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HOW MALAYALAM FEMALE DIRECTORS PORTRAY RELATIONSHIPS IN THEIR MOVIES

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INTRODUCTION :

For several decades, Malayalam cinema has engaged viewers with its bright and culturally rich tapestry. Lately, the industry— which has always been dominated by male voices—has seen a welcome change as skilled female filmmakers have become increasingly popular. By contributing their unique viewpoints, especially when it comes to the representation of relationships, these female directors are doing more than just enhancing the field of cinema.

The changing face of Malayalam film is examined in this paper via the lens of its female directors. It looks at how they challenge traditional narratives and reinterpret the workings of interpersonal relationships. The focus will be on how these directors portray various types of relationships, including romantic love, familial bonds, friendships, and societal connections.

Historically, Malayalam cinema has frequently given a one-sided portrayal of relationships, particularly those involving women.

Female characters were frequently portrayed as passive objects of desire, defined only by their relationship to the male protagonist. Sacrificial mothers, dependent wives, and ideal lovers were common themes. The growth of female directors, however, challenges this accepted practice. They promote a more complex understanding of human emotions and experiences, particularly those unique to women.

Furthermore, the paper will look into how these directors portray female friendships, which often go unnoticed in mainstream filmmaking. These friendships can be a source of strength, support, and resistance to cultural norms. Furthermore, the study of odd partnerships, such as same-sex bonds or religious

connections, will be conducted to better understand how female directors challenge boundaries and promote equality.

AIM

The main aim of this paper is to understand how Malayalam female directors portray relationships in their movies. This paper will look at the work of some known female filmmakers in Malayalam cinema, including Anjali Menon, Ratheena PT, and

Stephy Xavier. We will examine these films to see how they challenge the stereotypical male gaze while also presenting female characters with power and ambitions of their own. We'll see how they show detailed family relationships, where women are more than just caretakers; they also have hopes and aspirations. This paper explore how their viewpoints diverge from standard

narratives and change the dynamics of human interaction. The analysis will focus on how these directors portray romantic love, familial connections, friendships, and societal connections, with a special focus on themes of agency, female individuality, and social critique within these relationships.

Argument Points

. Female directors choose not to support traditional

representations of women as passive objects of desire or primarily defined by their relationships with men.

.They explore the complicated feelings, wants, and power of female characters, as seen in Anjali Menon's films, in which female leads have ambitious goals and aspirations.

. Films by directors like Menon question the traditional view of romantic love as one objective. They prioritize emotional connection, respect, and mutual progress in healthy partnerships.

.These directors portray complicated family interactions, including communication breakdowns and flaws with love and forgiveness. Importantly, female characters are unique persons with dreams that extend beyond being moms and daughters.

.Female directors highlight the value of female friendships as a source of strength, support, and even challenge, going beyond typical depictions of subplots.

.Ratheena PT's ("Puzhu") films address issues such as discrimination based on caste by portraying complicated relationships.

.These representations can generate discussions about social and economic injustices and challenge the established system.

.The growth of female filmmakers in Malayalam cinema is a recent phenomenon, with a clear change from limited involvement to increased recognition and influence.

.This trend shows a growing acceptance of female viewpoints and stories in the industry.

Evolution of Malayalam female directors

The Malayalam film industry, renowned for its storytelling ability, has long been a male-dominated industry. However, in recent decades, there has been a gratifying transformation with the rise of brilliant female directors. Their journey may be broadly split into three phases:

Pioneering steps(pre 2000s): The early days were a period of struggle for women directors in Malayalam cinema. Vijaya

Nirmala stands out as a true pioneer, directing "Kavitha" in 1973, the first Malayalam film directed by a woman. This was a major event, yet it remained a single accomplishment for a long time.

The number of female filmmakers remained low, and their films frequently followed popular themes and norms of the day.

Societal expectations and differences in power within the industry made it tough for them to find out their own place.

