

The Cinematic Feminine

A Study of the Portrayal of Women in the Movie ‘Pushpa- the Rise’

Sushma R Rao

Assistant Professor and
Head, Department of Journalism,
Vijaya College, Jayanagar
Bengaluru-11

Dr. Bhargavi Hemmige

Associate Professor and
Head, Department of Media studies,
Jain (Deemed to be University)
Bengaluru

‘You treat me like a slave, a pet dog. You want me at your beck and call. I can’t do it. I have self-respect’ this is a very famous scene from the Tamil film Kaatru Veliyidai from the maverick Mani Rathnam. Its Leela, a physician in a terror-stricken Kashmir hospital played by Aditi Rao Hydri mouthing these words of self-respect. A woman who not just by virtue of her occupation but by the space the character is located should be strong. The acceptance of her circumstances in just the one pivotal scene shows how the visual is manipulated to expect Women in these cinematic narratives show her as vulnerable and meek in contrast to her professional calibre (strong and decisive). As most women in not just south Indian popular cinema but Popular cinema across the subcontinent cinema is portrayed.... subtly vulnerable to male persuasion, domination. (Dasgupta, 1988).

This paper aims to examine the following objectives:

- To examine the Portrayal of women in popular cinema that reiterate dominance, stereotyping and violence.
- To examine the portrayal of women in the film Pushpa that relates to ethics under the appellation ‘Visual Ethics’
- To understand the patriarchal subtexts in the movie Pushpa

Literature Review

Every year, approximately 2000 films are produced in various Indian languages in India, which is by far the highest number of movies produced in any country. The maximum number of films are made in Hindi Tamil Telugu and Malayalam. As of 2017 there existed 6780 single screens and 2100 Multiplex screens across India, catering to the entertainment needs off over 1.3 billion people. The popularity of steaming services such as Voot, Netflix and Amazon Prime have recently guaranteed the increase of the impact of cinema. It has in fact moved on to become a 158.9-billion-dollar sector. The OTT platforms have a huge impact on the Entertainment industry. In a study conducted on OTT vs. Cinemas, it was found that almost 73% of the respondents preferred OTT over cinemas. Movies were the most preferred type of content on OTT. The access to smart phones and internet has boosted the impact that this medium can have over the audiences. (Gaonkar, 2022-05-10)

Indian Cinema

One of the greatest indicators of the influences of popular cinema is the celebrity star status associated around the Bollywood male actors. The Hindi film industry until a few years ago was synonymous with Indian Cinema. The heroes in particular enjoyed a cult status. One cannot analyse the female portrayals in Indian cinema without looking back to where these portrayals draw their influences from. The cinema of the 60's was breeding ground of patriarchal portrayals. the three great actors of the decade dominated the cinematic spaces-Raj Kapoor, Devanand and Dilip Kumar. (Bhattacharya).The first Indian supers star was also a male actor, Rajesh Khanna. But it was Amitabh Bachan with his angry young man who changed the way we perceive men in Indian cinema. Even decades later it's the angry male alpha of Deewar that we see as a continuous symbol in almost all popular cinema, no matter what the language.

A pervasive aspect of Indian cinema is the female protagonists taking a back seat is in fact a characteristic that's been associated with Indian cinema from its inception. If we look at some of the greatest block busters in Bollywood, no matter what the genre the portrayals are extremely problematic in their depiction of gender. The Movie that's hailed as the greatest popular cinema in Indian film history 'Sholay' had Basanti. Basanti, immortalized by Hema Malini who essayed the role of a village Tonga (horse carriage) driver, extremely strong and independent. But that Basanti again is shown as incapacitated waiting for a hero to free her from the villain. The female protagonist is always the second fiddle when compared to the importance given to the Male protagonist. The women in all contexts have their roles defined from the perspective of the men. The perspectives are the same if they are the protagonist, an antagonist or any other relevant male character in the movie. She seems to have no separate identity, and her journey is explored all throughout film in relation to the man. (Sibal, 2018)

Stereotypical doctrines have greatly shaped characters, situations, and plots. The acclaimed research findings of the Geena Davis Institute on Women in Media, which is supported by UN Women and The Rockefeller Foundation found that Indian films objectified women more than any other international films on screen. A survey conducted by the institute showed that, women in Indian films are frequently portrayed in sexually objectifying roles. On screen objectification of women is a contentious issue in Indian cinema. (Srivastava, 2014)

