

Insights Volume II : Love Stories

Exploring modern relationships through cinema

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Foreword

Love, a term so frequently used to describe a range of feelings, is actually rather difficult to pin down. What most people however agree with is that love is a fundamental human need, which is expressed in different ways. A lot of what love implies depends on the relationship in which it unfolds. The love between a parent and a child has different dimensions than the love between siblings, to name an example. Nevertheless, all relationships are subject to different social norms and expectations, which shape men and women as individuals, as well as the way they interact with each other. The different facets of love and relationships have since time been depicted through the arts. Film is not an exception. Being a rather modern form of art, it is constantly evolving, just like the social expectations on the relationships we live in.

The second volume of the “Insights Series” is therefore titled “Love stories”. It focuses on exploring power dynamics, and social norms and expectations in the day-to-day reality of men, women and children, as well as ways to cope with these. By choosing a range of films playing in different cultural contexts, an attempt was made to cater to the diversity within Sri Lankan society, while simultaneously sensitizing the audience about differences and similarities with regards to social expectations on men and women in other regions of the world. Despite the diverse cultural contexts, all chosen films deal with social challenges evident in Sri Lanka and have been identified by local gender experts, allowing for a discussion, which is close to the hearts and minds of people.

With its identified key themes and guiding questions, the film guide serves as resource material for all who wish to create a dialogue on issues related to gender with the aim of challenging the conventional understanding of gender roles and stereotypes. It can be useful in workshops dealing with the topic of gender, but just as well for work related to other topics, like education, employment and entrepreneurship, or co-existence, as the themes explored in this guide are relevant to all areas of life.

The purpose of this film guide is therefore to engage with films in order to explore modern relationships and to create a space to reflect, rethink, question and challenge existing social norms and expectations. The films chosen are not exemplary but rather have been selected for their ability to spark fruitful discussions about the way we treat, judge, exclude or accept others, simply put, on the way we live.



Film as a Form of deep Dialogue

Film, with its remarkable outreach, is one of the most popular art forms in the modern world. Anyone can understand a film or be a self-proclaimed film critic. One does not have to be a film expert or a scholar for that purpose. It is a medium that is accessible, engaging and inclusive, and therefore a powerful way of stirring a conversation on complex themes. Gender is a topic that can be rather complicated and at times hard to grasp. Through film the discussion can be taken from an abstract conceptual level to a more human emotional level. In that way a deep dialogue with others and with oneself can be created, which has the power to transform from within.

Gender in film is not a new subject among academics and audiences. It is an extensively studied and discussed topic in the art of film analysis. "Gender" has even become a movie genre, and there are well-developed film theories on feminism and queer. Laura Mulvey, who wrote influential essays on feminist film theory, brought up the argument that classical cinema is centred on a gender perspective, which portrays women as an objectified source of pleasure or as an erotic object of the "male gaze". In most classical movies, the audience is identified as male and thus the attempt is made to give the viewpoint of the male protagonist throughout the narrative. To provide a different perspective, the majority of movies in this film guide have female protagonists, while being targeted towards both genders.

The culturally diverse movies chosen also display a change in the way the topic of gender is approached in the present time. Today gender is understood as structured by culture rather than biology, or as American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler defines it, as a "performance" rather than one's fixed identity.

In South Asia film has a tremendous impact on society. Being home to the largest film industry in the world, it benefits from a vast audience base and a wide outreach, reaching people from the highest to the lowest income strata. Working with films can therefore be an effective way to address issue related to a polarizing topic like gender, which needs to be regarded from a variety of angles.



Understanding “Gender” through Love Stories

To this day, the topic of gender is one that triggers extreme reactions in many parts of the world. In Sri Lanka, “gender” is often equated with feminism and thus regarded as a Western concept that does not comply with the local culture. It therefore tends to be rejected or approached with skepticism. To explore some of the themes that fall under the topic of “gender” this film guide uses the approach of looking at the relationships between men, women and children and how they are affected by social norms and expectations.

Through the fourteen movies picked for this film guide, attention is being drawn to different human needs, like the need to feel respected and to have self-esteem, the need to feel belonging and acceptance, or the need to fulfill one’s full potential¹. None of these needs can be fulfilled in their entirety, as long as discrimination based on gender exists. This form of discrimination is not only directed towards women, as it is often falsely believed, but is just as much affecting men, as some of the movies picked will show.

To make optimal use of this guide, it is important to understand some of the basic concepts behind the idea of gender, as they have been used in the analysis and the questions provided for each movie.

The first key concept is that sex does not equal gender. While sex is a fact of human biology, gender is not. The experience of being male or female differs dramatically from culture to culture and from time to time. “Gender” therefore describes the socially given attributes and responsibilities towards men and women.

Another important concept this guide takes up is the one of “Gender Relations”. It looks at the way power is distributed between sexes, and how it creates and reproduces systematic differences in men’s and women’s positions in society. If the power dynamics are highly unequal it can be the cause of conflict and competition, while having the freedom and power to shape one’s own identity can lead to cooperation and mutual support.

Finally, the film guide also addresses issues related to the “Division of Labor”, which deals with the roles and activities that are considered as appropriate for men and a women. Over the past years several models have come up and competed with each other, ranging from the traditional model of the male breadwinner and the female homemaker, over the model of shared responsibilities, to the model of the female breadwinner and the male homemaker. The films here are chosen to ignite a productive conversation on these issues.

What all these concepts have in common is the idea that gender is a social construct that is not rigid or uniform across societies, but rather adaptable and thus can be changed. This film guide will therefore not condemn or approve any norms or practices, but shall rather start a conversation on phenomena in our society that need to be looked at with an open mind and a critical eye.

¹ Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



Dum Laga ke Haisha

A FILM BY SHARAT KATARIYA - 2015

2016 NATIONAL FILM AWARDS – BEST FEATURE FILM IN HINDI
2016 FILMFARE AWARDS – BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY



Target Audience

- Teachers
- Rural audience
- Community leaders

Key Themes

- Gender-based beauty standards
- Judgement and prejudices
- The value of education



Plot

25 years old Prem is a school drop-out, who runs a music cassette shop and lives with his father, mother and aunt. He is forced to marry Sandhya, a young educated woman, who aspires to be a teacher and would thus secure a stable income for Prem's family. However, Prem is horrified by the thought of having to marry Sandhya, as she is overweight and thus does not match the conventional beauty standard. After their marriage Prem continuously ignores her and tries to hide her from his friends. The situation culminates when Prem publicly humiliates Sandhya at his friend's wedding. Disappointed and hurt, Sandhya returns to her parent's house and files for a divorce. In the meantime Prem's family business is threatened by a competing store, owned by Prem's friend. A heated argument between the families ends with Prem being challenged to win in the Dum Lagao contest, which involves men carrying their wives on their back through an obstacle course. Prem's family, now more than before, needs Sandhya to return. The judge handling Prem's and Sandhya's divorce summons both parties and announces that they have to live together for six months before they can get formerly divorced. Forced to play along, Sandhya returns to Prem's house and the two finally start to get to know each other better and develop an understanding for the feelings and struggles of each other. Ultimately the two decide to participate in the Dum Lagao contest in a last attempt to save their marriage, and against all odds win it.

"A wonderful statement on the institution of marriage as seen by many Indians"

Reuters

"A couple that wins you over gradually but surely"

The Indian Express

Notes

Dum laga ke haisha is a romantic drama set in Haridwar of the 90s. The trigger to the range of gender issues unveiled in this setting is Prem's enforced marriage. Sandhya's appearance is his main concern and troubles him to the degree that he does not allow himself to look beyond her weight until the very last scenes, when the love story between the two characters finally unfolds.

The barrier Sandhya's appearance creates for Prem depicts one of the greatest issues in our media driven society. While Sandhya is much more educated than Prem and has higher prospects of securing a stable income, the power imbalance between the two still favours Prem, while disadvantaging Sandhya, not only for being a woman in a male dominated society, but for being a woman, who does not comply to the given beauty standards of the very same society.

While the perception of beauty differs from culture to culture; mainstream media has given prominence to certain beauty standards above others, leading to the exclusion of people who's looks do not fit the standard. While men are also increasingly affected by imposed beauty standards, beauty has historically been stronger related to femininity. Recently however, a change in the rigid beauty ideals of our day and time can be observed, with several campaigns promoting the idea of "beauty in all shapes and sizes", which will hopefully in the long term lead to more openness and acceptance of women like Sandhya, who will finally be appreciated and valued for their accomplishments rather than their appearance.

Key Questions

- Why do Sandhya's parents want her to marry Prem, despite their daughter being more educated and financially stable than him?
- What does Sandhya's contentment with herself and her body say about her character?
- How much has Sandhya's education contributed to who she is?
- In the Sri Lankan context, how high is a woman's education valued in comparison to men's education?



