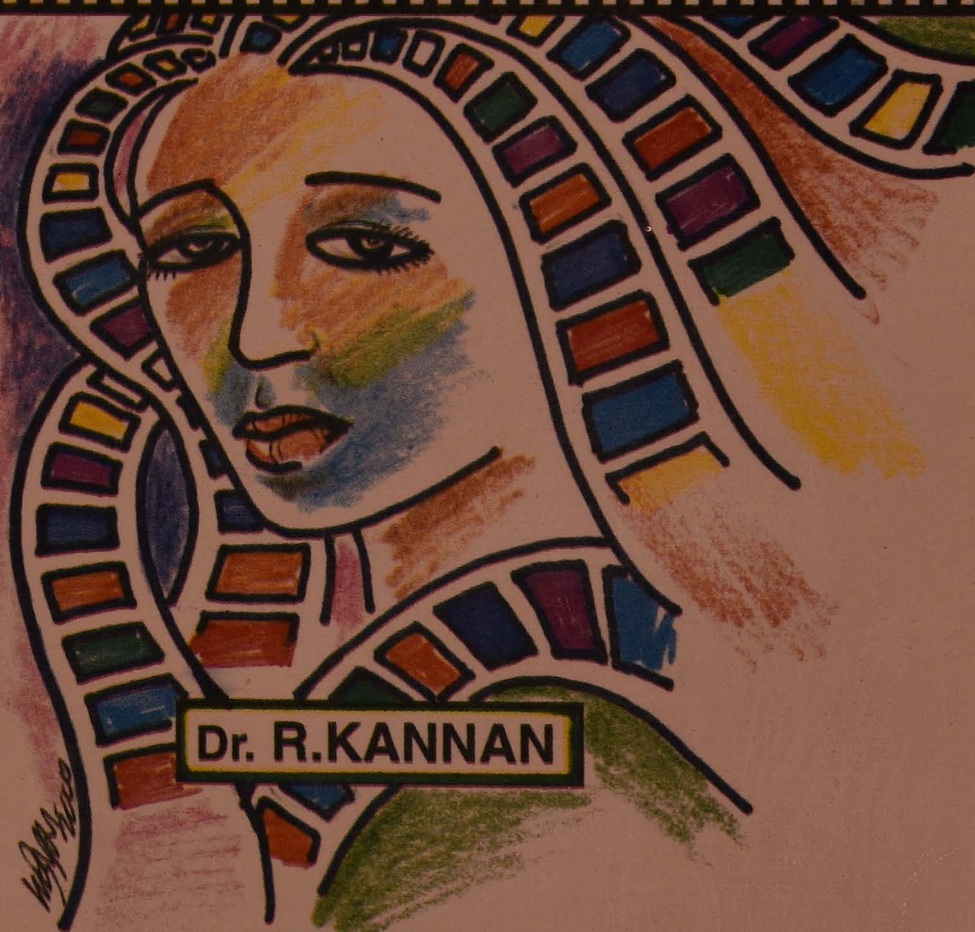


**WOMEN IN FILMS -
AN INCISIVE STUDY INTO
THE ISSUES AND TRENDS**



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Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai - 625 021**

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PREFACE

It has been my long cherished ambition to carryout a research work in the purview of sociology of communication. In a Sociological study the respondents constitute a vital segment. Hence at the outset I express my gratitude to the respondents, without whose cooperation, the goal would not have been realised.

I am thankful to Prof. M. Salihu, Vice-Chancellor, the authorities of Madurai Kamaraj University and Dr. R. Kasirajan, Publication Officer for publishing my research endeavour.

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R. KANNAN

Chapter I

Introduction

There is a feeling that the woman has not got her due in the celluloid. She has not been portrayed the way she deserves to be presented. This feeling infact has emerged as a kind of anguish, that some academics and activists have openly given vent to their feelings through their writings and utterances. There is a general impression that the women have performed roles, which are just the replica of the stereotyped role, which they perform, in real life. Time and again she is presented as adoring her life partner, rearing her children with great care and affection besides being an object of sex. Ultimately she remains an ever-cheaper commodity with no locusstandi as a gender and as a character.

How far is this view true? Is this view impressionistic and opinionated? Let us look into these issues as the discussion proceeds. The present work while attempting to examine the portrayal of women in films very much confines itself to Tamil films. Chennai, the Capital of the State of Tamilnadu, happens to be one of the major films producing centers in Asia. Film is the most popular mass entertainment in India. Interestingly, even after the arrival of satellite channels and cable television with an estimated viewership of 7.5 crores which by and large give the viewers entertainment in bulk and in instalments,* film as a medium gets going and maintains its popularity. Jain attributes this to the fact that film as a form of

entertainment is within the reach of the common man. "In India, the impact of the movies is all the more. Indians are not very much fond of social gatherings and club life mainly because majority of the people cannot afford that. The musical gatherings poetic symposia etc., remain too costly for an average man and do not attract a large number of people. Cinema being cheap and within easy reach of every one thus commands a better patronage"¹

The film industry in Tamilnadu has had a fairly long history, spanning over nearly seven decades. The first Tamil film **Kalidoss** appeared in the year 1931. Since then hundreds of feature films have appeared ranging over a variety of themes. "Between 1931 and 1994, 4382 Tamil films have been produced".** If a cross sectional analysis is made regarding the growth of this dream industry in terms of the annual output of feature films, one would understand its rapid growth. In the year 1951, the number of Tamil films stood at 26. In the next fifteen years, i.e., in 1966, the output of feature films touched 60. In 1980, the figure reached 145.²

In the present day, the Tamil film world has come a long way in matters like technical excellence and choice of stories. Apart from bagging national awards, one or two entries are also sent to compete at the international level.

A visible change that could be seen in the Tamil film industry is the distinct shift of focus from star domination to directorial domination. Two and a half decades back the film stars, atleast a few of them had exercised great influence in the

choice of stories, dialogues, songs, costumes and the directors (many of them) could not neutralise the over riding powers of the stars. But the trend has changed to a considerable extent in the present day, with the arrival of a host of new directors among whom many have had training or formal education relating to film. What is all the more interesting is the changing trend, noticeable among the audience who by and large have become discerning analysts. Tamil cinema has become a topic of discussion in debate clubs. People vociferously express their assent or dissent depending on the nature of the stories projected in films. In some extreme cases, people have protested against the screening of films if they have hurt their feelings with reference to caste, gender etc. A number of women's organisations have organised processions of women, who besides carrying placards and banners, by way of protest, have also defaced the posters of the matinee idols, with molten tar or black ink, if they were suspected to have been responsible for obscenity.

Of late, people watch the films with utmost care as to how a woman is portrayed in the film. While women's organisations have become somewhat militant, the elders are so very sensitive and touchy regarding the characterisation of women. While the perspective of gender dominates the sentiments of women activists, the preservation of culture is the prerogative of the senior citizens. Interestingly, the expectations of the youth of both genders, by and large, are different from the former, and in fact, run counter to the feelings of the statusquo stabilisers. Quite interestingly, debates regarding drifts and shifts pertaining to the focus of women are not something new to Tamil society.

Media experts point out that people have voiced their concern even six decades back when the Tamil film **Balayogini** was released in 1938. The film was about a young brahmin widow, who had decided to live with a servant belonging to a lower caste, after being driven out of home by her affluent relative. The film was screened at a time when the strong current of purity-pollution principles were sweeping the entire nation. David's observation about the film **Balayogini** is as follows: "This film shook the foundations of Hindu orthodoxy on several grounds".³

If the film had taken the whole Hindu Tamil Society by storm of course the reasons are quite obvious. Those were the days when women's network, support systems of women and issues like empowerment of women and role restructuralisation had not at all taken deep roots. In those days, there were only networks for men and such networks were only recognised. But in the present day, we are able to see "Widows' network", "Adolescent girls' network", etc. The functioning of such networks was not heard of five or six decades back. Similarly the by gone era was also devoid of support systems for women. Today women's supportive systems are recognised. For example, issues like reservation for women, women's police stations, family courts etc., have become a reality. Yet another reality is relating to the concept of power. Perceptible changes are witnessed in the contemporary society regarding the decision making power both within and outside home. The other distinguishing feature between the society of the past and the present is the role restructuralisation. The traditional roles are restructured. The roles are given new meaning today. Expressions like

“Career women” “Women headed families” are in vogue in the present day.

The structural changes discussed so far are witnessed only in the modern society. Therefore, it is but natural that a film like **Balayogini** with revolutionary theme had created a flutter in a male dominated society of the past. But in the present day, many issues relating to the portrayal of women in films are discussed. Certain issues like caste when presented in films have kindled the deep-seated feelings of the people in certain pockets of the state. People of some castes become sensitive when a low caste man is shown as falling in love with a high caste girl and this psychological state of affairs is particularly because of the caste conflicts witnessed in Southern Tamilnadu for quite some time. **Bharathi Kannamma** (1997) deals with the trials and tribulations faced by boys and girls in love, particularly because of their different caste affiliations. This film which had to overcome initially the opposition of the audience with caste sentiments became a box office hit.

When women are shown today as incapable of decision making, shown as a prey to male prurience the audience of the present day do not remain passive like their counterparts of the past. The pros and cons of such a presentation has become a matter of discussion every where people meet- the college students, housewives, office-goers, elderly and perhaps no one is an exception.

The audience of the contemporary society are no longer targets waiting to be shot at. They are very much aware of the fact that women appear on

the screen essentially to relax the audience for some time. Critics, activists and discerning audience every now and then are echoing their sentiments regarding this relaxation segment of the film.

A fortyfive year old man playing the role of a hero with a twenty year old girl in Tamil cinema is of course cynically commented upon though the aged heroes get continued patronage from their admirers. Vociferous protests are made by protagonists of women's cause, when films present foul as fair and fair as foul in matters relating to sex. While resentment is seen on one side, enjoyment of vulgarity happens to be a reality on the other side. One is able to observe a lamentation among the general public that rich costumes, dazzling jewelry, etc., worn by the heroine distance her in a material sense from the commoners. At the same time there are film viewers who appreciate such a grandiose presentation of the woman.

Ultimately, the issue under discussion boils down to a crucial question as to whether the woman has got her due in films; whether the dream industry has been preserving her modesty and dignity or the celluloid has treated her infradig. The answer is "Yes" and at the sametime "No". While some films have attempted to exalt femininity others have seriously injured the feminine ego. Here are some examples. Films released during different periods like **Annai, Aval Oru Thodarkathai, Pathinaru Vayathinile, Vidhi, Pudumaippen, Thirumathi Palanichamy, Roja** and **Indira** are examples to mention a few which have heightened the image of woman hood.

Annai depicted an issueless woman adopting her own sister's son and showering limitless love not only on the adopted son but also on a number of poverty stricken relatives.

Aval Oru Thodarkathai dealt with the sacrifices of love and marriage of a girl for the sake of irresponsible family members and invalid and dependent members of the family.

Pathinaru Vayathinile portrayed an intelligent girl mending the ways of an idiotic and illiterate youth.

Vidhi highlighted the firmness of a girl exposing a man who impregnates her (with a false promise to marry her). The girl falls a victim, as she is not aware of his amorous exploits; later she takes a sweet revenge.

Pudhumaippen, projected a highly individualistic woman waging a lone battle against odds finally emerging successful in getting her husband released from jail (imprisoned for unjust reasons); but finally rejects her husband who suspects her character.

Thirumathi Palanichamy was a film about a lady teacher of a school launching a crusade against a village big shot who forces the village children to involve in labour by preventing them to attend the school.

Roja one of the greatest box office hits of recent times showing the turmoil of an innocent girl whose husband is abducted by the terrorists of Kashmir.

Indira was a film about a woman fighting for the rights and privileges of lower caste people.

These are all creations, which have projected women in better light. There are also films, which have slighted the dignity of women from the viewpoint of filmgoers.

Kalki, one of the recent films is much debated because of the controversial theme (from the Indian point of view, more so Tamilian). It is the story of a girl, sympathising with a divorcee, (longing for a child from her husband) tempts her husband, begets a child and handover the child to the divorcee; the girl, heaving a sigh of relief, as if dutybound (people have come down heavily on this film especially in debate clubs).

