

# A Study on Portrayal of Gender in National Awarded Malayalam Films

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**Abstract:** *There are many movies represented women's issues and concerns in the films. But most movies women were portrayed for sheer beauty and attraction. Women in cinema start with an object of love and end in marriage. And it's a fact is that roles for women and women characters are far below as proportionality. Women film makers and actresses criticise that the media represent the interests of the elite class or superior gender and women has nothing in it. The glory and success of women and their contribution toward society and their fighting toward the evils and stereotypes never get proper respect and appreciation. And gender representation in cinema is one of the main concern in the present scenario. It's a fact that the majority of women characters tends to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. The Malayalam film industry is one of the most influential film industries in India. Each year plentiful movies are beholding the silver screen. Movies with varied genres and out of the box thoughts are the main highlights of the Malayalam film industry. There are many pieces of research made on the portrayal of women or gender in popular films. But, through this research, the researcher wants to analyse in-depth the representation of women in the National awarded Malayalam films and how the critically acclaimed films portray and constructs the women identities in the films and points towards the representation of women in society. Qualitative content analysis is used as the sole methodology for the research. Quantitative coding also is done for supporting the content analysis. And Betty Friedan's theory of patriarchy is applied for the theoretical framework.*

**Keywords:** Women, Gender, National Award, Malayalam Cinema, Representation

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Elsamma Enna Aankutty* (2010) was one of the early women-centric Malayalam films in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The role was played by debutant Ann Augustine. She beautifully portrayed the bold and brave women who have the responsibility of the family and her sisters. *Khaddama*(2011) starring Kavya Madhavan, portrayed the slave life of women who were migrated to Gulf countries for jobs.

22 *Female Kottayam* (2012) directed by Aashiq Abu and starring Rima Kallingal was a new wave women-centric film in Malayalam. The film was about the revenge and survival of a 22-year-old girl who was cheated and raped by her boyfriend and his boss. After the critical and commercial success of the film, there was a flood in women-centric films and female-oriented subjects in Malayalam. Swetha Menon's *Ozhimuri* (2012), Shobhana's *Thira* (2013), Nazriya Nazim's *Ohm Shanthi Oshaana* (2014), Manju Warriar's *How Old Are You* (2014), *C/o Saira Banu* (2017), Rima Kallingal and Manju Warriar's *Rani Padmini* (2015), Parvathy Thiruvoth's *Charlie* (2015), *Take Off* (2017), and *Uyare* (2019), Wamiqa Gabbi's *Godha* (2017) were super hits in the box office and got wide critical acclamation. These films contributed many female-oriented scripts and socially committed films. The films are enriched by spreading awareness and social commitments. The films played a vital role in empowering women through the on-screen and off-screen. Malayalam cinema is unique in the stances of scripts and representation of women.

National Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam is one of the National Film Awards presented to the best film in Malayalam of the year. The award is presented by Directorate of Film Festivals, the organization set up by Ministry of

Information and Broadcasting. The award was started from 1954 and *Neelakkuyil* was the first winner. That time the award was known as Presidents Silver Medal for Best Feature Film in Malayalam and from 1968 onwards the awards was known as National Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

The overall objective of the study is to explore the representation of women characters in National awarded Malayalam films. *Pathemari* (2015), *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016), *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), *Sudani from Nigeria* (2018). And the specific objectives of the study are as follows;

1. To study the characteristics of the women characters in the National awarded Malayalam films.
2. To analyse the manner of representation of women in the sample films.
3. To explore the total screen space and screen time of women characters in the sample films.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Routray (2011), in her study, examines how the film plays a vital role in constructing social beliefs and circulating certain views and opinions in the minds of the people and society. Rural or urban, film's influence in portraying certain issues and things is inevitable. Films ability in dealing with gender equality and its analysis on gender dimension is also certain. But various studies related to gender studies and gender equality suggests that films fail to portray gender equality and uniformity in the films. The film remains partial in some status quo. And film needs to be responsible for providing a platform for the suppressed groups, then only they can maintain an equilibrium of social and gender fairness.

