

**Breaking the gaze: Impact of Male Gaze in Malayalam Cinema, with Focus
on 'The Great Indian Kitchen'**

DISSERTATION

Submitted by

MAHITHA U P

SM22JMC011

Under the guidance of

NAFEESATHUL MISRIYA K

*In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree
Of Master of Arts*

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled **“Breaking the Gaze: Impact of Male Gaze in Malayalam Cinema, with Focus on 'The Great Indian Kitchen’”** by **MAHITHA U P**, is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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Nafeesathul Misriya K

19-04-2024

Department of Communicative English

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DECLARATION

I, **MAHITHA U P**, do affirm that the dissertation "**Breaking the Gaze: Impact of Male Gaze in Malayalam Cinema, with Focus on 'The Great Indian Kitchen'**" submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Master of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema, with a focus on the groundbreaking film "The Great Indian Kitchen." Through a combination of interviews and focus group discussions with experts and female viewers aged 18-30 respectively, the study explores the impact of cinematic representation on perceptions of gender roles and self-esteem. The research reveals that mainstream Malayalam cinema often perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes and objectification of women, particularly through scenes catering to the male gaze and the commodification of women's bodies. However, "The Great Indian Kitchen" emerges as a transformative example, challenging patriarchal norms and empowering female viewers through its authentic portrayal of the female experience. Key findings highlight the detrimental effects of objectifying shots and double-meaning jokes on women's self-esteem, emphasizing the need for more responsible and ethical filmmaking practices. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of increasing the representation of women in writing, directing, and technical roles within the industry to foster more inclusive storytelling.

Keywords: male gaze, objectification, self-esteem, confidence, patriarchy, feminist narratives, gender roles, filmmaking practices, woman, voyeurism.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is one of the most sought-after forms of mass media. As a powerful medium of artistic expression, it can shape perceptions, evoke emotions, and reflect societal norms. It influences the way we dress, walk, talk, and even decide what we eat. The scope of cinema and its power to sway human beings are beyond our imagination. The portrayal of women in cinema has long been a subject of debate and discussion, as it in turn reflects the societal attitudes towards women. One of the most discussed topics is the Male gaze and how it impacts women. Representing a woman from a heterosexual male point of view, thereby depicting her as a sexual object to be looked at by the male viewers can be termed as the male gaze. In literature, advertisements, and movies we see and feel the gaze. The term “Male Gaze” was coined by Laura Mulvey, in her essay “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”. It reduces a woman’s independence and agency and diminishes her into an object of desire.

Films depict women as objects who live under the shadow of the male protagonist. Their body and bodily features are all that is seen and heard in a film that is under the male gaze. This Objectification dehumanizes women and makes them believe they are just objects in the hands of masculine men. This will affect how women perceive themselves. The feelings of objectification among women movie-goers will be affected and will not be reduced with narratives focussing on traditional stereotypes and gender roles. Objectification reduces a woman's autonomy and agency, making her revolve and exist only for the validation of the male protagonist and thereby only portraying roles as the romantic interest, eye candy, or the occasional helper in the fight of the male protagonist.

Voyeuristic camera angles, close-up shots, and jokes are all some of the means used to objectify a woman in films. These techniques usually showcase the perfect body with no flaws, thereby

appealing to the mass audience. When this is shown repeatedly in films it normalizes the objectification and therefore, reinforces harmful stereotypes and creates expectations off-screen. Misinterpreted depictions of women can make them question their bodies or features, reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards, and increasing insecurity among women and girls. This will eventually lead to reduced self-esteem. The self-esteem of a woman or any individual is the key factor that drives them. Films can always bolster self-esteem by incorporating feminist narratives and showcasing real women on screen.

The prevalence of male gaze representations in Malayalam cinema is not solely a cinematic phenomenon but also reflects broader societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Traditional patriarchal norms and cultural factors contribute to the perpetuation of male-centric narratives that prioritize male desire and tell stories that revolve around a male protagonist. These representations not only shape individual perceptions of gender roles but also reinforce inequalities and power dynamics within society.

Moreover, The study focuses on the film ‘The Great Indian Kitchen’, and how it subverts the traditional male gaze, and how feminist narratives like this help reduce the feelings of objectification and bolster self-esteem among women audience. Directed and written by Geo Baby, this acclaimed film was released in 2021, with Nimisha Sajayan and Suraj Venjaramoodu playing the titular roles, ‘the wife’ and ‘the husband’ respectively. This film subtly portrays casualized misogyny, and normalized male entitlement, which will fall under domestic violence. With shots showcasing the mundane life of a woman in her household, this film earned wide recognition and is one of the most discussed Malayalam movies. The film is thought-provoking and was named ‘the breakout film of the year’ in 2021. The male and female dynamics portrayed in the film and how a woman becomes a slave of the household depriving her of all the joy in her life. From the first shot till the very last shot, it subtly explains the horrors of a patriarchal life and how it traps a woman in a world of stereotypes and prejudices.

The scenes in the kitchen, evoke a sense of disgust and that was the whole point of it to make people understand what is happening around them and how they are turning a blind eye to it. It addresses multiple issues in a woman's life, from dowry to her family not supporting her when her husband and his family mistreat her. With commendable acting from everyone in the film, it tries to have an impact on the audience and certain frames will not leave the viewers minds. That is one of the successful points in this film. The film garnered wide attention and awards for its portrayal and stands out from other films. It was a different approach to overall filmmaking and gave experimental cinema more scope than ever before in the Malayalam film industry.

1.1 THEORY

Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory was utilized in understanding how gender and power relations are portrayed in films. The male gaze theory was put forward by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". This feminist film theory proposes that in film, the world is represented from a heterosexual male point of view, thereby enforcing patriarchal norms and gender roles, which in turn objectifies and sexualizes women. 'Scopophilia' is a concept put forward by Sigmund Freud, Mulvey draws from this concept into her theory. 'Scopophilia' is the pleasure derived from looking. She asserts that voyeurism in cinema functions within the visual language of film, with a large male viewership finding pleasure in gazing at the female characters. Additionally, the camera operates as a means to objectify and sexualize female bodies thereby aiding the male gaze. Close-up shots, stylistic and slow-motion shots of the female body are employed in films to objectify them. Females exist as a means to be possessed by the male protagonist. Moreover, Mulvey addresses the scope of cinema to subvert the male gaze.

