



Contemporary Representation of Women as 'Grih-Nirmatri' in Hindi Cinema

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Abstract

The role of a woman in society is formative and crucial. Women not only manage household responsibilities but are also working members of society, financially supporting the family. Giving birth to a child to make him a good citizen of a country is a part of her responsibility which is a great duty. A mother is called the first school of a child. They are the unsung hero of our society. Her representation in society in different aspects is very essential.

Representation of women in media is an aspect that is explored quite often from various perspectives, but not as a homemaker. In this paper, researchers tend to find and analyze the action of grih-nirmatri (homemaker) in Hindi cinema (if it all exists) through the films released in the last decades specifically. The main aim is to study if mainstream Hindi cinema is portraying a woman who is mainly a homemaker and struggling to find her identity. Although, every woman is a homemaker even if she is an earning member of a family. Also, this paper attempts to examine how Hindi cinema keeps the essence of women which is an essential part of our Indian culture. Films are an important way of setting norms in a society in general. It works as a social change agent. Hence, it is significant to examine the portrayal of women in films from the above-mentioned perspective.

Keywords: Homemaker, women empowerment, Hindi cinema, the role of women



Introduction:

vittena rakṣyate dharmah vidyā yogena rakṣyate | mṛdunā rakṣyate bhūpaḥ satstriyā rakṣyate
gṛham || - chāṅakya nīti

The above shloka states the importance of a woman in a home which we call a grih nirmatri (homemaker). It says that virtue is protected by wealth, Knowledge is guarded by practice, gentleness protects a king, and home is secured by an excellent lady.

A home where a family lives and these families in turn forms a society where everyone lives and grows. A homemaker takes care of a home, a woman who plays different roles. She is a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother. This states that an excellent lady instills values in a child, keeps track of all needs of a family, and upholds family values and traditions.

‘गृहिणी गृहम् उच्यते;’ is a saying that insists on the fact that in a household, she upholds the family. It is all in her hands. In ancient India, women are aadi-Shakti. It is believed that god resides only in those places where women are respected. The society that oppresses his women always stays in grief and failure.

Many scriptures and mythological have narrated how women are always considered to be the ultimate source of power, patience, and courage.

This research paper tends to examine how a grih nirmatri (homemaker) is portrayed in contemporary Hindi cinema. The place which Indian ancient traditions has given to her, whether films are maintaining the same place.

Films are an essential part of our lives. It has a huge part to play in setting the norms and popular culture at large. For a long time, there are many researchers conducting analyses of the depiction of women characters on the screen from various perspectives. The female portrayal has always been a matter of concern among all researchers across the globe, not only in cinema but also in advertisement and other mediums of mass communication.

Chauhan (2013) in an article titled ‘Role of Women in Indian Cinema;’ stated that Indian cinema has developed since the days of the stereotyped portrayals of women and reflects the society even in this time, but still in this age women are stereotyped in other ways as an item girl and a woman who is known as a love interest of hero. Women are still treated as sexual objects. Though the change is inevitable.

Amaljith A.K. (2021) in a research article titled ‘Feminism and portrayal of woman identities in Indian Cinema’ states that women’s characters in general have evolved a lot in Indian cinema. He specifically talked about Malayalam cinema where women characters have become more strong and opinionated.

Vatika Sibal (2018) in her research paper titled ‘Stereotyping women in Indian cinema’ said that women’s portrayal in cinema has been constructed from a male perspective, so how a male



director fantasized about women has depicted in the same fashion. Also, she said it is irrelevant to say that there is any uniform way of presenting women in films. Cinema should not only entertain, but also it should act as a catalyst for social change. It should present progressive representations of women on screen.

Jingala N. (2020) et al in their book stated the journey of how a women's journey has changed from the inception of Indian cinema till the digital era of storytelling. As the narratives suggest women characters have evolved as strong and independent. Women characters are discovering their worth and identity.

Ahmed (2017) in his article titled "Feminism in Bollywood: Where are the women behind the Camera?" defined that in present times women's based films deal with topics of gender inequalities. The Bollywood feminist films failed to create an influence on society. Films and society mirror each other. Films act as a catalyst for social change. Female on screen has certainly changed, so as in society. Issues such as gender equality, healthy working atmosphere, maternity facilities, and pay parity are now discussed at various forums unlike earlier, where the majority of the women were passive receivers.

