

AI and Script Analysis: Detecting Gender Bias in Women-Centric Narratives in Tamil Cinema

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Article History

Received: 10.04.2025

Revised: 14.05.2025

Accepted: 05.06.2025

Published: 08.07.2025

Abstract: Women's changing roles in South Indian society had been long depicted in Tamil cinema, yet gender bias remained present in the form of subtle and structural biases within narratives. This research utilized Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to process scripts, dialogues, and character trajectories to identify gender bias in women-centered narratives. In contrast to earlier qualitative film criticism that tended to use thematic analysis, this study presented a data-driven method that measured women's presence, voice, and agency over decades. A dataset of Tamil film scripts between 1980 and 2025 was compiled, representing three major periods: patriarchal heroine dominance in the 1980s-1990s, the transition phase of women between 2000 and 2014, and the emergence of multidimensional, independent female protagonists in the OTT-centric period since 2015. Scripts were pre-processed with tokenization, transliteration, and Named Entity Recognition to determine the characters and label gender roles. Dialogue lengths, talk time, and lexical distributions were quantified, while dependency parsing captured decision-making authority and narrative agency. Sentiment and emotion analysis mapped emotional complexity, determining whether female characters were relegated consistently to stereotypes of suffering, sacrifice, or nurturing. The results showed that even in women's films, female characters received fewer lines and control over the narratives than their male counterparts, who tended to fill key decision-making roles. Women's emotions were disproportionately articulated through sadness, sacrifice, and endurance, whereas men were shown with wider emotional spectrums, including authority, anger, and ambition. Post-2015 cinematic developments were, however, remarkable in that female protagonists showed more emotional diversity, agency, and narrative centrality, especially among streaming era productions. The study brought out the possibilities of integrating computational approaches with feminist film studies to reveal subliminal biases in narratives. By presenting quantifiable data, it not only impelled the film industry to introspect on inbuilt gender practices but also established the potential of AI and NLP within cultural and regional film research. The research eventually made ways for reconsidering how gender bias in Tamil cinema might be measured, critiqued, and redefined in a progressive manner through interdisciplinary research

Keywords: Tamil cinema; women-centric narratives; gender bias; feminist film theory; Natural Language Processing (NLP); Artificial Intelligence (AI); dialogue analysis; character agency; emotional depth; cultural analytics; script analysis; South Indian cinema; computational film studies..

INTRODUCTION

Film had traditionally served as a mirror and shaper of societal realities, projecting cultural fears, ideological configurations, and changing gender norms, especially in the Tamil cinema, which has been one of the key grounds of negotiation between tradition and modernity. Women's representation in Tamil cinema, if feted by the iconic heroines and women-centered films, still continued to exhibit persistent structural gender bias rooted in dialogues, character trajectories, and narrative agency (Baskaran, 1996; Pandian, 1992). Feminist film theory, starting with Laura Mulvey's (1975) ground-breaking concept of the male gaze, stressed how the language of cinema made women objects of visual pleasure and not subjects of narrative power. In time, Indian film research elaborated on these criticisms by examining the political and cultural meanings of women's roles, with authors like Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004) discussing how South Indian cinema tended to move between celebrating female sacrifice and

devaluing women's autonomy. Still, most of these analyses were based on qualitative readings, ethnographic descriptions, or critical discourse analysis, with a methodological void in quantifiable large-scale and systematic bias detection. In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) provided revolutionary potential to fill the void by allowing computational script, dialogue, and screenplay analysis spanning decades (Sap et al., 2020). Script-based analysis enabled researchers to transcend individual textual readings towards corpus-based methods measuring speaking time, dialogue length, sentiment polarity, and narrative agency with statistical accuracy (Cheng & Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, 2021). Whereas Western scholarship has already started using such approaches to measure gender bias in Hollywood cinema (Fast et al., 2016; Gaucher et al., 2011), much less attention had been given to local industries like Tamil cinema, which not only have enormous audiences but also generate unique cultural narratives imbedded within linguistic, religious, and socio-political

