Relevance of Bechdel Test and Reverse Bechdel Test in Women-Centric Indian Cinema: A Case Study of English Vinglish and Queen

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ABSTRACT

Various researchers have found that the representation of women in films has been repeatedly following gender stereotypes. The feminists all over the world have been in opposition to these gender stereotypes played by women but after constant approaches, the portrayal of female characters has changed. The films English Vinglish and Queen are used to analyze in this study using the Bechdel Test and Reverse Bechdel Test. Bechdel Test and Reverse Bechdel test are used in bringing out whether there is an existence of gender difference in films. The films are analyzed using content analysis of scenes in the films by doing an analysis of how many female characters and how many male characters are mentioned and how many female to female interations are in the film and how many male to male characters interactions are available in the film. The study concludes that the female characters are given a more important place in films than that of the male parts in women-centric films.

Keywords: *Women-Centric Films, Stereotypes, Portrayal of Women, Bechdel Test, English Vinglish and Queen*

INTRODUCTION

Films are a depiction of the society and it plays an important role in shaping the personality of the humans in the times of lost face – to – face interactions. Films have a very high level of influence on how female characters are portrayed?[4]. The stereotypical representation of women in mass media has a big role in influencing the lives of the audience's social behavior[2]. stereotyped in various films. The stereotypical representations portray women as less accepted as persons and more like objects. Patwory (2014), states that women are shown to be completely dormant, totally subservient persons[7]. Alzahrani (2016) states that women were perceived as the weaker sex and consequently as sex objects even if women in some movies are portrayed as strong and independent,

they cannot be equal[2]. Bharathi and Kumar (2016) state that the image of women not recognized because of women accepting the roles given to them, they further claim that gender roles have changed and developed, continually and women these days are getting higher in all aspects of life[3]. The "women's film" itself is an umbrella term that was primarily created for female audiences and has its focus on women and human relations[8]. Murphy (2015) also says that there has been a change in the trend of female heroines, where female heroines are treated equally and fairly in films[5]. Women-centric films portray women as more independent, confident, and career-oriented[1]. There is a new trending point of view where women are being given their identity this is also creating an equal stand to men in society, by providing women with prominent and dominant roles that are socially practiced. This Shift in the portrayal of women is termed as "New Age Man" (NAM). NAM is the combination of traditional and masculine traits which also has men caring for the family, handling household work, etc[4]. Bollywood Hindi films like English Vinglish, kahaani, Queen, Pink, Neerja, Mardaani, Nil Battey Sannata, Mom, Padman, No one Killed Jessica, Manikarnika, Hichki, Marykom, Chhapaak, Soni, Padmavathi, Badla, and the Sky is Pink are good examples of the positive portrayal of women in films and are analyzed to bring out the considerable differences that have taken place in the representation of women in films. In this study we discuss about the films English Vinglish and Queen.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Theories
I. The Bechdel Test

Bechdel test was a test developed by Alison Bechdel as she has written to a friend of her's that for her to see a film it should have the following 3 criteria:

1. Films should have at least two female characters.

2. These female characters need to communicate with each other
3. The topic is something other than a man.

II. The Reverse Bechdel Test

Later a few other researchers have developed The Reverse Bechdel test to see a film it should have the following 3 criteria:

1. Films should have at least two male characters.
2. These male characters need to communicate with each other.
3. The topic is something other than a woman.

B. Reviews
I. Stereotypical Representation of Women in Films

Communicating through movies is the most multifaceted method for correspondence and to change this sort of circumstance, the media chiefs must settle on choices consistently[3]. There is an intense change in women's activists over the "new wave" in the film for more than 75 years[6] and films help in understanding the society in a better way[1]. The film is a feature of the media which is an enormous socio-social factor and women are responsible for the portrayal of their image; these days as they are not recognizing their image instead they are accepting the roles which put them on electronic media on demand[3].

Movies have been utilized as an instrument to depict individual imagination and thoughts which are cannot be attained in actuality. The characters had a vast influence, with an effect on gender stereotypes on the spectators who may range from kids to elders. Even after many debates on how female characters are portrayed in movies? [4]

Alzahrani (2016) concludes that women were seen as feeble and are shown as objects recommending that women are continuously stereotyped in various films[2]. However, the meaning is never fixed, as it depends on the result of social, cultural, and linguistic conventions that can change over time[9].

Gender stereotypes promote hyper-masculinity and women are underrepresented in film. It also says that films need more positive representations of women. The look of overall notable female superheroes and supporting characters therein is the issue"[5]. The stereotypical representations are reinforced in top-grossing films, with female characters being mere accessories to the plot. Even though we see a woman

working in various fields, side by side with men the filmmakers are not able to move from their past[11].

