

LAKSHMI: A CRITICAL REVIEW: WHATS THE FUSS ALL ABOUT?

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Abstract: *Mass media is something that is irreplaceable in the lives of the people. The statement is too good especially in the Indian context where mass media and media outlets are the order of the day for a vast majority of people for various reasons. Films are considered as a magnanimous medium that has more penetrating power in disseminating messages to the audience in a short period of time. Short films are also one such medium that disseminates messages to a large populace and are not entirely new in today's contemporary society. Short films in fact happened to be one of the earlier forms of cinema, which is considered or seen as a medium of entertainment. Short films have been playing a variety of roles in the society. They help in variety of aspects like awareness, representation and presentation of some aspect of a phenomenon, an issue or an incident. They are also not confined to boundaries or various geographies across the globe. There are various genres or subjects under which short films were made and are still being made. Many of them have won accolades over the course of years as well through their way of depiction, representation of the imagery, direction and other technicalities. The current research paper looks at the newest trending and most debated short film in YouTube that released last week – Lakshmi. The research paper will critically review various aspects that the short film has portrayed through iconography.*

Key Words: *Viral, Short film, YouTube, Lakshmi, Analysis,*

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Media and Behaviours:

Many of the previous studies done by scholars spoke about how mass media outlets are helping in shaping the attitude and behaviour of people. Mass media, such as newspapers, TV, radio, films are recognized as major factors that influence a wide range of social attitudes and behaviours (Petty et al. 2009; Champoux, 1999; Dunphy et al. 2008). In line with the social cognitive theory of mass communication (Bandura, 2001) which posits that humans may be inclined to adopt behavioural patterns through the observation of models, Eikhof et al. (2013) theorizes that mass media have the potential to influence people's perceptions of the personal and professional choices available to them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Media's influence:

Previous studies speak on the concept of media influence on attitudes and behavioural aspects. Many theoretical models have been developed by researchers for observing persuasion and behavioural aspects among people. Cognitive response theory (CRM), the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM) are some examples of these theoretical models (Zampetakis et. al 2015). It is also said that cinema serves as a medium of social inclusion for large pockets of people. Bhavnani R (2007) in his study 'Barriers to Diversity in Films' speaks about how cinema is playing a social inclusion role and cites Hudock 1993 that cinema plays an important social inclusion role, reaching out to otherwise under-served elements of the local population (Hudock, 1993; The British Film Institute and the UK Film Council Report, 2005).

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

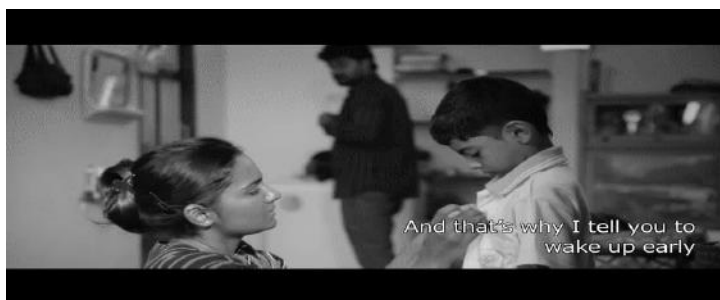
- To analyse the various iconographic elements in the short film 'Lakshmi'.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The researcher has envisioned to analyse the various iconographic elements present in the short film 'Lakshmi.'

5. ANALYSIS:

ICONOGRAPHY:



ICON 1 & 2 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.1 & 4.2



ICON 3 & 4 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.3 & 4.4



ICON 5 & 6 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.5 & 4.6

The short film Lakshmi, begins with a typical establishing shot of a working housewife in a household. It depicts the protagonist Lakshmi as a homemaker who prepares food, gets her son ready for school whilst her husband is also getting ready to go to his workplace amidst being scolded by her husband. Upon his departure she gets ready to go to her office and at night has to satisfy her husband for sexual needs even though she doesn't enjoy it. (Icons 1 to 6)

This routine continues for a period of time and she is okay with it. One day her husband gets a call from an unknown number. Lakshmi attends the call and asks who is on the other line by asking "Who is this?" (*Hello*). She gets a response asking "Can I speak to Shekhar? (*Sekhar irukkara?*)" Upon further questioning by Lakshmi as to who the person is, the call gets disconnected and then she questions her husband as to who the woman is as there is no chance of women working at his workplace which happens to be a lathe. The husband retorts that it is not her concern and that the other woman is a friend. It now dawns for Lakshmi that her husband is having an extra-marital affair with another woman (Icon 7 to 9). It can be inferred from Icon 10 that Lakshmi has realised the extra-marital affair of her husband and is in a shock.