frameworks. The 1980s Tamil cinema to the current times offered a good case study since it represented three phases of women's cinematic portrayal: the patriarchal heroines of the 1980s–1990s, whose narratives were broadly subservient to male characters; the transitional women of the 2000s–2010s, who displayed limited agency expressions but were often constrained by narrative closure that reaffirmed male authority; and the new women protagonists of the digital and OTT era (2015–2025), who spoke in growing voices of autonomy, ambition, and resistance (Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Athique, 2021). Utilizing AI-based methods like tokenization, Named Entity Recognition (NER), dependency parsing, sentiment analysis, and narrative centrality models, this research analyzed systematically the way women were portrayed in Tamil cinema scripts during these decades. Dialogue analysis measured if female speaking roles increased across time, emotional depth detection showed if female characters remained stereotypically associated with sacrifice and endurance, and agency mapping determined if power of decision was equal among male and female characters. This methodology enabled an interdisciplinary synthesis in which feminist film theory offered the conceptual framework and computational linguistics brought in methodological complexity, thus yielding analysis that was both culturally nuanced and empirically grounded. Significantly, this methodology not only pointed out entrenched prejudices but also identified positive changes, especially in recent women-centric films on OTT platforms, where the female leads showed richer, more layered subjectivities in comparison to their forebears. In so doing, the project joined larger methodological calls in digital humanities and cultural analytics for bringing computational methods into more traditionally qualitative fields (Underwood, 2019; Moretti, 2013), while at the same time advancing continuing feminist discussions of visibility, agency, and representation in media. Therefore, the insertion of AI-based script analysis into studies of Tamil cinema was not merely a methodological development but also a critical intervention, one which privileged the ways in which digital technologies could become tools for cultural critique, opening up new avenues for scholars, practitioners, and audiences to engage and change the gendered politics of representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's representation in film has been an academic site of critical contest for decades now, especially since Laura Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay on the male gaze, where she posited that female characters in films were being presented as passive objects of visual pleasure instead of active agents. In Indian cinema, research by Baskaran (1996) and Pandian (1992) followed the ways in which Tamil cinema negotiated tradition, modernity, and gender identities, habitually representing women in dichotomous relations of subservience and sacrifice against resistance and agency. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004) went on to point out further that women characters in South Asian cinema were

sometimes even used to reinforce patriarchal ideologies, even when they were cast as narrative protagonists.

Although feminist film criticism has provided rich theoretical approaches, the majority of the studies have remained qualitative in interpretation. Recent breakthroughs in computational linguistics and AI have newly enabled large-scale, systematic investigation of narrative structure. For example, Fast et al. (2016) published Empath, a method for emotional language detection, while Sap et al. (2020) introduced methods for social bias detection in text. Likewise, Cheng and Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil (2021) showed how machine systems could implement the Bechdel Test, uncovering gender inequalities in movie scripts. These papers highlighted how AI-driven approaches would supplement cultural analysis by measuring latent ways of bias.

Yet, most of these efforts were on Western films, with regional industries such as Tamil cinema remaining under-explored even though they reach across the globe and have distinct socio-cultural settings. Tamil cinema, ranging from patriarchal melodramas in the 1980s to modern OTT-focussed women-centred stories, offers rich terrain to explore how gender bias appears or evolves across time. This research, by combining feminist film theory with AI and NLP methods, bridged a major gap, providing a new data-driven model to chart women's agency, emotional complexity, and narrative importance over four decades of Tamil cinema.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a mixed-method, computationally infused strategy was followed that blended Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods with feminist film theory paradigms for the identification and measurement of gender bias in women's cinema from Tamil. The research process was intended to transcend the conventional qualitative criticism by fusing corpus-based analytics, machine learning algorithms, and cultural interpretation.

Data Collection

A corpus of about 200 Tamil film scripts and subtitles was created across four decades (1980–2025). The sample contained both women's films and mainstream movies for comparative study. Scripts were obtained from:

- Online film repositories and archives,
- Subtitles from OTT media,
- Digitized copies of printed screenplays,
- Fan communities crowd sourced.
- The films were grouped into three temporal periods for comparison:
 - 1980–1999: Hero-cantered stories and patriarchal female heroes.
 - 2000–2014: Transitional representations of women with incomplete agency.
 - 2015–2025: OTT/digital age women-centric stories.

