

Representation of Women in the Digital Age: A Journey Through Selected New Generation Malayalam Movies

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ABSTRACT--Film is an indispensable piece of our everyday lives which impacts the manner in which we see ourselves and the world. Film is a medium which builds the images of men and women. However, the portrayal may fluctuate as per the distinctions in the attributes of the character they are presenting. Through this paper I intend to investigate how the male predominant Malayalam film industry depicts strong female characters. Malayalam film industry has been undergoing a change in its representation of women characters. Instead of previously stereotypical representations, now there is an attempt to present them as more solid characters. However, we could likewise discover certain loopholes in the screen-play where she is constantly under the dominance of her better half or sweetheart in the household circle. Typically, film is considered as one of the realistic and practical works of art which reflects and speaks to our society which is truly a male centric one. Simone De Beauvoir's statement, " 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' is particularly pertinent with regards to new media as it assumes a significant job in strengthening certain cultural standards and practices"(Budgeon).Therefore, this investigation is a thorough analysis of the depiction of women in new generation Malayalam movies which revolve around marriage and love. The researcher has included two financially fruitful Malayalam movies of a decade ago; *How Old Are You* and *22 Female Kottayam*, focusing on the female heroes Nirupama Rajeevan and Tessa K Abraham respectively. In this manner, this paper attempts to investigate how gender issues are spoken to in these movies as film is a significant zone of study since it shows what is socially acceptable.

KEYWORDS--Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender, Social Constructivism, Digital Media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of Malayalam film industry begins with Mr. J C Daniel and a large number of the other amazing figures. The portrayal of women is one of the fundamental issues since the early period. There was very little reception and acknowledgment for ladies during that time and that could have been the explanation behind the male driven history of Malayalam cinema. Thus it is critical to understand how women are spoken to as subordinates in the male dominant household circle, through the foundation of marriage, love and maternity.

This study focuses on two women oriented new age Malayalam films and each one of them depicts women from various social strata of society. The selected movies are *How Old Are You* (2014) directed by Roshan Andrews featuring Manju Warrier, alongside Kunchakoban, Kanika, Lalu Alex and Amrutha Anil. The film discusses the life of a 36-year-old married woman named Nirupama Rajeev, who is a U D clerk in Revenue

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Department. As long as she can remember, she has always forfeited her own comforts for her family which comprises of her significant other, Rajeev (Kunchakoboban) and daughter Lekshmi Rajeev (Amrutha Anil), and Rajeev's folks.

The second movie under analysis is *22 Female Kottayam* (22FK) (2012) directed by Aashiq Abu featuring Rima Kallingal and Fahad Faasil in leading roles. The story delineates the life of a 22-year-old nurse Tessa K Abraham (Rima Kallingal) from Kottayam, a region in Kerala, who was sexually assaulted and afterward takes revenge on the individuals who abuse her. Both the movies are addressing womanhood in unusual ways. In the first film, women are considered as a device to do household work and in the second, she is just a device for sexual delight.

The new age film or new wave film in Malayalam industry began as a development in mid 2010, and is characterized by novel and unusual topics and new storytelling techniques. These sort of movies are not the same as the conventional movies of the last few decades because of their discussion of novel patterns and introduction of new on-screen actors in to the Malayalam film industry. Moreover it tries to dislodge the 'superstar' framework which has been dominating the film business for a considerable length of time. It is also characterized by the genuine screen play which is attached to the real world and closer to life and the lead characters who are generally common citizens. The presentation of new on-screen actors, absence of superstars, and the story set up in the metro driven urban territory makes them not the same as the regular so called 'masala' movies

Statement of the problem

Countless women-centric films were delivered during the new age era. Last eight decades had seen a large number of Malayalam films' birth and demise where some of them unequivocally got crowd's attention where some went unnoticed. There have been various movies in which females assumed a crucial job in the storyline. This analysis essentially focuses on the representation of women characters in the chosen films with women centric or socially applicable subjects. Through this examination the researcher intends to discover the general convictions about the status of women in Kerala which is believed to be reflected in these movies.

The analysis closely views the significant women characters in these movies by focusing on the visual and verbal representation of these women. Both the movies which are taken for study are women-oriented and mirror some genuine social issues concerning women and the whole society itself. In these movies, the actors are playing significant characters who reflect the social issues that influence the Kerala society.

Scope and Uniqueness of the Study

This study attempts to see how the contemporary movie producers of Kerala have been depicting women characters through their film and to what degree these celluloid portrayals are consistent with the real situation. The analyst expects to contemplate the chosen films that go under the class 'new age', where the women are treated as strong and solid characters, and have socially pertinent topics which make the women characters in these film significant.

The investigation likewise analyses how the women characters and their mentalities are being depicted in these movies. It likewise analyses the portrayal of how the women are treated in their profession and furthermore

in the foundation of marriage and love and how age matters in the life of ladies by considering the distinctive age group of women in the movies.

