

**COMMERCIALISATION OF FEMINISM AND NEO PATRIARCHY IN INDIAN
MOVIES**

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CERTIFICATE

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DECLARATION

I, Aswin Babu J.B, hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *COMMERCIALISATION OF FEMINISM AND NEO PATRIARCHY IN INDIAN MOVIES* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Thara Gangadharan Assistant Professor and Assistant Professor Ms.Lissy Kachappilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

COMMERCIALISATION OF FEMINISM AND NEO PATRIARCHY IN INDIAN MOVIES

Film is accepted to engage, to take the watcher to a world that is not quite the same as the genuine one, a world which gives escape from the monotonous routine of life. Film is a famous media of mass utilization which assumes a key job in trim feelings, building pictures and fortifying predominant social qualities. Since Independence, Indian film has experienced a ton of changes including a move from exemplary fanciful blockbusters to "Bollywoodised" revamps of Hollywood's effective movies. Ladies in the Indian film industry have assumed a significant job in the achievement of individual movies. Their jobs anyway have changed additional time, from being subject to their male partners to freely conveying the storyline forward. Before alluding to the changes, it is significant to comprehend the significance of Indian Cinema on the world today. Feminist consumerism is an effective marketing tool because it is part of a hegemonic common sense of consumerism that allows Dove to credibly present itself as the vanguard of a consumer movement facilitating women's agitation and channeling resistance into commodity purchases. Ladies' cooperation, execution and depiction in media are the three significant components of concentrate for the sociology analysts of present-day time, particularly for the women's activists. Since for the strengthening and improvement of the ladies segment, it is imperative to give them appropriate condition where they can raise their voices against the imbalances and the sexual orientation they are encountering in our male commanded or man centric social orders.

Improving the status of ladies, in each viewpoint, is viewed as the best way to annihilate this sex role also, accomplishing a superior personal satisfaction for the ladies. For this, correspondence can be viewed as imperative way and broad communications can assume a noteworthy job in forming social qualities, frames of mind, standards, discernment and conduct. It has been broadly perceived that media can assume significant job in advancing and spreading data among the majority and are viewed as the key players in the social, political and financial advancement of ladies. Media can concentrate all the issues looked by ladies, these can give a space for ladies to discuss their privileges or opportunities and in particular media can give a just domain where ladies can partake, speak to their womanhood and in which they will be depicted decidedly. A positive depict of ladies in media is important to keep up the genuine pride and status of ladies which will limit the hole and imbalances among people. Be that as it may, if media likewise become male commanded or assume the job as a negligible operator to advance this convention then the entire circumstance will be against the ladies where their improvement and strengthening will not be conceivable. The term media is broadly utilized as a short hand for 'Broad communications'. The word media is the plural type of medium. Thoughtfully, the media are those innovative offices which are occupied with the creation, determination, preparing what's more, conveyance of messages among the individuals. As an intelligent undertone, the broad communications manage the everyday issues of the country and particularly of the general individuals. It contributes towards the development of mass society what's more, mass culture. Broad communications in India, similar to each cutting edge and propelled nation, involves the Print media and Electronic media which are made out of the Radio, the Television, the Film, the Press, Publication and Advertising. Among these media, the TV, films, Advertisements, photography, activity, artistic creations and so on are viewed as the visual media.

When we talk about the women in Indian movies there is a stereotypic role for them, that is Cinema depicts woman as sacrificing her successful career to experience domesticated bliss. When the husband strays, it is the other woman is blamed. The husband is absolved of adultery and he returns to his legitimate partner i.e. the wife at the end of the story. But in the middle of 21st century we can find that there is a sudden change in this, the character done by the women becomes more powerful. We can find that there is something which shows the empowerment of women. When we go deeper into such movies, we can find that these all are the commercialization. At the point when thoughts of female strengthening are utilized as advertising strategies for films, the cunning isn't uncovered on the grounds that the item – which is simply the film, is showcased as being progressive. In a nation where movies and film stars are profoundly powerful, and in a situation where significant standard film is viewed as the way to draw in with 'uneducated masses', socially applicable movies remain on a platform, which they try to hoist through showcasing procedures that exaggerate their extension for social effect.

In India along with the advertisements, Cinema is also an important visual medium of entertainment. Unfortunately, the film industry cares little about the portrayal of women image in front of the public. They portray women's image as a sacrificing and devoted personality. Women who do not have these characters are portrayed as a negative personality. But some of our modern directors are focusing on the current topics of our society and making movies on lesbians and gays. Beside this some movies are totally focus on showing nudity or show actresses wearing bikini or undergarments while showing intimate scenes in movies like in movie Hate Story 3 (2015). In this Zariene Khan and Daisy Shah have given intimate scene with their male co-stars by wearing undergarments. Movie released in 2017 like Julie 2, Lipstick under my Burkha, Babumoshai Bندوقbaaz etc are the adult movie which have focused on promoting nudity of actresses, showing of sex scenes etc.

As far as programmers concerned on radio are focused on entertainment only. Only twenty percent is given for educational programmers. Women are shown as gossip-mongers, and advices were given to them on how to become a good wife, good mother and how to improve their physical appearance or beauty. The print media in India have little impact on people because of illiterate population of the country. It has been seen in the newspapers that they focus on the news related to rape, crime, politics, scandals, sports and economics. News on women empowerment is published only on Women's Day and other times issues related to them is completely ignored. Only gossips about actress of TV serials and film stars along with some hot pick-ups are published in newspaper. Magazines as well as newspapers have sections for females where some personal gynecological problems or personal love affairs problems are published. Otherwise special features on knitting, fashion, sales etc. are shown on the magazines. Thus, it can be said that in Indian Media there is an on-going trend to portray women as busy and concerned with beautifying herself, choosing make-up, jewellery, cosmetics, constantly watching her weight, worried about good figure and skin color and the like. She is not portrayed as an intelligent, decision maker, or as capable leaders and policy makers. Usually she is shown to accompany her husband like a shadow and following her decision without mattering it is correct or not. Now the question is here that how the media will play an effective tool for promoting a better image of women and represents their multiple roles as achiever in both at home and in the world of carrier?

In India, Mass Media comprises of the print media i.e. the newspaper and Electronic media composed of the radio, television, film, press, publication and advertising. In media objectification of women is harmful for our society because they focus on a specific part of the body and this focus in our culture detaches the person from their body. By this society creates a different view for beauty. The main concern is in a media industry i.e. movie industry. Women constantly struggle for their equality and they are not being represented

with respect in movies. Not only films, but magazines, television and music videos also represent negative portrayals of women. But no matter how much one complains, women will be objectified in entertainment field.

During the past decade there are advances in information technology that have transcend national boundaries and has put an impact on everyone, especially the children and youth. Media has to make a great contribution for the advancement of women. Many women are involved in jobs but few have attained the higher positions. This is just because of the lack of gender sensitivity. Advertisements and commercial sector often portray women primarily to target girls and women to become their customer easily. It is the fact of our Indian society that they generally consider women as weaker ones. As a result, women have to face huge traumas from birth to death like infanticide, rape, violence at home or drop out in education for family. But media do not focus on these problems. They are only busy in publishing the gossips of the actors and actresses, their love stories, their marriage breakage etc. Representations of Indian women by media reveal that they are not respected and looked them as objects. Currently advertisements are used to promote the products. We can see these numbers of advertisements in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internet, hoardings, pamphlets and the like. But these advertisements should be criticized because they are portraying women as sex objects. Woman's body has been used to promote things like male under garments, automobiles, shaving cream, deodorant etc. These images encourage people to think women as a sex object and this may encourage to violence against women also. For example, there is an advertisement of a use of deodorant which was a male deodorant in this the woman get attracted towards a strange man who has used that brand of deodorant. This show that women are treated as objects which itself do not have any self-identity and it promotes men that if you use this product the women will get attracted towards you. The

depiction of women in this and other advertisements is actually insulted to the women in general which are destroying the real status and dignity of women.