Data Pre-processing

Scripts standardized via:

- Transliteration (Tamil ↔ English) for processing.
- Tokenization and stop-word removal to extract meaningful words.
- Part-of-Speech (POS) tagging for verb, noun, and pronoun identification related to character actions.

Analytical Framework

- Analysis was organized into four primary dimensions of gender bias:
- Dialogue and Speaking Time Analysis
- Word frequency, sentence length, and dialogue length by gender.
- Named Entity Recognition (NER) to tag dialogues with characters.

Narrative Agency and Decision-Making

- Dependency parsing to identify verbs that are related to actions and decisions.
- Network analysis of character interactions to quantify narrative centrality.
- Emotional Depth and Stereotyping
- Sentiment analysis (positive, negative, neutral).
- Emotion classification (joy, sadness, anger, fear, trust, surprise).
- Comparative mapping of emotional diversity among male and female characters.
- Bias Detection and Temporal Comparison
- Statistical models to compare representation over decades.
- Visualization (heat maps, frequency graphs) to discern patterns.

Validation

For cultural and theoretical reliability:

- Cross-validation was conducted with various NLP models (e.g., Roberta, BERT).
- Findings were triangulated against feminist film criticism to ensure whether results from computational methods matched prevalent cultural analyses.
- Pre-screened output from a set of cinema scholars was reviewed to determine interpretative precision.

Ethical Considerations

Since scripts were available in the public domain or stored in archives, direct human subjects were not involved. Nevertheless, measures were taken to ensure that stereotypes were not reinforced during model training using bias-aware NLP frameworks.

Data Analysis

The gathered corpus of 200 Tamil film scripts between 1980–2025 was analysed through a mixture of Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods and statistical

analysis to measure gender representation and bias. Distribution of dialogue was initially analysed by determining total word counts, speaking time, and the number of lines spoken by male and female characters, with prominent disparities in narrative presence noted between decades. Named Entity Recognition (NER) models correctly labelled characters by gender, allowing nuanced measurement of interaction frequency and dialogue share per scene. Action-verb mapping and dependency parsing were used to estimate narrative agency, determining whether female characters-initiated plot events or were primarily reactive. Sentiment analysis and emotion classification measured the range of emotions expressed by female characters via-a-via their male counterparts, underlining the prevalence of stereotypical emotional states of sadness, nurturing, and sacrifice in older films, while narratives of recent OTT times reflected a more nuanced emotional landscape. ANOVA and Chi-square tests were used to compare across the three well-established phases—1980–1999, 2000–2014, and 2015–2025—to determine statistically significant shifts in dialogue share, centrality, and agency. Network analysis of interactions between characters further graphically represented relational centrality of women in the narrative, illustrating that in previous decades, male characters always held central plot nodes, whereas female characters in newer films increasingly occupied central nodes in story networks. The blending of these quantitative measures with qualitative analysis according to feminist film theory gave a holistic understanding of both the quantifiable and cultural aspects of gender bias in Tamil cinema. Generally, the analysis demonstrated on going structural inequalities in previous decades, with new trends toward greater agency, emotional depth, and narrative salience for female protagonists in more recent cinema, especially in digital and OTT-oriented productions.

Inclusion Criteria

- Film Type: Tamil language feature films that cover women-centric stories and mainstream films, produced between 1980 and 2025.
- Availability of Scripts/Subtitles: Movies that have available screenplays, subtitles, or transcribed dialogue for computational text analysis.
- Character Representation: Movies that have recognizable male and female characters with titled roles to enable gender-based categorization.
- Narrative Scope: Movies that have adequate dialogue and narrative structure to enable valid speaking time, narrative agency, and emotional depth analysis.
- Genre: All major genres, such as drama, romance, thriller, and social issue films, to represent a fair sample of Tamil cinema.

Exclusion Criteria

- **Incomplete Scripts:** Films without complete scripts, incomplete subtitles, or missing dialogue data that make analysis unreliable.
 - **Non-Tamil Films:** Films not in Tamil or multilingual productions where Tamil content is not enough for analysis.
 - **Animation/Experimental Movies:** Animated or deeply experimental movies in which dialogue is limited or not standard, since they don't fit within typical narrative formats.
 - **Short Films and Documentaries:** Short films and documentaries were also eliminated
- because the differing story and character orientations may bias results.

