

STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSIVENESS AND IDENTITY IN THE MOVIES: *ENGLISH VINGLISH* AND *36 VAYADHINILE*

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Abstract: Globalisation is one of the predominant key factors that have played a vital role in transforming society and which eventually led to changes in the overtones of culture. The radical changes have a remarkable influence on the way women identify themselves and approach their lives. It has resulted in the emergence of women struggling and unfolding to find new opportunities to redefine themselves. The new found ideologies in turn have impacted this patriarchal society to a great extent that it has brought with it individual and social changes and different perspectives about the roles of women and men in family and society, both in concealed lives and communal structures. This change is vividly captured and portrayed in the creative works and it is analysed and interpreted by various theories which are newly formulated or reformulated and one such is the re-emergence of the new age feminist theory. Feminist theory forms the basis for the study of the experiences of women in society, in particular, women's eminence and position within their society and family. Feminist thoughts assumes that women's welfare and perspectives are convincing in and of themselves and are not lesser or secondary to those of men's, nor should they be distinct only in relation to or as a difference from men's experiences. The absence of these assumptions in customary and sociological learning is one of the criticisms which have emerged in feminist erudition. This work explores upon new feminism as a conceptual framework for analysing the changes in women's life and attitude through two films namely *English Vinglish* and *36 Vayadhinile*.

Keywords: Globalisation, patriarchal society, new age feminism, *English Vinglish*, *36 Vayadhinile*.

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalisation plays a vital role worldwide in influencing and integrating societies. It has got its lion's share in significantly changing Indian culture and has left its footsteps in every facet of life. Indian culture is distinguished from all other culture due to its uniqueness, but the impact of globalisation has brought with it drastic changes that has currently transformed the frame work of cultural dimensions and in maintaining equilibrium of gender equality. Women are custodians for prioritising their lives and they no longer play subservient roles in family in this globalised society. Women, for many years were kept veiled; home was their only world and outer world were meant only for men, the bread-winners of a family. Hence, they were swathed by such a dark life that they remained ignored for many years. These struggles are built upon feminism as a theoretical framework in the light of new age feminist theory. "Feminism as a mode of analysis is grounded in the connectedness between the social institutions which shape the daily lives of individuals and in an orientation to social change." (Hartsock, 1981). There are numerous art works and media studies that act as weapons and pact with

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the recent social changes and also acts as a gateway for women to vanquish their bondages of subjugation that tie them up in family and society.

Cinema is also considered worthwhile by feminists to be a cultural practise representing misunderstood myths about women and femininity. "Feminist criticism was directed at stereotypes of women, mostly in films." (Haskell 1973; Rosen 1973). Many novelists and filmmakers have put efforts to throw light upon the worrisome situations and predicaments of women, by presenting them as high-flying figures in their novels and films. They depict women who emerge from the bondage of their family and warlike society; their prominence is on groping women's lives and their consciousness within the framework of family, representing women in their long-established roles as mothers, wives and daughters as they have an intense emotional perceptive of human motivations and a sharp bendable intelligence.

Women's Struggle with Family and Society

Women have faced many hardships and struggles they have been tormented for years. But now things have transformed, women induced as much valour within themselves so as to unveil their swathe to the society. They want prominence at equivalence with men in every respect possible. There is no doubt that they have been triumphant to a certain extent in reaching their goals as they can now edify themselves as much as they want. If not a lot, some are acquiring elevated and reputable positions in work places but, still it makes us think that all of women's demands are not concerned and it will never be fulfilled if they continue this way that is because each time whenever they are demanding something, they are in fact giving men a choice. In other words, women haven't really been triumphant in changing man's stance towards them. According to Janet Richards,

Women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous beings...A man is right, being a man. The woman is in the wrong...Feminists have recognized the factor of gender differentiation as the root cause of women's derogatory status in the hierarchical order of most of the societies. (Janet Richards 1981)

Women are suppressed and oppressed by their own family and the sophisticated society which still makes them crave for their identity and inclusiveness in it. Until they rise to a status in the society through their noteworthy efforts and by surpassing certain hurdles as their husbands and children disgrace and neglect them. The ultimate way to concord with this issue would be to make men realize their own importance to the society as a whole.

