



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reel Inequality on Gender Power Dynamics in Malaysian Tamil Cinema

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: Oct 2, 2024

Accepted: Nov 11, 2024

Keywords

Power Inequality

Malaysian Tamil Cinema

Malaysian Indians

Family Dynamics

Structural and Functional

Theory

This article probes into realms of gender stereotypes and power disparities within Malaysian Indian families, as portrayed in the Malaysian Tamil films through content analysis of four seminal Malaysian Tamil films such as *Andal* (2005), *Chenman Chaalai* (2005), *Ethickkalam* (2006), and *Chalanghai* (2007). Through lenses of structural and functional theory, findings illuminate multifaceted web of relationships between males and females within Malaysian Tamil households where results clearly underscore dominant role male members assume in Indian family institutions, perpetuating culture of domination and discrimination against their female counterparts. Despite instances of economic advancement among women, patriarchal norms reinforce male supremacy, constraining women within predefined social roles. Interestingly, research uncovers contradictory scenario where financially and socially marginalised male members paradoxically wield minimal power within family structure, while empowering female counterparts emerge as de facto leaders. This highlights complexity of power dynamics within Malaysian Tamil families. Ultimately, study emphasises the persistence of gender inequality within family institutions, particularly among Malaysian Tamil communities. However, it suggests avenues for addressing these disparities through individual empowerment initiatives. By highlighting the multifaceted nature of power dynamics, research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender relations within familial contexts and advocates for progressive interventions to counteract entrenched inequalities.

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INTRODUCTION

Power, both implicit and explicit, is a fundamental concept that underpins social inequalities within various social groups. It encompasses the ability to assert one's will and influence others through a multitude of mechanisms (Lister, Patrick, and Brown, 2024; Langenbach, 1995), often exerting control and dominance over individuals or groups (Newman, 2008). Power operates in a relational and reciprocal manner, serving as a dominant force imposed on individuals or groups.

This force also extends its reach, magnifying opportunities, and privileges for certain individuals that enable actions beyond the grasp of the common person. Those who wield power often inherit wealth, status, and authority, making it a pivotal force in governing family units, social strata, and even entire nations (Matras, 1984).

This article seeks to delve into the dynamics of unequal power within Malaysian Indian families, focusing on two key aspects of power relations. The first aspect scrutinises the manifestation of male power within family structures, while the second highlights the exercise of female power in the

absence of competent male figures. The analysis from this research draws from Malaysian Tamil cinema, utilising its portrayal of male and female characters to shed light on these power dynamics.

Background of the study

Gender inequality within the Indian community in Malaysia represents a significant social issue with multifaceted dimensions. One of the critical facets of this inequality is the power imbalance between males and females in both family units and work environments, which has enduring effects on the well-being of individuals and the broader society. Understanding this complex issue is crucial for several reasons.

In Malaysian Indian family structures, traditional gender roles have often assigned men as the primary decision-makers and breadwinners, while women are expected to manage household affairs (Mackinnon, 1989). This power dynamic has created disparities in authority and influence within the family. Research by Blumberg (1990) emphasises that men commonly occupy the role of the family's head, granting them considerable power to make critical decisions, control resources, and shape the family's direction. On the contrary, women's roles are frequently confined to caregiving and support functions. Power imbalances extend into the workplace, where gender discrimination remains a concern. Women in the Malaysian Indian community often face challenges in accessing equal opportunities, achieving leadership positions, and receiving fair compensation for their work. These disparities persist despite women's significant contributions to the workforce (Subramaniam, et al., 2016; Moorthy, et al., 2022). The consequences of gender-based power inequality in the Indian community in Malaysia are profound. Such inequalities perpetuate cycles of economic and social disadvantage for women, limiting their access to education, economic mobility, and decision-making power within families (Ridgeway & Nakagawa, 2014). This power imbalance is a contributing factor to issues such as domestic violence, diminished self-esteem among women, and reduced overall family well-being. Additionally, it reinforces stereotypes and traditional norms that hinder progress toward gender equality.

Following are objectives of the study:

- a) To identify the power inequality between genders in the Malaysian Indian society
- b) To explore the phenomenon of power inequality among genders in the Malaysian Indian society
- c) To analyse the outcome of power inequality among genders in the Malaysian Indian society.