The research titled “Breaking the gaze: Impact of Male Gaze in Malayalam Cinema, with Focus on 'The Great Indian Kitchen'” seeks to understand how this movie subverts traditional depictions influenced by the male gaze within which it occurs. This involves assessing characters and various scenes which do not adhere to these standards. Additionally, the study focuses on realizing how this movie represents its female characters to influence the perceptions of women about themselves. Specifically, to understand if the film reduces their feelings of objectivity and increases self-esteem. Finally, the research aims to provide practical recommendations to filmmakers and practitioners in Malayalam cinema

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1)To examine how 'The Great Indian Kitchen' challenges conventional male gaze portrayals and assess its influence on reducing feelings of objectification and bolstering self-esteem among women viewers.

2)To examine the perception of male gaze among women audience members aged 18-30, focusing on their experiences of objectification and its impact on self-esteem.

3)To suggest recommendations for filmmakers and media practitioners to create more inclusive and empowering representations of gender in Malayalam cinema.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research focuses on how feminist narratives such as ‘The Great Indian Kitchen’ can slam patriarchal narratives, thereby diminishing the male gaze in films. This will bring about narratives that will represent women with agency and autonomy. These narratives can help women gain confidence in themselves and reduce the feelings of objectification and bolster self-esteem.

1.4 NEED OF THE STUDY

In Malayalam cinema, women have been primarily depicted through a male-dominated eye, which enforces traditional notions and gender biases. Though there have been attempts to challenge these representations, their influence on how women perceive themselves as objects and their self-worth has not been fully examined. Even though films like "The Great Indian Kitchen" aim to bash traditional storytelling and patriarchal norms, there is limited research on whether these feminist narratives have succeeded in reducing the feelings of objectification and bolstering self-esteem.

Expanding upon the existing need of the study, it is imperative to delve deeper into the nuanced perceptions and experiences of women audiences, particularly those aged 18-30, as they represent a demographic deeply engaged with media consumption and shaping cultural attitudes. By comprehensively analyzing their interpretations of the male gaze and its impact on their sense of self-worth, this research seeks to bridge the gap between cinematic narratives and real-world experiences. Moreover, in the context of Malayalam cinema, where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, exploring the potential of films like "The Great Indian Kitchen" to disrupt these norms and foster a more empowering cinematic landscape becomes essential. Through this investigation, the study aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations for filmmakers and media practitioners to navigate towards more inclusive and gender-equitable storytelling, ultimately contributing to a more progressive and socially conscious cinematic landscape in Malayalam cinema.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates how women are portrayed in Malayalam films, particularly through the lens of the male gaze. It focuses on the experiences and perspectives of women viewers aged 18-30. By analyzing the film "The Great Indian Kitchen," the research explores how gender

roles are depicted and how this film challenges traditional patriarchal norms. The findings aim to guide filmmakers and media professionals in creating more inclusive and empowering representations of gender in Malayalam cinema. In addition to examining the portrayal of women in Malayalam films, the study also considers the broader societal implications of these representations, shedding light on the reinforcement or subversion of gender stereotypes. Furthermore, by incorporating qualitative methodologies such as interviews and focus groups, the research endeavors to capture the diverse voices and lived experiences of women audiences, offering a multifaceted understanding of their engagement with cinematic narratives. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to academic discourse on gender representation in film, enriching discussions surrounding media literacy, feminist theory, and cultural studies within the context of Malayalam cinema.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research results may not represent the views of all female viewers or be valid in other cultural contexts besides the Malayalam film industry. Women's interpretations of male gaze depictions and their impact on objectification and self-esteem may vary greatly depending on their personal experiences and perceptions. The study's narrow focus on women between 18 and 30 and its potentially limited sample size may limit the range of opinions captured. Other factors that may affect women's perceptions and experiences, such as socioeconomic status, education level, or personal values, may not have been considered in the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of the "male gaze" in her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' , this term describes how visual media, like movies and ads, often portray women from a heterosexual male viewpoint, treating them as objects of desire. Mainstream media commonly portrays women as objects meant for the enjoyment of heterosexual men. This portrayal reinforces stereotypes and unequal power dynamics between genders, as women are often depicted as passive objects of desire. Techniques like focusing on women's bodies or using voyeuristic or intrusive camera angles contribute to this objectification, limiting women's agency and individuality. The depiction of women as sexual objects is a leitmotif in erotic scenes. While women are essential to mainstream films, their roles often lack depth and fail to contribute meaningfully to the storyline. (Mulvey, Laura. Sept. 1975).

Movies are mostly seen and conceived from a heterosexual male point of view. The female characters lack solid characterization and are written from this heterosexual male perspective, with women being represented in relation to him. The women have no worth or value and are portrayed as dumb, while the men in the narratives possess talents and are highly regarded for their smartness (Jose, Ashima, December 2017). Women's characters are a product of male gaze and women in the audience also tend to view these characters from a patriarchal perspective, thereby objectifying the women on screen (Linda, Diana, 2017).

Close-up shots in films frequently highlight the bodies and sexualized traits of female actors. The desires and aspirations of female characters take a backseat to those of male characters. This approach subordinates female empowerment to male sexual desires and reinforces patriarchal norms, depicting women in submissive roles to cater to male viewers. When women

are consistently portrayed as sexual objects in various media forms like advertisements, TV shows, movies, and artwork, it influences young girls to perceive this portrayal as normal. Consequently, women who compare themselves to these sexualized depictions may experience body shame due to the pervasive influence of the male gaze. This limited perspective restricts women's self-definition. (Deb, dr.Jyotirmay. Sept.2023).

Another way in which the male gaze is depicted in films, besides voyeuristic camera angles, is through the narrative structure of the film. Female characters are often portrayed as subordinate to male characters. They lack autonomy and agency. The narrative focuses on the active role of men. This reduction of women's roles to gather the attention of the male protagonist reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes. For instance, in films like 'Athirathan' (1984) and 'Nadanpennum Naatupramanimarum' (2000), dialogues often degrade women and promote stereotypes rather than dismissing them (Tasker, Yvonne., 1993). Additionally, common stereotypical depictions make men appear to have more power and control over women, treating women as objects to be looked at. A significant trend observed in Malayalam cinema during the 2000s is the portrayal of women who wear modern attire, speak English, and confidant, arrogant and selfish characters who require redemption by the hero or the 'Kulapurushan', in Malayalam, "Kulapurushan" refers to a man or husband in a family. Eventually, these women undergo a transformation into a traditional 'kulastree', in Malayalam, "Kulastree" refers to a woman or wife in a family. donning traditional sarees and apologizing for her behaviour (Dika, Vera, 1990).

Rhythm and pacing of editing is actively used to portray women as objects of desire. Quick-cuts and slow-motion shots are utilized for construction of male gaze. 'Item songs' in films like "Madhuraraja" are classical example of this, as, they utilize rhythm, pacing in editing and even slow-motion introduction scenes of heroines showcasing their belly button (Mulvey, Laura., Sept. 1975).