ICON 7 & 8 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.7 & 4.8



ICON 9 & 10 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.9 & 4.10



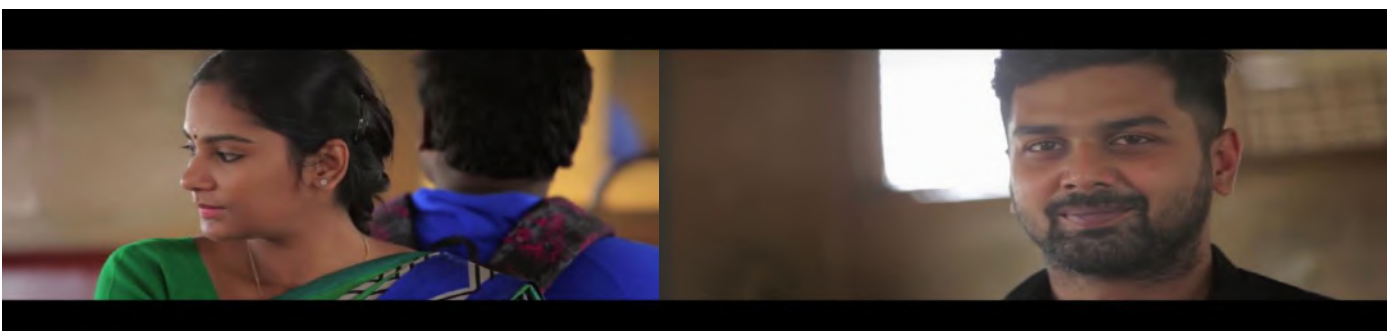
ICON 11 & 12 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.11 & 4.12

It can be inferred from Icon 11 and 12 that Lakshmi is also bore of the mundane schedule that she is always used to and wants a break from it. The icons 11 and 12 further establish that she also wants to break away from the mundane stuff she is going through daily.



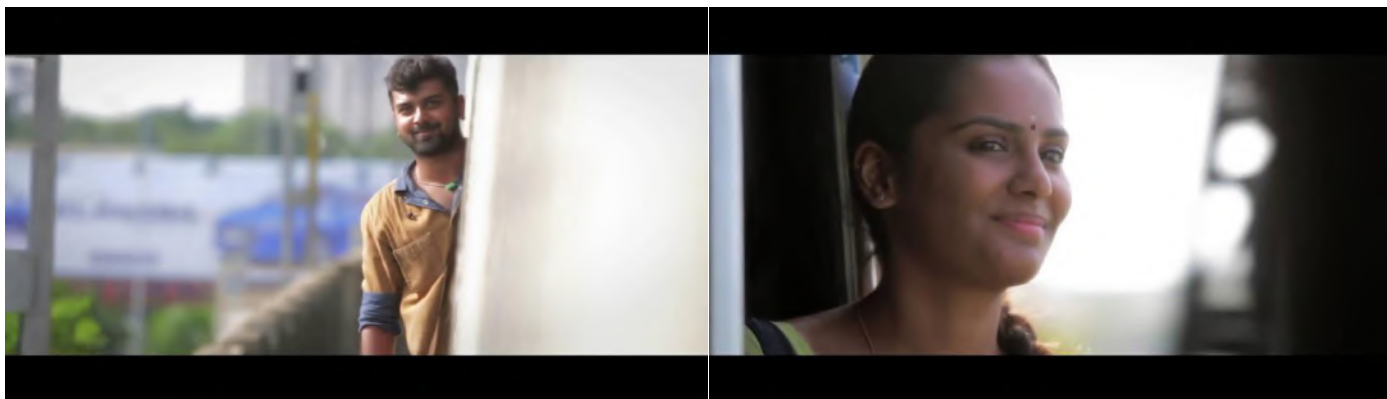
ICON 13 & 14 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.13 & 4.14

Icons 13 and 14 establishes the first meeting of Kathir and Lakshmi in a MRTS train. Kathir is a sculptor who also paints and whom she meets during the course of her journey home through MRTS (Mass Rapid Train System).

