

Representation of women characters in “Soorarai Pottru”. (2020).

Author: Jancirani A.,

Department of Visual Communication, Loyola College (Autonomous), Chennai, Tamil Nadu
600 034, India.

Corresponding Author: Dr Bharathi.B

Abstract:

Cinema has often reflected the existing views and beliefs of the society we live in. In a male dominant society like India, cinema has shown a close relationship between its characters and the society. Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. The Indian cinema has undoubtedly been male dominated and male centric and woman as a director is difficult to acknowledge, yet there are several women directors who have contributed a lot in the industry and are still continuing to do so, breaking the barriers.

This study will examine Representation of women characters in “Soorarai Pottru”. (2020). The Tamil cinema “Soorarai Pottru - by Sudha Kongara (2020)” is chosen as a sample to this study of content analysis. The qualitative methodology is used to analyse the women characters used in the movie. The result will allow us to understand the women who were once bound to their conventional roles within the household and the society are now less connected to them and have become more independent and no more bound to the cultural standards of any specific society and ideology.

Keywords: Representation, Objectification, Stereotype, Tamil Cinema, Decision Making,
Empowerment, Education.

Introduction:

The status of women in ancient India is a very complicated one as there are some contradictions in statements in different religious scriptures. Most commercial cinemas have stereotyped gender roles and how they must be fulfilled in this patriarchal society. Post-independence, the image of the woman as goddess 'Sita', chaste, virtuous and modest, repeatedly evoked in films (Macdonald, 2009; Tere, 2012). "Kollywood" cinema is becoming increasingly more visible all over the world. It made the researcher want to examine the matter on a deeper level. In particular, The researcher felt the need to look at the construction of women characters, because it is this construction that perpetuates Indian society. This paper is an attempt to analyse Representation of women characters in Tamil movie "Soorarai Pottru" by Sudha Kongara in the year 2020. This study helps to understand the way in which women characters are constructed has changed over a period of time.

Review of Literature:

Many studies have been conducted on the Indian Cinema Industry, and on the stereotypical portrayal of women in Indian cinema. This stereotypical portrayal of women in Indian cinema has been a subject of debate amongst the feminist scholars. Although there have been studies on women - centred movies that have tried to address women's issues, there has been very little, sociological research done on the portrayal of women in the films. The film which the researcher have chosen, women are shown to break out of the conventional roles, and stand-up for themselves. The Literature Review section will do an in depth analysis on the movie "Soorarai Pottru".

According to Mana Tabatabai Rad (2016) on Women and their portrayal in Indian cinema examines Daman- directed by Kalpana Lajmi which explains Durga, the protagonist, who could not take decisions regarding her own life, becomes empowered when she decides that she would not let her daughter suffer the same fate and would ensure that her daughter gets the right to make the decisions related to her life. In Daman, the director has emphasized women's empowerment and improvement of women's status with help of education.

Breaking the stereotypes: A feminist reading of the movie Dangal by Vikram Singh (2017) in his paper analyses the movie Dangal. In the movie Mahavir Singh Phogat is a former wrestling champion had to quit the sport due to his family pressure as it was not helping his family financially. He has four daughters. Mahavir realizes that his daughters Geeta and Babita can do the game wrestling. Geeta soon becomes a known wrestler in the state and international level. Mahavir and his two daughters struggle towards glory at the commonwealth in the face of societal oppression. According to Singh (2017) the two girls prove that gender is not restraint

in their path to victory. In this movie women are depicted as strong and they can make their mark without adopting the masculine.

Indian cinema and women by Sonu Sharma & Jitendar Singh Narban (2016) beautifully explains that the portrayal of women characters in Indian films at different periods. The Movies namely Mother India, Mirch Masala" Mohra, Nishabd" were selected for data collection. They conclude that over past decades, Indian cinema has witnessed many changes in the film industry and the films of this millennium depict women as more independent, confident, and career oriented beings.

