

TIFF 2012 Film Review: English Vinglish

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By Preeti Thandi.



English Vinglish is a **cheerful comedy**, which takes a homemaker on a voyage beyond the comfort of her home to the streets of Manhattan. The journey allows her to explore herself and regain her self-esteem. Gauri Shinde's first feature premiering at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) was inspired by her mother and stars none other than **Sridevi**. Shinde's story has a **personal connection** and begins in Pune, India yet it could have been a story of any family or of a newcomer to any country. *English Vinglish* focuses on language barriers and how they affect a person's self-confidence. Shinde takes a perceptive and jovial approach, which allows the audience to identify with the challenges of Shashi (Sridevi) immediately. The film also features Adil Hussain, Mehdi Nebbou and Priya Anand.

Shashi's **passion** is cooking and she runs a small catering business from home by making the Indian sweet '*laddoos*.' Yet her skill and passion is taken for granted as her husband (Adil Hussain) and kids make fun of her inability to pronounce English words correctly. When Shashi takes a trip to New York to help her sister, her world opens up. She finds herself again and regains her confidence. The unacknowledged symbol of her talent, the '*laddoos*' become sweeter.

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Shinde embellishes the film with **beautiful** colors and uses the New York skyline magnificently. Lost on the streets and subway maze of this massive city, dressed in a saree, Sridevi is quite a sight to behold and represents any typical newcomer. The screen goddess sheds her **glamorous avatar** for a more simplistic woman who is just a devoted mother and wife in the film.

Sridevi's restrained performance breathes life into the character of Shashi, her uncertainty, fear and frustration. She also does an excellent job by suppressing the way she delivers her dialogues to show the limitations of this woman. Yet her character is not weak, Shashi enrolls in ESL classes. Shinde brings alive a comical classroom which most non-native speakers and immigrants to North America will co-relate with. Grammatical mistakes and syntactical errors translate into a lot of humor and funny moments in the film.

Adil Hussain is perfect in his representation of a smart yet insensitive husband who takes his wife for granted and becomes 'judgemental'. He even goes on to say that his wife "**was born to make laddoos.**" In contrast Mehdi Nebbou is the kind stranger, sincere classmate, friend and admirer who holds a mirror for Shashi. Nebbou's soft, sensitive and expressive performance makes him one of the **most charming** characters in the film. *English Vinglish* is sure to please Sridevi fans and **appeal** to a larger North American audience with its' simplicity, mirth, music, colors and sweetness.