Finding Their Voice (2000s - Mid 2012s): The turn of the century marked a moment of change. With increased awareness and a strong independent film scene, more female directors emerged, finding their voices and creating out places in the industry.

Shalini Usha Nair's critically acclaimed film "Akam" (2011), an adaptation of a feminist novel, provided a deep portrayal of female desire, a topic rarely addressed in mainstream cinema. This picture was an important milestone, displaying the artistic potential of women directors and their capacity to explore stories outside the typical clichés. Anjali Menon, with her commercial success "Bangalore Days" (2012), proved that women directors could not only deliver strong narratives but also create box-office hits. Her film, with its joyful portrayal of female friendships and goals, struck a strong connection with viewers. These directors, along with others such as Gita Krishnakumar ("Aarohi" 2010) and K.P. Anachala ("Randu Penkuttikal" 2008), began to question traditional portrayals of women on screen. They concentrated on capturing female autonomy, complex emotions, and the realities of women's life in modern Kerala. This shift in perspective connected with a rising audience looking for new stories.

(Mid 2010s - Present): The present era is a golden moment for female directors in Malayalam cinema. They are no longer viewed as exceptions, but rather as a critical force driving the industry forward. Deepak Menon ("Kadambari" 2017), Vidhu Vincent

("Manhole" 2016), and Preethu Panikkar ("Thilothama" 2018) are willing to explore varying issues and push the limits of storytelling. They explore social challenges, discrimination based on gender, and odd relationships, injecting much-needed originality into the portrayal of human experiences. Films such as "Uyare" (2019) by Anweshi Prasad and "Kumbalangi Nights" (2019) by Madhu C. Narayanan co-directed with Deepa

Dhananjayan have received critical recognition for their bold and realistic representations of women and the complexity of relationships.

This trend shows an increasing acceptance of female perspectives in the Malayalam cinema industry. Studios are recognizing the commercial value of female-directed films, and viewers are embracing their unique stories. Online platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are opening up new distribution channels, allowing them to reach a larger audience.

Impact and the Road Ahead:

The rise of female directors in Malayalam cinema has had a

significant impact on the industry. It has resulted in a wider and more diverse range of stories being presented, challenging

stereotyped images of women and providing a more accurate portrayal of human interactions. Additionally, it has inspired aspiring female filmmakers, creating a more inclusive

environment within the industry.

However, issues remain. Despite their gains, women directors keep facing challenges such as inequality in wages and difficulty obtaining finance for larger projects. Some filmmakers still

struggle to break into the movie industry's mainstream and secure wider theater distribution for their films.

Looking ahead, the future of Malayalam film is bright with the continuous presence of these brilliant female directors. As they gain experience and popularity, audiences should expect to see narratives enhanced and the human condition portrayed in more depth. Their commitment to the industry promises to keep Malayalam film at the forefront of creative and interesting storytelling.

In this paper we explore mainly about 3 directors whose movies have become popular lately. They are Anjali Menon, Stephy Zaviour and Ratheena PT.

Anjali Menon

Anjali Menon has proven herself as a significant voice in Malayalam cinema, known for her touching stories and strong female protagonists. Her direction, distinguished by a

combination of artistic enthusiasm and college education, reveals a filmmaker committed to depicting human connections with depth and sensitivity.

Early life and education

Anjali was born in Kozhikode, Kerala, to T.M. and Sarada Nair. She spent most of her childhood in Dubai, UAE. Her exposure to different cultures obviously entertained her later storytelling tastes. After returning to India, she graduated from Providence Women's College in Kozhikode. However, her thirst for knowledge did not stop there. She earned a Master's degree in Communication Studies from Pune University, where she improved her communication skills, which are essential in filmmaking. Interestingly, Anjali has a history in Indian classical dance and music, indicating her artistic talents. This diverse educational background served as a bridge for her journey into the world of cinema. She enrolled in the famous London Film School, focusing her creative passion, and graduated with honors in Film Direction, Film Producing, and Film Editing in 2003. This experience surely provided her with the technical knowledge and storytelling skills that would shape her filmmaking career.

