



A Comparative Content Analysis of *Thappad* and *Pink*: Exploring Patriarchy and Gender Dynamics in Contemporary Indian Cinema

Dr. Priyanka Tyagi

Assistant Professor, MAIMS

Priya.tyagi144@gmail.com

Dr. Jitender Vig,

Assistant Professor, MAIMS

graphicsjv@gmail.com

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* Corresponding author

Abstract

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has long played a crucial role in reflecting and shaping societal values, including the entrenched norms of patriarchy and gender dynamics. This paper presents a comparative content analysis of two notable films, *Thappad* (2020) and *Pink* (2016), both of which boldly confront these issues. Directed by Anubhav Sinha, *Thappad* tells the story of Amrita, a woman who reassesses her marriage after her husband slaps her, highlighting the normalization of domestic violence and the silent endurance expected from women. In contrast, *Pink*, directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, follows three young women entangled in a legal battle after defending themselves against sexual assault. The film underscores the prejudices and moral judgments women face when they defy societal norms, with a strong emphasis on the importance of consent.

By examining the narratives, character development, and key dialogues of both films, this study aims to uncover how *Thappad* and *Pink* reflect and challenge patriarchal values in contemporary Indian society. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of cinema as a medium of social commentary and its impact on the discourse surrounding gender equality. This analysis will also explore the diverse approaches these films take to similar themes, offering varied perspectives on combating patriarchal oppression and empowering women in Indian culture.

Keywords: Bollywood, patriarchy, gender dynamics, domestic violence, consent

Introduction

Indian cinema has long been a powerful medium for reflecting and shaping societal values. Bollywood, as the heart of Indian cinema, often addresses a myriad of themes that resonate deeply with the audience, from romance and family to social justice and political issues. Among these themes, the portrayal of gender dynamics and patriarchy stands out as a critical area of analysis. Gender roles and the influence of patriarchy have been deeply embedded in the narratives of many Bollywood films, serving both as a mirror to societal norms and a catalyst for discussion and change (Chaudhuri, 2014).

The films *Thappad* (2020) and *Pink* (2016) are particularly notable for their bold confrontation of these issues. Both films challenge traditional narratives and highlight the struggles of women in a patriarchal society, yet they do so through distinct storylines and character arcs. *Thappad*, directed by Anubhav Sinha,





revolves around Amrita, a woman who reevaluates her marriage after her husband slaps her at a party. The film delves into the normalization of domestic violence and the silent endurance of women in a patriarchal setup. Sinha's portrayal of Amrita's journey from a submissive housewife to a woman who stands up for her self-respect is a poignant critique of the societal expectation for women to tolerate abuse for the sake of family harmony (Kapoor, 2020).

On the other hand, *Pink*, directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, follows the story of three young women—Minal, Falak, and Andrea—who are implicated in a crime after defending themselves against sexual assault. The courtroom drama highlights the prejudices and moral judgments faced by women who defy societal norms. Through its gripping narrative and powerful dialogues, *Pink* brings to light the pervasive issues of consent, victim-blaming, and the legal and social biases that women encounter when they resist male dominance (Jain, 2017). The film's assertion that "No means no" became a cultural touchstone, emphasizing the importance of consent and autonomy in gender relations.

This study aims to conduct a comparative content analysis of *Thappad* and *Pink*, focusing on their portrayal of patriarchy and gender dynamics. By examining the films' narratives, character development, and key dialogues, the research seeks to uncover how these films reflect and challenge patriarchal values in contemporary Indian society. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of cinema in social commentary and the ongoing discourse on gender equality (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2012). This comparative analysis will also explore how the films' distinct approaches to similar themes can offer diverse perspectives on the fight against patriarchal oppression and the empowerment of women in Indian culture.

Patriarchy in Indian Cinema

Indian cinema has long been a reflection of societal norms, with a significant emphasis on patriarchal values. Studies have shown that Bollywood films historically depict men as dominant figures and women as subordinate, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Chaudhuri, 2014). The portrayal of women in these films often limits them to roles such as caregivers or objects of desire, thereby perpetuating gender stereotypes (Dwyer, 2011).