Panama Pasama, Poova Thalaya and Mappillai released in different times are success stories of sons in law being subjected to the blackmailing and torture of cantankerous mothers in law.

Muthal Mariyathai is a story of submission of a man (a dominant patriarch) to his wife, a characterless and ill-tempered woman, who develops a platonic love for a young girl; this girl has a deep concern for the man who faces humiliation from his wife.

Apoorva Rahangal was a film about unmatched love. A middle-aged woman with a grown up girl is unable to resist her heart reaching out to a boy far younger to her.

The filmviewers, particularly women lament with a bruised ego about the films mentioned above.

In the present work, the author has attempted to ascertain the responses of the film-viewing public as to how a woman as a gender is presented in the films. Further four personalities who have made a mark in public life have also been interviewed. Their views on the portrayal of women are presented in detail.

The Reasons for the Choice of this Topic

It is only recently that gender issues are gaining grounds in communication research. "Studies loosely grouped as anti-sexist, profeminist or concerned with gender equity issues also increased since the early 1980's However, these changes are not consistent across different subdisciplines".⁴

From the view stated above, it is clear that studies relating to genders in the realm of media have not pervaded many social science disciplines.

In the present day, the subject of communication has emerged into a distinct discipline. Nevertheless Psychologists, sociologists, Political Scientists, Anthropologists and Historians are showing interest in the role of mass media on society. The Social Scientists however study the role of media only from their own angles and predilections. Therefore, gender specific issues in the realm of media have not been researched and accumulated in sufficiently large numbers by Social Scientists for ready reference. Cirksena quotes recent scholarship, to substantiate the view that the

discipline of Sociology has not paid due attention to the issue of feminism and to highlight emerging contradictions relating to feminist sociology.

“Anthropology as compared with other disciplines, more or less embraced feminist anthropology while Stacey and Thorn in their 1985 article took note of the 'missing feminist revolution' in sociology. Ingraham (1994) has recently pointed out the problematics and contradictions of the feminist sociology that has grown since then”.⁵

The debates as to what gender stereotypes refer to (message research) and the impacts of such stereotypes presented in the visual media (audience research) have not been pursued at length in social sciences. According to skjellum and Allen, gender stereotypes are assumptions that all males or all females possess specific characteristics. In their view, two common sexual stereotypes are that all men are aggressive and that all women are nurturers. “Within this domain of research, the conceptual argument is that televised images portray men and women in types of sex role situations that reinforce or create sexual stereotypes”.⁶

One is surprised to note that gender roles are depicted in media based even on race. “In mass media output, female characters are often constructed as archetypes of virtue and vice. Viewers familiar with the codes of Anglo American television will know for instance that in cinema and television, a young, blonde girl dressed in white usually signifies innocence and probity, just as dark haired women tend to dignify danger and sexuality”.⁷

In the light of the facts discussed, it is understood that the issue of gender stereotyping in visual media has come to stay as a much debated and thought provoking concept. Therefore, as a sociologist, the author of the present work has taken up the portrayal of women in films for a detailed investigation and to see how best this particular idea (namely portrayal of women) can be treated with in the frame work of Sociology.

The present study centres around two main objectives:

- i) To examine the issue of gender equality in films
- ii) to evaluate the popular view that women are treated as objects of sex.

Of course, while investigating the first objective issues such as women and independent thinking, decision making on the part of women, depiction of women's right and enslavement of women emphasised in films will be discussed.

While taking up the second objective, i.e., women being presented as objects of sex, issues such a portrayal of women in films and sexual abuse in real life, impact of films on the dressing pattern of women and changes noticed in the character of both girls and boys will be analysed.

Notes and References

- * The term instalment is used here consciously to point out the films and film based programmes which appear under different captions presenting select dialogues, songs etc.
- ¹ R.K. Jain, *The Economic Aspects of the Film Industry in India* : Atma Ram Publishers, New Delhi, 1960, p.16.
- ** Source - Sun TV Programme conducted by TKV. Rajan on 10-02-1995.
- ² Source - *India - A Reference Annual*, 1981, p.148.
- ³ C.R.W. David, Cinema as medium of Communication in Tamilnadu. The Christian Literature Society, Madras 1983, p.48.
- ⁴ Kathryn, Cirksena "Feminism After Ferment - Ten years of Gendered Scholarship in Communications" in *Women Transforming Communications. Global Intersections.* Donna Allen, Ramona R. Rush, Susan J. Kaufman (Ed) Sage Publications, London 1996. P-153.
- ⁵ Ibid. P-154.
- ⁶ Jennifer Herrett Skjellum and Mike Allen "Television Programming and Sex Stereotyping : A Meta-Analysis" in *Communication Year Book.* Brant R. Burleson, (Ed) Sage Publications, London 1996. P.158.
- ⁷ Liesbet Van Zoonen, Feminist Media Studies Sage Publications, London 1994. P.74.

CHAPTER II

PASSAGE OF TAMIL CINEMA

Form of Tamil Cinema

Any new art follows the footprints of an art / art form which enjoyed the patronage of a vast majority of the masses. This is true of the Tamil films as well. The early films actually reflected the well-known street plays of the period.¹ The street plays had songs as predominant content. Therefore, the Tamil feature films of the period between 1931 and 1946 were mainly song-oriented films. Dialogues were reduced to the minimum in such films. This is indeed the first phase so far as the form of Tamil cinema is concerned.

Some interesting developments of this period were brought to bear on the form of the feature films leading to the second phase. The Singie Talkie era (this is how Prof. K. Govindan calls the first phase) has slowly been shifting to a situation when there was a considerable reduction in the number of songs.² This transition occurred owing to two important developments. One important development is the gradual focus on social issues. When the films had social themes as the principal focal points, there was a drastic reduction in the number of songs in the film.

Another development which had its impact on the form of Tamil cinema (though not directly) was the breakout of the Second World War. During the Second World War there were restrictions on the liberal use of film rolls. Hence the film producers had to reduce the length of the films. Curiously one of the latent effects

(unintended and unrecognised) of the Second World War was a considerable reduction of songs in the films, which appeared between 1940 and 1945. Films like **Haridoss** are very much cinematic and good in the techniques of cinema.

The third phase regarding the form of the feature films derives inspiration from the stage dramas. This phase had commenced around 1947 and continued upto 1976. Dramas projecting the social reformistic ideas and dramas organised by the sabhas decided the trend of cinema of that period.

In the fourth phase Tamil cinema attained a new form. It is only in this phase people in dream industry attempted to take the art of film from the plane of artificiality to the spheres of visuals. **Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal** (1976), **Pathinaru Vayathinile** (1976) are films, which created a trend in this line.

Though the trend of presenting some vital events and happenings through symbolic visuals has come to stay since mid 70s attempts on such lines had begun much earlier in Tamil cinema. **Maman Mahal** (1955), **Unnai Pol Oruvan** (1962), **Yarukkaha Azhuthan** (1966) and **Pasamalar** a film of the 1960s are examples. Infact Eliis R. Duncan even in 1936 attempted to present the incidents in the form of visuals.

Thus to put it in a nutshell, (as Prof.KGovindan suggests) the form of Tamil cinema has passed through four stages. They are viz., (i) "Singie", (ii) "Singie Talkie", (iii) "Talkie Singie", and (iv) "Talkie" slowly giving rise to the cinema factor. The last stage emerges in 1976. Theodore Bhaskaran states that in Tamil films the spoken word still dominates against any development

of a visual sense. "When the film maker wants to reveal the intentions of a character to the viewers he/she some times resorts to 'direct address' in which the character looks into the camera and addresses the audience".³

Content of Tamil Cinema

If the feature films in Tamilnadu are analysed for their contents three distinct phases emerge.

In the first period films had mainly drawn from Puranas and Ithihasas. Though this was the trend of the Tamil cinema during the formative years some films, which appeared during the same period, indicated contradictions. Rather these films appeared as exceptions. These films stressed the need for unity among the Indians and projected the necessity of the country's liberation from foreign rule. Examples of films considered as exceptions during the first phase are **Thiyaga Bhoomi** (1938), **Thesa Munnnetram** (1938), and **Mathru Bhoomi** (1939).

While the content of the first phase of Tamil films was pertaining to epics the second phase was marked by films with stories relating to royalty. Such films were successful in keeping with the tastes and trends of the society of that particular point in time. Nevertheless during the same period films with reformistic ideas appeared by way of exceptions. Films projecting the ideals like intercaste marriage and widow marriage were released and these proved to be interesting exceptions during this phase. For e.g., in the film **Mantrikumari** a woman kills her husband and in **Rathakkanneer** a man arranges for the marriage of his neglected wife.

The third phase can be called the period of family oriented subjects. While such themes are very popular from mid 50s till date, films treating the idea of liberation appeared as exceptions. The films treating the theme of liberation dealt mainly with the liberation of labour force, society and economy.

Contemporary Trend of Tamil Cinema

The most important development of Celluloid in recent times is the advancement of technology. While this is a positive sign there are many negative signs as well, so far as the Tamil film world is concerned. The film critics like Prof.K.Govindan are of the opinion that the lines in lyrics and the views expressed there in are twisted and torn out of context for the sake of music. In the olden days music was composed based on the lyrics. At present the reverse happens to be the trend.

Theodore Bhaskaran points out how the colour aspect by the end of sixties had its bearing on the song sequences. He states that filmmakers tried to get mileage out of the colour aspect and shoot single song sequence in different locations with varied costumes. "This meant a complete suspension of the logic of time and space for the duration of the song".⁴

The manner of conveying stories has changed a good deal in the present day. The films of the present day attempt to convey mostly events pertaining to day to day life. This is indeed a welcome trend. This appreciation is also to be punctuated if one makes a content analysis of Tamil films with a critical eye. In attempting to present life situations, the films fall short of expectations, this is because half of what they try to

discuss is realistic and the remaining half stands nowhere near reality. The stories presented in films happen to be a curious combination of realism and concoction. As a result, the audience get confused.

Any film should be wholistic in nature. This means that a creation has to be viewed as a whole. The most fundamental aspect of any film is its story. The central idea, lighting, sound, dialogue, art direction, music and editing should revolve around the story. Paradoxically in the present situation every department of filmmaking tries to exhibit its talent and outshine the other. Therefore, the nucleus of the film gets shattered.

Another important factor, which has brought about the present situation, is the gradual decline and disappearance of the studio based system. In the studio-based system, the company used to employ the director, editor, cameraman, music director and actors. As the companies had a reservoir of talents at their disposal this resource pool could be utilised to the satisfaction of the film producers. Infact there was plenty of time available for rehearsal. Therefore, the producers and directors could aim at perfection. Films like **Chandralekha** and **Avvaiyar** were exemplary because they were studio-based productions. There was a wholistic approach in such grand productions.

In the present day, the studio-based system is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed the system started breaking since 1960s. Today the story line is decided by many persons, more particularly by the hero. The story is presented according to the whims and fancies of the hero-actor and infact the actor who plays the role of the hero is said to interfere in such things as sound and editing. As a result, the contents of the film are in total disarray. The producer who invests money does

not happen to be a domineering person, as in many instances, he happens to be a rank outsider. For many producers the main source of income is not cinema industry.

Cinema industry does not provide the investors with an assured income. A new class of rich has entered this industry for different purposes. Of late the films are not produced for the sake of art. "This is the state of affairs, with the arrival of the lumpen bourgeoisie"⁵ states Prof. K. Govindan. For these bourgeoisie cinema is not the main source of income.

Muktha Srinivasan states, "Each film is an experiment. Success in the experiment ensures life. Failure will prove to be fatal".⁶ According to him only ten per cent of the films at any given point emerge successful.

Output of Feature Films in Tamil

Feature film as a kind of mass entertainment has been very popular in India. This can be proved from the gradual increase in the output of films as well as the rise in the number of cinema halls. The same is true so far as Tamilnadu is concerned. Chennai, the capital of the State of Tamilnadu is one of most important production centres in India, besides Mumbai and Calcutta.