The films have centered more and slowly became a part of people, who are directly or indirectly shaping the ideas and gender roles. The word "woman's film" is an umbrella term as there is no such independent genre in itself referring to Hollywood films of the 1930s to early 1950s created primarily for a female audience" It has a common focus on women and human relations. In this kind of film, they deal with women's concerns where the women/female characters had a lead role. The women's movie has common disapproval. Despite women's movies are considered as inferior yet it makes money and producers produce such films. the films are mostly the imitations of books, short stories, and plays. Some movies are also based on the earlier screenplays of versions like the movie, stageplay, and novels. Sometimes our material may be from the earlier material produced which is very common in the movie industry[8].

These days women are getting higher with big steps of success in any field[3]. Women are being depicted in a different way instead of playing the roles of women taking care of children and staying at home and the role of the daughter, etc…

II. Changing Portrayal of Women in Indian Films

There has been a revolution in the portrayal of women in Indian cinema[10]. The present-day movies show women as self-oriented, self-assured, and ambitious[10, 1]. Indian films provide women roles which set an example to others that have very less amount of chances to show-case themselves and because the Bollywood films are doing well in the industry the female spectators relate themselves with the characters in the films[1].

Movies portray that which is happening around us and looking forward that men also follow that which is shown in films reducing the stereotypes of men. So, there is an increasing trend in films which is termed as "New Age Man (NAM)" that has the roles of male changing from the traditional manner which thereby resulted in improving the importance and supremacy of women in movies that are growing in the society. The new trend NAM was a combination of both men and women where the male character has the role of taking care and doing the household work. This new trend has improved the way females where shown in films and the male-parts also are coming to a new mindset where they think that women and men don't need to have any difference in the industry as well as the society. The author concludes that men are being

challenged at their place of work due to this shifting situation of society. Due to globalization, there has been an advancement in society[4].

Murphy (2015) mentions, that there has been a change in the portrayal of characters. Through the examination of the messages concerning the changing portrayal; that the depictions are sending to the audience are done by selecting prevalent themes or current attitudes toward women[5]. The images of females in the recent world are affected and this is due to the significance of women which is portrayed by media[1].

C. Film Reviews

The films are selected from after post-liberalization and are women-centered films for analyzing. The English Vinglish and Queen. In all these films the female characters play a major role and they are struggling for their own identity

1. English Vinglish(2012):- The life of an uneducated and her struggles to learn English just for the sake of her daughter who always rejected or made fun of her mother.
2. Queen(2013):- The story is about a girl who's marriage got canceled before the day of the marriage and her struggles to come out of the pain she has and ends with the challenging decision she makes at the end of the story.

METHOD

There are many films which are produced by the Bollywood film industry which focus on problems, crimes of women in India. The films like English Vinglish and Queen are the films selected for this study as they share similar story timeline, these films are being analyzed with the Bechdel Test and Reverse Bechdel Test. The films are selected based on their commercial success, content analysis of movies regarding no.of.female characters and no.of.male characters in these selected films and how many of them are having a conversation with the same gender while comparing we will arrive at an understanding of who is standing under the group of marginalized in women-centric films. The people whose names are mentioned are only considered excluding names like Maji, Biji, Dadi, Airhostress, Security, etc. the people in the background of the conversation are not considered in this study. The conversations on the telephone are ignored as the camera doesn't show the other person who is on the other side of the call at the same time video calls are considered in the study as it is showing the other person on call. The conversations to

a congregation are not as it is to all of them who are there. These conversations have no limit, e.g. "Hi" is also considered in this study. Conversations that had sign language were not considered. Songs used to express the emotions are also not considered.

DISCUSSION and ANALYSIS

In this study, the researcher is trying to find how many female characters and male characters respectively are there involved in these two films with relation to the the character and are given names as Sahsi, Sapna, Sagar, Godbole, etc in English Vinglish and Rani, Sonal, Mehra, Dhingra, etc in Queen. In two of these films, the story revolves around the female character and the problems faced by the female character how she tries to come out of it, this creates awareness about the same. In these films, the female character is more into the family environment obeying, and after certain problems they face they go to foreign and in the land that is not known to them they learn to live on their own and happily return to their country with all Self-respect, Self –identity and ambitious about themselves.

