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Unveiling Gender Dynamics: A Critical Analysis of Iranian Cinema

Toplumsal Cinsiyet Dinamiklerinin Açığa Çıkarılması: İran Sineması Üzerine Eleştirel Bir Analiz

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to examine the portrayal of gender in Iranian cinema and the subsequent effects on today 'society, gender dynamics, and individual identity as a result of those impacts. The historical foundation of Iranian cinema, the key films in the industry, and the impact that political and cultural forces have played are all extensively discussed throughout study. Moreover, the paper delves into the portrayal of men and women in Iranian cinema, as well as the impact of the media on the formation of cultural standards and gender identities. It also analyzes the loosening of traditional gender standards, while calling attention to the predominance of destructive female characters in contemporary Iranian cinema and emphasizing the significance of sensitive male characters in that cinema. Furthermore, the study looks at how family connections are shown in Iranian films across time, as well as the delicate interplay of distinct sex, gender, and cultural features.

As a result, women in Iranian cinema take on more prominent roles, but gender equality remains a challenge, and women continue to create meaningful films that resonate with audiences. The representation of masculinity in Iranian cinema is complex and varied, reflecting changing social and cultural norms in Iranian society. It is portrayed as heroic and honorable in some films, but violent and aggressive in others. This sparks a discussion about cinema's role in shaping social norms and values, as well as the need for more diverse and nuanced portrayals of masculinity.

Keywords: Gender, sex, Iranian cinema, femininity, masculinity.

Öz

Çalışmanın temel amacı, İran sinemasında toplumsal cinsiyetin tasviri ve bunun toplum, toplumsal cinsiyet dinamikleri ve bireysel kimlik üzerindeki sonuçsal etkilerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda İran sinemasının tarihsel bağlamı, sinemanın önde gelen figürleri ve siyasi-kültürel faktörlerin oynadığı önemli rol ele alınmaktadır. Makale İran sinemasının dişil ve eril tasvirlerin yanı sıra medyanın toplumsal normlar ve toplumsal cinsiyet kimlikleri oluşumu üzerindeki etkisi incelemekte olup çağdaş İran sinemasında hassas ve duygusal erkek karakterlerin ortaya çıkışı ve yıkıcı ve dişli kadın karakterlerin yaygınlaşmasına ele alarak geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet normların dönüşümü ve değişimini incelemektedir. Ayrıca, İran sinemasında aile dinamiklerinin temsilini araştırmakta ve cinsiyet, toplumsal cinsiyet ve kültürel unsurlar arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi analiz etmektedir.

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Sonuç olarak, İran sinemasında kadınlar daha önemli roller üstlenmekte, ancak cinsiyet eşitliği hâlâ sorun olarak devam etmektedir, kadınlar izleyicilerde yankı uyandıran anlamlı filmler yaratmaya devam ediyorlar. İran sinemasında erillik temsili, İran toplumundaki değişen sosyal ve kültürel normları yansıtmakta olup, karmaşık ve çeşitlidir. Erkekler bazı filmlerde kahramanca ve onurlu olarak tasvir edilirken bazılarında baskın ve saldırgan olarak tasvir ediliyorlar. Bu, sinemanın toplumsal normları ve değerleri şekillendirmedeki rolünün yanı sıra erkekliğin daha çeşitli ve incelikli tasvirlerine duyulan ihtiyaç hakkında bir tartışmaya yol açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsiyet, İran sineması, dişilik, erillik.