It is all about the male experiences, his dreams, tales of revenge, his angst and ultimately his ambition that sums up Popular Cinema in India. In Popular Indian Cinema, it is almost a cliché how frequently heroines are used to break up tedious violent sequences by unexpectedly switching to a romance arc. Women in popular Cinema are often portrayed as being both emotionally and physically inferior. (Gunjan, 2017) (Gunjan, 2017)

Contemporary cinema is a welcome change with films like Chameli (2003), Cheeni Kum (2007), Paa (2009), Ishqiya (2010), No One Killed Jessica (2011), Dirty Picture (2011), Kahaani (2012), Queen (2013), Thappad (2021) all movies with extraordinary themes with narratives that force introspection. The pandemic led OTT booms have added to these narratives becoming stronger at one end but are today working as a double-edged sword with the audience finding an easy base for the old hegemonic narratives to play too (Gaonkar, 2022-05-10).

South Indian Cinema

When we say South Indian cinema, we are not trying to posit its characteristic as a nation but understand the way in which it can fit into the domain of cinema with its own exquisite experiences. The label South Indian cinema is more nebulous endless self-evident category than its other counterparts ((Soumya Dechamma CC, 2010); Politics, celebrity worship, over-the-top fans, chauvinism, and a very central agency that is primarily male characterise South Indian cinema. This cinema from its inception was stratified rigidly into patriarchal hegemonic caste and class groups: even when it was visualised through this mythological and religious films.

Though South Indian cinema so remarkable movement of art cinemas with the likes of Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Girish Kasaravalli, as Pandiyan argues these art films are a product of reactionary cultural elites produced in response to the onslaught of popular cinema (MSS, 1992)

When we say Popular Cinema of South India, we don't mean any particular artistic genre, but Cinema that has remained extremely popular, especially with the rise of OTT platforms.

The greatest symbol of the success of popular cinema in the south are perhaps the icons of Tamil cinema Rajnikanth and Kamal Hasan. Their popularity rose steadily from the 70s and has not faltered till date. The OTT and box office success of the movie Vikram with Kamal Hassan is the classic indicator. (Vikram 2022)

While the public awaits the release of any 'Rajini starrer,' Female leads with significant roles in the movies are often overlooked. The lead characters who often portray the superstar's love interests are typically attractive, talented women who can sing and dance. Very few of his films other than the exceptions such as his 1999 release Padayappa, in which veteran actress Ramya Krishnan played a 'negative role' opposite the star do we get to see women in power packed roles. Blockbusters in which borderline misogyny pervades the plot and hypermasculinity that saves the day is a repetitive theme. (Sarkar, 2018)

Kamala Hasan is the answer to a perfect blend of parallel cinema and popular cinema. His roles are never the straight jacketed angry hulk different in every movie. But barring a few, particularly from his younger acting days with Sridevi and Sripriya his roles are mostly only about his character. Some movies like Thevar Magan allowed the female Characters some space to leave a mark as individuals in a story line. Revati's character is unbelievably real, so is that of Gouthami who is there in a few flash scenes.

These movies and characters that we identify the entire industry with have women in majority of their popular cinema as glamorous eye candy. Though the narratives are evolving contemporary popular cinema still is berated for archaic portrayals. (Kamal Haasan And His Best Onscreen Heroines, 2019)

Malayalam Cinema

Only two Indian language cinemas, Bengali and Malayalam, have garnered popular and critical attention on both the national and international levels. Malayalam cinema had the distinct advantage of having prominent figures from Malayalam literature, such as M.T. Vasudevan Nair and Thoppil Bhasi, deeply invested in the cinema medium. Many of their works have become film classics. Historically, Malayalam society was dominated by patriarchy. To some extent, Malayalam movies reflected this attitude. Recent Malayalam film releases diverge from the stereotype of women in domestic roles.

The female characters in Nimisha Sajayan's 2017 film Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum, Aishwarya Lekshmi's character in Mayaanadhi (2017), and Nimisha Sajayan's 2018 film Eeda all have strong female characters. In addition to having outstanding narration, characterisation, and hyper-local narratives, some films like Trivandrum Lodge, 22 Female Kottayam (2012), Kumbalangi Nights, and Uyare (both 2019), Maheshinte Prathikaaram (2016), also have remarkably strong, appealing female characters.

Though the characters and cinema are more evolved than other south Indian Cinema the fact remains that the male leads of popular cinema like Mammootty and Mohan Lal with their iron clad hegemonic characters still rule the box office.

