

FEMINISM THROUGH FEMININE ORIENTED MOVIES*(English Vinglish, Gangubai Kathiawadi, Taali)***Tisha Jangir**

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ABSTRACT

The research paper talks about feminism through two movies and a web series - English Vinglish, Gangubai Kathiawadi, and Taali. All three of them have shown feminism in a bold way and female roles as individuals or in the family through different perspectives. Feminism is a movement for women struggling for gender equality in every sector, such as education, politics, and many others. Feminists aim for women's liberation by making various decisions for themselves such as expressing both characteristics of masculine and feminine confidently. The main motive of this research paper is to highlight the problem faced by women in society that has been depicted through these movies through entertainment and fun. The main protagonists of these movies Shashi, Gangubai, and Shree Gauri are helping society to understand the role of women and the equality that they deserve and if they get that opportunity to prove themselves they can bring out a change in societal norms and attributes. The movie English Vinglish (2012) portrays the situation and battle of those "students", who are bad at English, and exhibits the significance pretended by the English language in the globalized world. Then Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022) shows the strong women's liberation role of Gangubai who is a sex worker. The film's continuous spotlight on the community school contiguous the sex worker and their rights in society further in Taali (2023) has shown the strong condition of transgender and how Gauri has brought out the extraordinary change in the view of the general public towards transgenders among others and demonstrated the way ladies can enable anything assuming she needs to and can be similarly dealt with like men in the society.

Keywords: English Vinglish, Feminism, Gangubai Kathiawadi, strong women, Taali.

INTRODUCTION

Feminism empowers not just women but extends its impact across sex, gender, caste and more shaping a diverse mosaic of societal progress. It empowers the people and society as a whole. A very common misconception is that only women can be feminists the word feminism itself was first coined in 1837 by French philosopher, Charles Fourier (as *féminisme*). It originally referred to feminine qualities or character, but that sense isn't used anymore. Women's roles have changed in today's scenario, now they are not just bound to do household chores or just be good wife material who takes care of their family and children. In earlier times women's roles were restricted to all these rituals and customs but these presumed roles are changing in the present time and now women do what they desire. "I raise my voice- not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ...we cannot all succeed when half of us are held back" (*Malala Yousafzai*)

A person's voice is a very powerful asset. A lot of the time we as women don't get treated

equally as our counterparts. For others, they have been forced into a corner to be seen but never heard. We are overlooked in general. We need to do more. Stand up for those who can't speak. Use our voices whenever we can. It's not about who can be the loudest, it's about amplifying our voices. Instead of being forced into silence, we must demand to be heard. "Our thoughts and feelings are no less important than others. Never let your voice or those around you be silent again" (*Medium*).

In this, Indian cinema has played a vital role by depicting major issues that take the viewer to a world that is different from the real one, a world that provides an escape from the daily grind of life. Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption that plays a key role in molding opinions, constructing images, and reinforcing dominant cultural values. The paper deals with representations of women characters in mainstream Bollywood movies and how feminism is depicted in society, how much today's women are empowered, and what great things they have done to make themselves stand side by side with men. Films are

believed to be the opium of the Indian masses as people rely on this medium to help them escape to a world of fantasy. "In a very explicit way, cinema has shaped the cultural, social, and political values of people of this country" (*stereotyping women in Indian cinema*). Indian cinema has the strength to change patriarchy and to talk on those topics that are not appropriate according to society but are much needed to talk on. In this research paper, feminism has been presented by two astonishing movies *English Vinglish* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, and a web series *Taali*. In these, females are shown assuming their roles not the one defined by the society but the one which makes them very human as men are. They take a stand for themselves whether it's about learning a language, choosing their occupation, or redefining one's gender.