2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics of this research consist of gender and age. Women in the age group 18-30 have been chosen as participants in the focus group discussion for this study. Both of these demographics are essential because the study focuses on how the male gaze impacts women. Other demographics like educational qualifications, profession, etc are not taken into consideration. Women watching idealized or objectifying age-based advertisements in media usually end up being de-motivated towards their bodies and experiencing dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Constant exposition to the same kind of characters and scenes can strengthen stereotypes and norms about physical attractiveness and traditionally defined gender roles. These conditions create the source of the objectification of women in different social spaces, such as, film. Hence, the importance of feminist narratives and how it can bolster self-esteem can be studied with these demographics(Tiggemann & Slater, 2013).

2.2. MALE GAZE IN MALAYALAM CINEMA

Malayalam cinema, also known as Mollywood, is the fourth-largest film industry in India. Even when recent films are soaring to new heights, it is still not free from patriarchal representations imbued with objectification (Cooke, 2018). A classic example of the male gaze can be seen in Mammooty's Kasaba, which was released in 2016, where Mammooty's character threatens a female police officer, saying, "I can stop your menstrual cycle if I would like to." Such dialogue reduces and diminishes a woman's presence to a mere sexual object, one the male protagonist can rule over and disregard (D. Greeshma, , 2021).

Another trope reflecting internal male gaze is the idea of rescuing one's sister, mother, or wife from harmful eyes and seeking revenge for the same, which can also be seen in many Malayalam movies like 'Puthiyaniyamam' and 'Varathan'. These are staples in many Malayalam films. However, many directors are delving into varied narratives nowadays.

Movies like 'The Great Indian Kitchen', 'B 32 Muthal 44 vare', 'Freedom Fight' and many more (B.S. Arathy, December 2020).

Many female-centric films continue to emphasize traditional gender roles, often depicting women as dependent on male characters. This perpetuation of traditional roles in contemporary settings is detrimental to both women and the entertainment sector, as it limits diverse representations and prolongs outdated gender stereotypes. In "Sara's," directed by Jude Antony Joseph, it portrays an independent woman who does not desire children; however, it concludes by suggesting that the next step in the protagonist's life will involve childbirth. This film, despite being women-centric, ultimately reverts to the expectation that a woman should become a mother (Krishna, Anjali, "Representation of Women in Malayalam Cinema").

Critiques of conventional family structures and familial institutions are often avoided by mainstream films, which typically uphold the traditional family as an ideal to be preserved under all circumstances. However, recent films have attempted to explore gender stereotypes and norms, breaking the patriarchal framework surrounding women through strong visual storytelling. "Uyare," directed by Manu Ashokan, depicts the journey of Pallavi Raveendran, an aspiring pilot who becomes an acid attack survivor. The film diverges from the stereotype that a woman needs a man and will be dependent on him, thereby rejecting the notion of women being merely objects revolving around the main male protagonist (U, Ananthakrishnan and Dr.V, Shanti, 2016).

2.3. IMPACT ON FEELINGS OF OBJECTIFICATION

“Sexual Objectification occurs when a woman’s sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her ‘’ (Barkty,1990). Women may self-objectify themselves and keep their bodies under surveillance when they see sexual objectification on screen. This will create

anxiety issues, depression and body shaming, and many other psychological stresses (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Women are identified as an inferior gender in many films and they are shown as completely dependent on their male counterparts. While women are the primary caregivers and epitome of love men are the breadwinners of the family. Any changes to such dynamics will result in someone being a negative character or someone who has to shape their life or change their character to be the 'ideal' one. Such dynamics in movies with which we view women and how they view themselves create unrealistic and stereotypical expectations. When male gaze in Malayalam movies are pervasive, female audiences may experience heightened feelings of objectification, contributing to a sense of disempowerment and alienation from their own bodies. ((Viswamohan & Chaudhuri, 2020)

Many urban populations believe that objectification is normal when the woman is the romantic interest of the male protagonist. Instances in the film 'Kabir Singh', where 'Kabir' calls his girlfriend "bandi" is an example in which such statements are normalized. Normalization of such ideas can be seen in many Malayalam movies, like, "Natturajavu" and "Narasimham" where dialogues such as "ente pennu" are used to convey the same idea, that objectification is normal when it comes to love. This normalization process perpetuates harmful attitudes towards women, by devaluing their agency and reducing them to mere objects of sexual gratification. (Kharat Sudarshan and Gagare Ajit, 2022).

In the realm of Malayalam cinema, the portrayal of emotions holds a profound influence on the perpetuation and subversion of objectification of women, especially involving gender dynamics. Objectification of women occurs when there is manipulation of emotions such as desire, lust, and romanticization within the narratives of the film (Dwivedi, 2018). the portrayal of objectifying feelings in Malayalam cinema significantly influences audience perception and interpretation of gender dynamics. Viewers internalize and replicate the emotional cues presented in films, shaping their attitudes and behaviors towards others. Reinforcing

stereotypes results in further objectification of women, positioning them as passive receivers of the male gaze (Menon, 2017).

Feelings of objectification in Malayalam cinema pose challenges to the portrayal of empowerment narratives, particularly for female characters. Despite attempts to showcase women in assertive and independent roles, the pervasive influence of objectifying emotions undermines such portrayals, limiting the representation of women as fully realized individuals with agency. This creates strong negative impact on women as they try to relate to women on screen (Kumar, 2021).

2.4. EFFECTS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION ON SELF-ESTEEM

The portrayal of women through the male gaze in Malayalam cinema can also impact women's self-esteem and body image perceptions. Women in Malayalam cinema are portrayed as obedient, nurturing, and imbued with an essence of passion. Females are regarded as compliant with a so-called “perfect body”. The audience, particularly women, who view these patriarchal narratives, first identify themselves with the characters on screen and eventually will want to look and be like them. This creates negative body image and mental trauma, which will eventually lead to self-esteem issues (Menon, Meera and K. Sreena, 'Understanding the representation of women with disability in Malayalam cinema through Laura Mulvey’s male gaze theory').

The correlation between media images portraying ideal body types or unattainable beauty standards and decreased self-esteem is demonstrated in many pieces of research (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997 and Calogero et al., 2011). In the context of Malayalam cinema, where actresses are often objectified and subjected to unrealistic beauty ideals, female audiences may internalize these standards, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their bodies, which will eventually increase insecurities about their bodies. Women struggle to

reconcile with their bodies with limited representation offered. But this is often met male gaze and it affects their self-esteem to look perfect in the way a man prescribes them to be. (Sreekumar, 2019).