Constitution gives equal importance to women's position and accorded equality to them. It is seen that where all citizens irrespective of gender are equal, women are clearly less equal than men. There exists high gender inequality in our country. (Harapriya Mohapatra 2015)

Several vibrant writers and film makers have voiced their opinion against the subjugation of women and extended their support by projecting and highlighting the struggle of women, in their families and the mountainous tasks that they are entitled to shoulder. The true progression of women requires a lucid approval to be given, to the worth of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and professions. Furthermore, these roles and professions should be cordially combined if we wish the society to bloom and culture to be virtuous and wholly human. Men should truly value and care for women with respect for their individual dignity. According to Harapriya Mohapatra,

Women begin their day at the crack of dawn and take care of the entire family, send children to school, pack their husbands' lunch. They have to perform their duties equivalent to their male counterparts. On returning home they have to complete all their household works and have to manage the same routine of the next day. The works they do at home are uncountable. This invisibilisation of women's labour fails to get them their due weightage in the family. (Harapriya Mohapatra 2015)

Feminist Theory as Conceptual Framework

Feminist theory has an impact on film theory and new feminist criticism as it deals with the predicament of women. The new feminist theory forms the basis for the study of the hardships of women in society; particularly of women's status and position within that society. Women's experiences emerge from its social and economical structure. According to Jaggar feminist theory is,

Feminist scholars are distinguished from non-feminist scholars precisely by their common social interest in ending women's oppression, and they see their scholarly work as contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how women's liberation should be achieved. (Jaggar, 1983)

Women aim for their liberation for which feminists create a pathway for them to acquire it, as through it women are liberated from all their subjugation in life.

Feminism is also a mode for analysing certain ways of thinking to eliminate the oppression and suppression of women in her family and in society in order to achieve liberation and emerge as successful citizens. (Andersen, 1983; Hartsock, 1981; Jaggar, 1983).

Reflections of Feminism in *English Vinglish* and *36 Vayadhinile*

With regard to this struggle of inclusiveness and identity two films portray women who are disregarded by their own husbands and children namely *English Vinglish* which is a directorial debut of Gauri Shinde and *36 Vayadhinile* directed by Rosshan

Andrews, are taken to explore and record the pulse of women in the society and about their projection in family and society. Both the female protagonists through their stupendous efforts are well received and identified by the society, until then they are out of favour and mortified by their husbands and daughters. They are appreciated by the society but not by their husbands who ignore the talents and behave selfish in every aspect of life. They are disregarded in the society by their husbands as they feel that their inclusion limits within home and kitchen so both the women protagonist in the movie try to prove them and their identity, so that they are accepted by their husbands and children.

Plot Overview

English Vinglish is a story of a hushed, kind-hearted housewife Shashi, who endures small insults from her well learned husband and daughter every day because of her inability to converse and comprehend English fluently. Though she is capable and open-minded somehow those qualities don't get perceived by them. Then a trip to visit her sister in Manhattan, she resolves to enrol in an English Learners class and encounters new people who edify her to value herself beyond the tapered stance of her family.

36 *Vayadhinile* is a story of Vasanthi, a housewife who sacrifices her dream for her husband and daughter. The family is planning to migrate to Ireland but due to Vasanthi's over age, she is shorn of visa and work permit. Trouble starts for her when she gets a prospect to meet the President of India where she ruins it by falling unconscious and becomes a chuckle to many on social media. Her friends at work and family feel embarrassed about the whole mishap. Vasanthi finds herself in a void when her husband and daughter do not need her anymore and decides to leave her and go to Ireland. Then enters Susan, a college friend who reminds Vasanthi of how she used to perform with intelligence and take up battle for causes in her college days and this inspires Vasanthi to rediscover herself. What Vasanthi does to regained and rediscover and how she becomes her true identity to reach the greatest heights forms the rest of the story.

Struggle for Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness is a concept of social integration which has a key role to create a society for all by eradicating discriminations; likewise these movies attempt to show how women, in life face suppression and oppression in society and family which always come in decipherable forms, often under love, protection and the assurance of security as depicted in the movies. The characters Shashi and Vasanthi struggle to ascertain their identity, as they are very much hurt by their husbands in many situations. For instance, in *English Vinglish* Shashi's husband grinningly says, "My wife, she was born to make laddoos!" to the white boy who is being inducted into

the family which makes Shashi to silently transform tremulous. Shashi's daughter invective her many times as she is unable to fluently converse in English.

In 36 *Vayadhinile*, Vasanthi tells her daughter about her forfeit of her dreams, to which her daughter replies, "Oh! What a tremendous sacrifice! You stand apart from all mothers? Those who want to achieve will do so come what may. You were laid back then, and now blaming it on me coolly."