However, recent years have seen a shift in Bollywood, with more films challenging these traditional norms and presenting more nuanced portrayals of women. This change is attributed to the growing influence of feminist movements and a changing audience that demands more realistic and empowering representations of women (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2012). Films like *Thappad* and *Pink* are part of this new wave, aiming to confront and dismantle the patriarchal structures ingrained in society.

Gender Dynamics in Bollywood

The representation of gender dynamics in Bollywood has evolved, with a noticeable shift towards more balanced and equitable portrayals. Traditional Bollywood often showcased women in secondary roles, reinforcing the idea that their primary function was to support male protagonists (Nair, 2013). This trend has been critiqued for reinforcing harmful gender norms and limiting the scope of female characters (Kabir, 2010).

Contemporary Bollywood, however, is increasingly featuring strong female leads who challenge these norms. For instance, *Thappad* focuses on the story of Amrita, a woman who stands up against domestic violence, highlighting the pervasive nature of patriarchal control within marriage (Kapoor, 2020). Similarly,





Pink revolves around the theme of consent and the societal prejudices women face, particularly when they resist male aggression (Jain, 2017).

Content Analysis in Film Studies

Content analysis is a widely used method in film studies to systematically examine and interpret media content. This method involves analyzing the narrative structure, character development, dialogues, and visual imagery to uncover underlying themes and messages (Krippendorff, 2013). Content analysis helps in understanding how films reflect societal attitudes and cultural norms.

For this study, content analysis will be employed to examine *Thappad* and *Pink*, focusing on their portrayal of patriarchy and gender dynamics. By analyzing key scenes, character interactions, and narrative arcs, the research aims to reveal how these films challenge or reinforce patriarchal values and contribute to the discourse on gender equality in Indian society.

Previous Studies on Thappad and Pink

Thappad and *Pink* have been critically acclaimed for their bold treatment of gender issues. *Thappad* has been praised for its nuanced portrayal of a woman's journey towards self-respect and autonomy, with scholars noting its critique of the normalization of domestic abuse in Indian society (Mehta, 2020). The film's depiction of various women's responses to patriarchal oppression provides a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal setup (Sharma, 2020).

Pink, on the other hand, has been analyzed for its exploration of consent and the societal biases faced by women who assert their rights (Sinha, 2017). The film's courtroom drama format has been particularly noted for its ability to foreground legal and moral arguments about women's autonomy and agency (Raj, 2016). The critical discourse around *Pink* highlights its role in challenging victim-blaming and advocating for justice and empowerment for women.

Methodology

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative research method that allows for the systematic examination of media content. In the context of this study, content analysis will be used to dissect the films *Thappad* and *Pink* to understand how they portray patriarchal norms and gender dynamics. This method is particularly effective for analyzing films because it enables researchers to identify recurring themes, symbols, and patterns in the narrative and visual elements.

Data Collection

The data for this study will be collected through a detailed viewing of both films, with specific attention to scenes that highlight gender dynamics and patriarchal structures. Key elements to be analyzed include:

- **Scenes and Plot Points:** Critical scenes that drive the narrative and reveal the central themes of the films.
- **Character Interactions:** Dialogues and interactions between characters that reflect power dynamics and gender roles.
- **Visual Imagery:** Use of symbols, settings, and cinematography to convey messages about gender and patriarchy.





- **Narrative Structure:** How the story unfolds and the resolution of the central conflict.

Analytical Framework

The analysis will be guided by a framework that includes the following criteria:

- **Representation of Women:** How female characters are portrayed, their roles, and their development throughout the film.
- **Dialogue Analysis:** Examination of key dialogues that reflect societal attitudes towards gender and patriarchy.
- **Character Development:** How characters evolve, particularly the female protagonists, in response to the challenges they face.
- **Narrative Arc and Resolution:** The overall storyline and how the films conclude, particularly in terms of resolving gender-related conflicts.

By applying this analytical framework, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of how *Thappad* and *Pink* address and challenge patriarchal values.