There are several reasons that motivate the researcher to carry out this study in terms of understanding the dynamics of power inequality between genders within the Malaysian Indian community. Firstly, it provides insight into the entrenched social structures that perpetuate inequality, allowing for the development of targeted interventions and policies to address these disparities. Secondly, it sheds light on the broader implications for the well-being of women and families in the community, informing efforts to promote gender equity. Finally, by examining the nexus of power in family and work settings, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender inequality, facilitating comprehensive strategies for change and progress. Based on the above aspects, three objectives for this study are identified.

Problem statement

In the context of family institutions, men traditionally assume roles such as husband, father, son, and brother, establishing a customary practice where they often hold the position of familial authority. Their primary responsibility revolves around meeting the diverse needs and requirements of family members across all domains, thereby affording them greater influence within the family structure (Blumberg, 1990). Conversely, women typically bear the responsibility of managing household affairs. Despite their profound roles and contributions within the family, the ultimate decision-making authority often rests with men (Mackinnon, 1989). While instances of women attaining the position of family head do exist, their power is frequently evaluated in comparison to that of men in similar roles. This discrepancy arises from societal expectations that assign women to specific roles and relegate their status to a secondary position within the social construct, prioritizing men in family dynamics (Ridgeway & Nakagawa, 2014).

Feminist theory underscores the importance of equitable contributions from both men and women in fostering a harmonious social structure. Nevertheless, notable disparities persist in terms of personal significance and earnings between the two genders (Slade, 2008). The pervasive issue of power imbalance between genders within family units remains a recurrent challenge. This problem frequently serves as a central theme in numerous Tamil movies in Malaysia, mirroring the real-life power dynamics within Malaysian Indian families. These imbalances hold profound consequences for society, contributing to issues such as divorce, violence against women and children, the erosion of family institutions, among others. Recognising the critical implications of this unsettling trend, the current study embarks on an investigation into the power differentials between genders within Malaysian Indian families, as portrayed in Malaysian Tamil Movies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of past research studies

Khoo Sim Eng's research on *The Construction of A Chinese-American Feminine Identity In Film* (1997) is crucial for this study. This research is focused on the facets of feminism in Hollywood movies. Six Hollywood movies produced between 1937 and 1990 were taken to investigate the struggles faced by Chinese women in America. The study identified challenges such as persecutory Chinese identity, traditional Chinese practices for Chinese women, and men's dominance over Chinese women. The focus of the research was on power imbalances from a gender perspective. This research provided the basis for the current study to examine the power imbalance between genders.

Following is the research by the degree of art graduate Achee Subramaniam (1995) entitled *Wanita Dalam Novel Tamil Malaysia (1910-1970)* and research by Palani Krishnasamy (2011), entitled *Pemikiran Femenisme Dalam Sajak Tamil Modern Malaysia*. These researches examined the status, life, and struggles of Indian women in Malaysia. The discussion is intended to comprehend the gender differences that led to oppression against women. The research didn't specifically discuss social imbalances between genders, but instead subtly depicted the power imbalances between genders. This research is taken into account to assist the current study in identifying social imbalances from the gender perspective, specifically between Indian families in Malaysia.

The book entitled *Understanding Indian Movies: Culture, Cognition and Cinematic Imagination* (2008) was authored by Patrick Colm Hogan. It discussed the film industry in India from various perspectives, such as tradition, culture, emotions, themes, and so on. In this book, films are depicted as a medium that reflects the reality of social life. In 2015, Rachel Dwyer wrote a book called *Mumbai Middlebrow: Ways of Thinking about the middle ground in Hindi Cinema*. The work investigated the potential of Hindi Movies as a medium that reflects the values, culture, and reality of its society. The books offer guidelines for the current study to analyze the lives of a specific group of individuals in a society based on the films produced about them.

Andrew Tudor (1974) who wrote a book entitled *Image and Influence: Studies In The Sociology Of Film* and Armes Roy (1974) who authored a book entitled *Film And Reality* also provided useful information for the current study. Both books focused on movies from a sociological viewpoint. Various elements, such as emotion, shades, music, characters, plots, scenes, and so forth, are discussed as prominent features that reflect the reality of social life in society. These books also provide a comprehensive understanding of sociological perspectives for current research on Malaysian Tamil movies. Book by R.Kerbo Harold (2012) named *Social Stratification and Inequality* and book entitled *Ketidaksamaan Sosial* (2000) Kntya Marippan are closely related to the elements of social imbalances. These books discussed the crucial aspects of social imbalances in societies while indicated visible implications of social imbalances in society.