Introduction

The creative form of Iranian cinema has undergone a dynamic evolution, mirroring the social, cultural, and political shifts within Iran. Iranian cinema is renowned for its study of intricate social themes with the intention of challenging viewers. Despite the obstacles posed by censorship Iranian cinema flourishes in the present day, serving as a source of inspiration for filmmakers worldwide to explore the limits of the medium. The beginning of Iranian cinema may be traced back to the early 1900s, coinciding with the arrival of the first motion picture cameras in Iran. Nonetheless, it was not until the 1930s that Iranian cinema flourished as a fully-fledged sector, following the founding of the inaugural film studios in Tehran. The first film screening in Iran took place in Tehran. Movie screenings served as entertainment during that period and were exclusively accessible to a limited number of privileged individuals. Khan Bahadur Ardeshir Irani, the director of Iran's inaugural sound film, The Lor Girl (Dokhtar-e Lor), in 1933, played a crucial role in the early development of Iranian cinema. *Shirin and Farhad*, in 1934, is another notable filmmaker from this era (Tapper, 2002, p. 25). Iranian cinema experienced significant growth during the 1930s and 1940s, with the establishment of several film studios and the production of numerous films. The films made during this period were heavily influenced by Hollywood, with romantic melodramas and adventure films reigning supreme (Naficy, 1993, p. 56-58). In next years politics has always played an important role in Iranian cinema, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian cinema had a surge in quality and innovation due to the rise of a new wave of filmmakers who explored novel forms and genres (Kazemi, 2018). With the rise of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime and the country's growing ties to the West, films promoting modernization and progress were produced. However, after the Shah was deposed in 1979 and the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, cinema underwent a major transformation (Pudeh & Shirvani, 2008). An essential feature of Iranian cinema, particularly in contemporary films, is its strong emphasis on realism. This is often accomplished through the use of naturalistic acting and a concentration on ordinary daily existence (Setayesh, 2018). Furthermore, several films delve into intricate issues and concepts, often employing allegory and metaphor, thereby prompting audiences to contemplate the world in their vicinity (Dabashi, 2001, p. 28-29). The Iranian movie often tackles prevalent social and political concerns such as poverty, corruption, and censorship (Yasami, 2018). The Iranian new cinema activity, spanning from the late 1980s to the 1990s, stands out as a prominent era in the history of Iranian film. This artistic movement was characterized by a deliberate emphasis on societal concerns, a refusal to adhere to conventional storytelling techniques, and a determination to expand the limits of Iranian cinema. Several films produced during this era garnered worldwide recognition and won prestigious awards at prominent film festivals (Sadr, 2006, p. 40; Dabashi, 2001, p. 28-29). Today, Iranian filmmakers consistently produce intellectually stimulating and provocative films that are widely acclaimed by global audiences. Iranian cinema, renowned for its prestige and influence, has made a lasting impact on the history of film, serving as a source of inspiration for filmmakers worldwide to explore innovative forms,

subjects, and concepts (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009, p. 18-21). A notable feature of Iranian cinema is its focus on female filmmakers who have made substantial contributions to the industry. Iranian women have successfully produced films that defy societal standards and provide a distinct viewpoint on Iranian culture, despite facing obstacles including government censorship and patriarchal attitudes. The contemporary Iranian film industry has exerted a substantial influence on the worldwide cinematic landscape. Iranian films have garnered numerous accolades and have been acclaimed for their artistic brilliance at various international film festivals. Iranian filmmakers have utilized their films as a means to bring focus to social and political matters, making a valuable contribution to worldwide discussions around these matters. So contemporary Iranian cinema serves as evidence of the potency of narrative and the capacity of filmmakers to delve into intricate socioeconomic matters. Their significant contributions to the cinema industry have not only raised awareness of social and political issues in Iran and beyond but also played a crucial role in achieving that. (Habibi & Farahmandian, 2016).

Research Methodology

- Research Design:

The research design adopted a qualitative approach, aiming to explore and interpret the representations of gender dynamics in Iranian cinema. This approach was chosen for its suitability in analyzing textual data and uncovering underlying themes and meanings within cinematic narratives. Through qualitative methods, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding gender portrayals in Iranian films.

- Data Collection:

a. Film Selection: A purposive sampling method was employed to select a diverse corpus of Iranian films. The selection criteria encompassed various genres, directors, and historical periods to ensure a comprehensive representation of cinematic narratives. At the same time, world-renowned and award-winning Iranian films were also taken into consideration.

b. Data Compilation: Selected films were acquired through reputable sources such as film archives, streaming platforms, and academic databases. Each film was meticulously documented, including title, director, year of release, and relevant contextual information.

- Data Analysis:

a. Content Analysis: A systematic content analysis was conducted to examine the portrayal of gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics within the selected films. Key themes and motifs related to gender were identified and categorized.

b. Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis was employed to uncover recurring patterns, symbols, and narratives surrounding gender representations. Through an in-depth examination of filmic elements such as plot, characterizations, dialogue, and visual aesthetics, the study aimed to elucidate underlying messages and ideologies embedded within the cinematic text.

Clarifying the Distinction Between Gender and Sex in Academic Discussions

Although sometimes used interchangeably, "sex" and "gender" are separate notions that have important implications for academic study. Understanding this

differentiation is crucial for accurate communication and subtle comprehension, especially in fields that overlap with identity, culture, and social systems**.**

Sex:

- Refers to the biological and physiological attributes that define individuals as male, female, or intersex.

- Determined primarily by a combination of factors including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs.

- Traditionally categorized as a binary system (male/female), but acknowledges variations in chromosomal makeup (XX, XY, variations), hormonal expression, and anatomical development. (Costello, 2020).

Gender:

- Encompasses the social and cultural aspects associated with masculinity, femininity, and non-binary identities.

- Shaped by societal norms, expectations, and roles ascribed to different sexes. Includes:

- Gender identity: An individual's internal sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with their assigned sex at birth.

- Gender expression: The outward presentation of one's gender through clothing, behavior, mannerisms, etc.