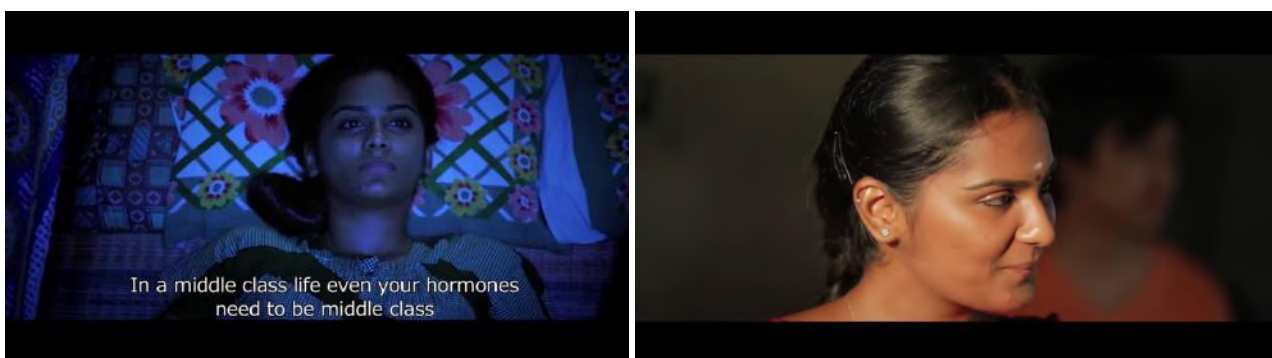


ICON 15 & 16 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.15 & 4.16

Icon 15 to 18 establishes how Kathir and Lakshmi try to get a sense of comfortableness during the travel in the train in the forthcoming days.

