

Women Empowerment in Selected Indian Cinema: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: *The empowerment of women, gender equality, and feminism are described in contemporary India. Society has changed by touching on these topics that are rarely discussed in the Indian film industry. The problems of women have been greatly focused on by contemporary directors. Feminism in Indian cinema has undergone a notable evolution, reflecting broader societal changes and challenges over the decades. From its early days to the contemporary era, Indian cinema has both mirrored and influenced perceptions of gender roles, empowerment, and equality. These films reflect changing attitudes towards gender roles and empowerment. Women's roles have changed significantly in modern life. In earlier times, the roles of women were bounded by rituals and patriarchy. Visual media influences society in many ways that affect individuals' personal lives. Cinema directly or indirectly influences society through the clothes they wear, how they speak, and their social behavior. This study tries to discover whether women's productive work has empowered them or weakened their positions in the films in which they appear. Cinema always reflected women's image, status, and role in society. Religion and mythology always influenced films whereby women characters were seen as the epitome of virtue and values, those who could do no wrong, quality of loyalty and obedience to the husband. Hindi cinema successfully institutionalized patriarchal values. In films, the victim's wife refuses to leave her husband's house despite severe physical and emotional violence and the rationale of leaving the marital house only at the time of her death. This is possible because art and cinema are the mirror of society. I have selected five films, Fashion (2008), No One Killed Jessica (2011), English Vinglish (2012), Queen (2013), and Pink (2016), for this study, where women's empowerment has been emphasized. The films discussed in this article demonstrate the range of thought among filmmakers about the status of women in Indian society*

Keywords: Empowerment, Women, Feminism, Indian society, Hindi cinema, Patriarchal.

Article History: Received: 10th May, 2024, Revised: 21st May, 2024, Accepted: 24th June, 2024, Published: 30th June, 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

All Feminism, the empowerment of women, and gender equality are discussed in contemporary India. Society has changed by touching on these topics that are rarely discussed in the Indian film industry. Feminism in Indian cinema has undergone a notable evolution, reflecting broader societal changes and challenges over the decades. From its early days to the contemporary era, Indian cinema has both mirrored and influenced perceptions of gender roles, empowerment, and equality. These films reflect changing attitudes towards gender roles and empowerment.

Women's roles have changed significantly in modern life. In earlier times, the roles of women were bounded by rituals and patriarchy. Recently, the status of women has been elevated above previous conventions, enabling women to take part in business, politics, law, science, medicine, sports, defense, and cinema. In India, cinema has always been popular. Visual media influences society in many ways that affect individuals' personal lives. Cinema directly or indirectly influences society through the clothes they wear, how they speak, and their social behavior.

Cinema always reflected women's image, status and role in society. Religion and mythology always influenced films whereby women characters were seen as the epitome of virtue and values, those who could do no wrong, quality of loyalty and obedience to the husband. Hindi cinema successfully institutionalized patriarchal values. Films like Dahej (1950), Devi (1970), Pati Parmeshwar (1988), Gauri (1968) depicted women as submissive wives and martyrs for their families. The study has depicted images of women in cinema as a concern during the 1960s and 1970s, criticizing women's image in film and their roles in the film industry. In films, the victim's wife refuses to leave her husband's house despite severe physical and emotional violence and the rationale of leaving the marital house only at the time of her death. Over time roles however have changed, from being dependent on their male counterparts to very independently carrying the storyline forward. Films and Societal Transformation Art and cinema play a major role in bringing about social change. This is possible because art and cinema are the mirror of society.

II. LIYERATURE REVIEW

The V. Kalyani described in the paper "The Portrayal of Women's Empowerment in Select Indian Movies"

that Women are less interested in reducing their role in the household and the care of children than in enlarging their role in the economy and society. As if to support this growth, the entire world now treats women's empowerment more seriously than in the past.

Ayushi .G described in the paper "Analyzing Portrayal of women in Bollywood Cinema" that Sometime films are made for entertainment but it is often affecting women's intelligence and dignity. The interest in films taken by feminists raised from the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in cinema. There is a fundamental transformation in role of women in modern India with the gradual change in the perception of women in society and made great progresses towards equality in role in movies in recent decades. Way of portrait of women in cinema has been a major issue of debate in India.