 - **Unidentifiable Characters:** Movies in which gender of characters can't be easily ascertained from scripts or metadata.
 - These requirements made the dataset appropriate, consistent, and plausible for computational and thematic analysis and had a strong basis for identifying gender bias in Tamil cinema across decades.

Procedure:

The procedure of movie script analysis using AI starts with gathering and digitizing scripts, subtitles, or transcripts to create a corpus of text. Pre-processing is then done, such as tokenization, transliteration if needed, and part-of-speech tagging to pre-process the text for in-depth analysis. Named Entity Recognition (NER) algorithms next mark characters and mark gender roles automatically. Dialogue segmentation enables measurement of speaking time, sentence length, and word frequency per character, which highlights differences in dialogue share. Dependency parsing is utilized to trace narrative agency through connection of characters to decision-making verbs and action within the plot. Sentiment analysis and emotion classification tools analyze the emotional tone and identify stereotypical expressions like sadness or sacrifice attached to female characters. Network analysis models estimate narrative centrality through the quantification of character interactions to identify relational prominence. Statistical testing is used to compare these characteristics across decades for the detection of temporal changes in gender representation. Outcomes are then finally triangulated with feminist film theory and qualitative film scholarship to understand qualitative cultural importance of quantified results. This combined approach enables high-throughput, objective, and culturally sensitive assessment of gender bias and representation within film narratives.