Kunsey (2018), opines that roles for women and women characters are far below proportionality. He found that portrayals of women are much more positive in movies directed by women and that female directors frame female characters much more positively. These positive portrayals are largely affected by the presence of a critical factor behind the scenes. Female directors tend to hire more women in key roles and depict women in a more positive light than men.

Pillai (2010), in her study, explains, even as a large number of women from the middle and working classes step out of their homes to make a livelihood, there is a visible hurry to get back and reemphasize their roles as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law as though to gain sanction and sanctimony for their further forays into the outer world. In this context, one can perceive an imperative need in Kerala's society today to look at and integrate representations of women, especially in the wake of knowledge of the problematic nature of representation itself, which can only be incomplete and partial interpretations rather than 'objective' description of 'reality'.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Method of Study**

The study deals with the application of qualitative and quantitative content analysis on the National awarded Malayalam films to study the representation of women characters in the films. The researcher watched the four sample films *Pathemari* (2015), *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016), *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), *Sudani from Nigeria* (2018) and analysed the visual and the verbal subjects in the film.

Qualitative content analysis is used as the sole methodology for the research. Quantitative coding also is done for supporting the content analysis because the researchers want to get down and indulge the representation and social relevance and picture of women portrayed in the four sample films and how gender plays an important role in the minds of society. Information about the films was also traced from other sources that helped the researcher to be enriched with the pertaining information of the films.

### **3.2 Content Analysis**

Content Analysis is described as a method to classify written or oral materials to identify categories of similar meanings (Moretti, 2011). These categories represent either explicit or inferred communication (Hsieh, 2005).

Abrahamson (1983) asserted that content analysis can be fruitfully used to examine virtually any kind of communication materials, including “narrative responses, open-end survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, and printed media such as articles, books, or manuals”. Because researchers can engage in data collection with or without direct contact with persons studied, it can be an unobtrusive method.

The research uses content analysis as the sole form of analysis to compare the content in the sample films. The researcher has, first of all, selected the sample films and then sorted the women characters in the films. And then applied the qualitative content analysis formulae into this. A coding sheet is also used for perceiving the representation of these women characters in the sample films. The study also explores the characteristics of women in the films and how the women characters are portrayed and their representation in the films.

### **3.3 Sampling and Selection**

The researcher employed the purposive sampling technique to determine the sample selection. The sample chosen for this research were films which won National Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam 2015-2018. (Vogt, 2005) Proposed that the utility of purposive sampling to researchers is that the characteristics of the sample are assumed to closely represent the entire population being investigated. Thus, based on this assumption my main aim to use purposive sampling design was to sample films that purposely represented the genre. The films taken for the study are;

1. Pathemari (2015)
2. Maheshinte Prathikaram (2016)
3. Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum (2017)
4. Sudani from Nigeria (2018)

## **IV. DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Film Summary**

#### **A. Pathemari**

The movie *Pathemari* is wrapped around a man called Pallikkal Narayanan who migrated to the gulf country to earn a living for his family. All the women characters in the movie are Narayanan’s kin relatives’ women are meant to be inside the home and cook for the men. Also, we could see that at certain parts of the movie women are pictured as selfish greedy and self-concerned individuals this gives an outlook to all women in society as they are unlovable and selfish minded people. Whereas men lead a sacrificing life they suffer and sweat to look after their family.

#### **B. Maheshinte Prathikaram**

*Maheshinte Prathikaram* is about the life of a common employed young man in a rural area. This kind of film will get its identity and appreciation mostly among rural common people most of the scene in this movie is related to each one of them hence the movie can realistically become the story of the common majority this includes the daily life routine of the youth living in shabby marginalized rural sectors so it is very important to understand that poor person living in this areas place themselves in the place of the actors.

#### **C. Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum**

*Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* shows the pathetic situation experienced by two couples and the extreme worst situation of guilt. The movie comes up with an emotional experience rather than a practical situational experience. The movie does not contain any fun or comic part it is all about emotional feelings and worthless expectations of the two side parties throughout the movie.

#### **D. Sudani from Nigeria**

The movie *Sudani from Nigeria* has football as the main theme of the movie. This film tells the story of Malayali’s love for football.

