

# BODY SHAMING IN MOVIES: A CASE STUDY ON SELECTED MOVIES

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**ABSTRACT** --This paper aims to examine the potential influence of movies, in support and reflection of body shaming among women in the society. Body shaming happens in many ways; it is criticising or judging someone's appearance or comment on their body and comparing it to other individuals. Women are always the major victims of body shaming. Female body-shaming is discussed in movies as an important element nowadays. Females always get conscious and influenced by their body, size, and colour. It's becoming a normal process that one fat girl or dark-skinned will get bullied by others in society. She has to be shameful about what she is. Films are considered as the reflection of society and vice-versa. It influences people's attitude as a whole and one to others. Body shaming has different perspectives in different cultures. This research is focusing on how movies indulge with body-shaming in different ways. For instance, comparing the Indian and the American culture, one can observe that body shaming happens in a repulsive way may be with different means. This paper intends to know how female body-size, colour etc. are portrayed in films. The paper attempts to analyse two selected movies from two different cultures; *Dumplin'* (2018), *Thamaasha* (2019). It relies on the social stigma of 'body image' and the effects on the society where the concepts of gender, race, and sexuality play a vital role.

**Key words**--Body Shaming, Fat shaming, Culture, Gender, Contemporary Movie

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *Body-shaming and women*

Is body shaming gender biased? It's a question that will leave the answer "Yes" with a sigh.

Who owns a person's body? By closely observing the following news like, a fifty-eighty-year old woman marries a 35-year-old man, the body of an actress gets fat after she has given birth, and the similar, one can observe that the body belongs to the spectator's eyes. Body shaming is one of the most common problems faced by women on social media today. People have been taunting them with bullying and bitter words and they are kindling much reason to do so.

Body shaming is most commonly affected in the case of girls with a fat body or within darker skin colour; they also face the most difficult situation in the marriage market. Girls are conditioned by the age old systems of societies by making them believe that white is beautiful. The main reason for this is the advertising and market system. Whitening creams, Fat reducing capsules, and shampoos for hair brightness are the top selling items here.

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The market itself has given us the general impression that human beings should live according to the market and the goods in the market. Men or women find it hard to be connected to the body in this way. Several health factors can lead to diseases from thyroid to cancer from depression to overeating. The body needs to be identified and managed by ourselves. On top of that, women should be able to answer and face the people who see the body as a beauty problem.

The care # Beauty fulfilment carried out a survey (2018 Aug 8) to determine how women perceived their own bodies growing up with the aim to promote a healthy body image among them. Women evolve thinking they need to look a certain way to be advised beautifully in the eyes of society, to gain love and respect. But the 'project image' showed women that they are instructed to be like this. But, in reality, it is unrealistic and hard to achieve. So, they grow up feeling ashamed of their own body thinking they are imperfect.

### ***Body-shaming in Indian culture***

It's a known fact that Indians are obsessed with appearance and body image. Body shaming is the act in which we criticise people on their physical appearance. But we are actually forcing them thinking that they don't fit enough in the artificial standards of beauty defined by the society. Indian's 'fair and lovely' concept is booming as the abuse against women on body-shaming increases. It is really sad that society can't help to define beauty and ugliness based on the colour, shape, and body size. The ideal Indian concept of a boy is expected to be muscular, tall and strong. While a girl should be thin, fair, short with no acne and body hair on her. Anybody who isn't satisfying these concepts are always bullied and criticised. And the criticism will end up with advice to be 'normal' and improving the look. In a patriarchal society like India the baggage of body-shaming is always extra for women rather than men. Fat-shaming has almost become synonymous with body-shaming but the 'thin' are also not spared. Skinny girls are always asked to cover with sleeved clothes so that the 'lack of figure' gets covered. These societal standards of a perfect body are endless.

Earlier, being fat was a symbol of being wealthy and belonging to a prosperous family; it was truly a symbol of royalty. But things have changed along with time, being slim is fashionable. The gym and the scare of obesity tremendous growth in fitness and the medical market system.