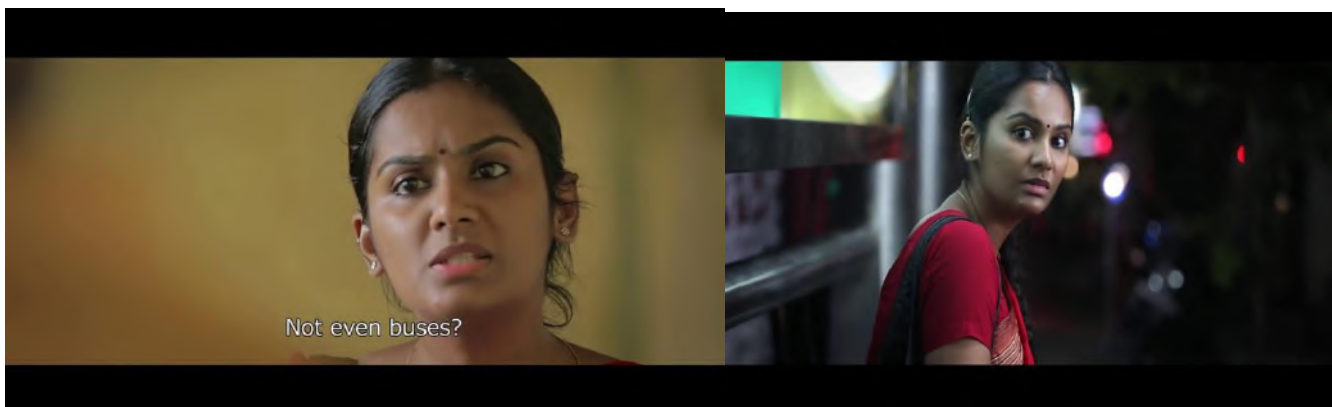


ICON 17 & 18 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.17 & 4.18



ICON 19 & 20 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.19 & 4.20

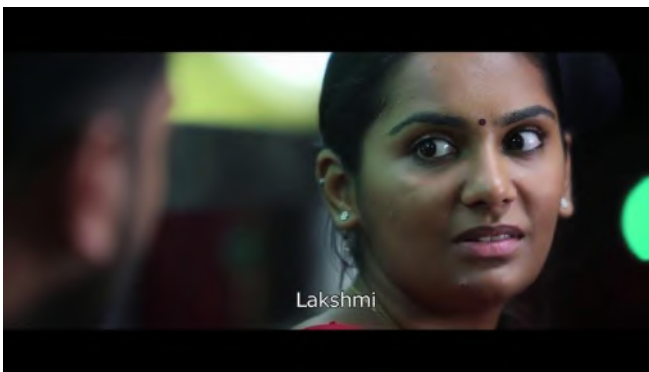
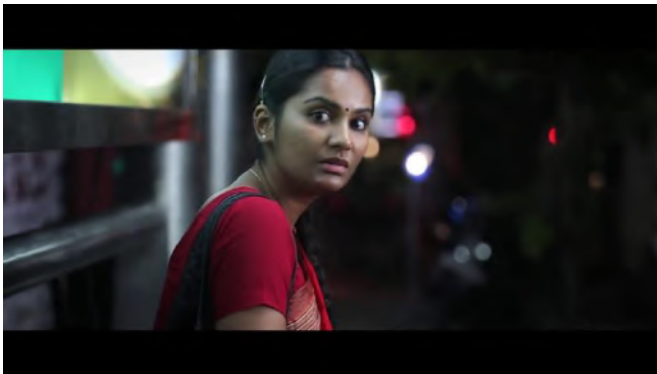
It can be inferred from icon 19 and 20 that Lakshmi is showing her inclinations towards an extra-marital affair through her dialogue in her mind which says “In a middle class life even your hormones need to be middle class.” (*Middle class vazhkaila, udambula irukkara hormones kuda middle class ah than irukkanum*) This statement in her mind helps us to infer that Lakshmi is interested in an affair outside her marriage and is confirmed subtly through her smile to Kathir during their usual journey through the trains (Icon 20).



ICON 21 & 22 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.21 & 4.22

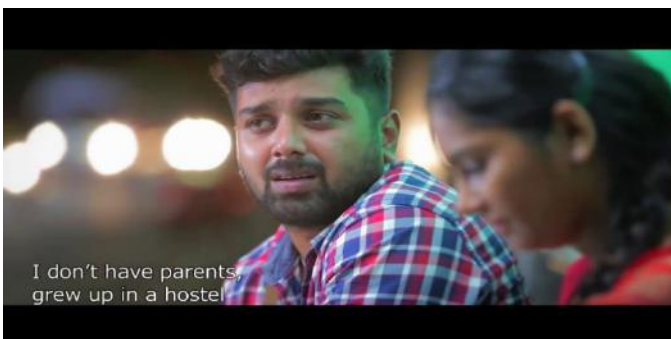
During one of such travels back from her workplace, Lakshmi finds herself affected because of cancellation of trains due to Cauvery issue. Icons 21 and 22 uses the Cauvery issue and the disruption of train services. However, it has to be noted that this is a glaring error on the part of the director in visualising that local train services were affected due to Cauvery issue where in reality only government and private busses and train services plying to and fro from both the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were affected.

It is seen as a glaring error as the protagonists Lakshmi and Kathir are only shown travelling in an MRTS (Mass Rapid Train System) that does not have any implication or connection to the Cauvery issue and also primarily for the fact that the protagonists are local travellers i.e. their places of residence are purely within or around Chennai where there are more trains plying on the routes. Also, it has to be noted that despite many of the trade unions and political parties calling for a state wide bandh in Tamil Nadu for attacks against Tamil people and that Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC), State Transport Corporation (STC) busses, MRTS, and cab services were the only source of transportation for people to commute to and from work (Abdullah, N. 2016).



ICON 23, 24 & 25 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.23, 4.24 & 4.25

Icons 23, 24 and 25 helps us to infer that Lakshmi is seen waiting at a bus stop looking for an alternative means of transportation to reach her home after informing her husband regarding her precarious situation. In this juncture, Kathir introduces himself and starts a conversation with Lakshmi by asking her name. She replies “Lakshmi” (*Lakshmi*).