Gideon Calder's *How Inequality Runs in Families: Unfair Advantage and the Limits of Social Mobility* (2015) is a highly relevant reference for the current study. The author highlighted the fact that there is a social imbalance in family units, particularly in the division of power between genders. In addition, the book investigates the unjustified social mobility between men and women, which is said to be rooted in traditional practices from the early life of an individual. Even with productive feminist thinking, this discriminatory notion remains difficult to dispel. The book also pays attention to the causes of power imbalances in a family unit.

Shirley's book *Families: A Social Class Perspective* (2011) brought attention to the power imbalances that occur in families between men and women. At the outset, this book provides basic guidance on the concept of family and social institutions. As it progresses, it talks about the factors that contribute to the emergence of social imbalance in family institutions. The phenomenon has been linked to structural and functional theory, as well as conflict theory. One of the main discussions is centred around the economic status and earning abilities of men and women in a household, which leads to significant power imbalances in family institutions. The book also touched on the implications of the power imbalances between genders in families. The finding segment of the book is helpful in completing an effective summary of the current article.

Power and gender

Gender is regarded as social stratification, identified as a binary between man and woman. Gender is also a social construct of biological characteristics between men and women (Bonnie Slade, 2008). Gender differences include norms and behaviors, internal roles, and individual experiences associated with being male or female that vary depending on the designated roles at birth. (Kerbo, 2012). Men are typically perceived to be physically and mentally strong (Chorn Dunham, 1995). Women, meanwhile, are perceived as weak, and more emotive (Kerbo, 2012). These biological and psychological differences have contributed significantly to the inequity of power between these two genders.

Structural and functional theory

The structural and functional theory is a school of thought grounded in the integrated theory of structuralism and functionalism. Both theories adapt and are related to the function of power inequalities and are drawn to social stratification (Bates Doob, 2000). The structure is the built-in organic component of each social institution, including family units, religion, and education. It is designed to regulate social standards and rules to ensure stability of the system (Steven Vago, 2004). The functions of the structure have classified social relations, recruited and controlled social positions, and created deserving individuals that lead the composition of unequal powers. (Wendy Bottero, 2010). The function works as a dynamic that favors or interferes with system maintenance (Yorburg, 1982). The function is the basis of social structure and social structure accents different functional perspectives in the maintenance of consensus and order in society. (Alex Inkeles, 1965).

The functionalist theory assumes that society has its own parts of social structures, mainly made up of social components. Each component plays the necessary role in ensuring overall stability. As each component is interconnected, without function, a system will not be maintained and will collapse in the event of a crisis (Radcliffe Brown, 1956). Structure and functional theory are intended to motivate the members of society to be interconnected and operate together. It is to maintain equilibrium and stability in social structures for the following generation. As humans are seen as always, looking for the truth, the social structure is said to justify the effort. (Rohana Yusuf, 2010). In general, social structure is thought to be the cause of inequality in society, as it creates differences based on specific functions. The theory admits that inequality is created on the basis of established norms and values amongst its members. These general social norms and values strengthen the status aspect of various social institutions (Kntya Marippan, 2000). Functionalist theorists have argued that social inequity is indeed necessary to continue social life. It is affirmed that these imbalances reinforce the sense of survival, and that improvement leads to empowerment.

The power of men and women within the family institution

A family may be defined as a social group of persons bound by marriage, blood, or adoption. The family carries out a variety of valuable functions, including increased membership in society through marriage. Often the family is led by a father and a mother who are the loving caregivers and nurture children to grow and develop well (Russon, 2003). The male role in families is represented by the husband, father, son, grandfather, etc. They were revered as the head of the family and assigned to

be the provider responsible for addressing the multiple needs of family members. This legitimate position conferred more power on men than it did on women (Lesser Blumberg, 1990). While women focus more on a family's home affairs men continue to be the decision-makers in family settings (MacKinnon, 1989). Women may be empowered as heads of family, but the law may not be equal to men. Women are an integral part of society. Nevertheless, she always assumes the secondary position in the social arrangement compared to men as men are always considered as the priority of society. According to feminist theory, males and females are indeed wheel of the same car. However, women remain considered male subordinates (Bonnie Slade, 2008).

Status of women and men in the family as depicted in Malaysian Tamil films

Research, on three movies, *Chemman Chaalai*, *Aandal* and *Dhusrajanam* shows details of the power relationship between men and women in a family cell.