***Thamaasha***, (2019) Malayalam Movie Directed by Ashraf Hamza. The movie was presenting a very sensitive take on body shaming. *Thamaasha* is the story of a University professor named Srinivas, who has a disappearing hairline and nervous mannerisms and he is on the lookout for love. Represented by Vinay Fort, the movie revolves around the character Srinivasan who is constantly disallowed in the wedding market for his baldness.

***Dumplin'*** (2018) American comedy film directed by Anne Fletcher and written by Kristin Hahn. It is based on the young adult novel of the same name written by Julie Murphy. To the tune of Dolly Parton's discography, *Dumplin'* makes a clear political statement with irresistible joy. The film delights in classic coming-of-age teen movie tropes while tenuously balancing a message of body positivity and the importance of community.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To examine whether body shaming is gender biased and to what extent women are body shamed.
- To understand how Movies act as a powerful medium against body shaming.

### III. HYPOTHESIS

- The study identifies that body shaming is gender biased.
- Movies are a powerful medium of body shaming.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology selected for the study is content analysis. Two films from two different cultures are selected to prove the objectives. The plots of the films are analysed to reach towards the hypothesis.

There are two types of data that are used in this research, primary data and secondary data. The primary data for this research is *Dumplin'* (2018) and *Thamasha* (2019). The data are taken in the form of images, female body-size, characterization that relate to the female performances in the movies. The secondary data are books, newspaper articles, advertisements which help in analyzing the primary data.

### V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gayathri G R (2018) did a comparative study of body-shaming in both Malayalam and Tamil movies and analysed the discourse around body size which is affected by cinematic representation of two films. She also explains the cultural-political land that forms the ground for parlaying of socio-cultural ideals about body image at the intersection of sexuality, race, and gender.

Katelyn J. Gaffney (2017) analyses and criticises the effect of negative body image caused by social media focusing on a contemporary issue. He observes from his studies that the Social media needs to brawny negative effects that influence societies the averaged sized women and even men around the world.

Keerthana V P (2019) described the social shame influence in the life of a person in a society where the concept of those ideas of sexuality, gender, and race. The author's focus on 'body-size' is visually represented by analyzing two films.

Raychel Duncan (2017) shows that this passion to look like and be something different is often brought on from community pressures, social media, and family opinions and comments. Maybe their weight, hair color, height, or there is always being that needs to be changed. The current research appears to explain why women are disappointed with their looks but not generally at what specific impacts this dissatisfaction has on their daily lives.

Derek K. Iwamoto (2016), a qualitative approach that criticizes the body Image was a form of perspective and concept about body weight, figure, size, facial features (e.g. eye size), and skin appearance/mood. He described their socialization experiences; advanced gender and racial personality; emotions and ideas about their bodies; beliefs of Western and cultural beauty norms; and body image management planning.

Lenny R. Vartanian (2014) brings an overview of research on social media and body image. Furthermore, appearance and comparisons play a role in the relationship between social media and body image.

In the thesis paper *'Why Don't I Look Like Her? The Impact of Social Media on Female Body Image'* by Kendyl M. Klein (2013) says about how the media, in general, is affecting the way a woman looks at herself and the increase of eating disorders among young women. The author talks about the 'Thinspiration' phenomenon wherein

young, bony girls post pictures of themselves, advising that a thin body is the ideal type and as the name suggests, is motivational.

Fat studies show that Feminist Criticism and reader manner theory uses the methods of acute and comparative content analyses to examine the tension between prose and graphic novels with regards to constructions of fat female bodies. Nicole Ann Amato (2019) brings an analysis of research on young adult novels and fat bodies.

