Cinema, a medium which expresses different aspects of life to any society without much difficulty than even literature, is much more a modern device to transform a society by its own audio-visual capabilities. It indirectly serves as a means for the uplift of a society by setting aside all its defects and drawbacks. Due to the developed scientific technology and skills involved in it, it met with many transitions gradually from the period of its inception. The captivating caption, the attractive theme, the excellence of the action on the part of the actors and actresses, the dialogue, the songs and music, the photography were factors which attracted the mass without any caste, colour, and creed and language disparities. Their entertainment and educative value too cannot be neglected. Further as it is a prominent communication process it will be convincing to have an analysis of the origin and evolution of Indian cinema in general before plunging into facts pertaining to Tamil cinema. Though the values and influences of cinema are many-sided it is a must to know the history of cinema as a prelude which in term yielded the scope for promoting Tamil cinema. In 1889 when William Free Screen discovered the Cinematograph it revolutionised the film industry. In 1894 Thomas Alva Edison discovered clistosus. Thus the film industry had its origin in its own way.

Indian Cinema

The motion picture was brought into India in 1896. This art industry had its own systematic pioneering endeavours. In the same year during July a film was screened at Hotel Bombay by the Lumiere Cameraman Murices Zester. Through the scientific research inventions introduced by Thomas Alva Edison, experts such as Augustus
Lumiere, Pathe Brothers and Leon Goumont France derived the goods to India during the later half of the 19th century. The first cinema show was held in India by the efforts of Lumiere Brothers at the Watson Hotel on July, 7, 1896 and on 14, July, 1896 at Novelty Theatre Bombay. Cinematography was the method employed for exhibiting the films. In 1904 the Touring cinema company owned by Mauek D. Sethna at Bombay screened the two reels of film entitled *The Life of Christ*. By 1910 cinema halls were sprung up in the major cities of India including Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras etc. But only foreign films alone were screened till the birth and outcome of Indian film. Though the 19th century was the period of the outcome of world cinema, in India it had its emergence only in the 20th century under colonial rule.

**Birth and growth of the Indian movie:**

Dundiraj Govind Phalke, inspired by the film like “*The Life of Christ*”, took up the pioneering effort. He released his own film entitled “*Raja Harichandra*” in the Coronation Theatre, Bombay in December, 1912. With this subsequently a galaxy of silent movies, mostly in the form of reproductions of fantasies and legends, were released and it was realised that they are known for their entertainment value.\(^1\)

After 1919, the alien British government itself undertook all activities such as the making of the film, releasing, distribution etc., After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the different films of Russia were centering on the themes of the policies of the government, the reactions, attitudes and outlooks of the common public. They even revealed the sorrows and sufferings of the downtrodden. Films such as “*Esther Jute the Lady of

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“Riamlin” etc. were of that nature. They were the social revolutionary films.\(^2\) This was a turning point in the themes of movies. Ideas pertaining to society began to form the basis for films. Some foreigners produced films on Indian themes, Indian setting, Indian culture etc. Indians too produced films in collaboration with foreigners.\(^3\)

India after witnessing the motion picture production in 1897, started to have its own feature film only after two decades. It had dialogues with the cinematographies of the world for well over seven decades. The interaction continued for a long period of 70 years. Anyhow the foreigners made their own films on Indian themes and location. Indian set up was also taken as a backdrop. Few others utilised the acting, dancing and other talents of the Indian natives. Subsequently some producers adapted themselves with the local film industry. Co-produced films gained greater impetus.

In the year 1898 the first “gramophone record” was released by Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd, Belgatchia Bhari Vir Singh’s Punjabi Naval Sundri two Italians, Chlorella and Cornaglia organised film shows in tents at the Azad Maidan, Bombay. Hiralal Sen started making films.

Two seminal works of Urdu Literature, Ruswa Mohammed Hadi Mirza’s Faan Ada and Abdul Halim Sharar’s Flora-Florinda, were published. The performance of G.B. Deval’s Marathi Play, ‘\textit{Sangeet Sharada}’, sometimes cited as the film of ‘social’ reform.

Major Warwick established a cinema in Madras F.B. Thanawala’s Gtand Kinetoscope in 1900 and newsreels established the genre’s commercial possibilities.

\(^2\) Ayya, \textit{Inraya Ulagil Thiraippadangal}, (Cinema in the Present World), Other details not available, p. 15.

The first Indian to record a song on gramophone disc was Sashi Mukhi of classic Theatres, Calcutta and it took place in 1902. In the same year J.F. Madan launched his bioscope show in a tent on Calcutta’s Maidan laid the foundation for a massive exhibition and distribution which dominated silent Indian, Burmese and Sri Lankan cinemas.

Veer Savarkar, later associated with the right-wing of Hindu Mahasabha, started the Abhinav Bharat as a secret society of revolutionary terrorists in 1904. Manek D. Sethna started the Touring cinema co. in Bombay, showing. The Life of Christ (two reels) in 1904,

In 1905 J.F. Madan turned as producer with Jyotish Sarkar’s film of “Protest Rally against partition of Bengal.”

In 1907 J.F Madan opened the Elphinstone picture palace in Calcutta, the first of his cinema chain. Pathe established an Indian office.

In 1910 Dadasaheb Phalke attended a screening of The Life of Christ at P.B. Mehta’s America-Indian cinema.

In 1911 George V. visited Delhi. The grand Durbar the India’s first extensively filmed public event, shot by Hiralal Sen, Bourne & Shepherd, Gaumond, Imperial Bioscope, S.N. Patanakar and Madan.

Pundalik was probably the first Indian feature film screened in 1912.4

Alam Ara was India’s first sound film screened. Kalidoss screened in the year 1931 was the first Tamil sound feature film, in Telugu Bhakta Prahlada and in Bengali Jmai Sasthi were also screened in the same Year.