ENGLISH VINGLISH (2012)

Patriarchy manifests and is deeply rooted in many social spheres. It is reinforced through several gender norms and family traditions and in the context of India, the general notion is that men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers. These issues around sexism, easy-going sexism, and the better status given than the English language which has excluded the non-English talking part of the general public are wonderfully addressed by Gauri Shinde's film *English Vinglish*. The story was inspired by Shinde's mother, a Marathi-speaking woman who ran a pickle business at her house in Pune. Her mother was not fluent in English, which embarrassed Shinde as a child. In an interview, Shinde said, "I made this film to say sorry to my mother" (*Production, development*).

In this movie, the main protagonist Shashi Godbole is an Indian homemaker who makes and sells laddoos as a home-run business. Her husband Satish and daughter Sapna take her for granted, mock her because she doesn't speak much English, and generally treat her with disrespect, making Shashi feel negative and insecure. However, her young son, Sagar loves her as she is, and her mother-in-law offers her words of sympathy.

Shashi's older sister Manu, who lives in New York City, invites Shashi's family to her daughter Meera's wedding to Kevin. It is decided that Shashi will go to New York alone 5 weeks before the wedding to help Manu organize. Her husband and children will join her as the wedding approaches. During her flight to New York, Shashi is given inspirational advice by a fellow passenger. While Shashi is in New York, she has a traumatic

experience at a café where the waitress is rude to her due to her inability to communicate in English. "She is comforted by a French chef Laurent who happens to be queuing up behind her at the café as he is weak in English" (*Plot*) their bond gets deeper and stronger than before and while staying with him Shashi realizes what she misses most in her relationship with her husband.

The whole movie revolves around her attempt to regain her dignity and respect in the family by joining English learning classes secretly which generally shows how important it is to be well educated for every gender to take a stand for themselves in public or privately, as learning the English language might just be nothing for some people who had those advantage to learn it in early age but for Shashi after learning and adapting a new language is what gave her a boost to take a stand for herself. It gave her a new personality which she was never aware of this concludes how much a language can make a huge difference in someone's life. "Mard khana banaye toh kala hai, Aurat banaye, toh uska farz hai." (When a man cooks, it's an art. But when a woman cooks, it's her responsibility.): Shashi is in conversation with Laurent about food and cooking. (*English Vinglish*)

This particular dialogue from *English Vinglish* clearly shows that when a man cooks food it is considered art but when a woman does it is considered her duty, this dialogue reflects traditional gender roles and stereotypes that have been prevalent in many societies for a long time, it implies that cooking is something exceptional when done by a man, potentially elevating his status and skills, from a feminist perspective, this situation is problematic because it reinforces traditional gender stereotypes that limit the choices and opportunities available to women. Feminism seeks to challenge and change such stereotypes, advocating for gender equality and the freedom for individuals to pursue their interests and roles without being constrained by societal norms based on their gender. By acting in both cooking and education Shashi proves herself that by giving equal rights to women they can do much greater things in life that will not only help them regain their value and confidence but also make them able to do the right thing in life.

GANGUBAI KATHAIWADI (2022)

The film "*Gangubai Kathiawadi*" directed by *Sanjay Leela Bhansali* displays how the law has excluded women's and other marginalized groups' viewpoints based on knowledge garnered from their

experiences, the focal thrust of this research paper is set on feminism and how feminism has been depicted in Indian cinema, through this film gives a much-needed glimpse into the life of a sex worker. However, the later trajectory of the film revolves around the matriarch of Kamathipura instead of expanding upon the perspectives of the 4,000 sex workers. In between acquiring a Bentley and taking swipes at her rivals, a short cute romance is portrayed between a young tailor, Afsaan (Shantanu Maheshwari), and Gangubai. Both go on dates only for Gangubai to have clarity about the sort of touch that she craves- the one that gives doesn't want. The film opens with a sad and pathetic image of a fourteen-year-old girl Madhu, to whom strenuously lipstick was applied, and a nose-ring was pierced. However, Madhu was constantly retaliating and crying as she wanted to go home. When the situation was no longer controllable by the brothel in charge, Rashmibai, Gangubai was invited to save the situation and control and persuade Madhu to accept her future as a prostitute because that is what her reality was but Gangubai being a strong independent woman never wanted any girl to become prostitute just like she was forced to become.