Research Gap

In the above-mentioned paper, I go through the literature review which I have mentioned in the reference of the paper. Through this literature, I have found some research gaps which I have tried to decrease in this paper.

- How portraying women in Indian cinema is a step toward women's empowerment?
- Are the representations of working women in the films chosen free of patriarchal modes or are they trapped within patriarchy as much as their non-working colleagues?

III. OBJECTIVES

1. How Indian film Industry has changed the way it portrays women?
2. To identify the portrayal of women in the early 1990s Bollywood cinema.
3. To explore the portrayal of women in the current scenario of Indian Cinema.
4. To try and discover whether women's productive work has empowered them or weakened their positions in the films in which they appear. .

IV. METHODOLOGY

Our History aims to discover the truth about the past, and some guidelines for the person in search of that truth have been discovered.

- Read the respective literature from which the film had been made.
- Source of criticism
- Watch Hindi films which are selected in the study.

V. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Art and cinema play a major role in bringing about social change. This is possible because art and cinema mirror society. Intellectual filmmakers hope to

achieve social revolution by making socially pertinent movies. However it is rare to see movies accurately representing marginalized segments of society because mainstream Indian cinema prefers to avoid raising uncomfortable questions about social issues. This has begun to change in recent times, as vulnerable groups, including women and people in poverty, are being portrayed in independent films and a few studio productions. Here, review of some Indian movies that deal with the issue of how women can become more empowered. The five films, Fashion (2008), No One Killed Jessica (2011), , English Vinglish (2012), Queen (2013), and Pink (2016), are selected for this study, where women's empowerment has been emphasized. Based on the actual response of the students to the pretests, detailed explanatory notes for each question were prepared and shared with the engineering students.

Fashion (2008)

Fashion (Bhandarkar 2008) depicts the life and struggle of fashion models. Fashion is a significant film in Indian cinema that explores the glamorous yet tumultuous world of the fashion industry. The movie provides a candid portrayal of the highs and lows experienced by models and designers, shedding light on issues such as substance abuse, exploitation, and the price of fame.

From a critical perspective, "Fashion" received praise for its realistic depiction of the industry's darker side, backed by strong performances from its lead actors, particularly Priyanka Chopra who played the central role. The film's narrative authenticity and its ability to delve into the psychological and emotional challenges faced by those in the fashion world were well-received.

No One Killed Jessica (2011)

No One Killed Jessica is an Indian thriller based on the murder of a model in New Delhi by the son of a high-ranking politician. In the film, the murder of Jessica Lal takes place in a nightclub in 1999. Jessica's parents file a police complaint against the accused, but the police take no action, leaving the accused free. When the case finally goes to trial, the venue is moved to Mumbai, where money plays a major role in preventing even a semblance of justice. When the case is transferred to Delhi, political power plays a major role in perpetuating injustice. As a result, this case gains nationwide attention on the front page of the daily newspapers. The public takes the issue to the streets, expressing resentment at the authorities for corruption based on political favoritism. Jessica's sister Sabrina gets journalist Meera involved in the case. They persuaded the court to reopen the case to present evidence of what happened to Jessica. The accused is arrested and detained in jail. By their willpower, courage, and perseverance, these two women have laid bare the role of favoritism in the legal system, the negligence

of the police, and corruption in political circles. From a critical standpoint, "No One Killed Jessica" received acclaim for its powerful narrative and performances. The film adeptly captures the public outcry and legal battle that followed Jessica Lal's murder, highlighting the role of media in shaping public opinion and influencing legal outcomes. Rani Mukerji and Vidya Balan delivered strong performances in their respective roles, adding depth and emotion to the film's portrayal of justice denied and eventually achieved.

Visually, the film is realistic and gritty, effectively recreating the urban landscape of Delhi and the courtroom drama surrounding the case. The cinematography and editing contribute to the film's tense and dramatic atmosphere, enhancing its impact on the audience.