The film *Chemman Chaalai* shows Shalu's father (Ravi) as the head of the family and the only decision-maker in family affairs. Throughout the movie, Shalu's mother is presented as a shy, dependent woman who doesn't even want to call her husband by name. Both shalu and shalu's mother are shown as a passive member of the family who readily accepts all decisions taken by the father without any opposition. Another scene in the film (00.35.33) shows even in urgent need of help, the mother sharply refused to accept any support which given without her husband's knowledge.

In the film *Aandal*, the principal female character is portrayed as a victim of abuse by her husband. In the scene (01.47.28) Aandal rejected a genuine marriage proposal from a young physician because she decided to be independent and never suffer under male domination again.

The movie *Dhusrajanam* shows the female character Karuppu who leads the family in raising his brother (Maari) and his stepbrother (Kuttan). Even though Karuppu tried to lead the family, her brother continues to resist his sister's decisions and guidance. One of the scenes (00:21:30) shows the brother being an irresponsible man and mistreating the sister, which renders her emotionally devastated and all her efforts have been ignored.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research aims to examine gender inequality in Malaysian Tamil society as depicted in the Malaysian Tamil Film. The research utilizes movie videos produced locally as research resources. Furthermore, the research is qualitative and interpretative in nature which is administered through library investigation. The research resources are primarily focused on Malaysian Tamil movies that are distributed on video cassettes, VCDs, and DVDs. The interpretation of these resources is centered around gender inequality in families in Malaysian Indian society.

A qualitative methodology is often employed to examine content construction. Researchers are able to investigate the occurrence of certain phenomena from multiple perspectives through this approach (Sabitha Marican, 2005). The current article is dedicated to analyzing gender inequality in Malaysian Tamil films and how situations are manipulated to enforce gender inequality, and the qualitative approach is considered a suitable methodology. It will enable a thorough investigation of the process and outcome of gender inequality in Tamil movies. The current research is inclined to analyse the gender inequality that exists in Indian society as depicted in Malaysian Tamil Movies. To achieve constructive research outcomes, it is essential to comprehend and interpret the content of the movies in relation to sociology attributes in a systematic manner. Therefore, the researcher must examine both the implicit and explicit aspects of the movies to produce critical findings. In terms of this, the current research used a hermeneutics approach to analyze and interpret the data.

Hermeneutics is a technique used to understand the true meanings of a phenomenon (Zygmunt Bauman, 1978). itis also provides clear guidelines for the systematic and theoretical interpretation of matters (Osman Bilen, 2000).Hermeneutic approaches are currently being used extensively to research texts in social science fields as well as other resources (Howell, 2013). According to this, the

hermeneutics approach was selected as the most appropriate approach for interpreting content in the current research on gender inequality in Malaysian Tamil movies.

The hermeneutic method concentrates on studying human activity through situations and events to comprehend the design of a social embodiment of certain societies. It also enables profound decoding of human characteristics, which is a crucial contribution of the hermeneutics approach. Gender inequality, the core of the current study is derived from the events portrayed in scenes in Malaysian Tamil movies. In order to investigate the subject constructively, hermeneutic ideology is deemed appropriate to systematically examine gender inequality, as depicted in Malaysian Tamil movies. Hermeneutics analysis is utilized in the interpretation process to uncover underlying meanings that can be hard to acquire through other techniques (Firmin, 2008). The approach also facilitates the comprehension process that innovates new findings in sociology studies (Melissa Freeman, 2008).

A movie is generally seen as a form of entertainment media. The content doesn't have to explicitly depict gender inequality. The attributes of gender inequality are depicted in scenes, events, and social incidents in the movies. Hermeneutic was the ideal choice for further investigation in Malaysian Tamil Movies, as the researcher found it to be the ideal way to uncover the hidden layers.

There are five Malaysian Tamil movies that have been identified for research in this article. Chemman Chaalai, Aandal, Dhusrajanam, Ethirkaalam, and Chalanggai are among them. Using the stop motion method, each movie is examined to identify and note scenes that are relevant to the gender inequality attributes depicted in the movie.

In addition, all the data collected from the primary sources carefully scrutinized to ensure its relevance and align with the research objective. The data that has been documented is classified and segmented based on the emerging themes and constructs. The data undergo interpretation and analysis after the systematic classification process. Each interpretation and analysis is conducted using a scene from certain Malaysian Tamil movies, with a focus on gender inequality in Tamil families in Malaysia. Additionally, each analysis is made clearer with relevant supporting data. A summary is created with concise explanations based on the findings in the final stage.