India happens to be the largest film producing country with an average of 800 feature films to her credit. (Films in all languages put together). The output of feature films in Tamil has also been steadily on the increase.

Output of Feature Films in Tamil
(Trend in 30 years)

Year of Production	Annual output of Feature Films in Tamil
1951	26
1956	51
1961	49
1966	60
1971	73
1976	81
1980	140

Source : India, A Reference Annual, 1981, p.148.

In thirty years (between 1951 and 1980) the output of feature films has registered almost a five-fold increase and there was a spurt in 1980.

Output of Feature Films in Tamil
(Trend in Late Eighties and Early Nineties)

Year of Production	Annual Output of Tamil Films
1987	167
1988	152
1989	146
1990	194
1991	186
1992	180
1993	168

Source : Doordharshan 1995 (Annual Compilation of facts and figures) Audience Research Unit (Directorate General, Doordharshan) 'Doordharshan 1995' has quoted CBFC as its' source.

Tamil Cinema through Ages - A cross Section

The first Tamil talkie **Kalidoss** appeared in the year 1931. Some songs (Keerthanans) in this film were in Telugu and some were in Tamil. Therefore, there are

people who argue that **Kalidoss** cannot be called the first Tamil Talkie. Some claim that it is a bilingual film (Tamil-Telugu). But Prof.K.Govindan has argued at length that it is only a Tamil film. Prof.K.Govindan's arguments are as follows.

- i) The Board of Censor has certified it as a Tamil film.
- ii) Bilingual and multilingual features/ dialogues are found in many films appearing till date.
- iii) To capture both Tamil and Telugu markets the distributors claimed that it was a bilingual film. (For more details see Prof.K.Govindan's paper "Historical Notes on Kalidoss" presented in Yadartha Film Society in 1981).

The first film with a social theme **Menaka** was released in 1935. An attempt to produce a film with a social theme was taken much earlier to the production of **Menaka** but such an effort was fructified only in the year 1936 with the release of **Dumbachary**. (This information was passed on to Prof.K.Govindan by Mr.M.G.Ramachandran.)

Two films of particular importance in the 1930s were **Thiyaga Bhoomi** (1938) and **Desamunnetram** (1938). The film **Thiyaga Bhoomi** adequately portrays the sufferings of a woman. The film challenges the supremacy of patriarchy and refuses to accept the age-old custom of exalting the husband as god. **Mathrubhoomi** was a film about the King Purushothama who fought against the aggressor Alexander the Great. The idea of the film was that the aggressor must be opposed. Infact this film opposed in a subtle way the colonial rule in India. As a result the film was banned.

Haridoss a much talked about film of the mid forties (1944) was produced at a length of 11,000 ft. owing to control imposed on the length of the films. This indirectly ensured the quality of the film. **Haridoss** had driven home the idea that looking after the parents was the moral responsibility of the son.

The film **Thiyagi** released in 1947 focused mainly on the sacrifices and nationalist sentiments. Higher caste man marrying a lower caste woman (Hyper gamy) and higher caste woman marrying lower caste man (Hypo gamy) were shown in this film. **Thiyagi** had portrayed a character called Dhayanandan who reminded the viewers of Gandhiji.

Two films with social themes **Nallathambi** and **Velaikari** appeared in the late forties (both in 1949) with a punch. **Velaikari** indicated a break with tradition. This film had portrayed even in those days, the spontaneous mate choice of a woman much against the wish of her father. This was a film off the beaten track in a conservative Tamil Society during mid twentieth century.

The films, which appeared in the 1950s, treated family oriented subjects and many of them were reformistic in their approach. **Manamagal** screened in 1950 emphasised the rights of women. This film had shown how a widow was tempted and ultimately left in the lurch.

Parasakthi (1952) portrayed how a young widow was subjected to sexual abuse and harassment. This film, which created a great excitement in early 50s, had shown how people holding high social positions had weakness for women.

Another film revolutionary in its content was **Manithan** (1953). Paradoxically enough in a highly conservative Tamil Society of the mid twentieth century the film had projected a man as a magnanimous life partner who had forgiven his wife who had gone astray.

The first film in Tamil without dance, songs and stunt scenes was **Andanal** directed by S.Balachander. **Andanal**, which appeared in the mid fifties, had driven home the idea that a woman could kill her husband if he indulged in antinational activities.

Ethirparathathu a film by Director Sridhar projected the idea that marital relationship is irrevocable. **Kalvanin Kathali** (1955) had shown a woman becoming a widow twice, once for the husband and for the second time due to her lover. The films, which appeared in the mid and late 1950s, had carried some specific messages, revolutionary in content, considering the social setup prevailing at that point in time. **Onre Kulam** (against untouchability) **Kalam Marippochu** (against feudalism) and **Enga Veetu Mahalakshmi** (against the excesses of mill owners and exploitation of landowners) are films to mention a few.

Early and mid sixties may be considered as the peak period of Tamil cinema. Issues like the break up of joint family and problems arising out of spontaneous mate choice have dominated the stories of this period. Films with high ideals and values appeared during the 1960s. While **Pavamannippu** (1961) had driven home the idea of religious integration, **Kappalottia Tamizhan** (1961) portrayed vividly the sacrifices and the patriotic zeal of the famous freedom fighter V.O.Chidambaram. **Rathathilakam** (1963) was a film in which the story was woven round the Indo-China war supporting the

stand taken by India. In a conservative Tamil society of the past, a film like **Kalathoor Kannamma** took the filmgoers by surprise because even in 1960 the idea of unwed motherhood was projected in this film.

The film world in Tamil cinema in the 1960s was enriched by the contribution of directors like Sridhar, Gopalakrishnan and K. Balachander. The seventies witnessed the arrival of directors like Bharathiraja, Bhagyaraj and Balu Mahendra who made a mark in Tamil cinema. In the eighties and nineties star performers among directors like Maniratnam and Shankar took Tamil Cinema to great heights.

The films of the seventies, which deserve a special mention, are **Dhakam**, **Avalum Pentane**, **Annakili**, **Silanerangalil Sila Manithargal**, **Aval Appadithan** and **Pasi**.

Dhakam is a story of a young blind man and his wife (brought up in a rural atmosphere) and their shocking experience in the city. Having had a bitter experience they retreat to the village. **Avalum Pentane** a film directed by Durai gave a culture shock to Tamil society, because in this film the director had made a bold attempt by showing a commercial sex worker getting married. **Pasi** directed by Durai was a very rare film in the late seventies. The film was shot in an actual slum in the city of Madras. A rackpicker falls a victim due to the sexual urge of a lorry driver and is left in the lurch.

Varumaiyin Niram Sivappu (1980) touched upon the problem of unemployment and supported the cause of self-employment. **Thanneer Thanneer** (1981) directed by K. Balachander was based on a play written

by Komal Swaminathan. It had profoundly touched upon the problem of drinking water scarcity and the desperate plight of the villagers. One of the much talked about films of the mid eighties was **Sirai** (1984). This film boldly attempted to express the view that by merely tying **Tali** (Mangalasutra) a man cannot become a husband. In the midst of Tamil films, which used to exalt the tali sentiment, **Sirai** was an exception. The film **Nayakan** was a film (1987) with an anti hero subject. The anti hero trend popular in 1948 was repeated in 1987. **Veedu** (1988) had portrayed amply the difficulties encountered in the construction of a house. This film revealed in an excellent manner not only the typical middle class sentiments but also the exploitation of this class by others.

The films directed by Maniratnam and Shankar shot into fame in the nineties. **Roja** (1992) a film by Maniratnam Centred round the issue of militancy in Kashmir has portrayed in an excellent manner the turmoil of a woman, when her husband is abducted. Arvindsamy playing the role of a cryptologist through his acting has nicely driven home the patriotic spirit. **Bombay** (1995) another film of Maniratnam very effectively dealt with communal harmony. Director Shankar's **Indian** (1996) is considered as one of the best creations of the nineties. A freedom fighter, once a soldier of Indian National Army, visibly upset over the corrupt practices prevailing in the society, takes law into his hands and victimises the culprits. The climax of this film lies in this dominant old man killing his own son for his evil deeds.

Notes and References.

The author has had discussions with Prof. K.Govindan, of Educational Media Research Centre, Madurai Kamaraj University on December 17, 1998, January 21, 22, 1999 and March 17, 1999. The facts and supportive evidences furnished by him enabled the author to write this chapter.

- ¹ The Tamil Sangeetha Therukoothu very popular among the people around six decades back is referred to as the street play. The street play had interesting combinations of songs and dramatization mainly pertaining to epics, episodes in history, etc.
- ² The Singie Talkie era gets extended upto 1950 though Talkie trend starts by the mid forties.
- ³ Theodre Bhaskaran. The Eye of the Serpent. An Introduction to Tamil Cinema. East West Books (Madras) Pvt. Ltd., Madras, 1996. P.69.
- ⁴ Ibid. p.55
- ⁵ Usually the term lumpen is used to refer to some proletariat who are cut off from the economic and social class. Nevertheless Prof. K. Govindan uses the term to refer to the newly emerged rich who have not all along been connected with mainstream filmmaking.
- ⁶ Muktha V. Srinivasan. Tamil Thiraippada Varalaru (A Book in Tamil), Gangai Puthaga Nilayam, Chennai, 1993. P.3.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

Choice of the Research Settings

When the theme regarding the portrayal of women in films was chosen, a question arose as to where the issue has to be studied. It was decided to choose a city and a village to find out how people in different settings view the portrayal of women. Among many possible alternatives finally after a careful consideration, the choice fell on the historical city of Madurai. The city has a large number of film fans associations. (Many of these associations have started functioning as welfare associations).

Interestingly, the city is known for instantaneous establishment of fans associations even for new faces and also for debutants. The city also has a large number of theaters and infact one of the cinema houses in Madurai City is said to accommodate the largest number of audience in the whole of Asia. Hours before the commencement of films, people queuing up in front of theaters in very large numbers soon after the release of films of their heart throbs is a common sight in the city of Madurai. This is just one example to drive home the point how far a considerable number of citizens are entertainment loving and emotionally involved with the film heroes.

As mentioned earlier, when the idea of collecting fresh and grass roots data arose, it was decided that the data should be collected in a city and a village hopefully with a prospect of analysing variations in data

relating to substantive issues. In keeping with this idea, a village called Kanavaipatti has been identified. This village belongs to Usilampatti Taluk and Usilampatti region is widely known for the prevalence of female infanticide. Thus for purpose of data collection for this exploratory study, the city of Madurai and Kanavaipatti village have been chosen.

Instruments devised for Data Collection

An interview schedule has been prepared for the purpose of administering among the chosen respondents in the city of Madurai and Kanavaipatti village. The first part of the schedule was designed to elicit the personal data viz., name, age, sex, monthly income, level of literacy, occupation, caste, religion and marital status.

The second part of the schedule is to elicit respondents views regarding the substantive issues of the study. Accordingly, questions have been framed to collect data regarding the frequency of exposure to films, favourite film artistes and portrayal of women.

Regarding the portrayal of women, questions on issues such as women and independent thinking, women and decision making, rights of women depicted in films, slavish tendencies, women as objects of sex in films, relationship between portrayal of women as objects of sex and sex abuse in real life, impact of films on the dressing pattern and the influence of films over the character of youth have been framed.

Case Studies with Personalities

Case studies have been conducted with four personalities who are connected with the world of media one way or the other. A brief career sketch of these persons and their views regarding the portrayal of women in films are given in the chapter "Women in films views of personalities in public life". Case study approach was found quite useful to probe many facets of the chosen theme and unique experience or feelings of the personalities.

Samples

Samples numbering 216 have been chosen in the city of Madurai. There are 72 wards in Madurai City. From each ward 3 respondents were chosen at random for the purpose of data collection. In this process, 216 respondents were drawn totally in Madurai using the simple random sampling procedure.

The rural informants who figure in our study constitute 10 per cent of the total population of Kanavaipatti (Total population of the village is 956; the men and women constitute 503 and 453 respectively). Thus the rural samples constituting 100 respondents have been drawn using the principle of randomization.

Time and Duration of the Study

The data were collected in the chosen research settings over a period of 9 months i.e., between April and December 1997 (both months inclusive).

