them in a presentable manner.

3.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study deals with the research design in which the secondary data are collected from the subject matter. The present study is an analytical research that helps to gather already available information, source factors and discuss the subject of critical evaluation. The dialogues related to the characterization of human values have been analysed. The dialogue and images were taken for the analysis and were used to discuss the theme of the research.

3.6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

While Tamil cinema comprises of movies with different concepts, the movies Madras, Kabali Kaala and Sarpatta Parambarai contain more concepts and themes which is enough to take for the research discussion. There is some time limitation the study could not be extending into the next level.

3.7. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The present study is a wide area in Tamil cinema. This research on the movies Madras, Kabali Kaala and Sarpatta Parambarai is aimed at uncovering subjects such as portrayal of women, cinematography, the director's perspective of the movie, and different themes that are discussed in the movie.

4. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

SCENE 1

4.1. WOMEN VOICING OUT AGAINST DEFAMATION

In his second movie, 'Madras', director Ranjith gets down to business straightaway with minimum fuss. He introduces the setting, the area, the characters, and the conflicts. The establishment part of the 'Madras' title track has been remarkably executed. A lot of blood is shed and a wall, which is a prime tool for politicking, is the bone of contention and a matter of immense pride for the people involved. The film encompasses elements like politics, drama, friendship, romance, betrayal, revenge and pride. Ranjith has surrounded the core of the movie with many equally important characters - Kaali, Anbu, Maari, Kannan, Johnny, Kalaiaarasi, Mary, the Blue Boys, the parents and several others. The action is set in the North Madras region, where two rival political factions vie for supremacy. This action movie also includes a captivating love story. The director portrays the female characters as subjected to defamation and voicing out against all their problems. Catherine Tresa (heroine - named Kalaiaarasi) despite her sophisticated appearance, comes out with an authentic performance. She beautifully emotes her character. The rendition of a perfect dubbing voice and her flawless lip-syncing forms an incredible combination.

Dialog

Edhuku epdilaan panraa enna paatha unaku epdi theridhu, nee enna periya rowdy ya, en pinnadi suthunna adipiya, naan unna love panrennu ooralan sollikinu suthuraa theva illaadha veyla pannadha naan sonnanna unnai love panren, anniki ennamo sonna naan apdilan illanu, asingama irukkudhu theruvula enga ponalum un pera solli koopuraanga nethu Vijay vandhu samma thittu thitturaan ennada nenachinu irukka ahh en pinnadi suthuna naan unna love panruvanna, sathiyama enaku unna pudikkavey pudikkala.

Kalaiaarasi

Why do you do this? What do you think about me? Do you consider yourself a big rowdy? You spread the word everywhere that I am in love with you. Did I tell you so? Don't engage in unwanted stuffs. It is ugly to hear people shout your name wherever I go on the streets. Vijay scolded me yesterday. Don't you dare think that if you are behind me I will fall in love with you. Definitely not, I promise that I don't like you.



Image-1



Image -2

The picture above shows the shot before the heroine starts escalating the issue with the protagonist. The shot is fixed in an open ground with a large crowd present. The heroine shouting at the protagonist in open ground in front of his friends is sure to make him feel embarrassed.



Image -3



Image -4



Image -3

Capturing the different emotions of the incident, the director has forbidden the protagonist from speaking. This scene perfectly narrates the importance of women voicing out against defamation.

Scene Interpretation:

Commonly, Tamil cinema portrays a girl developing a feeling of love or getting attracted to a boy who follows her and fulfills all her wishes. The director uses a similar concept in this movie where the hero Kaali, instructed by his friends, tries to impress the Kalaierasi by following her everywhere. This results in the residents of the area calling her with the protagonists' name. A worried heroine finding it difficult to face the society decides to put an end to this menace. The scene in which she voices out her concern to Kaali depicts her anger towards his behavior. Her mannerism exposes the way her personal and social lives are affected.

Shot interpretation:

This scene starts with a wide shot showing a playground. The heroine meets the protagonist at this ground in the presence of several onlookers and yells at him with anger and tears for misusing and defaming her name. The open ground location and the presence of onlookers is sure to cause Kaali an embarrassment. The entire scene shows a dominant Kalaierasi voicing her concerns out without a pause that Kaali is unable to respond to her allegations.

The director portrays Kalaierasi's character as a bold and strong one. It denotes her feminism, which means the concept of defamation and rights of her thoughts that seems to be extremely appropriate only to women. Tamil Nadu is a place where a deep root of traditional and female ideals is more important. According to Premalatha Karupiah (2015), Tamil movies have different elements capable of changing people's lifestyle. The progress of Indian women is usually perceived as having the power to challenge gender-based laws and practices. The Tamil women regard chastity as a highly fundamental value and as a result, women characters portrayed in Tamil movies ultimately re-emphasize the traditional values.

SCENE 2

4.2. WOMEN TALKING ABOUT EQUALITY

Kaala is a highly emotional movie that narrates a relationship based story intertwined with social issues. In this movie, the director takes up another relevant aspect of women empowerment. The film describes the fight for land, a dwelling place. A powerful politician (Nana Patekar) with an ulterior motive attempts to clear a slum under the guise of a scheme to improve the living conditions in Mumbai. The movie circles around the ensuing struggle between the protagonist and his people and the antagonist for land and the price they pay for it. The women in this film are not portrayed as in the usual films where they are pretty looking, singing or dancing around. The characters Zarina, Selvi, and Puyal are strong and the director has entrusted them with strong roles. They appear refreshingly different from the usual ones spotted in Tamil cinema. Zarina is a very strong, while also an equally tender and endearing character with a lot of substance and an interest for love. She is educated, has been a social worker and reformer and has travelled around the world. Besides, she also has a decent level of political awareness.