Critical engagement with media representations, coupled with the promotion of diverse and inclusive portrayals, can empower women to resist internalized notions of inferiority and reclaim their self-esteem. By interrogating the patriarchal gaze and advocating for alternative perspectives, female audiences play a crucial role in reshaping cultural norms and fostering greater inclusivity in Malayalam cinema (Sudheesh, 2021).

2.5 ANALYSIS OF THE FILM ‘THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN’

“The Great Indian Kitchen is the voice of the voiceless, the unsung hurdles, the silent cries of every woman, and an endless cycle for a lifetime of women in the kitchen. Many viewers relate to the film and the women’s plight in the patriarchal family and society” (Lourdes Antoinette Shalini and Alamelu C, 2022). The movie showcases the plight of women in almost every Indian household. The character portrayed by Nimisha Sajayan is a reminder as to how every woman is subjected to gender norms and the patriarchal expectations she has to face in a society. The husband portrayed by Suraj Venjaramood shows us how a patriarchal man wants his wife to be, making him savouring foods and not objecting anything he says and an object he wants to fulfil his sexual desires on. The societal pressure a woman faces in making her personal decisions and how she is subjected to negative comments when she doesn't go as society requires her to be are all themes in this drama. The majority of Malayalam films romanticize cooking and unnecessarily objectify them on its path to romanticizing cooking or in general while doing the household chores. This is where The Great Indian Kitchen shines the brightest. The film shows how difficult the life of a woman is and how much she has to suffer in order to gain the respect she deserves (The Great Indian Kitchen, 2021).

The film refrains from assigning names to most characters, with only two or three exceptions. This deliberate choice underscores a thematic essence: Nimisha Sajayan's character represents the archetype of 'everywoman,' while Suraj Venjaramoodu embodies the persona of 'everyman.' This absence of specific names serves to universalize their experiences and emphasizes broader societal dynamics rather than individual identities. This approach makes the ordinary audience to relate to them(Rangan B, January 15,2021).

The film, underscores a poignant critique of gender dynamics within the domestic sphere, urging readers to confront the often-overlooked contributions of women in maintaining household order. It challenges the notion of "not all men" by shifting the focus to the everyday labor and sacrifices made by women to sustain the household, from preparing meals to managing household chores. Moreover, it serves as a stark reminder of the invisible labor performed by women, highlighting the disparity between the visible abundance on the dinner table and the unnoticed toil behind the scenes. It prompts reflection on the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities and calls for a reevaluation of societal expectations surrounding gender roles within the home. Additionally, it underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the often-unseen labor of women in shaping the fabric of everyday life (Mohandas,Vandana,The Cue,2021).

“Eye-opener, at a time many women are still judged for their cooking skills than any other capabilities. It not only talks about the new-gen women who question such unsung slavery but is also a tribute to the women who have been silently managing it inside every home for centuries” . In the film none of the characters have names in turn depicts how it is the story of every household. When stereotypes and gender norms objectify women and reduces their self-esteem, The Great Indian Kitchen breaks away from it and empowers woman to walk away from toxicity and helps to understand self-worth(George, The Times Of India, 2021).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the way women are subjected to the male gaze and the effects on feelings of objectification and impacts on self-esteem, as well as how different feminist narratives like “The Great Indian Kitchen” can bolster self-esteem and confidence within themselves. It also focuses on how filmmakers can change their narrative to be more responsible and careful in delivering content like this. The study is a qualitative one, conducted through expert interviews and a focus group discussion. These inputs are keenly taken into consideration to understand and formulate the research design, sample selection, data collection tools, instruments used for data collection, hypotheses, and data analysis.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research methodology has been chosen by the researcher to conduct this study. It will be helpful to understand how women identify with characters on screen and how the male gaze affects their feelings of objectification and reduced self-esteem. The film chosen for this analysis is The Great Indian Kitchen and this method is highly suitable for studying the same thoroughly with the help of expert interviews. This will help us to understand how feminist narratives subvert the male gaze and help to bolster self-esteem among women audiences, with the help of a focus group discussion.

3.2 SAMPLE SELECTION

For the focus group discussion component of this study, a simple random sampling method was employed to select participants. The aim was to gather diverse perspectives on the subject matter while ensuring representation from the target demographic. The sample consisted of six participants, all of whom identify as female and fall within the age range of 18 to 30 years old.

This age group was selected to capture insights from individuals who are likely to have experienced or observed the phenomena under investigation, while also reflecting a range of generational perspectives. The decision to focus specifically on female participants was informed by the nature of the research topic, which centers on the experiences of women subjected to the male gaze and its impact on self-esteem.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Expert interviews and focus group discussions were employed in this qualitative study. Three experts who worked in the film “The Great Indian Kitchen” were chosen for the interview. They were closely associated with the cinematography and direction team, both of which dictate the thematic and narrative style of the movie. The interview was semi-structured which paved the way for open-ended questions, which in turn brought about their insights, and perspectives about the male gaze, gender norms, and stereotypes addressed in the film and how it empowers and generate confidence in a woman. The interviews provided valuable firsthand accounts and expert opinions, enriching the qualitative data collected for this study.

Additionally, a focus group discussion was also conducted with 6 females aged between 18 and 30. Participants’ attitudes, perceptions, insights, and lived experiences towards the male gaze and feminist narratives were discussed and in-depth exploration of these were facilitated. The focus group discussion served as a platform for collective sensemaking and the generation of diverse perspectives, complementing the insights obtained from expert interviews.

3.4 HYPOTHESIS

HO1: Exposure to 'The Great Indian Kitchen' will lead to a significant reduction in feelings of objectification and a significant increase in self-esteem among female viewers compared to viewers of films that adhere more closely to traditional male gaze portrayals.

H02: Women aged 18-30 who are regular viewers of Malayalam cinema will report higher levels of awareness and sensitivity to the presence of the male gaze in films, and this heightened awareness will be associated with lower self-esteem and greater feelings of objectification.

H03: Positive representations of female characters in 'The Great Indian Kitchen,' characterized by agency, autonomy, and resistance to traditional gender norms, will be positively correlated with increased self-esteem and reduced feelings of objectification among female viewers.

H04: Filmmakers and media practitioners who are exposed to recommendations for creating more inclusive and empowering representations of gender in Malayalam cinema will demonstrate a greater willingness to implement these suggestions in their work, leading to tangible changes in the portrayal of women on screen over time.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted a focus group discussion of six participants and an expert interview of three. A content analysis of the expert interview was conducted to analyze the gathered data. An expert interview serves as a valuable approach for obtaining insights from a knowledgeable individual regarding a research issue, potential solutions, or anticipated outcomes. The data gathered from the focus group discussion were also taken into account in the analysis. The study aims to understand how women audiences identify with women on screen and how accurate representation of women can bolster their self-esteem and confidence and reduce feelings of objectivity. It also focussed on how filmmakers have the capacity to change the stereotypical narratives and the study outcome showed what was holding filmmakers to make an accurate portrayal. The data gathered showcased varied opinions from women as well as experts and to them what objectification means in contemporary cinema. The research gives insights as to how “the great Indian kitchen” has impacted them and bolstered their self-esteem and confidence.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 EXPERT INTERVIEW

1. The researcher conducted an expert interview with Salu K Thomas, cinematographer of the movie 'The Great Indian Kitchen'.

