Feminism and Representation of Women Identities in Women Oriented Movies: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT   *The present Malayalam film industry is now said to be in a way of drastic change. Today, women oriented movies in Malayalam claim the representations of women in a new manner. This article seeks whether the appearance of the so-called feminism in present female oriented Malayalam movies is for real or unreal. This article looks at movies by giving a major importance to female oriented subjects. Women in modern time are studied from a critical point of view as they are represented in the movies, having the principal place and also as they are shown in the promos. The focus of the present study is to see how liberated are the women of present, especially in the times when the prediction is that they are empowered. The study concludes that women in these movies are conceptualised as modern women but they actually are a modification of traditional feminine identity.*

Keywords: Feminism, representation, women, movies.

Introduction

The process of female/male identity construction is nothing unusual for a society. The question generally raised is whether one is born with innate concepts of female or male and the gender identity status develop through their experiences from social structure about acceptable performative roles. In Malayalam cinema, female identities have been developed with the highest care taken in reproducing patriarchal expected stereotypes. Women issues oriented movies and movies released in the name of women empowerment were very rare from earlier days. This trend has become more commercialised now. Nowadays, these types of movies have become popular. Women who have represented as the shadows of male leads have now turned as central characters. Yet, it is to investigate whether the women oriented movies which have become popular in society really offer feminine values? The next question is that whether the movies are reproducing the old patriarchally determined women identities in a new manner? This study therefore focuses on evaluating the representation of women identities of modern society in two movies within the character of the patriarchy, namely, Rani Padmini (2015) and Ramante Edanthottam (2017). These movies are selected on the basis that both are popularised in the name of modern representation of females.

There is a drastic change in the position of women where they have become more economically and educationally independent as compared with the past. However, this change can not establish the impression that women are empowered, independent and modern. They still face the problems but in a new manner. Nowadays, patriarchy in media has turned into a new form. Generally, both in society and in film industry the change given to the position of women is a repressed one.

Patriarchy describes the institutionalized system of male dominance. So we can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men and women, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women (Jagger and Rosenberg 1984).The term 'women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making etc.(Jagger and Rosenberg 1984)

Gender socialization is another important concept. According to Anthony Giddens (2006), it is through socialization that the stranded child gradually becomes a self-aware, experienced person, in the ways of the values in which he or she was born. Toys, children's books and TV emphasize differences between male and female and adults react differently depending on the perceived sex of the child (Giddens A. 2006). As a changing and unstable system of power, patriarchy usually privileges men and male children while the position of the female members of society is reduced to that of an appendage to men and as child bearers for their husbands (Mtenje, 2017).

Review of literature

A classical study based on this topic is going to be explained here. Theory of man look is explained by Mulvey (1975) in an article entitled '*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in. How popular cinema produces and reproduces the male gaze is explained in this. She calls this approach as political psychoanalysis. The ordinary cinema represents women as tools for satisfying men's pleasure. Traditional cinema was produced for men's desire to voyeuristic happiness, when an egotistic pleasure was also formed through this representation. Male supremacy can be seen in the appearance and actions of male characters. Mulvey further argues that camera is also searching for these masculine types of voyeuristic pleasure through the lens of the '*phallic* camera', which is equal to a viewer in the theatre watches, a movie through the vision of the masculine personality. The main move to replace male-oriented cinema was by Avanti grade, Cinema (modern cinema). It is this study which gives background for this research. That is how feminism is seen through the eyes of viewers.

Rani Padmini and Ramante Edanthottam have followed the same format. Rani Padmini is a travelogue movie describing about a woman named Padmini who travels to the Himalayas to meet her husband (who is in the Himalayas, participating in a car rally) in order to resolve a misunderstanding between them. She got married to him with great expectations of a happy life and successful career. Padmini wanted to achieve her career, but her mother-in-low opposed it. Her path crosses with that of a tomboyish Rani, who is escaping from a pack of goons. She was not caring about her life but freedom. Although mismatched personalities, they develop an interesting friendship on the road. Similarly, the movie Ramante Edanthottam narrates the inner role conflicts and dilemmas of a talented housewife Nandini. She is a devoted mother to her daughter and adjusting wife to her husband Elvis.

