

# A Slap in the Face: Exploration and Exploitation of Power, Patriarchy and Marriage in Anubhav Sinha's *Thappad* (2020)

**Aditi Paul and Nipun Kalia**

## **Abstract**

Marriage is an intimate relationship which people enter on the assumption of romantic love and care. However, the reality of married life comes to the forefront after one has taken the marital vows. Films are a crucial component of society as they play a vital role in portraying cultural and social aspects. Films, while taking into discourse cultural representations, have highlighted the subject of marriage from diverse angles. On the one hand, films present Indian culture, where women are revered as goddesses and deities, but on the other, they also highlight the injustices that women endure. The practice of dowry, dowry deaths, and marital rape have been topics of longstanding importance that are addressed in the films. Hindi cinema has voiced gender equality by eliminating traditional patriarchal norms that govern Indian marriages. Several social and political factors have contributed to achieving gender equality, such as education, financial stability, and the emergence of nuclear families. Additionally, awareness and the provisions of Indian legal acts serve as one of the fundamental tenets of gender equality. The film *Thappad* (2020),<sup>1</sup> directed by Anubhav Sinha, highlights arranged matrimonial alliances in the new millennium. It challenges the hegemonic dominance of the established patriarchal customs inherent in Indian marriages. This article analyses the implications of gender discrimination and shifting power dynamics that result in divorce. Gender theory and feminist film theory are used to study the victims of domestic violence and promote equal gender roles and healthy relationships in marriage.

**Keywords:** gender roles, feminist film theory, gender theory, patriarchy

## **Introduction**

In India, marriage is socially constructed; one is expected to be married by a certain age as part of social customs. According to popular opinion, marriage is the most intimate relationship one can engage in. A successful marital union is built on the tenets of respect and mutual consent, in which the bride and the groom function as independent agents. As Sudhir Mungle states:

The transfer of a woman from one family to another is the premise of the institution of marriage in India and is ruled by negotiations based on caste, class, and religious boundaries. Marriage, thus, is an essentially public and political act that structures

---

Aditi Paul is a research scholar at the Department of English, Chandigarh University. Email: aditi.uila@cumail.in.

Nipun Kalia is an Associate Professor of English at the Department of English, Chandigarh University. Email: nipun.uila@cumail.in.

<sup>1</sup> Anubhav Sinha, *Thappad* (Mumbai: Tseries, 2020).

alliances, hierarchies, and social networks. The prime objective of marriage is to reproduce the social order.<sup>2</sup>

In an arranged marriage, parents and other relatives select a spouse for their adult child, and the cooperation of both parties is crucial for a successful alliance between Indian households. The selection of spouses by parents is more dependent on rationality than romantic ideals of love; as a result, the decision-making process prioritizes employment, earning capacity, and family background.

Moreover, Bollywood has shown much fascination with Indian marriages and marital relationships. In *Producing Bollywood*, Tejasvini Ganti focuses on how Bollywood films have paved the foundations for societal, intellectual, and political discourses, promoting patriarchy, joint family setups, and the virtue of women in Indian middle-class families. Ganti states, “Bollywood has mainly a male-dominated culture, and male characters are offered considerably more significance than women roles.”<sup>3</sup> This indicates that earlier Bollywood films that highlighted matrimonial alliances did not reinforce gender equality and emphasized patriarchal views. However, patriarchal values showcased in films not only have influenced Indian marriages but also help to institutionalize male privileges in society. Films thereby perpetuate the unjust gendered allocation of power and authority. Kamla Bhasin links patriarchy to “the power dynamics by which men rule women, and to characterize a system by which women are kept submissive in a variety of ways.”<sup>4</sup> This gender inequality and misrepresentation of women in films is a matter of concern for feminists and gender theorists. In light of this, Nidhi Tere says:

The interest in films taken by feminists stems from concern about the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in cinema. It adopts a critical approach towards gender bias on celluloid. The feminist approach to cinema asks a few pertinent questions like how women are represented on screen, how women’s issues are treated in cinema, what does feminism mean to film-makers, how does the feminist agenda manifest on screen, how is the women's character positioned compared to the male character and what is the role of women film-makers and women writers in depicting women’s issues.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Laura Mulvey introduced the notion of the “male gaze.”<sup>6</sup> Her article examined the power dynamics that exist in media representation, and how heterosexual male spectators typically reduce women to passive objects of desire. It suggests the manner in which women are portrayed in media contributes to perpetuating patriarchal power structures. Thus, in the present scenario, the films contest and disrupt the typical patriarchal representations of women in marriage unions to provide an egalitarian and inclusive portrayal of women on screen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sudhir Mungle, “A Feminist analysis of the Movie *Thappad*,” *Langlit* (2020): pp. 285-288.