## VI. CONTENT ANALYSIS

### *Dumplin'*

*Dumplin'* (2018), an American Comedy film directed by Anne Fletcher and written by Kristin Hanh. It is an adapted movie from a novel of the same by Julie Murphy. Followed by the tune of Dolly Parton's music, *Dumplin'* stamps a clear political statement along with the laughter of comedy. That is why the film is beyond the genre and stands out from the normal. It is more satire than comedy. The film satisfies a classic coming-of-age-teen movie analogy. As well as it throws a powerful message of body positivity and the relevance of community and culture. The plot focuses on 'Dumplin', a confident teen girl, who takes a job at the local fast-food shop. There she meets a former Jock whom she likes and who seems to like her back. But Dumplin starts to doubt herself. She then sets out to take back her confidence by entering a beauty Pageant and gaining respect for her mother, a former beauty queen. It's a known fact that American Culture has a problem with fatness and skin colour. We live in a media saturated world, in that a fat body is always represented as negative and dark-skin as dirty and cheap.

*Dumplin'* is a Netflix original which is popular all around the world. This movie deals with a worthy theme. It talks about the rule of being accepted by everyone. The story flows as follows; Willodean (Danielle Macdonald) who lives in a small Texas town is a plump high schooler. She was raised by her aunt with an obsessive love of Dolly Parton. Willodean's mother Rose (Jennifer Auston) who is a former beauty queen. She runs Miss Teen Bluebonnet Pageant. Her mother called her "Dumplin" which was 'normalised' as a symbol of affection. Her look and taunts from others make her ashamed of the physique and she starts to feel insecurity. At a point, from all the sufferings she decides to enter the pageant. She isn't necessarily planning for winning; she wanted to make a point. She joins the pageant along with her best friend Ellen (Odeya Rush) and two others Millie (Maddie Baillio) and Hannah (Bex-Taylor-Klaus). Millie and Hannah are also two 'imperfect' girls in the eyes of the society. Millie also was a fat girl who was judged by others and Hannah who is a rebellious and Tomboy figure. The four planning to defy the town and the cultures conditioned views on beauty.

*Dumplin'* is more than an entertainment, its thought provoking for everyone who is literally, mentally abused by their body image. Unlike Netflix's previous, lousy take on body-shaming, 'Insatiable', this movie is not mean-spirited or interested in dirty humour. Anne Fletcher and Kristin Hanh have an approach to tackle body-shaming with characters who are all generally likable. The beauty beliefs of American Culture and their endless body-shaming acts is being discussed in movies recently. In *Dumplin'* the 'fat fear' begins with a few high school boneheads shouting the awful word 'fat' to the protagonist, and 'Size Zero' beauty concept of pageant. Jennifer Aniston's Rosie is not cruel towards Willodean directly but she is also a part of the society who is obsessed with the appearance of the body. That made her gives her daughter a nickname dumplin. The film shows it as the 'worry' of a mother towards the daughter. She is worried about the way someone who being considered attractive gets self-

righteous about body weight. Millie who is in a supporting role also suffers the bitterness of body-shaming and Hannah is such a 'punk-like rebel' for society. Willodean, faces insecurity in her relationship with Bo due to her looks. She expresses insecurity loudly. Every woman suffers, accepts and at one stage resists body-shaming and all the societal norms and at last she breaks through it and flies like a 'phoenix' from the ash.

### ***Scene from Dumplin'***



**Figure 1**

*Dumplin' on Pageant contest*



**Figure 2**

*Dumplin' & her mother  
Standing near by*



**Figure 3**

*Rose wearing the crown*

### **Thamaasha**

*Thamaasha* is one of the movies that are mostly connected with body shaming in the contemporary Malayalam film industry. It is a romantic comedy movie directed by Asharaf Hamza and it is beautifully created. *Thamaasha* is the official remakes of Kannada Movie 'Ondu Motteya Kathe' (2017), but *Thamaasha* was a big hit and success. Malayalam filmmakers have given a quirky and extremely sensitive take to body image with *Thamaasha*.

The movie helps us to think and give awareness to viewers and how to approach life with more positivity. Malayalam filmmakers have an unusual and really sensitive take on body shaming. Body shaming is a part of life and it is created by people.