Gender portrayals in Telugu Cinema

Telugu cinema is an enigma. When we look back into the lanes of Telugu cinema history, the women were more than just colourful ornaments on the silver screen, they were dazzling divas, top performers, gifted directors, well-known singers, and inspirational female role models and much more. These women, with the roles they played, helped establish important trends in cinema at the time. Starting with the likes of the great Mahanati Savitri, Jamuna, Jayaprada, Sridevi, Bhanumati and Vijay shanti.

But this is also cinema that worships its male lead from NTR to Chiranjeevi. We see the same pattern repeating with contemporary cinema.

Women are always glamour relief, with very few like Ramya Krishna in Bahubali or the very debate character of Anushka Shetty in Bahubali, Samantha in Eega, a journalist in Mahanati and U-turn, even in Oh Baby, Aditi Rao Hydari plays an astronaut in Antariksham, and she dons a parallel persona as a movie actress in Sammoohanam are some movies which come as a welcome relief.

At the same time, we see women in contemporary Telugu films in roles that give them identity of the female protagonist beyond being arm candy.

There are hardly any female leads who have some strong screen time devoted to them. If we closely examine the Telugu cinematic space, we find that neither through her occupation nor through her character journey can we truly ascertain the heroine's identity. The construction of these female characters at the present is very loosely done. The writers should add some depth and dimension to make them more real.

Pooja Hegde who essayed the role of a software engineer in Maharshi (2019) doesn't utter a word about technology in the whole movie. Samantha's character in Aa is added as comic relief. She seems to spend all of her screen time in Seethamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu daydreaming about marriage. Ileana's character in Pokiri, an aerobics trainer is always confused.

In Race Gurram Shruti Haasan's character, Sarraiodu's Rakul Preet's role and the characters in Rarandoi Vedula Chudham for instance begin as strong characters who by interval fade into insignificance, as does Rashmika Mandanna in Devadas.

Masculinity in these movies is worn as prized crown. The most successful piece on toxic Masculinity Arjun Reddy celebrated meek women, a doctor at that ready to suffer in silence. It is one of the most watched movies on the OTT with remakes in many languages.

The epics Bahubali is also the fictional tale of muscular demi gods, women there to assist these men in their ascent to their rightful place. The success of RRR and Pushpa, show that it's a

very patriarchal and over the top hegemonic cinema that works in Telegu contemporary cinema. (Sripada, june 8 2019)

Gender portrayals in Kannada Cinema

About 1,500 of the more than 4,000 films produced during the past 85 years have been produced in this decade. The transformations that the state has gone through since independence are possibly best reflected in Kannada cinema. The portrayals though remain extremely challenging to define as the number of processes and the film makers and their ideologies have had a tremendous impact in every era.

Kannada Cinema jumped head on into the parallel cinema movement with the likes of Satyu and Girish Kasarvalli. But it was the inspired mix of parallel cinema ideology with the nuances of popular cinema that Puttana Kanagal introduced that can be considered a big landmark in gender portrayal in Indian Cinema. It was Sharapanjara and Ranganayaki that is still fresh in the Kannada Audiences mind when it comes to women portrayals.

Women as objects of desire became a norm in what can be considered as the dark ages of Kannada cinema in terms of gender portrayals. Women slipped into roles that essayed the classic male gaze. Cameras panning women's body and chest heaving skimpily dressed women were a cliché. The 2000s brought in a whole new perspective with movies like Munagru male, Amrutha Varshini, America America, Mogina Manasu leading with new positive gender narratives. But parallelly the archaic commercial patriarchal plot stayed alive with Om, Jogi, Robert, Yajamana, Tavarige ba thangi, Jackie Saartahi, Bachan, Rajakumara, Salaga; the fact that they are the biggest money makers adding to the cathartic effect. (IMBD Kannada list, June 2020) The pre pandemic Kannada cinema circuit saw a tremendous change with the success of KGF I and also had movies like U turn, Lucia Kirk Party which saw commercial success. This kind of enigmatic acceptance of both kind of movies has seen a shift towards the old rhetoric of women protagonists taking a back seat with the remarkable success of KGF II. It stands out to be one of the most watched movies in all languages. One of the first Kannada movies to see a pan India success not only on OTT but in theatres (a situation where Bollywood movies were bombing in the box office). The portrayal of women in these blockbusters is one of the most critical points of discussion along with the violence that they seem to be projecting. The fact that we haven't seen a Kannada actress who commanded great screen presence after Malashree speaks volumes about the patriarchal storylines projected. (KGF Chapter 2, May 5, 2022)

Theoretical Framework

1. **Schema theory:** schemas is that of **cause-and-effect**, a schema allowing the viewer to causally link the events of a film. Schema theory essentially says that all knowledge is divided into distinct parts. Information is held within these schemata, or knowledge units. Therefore, a schema is a broad description or a conceptual framework for comprehending knowledge—how it is expressed and used. According to Piaget's epistemology, cognitive schemas develop and are internalised by a process of functional integration of the regular structure of activities into memory. (Piaget 1954).