- Gender roles: Socially constructed behaviors, activities, and traits expected of individuals based on their perceived gender. (Polderman, Kreukels and, 2018; Mazzuca, Majid, Lugli, Nicoletti, 2020).

Key Distinctions:

- **Biological vs. Social:** Sex is rooted in biology, while gender is informed by social and cultural constructions.

- **Fixed vs. Fluid:** Sex is typically considered relatively fixed at birth, while gender identity and expression can be fluid and dynamic.

- **Assigned vs. Chosen:** Sex is typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics, while gender identity is a personal choice or realization (Ehrhardt, 1981; Byne, 2006).

Understanding these distinctions is crucial for:

- Avoiding harmful stereotypes and assumptions based on sex or gender.

- Recognizing the diversity of human experiences and respecting individual identities.

- Engaging in inclusive and equitable research practices.

- Analyzing the complex interplay between biology, society, and individual agency in shaping human experiences (McDermott, Hatemi, 2011).

Further Considerations:

- The understanding of sex and gender is constantly evolving, influenced by new scientific discoveries and social movements.

- Intersectional analysis acknowledges how factors like race, class, and sexual orientation further shape experiences of sex and gender (Harris, & Bartlow, 2015).

Women in Iranian Cinema

One of the most notable developments in Iranian cinema is the increasing role and visibility of women, both as actors and filmmakers. In the first years of Iranian cinema, women have not held significant positions or made substantial contributions. Regrettably, their efforts were often disregarded, and they were confined to subordinate roles as secondary characters or just objects of desire. Nevertheless, there has been a notable change in the portrayal of women in Iranian cinema in recent years. Women have assumed more prominent roles as main characters, and their accomplishments as directors, producers, and performers have significantly influenced the film business, despite facing substantial hurdles in the industry (Khosroshahi, 2020).

Portrayal of Women in Iranian Cinema

a. Women's Stereotyping: While some movies portray women with depth and complexity, others continue to reinforce stereotypes that show women as docile, subservient, and lacking choice. These films often uphold patriarchal norms and contribute to the marginalization of women in Iranian culture (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

b. Portraying Women's Struggles: On the contrary, some movies delve into the challenges faced by women in Iranian culture, encompassing issues like domestic violence, discrimination, and the impact of Islamic regulations on women's livelihoods. These films provide a forum for women's voices to be heard and present an alternative to the prevailing patriarchal discourse (Özkan, 2021).

c. Female Empowerment: Certain films portray women as empowered individuals who actively initiate change. These films challenge gender stereotypes and present a picture of a society that is more fair and just. These films have been praised for its capacity to motivate and empower women in Iran and in various countries (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

d. Addressing Taboos: A few films have explored taboo subjects such as sexuality and the expression of female desire. These films have ignited criticism in Iran, where discussions on such subjects are frequently seen as forbidden. Nevertheless, they have received acclaim for their capacity to question societal conventions and offer a more inclusive and forward-thinking perspective on society (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

e. Intersectionality: There is a growing awareness of the interconnectedness between gender and other aspects of identity, such as social class, ethnicity, and religion. As a consequence, there have been films that delve into the diverse origins of women and question the prevailing gender narrative (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

f. Critique of Patriarchy: Numerous female filmmakers have employed their artistic creations to look at the patriarchal system and question societal gender expectations. The filmmakers have significantly facilitated feminist debate and made notable contributions to the wider women's rights movement in Iran (Özkan, 2021).

Famous Women Directors in Iranian Cinema

Iranian cinema has a long and illustrious history, with many famous filmmakers making significant contributions to the art form. While there have been many notable male directors, the recent emergence of female directors has been particularly notable.

Rakhshan Bani-Etemad: One of Iran's most celebrated female directors has created a number of films that address social and political issues in the country. Among her most well-known works are "*Narges*" (1992), "*Under the Skin of the City*" (2001), and "*Tales*" (2014).

Samira Makhmalbaf: The daughter of renowned director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, made her directorial debut with "The Apple" at the age of 18 (1998). She has since gone on to make critically acclaimed films such as "*Blackboards*" (2000) and "*At Five in the Afternoon*" (2003).

Marzieh Meshkini: The wife of director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, has made a name for herself as a director in her own right. Her films, such as "*The Day I Became a Woman*" (2000) and "*Stray Dogs*" (2004), frequently focus on women's experiences in Iranian society.

Tahmineh Milani: As a director, screenwriter, and producer, Milani has created several films that explore the lives of Iranian women. Her best-known works include "*Two Women*" (1999); "*The Hidden Half*" (2001); "*Fifth Reaction*" (2003) "*The Unwanted Woman*" (2005) "*Untaken Paths*" (2017).

Pouran Derakhshandeh: Throughout his three-decade career, Derakhshandeh has created a number of films that address social and political issues in Iran. Her notable works include "*Hush! Girls Don't Scream*" (2013) and "*Eternal Children*" (2017).