Personal Life

While Anjali Menon's personal life is mostly private, it is known that she lives in Mumbai with her husband and son. Balancing her personal life with the demanding world of movies needs plenty of effort, and Anjali appears to have found a successful balance.

Career

Anjali Menon's filmmaking adventure began before she became a director. She improved her skills by editing and assisting producers with educational documentaries. This early exposure most likely gave her a solid understanding of the filmmaking process and the significance of conveying information in a clear and entertaining manner. She increased her experience by taking on event photography and feature writing for journals. This variety, which included both visual storytelling and textual narratives, eventually tapped into her ability to write interesting scripts and create visually wonderful films. Her directorial debut was in 2008, with the critically acclaimed youth drama "Manjadikuru". Set in 1979, the film looks into issues of family, friendship, and self-discovery. Anjali Menon's impressive debut, which gained international attention, including the FIPRESCI Prize for Best Malayalam Film, secured her reputation as a filmmaker worth watching.

Anjali Menon's filmography and success

Anjali Menon's films are known for their heartfelt stories featuring relatable characters, particularly strong female leads. She has a talent for conveying the complicated nature of human connections, whether it's love, family dynamics, or friendships. Her films are typically humorous, but they often address social issues in an underrated and interesting manner. Following the success of "Manjadikuru," Anjali Menon continued to impress viewers with films such as "Kerala Cafe" (2013), a team effort with many stories, and the hugely successful "Bangalore Days" (2014). This adulthood drama resonated strongly with movie fans, securing her reputation as a highly successful director. Her filmography includes more treasures such as "Koode" (2018), a lovely story of friendship, and "Wonder Women" (2022), a film that supports female empowerment. Anjali Menon's commitment to showing women with power and difficulties remains a trademark of her work.

Beyond Direction

Anjali Menon's contributions to Malayalam cinema go beyond directing. She is the founder of Little Films, a production company based in Mumbai and Kerala that produces both fiction and nonfiction films. This allows her to develop and assist youngsters in the business. She is also a supporter for gender equality in film, having co-founded the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC). This organization works constantly to establish a more inclusive atmosphere for women who work in Malayalam cinema. Anjali Menon's journey from a young woman with a passion for storytelling to a top filmmaker in Malayalam cinema is inspiring. Her commitment to her profession, combined with her wide educational background and artistic senses, has resulted in a unique style in the industry. Anjali Menon's influence on Malayalam cinema will never fade as she continues to make films that celebrate human connections, empower women, and challenge norms of society.

Portrayal of Relationships

Anjali Menon's directing abilities go well beyond creating visually appealing films. Her skill comes in creating go into detail of human connection, diving into the details of relationships with a sharp eye and a kind heart. Through her characters, she exposes beliefs and delivers a complex portrayal of love, family,

friendship, and societal relationships in all their varied brilliance.

Romance

Menon's films challenge the commonly accepted view of romantic love as a limited search of her. In "Manjadikuru," Aparna, the teenage protagonist, moves through adolescence while developing love for her companion James. Their bond is innocent, based on common experiences and a deep understanding. She challenges the stereotype of seeking sadness, showing power and independence. Similarly, in "Bangalore Days," the three cousins' romantic stories broke expectations. Divya, the independent career woman, seeks a companion who values her goals, but Kuttan's journey reveals a love that exceeds physical limits. She also executed first meeting of Meenakshi and Kuttan in clever manner as the actors who done those characters were deeply in love in another movie "Tattathin Marayathu" directed by Vineeth Sreenivasan which was an amazing love story. So she executed the meeting scene of Kuttan and Meenakshi in the flight scene adding the background score from Tattathin Marayathu giving the viewers a good and nostalgic experience. Anjali Menon celebrates the power of emotional connection, highlighting respect, mutual understanding, and shared growth as necessary components of a healthy romance.