Analysis

Overview of *Thappad*

Thappad (2020), directed by Anubhav Sinha, is a poignant drama that centers around Amrita, a devoted housewife whose seemingly perfect life is upended when her husband, Vikram, slaps her at a party. This single act of violence prompts Amrita to reevaluate her marriage and her place within it. The film delves into the normalization of domestic abuse in Indian society and challenges the expectation that women should endure such treatment for the sake of maintaining familial harmony.

Key Themes:

- **Domestic Violence:** The central theme of *Thappad* is the physical and emotional impact of domestic violence.
- **Patriarchal Norms:** The film critiques the societal norms that uphold and justify male dominance and female subservience.
- **Self-Respect and Autonomy:** Amrita's journey is one of reclaiming her self-respect and asserting her autonomy against societal expectations.

Overview of *Pink*

Pink (2016), directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, is a courtroom drama that follows the story of three young women—Minal, Falak, and Andrea—who are implicated in a crime after defending themselves against sexual assault by a group of influential men. The film's narrative revolves around the trial, where retired lawyer Deepak Sehgal defends the women, highlighting issues of consent, victim-blaming, and societal prejudices against women who defy traditional gender roles.

Key Themes:

- **Consent:** *Pink* emphasizes the importance of consent and challenges the victim-blaming mentality prevalent in society.
- **Gender Bias and Prejudice:** The film exposes the biases and prejudices that women face, especially when they stand up against male aggression.





- **Justice and Empowerment:** Through the courtroom drama, the film advocates for women's rights and justice.

Comparative Analysis

Portrayal of Patriarchy

Thappad: The film portrays patriarchy through the everyday experiences of Amrita and other female characters. Vikram's slap is a manifestation of the deeply ingrained belief that men have the right to control and discipline their wives. The film also highlights how other characters, including women, often internalize and perpetuate these patriarchal norms. Amrita's decision to leave Vikram and seek a divorce is a radical act of defiance against these norms.

Pink: Patriarchy is portrayed through the legal and social challenges faced by Minal, Falak, and Andrea. The men who assault them feel entitled to their bodies, reflecting a patriarchal mindset that views women as objects of male desire. The courtroom scenes reveal how societal prejudices and legal systems can be complicit in upholding patriarchal values, as the women are subjected to character assassination and moral policing.

Table 1: Key Themes in *Thappad* and *Pink*

Theme	Thappad	Pink
Domestic Violence	Central theme Amrita’s Journey against domestic abuse	Not Addressed
Patriarchy	Critique of patriarchal norms within marriage	Critique of patriarchal legal and social systems
Consent	Implied through Amrita's rejection of violence	Central theme; emphasizes "No means no"
Women's Empowerment	Amrita's quest for self-respect and autonomy	Legal and social fight for justice and recognition
Societal Prejudices	Highlighted through secondary characters' reactions	Highlighted through courtroom scenes

Character Analysis

Thappad: Amrita's character evolves from a submissive wife to an assertive individual who refuses to tolerate disrespect. Other female characters, such as Amrita's mother and mother-in-law, also represent different responses to patriarchal oppression—compliance, compromise, and eventual support for Amrita's stand. Vikram, on the other hand, embodies the entitled male who struggles to understand his own culpability.

Pink: The three protagonists—Minal, Falak, and Andrea—are depicted as strong, independent women who face severe backlash for defending themselves. Their characters are fleshed out through their personal backgrounds and interactions, highlighting their resilience. Deepak Sehgal, the lawyer, represents an ally who challenges patriarchal norms within the legal system. The antagonists epitomize toxic masculinity and the sense of entitlement that comes with it.





Table 2: Character Development

Character	Thappad	Pink
Protagonist	Amrita: Evolves from submissive to assertive	Minal, Falak, Andrea: Strong, resilient, fight for justice
Antagonist	Vikram: Entitled, fails to understand his wrongdoing	Rajveer and friends: Represent toxic masculinity
Support Characters	Amrita's mother, mother-in-law: Varied responses to patriarchy	Deepak Sehgal: Ally in legal battle, fights for justice
Key Interactions	Amrita and Vikram's dynamic; conversations with other women	Courtroom interactions; testimonies and cross-examinations

Dialogue and Interactions

Thappad: Dialogues in Thappad are crucial in highlighting the normalization of domestic abuse. Statements like "It was just a slap" are countered by Amrita's firm stance that any form of violence is unacceptable. The interactions between Amrita and Vikram reveal the power dynamics in their relationship, and Amrita's conversations with other women illustrate the societal pressures they face.