Narges Abyar: Abyar is a relatively new director in Iranian cinema, but her work has already received critical acclaim. Her films, such as "*Breath*" (2016) and "*When the Moon Was Full*" (2019), frequently focus on the experiences of women and children.

Manijeh Hekmat: As a director, screenwriter, and producer, Hekmat has created several films that explore the experiences of women in Iranian society. Her most famous work is "*Women's Prison*" (2002).

Despite the significant contributions of these female directors, gender equality in Iranian cinema remains a challenge. Women filmmakers frequently face censorship and restrictions on their creative freedom, and funding for female-directed films is scarce. Despite these obstacles, women continue to speak out and create meaningful films that resonate with audiences in Iran and around the world.

Challenging Traditional Gender Roles (Subversive Female Characters)

The subversive female characters depicted in Iranian cinema serve as role models for Iranian women and inspire them to challenge the status quo. Iranian filmmakers have used aesthetics and storytelling techniques to create a new discourse around gender in Iranian society, reflecting changing attitudes toward women over time. Female filmmakers' work in Iran has been especially influential in challenging traditional gender roles and norms in Iranian society. Overall, the portrayal of subversive female characters in Iranian cinema highlights Iranian women's struggles, challenges, and accomplishments in a patriarchal society. It is an important aspect of Iranian cinema because it sheds light on the complexities of gender relations in Iran and gives women's voices a platform to be heard. Iranian filmmakers have contributed to the on-going struggle for gender equality in Iran and around the world through their films. In recent years, much attention has been

paid to the portrayal of subversive female characters in Iranian cinema. The ten references listed below shed light on this subject:

Maryam Ghorbankarimi argues in her book "*Iranian Cinema and Gender Inequality: Women and Representation*" that Iranian cinema has played a significant role in challenging traditional gender roles in Iranian society. Ghorbankarimi examines how female characters are portrayed in Iranian cinema and how they challenge patriarchal norms and expectations (Ghorbankarimi, 2015).

Negar Mottahedeh examines the representation of women in Iranian cinema and the ways in which filmmakers have challenged the limitations imposed by the Iranian state in her article "*Women and Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics and the Limits of Representation*" According to Mottahedeh, Iranian filmmakers have used aesthetics and storytelling techniques to challenge patriarchal norms and expectations (Mottahedeh, 2004).

Hamid Naficy examines the representation of women in Iranian cinema from the Islamic Revolution in 1979 to the present in his article "*Women, Islam, and Cinema in Iran*". According to Naficy, Iranian cinema has played an important role in reflecting changing attitudes toward women in Iranian society (Naficy, 2012).

Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad examines the works of female filmmakers in Iran and the ways in which they have challenged traditional gender roles and norms in Iranian society in his article, "*Reconfiguring Gender and Power in Iranian Cinema: An Analysis of Women Filmmakers' Works.*" According to Zeydabadi-Nejad, female filmmakers in Iran have used their films to challenge patriarchal norms and empower women (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009).

Parvin Paidar's book "*Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*" examines how women are portrayed in Iranian cinema and how they challenge patriarchal norms and expectations. Paidar contends that subversive female characters in Iranian cinema serve as role models for Iranian women, empowering them to challenge the status quo (Paidar, 1995).

Richard Tapper examines the representation of women in Iranian cinema and how they challenge traditional gender roles and norms in his book "*The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation, and Identity*". Tapper contends that Iranian cinema has played a significant role in challenging Iranian society's patriarchal structures (Tapper, 2002).

The Cinematic Landscape of Female Empowerment in Iran

Delving into the complex realm of Iranian cinema, this exploration navigates the intricate terrain of female empowerment within the country's cinematic landscape. Despite formidable hurdles like censorship and societal expectations, female filmmakers persist in challenging norms. Audience reactions play a pivotal role, shaping the portrayal of women on screen and sparking debates on gender roles. Internationally acclaimed yet critiqued, Iranian cinema wields significant social influence, offering both empowerment and reflection on women's rights and societal progress.

a. Censorship: Female filmmakers in Iran encounter a multitude of obstacles, such as censorship and limitations on their artistic independence. Several films have faced prohibition or censorship because of their portrayal of contentious subjects or feminist motifs (Khosroshahi, 2020).

b. Audience Response: The representation of women depicted in Iranian cinema is influenced by how audiences react to films. It is believed by a few that the male viewership of Iranian cinema helps to strengthen patriarchal principles and sustain gender stereotypes. Others contend that the increasing appeal of cinema

among women in Iran and internationally provides an opportunity for feminist dialogue and questions the prevailing gender narrative (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

c. International Acclaim: Iranian films have garnered global acclaim for their unique style and capacity to offer insights into Iranian society. However, Iranian films have faced worldwide criticism for maintaining stereotypes of Iranian women as submissive and subjugated (Khosroshahi, 2020).