Information organisation and interpretation are made easier with the use of a cognitive framework or construct known as a schema. We employ schemas because they make it quicker for us to interpret the vast amount of information which is easily accessible in our surroundings.

Schemata is a frequent psychological jargon employed in film language. . Bordwell contends that our natural mental constructs, or "schemata," have a considerable impact on how we see the world as viewers There are "image schemas," or recurring and comparable associations, that exist underneath the level of cognitive perception.

The Paper attempts to interpret the chosen cinematic text with the concepts from schema like prototype (giving meaning to an object through the most frequent instance(s) of a certain category of semantics) and stereotype (audience's presumption of prototypicality.). Inter-textuality (intrinsic texts and cinematic texts whose relationships must be cognitively processed in the minds of those who perceive them) (Cinematic discourses, 22 August 2019.)

2.Reflection theory

The studies of Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen are frequently cited as examples of "reflection theories" of Cinema and women. These theories contend that film "reflects" social world. Women are portrayed in films in ways that mirror how society treats women. These portrayals are inaccurate representations of who women "really are" and what they "really want," (see Retro 1994).

The paper will look into women in the movie 'Pushpa' according to Haskell's themes for women portrayals.

Such narratives are connected to potent feminist critiques of the impact of advertising, pornography, and mainstream media on sex roles, violence against women, and body image, which in turn fuelled the argument for women's participation in image-making. A typology of images of women—including a variety of virgins, vamps, sufferers, anguished moms, child women, and sex kittens—is typically presented and critiqued in such studies.

3.Male gaze theory

A key feminist theory by Laura Mulvey will be applied to understand male scopophilia, objectification of women, and voyeurism in the film 'Pushpa'.

Methodology

A content analysis of the cinematic text of Pushpa the rise

Discussion

Pushpa: The Rise, originally in Telugu as well as dubs in Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, and Kannada, were released on December 17, 2021. The movie is a financial success, earning between 355 and 365 crores at the box office. One of the all-time highest-grossing Telugu films, the film broke the record for highest-grossing Indian film in 2021. Additionally, it is the 30th-highest-grossing Indian movie ever. (Pushpa , Jan 4 2022)

The Movie is the story of Pushpa Raj, an outcast. Pushpa, who was born out of wedlock, is constantly disrespected and has identity crisis from a young age. His name is now worthless in Seshachalam, a hill town. Pushpa is egged on by this humiliation and promises to make a name for himself without the backing of his father's name.

A sizable criminal organisation run by Mangalam Srinu (Sunil) is in charge of illegally cutting down the endangered red trees, transporting them, and smuggling them it around globe. Beginning at the very base of this organised crime is Pushpa. He is merely a part in the machinery, easily expanded to the big hitters until he demonstrates his true potential.

As Pushpa quickly starts to amass money and power through his never-give-up attitude, his fortunes start to change. Pushpa doesn't give in, unlike other woodcutters who abandon their load and flee when they see police. He resists the police and outwits them. Pushpa starts the

first offence when the cops pick up the smugglers and threaten to shoot them if they don't surrender, enlisting the support of the others. His mantra, "Pushpa Raj, Thaggede Le (I won't relent)", thunders on screen. In addition, a formidable villain targets him due to his quick rise. Pushpa gradually gains confidence and moves up the ranks he become the boss. However, neither the main female protagonist Srivalli (Rashmika Mandanna), nor the influential figures Mangalam Srinu (Sunil), Jolly Reddy, Konda Reddy, or his wife Dakshayani are his Achilles heel (Anasuya Baradwaj). Pushpa is troubled by the fact that his brother (Ajay) won't allow him claim his ancestry. The casual, caustic, haughty, and occasionally funny man loses his calm as a result of this that too in important situations of his life. And just as he achieves his life goals, IPS Bhanwar Singh Shekawat (Fahadh Faasil) enters, posing a threat to his carefully laid plans.(IMBD ratings/Pushpa, 2021)



The movie's main protagonist Allu Arjun is the life of the movie. It is almost a one man show. Even in his deglamourized look, he delivers a massive hit. It is a memorable character that kind of creeps up to the audience to start accepting him in all his bad boy ways.