THEMATIC RESULTS

Past studies on power inequality among genders

Literatures play a crucial role in identifying research trend and popularity of a topic. Based on this, overall research to identify studies conducted in this field would provide an understanding and interest among past researchers and provide justification for this study. The chart below shows the number of articles published between 2018 to 2023 in the field of gender inequality.

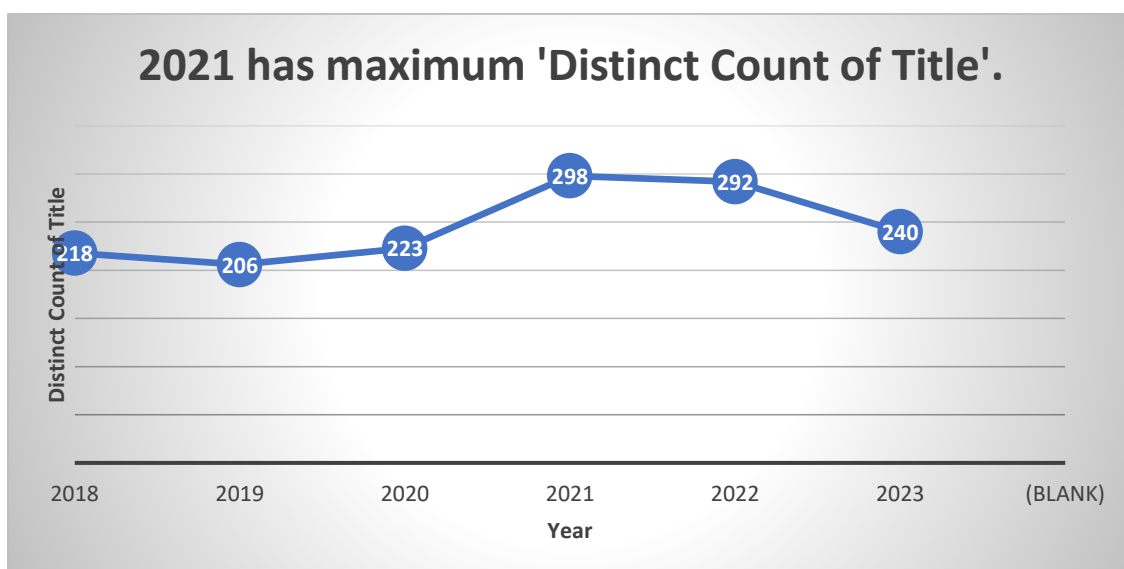


Chart 1: Number of articles published between 2018 to 2023.

Based on Chart 1, the growing trend of publication on power inequality among gender has been an attractive area for many researchers across the world.

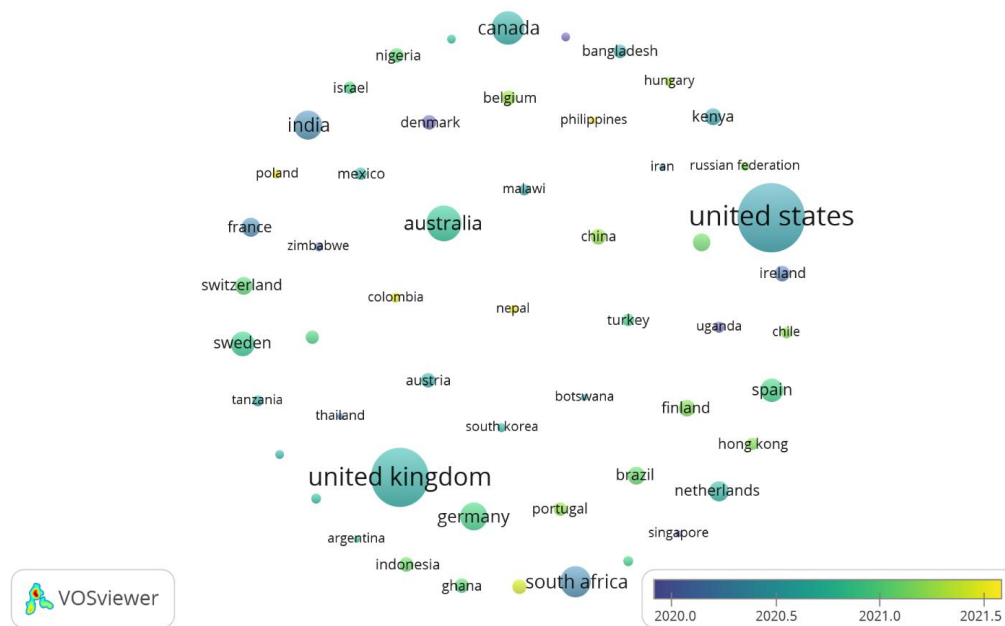


Chart 2: Countries that published in gender and power inequality.