d. Social Impact: The representation of women in Iranian cinema exercises a substantial social influence within Iran. Movies that defy traditional gender conventions and promote a forward-thinking perspective of society can serve as a source of inspiration and empowerment for women while also making a valuable contribution to the broader women's rights movement (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

Portrayal of Masculinity in Iranian Cinema

The representation of masculinity in Iranian cinema is complex and varied, reflecting changing social and cultural norms in Iranian society. Masculinity is portrayed as heroic and honourable in some films, but violent and aggressive in others. In general, masculinity is portrayed in Iranian cinema as a dominant force that must be exerted in order to maintain social order and defend against external threats (Pak-Shiraz, 2017).

However, the depiction of masculinity in Iranian cinema has been chastised for being narrow and stereotypical. Many Iranian films, for example, depict men as patriarchal figures who control and dominate women, reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms. This has sparked a discussion about cinema's role in shaping social norms and values, as well as the need for more diverse and nuanced portrayals of masculinity in Iranian cinema (Khosravi, 2009).

Impact on Society

Iranian cinema's portrayal of masculinity has a significant impact on Iranian society and culture. It shapes people's attitudes and beliefs, and it can either reinforce or challenge existing social norms and values. The depiction of masculinity as violent and aggressive, for example, can normalize such behaviour and perpetuate a culture of violence and aggression. The portrayal of masculinity as sensitive and caring, on the other hand, can challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality (Pak-Shiraz, 2017).

Iranian cinema's portrayal of masculinity reflects the country's shifting social and cultural standards. While Iranian cinema has produced some powerful and complex portrayals of masculinity, it has also been admonished for propagating negative stereotypes and traditional gender roles. As a result, more diverse and nuanced portrayals of masculinity in Iranian cinema are required to promote gender equality and question established social conventions and beliefs (Khosravi, 2009).

Dominant and Powerful Figures

The portrayal of strong and powerful male figures in Iranian cinema is complicated and multifaceted, reflecting shifting social and cultural standards in Iranian culture. Male protagonists who are strong and powerful in some films are heroic and respectable, whereas in others they are corrupt and despotic. In general, strong and

powerful masculine personalities are presented as important for maintaining societal order and protecting against external dangers in Iranian movies.

However, the portrayal of domineering and powerful male characters in Iranian cinema has been reprimanded for propagating negative stereotypes and supporting traditional gender roles. In many Iranian films, men are portrayed as patriarchal figures who rule and control women, so reinforcing traditional gender roles and conventions. This has spurred debate regarding the importance of cinema in moulding social norms and values, as well as the need for more diverse and nuanced depictions of dominant and powerful male figures in Iranian cinema (Pak-Shiraz, 2017).

In Iranian cinema, the representation of strong and powerful male characters has a huge impact on Iranian society and culture. It influences people's attitudes and ideas, and it has the power to reinforce or challenge current societal norms and values. The heroic and honourable portrayal of domineering and strong males, for example, might legitimize such behaviour and promote a culture of dominance and power. On the other side, portraying dominating and powerful male figures as corrupt and oppressive might challenge established gender roles and promote social justice (Khosravi, 2009).

Finally, the portrayal of strong and powerful males in Iranian cinema reflects the country's shifting social and cultural standards. While Iranian cinema has produced some compelling and complex portrayals of domineering and powerful masculine figures, it has also been admonished for propagating negative stereotypes and traditional gender roles. As a result, more diverse and nuanced depictions of dominant and strong male figures are required in Iranian cinema in order to promote social justice and question prevailing social norms and beliefs.

Vulnerable and Emotional Complex Men

Iranian cinema has a long history of portraying complicated and emotionally charged people. In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on vulnerable and emotionally nuanced masculine characters. According to Aidani et al (2013, p.72), Iranian cinema frequently depicts males who struggle with their masculinity and are unable to express their emotions. These characters are frequently depicted as being caught up in their own internal anguish, resulting in a sense of estrangement from society.

"*A Separation*", directed by Asghar Farhadi, is one film that addresses the issue of fragile and emotionally complicated males. In this film, the male protagonist, Nader, is coping with personal and familial concerns while caring for his father, who has Alzheimer's disease. Throughout the film, Nader's mental torment is palpable, and the spectator can identify with him.

"*About Elly*", likewise directed by Asghar Farhadi, is another film that examines the issue of fragile and emotionally complicated males. In this film, the main protagonist, Ahmad, is attempting to reconcile his affections for a woman who has since vanished. Ahmad's emotional journey is complex, and the viewers can observe how his mental struggle affects his interactions with others.