How many of us are making fun of their bodies through social media? In the movie *Thamaasha* the characters are bullied, Srinivas (Vinay Fort) and Chinnu (Chandni Nair). In Real-life, Vinay fort is a bald person, and Chinnu is also a plump girl. So, they didn't have to take any makeovers for the movie. Srinivas is a Malayalam language professor, 31 years old, and looking for a bride but it is rejected by his baldness. In the First frame the character Srinivas, talking about traits of a textbook 'nayakan'. He is not confident about his baldness, even when he was mocked by his body-shaming at home and in college; he feels guilty and shows an unwillingness to face him in front of everyone. It depicts the lives of people who are worried about body shaming. Srinivas, who is completely believable, brings out his character insecurities perfectly. Chinnu addressed fat-shaming and towards the second half of the movie, she becomes a confident character, and not bothered about her body. She loves to eat food. Chinnu shared a photo with Srinivas and uploaded it on Facebook and was bullied in social media, with bad comments and trolls. But Chinnu is a different person and loved her personality and not bothered about her body.

Chinnu who took in her body-shaming by laughter, making audiences to see through her eyes. It is Chinnu who shoves Srinivas to rethink.

Some people laugh at others. "How the body colour and the shape of a human being reflects his life." (Poem) Body shaming on social media was damaging self-esteem, that was poetry Srinivasan present at the class and last scene of the movie is the teaching of the poem written by the famous poet Ayyappan about an ideal man. Film

progresses, the tone of his teaching changes and towards the end, the tone is much like Sir's answer to the society and Chinnu's chapter clearly conveys through it.

*Thamaasha* with its clean comedies keeps you chuckling and entertaining too. Although Srinivas was a person of a mockery of society, he was meant to be a beautiful companion in the imagination of society. When Srinivas starts thinking through her view is where the movie begins. The Movie shows clean humour and keeps spectators entertained.

This movie is combined with our Kerala culture, and peoples. Body shaming is the same in every culture but the thinking is different. In Kerala, body-shaming has different aspects like noticing, commenting, etc.

When other cultures shy away from commenting openly about other people's weight, 'Thadivechuo, Thadikuranjo' are Malayali's conversations. People have a mental weighing machine that can accurately measure the body. The new baby was born and the only thing they can say is "Kuttike colour kuravanalo". Body weight and skin colour are two things that so many people around us have misconceptions on and openly comment about. If you go to a wedding and the bride is either fat or dark, then that is the only thing that people seem to notice.



**Figure 4:** Thamaasha Movie Poster

Movies are plagued with instances where the word "Thadichee" or "Thadiya" is used to joke or play circus elephant music every time an overweight person appears on the screen. The "fat" person has always been a source of constant humour, whether it's the bumbling idiot who is too slow or shown constantly eating. The fat is a social decision and the concept of culturally fat that matters more.

Culture shapes are an outline in which body image is formed, and hence it is a critical component to consider when body image varies. The number of people who have been the victim of body shaming increases every day. It is prevalent in our culture, especially among people who are overweight or obese. People of size often feel judged and negatively evaluated, even by their physicians. This sets them up for increased risk for disorder eating and decreased activity habits and increases their risk for mood symptoms, such as depression.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Movies are always connected to humans because it's the blueprint of human life, happenings, feelings, and society. Culture of a society influences movies, its theme, representation and impact. As well as a well created

movie and well told story can influence people. All these elements are interconnected. By this study we tried to analyse how two key movies that represent two cultures deal with body-shaming on women, which is a less discovered area in movies still today. The movie Dumplin' and Thamaasha which represents American Culture and Indian Culture respectively.

Body -shaming is happening mostly gender biased. The culture may vary, but the ideal beauty concepts; body image of women is always a stigma. She has to choose, think, eat, walk, talk, wear, everything according to its best. And what is best will be decided by the society. Fatness, Colourism and everybody shaming and bullying insecure women largely. Movies have always been a powerful mass media that can influence people and involve, inspire and be the change agent. Women's issues like fat shaming are nowadays discussed in contemporary American and Indiana movies as the major topic. The way of representation varies, but in a majority, it is always represented in the comedy genre. Dumplin' and Thamaasha represent two varieties of culture, characters, context, texture etc. but body shaming is involved in every culture.

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