Family

Menon's portrayal of family differs greatly from the described image commonly seen in popular cinema. In "Manjadikuru," Aparna's relationship with her parents shows communication difficulties and changing family dynamics. "Bangalore Days" dives into a complex family unit with its own set of problems showing how love and forgiveness bind them together. Importantly, Menon builds strong female characters that are defined by more than simply their responsibilities as mothers and daughters; they are individuals with hopes and goals. In "Bangalore Days" Divya dream of pursuing MBA from IIM and she also tells in the movie that her inspiration is her parents. She dreams of starting an independent company and also keeping most employees as women revealing empowerment for women through Divya's character.

Friendships

Anjali Menon's films provide a unique place for friendships, portraying them as an incredible source of support, strength, and even opposition. These connections are more than just side stories; they are important threads of her storylines. In Bangalore Days the cousins are felt like friends for the viewers. The connection between them, dream of going to Bangalore city together and caring attitude towards each other represents love and friendship. When Divya was sad she calls Aju for relief and he came and consoles her. In Koode also friendship is portrayed brilliantly. In the climax scene of Koode the tribute to their dead friend is executed brilliantly with heartfelt songs and Bgm. Menon's portrayals raise friendships from ordinary backgrounds to critical parts in her storytelling. They empower her characters by encouraging personal growth and adaptability, while also asking spectators to reconsider the strength and details of these connections.

Stephy Xavier

Stephy Xavier, an upcoming name in Malayalam film, is a skilled director who has worked out an identity for herself through interesting storytelling and a unique visual style. Having minimal knowledge about her personal past, her dedication to filmmaking and her quickly increasing filmography build a picture of a passionate storyteller set for an outstanding career.

Early Life and Education

Stephy was born to Late Xavier Karivelil and Gracy Karivelil and brought up in Wayanad, Kerala. She did her schooling at St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, Kallody, and graduated with a bachelor's degree from K.L.E. Society's S. Nijalingappa College, Bangalore.

Career

She started her career as costumer designer in the industry when she was just 23. She completed over 65 films by the year 2021, including Lord Livingstone 7000 Kandi, Guppy and Ezra. In 2016, Stephy worked on more than 96 films and 300 ad films. Stephy won her first Kerala State Award for Costume Designer for her work in the movie Guppy. She made her directorial debut through the film Madhura Manohara Moham.

Portrayal of Relationship

Stephy Xavier has only directed one film "Madhura Manohara Moham" which has gained huge audience response. The film's

cast includes Sharaf U Dheen, Rajisha Vijayan, Bindu Panicker, Aarsha Chandini Baiju, Vijayaraghavan, and Saiju Kurup. The story is set in Kumbazha and revolves around the happenings in the lives of siblings Manu and Meera, as well as the unexpected truths that reveal.

Stephy Xavier has executed very well the brother and sister

relation and also their connection with mother also. Meera is an respectful and obedient and responsible person in front of her elder brother Manu and her mother. But later Manu finds out shocking secrets about Meera which was having a lot of affairs.

After the interval part also the director drives the film

humorously while complicating the connection and bondage of the family. Towards the end of the film Manu tells Meera that he could not able to understand his own sister. After the wedding of the sister there was an heart touching emotional scene which was executed through good dialogue and background music.

The relationship with mother and Manu is also executed nicely with quite humor. When they find out hidden truths about Meera, Manu ask her mother to go for eating masala dosa that scene was executed very humourously. Both times when Manu finds out the truths about Meera he takes his mother to have masala dosa in order to discuss about the matter. Personally the climax portion and the sibling connection and emotion of the scene has worked out for me but I don't think it will connect with every audience.

Ratheena PT

Ratheena PT is an Indian film director and producer who works mainly in Malayalam films. Ratheena PT is a relatively new name in Malayalam cinema, making her directorial debut with the film "Puzhu".