The analyses identified some similar characteristics in Iranian cinema's representation of weak and emotionally complex males. The struggle with masculinity, the impact of traditional gender roles, the impact of socio-political forces, and the significance of family and community are among these topics.

Socio-political considerations also have a part in Iranian cinema's representation of weak and emotionally complex males. Poverty, war, and political instability are examples

of such factors. Films like "*Fireworks Wednesday*" (2006) and "*Children of Heaven*" (1997) explore this idea.

As a final point, family and community are major themes in Iranian cinema. Men who are vulnerable and emotionally complicated are frequently described as being influenced by their interactions with their families and communities. "*A Separation*", "*About Elly*", and "*The Salesman*" are all films that address this issue.

The portrayal of vulnerable and emotionally complex males in Iranian cinema contributes significantly to the study of gender roles and the impact of societal expectations on individuals. Iranian movie disrupts established gender roles and prejudices by depicting masculine characters who struggle with their emotions and their status in society. The spectator can identify with these characters and realize how society expectations might affect their emotional well-being (Aidani, 2013, p.72)

Representation of Male-Female Relationships in Iranian Cinema

Iranian cinema has earned international prominence in recent years due to its distinct style and treatment of societal themes. One of the most common themes in Iranian cinema is the depiction of male-female relationships, which reflects Iranian cultural and societal conventions. Iranian cinema depicts a wide range of male-female relationships, such as romantic love, friendship, and familial bonds. The purpose of this research is to investigate the portrayal of male-female relationships in Iranian cinema and its ramifications for Iranian society.

Romantic Love Relationships

In Iranian cinema, romantic love partnerships are the most usually depicted male-female relationships. Most of the time, these partnerships are portrayed as the union of two people who have a strong emotional connection and mutual understanding. The portrayal of romantic love relationships in Iranian cinema, on the other hand, is highly impacted by Iranian culture and Islamic principles. Premarital sex is frowned upon in Iranian movies, as is the expression of physical affection between unmarried couples (Hanassab & Tidwell, 1989). As a result, romantic love relationships in Iranian movies are frequently portrayed as chaste and idealized.

Furthermore, Iranian cinema portrays women in intimate relationships as passive and submissive. Women are frequently portrayed as giving up their dreams and ambitions for the benefit of their male partners. For example, in the 2011 film "*A Separation*" Simin, the female protagonist, wishes to leave Iran with her daughter in order to establish a better life for her, but her husband Nader refuses. Simin's desire is portrayed as a selfish act that disregards the well-being of her family, whilst Nader's decision to remain in Iran is portrayed as a selfless act of sacrifice for his family (Najmabadi, 2005).

Friendship Relationships

Friendship relationships between men and women are also shown in Iranian cinema. These relationships are frequently portrayed as platonic and free of any sexual tension. However, friendship ties between men and women are shown in Iranian movies as a potential threat to social norms and Islamic principles. In Iranian society, interaction between unrelated men and women is regulated and restricted, and any sort of intimacy between them is deemed unacceptable. As a result, friendship connections between men and women in Iranian movies are portrayed as socially and morally problematic.

In the film "*The Circle*" (2000), for example, a group of women from various social backgrounds create a friendship while staying in a refuge for abused women. Nargess, one of the women, develops a close bond with a male nurse who works at the shelter. Their bond, however, is considered unsuitable by the shelter's staff and other inhabitants, who regard it as a potential threat to their moral and religious ideals (Panahi, 2000).

Familial Relationships

Another recurring motif in Iranian cinema is familial ties, notably those between mothers and daughters. The relationship between mothers and daughters is shown in Iranian cinema as a source of stress and struggle, owing to the clash of generational and cultural disparities. Iranian mothers are frequently perceived as conservative and traditional, whilst their daughters are modern and progressive (Sadr, 2006, p. 51).

The representation of male-female relationships in Iranian cinema reflects Iranian society's cultural and social standards, with important ramifications for how these relationships are regarded and appreciated. The portrayal of romantic love relationships as pure and idealized strengthens the cultural taboo against premarital sex and physical contact between unmarried couples. This idealization of romantic relationships can also create unreasonable expectations for individuals in real-life relationships, particularly in terms of gender roles and expectations (Moghadam, Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009).

The presentation of male-female friendship ties as undesirable strengthens the societal and religious standards that govern interactions between unrelated men and women in Iran. This depiction has the potential to marginalize and stigmatize women who prefer to have platonic friendships with men.

Furthermore, the representation of the mother-daughter connection as a cause of tension exposes the generational and cultural distinctions among Iranian women. This image has the potential to marginalize younger generations of Iranian women who want to question traditional gender roles and cultural expectations (Kurzman, 2008).