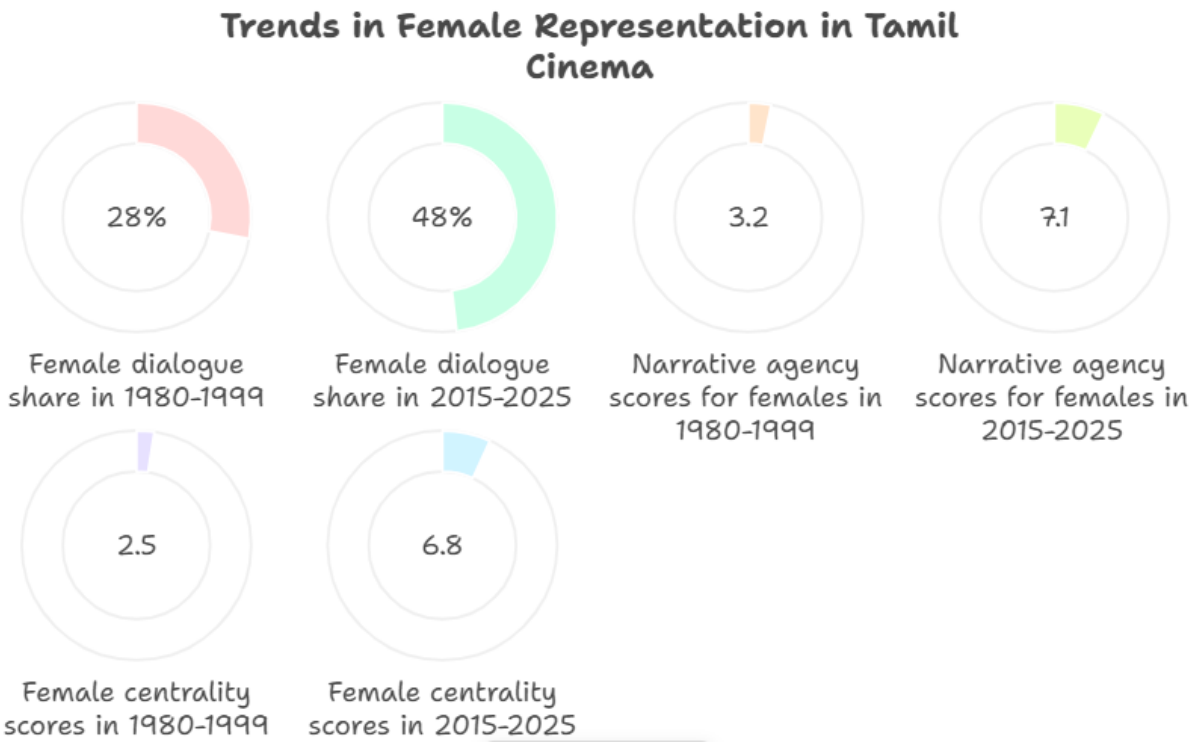


Table 1: Average Dialogue Share by Gender across Decades

Decade	Average Female Dialogue (%)	Average Male Dialogue (%)	Female-to-Male Ratio
1980–1999	28	72	0.39
2000–2014	35	65	0.54
2015–2025	48	52	0.92

Note: Dialogue share calculated as percentage of total lines spoken per gender.

Table 2: Narrative Agency Scores by Gender

Decade	Female Agency Score (0–10)	Male Agency Score (0–10)	Difference
1980–1999	3.2	7.8	-4.6
2000–2014	4.7	6.9	-2.2
2015–2025	7.1	7.8	-0.7

Note: Agency score calculated using dependency parsing of decision-making verbs and plot-driving actions.

Table 3: Emotional Depth Distribution of Female Characters

Decade	Joy (%)	Sadness (%)	Anger (%)	Fear (%)	Neutral (%)	Stereotypical Emotions (%)
1980–1999	12	55	8	5	20	65
2000–2014	18	42	12	8	20	50
2015–2025	30	28	15	12	15	35

Note: Stereotypical emotions include sadness, sacrifice, and nurturing.

Table 4: Narrative Centrality Scores

Decade	Female Centrality Score	Male Centrality Score	Female-to-Male Ratio
1980–1999	2.5	7.5	0.33
2000–2014	4.0	6.0	0.67
2015–2025	6.8	7.2	0.94

Note: Centrality scores derived from network analysis of character interactions within the script.