<sup>3</sup> Tejasvini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Kamla Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy?* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Nidhi S. Tere, “Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema”, *Global Media Journal: Indian Edition*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975): pp. 6-18.

As Rachel Dwyer states in *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*, the Indian film industry is among the world's leading producers of films, catering to a wide range of audiences across the globe.<sup>7</sup> This showcases that depictions of empowered female characters in films dismantle the conventional beliefs about women's empowerment and navigate the implications that females face due to social, political, and economic developments. This indicates that films serve as a highly influential entertainment medium and a source of reinforcement for the Indian populace. According to Ashish Rajadhyaksha, this reinforcement is called the "Cinema Effect, which refers to the vast influence and exposure of the cinema and cultural industry that influences, defines, and redefines many facets of life."<sup>8</sup> Further, as argued by Albert Bandura, people learn by watching others, especially from the activities and characters displayed in media.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that the portrayal of strong women who speak out against injustice might interrupt the existing prejudices and traditional attitudes. This would enhance women's integrity and encourage them to be independent. Additionally, the emerging generation of filmmakers, artists, and a growing female audience exemplify a new wave of films that focus on women's issues and gender equality. Such films emerge as a crucial medium of communication by emancipating changing gender roles and bringing forth the ideals of positive masculinity, which should be a part of mainstream cinema.

One of the best films in this genre which utterly dismantles the traditional idea of an ideal woman is *Thappad* ('Slap' in English), directed by Anubhav Sinha. It is a scathing indictment of the extensive demands that are made upon women in Indian marriages. The film offers a striking account of the rigid, traditional ideas of gender roles prevalent in Indian culture. It examines an arranged marriage setup in a tier-two city in India. The female protagonist, Amrita Sandhu (Taapsee Pannu), hails from a middle-class family but marries into an upper-class family. Amrita gives up on all her ambitions and settles for a fictitious happy marriage with Vikram (Pavai Gulati). The film's opening scene uses a mid-shot camera angle to bring the audience closer to the female characters linked to Amrita in one way or another. All the female characters in the scene are enjoying a candy bar, while trying to forget the harsh realities that patriarchy has imposed on them through the institution of marriage. As Inderjot Kaur states, "for a number of women, marriage, which is a holy tie based on commitment, understanding, and equality, has proven to be terribly violent."<sup>10</sup> The film takes female characters as the focus, to show how some female characters analyze the injustices done to them, while other females are unconscious of the injustices they are experiencing in marriage.

### **Arranged Alliance: A Site of Abuse**

Whenever women are not treated equally or in a dignified manner, the Indian legal system has rescued women and saved their dignity as daughters, wives, or mothers. The Constitution of India, being the supreme law of the land, under Article 14 states, "The State shall not deny to

---

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Hoboken: Prentice Hall, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Inderjot Kaur and Tanu Gupta, "Scrutinizing the Debasement of a Female Body through Marital Violence and Digital Media in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*", *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2022), p. 334.

any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.”<sup>11</sup> Law has never discriminated against men or women, but society at large discriminates between men and women. Similarly, in *Thappad*, Sinha highlights gender discrimination, women's ignorance, and misconceptions about their rights. In contrast, Sinha also shows the awakening of women against the gender injustice prevalent in marriage.