**4.2 Data Analysis and Discussion**

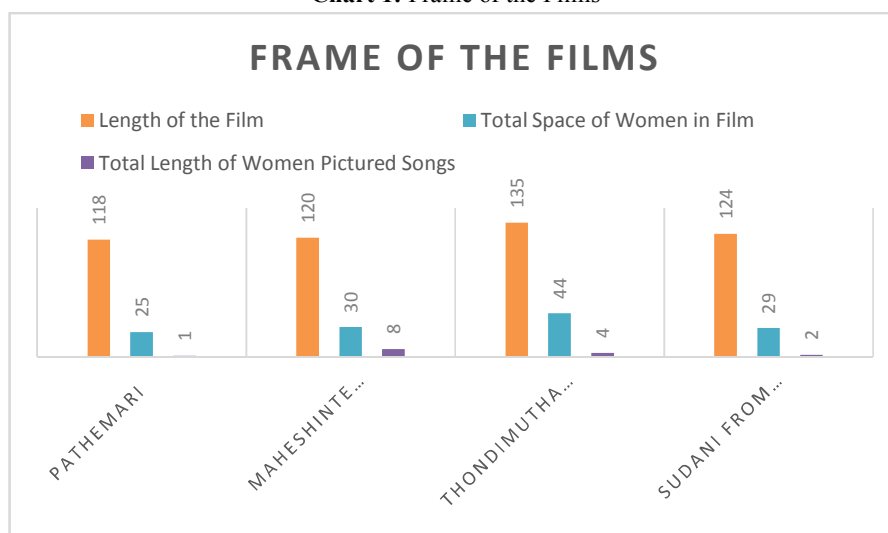
**Table 1:** Film Basic Details

Film Name	Film Genre	Release Date	Duration	Director Name	Writer Name
<b>Pathemari</b>	Historical Drama	9 October 2015	118 Minutes	Salim Ahamed	Salim Ahamed
<b>Maheshinte Prathikaram</b>	Comedy Drama	5 February 2016	120 Minutes	Dileesh Pothan	Syam Pushkaran
<b>Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum</b>	Family Drama	30 June 2017	135 Minutes	Dileesh Pothan	Sajeev Pazhoor
<b>Sudani from Nigeria</b>	Sports Drama	23 March 2018	124 Minutes	Zakariya Mohammed	Zakariya Mohammed, Muhsin Parari

**Table 2:** Frame of the Films

Film Name	Women Centric Film	Length of the Film	Total Space of Women in Film	Women Pictured Songs	Total Length of Women Pictured Songs
<b>Pathemari</b>	No	118 Minutes	24 Minutes 13 Sec	1	0.20
<b>Maheshinte Prathikaram</b>	No	120 Minutes	29 Minutes 56 Sec	3	7.25
<b>Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum</b>	No	135 Minutes	43 Minutes 38 Sec	2	3.10
<b>Sudani from Nigeria</b>	No	124 Minutes	28 Minutes 49 Sec	3	1.20