According to Geeta Bharti and Kamlesh Kumar on Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema and Print Media: Socio-Psychological Perspective reveals that due to gender stereotyping in India, and India being a patriarchal society, the media is also portraying certain gender biases. Bharti and Kumar uses the secondary sources of data from books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites of year 2015 and Indian cinema from 2010 to 2015. They argue that In foreign countries things are better as less stereotyping is present in their society. So media also portrays women in a better way. In India things are changing very slowly. The only way for women to be accepted in society is by creating gender sensitive awareness programs and education for people to give equality to women.

Women's Cinema in the 1920s by Rosanna Maule and Catherine Russell argues that in order to understand how women experience cinema, one needs to look at their publications, memoirs and so on (during the silent era). The study emphasizes on the fact that women's understanding of silent films was different not just because they tried to understand it at the backdrop of social and cinematic experience (meaning the existing social and cinematic understanding and reality of people) but also the fact that cinema gave that space for giving new perspective on certain social and everyday aspects of life.

The paper on K. Balanchander: An Innovative Filmmaker by Sathiavathi Chinniah (2009) analyzes few films of K.Balanchander. He has depicted women as courageous and ready to take risks in order to achieve their goals in his movies. Women are the protagonists in many of his movies. Even when they are not, they are assigned a strong role instead of being the ornamental objects. For example the movie Ethir Neechal which was released in 1968 and Unnal Mudium Thambi in 1988 shows women as a strong role. Diskey in her research about Tamil audience in Madurai, She says "Frequently they show women are self-sacrificing, persevering wife, self-centred women who transformed in to proper Tamil women. After the marriage breaks up the happy family life and avoid traditional joint family. According to Wadly

“Indian women are controlled by three important roles in the society, that of daughter, wife, mother.

According to Kumar Parag the paper on Identity of Muslim women in Hindi Movies reveals that women are depicted as strong roles. For example the movie Nikaah (Marriage) released in the year 1982. The heroine comes from a middle class Muslim family. He gets married to a Nawab Waseem. Nilofer is longing for love from her husband. But he uses as commodity and need to fulfil the physical needs. When she voices out, in his anger shows talak (divorce) thrice. She has to leave the house. Finally stays in a ladies hostel. She decided to look for a job interview; her application is turned down because she is a divorcee. In the working place she finds an old college friend Haider. They marry each other and living a happy life. The first husband realizing his mistakes and acknowledge his faults, and he wants Nilofer to live with him. The second husband ready to divorce her, thinking that still she has love towards her first husband. Nilofer, a strong woman, takes a bold step and expresses her desires that I want to live a free woman. I don't want to satisfy both of your needs. Parag concludes that women are depicted as they have right to decide about their own future in a male dominated society.

Objectives:

1. To study the representation of the women characters in the movie “Soorai Potru”
2. To find out how the movie represent “agency” aspects of women's life

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework:

The researcher gives a contribution theoretically and practically on the content analysis especially using Stereotypical theory to analyse the representation of women characters in “Soorai Potru”.

Stereotypical Theory:

The term "Stereotype" was coined by Walter Lippmann, the Social Scientist, in 1922. He used this term to refer to people's images in their minds about a particular topic. In his critically acclaimed book Public Opinion (1922), Lippmann explained that the way things were in the real world were often not the same as the images that existed in the minds of the individuals within a given society.

Methodology:

This study uses qualitative methods of content analysis to understand how women characters are represented in the movie. The coding sheet used as a tool to analyse the character, agency aspects of life, of women characters portrayed in the movie. Each and every shot of women characters was observed for qualitative analysis.

Sample:







“Soorarai Pottru “Movie has chosen as a sample. Sampling would be done on shot by shot of women characters of the movie analysing with help method of coding sheet.

Data Analysis:

In this research paper the researcher have taken 171 samples screen shots from the Tamil movie ‘Soorarai Pottru’ to analyse the content analysis through the help of coding sheet to analyse the women characters. But in this paper the researcher has used only 21 shots of the movie.

Scene 2

Description: Bommi and her family members travelling in the train to visit the groom’s house.

