Imaging Muslim Women and Identity Formation Through Tamil Cinema in South India

Media

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ABSTRACT   *Tamil movies are mostly created from men's perspective. The images of women which are shown are mentioned to have sociological or semiotic or stereotype style. In such circumstances when muslim females are projected, of social standing particularly representing first as women and secondly signify themselves as a member from socially excluded groups. Furthermore these portrayals of images were broken down by Tamil movies like Bombay (1995), Pokkisham (2009) and Mella thiranthathu Kathavu(1986). In these films female central characters have the benefit of key positions and check out to dislocate themselves out of social environmental forces that are controlled by men. In this context, this paper intends to examine and summarize the analysis of three Tamil movies with regard to Muslim women and a way of depict their characters and their social status. Further for this paper analyst acquaint Code sheet with break down from the film for examining the stereotype attributes of Muslim women in the motion pictures.*

Introduction:

Cinema is a fascinating subject, and become part of life of Indians. Tamil Cinema, centered in Tamil Nadu, popularly known as Kollywood , considered to be as regional cinema . it has gained much appreciation in the recent days because people have started to give much importance than before because of the unusual characteristics that people possess. Mass media has changed and shaped individuals attitudes in our existing society for they have started to dictate all process of thinking, right from the fashion to behavior that people follow. The Visuals in the cinema aid the viewers to enter into a world of their own. The rate of retention, absorption, concentration is much higher as they get engrossed into the story and pose to become as one of the characters of the story.

Minorities also play an essential part in our Indian society. A society by itself cannot function on its own; therefore it is only through the coordinated effort of every individual from various societies that help India as nation to function. In India majority of the people belong to Hinduism, apart from Islam constitutes the second largest religion (13 Percent). Other native religions such as Buddism, Jainism and Sikkism together constitute less than three percent and Christianity constitutes about two percent. When it comes to Tamil Cinema, Many minorities are depicted. Taking Muslim women into consideration in Indian cinema, are depicted as kohl – lined eyes (Gopal Krushna Sahli & Sameera, 2010) wearing ghagras who sulk and sob. Muslim community renders meritorious services for the development and opulence of a country and is also well-known in the field of teaching, civil servants, journalists and businessmen. This study is focused on the Muslim minority leading to understanding of how Muslim women in the community are stereotyped in Tamil cinema.

Status of Muslim women in India:

The Muslim community was subject to pressures like any other different Groups in India but their historical dominant role created their state of affairs distinctive in spite of being the minority group. The impact of western liberalizations has left a big question about the position of women among the educated Muslims, which is of repeated controversy. Over the years there is an assumed hyperbolic significance associated with the rights of girls. The entire life time of a female is supervised in detail in Islam in addition to its other contributes like "respecting the foster mother, having legal rights to property which also helps in the right to say divorce on safe grounds, permission to hold any post, remarriage etc. Women do not appear to be treated badly by Islam; in actual apply, the tendency appears to be different where the woman have an inferior standing.

Asghar Ali Engineer Pointed out Mainstream weekly, 2013 that, it is a general feeling that the minorities are either the 'fundamentalists' or the 'fanatics' among the entire community since it is they who are represented often in the society. The media frames have never brought to notice any of the non secular traditions or legal systems in Islam which treat women equally.

According to the Sachar Committee report , the Muslim community has the poorest literate acquisition rate within the country. The inferiority of women denies them access to resources, education, and even to health facilities. They are being exploited by the males and additionally the society. In general, women are the most affected sections of our society. Moreover Muslim women suffer further more due to the tradition and nature for Islam which does not even give them an opportunity to basic education and it is almost made inaccessible for them.

