FEMININE FASCINATIONS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE SPECTATORS AND THE FEMALE STARS

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is the only medium that can proffer the combination of reality and intimacy. When other mediums could only offer partial pleasure and the preliminary excitements, cinema provides the semi- magical transformation of screen identification. Apart from being the passive object of masculine desire, there is a little room for feminine desire within the cinema. In spite of these negative constructions the female spectators are capable of making multiple identifications across gender boundaries. The relationship between the female spectators and the female stars is a complex process that results in the formation of feminine identities through cinematic modes of address. Stars are often read as role models, contributing to the construction of the feminine ideals and are mostly referred to as the epitome of every woman.

The present study explores the cinematic identification and the audience readings of female spectators' with female stars as well as their strong attachment and the emotional affinity to their star ideals. Apart from the copying tendency mainly publicized by the youngsters my study examines how the image of power and confidence of the female stars is being incorporated in the lives of the female spectators. The present study adopted a survey methodology to analyze the perception of the female spectators about the female stars and also to examine how the ideologies portrayed by their favorite female stars are operative in their lives. The study is conducted among 200 female spectators of age group 18 – 40.

Key words: Cinema, Feminine Ideals, Female Stars, Female Spectators, & Screen Identification

INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema as a text and form is multifariousthat often adheres to an anticipated storyline and standard genre conventions (Dickey, 2007). Indian cinema has moved from the perimeter to the epicenter of world cinema relatively in a short period of time. Globally cinema is still the preferred hobbyfor most of the populace. Being a dominant reflector of the society cinema mirrors the social makeovers and new trends in society in fascinating manners and has been a facilitator of social transformation in multifariousmeans (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 2013).

Filmmaking, a high cost and riskyventure utilize the popularity of stars in cinemas as a means to attract the audience towards the movies. In commercial cinemas, stars are imperative to the processes of production, distribution and exhibition of movies.Subsequently with the onset of the star system, the films were progressivelypromoted via star differentiation (Klaprat,1985).

Stars are not just images theyform a part of the labour force of film production. The role of the stars in the industry is not only cramped to the process of film-making.The presence of stars is used by the distributors to sell films to exhibitors, who own and run the theatres. Exhibitors highlight this star image to attract the viewers who believesthat the presence of stars will help to draw audiences to the cinema hall. In this circuit of commercial exchange, the stars thus turninto a form of capital, with the intent of gaining turnover in the entertainment markets (McDonald, 2000).

A star who once entertained massiveaudience may fleetinglybecome obsolete in the public imagination and in certain instances;stars enjoycontinuous popularity over different periods of time. Stars are the cherished asset for the film industry who enjoys aninimitablestatus in the industry. Theyare a form of investment and the pays of the stars account for the foremost portion of any film's budget (King,1987).

EARLIER STUDIES

In the contemporary period it's hard to imagine a world devoid of motion pictures. Apart from communicating information and ideas they present us innumerable visual possibilities deeply gratifying our mind sets (David, 2012).Throughout the immense world and for an

enormous percent of the movie industry, the cinema revolves around a solar performer called the star (Morin, 1961). The term stars indicates a shift in the status of actors or actresses attaining mass popularity either with the release of one film or gradually with a number of movies (Morin, 1961). Stars have been seen as products not only of industry manipulation, but also of the film apparatus, the audience's whims and desires, society's stereotypes and mores (Dyer 1979). The term 'star' does not signify a single unified person instead, is composed of elements that are much more fragmentary in nature (Gledhill, 1999).

Stars denote the smallest group of the industry for the reason that they were so pricey. Becauseof their use in regulating the industry's outcomes and pulling audiences into the theatres, they were indeed gainful to the industry (Clark, 1995).Neither all highly talented actors become stars, norare all the starshighly talented (Dyer, 1979).Audiences make meanings for their own purposes by choosing texts or stars that proffer opportunities to constructconnotations of their own social identities and social experiences (Fiske, 1992).

When the persona of the female star is believed as a function of an erotic prototype, the personality of the male star is oftenassociated with heroic qualities (Morin, 1961). A star not only makes the character credible, but also possesses an overtly recognized charisma that entices spectators to the film and stay behind in the viewer's mind even after they move from the theatre (Rosen, 1981).Quite a good number of studieson female stars view them as figures of commercialism and consumption (Amossy, 1986). Virginia Wright Wexman (1993) indicates that the donkeywork of an actress is no way been recognized as part of her acting talent. Instead, they are purelyviewed as inert beauty models who have been levitated to stardom merely due to their physical appeal or because they are readyfor a compromise on their sexuality. Physical beauty is always considered as a criterion for female stardom (Hollinger, 2006).

When the male stars emphasis on work, training and competency helped them to sustain their stardom in their old ages, female stars are facing great difficulty in sustaining their careers once they reach in their forties (Fischer, 2004). As Molly Haskell notes it was perfectly normal for male stars to go on playing romantic leads from one generation to another, while their early female partners go wilting into retirement (Small, 2009).