S.NO	IMAGE	BOMMI	MUTHULAKSHMI
1		Bold	-
2			Angry
3		Bold	-
4		Bold	-
5		Bold	-
6		Happy	-

Interpretation**Bommi**

According to scene no 2, for marriage in our society groom visits the girl home. Here Bommi breaks the general norm to see the groom herself even though her parents are against it.

Bommi breaks the cultural norms of marriage alliance fixing and takes control of her life. She also very bold is answering and tackling all the questions shoot at her by the family members. In our society men are given more importance in education since they are obliged to take care of their parents. Bommi deliberately exposes this truth and feels that she did not get the education she deserves. She opposes the statement made that comes in the way of her education. Her facial expression indicates that she was not afraid to fight any obstacles that came her way. She is kept at the centre of the frame, implying her importance. She looks up to the elderly man angrily for degrading the women. She is seen challenging by the way she looks at him and her reactions to the elderly men. During the whole conversation, she is seen peacefully enjoying her food. Director tries to break the norm by making Bommi as bold and empowering women and establishes her as a strong and confident women.








This scene emphasizes that education is the only tool which can bring awareness about women empowerment in the society. Bommi's face seen with more of surprise and interest for good things. The bold body language and loud voice of Bommi establishes her strong role amidst the people in the train. Women should not be an obstacle for the improvement of women but must help for each other's improvement. The scene represents that the society can experience a tremendous change only when a woman empowers another woman. In our society there is a custom that after the marriage women are not allowed to study or they can't live a life what they wish or they are not able either to continue their dream. But her Bommi breaks the custom and portrayed as an empowered women who can lead a life with self-respect even after marriage.

Muthulakshmi

According to scene no 2, though Muthulakshmi tone is very high, her opinion is not accepted by her daughter. She wants her daughter to behave like what others expect which is not happening in the scene. As a mother she has freedom to convey her opinion to her daughter but here she loses her freedom. She is seen as an old woman who follows certain tradition, customs and things about society and what the people would talk about. She is always seen being that typical mother who objects her daughter from taking decisions all by herself since she is a woman.

Scene 4

Description: Bommi and her family members visits the groom's house and talk to each other.

S.NO	IMAGE	BOMMI	MUTHULAKSHMI	PECHI
1		Bold	-	-
2		Bold	-	-
3		-	-	Extrovert, Assertive
4		-	-	Humor
5		Bold	-	-
6		-	Angry	-
7		Bold	-	-

Interpretation**Bommi**

According to scene no 4, Bommi tries to implement her business idea and vision in the conversation when asking if there is no bakery in this place. She is not afraid though Nedumaaran speaks boldly which shows that women have equal rights to talk in front of men. She deliberately breaks the norms that women have the rights to talk in front of man. Bommi doesn't want to be an ordinary typical Indian woman doing her normal routine work like cooking, washing clothes instead she thinks out of box to run a business and want to be an independent in the society. She makes strong decision and takes control of her life. It represents that it is not slavery to look after the family but at the same time women must have time to respect and enjoy free things for themselves. Dreams and desires of a woman should not be expired after marriage. However as a woman she raises her voice to convey her opinion. Bommi talks to the groom with full confidence and authority, even after her parents ask her to

stop. She tells him about her future plans of opening a Bakery. She learns about the groom's ideas, his investors and funding. She is challenging to the groom with every questions. She is seen asking more questions regarding his business ideas and stages as even she wants to come up in life as a woman. In the earlier times they used to follow the custom where the females would sit and eat after all the men finish eating, however that thing wasn't followed and it broke the past custom.

She is so steady and constancy of resolve is brought out with that astounding clarity of words which makes the people around her to stand tongue-tied. She makes others to realize the reality that they live in a selfish society, where mothers who sacrifice their food for their family end up being in an old age home. When the groom says he is ready to marry her, she takes time to answer for the affirmation to get married, however breaking the stereotype of guys saying yes to a girl to get married. She has goals in life however, she even thinks about her husband to be and succeed in life and business he dreams to create.