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As cinema became the single largest entertainment in the country, edging out our traditional performing arts, such as the Kothas, folk theatre, and puppetry, the states went on stripping the industry of its gains. It was a sad silver jubilee for the cinema in India (as distinct from Indian Cinema) when, in 1922-23, entertainment tax was introduced in Bombay and Bengal presidencies.\(^5\)

In 1932 the East India Film co., was started in Calcutta, pioneering Bengali, Tamil and Telugu film making. Ramsay Mac Donald’s ‘Communal Award’, creating separate electorates in the provincial legislatures for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, Depressed classes, women. Marathas and ‘others’ further emphasised British efforts to communalise the nationalist movement and gave a new lease of life to the Hindu Mahasbha, which becomes its most strident opponent.

In Calcutta, **Bengal Lamps** India was the first manufacturer of light bulbs and electrical equipments. It was beneficial for film making. Prabhat studio moved to Pune in 1933 and its **Sairamdhri**, processed and printed in Germany, became India’s first colour film. Vel Pictures and Tamil Nadu Talkies were launched in Madras.\(^6\)

First sound features in Oriya (**Seeta Bibha**) and Kannada (**Bhakta Dhruva**) were screened in 1934.

**Diffusion of Indian Film Culture Abroad**

All the above happened within a span 27 years of the Indian films, which reached 120 countries of the world, done by way of promoting an understanding of Indian culture or the Indian way of life. As early as 1919, the first Indian feature film, **Raja**

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\(^6\) *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, op. cit., p. 20.
Harichandra, transcribing on celluloid an episode from Indian mythology, was not only commercially shown in the U.K., but also created a demand for the film for the natives. As early as 1926, an Indian film, “Light of Asia”, had a royal command performance in the U.K. In 1937 Prabhat’s Saint Tukram was adjudged as the best film at Venice.

By locating shooting in India in 1951 of The River had a direct bearing on the advent of the new era in Indian film culture.7

The first festival in 1952 did stir up the imagination of our film makers and viewers got a film of social protest, such as Datta Dharmadhikari’s Nanhe Munne (1952) and Zia Sarhady’s Food Path.8

1958, Mehboob’s Mother India became the only Indian film till date to win Oscar nomination as the best foreign film, though it lost to Federico Fellini’s Nights of Cibiria (1957) by a single vote at the third ballot.9

The Hindu mythology with its amazing imagination, and the Perso-Arabic legends, abounding in action, romance, and adventure, proved the cinema’s best feed at a time when trick photography was a craze. Out of such a vogue came films such as Allauddin and the Wonderful Lamp (1927).10

Similarly, some foreign companies used to dub their films in Urdu for screening in India. Dorothy Kingdom, who starred in Shakuntala (1920), was the first foreign girl to appear in an Indian film. From the date of their films it can be seen the borrowing of foreign acting talent, almost entirely female, became infrequent with the advent of the

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7. Ahish Rajadhyaksha, op. cit., p. 73.
8. Idem
10. Ibid, p.73.
talkie and the subsequent emergence of regional films and ultimately faded out with the involvement of India (as part of the British empire) in the international crisis after the Italian occupation of Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{11}

Film making in India by foreigners was a common feature in the pre Independent India under alien rule. The location, situation and climatic conditions were congenial and conducive for film shooting in India.\textsuperscript{12} So the foreign film makers flocked at Madras and other regions for shooting their films. Dorothy Kingdom, who starred in \textit{Sakuntala} (1920), was the first foreign girl to appear in Indian film.\textsuperscript{13} In 1929 at Elphinston Calcutta the \textit{Melody of Love} was screened.\textsuperscript{14} Palke was the first to offer specific volume for institutionalised film making. Ardhesir Irani was the first Indian Producer of the film \textit{Alam Ara} and first Indian colour film \textit{Kisan Kanya}, along with the first Indian Film in English.\textsuperscript{15} Thus at the initial stage, without any language barrier, many films came up but they had no fascination towards feminism.

While the film industry was growing with flying colors, the artists used to sing the songs with their original voices. Amir Bai, Kannan Devi, K.B. Sundarambal, M.S. Subbulakshmi, Saraswathi Bhai, K.C. Dey, Kundambal Sailgal, Khurucheed, Noorjehan were the singers who enchanted the millions.\textsuperscript{16} Such changes paved the way for further progress in this industry. In 1953 for the first time the \textbf{Film Fair Award} was instituted. The exhibition of approved films began in that year. It encouraged the growth of the film industry. In 1955 the \textbf{Children’s Film Society} was setup. The \textbf{South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce} was founded in 1937. The \textbf{Film Festivals} were also arranged.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid}, p.63.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, p.73.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Idem}.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} P.K. Thambi (ed.), \textit{The Indian Film Directory-1957} Susikanta Publications, Madras, 1957, p. 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Hameedudin Mohmood, \textit{The Kaleidoscope of Indian Cinema}, East West Press, New Delhi, 1974, p. 30.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, p.35.
\end{itemize}
In 1964 the **Natural Film Archive of India** was founded at Pune under the Information and Broadcasting Ministry of the Government of India. The **Film Institute of Adayar** also came up in that year. Thus the film industry was a thriving one by its constant and widened growth.