Difficulties Encountered

By and large, the respondents in both urban and rural settings were very much accommodative to the interviews. Nevertheless, ascertaining the rural responses, particularly making womenfolk agreeable to the interview had become an uphill task. Infact, much before Kanavaipatti village was chosen for the present study, this researcher had visited many villages near Madurai. But the researcher's request to women to act as respondents was turned down in almost every village he visited, as women were self conscious and hypersensitive to some questions in the schedule. At last in Kanavaipatti, the study was conducted fairly successfully. There was not much difficulty in establishing rapport with the residents of this village as the researcher approached them often with key persons of this village, before making the informants agreeable to the interview. Such problems never arose with the women respondents of Madurai City.

Classification of Respondents

The personal data of the rural and urban respondents on the basis of Age, Sex composition, income, education, occupation and marital status are given as follows:

Table I**Age Sex Composition of the Respondents
(Rural)**

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
15-25	24	16	40
26-35	16	15	31
36-45	8	16	24
46 and above	4	1	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>

Table II**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Income
(Rural)**

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
0-1500	78
1501-3000	15
3001 and above	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Table III**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Education
(Rural)**

<i>Education</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
School Educated	76
Graduates	15
Post Graduates	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Table IV**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Occupation
(Rural)**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Unemployed	24
Housewives	22
Self Employed	24
Office Goers	25
Teachers	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Table V

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Marital Status
(Rural)**

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Married	60
Unmarried	40
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Table VI

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Age Sex Composition
(Urban)**

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
15-25	35	69	104
26-35	25	26	51
36-45	13	19	32
46 and above	13	16	29
<i>Total</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>216</i>

Table VII

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Income
(Urban)**

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
0-1500	150
1501-3000	30
3001 and above	36
<i>Total</i>	<i>216</i>

Table VIII

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Education
(Urban)**

<i>Education</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
School Educated	64
Graduates	104
Post Graduates	48
<i>Total</i>	<i>216</i>

Table IX

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Occupation
(Urban)**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Unemployed	75
Housewives	40
Self employed	28
Office Goers	40
Teachers	33
<i>Total</i>	<i>216</i>

Table X

**Distribution of Respondents
on the Basis of Marital Status
(Urban)**

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Married	105
Unmarried	111
<i>Total</i>	<i>216</i>

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN AND THE ISSUE OF EQUALITY IN FILMS

The frequency of exposure to films presents an interesting picture for discussion. The ruralites far outnumber the urban residents so far as exposure to films twice a week. Feature films screened in the semi-permanent and permanent theaters in the vicinity of the village are the only source of entertainment for the rural respondents. Quite predictably the urbanites have many sources for their pleasant diversions. For example, with the arrival of satellite channels, urbanites have a cafeteria of programmes, (many of which are entertainment oriented) to choose from. Interestingly, the housewives in the rural setting are exceptions to this rule and do not conform to this pattern. Quite obviously housewives who figure in our study by and large belong to joint family households and of course are busy cooking the evening meal for the members of the family.

The pattern of exposure, as regards seeing films once a week, twice a month or once a month the response seems to be mixed and as such one can hardly distinguish between rural and urban viewers. Nevertheless there is an interesting finding regarding occasional viewing. There is a considerable percentage of urban respondents who come under the category of occasional viewers. But among the rural respondents, occasional viewers constitute the lowest, in comparison to others.

Table 1.1

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	40%	22.10%	22.50%	17.30%	12.50%	19.20%	22.50%	37.50%	2.50%	3.80%
26-35	6%	7.30%	12.90%	15.70%	19.40%	25.50%	38.70%	33.80%	6.50%	17.60%
36-45	8.30%	3.10%	12.50%	18.80%	8.30%	21.90%	70.80%	25.00%	---	31.30%
46 & above	20%	6.90%	---	13.80%	40.00%	13.80%	40.00%	31.00%	---	34.50%

Table 1.2

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	30.80%	9.30%	28.80%	18.60%	11.50%	31.40%	25.00%	27.90%	3.80%	12.80%
Female	20.80%	16.90%	2.10%	15.40%	18.80%	13.10%	56.30%	37.70%	2.10%	16.90%

Table 1.3

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	17.90%	18.00%	15.40%	16.70%	16.70%	15.30%	46.20%	37.30%	3.80%	12.70%
1501-3000	66.70%	3.20%	20.00%	9.70%	6.70%	38.70%	6.70%	29.00%	---	19.40%
3001 & above	28.60%	2.90%	14.30%	20.00%	14.30%	22.90%	42.90%	22.90%	---	31.40%

Table 1.4

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	19.70%	12.50%	18.40%	10.90%	15.80%	18.80%	44.70%	35.90%	1.30%	21.90%
Graduates	40.00%	11.50%	13.30%	20.20%	6.70%	25.00%	26.70%	31.70%	13.30%	11.50%
Post Graduates	55.60%	16.70%	--	16.70%	22.20%	10.40%	22.20%	35.40%	---	20.80%

Table 1.5

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Educa- tion	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Un- employed	29.20%	23.70%	25.00%	15.80%	20.80%	18.40%	25.00%	40.80%	---	1.30%
Housewives	8.00%	9.80%	---	9.80%	13.60%	12.20%	72.80%	36.60%	4.50%	31.70%
Self Employed	25.00%	---	20.80%	21.20%	12.50%	24.20%	37.50%	39.40%	4.20%	15.20%
Office Goers	28.00%	11.10%	20.00%	13.90%	16.00%	33.30%	32.00%	19.40%	4.00%	22.20%
Teachers	80.00%	10.00%	---	23.30%	---	13.30%	20.00%	23.30%	---	30.00%

Table 1.6

Frequency of Exposure to Films on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Number of Respondents seeing films twice a week		Number of Respondents seeing films once a week		Number of Respondents seeing films twice a month		Number of Respondents seeing films once a month		Number of Respondents seeing films occasionally	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	18.30%	4.70%	8.30%	13.20%	15.00%	22.60%	56.70%	31.10%	1.70%	28.30%
Unmarried	37.50%	21.80%	27.50%	19.10%	15.00%	17.30%	15.00%	36.40%	5.00%	5.50%

A reference has earlier been made about the arrival of satellite channels, which engage the attention of urban viewers and perform the mood accompaniment function for them. In an earlier study conducted by the author of the present work, using the case study method, one of the respondents has opined as follows regarding the satellite channels. "Before the invasion of satellite TVs, we were talking about the benefit effect of cinema on society and civilization. With satellite TVs, the cinema's onslaught on public is greater, wider and deeper, because cinema comes within your home in installments such as Pattukku Pattu, Thirai Malar, Super Hit Show, Cinema Quiz and so on".¹

It has been widely acknowledged by discerning viewers and media critics that segmentization of cinema into select dialogues, songs, etc., and beaming them through TV channels have created greater havoc than the cinema itself.

One of the crucial issues concerning liberated womanhood is the capacity to think independently. Hence our study has attempted to find out as to whether the women are portrayed as characters with independent thinking. Let us look at the responses.

Respondents hailing from Kanavaipatti village, holding the impression that women are projected as capable of independent thinking, appear considerable and outnumber those who hold the other view in the same village. However, large number of respondents belonging to the age group 46 and above, self employed and office goers in the village hold on to the idea that women are not shown as capable of independent thinking in films. Among the city respondents also those who view that women characters are shown to be

independent in their thinking out number respondents who have the opposite view. However, urbanites in the age group 36-45 and postgraduates among them have a relatively large number of respondents claiming that women are not shown as characters with independent thinking.

Women and Independent Thinking - Views of the Rural Residents

The rural respondents have specified some issues to drive home their view that women are shown as capable of independent thinking. For example, in Tamil films women are depicted as pursuing a career. This trend is prevailing for nearly two and a half decades. In a male dominated society, women pursuing a career is a new phenomenon and the Tamil films of the past have never shown the characters of the working women. Another point that the rural respondents put forward in support of their argument is, the emphasis in Tamil films about women going out to any place (without anybody accompanying them) in solitude. Another notable feature is that women are portrayed as choosing their own fields in education. This is indeed a big leap forward in showing women's independent thinking with a punch.

Another distinguishing feature between the films produced two and a half decades back and the films of the present day is the freedom given to the women characters. The freedom is particularly manifested in issues like spontaneous mate choice. The girls are shown as choosing their life partners.

Table 2.1
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	67.50%	57.80%	32.50%	42.20%
26-35	54.80%	54.90%	45.20%	45.10%
36-45	41.70%	41.40%	58.30%	62.50%
46 & above	20.00%	41.40%	80.00%	58.60%

Table 2.2
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	46.20%	47.70%	53.80%	52.30%
Female	64.60%	54.60%	35.40%	45.40%

Table 2.3
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	57.70%	54.70%	42.30%	45.30%
1501-3000	46.70%	43.30%	53.30%	56.70%
3001 and above	42.90%	47.20%	57.10%	52.80%

Table 2.4
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	55.30%	57.80%	44.70%	42.20%
Graduates	60.00%	53.80%	40.00%	46.20%
Post Graduates	44.40%	39.60%	55.60%	60.40%

Table 2.5
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	75.00%	57.30%	25.00%	42.70%
Housewives	68.20%	47.50%	31.80%	52.50%
Self Employed	37.50%	57.10%	62.50%	42.90%
Office Goers	36.00%	42.50%	64.00%	57.50%
Teachers	80.00%	51.50%	20.00%	48.50%

Table 2.6
Women and Independent Thinking -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Women shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Independent Thinking in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	50.00%	47.60%	50.00%	52.40%
Unmarried	62.50%	55.90%	37.50%	44.10%

Women and Independent Thinking - Views of the Urban Residents

The views of the urban residents are a little different from the rural responses so far as this issue is concerned. The urbanites feel that self-confidence is reflected in the characters performed by women. Tamil films give importance to the economic independence of women of late. Women have absolute control over whatever they earn. The independent nature of women is emphasised in such issues like child rearing, getting separated from life partners in the event of their highhandedness and even seeking divorce in some extreme cases.

Above all, many films stress the fact that women exercise their freedom in choosing their avenues in education and employment. Independent thinking on the part of women as an issue or as a theme takes a negative turn too. For example, in some films girls are found to be performing fiercely independent roles and are even shown as opposing their own parents. Looked from whatever angle, girls opposing their own parents, is a break with the tradition so far as the conservative Tamil society is concerned.

“Four cardinal virtues were laid down as the sine qua non (indispensable qualities) of an ideal woman. They were acham, madam, nanam, payirppu which may broadly be translated as fear, innocence, coyness and modesty. The qualities would naturally lead women to play their roles and perform their activities in a low key”.²

Of course it was a man's world and women were at the beck and call of men. But in a totally transformed Tamil society, old world values are replaced

by new principles of behaviour. In keeping with the trends and expectations of the contemporary society whatever new values creep in, come to be accepted within the norms of the society. Therefore, film viewers are reconciled to the so-called break with the tradition, whatever be its seriousness or intensity, without experiencing culture shock.

The position of women can largely be assessed not only in terms of independent thinking but in showing how much capable they are in decision making. From the tables, one understands that a higher percentage of rural informants appear convinced with the idea that Tamil cinema portrays women as capable of decision making in films. But among the villagers, those above 36 years have only less than 50 per cent of the respondents who hold on to this impression.

The urbanites overwhelmingly support the opposite view, i.e., women are not shown as capable of decision making in Tamil films. All socio economic categories, barring the age groups 15-25, 36-45, the income category Rs.3,001 and above and the unemployed, have more than 50 per cent respondents taking the stand that women characters have not received their due so far as decision making is concerned.

Women and Decision making - The Notions of the Rural People

The youth of the present day including the girls are shown as non-conforming to parental decisions. They do not abide by the advice tendered by them. Infact, girls choose to go on their own in accordance with the circumstances.