Career

Ratheena started her film career in 2010 as an assistant to Malayalam director Revathi. Her debut as an independent director was marked by the release of the movie Puzhu Featuring Mammooty, Parvathy Thiruvothu, Nedumudi Venu, Athmiya Rajan, Indrans and Malavika Menon.

"Puzhu," shows her ability to create an engaging plot with well-developed characters. The transition from scriptwriter to director reflects her creative vision and desire. Although as a newcomer, Ratheena PT's remarkable debut with "Puzhu" has generated a lot of talk in Malayalam film. Her ability to create an engaging script and turn it into a successful film demonstrates her talent as a storyteller. It would be interesting to watch what kinds of stories she decides to tell as she progresses as a director. Ratheena PT's name will likely be connected with more creative and well-crafted films in the coming years.

Portrayal of Relationship

Ratheena PT has directed only one film "Puzhu" which has achieved lots of critic reviews. The film was directed in a well manner narrating and driving storyline excellently.

Kuttan, a high-ranking IPS officer and widower from a Brahmin community, lives in a beautiful apartment with his son, Kichu.

His overprotective personality and controlling methods suffocate Kichu, who wishes his father would die. Kuttan begins to suspect that someone is attempting to kill him and is suspicious of everyone. His fear is heightened when his younger sister, Bharati, arrives in a nearby flat with her theatrical artist husband,

Kuttappan. Kuttan and Bharati had a difficult relationship because she eloped with Kuttappan, a member of an underprivileged caste. Kuttan's hatred and intolerance causes him to become angry and lose his mind.

The relationship of Kuttappan and Bharathi is portrayed in the movie excellently. Their relationship had lot of difficulties because Kuttappan belongs to a underprivileged caste. But they overcome all the hindrances through love and married opposing her brother and her family.

This creates hatred and anger in Kuttan's mind towards his sister and her husband. These all are the reasons for his dominating and strict behaviour towards his son Kichu. The brother sister relationship, father son relationship, couple relationship all portrayed in an excellent manner in the film according to the storyline.

Conclusion

The rise of female directors in Malayalam cinema represents an important change in storytelling. By reshaping standard narratives and portraying a diverse range of relationships, these directors are improving the cinematic environment and starting important discussions.

This research examined the works of Anjali Menon, Stephy

Xavier, and Ratheena PT, demonstrating how each filmmaker contributes a unique viewpoint to the portrayal of relationships. Menon's works, including "Manjadikuru" and "Bangalore Days," challenge limited romantic representations by highlighting emotional connection, respect, and shared progress. She also explores complex relationships within families and highlights female friendships as important sources of support and empowerment. Xavier's "Madhura Manohara Moham" looks into the details of sibling relationships, presenting unexpected realities and highlighting the changing bonds between families.

Similarly, Ratheena PT's "Puzhu" addresses social concerns such as caste discrimination through the conflicting relationship of a brother and sister. These films show how female directors are reaching beyond traditional portrayals to create narratives that appeal with modern viewers.

The influence of female filmmakers in Malayalam cinema goes beyond their individual films. It represents an increased accept of female viewpoints and experiences in the industry. Platforms like as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are further making availability to these films, allowing them to reach a global audience. This not only promotes exchange between cultures, but also opens the door for developing female filmmakers. Initiatives like the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), co-founded by Anjali Menon, help to create a more inclusive environment for women working in Malayalam cinema. However, issues remain. Gender wage gaps and the difficulties of obtaining finance for larger projects continue to be challenges. Increased exposure and distribution channels are vital for promoting female-directed films and maintaining their financial sustainability. As the industry grows older, it will be essential to create a cooperative environment that supports the work of female directors. With these outstanding directors continuing to work in Malayalam cinema, the future looks promising. As they gain experience and fame, audiences can expect even more interesting storytelling that dive into the human condition with depth and insight. Their dedication to portraying true relationships, social realities, and female power promises to maintain Malayalam film on the very forefront of creative and interesting storytelling.