



Breaking Barriers: A Content Analysis of Women-Centric Tamil Films in 2023 - Unveiling Character Arcs for Social Progress and Gender Representation

¹Bibitha Babu, ²Dr. S. Jenefa,

Research Scholar, Department of Journalism and Science Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University.

Professor & Head, Department of Journalism and Science Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University.

Abstract: The movie industry has always shown women in smaller roles, almost meaningless sometimes. But in the recent years, we have seen a shift in the mindset of some filmmakers. The proposed study delves into the character arcs of women in three distinct Tamil films released in 2023, namely "Kannagi," "Farhana," "Soppana Sundari". The primary objective is to explore how these films contribute to social progress and gender representation through the portrayal and development of female characters. Utilizing content analysis methodology, this research seeks to uncover the nuanced narratives that unfold on-screen, providing valuable insights into the role of cinema in shaping societal perceptions of women. The study aims at acknowledging the cultural and social context in which these films were released, recognizing the evolving landscape of gender dynamics and the growing demand for diverse and authentic representations of women in cinema. By focusing on the character arcs of female protagonists, the research aims to dissect the narratives, identifying key themes and patterns that contribute to or challenge prevailing stereotypes. Each film is individually scrutinized to discern the trajectory of the female characters' development. "Kannagi," for instance, may offer insights into traditional narratives, while "Farhana" may explore contemporary challenges faced by women. "Soppana Sundari" could provide a lens into the intersectionality of gender and other social aspects. Through this multifaceted approach, the study seeks to uncover the diverse ways in which character arcs contribute to social progress. Moreover, the research examines the depiction of women's agency, autonomy, and resilience in the face of challenges. By scrutinizing the choices, conflicts, and resolutions faced by the female characters, it aims to unravel the broader implications for women's empowerment and gender equality in society. The analysis also considers the extent to which these character arcs break away from or perpetuate conventional gender norms, offering a nuanced exploration of the films' potential impact on audience perceptions.

Key words: women centric, Tamil films, Female Representation, Character Arc

Introduction:

Now a day, there has been a noticeable shift in the film industry towards producing more women-centric movies. This change reflects evolving societal attitudes towards gender equality and the increasing demand for diverse and empowering narratives. Women-centric films often focus on female protagonists and their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. These movies offer a platform to showcase women's talent, perspectives, and stories, which were previously underrepresented in mainstream cinema. The rise of women-centric films signifies a broader cultural shift towards acknowledging the importance of gender diversity and equality in media representation. It provides opportunities for actresses to portray complex and multidimensional characters, breaking away from traditional stereotypes and tropes.

Moreover, the success of women-centric movies at the box office demonstrates the growing audience interest in stories that centre on female characters. This success encourages filmmakers to invest in diverse storytelling and highlights the commercial viability of women-led narratives. Overall, the increase in women-centric movies reflects a positive trend towards greater inclusivity and representation in the film industry, enriching cinematic



experiences and contributing to more inclusive cultural narratives. Moreover, the research examines, Studying character arcs in women-centric movies can be a fascinating and insightful endeavour. Here's a general approach to studying how character arcs work in mentioned films.

Objectives

- . Analysis the character arc of women characters in select movies
- . To study the patterns of Portrayal of women characters in select movies

Methodology

The data for this Research was collected using content analysis and Arc analysis approach of 3 women-centric Tamil movies released in 2023. Among all The Film, the below mentioned list of films was selected in recall sampling method.

1. Farhana (2023)
2. Soppana Sundari(2023)
3. Kannagi(2023)

Character arc

A character arc refers to the journey and development of a character throughout a story. It encompasses the changes, growth, or transformation that the character undergoes as a result of their experiences, challenges, and interactions within the narrative. Character arcs are central to storytelling as they provide depth and complexity to characters, allowing audiences to engage with their struggles, motivations, and evolution over the course of the story.

Character arcs can take various forms, including:

Positive Arc: In a positive arc, the character experiences growth, learning, or redemption. They often start the story with flaws, weaknesses, or internal conflicts and gradually overcome them through their experiences, ultimately becoming a better version of themselves by the end of the story.

Negative Arc: In a negative arc, the character undergoes a decline, regression, or moral deterioration. They may begin the story with positive qualities or noble intentions but succumb to their flaws, temptations, or external pressures, leading to their downfall or moral compromise by the story's conclusion.

