

Women Objectification and Hyper- Masculinity in the Select Movies of K.Balachander

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Abstract

Media is a representation of culture and society, and has power of voice in presenting reality to people around the world. Media educates people the different dimension of life. In the journey of cinema industry, Tamil cinema has produced and portrayed women characters in diverse perspectives. Representation of women in cinema varies according to different socio-cultural and political contexts. Women in cinema were mostly portrayed as loser, dominant figure, child breeder, uneducated and voiceless. Any negative stereotyping of women persistently connected with society in every aspect of activity reflects wider effect among the society. By insisting education for girl children, media helps the society to overcome gender bias. Requisite of gender equalities and women empowerment are enriched through media. The depiction of women has changed over the years according to changing social attitudes and perceptions.

Keywords: Dominant, socio-cultural, persistently, empowerment, social attitudes.

Introduction

In most popular films, women characters were shaped according to the themes and attitudes of the characters. Women were submissive sexual objects right from the time of the *Ramayana* to the *Mahabharata*. Importantly, this is followed in modernized culture also. Women have become more powerful in all fields, and have been rising to the place of men in terms of knowledge, education, empowering themselves in every aspect of their life around the society. Directors like K.Balachander have different dimensions on their women characters and have maintained transmission of traditional women role in to self-dependent. This article attempts to explore the idea of the status of women as an object in Tamil cinema represented in K.Balachander's select movies.

Cultural and social factors are interlinked with the development of stereotyped gender roles of domination and control. A girl child grows up with a constant sense of being weak and in need of protection. The families are responsible for creating equal division of labour between sexes and allocation of power over resources. Identity is the basic thirst for

every individual under human survival and that thirst prevails among women too. Psychological and physical imbalances persist in the archaic society with gender discrimination. Indian government has refined women's rights and law in keeping in mind the development of women in socio-cultural arena. In Tamil movies, they showcase gender disparity. Female characters were shown as objects and given low values; they were also tormented physically, domestically and psychologically.

Men were praised and celebrated as heroes for the country and family. They were given more importance in possessions, education, and in the societal development. Earlier 60's and 70's cinema actors like Shivaji Ganesan and MGR were celebrated for their bravery, intelligence, sense of humour and for the delivery of dialogues in a heroic manner. The women in cinema were reconstructed as women chased, tugged, hit, grabbed her waist and pinched inappropriately, and the hero shows some suggestive gestures to woo her. The behavioural attitude displays that he loves her and he expects to accept him accepting all his misbehaviour as love for her.

Gender – based violence often explained as a product of patriarchal attitudes, thinking and cultural backdrops. The most adverse impact was that women feelings were not accepted and the feelings were treated as having no values. Culture is instrumental in keeping crime alive. The Tamil film industry also encourages such crime in the form of movie persistently

promoting crimes through screening rape, culture of sexual violence and projects notion of toxic masculinity. Hero worship was greatly found in the earlier cinema. This started to vanish slowly with the emergence of new directors and the ideas of women empowerment in cinema.

Directors like Bharathiraja, Manirathnam and K.Balachander express the importance of women characters in their movies to show the equivalence and role of women in the society. Among the women-centric writers, the most famous and prestigious director in Tamil film industry was K.Balachander. He was the most prominent director in the film industry for 40 years and he received the most prestigious award- Padmashree award. His movies depict women characters as independent, bold and progressive. His films are women-centric in order to differentiate himself from other movie makers. Knowingly or unknowingly his themes focuses on need for women empowerment in the society. Feminism started to spread around only during 1970s, but Tamil cinema has been projecting the importance of women empowerment, women education, women liberty and women freedom since the 1960s.

K.Balachander portrays women characters with real life of women. In his movies, he took up realism in portraying women, at a time when hero worship was at its peak. Directors, for their own benefit and for the purpose of commercial issues, projected women as sex dolls exhibiting their beauty for advertisement on the silver

screen. Women are always seen as commodity sellers showcasing their beauty to sell commodities. This kind of approach has changed with remarkable changes that happened in Tamil cinema with the direction of movies exhibiting the rights of women in the society.