It is necessary for us to get knowledge of commodification/ objectification because of its adverse effects in our society. Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn and Twenge in 1998 did an experiment in which they asked participants to wear either a swimsuit or sweater but women prefer to wear sweater because they felt body shame in the swimsuit and this is due to poor eating. This self-objectification can lead to sexual dysfunction also, because while getting engaged in sexual activity another person focuses on another's body and woman can be distracted by thoughts about her body rather than enjoying sexual pleasure. Another adverse effect of female self-objectification is self-harming. It includes cutting, burning, hitting or biting, head banging, hair pulling, breaking bones, insertion of toxic or sharp objects etc. Such extreme behavior is related to the low self-esteem of person which is arrived from objectification or commodification. The trend of commodification/objectification of women in media is a profitable and entertaining section and it will remain continue. However, this media practice on women portray is harmful for our society in aspect of physical and mental reasons. Thus it can be concluded that overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereo types. The mass media in India has not done efforts about discussing the issues related to women and prepare the women to work for their rights and work for equal role in society. Women are stuck with shaping their body perfectly as presented by the media and all this is done on keeping their physical health and mental state aside. Due to this they face lots of depression and eating disorders. It is clear that commodification/objectification of women in media have negative effect on our society. For preventing objectification in girls and women it needs to increase societal rewards and social powers. Today, women oriented movies in Malayalam claim the representations of women in a new manner. This article seeks whether the appearance of the

so-called feminism in present female oriented Malayalam movies is for real or unreal. Women in modern time are studied from a critical point of view as they are represented in the movies, having the principal place and also as they are shown in the promos.

The focus of the present study is to see how liberated are the women of present, especially in the times when the prediction is that they are empowered. The study concludes that women in these movies are conceptualized as modern women but they actually are a modification of traditional feminine identity. The process of female/male identity construction is nothing unusual for a society. The question generally raised is whether one is born with innate concepts of female or male and the gender identity status develop through their experiences from social structure about acceptable per formative roles. In Malayalam cinema, female identities have been developed with the highest care taken in reproducing patriarchal expected stereotypes. Women issues oriented movies and movies released in the name of women empowerment were very rare from earlier days. This trend has become more commercialised now. Nowadays, these types of movies have become popular. Women who have represented as the shadows of male leads have now turned as central characters. Yet, it is to investigate whether the women-oriented movies which have become popular in society really offer feminine values? The next question is that whether the movies are reproducing the old patriarchally determined women identities in a new manner?

Gender socialization is another important concept. According to Anthony Giddens (2006), it is through socialization that the stranded child gradually becomes a self-aware, experienced person, in the ways of the values in which he or she was born. Toys, children's books and TV emphasize differences between male and female and adults react differently depending on the perceived sex of the child (Giddens A. 2006). As a changing and unstable system of power, patriarchy usually privileges men and male children while the position of the female members of society is reduced to that of an appendage to men and as child bearers

for their husbands of literature .A classical study based on this topic is going to be explained here. How popular cinema produces and reproduces the male gaze is explained in this. She calls this approach as political psychoanalysis. The ordinary cinema represents women as tools for satisfying men's pleasure. Traditional cinema was produced for men's desire to voyeuristic happiness, when an egotistic pleasure was also formed through this representation. Male supremacy can be seen in the appearance and actions of male characters. Mulvey further argues that camera is also searching for these masculine types of voyeuristic pleasure through the lens of the 'phallic camera', which is equal to a viewer in the theatre watches, a movie through the vision of the masculine personality. The main move to replace male-oriented cinema was by Avanti grade, Cinema (modern cinema). It is this study which gives background for this research. That is how feminism is seen through the eyes of viewers.

CHAPTER 2

Feminism as an academic discipline grew out of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave held that we cannot separate knowledge from political practice and that feminist knowledge should help to improve the lives of women. It is in this period that gender came to be defined as different from sex i.e., gender is a set of socially constructed characteristics where as sex is a biological reality. Gender, according to the theory of feminism since 1960s, is a system of social hierarchy in which masculine characteristics are more valued than feminine ones. It is a structure that signifies unequal power relationships between women and men. A gender sensitive lens enables people to see how the world is shaped by gendered concepts, practices and institutions. Later feminists incorporated feminism into theories such as liberalism, critical theory, constructivism, post modernism and post colonialism and they went beyond the binary of man/woman by introducing gender as a category of analysis. Liberal feminists believe that women's equality can be achieved by removing legal obstacles that deny women the same opportunities as men. Post feminists disagree with liberal feminists and they claim that people must look more deeply at unequal gendered structures in order to understand women's subordination. Feminist constructivists show us the various ways in which ideas about gender shaping takes place. Postmodern feminists are concerned with the link between knowledge and power. They suggest that men have been seen as „knower“ and as subjects of knowledge. Postcolonial feminists criticize western feminists for basing feminist knowledge on western women's lives and for portraying third world women as lacking in agency. They suggest the difference in subordination of women must be understood in the terms of race, class and geographical location and that all women should be seen as the agents rather than the victims.

In comparison with traditional life and culture, modern life and culture are highly centered on visual media.

The life experiences of people have become more visual and visualized than before, it can be perceived from satellite pictures and images. Most of the people have an online life/netizens in the present century. In this condition, there arises the need for visual culture as a field of study. Critics in various disciplines describe this emerging field as visual culture. In the book, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999), Mirzoeff describes visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure are sought by the consumers in an interface with visual technology (2). Visual technology is any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision from oil painting to television and the internet. In the present century visual culture has cast more influence upon the society than print culture. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff: Visual culture is used in a far more active sense, centering on the determining role of visual culture in the wider culture to which it belongs. Such a history of visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class gender, sexual and racialized identities. One of the most important features of the visual culture is the developing tendency to visualize things that are not visuals in themselves. The German Philosopher Martin Heidegger was one among the first scholars who commented that this development is the rise of the world picture. In his work, *The Age of the World Picture* (1977) Martin Heidegger argues that a world picture does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture. The world picture does not change from earlier medieval into modern, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age. The focus of the visual culture is on the visual as a space where meanings are created. Visual representation is an intellectual form of illustration of ideas and social reality. With the emergence of visual culture, there develops a „picture theory“. In W.J

T Mitchell's view: picture theory stems from the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation surveillance and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc) and that „visual literacy“ might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality .(16) There arises a paradigm shift from world as a text to world as picture, and through visual images the real condition and attitude towards world is visible. Most of the postmodern theorists opine that one of the specific features of visual culture is the dominance of image. The critics of visual culture start from Plato himself, Plato believed that the objects encountered in everyday life are simply a copy of those objects. According to him the image is inevitably distorted from the original appearance. It means everything seen in the real world is already a copy. For an artist to make a representation of what is seen would be to make a copy out of a copy. So there is no space for the visual arts in his Republic. Thus, image replaces reality with its representation. Aristotle gave much space to arts even though it is a copy of copy according to Plato. The modern world defines world in terms of pastiche, a pastiche is a work of a visual art, literature, theatre or music that imitates the style or character of the work of one or more other artists. It is also a kind of copying where originality or reality has been lost. The post modern world defines everything in terms of simulacra. According to Baudrillard what has happened in post modern culture is that our society has become so reliant on models and maps which have lost all contact with the real world. In his work *The Precession of Simulacra* (1984) he argues that “when it comes to post modern simulation and simulacra, it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2).

