

## PORTRAYAL OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN MOVIES AROUND THE MAJOR WORLD CINEMAS

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**Abstract:** The films a country or a community produces usually reflect the upheavals, the social movements, the changing trends and the persisting traditions in that society. Sometimes, films are also a harbinger of change, when they confront and criticise an evil, and force people to reflect on negative traditions prevalent amidst them.

Today a lot of churning is happening around the world vis a vis the role of women in it. This paper will throw light on the various cinemas of the world and will see how the representation of women in each cinema portrays women as independent and empowered. The way a female is depicted in a movie has changed a lot since the last few decades now. Strong roles are given to females and such portrayal influence the society as a whole for a better future of women.

**Keywords:** Cinema, Empowerment, Women, Women Studies

**Introduction:** Cinema is a medium of entertainment that reflects socio-cultural practices, customs and based on different ideologies. Most of the films project gender-based social issues in which women are represented from a male viewpoint. Films are mere reflection of the society so much so that sometimes they can even influence the public opinion or can mould the viewpoint of the public of the society. Films are one of the important tools of mass communication. In a very explicit way, cinema shapes the cultural, social and political values of people of a country.

Representation of women in films have often been a topic of discussion. Some critics say that female subordination is the reason why they are portrayed in a weaker light than the males of the film. Women always had the potential to act well on screen and stand tall with their male counterparts. There are cases when their potential is not completely shown to the world in order to boast the patriarchy that has always been omnipotent in our society in each and every sphere of the life.

This paper will throw light on the various cinemas of the world and will see how the representation of each cinema is has shown women empowerment in contemporary movies. Though the plots, themes, and treatment of the movies differ from one country to another still the way a female is depicted in a movie is commendable and worth a discussion. However, there may be many women-oriented films where the female character must have been depicted in a strong light but this paper has only collected a few movies from a selected few film industries of the world.

### Research Questions

The question gains importance when we look into the matter of the nation's developing policies. The monetary gains of a nation is essential for its development and the facilities provided to the citizens also play a role in it but there is no mention

of how to treat the citizens in an unbiased way. The society never guaranteed to give all the rights to the women let alone any kind of privileges that are considered appropriate to the status of being a human. Liberal feminists have this view that whatever a man is given by the society, the woman is always given less than that. If in any culture one has to see what it values less, one simply has to look at what it leaves or gives to the women. Women were not given any kind of power, property, pleasure, or prestige. Still they made their niche in every sphere of life and are even competing with their male counterparts in a healthy way.

1. How do we perceive female portrayal in cinema?
2. Can we find any similarity between the portrayals of women form one cinema to another?
3. Does the portrayal reflect the cultural notions of a country?
4. Is it right to generalise the empowerment of females shown in various cinema around the globe and influence the audience with such generalisations?

**Research Methodology:** The methodology used in this paper includes analytical methodology. The researcher uses the already available facts and information and analyses them to make a critical evaluation of the subject. Here the subject is a movie and while a few movies are taken from seven different film industries around the world, the conclusion is made on the basis of the analysis of all the movies separately.

The movies are critically observed and the depiction of the females in the movie is taken into account. The portrayal of females and males are compared and the weightage of characters are seen through the various techniques applied in the movie.

**Portrayal of Empowered Women : Indian Film Industry**

The way women have been portrayed in Indian cinema over the years also speaks volumes about their position and power (or the lack of it) in Indian society. Often, Indian cinema, especially the Hindi film industry has been put in the dock for objectifying women, presenting them as useless second fiddles, or worse just using them to fill the required song and dance routine.

However, despite its sexist tendencies, Indian cinema has also succeeded in portraying numerous women characters that were powerful enough to inspire a generation. If *Mother India* has a profound psychological and emotional impact on its generation, later day movies like *Bhumika*, *Arth*, *Prem Rog*, *Damini*, etc took a more humane and nuanced view of women.

The movie *English Vinglish* (2012), by Gauri Shinde, showed the struggle of a woman who is not English-educated, and yearns for much-needed respect from her spouse and even children. The film depicts how even a mother of two can find happiness and become confident by being positive and determined in her actions.

Shashi turns out to be an idol for all those women who have lost all confidence in them and who are constantly being teased and mocked by their family because of their less educational background. Shashi proved her worth to the others in a subtle way. She never left her family values and always considered them prior to everything else in her life. This consistency in her love and care for the family made everyone realise how important it is to be a support for one's family.

The movie was a small step in displaying struggles of Indian women. The lack of confidence, the absence of self-worth, can be devastating emotionally and psychologically. She emerges into a better woman and a confident one who can stand with the smartest person she had ever known, which is her husband. And to a point it shows that she even overshadows him as a better human being.

**Nigerian Film Industry:** The Nigerian film industry is often known as *Nollywood*, deriving its name from the popular *Hollywood* film industry. It is the second most prolific film industry after the Indian one. *Nollywood* movies mainly deal with how Africans are facing moral dilemmas. One of the famous Nigerian movies *Maami* (2011) directed by Tunde Kelani showed a single mother and her hurdles for bringing up a son as it is emphasised in the whole film that she is without a husband and, therefore, is weak and it is hard for her to raise her child alone.

The film was based on the struggles of a woman who despite all the evils of the society gave righteous morals and lessons to her son. The movie is named after the word 'mother' and the main focus is on the female protagonist through the eyes of her son.