In 1949 censorship became a federal function and separate certificates for Unrestricted (U) and Adult (A) exhibitions were instituted. In the same way the first **Film Enquiry Committee** was constituted in 1922-23 under the Chairmanship of Diwan Bhahadur, T. Rengacheriyar. But its recommendations were not all implemented. The Indian cinema witnessed major achievements during the thirties of the 20th century. New Theaters (1930), Bombay Talkies (1935), Vauhini (1938) etc. came up along with the establishment of Bengal Motion Picture. Producer’s Association, Calcutta, (1936), Indian Motion Picture Producer’s Association, Bombay (1937), South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce, Madras (1937).\(^{17}\) The Film Council came up in 1957 is having a network of official organisation. The Central Board of Film Censors (1951), National Film Awards Scheme (1953) Children’s Film Society (1955) University Film Council (1956), Film Institute of India (1960), Film Finance Corporation (1960), Indian Motion Pictures Export Corporation (1963), National Film Archives (1964) etc. formed the basis for the development and achievements of Film Industry in India.\(^{18}\) All these aspects had their own echo and impacts over the cine industry of Tamilnadu. But the growth and development was not at all a sudden one. It had its own progress in a steady and gradual manner. The growth was a positive one in varied spheres. So a study will be made on that line in the ensuing pages.

Tamil Films:

With all zeal and enthusiasm the Tamil cinema, on par with its Hindi counterpart, started to flourish even during the soundless picture period i.e., at the beginning of the 20th century. But after 1931 it had a chequered career mainly due to the meagre financial resources of the film makers and producers. In 1934 A. Narayanan of General Pictures Corporation founded a new Studio at Madras and produced the film Srinivasa Kalyanam. Before that between 1931 and 1932 four films viz, Kalidoss, Harichandra, Parijatha Pushpaharan and Ramayanam all in Tamil were released by Imperial Film Company, Bombay. They had their own unique features. They had Tamil dialogues and Telugu songs S. Vincent was the first Southerner to produce the film Valli Thirumanam. Thus most of the films were based on legends. But in 1934 as the cine industry became a wealthy one 14 films came out in 1934 and the number reached 38 in 1935. In 1937 there were 10 Studios in the Madras Presidency. Seven were located in Madras, and the others were located at Salem, Coimbatore and Bangalore. The Tamil films of the initial period had their own flare for music and lengthy songs occupied the major parts of the film. It was difficult to have actors and actresses who were capable of acting and singing. So there was a heavy demand for actors and actresses who could sing without play back music system. Chinthamani, Ambikapathi, Sevasadanam, Thiru Nilakandar, Ashok Kumar, Sivakavi, Haridoss, Meera etc, were some of the films which achieved success due to musical hits of those days. M.K. Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar, C.Kannamba, M.M. Dhandapani Desigar, M.S. Subbulakshmi, K.B. Sundarambal, P.U. Chinnappa were capable of singing and acting. At this initial stage the Tamil films too devoted to mythological and legendary themes. Devotional works followed them. Then only the
social themes along with reformist tendencies penetrated into the Tamil films. A few films struck individual notes. For example Miss Malini stood for urbane sarcasm. Nallthambi highlighted facts about prohibition. While Parasakthi was a social satire, which condemned the social evils, Velaikkari was known for dialogue. Avvaiyar was an exposition of high pitch music and it depicted the qualities of a Tamil poetess of early period. The film Valkkai was significant for love theme and family activities. Since majority of the Tamil films stood for entertainment value, occasionally few films were noticeable for social themes. For instance the film Rathakkannir exposed the outcomes and effects of immorality. In the same way when T.R. Sundaram of Modern Theatres of Salem released his first Tamil colour film Alibhabha and 40 thieves, it had a massive appeal. Likewise Chandraleka produced by Gemini gained an amazing popularity in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. The massive scene setting was a captivating one in it.

The growing attention turned towards the production of successful films encouraged many to establish studios in the south India. A.V.M. Studio of Meyyappa Chettiyar, Jupiter, Narasu, Pakishiraja were other few significant studios, responsible for the production of attractive Tamil films. The Tamil studio owned producers diverted their energies by their own efforts not only captivated the attention of the Tamils but also encouraged them to turn their attention to exploit the Hindi market. The film Kalam Marippochchu borrowed its theme from the Telugu film Rajalu Marayi. Its theme gained a warm welcome. So the Tamil film prior to the period taken up for study was mostly for fetching money and also to entertain the public in its own way. Thus cinema

20. Personal observation of such films.
was a thriving industry in Tamilnadu. During the pre and post-independence periods, the Tamil films had their own progress and mostly feminism had its own slight touches in them. The increased number of films, studios and theatres stood for the highvalue of entertainment produced by them. A.L. Narayanan, Kovai Thambi, Raja Sandow, M.M.A., Chinnappa Thevar, R. Prakash, Sridhar, K. Subramanian and many others contributed their mite to the Tamil film industry.\(^{22}\) They were able to feel the pulse of the audience and offered all what the people wanted through films.

The number of studios of popular nature available in Madras will disclose the status of cinema in Tamilnadu.\(^{23}\) Because of the massive attraction shown by the public to cinema the number of producers and studios increased.

It should be noted here that though the number of studies has increased no stress is assigned to that because the topic for analysis is different. The number of permanent and touring Theatres in Madras State is shown here. The population based on the 1951 census, is given.\(^{24}\)

**Theaters in Madras State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Touring</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras city</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,16,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinglepet Dt</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18,53,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32,93,204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{22}\) Interview with R. SaratKumar, Cine Actor on 20 November, 2012.


\(^{24}\) Here the earlier number alone is given as an illustrative measure. As it does not come under the purview of the present study no such details are provided with regard to the period between 1975 and 1985.
Awards:

The system of many awards associated with film industry too encouraged the growth and development of film industry in Tamilnadu. As a means for the growth of the industry different kinds of awards were instituted at different levels.