Sunita was a domestic helper at Amrita's home and hailed from a lower-middle-class society. She was ignorant about her rights and was a victim of domestic violence. As Sharavari Vaidya states, “Domestic violence is described in Section 3 of the Act; it includes physical and mental abuse, sexual and economic abuse.”<sup>12</sup> Sunita bears physical violence due to her lower social and economic position. Thus, social norms and presumptions based on class and occupation make women of lower economic positions ignorant about their fundamental rights. Sunita was dependent on her husband for shelter. She endures domestic abuse silently yet does not consider leaving her husband. Domestic violence is accepted and normalized in the lower strata of society. Sunita's persona is consistent with the theory of intersectionality, which emphasizes that intersecting identities of class, caste, gender, and race cause complex oppression. As Kimberlé Crenshaw states, “The intersectionality paradigm recognizes that people have multiple identities and that the discrimination and disadvantages they experience are usually co-constructed, resulting from the interaction of these multiple identities.”<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, Netra Jaisingh, who was a leading lawyer in the city, despite winning a case on sexual harassment, was a silent victim of sexual and emotional abuse. Her character exemplifies the difficulties women face in positions of power while they are trying to balance their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, in the scene where Netra holds a conversation with Amrita, she states, “Every relationship is flawed, so best mend it.”<sup>14</sup> The scene demonstrates how even well-educated people who are aware of women's rights may have misconceptions about domestic violence because of societal norms surrounding gender roles and marriage. In contrast to Netra's character, as a traditional woman, Amrita's mother believed “the main purpose of marriage is to establish a family, produce children and further enhance the family's economic and social position.”<sup>15</sup> She was happy in her married life but had sacrificed her desires and urges for the family's welfare. In a scene when Amrita's parents are discussing Amrita's decision to file for divorce, the camera mid-shot highlights the hidden sufferings that Sandhaya has undergone while performing her familial duties:

Sachin Sandhu (Amrita's father): Have you ever been asked to give up your desires?  
Sandhaya Sandhu (Amrita's mother): My father wanted me to perform at All India Radio. I gave up my desires. I should have managed the home, looked after the children, or sung songs.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Indian Legislative Department, “Article 14”, *Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India* (2022). At: [www.legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india/](http://www.legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india/).

<sup>12</sup> Sharavari Vaidya, *Family Law* (Allahabad Law Agency, 2012), p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics’, In *Feminist Legal Theories*, ed. Karen Maschke (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>15</sup> Aditi Paul and Nipun Kalia, “A Critique on the Institution of Marriage with Reference Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth* and Mahesh Manjrekar's *Astitva*”, *Literary Voice*, vol. 15 (2021): p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

The scene accentuates that marriages usually demand sacrifices from women alone, whereas men prefer to remain silent even after knowing the reality. The scene highlights gender inequality by showcasing the one-sided patriarchal marriage structure, which forces women to make certain compromises for the sake of family or children. As stated by Delony Manuvel:

Cooperation and compromise are two different things, and often in a woman's case, the society makes her believe that the compromises that she makes are part of cooperating. In cooperation, the effort and sacrifice made are not one-sided, whereas in compromise, it is taking advantage of one party.<sup>17</sup>

This demonstrates that in an arranged marriage, generally, women give up their careers, comfort zones, and interests for a successful married life. The patriarchal norms laid by society force women to make such adjustments and make sacrifices for the benefit of the family. As Foucault states, "The concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down the majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve."<sup>18</sup>

In another scene, Amrita's father tries to make her realize her responsibilities by stating, "Your mother spent her life making others happy. Making Kachori for Vikram (her son-in-law), Tehri for me (her husband), and pasta for Karan (her son). Mothers don't have a choice to make others happy."<sup>19</sup> The scene showcases the irony associated with Indian arranged marriages, where women are so engrossed in their familial duties that they fail to consider their happiness. Similarly, Amrita seems to be happy in her married life; she willingly gives up her desires and accepts the stereotypical role of wife as prescribed by the patriarchal society. She devotes her life to ensuring that her husband and mother-in-law live comfortably. However, while performing her marital duties, Amrita does not even realize that she has stopped appreciating and enjoying the things she loves the most.

Amrita's mundane routine is depicted in a scene, where she constantly moves in the house, manages the house, and attends to whatever Vikram demands. While preparing for an official presentation, when Vikram was not able to find anything in a working state, he would straightway call for Amrita, saying, "Amu, your internet is not working" or "Amu, your printer is not working."<sup>20</sup> To this, Amrita responds sarcastically, "Whatever is not working in the house belongs to me."<sup>21</sup> The scene indicates that Amrita, as a homemaker, was burdened to look after her husband and in-laws. She was responsible for managing everything at Vikram's house and was supposed to sort the things if they were not in working condition.

On the other hand, Vikram appeared to be the ideal spouse on the surface, but on the inside, he was dominating and had a patriarchal mindset. He never wanted Amrita to become an independent or successful woman. Being unbothered about Amrita's career or desires, Vikram was unaware that Amrita was a talented dancer and could have become a successful

---

<sup>17</sup> Delony Manuvel, "The Farcical Incongruity in the Compromises Accepted by Women to Maintain Stability in Society: *A Doll's House to Thappad*", *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2020); p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>20</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>21</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

professional dancer. His ignorance is evident in the scene when, on seeing their neighbour Shivani driving the car, Amrita asks him, “Can I also learn to drive?” Vikram dismisses her childishly, saying, “First, you learn to cook food.”<sup>22</sup> The psychological restraint and control of Amrita's desire in this scene depict a submissive body, as indicated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, “the body that is both an object and a target of power; it is managed, sculpted, and trained, and it obeys and responds.”<sup>23</sup> The scene indicates that male supervision controls women's bodies and desires. As a result, men believe they have complete control over women's bodies, especially their sexuality, and become tyrants and manipulators in marital institutions, effectively turning them into commodities of use.

Apart from Vikram, all the elderly members of the family insisted that Amrita should improve her culinary skills. This confinement of women to the kitchen area and excluding men from it is an interplay of power dynamics. Women in traditional marriage setups have a lot of peer pressure to cook perfect food round-the-clock, be available in the kitchen, and maintain a household. The ideology of the elders indicated that as a wife, Amrita's sole responsibility was to make Vikram's life smooth and comfortable. Moreover, the film highlights that in arranged marriages, men and women must follow prescribed gender roles. According to these gender roles, women manage the home, whereas men manage the office and earn a living. Society tends to take these gender roles as normal, and the adjustments made from the women's front are considered a “good housewife” gesture, which is essential to lead a successful married life. As Manuvel observes, “Society constantly praises the compromises made by women to maintain the status quo. It conveniently ignores the resentment associated with compromises that erode the relationships and crumble the self-esteem of the woman involved.”<sup>24</sup>

### **A Slap: Emerges as an Awakening**

Amrita's life abruptly turned upside down when her husband Vikram slapped her during a party held at their house. The party scene gives a perfect picture of celebration in a Punjabi family, where the guests are enjoying the food, family members and protagonists are dancing to Punjabi songs, when suddenly, over a heated argument with a senior, Vikram slaps Amrita. Vikram keeps the seniority of his colleague in mind and does not argue with him. However, he vents his anger on Amrita, assuming she will understand his situation. This indicates that Vikram was aware of the repercussions of hitting his colleague, and purposely vented his rage on Amrita as she was weak and financially dependent on him. He assumed she would tolerate his act of violence and, as a loving wife, would forget about it. As Albert Camus states, “The lowest man in the social scale still has his wife or child. If he's unmarried, a dog. The essential thing, after all, is being able to get angry with someone who has no right to answer back.”<sup>25</sup> In the scene when Vikram hits Amrita, the camera revolves 360 degrees around Amrita, who stands numb and embarrassed. All the family members and friends were in Amrita's vicinity, yet no one stood up for her. Only Swati, Amrita's future sister-in-law, wanted to speak out against the incident; Amrita's mother silenced her to prevent conflict with Vikram's family.

---

<sup>22</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Manuvel, “The Farcical Incongruity”, p.21.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Camus, *The Fall* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 34-35.

Even after the incident, Amrita's mother-in-law and brother are concerned about Vikram's health and office politics, not about the emotional abuse that Amrita was going through.

The next day after the party, Amrita's mother-in-law enquires if Vikram had slept properly. Even when Amrita visits her parent's house, her brother enquired if Vikram was fine. This shows the alienation of victims by the family members, which normalizes the violence and atrocities against women. They all tried to suppress Amrita's emotions and expected her to forget the incident as an understanding wife. As in *Understanding Patriarchy*, bell hooks states, "patriarchy is a perilous social infection. Man-controlled society is a political-social framework that demands that males are innately ruling, better than everything blessed with the option to rule and dominate by means of mental and physical violence."<sup>26</sup> This shows that both primitive and present worlds are male-oriented. Males designed the ideas that shaped a culture that further described gender roles. Thus, the image of a woman and symbols used to describe her were created and fashioned by men to suit their personal needs.

The slap was not just a physical act of violence for Amrita; it also diminished her sense of dignity and self-respect. It catalyzed the realization of the unfair treatment and limitation of the agency that she had encountered within the institution of marriage. Everyone in the family tried to pacify Amrita by saying, "It was just a slap."<sup>27</sup> Instead of apologizing, even her husband tried to normalize his act by saying, "It just happened."<sup>28</sup> No one in the family made efforts to make Vikram realize how his actions had harmed Amrita's dignity. Under the patriarchal setup, men are considered innocent and protected by the family even after performing a wrong act. In contrast, women are advised to accept their situation and adjust in accordance with their husbands' preferences. As Mungle asserts, "the social setup is developed and implemented by man. So, men should always have the upper hand in receiving respect and position."<sup>29</sup>

Vikram's refusal to accept his mistake made Amrita realize the gravity of the situation. In a scene, Vikram discusses his company with Amrita and states that he would not prefer to spend his time and effort in a company that did not value him. Listening to this, Amrita, who shares the same sentiments, decides to free herself from a relationship where she is not appreciated. She tells Vikram, "You were emotionally invested in the company. You could not move on. I have invested my life; how can I move on? I do not love you?"<sup>30</sup> Even though Amrita was not happy while filing a divorce (under which adultery, cruelty, desertion, and mutual consent serve as the grounds for legal separation) but she was unable to change her decision. By filing a legal separation from her husband, she demonstrates that she has analyzed her identity and emerged as an exponent of practical feminism for the audience.

Amrita had to endure many hardships and deprivations, as she was firm in her choice and refused to submit to her husband's wishes. Vikram forced her to return home by claiming restitution of conjugal rights, which according to Indian law states "when either the husband or wife has, without reasonable excuse, withdrawn from the society of the other, the aggrieved party may apply, by petition to the district court, for the restitution of conjugal rights."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy* (Louisville: Louisville Anarchist Federation, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>28</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>29</sup> Mungle, "A Feminist Analysis of the Movie *Thappad*", pp. 285-288.

<sup>30</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>31</sup> Basant Sharma (*Hindu Law* Central Law Publications 2020), p. 69.

However, Netra Jaisingh, Amrita's advocate, insisted on voicing the injustice by demanding alimony or maintenance (that varies between 1/3 and 1/5 of the income of the earning spouse, entitled according to Section 25 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 2005) so she could spend rest of her life at ease. In the scene when Netra and Amrita discuss the pointers for her divorce petition:

Netra: All marriages are deals, Amrita. A contract between two people. So, love doesn't turn out to be mandatory for marriage. For love, marriage is not required. What do you think, all the marriages in the world are working on love? It is an unfair deal of some sense of dignity and security; that is why you have come to me. At least, now allow me to crack a fair deal in your favour.

Amrita: My deal was fair; he would handle the office, and I would look after the home. The slap was unfair. It is unfair to expect from me that I should move on. It is unfair that all my other options are too messy and dirty apart from moving on. It is unfair that you are advising me to accept the unfair. That one slap showed me all the unfair things I have been ignoring so far. This was why everyone was expecting that this time also, I will move on.<sup>32</sup>

The scene depicts that education and female empowerment movements have made women socially and legally aware. It has given them the strength to protest against injustice. In the scene, Amrita's character undergoes a drastic transition from a subservient, obedient figure to a woman who demands respect and subverts traditional binary gender norms as prescribed by the patriarchal institution of marriage. As Meena Shirdwadkar explains:

Women began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings as they received education. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male-dominated ideas of morality, and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society—all come up in a welter of projection.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Sunita, Amrita, being an educated woman, was able to recognize the injustice done to her. Further, to liberate herself from unbalanced compromises, Amrita announces, "Just a slap, but he cannot hit me."<sup>34</sup> This showcases that when women consciously start treating themselves as equivalent to men, they can understand the politics behind subjugation.

In the scene where Amrita visits Netra for legal advice, she states that the injustice she has suffered has multiple facets behind it. She says, "Entirely he (Vikram) is not at fault. I, too, have made some mistakes, as I allowed all these things to happen. My mother has also made some mistakes; she taught me how to stay. His (Vikram's) mother is also at fault."<sup>35</sup> Amrita's dialogues in the scene indicate that women have been supporting and guiding each other to

---

<sup>32</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>33</sup> Meena Shirdwadkar, *Images of Woman in the Indo-Anglican Novel* (New York: Sterling Publishers, 1979), p. 285.

<sup>34</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.

<sup>35</sup> Sinha, *Thappad*.



abide by the rules set up by patriarchy. Thus, “patriarchy has been supported and sustained by the elder female community members, thus rendering gender biasedness over generations.”<sup>36</sup> However, in the film, when Amrita protests against injustice, it encourages other women to fight for their liberation. Looking at Amrita fighting for her dignity by filing for divorce, Sunita overcomes her fear of being homeless, and by confronting her husband, she puts an end to the domestic violence prevalent at her house. On the other hand, Netra Jaisingh, a bold and educated woman, draws inspiration and courage from Amrita and walks out of her abusive marriage. Moreover, Shivani, Amrita’s neighbour, decides to raise her daughter alone and not to remarry. By show women supporting and learning from one another, the film inspires its female audience to fight against injustice, and sends a strong message to its male viewers.

## Conclusion

Over the past three decades, issues pertaining to women, gender, and governance have become increasingly prominent worldwide. This dimension has strongly emphasized research on the countries in the Global South, which have always been marginalized and silenced within geo-cultural frameworks. The global ideas, advancements, and contributions made by India were neglected in the past, thus creating a space to undertake studies on Indian cinema, traditions, and governing factors leading to women's empowerment. Further, women's bodies and sexuality have always been significant tropes in the Bollywood Industry, thus throwing a great deal of light on the masculine, bold, and assertive roles played by women. The analysis of the paper targeted three questions: the existence of male dominance in an arranged marriage, domestic violence, and gender roles assigned by the patriarchal society. Additionally, the analysis of women characters, their caste, class, occupation, clothing, agency, and frames within the scenes gives a great insight into their psychology and sexuality.

*Thappad* emphasizes gender-based institutional and familial standards that lead to the abuse of women in arranged marriages. It draws attention to numerous instances of gendered abuse and treating women as objects without considering their needs and feelings. Moreover, it illustrates the unfairness and prejudices women endure due to compromises she is attuned to accomplish without question. Therefore, in an arranged marriage, it is vital to reduce the meaningless compromises made by women and the advantages received by men in exchange for nothing. The film emphasizes to achieve gender equality in marriage, both men and women should work in unison to alter society's expectations of sacrifice and compromise from women. The males must overcome their desire to exert authority over women by rejecting the established patriarchal conventions and practicing gender equality.

Further, the fear of offending men also compels women to remain silent in matrimonial alliances. Their silence is considered a sign of approval, so women must raise their voices against the unjust compromises expected from them. They must demonstrate their feelings honestly and openly for the next generations and themselves. Thus, women should actively resist conforming to social norms and confidently voice their ideas. Films give a lucid

---

<sup>36</sup> Aditi Paul, and Nipun Kalia, “Marriage across the Seven Seas: The Representation of South Asian Women in Arranged Marriages in Diasporic Cinema,” *Literary Voice* (2022): p. 156.

understanding of viewpoints pertaining to gender complexity and help to create a healthy relationship between men and women. The women-centric films highlight the hidden agendas prevalent in women's lives, giving them a voice and rejecting the narratives as perceived by their male counterparts. Moreover, serving as a societal mirror, films help elevate women's status by shaping their ideologies and perceptions. The spectators can easily understand women's cultural and socio-economic difficulties when they see strong women fighting against violence or wanting to maintain their agency. The portrayal of Indian women in the movies has changed tremendously, which also reflects how they are viewed in society. Thus, films can bring a massive shift in the ideology of spectators; it can change their perceptions about individuals' sexuality, agency, and gender roles in marriage.