Table 3.1
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	65.00%	51.90%	35.00%	48.10%
26-35	54.80%	37.30%	45.20%	62.70%
36-45	45.80%	53.10%	54.20%	46.90%
46 & above	20.00%	17.20%	80.00%	82.80%

Table 3.2
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	50.00%	34.90%	50.00%	65.10%
Female	60.40%	50.00%	39.60%	50.00%

Table 3.3
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	55.10%	46.00%	44.90%	54.00%
1501-300	53.30%	20.00%	46.70%	80.00%
3001 and above	57.10%	55.60%	42.90%	44.40%

Table 3.4
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	52.60%	42.20%	47.40%	57.80%
Graduates	66.70%	46.20%	33.30%	53.80%
Post Graduates	55.60%	41.70%	44.40%	58.30%

Table 3.5
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	66.70%	53.30%	33.30%	46.70%
Housewives	63.60%	42.50%	36.40%	57.50%
Self Employed	41.70%	35.70%	58.30%	64.30%
Office Goers	44.00%	30.00%	56.00%	70.00%
Teachers	80.00%	48.50%	20.00%	51.50%

Table 3.6
Women and Decision Making -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Women shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films		Women not shown as Capable of Decision Making in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	50.00%	42.90%	50.00%	57.10%
Unmarried	62.50%	45.00%	37.50%	55.00%

Of late the feature films deal with the welfare schemes initiated by the Government. The inference from this situation is that helpless women are shown as seeking help or concession from various welfare schemes or social safety net intended for women folk. This is indeed a classic example to prove the point that decision making lies in the hands of women, when the situation warrants.

Women and Decision-Making - What do the Urbanites Think?

When the situation of decision making by women is picturised, that particular sequence is not without its defects. At times, woman is projected as highly dictatorial. In matters relating to marriage and divorce, we are able to see freedom being exercised by women characters.

These trends of course are off the beaten track so far as Tamil film world is concerned. Whether these changing trends would be approved by the Tamil society is only left to be seen, according to urban respondents.

The emergent picture as regards women's rights in films is quite interesting. A striking feature pertaining to this issue is that both rural and urban respondents have opined in large numbers that women's rights are adequately depicted in Tamil films. Though all the socio economic categories have expressed this view in a majority, there is an exception. The age group 46 and above has only 20 per cent of respondents supporting the view that women's rights are shown in films. From the views of the respondents of the village and the city, one understands the clear difference in the perception of the issue.

Women's Rights in Films - Responses of the Ruralites

When the women fall victims due to the machination of the anti-social elements or the out-lawed, women are shown as retaliating in full measure to restore their rights. As said earlier, the perception of women's rights by rural respondents is different from their counterparts in urban areas. 'Women's Right' as an issue assumes a different meaning in the village context. Infact, some of the respondents harbour an impression that Thai Maman Seeru* comes under women's rights. In the recent years, many Tamil films deal with rural oriented themes and invariably Thai Maman Seeru becomes a focal point. The rural respondents state that such films instruct the audience as to how brides should receive gifts from their maternal uncles. Kanavaipatti being a remote village, there is absolutely nothing paradoxical regarding the people's understanding of 'Women's Rights'.

The rural respondents further state that Tamil films try to show everything in keeping with the principle that men and women are equal. An important point that ruralites put forward regarding women's rights in films is the lone battle waged by women in village panchayat gatherings to seek justice. Such scenes demonstrate clearly the importance being given in Tamil films to 'Women's Rights'.

Table 4.1
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	75.00%	66.30%	25.00%	33.70%
26-35	71.00%	74.50%	29.00%	25.50%
36-45	54.20%	84.40%	45.80%	15.60%
46 and above	20.00%	65.50%	80.00%	34.50%

Table 4.2
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	71.20%	62.80%	28.80%	37.20%
Female	60.40%	76.20%	39.60%	23.80%

Table 4.3
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	60.30%	71.30%	39.70%	28.70%
1501-3000	86.70%	76.70%	13.30%	23.30%
3001 and above	85.70%	63.90%	14.30%	36.10%

Table 4.4
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	59.20%	79.70%	40.80%	20.30%
Graduates	86.70%	63.40%	13.30%	36.60%
Post Graduates	88.90%	70.80%	11.10%	29.20%

Table 4.5
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	75.00%	65.30%	25.00%	34.70%
Housewives	63.60%	80.00%	36.40%	20.00%
Self Employed	50.00%	78.60%	50.00%	21.40%
Office Goers	68.00%	67.50%	32.00%	32.50%
Teachers	100%	69.70%	---	30.30%

Table 4.6
Films and Depiction of Women's Rights -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Women's Rights Depicted in Films		Women's Rights not Depicted in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	61.70%	74.30%	38.30%	25.70%
Unmarried	72.50%	67.60%	27.50%	32.40%

Women's Rights in Films - The Points of View of Urbanites

The urban respondents do admit that rights of women are shown in films. But sometimes, this particular theme is wrongly treated. Sometimes, the treatment of the theme is unacceptable. It is indeed strange that the rights of women are emphasised only in trivial issues and not in macro level issues concerning them. Issues such as property rights for women, representation for women in legislatures, income generation for women folk etc., do not receive their due. Entering into a wordy duel with men or mere retaliation does not adequately portray women's rights. More than women's rights, the screenplay gives importance to the issue of treating women as objects of sex.

Though urban respondents express the feeling that Tamil films deal with women's rights, their responses are undoubtedly punctuated by certain reservations. The views of urban respondents regarding 'Women's Rights', one infers, appear to be suggesting the inclusion of liberal feminism in Tamil films. "Women were also seen to be in possession of rationality and not as mere sexual objects. It was advocated that women should be empowered with civil and political rights and educational facilities. However, the ideal of women's place at home was not challenged".³

For the question on enslavement of women in films, the kind of response by both rural and urban respondents is different from the standpoints that these respondents have taken for other issues.

Table 5.1
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Contemporary films Emphassising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphassising enslavement of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	32.50%	41.30%	67.50%	58.70%
26-35	32.30%	29.40%	67.70%	70.60%
36-45	37.50%	18.80%	62.50%	81.30%
46 and above	20.00%	31.00%	80.00%	69.00%

Table 5.2
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Contemporary films Emphassising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphassising enslavement of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	19.20%	26.70%	80.80%	73.30%
Female	47.90%	38.50%	52.10%	61.50%

Table 5.3
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Contemporary films Emphassising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphassising Womenment of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	38.50%	36.00%	61.50%	64.00%
1501-300	13.30%	30.00%	86.70%	70.00%
3001 and above	14.30%	27.80%	85.70%	72.20%

Table 5.4
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Contemporary films Emphassising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphassising Womenment of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	35.50%	29.70%	64.50%	70.30%
Graduates	20.00%	35.60%	80.00%	64.40%
Post Graduates	33.30%	35.40%	66.70%	64.60%

Table 5.5
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Contemporary films Emphasising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphasising Womenment of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	29.20%	42.70%	70.80%	57.30%
Housewives	36.40%	32.50%	63.60%	67.50%
Self Employed	29.20%	21.40%	70.80%	78.60%
Office Goers	44.00%	22.50%	56.00%	77.50%
Teachers	---	39.40%	100.00%	60.60%

Table 5.6
Projecting Women as Slaves -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Contemporary films Emphasising enslavement of Women		Contemporary films not Emphasising Womenment of Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	33.30%	28.60%	66.70%	71.40%
Unmarried	32.50%	38.70%	67.50%	61.30%

In all the socio-economic categories informants constituting much less than 50 per cent have stated that contemporary films emphasise enslavement of women. This means that in all the socio-economic categories, respondents in a majority have a firm conviction that contemporary films do not emphasise enslavement of women. The inference is that the Tamil films have gone a long way. Let us look at the views of the respondents of our study, who have taken a stand that the Tamil films emphasise the enslavement of women.

Views of the Rural Respondents on the Issue of Enslavement

The rural respondents of our study point to the biological superiority of men. They state that the women have to experience the inevitable law of life namely pregnancy. Therefore, Tamil films show women as serving the superior orders of men.

Time and again scenes of women fearing patriarchal authority are shown. Stereotyped situations like super ordination of men, power and decision making vested in the hands of men and women remaining subservient have become a part of Tamil cinema.

Enslavement - The Contention of the Urbanites

The urban respondents point their fingers at scenes in which men are shown as torturing and beating women as a result of intoxication. What is indeed distressing to note is that women are projected as incapable in issues like contemplating girl's marriage and inefficient in assets management. Even the denial of rights for women in expressing their personal likes

and dislikes is explicitly treated in films. The portrayal of women in Tamil cinema is such that they are existing only to cater to the requirements of men. Tying of tali (Mangala Sutra) necessitates a moral obligation for a woman to do everything that her husband demands. Woman exists only to carryout the household errands and to rear children.

From the way the urban respondents lament about the treatment of women in the Tamil films, one is given to understand that urbanites' views on 'Enslavement of women' fall in line with social feminism. "A group of social feminists argues that women's oppression is based on unpaid house work, child bearing, child care and house work are mentioned as being productive activities".⁴

The urban respondents very strongly criticize another trend in Tamil cinema. In majority of Tamil films, the idea of heroes keeping the heroines under their control is shown. This trend is somehow catching up and becoming increasingly popular. Through such repeated ideas, the audience expectation has been molded in a particular way. It is indeed paradoxical, the urbanites aver, that the dream industry is justifying the inclusion of such scenes and legitimizing them as a part of Tamil culture.

Notes and References

- ¹ R. Kannan "Tamil Satellite Channel and the New Television Order - A Study on Communication and Social change" Kerala Sociologist Vol.XXIII. No.1, June 1995. P-87.
- ² R. Kannan "Ancient Tamil Society". Historia Vol.II, August 1984. P.180.
- * Thai Maman Seeru means the munificent gifts given by the maternal uncle to the girl on the occasion of her wedding. This practice is pursued by the members of certain castes in Hinduism for generations in the State of Tamilnadu.
- ³ Deepa Mathur "Women, Family and Work", Rawatt Publications, Jaipur, 1992. P.10.
- ⁴ Ibid., P.11.

CHAPTER V

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AS OBJECTS OF SEX IN FILMS

The issue of women being treated as objects of sex has long been a topic of discussion not only in the academic seminars, but also in public fora like debate clubs in Tamilnadu. Massive rallies are being organised by the voluntary organisations and activists of women's cause to attract the attention of the public and consolidate the opinions of the masses against the vulgar presentation of women. Infact, thousands of socially conscious women, took out a procession and celebrated 'Women's Day' in Madurai in 1997.

The idea behind the procession was essentially to condemn all kinds of violence on women. Interestingly, one of the resolutions by the processionists took a strong exception to schools, colleges and other institutions organising beauty contests for women, which invariably subject them to vulgar exhibitionism. Many NGOs, women groups and people's organisations under the banner of Social Action Movement sponsored this procession.* Infact, on one of the earlier occasions on the eve of a beauty contest to select the Miss World (November 1996), women in the city of Madurai went on a procession in large numbers to register their protest. One of the resolutions strongly condemned the vulgar presentation of women in TV programmes, films and magazines.**

Such is the reaction of the highly sensitive women of this part of India to any attempt that tries to project women as objects of sex or create such an impression.

It is in this context the present study endeavoured to ascertain the opinions of people of this region on a sensitive issue like this.

Ruralites on the Issue of 'Women as Objects of Sex' in Films

Though the rural respondents have overwhelmingly harbour an impression that women are shown as objects of sex in films, they do not have crystallized opinions on the said issue. Nevertheless they have the following views to offer. They are of the view that a ravishingly beautiful girl is being loved by so many persons. Casual dressing aimed at exhibitionism, obscenity reflected in action and dance etc., project women as objects of sex in the show world. These will have larger consequences. The rights of women will suffer a set back. The respect that women command in the society will be declining with the passage of time. It goes without saying that the progress and development of women would be affected in due course. Ultimately, the psychology of the youth would be affected.