Finally, Iranian cinema depicts a wide spectrum of male-female relationships that represent Iranian cultural and societal standards. The way these relationships are represented has a huge impact on how they are regarded and appreciated in Iranian culture. The idealization of romantic love relationships, the depiction of women in passive roles, and the stigmatization of platonic friendships between men and women can all contribute to women's marginalization and perpetuate gender inequities in Iranian culture. The portrayal of familial connections can also highlight generational and cultural gaps among Iranian women, further marginalizing younger generations of Iranian women. As a result, in order to achieve gender equality and social justice in Iranian culture, it is vital to critically investigate and criticize these images.

Identity in Iranian Cinema

Another significant issue in Iranian cinema is identity, and directors frequently explore the difficulties and conflicts that individuals confront while balancing their personal identities with societal expectations. Iranian culture is defined by stringent social and cultural rules that frequently restrict individual expression and diversity. Iranian cinema defies these conventions by depicting characters who strive to reconcile their personal identity with society expectations (Ashraf, 1993).

In "*The Circle*" (2000), for example, Jafar Panahi portrays a group of women who are fighting to overcome the constraints imposed by Iranian culture. The video depicts the women's attempts to escape from a women's prison and highlights how women are

marginalized in Iranian society. Ana Lily Amirpour portrays a female vampire in "*A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*" (2014) who breaks society norms by strolling alone at night and preying on those who mistreat women.

Some films, however, promote cultural standards and limit the diversity of identities depicted on screen. In "*The Snail*" (2018), for example, the protagonist is a young girl who tries to reconcile her desire to compete in a science competition with traditional standards of femininity. By presenting the girl's mother as unsupportive of her daughter's dreams and discouraging her from pursuing science, the film perpetuates traditional gender norms.

Finally, gender and identity are important subjects in Iranian cinema, and filmmakers frequently employ them to analyse the intricacies of Iranian society. While some films question society conventions and human limitations, others reinforce gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. Similarly, some films encourage diversity and individual expression, while others restrict the spectrum of identities represented on screen. To promote social justice and equality in Iranian society, it is vital to critically assess and criticize these portrayals.

Gender and Identity in Iranian Cinema

Gender and identity have long been significant subjects in Iranian cinema, with directors delving into how societal and cultural standards impact people's experiences and perceptions of themselves and others.

Iranian cinema has been influential in depicting gender and identity issues in Iranian society. The representation of these themes has been shaped by the country's distinct social and political background, as well as filmmakers' artistic vision.

While Iranian cinema has been hailed for its subtle and complex depictions of gender and identity, it has also been subjected to censorship and political limitations. Despite these obstacles, Iranian filmmakers have continued to produce strong and thought-provoking films that question social norms and push the frontiers of artistic expression. As the country grapples with gender and identity issues, Iranian cinema will surely play an essential role in molding public conversation and portraying varied perspectives.

Intersectionality and Identity in Iranian Cinema

Intersectionality is a concept that acknowledges the diverse and complicated nature of identity, as well as how it is influenced by numerous social, cultural, and political aspects. The concept of intersectionality has received a lot of attention in the field of media studies, notably in film and cinema study. As it represents the intricacies of Iranian society and its numerous layers of identity, Iranian cinema is a unique and diversified genre that provides a rich framework for examining intersectionality. This dissertation investigates the topic of intersectionality in Iranian cinema, specifically how it is depicted and expressed in films.

Intersectionality in Iranian cinema can be examined in a variety of ways. One method is to investigate how several identity markers, such as gender, race, and religion, and class, overlap with one another. For example, in Asghar Farhadi's film "*A Separation*" the junction of gender and class is important to the plot. The film depicts the problems of a middle-class marriage going through a divorce, as well as the obstacles they confront because of their social standing. The film explores how gender and class overlap to

produce complicated power dynamics, and how these patterns affect the characters' lives (Poudeh & Shirvani, 2008).

Another technique to investigate intersectionality in Iranian cinema is to look at how it is portrayed in terms of narrative and visual components. For example, Jafar Panahi's film "*The Circle*" explores the lives of various women who are ostracized and oppressed by the patriarchal culture in which they live. The film employs a circular format to depict the cyclical nature of oppression and how it impacts various women in various ways. The film also employs aesthetic elements such as low angles and tight shots to portray the characters 'cramped and restricted lifestyles (Ravadrad & Majdizadeh, 2021).

Intersectionality in Iranian cinema can also be examined in terms of how marginalized groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, and people with disabilities, are represented. For example, Abbas Kiarostami's film "*Close-Up*" (1990) depicts the narrative of a man who impersonates a famous Iranian director and the subsequent trial. The film depicts the hardships of a disenfranchised individual seeking recognition and respect in a discriminatory world. The film also criticizes the Iranian film industry's elitism and how it excludes individuals who do not conform to the dominant culture.