Female stars arefrequentlydepicted as Galatea Figures, whose career are launched and supervised by dominant male directors or producers, on the other hand male stars are never

shown in this way (Wexman, 1993). A few female stars are capableto run a film with their own star status without the support of a major male star (Fischer, 2004). Most contemporary actresses have moderatelya small window of opportunity for making it into the top ranks of the stars were the ranks are completely dominated by men (Kramer, 2003). Male stars have the highest value in demanding remuneration twofold what female stars earn and the female stars value is mostlydetermined by which male stars are ready to collaborate with her (Majumdar, 2010).

Stars are beheld as consumable feminine images which female spectators reproduce by othermodes of consumption. The female spectators constructspecific images of femininity that remind them about their favourite stars. Theydevelopa newfangled feminine identity, one thatfuses thefacet of the star with their own semblance (Stacey, 1991).

The star is not justveneratedby the character she plays. The beauty of the actress and the fictional heroine interpenetrate where beauty is viewed as aprerequisitefor the star. Even though the theatre never required beautiful actors, gorgeous and elegant actors were preferred for the star system. Like kings and gods, the star's admirers have more right on her than they belong to her and her adorer's demand of her both simplicity and splendor (Morin, 1961).

After the long standing reign of old time heroine Malayalam cinema has witnessed the rise and fall of numerous female actresses (Harris, 2010).Film after film in Malayalam film industry has portrayed women as one who takes pleasure in offering her servitude to the man.By skillfully using the parables, movies camouflages the sexism concealed in them and interweaves an indiscernible web around the woman, constructing and restrainingher (Pillai, 2010).

METHODOLOGY&THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stars, revered as hero's, worshipped and perceived as god are more than objects of admiration. Stars continue to live on-screen and in the imaginations of the admirers. In a varying degree theirinfluences have an impact on every aspect of one's life (Morin, 1961). The relationship between female audience and the female stars is a multifaceted one. Apart from being constrained in the negative ideologies of feminine identifications the female audiences are also capable of making multiple identifications like male spectators. Through this study the cinematic identification and the readings of the female spectators with the

female stars is examined. Besides, the study also unearthshow the image of power and confidence of the female stars is being incorporated in their lives.

The study conducted amongst 200 female spectators who are recurrent viewers of the Malayalam movieshad adopted the quantitative methods.To analyze the perception of the female spectators towards the female stars survey method is preferred and the data obtained from the respondents were analysed using SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The questionnaire was constructed by referring Stacey (1994) existing work on *British cinema audiences and Hollywood stars in the 1940s and 1950s* and the questionnaire for the present study consists of three sections mainly the movie-going background of the respondents, their perception about the Stars, and their demographics details.The purposive sampling which comes under Non- Probability Sampling has been preferred for identifying the samples touncoverhow the ideologies depicted by their preferred female stars are germane in their normal lives.

Richard Dyer, in his Star theory (1979) had discussed in depth regarding star's special position in audiences' lives. The audiences' perception of a film is deeply influenced by the reading of the stars, and ascertains the way the audiences feel the film. Dyer's has categorized his theory into three sections - Star as a construction, Star as a commodity, and Star as an ideology. The stars whom we see through screen are not real people, but depictions of what people should be like, and what the media want to see and believe in. Stars are created for persons to pin their hopes on and live their lives through. A star remarkable quality makes him unique from the rest and that quality stays in the mind of the populace whenever they think about the star. As the audiences possess a feature they share or admire in the star they connect themselves to the star and relate a star to their lives or dreams. This then develops into admirations and progress further to idolizing them by making them more popular and in some instances this admiration will make them behave like their stars.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The meaning attributed to a movie is something created from the interaction between the text and its users; and not discovered simply from the text itself (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1980). Individuals belonging to a diverse economic and social status will have access to discrete cultures that affect in coding and decoding the media texts. Moreover, the author of a

text never wholly determines the meanings generated by text and reader interaction. As Virginia Nightingale (1996) says *"the people are not audiences by nature, but by culture. We learn to act and think of ourselves as audiences in certain contexts and situations. From a research viewpoint, 'audience' is always context and text-bound.*"

In the present study out of the 200 respondents,82.2% are aged between 19-28 years of age, 13.3% belongs to the age group of 29-38. The respondents surveyed also possess a wide range of educational credentials including diploma, degrees and higher degrees. Overall, the46.7% were found to be undergraduates and 31.1% respondents with post-graduation qualification. The respondents participated in the study comprise of students, private and public sector employees. For the present study, it is vital to figure out whether the respondents are interested in watching Malayalam movies. As the study mainly details with movie going backgrounds and the star preferences only those who watched numerous Malayalam movies can be able to answer the questionnaire. Themajority of the femalesparticipated in the survey had preferred to watch movie from their personal devices like laptops, mobiles, and desktop other than from the cinema theatre. 48.9% of respondents prefer to go theatre sometimes and only 6.7% goes to cinema hall on a regular basis for watching movies. When the respondents were asked about the money they spend for watching movies 53.3% of females responded that they spend less than half of the money for this purpose and 82.2% had pointed out that they never goes to cinema alone and highly preferred the company of their family members followed by their friends.