Stereotypes of Muslim Women in Indian Cinema

Identity may be a crucial issue for Muslim females as they are frail in power ratio. However it isn't the power quantitative relation solely in fact it's can be applied in every aspect of life, it may be domestic or, social or professional. Muslim women are generally considered as the cultural and moral carriers of their community thought they are not considered as guardians of it. Thus when we watch a Muslim woman in a movie, they are marginalized twice. First as a female and second as a representative of a minority community. This paper is an attempt to study this perspective through Hindi movies that's that the foremost powerful and cogent medium to express in India. On viewing Indian Hindi movies or the foremost stream cinema right from Nineteen Eighties until recently, the audiences observe that Muslim women are stereotyped. They are proprietary to be mothers, devoted daughters, dedicated or compliant wives who do not question the authority of their male counterparts. None can stop viewing this medium because it has created a huge impact among Indians.

Most of those events like Partition, Mumbai Communal Riots, Kargil war, Bomb blasts Gujarat Communal Riots and many additional have created an opponent like position in the minds of individuals have been depicted in Indian Cinema in moving image, documentary or a commercial motion picture. All those visual texts are either critically ac-

claimed, or box office hits, or usually receive a yellow card for the text they project from the censorship. They have always special to Indian audience as well as others. The reason behind this approach of the audience is may be because these films take their stories from the truth that has happened somewhere in someone's life which is why cinematography too becomes vital in such depiction of muslims and other minority groups.

Muslim women in Tamil Cinema
The Tamil movies of Nineties show marked departure from its predecessors. It was the time once Hindu nationalism enjoyed a hegemonic standing till the demolition of Babri Masjid of worship in 1993. Muslim community rather than being plus or a crucial constituent of the country was not taken into thought. Hindutva ideas and Indian society approach were reflected in the cinema. The new problems which Tamil movies started addressing were riots and terrorist act. The largest part of common stereotype is the Love interest. The 'heroine' is almost continually delineate because of the Hero's love interest and has little else to do in the image show apart from satisfy the hero together with her beauty and romance. This stereotype is so common that it's not questioned.

Objectives:
The main objectives of the study are

• To Examine how Muslim women are stereotyped in Tamil films
• To determine whether the stereotype of Muslim women signifies in Tamil cinema as lower in Social status.
• To analyze whether Muslim Women are portrayed as good looking girl friends of boys of other Castes or Religions

Analysis of the film
The three films were chosen for analyzing the three different women characters played in the using the coding sheets. This paper is primarily a qualitative analysis of the roles given to Muslim women in Tamil cinema, and undertakes to understand the operational definition of the idiom and to check for the conformation of the given functions to the portrayal of Muslim women in Tamil cinema. The largest part of common stereotype is the Love interest.

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Content analysis is used as a method to analyze the films chosen from three different decades.

The stories of the films are purely based on the content outline Hindu Male loves Muslim Female.

Method
Content analysis is used as a method to analyze the films chosen from three different decades. Two coders, from that one male and one female, both 25 years of age viewed the entire film and coded the film by observing the actresses - their traits, characteristics highlighted, social status , interaction with other characters etc.. Role of Noorjahan in Mella thiranthathu kadhavu (MTK) played by Amala (leading actress in 1980's phase), was excellent in performance maintaining the chastity in the film. Likewise in the film Bombay, block buster hit released in 1995, Role of Shaira banu was well played by the Bollywood actress Manisha

Koirala. In this film a Muslim women has been designated as a decision maker with authorities to face and manage all controversies and problems as consequence of marrying Hindu Man. The film Pokkisham (2009) also has same story outline and is romantic melodrama. Here the Roles of Nadira played by the actress Padmalakshmi having a gorgeous look gives an extra ordinary performance in the film, depicting her interest in Tamil literature. This study can be replicated and expanded quantitatively. According to sociologist Eoin Devereux (Stewart, Kowaltzke, & Stewart, 2007) identified codes and conventions is one of way of analyzing representation in films. This can be understood by evaluating the technical and symbolic codes that are to communicate the content. For example, the representation of Muslim women in the 'girl power' or glamour occurrence of the early 80's till 2000's can be analyzed by looking at the symbolic codes of costume and character traits.