ICON 26 & 27 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.26 & 4.27

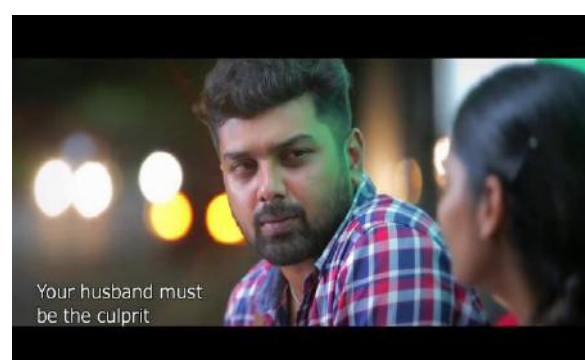
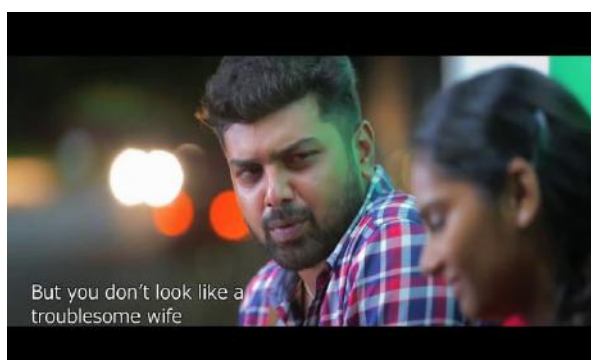
It can be inferred from icons 26 and 27 that Kathir is speaking more about himself stating that he is an orphan and grew up in a hostel. He is also seen saying his wish to Lakshmi that he wants to travel all over the world, it can be seen through the dialogue “I don't have parents, grew up in a hostel. Before I die, I want immigration seal of all the countries on my passport.” (*Enakku appa amma lam illa, valarnthathu ellam hostel la than, saavarathukkulla ella countries oda immigration seals um en passport la irukkanum nga*).



ICON 28, 29 & 30 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.28, 4.29 & 4.30

Later he spurs Lakshmi to open up about herself by asking her to tell more about herself, she later says that she doesn't have any big dreams as Kathir and that she's an ordinary girl. (*Enakku ungala maathiri kanavellam illenga naan oru satharnama ponnu*)

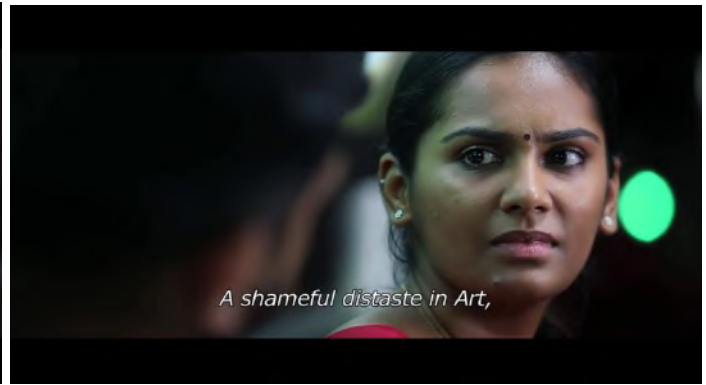
Kathir then asks about what she does in her free time to which Lakshmi replies that I cook, I clean, I take care of my husband and my kid. (*Pathi neram samachutukittu, veeta sutham pannitruppen, veetukaarar ethavathu kettarna seivam, paiyyana pathuppen*). Kathir then appreciates her by saying that taking care of the family whilst going for a job is more tedious and shakes her hand, Lakshmi though is hesitant but eventually shakes her hand (Icon 29). He later questions whether anyone has complimented her for being an interesting person for which she shakes her head in the negative and later wishes her to be the first person to compliment her.



ICON 31 & 32 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.31 & 4.32

Icons 31 and 32 helps us to infer through next dialogue which traverses through a simple conversation whether Lakshmi's marriage was a love marriage or an arranged marriage. After the conversation, Kathir tells to Lakshmi that she doesn't look like a troublesome wife and that her husband must be the troublesome one (*Ungala paratha prechanai panra pondatti mathiri therila, unga husband than culprit ah irukkanum*).

This conversation tries to reiterate that husbands and men are the ones who are troublesome and that women and wives are nobler in nature. She smiles and then Kathir asks her if she reads Bharathiyar to which she nods in the negative.



ICON 33 & 34 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.33 & 4.34



ICON 35 & 36 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.35 & 4.36

Submerging in the depths of ignorance,

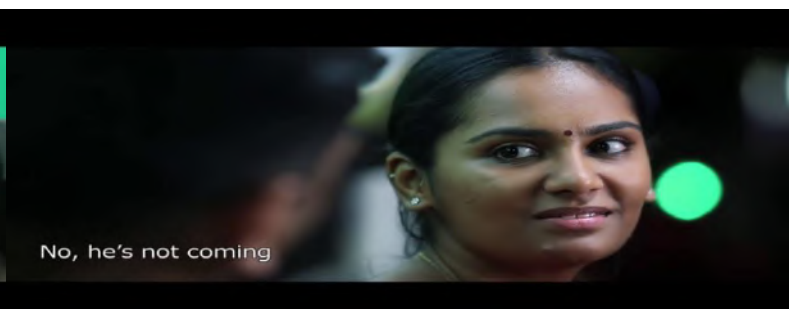
A shameful distaste in Art,

Spit, upon her, O'Girl

Listen to the revolutionary One!