To clarify his point, he argues that there are three orders of simulacra. In the first order of simulacra which he associates with the pre-modern period, the image is a clear counterfeit of the real; the image is recognized as just an illusion, a place marker for the real.

In the second order of simulacra which Baudrillard associates with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the distinctions between the image and the representation begin to break down because of mass production and the proliferation of copies. Such production misrepresents and masks an underlying reality by initiating it well. In the third order of simulacra which is associated with the post modern age, people are confronted with a precession of simulacra, that is, the representation precedes and determines the real. Even though everything is a copy of reality, the world completely depends on visual culture whereas post modern people believe in the on screen reality. Every visual image represents the real world and people can receive what is going on around them. The visibility of visual culture is fragmented into disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video. The constituent parts of visual culture are the visual events that are the interaction between viewers and viewed, in other words, the interaction between signs and signified. Semiotics (science of signs) is a system devised by linguists to analyze the spoken and written word. It divides the signs into two parts- the signifier that which is seen and the signified that which is meant. A picture of a tree is taken to signify a tree not because it really is in some way tree like but because the viewing audience accepts it as representing a tree. Thus seeing is not believing but interpreting. In the visual field, the constructed nature of the image was central to the radical technique of montage in film and photography in the 1920's and 1930s. It was introduced into cinema by Sergei Eisenstein in his articles and book particularly *Film Form* (1949) and *Film Sense* (1947).

Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time and information. Montage was the artificial juncture of two points of view to create a new idea, through the use of cross-cutting in film and the blending of two or more images into a new idea in photography. Visual image is more democratic medium than the written text. According to Frederic Jameson those who have the temerity to

enjoy visual pleasure are pornographers at best most like animals. It is the idea derived from the film theory of Christian Metz and other film theorists of the 1970s. These film theorists consider cinema as an apparatus for the dissemination of ideology in which the spectator was reduced to a passive consumer.. After the construction of an image, the maker loses the power upon the image. It is the viewer or spectator who creates meaning upon what is shown on the screen. As a visual sign, cinema plays an important role to reflect the socio-economic political condition of a particular society. Cinema can serve its best purpose of creating a better society. As far as Kerala is concerned, cinema plays an important medium for women empowerment as it articulates the voice of women. The very idea of feminism is articulated through the medium of cinema as a cultural artifact. A genre called women –centric cinema has evolved with the extreme interaction of women with cinema. As a result of this interaction, a new dimension in film theory has evolved as feminist film theory. Theories like psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralism, post structuralism and deconstruction and so on provide new methods of decoding and demystifying the meanings of cinema as an art form. Feminist film theory provides a space to interpret and generate the signs of cinema from a woman’s perspective. Women have been discontented with their banishment from mainstream representation. This is one of the reasons for the evolution of feminist film criticism. This feminist film criticism provides the sense of a female perspective on narrative, character, genres, parody etc and also provides an impact on women’s reception of a film. As its inception in the 1970s, feminist film theory has provided the impetus for some of the most interesting developments in film studies like feminism, there has been a cultural backlash against feminist film theory also. Within the feminist film theory and criticism, there are ground breaking ideas of some major feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey, John Clairston, Marry Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed whose works are informed by a passionate commitment to both film and feminism. All these major

feminist film theorists have made remarkable contributions to feminist film theory, showing why film is an issue and why feminist issues are important in film. Feminism is a method of vocal and emotional protest against the power structures within the patriarchal society where men rule and their values are privileged. Feminists raise their voices against exploitations and oppressions towards women. Feminism is not just about women and not simply against men. It is for the socio-economic and political empowerment of women and society.

Women's movement can be classified as first wave feminism, second wave feminism, third wave feminism and fourth wave feminism based on historical time. The Suffragette Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is known as first wave feminism. The second wave feminism draws attention to women's experience in the home and family, reproduction, language use, fashion and appearance. The slogan of second wave feminism was „the personal is the political“. The dominant figure in the second wave feminism was Simone de Beauvoir and her influential work *The Second Sex* (1949). She herself declared that she is not a feminist but a socialist believing that socialism would bring an end to oppression of women. Many of the second wave campaigns centered on women's bodies and issues of feminine appearance. They give priority to the representation of women. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) Shula Smith Fire Stone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) are some of the key feminist works published at that time. Feminist film theory is the product of second wave feminism which began in the 1960s. In Britain, Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston joined the London women's films which started in 1971 and was devoted to screening films by women. The influential texts in women's film studies are Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973), Joan Mellen's *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* (1974) and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (1974). Feminist film theorists drew attention on thinkers such as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Marxist Philosopher Louis Althusser, the anthropologist Claude Levi

Strauss, the film theorist Christian Metz and the semioticians like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes to understand how films produced their meanings and how they addressed their spectators. The key concepts of feminist film theory are the male gaze, the female voice, technologies of gender, queering desire etc. Feminist film theorists demand for „positive“ or „true“ images of women. Making direct link between images of women and society was the trend that originated in U.S and they demand for the images of women as they „really“ are or how they would wish women to be. Dissatisfied with this approach British film theorists formed a number of discourses to analyze the representation of women in film. A figure in this movement was Claire Johnston and her auteur theory. She argues the feminist analysis of woman as a „sign“ signifying the myth of patriarchal discourse. She a diagnosis that woman as woman remains the unspoken absence of patriarchal culture. Laura Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in the year 1975 is treated as pioneering essay and many of its insights are still applied in the films. According to her, the representation of woman as a spectacle to be looked at exists in every part of visual culture. In such representations, women are defined in terms of sexuality and an object of desire. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema is constructed for a male gaze, male fantasies and pleasures. It was the first attempt to consider the interaction between the spectator and the screen in feminist terms.

According to feminist scholars, women are classified in the mainstream media and especially in the commercial film industry as objects. However, they mention that efforts are being taken to expand the women's role beyond the stereotypes that existed years ago (Brewer & Chand 2009). Feminist film scholars have emphasized a term called the "male gaze", which is identified as the way the camera portrays women on screen as sexual objects (King 2007). This idea of "male gaze" has been elaborately explained by Laura Mulvey in her work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in 1975. According to her, women

in films play a secondary and more ornamental role for the male audiences in the traditional cinema (Mulvey 1975). 'There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at' (Mulvey 1975: pp.16). Scopophilia was also explained as "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 1975: pp.16). Voyeuristic actions of children and their willingness to watch and ensure that the secret and the censored body parts exist in others is one of the clearest examples for explaining Scopophilia. Most mainstream films have been purposefully designed to illustrate a world that is free and magical. Therefore, cinema unfolds a whole new arena for the audiences where they are nonchalant towards the existence of other audience members-- that is displayed by enabling them to create a feeling of detachment-- and by entertaining their voyeuristic fantasy (day-dream) (Mulvey 1975), the patterns of on-screen light and shade that waver from time to time are also instrumental in creating a bubble of voyeuristic separation. According to Mulvey, cinema has been affiliated with "three different looks": looks of the camera as the pro-filmic actions are recorded, looks of the audiences as the final product is viewed by them, and finally the 'characters at each other within the screen illusion.' But, the main practice of narrative film techniques disagrees with the first two looks and considers them to be inferior to the third. So, the main intention is always to remove the presence of prying cameras and by restricting distant information from the audiences (Mulvey 1975). Thus, with the presence of these two objects (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), the essence of reality, accuracy, and facts cannot be portrayed by imaginary drama. At the same time, the look of the audience is not accepted as a central force, especially when the appearance of women in films as an object of desire is threatened by dispersing the illusion. Moreover, this enables the spectators to the erotic image on screen directly (without mediation). Therefore, Mulvey's theory breaks the main motive of illusion that is to create a