Objective:

The objective of this paper is to analyze the depiction of women as grih- nirmati or homemakers in Hindi cinema, more precisely in the last decade. As we can say the presentation and representation of women on screen have changed quite significantly. Hence, in that situation, the presentation of homemakers also undergone any change, and how those changes can be described, is what this paper aimed to understand.

Research Methodology

This study has taken a narrative analysis approach to research which is a qualitative method. A narrative is a way in which a story has been told. It is an in-depth analysis of a narration articulated chronologically. The narration is structured in a way that is construct meaning including its visuals, dialogues, setting, and mise-en-scene. It is a descriptive study of films under study. Narrative analysis refers to a cluster of analytic methods for interpreting texts or visual data that have a storied form (Lia Figgou, Vassilis Pavlopoulos, 2015). Narrative analysis is a useful method for uncovering the underlying ideologies embedded in stories and the larger culture that creates the narratives (Stokes, 2003).

Sample and Justification

As stated above that this paper specifically tends to focus on homemaker's representation in Hindi cinema in the last decade (2012-2021). Hence, this one decade is the universe of the sample. Out of which, using the purposive sampling method three films are undertaken in the study namely English Vinglish (2012), Tumhari sullu (2017), and Panga (2020). The reason for selecting these films is primarily as follows-



- The narrative of these films revolves around female characters who are shown to be a homemaker and struggling for their identity.
- The homemaker is shown as a protagonist in the narrative.
- All three films are well received at the box office and critically acclaimed.

Film	Director	Female Actor	Name of the character	Duration of the film	Genre
English Vinglish	Gauri Shinde	Sridevi	Shashi Godbole	2.14min	Comedy-drama
Tumhari Sullu	Suresh Triveni	Vidya Balan	Sulochana	2.20 min	Comedy - Drama
Panga	Ashwini Iyer	Kangana Ranaut	Jaya Nigam	2.11 min	Sports Film

Descriptions and Discussions:

English Vinglish (2012) is a story of a homemaker Shashi Godbole who is a wife, daughter-in-law and mother of two. She is a small entrepreneur who makes snacks and runs the business from her home only. She is a caring mother who does all household chores along with children and in-laws. Instead of respect, she is been ridiculed by her daughter and husband for not speaking proper English. They made fun of her for underestimating her skills. In the middle of the narrative, she went to the USA to visit her sister for her niece’s wedding and enrolled herself in an English-speaking course. There she got time to think about herself that is where she met new people who respects her for her dedication and intelligence. In the class, she emerged as the best student and from there she gained confidence and identity. In the climax scene where she stood and gave a speech in fluent English that is where she expressed how she felt as an individual when her own family ridiculed her and felt embarrassed of her.

Tumhari sullu (2017) is a story of an ambitious homemaker Sulochana who is taking care of her family and at the same time, she wants to pursue her dreams. Though, her husband is shown to be a supportive person. She is happily married. In her case, her life took a turn when she started working on a night show on a radio station so that she can live her dreams. She tried to balance her responsibilities with work. She chooses to work at night so that at least she can be with her son during the daytime and at night she goes to work while he slept. In the struggle to cope with everything, at one point she left her job considering that she is not able to manage both, but in the end with the support of her family, she continued with her job and helped her husband financially.

Panga (2020) is a sports film genre where the protagonist is a homemaker and a working woman Jaya Nigam. She works in a government office, though she is not satisfied with her job. She is an ex-kabaddi player and wants to be a kabaddi player always. Due to the family constraint, she left her dreams and become a homemaker and a working mother. She kind of forget her dreams until her old friend told her to start playing the sport again and asked her to

do a comeback on the ground. She goes through an emotional roller coaster as she leaves her family behind to chase her dreams. Her husband supported her and took care of the family responsibility. This film showcases their struggles as a family and gender identity.

Data Analysis

Film	Women-Centric	Educated	Identity crisis	Decision Maker	Confident	Strong persona	Ritual / Religiously inclined	Changed in the end
English Vinglish	Y	NC	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Tumhari sullu	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NC	Y
Panga	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NC	Y

Y- Yes, N- No, NC- Not Clear

This table indicates how these three films depicted homemakers in their respective characters.