1) Can you please explain how 'The Great Indian Kitchen' differs from its contemporaries in representing gender roles and the male gaze?

A: The script of the great Indian kitchen demanded the camera to be the eyes of the kitchen. the camera should mimic mundane tasks done by women inside the kitchen. the basic aim of the story was to show whoever was in the kitchen, whether it be a man or a woman, and their daily chores. in our society mostly woman do all the housework. There has never been such a reading about mother or women in the movies we watch. It differs from contemporary cinema in this way.

2. Why do you think many contemporary cinema portray women in an objectifying manner which affects their self-esteem?

A: The problem is that cinema predominantly caters to the male audience. Film-making is done in an objectifying manner to attract and please men to the product, the cinema. Objectifying women is kind of a marketing strategy. A lot of fight movies are coming out and the audience is mostly male and it will include many things to attract them. Instead, it should be filmed in a way that appeals to all types of audiences. Doing so will make this situation better and improve self-esteem.

3. How did you try to avoid male gaze , while shooting the intimate scenes, were there any challenges?

A : Filming intimate scenes for "The Great Indian Kitchen" posed minimal challenge. Every member was like a family and this helped in the shooting process. The absence of attempts to cater to the male gaze helped the scene's treatment, adhering to standard shot division techniques that are consistent with the film's narrative language.

4. How did the great Indian kitchen utilize cinematography to defy gender roles and male gaze?

A: When it comes to 'The Great Indian Kitchen', there are shots that romanticize food in the beginning. After the newlywed bliss, when the wife gets trapped in the kitchen, there are changes in the shot division and lighting, and the tone of the film turns dark. In the end, we see what a real kitchen looks like; with heaps of waste, we feel disgusted by the kitchen, and this is done by using a desaturated tone to showcase the reality. This kitchen doesn't attract anyone. This is the only way the audience will realize what is happening in their own houses. This is the reason for the shift in the frame.

5. Which are the most empowering scenes in the movie, which lead the viewers to think of the character with agency and autonomy, and by which countered the gender norms?

Certain scenes within "The Great Indian Kitchen" convey empowerment for the protagonist, 'the wife', emphasizing her agency amidst societal constraints. Moments such as Suraj's fall from the bike and Nimisha's subsequent introspection illustrate her inner turmoil. The climactic scene of Nimisha's defiant departure resonates strongly, underscoring themes of resilience and resistance scripted to address contemporary social issues.

6. How can cinematographers work together to avoid the male gaze?

A: Filmmakers must prioritize ethical guidelines when it comes to lighting, camera angles, and how they depict women's bodies. While directors may suggest angles that objectify women, it's crucial to resist and uphold ethical standards. The goal is to create visually appealing films without resorting to objectification, even in intimate scenes. This demonstrates a commitment to ethical filmmaking practices.

2. The researcher conducted an expert interview with Martin Joseph, Associate Director of the movie 'The Great Indian Kitchen'.

1. Can you please explain how 'The Great Indian Kitchen' differs from its contemporaries in representing gender roles and the male gaze? Did the film help reduce feelings of objectification and bolster self-esteem

A: The film is different in its portrayal and depiction of women in Indian households. Even before starting Cinema, makers had a strong conviction that what was being told in the movie was happening everywhere. The director, Geobaby made this film from real-life inspirations. He observed that a person takes just 15-20 minutes to have food, but the amount of time and work put into the preparation are immense and are done by women working tirelessly. The script stemmed from the idea that when men contribute to these household chores, half the time will be saved as two people are working in the kitchen. A criticism conveyed by the audience was about the lagging scenes in the kitchen. Many of them asked why there were these many repeating scenes in the kitchen. But these scenes were placed deliberately, to show the audience what was happening daily in every Indian household. To bore them with it and make them realize what was happening in their kitchen. The script demanded to shoot various scenes in the kitchen and later it was improvised by the whole team. They added their interpretations and opinions which helped to craft this outstanding piece. There are many female-centric films in the Malayalam film industry, like 'Uyare', but, the way 'The Great Indian Kitchen' stands out

is different. The makers wanted to tell the story from the female perspective and wanted the audience to relate with the characters on the screen. This was reflected in the audience as many viewers expressed that they were empowered by the representations in the movie, and tried their maximum to eliminate the gender norms surrounding them. They started to speak up and voice their opinions which helped to boost their confidence and self-esteem.

2. Do you think many contemporary cinema portray women in an objectifying manner which affects their self-esteem?

A: There are chances for women to feel low self-esteem and feelings of objectification when romanticization of cooking scenes, washing clothes, or generally the presence of a woman showcasing the 'ideal body'. This romanticization is used to increase the aesthetic appeal of the scenes. Even the Hindi remake of 'The Great Indian Kitchen' follows a similar pattern, where certain scenes are romanticized. In most Malayalam movies similar patterns in filmmaking are observed. In 'The Great Indian Kitchen', this pattern is broken and close-to-reality scenes are utilized to create an impact.

3. How can filmmakers work together to avoid the male gaze and bring about more inclusive feminist narratives?

A: In Malayalam film industry, producers don't always entertain female-centric movies, or else, well-reputed or established directors and actors with high star value must direct and act in them. The makers of the Malayalam film 'Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey' before casting Basil Joseph as the male lead in the movie, went on to ask 15 prominent actors in the Malayalam film industry, who all denied acting in the film because the male protagonist in the movie had to be beaten up by a women. They thought that it wouldn't sit well with the audience. These judgements which arise from a patriarchal perspective and gender norms in society are a hindrance towards female-centric movies. First-time collection, satellite value, and OTT sale are all concerns of

the producers. A producer produces a movie ultimately for profit, it is noted that high-star value and appeal are the greatest crowd pullers towards a movie. Stories revolving around the hero are always made because they lure the audience to theatres. Thus, it is a herculean task to find a feasible producer and to do a female-oriented film or the makers will have to produce themselves.