**Chart 1:** Frame of the Films

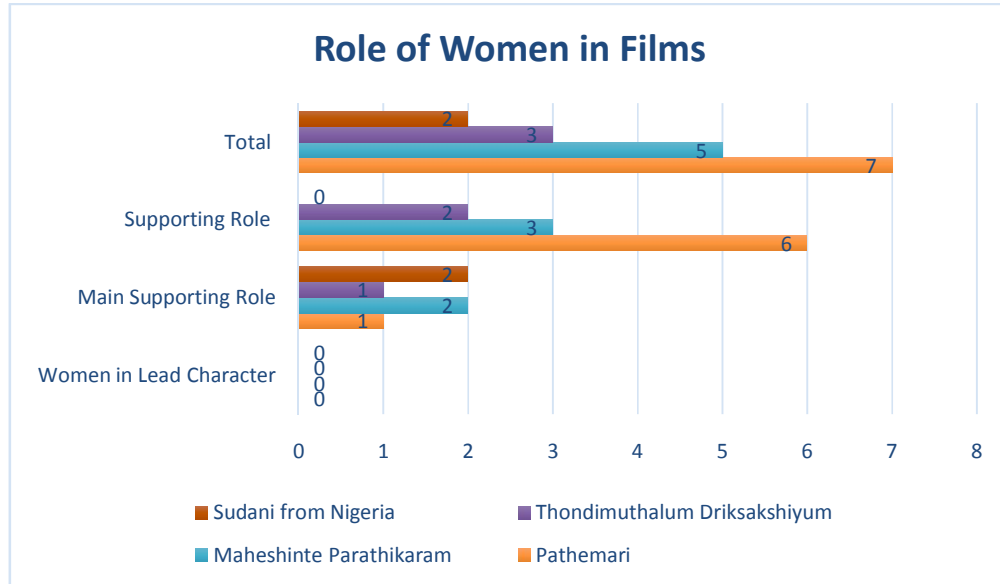


**Analysis**

These four researched movies are not Women-centric films. In *Pathemari*, the total movie length is 118 minutes, but the duration of women in the film is just 24 minutes and 13 seconds. In this movie, there is only one woman pictured song and the total length of the women pictured song is 0.20 minutes. In the movie *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, the film duration is 120 minutes and women space in the film is for 29 minutes and 56 seconds, but here there are three women pictured songs and its total length is 7.25 minutes. Film *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, stretches about 135

minutes, but the women's space lasts only for 43 minutes and 38 seconds. There are two women pictured songs and it expands to 3.10 minutes. *Sudani from Nigeria* is a movie having a total expansion of 124 minutes, but the women space in total is just 28 minutes 49 seconds and having three women pictured songs of a total length of 1.20 minutes.

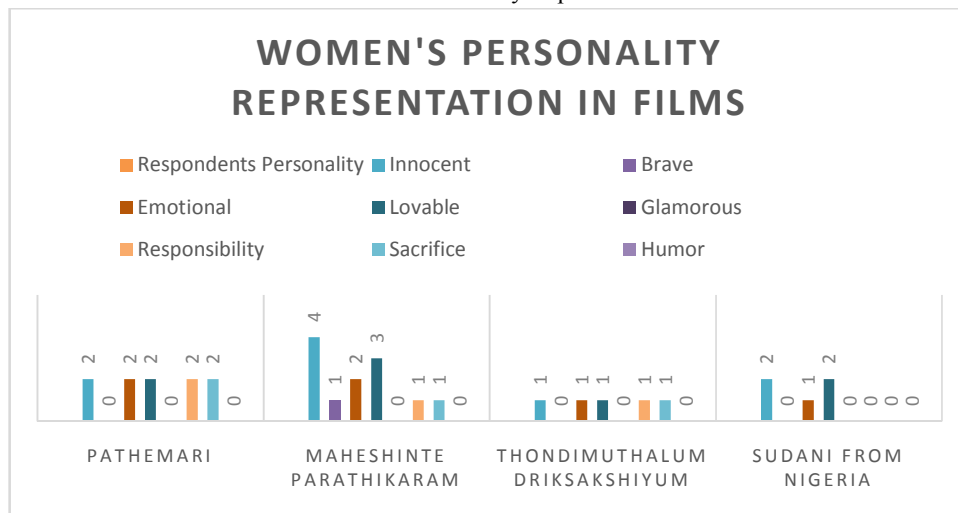
**Chart 2: Role of Women in Films**



**Analysis**

In a brief, this chart points out the role of women in films. In these four national award-winning movies they are not any woman that in the lead role. In *Pathemari*, there are a total of seven women characters. Here there is only one woman in the main supporting role and six women in other supporting roles. In *Maheshinte Prathikaram* there are five women characters and in that two women role in a main supporting role and three women in supporting roles. In *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, there are only three women characters in total and in that only one woman is the main supporting character and two in supporting roles. In *Sudani from Nigeria*, there are only two women characters in total and in that, they both took up main supporting roles.