Flat Arc: In a flat arc, the character remains largely unchanged throughout the story. Instead of undergoing significant personal growth or transformation themselves, they serve as a catalyst for change in other characters or the world around them. Flat arcs are often associated with characters who possess unwavering beliefs, values, or strengths that influence those around them. Character arcs can be mapped out over the course of the story, highlighting key moments, decisions, and interactions that shape the character's trajectory. They are essential components of character-driven narratives and contribute to the overall themes, messages, and emotional resonance of a story. Effective character arcs create relatable and compelling characters that resonate with audiences long after the story has ended.

Data Analysis

1. Name of the Film: **KANNAGI**

Female lead: Keerthi Pandian

Plot: The film's theme is about issues faced by women in today's Indian society. Four women whose lives are dominated, crafted, and judged by society and affected, changed and disturbed by external influences.



Interpretation: In the women-centric movie "Kannagi," each character undergoes a unique character arc that reflects their individual struggles, growth, and eventual resolution. Here's a breakdown of the character arcs for the main female character

KALAI (Ammu Abhirami): Kalai's character arc begins with her constant disappointment as her mother rejects prospective grooms. Over the course of the film, Kalai likely experiences a journey of self-discovery and empowerment, learning to assert herself and challenge societal expectations placed upon her. Her arc may culminate in her finding independence and self-worth outside of traditional marriage norms.

Here's a breakdown of how her character arc might unfold:

Introduction of Disappointment: The film begins with Kalai experiencing repeated disappointment as her mother rejects prospective grooms. This sets the stage for her initial struggle with societal expectations and her dependence on her mother's approval.

Internal Conflict and Self-Reflection: As Kalai navigates through these rejections, she begins to question the validity of traditional marriage norms and starts to reflect on her own desires and aspirations. This internal conflict sparks the beginning of her journey towards self-discovery.

Challenging Societal Expectations: Kalai starts to assert herself and challenge the societal expectations placed upon her. She may begin to voice her opinions, push back against her mother's decisions, and explore alternative paths for herself outside of marriage.

Exploration and Growth: Through various experiences and encounters throughout the film, Kalai explores different aspects of life outside of traditional marriage norms. She might pursue education, career opportunities, or hobbies that she's passionate about, discovering her strengths and capabilities along the way.

Finding Independence and Self-Worth: As Kalai gains confidence in herself and her abilities, she gradually finds independence and self-worth independent of her marital status. She realizes that her value isn't determined by whether or not she conforms to societal expectations of marriage, but rather by her own strengths, passions, and choices.

Culmination of Arc: The climax of Kalai's character arc could involve a pivotal moment where she fully embraces her newfound independence and self-worth. This might be symbolized by her making a significant life decision on her own terms, whether it's pursuing a dream career, starting a business, or simply choosing to live life on her own terms without the pressure of conforming to societal norms.

Resolution and Acceptance: By the end of the film, Kalai comes to a place of acceptance and peace with herself. She may reconcile with her mother, who comes to respect and support her daughter's choices, or she may find a new community of like-minded individuals who accept her for who she is.

Overall, Kalai's character arc is a journey of empowerment, self-discovery, and liberation from societal expectations, culminating in her finding independence and self-worth outside of traditional marriage norms.

NETHRA (Vidya Pradeep): Nethra's character arc revolves around her fight against false accusations of barrenness in her divorce case. Throughout the film, Nethra confronts the injustice and stigma surrounding infertility, ultimately finding strength and resilience in standing up for her truth and reclaiming her dignity as a woman.

Introduction of Conflict: The film begins with Nethra facing the false accusations of barrenness in her divorce case. This sets the stage for her initial struggle against societal prejudices and the stigma associated with infertility.



Denial and Anguish: Initially, Nethra may experience denial and anguish as she grapples with the unfairness of the accusations leveled against her. She might feel isolated and ostracized, struggling to come to terms with the implications of the false accusations on her identity and sense of self-worth.

Seeking Truth and Justice: Determined to prove her innocence and fight against the injustice she's facing, Nethra embarks on a journey to seek truth and justice. She may enlist the help of lawyers, experts, and allies who believe in her cause, while also confronting the biases and prejudices embedded within the legal system and society at large.

Embracing Vulnerability: As Nethra delves deeper into her legal battle and the emotional toll it takes on her, she learns to embrace her vulnerability and confront her fears head-on. She may open up to trusted friends and family members, seeking support and solidarity in her quest for justice.