world of obsession-- by hiding the fear of unmanning, being enchanted by the image on screen-- so that the spectator concentrates to an extent that it encourages one to fully associate with the image in front of the viewer (Mulvey 1975). Numerous Indian feminist film critics drew on Mulvey's analysis and have theorized the workings of Indian cinema. In her essay, 'The Avenging Women in Indian Cinema', Lalitha Gopalan on the lines of Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema' theorizes that the female body has always been the main object of focus. Women in Indian films are type cast as objects who abide by all rules and regulations of the patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the concept of conventional heterosexual division of labor is employed to give pleasure to the audiences. Adding to this, the style of narration-- just to suit the sensibilities of male audiences-- portrayed men as active and female as passive (Gopalan 1997). She also discussed the feminist film theories on sex and violence and the movies which portray women as avengers. Carol Clover, a famous feminist film theorist, argued that these movies - which are otherwise very cautiously managed by the mainstream films tailored for male gaze--very superficially touch on some complicated issues like gender and spectatorship . Indian feminist film theorists like Vandana Shiva argued that the male ego is gratified by objectifying women. Steve Dyer provided ethnographic evidence to support the applicability Mulvey's arguments in Indian Cinema. Hindi films treat women on screen as an object of men's and the camera's gaze. Women in these movies exposed themselves in sexy dance numbers being lustfully stared at by men (Hero, villain or any other male character), thereby encouraging the male audiences to do the same. Besides this, the pleasure of scopophilia was true in the context of Indian male audiences, especially while discussing their favorite heroines. The heroines were chosen based on their physical beauty, sexiness, and dancing capabilities (Dyer 2000). Early feminist scholars have considered mass media as a powerful agent of gender socialization because it deals with numerous gender related programs (Walter 1995; Tuchman. 1978;

Dasgupta & Hedge 1988). According to Indian feminists, media honors the male dominance by portraying women as objects. Along with this, the Hindi films and various beauty contests devalue a woman's sense of individuality and intellectual prowess by emphasizing only on physical beauty (Gandhi & Shah 1992). They further discussed that the stereotypical portrayal of women in Hindi films enables men to expect women to always serve them (Gandhi & Shah 1992).

According to Freud, the fact that femininity arises out of a critical course of parallel development between the sexes -- also known as masculine or phallic for boys as well as girls--- is the major cause of complicating femininity (Mulvey 1975). The terms used by Freud to perceive femininity are similar to those that he laid out for the male. The real position of women in a patriarchal society is precisely shown by these problems of language. He further explained various terms used by general male to define women for example, men were described as 'active' and women as 'passive'. Freud also felt that femininity by being 'passive' authorized the control of 'the active' or 'the phallic phase' (Mulvey 1975). According to this study, the majority Hollywood movies catered to the masculine pleasures by recognizing with the 'active'. Problems of aesthetic languages and politics of images are of common interest to feminism and film theory. In addition to this, various intellectual debates revolving around the nature of signs and psychoanalysis has influenced various theories of film and feminism (Mulvey 1989). Various film feminists theorist like Pam Cook, Laura Mulvey and Annette Kuhn drew heavily from the empirical and more scientific approach offered by semiotics and structuralism (Hayward 2000). In her essay on Dorothy Arzner, Pam Cook explains that Hollywood cinema situates spectators in a particular closed relationship that keeps it away from any sort of contradictory image. These arguments strengthen the theoretical claims made by the avant-gardists (parallel film makers) (Hayward 2000).Also,patriarchalideology comprises various 'truths' and beliefs regarding the

significance of sexual difference, place of women in society and the confusion regarding femininity. According to the political viewpoint, aesthetic debates have influenced feminist film theories. However, ideologically, it is important for feminists to be acquainted with the fact that none of these ideologies--patriarchal or bourgeois-is eternally holistic, and the contradictions between them can affect the feminist viewpoint(Mulvey 1989). Various avant-garde movements during the twentieth century have led to the progress of 'oppositional aesthetics'. Julia Kristeva has studied how the relation between the avant-garde and semiotics affect women. In her work on modern poetics, Kristeva studied the conditions that resulted from connecting the language of modernism with 'the feminine'. Traditionally, language also represented 'the feminine' as pleasurable and illogical and inferior to patriarchy. Thus, the main idea of her work suggests that disobeying the norms will enable a change in the existing use of language. Hence, this logic can also be applied in the area of film making too; especially in the area of feminist films, independent of the constraints of commercial cinema. Therefore, these types of cinema would mainly play the role of signifier that had been totally ignored previously.

According to feminists, this kind of filmmaking has three major attractions: 'aesthetic fascination with discontinuities; pleasure from disrupting the traditional unity of the sign; and theoretical advance from investigating language and the production of meaning' (Mulvey1989:pp.122).These feminists centered their arguments on three major assumptions. First, all women have capacity to scrutinize the credibility of the portrayal of women in the film, and, second that these women film-makers were feminist. And the most important of all, they called attention to the fact that "Belief in a fixed feminine essence meant legitimating patriarchy through the back door. By 'order of things', implicitly what was also being accepted was the 'naturalness' of the patriarchal order." (Lapsley&Westlake1988: pp.25). However, during the late eighties and early nineties feminists wanted to broaden the arena on

the textual operations of films by examining them within numerous social contexts like the historical and social contexts of reception (Hayward 2000). Thus, this approach --not only expands the discussion around spectatorship, but also reestablishes the questions of class that had been overshadowed by the question of gender as it was the major focus by the previous feminist era (Hayward 2000). According to Silverman (1981) Mulvey's discussion on female spectator positioning as male, the debate had moved on to consider that positioning as masochistic, or as either "masochistic or transvestite" (Doane 1984). By now feminists were aware of disadvantage of psychoanalysis (Filterman & Lewis 1990). Various discussions centering on sexual differences concerning languages had opened based on Lacan's notion of construction of the subject. But this notion also could not solve the problem of defining femininity in relation to masculinity, and the male as the subject and women as the other (Filterman & Lewis 1990). During this era, British feminists studied the influence of class, gender, race, the structure of power and resistance on popular culture and tried to associate it with their research. On the other hand, the American feminist and cultural studies experts, unlike their British counterparts were immensely influenced by Michael Foucault. They concentrated more on Michel Foucault's theory of power and his social notion of technology and its application in the real world (De Lauretis, 1984). For Foucault, technology was a combination of power (technos) and knowledge (logos). Therefore, technologies meant discourse of power (Foucault 1977& De Lauretis 1984). Feminist film theorists have based their analysis on two major aspects of Foucault's theory of power. First, the idea that film produces a reality effect is not entirely applicable because 'reality- effect' is also produced by the film product's textual operations, conditions and (im) positions' influence on production and reception. Thus, the social relation of power between the various parts of the film industry like camera, director, producer, crew, editors is equally influenced by the reality effects as the spectators. He further elucidates that audiences are not the only product of an

ideological apparatus. In addition to this, he implies that each spectator is a unique socio-cultural individual, actively participating in creating reality while watching film. So, they are not classified as male or female spectators but numerous factors like age, sex, gender, class, and race has an impact on the reception and meaning of production (Hayward 2000). Therefore, the analysis of films on a wider scale allowed feminist film theorists to use the effects of psychoanalysis in new a context unlike its old that was male- centric. So, in other words the femininity could be defined without using masculinity (Hayward 2000). Moreover, femininity not only becomes more than just a male construct but also it is seen as multiform and plurahstically position: Women (Doane 1987). The other aspect of Foucault's theory that influenced the feminist film theorists was his idea of 'resistance' which existed with power relation.