Coding functions
1. Categorization to do the content analysis, the researchers used 10 codes:
2. Subordinate role function -
3. Alternative role function
4. Family ahead of self
5. Social status
6. Purity/chastity
7. Religious practices
8. Symbolism of virtue (Presence on screen)
9. Objectification
10. Career Orientation
11. None of these

The researchers divided angle into two categories; yes or no. If the content of the whole scene reflected positive angle, it was coded as yes while the negative slant was coded as no .All the scenes of the movies were taken as coding units for identifying the slant. There were three main female roles in the three hit films, each actress playing the female lead opposite the three male lead. All scenes in which either of them and / or both of them appeared were coded as per the categories by two coders. The three female roles were coded separately. The following tables are the individual coding sheets of the two coders followed by the consolidated coding sheet. The coders simply had to answer Y for yes and N for no, for every given characteristic trait. If they found that trait to be present in the character for a scene, they would have answered yes (Y) and if not, they would have answered No (N).The following pages have the tables, which were the coding sheets of the two coders.

Content Analysis of the three Tamil Movies:
Mella thirandhathu kadhavu (1986)
The genre of this film is melodrama romantic love story. A good-looking village girl (Tulasi) was innocent in character. One day she receives a letter from her cousin (Subramani). She is very excited, and eager to meet him. Subramani left village with their family when he was in childhood. Subramani visits village for his research work in folk songs. Tulasi helps Subramani for his research work and falls in love with him. Suddenly Tulasi's father passes away due to heart attack. Tulasi's father asks Subramani to marry tulasi on his death bed. After the death of Tulasi's father subramani leaves the village denying to marry Tulasi . After her mother's demise Tulasi comes to her Uncle's house and tries to explore Subramani's denial that leads to flashback. Subramani was seen to have fallen in love with gorgeous Noorjahan portrayed as a student and good singer in Musical class. Since Noor Jahan used to come to the music college with a veil was interested to see her face. One day when the Noorjahan and Subramani planned to meet,

Noorjahan dies after she steps into quick sand and Subramani cant Rescue from that hazardous quick sand. After listening the flash back Tulasi decides to die for the love of Subramani in the same quick sand where Noorjahan died . Subramani understand her love, for him and save her from the danger. Finally Tulasi marries her beloved cousin Subramani is the story.

Bombay (1995)

Many movies were created on the problems related to Hindu-Muslim marriages / relations Bombay, released in 1995, directed by a South Indian director Maniratnam, tried for the first time to interpret the advanced relation between Hindus and Muslims by hitting focus on feminine protagonist. The picture is jam-packed with multiple meanings. Slackly the film show is predicated on the communal riots that erupted after the demolition of Babri Masjid (a 16th century masjid at Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh purported to be designed on the birthplace of Lord Rama) in 1993 that was destroyed by Hindu extremists. But the most concern of the picture show is to depict religious construction of Muslim girls that is that the central a part of her identity. The image is unique too as for the first time on the silver screen the marriage of a Hindu boy and a Muslim woman is shown (see Fig no. 1). One vital factor is to notice that the most objections of the individuals from each community, i.e., Hindus and Muslims, were that they weren't able to settle for wedding of a Hindu boy with a Muslim woman or vice-versa. This created the film more controversial. Though the film starts with the identity of a Muslim girl who, despite all prejudices of her father and community, dares to marry a Hindu boy it winds up giving a message of national unity. Through this the director tries to depict the quality of faith on femininity. He also discusses the problem of veil in Muslims.

Pokkisham (2009)

The film Pokkisham is an emotional love between Nadira , a Muslim girl introduced as a literature student, and Lenin, a Hindu boy, introduced as a marine engineer working in Calcutta in 1970s. The literature introduction blossoms into love in the 1970s when people relied only on letters for communication. Mahesh, son of Lenin searching of some materials finds his father's treasures (love letters of his father). The story begins with flash back of his father (Lenin) , where he meets Nadira at the hospital where his father is admitted. Soon the ultra-orthodox Muslim girl and the Hindu boy are attracted towards each other as they discuss poetry. Lenin proposed to marry Nadira and goes to her house for marriage proposal. Family denies the proposal because of religious reasons and the whole family leaves the native .After reading his late father's romantic memoirs, Mahesh takes up the task of tracking down Nadhira. His mission is to give the love letters written by his dad which were not posted. On having read the letters Nadira is shown talking to her herself as well as to Lenin saying that she showed her anguish by punishing her father by denying to marry anyone. She is shown to currently live with her sister and her lovable family submitting her apologies to the Lenin who was no more. Her promises to Lenin that she will join him soon and never separate remaining the ending note of the film.