Finding Strength in Community: Throughout her journey, Nethra discovers strength and resilience in the support of her community. She may connect with other women who have faced similar challenges, forming bonds of solidarity and mutual empowerment as they navigate the complexities of infertility stigma together.

Reclaiming Dignity and Identity: As Nethra's legal battle progresses, she begins to reclaim her dignity and sense of identity as a woman. She refuses to be defined by societal expectations or reduced to mere labels, asserting her worth and autonomy in the face of adversity.

Empowerment and Resolution: The climax of Nethra's character arc could involve a pivotal moment where she triumphs over the false accusations and emerges victorious in her quest for justice. Whether through legal vindication or personal empowerment, Nethra finds closure and resolution, reclaiming her narrative and asserting her truth.

Inspiring Change: By the end of the film, Nethra's journey serves as a catalyst for broader social change, challenging the stigma surrounding infertility and advocating for greater awareness and understanding. Her courage and resilience inspire others to confront injustice and stand up for their rights, leaving a lasting impact on her community and society as a whole.

Overall, Nethra's character arc is a testament to the power of resilience, courage, and self-discovery in the face of adversity, as she confronts the stigma surrounding infertility and reclaims her dignity as a woman.

NADHI (Shaalin Zoya): Nadhi's character arc centers on her beliefs about marriage and commitment as she enters a casual relationship with Abhiroop. As Abhiroop develops deeper feelings for her, Nadhi may grapple with her fear of commitment and confront her own emotional barriers, leading to personal growth and a reevaluation of her views on love and relationships.

Introduction of Nadhi's Beliefs: The film introduces Nadhi as someone who holds firm beliefs about love, marriage, and commitment. She may be portrayed as someone who values her independence and is wary of entering into serious relationships.

Entering a Casual Relationship: Nadhi enters into a casual relationship with Abhiroop, initially enjoying the freedom and lack of commitment that it offers. However, as their relationship progresses, Abhiroop begins to develop deeper feelings for her.

Confronting Fear of Commitment: Nadhi grapples with her fear of commitment as Abhiroop's feelings intensify. She may struggle with opening herself up emotionally and allowing herself to become vulnerable in a committed relationship.



Exploring Emotional Barriers: Throughout the film, Nadhi explores the emotional barriers that prevent her from fully committing to a relationship. She may reflect on past experiences or traumas that have shaped her beliefs about love and commitment, allowing for deeper character development and introspection.

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery: As Nadhi confronts her fears and emotional barriers, she undergoes personal growth and self-discovery. She may learn to confront her insecurities, communicate her needs and desires more effectively, and develop a deeper understanding of herself and her values.

Reevaluation of Views on Love and Relationships: Through her experiences with Abhiroop and her journey of self-discovery, Nadhi reevaluates her views on love and relationships. She may come to realize that true intimacy and connection require vulnerability and emotional openness, leading to a shift in her beliefs about commitment.

Resolution and Closure: The climax of Nadhi's character arc could involve a pivotal moment where she confronts her fear of commitment and makes a decision about the future of her relationship with Abhiroop. Whether she chooses to fully commit to the relationship or decides to part ways, Nadhi finds closure and resolution in her journey of self-discovery.

Moving Forward with Clarity: By the end of the film, Nadhi emerges with a newfound clarity about her values, desires, and beliefs about love and relationships. She may embrace the idea of commitment and intimacy, or she may choose to continue exploring her independence while remaining open to the possibility of love in the future.

Overall, Nadhi's character arc is a journey of personal growth, self-discovery, and reevaluation of beliefs about love and commitment, as she confronts her fear of commitment and navigates her emotional barriers in the context of her relationship with Abhiroop.

GITA (Keerthi Pandian): Gita's character arc involves her desperate attempt to terminate an unplanned pregnancy that exceeds the legally allowed time frame for abortion. Throughout the film, Gita likely faces moral dilemmas, societal judgments, and emotional turmoil as she navigates the complexities of her situation. Her arc may ultimately lead to a journey of self-acceptance, resilience, and empowerment as she confronts the consequences of her choices.

Introduction of the Crisis: The film introduces Gita facing the stark reality of an unplanned pregnancy that exceeds the legal time frame for abortion. This sets the stage for her desperate attempt to navigate the complex and emotionally charged situation she finds herself in.

Moral Dilemmas and Inner Conflict: Gita wrestles with profound moral dilemmas and inner conflict as she grapples with the decision to terminate the pregnancy. She may struggle with conflicting values, societal expectations, and personal beliefs, leading to intense emotional turmoil.