This movie revolves around the central myths about sex workers and how someone cannot rape a sex worker because a sex worker has consented to sex with anyone and everyone, *Gangubai Kathaiwadi* brings out several points about consent, equal rights in society, how they should be treated well by the society and demolish the concept of patriarchy which treats man as the Subject and woman as the 'Other'. "In the film, 'intersectional feminism' in terms of academic Nivedita Menon has been advanced to acknowledge how women from marginalized communities encounter oppression on manifold fronts – profession, gender, social and financial status, health, education, among other reasons". -From prostitute to Madam of Kamathipura (*Goyal*)

The majority of the depiction of sex workers in Hindi cinema has not been nuanced. Sex workers are depicted as highly sexual beings given three-minute dance sequences, many times portrayed at brothels surrounded by men which generally makes a mindset of the society that this is how sex workers should be treated due to such movies like *Gangubai Kathaiwadi* we can gain knowledge behind the pain and disrespect these people go through on daily basis just to earn bread and be able to feed their

family. This film is a great example of how feminism is just not about sex, gender, or caste it's about equal rights that should be given to every living being. When Gangu delivered her speech in Azad Maidan pressing for rights and dignity for sex workers, she was, in her style, sponsoring intersectional feminism. This is why what Gangu did is so heroic. She said, "Yes, I am a sex worker, and you better respect me for it" (*Gangubai Kathaiwadi*). This is not to say that she was glorifying the trade itself. After all, she fought for the right to education of the kids of Kamathipura so they do not have to work as their mothers had to.

This concludes that movies like *Gangubai Kathaiwadi* are a great way to show society their reality and to bring change in the societal norms and rituals that are bounded around only to women, it also specifies that feminism is not just about women but also about men helping women to shine bright like a star and support them. Gangubai's story and her demands for customary living rights for sex workers perhaps stand significant in the 2022 scenario as the Supreme Court has recently recommended a guideline where the police or the central force has no right to harass or arrest a sex worker if a brothel is in case raided for running unlawfully. Gangubai is not just a historical figure to cherish in our minds, but also, she is a woman who intrigues us with the awareness to fight for our rights with confidence. Despite the difficult circumstances that she faced, she did not let her spirit break, instead, she showed immense courage and resilience she is a true example of self-belief.

TAALI (2023)

Taali is a great web series of six episodes that talk about transgender and their battle for equality. In this web series, Sushmita Sen played the amazing role of the protagonist Gauri aka Gautam whose life was a whole struggle to find out about himself and let himself, his family, and society accept the reality. Since childhood, he loved dressing up as a girl and somewhere inside him he knew he liked to be a girl but sexually he was a boy so his whole life was a roller-coaster ride.

There's a scene in *Taali* in episode 4 "Gauri aa gayi" where she was interviewed on her becoming transgender and on raising her voice for the rights of her community. It was believed that this influenced others to doubt their gender or change their sex, to which she replied that someone is born with a particular gender/sex is what god decides and to accept your reality is what you

decide. “Maa hona koi gender nahi, feeling hai”(Taali,1:52) this particular dialogue in the trailer of *Taali* expresses the real emotion of not any particular gender, caste, or religion but the emotion of love and care towards a child that society has only bound it with mothers, the power of being a women is shown in this series which describes what feminism is all about. Even though Gauri was fighting for her equality against the whole world there was a man like Navin who stood by her all the time and helped her throughout to win her fight.

The show knits together the key turning points of Gauri Sawant's eventful life, her estrangement from her policeman-father (played splendidly by Nandu Madhav) being the most emotionally wrenching of them. She has to come to terms with her physiological and emotional confusions as she grows up in a conservative environment that makes the process all that more challenging. As Gauri evolves from a girl trapped in a boy's body craving acceptance to an assertive transwoman who files a petition in the Supreme Court of India for recognition of her community as the third gender, she has to take on inimical forces both within and outside the world of transgenders. On one hand, there are pimps and brothel keepers. On the other, self-appointed guardians or orthodoxy and people in positions of power (one such person, the dean of a hospital, played by Ananth Mahadevan, faces the brunt of her aggression) stand in her way. But she fought all of them and in the end, she won her fight.