English Vinglish (2012)

English Vinglish is the story of an ordinary Indian housewife Shashi who wants a new outlook on life by learning to speak English. Shashi runs a small business on her premises in India. But her husband and her daughters mock her for being unable to speak English. A series of circumstances requires her to face being alone in New York City for 15 days without any assistance. That situation was very much challenging even for a well-educated person. New York's multicultural atmosphere is daunting. But Shashi accepts the challenge and even learns some English. Returning home, she demonstrates her English knowledge to her husband and children. Although she is now good at English, she still chooses to read a Hindi daily newspaper. Thus, the film offers two messages. First, women can realize real freedom through a powerful weapon called education, as it has the power to change their lives. Second, language should not be used as a benchmark to measure the value of a person. This film contains a two-part guide for how women can attain self-actualization in modern India.

Queen (2013)

Usually, Indian movies center around a male hero who saves the female lead from problems. However, this trend has changed, and female-centered movies such as Queen have become more common. Queen is an unusual movie in India. It tells a simple, sensible story, and yet it is entertaining. Rani is a young woman living in a typical Punjabi village. She expects to get married, but her fiancé abandons her. She decides to take the planned honeymoon alone by traveling outside India. In the course of the story, she is transformed from being shy and frightened in a foreign country to a courageous woman who recovers from an attempted attack on her. Although she is brave, she is not portrayed as having the conventional characteristics of bravery; instead, she has both tough and sentimental sides to her Women's Empowerment in Indian Movies 193 varies according to circumstances. This movie also reveals gender

discrimination in India. A well-educated woman has a wonderful job opportunity, but her fiancé does not allow her to work outside the home. In conformity with the conventional mindset of Indian society, she is expected to give up her individuality for the family. Yet, both in the movie and in life, Indian women resist those conditions and the discrimination they experience. In this movie, the protagonist's travel experience transforms her from an innocent girl into a valiant woman; that is the highlight of the film. The film reveals the spirit of women. This applies to Rani, the protagonist, and to a woman she meets in Paris. Although Vijaylakshmi is a single mother, she is not limited to a pessimistic or feeble role. She is a ferociously independent single mother. She enjoys all sorts of things, has many relationships, and is frolicsome in her drinking. She is consistently shown to be brave and strong. The strength and independence of Indian women is often masked by the controls imposed on them by societal values. They are brave enough to fight against discrimination and injustice, but they are also tender in valuing and loving people. Visually, "Queen" captures the picturesque landscapes of Paris and Amsterdam, providing a vibrant backdrop that enhances the protagonist's journey of self-exploration. The cinematography and editing contribute to the film's narrative flow, effectively conveying Rani's emotional evolution throughout her travels.

Pink (2016)

Pink (Chowdhury 2016) reveals a lot about women and how society views them. Three professional women live together in an apartment. Through a male friend, they meet Rajveer Singh at a music concert. Rajveer and his friends invite the women to a party at a resort. At the party, they are having drinks, which Rajveer believes is a green signal that the women wish to have sex, so he and the others take steps toward that belief. The women resist and fight. In the fight, Minal hits Rajveer on the head with a bottle, injuring him. This sets in motion the conflict that drives the story. Rajveer wants revenge on the women. He and his friends menace the women, assault them, and insult them, but they cannot change the mind of Minal, who sees herself as a victim, not a perpetrator. In her view, she hit Rajveer in self-defense to avoid being molested or raped. Rajveer is annoyed because of his hurt pride, so he presses charges of assault against Minal. By filing a police report before the women do, he gains the upper hand in the legal proceedings. At the resulting trial, the women are treated by the opposing attorney as loose women who deserve whatever the men might have done. Only through the skillful work of Minal's attorney does the full truth come to light. The fundamental questions of the movie are the proper female behavior and why women are considered wrong merely by meeting with men. These narrow-minded men always try to curb the freedom of