Billy Elliot

A FILM BY STEPHEN DALDRY - 2000

2001 BAFTA AWARDS – BEST BRITISH FILM
2000 BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILM AWARDS – BEST SCREENPLAY



Target Audience

- Artists
- Parents
- Teachers

Key Themes

- Challenging male gender stereotypes
- Men in fields perceived as feminine
- The impact of social class on gender perceptions



Plot

11-year-old Billy lives with his widowed father Jackie, his older brother Tony, and his grandmother in a small mining village. Jackie and Tony are miners, but out of work due to the miner's strike. Jackie takes Billy to boxing classes, but Billy dislikes the sports and struggles to learn it. He then comes across a ballet class that is transferred to the gym while their usual studio is being used as a soup kitchen for the striking miners. Without his father's knowledge, he joins the ballet class. When Jackie discovers this, he forbids Billy to take any more classes. Passionate about dancing, Billy secretly continues his lessons with his dance teacher Georgia. Georgia is convinced of Billy's talent and wants him to join the Royal Ballet School in London. Only after Jackie sees Billy dancing in the gym, he realises that his son is truly gifted and starts supporting him. Jackie and his fellow miners raise money for Jackie to take him to London to audition for the Royal Ballet School. Billy performs well, but after he punches a boy at the audition, the review board informs him that the incident will negatively affect the final decision. Demotivated Billy returns home with his father. Sometime later Billy receives the long awaited letter from the Royal Ballet School and is overwhelmed when finding out that he was accepted. The film ends with Billy being 25 years old and performing in "Swan Lake", while Jackie, Tony and his friend Michael are proudly watching in the audience.

"A bold, attractive and emotionally generous film"

The Guardian

"A surprisingly wise and funny meditation on the nature of what it truly means to be a man"

Salon

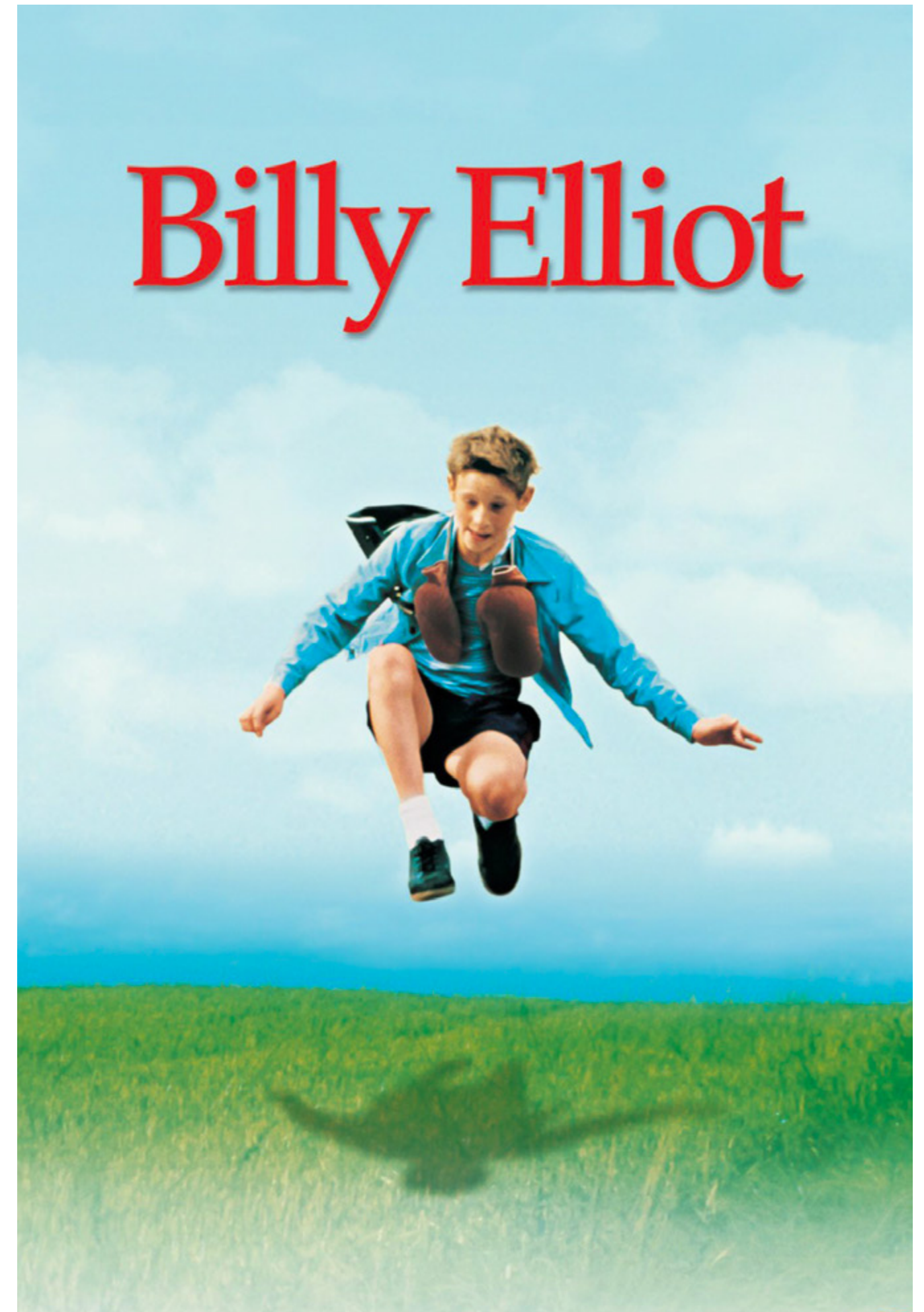
Notes

The story of Billy Elliot is set in a small mining village, depicting the 1984/85 coal miners' strike, which marks one of Britain's worst industrial disputes. Billy, coming from a mining family gets to experience the adverse financial effects the strike has on his family, creating a tense and aggressive atmosphere in the household and the town. The grim setting makes attributes connected to masculinity, like strength, assertiveness, aggressiveness and boisterousness a necessity to gain respect and live in dignity. A boy dancing ballet thus does not fit the bill and negatively affects the deep relationship between father and son in the story.

In many Western cultures until the 20th century women were not allowed to take part in music and the fine arts. Looking specifically at Ballet, which is conventionally considered a feminine field, and in line with feminine role expectations, this gender imbalance is surprisingly evident to this day. For instance, between 1999 and 2013 no woman was commissioned to create a main-stage ballet in the Royal Opera house, the flagship institute of British dance. Not only among directors and choreographers, but also among high-ranking artists this trend can be observed, though less stark. There is a strong discrepancy between the conventional idea of femininity and masculinity in the arts and the reality for many professionals. The lack of awareness and existing misconceptions play a major role in today's gender related issues.

Key Questions

- How do popular ideas of "being a man" affect Billy's aspiration?
- Why did Billy's father have such difficulties to accept Billy's passion? How would you explain his fears?
- Does Billy's social background shape his family's notion of femininity and masculinity?
- Are men in Sri Lanka just as affected by stereotypes as women? If so how?



Mustang

A FILM BY DENIZ GAMZE ERGÜVEN - 2015

2016 CESAR AWARD – BEST FIRST FEATURE FILM
2015 EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS – EUROPEAN DISCOVERY OF THE YEAR



Target Audience

- Teachers
- Parents
- Activists

Key Themes

- Freedom of choice
- The notion of virtue
- Expression of femininity



Plot

Five orphaned sisters live with their grandmother and uncle in a remote Turkish village. The film starts with the girls bidding their beloved teacher farewell, as she moves to Istanbul. Shortly afterwards the girls find themselves playing in the sea on the shoulders of a group of male schoolmates. By the time the girls come home, word about their indecent behaviour has spread among neighbours and the family. The girls are punished and from then on prohibited from leaving the house. They are dressed in conservative clothing, deprived from everything that could corrupt them, and are no longer allowed to go to school. Instead they are taught to manage household chores. However, the girls somehow find ways to secretly leave the house. When they are being caught by their grandmother leaving the house to see a football game, she starts marrying them off one after another. Each one of the sisters deals with their plight differently. While the oldest one refuses to marry the man her grandmother chooses and instead convinces her to let her marry her boyfriend, the other girls are not as lucky. One of them obeys and marries the man chosen for her older sister, but lives an unhappy life. The other one commits suicide after her marriage is arranged and the youngest two run away from the marriage their grandmother has arranged. The movie ends with the girls going to Istanbul and finding their former teacher, who in surprise and concern embraces the sisters.

“Mustang is full of life even as it depicts lives in lockdown”

New York Times

“Mustang is a gripping film, and one that ought to stir up a bit of controversy”