Table 6.1
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Women shown as objects of Sex in Films		Women not shown as objects of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	75.00%	81.70%	25.00%	18.30%
26-35	83.90%	86.30%	16.10%	13.70%
36-45	87.50%	90.60%	12.50%	9.40%
46 and above	100%	79.30%	---	20.70%

Table 6.2
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Women shown as objects of Sex in Films		Women not shown as objects of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	76.90%	84.90%	23.10%	15.10%
Female	87.50%	83.10%	12.50%	16.90%

Table 6.3
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Women shown as object of Sex in Films		Women not shown as object of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	83.30%	83.30%	16.70%	16.70%
1501-3000	80.00%	83.30%	20.00%	16.70%
3001 and above	71.40%	86.10%	28.60%	13.90%

Table 6.4
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Women shown as object of Sex in Films		Women not shown as object of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	82.90%	79.70%	17.10%	20.30%
Graduates	73.30%	81.70%	26.70%	18.30%
Post-Graduates	88.90%	93.80%	11.10%	6.20%

Table 6.5
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Women shown as object of Sex in Films		Women not shown as object of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	62.50%	81.30%	37.50%	18.70%
Housewives	86.40%	80.00%	13.60%	20.00%
Self Employed	91.70%	82.10%	8.30%	17.90%
Office Goers	84.00%	90.00%	16.00%	10.00%
Teachers	100.00%	87.90%	---	12.10%

Table 6.6
Women as Objects of Sex -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Women shown as object of Sex in Films		Women not shown as object of Sex in Films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	88.30%	84.80%	11.70%	15.20%
Unmarried	72.50%	82.90%	27.50%	17.10%

Urbanites' Impressions Regarding 'Women as Objects of Sex in Films

It is only the tendency for exhibitionism that projects woman as an object of sex in the celluloid. Glamour dances and college subculture showing the fun and frolic among the youth reinforce this idea. Infact, the glamour dances are deliberately introduced regardless of their relevance to the story line. Day by day the tendency to show the woman as an object of man's enjoyment is increasing. It is indeed paradoxical that in Tamil cinema a woman playing the role of a wife appears glamorous in front of her husband and this trend unfortunately has come to stay.

What is indeed deplorable is the extremely deviant path chosen by the Tamil cinema. The screenplay is written in such a way that women on many occasions are shown as trump cards. For example in some films, it is shown that women can be used to get things done in offices, when fair means fail.

Women want to dress like the film stars. As a result, a distinct change is noticeable in the lives of those who resort to the imitative behaviour. Dream industry's attempt to show the woman as an object of sex will induce the youth to indulge in sex abuse.

The urban respondents lament that there are not many sources of entertainment worth mentioning in Tamilnadu. Therefore, people are compulsorily drawn to cinema. The stereotyped portrayal of woman as an object of sex makes some cinemagoers mistake even women who hail from respectable families.

The urbanites have also expressed concern that Tamil culture, civilization, and character may degenerate in view of the course taken by Tamil cinema. Constantly, the feature films focus only on the woman's body thereby registering an impression in the mind of the viewer that she is only an object of beauty who is incapable of thinking. The urban informants say that the baser instincts of the youth are induced and as a result they are led to the path of cultural atrophy.

In this context, it would be appropriate to recall the views expressed by Satyajit Ray, three decades ago. "The scenes of love making in Indian films have therefore been reduced to a formula of clasping hands, longing looks, and vapid, supposedly amorous verbal exchanges - not to speak of love duets sung against artificial romantic backdrops".¹

The views of Muktha V. Srinivasan are in fact thought provoking. "We are in a stage of transition from the period of traditional films to the period of films crossing the conventions. This is inevitable. At the same time, we should not produce films, which shake even the fundamental institution, namely the family. Films with scenes of elopement are being screened".² Muktha Srinivasan states that such films were on the rise between 1976 and 1985.

Many writers have voiced their grievances that woman as a gender has not had her due and has not been presented in a correct perspective in the media. Singhi opines that emphasis on woman's beauty is a clever mechanism for depriving her of her intelligence. He states, "The cosmetic industry, the media, the advertising agencies and market forces have their business interests in commodification of women. The literature, magazines and news papers through

subterranean and quasi visible methods have constructed an image of woman which focuses on display of her charm through body and its parts".³

For the question whether the women are projected as objects of sex in films, both urban and rural respondents have overwhelmingly expressed the view in the affirmative. But for the question whether portrayal of women in films has anything to do with sexual abuse the rural and urban responses seem to be divergent. While rural informants in large numbers believe that the portrayal of women in suggestive postures would lead to sexual abuse in real life, urban respondents in a majority (as found in the tables) seem to think the other way.

Views of Ruralites on Abuse in Real Life

Though majority of the rural respondents feel that scenes in the make believe world bear relationship with the occurrences in the world of reality they are unable to explain. They state that the imitative behaviour of the girls (influenced by the films) lands them in trouble. Men known for amorous exploits easily mistake women who dress like actresses and try to take advantage. Sometimes, they abduct such women, outrage their modesty and even murder them in cold blood.

Views of Urbanites on Abuse in Real Life

Taking cues from the celluloid, men with ulterior motive, cross the limits of normative behaviour, take undue advantage with women, and ultimately leave them in lurch, according to the urban informants.

Table 7.1**Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse
in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Age**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	55.00%	50.00%	45.00%	50.00%
26-35	58.10%	51.00%	41.90%	49.00%
36-45	62.50%	37.50%	37.50%	62.50%
46 and above	80.00%	37.90%	20.00%	62.10%

Table 7.2**Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse
in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Gender**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	63.50%	38.40%	36.50%	61.60%
Female	54.20%	52.30%	45.80%	47.70%

Table 7.3
Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse
in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	57.70%	47.30%	42.30%	52.70%
1501-3000	60.00%	26.70%	40.00%	73.30%
3001 and above	71.40%	61.10%	28.60%	38.90%

Table 7.4
Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse
in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	53.90%	35.90%	46.10%	64.10%
Graduates	86.70%	45.20%	13.30%	54.80%
Post Graduates	55.60%	64.60%	44.40%	35.40%

Table 7.5**Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Occupation**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	41.70%	45.30%	58.30%	54.70%
Housewives	63.60%	42.50%	36.40%	57.50%
Self Employed	58.30%	28.60%	41.70%	71.40%
Office Goers	64.00%	52.50%	36.00%	47.50%
Teachers	100.00%	63.60%	---	36.40%

Table 7.6**Portrayal of Women in Films and Sexual Abuse in Real Life - Views on the Basis of Marital Status**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Number of Respondents claiming relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse		Number of Respondents claiming no relationship between Portrayal of women and sexual abuse	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	61.70%	42.90%	38.30%	57.10%
Unmarried	55.00%	50.60%	45.00%	49.50%

Infact, the self-respect of women who go out for one or the other vocation in a school, college or office is affected, increasingly due to the presentation of women in a low taste. Indecent presentation of women in the screen induces the animal instincts in men especially the youth apart from increasing the incidents of sexual abuse. Paradoxically enough some old timers are also led into a wrong track, as a result of the influence of cinema.

It would be prudent to refer to The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986. "The new law seeks to bar 'indecent representation of women' by which is meant the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman her form or body of any part there of in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or derogatory to or denigrating women or is likely to deprive corrupt or injure the public morality or morals".⁴

In keeping with the common sense assertions, the respondents of our study also have taken a stand that the films certainly have their impact on the sartorial fashion of the viewers. There is hardly any difference between the rural and urban filmgoers so far this standpoint is concerned.

Table 8.1
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of
Women - Views on the Basis of Age

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	87.50%	90.40%	12.50%	9.60%
26-35	93.50%	90.20%	6.50%	9.80%
36-45	75.00%	96.90%	25.00%	3.10%
46 and above	100.00%	82.80%	---	17.20%

Table 8.2
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of
Women - Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	90.40%	87.20%	9.60%	12.80%
Female	83.30%	90.80%	16.70%	9.20%

Table 8.3
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of
Women - Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	84.60%	92.00%	15.40%	8.00%
1501-3000	100.00%	93.30%	---	6.70%
3001 and above	85.70%	75.00%	14.30%	25.00%

Table 8.4
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of
Women - Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Education	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	85.50%	89.10%	14.50%	10.90%
Graduates	86.70%	89.40%	13.30%	10.60%
Post Graduates	100.00%	89.60%	---	10.40%

Table 8.5
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of Women - Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Occupation	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	79.20%	89.30%	20.80%	10.70%
Housewives	72.70%	95.00%	27.30%	5.00%
Self employed	100.00%	85.70%	---	14.30%
Office goers	92.00%	85.00%	8.00%	15.00%
Teachers	100.00%	90.90%	---	9.10%

Table 8.6
Impact of Films on the Dressing Pattern of Women - Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Marital Status	Respondents confirming the impact of films on the dressing pattern		Respondents claiming no impact on the dressing pattern	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	86.70%	91.40%	13.30%	8.60%
Unmarried	87.50%	87.40%	12.50%	12.60%

Villagers Opinions on Sartorial Fashion

Ruralites state that a lot of changes have taken place in the dressing pattern of women. Women have gone a long way from a stage of conventional dressing to a stage of splendor and grace. New arrivals like chudidars, midi and gowns have become the most sought after dresses of the girls. The rural respondents say that the dresses preferred by women are men centric. The sole intention of women appears only to attract the opposite gender. The snobbish tendency makes women wear dresses, which look transparent and those, which make them, appear semi naked.

Urbanites on Sartorial Fashion

Cinema has influenced women in such a way that they try out new hairstyles and dressing novelties every now and then. Fashion parades and beauty contests, which are increasing day by day, are emanations of cinema culture. Women influenced by the heroines of films also like to dress much the same way. Women prefer sleeveless blouses and window jackets.

Female respondents in our urban sample state that only the educated women residing in the cities have switched over to modern dressing. Nevertheless on occasions like social functions, they prefer traditional dresses to modern ones. Since imitative tendency is gripping the psychology of the young women, the garment manufacturers and fashion designers have started introducing changes keeping in mind the new trend. The urban informants indicate that such changes lead to erosion of culture.

For the question whether cinema has had its impact on the character of young girls, a large majority of both rural and urban informants have responded in the affirmative. The overwhelming response is that the celluloid certainly effects a change in their behaviour.

The Role of Cinema on the Character of Girls - Views of Ruralites

The rural respondents unanimously state that changes have taken place in the dressing pattern, character and in the thought process of the girls. Viewing films has rendered some positive developments. Girls of late are bold enough to enquire anything, which they consider atrocious. They fight against the evil deeds. These are undoubtedly due to the inspiration they derived from the films. Spontaneous mate choice is steadily on the increase due to the influence of cinema. On the other hand, cinema has had its negative side also. Awfully bad hair styles and dressing, nonchalant behaviour of girls like going out to any place in solitude without informing anybody and desire to lead a life in pomp are indicative of the negative influence of cinema.

Table 9.1
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Age.

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	82.50%	70.20%	17.50%	29.80%
26-35	83.90%	72.50%	16.10%	27.50%
36-45	70.80%	81.30%	29.20%	18.80%
46 and above	100.00%	65.50%	---	34.50%

Table 9.2
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Gender

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	78.80%	70.90%	21.20%	29.10%
Female	83.30%	73.10%	16.70%	26.90%

Table 9.3
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	84.60%	73.30%	15.40%	26.70%
1501-3000	66.70%	56.70%	33.30%	43.30%
3001 & above	71.40%	80.60%	28.60%	19.40%

Table 9.4
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	85.50%	68.80%	14.50%	31.30%
Graduates	53.30%	70.20%	46.70%	29.80%
Post Graduates	88.90%	81.30%	11.10%	18.80%

Table 9.5
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	75.00%	72.00%	25.00%	28.00%
Housewives	77.30%	65.00%	22.70%	35.00%
Self Employed	91.70%	71.40%	8.30%	28.60%
Office Goers	76.00%	75.00%	24.00%	25.00%
Teachers	100.00%	78.80%	---	21.20%

Table 9.6
Impact of Films on the Character of Girls -
Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young girls due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young girls due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	81.70%	72.40%	18.30%	27.60%
Unmarried	80.00%	72.10%	20.00%	27.90%

The Role of Cinema on the Character of Girls - Views of the Urbanites

The girls fall in love with boys without knowing their worth. In their keenness to get a pally with their boy friends, they do not pay attention to their life's ambitions. They are engaged in an unwarranted conversation with men folk. It has become customary among the college girls to heckle and bully their own friends in public places. The girls think that such things are their privilege. Unimaginably large number of girls consider the young heroes of the film world as their heart throbs. They even spoil their personal lives with the intention of marrying them. Scenes of teenage love are replete in Tamil films. Therefore, such films are responsible for untoward occurrences among students of both sexes in schools.