women by questioning their morality. The American Journal of Economics and Sociology Thus this movie reminds us that women should be allowed to live on the same terms as men. Their feelings should be respected, and their permission or consent about intimacy is essential. For their safety and well-being, women should have the right to fight off anyone who seeks to take advantage of them. Women are not puppets or objects to be exploited. This movie raises an important issue, but it is only one issue among many; it is like taking a drop of water from an ocean. We may hope that future movies can push the boundaries beyond a woman's right to demand consent. However, *Pink* is a good start, and more such movies are needed to transform the existing patriarchal society into a decent one and to give more power to women. *Queen* is a powerful Indian courtroom drama that addresses issues of consent, gender inequality, and societal prejudices against women. The film revolves around three young women who are implicated in a controversial incident and the legal battle that ensues. Critically acclaimed, "*Pink*" received praise for its hard-hitting narrative and strong performances. Amitabh Bachchan's portrayal of a retired lawyer who takes up the case pro bono garnered particular acclaim, along with the performances of Taapsee Pannu and other supporting cast members. The film effectively challenges societal norms and sheds light on the importance of respecting women's choices and autonomy.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

Each of the movies examined in this article speaks to a different dimension of what is required for women to gain power and overcome systems that oppress them. Fashion may inspire women who face adversity, even in top-level jobs that look glamorous from the outside. Women who have been lucky enough to succeed against great odds are sometimes envied because of their success, but those women must still fight discrimination and harassment. Fashion may inspire women who face adversity, even in top-level jobs that look glamorous from the outside. Women who have been lucky enough to succeed against great odds are sometimes envied because of their success, but those women must still fight discrimination and harassment.

English Vinglish shows a woman who must learn English to gain the respect of her family. Critically acclaimed, "*English Vinglish*" received praise for its original screenplay and the nuanced portrayal of its characters. Sridevi's performance as Shashi was particularly celebrated for its depth and authenticity, capturing the character's inner transformation as she gains confidence and self-respect through her language-learning journey.

Visually, the film beautifully contrasts the bustling streets of New York with the intimate moments of Shashi's personal growth, enhancing the narrative's

emotional impact. The cinematography and production design effectively convey the cultural and emotional landscapes that Shashi navigates, providing a rich backdrop for her story.

No One Killed Jessica tells a story of two women's perseverance and courage in trying to make the justice system work. But we might ask why so much effort is required for police, lawyers, and courts to act appropriately. We can be proud of the women who devoted themselves to justice, but their extraordinary work should not be necessary. The death of a young woman should be enough to lead to a serious investigation and the punishment of the wrongdoer. The protagonist in *Queen* undergoes the biggest transformation of any of the women in these movies. "*Queen*" is celebrated for its authenticity and fresh perspective, offering a feminist narrative. The film's narrative is both humorous and poignant, as it chronicles Rani's transformation from a sheltered girl to a confident woman who learns to embrace life on her terms. She begins as the shy and submissive young woman who everyone around her protects. She has learned to keep herself back in every step of life. But being rejected by her fiancé gives her a chance to face life on her own, and she makes the best of her new situation. From this, we learn that every woman should have a chance to develop and maintain her own individuality and unique spirit.

Visually, '*Pink*' adopts a realistic and gritty aesthetic that complements its serious themes. The courtroom scenes are meticulously crafted to heighten dramatic tension, while the film's cinematography and editing contribute to its narrative impact. It offers a thought-provoking exploration of justice, morality, and the complexities of gender dynamics in contemporary India, making it a significant contribution to Indian cinema. From a patriarchal perspective, Minal and her friends act irresponsibly when they meet men in the evening to relax with them. Their critics would say they are acting like men. The women claim a right to public space and take for granted that the law will protect them from predators. Although the women Women's Empowerment in Indian Movies 201 are exonerated by the end of the movie, the question lingers afterward: How long will it take for women to have the same right to public safety as men.

CONCLUSION

The movies discussed in this article explored the range of thought among filmmakers about the status of women in Indian society. Some directors think that the path to empowering women is wide open and needs only be followed. Others recognize the obstacles on the road to women's equality and imagine they are easily overcome by individual women with enough determination. In those cases, women need to be conscious that their individuality is a precious achievement because a successful woman's personality has the power to influence other

aspiring women. The most cutting-edge directors understand that the road to gender equality is not straight and that the obstacles to success are subtle and systemic, with both men and women silently accepting social traditions that stand in the way of full equality for women. As a new generation of directors gains dominance in the film industry, we can expect more innovative work that will challenge long-held prejudices and move society in the direction of supporting the development of women with independent ideas, goals, and dreams.

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