

SONG SEQUENCES AND FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN V. RAVICHANDRA'S SELECT KANNADA FILMS

Tejas NK*

Aasita Bali**

Abstract (10pt)

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Indian Cinema is an umbrella term for films produced in India, encompassing of movies from different regions and dialects. Though regional language movies in Kannada, Bengali and Marathi have earned a reputation for themselves globally, one cannot deny the fact that "Bollywood" is the equivalent word for Indian cinema which is by and large about patriarchal structures (Nair, 2013). Kannada film industry and films are known for their actors who are worshipped like demi-gods and introducing item song in films (Mahesh, 2014).

Kannada films are popular films not only among Kannadigaites, but the popular filmmakers from Kannada cinema left a mark among other regional language filmmakers. For a long time Kannada films revolved around the theme of social drama and mythology but the filmmakers like V. Ravichandra experimented with the glamour element and became a trendsetter. Rajkumar was one of the most successful actors in the Kannada film industry. He involved himself in action and romantic flicks during his entire career. The movies in which he acted had elements of objectification but was limited to only one song. The researcher analysis how effectively V Ravichandran uses Laura Mulvey's visual pleasure and objectification theory in his songs and how it also reflects how it is a normal for the spectator to enjoy the sequences which are phallogocentric to a large extent. The research tries to analyse song sequences from three most box office successful film of V. Ravichandra and study how Laura Mulvey's understanding of male gaze gets reflected in Kannada cinema.

* Doctorate Program, Linguistics Program Studies, Udayana University Denpasar, Bali-Indonesia
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** STIMIK STIKOM-Bali, Renon, Denpasar, Bali-Indonesia

1. Introduction (10pt)

The history of Indian Cinema goes back to the nineteenth century. In 1896, the very first set of films shot by the Lumiere Brothers, were shown in Mumbai (then Bombay) at Watson Hotel. India's first indigenous silent feature film was made by Dada Saheb Phalke, the father of Indian Cinema, in the year 1913. As the silent era faded away and talkies emerged, mythological text became a major theme of these films and it inspired many filmmakers in most Indian language to make films based on it. Regional films emerged and films began to be made in Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali and so on.

The first Kannada-talking picture appeared during 1934, three years after Indian cinema had diversified into Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. In fact two Kannada movies were released in quick succession in that year between March and April. However, the honour of being the first Kannada motion picture to be screened in the maharaja-ruled Mysore State was done by "Sathi Sulochana." (Guy, 2004). The film industry in Karnataka referred as Sandalwood or as Chandanavana in Karnataka is a part of Indian cinema where films are produced in Kannada language. The late 60's saw the emergence of famous Kumar trios Rajakumar, Kalyankumar, Udaykumar who ruled the industry from 60's to 70's with majority of the films during this decade were either mythological or historical in nature. Dr Rajkumar considered as the greatest actor that Kannada cinema has seen mainly because of the ease with which he enacted historical, mythological, social, adventurous and comedic roles (Adarsha, 2014). The 1970s and the 1980s are often considered to be the Golden Age of Kannada cinema. Kannada film industry was considered as leader of south Indian cinema during this phase (Adarsha, 2014). The late 80's saw the emergence of V. Ravichandran and Shivarajkumar and Ramesh Aravind as top heroes, with a good number of family oriented films made during this period.

Veeraswamy Ravichandran (born on 30 May 1961), also known as Ravichandran, is Kannada film actor, music director, and director known for his substantial work in Kannada film industry. He is often considered as "The Show Man" of Kannada silver screen for his multi-faceted works in his movies (Anonymous, 2005). Ravichandran made his acting debut in Khadeema Kallaru (1982) at the age of 21 as a villain and later acted in Chakravyuha in 1983. Subsequent to featuring in a series of multi-starrers in supporting and lead roles, he made his directorial debut

with the movie Premaloka (1987) where he was also in the lead role. Premaloka became one of the highest grossing blockbuster movies in Kannada silver screen establishing V.Ravichandran as an auteur. He brought it novelty in presentation and casting top notch actress from popular Hindi cinema.

