

AN ANALYSIS ON THE PORTRAYAL OF MALE PROTAGONIST IN TAMIL FILMS

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ABSTRACT

Tamil cinema is influenced by the actors staging their roles and taking a stand in society. The characters that the actors portray in their films right from the ages of MGR to Kamal Hassan and to Vijay Sethupathi in the recent times and their portrayal of characters as 'men' in their movies has a lot to say about the gender identities in the society. The research aims to study and understand how men are showed and portrayed in Tamil films because of the importance of cinema that has been inbred so deeply into the hearts of the people right from the old ages and how cinema is used as a tool to represent and portray societal values. Content analysis has been used to analyze the Tamil movies corresponding to the consumption of gender identities, male dominance, masculinity and their gender roles in the cinema through which they are portrayed. The paper talks about the shift in the portrayal of men in the Tamil cinema over time and a positive approach towards the conclusion.

KEYWORDS: *Male Dominance, Content Analysis, Male Protagonists, Tamil Cinema Hegemonic Masculinity, Male Portrayal*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

The Tamil Film industry also is known as the Kollywood Industry is situated in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, Chennai. The center point of the Tamil film industry is in Kodambakkam which is in Chennai. Kollywood is a colloquial term used to portray this industry, the word being a portmanteau of Kodambakkam and Hollywood ("Tamil cinema - Wikipedia," n.d.).

Tamil cinema later ardently affected other film making ventures of India like the Tollywood, Sandalwood, and Mollywood, setting up Chennai as an auxiliary center, the origin for Hindi cinema and other South Indian film industry. In the course of the last quarter of the twentieth century that is post-1950s, Tamil movies from India built up a worldwide presence. The film industry was filled with various theatre actors casting in front of the cameras viz Shivaji Ganesan, M.G Ramachandran, Nambiar, Gemini Ganesan, Suruli Rajan, Nagesh, etc. Through film distribution, where the movies are sold to the foreign market, numerous cinema theatres in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Japan, and the Middle East, parts of Africa, Oceania, Europe, and North America started originated which screened Tamil movies. The business additionally brought into the concept of independent film making in Tamil diaspora populaces in Malaysia, Singapore, and the Western Hemisphere ("Website," n.d-a).

The Tamil Film industry has its origin around the 1930s, and had been a prolific producer of movies after tele-color was introduced. In the recent three decades, the Tamil film industry has produced over more than 15,000 films but in the recent years did the industry produce almost 1000 films per year out of which 400 films get a national level good response and among which almost 150 movies get critically acclaimed worldwide. This made it easier for young and new talented artists and directors (TNN, 2013).

In this research, three movies namely *Veeram*, *Mass* and *Theri* have been chosen for study by the researcher. These movies are known for their box office super hit films in the market have been chosen for study by the researcher (Raghavendra). The researcher considering the fact that the leading actors who have played as protagonist Ajith Kumar, Surya, and Vijay in the above said movies have been prevailing in the Tamil cinema industry from a long time since their start of career (Padavirumbee, 2012). These movies have been selected to analyze the male protagonist's role in Tamil cinema and how it builds up masculinity in the whole narrative; also it analyses and identifies how men are portrayed in Tamil. The male protagonists give away major impact to their fans; on the society and to the youth.

This research is conducted to study upon the portrayal of men in commercial films in Tamil cinema, and analyses the cinematic elements which goes in accordance with the display of masculine characteristics of man.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework consists of concepts and, together with their definitions and reference to relevant scholarly literature, existing theory that is used for the particular research (Labaree, 2009).

Connell's Theory of Masculinity

R. W. Connell's says that hegemonic masculinity is a part of gender theory which perceives different masculinities that change over time, culture and the person. Hegemonic masculinity is characterized as training that legitimizes men's prevailing position in the public eye that is the society and legitimizes the suppression of women. Hegemonic masculinity initiates to clarify how and why men keep up dominant social parts over women, and other sexual orientation personalities, which are seen as "feminine" in a given society. To discuss masculinity is to talk about gender relations. Masculinity is not proportional to men; they concern the position of men in a gender order. They can be characterized as the examples of training by which individuals (the two men and women, however mostly men) connect with that position. The hypothetical concern was the gender order arrange all in all; masculinity was one bit of the jigsaw ("Masculinities," n.d.).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is primarily used to obtain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations; the methodology that is used to do the study of this research is "Content analysis." Content analysis is a technique for systematically describing written, spoken, or visual communication. Considering the main elements of important scenes like dominant male roles, camera angles, music and dialog are taken and analyzed in accordance to the research topic ("Content analysis: Introduction," n.d.). The movies taken are Ajith Kumar's *Veeram* (2014), Suriya's *Mass Engira Masilamani* (2015), and Vijay's *Theri* (2016). These movies defined the mass culture in Tamil Nadu and had a huge impact on tamil society. Considering the mass appeal of these movies, the research is exploratory in nature; the process supports a qualitative method of inquiry. All of the three movies focus on the protagonists in dominant roles.

The analysis of the movies talks on why the character of men so dominant in the recent commercial movies and how they are portrayed and thus how the portrayal construct the ideology of men?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the book 'Tamil Cinema', from the sub-topic gender identities in cinema consumption, the author Periyannayagam Jesudoss talks about how gender roles are socially created and the way they are learned from the behavioural pattern by our forefathers and elders mediated by the pop media. Tamil cinema still propagates customary gender stereotypes since it reflects overwhelming social esteems. The cinema's portrayal additionally fortifies them, introducing them as characteristic and this is consumed by the audience. For instance, the stereotypes of masculine domination and feminine submission are depicted, frequently supported, and once in a while tested in cinema; however, the prevalent pictures of male domination and female submission are for the most part strengthened by cinema. Numerous cinema stories are still implicitly intended to be deciphered from the perspective of male domination ("[Tamil Cinema]," n.d.).