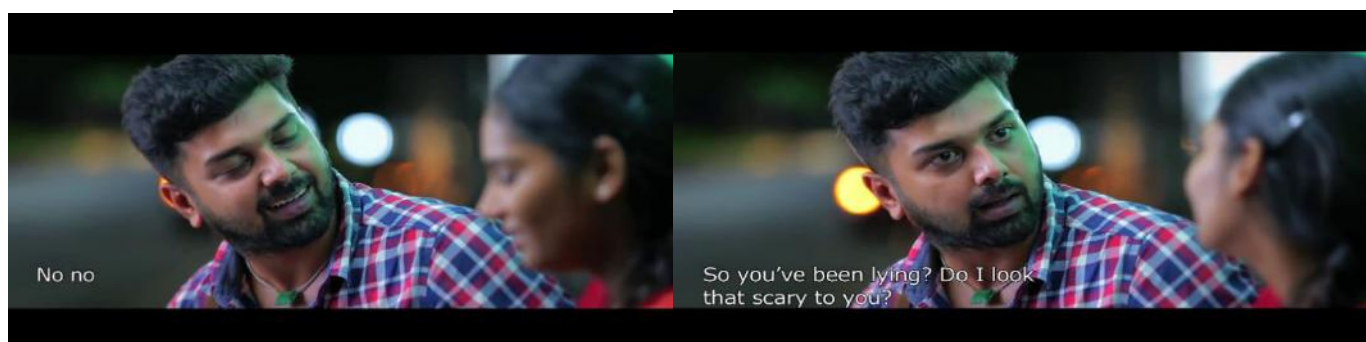
(Amizhthu perilam ariyamaiyil, avalameethi kalaieendri vaazhvathai, puzhanthuthalluthal pennagam aaguma, udayakkanner uraippathaik keateero)

Icons 33 to 36 speaks about one of Mahakavi Bharathiyar's poetry on Feminism. The poetry says that one could even have ignorance, a bad taste in Art, but should listen to the tears of a woman on whom wishes and wills are forced upon against her wishes.



ICONS 37 & 38 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.37 & 4.38

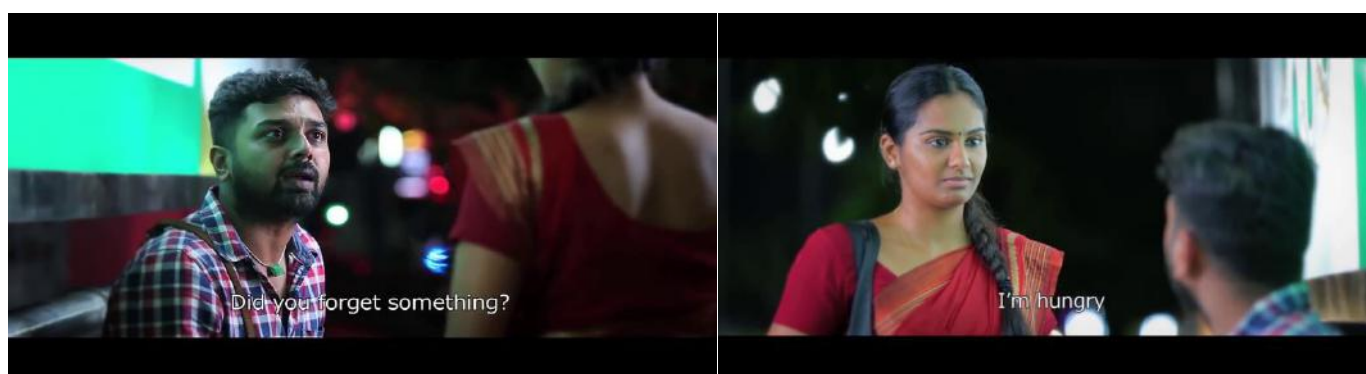
Icons 37 and 38 happens to be a conversation between Kathir and Lakshmi. Kathir is being concerned as to how Lakshmi will reach her home as it is very late at night. He quips It's really late. Your husband isn't here? (*Yennanga ivlo neram achu, unga husband varave illa*). Lakshmi replies that he's not coming (*avaru varamaataru*).