4. How is male gaze and objectification deployed in Malayalam cinema? Do you feel a shift towards better representation?

A: Objectification in Malayalam cinema is usually seen in the form of double-meaning jokes. In many college-based stories, we can see the use of double-meaning jokes. This attracts youngsters to the theatre. Usually, makers won't think about the messages passed through it, as it is made to cater to the commercial aspect. Unlike films in other industries, there are only a handful of item songs in Malayalam cinema, and not every film has an item song, but humor that mocks a woman and objectifies her has been a staple in many films. Some families left the theatre because such jokes and objectification made them uncomfortable and irritated. Nowadays, with emerging discussions and debates about 'political correctness', makers try to avoid narratives imbued with objectification, gender norms, and also double-meaning jokes.

5. What are the changes employed by the makers of the film, 'The Great Indian Kitchen' to subvert the male gaze?

A.: The film did project men's problems. The makers told the story from 'the wife's' perspective and depicted it as close to reality. In the storyline, Suraj Venjaramood's character can't accept many things done by his wife, like applying for a job, picking him up when he fell from the bike during Sabarimala abstinence, or even playfully teasing him in the restaurant about his table manners. This is placed in such a manner because it resembles many men. None of the main character's name is mentioned in the movie, except for Janaki (little girl) and

Usha(maid). Such a treatment is used to highlight how this is a story of many Indian households. We can see this husband and wife when we look into our society .

3.The researcher conducted an expert interview with Anna Fatima, Assistant cinematographer of the movie ‘The Great Indian Kitchen’.

1. How are women represented in the movie ‘the great Indian kitchen’ ?

A; In this movie, we can see how society cages women like a bird, and how much she has to suffer for her autonomy. In the end, she breaks from that cage and move forwards for freedom. This character is empowering for a lot of women who are in patriarchal surroundings, to break the dominance of men and find their own identity. Ultimately, the protagonist's quest for freedom resonates as empowering and inspiring to women.

2. Did ‘The Great Indian Kitchen’ help in having a positive impact on women?

A: The great Indian kitchen, has had an impact on the audience. Many people have commented about it to the makers of the movie, that they felt empowered after watching it. The film portrays reality and is not made to please anyone, it breaks away from the stereotypical portrayals we see on screen and this has helped women identify with the character. The movie has lot of close-up shots in the kitchen, not portraying her body but rather, showing the suffering gone through by the character. Additionally, the audience criticized the lengthy scenes in the kitchen, but these scenes showcase the brutality in an ordinary woman's life.

3. How can filmmakers work together to avoid the male gaze and bring about more inclusive feminist narratives?

A: Geo Baby created this film by observing whatever was happening around him. Filmmakers always get inspired by their surroundings. Such inspiration can lead to better feminist narratives. Additionally, when the mindset of the people changes, it will be reflected in movies.

When the filmmakers are aware of their society and want to cast a positive message, better stories emerge.

4. How can cinematographers work together to avoid the male gaze?

A: Responsibility for objectification in film cannot be solely attributed to cinematographers; directors play a pivotal role in guiding the visual narrative. While cinematographers execute the director's vision, decisions regarding close-up shots and framing ultimately rest with the director. Objectification tends to occur with extreme close-up shots, emphasizing the importance of directorial discretion in shaping the film's aesthetic and thematic integrity.

5. Do you think 'The Great Indian Kitchen' helped in bolstering the self-esteem of women by subverting the male gaze and employing autonomy and agency?

"The Great Indian Kitchen" has served as a catalyst for women to reckon with longstanding societal norms. After seeing this film, many women have realized what has been going on in their lives. If more films like this come out, it will be possible to empower women without losing their individuality and also will help them bolster their self-esteem.

4.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with 6 participants and asked 6 questions.

The questions are:

1) How do you perceive the representation of women in Malayalam cinema, particularly in terms of the male gaze? Can you provide examples of films or scenes that you believe exemplify this portrayal?

2) How do these representations of women in cinema impact your feelings of self-esteem and identity as a woman? Have you ever felt objectified or misrepresented by the way women are depicted on screen?

- 3) Have you watched the film "The Great Indian Kitchen"? If so, how do you think it challenges traditional gender roles and the male gaze in Malayalam cinema? Do you feel it provides a more empowering representation of women?
- 4) In your opinion, what changes would you like to see in Malayalam cinema to create more inclusive and empowering representations of gender? What recommendations would you offer to filmmakers and media practitioners to achieve media
- 5) How do you think films like "The Great Indian Kitchen" can influence societal attitudes towards gender roles and perceptions of women in Kerala? Do you believe such films have the potential to shift the narrative and promote gender equality?
- 6) What are the scenes or depictions in which you felt the females have autonomy and agency?"

These are the inferences from the responses from participants:

There are various scenes in Malayalam films that objectify and undermine the authority of women. In Pulimurugan, we can see actress Namitha portrayed in an objectifying manner by playing music that conveys eroticism. Her walk, her talk, everything is portrayed in a sexually appealing way that caters to the male audience and is fully misinterpreted. The role lacks characterization and doesn't contribute to the storyline in any manner and just exists as an object to be looked at. Another example of a movie is 'Spadikam', where in the song "Ezhu Mala Poonchola," Silk Smitha is portrayed in a stereotypically feminine way. The song was imbued with various objectifying shots of Silk Smitha, intentionally exposing her cleavage, and shots of Silk Smitha massaging Mohanlal in a sexually exciting manner. Another example in the movie 'Puthiya Niyamam', even a rape scene is shot voyeuristically, and the idea of such a thing itself questions the whole point of the movie, which was supposed to be "women-centric." The scene even garnered many views when it was put on social media sites.

Movie lovers used to admire and still admire movies like ‘Vandanam’ and ‘Anachandham’, but the way the female protagonists in these movies were objectified was simply placed as jokes. Many say there is no point discussing the older movies, but the point is today’s generation evolved watching these movies. There are directors whose every film had a rape scene in it. Such portrayals over and over again normalized the innocent male character who raped a woman unknowingly or out of love or to punish her and later redeeming himself by marrying her. However, there are sufficient shifts from such portrayals. In the past five to six years, there have been numerous changes in the roles women used to portray in the Malayalam film industry. Many movies focus on bashing the male gaze and subverting the patriarchal narratives. One such example is “The Great Indian Kitchen.” Women were only accepted for their petite, slim bodies, and the fairer the better, and they even put on heavy makeup to please the male audience so that their appearance is “desirable.” But now we can see diverse representations in the Malayalam movie industry, and it has become more inclusive compared to other film industries. Actresses have the choice to wear makeup according to their comfort level, and Sai Pallavi and Nimisha Sajayan have explained this on several occasions.