The women in this tale of men and their worldly business however are blended coyly into a patriarchal world with all its problematic stereotypes and prototypes. The three main women we see predominantly in this movie Rashmika Mandanna as the heroine Srivalli, Anasuya Bharadwaj as one of the bad men's wife Dakshayini and who plays the mother.

The Glorified Mother

The mother figure in Indian cinema has endured a long history of self-sacrifice while being bound by patriarchal ideals. The recurring depictions of motherhood as a virtue normalise selflessness as an essential quality of a good mother, and as a result, real mothers in the audience start to internalise self-sacrifice as an essential component of motherhood. Mothers, in Indian cinema serve as ambassadors for patriarchal values. (Jhamtani, 2016)

The Mother in Pushpa is the embodiment of these patriarchal construct. The movie opens to this image of a hardworking, loan ridden woman who with her unruly son is trying hard to make a living. The son, shows initially itself that he doesn't take any insult to his mom lightly as he goes on bashing and parading his money lender through the village. The whole concept of the woman needing her son to come to her rescue shows how we treat our mothers on screen ...from scene one is dependent on the male character for identity.

Pushpa is born out of wedlock. The humiliation that his mother suffers adds as a catalyst to the humiliation that he has suffered at the hands of his step brothers as a child. The urge to show off his new wealth comes across when he shows off his new car with his mother net to him to

his relatives. The new car becomes a metaphor for his urge for approval, approval for his status via his mother's.

The single middle aged or old women have no place on their own is very clear in the movie. The Mother and her status as a helpless widow are brought in at many times in the movie, she has little or no control over the actions of her overbearing son.

Her constant humiliation continues when Pushpa's engagement to Srivalli is broken when her father discovers he was born out of wedlock. She is visibly intimidated by the presence of her stepson. The step son points out that 'the son doesn't feel ashamed to claim his illegal parenthood, but shouldn't she as a woman at least feel ashamed'. the script though is meant to repulse the audience on the contrary builds a strong visual of every woman who is standing in a contrary space to the institution of a marriage.

The stepbrother very poignantly points out that Pushpa does not have a surname, father's name in his birth certificate. The mother's virtue is constantly questioned as she doesn't raise her voice but suffers in silence. The absent father is a constant piece of ridicule in the mother's life adding meaning to the patriarchal narrative. A narrative where a woman's identity is defined only by its association to the patriarch. the Popular Cinema constantly contributes to the continuation of the hegemonic ideal. the reverence and exploitation of females (the mother, the whore), who are elevated from their positions only to be mercilessly, and even cruelly sometimes, knocked to the bottom. (Haskell, 2016)

She constantly apologises to her son for his humiliation, never once standing up against the brutality she is facing. the ramification of such images is this glorified suffering I silence mothers. When looked at closely this shows a patriarchal Control over women's sexuality. A man having an affair out of wedlock will never have to go through the trials and tribulations that a woman who braves to challenge the structure does.

The constant craving for male validation in every scene will build a recall construct or image in the audience's understanding of a woman's status quo in a similar situation. The preconceptual patterns that are directly meaningful and rooted in our perceptual and kinesthetic encounters are created by visuals. (Kravanja, 2012)

The vamp

From the beginning, popular movies strictly separated the roles of heroines and vamps, giving them distinct characteristics: heroines were good and pure, and vamps were bad and impure. In an attempt to provide entertainment of a more sexually explicit kind, the vamp—a cabaret dancer, tawaif (prostitute), or a mobster's moll—has often been featured in popular cinema. The vamp, in contrast to the heroine always wore more provocative attire, smoking, drinking, and using more overt sexual references. (Kishore, 2014)

These onscreen vamps are portrayed in gendered ways often maintaining the power of unrealistic and uncomplimentary stereotypes. Stereotypes are oversimplified yet widely accepted thoughts or beliefs about people both as individuals and as members of groups. Constant reinforcement of a prescribed way of behaving normalizes these image associations. Common female portrayals in film and other media that reinforce gender stereotypes.

