Women Empowerment through Greenhouse Project as Portrayed in the Post-Feminist Tamil Film 36 Vayadhinile

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Abstract

The inception of post-feminism happened during the 80's, and it is a highly debated topic since the word “post” can be referred as “dead” or “after” feminism. Its goals are different from second wave and third wave feminism. One of the main goals of post-feminism is that women can be equally empowered as men. To realize this goal, women should be financially stable to run their family by themselves. In the beginning, the post-feminist generation focused on media a lot. In the present scenario, there are many types of media available. For the purpose of study, the researchers have chosen one of the visual media, film, and particularly Tamil films. In this paper they attempt to analyze how women empowerment through greenhouse projects is portrayed in post-feminist Tamil film 36 Vayadhinile (At the age of thirty-six).

Keywords: Postfeminist, empowerment, film.

AN OVERVIEW OF POST-FEMINISM

Post-feminism has many meanings in literary theory. To be precise, it has been labeled under two categories: I. “death of feminism”, “anti-feminism”, “feminism is irrelevant now”. II. The next stage in feminism is, it intersects with other “post-” philosophies/theories, such as post-modernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. After 1980, there were many changes in the literary theory. It also made an effect in feminist theory. Post-feminism began to be generally understood as “after feminism”. In popular media, it is sometimes used disparagingly as if feminism is no
longer needed. There are many debates happening in the post-feminism theory right now.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ‘post-feminism’ as “of or relating to the ideas, attitudes, etc., which ignore or reject feminist”. Post-feminism differs from feminism in its goals. People want something new in such feminism goals.

Historically, in the year 1919, a group of female literary radicals in Greenwich Village founded a new journal with the idea, ‘We’re interested in people now – not in men and women.’ They declared that moral, social, economic, and political standards ‘should not have anything to do with sex’. Promised to be ‘pro-woman without being anti-man’, they called their stance ‘post-feminist’. (Genz & Benjamin A, 2009)

The word ‘post-feminist’ was used in a journal in 1919 but it couldn't reach the wider population because people were fighting for their basic rights back then. So the post-feminist concept was not understood by many people.

But officially the term was first used in the year 1982 in New York Times by Susan Bolotin in her article, ‘Voice of the Post-Feminist Generation’. This article was based on various meetings with the ladies who contributed much for the objectives of woman’s rights, yet were not recognized as women’s activists. In the interviews, many people said that they were not accepted as feminists because their goals had to deal with so many different social issues.

Susan Bolotin is the first person who wrote on post-feminists in the newspaper and reached a mass audience with the idea of their new goals in their family, working place as well as the society. After her, many post-feminist writers stood up and started to support the concept. The media became the main tool to seed the post-feminist views all over the world since its inception. (Bolotin, 1982)

Those who have been all supportive of the goals of post-feminism are called post-feminists. Many such people make use of the medium of cinema to portray post-feminist ideas in their films. One Tamil film 36 Vayadhinile depicts the idea of post-feminism as its core theme and it is the subject matter of this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I. How are post-feminist concepts used in Tamil films?
II. How do Tamil films portray post-feminist female characters?
III. Can women be empowered through greenhouse project as portrayed in the film 36 Vayadhinile?
IV. How is a working woman portrayed in this film?
Tamil Films in India

The people of India speak many languages and there are many film industries here. Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood, Mollywood and Sandalwood are called so based on their place of functioning or the language mainly focused, e.g. Bombay (the previous name of Mumbai) for Bollywood, Telugu for Tollywood, Kodambakkam (a part of Chennai where Tamil film industry grew up) for Kollywood, Malayalam for Mollywood, Sandal which is used to produce soaps in Karnataka for Sandalwood to denote Kannada film industry. Each industry releases its movies with different themes. It is reported that “the South Indian languages of Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu make up nearly 50% of the share of movies that are released in India.” (Pollard, 2011)

Tamil Films and Women Characters

In Tamil films, women have been portrayed as mother, wife or sister traditionally. In almost all the films the heroine is a beautiful woman. Her main role is to attract the hero. If her beauty bewitches other men in the story, they certainly have some evil qualities and become villains. It is in this way the directors tell the story on the screen. Till recently, most of the social films from Kollywood have not spoken on woman empowerment, gender equality and the rights of women at home and at workplace. However, a few films from the Tamil film industry, of late, have begun a new trend of depicting strong female characters where the lead woman carries the entire film on her shoulders. She is either the centre of authority or financially stable
on her own. She is independent of her men. From among such films, the investigators have chosen 36 Vayadhinile for an in-depth study.