The paper titled, "Representation of Women in the Digital Age: A journey through New Generation Malayalam Movies" stands among the rare few studies of women in new age Malayalam films. There have been various examinations of specific movie producers in Malayalam film industry. Be that as it may, just a couple of studies have been done on the Malayalam new age films based on the portrayal of women in the film. So the area of study is one of a kind.

II. OBJECTIVES

- The main objective of the investigation:
 - To inspect the portrayal of women in new age women oriented Malayalam films.
- The particular objectives of the investigation are as per the following:
 - To examine the portrayal of women in the movies made in Kerala in the contemporary time frame, both politically and socially(2010-2016)
 - To assess the job of society in making the clichéd portrayal of ladies through the foundation of marriage and love.
 - To understand how men and women are represented stereotypically in the chosen films.

III. HYPOTHESIS

- The attributes of strong ladies in new age women oriented Malayalam films are bound to the work place in contrast with household front.
- The women characters in the new age women oriented Malayalam films are portrayed as subordinate to men in the residential circle.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes qualitative, comparative and content analysis technique as its overall system and comprises analyzing, comparing film content and the character detailing. The film content and secondary data were investigated using a feminist theoretical framework.

This paper qualitatively explores how women are portrayed in the movies *How Old Are You* and *22 Female Kottayam*, so as to perceive how gender assumes a significant job in our society. The researcher analyses the fundamental women characters as well as the other important characters in the selected films and furthermore investigates how issues identified with women are addressed in the movies including how the women characters are presented with regard to the accepted status of women in the society.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory:

Feminism is a movement which endeavours to break down the structure of male centric culture. This paper doesn't offer answers for the manners by which sexual and gender standards make social behaviours and ways of living; rather it will investigate the manners by which these norms are working in mainstream popular culture.

Patriarchy and Subordination:

Man controlled society actually implies the rule of men in a male oriented society. It is a social and ideological concept which thinks about men as better and superior to women. It is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (Sylvia Walby, "Theorising Patriarchy").

Social Constructivism:

The fundamental thought of social constructivism is that the world is socially developed. The social order through we see the world is correct or wrong, and is in the consistent stage of progress. Meaning is developed through the collaborations between various individuals and their connection to objects and others people

22 Female Kottayam

22 Female Kottayam is a much advertised and brilliantly marketed Malayalam film directed by Aashiq Abu, one of the finest among the new age directors in Malayalam film industry and scripted by Abhilash Kumar and Shyam Pushkaran featuring Rima Kallingal, Fahad Faasil, Prathap Pothen, TG Ravi, Saathar and so on. The film which is viewed as a milestone in the new wave of film-production opened to critical acclaim and rave surveys. The film was commended for the acting of the lead cast, the innovation of the producers in investigating a subject rarely attempted, the melodious music and background score etc. Be that as it may, clearly it is quite impossible to accept the film except for the delightful visuals and the music.

The movie is about a nurse named Tessa K Abraham settled in Bangalore, who is betrayed by her lover Cyril and then later by his friend Mr. Hedge. She then sets out to take revenge upon her tormentors. The movie ends with her killing Mr. Hedge with the help of a wealthy man named DK and performing penectomy on Cyril.

What makes *22 Female Kottayam* disturbing is the manner in which the female lead character is depicted in the film. Tessa K Abraham, played by Rima Kallingal, is continually ready to get suppressed, at first, out of adoration and love and then afterwards to accomplish her end. Her body is her solitary quality and sole power. "You don't have to do it for free," Tessa boldly guarantees a rich man to whom she sticks to get retribution. The announcement is stunning. There is another instance in the movie where one of her friends tells her that her Visa is ready and she could go abroad next month itself. That friend of Tessa has an illicit relationship with DK. So it indirectly points to the fact that she got visa due to the influence of DK and this shows the existing male dominance where a woman is forced to do anything to fulfil her dreams.

The same theme is presented in a different way in the movie starring Manju Warrier, *Kannezuthi Pottum Thottu*. In that movie too, which was released years ago, the female protagonist uses her sexuality as a weapon to wreak havoc upon the people who destroyed her family. So all these point to the deep rooted misogynistic fact that women are always an object of sexual delight for men.

Tessa, who, at one minute seems a monumental figure, becomes unexpectedly weak in the next minute. Her subjugation diminishes her to a weak human for whom one can have just pity. Her action infers that men are dauntless who will do anything for their desires.

There are so many instances in the movie which delineates the realistic condition of woman in this society due to the prevalence of deeply-rooted patriarchy. In one of the scenes in a night club when a stranger tries to touch Tessa inappropriately she remains mute. Here Tessa is portrayed as a weak and fragile woman who relies upon her man to respond to that act of misbehaviour.

Moreover in the climax, Tessa kills Mr.Hedge mercilessly without a second thought. But she didn't kill Cyril. Even though she surgically removes his male genital, she didn't go to the extreme of taking his life.