Analysis and discussion

According to the movie Rani Padmini, the film starts and ends with the background of consistency of stable family life and gender socialisation. First part of the movie shows how two girls, Rani and Padmini, were born and brought up in a totally different manner. Padmini was developed by herself as an obedient and disciplined girl. On the other side, from the childhood days itself, Rani was represented as a bad girl who had been quarrelling with boys, smashing her colleague who disturbed her and opposing the advices of mother etc. Padmini didn't want freedom without her husband. When she was successful finding out her husband she made him feel guilty for his deeds. However, she forgives and invites him again to her life. (She knew that he had cheated her and signing divorce petition in accordance with his mother's wish.   Finally, she becomes a mother of a child and shows she leads a happy family life. At the same time, Rani was all set to commercialise her beauty for survival. Objectification of the physical appearance of women is shown in this background, possibly because globalisation has this tendency to commercialise women's physical appearance and beauty. The movie points out that both of them were achieving their freedom. The film repeats that motherhood and maintenance of a good family life are the ultimate goals of a woman's life and her highest creative success. It was not unusual for such films to imply that decent wives and mothers would watch this.

The movie, *Ramante Edenthottam,* represents Elvis (husband of Nandini) as an arrogant, selfish, untrusting and rude husband. On the other hand, Raman is represented as a man who is encouraging and faithful. Raman is represented as the male cum main hero. Nandini was not self-empowered. She contacts Raman whenever she is in need for suggestions about her dilemmas. He encourages her to escape from the marriage. It shows that a man is the villain, but also the main saviour of a woman. Nandini becomes economically empowered and also breaks the loveless and unfaithful marriage. However, she still loves to have the care of Raman. It shows that women can live alone, but always they expect the care from a man. She is finding satisfaction from the friendship of another man. Active patriarchal system has controlled the narrative structure of this film. The director encodes equal status to men and women in the movie for the satisfaction of both male and female viewers.

Women in these movies are projected women as dependent and in need of a man's protection and acceptance. They are also surrendering themselves in the world of maternity. They attempt to bring a change but not gaining it. Mostly the movies portray two extremes of women identities: one being the obedient and idyllic and other being the bold and ruthless. Still, no movies take the effort to show the actual identify of a woman along with her real life situations. Heroines are modern in their appearance, but hold traditional patriarchal identities. The only change was the female character Nandini divorcing her husband. However, she was placing her lover on that place.

These two movies were released recently in the film industry and they were successfully adapting to the formula of a previously united female viewership: young women, professional women, travelling women and the orthodox housewives. All types of viewers were happily satisfied to this women oriented movies. Because it's framed very well in an outer cover as it advocates the feminist values. By following this trick, the movies makers gain the acceptance from the larger audience irrespective of their actual views. They are also indirectly popularising the concept of developing modern female identity, while female representation is bound to old patriarchal perceptions and traditions. Nowadays, female oriented films have become commercialising subjects which immediately influence the viewers. This is the main reason why presently these types of movies are getting preference.

In contemporary patriarchal culture, many of these subject positions have a gendered character, like voyeurism and masculinity, and romantic desire and femininity (Zoonen, 1994). Moreover, visual and narrative codes are often employed to realize an ideological 'closure-' of the text, 'enforcing' a traditional gendered subject position (Zoonen, 1994). This does not mean, however, that female spectatorship can only be moulded in the neither traditional patriarchal framework, nor male spectatorship either for that matter (Zoonen, 1994).

Conclusion

In a modern patriarchal setting, media conserve patriarchal concepts and highlight traditionally made identities for women, thus modifying traditional gendered social structure. We can't call it as modern films until they preach modern women identities. In films, the reproduction of traditional identities of women has developed in a modern scenario. The identity of the new woman in movies is the mirror reflection of marginalisation of the female, because the movies are narrated from the male perspective of feminism. The new films are also developing the male gazes through female views. In their traditional feminine identities, women are concurrently viewed and presented with their actions coded for strong visual appearance.

The presentation of woman is one of crucial elements of vision in film. However, it does not mean that women and their issued get prime importance rather they are used for popularity of movies. The physical appearance of a woman and the acceptance of woman oriented issues are mainly utilised for this. In Malayalam movies, female identities are restricted to a typical gendered definition of womanhood where their identities are defined by their actions yet bounded within their gendered identities like, mother, wife and sister. These films attempt to show some changes from the patriarchal representations of women in terms of marriage, family and motherhood. However, the opportunity of showing true freedom seems to be a myth.

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