Further, gender and power inequality appear as an important area of study in many countries with the United States of America and the United Kingdom leading the way. As far as Malaysia is concerned, publications in this field are not as high as the western countries and only eight Scopus indexed articles were published, which can be observed below in Chart 3.

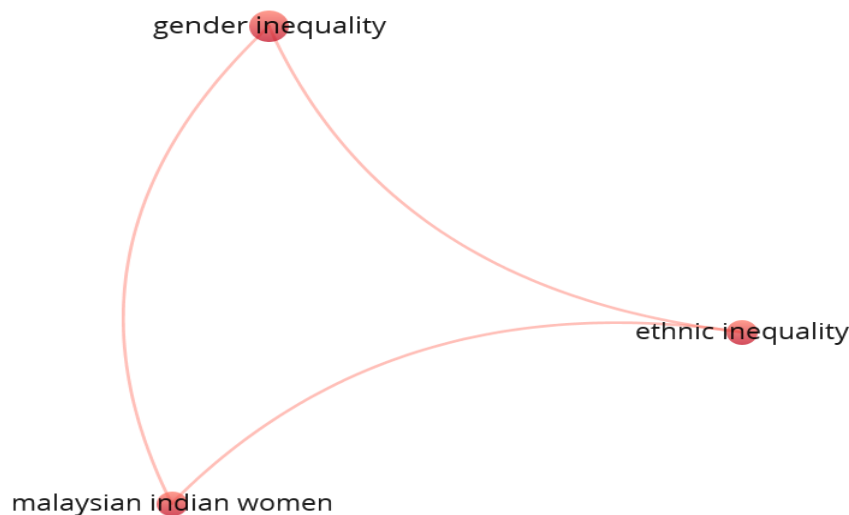


Chart 3: Keywords used in the articles published in Malaysia.

Chart 3 identify the main scope of the eight articles published in Malaysia through the keywords used by the authors where ethnic inequality, Malaysian Indian women, and gender inequality are prioritised. This is strong evidence to justify the topic of this study that investigates gender disparity and power inequality in the Malaysian Tamil movies.

Analysis of movies

The male characters in Malaysian Tamil movies have been powerful in many aspects of society compared to the female characters in the context of the Malaysian Indian family. Although females endeavor to lead the family in the absence of a responsible male contribution, these characters are still degraded and ignored by their male counterparts. The semiotic theory has highlighted that the meanings and communicated signs and symbols are organized by understanding the landscape of culture, civilization, tradition, religion, education, and so on. Moreover, such identities and signs may establish more complex cultural conventions and meanings over a longer period of time in some societies (Preucel, 2010). On the basis of this theory, it may be said that the power held by men in the Indian family is the result of practical practice by many generations.

Looking at the domestic setting from a Hindu cultural and religious perspective, men tend to have prominent roles with greater authority and power over women. The family institution formed by traditional Hindu principles places higher values on men like father, husband, and son. They are responsible for providing support and care for women who will be the daughter, wives, and mothers in the family institution. Women are also known as the property of men (Thatchinamurthy, 2001). A father has the right to determine the marital arrangements of his daughter. (George Hart, 2002 & Puranaanuru, 343: 11-13). This social conditions can be seen in the movie *Chemman Chaalai* where the father decided his daughter's marriage covenant without giving a thought to her consideration.

The persistence of male domination in the Indian family context is still evident, as the culture resists the daughter's own decision on the marriage arrangement. It is firmly maintained that fathers are responsible for organizing the marriage of their daughters. (Vimala Nair, 1997). In the film *Chemman Chaalai*, the female character Shalu had to face many challenges to espouse the love of her life because of the patriarchal aspect of the family (01.23.00). This continues to be the case in Malaysian Indian society. Scholarly articles in the Journal of Indian Studies, University Malaya, have reported that Malaysian Tamil women still restrict themselves to addressing their husbands by name. It was quite prominent in the 1980s. Although the current generation has already crossed the bridge, a small proportion of families still follow this social standard (Manimaran and Rajantheran, 2006). This scenario is found in the film *Chemman Chaalai*. Shalu's mother never refers to her husband by his first name (01.23.00). Even if the Tamils regard this practice as an act of respect, it still underlines the superior position and power of men in the family. As Weber (2009) indicates, these practices have been embodied in tradition and culture over time.