If the girls remain headstrong it can very well be attributed to the influence of cinema. Premarital sex relations, nurturing ambitions without realising the difficulties at home and ultimately getting into trouble are due to the impact of films.

On the positive side of course, cinema has impressed upon the girls the importance of education. They are brave enough to inform their parents that they would not choose who demand dowry and would only marry grooms of their choice. Women want to render service to the society in the present day and the urban respondents attribute it to the films.

A question may arise at this juncture as to why in a study on 'Women in Films' the cause and effect relationship between films and male youth behaviour should be probed. Amply convinced by the logic that

the portrayal of women in films is certainly brought to bear on the behaviour of male youth, this issue has been chosen.

Contemporary Tamil Films and the Behaviour of Male Youth - Views of the Rural Informants

The rural respondents state that the filmic violence leaves indelible impressions in the minds of the youth. The violence apart the youth are quick to adopt the material culture shown in cinema. The imitative behaviour is quite visible in the kinds of dress, jewelry, footwear preferred by the school and college students. Curiously the youth feel that they should each be liked by many girls as in the films. Of course, there are positive signs as well. The helping tendency found among the modern youth is undoubtedly a value derived from the celluloid.

Table 10.1**Films and change in the Character of Young Boys - Views on the Basis of Age**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Age	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
15-25	80.00%	77.90%	20.00%	22.10%
26-35	87.10%	80.40%	12.90%	19.60%
36-45	75.00%	90.60%	25.00%	9.40%
46 and above	100.00%	72.40%	---	27.60%

Table 10.2**Films and change in the Character of Young Boys - Views on the Basis of Gender**

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Gender	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Male	84.60%	77.90%	15.40%	22.10%
Female	79.20%	80.80%	20.80%	19.20%

Table 10.3
Films and change in the Character of Young
Boys - Views on the Basis of Income

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
0-1500	83.30%	83.30%	16.70%	16.70%
1501-3000	73.30%	76.70%	26.70%	23.30%
3001 and above	85.70%	66.70%	14.30%	33.30%

Table 10.4
Films and change in the Character of Young
Boys - Views on the Basis of Education

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School Educated	85.50%	82.80%	14.50%	17.20%
Graduates	66.70%	77.90%	33.30%	22.10%
Post Graduates	77.80%	79.20%	22.20%	20.80%

Table 10.5
Films and change in the Character of Young
Boys - Views on the Basis of Occupation

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Unemployed	75.00%	74.70%	25.00%	25.30%
Housewives	77.30%	87.50%	22.70%	12.50%
Self Employed	91.70%	89.30%	8.30%	10.70%
Office Goers	80.00%	70.00%	20.00%	30.00%
Teachers	100.00%	84.80%	---	15.20%

Table 10.6
Films and change in the Character of Young
Boys - Views on the Basis of Marital Status

Rural N = 100

Urban N = 216

Income	Number of Respondents pointing out changes in the character of young boys due to films		Number of Respondents asserting no changes in the character of young boys due to films	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Married	83.30%	82.90%	16.70%	17.10%
Unmarried	80.00%	76.60%	20.00%	23.40%

The Views of the Urban Respondents on the Issue of Male Youth Behaviour

The youth are not attentive to their studies and are only roaming about. If they are on campus, they make a mockery of the girl students just as shown in cinema. Torturing the mind and body of the opposite gender is on the increase. The youth model their behaviour after the heroes and indulge in violence in real life and get spoiled. The scenes of contemporary cinema depart markedly from natural world. Even the techniques of stealing from one's pocket, ragging the newcomers in the college etc., are shown in contemporary Tamil cinema.

It is only cinema, which has created a bloated self-image among the youth. The male youth think too highly of themselves and the self-image is disproportionate to their ability and knowledge. Alcoholism and drug addiction eulogised in cinema are considered as a part of culture and imitated by the upper echelon of the society. The youth appear to have completely forgotten their mother tongue and they have developed an affected accent in their conversation in English. The youth treat the elders with scant regard and that is one of the reasons why the parents with hurt pride prefer the old age homes.

Quite interestingly, the respondents of our study in the city of Madurai do not hesitate to point out changes in the positive direction. Good ideals like giving due regard to the opposite gender are certainly an import from cinema. The urban respondents do concur that gender equality is a value inculcated in the minds of the youth by cinema.

Notes and References

- * For more details see the Indian Express (Madurai) April 1, 1997, Dhinabhoomi, April 1, 1997 and Dhinamani, April 1, 1997.
- ** See Dhinamani, November 21, 1996.
- ¹ Satyajit Ray, Our Films Their Films, Orient Longman Limited, Hyderabad. 1993 (Third Edition) P.59
- ² Muktha V. Srinivasan, Tamil Thiraipada Varalaru (A Book in Tamil), Gangai Pathippaga Nilayam, Chennai. 1993. P.51.
- ³ N.K. Singhi "Gender Theme: Issues and Perspectives" in Women Images Pratiba Jain and Rajan Mahan (Ed) Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1996. P.60.
- ⁴ Rights of Women Encyclopedia of Social Change (Editor in Chief, Laxmi Devi) Vol. 5. Social Welfare for Social Change. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. 1996. P.148.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN IN FILMS - VIEWS OF PERSONALITIES IN PUBLIC LIFE

This Chapter consists of the views of persons who have been associated with the film world or media in some capacity. This particular part of research endeavour reveals clearly the viewpoints of the intellectuals about the main theme.

Ms. Nirmala Suresh, a poet, writer, literary critic, media person and a political personality, in an interview with this author has stated as follows:

Tamil Films: Not Reflecting Reality

Many films are not realistic. Commercial motive dominates and of course that is the one and only trend of the present. The pressmen tend to be sensational for an increased circulation of newspapers. Film producers also toe the same line.

A number of instances can be cited to drive home the view that Tamil films are devoid of realism. Group dances are not only unnatural, but also have gone beyond certain limits. In Malayalam films, we do not come across group dances. Scenes relating to love making are required to be realistic. Paradoxically enough scenes depicting love appear to be totally devoid of privacy. Rather the element of privacy is given a go by. "I do agree with the view that for aesthetic purposes dances are needed. However, they should not

make people frown". To make things worse, the dressing of women is inappropriate to the character and the context.

Characterisation not Proper

Basically characterisation is wrong regarding women, as their characters are not presented naturally. Infact, women characters are degraded. The overemphasis on tali sentiment runs counter to rationality. Most of the films stress a stereotyped idea that the girl should marry a boy even if he commits mistakes. The story lines are by and large pursued only in this manner. But, no self-respecting woman will approve this trend in real life.

"I admit that love or romance has to cut across class. But, this idea should not be treated in an ignoble way". For example, the girl is used as an instrument to defeat opponents and sometimes her own father. A high caste girl is shown as marrying a low caste man. Has a high caste boy been shown as marrying a low caste girl? This does not happen in many films. There is a great deal of bias with regard to the portrayal of woman. She is believed to develop love even at first sight and even when she first talks to the hero.

Heroine based films are not released in large numbers. The heroines are also required to dance and of course this is not in good taste. While seeing the films, we understand the intentions of producers. The women are forcibly made to play subservient roles. The goddess image given to the woman is essentially to silence her.

Some films boldly attempt to show women as scaling great heights. Even those women are shown as defeated or estranged individuals in personal life. The best example is the role played by Sowcar Janaki in **Iru Kodugal**. Does it mean that only women who miserably fail in personal life make a mark in public life?

The films only concentrate on such things as love, fashion, glamour and so on. People connected with the dream industry do not seem to think that romance is only a part of life. In keeping with the present trend of globalisation and consumerism, the films of the present day focus on fashion. What is indeed surprising is that even the artiste playing the role of a village girl is presented in a glamorous way.

If the intense love making of girls with cross cousins, uncle niece marriages justified in Tamil films are anachronistic, girls sprinkling turmeric water on cousins and uncles (prospective bridegroom) is nothing but an uncivilised act, looked from whatever angle. This uncivilised exhibition of girls is not certainly reflecting reality.

Feudalistic Sentiments in Tamil Films

Feudal sentiments are reflected in Tamil films. Landlords outraging the modesty of farmwomen and subsequently asking their workers to marry these women have become a common theme in films. No doubt there are such stray incidents in real life. Exaggeration of such incidents in the celluloid reveals only vulgarity of mind. In many films, we see polygyny being justified. Man living with more than one woman is glorified. What will happen, if the reverse is shown? i.e., one woman living with more than one man. Films

are required to imbibe good values. In keeping with the popular belief, the mothers in law are shown as cantankerous women ill-treating their daughters in law. The sons in law facing the torture from their mothers in law are also not uncommon in films. Women both young and old, endowed with culture, education and wealth are not portrayed in films. They are projected only with defects. To show the defects of women with a punch, men are shown as henpecked husbands. They become a laughing stock by washing the clothes of their wives. Films also indulge in character assassination of women involved in public life. Singers and dancers are shown as characterless.

A film called 'Mouna Porattam' (a film dubbed in Tamil) serves as a model for the producers.*

Women, Denied a Rightful Place in the Film World

Women writers and poets are not allowed to flourish in cinema industry. In Tamil cinema, feminist perspective does not receive its due. Strangely, it is only men who write as to what a girl would think in her romantic mood. So far as the film industry is concerned women are not permitted to enter even the technology side. Focusing the camera on the body of the women seems to be the sole concern of Tamil cinema.

Mrs. Arasu Manimekalai, Professor in a Government College, Writer, Member of the Film Censor Board and first woman to have written story dialogues and lyrics.

Women Characters in Films

There are only extremes so far as the Tamil films are concerned. The women are shown either as slaves incapable of even weeping or as militant individuals. The women are presented as over submissive. The stories are written with such a deliberate intention since the days of Nalayini.* The stories are only reflective of the male dominated society. The films depict women who are timid and retiring by nature as paragons of virtue. Amman worship becomes an integral part of many films. This indeed brings down the image of women, because of the fact that the artistes who perform amman worship dance, wear the leaves. Nothing will be more degrading than this.

A woman has many dimensions. But, all these do not receive their due in the films. Instead of showing the trials and tribulations of the widows, divorcees, young girls during their studies, the films again and again focus on love and the problems faced therein. Usually women are liked for two reasons. One is for love and another for their cooking ability. The same trend is perpetuated in films also. By dwelling on love sentiment and by creating an impression that this sentiment alone succeeds, people in the film world try to sidetrack the whole scheme of things. Negative tendencies are nurtured by some films. Many films count only on the glamour of women.

Impact of Films

The girls who see the films live in a world of dream and they feel that their love would also be fulfilled much the same way. Of course that is not all. Some of the cinema sentiments have cost the lives of people. Impressed by the snake sentiment eulogised in Tamil cinema, a woman has lost her life when she worshipped a snake as 'Nagaraja'.* Another woman influenced by fire walking shown in films sustained burns and died.**

A woman with a fighting instinct is not picturized. Therefore, those influenced by the films accept their lives in the same way. Even in the present day, there are girls who take the cinema as an example in matters relating to their personal lives. Varieties of sarees, bangles etc., tagged with cinema titles are best sellers today. College girls are greatly influenced by the jewelry and sartorial fashion exhibited by films.

The films try to camouflage by driving home the idea that life is full of romance. Girls hailing from affluent families are not affected by this mirage. Girls belonging to middle class families by and large are affected by this trend.

Film World

One of the important issues relating to the production aspect of the film is story discussion. With absurd elements on the increase, one doubts whether story is discussed properly. The films are hero centered and a film becomes a box office hit because of the hero and not the heroine. It is to be noted that women are not found in the art of film making except acting.

While the beauty of a woman is appreciated, her talents and multifarious interests are not recognised. Infact, there is a feeling of jealousy over her talents.

Mr. V. Nallathambi, Writer, Media Critic, Retired Official from Doordarshan and once a Member of the Panel of Selectors which would decide the suitability of films for telecast has the following points to offer.