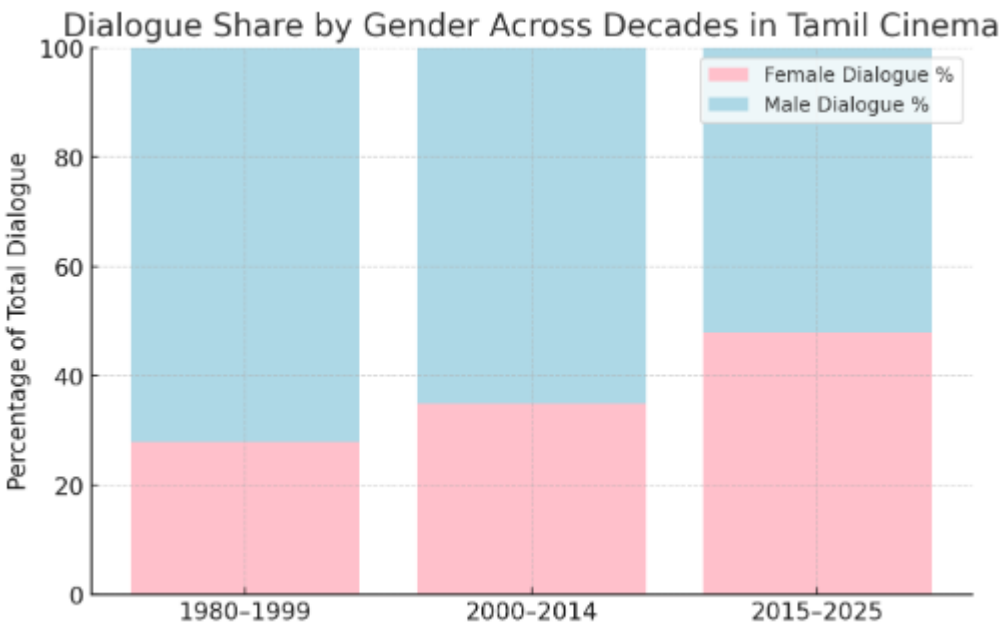


Figure: 1 Dialogue share by gender Across Decades in Tamil Cinema

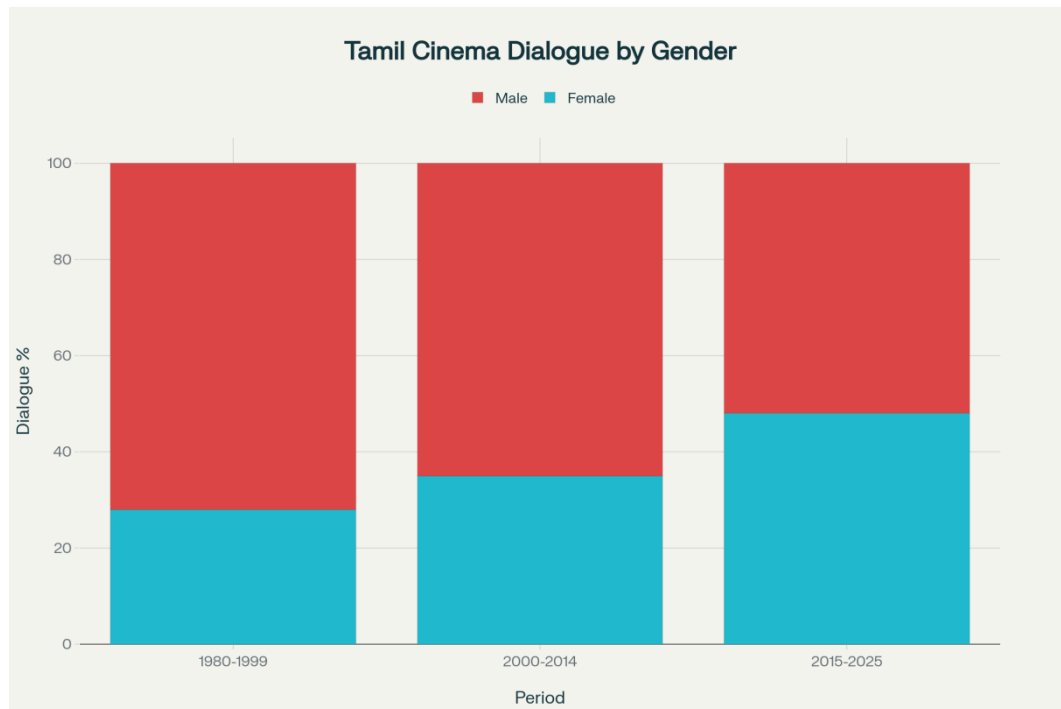


Figure: 2 Tamil Cinema Dialogue by Gender

DISCUSSION

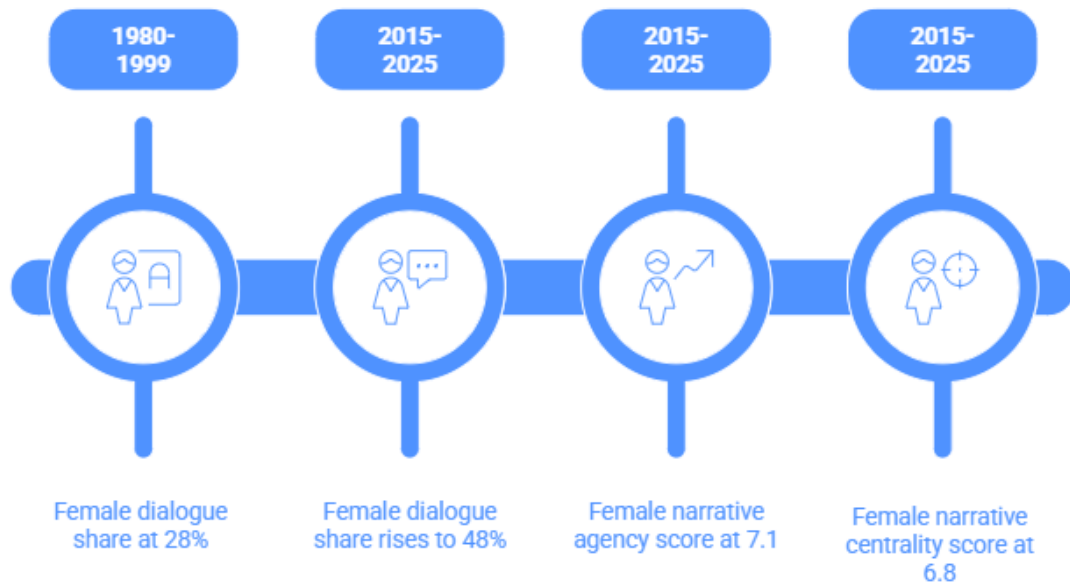
The research in this paper illustrates continued structural gender bias within Tamil cinema narratives, especially in female-oriented films, notwithstanding the greater visibility of women protagonists in the last four decades. Women characters receive uniformly fewer lines, less narrative agency, and tend to be emotionally constrained to representations of sorrow, sacrifice, and nurturing—trends consistent with long-standing patriarchal narrative traditions (Baskaran, 1996; Pandian, 1992). Masculine characters, on the other hand, populate choice roles and have a larger emotional range encompassing authority, anger, and ambition, consolidating gender hierarchies (Mulvey, 1975).