He also suggested that resistance leave their traces despite being separated by social and institutional strata (Foucault 1978). Foucault's discussion on counter-investment has been of immense influence on the feminist film theorists' idea of counter-cinema. He defines counter-investment as a flip side of power relation (Foucault 2000). On the similar lines, the role of power relations is contradicted by counter-cinema. Thus, it represents a set of various ideas that is an antithesis to the existing hegemony. So, this represents that patriarchy is not superior to femininity. The counter-cinema argues that patriarchy is nothing but an outcome of certain theoretical discussions like psycho-analysis. Therefore, women's counter-cinema, in Foucault's term is an attempt to concentrate on discourses that have been avoided so far (Hayward 2000). Claire Johnston (1976) suggested that one should learn to function at various levels, which means that movies should also be made in different genres other the male-dominated ones. Not only did he appreciate the handful of women filmmakers, but also hoped for an increase in number resulting into a change of outlook.

Thus, it is seen that general film theories have been influenced by numerous feminist film theories, that have been practiced. However, these theories have been also criticized. The Black feminists have criticized the narrow scope of applicability of these theories. According to them, these theories only deal with the social and cultural experiences of the white and mostly the middle class women. The Black, Asian and Latin feminist filmmakers have also commented that the studies on popular culture have been restricted to the White-only area in their analysis. Despite an increase in the number of Black, Asian and other non-white women on-screen their presence has been completely ignored in these theories (Hayward 2000; Kuhn &Radstone 1990; Attille &Blackwood 1986).

The study of popular culture influences the study of mass media. Experts believe that popular culture influences the television culture and is also influenced by the demands of viewers (Gans 1974). Popular culture is also known as, taste culture or "mass culture". It is a German concept that was used to refer to the taste of the uneducated, unrefined working class in Europe. So, this kind of entertainment remained unattractive to the educated, elite and "cultured" group of people in the European society, and their taste was termed as highbrow. Furthermore, a middle ground between the high and low brow was considered as middle brow (Gans 1974). Therefore, based on these assumptions culture was categorized as high brow culture, middle brow culture and low brow or popular culture. This analysis, also saw that popular culture was created by a group of profit-minded businessmen who borrowed the high culture's ideas and debased them to cater to the entertainment needs of the masses for money-thereby, resulting to an adverse effect on the high culture (Gans1974). Van Wyck Brooks (1915) in his essay, 'Highbrow and Lowbrow' saw that this antagonism between the high brow culture and the low (mass)-brow culture had become a topic of social criticism (Faber 2006), and so he suggested for a genial middle ground' that would enable the 'cultural life' to grow (Rubin 1992), leading to the emergence of 'middle-brow culture'. Russell Lynes

further elaborated on the term 'middle brow', as a category, which was a cross between the chief patrons of society and the working class. This group was very keen on improving their minds and fortune by trying to emulate certain habits of the high- culture (Rubin 1992). While these are useful categories for theorizing popular culture, it should be understood that these categories are fluid and people move between these categories in their consumption of popular culture.

Catherine Strong (2011) analyzed the cultural values associated with women in filmmaking, composing, and editing. She found that music composed by the male bands were known as "serious music", whereas women's contribution to music was criticized as "pop". Moreover, music created by men was considered as "high-brow" and the ones that were composed by women were considered as "low brow". Furthermore, studies have shown that "Popular Culture" has a relation with "consumer culture". Popular culture is influenced by consumer culture and vice-versa. Also the concept of gender and gender roles-- a product of the society directing that an individual functions as male or female in the society also has a great influence on the popular culture. Drawing from this assumption, popular culture in the mass media has portrayed women as consumers and men as producers. This phenomenon is known as 'feminization of consumption' (Sandlin & Maudlin 2012). The consumers are considered as active participants, who make choices based on their needs and desires (pp.94). This happens in case of Indian cinema, where the male audiences look forward to satisfy their needs, desires through the images of women on screen. The gratification of men becomes very important because most audiences and filmmakers are men (Nandkumar 2011). Even in the Indian context, Popular Culture is influenced by dominant culture, and the popular culture caters to the need of the masses creating an influence on them in turn. Therefore, in my analysis, I will try to see how popular culture is applied to the Indian male audience. Popular culture's emphasis on Indian films has stressed hierarchy and male

domination. Most commercial cinema has portrayed the heroes as an ideal man, who is an extremely strong individual capable of winning all the challenges at societal, familial, and official levels. Besides this, they are portrayed to be extremely responsible and protective towards spouses and elders (Hansen 1992). These are few examples of Indian men maintaining 'Indianness' in movies conformed by popular culture.

Therefore, Indianness for men is being brave, responsible and offering protection whereas for women it means being sexually chaste, obedient, and being extremely devoted to the family (Derne 2000). Even films portraying women as strong willed, career-minded individuals always maintain male supremacy (Derne 2000). Bollywood films have always upheld dominant values of society-- that have been barely challenged- and if at all challenged; they have been challenged by men (Hansen 1992). On the other hand, they portray women as immensely adjusting and patient in finding a solution to the most serious and stressful real life problems. This encourages women to think that calmness and patience ensures a successful solution to their problems (IenAng1985). Therefore, Bollywood movies provide a vicarious feeling for men to be rebellious and women to be calm and obedient (Derne 2000). Thus, the popular culture of Bollywood films plays a very important role in shaping the status of women in reality. According to Marxist tradition, popular culture is just like religion that serves as "opium of the masses". Moreover, Herbert Marcuse (1968) argued that popular culture reduces the experience of pains amongst women in order to bear oppression. They always are always taught to obey patriarchy, and this encourages a fatalistic nature amongst women as they are portrayed to succumb to their existing fate (VanZoonen 1994). Antonio Gramsci's (1998), concept of hegemony is at its best in the Indian context. The dominance and influence of patriarchy affects the society and most Bollywood films are based on this ideology. This hegemonic ideology, also endorsed by religion has become the most powerful, internalized, common and dominant ideology of Indian society. Thus, various

factors of religion influence and govern popular culture in the Indian context. The epics and mythological tales of Hinduism have always celebrated male dominance, and this has been adopted by filmmakers (Nandkumar 2011). Therefore, this explains why women centric films or films in which women are shown as self dependant and responsible have not been considered as mainstream movies, and have stirred controversy as well. Instead of sticking to the usual patriarchal framework, these movies challenge the common beliefs through non-stereotypical roles that are discouraged. Moreover, challenging the ills of religion and culture causes severe controversies (Nandkumar 2011).

CHAPTER 3

Many writers and directors around the world have tropes that they keep going back to if the supporting characters in Mysskin's films scream incandescently, the protagonists in Mani Ratnam's universe whisper sweet nothings into each other's ears. So it shouldn't come as a big surprise that some people keep dying in Atlee's movies. Atlee has directed four feature films so far, of which three star Vijay in the lead. In every film of his, he has killed off a key character to take the story forward. The male gaze is everywhere in *Bigil*, whether it's the *Singappenney* anthem, or the various ways in which Atlee finds an opportunity to lecture men and women, through Michael, about what's the need of the hour. Football, like carrom in *Vada Chennai*, doesn't get its characters out of poverty. Rather, it enables them to become achievers in a society filled by the likes of Sharma (a dominant-caste villain, played by Jackie Shroff, who looks down upon people of Michael's ilk).

Michael Rayappan is a crime boss from Chennai who works for the welfare of people in his slum. He has a romantic relationship with Angel Aasirvatham, a physiotherapist who comically refuses to marry any groom at the last minute due to their love. He has a running feud with a rival don named Daniel. One night, Daniel attacks Michael and his close friend Kathir, who is the coach of the Tamil Nadu women's football team. Kathir suffers spinal injuries during the attack, due to which he is paralyzed for a year. To allow the women's football team to take part in the upcoming National Championship in Delhi, Kathir requests to the Tamil Nadu Football Federation to replace him with his former teammate named "Bigil", who is none other than Michael. The story then shifts to Michael's past as a football player.