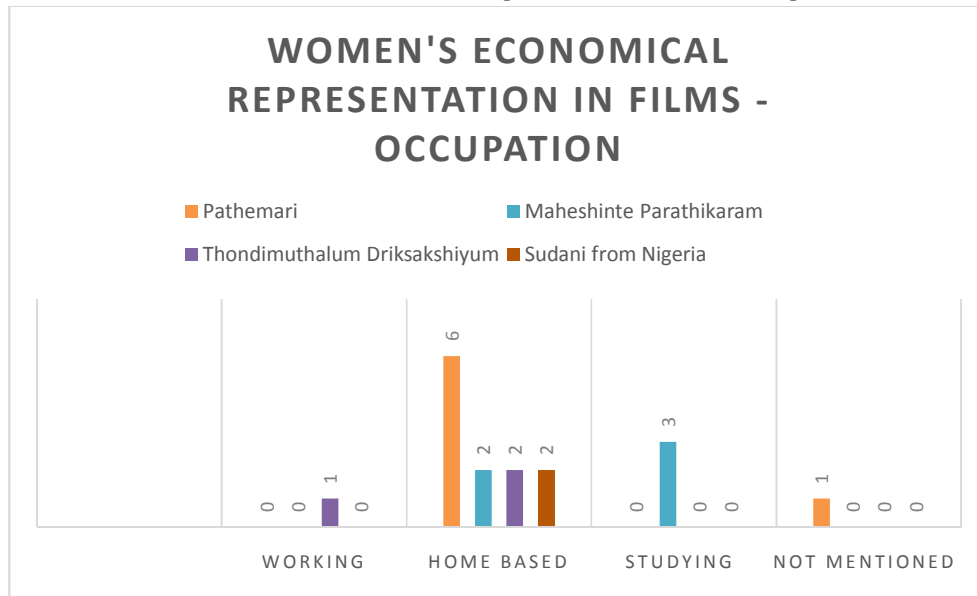
**Chart 3: Women's Personality Representation in Films**



**Analysis**

This chart compresses women's personality representation in films. Here in *Pathemari*, two women portraits are innocent, emotional, lovable characters. They embrace responsibility and sacrifice roles. In *Maheshinte Prathikaram* women behaviour contains four members resembling innocent one as brave, two as emotional, three as lovable and one for each responsibility and sacrifice. In the movie *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, the cast portrays the characters as one character role each for innocent, emotional, lovable, responsible and sacrifice. In the film *Sudani from Nigeria*, two cast roles are meant for the innocent and lovable and one for emotional.

**Chart 4:** Women's Economical Representation in Films - Occupation



**Analysis**

This represents the woman's said economic representation in these films. This means that income source or the occupation of the woman character in the movies. Only in the movie *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* we can see one woman in the working class; whereas in *Pathemari* six women, in *Maheshinte Prathikaram* two women and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* two women and in *Sudani from Nigeria* two women roles are doing home-based works like household duties. Only in the movie *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, they represent three women characters on studying age. And one character in *Pathemari* does not mention her occupational status.

**Table 3:** House of the Women Characters

Name of Film	House	Bungalow	Apartments	Habitat house	Not Mentioned
Pathemari				✓	
Maheshinte Prathikaram				✓	
Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum				✓	
Sudani from Nigeria				✓	

**Analysis**

In these 4 award-winning movies, the women characters are situated in Habitat houses where they are living in affordable, low income, one storey small houses.

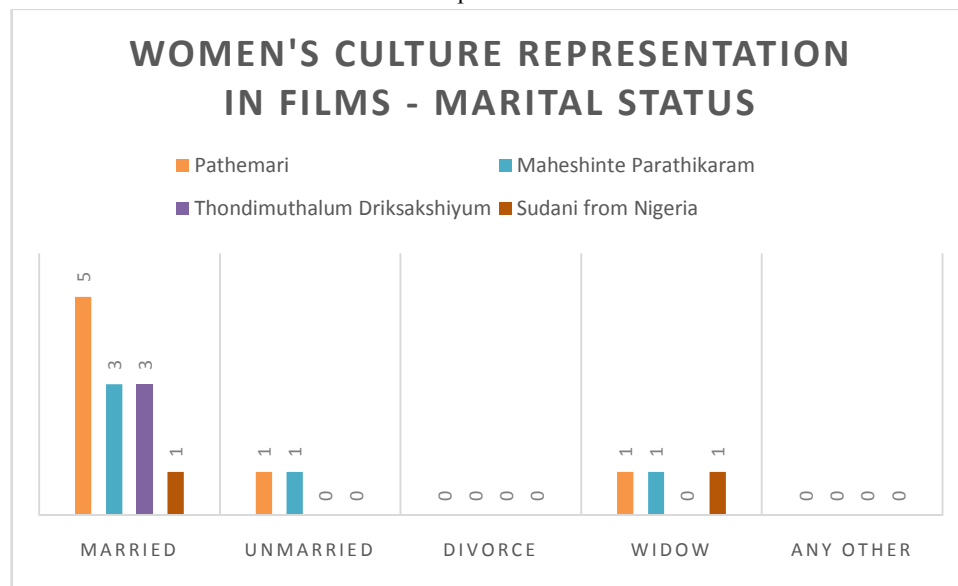
**Table 4:** Residential Place of Women Characters