The Vamp in Pushpa is Datchayani ((Anasuya Bharadwaj)). She is the quintessential 70's rural bad woman with a western haircut. She is the other villain's woman with her devil may care look, dressed in expensive kanjivarams among very women clad in almost cotton rags, with the loads of gold chains around her neck; She doesn't beat an eyelid as people are being chopped off right in front of her. This visual is highly gendered. the subtext contrasting this

bad woman as insensitive as opposed to the pure and good woman who cannot see anyone hurt. A woman should be sensitive, it's the man who should look strong. Strong looking women on screen translate to vamps. The only time Datchayani shows strong emotions and attacks is when her brother is hurt. Even at that situation the sexual overtones take over her sensitive side. Datchayani's (Anasuya Bharadwaj) saree is constantly falling off her shoulders. The saree looks like an innuendo of sorts to show sexual violence as it slips again as it slits someone's throat?

These visuals are very powerful. The visual ethic here prescribes to systems of ethics. The "normative" ethics typically describe "good" and "bad" behaviour and insist that we adhere to the guidelines and restrictions (norms) of appropriate behaviour. These visual ethics as prescribed by popular cinema will form free cognitive associations which will be Normative systems are also 'evaluative', or 'prescriptive'. These Image schemas are never merely physical due to their complex and ambiguous nature. They always include a cognitive component. (Bullock and Trombley 2000, pp. 594-5).

The quintessential Item numbers

Due to their sensual and seductive characters, the vamps gained their fame in Hindi/Bollywood movies early on, in particular when they started dressing in skimpier attires in the few strategically placed songs placed in Popular Indian cinema. But the heroines in the 90s quickly took up this glamorous seat.

These films show women in outfits formerly reserved for vamps. These songs normalize a narrative where a woman throws herself open consciously at the scopophilia gaze even as she openly and joyfully exploits her own beauty without reneging on her claim to the heroine's special rank.

Samantha's dance number Oo Antava was one of the Pushpa pre-biggest release's draws. The commodification of the female body is a specialty of dance music. The item number is specifically placed and is unapologetically only there to titillate the male audience. There is no hidden subtext to the plot. you simply enter, dance, and exit the movie forever.

The song initially was popular because of the blunt criticism of the ever-objectifying male gaze and Andrea Jeremiah's sassy singing made it extremely popular.

If I wear a saree, they slay me with their looks.

If I'm wearing a skirt, they scrutinise me with their eyes.

It is not the clothing that matters, neither the saree nor the gown.

It's all about how you see it. The way that men think is perverse.

The way the song has been filmed is in direct contrast to the lyrics which was hailed as being progressive. It is always debatable whether the actress actively chooses to be sexualized or if the misogynistic patriarchal perspective makes the decision for her. When watching an item song, we critique it by seeing how the actress is explicitly sexualized using gestures and the context of her dancing among a bunch of drunk men who want to disgrace her in every manner. Male gaze dominates the video's perspective, keeping viewers glued to their screens whether or not they are actively listening to the lyrics. The problematic filming of the video contravenes the lyrics to Oo Antava's song. Throughout the song, harassment is normalised, and the presentation is skilfully designed to give the impression that the actress is appreciating it.

An incorrect narrative that normalises objectification and harassment of women seems to develop throughout the entire film, especially with Pushpa dancing with provocative gestures in this song.

Bordwell argues the viewer employs particular schemas. These are complex mental models that arrange the plot's visual cues into a logical and understandable mental whole. The cause-and-effect schema, which enables the viewer to causally correlate the events in a movie with some form of logical intervention, is one of the most significant schemas. (Bordwell, 1985)

When we consider the song Oo Antava in the context of our larger society, the schematic image they can possibly get constructed is that women enjoy being subjected to coercion, harassment, and catcalling. In this extremely binary construct, women have no problem being objectified and men shouldn't find it problematic. (Aziz, feb 2022)

The Heroine or the victim

Sri Valli (Rashmika Mandanna), a target of both the antagonist Jolly Reddy and the protagonist Pushpa Raj (Allu Arjun), will be the real victim.

Srivalli is offered a certain sum of money to look at Pushpa in the first problematic scene, and she gladly accepts the offer. As if that weren't enough, she is given an even greater sum in exchange for kissing the hero. She not only consents, but her friends also drive her to a remote location and instruct her to sit in the Hero's Omni van.

The visual ethical that it conveys is huge. To the minds of the young impressionable audience, which is majority heterosexual the lessons of toxic masculinity is very clear.

The director tried to add some humorous value to these parts in the long action movie. It is not clear who would have thought those scenes entertaining, let alone amusing.

In the movie, Pushpa develops feelings for Rashmika (Srivalli). He experiences love at first sight, and ever since, Pushpa has been stalking Srivalli everywhere she goes. And once again, popular movies and rom-coms are notorious for encouraging the culture of stalking, in which a man can pursue a woman simply because he is a "Hero."