This all happened only because there was a man like Navin who helped her. This particular series shows that feminism and equality is not just about giving women the lead role in every stream but it is about a social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for the equality of the sexes/gender and challenges the systematic inequalities faced by women. The main goals of feminism vary, but they often include promoting women's rights, addressing gender-based discrimination in the patriarchal structures, and advocating for social, political, and economic equality between men and women.

CONCLUSION

The research paper concludes on how through Indian cinema there's wide change in thinking of society and explaining the real meaning of feminism, it's so important for society to accept

all gender types and their equality in society whether it social, political, or cultural. The more people are given rights will benefit society only to grow in every stream. Since the advent of Indian cinema has played a vital role in bringing a change in society and currently also talks about topics that are considered taboo in society, like the movie *English Vinglish (2021)* has shown the importance of language, how much a language can make you feel superior in the gathering, speaking and learning a new language gives a different level of confidence to the person. It varies from person to person in this movie the lead character Shashi was not proficient in speaking the English language due to which she was always treated as a corner child in the room by her husband and daughter. This highlights that educating a woman is of utmost importance even if she doesn't make an earning out of it at least she has the right level of knowledge and can take her stand in society this is what feminism talks about giving rights to women means educating every girl child, treating them equally like men. Feminism is not just about making women the main role in every stream but it is about giving a chance to women in social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for the equality of the sexes and challenges the systemic inequalities faced by women like Maya Angelou has said-“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”

Likewise, *Gangubai Kathaiwadi (2022)* has spoken about the reality of sex workers and how poorly they are treated by the men in society. Gangubai fought for the rights of their community as they are also women but due to the difference of caste, status, and religion they are mistreated in the society. Gangubai is the protagonist of this film and her journey from being a normal girl who belong to a decent family turned into a sex worker because of her beloved, that one mis-happening changed her whole life which later on turned in her favour. She got the biggest lesson from the society that if you have equal rights of living then only you can survive in this world or else you have to face the worst time.

The paper sheds light on the social conduct of female prostitution that traumatizes women. Most importantly, it offers an alternative interpretation of the representation of a prostitute character, not as a woman in vulnerability, but as a victorious powerful feminist figure. The portrayal

of Gangubai as a moral character, being a virtuous leader and mother figure, contradicts her conceived social stigmas as a 'devalued prostitute' and the underworld 'Mafia Queen of Mumbai.' Adding to the study, the symbolic analysis reveals that the representation of the color 'white' signifies the character's morality and purity, highlighting her position as an alleged victim.

Also in *Taali*(2023), Gauri's character shows how if a woman wants to do something she will make it happen doesn't matter how many obstacles come her way to success. Gauri believes that fighting for the rights of transgender and their children's rights to education brings a drastic change in society. Shreegauri Sawant is a renowned Transgender rights activist and social worker based in Mumbai. In 2014, she was a petitioner in a landmark Supreme Court ruling, one that accorded legal status to transgender persons and granted them a range of civil rights and safeguards.

Sawant's non-profit, the Sakhi Char Chowghi Trust, has been active for decades. She adopted a girl, Gayatri, in 2008. Sawant was featured in a viral Vicks campaign; she also appeared in an episode of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, along with Usha Uthup — a personal hero whose trademark large bindi Sawant fashioned as her own. As Gauri (Sen) relates her inspiring life story to a journalist, we get a series of conventional flashbacks: childhood, transition, youth, and motherhood. Feminism is not just about women getting their rights it is about how society makes them feel accepted and equal with men. Through this series, we have seen that Gauri was not the only one who was fighting for their rights. It was Navin, the NGO owner and her dear friend who throughout her journey supported her in the fight for equality in society. This makes him different from other men and also an apt example of what feminism talks about.

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