In the film English Vinglish, the heroine(Sahi) is being put down by her husband and her daughter because she doesn't know English and there arises a situation that the heroine has to travel to a foreign country Newyork all alone. Sashi learns to speak English in less than 4 weeks and tells her daughter and her husband that even she can speak English. In Queen, the heroine(Rani) is rejected by her fiance before the day of her marriage because she is not so modern, even though it was a love marriage. Later after her grandmother's conversation with her, she decides to go for her honeymoon to Paris all alone which she planned of going after her marriage with her husband. There in Paris, she learns how to dress in a modern way and she gets used to the foreign culture. Rani sends her photograph to her fiancé.. Eventually, , he finds the place where Rani is staying and waits there to meet her but she refuses to speak to him and tells him that she will speak to him the next day. After they met the next day she tells him that they can speak to each other once she returns to Delhi. Queen is a film that doesn't end like the routine film ending where the girl goes back to her finance when he returns and the story ends up happy but here the girl goes and gives her engagement ring back to her finance and leaves that place

The Bechdel analysis is done in the following manner :

1. The conversation should be with the same gender.

2. The people whose names are mentioned are only considered excluding names like Maji, Biji, Dadi, Airhostress, Security, etc.
3. The people in the background of the conversation are not considered in this study.
4. The conversations on the telephone are ignored as the camera doesn't show the other person who is on the other side of the call at the same time video calls are considered in the study as it is showing the other person on call.

5. The conversations to a congregation are not considered, as it is to all of them who are there.
6. These conversations have no time limit, e.g. "Hi" is also considered in this study.
7. Conversations that had sign language were not considered.
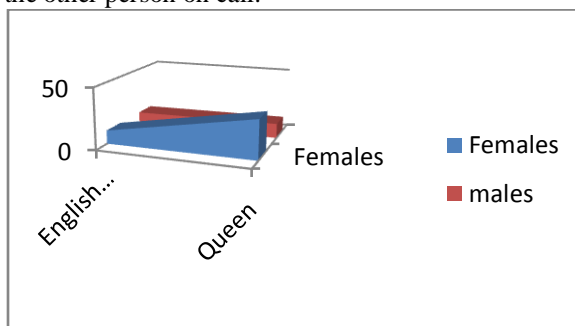8. Songs used to express the emotions are also not considered.

Fig 1: Number of Male characters and Female characters

The number of Male and Female characters as shown in Fig.1 are as follows:

1. There are 11 female Characters and 11 Male Male characters in English Vinglish that follow the criteria.

2. There 9 female Characters and 9 Male Male characters in the film Queen that follow the criteria.
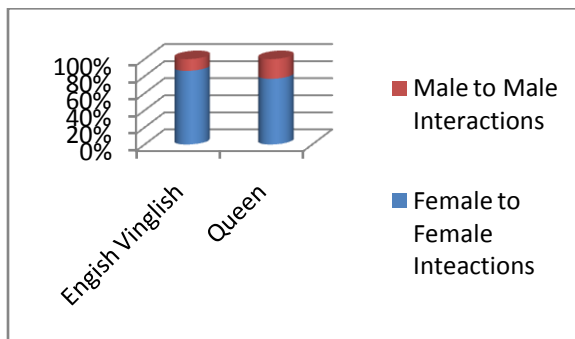

Fig 2: The number of female-to-female characters and male-to-male conversations

The Conversations in the films as shown in the above Fig.2

1. There are 44 Female to Female Interactions and 7 Male to Male Interactions in the film English Vinglish.
2. The films Queen has 30 Female ti female Interactions and 9 Male to Male Interactions.

In these films, the female and male characters are given equal roles, but when coming to the

show the other person who is on the other side of the call. The conversations to a congregation are not

conversations female-to-female interactions are given more weightage than male-to-male interactions.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Bechdel Test was applicable to this study in a myriad ways. However, only two films are considered here, where the protoganists eventually carve a niche for themselves. The limitation of this study is only two films are considered. Moreover, conversations on the telephone are not considered as the camera doesn't

considered as it addresses a common gathering . Conversations that had sign language were not

considered. Songs used to express the emotions are also not considered.

We see that in women-centric films the female and male characters are given equal roles, but when coming to the conversations female-to-female interactions are given more weightage than male-to-male interactions. Female characters are accepted as persons in women-centric films more than as objects. They are also given roles that keep them on positive side of the film stating that the female can do anything if they decide to do it. As many researchers have stated that there is a positive portrayal of women in recent films, the study also proves that women are given equal importance with men in all aspects of life. So, the new trending point of view NAM suits these two films. Male characters are coming under the marginalized group.

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