Societal inequality is also reflected in decision-making. Decision-making is considered to be an action that is only associated with individuals with power in a social institution (Kerbo, 2012). Since decision-making is an important factor in the family institution, it has always been considered a plan of action for men (Susan Oorjitham, 1984). Scholarly research has shown that women, especially in the role of wife and daughter, in Tamil families have little objection to the decision of men in the family. Despite the fact that the decision-making process never involves them, it is always respected and accepted. (Susan Oorjitham, 1996). In the movie *Chemman Chaalai*, Shalu's marriage arrangement will be planned without her concern, and Shalu's mother, defensively rejects assistance because she was not authorized by her husband.

When power is conceptualized as a dominant agent, it has the potential to make others vulnerable and gain their freedom of decision (Saul Newman, 2008). From this perspective, when women are oppressed and discriminated against, they tend to lose their rights in decision-making, particularly in matters relating to their own well-being and marriage. Men are commonly seen as the livelihood of a family and a productive contributor to a nation's economic growth. (Smith, 2001). The economic advantage and the capacity to earn money further reinforce the role of men in a family.

Table 1: Figures on the labor market based on gender in Malaysia.

Statistic	2013		2014	
	Men	Women	Men	Women

Labor force ('000)	8,485.4	5,149.2	8,579.4	5,362.2
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Source: Statistical information booklet, 2014

The tabulation proposes that women's contribution to economic growth and national development is quite evident. However, Tamil women have not yet had the opportunity of strengthening their position within the family institution. Research on Malaysian Indian women summarises that although Malaysian Indian women have become economically established, they are still placed in a secondary position in the family institution. The secondary status of women is apparent in family management, decision-making, and traditional and cultural practices. (Manonmani Devi Annamalai, 2008).

The aforementioned discrimination against Malaysian Tamil women was clearly illustrated in *Dushrajanam* film. The female character, karuppu as the head of the family was unable to control the stability of the family because of the distorted male ego projected by his brother. Her brother exhibits bad values and acts recklessly to destroy peace and harmony in the family (00:21:30). The scene clearly points out the challenges faced by the female character to gain full power to maintain stability. As the dominance of men over women has been naturalized over time, there is an ongoing effort of guidance being offered to men to improve this situation. According to Mahatma Gandhi (2005), women should be treated on an equal footing with men in every aspect of life because their existence is hailed as a gift to humanity. Mahatma Gandhi's notion clearly emphasized that inequality of power is not a privileged situation in society, but it remains very evident among Tamil people in Malaysia. In fact, male dominance is easily accepted as a commonality in social life (Hurst, 2015). It is alleged that male dominance skills provide safety for the family, support the well-being of family members and promote household stability. The structure of the family as a unity recognizes and accepts this contribution of men as the norm of society. (Yorburg, 1982).

The decline in the male power in family institutions.

It is common to refer to men as the powerful gender in a societal context, especially in the family institution. Men remain affiliated with decision-making power, policy-makers, and guardians of social, economic, and political institutions. (Bonnie Slade, 2008). Men also stood at the highest level of the family hierarchy with the greatest power (Suzanne Romaine, 2009). Nevertheless, they tend to lose their superior state when they are not capable of functioning in multiple ways, according to the social order (Sepali Kottegoda, 2006). This aspect is clearly grasped in the Malaysian Tamil films chosen for the current study.

Men losing power within the domestic setting as shown by Malaysian Tamil films.

Andal is a movie that spells out the idea that men lose power in the domestic context. In the scene (01.35.50), the main female figure Aandal is shown revolting against her husband Suresh, who betrays her confidence and forced her into prostitution. Although Aandal was a devoted wife, her sincerity and affection were never valued by her husband who ill-treated her for his own gain. Pain and treason turned her into aggression and action against her husband.

On the other end, in the movie *Ethirkalam* the male character Kathir loses respect and priority in his family when his family members get to know that he was expelled from college and was arrested by police officers for his alleged involvement in gangsterism (01.50.00).