Seven years earlier, Michael was an aspiring footballer and contributed to victories for the Tamil Nadu football team along with Kathir. His father was Rayappan, a don who had

a feud with a rival don named Alex, who was Daniel's father. Rayappan encouraged his son's passion for football as he did not want him to end up as a criminal like him. When Michael was unable to make it to the Indian football team due to Rayappan's criminal record, Rayappan personally took up the matter with the All India Football Federation president J. K. Sharma and forcefully ensured Sharma to include Michael and Kathir in the Indian team probable list. But despite Rayappan's efforts, Michael's football career was cut short as he witnessed Rayappan being killed by Alex and Daniel, just when he was about to leave for Delhi to attend the selection trial for the Indian football team. Michael then killed Alex in front of Daniel, thereby taking revenge for Rayappan's death, and stayed back in Chennai to become the new leader of his father's gang.

In the present day, Michael accepts Kathir's request to coach the women's football team and leaves for Delhi with the team, with Angel also accompanying them as team physiotherapist. However, due to his criminal background, the girls refuse to cooperate with him, even blaming him for the team's opening loss to Manipur in the National Championship and requesting the Federation to have him removed. Dejected, Michael gives his resignation to Sharma, but he soon realises that Sharma is targeting him in revenge for the humiliation that he had faced at the hands of Rayappan to allow him into the Indian football team. Sharma sends armed assailants to attack Michael; however, Michael subdues the assailants and withdraws his resignation. He convinces the girls to support him and starts training them hard with the sole focus of winning the Championship. He even manages to bring back two former key players to boost the team's strength: Gayathri, a Brahmin girl who had to quit playing football after she was married to a conservative family; and Anitha, who went into depression and refused to leave her room after a man threw acid on her face as she spurned his advances. Despite Sharma trying to rig the team's next match against Haryana so that they will be eliminated and sent home, they manage to beat Haryana and win all their remaining

matches, eventually qualifying for the Final at Chennai, where they are to play Manipur again.

On the eve of the Final, one of the team's players, Vembu, is kidnapped and forcefully injected with cocaine by Daniel, who is hired by Sharma in order to sabotage the team's chances of winning the Championship. Though she recovers, she is unable to play in the final as she would fail the dope test. The team's captain, Thendral, is also kidnapped by Daniel, who attempts to forcefully inject cocaine on her as well; however, Michael manages to rescue her. Michael proceeds to kill Daniel once and for all, but when he sees Daniel's young son, he changes his mind and spares Daniel, as he does not want the young boy's future to end up like him by seeing his father die. The next day, Tamil Nadu plays the Final against Manipur without Vembu. The match turns out to be a thriller with Tamil Nadu winning the Championship through a penalty shootout. Michael and the team dedicate their success to Kathir, who is watching the match from the dugout in a wheelchair.

During the credits, Michael gets Sharma framed for drug possession, leading to Sharma's arrest in Malaysia, where he is on a holiday. A few months later, Michael, no longer a rowdy, takes up football coaching for children, with one of his wards being the son of Daniel, who has made peace with Michael.

Let's talk about inconsistencies and the exhausting length of Bigil. It was promoted as an ambitious sports drama, but the coach Michael spends more time mouthing punch dialogues than training the girls in football. Bigil isn't another formulaic sports film, but it's pretty much set in a template. You have this underdog element, and you know who's going to win against all odds. Atlee somehow manages to make everything 'look' effective. But that doesn't mean Bigil is a good film.

This Vijay-starrer is unnecessarily bloated with multiple characters and subplots. Atlee has so much to say and struggles to deliver what he promised in three hours. Usually,

coaches build the team, and push players to succeed. In Bigil, Michael 'motivates' his team, by insulting them. He calls one of the players 'gundamma' (fat woman, literally), multiple times; so that she delivers a goal. How a fat-shaming exercise considered 'encouragement'. In an 'empowering' film, you see the camera focusing on the same Pandiyamma as she comes running to the stadium. We are shown the earth to be shaking, in a bid to get us laughing. Also, talk about that misplaced-awful background music! Even though Michael says, 'saadhikka azhagu mukkiyam illa', the tone of the scene is incorrect. And, that is not how you conceive it. Though Vijay brings to the role a cheerful enthusiasm, there's little gravitas. In lots of places, Atlee forgets his protagonist is Michael, the coach. The dialogues, match sequences and everything is for 'Thalapathy' Vijay and panders to his image. Nayanthara plays Michael's love interest, Angel. It is frustrating to see her character go behind Michael, wherever he goes like a Hutch Dog. She's shown as a physiotherapist, but she doesn't do any related chores on the screen.

Though Bigil has a subplot on women's football, there's very little about the players, their lives, ordeals and dreams. Bigil thinks Vijay is this Lord Krishna, who drives the chariot. In Mahabharata, Krishna is the driver of the horse cart. Here, Michael is both the saviour and Sarathy – the driver, who rides a chariot, driven by horses (read: women players). This visual appears in one of the crucial scenes.

The important football scenes that happen in the stadium are poorly choreographed. It feels like I was watching a video game played to a packed movie hall. Fans didn't seem to have an issue, whereas I did. Vijay is terrific as the don, who stutters. There's some honesty in the way he speaks and behaves.

As the end credits of Bigil roll, a slide appears, "Dedicated to women." Let's face it. Many women who watched the film, found it progressive and that it addressed an important issue about them being suppressed in life for various reasons. But Bigil received equal

backlash for Atlee's treatment and the way he portrayed the women on screen. The question here is - Does the film swear by women empowerment? In the process of glorifying Vijay, Atlee let down the women in his film and those who were watching it. Even after claiming that the film is about women empowerment, one could handpick only a few moments that made women proud.

Vijay, a former football player, an excellent one at that, had to become a gangster due to the circumstances he is placed in. When his friend gets injured, he is forced to head the team of women football players who represent Tamil Nadu. But, never once in the film are the women footballers shown to apply their mind and score goals. Even during the crucial moments, Vijay's Michael has to be there with them to guide them to victory. When two former footballers Anitha (an excellent Reba Monica John) and Gayathri (an equally good Varsha Bollamma) are brought back to the team by Vijay's arousing monologue, the theatre erupts in applause. Anitha is an acid-attack victim because of which she has locked herself in her room for several years. All it takes for Anitha to come out of her room is Vijay's motivational speech. Vijay's character teaches her to face her fears and it serves as an excellent build-up to the scene that is about to unfold.

Anitha is forced to face the one who attacked her with acid. She sees him and tries to flee. But, Vijay doesn't want her to budge. She had to face the harasser so that she could concentrate on 'football'. Not even once does Vijay's character ponder on the mental space Anitha is in or whether she can come face to face with the perpetrator. But Anitha delivers a perfect blow to the attacker with her words and walks back with her head held high. She becomes the hero. The celebration is cut short by Vijay's entry, only to deliver the closing line of an epic sequence. It's Reba Monica John and countless Anithas' scene to shine. But, no, a star had to wrap up the scene. How is it women empowerment when such a woman is

not allowed to have a proud moment in the film that is all about its lead actor? Similarly, Gayathri, who hails from a Brahmin family, had to give up football because that's not the norm for women hailing from similar backgrounds. Here, for a change, Nayanthara teaches a lesson to Gayathri's sexist husband who doesn't let his wife play because it will require her to wear shorts. Again, a nice build-up, but Atlee ruins it towards the climax. By then, Vijay's Michael, the coach, has become an 'annan' (brother) to everyone in the team. So when Gayathri finds out that she's pregnant, her annan decides for her that it is not safe for her to play.