The system of **Annual State Awards** for films was introduced in 1954 by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, as per the recommendations of the Patil Enquiry Committee with a view to encourage production of films of high aesthetic and technical standard. These served as an encouragement for producing films with varied themes. Under this scheme the awards arranged were as shown below:

### All India Awards

1. President’s Gold Medal for the best feature film
2. President’s Gold Medal for the best documentary film

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>District</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>KanyaKumari</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19,92,837</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28,91,817</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Nilgiris</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Ramnad</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>20,80,519</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Salem</td>
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<td>33,71,769</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Tanjore</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>29,82,670</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Tinnevelly</td>
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<td>24,45,967</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Tiruchy</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>3,12,19,993</td>
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</table>
3. Prime Minister’s Gold Medal for the best children’s film
4. Certificates of merit for the next best in these categories

**Regional Awards**

1. President’s Silver Medals to the best in each regional language feature, the total production of which in the year was not less than a dozen and also one to the best in the group of languages in which the year’s production was less than twelve.
2. Certificates of Merit to the next best in each language.25

**Film Fan’s Association Awards**

Film Fan’s Association, Madras is a body organised from among the film going public. One of its aims is to improve the general standard of films by giving constructive suggestions and encouragements to Producers. Towards the end they instituted Awards in 1953 to the Best Film. Actors and Actresses in Tamil and Telugu languages. The selection was done by public poll. But in later years selection was by a Panel of Judges who were experts in different aspects of film industry. In 1954 awards were given also to best supporting artistes in Tamil and Telugu films. Arrangements were made to provide awards also to the Best Child Artist and for the best Theatre in the city of Madras. In 1955 non- south Indian Actors and Actresses were included for awards. In the same year the best documentary was also included.26

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25. Here the earlier number alone is given as an illustration measure. As it does not come under the purview of the present study no such details are provided with regard to the period between 1975 and 1985.
The following list will indicate the growth of Tamil films from 1932 to 1990.\[27\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No of Films</th>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>No of Films</th>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No of Films</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1952</td>
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Though there were little variations in the rising trend in the film industry every year it is obvious that the number of films increased. It was also due to the attraction of the people. The distinctive taste, the income gained due to film production, the entertainment value were the basic qualities which caused the uplift of the qualities of films. The above statement will attest this. By an analysis of the various titles of films produced between 1906 and 1924 one can notice the different types of films of that period.\textsuperscript{28}

1916 - \textbf{Keechaka Vadham} (R. Nataraja Mudaliar - Producer)

1920 – \textbf{Nala Dhamayanthi} (Ardeshri Irani)

1921 – \textbf{Bhaki Kidua} (Kohinoor)

So at the initial stage importance was assigned only to mythological and legendary themes and stories in the films. Cinema offered a concept and a feeling of relaxation to the common public. They mostly entertained both the rural men and urban dwellers. The requirements for joy of music and dance were all fulfilled.\textsuperscript{29} The Tamil films of the thirties and forties of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century were yielding to a conscious treatment of social reforms, \textit{swadeshi}, untouchability, widow remarriage, social inequality, injustice and many other problems had their own echo and influence over the society. The themes discussed in the screen entered into the minds and hearts of those who witnessed them. The making of films was also a costly affair due to its trick shots. It should be noted that drama stories and dramas enacted were converted into films. For instance K. Subramaniyam’s drama \textbf{Pavalakkodi} had the opportunity of becoming a film. \textbf{Or Irvu}, \textbf{Andhanman Kaithi}, \textbf{Gnana Oli} etc., were dramas which were filmed later. The various

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Hameedudin Mohmood, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 41-42.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 138.
\end{itemize}
techniques employed in films and the monotony of witnessing the films of legendary nature encouraged the Producers to adopt changes in selecting the themes for films. So life oriented social themes gained impetus.

In 1935 the film **Menaka** was released as pioneer effort having a social theme. The T.K.S. Brothers played a major role in this film. It was the Tamil film which gave opportunity to have the songs of Bharathi. Thus Tamil film was for the first time utilised to induce the spirit of nationalism and popularity of the songs of Bharathi. In addition to that with the introduction of this film onwards both men and women played the role of the other sex. Thus this film was a directive and forerunner for future films. This film had a sociological background. PerumDevi and Komala were the two widows, who did not like the marriage of Menaka with their brother Varahasamy who was an Advocate by profession. They sold the film **Menaka** to one Naina Mohamed by getting Rs. 5000/-. They created a story and informed their brother that his immoral wife had ran away with some other man. Then while Naina Mohamed tried to reduce her, his wife Nurjahan saves her.

She even protects her by keeping her in a relative’s house. When Varahasmy met with an accident, Menaka rendered all helps to him in disguise as a nurse. Finally Varahasamy acknowledges her chaste nature. This was the first Tamil picture which depicted a story regarding women. It also exposed the downtroddness of women in the patriarchal society along with the helping tendency of women. Further it also stressed the position of woman’s chastity and morality. This is a total portrayal of the traits of

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feminism. Instead of modern ideas it revealed the traditional and conservative approach of the Tamils.

Father, mother, son and daughter are the outcomes of close blood relationship noticeable in a family. All of them should be placed and accorded an appropriate place and respect. If it is deviated that would endanger the peace and serenity of the family. It will also affect the prestige of the family. This theme was highlighted by the film Navina Sarangathara released in 1936. This was a story which pointed out the fact that there should be specific observances in maintaining the cordial relationship in the family.\(^{31}\)

The story of this film was based on the uncharacteristic relations in the family, King Narendra, due to his fickle and perverted mind was keen on marrying the girl who was fixed for his son. She too agreed to accept it. After some time she decided to escape from the unwanted situation. In the meanwhile Sarangathara and Chitrangi met each other. The king who witnessed that, due to fear accused them for their meeting. He cut off their hands and imprisoned them. The king could not avert the opposition and scathing criticisms of the public. Then with the assistance of a magician they got back their hands and became united. The story reiterates that Chitrangi without yielding to the wishes of her father in law maintained her chastity and lived a happy life with Sarangadhara. This story revealed that women should be ready to face any critical situation and should solve them by their wisdom. The social theme, which went on with the exposition of the behaviours of men and women continued to survive even in the later half of the 20th century. In 1953 this film was censored for the second time.\(^{32}\)

This film preached a practical lesson about life.