Pechi





According to scene no 4, Pechi is portrayed with respect and dignity. She is like the head of the family and everyone listens to her words including her son Maaran. The way she converses with male characters shows the respect she is given in her family. She is the face saver for the family when Bommi's dad asks about their family asset and his job. She diverts the tensed moment with her presence of mind. It is evident when she invites the girl's father to dine though he was reluctant. She is portrayed as a woman who follows good traditions who is extending her hospitality by feeding all her guests. Her costume is simple and in bold red color checked design appealing to the audience. She is living a dignified and respectful life even though she is poor.

Muthulakshmi

According to scene no 4, though Muthulakshmi tone is very high, her opinion is not accepted by her daughter. She wants her daughter to behave like what others expect which is not happening in the scene. As a mother she has freedom to convey her opinion to her daughter instead she loses her freedom here. As a mother she loses her dignity and self-respect.

Scene 13

Description: Bommi's family members leave the place after talking to groom's family.

S.NO	IMAGE	BOMMI	PECHI	MUTHULAKSHMI
1		Empowerment	-	-
2		Bold	-	-
3		Bold	Supportive	-
4		Bold	-	Angry

Interpretation**Bommi**

According to scene no 13, the empowered spirit of Bommi, her decision to hold the marriage until both of them achieve in their respective dreams is something that is rare in our society. In our society primary decision for marriage is taken by the groom but Bommi changes that norm and challenges that. She puts her decision straight forward in front of her family. She feels that her ambition of starting bakery is equal to Nedumaaran's ambition which she thinks as big as Nedumaaran's. She is seen an exuberant and cheerful person who was not only in control of her happiness but also controls others' key to contentment as well.

Muthulakshmi





According to scene no 13, Bommi's mom is portrayed as one who keeps the tradition. She is more concerned about the reputation of the family then allowing her daughter to make her own decision. She feels that loses her dignity since her daughter doesn't obey her words. She is always seen being that typical mother who objects her daughter from taking decisions all by herself since she is a woman. She is has this old custom influencing character.

Pechi

According to scene no 13, she encourages and supports her daughter in law indirectly to stand on her own leg. Pechi's compassion towards the Bommi is evident when she says 'Maaran, you deserve this' indirectly supporting her decision. Pechi is seen supporting Bommi in all the situation no matter what she's going through in life and at times she also seen trying to make sure things are fine for her daughter in law.

Scene 75

Description: Bommi's Struggle at the Airport.

S.NO	IMAGE	BOMMI
1		Sad
2		Supportive
3		Bold
4		Supportive

Interpretation**Bommi**

According to scene no 75, While Maran is going through a great set back, Sundari is by his side, both of them look at each other, and she shares the pain of Maran and tells him to continue even though she is in pain herself. Sundari's bold and assertive nature is evident. She is ready to manage her suffering by herself and indirectly asks Maran to fix the setback he is going through. The fact that woman are more supportive in the family is well portrayed through the character of Bommi, even after so many failures gone through by Maran, She is so supportive and stands by her husband to collectively achieve the big dream of creating the most affordable airlines where everyone can fulfil the dream of flying. Bommi puts public interest before her own.

Findings:**Representation of the women characterization in “Soorarai Pottru”**

- Bommi is always seen as a bold and self-sufficient woman who makes her own decision without following any traditional ways of things and customs. Having the bold nature she is seen arguing for all the things that people question her for as she is a woman and doing such a thing. Specially the scene where Bommi’s family travels in the train to see the groom.
- Bommi is shown as bold and strong women who breaks the cultural norms of marriage alliance fixing and takes control of her life. She also very bold is answering and tackling all the questions shouted at her by the family members. Though her parents are not willing to go to groom’s house she takes her own decision to meet the groom. In the first train scene itself she breaks the patriarchy system.
- She is so steady and constancy of resolve is brought out with that astounding clarity of words which makes the people around her to stand tongue-tied. Bommi's character is portrayed as a bold and courageous girl who is convinced of what she thinks is right for her life.
- Pechi is portrayed with respect and dignity. She is portrayed as a woman who follows good traditions who is extending her hospitality by feeding all her guests.
- Pechi is portrayed as a women who live a dignified and respectful life even though she is poor. She is portrayed as humor in some of the scenes especially when she invites the groom’s family to have a lunch with them.
- Pechi establishes her as the home maker who is not so much worried about her dressing style.
- Muthulakshmi is portrayed as one who keeps the tradition. She is more concerned about the reputation of the family then allowing her daughter to make her own decision.
- Muthulakshmi is always seen being that typical mother who objects her daughter from taking decisions all by herself since she is a woman.
- Muthulakshmi is portrayed as a traditional women who feels sad for the plight of her daughter suffering alone and without financial support from her husband.