The most baffling sequence in this 'women empowerment' film is where Michael body-shames Pandiyamma (played by Indrajith Shankar) so that she takes it as an inspiration to hit back with rage. He repeatedly calls her 'gundamma' (fatso). If that isn't enough, when she sets foot on the ground, Atlee shows her visuals of the ground shaking with blaring sounds. The thought of leading a women's football team to victory is a welcome move. But when a film is dedicated to women, it shouldn't just graze the surface. Body shaming in the name of inspiration, hand-holding a team and taking decisions for them is not women empowerment.

'Bigil' ticks off all the checkboxes in a typical Thalapathy Vijay film where we anticipate a truly mass intro scene for a mass hero in full form (students running to Vijay in distress. Check. A gaana song to welcome those in pursuit of the hero. Check. Hero's sidekick calling him CM not Chief Minister, but Captain Michael. Wow. Check. A cop abandoning the task force in fear after he sees that it is Vijay's area that he is standing in. Check). A mass Rahman song to show off Vijay's extraordinary dancing skills ('Verithanam' sung by Vijay is addicting. Check). Stylised action sequence involving bikes on Napier's bridge. (First glimpse of first villain too, also featuring Daniel Balaji's

magnificent hair. Check). Multiple villains, including Tamil-speaking North Indian actors (the bad guys are always lurking around in Bigil, even when you're in Delhi, far away from Tamil Nadu. Check.) A slew of comedians who are part of the hero's motley gang (Vivek, Yogi Babu. Who else do you need? Check.) Trademark Vijay gestures from his previous films (Hand crossing head salute. Throwing chewing gum into mouth. A swag veshti fold jump. Check, check and check.)

There was solid scope to deliver a strong 'message', one of women's empowerment, but the film never lets it surpass the need to celebrate Vijay's heroism. If it had, it would have made a world of a difference. To paraphrase a dialogue from the film: 'Naan yaaru theriyuma nu solladha, unakku enna panna mudiyum athu kaattu'. Just making a 'message-oriented' commercial film does not mean you deserve hurrahs - it's how the message is presented that matters the most. Atlee deifies Vijay to a superhuman level in this film --- Vijay the coach of the Tamil Nadu women's football team (who literally 'schools' the women), Vijay the older brother 'anna' figure to the women, Vijay who saves every football match from being destroyed by vile villains, Vijay the last-minute 'kadavul' (god)... And their idea of a 'strong' woman is limited to childbirth and motherhood, which the film reiterates several times through dialogues and visuals.

Vijay can now stake claim to the 'Kollywood's Akshay Kumar' tag. Sample this. In the final football match of the film, the female players are shown having 'Bigil' embossed on their jerseys, and not their names. "Oru Bigil illa, 11 Bigils". Heroism 101. 'Bigil', to its credit, does make a few progressive statements like its criticism of the 'maatu ponnu' stereotype (a dig at Brahmins?) and the portrayal of an acid attack survivor's battle. Necessary even if rather generic. "Thannambikkaiyum theramai ode mugam nee" is my sole takeaway dialogue from 'Bigil'. Which unfortunately is delivered by Vijay - and not one of the 11 women. No points for never allowing the women into the spotlight, sans

Vijay. The 11 female actors, who are never the 'heroes' of the film even when they score goals and win matches, play their parts to perfection - however, unlike 'Chak De India', the film does not take the time to invest in a back story for each of them. The fact that the makers did not think that it's important is sad. The body shaming and the North East slur was totally unnecessary and completely offensive.

Nayanthara's role, although starkly lesser in stature, does have its moments (sigh, will we ever see a female coach headlining a big budget film?). Despite being 'Lady Superstar' and getting more screen time than any of her peers would in a film of this nature, she's still made to do some superficial 'strong heroine' scenes - beating up guys for harassing her friend, a slo-motion shot of her donning black shades and getting on the bike with the hero, and even a couple of 'loosu ponnu' scenes that just fell flat. But one scene merits a shout out: when the heroine pacifies the bristling hero and goes on to deliver the anti-patriarchy lecture instead of him. Thanks for letting the heroine deliver the message at least this once, dear makers.

Vijay as Rayappan (the gangster father) is a memorable character (just not his voice, sorry - sounding like you're recovering from a bad cold is not convincing at all, especially if it alternates between Vijay's real voice and a raspy add-on. Cue: Bigileyyy). Right from his entrance scene (a much more stylish opening than Bigil's) where he slays those waiting to kill him all along humming an MGR song to his final emotional fight sequence, Vijay manages to make us feel for the appa character - one who got caught up in a world of crime too early in life and wants his talented son to forge his own path through football, not swords. Now, that's one 'message' that is communicated rather empathically - in the North Madras-set world of 'Bigil', sports is not just a game but a means for a better life for the youth of these troubled neighbourhoods. The symbolism of the scene where Vijay drops his knife and picks up a child's book is cliché, but still works. For an actor

who is most comfortable in the light comedic zone, Rayappan must have not been easy to pull off. But he adds his charm to the 'Nayagan'-type ageing don character too. The father Vijay hugging the son Vijay scenes make you smile.

Vijay's veiled digs at the ruling government and the political climate of the country, one we've come to await in every film since 'Mersal', were rather tame in this film. If it was multinational corporations exploiting farmers that was the focus of 'Kaththi', and the corrupt practices of medical practitioners in 'Mersal', in 'Bigil', Vijay takes on the politics in the world of sports. But with a slight change. Instead of power-packed punch dialogues, Rayappan's beautiful, mass 'thoo' ("Sportslayum vyabaram ah da, thoo!") serves the purpose. A final word. If 'Bigil' worked as a motivational, inspiring, goosebumps-inducing sports film for you, a large chunk of the credit goes to AR Rahman's music (and no credit to the CGI football kicks). The 'Singapenny' song and Rahman's uplifting voice did the trick of making me believe that maybe... this film really did care about women's liberation.

CHAPTER 4

The movie starts off by portraying the life of an urban, interfaith couple – Louis Pothan and Vasuki – and their daughter. Louis' multiple roles as a lawyer, film critic and artist keep him busy, yet jovial, most of the time. At home, however, Vasuki is disturbed after a shocking incident turns her world topsy-turvy. How she gathers enough courage to confront it and goes about her putting her life together forms the plot.

Puthiya Niyamam is a 2016 Indian Malayalam-language crime drama film written and directed by A. K. Sajan. The film explores the drug fueled crimes and consumption of substances like marijuana and LSD by the youth. The film was dubbed into Tamil and Telugu as the title Vasuki. Louis Pothan is a popular part-time television film critic, an artist, and a divorce lawyer who also participates in a live TV channel named "Kathrika". His wife Vasuki Iyer is a Kathakali artist, and they live together along with their school going daughter Chintha. They live away from their parents since their marriage was an inter-religious one. One day, Vasuki is raped by her two neighbours, Aryan and Sudeep, who are engineering students, and Pachai, a man who irons clothes at her building. Vasuki goes into shock after the rape. She does not confide in anyone and becomes withdrawn. Her demeanour changes as she becomes irritable and lax in her household work. She even contemplates suicide, but better sense prevails when she realises that it is her rapists who should die and not her. After a Kathakali performance, she is complemented by Jeena Bhai, the new police commissioner. Vasuki finds Jeena's phone number from Louis's mobile and calls her and narrates her ordeal. Jeena Bhai's telephonic assistance helps her kills her rapists one by one. After the deed is done, Jeena tells Vasuki that their brief friendship over the phone was over and Vasuki should never contact her again.

It is later revealed that Louis was informed by Swami, a resident of a neighbouring apartment building, of his wife being raped. Swami had witnessed Vasuki being raped from his house but was old and too far away to help. He informs Louis about what he saw. Louis, through a mobile software (which can transform a male voice to a female voice), mimics Jeena and guides Vasuki to murder her rapists. He realizes that this was the only way that she would get absolution. Louis never reveals the truth to Vasuki and decides to keep it as a secret so that they could lead a happy married life.

