

Indian Middle-Class Family Values and Beliefs, Representing Two Contrasting Characters in the Film *Ore Kadal*: A Study of Female Characters

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Abstract

Film is a reflection of society, and it is the easiest way to communicate an idea to a large community. The film *Ore Kadal* by Syamaprasad explores the lifestyles of middle-class families, their beliefs, and how they are conditioned by society. The film also communicates the importance of love and attention given to the members, particularly the wife. Love, attention, communication, and mutual understanding are some of the important aspects of the well-functioning of a family. When it comes to middle-class families, they are working-class people, and throughout their lives, they value and aim for financial stability and achieving their goals. Even though the concept or system of family is the primary concern, they sometimes neglect the personal or emotional space that is very much needed for family function. This affects the family members, especially the wife, very badly. These small neglects may develop trauma in the future. *Ore Kadal* is a film that narrates the life of Deepti, a middle-class woman, and her extramarital relationship with Nathan. So this paper tries to study these two contrasting female characters regarding middle-class beliefs and values and how they differ from each other, and this paper tries to find out how Deepti was caught up in a medical condition called depression.

Keywords: Middle Class, Family, Depression, Values, Beliefs, Libido, Psyche.

1. Introduction

It is common among Indian families to hear phrases like “No budget for this, or we can’t afford it right now, or We will buy it later for you.” Middle-class families are the major categories that contribute to the economy’s development and are also the major consumers. According to Garrett W. Brown, the word middle class means “the class or social stratum lying above the working class and below the upper class.” (Brown et al., 2018). They are the group that belongs neither to the upper nor the lower classes. It doesn’t imply that the middle class is made up of working-class people who earn their daily bread and are uneducated. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term middle class as “a social group that consists of well-educated people, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who have good jobs and are not poor but are not very rich” (*Middle Class*, 2024). There are several categories, mainly the middle class, which is divided into the upper middle class and the lower middle class. Upper-middle-class categories are highly educated and professionals; mostly, they do “white collar” jobs. (Tarkhnishvili & Tarkhnishvili, 2013). Another category is the lower middle class, which comprises the people who work for the upper class at a technical or managerial level. Relatively, they have less income and workspace freedom (Tarkhnishvili & Tarkhnishvili, 2013). Marriage in India is considered not only the sacred union of two individuals but also two families (Doniger & Smith, 1991). They should be loyal and faithful to each other until their deaths (Kapadia, 1966). It’s said that polygamy is also practised in Indian traditions, yet monogamy is considered ideal (Kapadia, 1966). Is there any connection between family relationships and the economy? Indeed, the term middle class is defined in accordance with the economy. The economy influences people’s lifestyles and can impact family relationships through financial stress and societal expectations. Because the middle class is a group that struggles and works to make ends meet. Even though they work hard to support the family, their inability to express love and care to the members will eventually collapse the rhythm of the family.

2. Objectives

- To understand how the economy influences the rhythm of family life.
- To understand the conflicting middle-class values and beliefs in the female characters.
- To understand the correlation between Deepti's state of depression and her actions.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using content analysis and psychoanalysis for an in-depth exploration of the character's behaviours and motivations.

3.1. Content Analysis

It is a research methodology developed by Bernard Berelson and the most appropriate for content analysis. Simply put, it is the scientific study of communication, or the study of contexts, intentions, or meanings in a message (Bammidi, 2008). Bernard Berelson describes "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952). Alan Mckee points out that content analysis can be treated as qualitative analysis when it comes to textual analysis (Mckee, 2001).

3.2 Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis deals with theories about the unconscious mind and the treatment of mind-

related problems. Depression is a state that can affect a human being mentally and disturb their everyday cycle and mental rhythm.

