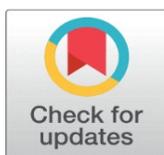


VISUALIZING WOMEN STEREOTYPES: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FILM 'THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN'

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Received 10 October 2023
Accepted 10 February 2024
Published 15 February 2024

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DOI [10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1
NCJCFPC.2024.803](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.NCJCFPC.2024.803)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Films have consistently served as a narrative medium reflecting the discourses of male patriarchy in society throughout the ages. In particular, a significant portion of Indian cinema perpetuates male-centric stereotypes, depicting women as the weaker sex—an inaccurate representation of reality. Joe Baby's Malayalam film, 'The Great Indian Kitchen,' meticulously replicates prevalent customs dictating women's roles and explores various aspects of women's emancipation. The film delves into the frustration and discontent experienced by a married woman, highlighting her struggle to conform to the traditional patriarchal roles of being a wife and daughter-in-law. By the film's conclusion, it unravels her journey as she breaks free from the confines of this stereotypical system. This paper aims to focus on the deconstruction of women stereotypes ingrained in our society, with a specific examination of how 'The Great Indian Kitchen,' directed by Joe Baby, portrays and challenges these beliefs within the context of typical Indian societal norms. Employing a discourse analysis method, the film is scrutinized to derive meaningful findings.

Keywords: Communication, Film, The Great Indian Kitchen, Women, Stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

Neale (1993) defines the term "stereotype" as having been extensively employed in movies and other creative writing endeavors to comprehend issues of racism and sexism. Stereotypes are widely held, simplified, and generalized beliefs or ideas about a particular group of people. These mental shortcuts or categorizations often stem from societal norms, cultural traditions, or preconceived notions. Stereotypes can be based on various characteristics such as gender, race,

ethnicity, religion, occupation, or other social attributes. While stereotypes can sometimes have a basis in reality, they often oversimplify and make assumptions about individuals within a group, leading to unfair and inaccurate generalizations. Addressing and challenging stereotypes is essential for promoting understanding, respect, and equality among diverse groups in society.

1.1. WOMEN STEREOTYPES

"Women stereotypes" refers to preconceived and oversimplified notions, beliefs, or generalizations about women based on their gender. These stereotypes often arise from cultural, social, or historical norms and can encompass a range of characteristics, behaviours, or roles that are attributed to women as a group. Stereotypes about women may include expectations regarding their appearance, behaviour, abilities, roles in society, or even their emotions.

These stereotypes can be both positive and negative, but they tend to limit the diverse experiences and potential of women by reducing them to a set of predetermined traits or roles. Examples of women stereotypes include assumptions about their nurturing nature, emphasis on physical appearance, or expectations regarding traditional gender roles. Addressing and challenging these stereotypes is crucial for promoting gender equality and recognizing the individuality and complexity of women's lives and experiences.

Stereotypes have long been woven into the fabric of societal narratives, shaping perceptions and expectations, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of women. These deeply ingrained beliefs often dictate societal norms, defining roles and behaviors that women are expected to adhere to. In this complex interplay of cultural expectations and reality, the role of film emerges as a potent influencer, both reflecting and perpetuating these stereotypes.

In the vast realm of Indian cinema, the portrayal of women has been a subject of critical examination and debate. Stereotypes, deeply ingrained in societal norms, find a prominent place on the cinematic canvas, shaping perceptions and reinforcing traditional gender roles. This article explores the nuanced landscape of women stereotypes portrayed in the film "The Great Indian Kitchen", examining how these portrayals contribute to, challenge, or perpetuate societal expectations. From the submissive wife to the empowered protagonist, the reel representations of women in Indian cinema offer a lens through which we can analyse the evolving dynamics of gender roles and the broader cultural shifts taking place in the subcontinent's film industry. Delving into the nuances of these portrayals unveils not only the complexities within the narratives but also the broader impact they have on shaping perceptions of women in society.

The Great Indian Kitchen, a 2021 Indian Malayalam drama film written and directed by Jeo Baby, delves into the narrative where Actress Nimisha Sajayan portrays a bride endeavoring to conform to the expectations imposed upon her by the Hero Suraj Venjaramood and his family, positioning her in the role of a subservient wife. Notably, Jeo Baby's film stands out by addressing the pervasive nature of patriarchy in our culture with honesty and without resorting to gimmicks. The Great Indian Kitchen provides valuable insights into the responsibilities that an Indian married woman assumes in the kitchen and her daily life.