The Prized Virgin

Sex is the equivalent of the self in a highly patriarchal construct; to surrender to sex is to lose oneself; however, abstinence would ensure its preservation, if not its salvation.

The movies support the instincts of the cinematic viewer: The "virgin" is a fundamentally good character who is revered and elevated above any virtues she may have had as a woman. The "whore," the pervasive bad girl, on the other hand, is publicly chastised and warned against—and secretly sought after by men.

Tragically, Sri Valli herself doesn't believe she is worth more than what she can offer in terms of sex. Pushpa is fundamentally a piece of art that rationalises patriarchal systems and allows the commodification of women. Srivalli, the protagonist, reserves her virginity for her husband, reinforcing the pure-impure dichotomy that is used to limit women's activity and autonomy. Only if they have "saved" themselves for their husbands are they regarded as deserving "wives" or "proper" women. The irony here is that despite the sexualization of women in society, women are still expected to "practise restraint" and "preserve themselves" for their male counterparts.

Audiences negotiate through the subtexts as they decode these highly influential messages from cinematic narratives—Neither is their complete conformation nor a complete denial of the predominant ideology. The socio-historical context of viewers and the discourses they may access influence how a reading is negotiated. (Hall, 1980)

The Damsel in distress

The women in Pushpa are highly weak and always in need of the hero to rescue them. It is not only the female protagonist but the mother too. It adds value to the whole Indian ideology of the woman always being under the shadow of the men in her life, whether it is the son or the husband is immaterial. The hero saves Srivalli when she becomes the target. This incident serves to affirm the brutally combative and vengeful masculinity of the knight in shining armour. These women are constantly looking for meaning for their stories only when looked at from the male counterpart's perspective in every scenario.

Scophilia

Scophilia refers to **the pleasure of looking as well as the pleasure of being looked at**. It refers **“Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look.”** It is therefore highly hegemonic and voyeuristic. Pushpa falls in love with Srivalli at first sight and stalks her continuously. Srivalli finally falls for her stalker. The movie provides no explanation for Sri Valli's fascination with Pushpa Raj other than the fact that he's the hero. The visual ethic and the logic that the movie offers sanctions the transgressions of scopophilia without taking responsibility for imposing these highly gendered codes to its audience.

Conclusion

“Women are compromised the day they're born,” says a rueful Paulette Goddard in *The Women*.

Pushpa -the rise is so highly gendered in its patriarchal portrayal of women that at no given point of time are these women allowed to handle the compromise. They cannot wrestle out some triumph in any given scenario without a man by their side.

From frame to frame the script compromises on the identity of the woman involved. The application of the Bechdel Test shows that in no frame of this film can you see two women talking about anything other than the male protagonist. It is a perfect indicator to the gender inequality in this piece of fiction. Each frame goes on to define and reiterate the Patriarchy and the visual ethic that the movie subscribes for its audience.

Pushpa the Rise unapologetically sexualizes women and portrays them as objects from a male perspective throughout the movie. one can only start wondering if the visual ethic prescribed by mainstream Indian cinema is anything other than ‘macho heroes and one-dimensional heroines’.

If one peels down layers of these characters, they can see that each one of them end up conforming to patriarchal values in every nook and turn. One cannot argue with the fact that these women are mostly scripted, conceived by men, to be watched by men and followed by women.

With the pan India release and popularity of movies across the country, OTTs and multi-language releases are an added boon to push such messages. the question of what these messages do to our decoding abilities as audiences is moot. These visuals and the gender ethics that they are so blatantly prescribing to, are pushing back progressive feminist narratives.

If we wish to alter the way that we think about women as social beings, the way that women are treated in society as gendered objects should be re-examined and reconsidered by both the filmmakers and the audience. A Radical shift in the mindset of these filmmakers is the need of the hour.