In the film *challenge*, there are two scenes depicting the male character losing honor as husband and father as a result of his involvement in gangsterism. His spouse, Muniamma, refuses to accept the money offered by the husband and denies him for his illegal activities (00.40.20). Another scene shows that the daughter, Uma, pursues her father out of the home after learning about his dangerous illegal way of life (01.02.47).

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of Malaysian Tamil films, the findings suggest that men can naturally gain the highest position in the social hierarchy because of long-standing cultural norms. Despite this, the privilege may not be durable if men did not succeed in maintaining their quality and status effectively. Structural and functional theory reiterates that individual status in the social hierarchy rests upon the effective constitution of existing functions. The functions must justify the superiority of men to the appropriateness of power. The projected value must be capable of sustaining the acceptability of inequalities in a positive way. (Merton, Robert, 1968). And failure to hold the value will collapse the order of the system. Current research has identified two fundamental causes that may decrease the position of men in social intuition. First, men tend to lose power if they do not discharge their functions in a responsible manner. Second, when a man does not abide by his moral principles and has a decreasing value, he loses his reputation and power.

In short, social inequality is accounted for by the acknowledgment configured on the process of relational power between the individual and groups in an institution. To maintain recognition, individuals must play their role well, otherwise, they risk losing power within the institution (Bottomore, 1991). Therefore, maintaining individual function is crucial for the existence of social inequities in society. Indian philosophy emphasizes that men are hailed as protectors of the family, society, and the nation (Smith, 2001). And when the men failed to function appropriately, he is looked upon as a disgrace. Men have an obligation to support any person in need (*Thirukkural*, 42). This declaration clearly indicates the importance of the role of men in building a basic society. In fact, man is also perceived as inferior if he survives on female gains (Umadevi Brabaharan, 2011). A.K Guna (2006) reported that most divorce cases occurred in Indian society due to financial difficulties in the family. When men fail to constructively manage the family's financial situation, they are considered unfit to lead the family or to provide stability to the institution.

Indian society has consistently emphasized the role of men as guardians, providers, and protectors of the family institution. On the other hand, Indian women are expected to remain loyal to their husbands throughout their lives, irrespective of setbacks. (Thatchinamurthy, 2001). However, the current generation of the modern era does not seem to operate according to these expectations as women do not accept irresponsible, unable, and abusive men as respectable figures in society (Umadevi Brabaharan, 2011). This trend is quite evident in films like *Ethirkalam* (01.50.00) and *Chalaggai* (01.02.47). Characters like Kathir and Muniamma's husband, lose value as respectable men because of their failure to build discipline and a virtuous life. Whereas in the movie *Aandal*, the male character, Suresh loses respect as men when he forced his own wife into prostitution and turned her into a drug addict for his selfish personal gain.

There is a scene in *Aandal* where she releases her anger verbally and tends to be physically aggressive by slapping the husband for making her a prostitute. The husband is characterized as heartless, wicked, and addictive (00.55.32). It is not common to see women lose their composure and humiliate their husbands by striking the males. But the male character in this film is shown as unprincipled men who have fallen to the lowest moral standards. According to the producer of the movie, Santosh Kesavan, it's not normal for a woman to act aggressively against men in Tamil society. However, in an abusive and violent situation, an innocent female victim has the right to display her anger and pain. Across this scene, the producer wanted to share the notion that men have principles to follow and never slide lower simply because they are men. (Interview conducted with the director cum producer of *Aandal* on 8/1/2014).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the study on Malaysian Tamil movies that focuses on power imbalances between genders among Malaysian Indian families resulted in two findings. Firstly, the power of men in Indian families is dominant over women. This indicates that men are still able to dominate family institutions in Malaysian Indian society. Despite excelling economically, women still have limited decision-making power and lack proper control over family members, particularly men. This scenario showed gender-based power imbalances in family institutions among Indians in Malaysia.

The second discovery presents insights into the loss of power and status of men in the family institutional structure. The research suggests that men's power and status in family or social institutions are not permanent. If a man fails to be accountable or exhibit ethical behaviors, he may lose his power as the head of the family. Their position as true men are in jeopardy, which results in women taking over their position in the family institution. As men stoop lower than women, power imbalances are reversed.

It can be concluded that power imbalances in families, particularly among Malaysian Indian families, are a complication that cannot be avoided. The existence of gender inequality in roles and dedicated responsibilities leads to persistent power imbalances. On the other hand power imbalances can be resolved if there are visible changes in the situation and actions of individuals in the family institution.

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