'Puthiya Niyamam' straddles the thin line between the right and wrong and easily loops in the grey places. Once again justice is meted out by people close to the victim as we have seen in countless stories. With Mammooty and Nayanthara leading the roost as a couple, the familial bond is classy. An uneasy air prevails in the story and the narration takes its thriller tone from here. The way the plot is conceived is interesting. Starting with a heavy aura around Vasuki (Nayanthara) which even leads to her daughter to wonder if her mother is having an affair to the occasional steely and resigned looks alternating in each frame, the element of mystery is introduced right from the beginning. This thread is kept up throughout the narrative. While Louis Pothan (Mammooty) is as cool as a cucumber, Vasuki is a smoldering mess. An eminent advocate who prefers to let his clients who approach him for divorce think twice before filing notice, an uber cool exterior who supports his wife in perplexing moments, a lovable flat mate, self confessed communist, and a staunch family man - Louis Pothan is one someone whom everyone loves. Who can blame the ever nosy neighbor played by Rachana Narayankutty who proclaims to love this married man and unashamedly chases him?

'Puthiya Niyamam' has a lot many classy moments which lend a charm to the overall feel of the movie. Some of the dialogues are very engaging and work well to further the story. Comic elements have not been left off, mostly coming in from the divorce cases that

comes to Louis. Intrigue is also added by the visuals - an old man with the telescope, Vasuki's broken arm, the mask of the Kathakali, the fluttering Kathakali vesham et al feels symbolic, without feeling contrived. The urbane landscape is beautifully brought out with a tastefully done flat, a garden in the balcony, the dingy but proactive office of Pothen and the cityscape. In spite of all these realistic elements, a perfect looking Nayanthara with no hair out of place unlike usual home makers, typical slow motion Mammooty walk towards the end, the police role done by Sheelu Abraham, the garish and conventional background music of a typical thriller and backtracking camera all add to take away from a lovely tale. 'Puthiya Niyamam' should have stuck with the familial part of the narrative instead of going the revenge way in such an unlikely fashion. The psychological aspect of the characters which were given importance in the beginning was dismissed from the scene later on.

Apart from these odds moments in the story, 'Puthiya Niyamam' is definitely an engaging watch. But the weightiness of the issue pictured gets drowned out in the process and this is where the movie fails. A K Saajan can take heart that he has been able to conceive such a movie beautifully. More thought on how to deal with what Vasuki undergoes would have taken the movie to a new level.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

When ideas of female empowerment are used as marketing techniques for films, the artifice is not revealed because the product – which is the film itself, is marketed as being revolutionary. In a country where films and film stars are highly influential, and in an environment where meaningful mainstream cinema is seen as the means to engage with ‘illiterate masses’, socially relevant films stand on a pedestal, which they seek to elevate through marketing strategies that overstate their scope for social impact. Feminism has become almost a selling point for some current movies, but aren’t these either riding on male actors, or turning feminism into a ‘commodity’? A film seeks its audience through targeted marketing. The first glimpse of any film is its promotional posters, teasers and trailers, along with the innumerable interviews and discussions with the cast and crew on print, radio and of course TV and social media spaces.

Films are categorically placed in particular genres and often the theme of the film is suggested through intelligent marketing devices. Sometimes a film gets promoted for. The manner in which a film is projected speaks volumes about the industry, and it is interesting to observe the mode in which it negotiates themes as sensitive as women empowerment. Mainstream cinema seems to be thrilled to have discovered a subject that looks equally appealing to the masses as well as to the critics. It is a currently relevant, hugely controversial subject, feminism.

Feminist themes seem to be fashionable these days. We have a handful of films that deal with women’s issues in a sensitive manner, no doubt. Kudos to the film makers! So why should we worry? Why do we need to reflect upon this ‘fad’ that seems to be quite empowering to women in a misogynist society like India? It is quite a frightening scenario

when an ideology like feminism is reduced to identity politics and core issues get submerged in all the noise created by the market. When ideologies get commodified, we lose track of the several major issues that plague women in India. The woes of the middle class urban Indian woman are only one among the many problems faced by Indian women. Yet we prefer to eulogize these films as women-friendly films.

Are they films that address the core issues that women face in Indian society or are they equipped to merely touch upon the surface in a shallow manner and still claim to be **women-focused films**? An interview during the promotion of the film Pink in which the cast and director of the film Pink speaks about the film, began with this statement by the anchor, “The film ends where the movement starts”. Does it, really? Post-feminism **asks you to be wary of such feminist expressions of creativity** that populate popular culture, since they try to focus on identity politics at an individual level. Honest interventions are few and rare and marginal causes are ignored completely, especially in the Indian context. Moreover, while feminism becomes yet another product for consumption, and popular media projects images of feminist identities ideal for the neoliberal market, narratives, unfortunately, fail to perceive the harsh reality of gender inequalities and exploitation that exists at several levels, in numerous forms.

In a modern patriarchal setting, media conserve patriarchal concepts and highlight traditionally made identities for women, thus modifying traditional gendered social structure. We can't call it as modern films until they preach modern women identities. In films, the reproduction of traditional identities of women has developed in a modern scenario. The identity of the new woman in movies is the mirror reflection of marginalisation of the female, because the movies are narrated from the male perspective of feminism. The new films are also developing the male gazes through female views. In their traditional feminine identities, women are concurrently viewed and presented with their actions coded for strong visual

appearance. The presentation of woman is one of crucial elements of vision in film. However, it does not mean that women and their issues get prime importance rather they are used for popularity of movies. The physical appearance of a woman and the acceptance of woman oriented issues are mainly utilised for this. In Malayalam movies, female identities are restricted to a typical gendered definition of womanhood where their identities are defined by their actions yet bounded within their gendered identities like, mother, wife and sister. These films attempt to show some changes from the patriarchal representations of women in terms of marriage, family and motherhood. However, the opportunity of showing true freedom seems to be a myth.

On the whole this thesis was a discourse analysis that enabled me to understand the sociological and cultural implication of women-centric films as more than just another film presented on the silver screen. Through the use of discourse analysis my main aim in the study was to find the various layers on which the women-centric films operate, and their difference from the commercial Bollywood films. I also tried to see the message that these films wanted to give by portraying women who opposed patriarchal commands as brave enough to fight the injustice against them. However, Dasgupta (1983) has argued that such women who dare to challenge the patriarchy have been either forced to reconcile or have been punished to an extent that they have regretted taking such steps. This study, working against this claim, considered' films where women have dared to resist patriarchy, but have not regretted their decision. This study contributes to the literature by making the topic of women-centric films in Hindi available to international scholars. On the other hand the study can be criticized on various grounds.

These two movies were released recently in the film industry and they were successfully adapting to the formula of a previously united female viewership: young women, professional women, travelling women and the orthodox housewives. All types of viewers

were happily satisfied to this women oriented movies. Because it's framed very well in an outer cover as it advocates the feminist values. By following this trick, the movies makers gain the acceptance from the larger audience irrespective of their actual views. They are also indirectly popularising the concept of developing modern female identity, while female representation is bound to old patriarchal perceptions and traditions. Nowadays, female oriented films have become commercialising subjects which immediately influence the viewers. This is the main reason why presently these types of movies are getting preference.

Thus, this thesis attempts to see the role of popular culture plays in women centric movies. Although popular culture has shown women challenging the system, these have been under the guidance of men. However, popular culture in the domain of Indian cinema has not appreciated the idea of self dependant women capable of fulfilling their emotional, financial needs and above all they do not need a man to protect them.

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