The Guardian

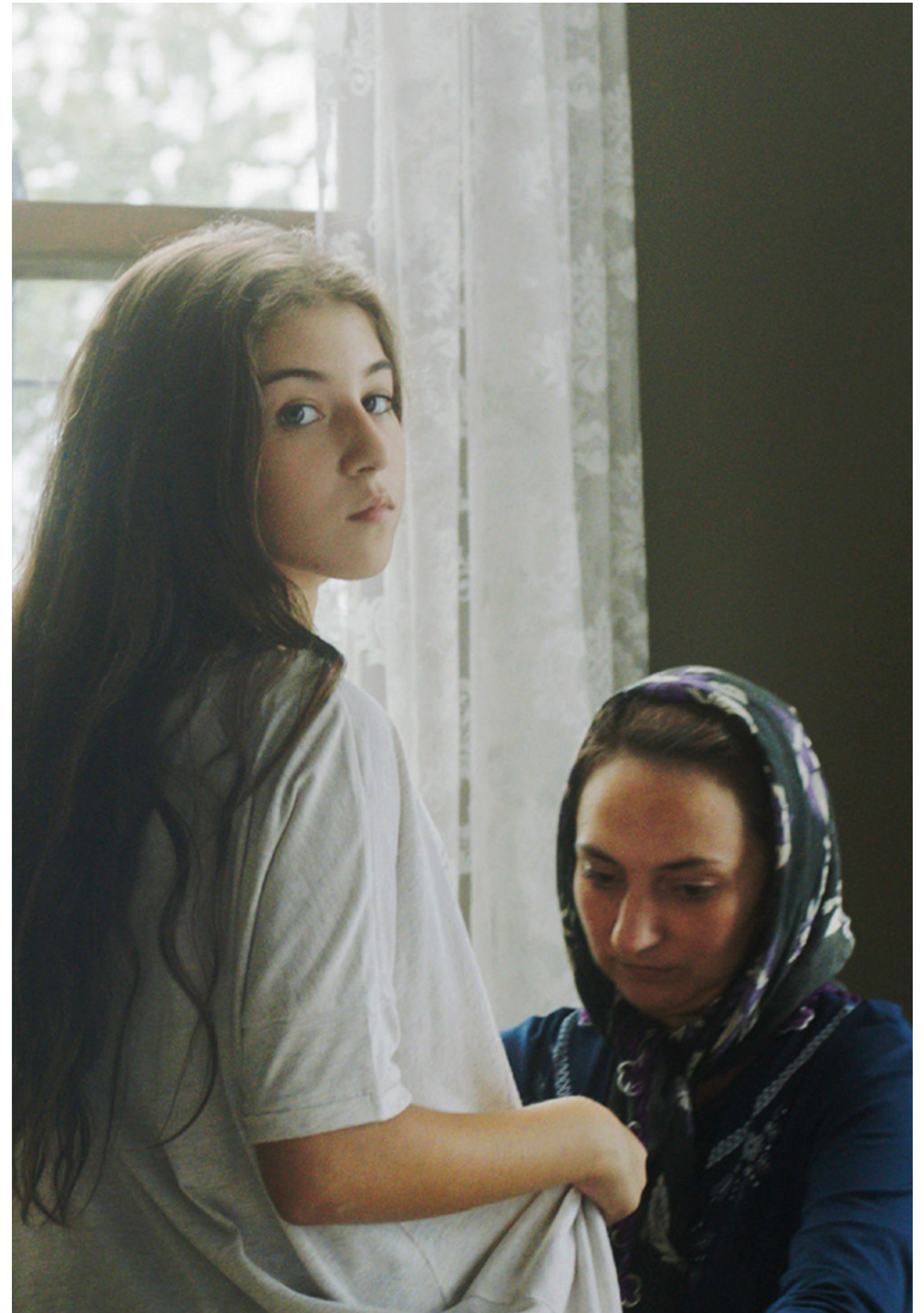
Notes

Based in a remote Turkish village with strong patriarchal structures, the film unveils the relationship between five sisters and their grandmother. The driving factor in restricting the girls' freedom is ultimately love. The grandmother wants the girls to have a secure future, which according to the social construct she lives in, is only possible through marriage. She uses the power she has in the household to protect the girls not only from committing a deed that could in her eyes spoil their future, but also from their abusive uncle. One way of protecting them is to restrict them in expressing their femininity in any other way than fulfilling their traditional gender roles. Despite being the main culprit, the uncle does not face any consequences for his abuse throughout the movie. His character portrays the unequal power dynamics between men and women in a patriarchal society, where a man's ability to suppress the rights of women is a measure of his power. In *Mustang* the girls' strive to flee to the capital city Istanbul symbolises the struggle for freedom and equality, while education through the figure of the teacher becomes a symbol of progress and openness.

Although having had to face negative and at times aggressive criticism within Turkey, Deniz Gamze Ergüven gained international praise for her piece of art by being nominated for the 2015 Oscars and Golden Globe awards, and winning awards at numerous prestigious film festivals.

Key Questions

- The grandmother wants to protect the girls. From what does she want to protect them and do you agree with the measures taken by her?
- Each girl uses a different strategy to cope with her fate. Discuss the strategies and their outcomes.
- What does the teacher in the movie symbolise?
- Compare the life of daughters in Sri Lanka and rural Turkey.



Sulan Kirilli

A FILM BY INOKA SATHYANGANI - 2002

2004 DHAKA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – BEST FILM AWARD
2004 TAMIL NADU INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – BEST DIRECTOR

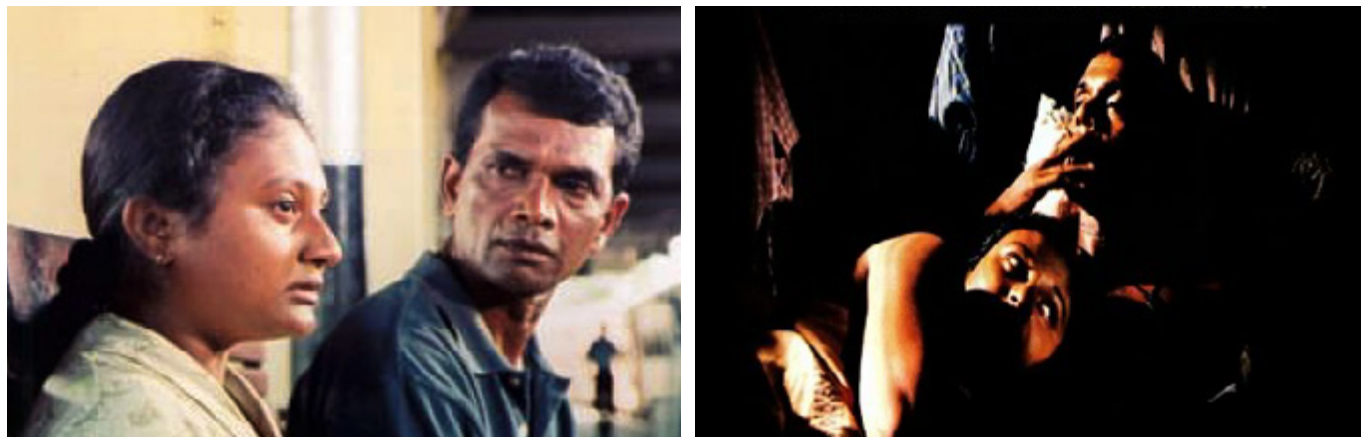


Target Audience

- Social Activists
- Working women (e.g. Free Trade workers /Migrant workers)
- Rural audience

Key Themes

- Social pressures and norms
- Family honour and pride
- Abortion



Plot

Young Rathie is a garment factory worker from a remote village, living in the suburbs of Colombo. She starts an affair with the soldier Shanta. When Rathie finds out that she is pregnant she gets caught in a wishful dream of her and Shanta living happily together. She strongly believes that Shantha will be supportive of the pregnancy and even tells her parents during a visit to her village that he will soon come and introduce himself to them. Without telling him about the pregnancy, she sends him many letters urging him to come to visit her. When he finally comes to see her and she reveals that she is pregnant, he is in shock and asks her to abort the child, as he happens to be married. When Rathie hears about his marriage she is devastated and finds herself in a complicated situation. On one hand Shanta wants her to abort the child to protect his marriage, on the other hand the law does not allow her to have a legal abortion, and she herself wants to keep the child. Throughout the movie she finds herself being torn between her limited choices. Without Shanta's knowledge she one day goes to visit his mother and pregnant wife. Seeing them she feels pity and makes up her mind to abort the child for their and Shanta's sake. The day before the abortion she feels the child moving in her womb for the first time, leading her to finally decide to keep the child.

"A brave film, and one made by a filmmaker with great potential"