ICON 39 & 40 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.39 & 4.40

Icons 39 and 40 are continuation of the same conversation. Kathir asks Lakshmi whether she was lying and that she's afraid of him to which Lakshmi replies in the negative. Lakshmi added that she's staying at a friends' house nearby and that is too late. Kathir then asks her to stay at his house if she's ok with it and that he'll cook well and for a change she can taste his food instead of always being the one to cook.

Lakshmi later calls her husband and informs her of her precarious situation for which her husband retorts asking so what. Lakshmi tells him that she'll stay at her mother's house and immediately the husband is concerned about tomorrow's breakfast, she replies that she'll come home earlier and will make breakfast.



ICON 41 & 42 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.41 & 4.42

The next sequence has Kathir and Lakshmi in a conversation. Kathir asks Lakshmi whether she forgot something to which Lakshmi replies that she's hungry. This implies that she's agreed to go to his house for the stay.

The next sequences shows her entry into Kathir's house and observes sculptures and paintings all around the walls and other places of the hall. Kathir then begins to prepare food and start conversing. The later sequence has another poetry albeit a longer version of Bharathiyar's poetry already mentioned above.



ICON 43 & 44 Courtesy: YouTube **Figure 4.43 & 4.44**

Icons 43 and 44 speak more about Bharathiyar's poetry

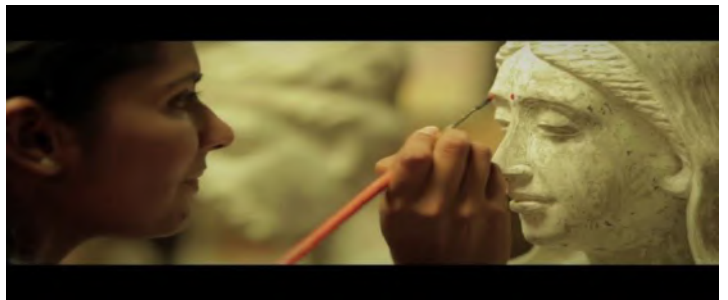
With a determined look, steadfast look,

Ideals that hold strong...

And wisdom to judge the world,

A women does not falter!

(Nimirtha nadai, neerkonda paarvai, nilathiya yavum achatha nerigal, thiruntha nyangathethram iruppathal semmai maathar thirambuvathillai aam)



ICON 45 & 46 Courtesy: YouTube **Figure 4.45 & 4.46**

Icons 45 and 46 shows Kathir urging Lakshmi to try her hand at sculpting a miniature statue of a women and then she puts a vermilion on the face of the statue. The next sequence is seen Lakshmi showing Kathir a perfectly sculpted statue of a woman.



ICON 47 & 48 Courtesy: YouTube **Figure 4.47 & 4.48**

The next sequence shows Kathir pulling aside Lakshmi to a wall mounted mirror and frees her braided hair.

ICON 49 to 54 Courtesy: YouTube **Figure 4.49 to 4.54**

There's another song that plays in the background

Smile dear star, smile

For you have not faltered

You have merely lit another man's sky,

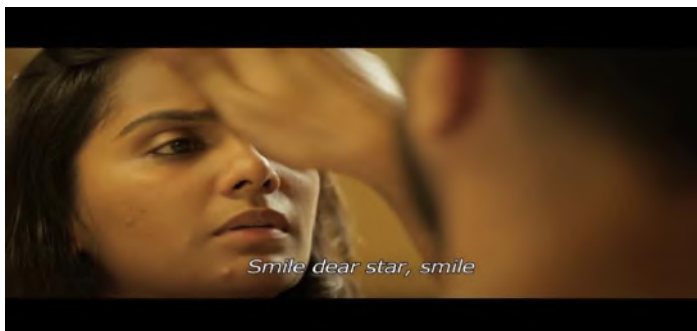
Brighter than it ever was..