The movie is female oriented as it can be seen from the title. The audience sympathised when they saw a single mother fighting for the basic needs in her life and they empathised with the relationship between a mother with her son which was not only humble but also quite realistic one.

Most of the movie is shown through flashbacks of 'Kashy' the son who kept on thinking about her mother and how difficult it was for a poor mother to raise a child on her own. His mother was always the centre of his thoughts and the news of his father brought violent memories of patriarchy back from his childhood.

The comparison of father and mother in the movie is shown in the light of a country that depends upon the determination of women's struggle which is constantly undermined by the corruption of the patriarchal power. The empowerment of women is shown in a subtle way through the dialogues and the mannerisms of the characters.

**Iranian Film Industry:** Many movies have often shown working women having microwave dinners, coming home late, watching TV alone but still longing for a male for companionship. This clearly shows how a female even after being economically and physically independent is always emotionally dependent on man. This is not only a general notion of filmmakers but it can also be said to have influenced many women and programmed their brains in such a way as to behave and react in a certain way because there is no doubt that cinema influence audience in a huge way. Films often show that even if you happy being single you are secretly sad and melancholic and yearning for a man to be by your side.

The Iranian movie *A Separation* (2011), by Asghar Farhadi, deals with a recently divorced couple where both the husband and the wife are working. The wife is shown as an independent woman who is driving her car and taking her own decisions about leaving her home and even the country that is filled with disastrous happenings every now and then. The husband is shown with an ailing father who is suffering from Alzheimer's and needs constant care. Here the wife is yearning for her husband to confess his love for her in order to give her a reason to stay but the husband is only concerned about his father and daughter and in the end when he asks his wife to stay the reason was simply to take care of his father. Showing that a woman no matter how independent is often treated as a maid by her husband.

The wife is seen economically independent but she is also emotionally attached to her home and family still her ego does not allow her to continue living with a person who does not respect her feelings. The husband, on the other hand, is independent in all senses but needs his wife as a caretaker, he never

admits that he is emotionally, physically, or otherwise attracted and dependent on his wife. The movie shows a realistic picture of a married couple where a wife is supposed to make compromises and has to be flexible all the time whereas the husband is not expected to follow his wife's orders or even consider her wishes or desires in any way.

Despite all the difficulties in their life the wife is determined till the end to leave her husband's house where her wishes and independence is not respected. Shown in a powerful light, the female protagonist of the movie is empowered in an economical as well as emotional way.

**American Film Industry:** The 2006 film *The Devil wears Prada* directed by David Frankel has shown two kinds of empowered women in his movie. One is shown with a business mind who does not care about emotions and feelings of others very often and the other is shown whose life depends upon the intimacy of her friends and family.

Though both the females are independent in their own ways yet both are poles apart when it comes to taking decisions. While one applies her practical judgment the other is happy with her emotional way of looking things.

Miranda Priestly is said to be the icy editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine who was not only respected but also feared by others, including Andrea, her newly appointed junior personal assistant. Miranda was too much into her business that she often ignores her family when it comes to the emotional bonding. Though she takes care of her twin daughters by all means when it comes to money but somehow the sentiments are seen missing.

Andrea is somewhat able to identify the heart that lies within her boss and even defends her when she was being called a callous and selfish person by saying, "if Miranda were a man no one would notice anything about her, except how great she is at her job." This dialogue suggests how the patriarchal society sees a woman in-charge of a big institution when compared to a male one. They are often degraded as career obsessed women whereas men are considered to be loyal to their jobs.

In the end though both the female protagonists are shown parting their ways where Miranda goes into her world of business where she rules and orders everyone being callous and emotionless while Andrea is seen leaving the same place willingly to return to her world where she is loved by her friends and where she feels independent being herself. This is the way both the females were shown empowered in their own ways where both take different decisions but were happy with their lives.

**French Film Industry:** Another well-known movie that shows women empowerment is *Amelie*, a French movie directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet in 2001. The

titular protagonist of the movie was a waif and wants the world to be a better place for its people. The spiritual and emotional empowerment shown in the film is beyond words.

Amelie had a sad childhood but decides to spread joy and happiness everywhere so that no one would experience the melancholy she had gone through. She helps known and unknown persons in her life and does not want to reveal her identity to them. She wants it to be a secret and the twinkle in her eyes could very well portray this feeling.

Each character is depicted in a believable way but Amelie is the one everyone would like to become in real life. The happiness on others' face brings satisfaction to Amelie. Making the aim of her life to give delighting surprises to people, Amelie vicariously feels pleasure when she sees them glad.

The movie clearly shows how empowerment is related to one's own will and determination. She could have chosen to become a hopeless and gloomy soul but she chose to become an exuberant and cheerful person who was not only in control of her happiness but also controls others' key to contentment as well.

**Conclusion:** These few movies clearly show that movies all over the world are showing women in a fresh and bright light with highly empowered spirit, be it in the terms of economic, spiritual, or psychological way. From time immemorial stories and fables were influencing people and now cinema has taken the responsibility in its hands for the same. Being the most effective medium for the society, cinema is conspicuously very powerful and the portrayal of strong and influential leading ladies on-screen not only spread positive vibes around the audience but also plays an important role in shaping the personalities of millions of women around the globe. It is a huge responsibility of the filmmakers to show their characters in a way that it makes the world a better place. We are also glad in a way that some of the major cinemas in the world are representing female characters in a much better way than were shown a few decades ago. Let us all see in the coming years how cinema, which is one of the major medium of mass communication, will influence and help women empowerment around the globe.

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