



GENDER AND FILM: REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN INDIAN REGIONAL SPORTS FILMS

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Abstract

Indian film industry is one of the largest cinema hubs in the world and the Indian film stars are renowned for the astounding performances in the Indian films and the foreign films. Apart from the dominated Bollywood films there are many regional language films also across the country such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi etc. Tamil film industry centred at Chennai, Tamil Nadu is India's second largest film industry in terms of films produced and distributed.

There are many films in Tamil industry portrayed men as sportspersons and characters, but only a few movies represented women as sports players. The present study focuses on the in-depth analysis of the representation of women in Tamil sports films and how the so-called Kollywood industry constructs women sports characters. The study also explores the representation of gender in films and women empowerment.

The study titled "Gender and Film: Representation of Gender in Indian Regional Sports Films" aims how gender and women are portrayed in Tamil sports films and how they act and survive the social stigma and stereotypes and succeed their goal. Both films discuss the plights and problems facing women sports players while succeeding their goal and pointing fingers towards the representation of women in society. Mixed methodology is used for the study. Qualitative scene by scene analysis and quantitative content analysis with coding is applied. Structuralist Film Theory and Feminist Film Theory were used for the theoretical framework.

Key words: *Gender, Film, Indian, Women, Representation*



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1. Introduction

Gender representation in popular films is also one of the main concern in the present scenario. It is a fact is that women characters in popular films are underrepresented. Women characters lack screen space and time. At the same time, many women-oriented plots and women-centric films are releasing and they discuss gender issues and social issues.

If women need to get a place in sports, what she has to overcome is not challenges and competitions from the ground, first, she has to clear the trials from her family and society. The social taboo on women in participation in sports is still there in many parts of the country. And if she succeeds in the sports, the next steps maybe they have to face is gender inequalities and discriminations in the name of caste, creed and sex.



The Tamil film industry is one of the most influential film industries in India. Each year plentiful movies are beholding the silver screen. Movies with varied genres and out of the box thoughts are the main highlights of the Tamil film industry. The incredible contributions from scriptwriters and thespians are also flawless.

When it comes to representation of women in sports films, the input from the Tamil industry is only a few which can be counted in fingers. There are several films which women are portrayed in crucial and lead roles. But, in the case of sports movies, women representation is falling. *Irudhi Suttru* (2016) starring Ritika Singh and *Kanaa* (2018) starring Aiswarya Rajesh are the only films which portrayed women as sportspersons. After the success of these movies, Vijay's *Bigil* (2019) also got a wide appreciation for its content in women representation and women empowerment.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- a) To explore the gender representation and women empowerment in Tamil sports films.
- b) To compare the characterization of two sports women characters in the sample films.
- c) To identify the nature of representation of problems faced by sports women in their daily life.

2. Review of Literature

Patowary (2014), explains that the on-going trend in Indian Media to portray women as busy and concerned with beautifying herself, choosing make-up, new fashions, jewellery, cosmetics, worried about the good figure and skin colour, proud of advertising and selling latest products. Usually, she is shown to accompany her husband like a shadow or as a decorative piece.

Peter (2018), explains many Tamil movies are coming out from stereotypical representations and giving enough screen spaces and characters to women thespians. Portraying women as significant characters, giving them voices and making them acclimate for a better charisma are witnessing in many recent movies is a good sign. When coming to the south Indian cinema, mainly in the Tamil film industry they have witnessed many women-centric characters in the old days, given birth by the virtuous writers and directors.

Vilsaraj (2019), explains the relationship between the representation of sportswomen and Indian cinema. Indian cinema industry popularly known as Bollywood always stands with its unique style of representation of varied themes. Many movies discuss the concerns of the public and the truth of common people. The Indian women we can in sports are the one who came across many barriers, family, society, stereotypes, discrimination, inequality etc. but, now they are the heroes of the country and people are ready to cheer up for them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method of Study

The study deals with the application of mixed methodology. Qualitative scene by scene analysis and quantitative content analysis used in the selected Tamil sports films to study the representation of women characters in the films. The researcher watched the two sample films *Irudhi Suttru* and *Kanaa* and analysed the visual and the verbal subjects in the film. The researcher wants to know the representation and social relevance and picture of women portrayed in two Tamil sports films and how gender plays an important role in the minds of society.