You may go back to being eclipsed,

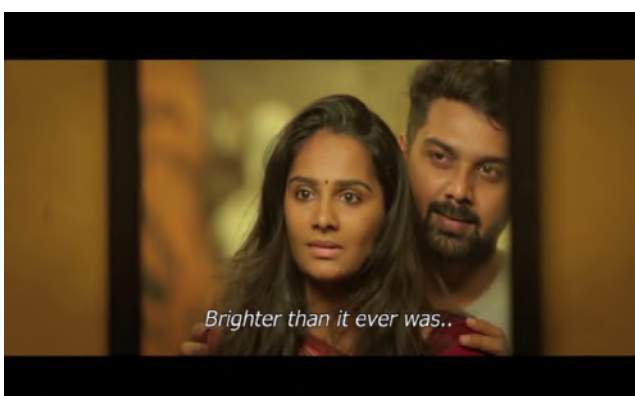
But remember, one day you shone

Brighter than you ever have!

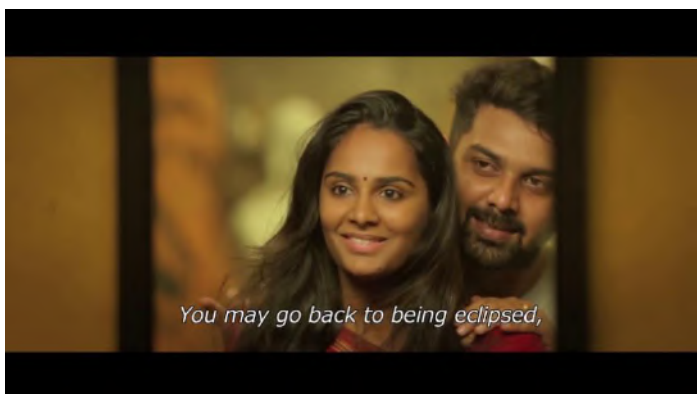
(Mellachchiri mounatharagaye, vear oruvanin vaanil olithaathunindri vear oru kuttramum unn kanakil seerathathu, krahathai nokki oodalam, aanal marakkathe kanmaniye nee milinrnthu nindraadai manathil kondu kummi adi)



ICON 49 and 50 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.49 & 4.50



ICON 51 and 52 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.51 & 4.52



ICON 53 and 54 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.53 & 4.54



ICON 55 and 56 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.55 & 4.56



ICON 57 & 58 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.57 & 4.58

Icons 55 to 58 shows Lakshmi having a one-night stand with Kathir.



ICON 59 & 60 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.59 & 4.60

Icons 59 and 60 shows Lakshmi back to her previous routine of preparing food and her husband asking her whether she's not getting late for train - Lakshmi, aren't you not late for the train? (eh lakshmi, train ku late avale?)



ICON 61 & 62 Courtesy: YouTube Figure 4.61 & 4.62

Icons 61 and 62 shows Lakshmi answering her husband saying that she's going to travel in bus for a few days – I'm going by bus for a few days (naan konja naalikki bus la than ga poren).

The short film ends on an interesting note by keeping viewers on a suspense as to whether Lakshmi is really going in bus to work or will continue to have an affair with Kathir after her one-night stand with him.

6. CONCLUSION:

The current research study was undertaken with an objective of analysing the iconographic elements present in the short film Lakshmi, which is the most hotly debated and discussed short film in YouTube. This short film has Lakshmi Priyaa Chandramouli and Nandan as the leads amongst others. Directed by Sarjun KM and produced by I B Karthikeyan, the music in the short film was scored by Sundaramurthy KS

and cinematography by Sudarshan Srinivasan. The music and cinematography elevates the film's pace and credit must be given to the director for getting his placements spot on. The director also captures the essence of the dissatisfaction of the part of the women due to an unsuccessful marriage and seeks solace outside her marriage. The opening sequence and the ending sequences are apt justifications for the same. There still exists a variety of viewpoints from various quarters on this short film for its portrayal of woman and the concept of Feminism. There are many facets of people who are voicing their views against this short film, because it shows the women to be justifying her act of having an extra-marital affair after knowing about her husbands' extra-marital affair. There are also facets of people who are lending their support to the same short film Lakshmi, saying that it is the lens through which we view these short films and are promptly agreeing to the standpoint of the women. It has to be observed that such portrayals are not new in the industry and there are many blockbuster box office hits such as Sathilelavathi and Agni natchatiram amongst others which had portrayed women as villainous characters and in similar veins as Lakshmi and were accepted and given rave reviews.

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Disclaimer: All the images used in this research film work have been taken from Lakshmi, the short film in YouTube.