Name of Film	Residential place	Metropolita n city	City	Village	Slum	Not Mentioned
<b>Pathemari</b>				✓		
<b>Maheshinte Prathikaram</b>				✓		
<b>Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum</b>				✓		
<b>Sudani from Nigeria</b>				✓		

**Analysis**

This table shows the residential place where women roles are centralised, in all four films women characters are located in villages.

**Chart 5:** Women’s Culture Representation in Films – Marital Status



**Analysis**

This chart gives the analysis of women characters marital status. In the movie *Pathemari* there are five married, one unmarried and one widow character. In *Maheshinte Prathikaram* there are three married, one unmarried and one widow character. In the movie *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, the women characters take up the roles of three married women. And in the film *Sudani from Nigeria*, the women roles are of one married and one widow.

**Table 5:** Relationship Status

Name of Film	Wife	Mother	Sister	Friend	Lover	Relative	Any Other
<b>Pathemari</b>	1	1	4			1	
<b>Maheshinte Prathikaram</b>				1	1	1	2
<b>Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum</b>	1						2
<b>Sudani from Nigeria</b>		1					1

**Analysis**

This table portrays the relationship status of women role in connection with the lead role. In *Pathemari*, Women roles can be categorised as one wife, one mother role and four sister roles. There is one woman who plays the role of a relative. In *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, there is one role for women as a friend, one Lover role, one relative role and two other women characters. In *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, there is one wife role and two other roles for women. In the film *Sudani from Nigeria*, there is only one mother role and one other woman role.

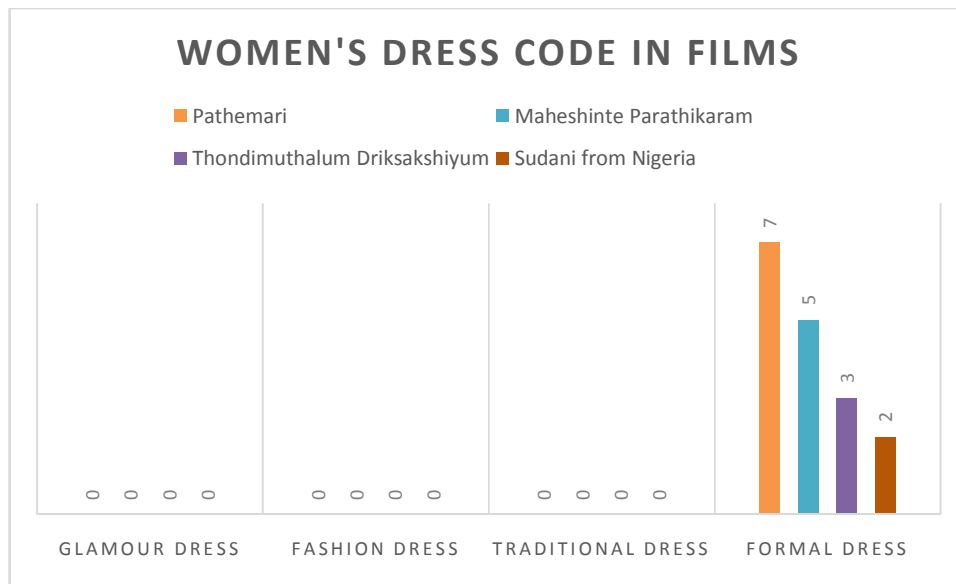
**Table 6:** Religious Activities

Name of Film	No	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Pathemari</b>		✓			
<b>Maheshinte Prathikaram</b>			✓		
<b>Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum</b>		✓			
<b>Sudani from Nigeria</b>			✓		

**Analysis**

This table sketches the religious activity of women characters in subjective movies. In the films *Pathemari* and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, the religious role of women is low. And in films, *Maheshinte Prathikaram* and *Sudani from Nigeria* there shows a medium religious activity by women.