3.2 Scene by Scene Analysis

Qualitative approach Scene by Scene analysis is used for the data analysis. Scene by scene analysis is breaking down the scene and uncovering the writer's intention and critically examining each and every verbal and visual



aspect of the scene.

The researcher has watched the two films *Irudhi Suttru* and *Kanaa* and selected 20 scenes from each film which deeply discusses the representation of women in sports, women empowerment in the sample films, their personal life, problems and dilemma's, society's point of view and the discrimination and challenges they face throughout their journey.

3.3 Content Analysis

The research uses content analysis as the sole form of analysis to compare the content in the selected films. The researcher has, first of all, selected the Tamil sports films and then sorted the women lead character films and then, women Tamil sports films. Then applied the quantitative content analysis formulae into this. Scene by scene analysis is used for the data analysis and coding sheet is also used for perceiving the representation of these women lead characters.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Structuralist Film Theory

Structuralist film theory emphasizes how films convey meaning through the use of codes and conventions such as words, sentences, grammar, narratives etc. Structuralist film theory helps to enrich the minds of the audience with critically reviewing each and every scene of the films. Structuralist film theory states perceiving film is all about not just through his or her eyes but also through his or her perusing mind and human understanding.

4.2 Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory generally is about theoretical film criticism that arises from feminist politics and theories governed by the second wave feminism rooted from sociological theories concentrated on the how the public scrutinizes how women deliver the attitudes, scenarios, and characters given to them to portray in a particular film in a television or cinema screens.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretations

5.1 Analysis of 'Ezhil Madhi' using Feminist Film Theory

Ezhil Madhi is the lead sports woman character in the film *Irudhi Suttru*. The characterization of Madhi is based in a slum in Chennai. Madhi's characterization is portrayed as a bold and aggressive girl who is raw, eager and do not afraid of anyone or anything in the world.

The analysis of the characterization of Madhi is to identify the gendered norms in its construction at different levels. Madhi have sincere love and responsibility towards her beloved. When her sister Lux was cheated and lost in a boxing match, Madhi couldn't control herself and she angrily beat the judges. Here the girl breaks the notions of stereotypes and tells us that women can also speak in the public against injustice and inequality.

Coach Prabhu touches Madhi during the training session without her permission. When she reacted he said: "I am not interested in your body". At the same fraction of second, he bravely replies that you are not getting it even if you crawl. Prabhu is her coach, but for Madhi he is a stranger and she doesn't let anyone touch her body without her permission. The bold character in herself is ready to open her mouth against the immoral preaches. Who, what, or where it doesn't a matter for her.

Madhi is a bold and aggressive girl but she is very innocent also. She didn't have a fond of hiding things. She expresses her feelings directly. Women players facing sexual harassment is a matter of concern in sports. When the



new coach is about to misbehave Madhi in the train, she reacted wildly and punches him.

Madhi is a slum girl fishmonger from Chennai. A fisherwoman to fight with a world champion is a newsworthy item for media's to celebrate. The fishmonger represents the women in the country and the whole country is praying for the win of the fishmonger. It seriously talks about the women empowerment and if a fishmonger can fight in the boxing ring, it can inspire and motivate many women in the country who have uttermost love and passion towards sports.

5.2 Analysis of 'Kousalya Murugesan' using Feminist Film Theory

The characterization of Kousalya is based in a rural village in Tamil Nadu. Kousalya lives with her cricket lunatic father and big-headed adoring mother. Kousalya is born and brought up in the rural village and the characterization of Kousalya is a very typical traditional and conventional village girl. The stereotypes, norms and culture of the village have made her a simple calm and a quite orthodox girl.