When we see a movie the emotional connection with it is vital to enjoying the movie. Women connect with the women they see on screen. They tend to follow their style, walk, talk, and do whatever they do. When these movies objectify women it poses a threat to their personality and identity. The feeling of running away from the theatre because of the objectification and misinterpretation in the cinema, is also happening around us. The hurtful representation makes a woman weak and finds herself with low self-esteem. A focus on Women with slender long fingers, luscious voluminous hair, and specific body parts, such as cleavage and stomach, which are presented in a sexually charged manner are always seen in many movies. These body parts are frequently exaggerated and showcased as idealized representations, catering to societal notions of desirability. But when these representations are idealized we tend to have

an obsession to be like that. When these obsession starts to affect a human being there are various negative effects in them. One participant observed that she even started dieting after she watched Nora Fatehi's dance in 'Kayamkulam Kochhni'. Participants observed that the representation of idealized bodies harms their self-consciousness and this makes them lose their identity and no longer connect to themselves in real life, thus affecting their self-esteem.

All the participants watched the Malayalam movie 'The Great Indian Kitchen'. The movie had a positive impact on them. It was a film that surprised and created a wow factor for the entire audience. The subtle representation of how patriarchy and the inner turmoils of womanhood are all efficiently portrayed in this drama. Such rendition smashes the male gaze and the objectification that comes with it. The cinema opens to us how women are treated as objects in real life, how they are just vessels for a heterosexual man to fulfill their basic needs. From cooking in "ammikallu" to washing clothes with hands and not using a washing machine are some examples from the movie that tell us they want women to obey and do everything for them. Women are just machines for getting their things done. The scene in which the "wife" tries to pick up her "husband" when he falls and how he lashes out at her for picking him up when she is on her period as he is a "Swamy", tells us how people at large in this society believe in taboos which are hindering the freedom of women. Another example from the film showcases how the 'wife' washes the dishes, cleans the house, cooks for the in-laws, and how she is getting tired as each day passes because she has no voice in the house. The empowering portrayal that subverts objectification and the male gaze are many. None of the scenes romanticize cooking. In many films, close-up shots of a woman's various body parts, such as, the back of the neck, her cleavage, and her legs are shot for male appeal. This voyeuristic placement was not at all seen in the film 'The Great Indian Kitchen'. The close-ups in this movie reveal the hardships of Indian women, how they are confined to the kitchen, the chores they do each and every day without another helping hand, and the way they are deprived of all

the privileges a heterosexual man poses. The female character sweats a lot in the kitchen, does not possess the 'ideal body', and has her flaws. Such a portrayal is not at all shown in the majority of mainstream Malayalam movies. This is an example of how the male gaze works.

Malayalam cinema has seen several female writers and directors. When more female writers emerge, more lived experiences and layered stories emerge. This is vital because male writers write stories from their perspective and cannot accurately write about women's feelings. They knowingly or unknowingly reinforce stereotypes and gender roles. Women written by men are devoid of dreams and possess no agency. They are always placed as eye-candy and just exist to dance alongside the male protagonist. This will bring about male gaze. This is where we need more writers, directors, and other technicians to come into the mainstream cinema landscape. Thereby telling accurate stories of women and bashing the male gaze. Not only behind the camera we need more powerful representation of women on screen, there are various professions in which women excel in real life, film showcase their job as a teacher if not a teacher then police officers, who are intentionally objectified. Such portrayal should be changed. Women conquer many professions and excel at them just as men. Such empowered representation will also empower the girls who are watching these films. Mainstream Malayalam producers still don't entertain female-led stories. Many women-centric projects were cut out because no producers would produce them. They have a format, that will always be male-centric and females will be secondary or tertiary and presented to satisfy the male audience. Female-centric movies are emerging but not enough and producers should also play a role in increasing these productions. When male writers write stories about them, consult females with their stories and they can adequately tell where they have been misinterpreted. Many movie writers are using this innovative idea to portray women more realistically.

The movie 'The Great Indian Kitchen', was the starting point of a new way of storytelling in Malayalam cinema. This experimental movie showcased how misogyny and patriarchy are

internalized in Indian households. These are the primary causes of the male gaze and objectification we see in many other movies. With this film, many participants observed that the accurate representation in the movie has helped them look at themselves in a more empowering way. There are many examples, the first one is from the first scene in which she dances and sweats. This scene intercuts with various shots from the kitchen of her home. Most movies don't showcase females sweating while dancing or while doing any other chores, it is considered 'dirty' and not suitable for a woman. In many movies, scenes in which dancing scenes are shown, most of the time the women are objectified, placing closeup shots of her body. Not a single drop of sweat is seen. Her stomach, lips, and legs, are all used for close-up shots, these are not used to showcase the beauty of dancing but rather placing it to appeal to the male audience. In 'The Great Indian Kitchen' we can see these shots enhance the beauty of dancing and tells us how much the female character loves to dance.

The next one, Nimisha Sajayan's curly hair were embraced in this drama. Curly hair were never embraced in mainstream cinema. The heroine will have lustrous wavy or straight hair, through which wind is blown. it is reduced to a visual tool for enhancing the attractiveness or desirability of female characters. this aligns with conventional beauty standards while marginalizing those with diverse hair textures or styles. This lack of representation reinforces the idea that only certain hair types are considered attractive or desirable. This is where 'the great Indian kitchen' breaks norms. It portrays frizzy curly hair and doesn't say it is unattractive, rather it normalizes the same. Such depiction will help the audience to identify with themselves in a much healthier way.

The next one, fingernails and palms are always placed for aesthetic appeal, with soft moist hands and nails coated with nail polish in almost every scenario. But when we look at 'The Great Indian Kitchen', we can see otherwise. The nails are not polished. She wears gold bangles as a newlywed would wear and as time passes these bangles are reduced to one and then none.

She smells her hands often to check if the smell of rotting waste is still on her hands. In this movie, there are several close-up shots of her hands where she washes dishes, cuts and peels vegetables, cooks food, cleans around the house, and so on. None of these scenes shows the aesthetic appeal of a woman's hands or fingernails, rather it symbolizes the hardships the female protagonist goes through. The realistic portrayal helps women audience to see and understand not every female possesses the slender long fingers and nails shown in other movies. It just portray how the hands of a woman who works in the kitchen look like.

Furthermore, Designer brands, glitzy ensembles, and striking accessories are often the focal points of scrutiny when it comes to women's fashion choices in films. The perception that a woman's value is dependent on how she looks can also be sustained by this, supporting consumerist ideas. Costume designers might place more emphasis on clothing that draws attention to the feminine form and appeals to the masculine gaze, such as skimpy or form-fitting attire that draws attention to skin and curves. This turns women into consumable objects of desire for the audience, objectifying them. Such ideas are not perpetuated in this movie. We can see the female protagonist wearing normal churidars in almost every scene. None of them are branded and they are tailored to look exactly like a Keralite. They are not form-fitting attire and doesn't draw attention to her feminine form and are not catered to the male audience.

