



OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS: A STUDY ON FEMALE REPRESENTATION BY WOMEN IN POPULAR INDIAN CINEMA

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Abstract

Popular Indian film industry has been dominated by men in all its fields. Even though women are involved in all roles including as film producers, film critics, actresses, directors etc., generally, they have been underrepresented and used for the purpose of generating erotic pleasure. This underrepresentation mainly happens in films which are directed by men. Recently, the number of women film makers has been increasing. Majority of films which are directed by women represent women true to their self, projects their problems and works for their betterment. Thus, by analysing certain Indian popular films, the present research paper projects the main notions that such movies try to present and how far those movies are different from those movies which are produced and directed by men.

Keywords: Representation, Women, Popular Movies.

Introduction

In the past, female representations were underrepresented and subjected to the concept of male gaze. Even though there are 'super woman' characters in popular films, women are still sexualised. The film sector visages a constant difficulty to trace a sufficient aspect to balance both the sexualisation and betterment of sturdy women. Although representations of women characters have been improved in recent years, the rapid change in attitude happened in the popular Indian industry with the arrival of women directors and script writers. The present research paper analyses the female representations in major popular Indian films which are directed by women.

Representation of Women by Women in Popular Indian Cinema

Indian film industry has been dominated by male film directors. The subjects and theme dealt by these directors' present women in mainly two aspects. They are good hearted mother figure or the modern figure of a vamp. Majority of these popular movies present typical female characters and has been used for the purpose of invoking male gaze also. Even though the film industry has been dominated by male directors there are many some good female directors who present the female issues directly. Women film makers presenting the life of women try to create and examine the female experiences, problems and hardships encountered by women in everyday life. Film makers like PremaKaranth, Aparna Sen, Vijaya Mehta, Sai Paranjpye and Parvati Ghosh etc. have presented such themes. The difference in presentation can be seen with observing the following films. They are:

1. Phaniyamma (1983) – by PremaKaranth
2. Rao Saheb (1985) – by Vijaya Mehta
3. 36 Chowringhee Lane (1981) – by Aparna Sen
4. Parama (1985) – by Aparna Sen

Phaniyamma(1983)

In Phaniyamma (1983) directed by PremaKaranth, one can see the plot revolves around a Brahmin orthodox girl, Phani who does household works and chores while her brother attends school. At the age of nine, as per the custom, she was married to a little boy. After her marriage the boy went back to his home and the girl went to live with her uncle until she reached puberty. Unfortunately, one day she received a news that her boy husband died from a snake bite and she became a widow. When she reached puberty, her head was shaven and the bangles were broken, and she faced humiliation. She then decided to withstand the adverse situations and later became a social activist. She started helping untouchable women at child birth. She could even make a woman to leave her husband because of the atrocities she had faced from him. At the end of the film, she was seen advocating for abolishing old customs and traditions and the need for accepting a new world. Thus, the film presents the issues face by women in the Indian society and also gives example of powerful resistances.

Rao sahib (1985)

Rao sahib (1985) directed by Vijay Mehta, is the story of a young barrister, Rao Sahib who returned from England after his education and brought progressive ideas back with him. Enamoured by the western ways he started fighting with his father and society. His aunt Mausai, played by Vijaya Mehta, stood as the champion of modernity and a denouncer of brahminical values such as austerity, self-denial and the strictures of religion or tradition.



36 Chowringhee Lane (1981)

36 Chowringhee Lane (1981) directed by Aparna Sen, is a film which dealt with story of a character named Violet Stoneham, an Anglo-Indian teacher. She was lonely and enjoyed teaching Shakespeare. Later she meets a former student of her, Nandita and her boyfriend Samaresh. They became friends, and they even start using the apartment of violet. Her old friends left her and she is not appreciated at her job but she finds happiness in the company of her new friends. Eventually Samaresh and Nandita got married and moves away. Later Violet wanted to meet them, and she called them and organised a party in the Christmas eve. But they lie violet that they were out of town, so that violet comes over and drops off the cake on Christmas day, and she realises the fact that the couple has been deceiving her that they were actually in the apartment. She walks home silently, and alone she recites aloud the lines from King Lear with her only audience being a stray dog. The film actually shows the problems that a lone woman faces in our society.