Kousalya's village is a rural island and when Kousalya wanted to play cricket no one couldn't accept that. First, her school PE teacher told her "Cricket is a boys' game. It's not for girls. The true side of gender inequality and gender discrimination has happened there. The character of Kousalya faced many objections and demurrals from her mother and the gender-stereotyped society.

Once Kousalya went for playing cricket even after attaining puberty against her mother's wish. Typical worried orthodox mother storms into the cricket ground and beats Kousalya with a bamboo broom by telling "You wretched girl! You have the gall to disobey me and play cricket with these boys? I'll break your limbs and use them as fire-wood. How dare you".

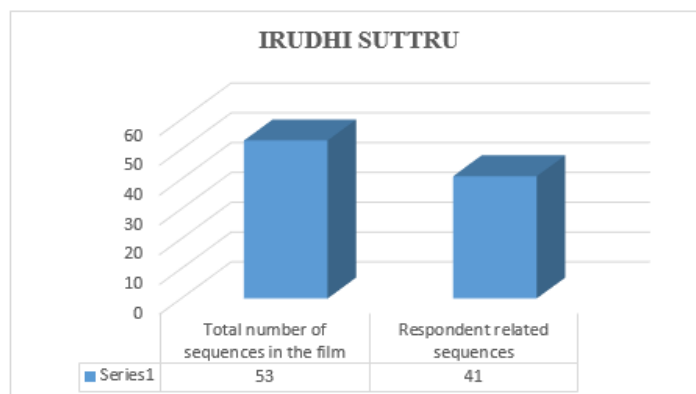
Whenever the society's fingers pointed against Kousalya she couldn't react anything because she was silent and she was fearful because she was brought up in that manner. The social construction of the girl played an important factor in her characterization.

When Kousalya moved to national camp for training the retired chief selected motivated women players to work hard and chase their dreams. The players need to make proud of them and their family. He messages about the women empowerment can be done through sports also. Women are not the one who seals in the kitchens and corridors unless they also have the right dream beyond the social milieu.

5.3 CODING

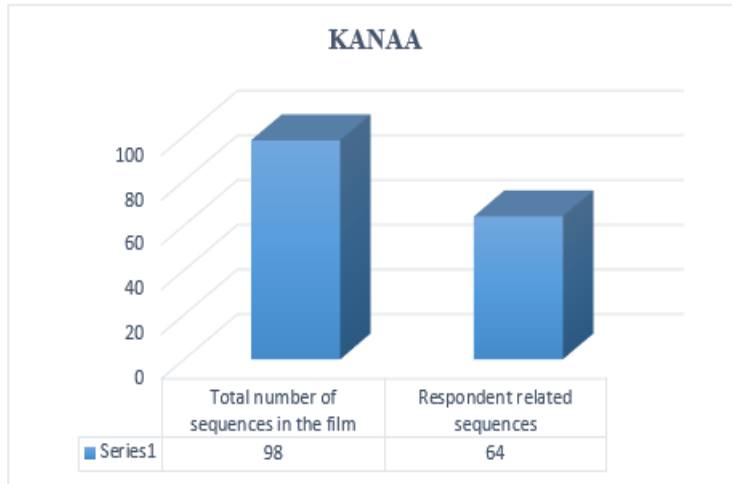
Comparative Analysis

Quantitative content analysis towards comparison of representation of sports women characters in the sample films.