Result & Discussions:

In Table 1, the three films, portrays Muslim women character as girl friends of Hindu boys in the three films have been given. The table describes the no. of scenes appeared by Muslim Women personality played in the film and this percentage of role played in the totality of the film. In these films, role of Muslim women is inadequate and she has been depicted as a good looking lover / wife of the

protagonist. The stereotypes of Muslim women in the film and her identity in society are projected from the director's point of view .

Figure No.1 (Scene From the Film *'Bombay'* **directed by**

Mani Ratnam)

Table 1: Percentage of Muslim women character appeared below mentioned movies:

Name of Film	Name of character	Total scene of the film	No. of scene played by character	Percentage
Mella thiranthathu kadhavu (1986)	Noorjahan	95	33	34%
Bombay (1995)	Shaira banu	115	44	38%
Pokkisham (2001)	Nadira	91	23	25%

- Over all three films were analyzed on the basis of 10 categories with classified skews. Distribution of skews in these three movies by the two coders are given below :
- From the total numbers with percentages of slants in different categories are presented.
- Subordinate role of women function (Represents lead actress role in relation to male lead Eg. Protagonist Mother / Wife / Girl friend) in the all three films shows the Favorable slant Y with result of 100% in MTK and Bombay compare to Pokkisham is 82%.
- There is no Alternative role function (signify as vamp / night club dancer/ prostitute women) of Muslim women in all three films is 0%.
- Family ahead of self code function (Signifies compromises for the sake of family / sacrifice for the sake of family social status) Muslim women 9 % in MTK, 30% in Pokkisham Movie and finally in Bombay as 34%.
- Home maker function (Home maker/ lives in joint family/) representation in bombay is 59% whereas in MTK is 9% and 100% in Pokkisham film
- Chastity factor reveals customs and values in marriage, sexual purity and religion rituals which stereotypical traits in Bombay is around 59%, MTK and Pokkisham is 100% signifies the good traits of Muslim Women in the films.
- Pious defines the religious practices & offering prayers in scenes is 6% in Bombay Film, 0 % in MTK and 22 % in Pokkisham.
- Symbolism of Virtue represents in film following the values of women in society is depicted 100% in all the three movies.
- Educational status of Muslim Women in 18% shown in Bombay, in MTK 34% portrayed as student in the

film and 61% in Pokkisham is more compare to other two films.

- Objectification represents costume and framed in sensuous way of Muslim women 30% in Bombay, 30 % in film Mella thiranthathu kadavu , and finally 0% in the pokkisham.
- None of these – athesist / agnostic / rebellious/ other roles in which women not conform to any of the above mentioned stereotypical categories, 0% in all the three movies.

These Films depicts the Representation of Muslim women and their identity. The analysis of Movies shows the socio –economic positions of Muslim women's are lower in status. Even through the film directors are from different community, portrayed Muslim culture in their view point in all the three movies. Educational status of Muslim women is shown slightly higher in *Pokkisham* movie than the other two films. In the Film Bombay, Muslim women from rural background portrays as Home Maker of her family and as submissive to her husband, as she is from an orthodox family. In the film Mella Thiranthathu Kadhavu, the role of Noorjahan, portrays as a Muslim girl friend to her Hindu male boy. Added to that she had shown as a good singer and interest in music, this was exposing the talent of a Muslim girl (See Fig No.2).