This article aims to dissect the intricate relationship between women's stereotypes in society and the powerful impact that the cinematic medium has in either challenging or reinforcing these age-old narratives. As a mirror to societal values, films not only reflect prevailing attitudes towards women but also possess

the transformative potential to shape and reshape these narratives, fostering a deeper understanding of the evolving roles and aspirations of women in our ever-changing world.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Seiter (1986) posited that watching a movie dealing with emotionally charged and contentious aspects of daily life can be humorous and enjoyable for women, whereas men might perceive the film as a domestic comedy. According to Pichanot (2021), film is a major sociocultural influence and a potent medium. Today, it is considered one of the most powerful visual communication techniques. The prevalence of prevailing preconceptions in the country is influenced by the portrayal of women on television and in movies, given their significant presence in the population. The article commences by discussing feminist film critique and how Hindi cinema has confined itself to predetermined representations of womanhood, adhering to stereotypes of femininity.

Alola & Alola (2020) demonstrate that gender stereotypes are prevalent in Nollywood films, where women are often depicted as sex objects, helpless, and reliant on men. Conversely, men are typically portrayed as independent, successful, and the primary providers for their families. These films frequently depict men in professional and leadership roles, while women are often shown in traditional and domestic settings. The study's analysis indicates that the most commonly applied stereotypes to women include those of the wife, primary caretaker, dependent, lazy, and secondary to men. In addition to addressing any intercultural biases, this study discusses the pros and cons of how African women are portrayed in these Nigerian films.

Gunjan & SVSU (2014) asserted that reaching a consensus on the portrayal of women in film is challenging. It is incorrect to assume a uniform representation of women on the Indian silver screen, as women in India form a diverse group, encompassing different religions, castes, classes, and socioeconomic statuses, leading varied lives with distinct ambitions and desires. The context in which female characters are positioned in movies must be considered. Women characters should possess the autonomy to negotiate their own position within existing power structures and even challenge or overturn those institutions altogether.

It is time for a redefinition of women as objects of the male gaze in film. The need of the hour is for narratives that centre on the lives and challenges faced by women. Overcoming preconceptions will significantly contribute to advancing the position of women in Indian society. In order for Indian women to achieve their goals, cinema must provide a unique and independent platform for them. Cinema, being a highly impressionistic art form, is crucial as a tool for promoting unconventional thinking and fostering empathy for diverse realities. The sole purpose of cinema is not merely to entertain; it must also initiate efforts to bring about societal change through entertainment. Cinema needs to depart from the "formula film" approach and create more progressive representations of women to contribute to the advancement of modernity as a media product. Such portrayals should be truthful and appropriate, considering the evolving role of women in society.

3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This study explores the deconstruction of women stereotypes as portrayed in the film "The Great Indian Kitchen". Additionally, this study aims to thoroughly

investigate the portrayal of "Visualizing Women Stereotypes" Within the film, recognizing it as a significant contributing factor to the various challenges and obstacles confronted by women in society.

To comprehend how language operates within a social context, discourse analysis delves deeper than examining individual sentences. The methodology employed in this study is discourse analysis, utilizing existing facts and information to critically assess the portrayal of women in film. The films undergo thorough observation, and the representation of women is carefully scrutinized. The deconstruction of stereotypes and the portrayal of females are evident through the discourse present in the films. The deconstructive examination of films adopts a discourse analysis approach. In tracing the research paths on the film "The Great Indian Kitchen," scholars have formulated discourse by analyzing dialogues within the qualitative research framework. According to [Bateman \(2017\)](#), the study of viewers' established ideas regarding how women are portrayed and interact with one another, known as feminist film theory, serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

4. ANALYSIS

In this analysis part, delve into the deconstruction of women stereotypes as portrayed in the film "The Great Indian Kitchen." The focus will be on providing a descriptive examination, aiming to shed light on the ways in which the movie challenges and dismantles prevalent societal perceptions of women. Through a careful exploration of the film's narrative, characters, and thematic elements, we will unveil the nuanced layers that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding gender roles.

4.1. WOMEN AS HOUSEHOLD SERVANT

Household duties refer to the various tasks and responsibilities involved in managing and maintaining a household. These tasks typically include activities related to the upkeep of the home, the well-being of its residents, and the smooth functioning of daily life. Common household duties may include cleaning, cooking, laundry, grocery shopping, organizing, and taking care of children or other family members. The specific duties can vary depending on cultural expectations, family dynamics, and individual preferences.

Food preparation, vessel washing, and cleaning are the main household duties portrayed in this film. In one scene, the hero and the father-in-law chew their meals and leave the leftovers on the table. However, when eating meals from outside the hotel, the hero appropriately disposes of the food waste on the plate. When questioned by his wife about maintaining good table manners outside the home, he responds, "It's my house, and it's my convenience," asserting his right to do as he pleases at home. This leads to an argument, and he pushes her to apologize.