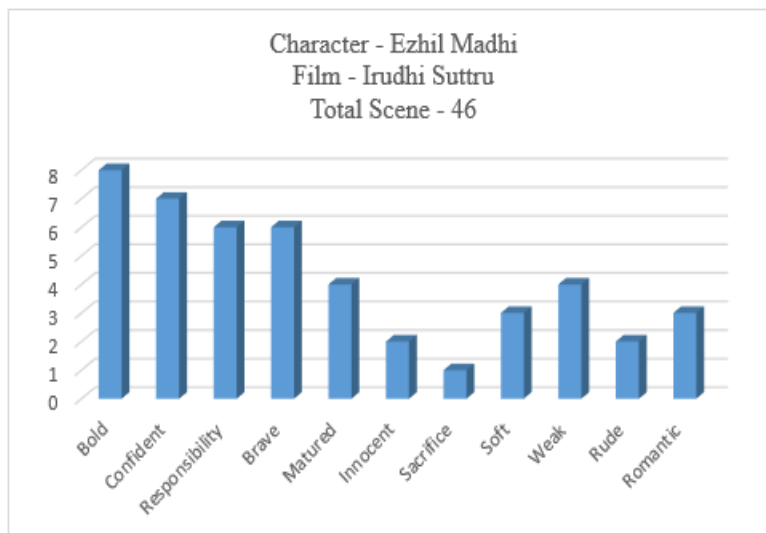




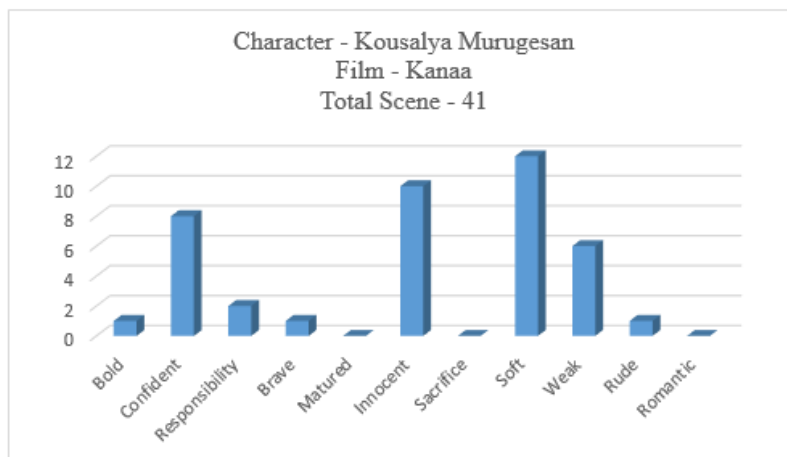
Graph 1. Nature of presence of the lead character in the film. *Irudhi Suttru*



Graph 2. Nature of presence of the lead character in the film. *Kanaa*

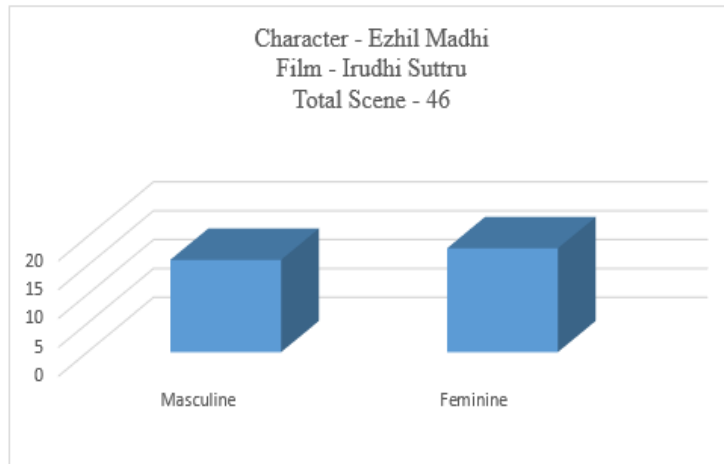


Graph 3. Nature of Characterization of 'Ezhil Madhi'