In every household when people view films they take into account, whether such films are fit for family viewing. This means whether all members in a given family can watch it without any embarrassment. The films we see have also been viewed by the Censor Board members. There may be differences between their perception and our perception.

Dark room viewing for film certification is different from viewing films with grown up daughter, son, father and mother. Dark room viewing allows certain things owing to certain circumstances. When we used to telecast films as members of the panel of selectors, the feed back was instantaneous. We received letters and phone calls from TV viewers as follows. "How do you allow some sequences?" (Scenes of obscene nature and violence) Therefore, we had to be vigilant and doubly careful.

From the days of the film artiste Ms.Kannambal to the period of artiste Ms.Revathi, women have played all kinds of roles in films. This is a positive point. All the time women have been portrayed as sexual symbols mainly to induce the baser instincts. They are made to play sentimental roles. They are not portrayed to project rationality. This is a minus point.

How can Women be Portrayed?

Times are changing and the roles played by women in real life are also changing. Both in rural and urban areas, women are taking different roles due to change in time. Their personal and social problems are not adequately portrayed or projected in films in a penetrative manner. Regarding the role of film in society, people might say that there is no impact. "I do not agree with this view". Certainly it makes an impact. An instance can be cited as a case in point. Taking clues from a TV play a youth had entered a house, took advantage of the solitude of a blind girl and outraged her modesty. This occurred in North Madras. This means, a film, TV programme, radio programme, or news item has its own impact on society. Therefore, portrayal of women is required to be done with utmost care.

Films serve as Models

For both good and bad films serve as models. Films can make or mar the society. This can be explained by the following example. In case in a classroom the students are not able to understand an issue or a problem, the teachers may quote an instance/song/dialogue relating to the point in discussion. This act of quoting from the film might clarify the doubts of the students. This is an apt example of film/s serving as models for learning or absorbing good things in life. By the same token, films would serve as models in the spread of bad things as well. The dressing patterns among the modern youth make the elderly and conservative sections of the society frown. Dressing styles are just imitations only.

Break with the Tradition - A Radio Drama and its Reception

It is only very rarely women are shown as capable of decision making. "I would like to quote the example of Pazhithirai, a radio drama produced by me". Sowcar Janaki played a lead role of a teacher turned Educational Administrator. Her husband insists on begetting more children, whereas the lady is a supporter of a small family norm. This radio play very nicely projected the idea that the woman was firm in limiting the size of the family. Irked by his wife's decision, he divorces his wife. The firmness of the woman, specially for the betterment of the family treated in the radio play had a good reception.

Women's Rights not adequately shown

The rights of women are not adequately represented in films. In spite of the fact that women are viewing films regularly, they are not informed of their rights to ancestral property. Even in matters like education, it is only the parental decision making, which counts.

Woman as Object of Sex

It is a wellknown fact that commercial motive dominates the psychology of the film producers. It is because of this senseless materialistic tendency women are shown as objects of sex. Of course, this trend in cinema has not led to a free sex society till this day.

If the trend is allowed, it may lead to such a situation. Pronounced changes have not taken place in the character of women folk. Nevertheless women have gone to the extent of quoting from films certain instances or sequences to equate with the personal life situations. But, they have not progressed to the extent of practicing whatever they see in the celluloid.

Mrs. Sarojini Varadappan, an active Social Worker, and presently the President of the Indian Red Cross Society was a member of the Regional Film Censor Board for nearly 10 years. Served as office bearer in several national organisations for the welfare of women.

In majority of the films, women are not depicted as capable of independent decision-making. This aspect is emphasised only in some films. Only a few films deal with the rights of women. Majority of films projects the idea that women are slaves. Undoubtedly, women are portrayed as objects of sex. The consequences of this trend are going to be very serious. The trend might lead to a free sex society with drastic deviation from the culturally prescribed norms of the society. Vulgarity dominates the films because of the tendency for nudism. This will without doubt be brought to bear on the character of young girls. Some girls after seeing the films run away from their houses, with a desire to act in films. This behaviour is a natural consequence of an urge for quick money and easy life. This way, the film is causing a serious damage to the society.

Poor people are time and again exposed to unnatural scenes in films. This exploitation of pleasure area by the films has created an expectation among the

poorest sections of the society. Repeatedly they like to see unnatural scenes. If people do not get, they get frustrated.

How do girls performing dances in films agree to conditions, which subject them to exhibitionism? The costumes worn by dancers project vulgarity. Exhibitionism will lead to very serious consequences. Sexual harassment and male chauvinism treated in films will lead to increased crime rate. The society is fast changing. Dating has come to stay. Some girls now a days question the very necessity of the institution of marriage. Girls must be taught the importance of chastity in keeping with the norms of Tamil society. If the home atmosphere is not good there is every possibility of girls falling a prey and being susceptible to the harmful elements projected in films.

Notes and References

- * Mouna Porattam is a film about a tribal girl. A film dubbed in Tamil vividly portrays a highly principled girl, who rejects the tali, after exposing the true colours of an officer. The officer promises to marry her and outrages her modesty. The tribal girl begets a child. Subsequently, the officer refuses to marry her. She undertakes fasting in front of his place, mobilises public sympathy in her favour. Yielding to the pressure, the officer offers to marry her. But, the girl rejects the officer and leaves the place after fulfilling her mission.

- * Nalayini is an epic character. Her husband is known for amorous exploits. He becomes a leper and as a result his movements are restricted. Knowing her husband's desire, Nalayini carries him to the house of the commercial sex worker.

- * The term Nagam refers to Cobra. Nagaraja means, King of snakes.

- ** Fire walking is popularly known as 'Thee Midihi' in some places and 'Pookuzhi' in certain places in Tamilnadu. Both men and women walk over fire spread over a few meters when they believe that their prayers are answered by Lord Almighty.

CONCLUSION

Cinema has undoubtedly been one of the greatest fascinations of the present century. The values and beliefs of people have been fashioned by the films in many parts of the world. In the state of Tamilnadu where this study has been conducted, the film personalities have been wielding influence among the people for more than one generation. The enormous influence enjoyed by some has helped them to have the political clout, which they have used to their advantage. Just as cinema influenced the sphere of polity, it had also made its impact felt in many facets of culture both material and non-material.

As a medium of communication operating in a given socio-cultural/milieu namely the state of Tamilnadu, the feature film has been reflecting Tamil society's culture. At the same time, the celluloid undoubtedly has introduced a number of cultural traits from other societies.

One reason why cinema has emerged as a major crowd puller is due to its entertainment value and affordability by the audience. Of course, the end product of entertainment is achieved by cinema through a wide variety of themes or subjects. When numerous themes are treated in several of their dimensions, it is but natural to presume that such issues will have a bearing on the viewers. Naturally an observer of the films with an inquiring mind would like to know whether cinema is only reflecting the culture of the geographical area of its operation or is also attempting to introduce

something alien among the audience. It was in this context the researcher of the present study wanted to examine two objectives. The first one is pertaining to gender equality in films. The second objective is to evaluate the popular view whether women are treated as objects of sex.

The present study being exploratory in nature was conducted in the city of Madurai and Kanavaipatti village. Besides the sample studies conducted in a city and a village, case studies were also conducted with four personalities in the city of Madras currently renamed as Chennai.

Any study attempting to assess the issue of equality portrayed in films, should have at its central concern certain issues like independent thinking on the part of women, their role in decision making, women's rights and enslavement of women. Therefore, it was decided to ascertain the standpoint of the respondents regarding the portrayal of women in relation to the above said issues.

One of the important aspects of liberated womanhood is reflected in independent thinking. Though woman, as an individual was capable of independent thinking, it was not noticeable in the past. Quiet obviously it was a man's world. But one has to acknowledge the fact that the independent thinking on the part of the woman is manifest in the present day in view of the on going social transformation. In this context, this particular issue has become a striking research point.

The overall percentage of respondents in the village as well as in the city holding the impression that women are shown as capable of independent thinking in Tamil cinema, is higher than those who claim otherwise. Women pursuing a career, women going to places without any one escorting them, their freedom to choose an academic course and spontaneous mate choice are issues highlighted in the big screen.

The rural informants are quite convinced that these are indicators to believe that women are shown as capable of independent thinking. For the urban respondents, issues like self confidence, economic independence, legal separation from an unwilling life partner and even opposing the parents to establish their rights reflect the independent thinking and of course cinema deals with such issues in abundance.

One of the important avenues, by which legitimate gender equality can be achieved, is the capacity for decision making. Quite interestingly, the pattern of rural response in this regard appears different from the views of the urbanites. While a large number of rural respondents state that the films drive home the idea that women are capable of decision making, urbanites overwhelmingly support the other view.

According to the ruralites, the silver screen often projects the idea that women are capable of decision making as and when the situation warrants. They cite the example of women folk deriving benefits of the social security schemes in desperate situations. Feature films deal with such

issues adequately in the opinion of village respondents. It has been stated earlier that a large number of urban respondents do not agree with the view that the celluloid adequately picturises decision making by women. Even those urbanites who concur that cinema shows decision making by women, state that the idea of decision making is driven home by projecting women as highly dictatorial.

Yet another indicator of gender equality is the right enjoyed by women. Interestingly, both rural and urban respondents overwhelmingly respond that the rights of women are amply illustrated by cinema. From the responses of the ruralites, one understands that they are required to be enlightened on women's rights. Nevertheless a significant point that the ruralites drive home is that the Tamil films ably project the relentless battle waged by women in the village panchayat gatherings to seek justice. The urban respondents aver that only in trivial issues the rights of women are established. Issues of greater significance like property rights for women, representation for women in legislatures etc., do not receive their due in films. Undoubtedly, liberal feminist sentiments are echoed in the views of the urbanites.

Another interesting aspect of our study is that all the socio-economic categories of both rural and urban samples constituting much less than 50 percent only hold an impression that films emphasise the idea of enslavement of women. While ruralites refer to scenes in which women shudder at the patriarchal authority, more or less similar sentiments are expressed by the urban

respondents. But the urbanites are more vocal. According to the urbanities, the enslavement is emphasised by showing the denial of rights for women; they are even prevented from expressing their likes and dislikes.

When a researcher is embarking on the problem of the portrayal of women in films an important substantive research issue to be grappled with, is the societal view or its perception as to whether she is presented as an object of sex in films. The rural and urban respondents think in unison with regard to women being portrayed as objects sex. While rural respondents come down heavily on exhibitionism and obscenity reflected in action and dance, the urbanites take exception to the screen play which deliberately -presents woman as a trumpcard in the hands of people with manipulative intentions.

The view regarding the relationship between the indecent presentation of women and sexual abuse in real life is supported by a large number of rural respondents. Such a view is not supported by a large number of urban respondents. Ruralites state that men with criminal instincts try to outrage the modesty of the fair sex, which tries to imitate the actresses. Urban respondents opine that indecent presentation of women induces the animal instincts in youth. Some old timers are also no exceptions under such circumstances according to the urbanites.

From the present study, one understands that both rural and urban residents confirm the impact of films on the dressing pattern. The percentage of

respondents claiming absolutely no impact on the dressing pattern is negligible. The ruralites opine that women are keen in attracting the opposite gender through dressing novelties, for which they get cues from cinema. The urban informants indicate rapid changes in the dressing pattern of women and this, they point out, will lead to the erosion of culture.

The respondents representing both rural and urban areas (with the exception of a negligible percent of informants) support the notion that the character of both girls and boys has undergone thorough changes in view of the films. The break with the tradition is evidenced from the instances that the informants cite, like teenage love, pre-marital sex, nonchalant behaviour of both boys and girls, the imitative behaviour reflected in dressing and wearing jewels and indifferent attitude to education.

This research study apart from presenting and analysing the data obtained from the rural and urban informants, has also given in detail the views expressed by four personalities on the said theme. The case study data obtained from them constitute the finale of the present exercise.

If this attempt on the portrayal of women in films is considered as a sensitive pointer by discerning analysts the researcher will feel amply rewarded.

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This book deals with two main objectives. It examines the issue of gender equality in Tamil films. It also presents the societal view as to how women are treated as objects of sex.