When inquired about the main reason for their choice of movies, the majority of 42.2% of the females answered that they always look into the genre of the movie, whereas 35.6% responded that their selection of movies will be based on the reviews only while 22.2% are attracted tothe director and the stars. Most of the respondents, the 44.4% had a liking towards thriller movies and 37.7% preferred romantic movies.

According to Ellis (1991), majorityof the public often goes to the movies by looking at the star cast and invariably have an inclination towards their favourite star. On the backdrop of this statement, it was asked to the respondents whether they are interested in watching their star movie repeatedly. 64.4% of female respondents had responded that they are interested in watching movies persistently while the 40% acclaimed that they enjoyedwatching those movies due to the brilliant screenplay and the direction.

A star image is evolved by a unification of a star's on-screen and off-screen identities which the audience recognizes and expect from one movie to another (Vincendeau, 2000). In general, stars are discussed in terms of their persona which is erected across various films and a star image can be carried into each new movie (Higson, 2001). When the respondents were enquired about the image they want to correlate with their stars, nearly 53.3% of female respondents want to associate their female stars with a bold image on-screen and 22.2% preferthose stars whobringvariety in their performance. The respondents were given a choice to select the ten female stars of their choice and after the detailed analysis, 64.4% of females had selected ManjuWarrieras the most preferred actress while 51.1% favored Shobana and 37.7% had chosen ParvathyThiruvoth.

71.1% of respondents considered the natural and realistic acting style of the stars as the most appealing quality and they believe that this quality makes these actresses different from other language actress, whereas 48.8% were pleased with their character selection and 22.2% were fond of their devotion and passion towards the work. When enquired about their dislike towards any stars, 35.6% of respondents stated that they had purposefully avoided watching their movies and they were upset about their wrong character selection and at times due to their overacting. The 68.9% of females in their leisure timesgenerally talk about the performance and beauty of their favorite female stars. The 40% of females procures information about their stars from the social media, whereas only 13.3% takes effort to buy a magazine and that too sometimes.

The audience tends to relate themselves with a star as they possess a feature they admire in the star. This admiration towards a star, then turns into idealization wherein imitation of the star is engrossed. This is most obviously visualized through fashion trends, where dress styles and hairstyles are copied to accuracy.The choice of their preferred stars ManjuWarrier and Shobana proves that the respondentsmaintain their interest for a preferred star unceasingly for years. When 48.9% retains their interest towards a particular star 31.1% are interested in imitating the styles of their adoring female star.Even though 46.7% of respondents had admitted the fact that after watching movie female stars had created an impact on their lives more than the male stars,53.3% discloses frankly that they never got any inspiration from these stars. The remaining percent who got inspired from those stars are motivated by their bold attitude towards life.

DISCUSSIONS& CONCLUSIONS

From the study it was evident that the female respondents always want to see their favored stars enacting incourageous roles and they alwayswished to see their star portraying challenging andvaried roles. But the saddest part is that, the industry never gives too much room for female oriented movies.When male and the female spectator's gets goose bumps and inspiration from seeing their favoritemale stars on-screen, the same magic doesn't workfor the female stars. When it is obvious from the study that the women oriented movies and the female stars fails to inspire their viewers, it's high time to think about what went wrong in our film culture. In movies the star-actresses are viewed as a construction, creation of a culture, industrially produced and prefabricated by men (Gaines, 1990). The star's physical attributes and the beauty of her face rather than her talent that gets her the personal rather than professional attention of producers (Majumdar, 2009).Powerful female stars often play characters punishing the patriarchal narratives and the qualities of self-confidence and authority are remembered as offering gratification to female spectators in something they lack and desire (Stacey, 1991).

When the respondents adorned the natural and realistic acting styles of the female stars the industry always favored the macho super heroes. There are a few actresses inthe Malayalam industry who can hold a movie on her shoulder and is capable to bring success and profit to the industry. The acting proficiency of the female stars has traditionally been more naturalized than those of male stars, who are much more apt to be defined as highly proficient and well-trained professionals. The male star's achievements were often attributed to their hard work and their acting proficiency, rather than their physical attractiveness and natural skills (Hollinger, 2006).

Following the theatre tradition the earlier decades female characters of the Malayalam movie industry,were not mere individuals they were representatives of a class or community, which also made it difficult for the film's narrative logic and morality to position them as purely sexual subjects (Venkiteswaran, 2010).When the male actors was able to find a flawless place in the industry for years the female actors struggles to find an impeccable status and within a short span even the strongest woman character wane from the limelight (Harris, 2010).

The audience perception about the stars, which is least taken into thought, ought to be studied analytically. Other than merely watching the movie, trivial attention has been given to spectator's attachment with the star. According to Boorstin (1992), stars, emerge to be meaningful, but in effect, they are meaningless. Stars never have a potent character, but a definable, known personality, a figure that can be a nationally advertised trade name. From the viewpoint of production, the stars place the stress on the filmmakers who construct stars or cause them to exist. However, it has been corroborated that the determining factor in the making of stars is the audience rather than the producers of media texts (Tudor, 1974).

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