She wanted him to understand the gravity of what he has done but deep inside her affection for him doesn't allow her to kill him. These may be the factors that make this new age feminist movie a less interesting one for the researcher. This movie could also be hailed as an exceptional masterpiece for portraying a female lead character who dares to take a bold move to destroy the life of her tormentors. But the factors mentioned above showcase the underlying elements of patriarchy and subordination that stills prevails in the society.

How Old Are You

How Old Are You? directed by Rosshan Andrews remains an achievement in Malayalam film from multiple points of view. It denoted the re-emergence of Manju Warrier to the cinema after a long break. It is that uncommon film where a lady in her 30s takes the limelight. It is a rousing and persuasive story of women empowerment. Also, the film stays one of the best rebound films by a lady entertainer in Malayalam film. During the promotions of the film one of its authors Bobby (of the Bobby-Sanjay duo) conceded that he got the rousing string for the movie after an easy-going discussion with his wife. "Who decides the expiry date of a woman's dream?" was the succulent inquiry she presented.

The story is about a 36-year old woman named Nirupama Rajeev (Manju Warrier) who works as a UD clerk in the Revenue Department. Her husband is Rajeev Narayanan (Kunchacko Boban) who works at Akashavani and he wishes to migrate to Ireland. But most of the Irish companies turn down Nirupama's job applications due to her age. Nothing amusing happens in her life; she craves for a change.

Much to her surprise, one day she gets an invitation from the office of President of India who wishes to have a conversation with her, after a question her daughter has asked to the President who came to the school. But unfortunately she faints in between the conversation and her meeting with the President turns out to be a laughing stock in her family and workplace.

Nirupama's conversation with her old college friend Susan (Kanika) comes as a solace to her mundane life. It reminds her of her old self- bold and brave. Then things take a wild turn when her rooftop organic farming becomes a success. Once again the President invites her to congratulate on her new success which has created a revolution in the farming industry. The transformation of her character from a distressed woman to a bold and powerful woman is almost commendable. But when dives deep into the layers of this movie which deals with women empowerment, strains of patriarchy could still be found.

There is a scene in the movie where Nirupama's job application is turned down by the Irish authorities just because she is one year above the age limit. But on the other side, her husband who is older than her gets a job easily. Facing double standards in professional life is still a major obstacle for lots of woman.

In one of the scenes Nirupama's teenage daughter Lekshmi angrily asks her to reduce the volume of the TV so that she could study. Seeing Lekshmi's behaviour, her grandmother comments that a girl should not shout loudly

and misbehave because society will eventually blame it on her mother. This instance clearly indicates the fact that women are equally responsible for the prevalence of patriarchy.

There is an instance of subordination when Nirupama tells Rajeev that she is ready to remove her hair colour if he disapproves of it. This shows that even though Nirupama is an educated independent woman, her life decisions are bound to her husband.

The most poignant scene happens when Nirupama visits her colleague's home to talk about the departure of her husband and daughter to Ireland. Realising her pathetic condition, Nirupama cries as her husband and daughter ignored her by going to Ireland. She says that she has sacrificed all her life to look after her husband and daughter but now they feel ashamed to call her their wife and mother respectively. Rajeev says that he doesn't want their daughter to become another 'Nirupama' and that scathing statement has stabbed her right in the heart. This scene explores the stereotypical notion of how a good wife should be and what in turn she receives at the end of the day.

And in the last scene of the film, Nirupama receives appreciation from the President of India for her success in the field of organic farming. Rajeev and Lekshmi also join her in that happy moment. In that meeting President says to Rajeev that he can be proud of his wife and as a happy gesture he holds her hand. She feels complete and content with herself only after her husband appreciates her. She wants the approval of her husband to feel completeness in her life. She is not able to take a strong stroll in her path of success alone; she wants the company of her husband to make her feel whole and complete.

V. CONCLUSION

The movies which the researcher has taken for study show women as solid characters, who are working and striving in a society where women are given better socio, political and gender status and this is reflected in contemporary movies to a degree as the analyst has examined while doing the study. However, by one way or another patriarchal perspective sneaks in to these movies at times where the principle female character requests help or rely upon male hero to accomplish certain jobs. Thus these movies are attempting to state that women's identity is constantly joined to the male individuals throughout her life.

In *How Old Are You*, the director neglected to mirror the true strength of a lady who could remain alone and make a gathering and change the organic cultivating techniques. Here in the film *How Old Are You*, Nirupama was portrayed as a perfect lady who forfeits her life for the whole family. Even after she receives the appreciation of the President of India, she becomes happy when her husband feels proud of her. Then again in *22 Female Kottayam*, Tessa is cheated by a drug store proprietor when she was in school, and afterward cheated by Cyril; this conveys that women at times turn blind due to love and affection, paying scant heed to their future. On the peripheral surface these films may appear as the flag bearers of feminism and women empowerment but when one digs deep in to the inner layers of it, strains of patriarchy and subordination could still be traced in these new generation movies. This happens due to the centuries old conditioning of our society which still nurtures patriarchy in its roots.

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