\(^{31}\) The Booklet Published to advertise the film, Chennai, 1930, p. 2-3.

\(^{32}\) Thulasi Palanivel, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
It is a known and accepted fact that a man should have sexual relations with his wife alone by her consent. It was the credible status assigned to women. If it is executed in a willful way that will be called force and violence. To pinpoint this view in 1939 itself a film called Thiru Nilakandar was released. Ambalavanar was a potter. He led his life with his wife by the income from the sale of pots. Once when they attended a dance performance by the Devadasi called Kalavathi, she was fascinated by Thiru Nilakandar. But he returned home by convincing her that he would come on some other date. His wife when came to know of it requested him to keep him away from her company. But he was particular and adamant that she would satisfy him by next day as stipulated by him. In the meanwhile, while he was desired to have a go with her she refused and got fainted. She also informed him that he should never touch her. Amidst such hard unbearable situation God appeared before them and brought an union among the couple. This film too depicted the condition of women of that contemporary period. Even the downtrodden condition of women could be removed only by the will of God. So the films themes based on feminism gained importance even before the dawn of independence.

The film Thiaga Bhumi too depicts the autonomous activities and revolutionary ideas of a woman. Due to the views of subordination of women the husband filed a case for enabling his wife to live with him. The wife refuses and demands divorce from him. She categorically informs that it would be letter to dedicate for the cause of freedom of the nation than being a slave of the husband and his family. This story was written by Krishnamurthy, the editor of Kalki, a Nationalist and it was directed by K. Subramanian. This film stood for feminist ideas and women’s liberation. The veteran freedom fighters,
national leaders and social reformers stood for the liberation of women and then dedicated to the national movement. As this theme was opposed by the British, the film producers diverted their attention to concentrate on feminism and other like subjects. This film condemned the dowry which was a social menace to women. So far no film on the liberation of women, blended with social and political ideas, has come up. This was banned by the alien rule. The films such as Balayogini (1937), Sevasadanam (1938), Bhaktha Seela (1940) etc. formed the basis for women’s liberation, Indian Independence etc. The concept of untouchability was also highlighted. Thus the Tamil cinema, during the early half of the 20th century was familiar for its multifaceted approaches. Feminism, autonomy, liberation of women, social uplift ideas etc. were few themes which stood for the uplift of the society. Anyhow they were blended with feminine traits and qualities.

In the same year in 1941 a new revolutionary film based on women’s traits was released. Ashok Kumar was the title. If the second wife treated the son of the first wife as her son it will be alright. But if she looked at him as her beloved, the level of her status will be low beyond imagination. This film indirectly hints the existence of remarriages a old widower and its reaction on women. These films placed Tamil cinema at the highest pedestal with sociological themes. Such films even stirred the norms of the society. The system of offering a lady as the second wife to an old man, which prevailed then will reveal the status of Tamil women as well as the gender disparity and inequalities. The film also pointed out that a girl should not love a boy of teenage. The

36. Idem.
women were also depicted as women of villainous nature.\(^{37}\) So it is revealed that women have vices and virtues.

The film **Mangamma Sapatham** released in 1943 by Gemini Studio was a powerful story relating to women. According to this story, a king who married a girl hailed from a poor peasant family informed her by saying that he would keep her as a concubine without giving the status of a wife. But she retarded it by saying that she would have a son through him without his knowledge and would punish him for his ill-treatments. Thus the women had to face many atrocities and they were compelled to face any critical situations.\(^{38}\) They were expected to deal with any situation cleverly by their practical wisdom.

**Devadasis** too maintained their own status by their own personal qualities and traits. For instance Aparanji, a **Devadasi** used to collect money for seeing, smiling and enjoying her beauty. When a temple priest showed affection to her, he was punished and asked to carry out her household activities. Then he was released after she was punished by the king.\(^{39}\) This was the story of **Dasi Aparanji**. This is also an expression of the other side of women during 1944. This indicates that there were immoral ladies in the society who corrupted it.

The film **Mangayar Karasi** produced in 1949 was a sentimental one. In this film an young man when endeavoured to enjoy a lady by force, came to know that she was his mother. This anticlimax too depicted the status of women and the weaknesses of men in the patriarchal society.\(^{40}\) The question behind this is that women were treated merely a

\(^{37}\) Ibid, p. 38.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, p. 24.
\(^{40}\) Ibid, p. 29.
tool to quench the sexual thirst of men. This conservative attitude paved the way for the exploitation of women.

In 1953 a new film called Anbu was released and it was a story between an aunt and her son. The woman who married an old man had to face number of physical as well as mental problems. A young girl who married an old man had a son at the marriageable age. People began to introduce many accusations over them by creating stories about the illegal contacts among them. Due to suspicion such unwanted false allegations were imposed on woman mainly to keep them subservient to men. Such conditions were revealed in this film called Anbu.

In the same way a lady who loved a man, due to unavoidable circumstances, was forced to marry her lover’s father. Only after marriage the father comes to know of the love affairs about his wife. His son also came to know about his own aunt. The father with broken heart undertook pilgrimage. He also requested his son to marry her. The son says that she would never acknowledge such things till her husband was alive. So the father dies. The wife instead of remarriage undertakes widowhood. This was the theme of the film Ethirparathadu. This unacceptable stress on sexual pleasure and incompatible marriage was condemned and it appreciated the qualities of women, who were known for their chastity and morality which were the feminine traits of the Tamil women.