4. Analysis

4.1. Middle-class film *Ore Kadal*

Independence? That's middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth. G. B. Shaw

Women play a significant role in films; they are not the supporters of male characters, but they are inevitable for the development of cinema. Syamaprasad's *Ore Kadal* (Shyamaprasad, 2007) tells the story of Dr. Nathan, an economist, and typical Malayali middle-class housewife Deepti and her husband Jayakumar. The opening scene from the movie shows that the son has a fever, and Deepti tries to console him by giving cough syrup, but the bottle is almost empty. She contacted her husband, who went to Bangalore in search of a job. She asked him for money to take the child to the hospital. The conversation later changed into an argument, and he began to accuse the wife, 'Due to your lack of care, the child had a fever.' However, he didn't send the money because he was jobless and had no funds. From a conversation with his friend over the phone regarding the immediacy of getting a job and his poor economic condition. Her clothes are not properly pinned, and her hair is neither combed nor braided well. Her neck is highlighted with the sacred yellow thread beneath a golden one, while one hand is empty and the other has a plastic bangle, showing they have little to sell. From this scene, it appears that the family is suffering, and they are a middle-class, jobless family. Later, the conversation between Deepti and Nathan reveals the same: her husband has lost his job. The conversation between Deepti and Nathan continues; at first glance, the unmerciful social scientist (Nathan) thinks about her or the people or women like her as poor, jobless, and clueless as the subject of his next book. The term "social scientist" refers to those individuals who study society or how people live. Nathan, an economist, is currently writing a book on Indian middle-class families and their lives. Even though he studies and experiments with human life, he has no concern for anyone in life; he never loves or cares about anyone. After all, according to him, it is all about one's needs. However, Deepti, the dedicated wife to her husband, was moderately educated but restricted to the borders drawn by her spouse, which differs from this description. She is very sensitive, highly emotional, and attached; these traits developed gradually due to the societal influence that moulds a typical woman.

4.2. Bela the Woman

It is always true that circumstances make a woman strong, no matter how vulnerable she is. Bela had a broken childhood, and the circumstances she went through made her emotionally strong. She repeats, 'It is better not to keep any relationship emotionally; later it will be a burden' (Shyamaprasad, 2007). The broken background and her child's death made that younger Bela strong. She belonged to the middle-class women, but the background she hails from never implanted the values because her mother eloped with her lover, her father committed suicide, and she became impregnated by her uncle. From all these traumatic experiences she had, she never failed or was disappointed in life, but that became an energy for her to move forward. Therefore she sees no point in keeping the values in her life; the only possible thought is to thrive and fill the stomach for existence. Being with Nathan,

she comforts and cautions him to keep away from relationships because they are painful and relationships connect a human being emotionally.

4.3. Deepti, the middle-class woman

Born into an ordinary Malayali family, raised by ordinary working-class parents and experienced the struggles of a middle-class family. This upbringing made her much more sincere about the values already instilled in her and nurtured in herself as a woman. She points out that she discontinued her education at a specific age in her teenage years. She felt that she got 'a lot of love from outside,' so she decided to go with him (her husband). In the other half of her life, she lived truthfully and loyally to herself and her family until she met Nathan. The circumstances she lived in, including the denial of love from her husband, attracted to Nathan. The husband's lack of affection is purely economic. (In another part of the film, after he receives some money, he starts showing affection by hugging her. However, she is uncomfortable with this approach and tries to avoid him.) The family has no proper income, and they are economically struggling, so similar to what an average Malayali thinks, there is no value for romance in life; what matters is how they should live tomorrow. This instance triggered her because the desire for love played a significant role, and her proximity to Nathan brought forth those underlying or repressed sexual emotions, leading to a physical relationship. Nathan's lifestyle is similar to nomadic; even though he is educated and has a high reputation in academic society, he is a drunker and believes he is a free man, free from all emotional bondage, particularly with human relationships. From that moment onwards, she started admiring and loving Nathan, despite his warning, 'Don't love me.' Even after that, she approached him, leading to a conversation between them. She asked, 'Why did you do this to me? Do you think I am only a body, nothing else?' (Shyamaprasad, 2007). He casually replied, 'I don't believe in relationships' (Shyamaprasad, 2007). There she uses the significant word 'sin,' to express the moral dilemma she faces. This concept is linked to the mindset of the poorly educated middle class. The educated social scientist Nathan counters that there is nothing called sin or virtue; all these were the beliefs of the common, uneducated middle class (Shyamaprasad, 2007).

When she conceived Nathan's child, the care she expected from Nathan and his failure to provide the same created a dilemma for her. She consciously thinks about the notion that she has cheated her husband, and it is against the values she upholds. From this point on, she began to suppress her feelings. How long could an ordinary woman bear them? By the time the child was born, she had completely changed, and the guilt feeling began to dominate and affect her psychology, she slowly moved to the depression phase. Deepti's state of depression can be linked to psychiatric disorders (Ratnakaran et al., 2015). "Depressive disorder (also known as depression) is a common mental disorder. It involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time" (*Depressive Disorder (Depression)*, n.d.). WHO says that depression can occur in any human who has gone through stressful situations, abusive incidents, or severe losses, and depressive disorders are more common among women than men (*Depressive Disorder (Depression)*, n.d.). Following childbirth, Deepti undergoes noticeable personality changes, experiencing sleepless nights and difficulty in recognising

her surroundings, leading to her later life in an asylum.