In contrast to previous films, this one swiftly shifts its focus to the women living in this typical Indian household, grappling with a sink piled high with dishes and rotting leftovers daily. The men leisurely watch videos on WhatsApp, leaving food trash on the dining table for the women to clean, while the women toil and strain their backs in the kitchen. Some of the most poignant yet unsettling images in the film are shot in the kitchen, highlighting the harsh conditions in which women prepare meals and serving as a stark reminder of the reality of how patriarchy confines women. [Pudipeddi \(2021\)](#)

"The Great Indian Kitchen" underscores the systemic bias against women in traditional Indian households, revealing how it is practiced and passed down from one generation to the next—a backdrop that resonates with millions of people. In another scene, the father-in-law advises Nimisha against pursuing a job, believing that women are better suited to household work than positions in government. He tells the heroine, "Your mother-in-law is also a postgraduate, but after marriage, she didn't go for a job. That's why our two children are now in good positions. Women have to stay inside the home would look good for the family."

In another scene, the father-in-law says to his daughter-in-law, "Are you washing the clothes using the washing machine? You don't know that the dress will spoil immediately. So, you should at least wash my clothes normally. Don't put them in the washing machine." The father-in-law claims that washing the dress in the washing machine will destroy it, implying his dislike for using a washing machine to clean his clothes.

In another scene, the same father-in-law insists on the daughter-in-law for food preparation. The father-in-law asks, "Did you prepare the rice in the pressure cooker?" The daughter-in-law responds with a "yes." He then replies, "Could you prepare at least the rice on the firewood stove?" In this situation as well, he is kindly requesting her in his talk, but the fact is that he is silently assigning all household duties to her. [Chakrapani \(2021\)](#)

Referring to women as "household servants" is a dilemma in our society can be considered out dated and inappropriate. It perpetuates a traditional and stereotypical view that confines women to specific roles within the home. It's important to recognize and appreciate that women, like men, have diverse skills, aspirations, and contributions that go beyond traditional gender roles.

Additionally, recognizing that household duties should be shared responsibilities among all family members, regardless of gender, promotes a more equitable and inclusive perspective.

4.2. DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse against women in India is a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that transcends socio-economic boundaries. Women across the country face various forms of abuse within the confines of their homes, including physical, emotional, and financial mistreatment. This problem is often exacerbated by cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and a prevailing societal silence around the issue.

Sometimes, women are unaware that their husbands harbour a nasty and disdainful attitude towards them. Husbands relegate their wives to the status of thankless servants by tacitly expecting women to carry out tasks like holding their shoes when they go out. In another scenario, a mother-in-law quickly arrives, providing her husband with toothpaste and a toothbrush. Another instance features a hero father waiting for his wife to bring his shoes. When she does, she carefully places the shoes on his feet. These are just a few examples of the many seemingly meaningless chores that servile women perform. To the uninitiated eye, it appears to be a subtle form of slavery. The movie depicts this specific kind of domestic abuse, which doesn't involve overt cruelty. Without raising a voice or an arm, they damage someone in an equally serious way.

A scene from the movie depicts the wife in the kitchen, visibly overwhelmed. In another scene, she gazes at the kitchen door more intently than usual while standing there. Despite having once been a professional dancer, she is now forced to perform a new kind of dance as a housewife, juggling pots and pans while fixing a broken

drain pipe. The pipe metaphorically represents the crack in her marriage, which, like theirs, falls apart but goes unnoticed by her spouse until the bitter end. In a restaurant scene, the woman is seated next to her husband, enjoying a luxury she rarely experiences at home, highlighting the inequality women face within the household. Her description of the abuse taking place in private draws attention to a common problem exacerbated by the current epidemic. Women's exploitation is not exclusive to the Indian subcontinent.

Heroine delicately addresses her spouse in a particularly heartfelt scene, expressing her desire for more foreplay as they become intimate.

Wife: "Can I ask something? I'm experiencing pain during intercourse, so could you please engage in some foreplay beforehand?"

Husband (Mockingly): "Do you claim to know everything about foreplay? I don't feel inclined to indulge in such things."

Her spouse mocks her knowledge of foreplay, insinuating that it's improper for women to express interest in such matters. (She is requesting foreplay from her husband, and he responds by questioning her understanding of the topic.) The film sheds light on the genuine necessity for sexual education and the patriarchal mind-set prevalent in male perspectives on sexual intimacy.

4.3. CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS DEEPLY ROOTED IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In patriarchal societies, customs and beliefs often run deep, shaping the way individuals perceive and interact with the world. Unfortunately, these deeply ingrained norms can lead to various challenges and problems for women. Patriarchal customs often reinforce traditional gender roles, placing men in positions of power and women in subordinate roles. This inequality can manifest in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and decision-making within families. Deep-rooted beliefs may limit the opportunities available to women. Traditional expectations regarding women's roles may discourage them from pursuing education and careers outside the home, constraining their personal and professional growth. Patriarchal customs may uphold the practice of arranged marriages, where families play a significant role in selecting spouses. This can result in women having limited agency in choosing their life partners and may contribute to issues such as early marriages and lack of compatibility. Traditional beliefs that perpetuate the idea of male dominance can contribute to the acceptance of violence against women. Domestic violence, dowry-related violence, and honor killings are examples of how patriarchal customs can lead to the mistreatment of women. Patriarchal norms often marginalize women in decision-making processes, both within the family and in broader social and political contexts. This lack of agency can impact women's ability to advocate for their needs and contribute to societal progress.