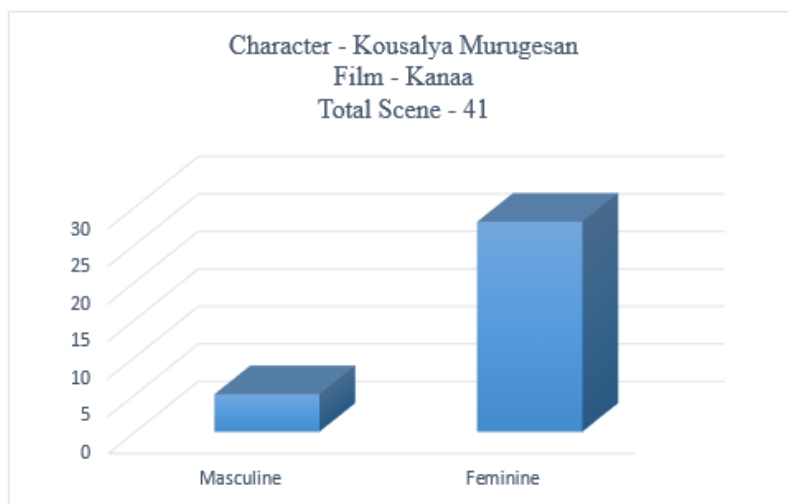




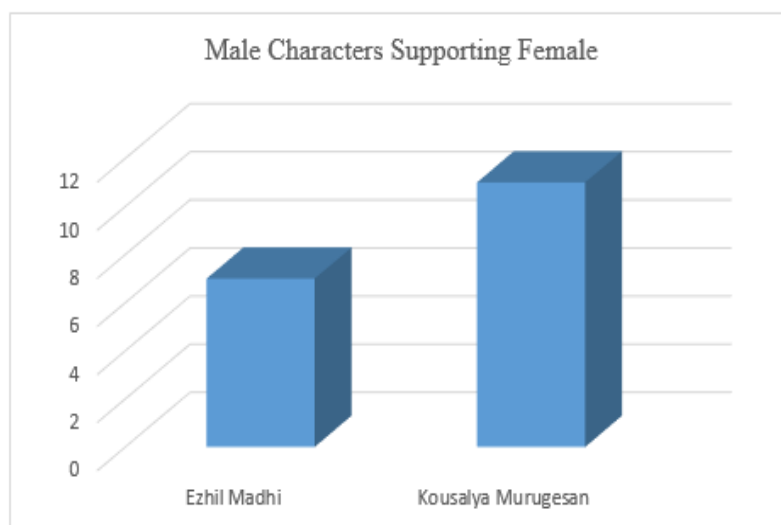
Graph 4. Nature of Characterization of ‘Kousalya Murugesan’



Graph 5. Assertive Vs Submissiveness of the character ‘Ezhil Madhi’

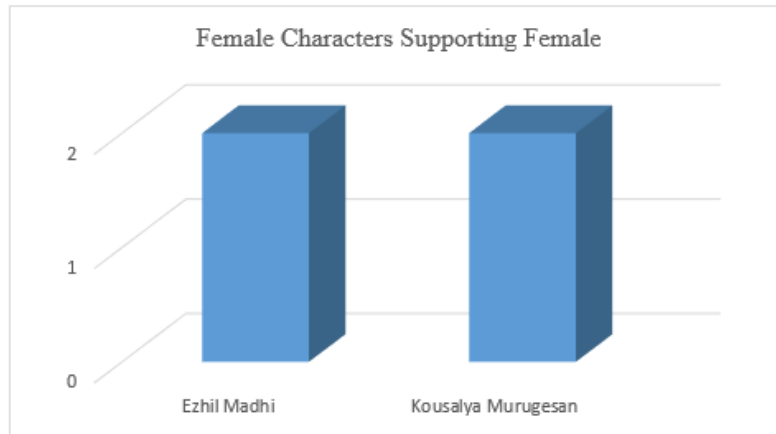


Graph 6. Assertive Vs Submissiveness of the character ‘Kousalya Murugesan’





Graph 7. Male Characters Supporting and Encouraging Female Character



Graph 8. Female Characters Supporting and Encouraging Female Character

6. Findings

a) Breaking stereotypes – ‘Sports’ – as a domain for women also

In *Irudhi Suttru*, Madhi is an underdog with an amazing talent for sports. She never practised boxing or never trained under any coach. But, she worships Mohammed Ali and has extreme talent in boxing. And the coach found the talent in her and trains her to become a good boxer.