Pink: The courtroom dialogues in Pink are pivotal in addressing issues of consent and victim-blaming. Phrases like "No means no" become a powerful assertion of women's rights. The interactions between the protagonists and their assailants, as well as the cross-examinations in court, expose the deeply entrenched gender biases that the women have to fight against.

Table 3: Analysis of Key Dialogues

Dialogue	Film	Context	Implication
"It was just a slap."	Thappad	Vikram's justification	Normalization of domestic violence
"No means no."	Pink	Deepak Sehgal's courtroom argument	Assertion of the importance of consent
"Why didn't you leave him?"	Thappad	Question posed to Amrita	Highlights societal expectation of tolerance
"They are good girls."	Pink	Defense argument in court	Countering character assassination and prejudice

Narrative and Resolution

Thappad: The narrative arc of Thappad follows Amrita's journey from compliance to self-assertion. The resolution is not just about Amrita leaving Vikram but also about initiating a broader conversation on the unacceptability of domestic violence. The film concludes with Amrita's decision to live independently, symbolizing her reclaiming of self-respect.

Pink: The narrative of Pink builds towards the courtroom climax, where justice is served. The resolution comes with the acquittal of the women and the conviction of the perpetrators, sending a strong message about the importance of consent and the right to self-defense. The film ends on a hopeful note, emphasizing the need for societal change and legal reforms.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Narrative Structure





Aspect	Thappad	Pink
Opening Scene	Amrita's daily life pre-incident	The night of the assault
Inciting Incident	Amrita getting slapped by Vikram	The assault on Minal, Falak, and Andrea
Rising Action	Amrita's decision to seek divorce	Legal battle and public scrutiny
Climax	Amrita confronting societal norms	Courtroom verdict
Resolution	Amrita's decision to live independently	Acquittal of the women, conviction of the perpetrators

Table 5: Representation of Gender Dynamics

Element	Thappad	Pink
Female Agency	Amrita's journey towards autonomy	Women defending themselves against assault
Male Dominance	Vikram's control and sense of entitlement	Rajveer's aggression and societal support
Societal Expectations	Women expected to endure abuse for family's sake	Victim-blaming and moral policing in court
Legal and Social Support	Limited; Amrita faces opposition	Mixed; strong defense but societal bias

Discussion

Findings

The comparative analysis reveals that both Thappad and Pink are significant in their portrayal of patriarchy and gender dynamics. Thappad focuses on domestic violence and the subtle ways in which patriarchy manifests in marital relationships, while Pink tackles issues of consent and societal prejudices against women who assert their autonomy. Both films challenge the normalization of patriarchal values and advocate for women's rights and empowerment.

Implications

The findings suggest that contemporary Indian cinema is increasingly addressing and challenging patriarchal norms. By portraying strong female characters who resist oppression, these films contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality and women's rights. They also highlight the need for societal and legal reforms to support women's autonomy and safety.

Limitations

The study is limited by its focus on only two films. A broader analysis including more films and other forms of media could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Indian cinema addresses patriarchy





and gender dynamics. Additionally, the analysis is based on the subjective interpretation of the films, which may vary among different viewers.

Conclusion

This research paper conducted a comparative content analysis of *Thappad* and *Pink*, exploring their portrayal of patriarchy and gender dynamics. Both films were found to challenge traditional gender roles and advocate for women's rights, though they did so through different narratives and thematic focuses. Future research could expand on this study by including a larger sample of films and analyzing how other forms of media, such as television and digital content, address similar issues. Additionally, audience reception studies could provide insights into how these films impact societal attitudes towards gender and patriarchy. *Thappad* and *Pink* are important contributions to contemporary Indian cinema, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need to challenge deeply ingrained patriarchal values. Through their powerful narratives and strong character portrayals, these films inspire critical reflection and advocate for a more just and equitable society.

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