The Island

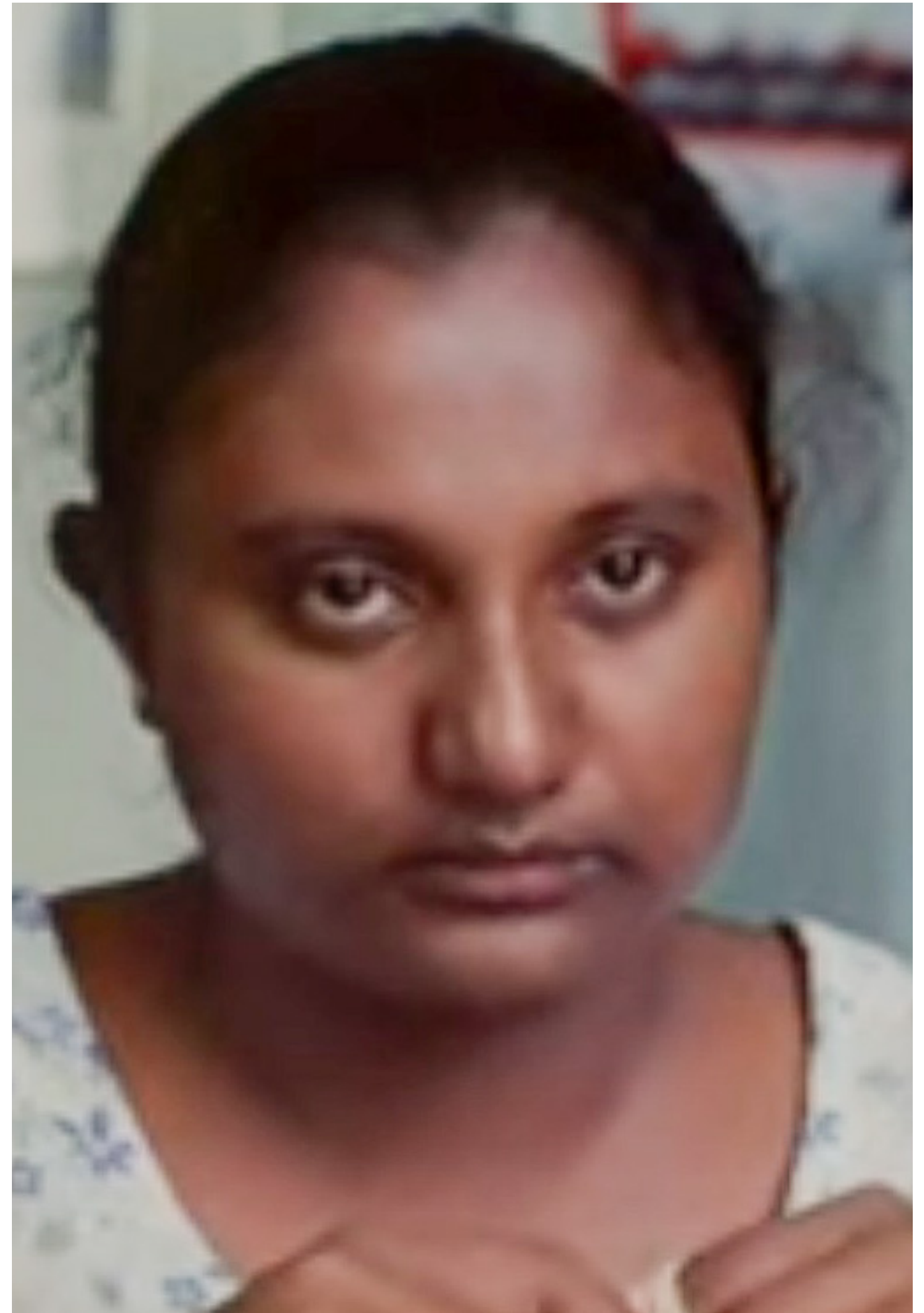
Notes

Sulan Kirilli tells the story of a young woman from a rural background. In the hope of finding a better life and determining her own fate, she leaves the comfort of living with her family to seek a job in the capital. Confirming the notion of the “corruptive influence of the big city” Rathie gets involved in an affair and ends up pregnant, which turns her life upside down. Her pregnancy is as much of a shock for Shante as it is for Rathie, as the consequences of having an illegitimate child in a society, where premarital affairs are condemned, are severe.

The relationship between the two points at some of the core gender issues in Sri Lankan society. By involving herself in a pre-marital affair Rathie becomes a social outcast. She cannot seek help from her parents, as the news about her pregnancy would bring shame to the family. At the same time abortions are illegal and stigmatized due to the high social value placed on motherhood. Therefore, it is not truly an option either. Shante on the other hand does not only worry about having to take responsibility for an illegitimate child, but fears that Rathie will expose her pregnancy to his wife, knowing that it will ruin the relationship between him and his family. Furthermore, it would bring shame to his name and destroy the image of him being the responsible provider, who is supposedly only away from his family because he is fulfilling his duty.

Key Questions

- How does the judgement on extra marital affairs and a resulting child affect men and women differently?
- Which challenges will Rathie have to face with her child?
- Rathie did not conform to the societal pressures but instead took her own decisions. Do you think she will find happiness in the long term, or would she have lived a happier life following social expectations?
- Do you see a danger of sending your daughter/sister to the city for job/ education opportunities? If so, discuss why.



Amma Kanakku

A FILM BY ASHWINY IYER TIWARI - 2016

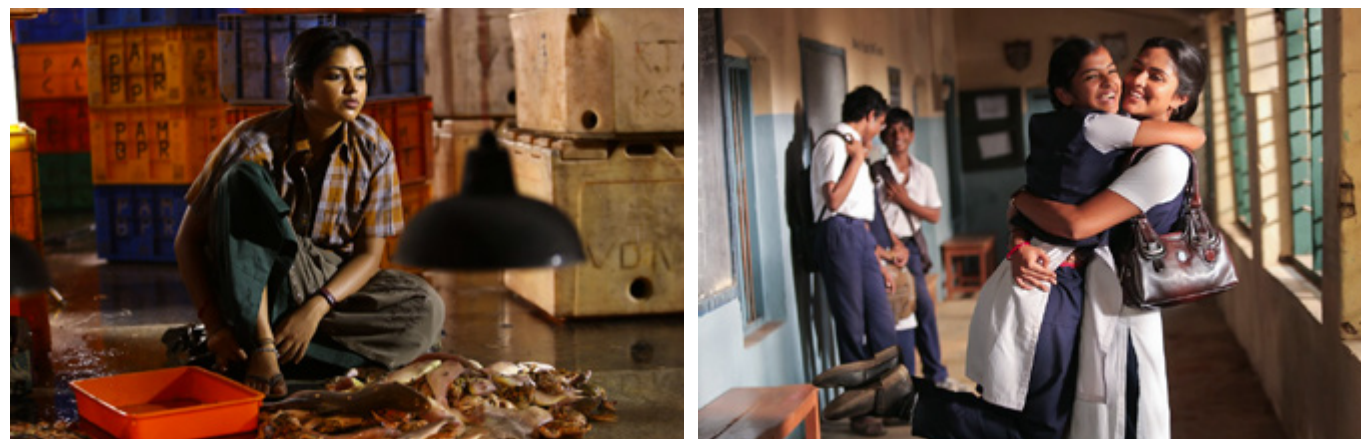


Target Audience

- Teachers
- Single mothers
- Rural audience of all age groups

Key Themes

- Women's empowerment
- Female role models
- Breaking gender and class boundaries on occupation



Plot

Shanthi is a young widow, who, among other odd jobs, works as a maid in Dr. Nandhini's household. Her daughter Abhinaya just entered tenth grade but has no motivation to study. This worries Shanthi, as she works day and night to save money for her daughter's advanced education. When Shanthi asks Abhinaya which occupation she wants to take up in her future, she tells her that being the daughter of a maid, there is no other option for her than becoming a maid as well. Frustrated Shanthi shares her worries with Dr. Nandhini, who challenges her to go back to school. Although hesitant at the beginning Shanthi realizes that her own lack of education is the reason she cannot mentor and tutor her daughter properly. With Dr. Nandhini's help she enrolls in her daughter's school. Seeing her mother in her classroom infuriates Abhinaya, who feels ashamed of her mother and avoids her at school. Shanthi studies hard and soon picks up where she left off years ago. When Abhinaya one day sees her mother being dropped off at home by a man, she thinks that she is a sex worker and in anger steals her mother's savings, and spends them all in one day. Through a classmate she learns that her quick assumption was wrong. Shanthi is not a sex worker and never used Abhinaya to achieve her own dreams through her, but rather wanted Abhinaya to study hard in order to have a good future for her own sake. The movie ends with Abhinaya being many years older and attending an interview for a high-ranking position in the civil services.

"A likeable mother-daughter tale"

Indiaglitz

"A noble story that Tiwari narrates with a fair degree of conviction"

Hindustan Times

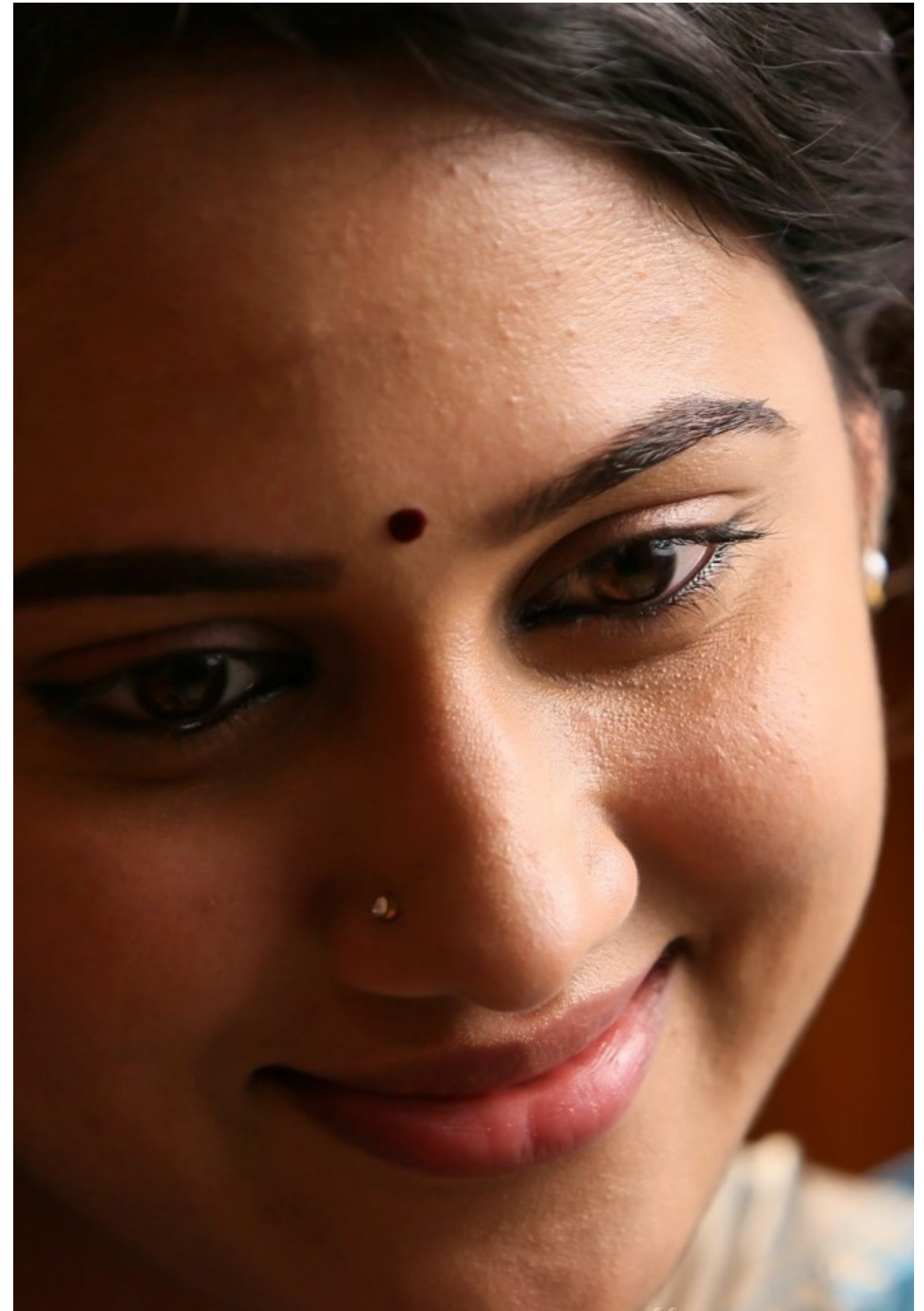
Notes

Amma Kanakku is a drama set in the suburbs of Chennai, India and portrays life in the lower income strata. Despite poverty, Shanthi juggles with her responsibilities of being the main income earner and head of her household, while being a single parent to a daughter, who lacks ambition to work her way up the class and income ladder. Although sprinkled with small quarrels the relationship between mother and daughter is one of unconditional love. Shanthi's only dream is that her daughter will one day have a good future. For that she looks beyond class and gender boundaries by encouraging her to aspire to a job that is not confined to her gender. The person she looks up to and approaches for advice whenever facing a difficult situation is Dr. Nandhini, a female doctor, who combines intellect and a kind heart.