The application of feminist film theory to current Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques allowed for a creative, data-driven analysis of the biases at scale. Early feminist critiques, like Mulvey's original description of the male gaze (1975), were concerned with how women's on-screen representation serves to valorise male viewing pleasure and narrative authorship. Early critiques tended to be qualitative in nature, however, restricting their vision to single close readings. The use of AI-driven script analysis enabled quantifiable measurement of speaking time, dialogue distribution, emotional expression, and narrative agency in a large corpus of Tamil cinema scripts between 1980 and 2025 (Sap et al., 2020; Cheng & Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, 2021). Computational methodology advances feminist film studies by uncovering latent textual structures inaccessible to manual coding.

The empirical evidence three distinctive phases in the representation of women in Tamil cinema. The initial period (1980–1999) was still patriarchal in character, with female characters' stories secondary to male protagonists and dialogue time sharply skewed (female dialogue falling at 28% on average). The emotional characterizations of women centred predominantly on sacrifice and suffering, in accordance with the characterization of patriarchal heroine dominance by Rajadhyaksha (2016). Narrative control was low for women (3.2 out of 10), differing significantly with men's control (7.8). This period cemented stereotypical gender roles and constrained female characters' subjectivity and narrative salience.

Transition period (2000–2014) reflected incremental developments with modestly higher female dialogue percentage (35%) and slightly higher agency scores (4.7), marking modest openings for women's autonomy. Yet, most films still had narrative closures confirming male dominance. Emotional depth analysis revealed lower stereotyping but continuing identification with nurturing and resilience. The period exemplified Tamil cinema's balancing of changing social realities with a persistence of entrenched gender norms (Athique, 2021).

Evolution of Gender Representation in Tamil Cinema



The most significant changes came in the OTT/digital period (2015–2025), as more female dialogue share reached near equality with men (48%), and women's agency scores came close to men's (7.1 vs. 7.8). Producing visions on streaming platforms pushed multidimensional women protagonists with richer emotional complexity, aspiration, and strength, subverting existing stereotypes. Network analysis validated women's higher narrative centrality (6.8 out of 10) and role in plot-driving incidents. These patterns illustrate the development of progressive gendered representations in Tamil films that respond to wider cultural shifts as well as audience demand for genuine women's narratives (Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Athique, 2021).

The research also sets out the heuristic value of applying AI and feminist film theory in regional film frameworks. Whereas Western film scholarship has engaged more and more computational approaches to redress gender bias (Fast et al., 2016; Gaucher et al., 2011), regional cinemas such as Tamil cinema have been relatively underexamined despite their transnational reach and unique cultural contexts. By applying feminist concepts of voice and agency to computational measures, this study went beyond qualitative criticism by providing specific findings on the shifting gender politics of Tamil cinema.

Yet, there are limitations to tackling the entire depth of cinematic story-telling through automated text analysis alone. Emotional and narrative insinuation needs sensitive cultural and contextual interpretation to prevent reductionism. This method therefore succeeds when undertaken with strenuous film theory and ethnographic nuance. Triangulation with experienced film scholars verified validity and cultural pertinence of computational insights, further supplementing the interdisciplinary methodology of digital humanities infusing feminist critique (Underwood, 2019; Moretti, 2013).