These are some of the subtle ways in which 'The Great Indian Kitchen' dismantles the male gaze and thereby reducing the feelings of objectification and improving self-esteem among women audience. Feminist narratives like these help women to identify what's happening around them and identify with accurate portrayal of women on screen. This will aid individuals in building confidence within their environment, enabling them to normalize minor imperfections and recognize that it is entirely natural to possess flaws in our bodies. Such understanding diminishes the emphasis on 'ideal bodies'.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter examines the findings of how the acclaimed film, 'The Great Indian Kitchen' challenges conventional male gaze portrayals and assesses its influence on reducing feelings of objectification and bolstering self-esteem among women viewers. Additionally, the perception of male gaze among women audience members aged 18-30, focusing on their experiences of objectification and its impact on self-esteem. Moreover, suggesting recommendations for filmmakers and media practitioners to create more inclusive and empowering representations of gender in Malayalam cinema. The findings are presented methodically.

1. 'The Great Indian Kitchen' defies conventional stereotypes and objectification of female bodies challenging the male gaze by depicting the reality of a woman's life. The portrayal of women's experiences in the kitchen serves to challenge traditional gender roles and norms.
2. The absence of voyeuristic camera angles and shots and the usage of visual storytelling techniques, such as lighting, shot composition, and color grading, and by utilizing dark tones and desaturated tones to contribute to subverting gender roles and objectification, have helped female audience to gain confidence and reduce the feelings of objectivity and bolster self-esteem.
3. The climax scenes which depict agency and autonomy and bash the patriarchy in the female protagonist's life help women to identify with the character and empower them in making decisions in their life.
4. Films deploy the male gaze and the objectification that comes with it to cater to the male audience. It is a marketing technique to pull a large crowd towards the theatre. By

framing narratives to align with the male perspective, and by tapping into existing cultural norms and desires, filmmakers try to reverberate with the male audience.

5. Objectification in Malayalam films is mainly spread through double-meaning jokes. Jokes about women's bodies diminish their value, and reduce their agency and autonomy. These jokes are incorporated to attract youngsters and the makers do not think about the messages passed by them.
6. The close-up shots throughout the film portray difficulties faced by women in every household, contrary to other Malayalam films deploying the shot for objectifying and increasing the aesthetic appeal of the films.
7. Conventional beauty standards, including ideal bodies, smooth silky hair, polished nails, and glamorous appeal of a woman are always used to increase the aesthetic appeal of a film, and this is not seen in the film, 'The Great Indian Kitchen'. Many participants observed that the accurate representation in the movie, 'The Great Indian Kitchen' has helped them look at themselves in a more empowering way, thereby increasing their self-esteem.
8. Participants express concerns about the objectification of women in Malayalam films, citing examples of scenes that are rendered to the male audience. Participants report feeling objectified and misrepresented by the portrayal of women in films, leading to negative effects on self-esteem. Obsession with idealized body standards depicted in movies contributes to unhealthy dieting routines and even starving oneself.
9. In the discussions, participants emphasized the significance of media literacy skills in examining and understanding how gender is portrayed in movies. By exploring concepts like the male gaze, objectification, and gender expectations, young women gained a deeper understanding of media and developed a more critical eye when consuming it.

10. In the discussions, participants observed the increased representation of female writers, directors, and technicians can lead to increased feminist narratives in the industry. These narratives will help to tackle the male gaze and reduce the feelings of objectivity and increase the self-esteem among the women audience.
11. Refrain from objectifying shots, as in, close-up shots, and voyeuristic framing, and prioritize ethical filmmaking principles in intimate scenes.
12. The success of ‘The Great Indian Kitchen’, indicates that people need a shift from masculine stories with a potential focus on real-life stories with in-depth characterization.
13. The lack of producers to produce female-centric movies is a major setback in the industry. Producers believe, such stories can’t make a good first-time collection and won’t sit well with the audience. Finding a feasible producer is still a herculean task as they mainly go for well-reputed stars with high star value.
14. Discussing scripts with women to potentially identify any inaccurate representation. This will help in crafting a film that doesn’t deploy the male gaze and will also help in ethical filmmaking.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

A study on the portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema, especially in the film "The Great Indian Kitchen," has revealed important findings. By analyzing focus group discussions and expert opinions, the researcher has examined how gender representation is interpreted in movies and how it affects female viewers' self-esteem. This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between cinematic representation, the male gaze, and its impact on women. Additionally, it highlights the necessity of amplifying marginalized voices in film discourse, fostering a more inclusive industry for both creators and audiences alike. The findings underscore the detrimental effects of objectifying shots and double-meaning jokes in perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes, emphasizing the urgency for more responsible and ethical filmmaking practices.

The findings reveal that traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms are often perpetuated in mainstream cinema, contributing to the objectification and marginalization of women characters. Scenes that cater to the male gaze, characterized by voyeuristic framing and objectifying shots, not only reinforce societal stereotypes but also have tangible effects on women viewers' self-esteem. The pressure to conform to idealized beauty standards depicted in films can lead to unhealthy behaviors and feelings of insecurity among women audiences.

Despite prevailing norms, "The Great Indian Kitchen" emerges as a trailblazing film that confronts traditional gender roles and disrupts the male-centric perspective. It realistically depicts the female experience in the kitchen, crafting nuanced characters. This poignant critique of patriarchal society empowers female viewers, enabling them to assert their independence and sense of self. By employing inclusive storytelling and shunning objectifying

visuals, the film establishes a model for ethical filmmaking centered on authenticity and empowering narratives.

Furthermore, this research emphasizes the need to increase the number of women in writing, directing, and technical roles in the film industry. By doing so, we can bring more diverse perspectives and lived experiences to mainstream movies. Collaborations between filmmakers and female viewers are essential to ensure accurate and inspiring portrayals of gender on screen. This will lead to a more inclusive culture and promote positive social change. Additionally, it underscores the importance of support networks for emerging female filmmakers, providing them with the resources and opportunities necessary to thrive in a male-dominated industry.

This research explores how Malayalam cinema intertwines cinema, gender portrayal, and how audiences react. By emphasizing how films like 'The Great Indian Kitchen' can challenge traditional gender roles and inspire female viewers, the study highlights the significance of feminist narratives and responsible filmmaking in creating more fair and inclusive representations of gender in movies. The findings of this study serve as a call to action for the film industry to embrace inclusivity, authenticity, and ethical storytelling, ultimately paving the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for Malayalam cinema and beyond. In conclusion, this research highlights the transformative potential of cinema in challenging societal norms and fostering empathy and understanding

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