Despite emphasizing the empowering role women can take up for other women, the film also strongly shows the supportive role men can play in uplifting women. Shanthi's bench neighbor, who is a genius and helps Shanthi to improve her skills in math or the collector, who shows generosity and respect towards her, despite their class differences, are all good examples. Especially the headmaster, who enrolls her in school and never patronizes or degrades Shanthi for her gender or age, but deals with her in a rather gender-neutral way, symbolizes the empowering role men can play.

Key Questions

- How does the movie depict the support provided by the different male and female characters towards Shanthi?
- What kind of role do men in society have towards creating an enabling environment for women (or a limiting environment)?
- Are the aspirations Shanthi has towards Abhinaya formed by the fact that she is a girl?
- How relevant is this story to your own life?



Wadjda

A FILM BY HAIFAA AL MANSOUR - 2013

2013 ALLIANCE OF WOMEN FILM JOURNALISTS – BEST NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE FILM
2014 PALM SPINGS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – DIRECTORS TO WATCH



Target Audience

- Students of all age groups
- Teachers
- Parents

Key Themes

- Gender and Religion
- Gender norms across cultures
- Self-determination



Plot

Wadjda is an 11-year-old girl, living in the capital city of Saudi Arabia. She dreams of owning a bicycle to race her neighbourhood friend Abdhulla. However, riding bicycles is not considered as appropriate behaviour for girls, which is why her mother refuses to buy one for her. Wadjda tries to earn the money herself by selling mix tapes and self-made bracelets at school, which earns her a bad reputation among teachers and the head mistress. When Wadjda learns about her school's Quran competition at which the winner will gain a cash prize of 1000 Riyal, enough money to buy the bicycle she wants, she decides to participate. Her dedication and steady improvements impress her teachers. When she is declared the winner of the Quran competition and asked what she is planning to do with the prize money, she announces that she wants to buy a bicycle. The teachers are shocked and refuse to give her the money, saying that it will instead be donated to Palestine. Wadjda is devastated. In the meantime, her mother's greatest fear comes true: Following his mother's request, her husband, Wadjda's father, marries a second wife, as Wadjda's mother cannot bear any more children. Despite her own grief, she shows Wadjda how proud she is of her daughter winning the competition. Having heard of what happened to the prize money, she overcomes her own reluctance and surprises Wadjda by buying the bicycle. The movie ends with Wadjda and Abdullah finally racing each other on their bicycles.

"A bittersweet film about a 10-year old girl finding her feet in Riyadh society that cannot fail to win you over"

The Guardian

"Beautiful, nuanced tale of an independent Saudi girl"

Common Sense Media

Notes

Wadjda's story is set in Saudi Arabia, where women have rather limited possibilities of taking part in public life. Wadjda's free spirit is a refreshing portrayal of Saudi Arabian girls and women, and contradicts the general media's projection of them. Her relationship with her mother is one of love and appreciation. However, several minor conflicts between the two arise due to Wadjda's refusal to comply with the society's gender norms. Throughout the movie, the mother undergoes a transformation, depicted by her cutting her hair, despite her husband's preference for long hair, and buying Wadjda the bicycle, putting her daughter's happiness before the persisting social norms and expectations.

In the film the bicycle becomes a symbol of freedom and self-determination, which finds support across genders, as symbolized by Wadjda's mother and her friend Abdhulla. Women's quest for freedom and self-determination is not unique to Saudi Arabia, but is of an almost universal nature. Many of the gender norms depicted in the movie turn out to be cross-cultural norms to be found in many South Asian cultures as well, where girls don't enjoy the same privileges as boys.

Haifaa Al Mansour gained tremendous attentions for creating the first feature film entirely shot in Saudi Arabia. Being a woman herself she had to face significant challenges throughout the production process. She was remunerated with several awards for her masterpiece and the support of the Saudi government, which submitted the movie to the Oscars.

Key Questions

- How does religion define gender relations?
- Does this film contribute to reinforcing or challenging stereotypes of men?
- The film deals with the concept of having to be a "respectable girl". What does being a "respectable girl" mean in the Arab and in the Sri Lankan context?
- How are social expectations on gender institutionalized within the school system in the movie, and is this relevant to Sri Lanka?



Bend it like Beckham

A FILM BY GURINDER CHADHA - 2002

2002 BRITISH COMEDY AWARDS – BEST COMEDY FILM
2003 ESPY AWARDS – BEST SPORTS MOVIE



Target Audience

- Parents
- Female Athletes
- Youth

Key Themes

- Women in fields perceived as masculine
- Gender stereotypes in sports
- Gender norms across cultures and generations



Plot

Jess Bhamra is a young Indian girl, who lives in the UK with her family. She has a natural talent for football, with her idol being David Beckham. To her family's resentment she follows her passion, using every opportunity that arises to play football. One day Jules, a football player herself, sees Jess play in the park and invites her to her football training. Joe, the coach of the team is soon convinced of Jess's talent and the three of them become close friends. In the lead up to the final game, where a scout is to be watching, Jess finds out that the game clashes with her sister's wedding. Joe pleads Mr Bhamra to allow Jess to play in the match but he refuses, revealing that he was discriminated when playing sports in the UK during his youth. Her parents force her to give up playing football and to focus on her studies and engage in household chores instead. Jess obeys them but her unhappiness is evident. When Jess' father finally lets her join the match, the team is losing with half an hour left. At the very end, Jess scores at a free kick and makes her team win the tournament. Jules and Jess are both offered scholarships to the Santa Clara University in California. When the girls are at the airport, Joe confesses his love for Jess. They agree to have a relationship and tell their parents when she returns. The girls then leave to pursue their dream of playing professional football.

"A genial ethnic sports comedy"

New York Times

"Gurinder Chadha turns this British-Asian film about a clash between traditional values and the modern world into a fantastic feel-good movie"

BBC Films

Notes

Bend it like Beckham tells the story of cultural and generational clashes within a family. Based on their own cultural context, Jess' parents have a very clear idea of what a good daughter and ideal wife should be like. Her British friend Jules faces similar struggles with her mother, who constantly encourages her to dress and behave more "like a girl". With their passion for football the girls fall outside the framework of what is considered as feminine in their parents' eyes. Joe is one of the few characters in the movie that sees beyond the boundaries of femininity and masculinity, race and culture, by coaching a women's football team and falling in love with Jess.

Across cultures, many fields of sport have for a long time been considered as too aggressive and rough for women, which is why they were often perceived as masculine. This is true for some sports more than for others, but football certainly falls into this category. Despite cultural differences, in Jess' and in Jules' case it is the older generation that tries to enforce certain social norms on their children, whereas the younger generation regards being a girl or a boy as less of a limitation in their life choices. In that way the film shows that ultimately gender norms are not rigid, but rather a social construct that changes over time and generations.

Parmendra Nagra, the actress who portrays Jess, won the 2002 Federation International de Football Association's (FIFA)'s international personality of the year award for promoting the sport and its values.

Key Questions

- Compare Jess' and Jules' family's attitudes towards being a girl and a boy. To what degree do you agree/disagree with the parents for not letting the two girls play?
- How does Jess cope with her family's expectations and the rules imposed on her? What are your views on that?
- How do you estimate the social acceptance of girls following sports that are considered as masculine and vice versa in Sri Lanka?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you could not follow a dream or a talent because it did not match traditional gender norms?



Ki and Ka

A FILM BY R. BALKI - 2016



Target Audience

- Age group 18+, viewer discretion advised
- Urban audience
- Female Professionals

Key Themes

- The role of the breadwinner and homemaker
- Division of labour in a household
- Women in leadership positions



Plot

Kia is a young professional, who strives to become the CEO of her marketing company. On a flight she meets Kabir, the son of a rich real estate developer. To Kia's surprise Kabir has no interest in taking over his father's business. His role model is his mother, a housewife, who he considers to be an artist for making his house a home. He aspires to be a stay-at-home husband and to create a home for his loved ones, just like his mother did. Recognizing that their lifestyles complement each other perfectly, they decide to get married. Throughout the movie it becomes clear that for both of them this unconventional relationship bears many challenges, with Kabir constantly having to deal with the accusation of living off of his wife's money, and Kia having to deal with people claiming that she married a useless man. When Kia explains her lifestyle in an interview, the TV host becomes curious and asks Kabir for an interview. Kabir becomes famous and is being invited to give speeches and interviews about his lifestyle. However, his newly gained fame makes Kia jealous and their relationship starts to fall apart. When Kia's mother is sent to hospital while Kia is abroad and Kabir is at a social event, despite having promised to look after her, Kia is furious and starts a fight with Kabir, which leads to their separation. When Kia understands that her role as the breadwinner made her jealous of Kabir, the homemaker, when he started gaining attention, she deeply regrets her behaviour and is ultimately being forgiven by Kabir.