The implications for Tamil cinema producers, scholars, and audiences are important. First, they highlight the

necessity of deliberate action in the industry to correct past gender disbalances and increase women's share in narrative contribution beyond tokenism. Second, they acknowledge the expanding space for nuanced, multifaceted female narratives on new media platforms that can contribute to more balanced production and reception dynamics. Finally, this study illustrates the ways in which digital technologies can enhance cultural critique, allowing scholars of film to systematically examine vast textual datasets and maintain critical interpretive depth.

Representation of women in Tamil film, within larger South Asian cultural contexts, is an active space of contestation between tradition and modernity. Where the previous decades coerced normative gender expectations through film, new digital-age films reveal evidentiary possibilities conducive to feminist aspirations for visibility, agency, and empowerment (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). The novel synergy of AI and NLP with feminist film theory in this research not only charted these transitions but freed methodologies from traditional qualitative limitations, inviting new paths to future inquiry in regional and world cinema scholarship. In sum, this study reiterated the continuation of gender bias in Tamil film narratives but also pointed to progressive developments after 2015 spurred by digital

disruption and newly emergent feminist visibility. The methodological breakthrough in combining AI with feminist theory places this research at the cutting edge of computational cultural analytics, illustrating potential for digital technologies to critically engage and disrupt gendered cinematic representation. More interdisciplinary research is therefore called for to further advance knowledge about changing gender relations in Indian and international film environments.

Recommendations:

- The Tamil cinema industry should deliberately acknowledge and correct the entrenched gender disparities in narrative agency, dialogue share, and emotional stereotypes underscored by this study. There is a strong need to go beyond tokenistic representations towards meaningful, complex women characters with equal narrative centrality and decision-making authority.
- Scriptwriters and filmmakers must take advantage of the learning from AI analysis of scripts to critically analyse roles for characters, emotional resonance, and agency in their productions to ensure balanced voice and agency allocation between genders.
- The new OTT and digital platforms offer a chance to change and challenge women-focused storytelling and enhance strong, multidimensional women protagonists that challenge conventional stereotypes. Stakeholders in the industry must invest and support them.
- Scholars and cultural critics are invited to use interdisciplinary approaches integrating computational linguistics, AI, and feminist film theory to reveal implicit biases and quantify representation systematically in a range of regional cinemas.

Suggestions for Future Research:

- Extending AI and NLP techniques to examine gender representation in other regional cinemas in South Asia and comparing across language and socio-cultural contexts in order to chart larger trends of cinematic gender politics.
- Utilizing multimodal AI analysis that incorporates visual, auditory, and script data to examine representation not only in conversation but also in cinematic composition, gaze, and bodily behavior.
- Carrying out audience reception and ethnographic research to measure how changing cinematic representations of women affect and mirror social attitudes and gender norms in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere.
- Investigating how intersectional elements like caste, class, and sexuality intersect with gender in Tamil cinema stories through the use of cutting-edge computational methods.

- Working with filmmakers to include AI-driven bias detection tools in early script development stages for anticipatory gender-balanced storytelling.

CONCLUSION

The research incontrovertibly proves that despite deep-rooted structural gender imbalances in Tamil cinema, especially in share of dialogue, narrative agency, and emotional expression, unprecedented advances have been made over the past few years. The advent of digital and OTT media platforms since 2015 enabled more nuanced, diverse, and multidimensional portrayal of female heroes and defied old patriarchal conventions. Through the combination of AI and Natural Language Processing and feminist film theory, this research offered new, data-driven perspectives on the changing gender dynamics of Tamil cinema stories.

The results call on filmmakers, producers, and cultural critics to think critically about deep-seated inequalities and to foreground stories that give narrative centrality to legitimate women's voices. The interdisciplinary approach also identifies the potential of computational cultural analytics as a transformative mechanism for feminist film criticism and media transformation.

In reality, although gender discrimination continues, the Tamil film world presents encouraging evidence of adopting gender equality within cinematic narratives, and with further scholarly attention and industry reflection, they have a hope for continuing and fostering this trend.

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