The Film Great Indian Kitchen visualizing the customs and beliefs deep rooted in the patriarchal society.

"In fact, she stops cooking for an entire week when her period begins. Unfortunately, because she is reduced to an untouchable status, it exposes her to a brand-new kind of suffering. Menstruation is a challenging plotline, and we see how the family handles Nimisha at this time. Nobody cares about the women who toil to keep the house clean while the men chat about purity and prepare for a pilgrimage visit to Sabarimala. When the heroine has her periods, the husband asks her 'have you prepared the tea? You shouldn't. He suggests asking Usha for help to prepare

lunch. Another scene unfolds when she gets her period after her husband decides to go on a pilgrimage. An aunt comes to the home and advises her to sleep only on something that can be washed during periods."

"Another scene unfolds when she gets her period after her husband decides to go on a pilgrimage. An aunt comes to the home and advises her to sleep only on something that can be washed during periods. When she touches the holy basil plant Tulasi leaves, her father-in-law asks if she knows she shouldn't touch it during this time. The aunt scolds her when she hangs her innerwear out to dry in the sunlight. The heroine says, 'If it's not dried well, isn't it unhygienic?' In another scene, the hero falls into the mud, and the heroine quickly comes to lift her husband to stand up. However, the hero shouts at her, saying, 'Don't you know you shouldn't touch pilgrims during this time (menstruation period)?' At the same time, in another scene, a child plans to go pilgrimage enters the room and gives her a handful of fruits."

The situation described appears to involve a violation of human rights. Another scene in the movie portrays that, however, the court has declared that menstruation is not impure. The news is broadcasting a scene where a woman, the protagonist, is inside a closed room, sitting on the floor, while her father-in-law watches. The woman throws drained water at her husband and father-in-law, with prayers chanting in the background. Subsequently, she leaves the house, and a group of women is shown protesting to preserve religious customs. Symbolically, the narrative reveals the stance on women's rights, even though some women oppose the efforts to protect those rights.

After their wedding, the couple visited their families as special guests. During the visit, host asked to the couples if they ate beef, and they affirmed that they did. The homemaker then served beef and tapioca to everyone. The couples inquired whether the hosts had started cooking beef at home. In response, the hosts explained, "We used to only have beef when dining out. Now that it's reached the courtyard, it will soon find its way into the kitchen. Since my mother is here, we're not cooking it in the kitchen yet. We are following this tradition because our parents did."

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The Film "Great Indian Kitchen" plays a crucial role in raising awareness about domestic abuse and challenging societal perceptions. Film has the power to shed light on the harsh realities faced by women, providing a platform to initiate conversations that might otherwise be swept under the rug. By depicting authentic portrayals of domestic abuse, films can serve as a mirror reflecting the harsh realities that many women endure. Through compelling narratives, films can evoke empathy, prompting audiences to confront the gravity of the issue and encouraging dialogue. Additionally, they can contribute to de-stigmatizing the experience of survivors and dispelling harmful myths surrounding domestic abuse.

The director, Jeo Baby, draws attention to this social evil that pervades our cultures and asserts that it amounts to a violation of human rights. The background music in the film blends with viral social media articles and news commentary, emphasizing how a woman's menstrual cycle is exploited to body-shame her and prevent her from entering temples such as the Ayyappa temple in Sabarimala. Although "The Great Indian Kitchen" appears to be a simple tale, it delivers a strong message on gender inequality. Gender bias, backward behaviour, and other social evils have persisted for ages, and each new generation works to further entrench

them. Finally, it deconstructs the old stereotypes to break free from that chain. In addition to skillfully capturing these issues, the movie also makes a bold suggestion on how to terminate the cycle of intolerance and start a new one that relies on a woman's independence and self-worth.

Films can serve as catalysts for change by inspiring collective action, fostering community support, and encouraging victims to speak out. The role of filmmakers, therefore, extends beyond entertainment to social responsibility. By addressing domestic abuse in their work, filmmakers have the potential to influence public opinion, challenge ingrained attitudes, and contribute to the larger movement towards creating a society that condemns violence and supports survivors. Through thoughtful storytelling, films can become powerful tools for education, advocacy, and ultimately, societal transformation regarding the issue of domestic abuse against women in India.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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