The film Andha Elu Natkal, a replica of the earlier film Anbu, says that the screen play writer was both appreciated and condemned. This story revolves around things through which many changes were introduced to promote the condition of women.

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But the society was unwilling to acknowledge such themes. Any how it is evident that women were the centre of actions in many fields.\footnote{Thulasi Palanivel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.}

One brother and sister were orphans and were living in different places. When they grew up, those who protected each of them decided to get them married. But when the relationship is revealed the marriage was stopped. This unique theme was the basis for the film \textbf{Nallavan} produced in 1955.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 40.} Though it is a story it is centering on the basis of circumstances, here too the woman member has no say.

In 1953 a film \textbf{Manithan} was released. The story was a quite absorbing one and depicting the qualities women in a distinctive way. One lady due to her marriage with an elderly old man is suffering without the satisfaction of married life. Another lady was in the same state of affairs because her husband was a soldier functioning in a remote place. Both the women were sisters. At that time one had the unique problem of sex even after married life. One could not get satisfaction due to age and the other’s opportunity was forbidden by circumstances. Rajan came and stayed with them along with his sister. Rajan was requested to have sexual contact with the younger sister. Though he bluntly refused it, he seduced the elder sister and she became pregnant. While he was driven out of the house, unfortunately he met with an accident. At that time the soldier, returning home, happened to save him and comes to know that he was responsible for making his wife pregnant. He thought that circumstances have forced them to err. So he pardons them. But Rajan repents much for his mistake and commits suicide. This film which
attached stress to lust affected the culture and prestige of the Tamils at the stake of feminism.44

**Andha Nal** released in 1954 was also a film which centered on the theme about a lady. For the married lady, there is no God superior than her husband. It is the traditional and customary faith prevalent in India. But this film exposes that the spirit of nationalism is superior than chastity and morality of women. So the wife even killed her traitor husband for the sake of her country. Thus the story pinpointed that women were not at all inferior in maintaining the prestige of the nation. Their concept of nationalism was treated as a venerable act than age old customary practice which was vogue in a male dominated patriarchal society. This film which had no songs obtained national award. Thus it depicted the characteristic qualities of a lady, who was expected to be a model for others.45

**Kalyanapparisu**, released in 1959, was a film which revealed the boldness of a lady who expressed her earlier love affair to her husband. This theme suggested that they must be free, simultaneously frank, dedicated and should he prepared to face any situation. For instance two sisters love one man. But the elder sister marries him and she comes to know about the love affair between her sister and husband. The sister dies and her husband offers their child as a marriage gift to his sister in law. This film which stood for the boldness of a lady obtained a national award in the year 1959.46 This is another form of the depiction of feminism.

**Nenjil Or Aalayam**, a film released in 1962 was a one which stressed on widow remarriage and faith to love. A husband meets his end at a very early age. By

44. Ibid. p. 33.
45. Ibid. p. 33.
46. Ibid. p. 54.
understanding his wife's love with another man, in his death bed he demands his wife to remarry her old lover. Though it seems to highlight the noble qualities of a man its stress on widow remarriage was a revolutionary theme. As parents who could not bear with the widowhood of their young daughter, her brother was desirous of seeing his sister with all happiness by using flower and Thilak, which will make her a Sumangali. Thus it is felt that the husbands also should see that their wives should never spend the rest of her life in miserable and should remarry after his early demise. The story reveals that the age old miseries and despicable widowhood should he removed by the encouragement given by the husband even before his death. Thus by magnanimous activities, to the uplift of feminism, efforts were undertaken even by cine films. This forward policy of a husband, though new to the Tamils, it was an illustration for being a model husband who believed that his wife should never suffer on any ground. This was also a theme followed to venerate feminism. It is obvious that feminism is pushed back because of traditions, which were to be eliminated. Further feminism was also used to break the age old customary practice of widowhood.

**Dravidian Concepts:**

Cinema is a powerful media to express and to make people to acknowledge progressive native Tamil culture which was an indigenous Dravidian one without any Aryan impact and influence. When a popular literary theme is filmed it would naturally captivate the attention of the mass. The visual and oral communications will have their own results. For instance the Tamil film Kannagi could be ciated as a suitable example Parthiban Kanavu, a renowned novel of Kalki too gained a warm welcome among the Tamil mass when it was filmed. It should be remembered here that both these films,

47. Ibid. p. 69.
based on Tamil literature, exposed the qualities of women. Even **Ramayanam** and **Mahabharatham** too witnessed the concept of films. They too infused changes in the attitudes and outlook of men. Gradually various artistic features such as dance, music (both vocal and instrumental), lyrics, costumes make up etc. gained prominence in films and stood to depict the introduction of a new culture. In the same way when pictures like **Avvaiyar, Penn** were released they stood beyond the hurdles of time. They depicted feminism in a different perspective. When folk dance and songs applied in **Therukkuthu** they became popular with **Kuthu** as depicted in **Cilappatikaram**.\(^{48}\) **Velaikkari, Or Iravu, Gana Oli, Avvaiyar, Veera Pandia Kattabomman** etc., were staged as dramas and then came to motion pictures. Such facts stood for the popularity of the theme among people. Cinema, which had already absorbed themes from epics, **Puranas** and mythologies, with historical touches gradually drifted to adopt social themes. To inculcate the spirit of social reforms, cinema was taken as a powerful weapon because they were able to portray the actualities of life in pictures. They reveal both the good bad elements in life. It widened the scope of the understanding of the social transitions and transformations of the society through the ages. So the film is a significant medium even to highlight history, historical facts, art, culture and trends. Those who hailed from Dravidian movement too served as catalytic agents for the inclusion of Dravidian concepts into films.\(^{49}\) Anyhow feminism is given prominence in all varieties of films.