"Ki & Ka isn't a strong voice against gender stereotyping, but it's one of its kind in mainstream Hindi film industry, and that makes it notice-worthy"

Hindustan Times

"Ki and Ka is worth a ticket because it shows how there is nothing wrong with the man wearing the apron and the women wearing her ambition"

The Times of India

Notes

The story of Kia and Kabir unfolds in modern, urban India, where despite modernisation in many aspects of life, traditional gender-related stereotypes still persist. This is shown through the role of Kabir's father, whose attitude towards his son represents the mainstream perception of what a man should be. The relationship between Kia and Kabir is a typical love story, with the twist that their marriage allows both to live the life they aspire to, without having to conform to traditional gender norms society places on married men and women. That making life choices, which do not comply with social expectation, is neither bad nor something to be ashamed of, is an important theme of the movie.

Although the relationship between Kia and Kabir might seem unconventional at first glance, it is ultimately an exchange of gender roles rather than a redistribution of work. The challenges and difficulties the two face throughout their marriage are the same as the ones in conventional marriages. Rather than sharing their workload and being equal partners to each other, the homemaker lives in the shadow of the breadwinner, causing the smallest shift in the power dynamics to bring jealousy and disharmony, as the breadwinner is not used to sharing the attention. The movie transcends gender barriers and highlights a rather structural issue evident in many households, which cannot be changed by merely exchanging the roles of men and women.

Key Questions

- Does Kia's and Kabir's lifestyle represent the ideal solution for women striving for a career?
- Does Kia's and Kabir's marriage depict a role shift or a shift in the division of labour? Which of the two options do you prefer for your own life?
- From your personal experience, how do social norms and expectations limit men's and women's freedom in living the life they aspire?
- To what degree would Kia's and Kabir's lifestyle be accepted in the Sri Lankan society?



Erin Brockovich

A FILM BY STEVEN SODERBERGH - 2000

2000 NEW YORK FILM CRITICS CIRCLE AWARDS – BEST DIRECTOR
2001 GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS – BEST ACTRESS

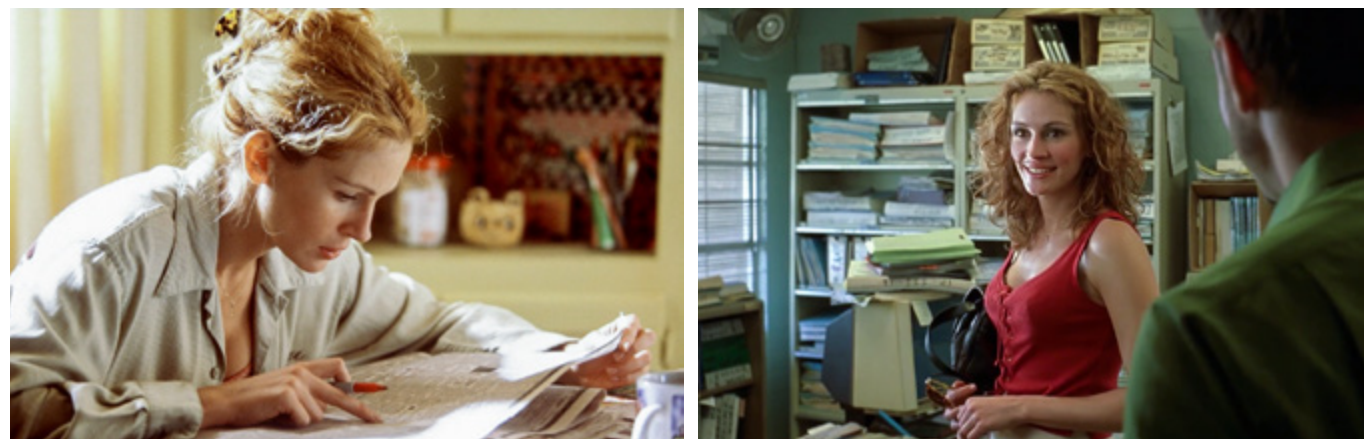


Target Audience

- University students
- Activists
- Community leaders

Key Themes

- Judgement of women based on appearance
- Combining career and family
- Shifted gender roles



Plot

Erin Brockovich is an unemployed mother of three. Unable to pay her bills she is desperate to find a job. When she gets involved in a car accident and loses the lawsuit that follows, she is able to convince her lawyer to offer her a job, as a compensation for the lost case. Her co-workers openly judge her for her style of clothing and her manners, but she couldn't care less. Their perception changes when she begins to investigate a suspicious real estate case involving the Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG & E). She discovers that the company is responsible for contaminating land and water by illegally dumping toxic waste. To cover up the problem, the company is attempting to buy the contaminated land from its owners, which is how the case comes to Erin's attention. In the meantime, she gets to know her new neighbor George, who develops an interest in Erin and willingly takes care of her children while she is at work. This allows her to visit the affected families one by one and to collect large amounts of evidence about the serious health effects the contamination has on the residents. Although her boss and her colleagues are stunned by Erin's engagement, it leads to many tensions within her household. Her children feel neglected and George leaves her temporarily. Regardless, she continues to dig deeper and is able to collect enough evidence to win the case. Having understood the importance of Erin's work she also regains her children's and George's support, leading to a happy ending.

"Erin Brockovich will make you laugh. It will make you cry. It will make you stand up and cheer"

New York Times

"This film is smart, savvy, funny, and, at times, poignant. (...) It's a reminder of the impact that a truly good motion picture can have"

Reel Views

Notes

The movie Erin Brockovich is set in the 1990s and portrays the real life story of the same-named clerk and environmental activist, who helped her law-firm win 333 million US Dollars for the victims of PG & E's water pollution. While unfolding the love story between Erin and George, the much stronger message of the movie is the proclamation of self-love and respect, as well as love and empathy towards a community.

The film firmly declares the old and known saying: "Never judge a book by its cover". Erin's behaviour and appearance tends to raise eyebrows. Her straightforward and loud personality makes her fairly unpopular among some people, but is also her key to success among others. With her provocative wardrobe she is not always taken seriously. However, she feels comfortable in her clothes and thus rejects even her boss's request to change. She also lacks a formal college education in law and is thus underestimated and looked down upon by colleagues from other law firms, until she proves to be just as capable as anyone else. Despite all the disadvantages her behaviour and appearance bring, she stays true to herself and does not let other people's judgement influence her decisions. She gains their respect, not by changing who she is, but by convincing them of her competencies by being hard working, confident, quick-witted and never shying away from proving her point, regardless of her counterpart's social or professional status. She is an example of a woman who does not conform to norms and standards but makes use of her unique potential, becoming a role model and leader in her respective field.

Key Questions

- How is Erin being perceived for the way she dresses?
- How do you explain the phenomenon of women judging other women?
- What are the factors that make George decide to leave? How are these connected to gender dynamics?
- Describe the power relationship between Erin and the other lawyer and compare it to the Sri Lankan context. Do you know of similar situations in other professions?

She brought a
small town to its feet
and a huge company
to its knees.

Julia Roberts is Erin Brockovich

Based on a true story.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENT
A JERSEY FILMS PRODUCTION "ERIN BROCKOVICH"
ALBERT FINNEY AARON ECKHART CASTING MARGERY SIMKIN
MUSIC BY THOMAS NEWMAN SUPERVISOR AMANDA SCHEER-DEMME
COSTUME DESIGNER JEFFREY KURLAND EDITOR ANNE V. COATES A.C.E.
PRODUCTION DESIGNER PHILIP MESSINA PHOTOGRAPHER ED LACHMAN A.S.C.
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS GAIL LYON PRODUCERS JOHN HARDY CARLA SANTOS SHAWBERG
PRODUCED BY DANNY DE VITO MICHAEL SHAMBERG STACEY SHER WRITTEN BY ROSS WOLFMAN
DIRECTED BY STEVEN SODERBERGH
COLUMBIA PICTURES PARENT STRONG LANGUAGE SOME DRUG USE AND SMOKING A UNIVERSAL PICTURE

Akase Kusum

A FILM BY PRASANNA VITHANAGE - 2008

2008 INDIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – PEACOCK AWARD
2008 GRANADA CINESELSUR FILM FESTIVAL – BEST ASIAN FILM AWARD



Target Audience

- University students
- Working mothers
- Cultural actors

Key Themes

- Aging and loneliness
- Motherhood versus career
- Life without male guardianship



Plot

Sandya Rani is a retired actress, who was once the shining star of Sri Lankan cinema. After leaving the film industry she started living a secluded life with her maid. To earn an extra income she rents out a room in her house to couples in the film industry. That is how she gets to know Shalika, a young actress who is having an extramarital affair with her co-actor. When her husband finds out about the affair, Shalika permanently moves to Rani's house and the two women become close friends. Shalika decides to start acting in soap operas and convinces Rani to join her. Rani's return to the entertainment industry does not go unnoticed by Priya, a young single woman in her mid 20s, who works at a karaoke bar and happens to be two months pregnant and HIV positive. It turns out that Rani is Priya's mother, but was forced to abandon Priya and her father, since Rani had to be presented as a virgin to become a star. When Priya reveals her existence to Rani, she starts her search for her long forgotten daughter. However, Priya, carrying a grudge against her mother for neglecting her, drives her away. It is not until Priya is admitted to hospital, that she starts writing letters to Rani, in which she reveals her life story and her feelings. When Rani receives the letters, Priya is already dead, but her child survived. The movie ends with Rani taking care of the child, hoping that one day she will be forgiven.

