PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN FILMS OF FEMALE DIRECTORS
-A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF "IRUTHI SUTTRU BY SUDHA KONGARA"

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Abstract

The representation of women in media has been discussed from the second wave feminism and, many feminist scholars have analyzed whether women were portrayed stereotypical or not. The studies revealed that women were not shown in a constructive manner. They were shown as objects of sexual desire and their role was to support men. Feminist critics argued that the domination of men in media industry was the reason for this kind of representation. The Film theorist Claire Johnston proposed the concept "Counter Cinema" to control this biased representation. She said that women's cinema would be the alternate cinema as they become the producer of the message and so they could change the way women are represented. The researcher has analyzed the movie "Iruthi Suttru" directed by Sudha Kongara, a female director to identify whether the representation of women was stereotypical or not and, if there were any objectification and narrow representation in the movie. The results showed that the female director had attempted in many areas to improve the representation of women in this movie but there were stereotypical portrayal of women in few categories. It was also found out that the female director showed women as sexual object in few shots. There was no narrow representation of women in this movie.

Key words- Portrayal,Women,Iruthi Suttru, Female Directors, Sudha Kongara

1. Introduction

Many have criticized that the representation of women were not realistic. Women were portrayed as submissive characters, objects of sexual desire and, their main role was to support the male lead. It was found out that there was a stereotypical and narrow representation of women in movies by and large. The poor representation of women could be the fault of male directors who wanted to give importance to the male characters alone.

Hence, this study focused on how female characters were represented in one of the Tamil movies directed by a female director. The Study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis.

1.1. Need of the Study

The study would help the media scholars to find out how Tamil female directors portrayed women in their movies. This study would widen the knowledge on media and women. It would also help the Tamil film industry to have better understanding on the representation of women.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to find out if there were any stereotypical portrayals of women in the movie.

1.3. Research Methodology

The study has used both quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis to analyze the movie and, the coding sheet was used as a tool. Each and every shot was observed for qualitative analysis.

2. Review of Literature

Gnaani (1996) argued that the Indian filmmakers followed the trend as they portrayed women as just stand by in the story, being the male protagonist's love interest, either giving him happy company, or making him a jilted sad devdas. The trend continues even today though the style of presentation has changed. Women symbolized the "the weaker sex" who were solely dependent on men for almost everything. Sridhar (2014) found out that there was a constant failure across films to look beyond the portrayal of woman as someone "who loves to cook and clean, wash and scrub, shine and polish for her man.

Jacob & Akbar, (2014) pointed out with the reference of Laura mulvey's "Visual pleasure and Narrative cinema" (1975) that the conventions of popular narrative cinema are structured by a patriarchal unconscious and positioning of women in films happened as objects of a "male gaze". Mulvey used terms such as 'scopo-philia (pleasure in looking) and 'voyeurism' (pleasure in looking without being seen) to describe the visual pleasure of cinema spectatorship. She stated that popular narrative cinema was structured to support the patriarchal order in which woman's place is as, 'the bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.

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Kawecki (2010) said that Girls tend to perceive their bodies as "objects" and that others also view their bodies as objects, whereas boys tend to perceive their bodies as "processes" such as power and function.

According to Kutty Revathy (2001), Female directors were trying to break the male created representation through their languages and modern thought. Women's cinema has been rejecting the objectification and beauty doll representation. The main motto of the women's cinema has been to express the women's psychological point of view. It would be the dawning of a truly liberated era for women in cinema, only when women would actively involve in these departments.

The report by Geena Davis Institute, founded by Academy Award winning actress Geena Davis, was released at 'Global Symposium on Gender in Media' here. According to the study, funded by the Oak Foundation, the gender ratio in India's film industry stood at 6.2 males to every female, and only one-in-ten directors was a woman.

3. Theoretical Framework

The stereotypical theory was selected to analyze the portrayal of women in films of female directors. The term 'Stereotype' was coined by Walter Lippmann, the Social Scientist in 1922. It was used to refer to the image that people hold in their minds about a particular topic.

According to Chad Brewer (2009), Lippmann in his critically acclaimed book, Public Opinion (1922), explained that the way things were in the real world were often not the same as the images that existed in the minds of individuals within a given society, yet the dominant group perpetuated the inaccurate images. As the paper passed through the press, the press produced exact copies according to what the press manager had specified the print should look like. Much like powerful players in society, the media directors could determine how society viewed specific groups within that society.

Brewer (2009) added that after Lippmann coined the term stereotype, many other social science theorists used the concept with a variety of explanations; however, they all focused around the same idea of cultural and superficial beliefs or generalizations about a specific group or subgroup within a given society. Most often, social scientists defined a stereotype as

a negative idea or image thought to be true of every member of a specific group. Stored schemas in the minds of citizens provided by media and governmental messages facilitated these images. These beliefs became shared knowledge between members of the same society and culture.

Men were taught to be dominant and competent whereas women were taught to be warmth and expressive in our culture. It cultivated in the young minds that men were assertive, cold, rough and competent whereas women were submissive, warm and gentle.

For the audiences who had little or no contact with the stereotyped group, the information and portrayals through media might create "Constructed meaning" and stereotypical opinions about certain groups.

This stereotype might be the result of one's own observation or influenced by the external groups such as friends, family, teachers, colleagues and media.