The representation of women has acquired different way in respect to cinema industry with the women -centric directors. Cinema has been considered as the major means to reach wider audience. Decision making and problem solving were done only by the male characters and women characters have been passive listeners. Society expects women to be passive participants of a family; they should engage themselves to cook, to serve men, to take care of children, and in-laws. The women were idolized as objects and underscored by dehumanization. The 'wooing' or 'courtship' of women on screen is carried out through harassment, teasing, molestation and pursuing women until they give in to men. This sort of portrayal encourages onlookers to approach women in terms of abuse, harass, and stalk in the name of wooing. Women were not given independence related to their life and they were even treated as voiceless.

Male dominant society destroys women's self-confidence and denies decision making even in their education and marriage. Tamil cinema under the direction of K.Balachander developed a tremendous improvement of women's condition in society and expressed women's rights in the society. Even though he produced women

centric movies he also presented women as an item of lust where women are completely underscored. In the movie *Aval Oru Thodar Kadhai*, a character called Fatta-Fat willingly loses her virginity to a man who also woos her mother for the same lust. In depicting such characters KB voluntarily degraded women values. Such depiction encourages younger generation to persuade a women in a notion of a sexually submissive attitude.

Representation of women in K.Balachander's movies portrays cultural representation of women in day to day life. His women characters emphasize empowerment and development and the idea that society relies in the growth of girl child. He has shown his women characters as strong, independent, struggling to survive, self -sacrificing and often depicted as women exposed to society. Women characters of Balachander are rarely ideal but they were real. Women characters were educated and they fight their war against the patriarchal dogma. They were relentless strugglers against the society who refused to treat them par with its men. From the direction of KB two movies were selected to display his portrayal of women in the society and the importance of women rights to lead their life peacefully. He took up the theme of feminism and made strong women as lead characters in his movies was shown as objects of self sacrifice and sacred lamp of the family. Particularly speaking about *Aval Our Thodarkathai* he produces a strong heroine who was shown as the bread winner of the family with ostensible manner.

Somehow she was also depicted as a loser who deliberately sacrifices her life to her widowed sister and unmarried sister. The director portrays Kavitha (Sujatha) as a sacrificial lamb for a 'thankless family'. He uses revolutionary character who works for family even in the place where men are shown as drunkards, useless to the family for pence. The society always celebrates men and exposes them as masters of the family, but KB has produced women as decision makers. Here in this movie *Aval Oru Thodarkathai*, he deliberately slaps the society who worships men as Godfathers. The inner struggle of a woman was not expressed instead she was shown as a woman with adamant character. This movie is a tricky concept that woman can't handle the job of a man. KB strongly argues that a woman can thrive in a man's position just as easily as a man can. Woman depicted in this movie was able to handle all the challenges as a man can face to take care of a family. Mostly in many movies, women were shown as dull figures who strive to handle the family with struggle. But in this movie KB posturizes the character with lofty style of behaviour and faces the problem bravely by wearing high costumes, cheerful smiles and in the most modern style of attitude. Even here in this movie women are portrayed as self-sacrificing, bold and modern but the dignity of individuality was suppressed. The heroine of the movie was an object of earning for the betterment of family and to continue her service of earning until her death. KB's idea of imparting women characters in this movie was an attempt to show women as brave, independent and

arrogant in decision making, but her inner feelings were not given importance. Masculinity destroys the power of women in terms of marriage. It is not necessary for a woman to remain as a spinster, she can also support her family after her marriage but hyper- masculinity asserts the value of women in lower level.

KB raises his heroine to the position of man who was forced to take the role of man to run a family with a fierce and twice unpleasant as man. As a women-centric director he clearly shows his central woman character is an important factor for the development of society and family. But he failed to project other minor women characters in such a bold and independent manner. Except the heroine, all the other characters were presented as submissive to men. Particularly speaking the widowed sister was portrayed as an item of lust who willingly and knowingly fall in love with her sister's lover. This type of projection tempts the younger generation to approach woman with a heroic masculinity. Usually in movies during 80s and 90s, male characters played an important role showing idealism with realism, quality of heroism, powerful in strength and with positive traits.