Dialogue

Zarina: Kai kudunga, kudunga kudunga Kai koduthu pazhagunga adhudhan equality kaalula vizhavekkuradhu illa.

Zarina: Offer me your hand. Let's shake hands. This is equality. Equality is not falling at another's feet.



Image-4



Image-5



Image- 6



image-6

The above images show the scenario where Zarina was asked to touch his feet in the name of respect. An angry Zarina drapes her dupatta over her shoulder as she walks out of the house. The expression on her face paints a picture of sheer rage and defiance instead of shame or modesty.



Image -7



Image -8



Image -9

Scene Interpretation:

Zarina with whom Kaala shares beautiful memories in the past, comes back to the slum, her birthplace, as a single mother, after having lived in different parts of the world. Being a social worker, she wants to improve the standard of living of the residents of the slum. She plans to join hands with the politician, who had earlier proposed the slum development project, with the aim of helping her people. Eventually, as she learns about the ulterior motives of the politician, she begins to raise her voice against the problem. A meeting with the politician turned out to be a humiliating experience for her as she was asked to touch his feet as a mark of respect. Angered by this, Zarina puts up an attitude of rage and defiance while exiting the house. Her expression supersedes the conventionally expected expression of shame or humiliation.

Shot interpretation:

Conventional Indian cinemas include the culture of touching an elder's feet as a mark of respect. However, such an act has now evolved into a form of harassment of the one who does it and equips the other with a superiority complex. Later, after all the procedure, when the contract of the project returns to Zarina officially, she talks about equality and walks out majestically. She asks the politician to offer his hands as a sign of equality and articulates the fact that touching his feet is not equality. As she utters this dialogue and walks majestically, all the characters in that scene are seen giving her a standing ovation. The background music perfectly suited the scene.

Sri Govind Bharatvaraj, (2018) analyses the movie *Lagaan*, released in 2001, which is one of the blockbuster Hindi movies. It is a commercial film with a Gandhian perspective in dealing with the subaltern groups. The movie portrays a character Kachra, an untouchable, who was once resisted by caste Hindus from participating in cricket. While the world witnesses progress in several areas of life, gender equality is still something beyond reach for many. Director Ranjith has beautifully depicted equality through Zaira in this particular scene, which adds a touch of perfection to the film.

5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Director Pa. Ranjith creates a small world out of his perception of the social problems. All his movies have an element of distinction in comparison to the other Tamil movies. Starting from the beginning to the very end of the movie, every part of the movie sequence is sculptured with the director's perspective of the society's problems. The characters in his movies have a specialty of their own that the people in the society could relate to. The unique style of the director is seen in the way his characters exhibit human values. and he explored observations and much more in the film. The detailed shots in the movie reflect his ideologies.

The director expressed the selective characters which relate to the society and the depth of the character in reality. In Tamil cinemas, the central male character is usually embroiled in extra-marital relationships. Majority of the films portray women as traditional people imposed with the role of preserving customs and culture. These traditional women characters are always portrayed to focus on their morality. However, movies of modern times have shown women under a different light. Such movies have faced a barrage of criticism and a list of accusations for equating women empowerment with sexual independence, extra-marital relationship, living together, equality, and others. These modern cinemas have broken the conventional and cultured tone of Tamil cinema. One of the modernist film directors, Mani Ratnam, always portrays women in a positive state and augments their characters beautifully and boldly in his films.

An individual forms a part of the society in which he lives. Society is constituted by different people whose actions cause different levels of impact in an individual's life. Women play a significant role in the formation and functioning of the society. Human life is connected with various social actions of politics, government, religion, gender, and cultures. These links connect a person with the society, which in turn is structured by other individuals. This is one of the important events in human life. Director Pa. Ranjith expressed the selective characters which relate to the society and the depth of the character in reality.

6. CONCLUSION

The above discussions on the movies reveal that director Pa. Ranjith has become a trendsetter in Indian cinema with his style of movie making. The characters in his movies are portrayed in different story genres. In particular, the women characters in his movie have etched names for themselves. His movies have disrupted traditional cinema. They have deviated from exploring the conventional commercial concepts to exploring real life happenings. This has made his movies highly relevant to the audiences. The director has taken care to convey the point that humans naturally tend to change their physical and mental behavior as a response to the situation or incident that they have encountered. His characters are nonjudgmental towards others. Rather, they are individuals with their own set of positive and negative qualities. These movies emphasize the truth that all humans are equal, striking a blow to discrimination in all forms. The seamless blending of screenplay, concepts, dialogues and shots has rendered a deep touch of reality to his movies. In short, Ranjith has taken Tamil cinema to a higher standard wherein people view it as a mirror that reflects the culture and society. Among the several concepts that the director has explored in his movies, woman freedom is one. The women characters in his movies articulate the significance of women's desire and how it needs to be shielded away from opinions and tastes of other. He brings to light the sacrifice made women in raising up and nurturing their families. In doing so,

he also exposes the dark side of this sacrifice that forces women into uninterested lives, wherein acceptance of a different culture and social norm is a consequence of compulsion rather than of love.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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