The narrow representation was also the type of representation of media on women. Media portrayed women as slim, extremely white, young and perfect beauty. This kind of representation was called narrow representation.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Total number of shots female appeared

In Irudhi Suttru movie, the female characters appeared in 842 shots out of 1401 total shots in the movie which means 60% of the shots had female characters.

It was found out that female director had given equal space to women characters in the movie. The director portrayed women characters as active participant. Therefore, it was concluded that based on the number of shots female appeared in the movie, there was no stereotypical representation.

4.2. Role

To analyze the variable "Role", the researcher had three parameters such as lead, major and minor. In 49% of total shots of Irudhi Suttru movie, women were shown in lead roles and in 37% of total shots they were shown in major roles, whereas 27% of total shots showed women in minor roles. It was revealed that women were shown as lead characters in the

movie directed by a female director. The director portrayed women as lead characters instead of showing them mere appearing and vanishing. Women were not shown as stand by or being the love interest of hero or just giving happy company to hero in this movie. So, it was concluded that based on account of the roles given to female characters in this movie, there was no stereotypical representation.

4.3. Space

The variable "Space" referred to the factors whether women were shown in domestic realm, working place or other places. The factor 'workplace' referred to the training place and the factor 'other places' refer to the boxing court. In Irudhi Suttru only in 6% of total shots women were shown in domestic realm and in 2% of total shots women were shown at working place. It was found that in 78% of total shots women were shown in other places, ie. boxing court.

Hence, the female director did not show women in a traditional way not as a subordinate to men. She did not show women as merely cooking, washing and scrubbing for men. She had shown women as a goal oriented and striving hard to achieve them. Hence, it was concluded that as per the space allotted for women in the movie, there was no stereotypical representation.

4.4. Character

This variable "Character" referred to whether women were shown as weak & crying or bold & strong. In Irudhi Suttru, only 8% of total shots showed women characters as weak and crying. Women were shown submissive, weak and crying when it was related to love issue. This movie had 13% of shots of showing bold women.

The director has portrayed women as bold and physically strong in many shots though she had shown women as submissive, weak and crying. The percentage of showing women as bold was higher than the percentage of showing women as submissive. The director didn't show women mostly as weak, very emotional, warm, gentle, soft-spoken and fearful. She portrayed women as strong, powerful, focused, active and aggressive in this movie. Hence, it was not stereotypical in showing women in character wise.

4.5. Decision Making

In Irudhi Suttru, eight shots showed female characters as decision makers and three shots showed others as decision makers. Here, the other refers to the coach, Prabhu. The percentage of showing women as decision makers was higher than the decision taken by

men. Talking about the freedom of choosing the female lead's partner, this movie portrayed that woman decided whom to love and marry. Hence, it was not stereotypical when concerned with decision making rights.

4.6. Fetish Image

In Irudhi Suttru, there was no kissing scene, one shot showing woman 'hugging', one shot showed female character as glamorous, two shots revealed 'touch with the sexual motivation', two shots had the sexual motive sight and it had six festish shots in total.

When the appearance of Madhi was concerned, it was entirely different from usual heroines of Tamil cinema: she wore only ¾ th pant, tracks and loose shirts, no ornaments, no stylish hairstyle, no lipstick or other make ups. Her extreme white color or north Indian look was justified by the director in the plot of Madhi's north Indian mother and south Indian father.

It was also found out that there was no narrow representation of women in the movie and therefore not stereotypical. But there was sexual objectification of women in this movie therefore it was stereotypical.

4.7. Economic Dependency

Though Madhi in Irudhi Suttru was shown in one scene as a fish seller to support the family, in other scenes she was showed as dependent on the coach for money. She collected money daily from Prabhu and made her family happy by buying sari for her mother, biryani for her family and so on. Prabhu bought her muffler, shoes, training equipment and energy drinks. He paid certain amount to Thamayanthi to bring their daughters to Delhi for tournament training. Moreover, Prabhu rescued Madhi from the police station before filing FIR by paying one lakh. Here, the female characters were dependent financially on male characters.

It was found out that the female director also showed women as economically dependent on men. Hence, it was stereotypical in portraying women as economically dependent.

4.8. Crisis Management

The crisis management by women characters in the Irudhi Suttru movie was shown equal in both weak and strong category. It had 24 shots showing women as weak but it also had 24 shots showing women as strong when problem arose. Hence, this movie had balanced representation of crisis management capacity of female characters.

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4.9. Derogatory Comments

This movie had 26 shots of derogatory comments and it was clear that the female director also allowed their male characters to use derogatory comments on women. Hence, it was stereotypical.

4.10. Violence:

The variable 'violence' referred to both physical and mental torture which prevented women to progress. In Irudhi Suttru movie, beating man by woman and woman by man was shown equally whereas it had 10 shots of mental torture done by male characters.

The total number of shots showing violence against women by men was very low. The female directors presented women beating and slapping men. It had shown male characters torturing female characters verbally. Hence, it was stereotypical when it was related to mental torturing on women.

5. Conclusion

The female directors portrayed women constructively in six categories and stereotypical in four categories. It revealed that the female director also portrayed women stereotypical but the percentage was very low. According to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of this movie, it was concluded that the female director had attempted in many areas to improve the representation of women in this movie though there were stereotypical portrayals of women in few categories.

It was also found out from the category of fetish images that the director had shown female characters as sexual object in few shots. There was no narrow representation of women in this movie.

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