While K.R. Ramasamy, N.S. Krishnan, S. S. Rajendran etc., were actors of that group, C. N. Annadurai, Bharathidasan, M. Karunanithi etc., were writers of Dravidian group. The films like **Or Iravu, Velaikkari, Parasakthi, Rangoon Radha** etc. were

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\(^{48}\) **Cilappatikaram. III Arangerra Kathai, Lines 12-13.**

films which stood for the introduction of social change through their depictions. All their outcomes were mainly to transform the Tamil society as a rationalistic one. Cinema reached the position of a medium to highlight the language, race and culture of the Tamils. As most of the above said personalities were belonging to a specific political party their entire services were centering on Dravidianism. Films began to absorb political themes also.\textsuperscript{50} T.V. Narayanasamy, Kannadasan were two members emerged from Dravidian group. Pavalar Balasundaram, belonging to Dravida Kalagam was responsible for releasing Parasakti on 13\textsuperscript{th} October, 1952. Even in it the condition of a widowed sister is highlighted.

Concepts, detrimental to devotion, importance to rationalism also are brought to light by the Tamil films. Parasakthi which had the above themes also exhibited the spoiling of women in the name of religion and society. At this juncture of political rivalry between the Congress and Dravidian parties Murasoli Maran, A.V.P. Asaithambi too came to the Tamil cine field.\textsuperscript{51} Thus Dravidianism penetrated into the Tamil film. Along with the spread of the political ideologies of the party, the cine field was utilised to the upkeep of rationalism, social reform and development of Tamil culture.

\textbf{Marxism:}

Like the inclusion of Dravidianism, Communist Marxian ideologies also had their own impacts and influences over the Tamil films. Though actual Marxian principles were not exactly followed much importance was assigned to the affluent nature of the agrarian pursuits. Films such as Vivasayi, Palni, Urimai Kural, Thayaikkatha Thanayan, Irumpu Thirai, Makkalaippettra Maharasi, Pattikkada Pattanama, Kalam

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p. 56.
Marippochchu etc., revealed the social, political and economic activities of the Tamils of the contemporary period. The film Nenjam Marappathillai exposed the harshness of land lords. Kalathur Kannamma spoke about the horrors of hunger. Even in those films the roles of women were appreciable.

Jayakanthan, T. K. Balachandar, Pattukkottai Kalyana Sundaram and few others were popular communist artists. Pattukkottai Kalyana Sundaram’s songs adorned films during the period between 1954-1979. His focus on women’s problem was less. But he devoted much to expose the equality of men and realities of women. They expressed the mentality and outlook of the corrupted society. Most of them revealed the availability of family unity, value of love, the virtues of motherhood, honesty etc. No much importance is assigned to the values of women of high and lower older. But devotion to feminism was not at all avoided.

Slowly changes occurred in Tamil Cinema. The importance assigned to heroism paved the way for the promotion of hero-worship. From 1960 onwards Tamil films began to highlight the importance of traditional values. Social reform co-operative efforts, social justice also gained impetus. Heroism and hero worship emerged gradually. But the heroines were not at all neglected.

Subsequently many changes crept into the Tamil films. A husband, when lost his potency in an accident wants to allow his wife to marry other man. The wife as soon as heard of it falls at his feet and dies. This was the outcome of the concept of one man one wife and Pathi Bhakthi (Devotion to husband). This was the theme of the film

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Saradha.\textsuperscript{53} Thali Bakkryam a film, released in 1966, also centres on woman. A lady marries an old man but was thinking of an young lad who accompanied the old man. This double role of the wife created many problems. This film insisted Tali as the sacred asset of woman Tali was even treated as a fence to a lady. This reveals that the male domination could never be eliminated from the society. Family oriented stories began to occupy the Tamil silver screen and women’s subordination was one of its chief subjects. The women were accepted as dolls and their beauty was given much importance.\textsuperscript{54} So no modern concepts of women’s education and employment did gain popularity.

\textbf{E.V. Ramasamy:}

Tali, the holy knot was a venerable object even from the Sangam age onwards.\textsuperscript{55} E.V. Ramasamy criticised Tali as an ornament which makes woman a slave.\textsuperscript{56} In the film Nannambikkai it is pointed out that in countries like France, England, America Tali is criticised. In the films Thangamalai Ragasyam, Tali is treated a saddle. In 1960 in the film Virakkanal the woman is tying a Tali to her husband and claims her equality. Tali is not at all needed for anybody with the changing trend of age old values which must also be transformed. A lady without Tali can be a wife of a man. Even without tying a Tali simply by wearing a garland a wedding can be negotiated by elders who assemble there. The registered marriage will be an approved one. Even the wearing of ring will complete the marriage. The custom of wearing a Tali is a one which came up in the

\textsuperscript{53} Thulasi Palanivel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{55} They were known as Pulippal Tali, Aimbadai Tali etc. Vide: N. Subrahmanian, \textit{Sangam Polity}, Ennes Publications, Madurai, 1967, p. 296.
\textsuperscript{56} Vidudhalai, 6, May, 1956.
middle. After exchanging a garland the marriage should be announced through a newspaper. That would become a valid marriage. The marriage can even be registered.

E.V. Ramasamy, the Dravidian leader pointed out that marriages could be celebrated without the assistance of a Brahmin priest. He even informed out that a woman should tie a Tali to her husband to make others to know that he is a married man.