**Chart 6:** Women’s Dress Code in Films



**Analysis**

This chart represents the women's dress code in these four movies. In all these movies all the women character are wearing formal dresses.

**V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

In the film *Pathemari*, there are only seven women characters throughout the movie and the movie contains no women as the main character all these roles are limited to a patriarchal culture where women are just meant to look after kids and do household duties. By showing women characters like this film influence an average orthodox middle-class people to treat their own wife’s mothers and daughter’s as a beaten-down class member of their family women never get a chance to make decisions or raise their voice women are categorized as men’s supporters. They don’t take

part in any concern issues. The movie deals with a very relevant and heart touching theme the content and the idea of the whole movie is very appreciable.

All women characters are depended and relayed on men the movie never opened an opportunity for a self-standing and bold women character this movie does not contain any female character in its main role but the co-actress plays the role of Nalini as the wife of Narayanan. Nalini is not having any happy time and enjoyment stylish life in the story she is oppressed and limited to the dreams of hopes that she could never fulfil in her life in this movie all women's are placed only in a habitat home finishing their life within the four walls. Life or fate never offered them anything enjoyable.

In *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, there are two women in the main supporting roles. The initial woman character in the movie is Sowmya who was Mahesh's lover; she is characterized as a woman who is not bold and courageous. She is controlled by her family and is ready to leave her life according to fate. What this indicates is that young girls in society should not move on with their interests or dreams family has the authority to control their lives and after marriage, she should be under her husband without earning a job or profession this is truly a wrong mentality that the movie can influence upon common people indirectly.

Another major role is done by Jimsy who is a bold and educated teenager but there is no broad space given for her to go up with her dreams and passion. Even though she is educated she is finally tending to be a home maid holding up family responsibilities the film does not give importance to her thought and voice through this study the researcher objects that this film could have included something innovative and successful in this character's story that could have been an inspiration or ignite for those young girls who see the movie. Still, the researcher appreciates the bold and pleasant role given to this character. Also, in this movie, there is a character called Sara for a very timid duration this character is an impatient short-tempered and aggressive woman showing this on the screen never earn any applause for the role instead at least for a small group it may have created an illogical perception that most women behaviour is like that.

This story could influence the mentality of poor uneducated families. Most of the families in the rural area even though they are illiterate or jobless they would have a television in their home and people like watching these kinds of movies this film plays a crucial role among common people in constructing and changing up their ideas, customs and turn up their mind this could lead them blindly belie that women in real life should be limited as the characters in the movies.

In *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, There is only one woman character who is called Sreeja who appears as the wife of the main actor she is having a bad dreadful experiences .and the women are having a troubled and mercy life full of worries and tension even before and after their marriage, she is betrayed by her family and her beloved ones for choosing her life partner. This attitude helps us to analyses what films speaks. Women do not have the right to choose their life partners once they do so they will be hated by their parents. Here Sreeja is having a small temporary job this is not a profession or career only for a livelihood life gifted only hardships and bitter memories for her. This female role is not having any motivational or inspirational role to awake wives settled under their husbands. Sreeja's character is calm innocent and emotional. Scenes could have been added where she is bold confident and practical. More participation of women brings a charismatic stimulation for lots of women who are ending up their life without any inspirations for aspirations.

In Sudani from Nigeria, There is no specific young woman character in the movie but here there are two characters called Jameelatha and Beeyumma who are so loving caring homely and Pray full mothers. Their presence brings an overall delight and focuses on the motherhood behaviour of a woman they are the only women characters. Both of these characters are not independent they only do household duties where they are living in habitat small houses and their appearance are like old orthodox Muslim widows. The whole theme of the movie is sports-based and this movie does not provide an opportunity for a female to bloom as a football winner. There is a cliché mentality for certain people that sports are meant only for men and this movie does not put up any event or scene to change that wrong mentality.

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