2. Song, dance and objectification:

According to Laura Mulvey (1975), “Cinema has changed over the last few decades. It is no longer the monolithic system based on large capital investment exemplified at its best by Hollywood in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. Technological advances (16mm, etc) have changed the economic conditions of cinematic production, which can now be artisanal as well as capitalist. Thus it has been possible for an alternative cinema to develop. However self-conscious and ironic Hollywood managed to be, it always restricted itself to a formal mise-en-scene reflecting the dominant ideological concept of the cinema”. Since the advent of Indian cinema, role of woman actors have been more or less restricted to add glamour to the film and pull crowd. In most of the popular films, there would be songs which would describe the physical beauty of women. Bollywood has always been under the line of fire for its portrayal of women as objects of desire. Be it Nadira, Helen, Zeenat Aman, Parveen Babi Mandakini, or most contemporary popular actresses. From 'Sheila Ki Jawaani' to 'Munni ki Badnaami', it is usually women who are employed as objects of desire (Manve, 2014). In Kannada cinema as well, women have been objectified in song sequences. In fact Kannada cinema is known among Indian cinema for introducing the item song/Cabaret dance (Mahesh, 2014). Until the 2000, objectification in form of cabaret dance was restricted to maybe one song but most of the films songs would be about emotional journey and predominately expressing love for the beloved in some or the other way.

3. V. Ravichandra and songs in his films:

In the late 1980's, Ravichandran made his debut as an actor and as a director in his movie 'Premaloka', in which he brought in newness in the film making technique which was welcomed in the Kannada film industry. Right from his first movie Ravichandran, as a director felt that the success formula to bring audience to the theatre would be by roping in prominent actress from popular hindi films for a short screen time. Several prominent female actors like

Juhi Chawla, Shilpa Shetty and Priyanka Trivedi are seen cast opposite the male lead, played by V Ravichandran in all films under study. Before they were cast in his movies, they were quite popular with Juhi Chawla and Shilpa Shetty being in Bollywood and Priyanka being well established in Kannada film industry. For this research paper, three of V.Ravichandra's films are selected. 'Preethsod Thappa', 'Premaloka' and 'Malla'

Even though these actresses were cast as the main lead role in these movies, the importance given to them in those films is very minimal and restricted to pleasing the man and sing songs for him. There were different levels of objectification that is meted out to by director V Ravichandran in his movies. Also, it can be observed that in some sequences, he tried to highlight the social issues that are faced by women in their daily lives.

3.1 Film: Preethsod Thappa

'Preethsod Thappa' which means 'What is wrong in loving and marrying someone' is a 1998 Kannada movie written by Krishna Vamshi and directed by V Ravichandran. It was produced by Rockline Venkatesh. The cast of the film include V Ravichandran himself as the main protagonist 'Raja' and celebrated Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty as 'Chandana'. In the first film for analysis 'Preethsod Thappa', the female character of 'Chandu' played by Shilpa Shetty is subject to commoditisation from the beginning of the movie. The first half of the film has sequence when 'Chandu' the lead female actor is reduced as an object for dominant male gaze when few of the male characters gaze at her lustfully when she is rope skipping and in another scene, men intimidate her by objectifying her body parts and camera zooming at her body. Interestingly to protect herself from all the gazers in the society, she thinks of someone whom she names as Raja. She personifies the love of her dreams to a King of Spades. The card is shown rolling through all her body parts, indicating that she has to be protected by him at all costs and enjoy the opportunity of serving her man in all possible way. Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (Mulvey, 1975). Chandu continues to be passive and meek in front of the male lead and obeys whatever the male lead tells her to do, smilingly.

The song 'Raja Raja' starts off with Shilpa Shetty clad in just a black towel, peeping out of a barrel. The barrel then rises up along with her inside and she describing her ideal man as 'Crazy boy', a non- Kannada term which depicts the English language influence in songs in regional and show the changing trends in the Kannada films.

3.2 Film: Premaloka

Premaloka- The World of Love is a 1987 Kannada musical romantic film written and directed by V. Ravichandran making his directorial debut and also produced it under Eshwari Productions. The movie stars V Ravichandran and Juhi Chawla as the main lead. Juhi Chawla is one of the most popular actors in Bollywood. Her career skyrocketed after she performed exceptionally well in 'Premaloka'. But here too, she is subjected to a lot of objectification in the entire movie. When she goes out to buy groceries for home, she is gazed upon by the street vendors. They also pass comments in a very lyrical manner. In terms of visuals, she is not left out as they make certain gesture which indicates her different body parts that they intend to target. This sequence aptly describes the issues women generally face when they go to public places. They are gazed upon by males and in some cases, gestures are also made by them to express their desire.