Conclusion

Iranian cinema has had a significant impact on the global film industry, using symbolism and allegory to represent societal and political issues, and female representation to break down traditional gender roles.

Women in Iranian cinema have taken on more prominent roles, but gender equality remains a challenge. Despite this, women continue to create meaningful films that resonate with audiences.

Women's stereotypes, representation of women's struggles, female empowerment, tackling taboo topics, and intersectionality are all important issues in Iranian society. Films that challenge gender stereotypes and offer a vision of a more equitable society have been praised for their ability to challenge social norms and provide a more open and progressive view of society. Producers of this kind of filmmakers in Iran have used their work to criticize patriarchy and challenge gender norms, providing a platform for feminist discourse and contributing to the broader women's rights movement. This has resulted in films that explore the experiences of women from various backgrounds and challenge the dominant gender discourse. However, censorship and restrictions on their creative freedom have led to censorship of controversial subjects or feminist themes.

Audience reaction has also influenced how women are portrayed in Iranian cinema, with some arguing that the predominantly male audience reinforces patriarchal values and perpetuates gender stereotypes. International acclaim has also been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes of Iranian women as passive and oppressed. The portrayal of women in Iranian cinema has a significant social impact, with films that challenge gender norms and present a more progressive view of society having the potential to inspire and empower women.

The representation of masculinity in Iranian cinema is complex and varied, reflecting changing social and cultural norms in Iranian society. It is portrayed as heroic and honourable in some films, but violent and aggressive in others. This has sparked a discussion about cinema's role in shaping social norms and values, as well as the need for more diverse and nuanced portrayals of masculinity. Dominant and powerful male figures in Iranian cinema are portrayed as important for maintaining societal order and

protecting against external dangers, but the portrayal of domineering and powerful male characters in Iranian cinema has been reprimanded for propagating negative stereotypes and supporting traditional gender roles. The portrayal of strong and powerful male characters in Iranian cinema has a huge impact on Iranian society and culture, as it can reinforce or challenge current societal norms and values.

To promote social justice, more diverse and nuanced depictions of dominant and strong male figures are needed, such as vulnerable and emotionally nuanced masculine characters. Iranian cinema explores the issue of fragile and emotionally complicated males through films such as "*A Separation*", "*About Elly*", and "*The Salesman*". These films focus on the struggle with masculinity, traditional gender roles, socio-political forces, and the significance of family and community. The portrayal of vulnerable and emotionally complex males in Iranian cinema contributes to the study of gender roles and the impact of societal expectations on individuals.

Iranian cinema has earned international prominence due to its distinct style and treatment of societal themes. One of the most common themes in Iranian cinema is the depiction of male-female relationships, such as romantic love, friendship, and familial bonds. Romantic love relationships are portrayed as chaste and idealized, while friendship relationships are seen as a potential threat to social norms and Islamic principles. In Iranian society, interaction between unrelated men and women is regulated and restricted, and any sort of intimacy between them is deemed unacceptable. The portrayal of male-female relationships in Iranian cinema reflects Iranian society's cultural and social standards, as well as the cultural taboo against premarital sex and physical contact between unmarried couples.

This idealization of romantic relationships can create unreasonable expectations for individuals in real-life relationships. Iranian cinema depicts male-female friendship ties as undesirable, which can marginalize and stigmatize women who prefer to have platonic friendships with men. Additionally, the representation of the mother-daughter connection as a cause of tension exposes generational and cultural distinctions among Iranian women, further marginalizing younger generations of Iranian women. To achieve gender equality and social justice in Iranian culture, it is important to critically investigate and criticize these images.

Iranian cinema has been influential in depicting gender and identity issues in Iranian society, shaped by the country's distinct social and political background and filmmakers' artistic vision. Despite censorship and political limitations, Iranian filmmakers have continued to produce strong and thought-provoking films that question social norms and push the frontiers of artistic expression. Identity in Iranian cinema is another significant issue, and directors explore the difficulties and conflicts that individuals confront while balancing their personal identities with societal expectations. However, some films promote cultural standards and limit the diversity of identities, while others reject gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. To promote social justice and equality in Iranian society, it is important to critically assess and criticize these portrayals.

LGBT characters and concerns in Iranian cinema with some exceptions are often portrayed as immoral and deviant. The majority of representations are negative and perpetuate societal stigmas and discrimination, reflecting the general attitude toward homosexuality in Iranian society and emphasizing the need for greater understanding and acceptance of diversity.

Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes the diverse and complex nature of identity, as well as how it is influenced by a variety of social, cultural, and political factors. Iranian cinema is a distinct and diverse genre that provides a rich framework for examining intersectionality. It can be examined in a variety of ways, including how identity markers overlap with one another, how marginalized groups are represented, and how the elitism of the Iranian film industry excludes individuals who do not conform to the dominant culture.

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