In English Vinglish, Sridevi’s character was a homely caring woman, always wearing a saree and bindi, a traditional woman. She wants to do something on her own along with discovering her identity small business that the money business, she taking admission classes. This has a feeling of She took care of tirelessly for certain scenes made fun of her



which is why she did a from home. It was told that she earned from her used that money for to English-speaking gesture shows that she self-respect and pride. her family and work them. Still, there are where her own family for her English skills

and that she can only be a homemaker. They undermine her capabilities and remain judgemental towards her.

In a scene where her daughter misbehaves with her and told her that she is embarrassed by her personality, she patiently listens to her and tries to talk to her nicely.

This shows that she is a caring mother. Although she felt disguised for herself. She is not very confident initially in the story as she said that she can't travel to the US alone or she undermines her capabilities. She is



not so strong in the beginning, but as the story progresses and she discovered her true worth, she became confident and strong in the end. She is a religious lady as she is shown to do pooja and followed all rituals at the wedding that she went to attend in the US.

In Tumhari Sullu, Vidya Balan is a happy-go-lucky homemaker. She is blissful in our world with a son and husband. She is shown as a strong, confident woman as she can take a job in a radio station on her merit and did a show which is quite popular. She is a decision-maker in the sense that she decides that she will do the job and convinced her husband that they both can manage household responsibilities.



In a scene, she was shown doing household chores and working simultaneously in her office while being on air. She is a strong woman as she tried to manage and even after her sisters told her to leave the job and concentrate on her son. She didn't listen to anyone to chase her dreams but try hard to manage both

work-life. Of course, she failed sometimes, but she is courageous enough to start again and never let her confidence go off.

In one scene, where she felt that she failed as a mother when her son was caught in school in case of cheating and she called into the principal's office with her husband.



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As far as her representation is concerned, she is not shown as a religious person anywhere in the film. She generally wears Indian attire in the

representation is shown as a religious person anywhere in the film explicitly. Indian attire in the

In Panga, Kangana's character is a working mother. She was shown both in Indian and Western



attire. She is a surly confident and strong woman. She is confused as to whether she should go to the field again for her dreams or not because she needs to leave her son with her husband till the tournament gets over. In a scene, she is seen crying and frustrated with her present situation on the professional front. She said that besides being a happy mother, she has some dreams and every mother has a right to fulfill those dreams.

She was chaotic but certainly has the say in the family. She took her own decision and followed

that. In her case, she got all the support from every corner, but this film is more about internal guilt than external. Like every mother, she felt guilty about leaving her son. She is a decision-maker.

All these characters changed as per the film's narratives and the characters they were portraying. There is a huge change in Shashi Godbole. With the story, she discovers herself and becomes a confident woman. For Sulochana, she got changed in terms of her identity when she realized that she can also support her husband financially and emotionally. In Panga, Jaya fulfilled her dreams and started playing the game she once left due to household responsibilities. She is shown to be more content in the end.



Finding and Conclusion

- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, homemakers are shown to achieve some or other thing outside their house to feel content and to make their identity.
- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, homemakers belong to a middle-class section of society and belong to sub-cultural communities.
- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, homemakers are shown always struggling between family and their dreams. It is also important to mark that in each of these films, the protagonist got full or partial support from family or extended family.
- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, all these women are shown to be caring wives, nurturing mothers, and patient women.
- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, the essence of Indian women are intact in all these characters as they are nowhere shown to be self-centered and careless.



Instead, the film narrated the story and struggle of every Indian woman who tries to strike a balance between her family and dreams. She is shown to give up her dreams and put her family first in all narratives which is true for Indian women as described by Indian culture as she is nurtured.

- Interestingly, all homemakers are earning whether from a job or a small home-run business, but are financially independent. Unlike the earlier portrayal of a homemaker who stays at home and remains financially dependent. This narrative has certainly changed with time.
- In English-Vinglish, Tumahri Sullu, and Panga, all homemakers are shown a mix of modernity and tradition.

The portrayal of women in Indian Cinema has changed over the years including the presentation of a grih- nirmatri (homemaker). She is no longer showcased as a poor and helpless woman who is always waiting for her husband or sons to take care of her. Today it is changed to a woman who is managing both roles well with the help of family and friends. She is chasing her dreams and taking care of her family also. She is ambitious and homely at the same time. A good mix of traditional and modern. She is contributing to nation-building, economic growth, and society as a Bhartiya woman.

Limitation

The limitation of this study is the sample size. Due to time constraints, researchers were only able to examine three films, this sample size can get large to get a clear and more generalized overview.

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