Likewise Vasanthi's husband also fulfils his dreams selfishly not bothering about his wife. Both the characters struggle for their identity in their families as they are very much snubbed by their husbands and daughters.

Inclusiveness in Society

Inclusiveness in society is of major importance for women as both the characters Shashi and Vasanthi gloriously attain it by their spectacular efforts. As Shashi joins an English Learners class, she meets one of her classmate Laurent, who is a chef and when they converse she sadly opens up that, "When a man cooks, its art... When a woman cooks, it's her duty" but Laurent replies, "Women cook good food with love for family" which makes her feel assured of herself as it paves way for her to re-emerge in the society.



**Figure 1: Shashi fluently and boldly orders coffee from the same coffee shop, where once she stammered to order in English.
English Vinglish, 2012**

Likewise Vasanthi's college friend Susan meets her once and finds Vasanthi entirely changed compared to her in her college days she asks, "Where is that Vasanthi?" to which Vasanthi replies, "I don't know. I must search for her." Susan explains Vasanthi saying that,

There are 5 do's a girl can do. And 50 don'ts she should not do. We can do the 5 which everyone likes. But can't do the 50 we dream about! That's

how simple a life of a woman is. Since we are the answers for everything, they thrive being the questions. If we become the question, nobody will have an answer!” Susan continues “Your dream is your signature.

Vasanthi then realises and gets assured to regain her self-respect she gets an opportunity to give a speech through social media about her experience with the President and the grounds behind her unconsciousness for which she gets admiration from the society for her brave attempt to address the society through the same social media which once ridiculed her.



Figure 2: Vasanthi gets reassurance and confidence through her college friend Susan David after which she decides to attest herself in the society.
36 Vayadhinile, 2015

Inclusiveness in Family

Family is a miniature of the society where everyone is comfortable and find solace in but women sometimes feel that they no longer adhere to it at some circumstances where they are ridiculed, at that juncture they tremendously start to prove themselves to regain their self-respect. The characters Shashi and Vasanthi thrive for their inclusiveness and identity in their families, as each gets a chance to prove them to the society they prudently make use of it through which they succeed and get their recognition in the family also.

As Shashi gives a speech in English at the wedding which makes her husband and daughter perplexed as the speech was very inspiring and true to heart where Shashi was open about her views of family. She starts her speech as,

Meera... Kevin... Maybe you'll very busy... but have family... son... daughter. In this big world... your small little world, it will make you feel so good. Family... family can never be... never be... never be judgemental! Family will never... put you down... will never make you feel small. Family is the only one who will never laugh at your weaknesses. Family is the

only place where you will always get love and respect. That's all Meera and Kevin... I wish you all the best. Thank you.

This speech makes her husband and daughter realise how they have been treating Shashi all these years and they reconcile with her and accept her.



Figure 3: Shashi's English speech at the wedding astonishes her husband and daughter, who feel guilty and regret for their behaviour towards her all these years.
English Vinglish, 2012

Likewise, Vasanthi is offered a chance to address a message about the dangers that the Indian residents face by consuming artificially grown vegetables and food poisoned by fertilizers and chemicals. Vasanthi regains her true self and reaches great heights through her presentation about the importance of organic vegetables through which she is accredited and when her husband returns to take her to Ireland for the sake of their daughter and to look after the household works as there maids are very pricey, for which Vasanthi diligently refuses and questions her husband, "Who decides the expiry date of a woman's dream?" to which he has no answer and then he realises his selfish behaviour towards her understands and accepts her.



Figure 4: Vasanthi attests herself with her family and in the society.
36 Vayadhinile, 2015

CONCLUSION

With the advent of new feminist theories which reflects the varicoloured making of women's cinema as the globalised society have adverse effects on women particularly in the developing countries. Women play countless roles, as mothers, wives etc. responsible for their children and families, as working women at home and outside. Their family is their world in miniature but they struggle in it till date to establish themselves in various ways so that they can be recognised by their family. To attest them in their family they had to attest them in the society first through which they get acknowledgment in both, as they are uncared by their husbands and daughters for what they were which leads them to prove them to the society and family. In the movies *English Vinglish* and *36 Vayadhinile* they accomplish something in their endeavour and they attest themselves and regain their self-respect. Their struggle for inclusiveness and identity were rewarding in their lives and they re-emerge.

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