In films the make up for women will be more when compared with men. The excessive make up is done mainly to captivate the attention of the viewers. While cinema served as a means to expose the multifaceted development of the society it also cannot be denied that it serves the purpose of maintaining the old values, customary practices and traditions. It also assists the maintenance and continuation of old orthodox but superstitious values. The Varanashrma Dharma, superstitions and unwanted beliefs are also highlighted in some films. It was not for teaching anything to the society but that was mainly to make money. Without allowing the people to think and by making them to have faith and belief over films, importance was assigned to the preservation of old traditions without giving room for modernism and change.

E.V. Ramasamy due to his support to non-brahmin movement, Justice Party and self-respect movement attempted to bring social equality. His policies and principles were echoed in dramas, films and speeches. Women emancipation, removal of caste, language and religious disparities were all encouraged by him. Those who withdrew from Dravida Kalagan and formed the Dravida Munnttra Kalagan were also known for their social welfare activities. Alaigal Oyvathillai (1981) was the film which crossed the barriers of sacred thread and cross i.e., Brahmanism and Christianity. In the

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57. E.V. Ramasamy, Valkkai Thunai Nalam, (Family Welfare), Author’s publication, Erode, 1977, p. 29.
same way in the film **Vedam Pudhitu** (1989) a Brahmin boy, who was a close associate of Balu Thevar, removes his sacred thread. Thus social reform was a predominant factor and that had its own impact over the films.

In Tamil films importance was assigned to speech and dialogue than to the validity of the scenes. The language and cinema techniques were quite new and appealing to people. But Balu Mahendra, who became a Director after 1978, through films such as **Aliyatha Kolangal, Mudu Pani, Munram Pirai, Vidu**, etc. converted cinema as a means for exchanging ideas and thoughts with the public and cinema became a real media. The film **Pasi** released in 1979 exposed the life of the people of the slums in Madras. The film **Agraharathil Kaluthai** pin points that Agrhara which caused social problems due to caste domination should be wiped off. The film **Pudu Vasantham** by Vikraman suggested that a lady can live with four men in the same room without any problem. Thus sex disparity was set aside in his films. This too was for highlighting the values of feminism.

The Tamil films, after Indian independence witnessed tremendous changes due to the absorption of variety of themes. Jawar Seetharaman introduced foreign themes into Tamil film. His **Elai Padum Padu** (1950) was the outcome from the French **Les Miserable**. Likewise **Alayamani**, (1962), **Saradha** (1962), and even **Iru Kodugal** led to changes in their artistic achievements.

In 1960 **Veera Pandya Kattabomman** the Tamil film attained international honour when Sivaji Ganesan obtained the best actor award in the Afro Asian film festival at Cairo. After 1960 the Directors began to play a significant role in the film industry.

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Sreedhar, K. Balachandar, Mahendran, K. Backiya Raj, T. Rajendar, Balu Mahendra, Maniratnam and others prompted their role in the film industry of Tamilnadu. They attached value to the themes and way of exposition.

K. Balachandar, due to his anti-sentiment formula introduced themes which supported social justice. His film Arangerram had an unique theme centering on a Brahmin girl, who became a prostitute due to family circumstances. This had a staunch opposition from the Brahmin community. But the miserable plight of the heroine attracted the womenfolk in large quantities. In 1973 this film was released by KalaKendra. When the misdeed of that lady was known to the family members, the Director made her mad. Thus a new trend was imposed on the lady. This was a new vision pertaining to feminism.

Singitham Srinivasa Rao’s Dikkarra Parvathy (1973) broke the Tamil conventional shackles. This theme too was about women. Anyhow the tragedy of a Tamil film, which is otherwise the third largest and financially the most visible cinematography, is the adamant denial of the will to change. Between 1969 and 1973, a new generation of film makers emerged and they presented films of mixed nature. The film institute started in 1960 produced eminent personalities in different areas in film technology. All the artists and technicians were encouraged largely.

In 1972 when the film Idaya Vinai was released it pointed out that the women had to face many difficulties even after getting married. According to this story a brother gets his sister married to a man. After the birth of a child her husband accused her and framed

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62. Ibid, p. 68.
63. Hameedudin Mohmood, op. cit., p. 45.
charges against her by saying that she had illegal contact with his brother. Then after realising the truth he repented. This story emerged with the view that the women can be accused at any time without authentic evidences.\(^65\) The story of the film *Maru Piravi* in 1973 was also a one centering on women. It is a curious story. A Professor marries his student but has no sexual satisfaction because his wife was like his mother in appearance. This is an unique theme regarding man and woman.

Finally the wife convinced him and their life became a prosperous one.\(^66\) The story of the film *Paruvakalam* also centred on woman and molestation. Such facts reveal that women were put into torture on the basis of their chastity.\(^67\) Above all it cannot be denied that the films depicted the real life problems of women.

The city dwellers believed that rural women were known for their illiteracy and they did not know anything about city life. But actually the feminists pin pointed that rural women, due to their nature, execute things boldly. They prove that they could be good politicians and serve even as ministers. But such films were rare. Films like *Kurathi Magan, Meyor Meenakshi* too support this fact. In the same way the educated city dwelling girl was exhibited as the lady who knew everything. But not in all films, this nature is depicted and everybody is known for her services.

The Period between 1978 and 1985 too had the same trend. In all of them women were not recognised. But number of reform measures and concepts of feminism were made to be on the march in the progressive way. Thus the Tamil cinema from its beginning till date is progressive in nature in some form or other. As a customary practice importance is assigned to hero’s and heroines. Under such circumstances

\(^{65}\) Thulasi Palanivel, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
\(^{66}\) Ibid, p. 63.
\(^{67}\) Ibid, p. 68.
feminism is portrayed mostly on the basis of customary practices and traditions, because deviations will not captivate the attention of women viewers. It should be remembered that throughout the periods acquisition of money was the main objective of the producers. But they adjust themselves with the changing trends. Anyhow it is evident that feminism plays its role secondary to monetary considerations.