Navigating Societal Judgments: Gita faces harsh societal judgments and stigma surrounding her decision to terminate the pregnancy beyond the legally allowed time frame. She may encounter condemnation, scrutiny, and ostracism from her community, adding another layer of complexity to her already challenging circumstances.

Desperate Attempt and Consequences: Despite the risks and legal barriers, Gita embarks on a desperate attempt to terminate the pregnancy. The consequences of her actions may be dire, further exacerbating her emotional turmoil and sense of isolation.

Acceptance and Resilience: As Gita confronts the fallout of her choices, she begins to embrace self-acceptance and resilience. She may draw strength from within, finding the courage to confront the challenges head-on and navigate the complexities of her situation with newfound determination.



Embracing Empowerment and Self-Advocacy: Gita's character arc culminates in a powerful moment of empowerment and self-advocacy. She refuses to be defined by society's narrow judgments or constrained by its limitations, asserting her right to autonomy and self-determination.

Finding Meaning and Purpose: By the end of the film, Gita finds meaning and purpose in her journey, despite the challenges she has faced. She may emerge with a newfound sense of resilience, empathy, and understanding, ultimately inspiring others to confront their own struggles with courage and compassion.

Overall, Gita's character arc is a deeply emotional and transformative journey of self-acceptance, resilience, and empowerment as she confronts the consequences of her choices and navigates the complexities of her unplanned pregnancy beyond the legally allowed time frame for abortion.

Through their individual character arcs, the female protagonists in "Kannagi" navigate societal pressures, confront injustice, and find strength in solidarity and self-discovery. Their stories highlight the complexities of womanhood, resilience in the face of adversity, and the importance of challenging societal norms to forge their own paths.

2. Name of the Film: **FARHANA**

Female lead: Aishwarya Rajesh

Plot: Middle-class mother Farhana takes a call centre job due to her financial situation. Although this gives her freedom, it also leads her into a web of danger.

Interpretation:

In the women-centric movie Farhana as the central character, her character arc unfolds as follows

Introduction and Struggle:

Farhana is introduced as a devout Muslim woman whose family is facing financial struggles with their small footwear business. This sets the stage for her initial circumstances and establishes the challenges she faces in providing for her family.

Decision to Join Call Centre:

Due to the family's dire financial situation, Farhana makes the decision, with her family's consent, to join a call centre for better prospects. This marks a significant turning point in her life as she ventures into a new field to support her family.

Encountering Challenges in the Call Centre:

As Farhana begins her job at the call centre, she faces unexpected challenges, including the discovery that her work involves engaging with lonely and sexually driven strangers. This presents a moral dilemma for her, as it conflicts with her values and beliefs.

Personal and Professional Struggles:

Farhana's personal and professional struggles intensify as she grapples with the ethical implications of her job while also dealing with her infant's critical health condition. This adds layers of complexity to her character as she tries to balance her responsibilities as a mother with her job requirements.

Encounter with a Unique Individual:

Amidst her challenges, Farhana encounters a unique individual who intrigues her with his approach. This encounter likely sparks a personal and emotional connection for Farhana, offering her a glimmer of hope amidst her difficulties.



Consequences of Breaking Protocols:

Despite the risks posed by her family background and company protocols, Farhana decides to meet this individual, leading to unforeseen consequences and greater trouble. This decision marks a pivotal moment in her character arc, where she must confront the repercussions of her actions.

Throughout the film, Farhana's character arc is characterized by her resilience, moral dilemmas, and personal growth as she navigates the complexities of her circumstances. Her journey serves as the focal point of the narrative, highlighting themes of sacrifice, morality, and the pursuit of happiness in the face of adversity.

3. Name of the Film: SOPPANA SUNDARI

Female lead: Aishwarya Rajesh

In the movie "Soppana Sundari," the titular character's arc might involve her journey amidst the chaos surrounding the possession of the car. While the film's primary focus seems to be on the comedic mishaps stemming from various characters' attempts to claim the car, Soppana Sundari could play a pivotal role in navigating or even exacerbating the situation.

Interpretation:

Her character arc

Soppana Sundari is introduced along with her car, which becomes the center of attention due to its coveted nature.

Desire for the Car:

Initially, Soppana Sundari might have a strong attachment to her car and be determined to retain ownership despite others' attempts to claim it.

Involvement in the Chaos:

As the chaos escalates with multiple characters vying for the car, Soppana Sundari might find herself dragged into the whirlwind of events, either inadvertently or as a result of her actions.