R. W Connell says in her book 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept'.

"Gender order is a whole and masculinity is one piece of a bigger jigsaw".

The idea of hegemonic manliness has impacted gender studies about crosswise over numerous scholarly fields however have also pulled in genuine feedback. The author follows the cause of the idea in a merging of thoughts in the mid-1980s and guides the ways it was connected when exploring on men and masculinity. Assessing the vital criticisms, the author defends the fundamental idea of neither masculinity, which in most research use is neither rectified nor existentialist ("Masculinities," n.d.).

'Gender, Men and Masculinities' says "Gender includes men and in addition ladies. Endeavours to comprehend gender have in some cases utilized gender roles, and some of the times have regarded men and women as basic classes. Likewise, the most productive approach is to consider gender to be an arrangement of social relations. Masculinity is the example of social practice related to the position of men in any general public's arrangement of gender relations. The substantial distinction isn't a settled determinant of the gender patterns; it is, somewhat, a perspective in gender practice. There are numerous masculinities; there are orders of masculinities, frequently characterizing a "hegemonic" design for a given society; masculinities are aggregate and in addition singular; masculinities are effectively built-in social life; masculinities are internally complex; masculinities change over the period of time in due course of history. Developments for change of conventional masculinities have created in numerous nations. Numerous men oppose change, as a result of the "profit" they get from male-centric gender frameworks yet, there is also an essential intention in men to change. Such change is destined to be effective when it underlines social equity and also de-gendering or gender diversity ("Website," n.d-b).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The three movies stand as an exemplary to all the males in our society as it marks an example of how a man should be. It's not the muscular and fit body that defines a man to be a man but his characters and the way he connects with the others. As the author of 'Tamil Cinema' says in his book that the gender being a so prominent as it is a part and parcel of our society, to which the generation of people have been taught and learned through movies.

Camera Angles/Movements

In every movie, the camera angles play an important role in showing the characters in a movie. The angles placed and the movements of the camera around the character have to juxtapose in order to convey meanings.

- In Mass Engira Maasilamani movie's portrayal of the man is very strong and evident. The camera angles are set in specific ways so that the character is established strongly from the beginning to the very end of the movie. Slow motions and low angles were many. This movie shows that even being a man, he cannot stand alone.
- In the movie Veeram, a male in rural society is represented. The usage of dutch tilt, a camera movement which involves the tilting of the camera towards one side so that it isn't levelled ("The Dutch Angle: Tilting the Camera for Dramatic Effect," 2016) and also slow-motion camera technique was used often. The costumes the male protagonist wore and the supporting characters are evident to show the dominance of the male character. The portrayal of the male protagonist in this specific movie was all about how dominant the males can be.
- The movie Theri has a normal representation of the male protagonist to which we can define the male as a caring and loving individual when compared to the other two movies. Not much of camera angles were shown to highlight the male character so that the portrayal of the male characters is very subtle.

Music

Music is a must for every form of storytelling or narration; the background score is one of the most important parts of conveying a story as it binds the audience and the visuals together ("Importance of BGM in movies," n.d.).

- The mass movie had a different sound track running behind for each of the male protagonists where the actor Surya had a dual role within the film. BGM was mild yet recurring to intensify the motif of the characters.
- In Veeram, BGM played a huge role in the narration part, the background score was heavy with the rural drum beats; the music and lyrics for the recurring motif song were intense that the male character had got an extra weightage along with the slow-motion camera technique.
- Theri's BGM played an important role during the fight sequences, loving and caring scenes, and marriage and motif scenes. Apart from that, the BGM score was well planned to get along with the story due to its tenderness and softness throughout the movie.

Dominant Role

Movies where the men have a great impact over women where the women's role is submissive in the movies. This also portrays the subjugated ideology of women in our society (Kalyan Raman, 2017).

- In Mass, although the female lead presence time is less, the male is shown as a strong and independent character. On the contrary, he is shown as a loving, tender person to the opposite gender. He became non-resilient when distress came upon their beloved ones.
- In Veeram, the male is shown as an alpha male with a bunch of siblings who are trying to be just like the eldest sibling. The screen presence for the female lead is very less yet again the character is supportive towards the women and family-related issues. The character is shown as a mentally and physically strong person and takes up the burden of the entire family on his shoulders. This refers to how the males in the current societal scenario are represented. It is the duty of a male to take care of things and make sure nothing goes wrong.

Dialogues

Dialogues require enticing the audience to push the story forward. It is the dialogues which connect the audience with the characters in the movie (Kelly & Laurent, 2010).

- In the movie Mass, the dialogues were centered and inclined towards love, friendship, trust, etc. The dialogues played a fair role in the movie. The dialogues stressed the qualities of man.
- In Veeram, Dialogues played a very important role in the narration part as well as on conveying the portrayal of the man. The dialogues created a huge impact on the audiences as it stressed upon how a man should be towards his family, wife, friends, and others thus creating a role model to the other male supporting characters within the movie.
- In the movie Theri, the dialogues were mostly family centered, and stressed mostly upon good relationships and how a man should be towards his mother, wife, and daughter. Though the movie has no fatherly figure to the protagonist, there are instances of how a father ought to be in the latter part of the movie.

CONCLUSIONS

The research paper focused on the portrayal of men in Tamil cinema and after the analyses and the findings the researcher has come to the conclusion that, with all the three given movies having similarities in all the parameters, it is proven that the male representation and their portrayal in the movies are dominant and the factors influence the viewer's perception affecting both the males and females in the society. This portrayal builds up an idea of the male being present in society.

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