Parama (1985)

The movie Parama (1985) directed by Aparna Sen, is about a 40-year-old married woman, Parama (Raakhee) whose identity lies in the words like 'bahu (the daughter-in-law)' 'kaki maa (paternal aunt)' 'bhabhi (brother's wife)'. Her well-settled, very normal and predictable life turns upside down when Rahul (Mukul Sharma), an expatriate photo-journalist working for a magazine chooses her to pose for a photo essay, 'An Indian Housewife'. Through Rahul, Parama rediscovers herself. His photographs of her make her look glamorous. Their affair or rather her discovery of herself, becomes a problem when some of the photographs, earlier admired by the family, are published in a journal (the semi-nude photographs that were published were never shown to the family, Rahul deceived her by publishing those photographs without her consent). Parama is rejected by her husband and has a mental breakdown. In the end, a doctor suggests prescribing psychiatric treatment and the family is willing to accept her back, but Parama adamantly refuses any sense of guilt, turning to her friend and asking her if she can help her to find a job. There ends the film but at the same time it poses a lot of disturbing questions to the society.

In Malayalam film industry also, there are many female directors like Anjali Menon, Geethu Mohandas, Revathi, Sreebala. K. Menon, Shalini Usha Nair, Revathi s Varma, Roshni Dinakar etc. The differences in the portrayal of female characters can also be seen in their movies like:

1. Bangalore Days
2. Makal (a segment of the Malayalam anthology film Kerala Café)
3. Love 24x7

Bangalore Days (2014)

Bangalore Days, directed by Anjali Menon, is a rare urban movie in Malayalam film industry. In the movie the platonic relationship between three characters, Kunju, Kuttan and Aju, who are cousins, presented. The character of Kuttan, who withholds age old moral aphorisms like whether the leaf falls on the thorn or the thorn falls on the leaf, it is the leaf which gets damaged. But later the character changes himself about the attitude of life and ends in even marrying a foreigner. The character of Aju shows the modern progressive figure of man who marries a crippled, named Sarah. From Sarah we get more than one powerful female characters being presented. The heroine, even though she is crippled but possessed with a strong identity and aiming for heights thus giving a perfect message for the women audience. And again, the mother of Sarah also disturbs the tradition like she doesn't want her daughter to get settled with a man even though she is crippled but wants her daughter to reach heights that she wished for. Thus, creation of a true self from the part of women can be taken into account.

Makal (2009)

Makal is a short segment in the anthology of movies Kerala Café. This session is directed by Revathi which portrays the condition of poor working-class people especially women. It is about the flesh trade which is happening under the disguise of adoption. A poor lady of Tamil background was forced by her husband to sell her daughter for money. Even though she is worried by this fact, relieved at one point that her daughter will get a better life than theirs because those who came to adopt her belong to a wealthy family. But later it turns out that they are part of flesh business and hands her over to prostitution. The movie shows the failure of developmental projects to reach the poor, especially women. The domestic problems that women face under the patriarchal figures, represented by her husband has also been discussed. Another important problem that the movie projects is the problem of prostitution especially child prostitution under the disguise of adoption and it also shows the inefficiency of existing laws of the country. Mainstream feminist writers and thinkers sometimes fail to reach to these sessions of the society and the importance of such a discussion has been cleverly portrayed by Revathi through this short session, Makal.

Love 24x7 (2015)

Love 24x7 is a movie which is based on the lives of journalists, directed by Sreebala. K Menon. As the title itself shows, the continues work and life of two journalists named Rupesh and Kabani and their love and work are the main plot of the movie. Their



affair cannot be considered as a portrayal in traditional manner, but it is interwoven with personal prejudices which gives importance to the profession. The female protagonist of the film *Kabani* is an example for the female society about the importance of education and getting a job in the modern times for their own existence. The character gives more importance to her career rather than the relationship with Rupesh traces the concept of Virginia Woolf's theory of *Room of one's Own*. *Kabani* even breaks up with Rupesh for the sake of her job and career. Later the relation becomes alive in which the director indirectly signs the idea that a woman should give importance to career rather other aspects of life. Along with the character of *Kabani*, her mother is also a symbol of female struggle. She is a widow and worked hard to raise her daughter and even participates in the election process and becomes the representative of the local people. Thus, the character of *Kabani's* mother has been carefully portrayed by the director as a model for the women spectators.

All these movies, express or place women at centre of narration and their problems and empowerment are spoken through the emotions shared by the film makers themselves. Thus, when one observes these types of movies, one can say that these are products of not mainstream patriarchal political ideologies which uses male gaze and visual pleasure as tools for drawing masses into the theatres. So that one can say that there is politics behind every scene, especially when they present women characters in creating and identifying selves.

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