Figure .No :2(Scene from the Film: *Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu* **) directed by R.Sunderrajan**

Pokkisham was a periodic film, which is released in the year 2009. This film was totally concentrates on the periodic elements which is available during 1970's. Cheran, who is the director of the film , majorly concentrate on the wardrobe of Muslims and their practices. The Periodic segment of the film reveals the style, language and way of life of Tamil Muslims who live in a village near Nagapattinam zone. The role of Nadira , in the film Pokkisham, portrayed as good and knowledgeable person in Tamil Literature.

Figure No.3 : Scene from the Film: *Pokkisham* **directed by Cheran**

She also exposed herself as interest in studies and as well as submissive in nature (See fig: no.3). Analysis of all the three films showed Muslim women in different angle and is depicted as a girlfriend or wife of Hindu Male. From the previous studies, a few studies have specified the Symbol-

ic interactionism, which explains that humans give meaning to each other's communications. Within the context of intercultural communication, this means that once one cultural group "names" another cultural group, that group becomes a social object, the meaning of which is constructed symbolically and interactively. The Film represents the Muslim Women with their Islamic practices and their wardrobe based director's view point. The characteristics of Muslim Women and Islamic practices is portrayed as they are from the South Indian Society (Tamil Nadu).

Conclusion

From the analysis of the movies, the stereotype of Muslim women and her identity in community is depicted as substandard in the Indian society. In the early 80's, the film *MTK* portrayed the Muslim women only for chastity and as a good looking women with the religious constraints. In this film the character is portrayed as educated Muslim women studying in Music College. Whereas in the film *Bombay* which was released in the 90's, education and career interest of women are shown very less and portrayed Muslim women belong to middle class family with the religious constraints. In this study it has been found that, the three films portrayed Muslim women as modestly with religious code wearing a veil to cover the face. In all the movies women were not treated as an intellectual character doing social reforms. Since, the medium is male dominated the basic projection of female role did not center on the demand for space, identity and recognition.

The two main reasons behind these attributes are profitability and politics of ideology. The film makers are also influenced by modern day settings. The earlier decades portrayed Muslims as feudal elites and aristocracy. Then the later decades showed them as middle class or Muslim social which were of interest to the common men. Radical changes happened in the past two decades of the political scenario in the shadow of hindutva nationalism experience. Cinema reflected the contemporary reality. One might argue that it is just an audio visual narrative and it can also be felt that it is stereotyped through partition of Pakistan of Muslim identity.

Through the Tamil cinema, constructing image of Muslim women can bring change in the community. If we compare Muslim woman participation in education and Working in various fields before three decade it is comparatively high. Film industry in India is a very powerful medium to build public opinion or reshape the views on certain social issues. Indian movies have portrayed Muslims negatively more after 9/11 incident. In Indian Cinema, Muslims are portrayed as terrorists, disloyal to society or to nation and as criminals. This becomes a change the attitude of every Indian in the nation. Mostly the Muslim Men are depicted as Criminals, fanatic, and terrorist in the Indian film after 1990's era. Even Tamil Movies had changed the concept of essaying Muslims characters from supporting actor of protagonist to Villains, then underground gang leaders doing illegal business and presently changed as terrorist. This was not seen three decades before. The representation of Muslim women is quite different in Tamil movies and they showed as maintaining chastity, dressed up in modesty way with religious constraints. The status of Muslim women under the community is constructed as virtuous women, maintain with religious practices, inferior in career orientation and lower in education level. So, Tamil cinema has to construct the Muslim women in high ranking in education and label as successful women in career life.

There seems to be an exaggerated perception which has

been the mainstream academics of media projections of Muslim women as educationally backward and their being non responsive to social change etc. More research has to be done in this area with more importance to the rapid socio economic and political change and the impact of this on women.

The challenge of a researcher is to simultaneously see the problem of Muslim women with the rest of women from other community and their situation. This also calls for the historical and political understanding of the context and the social frame within which Muslim women are place. Tamil cinema has to construct the Muslim women in high ranking in education and label as successful women in career life. The approach is to recommend the Indian cinema to expose role of Muslim women not be used as good looking female in the films rather she should be stereotyped as a successful , ambitious , educated women.

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