For the traditional villagers, a girl playing sports is against the norms of the society. The minds of the villagers are women are only considered fit to cook and work in the fields and here the young girl Kousalya is breaking the glass ceiling by entering a predominantly male sport. She was not ready to put down her passion and she worked hard and overcome the challenges and barriers.

Madhi and Kousalya are the true inspiration and motivation for many women in our society. Both characters were born in a poor middle class family lived ordinary life but, their strong passion towards sports overwhelms the challenges and problems in their journey.

b) Representation of Gender Inequality

In sports, participation of women is considering as the opposite role that the society has prescribed for them. So, gender inequality is a part of discrimination against women. Traditionally women are considered to weaken sex in the society. In both films the characters facing many discriminations and gender inequalities. In *Irudhi Suttru*, Madhi faces sexual offers from the head of boxing academy. And for him, the women sports characters are always an object for the academy’s sexual interests. It happened because she is the weaker sex in society.

In *Kanaa*, everywhere Kousalya faces gender inequality. When she plays cricket, the whole village was against her because they believe cricket is a men’s game and women are another genders of the society and they are not supposed to play the another gender’s game. Not only from society, from her family itself, had she faced gender issues. And family is a piece of society.

c) Breaking Gender Stereotypes

The study finds that the construction of the two women characters are towards breaking the gender stereotypes. Firstly, the women characters are portrayed less stereotypical and given much characterization in both films. Ezhil Madhi and Kousalya are from different parts of Tamil Nadu, but their background is the same. Both of



them are from the rural areas and of course the lower sections of the society. They have absolutely nothing in their hand, but their passion and goal made them different from others.

In Kousalya's situation, her biggest challenge was her society. She is from a stereotyped rural village. And they have certain norms and practices. Women playing cricket with sports was criminality among the villager's minds. Many villagers opposed her playing cricket. Their lifestyle acts were preaching them to follow their traditions and stereotypes.

d) Focus on Women Empowerment

The study finds that both films highly promote women empowerment. If its Madhi or Kousalya, they both were losers and coming from the lowers sections of the society. They have nothing in their hand. Only passion and commitment was they had, and their hard work and obligations take them to success.

In *Irudhi Suttru*, the slum girl won the boxing championship and she represented the women in our country. And the whole country is praying for the win of the fishmonger. It seriously talks about the women empowerment and if a fishmonger can fight in the boxing ring, it can inspire and motivate many women in the country who have uttermost love and passion towards sports.

In *Kanaa*, Kousalya wins the match and she became the women of the match, after that her emotional speech told about the problems and challenges faced by her. In the family and society, she faced many problems, but she is not ready to give up and work hard and even hard. The village girl has finally trodden everyone and everything.

7. Conclusion

Mostly women sports players from rural society are facing several problems. The norms and practices, stereotypes and family and society's discrimination etc. and the stories of women sports players will be truly an inspiration for the women in the rural area who have a strong passion towards sports and come forward for attaining their dream. These films reflects the theme of women empowerment and can witness a huge change in the number of women players who take up sports as their career.

Both Madhi and Kousalya can inspire and motivate the coming generation. Both characters faced many problems and challenges with different backgrounds. But, they were able to challenge them. Or they had to overcome them. Because they wanted to do many things and make happy many faces. Their struggles are real inspiration for the women in a rural area because many women sports players have strong love and passion for sports, but, the family and society are the problems here. Their stereotyped minds and conventional attitude should have to be changed and let the coming generation chase their dreams.

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