KB with the ideal follower of Subramaniya Bharathi's he borrowed themes for his women central- characters from the concept of 'Pudhumai Pen'. KB's heroines' life represented as an independent, individualistic personality and their voices untrammelled by the presence or absence of men in their lives. He

celebrates women in his movies to showcase the importance of their development in society and culture. Even though the movie was women-centric, the director portrays woman as a self-sacrificing agent and man as a benefiter. His heroine in *Aval Oru Thodarkathai* was a commercial idealistic continuum. The heroine Kavitha (Sujatha) contributes to her family in all aspects when it comes in to an interest of marriage as a compulsion to liberate her from all her responsibilities. Marriage is not an end point for any woman to conclude their journey of life but the real journey starts only after the marriage. However the heroine was described as a brave, proud and independent person. The director showed her as a woman can't strive for a long in the society were men lead the 'high positions'. This type of hyper-masculinity assertions has created inequality based dynamics.

The next movie of KB was *Manathil Uruthi Vendum* which clearly outlines the role of women in a local dialect. He produces his heroine Suhasini in the lead role who lives for the beneficiary of entire family and earns only for their needs. The heroine of the movie played the role of a nurse and she is portrayed as the sole bread winner of the family. She was a strict worker and kind towards her patients. The character was created to depict women to be glorified to the height of men, where women are meant for household works. It was the time when men were glorified for their hardships and for their financial status. This movie clearly focuses on the women characters- how they face challenges in the

society for the improvement of financial status of the family. The heroine in the movie *Manathil Uruthi Vendum* is self-dependent, career centred and goal oriented. The director produced his heroine as a woman who finds meaning and joy beyond the apparently conventional or who is seen to find themselves bigger than themselves. Every stage of her life Nandhini (Suhasini) the heroine plays a great role in keeping the family financially stable. This movie represents the firm mind of a woman who supports and cares for her family at every time even at her critical status. KB takes his heroine in the sense of far-reaching in its impact than the traditional devices. The heroine handles her family with dignity and in respectful manner. Irresponsible men characters were showed in her family who were all running behind their own wish and whims. The father of the heroine is an old man who gives birth to children even at his old age but refuses to work and earn for the family blindly expressing his inability.

KB showed his heroine as a real sacred lamb when she dedicatedly decided to donate her kidney to her Ex-husband. The sympathy over the man she donated her kidney- this was figured as women are emotionally weak. This attitude brought her great acclaim but besides her profound fame and name she behaves as a well-wisher of common man which even destroys her love because of her kindness. Even in such scene men were brutally criticizing women for their humaneness. The norm created by the cinema- that man can get married twice even if the first wife is alive but women are objected to help or

have friendly relationship with man apart from husband or lover. The central theme of this movie was requirement to the subject of marriage, being married, performing roles and function of a women adhering. Also employment factor in which heroine is portrayed as self-reliant and strong independent woman boosting her self-confidence through her profession. In Tamil movies, women-centric concept revolves around one central character and other minor women characters were not given much importance and their inner feelings were not focused outwardly. In this movie wife of Nandhini's (Suhasini) ex-husband was pictured as an object of voiceless. Tears and pleading for husband survival is given more importance than the self dignity of women which is underscored. It clearly depicts the typical cultural notion of being bowed to husband at all circumstances is envisioned through the character.

Conclusion

Films are mirror of our life. Strong messages are conveyed through a powerful medium in a disguised manner. KB produced a positive portrayal of women on the silver screen. In perpetuating traditional values using 'female ideal' as a main tool to achieve this continue to be at the force of feminists concern about valid female representation in the media. Considering the fact women also having socio economic

status they pose different kind of ambitions and desires from which they lead different lives. It is improper to portray in an identical manner. KB portrayed women as self-sacrificing independent and strong but he showcased them as a scapegoat. Film plays a responsive role in portraying characters towards context. Women are exhibited as commodities. Their emotions and inner feelings were destroyed and hidden through their sacrifice for the family or for an individual. Cinema has to create a separate and independent space for women to help them to realize their own dreams.

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