Personal Growth:

Throughout the film, Soppana Sundari could undergo personal growth as she navigates the challenges posed by the situation. She may learn valuable lessons about attachment, possession, and the importance of relationships over material belongings.

Resolution:

Ultimately, Soppana Sundari's character arc could culminate in a resolution where she either retains ownership of the car or comes to realize that its possession is not as important as the relationships and experiences she gains along the way.

Comic Relief:

Alongside her character development, Soppana Sundari may also provide moments of comic relief, adding to the overall humor of the film.

While the movie's primary focus may not be on Soppana Sundari's character arc alone, her presence and development within the chaotic narrative contribute to the overall storyline and themes of the film. Based on the character arc study the movie soppana sundari is not a women centric movie, becuse of this film not contain the stages of character arc.



It seems like you're highlighting a trend in Tamil cinema where films are titled in a way that suggests they are women-centric or focused on female characters, but the actual content may not align with this expectation. This can lead to audience disappointment when the film does not deliver on the promised narrative centered around women. While it's essential for films to accurately represent their content through their titles and marketing, true feminist films should indeed prioritize the female character arcs and experiences. Merely having female suffering, dialogue, screen time, or bold characters does not necessarily make a film feminist if it doesn't delve into the depth and complexity of the female characters' journeys and perspectives. Feminist films should authentically portray women's experiences, challenges, growth, and agency, allowing their narratives to drive the story forward and offering nuanced explorations of gender dynamics and societal issues. It's important for filmmakers to move beyond surface-level representation and truly engage with the intricacies of female character arcs to create meaningful and impactful storytelling.

Conclusion:

The valid observation that some films labeled as "women-centric" may not necessarily adhere to the true essence of that label. The term "women-centric" typically implies that the story revolves around a female character or characters, with their experiences, struggles, and growth at the forefront. This often involves a well-developed character arc that allows the female protagonist to undergo significant personal or emotional changes throughout the course of the narrative.

However, there can be instances where films are marketed as "women-centric" merely to capitalize on the trend without truly embodying the essence of female-centric storytelling. In these cases, the female characters may exhibit traits and behaviors more commonly associated with male characters or may conform to stereotypical gender roles, rather than offering nuanced portrayals of women with their own agency and complexity.

Indeed, in some cases, particularly in low-budget productions, filmmakers may opt to cast a female main character to appeal to certain demographics or trends without necessarily prioritizing authentic women-centric storytelling. This can lead to female characters being written and portrayed in ways that mimic traditional male mannerisms or stereotypes, (raangi tamil movie) rather than offering genuine exploration of female experiences.

Such decisions may be driven by commercial considerations, as filmmakers may believe that featuring a female protagonist could help attract audiences or differentiate their film in a crowded market. However, when this approach results in female characters merely adopting male mannerisms or conforming to traditional gender roles without meaningful depth or complexity, it can detract from the authenticity and impact of the storytelling.

True women-centric movies go beyond surface-level representation and delve into the nuances of female experiences, struggles, and triumphs. They offer well-developed female characters with their own agency, motivations, and character arcs that are distinct from those typically associated with male characters. These films provide audiences with an opportunity to connect with and empathize with female characters on a deeper level, contributing to more inclusive and diverse narratives in the film industry.

References:

- [1] Ramanujam, S. (2023, December 15). Kannagi [Review of the movie Kannagi]. The Hindu.
- [2] Suganth, M. (2023, December). Kannagi Movie Review: Kannagi delivers its message without being preachy. Times of India.
- [3] Rajendran, G. (2023, May 12). Farhana Movie Review: Aishwarya Rajesh pillars this intriguing drama on empowerment and freedom of choice. The Hindu.
- [4] Chandar, B. (2023, April 13). Soppana Sundari Movie Review: Three women pack a punch in this simple and neat entertainer. The Hindu.



-
- [5] Lakshmipriya, M., Shanthichitra, K., & Rajesh, R. (2023, May). An analysis of the male lead roles in women-centric Tamil films.
 - [6] Pichanot, P. (2021). Portrayal of Women from Stereotype to Empowered in Film Studies.
 - [7] Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT), 12(3), 3282-3287.
 - [8] Fedorova, A.(2023, January 27). Stereotypical Women Representation in the film industry.
 - [9] Sibal, V. (2018, March). Stereotyping Women in Indian Cinema. Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies, 5(43).