Representation of Agency aspects of life in “Soorarai Potturu”**Education:**

- In the train sequence where Bommi states that her parents have spent more money on her brother for studies since he is a male. Bommi is seen challenging by the way she looks at him and her reactions to the elderly men when he says only the male child's will take care of the parents till the end not the female child. In the particular scene Bommi deserves that education is the only tool which can bring awareness about her life in the society.

Empowerment:

- Bommi is portrayed as an empowerment women. The bold body language and loud voice of Bommi establishes her empowered role amidst the people in the train. In our society there is a custom that after the marriage women used to enjoy with the family and take care of the child and only men are the person who take care of their parents. But Bommi breaks the custom and portrayed as an empowered women who can lead a life with self-respect and can take care of her parents.

Decision Making:

- Bommi is shown the decision maker for all the time about her life. Specially in the particular scene where she visits the grooms and deliberately tells that though she does all the normal routine work like cooking, washing clothes she doesn't want to be an ordinary typical Indian woman doing the routine work instead she thinks out of box to run a business and want to be an independent in the society. She makes strong decision and takes control of her life.
- Bommi is portrayed as a good decision maker whom to marry. Hence, it was not stereotypical when concerned with decision making rights. In our society primary decision for marriage is taken by the groom but Bommi changes that norm and challenges that. She puts her decision straight forward in front of her family. She feels that her ambition of starting bakery is equal to Nedumaaran's ambition which she thinks as big as Nedumaaran's.
- Bommi endures and stands by her decision though her husband Maran is not doing so well in his career at the moment.

Challenging:

- Bommi is portrayed as a challenging women she herself can handle the situation in all the way. Especially in the airport scene due to pregnancy she struggles to stand there. The scene ends with a powerful shot of Bommi enduring all the trouble by herself. It shows her resilient spirit and assertive nature. It represents that it is not always only men who have been leading women but even women can lead all.
- Bommi is seen talking things straight forward, challenging situations and overcoming difficulty also being supportive in many situations. . She looks very enthusiastic to see new things in her life. She is compassionate towards Maran, as his business is down at the moment.
- As an entrepreneur herself, Bommi breaks the societal norm of married woman expected to be dependent on their husband at the time the movie is set.
- Bommi has the guts to say that she too has desires and dreams and nobody can snatch away that right from her. She proves that every woman is equal to men in all aspects. This scene wonderfully depicts how, for every single women on this earth, there lies a desire. To fulfil all her dreams and also to show her identity to the society she has to prove herself to others.

Conclusion:

This paper suggests that the movie Soorarai Pottru depict the characters of the women as being more independent and making their own choices family and work. Women are more supportive in the family is well portrayed through the character of Bommi, even after so many failures gone through by Maran. She is so supportive and stands by her husband to collectively achieve the big dream of creating the most affordable airlines where everyone can fulfil the dream of flying. The establishment of the women characters in the Tamil movie has changed a lot over years and this change is very apparent. The women who were once bound to their conventional roles within the household and the society are now less connected to them and have become more independent all over the world. This led to the change in the characters of women in role too, depicting that women are independent individuals and are no more bound to the cultural standards of any specific society and ideology. This trend is followed in the movie “Soorarai Pottru” of new millennium which fabricates women as individuals who carry their own destinies. Women are depicted as free spirits who are not liable to be ruled by the cultural standards and traditions. And they are portrayed as being self-governed to fulfil their own requirements and also in relation to the external aspects.

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