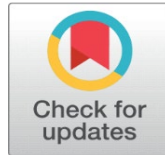
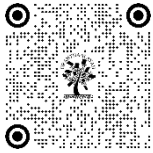


A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ADOLESCENT REALITIES AND FEMALE AGENCY: *HADINELENTU* AND *ALL WE IMAGINE TO BE LIGHT*

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative study of the Kannada film *Hadineleentu* (Seventeeners) and the Hindi film *All We Imagine to Be Light*, both of which delve into the complexities of gender, caste, and societal norms. While *Hadineleentu* focuses on the repercussions of adolescent sexual exploration in a caste-conscious society, *All We Imagine to Be Light* portrays the intersecting lives of three women grappling with personal and societal expectations. By examining the films' thematic elements, narrative structures, and socio-cultural implications, this study sheds light on their representation of contemporary issues and their contributions to progressive cinematic discourse.

Keywords: Adolescent Sexuality, Caste Discrimination, Female Agency, Progressive Cinema

1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema often serves as a mirror to society, reflecting its intricacies and contradictions. *Hadineleentu* and *All We Imagine to Be Light* stand as poignant examples of films that engage with critical social issues, offering audiences a platform for introspection and dialogue. This study investigates how these films address themes such as caste, gender, and personal agency, highlighting their significance in contemporary Indian cinema.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

- 1) To analyze the portrayal of caste and gender dynamics in *Hadineleentu* and *All We Imagine to Be Light*.
- 2) To explore the contrasting approaches to female agency in the two films.

- 3) To assess the films' impact on societal attitudes toward sensitive issues such as adolescent sexuality and interfaith relationships.
- 4) To examine the narrative techniques employed to convey complex socio-cultural realities.

3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on thematic and narrative analysis. By contextualizing the films within their socio-cultural milieus, the article draws on critical theories of feminism, intersectionality, and postcolonialism to elucidate their underlying messages. The analysis is enriched by references to contemporary film criticism and sociological studies.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of caste, gender, and agency in Indian cinema has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for decades. Scholars such as Shohini Ghosh and Shoma A. Chatterji have explored the evolving representation of women in Indian films. Similarly, studies on caste in cinema, including works by Harish Wankhede, provide insights into how visual narratives grapple with entrenched hierarchies. This review draws on these perspectives to frame the comparative analysis of *Hadinelentu* and *All We Imagine to Be Light*.

5. METHODOLOGY

The research integrates textual and visual analysis to examine the films' treatment of caste and gender. It also incorporates audience reception studies to gauge the societal impact of the films. The study draws on secondary sources, including interviews with filmmakers, reviews, and critical essays, to contextualize the films within broader discourses on Indian cinema.

6. ANALYTICAL TOOLS

- 1) **Intersectional Analysis:** To explore how caste and gender intersect in shaping characters' experiences.
- 2) **Feminist Critique:** To evaluate the portrayal of female agency and resistance.
- 3) **Comparative Framework:** To identify similarities and differences in narrative and thematic elements.

7. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Caste and Social Dynamics in *Hadinelentu*

Hadinelentu is a compelling portrayal of how caste influences the lives of adolescents in contemporary India. The film boldly addresses the double standards and systemic biases that emerge in the aftermath of a leaked intimate video involving a Brahmin boy and a Dalit girl. While the boy escapes punitive measures due to his upper-caste privilege, the girl faces expulsion and legal action. The narrative critiques the educational institution's complicity in perpetuating caste-based discrimination, as the management actively seeks to vilify the girl by uncovering her falsified age certificate. This deliberate targeting underscores the intersection of caste and gender oppression, highlighting how societal structures work against marginalized communities.

The film's nuanced storytelling avoids sensationalism, instead offering a thought-provoking exploration of power dynamics. By exposing the entrenched biases within educational and legal systems, *Hadinelentu* challenges viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about caste privilege and its implications for justice and equality.

Gender and Female Agency in *All We Imagine to Be Light*

In contrast, *All We Imagine to Be Light* delves into the personal struggles and agency of three women navigating their realities in a patriarchal society. The protagonist's steadfast refusal to pursue a romantic relationship with her colleague, despite her estranged husband's absence, exemplifies her commitment to self-respect and autonomy. Her roommate's relationship with a Muslim man, characterized by casual intimacy and a lack of discussion about marriage, challenges

societal expectations of purity and religious conformity. Meanwhile, the third woman's displacement by real estate developers underscores the intersection of gender and economic vulnerability.

The film's strength lies in its refusal to moralize or prescribe solutions. Instead, it presents a tapestry of lived experiences, urging viewers to empathize with the characters' choices and dilemmas. The absence of caste as an explicit theme in this film, however, invites critical scrutiny. While its focus on urban realities resonates with a global audience, the omission of caste dynamics risks downplaying a significant aspect of Indian social realities.

Contrasting Narrative Approaches

The stark differences in narrative approaches between the two films are noteworthy. *Hadinelentu* adopts a direct and confrontational style, addressing caste discrimination head-on. Its setting within a school amplifies the stakes, emphasizing the formative influence of institutions on young lives. In contrast, *All We Imagine to Be Light* employs a more introspective and understated approach, focusing on interpersonal relationships and internal conflicts. While this subtlety enhances its emotional depth, it also limits its scope in addressing systemic issues.

Broader Implications for Indian Cinema

Both films contribute to the evolving discourse on social issues in Indian cinema. *Hadinelentu* exemplifies the potential of regional cinema to tackle sensitive topics with courage and authenticity. Its candid exploration of caste and adolescent sexuality challenges mainstream narratives that often sanitize or ignore these realities. On the other hand, *All We Imagine to Be Light* highlights the universality of women's struggles, making it accessible to a wider audience. However, its global aspirations may inadvertently dilute its engagement with the specificities of Indian society.

By juxtaposing these films, this study underscores the importance of diverse storytelling in addressing the complexities of contemporary India. While *Hadinelentu* confronts systemic inequalities, *All We Imagine to Be Light* emphasizes individual resilience and solidarity. Together, they offer complementary perspectives on the interplay of societal and personal dynamics.

8. CONCLUSION

Hadinelentu and *All We Imagine to Be Light* represent two distinct yet equally important contributions to Indian cinema. By addressing issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and personal agency, these films challenge audiences to question societal norms and reflect on their implications. Their contrasting narrative styles and thematic focuses highlight the richness of contemporary cinematic discourse, underscoring the transformative potential of storytelling in fostering social awareness and change.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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END NOTES

The POCSO Act in India differentiates between juveniles and adults, often complicating cases involving adolescents. Interfaith relationships continue to face societal resistance in many parts of India, reflecting broader tensions around religion and identity.