"Haunting"
iFilm Connection

"Malani Fonseka is Magnificent. Nimmi Harasgama is irresistible"
Philip Cheah (Film Critic)

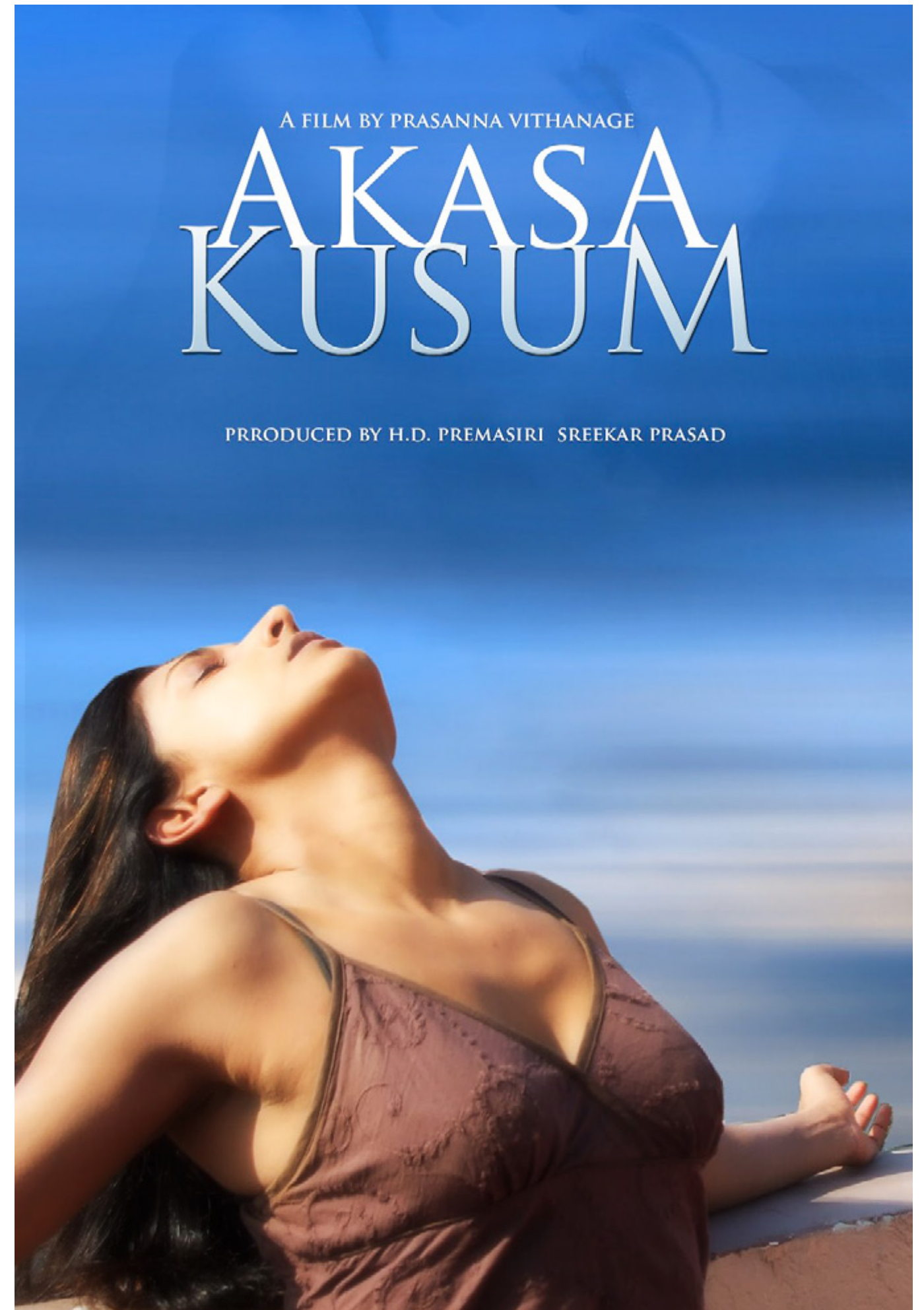
Notes

The movie reveals the story of three generations of middleclass working women in modern day Sri Lanka. The relationship between Rani and her daughter is strained due to Rani having chosen her career over her family. The choice came with financial benefits for Rani, who gained fame and fortune as a star, and for Rani's husband, who was bribed to take the child and leave her. Nevertheless, the fact remains that she had to be known as a single woman, a virgin even, to be made a star, in order to appeal to the male audience. This left her alone in her middle age, without a partner or a child. That there has been a change in the pressure that can be placed on women, is shown through the character of Shalika, who is married and involved in an extra-marital affair, while being a known actress. However, she is also sexually objectified by her affair and is finally dropped, when the situation becomes too inconvenient for her lover. Having no social and financial security, Priya lives the most difficult life out of the three, as she has to face pregnancy and HIV aids alone. Her profession makes her a social outcast, leaving her with no pity from society.

What the movie makes evident is, that although all three women suffer because of the choices they made, each one found a way of dealing with the situation and making a living without being dependent on a man. That this is possible, even in a rather male dominated society is one of the key messages the movie delivers.

Key Questions

- How does the film depict the three women dealing with aging and loneliness?
- What is the price the three women pay for the choices they made, and to what degree are these choices their own or influenced by social expectations?
- Would Rani have had to choose between living with her family, and becoming a star, if she were a man?
- Do you think single women can live dignified lives in Sri Lanka?



Iraivi

A FILM BY KARTHIK SUBBARAJ - 2016



Target Audience

- Age group 18+, viewer discretion advised
- Rural and urban audiences
- Social activists

Key Themes

- Male dominance
- Violence and Masculinity
- Vulnerability and dependence of women in patriarchal societies



Plot

Arul is a talented film director, who fell out with his producer, due to which his latest film was never released. In a violent confrontation Arul's best friend Michael kills the producer and is being arrested. Disappointed and angered, Ponni, Michael's wife, cuts him out of her life, and Arul's brother Jagan confesses his love for her. Unable to decide between the two, she secretly returns to her village. Yazhini, Arul's wife, also moves back to her parent's house and files for a divorce, as she can no longer bare Arul's alcoholism. After Michael's release from prison he returns to Ponni with the promise of a better future. However, when asked to rob a temple to organise money for Arul to regain the production rights of his film, he agrees. Barely having escaped from the police, Michael finds out that Jagan had pulled the strings for Michael to be arrested, so that he could live with Ponni. Michael confronts Ponni and finally the two decide to leave the past behind and start a new life in Chennai. When Michael unexpectedly meets drunken Jagan, the two get into a fight, with Jagan being killed. Michael is shocked and arranges their departure to Chennai on the very same day. Enraged about Jagan's murder, Arul, who in the meantime acquired the production rights of his film and convinced Yazhini to return to him, kills Michael in an act of revenge. He is being captured by the police and makes a final phone call to Yazhini to bid farewell forever, while Ponni leaves for Chennai alone.

"*Iraivi* is an unusual feminist film, in the sense that it's seen entirely through the prism of sympathetic male characters"

the Hindu

"Beautifully etched out characters, wonderful all-round performances, exceptional music and a thought-provoking message"

Rediff



Notes

Iraivi is a modern day drama based in the suburbs of Chennai, India, depicting the existing flaws in its society's gender dynamics. The story is centred on three men who appear to be the main characters, but the inner core of the story are the women attached to them. Although Arul and Michel both love their wives, and want to live a peaceful life with them, it is ultimately their own choices that prohibit them from achieving that, constantly placing their wives at the receiving end. In their short-tempered way of making decisions and being quick to use violence, the male characters in the movie become the antagonists, with the women becoming the real heroes, by utilizing their own free will to react to the always-changing circumstances. This is clearly shown through Yazhini, who files for a divorce, Malar who sets clear boundaries of wanting nothing more but a physical relationship with Michael, and Ponni, who abandons Michael after he goes to Jail, but due to her commitment also refrains from entering into a new relationship with Jagan. These three women stand in contrast to Arul's and Jegan's mother, representing the previous generations of women, who are known to have silently suffered from their husbands' misbehaviour.

The movie unveils the idea of "manhood" as a justification for misconduct and wrong decisions, which is widespread. It also shows that women might be vulnerable and to a certain degree dependent on the decisions taken by the men in their lives, but that their decision to exercise free will can free them.

Key Questions

- "Men are supreme, Women are subtle", do you agree with Arul's statement?
- How do Arul's, Jagan's and Michael's perception of women differ?
- What are the factors that make George decide to leave?
- Compare the situation of the women in the movie with your own society. Are women in your cultural context similarly dependent on their husbands/fathers/brothers?