4.4. Reason for depression

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychologist and father of psychoanalysis, divided the unconscious into three parts: the id, the ego, and the super-ego. According to Freud, the Id works on the unconscious level, which may be desires or instincts; the Superego works on the morality principle, or the way society creates some rules, regulations, or things that appeal to societal norms; and the Ego works on the reality principle, and the Ego mediates the Id and the Superego (Freud, 1989). "Libido," or free energy, is another driving force that initiates feelings (Carhart-Harris et al., 2008). Ego means the instincts, which can include sexual or repressed sexual desires according to Freud. The libido, known as free energy, is linked with sexuality. "Libido in psycho-analysis, in the first instance, is the force (thought of as quantitatively variable and measurable) of the sexual instincts directed towards an object - 'sexual' in the extended sense required by analytic theory." (Freud, 1924) (Carhart-Harris et al., 2008). So libido, according to Freud is sexual, and the concept of ego works on the pleasure principle, so they are connected; "ego is the true and original reservoir of libido." (Freud, 1920). These two play a significant role in depression (Carhart-Harris et al., 2008). "Repression, we have said, proceeds from the ego; we might say with greater precision that it proceeds from the self-respect of the ego." (Freud, 1914) (Schwartz, 1983). So the repressed sexual desire in Deepti as 'Id' without considering the 'Superego or the Ideal ego' (Freud, 1914) and the conflict inside her worked with the ego; the reality principle developed a pang of guilt, such as when she betrayed her husband (an affair with Nathan) and continued derelict from Nathan when she came to inform him that she was with his baby. The suppressed emotions later developed guilt in her mind. (Freud, 1930). Struggling with her internal moral beliefs, she finds it challenging to justify her actions to herself, ultimately leading to the development of her medical condition.

4.5. Bela and Deepti: An Analysis

Bela and Deepti grew up in the same environment, a middle-class lifestyle, but Bela had a different path compared to Deepti. One chooses to leave, while the other is forced to depart due to circumstances. As previously stated, Deepti adheres strongly to her beliefs and values. She tells the doctor her childhood memories and says, 'After high school, they stopped my education, and I got lots of love and chose to be with him. Now I think its sin; I have sinned,' and the doctor inquired, 'Who taught you about the sin?' She retorts, 'I know.' Maybe she came across sin in her upbringing, but the same sin is not present in Bela. 'You also went through many situations, but you aren't crazy?' Nathan asked Bela once. She replied, 'I haven't loved anyone emotionally'. Deepti, an archetype of a common poor village woman, created a symbol of innocence and a lack of understanding of the face of modern society. But Bela knows all the pitfalls of the modern world and their needs that's why she said, 'I haven't loved anyone emotionally'. These perspectives underscore the stark contrast in the beliefs and experiences of the two female characters.

5. Conclusion

The concept of middle-class families works well in this film. Along with the idea of the middle class, this film emphasises the life of a Malayali, so it is also about the life and belief system of the average Malayali middle class. In India, the concept of the middle class is almost the same, regardless of residence. Both female characters in the film have gone through traumatic incidents in their lives. They both belong to the middle-class lifestyle, and Deepti continues the same lifestyle and beliefs, but Bela doesn't; the circumstances she faced in her life made her thoughts different. These characters are distinct in their representations. Indeed, they are no longer similar in representation. The trauma that Deepti went through was reflected in her as depression, and the suppression of emotions created guilt in her, and she couldn't tell all these things to her husband or Nathan. This led her to a depressed state. Apart from that, it is important to note that, family life is not an easy one. Understanding each other and valuing the other partner's emotions and ability to listen to their problems is an important factor in a relationship. If the priority changes, it reflects badly on family life, similar to Deepti and her medical condition. So this paper tries to shed light on the importance of care and attention given to the partner, particularly female characters because they are very complex in their psyche and small negligence creates a bigger impact on life.

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