The song 'Ee nimbe hanninantha hudugi banthu' which means 'Look, here it comes; the girl with lime looks', uses word 'banthu' at term used for inanimate objects and creatures. The camera shots are limited to only mid and close up shots in the entire sequence. During the eye shot, the foreground elements are placed so that the female character would appear to be peeping from an object. The peeping indicates the hint of shyness the female character possesses. Her walking style is extensively shown in close up range as she moves the hips sideways while walking. Even though she is playful in her approach, the viewers see it in a very sensual manner because the hips don't lie. There are a couple of instances where her facial features of the female character like eyes, nose and eyebrow are at an extreme close up range. The camera angles are mostly placed keeping in mind the view of the gazers, especially that of the torso part. The magic of the Hollywood style at its best (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence) arose, not exclusively, but in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure (Mulvey, 1975). The zoom helps the viewers have a close up look at the body

parts and also make it appear bigger as most men have a fascination for bigger bosom in women. The camera view repeatedly moves back and forth across her body to show the target spots. The song 'Nodamma Hudugi Kelamma Sariyagi' gives a description of the woman to be either a lifeless object or an animal. Women's feelings are not considered when they lament about the difficulties in their lives. She is told to adjust to the situation and express happiness to whatever comes in her way. The song contains both similes and metaphors that describe the female character.

In the Indian context, most males prefer women who have ample bosom and are also sexually attracted to them more than the ones who have flatter bosom. They describe her to be a descendant of Rambha and Menaka, celestial figures from the Indian mythology, and call her 'maalu'. 'Maalu' in English can be translated as commodity. Most characters in the film treat women as property or product which could be bought and sold anywhere. Women are considered as something that can be used for a certain period of time and when one is bored of using the same product, he decides to dispose of the product. This is similar to what Laura Mulvey explains in her essay where women are used by people like commodities and are disposed once they serve the need of the consumer. English language has been extensively used in this song. Words like Ball, Beauty, Duty, and Public Road are sourced in the song. Even though these words were used mostly to boost the rhythmic tune of the song, the meaning to these words has more significance when they are used in English rather than the native language.

3.3 Film: Malla

The third movie 'Malla', released in 2004 casted Priyanka Trivedi opposite V Ravichandran. The movie is about a man called Shiva, son of Malla, who was separated from his parents by a dacoit in his childhood. Malla though sacrifices his life to save his son's life is unable to get him back because the goons decide not to hand over the baby and raise him in their environment. He turns out to be equally notorious until he realizes that they were the ones who killed his father. Shiva then decides to take revenge by killing them all. The role of the woman in this film is restricted to being merely an object of desire and lacking any agency. Even though she appears bold and straightforward, the moment she meets Malla, she becomes passive and listens to him, albeit unintentionally.

In the song 'Masthu Nee Masthu' the entire song sequence is shot in a closed environment, in a cave-like setting. But even then, the camera shots were either long shots or mid shots. Only in few instances have there been a close-up shots being used in the song. It was used to either focus the face of the male lead or to zoom into the features of the female character. There is constant angle shuffles in the song between the dancers, the other moment they show the male lead. The constant shuffling does not let the viewer settle to extended. Even though the female character was seen in the shots taken, they were very brief, for about half second to one second at maximum. Human brains have a fascination to look more after they get a glimpse of something, especially a woman's body. This gives a simulation of the peeping to the viewers. There exists more Voyeurism in the spectators while watching this particular song as the camera shot is not fixed for long periods of time. She allows him to objectify her extensively in all the songs that come after this. This describes that women do not have a say in telling 'no' to a male and oppose him. Even in the society, women do not have a say when men are speaking. They are not allowed to oppose the stand taken by the masculine gender in certain issues. Whereas in the song 'Olagirod Olagidre' while the song begins, the female character's clothing changes from being a two piece clothing to a one piece skirt with shorts. The clothing is tight fitting and even though it covers her torso, the shape and size is still prominently visible due to the figure hugging nature of the clothing. The clothing completely covers the top portion of the body but her lower part of the body which includes a major portion of the knees and legs are revealing. The male lead in the entire duration of the song asks the female character to change her habits and adopt the Indian culture. But she kept on refusing his offer. Even though the female character appeared not to think about wearing such attire, she eventually gave in to wearing what the male lead had asked her to wear. There is no case of outright authority given to females in such circumstances as they are meant to bow down to a man's wishes, especially in the villages.

4. Conclusion

The songs discussed and analysed from three films directed by V. Ravichandran bring out the fact that the popularity of his films is due to the fact that he uses cinematic techniques and popular actors to ensure box office success of the film with casual and informal treatment to the women lead actor/characters. The paper determined the ways in which the director V Ravichandran in some sequences, tried to highlight the social and personal issues that are faced

by women in their daily lives. Three films under the study 'Preethsod Thappa' 'Premaloka' and 'Malla', conveys similar submission from the female protagonist where she is willing to undergo change to meet the expectations of the hero and how these three films depict the way in which male gaze operates and reinforces the patriarchal order. As a director and actor, V Ravichandran aptly depicts the struggles that women go through in their daily lives by the means of objectification in his movies which supports the arguments proposed by Laura Mulvey in her essay.

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