**Women Empowerment Portrayed in Tamil Films**

At the 21st century, the modern yet decadent struggles restrain a woman’s intellectual abilities and leave her mostly to embark upon ideal standards of beauty. The popular contemporary media representations ranging from cooking shows, fashion shows, soaps and films represent an ideal woman as a glamorous and free woman or a domesticated wife or mother. This depiction of woman lies on the grounds of making her subservient to the ruling order, where she is to be kept away from economic and political processes. This flight away from the economic and political struggles is the first fatal move that oppresses the woman under the patriarchal order. As Engels had rightly said, “To emancipate woman and make her equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time” (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, 1942).

**Feminist Environmental Philosophy**

The feminist environmental philosophy has been divided into three kinds of positions as listed below.

- Positions whose historical beginnings are located in non-feminist Western environmental philosophies.
- Positions that were initially identified with “ecofeminism” (or “ecological feminism”) generally, but, since the late 1980s and early 1990s have been more accurately identified with ‘ecofeminist philosophy’ specifically.
- New or emerging ‘stand alone’ positions that offer novel or unique perspectives on ‘women-nature connections’ that are not identified with either (Warren-2014).

**Women Empowerment Portrayed in 36 Vayadhinile**

36 Vayadhinile (2015) is directed by Roshan Andrews. The protagonist of the story is Vasanthi played by Jyothika. The story is how an ordinary woman achieves success in the society after the age of 36. She works in a government office as an upper division clerk and earns a monthly salary. Her husband works at a radio station and plans to go Ireland with Vasanthi and their daughter. But unfortunately the Irish companies refuse her job applications because of her age. This incident becomes as a turning point in her life and she starts a greenhouse project and becomes successful. She becomes famous all over India.
For the research, the film *36 Vayadhinile* was chosen and the character Vasanthi was studied in depth. She showcases the importance of woman empowerment with financial stability. When she starts terrace gardening with her neighbors' support, she applies for a bank loan. It enables her to become successful in the society. It reveals how a woman can think independently and earn respect from the society.

**Greenhouse Projects**

Vasanthi finds out that the unhealthy vegetables which are available in the market have been sprayed with toxic pesticides which affect people's health. So she plans the greenhouse projects with other women in her neighborhood for the welfare of their own families. She produces organic vegetables. Her friend Susan arranges the region's annual architectural conference. Vasanthi gives a talk on organic greenhouse farming and it is well-received by the audience. Even without the support of her husband, her new project becomes a big success. It is able to fulfill the demands of a wedding catering order which gives her a huge financial support.

The character Vasanthi projects the characteristics of an ecofeminist, who supports the natural greenhouse. And finally her concept gets selected by the state government and she meets the President of India as a successful woman along with her husband. There she is hailed as a symbol of post-feminist generation.

**Advantage of Greenhouse**

The movie is useful to every woman in India because it gives them health awareness as well as entrepreneurship ideas. In the urban side people can form gardens on their terraces and get vegetables for domestic consumption and for earning money. It also helps them to encourage a sustainable and healthy environment for the welfare of their families. The families get not just highly nutritious vegetables without poison, but also tasteful ones.

**Social Impact**

In the Tamil film industry, every week and during festival days many movies get released in different genres. One among them is *36 Vayadhinile* which has a female-oriented subject with post-feminist views to attract young and married women. These kinds of movies have time and again proved that the concepts explained in them can be used in real life situations for the betterment of the people. Such concepts reach the audience effectively.

**CONCLUSION**

The women empowerment through greenhouse projects as portrayed in the film expounds post-feminist views. The portrayed female role has the characteristics of
courage and power to influence the women audience. It clearly espoused the cause of the economic independence of women. As such, the protagonist woman characters get good respect from the female audience and they also take them as role models. They extol the virtues of such characters at their work places and families.

REFERENCES


Selected Film: