



Between Tradition and Transformation: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Gender and Voice in Hindi Movie *Thappad*

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Abstract

Between Tradition and Transformation: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Gender and Voice in Hindi Movie Thappad explores the portrayal of gender dynamics and the evolution of voice within the context of domestic violence, as depicted in the 2020 Indian film *Thappad*. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Film Theory to examine how language, silence, and non-verbal communication shape the power relations between the protagonist, Amrita, and her husband, Vikram. The film's central moment—a slap—serves as a catalyst for Amrita's journey from passive submission to active resistance, offering a critique of patriarchal structures and the normalization of domestic violence within middle-class Indian families.

This paper analyses how the film's dialogue and character interactions serve as tools of both oppression and resistance, reflecting broader sociocultural and gendered power dynamics. Through CDA, the study examines how Vikram's discourse manipulates the narrative to downplay the severity of the violence, while Amrita's rejection of his justifications becomes a form of resistance to patriarchal control. Drawing on Feminist

Film Theory, particularly Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, the analysis highlights Amrita's transformation as a re-performance of gender roles—shifting from the passive 'ideal wife' to an empowered woman demanding justice.

The findings of this study contribute to feminist discourse and cinematic analysis by showcasing how *Thappad* challenges traditional gender norms in Indian society. It argues that the film provides a powerful intervention into the ongoing conversation about women's agency, using Amrita's reclaiming of her voice as a form of feminist resistance. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of language, silence, and voice in the cultural transformation of gender dynamics within contemporary India.

Keywords: gender, voice, power dynamics, feminist film theory, critical discourse analysis, domestic violence, resistance, Indian cinema

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1. Introduction

Indian cinema has long been a site of complex negotiations between tradition and transformation, particularly when it comes to representations of gender and power. The 2020 film *Thappad*, directed by Anubhav Sinha, stands as a powerful intervention in this discourse, offering a critique of the normalized violence women often endure within patriarchal familial structures. The film centers on Amrita, a middle-class woman who experiences a slap from her husband, Vikram, during a heated argument. While the slap serves as the film's dramatic catalyst, the focus shifts to Amrita's decision to confront this act of violence, leading her on a journey that challenges the societal, familial, and personal forces that have conditioned her to accept such behavior. *Thappad* becomes not just a narrative about one woman's struggle for justice but a broader critique of the cultural norms that normalize domestic violence and silence women's voices in contemporary India.

The story of Amrita's transformation—from the silence she initially endures to the active assertion of her voice—provides an important framework for exploring the intersections of gender, voice, and power. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Film Theory to examine how the film uses language, silence, and body language to subvert patriarchal norms and illuminate the transformative potential of reclaiming one's voice. Through CDA, the film's dialogues and non-verbal expressions are analysed to uncover the ways in which language functions as both a tool of oppression and a mechanism for resistance. At the same time, Feminist Film Theory—specifically Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity—offers insights into how Amrita's journey of self-assertion can be understood as a re-performance of gender, challenging the passive role prescribed to women in patriarchal contexts.

By focusing on the evolution of Amrita's voice, the study positions *Thappad* as a feminist critique of not only the gendered power dynamics within marriage but also the larger societal expectations that define women's roles within family and society. In doing so, this

paper contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on the intersection of gender, voice, and power, providing a critical reading of how Indian cinema can be used as a tool for both cultural reflection and social transformation.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of gender, language, and power has been widely explored in both Indian and global contexts. In particular, feminist film theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA) offer important frameworks for analyzing how gendered power dynamics are represented in cinema. This literature review examines the existing scholarship on gendered discourse, voice, and resistance in both Indian cinema and global feminist theory, with particular focus on the film *Thappad* (2020).

2.1 Gender, Language, and Power in Post-Colonial India

Aziz (2003) explores the intersection of gender and language in post-colonial India, emphasizing how language both reflects and perpetuates societal hierarchies. In the context of *Thappad*, this framework is invaluable for understanding how gendered language functions as a tool of power and control, particularly within the family unit. The discourse of *Thappad* reveals how Vikram, Amrita's husband, uses language to normalize his violent behaviour, thereby reinforcing patriarchal power structures. His justifications of the slap—framed as a "momentary lapse"—serve to diminish its severity and reassert male dominance, reflecting the cultural patterns of speech identified by Aziz.

2.2 Media, Patriarchy, and Gendered Voices in Indian Cinema

Bhatia (2011) addresses the role of media in perpetuating patriarchal voices, particularly through representations of women in Indian cinema. This framework is crucial for understanding how films like *Thappad* challenge media portrayals of female submission. Bhatia argues that the media often presents women in roles that reinforce male authority. *Thappad*, however, subverts this norm by centering on a woman who, after experiencing violence, resists the expectations of silence and compliance. The film offers a critique of the ways in which media often positions women as passive subjects, while Amrita's journey of resistance challenges these representations.

2.3 Domestic Violence and Feminist Film Theory

Mehra (2020) offers a critical examination of domestic violence in contemporary Indian cinema, focusing on *Thappad* as a case study. Mehra's work contributes to the understanding of how Indian films deal with the cultural politics of domestic violence, particularly in middle-class households. *Thappad* critiques the normalization of violence within the family by focusing on Amrita's emotional and *psychological* response to her husband's slap. The film highlights how societal pressures, as well as the deep-rooted belief in family honour, shape responses to domestic violence. By challenging the notion that domestic violence can be overlooked or excused, *Thappad* joins a growing body of feminist cinema that seeks to dismantle the cultural normalization of male violence against women.

2.4 Feminist Film Theory and the Politics of Voice

Feminist film theorists such as Mulvey (1975) have explored how cinema both reflects and perpetuates patriarchal structures through the objectification of women. In her seminal work, Mulvey discusses the "male gaze" and its impact on the representation of women in film. While *Thappad* may not employ the male gaze in a traditional sense, the film uses its narrative to critique the patriarchal gaze and the *silencing* of women. Amrita's journey of reclaiming her voice becomes a feminist act of resistance, whereby her silence transforms into a form of active protest against male dominance. The shift in Amrita's character from passive wife to autonomous individual challenges the traditional representations of women in Indian cinema.

2.5 Gender and Caste in Indian Cinema: An Intersectional Approach

Krishnan (2018) provides an intersectional analysis of gendered voices in Indian cinema, emphasizing how women's experiences of oppression are shaped by both gender and class. In *Thappad*, Amrita's socio-economic position influences her initial submission to her husband's abuse. Krishnan's framework helps contextualize Amrita's experience within the broader societal structures that limit *women's* agency, especially within lower-middle-class families in India. Amrita's silence in the face of abuse is not merely personal but deeply rooted in class-based and gendered social expectations. However, her eventual resistance exemplifies the breaking of these intersecting chains of oppression, reflecting the transformative potential of reclaiming one's voice.

2.6 Women's Agency and Resistance in Cinema

Gandhi (2010) highlights the increasing representation of women's agency in contemporary Indian cinema, a trend that *Thappad* exemplifies. Amrita's refusal to accept her husband's justification of his actions, and her decision to take legal action, represents a significant shift in how women are portrayed in Indian films. Gandhi's work provides a theoretical backdrop for understanding how *Thappad* challenges the passive female role traditionally depicted in Bollywood. Amrita's transformation from a silent *victim* to an assertive woman rejecting patriarchal norms showcases the growing representation of women's agency in Indian cinema.

2.7 Critical Discourse Analysis of Bollywood and Gender Identities

Prasad (2019) applies a critical discourse analysis to Bollywood's portrayal of gender identities, focusing on how films *negotiate* male and female power dynamics. In *Thappad*, this negotiation is central to the narrative, as the film examines how gender roles are enforced and contested within the family. Prasad's analysis of Bollywood discourse provides a lens through which to understand how *Thappad* critiques the traditional portrayal of women as subservient to their husbands. The film challenges the assumption that domestic violence is a private matter, instead positioning it within the larger discourse of gender inequality.

2.8 Performance and Ideology of Gendered Communication

Barrett (1987) and Tannen (1990) both discuss how gendered communication reflects and perpetuates societal ideologies. Barrett's work on the ideological shaping of communication provides insight into how Vikram's discourse in *Thappad* seeks to maintain control by trivializing his violent act, while Amrita's silence can be read as both a form of compliance and resistance. Tannen's exploration of how men and women communicate differently helps explain the communication breakdowns between Amrita and Vikram, where his violent actions and subsequent justifications are framed as rational, while her emotional response is dismissed as irrational.

2.9 The Ideology of Gender and Performance in Indian Cinema

Lazar (2005) emphasizes the role of language in constructing gender as both a performance and an ideological practice. This framework is particularly useful for understanding how Amrita's transformation is reflected not only in her actions but also in her language. In the beginning, Amrita's language is subdued, reflecting her internalized submission to patriarchal norms. However, as the film progresses, her speech becomes more assertive, culminating in her rejection of Vikram's authority. Lazar's concept of gender as performance highlights how Amrita's evolution from silence to voice symbolizes her ideological shift and her reclaiming of power.

The scholarly work on gender, language, and cinema provides crucial insights into the analysis of *Thappad*. Drawing from CDA, feminist film theory, and intersectional feminist frameworks, this review demonstrates how the film critiques the ways in which language and communication perpetuate patriarchal power. The integration of references like Aziz (2003), Bhatia (2011), Mehra (2020), and Prasad (2019) allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural forces at play in the film. *Thappad* presents a critical interrogation of the silent acceptance of domestic violence and the ways in which women, particularly in Indian society, negotiate their voices and agency within oppressive structures.

3. Theoretical Background

The analysis of gender, language, and power in *Thappad* requires an understanding of the theoretical perspectives that shape how gender dynamics are portrayed in Indian cinema. This section provides an overview of the key theories employed in this study, particularly Feminist Film Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Intersectionality, to frame the film's engagement with gendered voices, silence, and resistance.

3.1 Feminist Film Theory: The Politics of Representation

Feminist film theory provides a critical lens through which to examine how women are represented in film. One of the foundational contributions to feminist film theory is Laura Mulvey's (1975) concept of the "male gaze," which critiques the objectification of women in cinema and the ways in which visual pleasure and narrative structures are aligned with patriarchal values. Mulvey's argument that cinema typically positions women as passive objects to be gazed upon by a male protagonist (and by the audience) provides a crucial

framework for understanding the gender dynamics in *Thappad*. However, *Thappad* offers a distinct subversion of this gaze by placing the female protagonist, Amrita, at the center of the narrative, allowing her to be both the subject and object of the story. Amrita's journey from silence to resistance challenges the traditional objectification of women in cinema, positioning her as a fully realized subject with agency and voice.

While Mulvey's work is essential in understanding the broader implications of the male gaze in cinema, bell hooks (1992) provides a more nuanced view of representation, particularly in terms of race and gender. hooks discusses the intersection of race and gender in media, arguing that the representation of black women in cinema has historically been shaped by both racial stereotypes and gendered oppression. While *Thappad* is set in a middle-class Indian context, hooks' framework allows for an understanding of how gendered representations are not merely universal but deeply shaped by specific cultural and socio-political contexts. In *Thappad*, Amrita's struggle is embedded in Indian cultural and familial contexts, which complicates her portrayal as a victim of domestic violence and enables her transformation into an empowered subject.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Language of Power

The analysis of language and power in *Thappad* is informed by **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, particularly the work of Norman Fairclough (1995), who argues that language is not merely a tool for communication but a medium through which power relations are constructed, maintained, and challenged. CDA highlights the ways in which discourse shapes social realities and reinforces structures of dominance, particularly in relation to gender and authority. In *Thappad*, the dialogue between Amrita and her husband, Vikram, reveals the ways in which language is used to perpetuate patriarchal power. Vikram's use of language to justify the slap as a "momentary lapse" functions to minimize his violence and reassert control over Amrita, illustrating how language can both reflect and sustain gender inequality.

Moreover, the CDA framework allows for an analysis of gendered communication, a concept explored by scholars like Deborah Tannen (1990) and M. Barrett (1987). Tannen's work on gendered communication suggests that men and women often speak in different registers, with men typically using language to assert power and dominance, while women are socialized to adopt more passive and accommodating communication styles. In *Thappad*, Vikram's communication is aggressive and dismissive, while Amrita initially responds with silence, reflecting the gendered power imbalance between them. Her silence, however, is not merely passive but evolves into a form of resistance as the narrative progresses.

M. Barrett (1987) builds on this by discussing how language is ideologically shaped to reinforce gender roles. The film's dialogues reflect how societal expectations of women's subservience are encoded into everyday language, with Amrita's eventual reclamation of her voice serving as a challenge to these deeply ingrained norms.

3.3 Intersectionality and the Multidimensional Nature of Gendered Oppression

Intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), provides a crucial framework for understanding how various axes of identity—such as gender, class, caste, and marital status—intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression. In the case of *Thappad*, Amrita's experience of domestic violence cannot be understood solely through the lens of gender; it is also influenced by her position within the socio-economic hierarchy. Amrita's class status complicates her response to the abuse, as societal expectations often dictate that women in her position endure suffering in silence for the sake of family honour.

Prasad (2019) emphasizes how Bollywood cinema often reflects and negotiates gender identities within the constraints of patriarchal norms. This negotiation is particularly evident in *Thappad*, where Amrita's identity as a middle-class wife intersects with her gendered expectations. Her journey of resistance challenges both traditional gender roles and class-based expectations. The film's portrayal of Amrita's evolving self-awareness and agency is a testament to the complex interplay of gender and class, which is central to understanding the dynamics of power and control in her marriage.

Moreover, Krishnan (2018) further enriches this analysis by examining the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class in Indian cinema. While caste is not explicitly discussed in *Thappad*, the socio-economic positioning of Amrita plays a significant role in shaping her responses to Vikram's violence. Her decision to break free from the oppressive structures of her marriage and family reflects an intersectional analysis that transcends the individual level to address broader societal inequalities.

3.4 Feminist Resistance and Reclaiming the Voice

In line with Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, where gender is seen as a performative act that is continuously enacted and re-enacted, Amrita's journey in *Thappad* represents a re-performance of gender. Her initial silence in response to Vikram's slap reflects the internalized gendered expectations of her role as a wife. However, as the narrative unfolds, Amrita gradually reclaims her voice, demonstrating that gender is not a fixed identity but a performance that can be challenged and reshaped. Her transformation is both an act of personal liberation and a critique of the broader societal structures that confine women to passive roles.

Feminist film scholars like Gandhi (2010) emphasize the growing representation of women's agency in contemporary Indian cinema, particularly in films that challenge traditional gender norms. *Thappad* exemplifies this shift, with Amrita's refusal to accept Vikram's justifications and her decision to seek justice marking a significant moment of feminist resistance. The film highlights the importance of voice—not only as a form of expression but as an instrument of empowerment and social change.

The theoretical frameworks of Feminist Film Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Intersectionality provide the tools necessary to critically analyse *Thappad's* depiction of gender and power. By examining the role of language, silence, and communication in the film, this study demonstrates how patriarchal power is maintained and subverted through discourse. Moreover, the intersectional lens allows for a deeper understanding

of the complexities of Amrita's experience, highlighting how her gendered and class-based identity shapes her responses to violence. Finally, through the lens of Butler's performativity and Gandhi's work on women's agency, we can understand Amrita's transformation as a feminist act of reclaiming her voice and challenging the gendered power structures that seek to silence her.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Film Theory as its primary analytical frameworks to explore the representation of gender, voice, and power in the 2020 Indian film *Thappad*. The methodology involves a close textual analysis of key scenes in the film, with a focus on language, silence, and the performance of gender. By applying CDA and feminist perspectives, the study aims to unpack how the film challenges traditional gender norms and provides a critique of patriarchal power structures in the context of domestic violence.

4.1 Data Collection

The data for this study consists of the full-length film *Thappad*, which is transcribed for analysis. Specific scenes are selected based on their thematic relevance to the central research question, focusing on key moments where gender dynamics, voice, and power are most prominently displayed. These include:

1. **The slap scene** – The pivotal moment where Vikram slaps Amrita, which acts as the catalyst for the entire narrative.
2. **Amrita's silence and internal reflection** – Scenes where Amrita's non-verbal responses and inner thoughts illustrate her passive compliance, later transitioning into resistance.
3. **The legal battle** – Amrita's journey through the legal system, where her voice shifts from silence to assertive demands for justice.
4. **Family interactions** – Scenes involving Amrita's interactions with family members and her husband's attempts to justify his actions, offering insight into the societal pressures she faces.

These scenes are transcribed and analysed to examine the way language is used to reinforce or challenge patriarchal norms and gendered power relations. The analysis also focuses on the non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, which play a crucial role in the communication of power, resistance, and submission.

4.2 Analytical Approach

The study applies a multi-step analysis using both CDA and Feminist Film Theory. The analysis unfolds as follows:

1. **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Language and Power**
CDA is used to examine how discourse shapes and reinforces gendered power relations

in *Thappad*. Drawing on the work of Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2001), the study analyses the language used by key characters—particularly Vikram, who attempts to justify his actions, and Amrita, who begins to assert herself in increasingly vocal and legal forms. The discourse surrounding domestic violence is dissected to understand how the film critiques the cultural normalization of such violence and the discursive silencing of women's voices.

Specific elements of CDA are applied to the film's dialogues, including:

- Lexical choices: Words that normalize violence, guilt-tripping, or justify behaviour.
- Speech acts: How the characters use language to apologize, justify, and defend actions.
- Interruption and dominance in speech: Analysing the power dynamics in verbal exchanges, especially the silencing of Amrita's perspective by Vikram and her family.

2. Feminist Film Theory: Gender, Voice, and Performative Acts Using Feminist Film Theory, the study focuses on how gender is represented and performed in *Thappad*. Drawing on Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, the analysis examines how Amrita's identity shifts from passive acceptance to active resistance. Initially, Amrita's role as a wife and mother conforms to societal expectations of female submission and silence. However, as the narrative progresses, her choice to speak out and confront her husband becomes an act of resistance against these performative norms.

The analysis also incorporates feminist concepts of voice and silence, looking at how Amrita's silence is both a product of societal conditioning and a strategic act of resistance. The shift in her performance from silence to voice is analysed as a feminist reimagining of agency and gender, in which she redefines herself as an autonomous subject who can reclaim her voice and reject patriarchal authority.

The film's exploration of silence as a form of compliance and resistance is a key point of analysis. By looking at moments where Amrita chooses to remain silent and later speaks out, the study explores how silence can be both a tool of oppression and a means of reclaiming power when strategically used.

3. Intersectionality and Sociocultural Context: The analysis also considers the intersectional dynamics of gender, class, and marital status in Amrita's narrative. Her middle-class background and the cultural pressures to maintain family harmony play a significant role in shaping her initial submission to Vikram's violence. Drawing on intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), the study examines how Amrita's experiences are influenced by both gendered and class-based expectations in Indian society, where familial reputation often outweighs the individual's emotional and physical well-being.

Additionally, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) concept of the "global sisterhood" is used to critique how women's experiences in different cultural contexts—particularly in India—are often misunderstood or oversimplified by mainstream Western feminism. The study highlights how *Thappad* reflects a localized feminist critique of domestic violence that resonates with the lived realities of Indian women.

4.3 Data Analysis Process

The analysis process consists of the following steps:

1. **Scene Selection and Transcription:** The selected scenes are transcribed verbatim to capture both spoken and non-verbal elements of communication.
2. **Discourse Coding:** Using CDA, specific linguistic features are coded to identify patterns of gendered language, such as the use of diminutives, justifications for violence, or instances of linguistic domination.
3. **Performative Analysis:** Applying Feminist Film Theory, the study examines how gender is constructed and deconstructed through Amrita's actions and responses.
4. **Intersectional Consideration:** The final analysis incorporates a reading of how Amrita's gendered experience is intersected by her social position, exploring the societal and cultural pressures that influence her decision-making process.

4.4 Rationale for Methodological Approach

This methodology was chosen because both CDA and Feminist Film Theory offer a comprehensive and nuanced approach to analysing gender in cinema. CDA allows for an in-depth examination of how language reflects and constructs societal power relations, making it ideal for understanding the discourse surrounding domestic violence in *Thappad*. Feminist Film Theory, on the other hand, provides critical insights into how gender is represented and challenged in film, focusing on the complexities of female subjectivity and agency. By combining these approaches, the study offers a rich analysis of how *Thappad* critiques traditional gender norms in Indian society while providing a feminist perspective on voice, silence, and resistance.

Methodological approach of this study allows for a detailed and nuanced analysis of *Thappad*, highlighting how gender, voice, and power are constructed and contested through language and performative acts. By applying CDA and Feminist Film Theory, the research provides a critical examination of how the film challenges patriarchal structures and offers a feminist intervention into the discourse surrounding domestic violence and women's agency in contemporary Indian society.

5. Analysis

The analysis of *Thappad* requires an exploration of the film's treatment of gendered power relations, language, and resistance, all of which are intricately woven into the narrative. This section examines how gender, voice, and silence function within the film, drawing on Feminist Film Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Intersectionality to dissect the ways in which *Thappad* challenges and subverts patriarchal norms.

5.1 Gendered Discourse and Power Dynamics

The language of power in *Thappad* is crucial for understanding how patriarchal structures are both maintained and contested. The discourse between Amrita and Vikram, particularly in the aftermath of the slap, illustrates how power is communicated through both explicit language and silence. Vikram's use of language to justify his action—framing the slap as a "momentary lapse"—is an example of how language functions to normalize violence and reassert patriarchal control. His words serve to minimize the seriousness of his actions, suggesting that his aggression is an isolated incident rather than a symptom of deeper systemic issues.

This reflects Fairclough's (1995) analysis of CDA, where language is seen as a mechanism through which social power is both reproduced and contested. Vikram's discourse, aimed at dismissing Amrita's emotional reality, mirrors the social expectation that women should remain silent or passive in the face of violence. In contrast, Amrita's initial silence can be understood as both an internalization of patriarchal norms and a reflection of her socio-cultural conditioning. This silence, while initially perceived as compliance, gradually transforms into an act of resistance, as Amrita finds her voice and refuses to accept Vikram's justifications.

The feminist critique of patriarchal discourse—as discussed by Butler (1990) and Lazar (2005)—is vital for understanding how Amrita's evolving responses to Vikram's language reflect her growing awareness of gendered power structures. Amrita's shift from silence to articulation symbolizes a profound reclamation of agency. This process aligns with Butler's theory of gender performativity, where Amrita's transformation represents a conscious re-performance of gender roles, from a submissive wife to a woman who asserts her rights.

5.2 Silence as Resistance

Amrita's silence in the face of violence is not simply an act of passivity but is rooted in the complex dynamics of gendered communication. Tannen (1990) discusses how women's communication is often shaped by a cultural expectation of deference and compliance, particularly in heterosexual relationships. Amrita's initial silence can be seen as a manifestation of this socialized behaviour. However, in *Thappad*, her silence also functions as a form of resistance, as it challenges the assumption that women's silence should be interpreted as consent.

Her eventual decision to speak out and take legal action disrupts the expected trajectory of female passivity in Bollywood films. Gandhi (2010) argues that contemporary Indian cinema has increasingly depicted women asserting their agency, and *Thappad* exemplifies this shift. By breaking the silence that is often expected of women in violent domestic settings, Amrita's character challenges the stereotype of the submissive wife. Her refusal to accept Vikram's apology, combined with her legal pursuit of justice, represents a reclaiming of her voice—a powerful feminist act that defies patriarchal norms.

Moreover, Krishnan (2018) highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding women's experiences in Indian cinema. Amrita's social and economic background plays a crucial role in her response to violence. As a middle-class woman, Amrita is expected to prioritize family honour over her own well-being, making her eventual decision to leave Vikram and seek justice even more significant. Her resistance is not just a personal rebellion but a political act that challenges the expectations placed upon women from specific socio-economic backgrounds.

5.3 The Role of Gendered Ideologies in Communication

In analysing the ideological shaping of gendered communication, Barrett (1987) argues that discourse is deeply embedded in societal ideologies that define gender roles. In *Thappad*, the communication between Amrita and Vikram is heavily influenced by these ingrained ideologies. Vikram's use of language to justify his actions reflects his belief in male entitlement and female submission, ideas that are culturally embedded in the patriarchal fabric of Indian society. His defense of the slap as a minor issue, despite its emotional and physical impact on Amrita, underscores the gendered double standard that minimizes male violence and holds women accountable for the breakdown of relationships.

Amrita's response, initially silent and submissive, follows the traditional role of the wife who is expected to tolerate her husband's faults. However, as Mulvey (1975) notes, women in cinema are typically constructed as objects of male desire and control. *Thappad* subverts this by focusing on Amrita's interiority and emotional journey, offering a counter-narrative where the female protagonist is allowed to become the subject of her own story. By the end of the film, Amrita's act of speaking out represents a rejection of the patriarchal ideology that has shaped her identity and responses for years.

5.4 Reclaiming the Feminist Voice

The transformation of Amrita's character from a compliant wife to an empowered woman is central to the feminist narrative of *Thappad*. In the film, Amrita's voice becomes a symbol of resistance. Her decision to challenge her husband's authority and to take legal action against him marks a pivotal moment of feminist resistance in the narrative. This shift is not just about asserting physical space but also reclaiming the psychological and emotional space that was previously occupied by silence.

As Lazar (2005) argues, gender is a performance that is shaped by societal expectations. Amrita's shift from silence to voice can be understood as a re-performance of gender, where she rejects the passive role that is often ascribed to women in domestic violence situations. Prasad (2019) suggests that Bollywood films like *Thappad* reflect the growing negotiation of gender identities within the constraints of patriarchal norms. By providing Amrita with a narrative arc in which she reclaims her voice, *Thappad* engages in this negotiation, allowing for a nuanced portrayal of a woman's struggle for agency within the confines of traditional gender expectations.

Mehra (2020) provides a useful lens to analyse how *Thappad* critiques the normalization of domestic violence in Indian society. By situating Amrita's personal journey within a broader cultural and social context, *Thappad* challenges the acceptance of violence as a part of familial life. The film critiques the cultural politics that frame women as the moral guardians of the family, while men are often excused for their transgressions. Amrita's resistance is not only an individual act of rebellion but also a challenge to the cultural normalization of violence against women.

The analysis of *Thappad* demonstrates how the film subverts traditional gendered communication and the patriarchal ideology that underpins domestic relationships. Through its depiction of Amrita's evolving silence and eventual resistance, the film critiques the cultural norms that constrain women's voices and agency. Drawing from CDA, Feminist Film Theory, and Intersectionality, this analysis shows how the film employs language and silence to both reflect and challenge power dynamics. Amrita's journey from submission to self-empowerment offers a powerful feminist narrative that critiques the cultural politics of gender and violence in contemporary Indian society.

6. Conclusion

Thappad (2020) presents a powerful feminist critique of patriarchal power dynamics within the Indian family, focusing on the gendered struggles of its protagonist, Amrita. Through its nuanced portrayal of domestic violence, the film interrogates the normalization of male violence and the silencing of women, challenging deeply ingrained social and cultural norms. This paper has analysed the film through the lenses of Feminist Film Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Intersectionality, demonstrating how *Thappad* disrupts traditional gender representations in Indian cinema and provides a voice for women who have long been marginalized and silenced.

By focusing on the language of power and the communication of resistance, *Thappad* exposes how patriarchal structures are reinforced and challenged through discourse. Vikram's use of language to justify his violent act of slapping Amrita reveals the power dynamics within their marriage, where male violence is normalized and excused. In contrast, Amrita's silence, initially a form of submission, gradually transforms into a powerful act of resistance. This transformation is not merely personal but reflects a broader societal shift in how women are beginning to reclaim their voices in the face of patriarchal oppression.

The film's portrayal of Amrita's evolving self-awareness and her eventual assertion of agency challenges traditional gender roles in Bollywood cinema, which have historically confined women to passive and subordinate positions. Drawing on Lazar's (2005) theory of gender performativity, Amrita's journey can be seen as a re-performance of gender, where she actively redefines her identity and challenges the societal norms that seek to silence her. Her act of resistance—both through legal action and public defiance—becomes a feminist reclaiming of voice, highlighting the power of women to redefine their own roles within the family and society.

Moreover, *Thappad* highlights the importance of intersectionality, as Amrita's response to violence is influenced not only by her gender but also by her socio-economic status. Krishnan (2018) emphasizes that women's experiences of oppression in Indian cinema are shaped by multiple intersecting identities, and Amrita's class position plays a significant role in her initial submission to Vikram's authority. However, her eventual resistance transcends these socio-economic boundaries, reflecting a broader feminist struggle for justice and equality.

In conclusion, *Thappad* represents a significant departure from traditional Bollywood portrayals of women as passive victims. It positions Amrita as an empowered subject who challenges the social and cultural systems that seek to silence her. The film serves as a cultural critique, questioning the acceptability of domestic violence and challenging the normalization of male authority. By centering women's voices, *Thappad* contributes to a broader feminist discourse in Indian cinema, offering a powerful representation of resistance against patriarchal oppression.

Ultimately, *Thappad* underscores the importance of voice and agency in dismantling patriarchal power structures, showing that the act of reclaiming one's voice is not just an individual struggle but a collective, societal challenge. This feminist critique, grounded in Feminist Film Theory, CDA, and Intersectionality, offers an essential framework for understanding how cinema can function as a tool for social change, amplifying the voices of those who have been historically silenced.

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