Bibliography

- [1] (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9179430/>
- [2] Aziz, N. (feb 2022). *Oo Antava — A Tokenist Take When It's Just Another Item Song Objectifying Women*. Retrieved from <https://feminisminindia.com/2022/02/11/oo-antava-a-tokenist-take-when-its-just-another-item-song-objectifying-women/>
- [3] Bhattacharya, S. (n.d.). A Brief History of Indian Cinema. https://www.academia.edu/49405099/A_Brief_History_of_Indian_Cinema.
- [4] Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the Fiction Film*.
- [5] (22 August 2019.). *Cinematic discourses*. Retrieved from <https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellibst/3222/cdnotes02--discoursal&cinematicaudiences.htm>
- [6] Dasgupta, S. D. (1988). *The eternal receptacle: A study of mistreatment of women in Hindi films (InR. GhadiallyEd.), Women in Indian society. A reader. Pp. 209-. India: Sage Publication. .*
- [7] Gaonkar, A. (2022-05-10). OTT vs. Cinemas: The Future Trend in the Movie and Entertainment Sector. *IJRASET*42467.
- [8] Gunjan, S. (2017). "PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN HINDI CINEMA. <http://anubooks.com/>. Retrieved from <http://anubooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Notions-2014-No2-20.pdf>
- [9] Hall, S. (1980). *encoding and decoding*.
- [10] Haskell, M. (2016). *From Reverence to Rape*. Newyork: The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 60637.
- [11] Dhabliya, D., & Sharma, R. (2019). Cloud computing based mobile devices for distributed computing. *International Journal of Control and Automation*, 12(6 Special Issue), 1-4. doi:10.33832/ijca.2019.12.6.01
- [12] (June2020). *HIGHEST GROSSING KANNADA MOVIES BY YEAR(2000-2022)*. Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls560659072/>
- [13] *IMBD ratings/Pushpa*. (2021). Retrieved from IMBD rating: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9389998/ratings/?ref_=tt_ov_rt
- [14] Jhamtani, R. (2016). "Indian Cine-maa: A Body of Patriarchal Discourse." *Screening Motherhood in Contemporary World Cinema*,. Demeter Press.
- [15] (2019). *Kamal Haasan And His Best Onscreen Heroines*. Retrieved from <https://nettv4u.com/entertainment/tamil/article/kamal-haasan-and-his-best-onscreen-heroines>
- [16] (may 5,2022). *KGF Chapter 2 leapfrogs over RRR to become 2nd most successful film in India, top 4 movies are now all non-Bollywood*. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/others/kgf-chapter-2-leapfrogs-over-rrr-to-become-2nd-most-successful-film-in-india-top-4-movies-are-now-nonbollywood-101651753446437.html>
- [17] Kishore, V. (2014). Bollywood Vamps and Vixens: Representations of the Negative Women Characters in Bollywood Films. *Academia.edu*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/38526084/Bollywood_Vamps_and_Vixens_Representations_of_the_Negative_Women_Characters_in_Bollywood_Films
- [18] Kravanja, M. C. (2012, Nov). Embodied VisualMeaning: ImageSchemas in Film. *Researchgate*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272271992_Embodied_Visual_Meaning_Image_Schemas_in_Film
- [19] MSS, P. (1992). *Telegu Cinema Pata Charita*. Chennai: Sneha Publication.

- [20] Najib, R. (June28, 2019). *Stronger, bolder, louder: The new female leads in Malayalam films*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/cover/the-evolution-of-the-female-lead-in-malayalam-cinema/article64561390.ece>
- [21] Dhabliya, D., Soundararajan, R., Selvarasu, P., Balasubramaniam, M. S., Rajawat, A. S., Goyal, S. B., . . . Suciu, G. (2022). Energy-efficient network protocols and resilient data transmission schemes for wireless sensor Networks—An experimental survey. *Energies*, 15(23) doi:10.3390/en15238883
- [22] (Jan 4 2022). *Pushpa*. Retrieved from <https://www.india.com/entertainment/telugu-news-allu-arjun-beats-thalapathy-vijay-at-worldwide-box-office-pushpa-collects-rs-306-crore-check-top-10-south-indian-movies-worldwide-pushpa-box-office-record-5170555/>
- [23] Sarkar, A. R. (2018). *Fading misogyny in Rajinikanth blockbusters, one movie at a time*. Retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/entertainment/tamil/2018/jun/07/fading-misogyny-in-rajinikanth-blockbusters-one-movie-at-a-time-1824936.html>
- [24] Sibal, V. (2018). STEREOTYPING WOMEN IN INDIAN CINEMA. *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* 5(43).
- [25] Soumya Dechamma CC, e. S. (2010). *Cinemas of South India, culture resistance ideology*.
- [26] Sripada, K. (june 8 2019). *How Telugu films don't give an identity to the female protagonist*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/women-in-telugu-cinema/article27697112.ece>
- [27] Srivastava, P. (2014, october 11). Depicting women in Bollywood: The mould never changes. *India Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/bollywood/story/depicting-women-in-bollywood-222702-2014-10-11>
- [28] (n.d.). *Vikram 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9179430/>