36 Vayadhinile

A FILM BY ROSSHAN ANDRREWS - 2015

2016 CRITICS AWARDS – BEST ACTRESS



Target Audience

- Social activists
- Rural and urban audience
- Female entrepreneurs

Key Themes

- A woman's multiple social roles and responsibilities
- The impact of marriage on a woman's life
- Women's empowerment



Plot

Vasanthi is a 36-year-old middle class woman, whose husband and daughter aspire to migrate to Ireland. In order for her to get the visa, she needs to find a job at an Irish company, but is rejected at a job interview because of her age. Due to a question her daughter asks the Indian president at a school visit, he invites Vasanthi to a meeting. At the sight of the president Vasanthi faints, leading to a series of humiliating events, followed by her daughter and husband leaving to Ireland, despite her objections. Susan, a former classmate, reminds Vasanthi of the confident young woman she once was, and encourages her to find back to her old self. This encounter leads to Vasanthi's determination to change her life. She stands up to the people who humiliated her by posting a video on Facebook about her meeting with the president, which quickly goes viral. By chance she gets the opportunity to produce organic vegetables for the cooks of a big wedding. Again, she lacks the confidence to take up the challenge, but a visit to a mass producer makes her realize the value of organic food. She gathers the courage to educate her neighbours and gets them involved in the project, allowing her to deliver the huge quantities requested. Following that, she takes up an opportunity to speak at a conference about her work and gains a high degree of prominence, leading to another invitation by the president. This time her husband and daughter accompany her, showing their support and changed perception of Vasanthi.

“The mere existence of this film, in this hero-driven industry of ours, is reason to celebrate”
The Hindu

“Some films need to be appreciated for the impact they leave on the audience. In that sense, Jyotika's comeback film 36 Vayadhinile is the perfect example”
Hindustan Times

Notes

The story unveils in an urban setting in Tamil Nadu, where society is dominated by men and the male-headed household is seen as a stable unit that provides protection and security to its members. While once having been a confident activist, since her marriage Vasanthi's world has been centred on her husband and daughter, to the degree that she has no ambitions or goals of her own. Although her love for them always makes her place their wellbeing before her own, her husband and daughter show little appreciation and an even lesser degree of respect towards her. In contrast, her friend Susan, who was inspired by Vasanthi during their college days, has pursued her dreams and is a symbol of a woman's agency.

The issues many married women face in South Asian society are clearly depicted in the movie. With marriage many women fall into a pattern of entirely focusing on the wellbeing of the family, to the degree that they lose their own identity in fulfilling the role of the nurturer and carer. This, in turn, leads to their family members losing their respect for them, since work in the household is rarely regarded as an accomplishment, but rather as the duty of women and is thus taken for granted. Furthermore, the movie attempts to challenge the widespread notion that with age a woman's value deteriorates as she loses her two greatest assets, namely her beauty and fertility. Vasanthi's story shows, that rather than being a hindrance, age and maturity can contribute to a person's success, and therefore should not determine a woman's worth or mark the end of a woman's career and ambitions.

Key Questions

- In which instances was Vasanthi's true character revealed even before Susan stepped into her life, and what are the possible reasons for her fall?
- How does marriage affect Vasanthi's dreams? Is this the case for women in your society as well?
- Can any woman achieve what Vasanthi achieved? What kind of support-mechanisms did Vasanthi have?
- Do you know any women or men in your community who are change makers or transformative leaders? What impact do they have on you and your society?



Oba Nathuwa Oba ekka

A FILM BY PRASANNA VITHANAGE - 2012

2013 MILANO AFRICAN ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL – SIGNIS AWARD
2013 VESOUL ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL – BEST FILM CYCLOD'OR



Target Audience

- Community leaders
- Activists
- University students

Key Themes

- Internalized social norms
- Dealing with trauma
- Interpretation of nonverbal communication



Plot

Sarathsiri is a Sinhala pawnbroker in his mid forties. While working at his pawnshop he meets Selvi, a young Tamil woman from Killinochi, who pawns her earrings. After their first encounter she keeps returning to his shop to pawn small items of little value. Sarathsiri develops an interest in her and saves her from an unwanted marriage with a wealthy old widower by marrying her himself. Selvi becomes a loving wife to Sarathsiri. However, he is afraid that her love for him will hinder him from following his dreams, and so he starts becoming distant. One day, an old friend of his appears at his doorstep and Selvi finds out that the two were in the army together. When she confronts Sarathsiri, she reveals that soldiers killed her brothers, and her parents sent her away in order to save her. The argument between the two ends unresolved and Selvi starts distancing herself from him. Shortly after, she falls sick, for which Sarathsiri blames himself. In the fear of losing Selvi he promises her to change. However, he also confesses that he lied as a witness in a rape case to protect his friends. This gives Selvi a second shock but the next morning she appears to have recovered and tells him that she is ready to be the wife he wishes and apologizes for having caused him pain. Sarathsiri is overjoyed and sells his pawnshop, and leaves to buy air tickets for a trip to India, as she has always wanted to go there. When he returns, he finds her dead in front of the house.

“A poignant love story between a Tamil girl
and a Sinhala ex-Army man”

the Hindu

“Vithanage successfully makes the viewer
feel the depth of emotion between Selvi
and Sarathsiri”

World Socialist Website

Notes

The film is set in the upcountry region of Sri Lanka, where diverse ethnic communities live together in close proximity. The relationship between Sarathsiri and Selvi is a love story, which is tainted by the scars of the long civil war that raged in the country for many years. Although it caused the different ethnic communities to feel alienated from each other the film shows how closely related they are regarding gender norms, which can be observed in Sarathsiri's and Selvi's marriage.

Both, Sarathsiri and Selvi have to deal with their own experiences made during the war, which left them with deep traumata. The way they deal with it is strongly connected to the way they were brought up to communicate and express their feelings. While Selvi turns silent and distances herself emotionally from Sarathsiri after she learns about his past, Sarathsiri has hidden his inner struggles behind a wall of silence right from the beginning. Selvi never interprets Sarathsiri's silence negatively, since being a man of few words does not contradict the conventional idea of masculinity, whereas Selvi's silence communicates her struggle of dealing with the emotional baggage she is carrying.

In that way the movie deals with internalized social norms and the impact it has on the way men and women communicate with each other, and the challenges they bring into the process of building a truly understanding and equal relationship.

Key Questions

- Why did Selvi and Sarathsiri have difficulties in communicating? How is it related to the way they were brought up?
- How did Selvi change Sarathsiri?
- What is needed to build a truly loving relationship despite baggage from the past?
- What are the gender stereotypes connected to the different ethnic communities in Sri Lanka and how are they portrayed in the movie?



The Pursuit of Happyness

A FILM BY GABRIELE MUCCINO - 2006

2007 NAACP IMAGE AWARDS – OUTSTANDING MOTION PICTURE
2007 MTV MOVIE AWARDS – BEST BREAKTHROUGH PERFORMANCE



Target Audience

- Parents
- Entrepreneurs
- Community leaders

Key Themes

- Social pressures on men
- Parental love
- Men as caretakers



Plot

Chris Gardner, his wife Linda and their son Christopher find themselves in a financial crisis. Chris heavily invested in a business of selling bone density scanners. However, it turns out that the machines are difficult to sell since many hospitals regard them as unnecessary luxury items. Linda has two jobs to financially support the family and their son Christopher attends a cheap day-care centre, where the children are left to themselves. After many disappointments, unable to bear the situation any longer, Linda leaves for New York. On Chris' request she leaves their son with him. In the meantime Chris is able to land an internship as a stockbroker. What he did not know is, that the internship is unpaid and the chances of ultimately being hired are quite low. Nevertheless, he takes up the challenge. While everything seems to be going well at first, with Chris regaining financial stability by successfully selling some of his bone density scanners, the rude awakening comes soon. His long unpaid taxes are being forcefully deducted from his bank account, leaving Chris with less than 22 dollars in his pockets. Unable to pay rent the two end up homeless. In order to pick up his son from day-care and to get a room at the homeless shelter he has to leave the office earlier than his competitors, and loses the weekends to study, as he has to sell the remaining bone density scanners. Despite all these disadvantages he is able to leave a lasting impression, and is ultimately the one intern to be hired, which marks the turning point in his life.

“The beauty of the film is its honesty”

San Francisco Chronicle

“A fairy tale in realistic drag”

New York Times

Notes

Based in San Francisco, USA in the early eighties, “The Pursuit of Happyness” is a story about a single father's struggle to overcome his financial crisis. Despite all hardships, the parental love shown in the movie is unconditional and always prioritizes the child. Being a single parent, Chris has to take the role of the provider and the nurturer and succeeds in both by not only building his career and providing his son with financial stability towards the end of the movie, but also by showing emotions and giving him the love and care that is usually attributed to mothers.

Single father households are statistically increasing. For instance, researchers have found that in the US men head a quarter of all single-parent households. Even in Sri Lanka single-parent households headed by fathers are not too uncommon due to many women working in the Middle East as domestic helpers. Although the reasons for this demographic shift may vary based on the cultural context, what is evident is, that fathers who invest substantial time in the development of their children are gaining more and more credit, slowly loosening traditional gender roles.

The film is inspired by the life story of Chris Gardner, who was involved in the production of the movie and appears on screen in the final scene. The inspirational value of the story was not only recognized by himself, but also by viewers of the movie, including the mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee, who organized an official screening of the movie to the city's homeless people in the hope of encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their families.

Key Questions

- Is a mother's love different from a father's love? If so, should it be that way?
- How are men, who show emotions like Chris, perceived in your cultural context?
- How is Chris' wife portrayed in the movie? What picture does it give of women?
- Would Chris have been able to turn his life around, if he was a single father in the Sri Lankan context? What are the factors that enabled him to succeed?



Thanks

Thanks goes to the directors of the chosen films, for creating pieces of art that depict contemporary relationships in a way that create the base for fruitful discussions.

Our thanks extend to everyone who was involved in the production of this handbook and invested their time and effort into shaping it into the form it has finally taken.

Finally, we would like to thank the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for supporting this publication.

We hope you will enjoy working with it and that it will stir some engaging discussions.