

***THAPPAD: A SCORCHING AND POIGNANT INDICTMENT OF
PATRIARCHY***

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***THAPPAD*: A SCORCHING AND POIGNANT INDICTMENT OF
PATRIARCHY**

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PREFACE

Thappad, a 2020 Indian Hindi language drama film directed by Anubhav Sinha, co-produced with Bhushan Kumar of T- series was critically acclaimed for its honest portrayal of the plight of majority of Indian women after marriage. *Thappad* (slap) highlights and discusses issues that are faced in a marriage relationship in today's age.

Director Anubhav Sinha who has earlier noted for bringing socially relevant issues through his film portrays the life of Amrita (Taapasee Pannu) a young girl who leads a happy marriage life and changes a slap brings to her marriage relationship and the life's of those around her through this particular movie. The movie is not just about domestic violence. It reveals the deep rooted patriarchy within our society through its well- crafted characters. The protagonist Amrita reexamines her place in her family after that slap from her husband Vikram. She realizes all the inequalities that she have been avoiding all these years for the sake of her family and husband. *Thappad* also shows how women too becomes the patrons of patriarchy. The movie also shows men as the victims of patriarchy. This becomes evident when Vikram, Amrita's husband does not even know what crime he has committed enough to end up in a divorce. He considers it's just normal to beat one's wife.

Our project titled “***Thappad: A Scorching and Poignant Indictment of Patriarchy***” aims at revealing the aspects of domestic violence as well as the domesticated silence of women. The first chapter introduces the movie in the background of feminism and its Indian aspect. The second chapter, the core discusses how the movie serves as a disclosure to the hidden details of patriarchy, feminism and domestic violence within the movie. It also focuses on different perspectives of

feminism through the eyes of different characters, how the life of women around the protagonist Amrita changes with that one slap. The third and concluding chapter deals with the climax of the movie, justification to the movie's title and tagline and also the impact a thappad could bring to our society.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Film or a motion picture is a series of still or moving images produced by recording photographic images with camera or by creating images using animation techniques or visual effects. The process of film making has developed into an art form and an industry. Films are cultural artefacts created by specific cultures, which reflect those cultures and in turn affect them. Films are a popular source of entertainment and educating the masses. The visual elements of cinema provide motion pictures a universal power of communication.

India has emerged as the largest film producing country in the world with an annual production of more than thousand films. Though cinema has a western origin, it has become a popular entertainment in our country. It is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. In a very explicit way cinema has shaped the social, cultural and political values. Movies, films, documentaries have always been a mirror to the society. It portrays the existing culture and habits of a community as such. In a way, also reflected the position of women in the social setup.

In recent years, the cinema industry has also somewhere felt a bit of pinch to bring change, from patriarchal society structure to that of equal. Indian cinema industry, especially Bollywood is undergoing a wide range of change. Popular Hindi cinema often referred as Bollywood provides a look at family structures and perceived traditional roles of males and females within them. Men are often portrayed with

characters that meet the society's definition of masculinity while female roles are reduced to misogynistic ideals. As a result, the lack of equality both on and off – screen has raised, questions on gender stereotyping, and misinterpretation of a balanced society. The role of women is often problematic in Indian movie. Over many decades they are mainly portrayed as an object or eye candy in the main stream movies. As majority of the movies being male centred, the female characters did not have any significance of their own in majority of the male oriented movies.

We could see the upcoming of many feminist movies, smashing the Patriarchal dominance, re-examining the existing cultural norms and values. The male - female relationship has been a perennial issue in all genres of literature including films. The changes in it have been reflected in films and literature too. A relationship which is defined and redefined as though finding no transcendental definition, the debate and discussion is going on. Always there are stereotypes for how a woman should perform the act of being a woman, backed up by the established notions of culture and civilization. Many contemporary film makers began to represent strong and powerful female characters. Myriad movies are now focused on the female oriented subjects. The significant shift in the themes of the films also implies the elevated status of women in the current time.

Thappad, literally translated as slap is a Hindi Language Indian drama film directed by Anubhav Sinha. His most recent films *Mulk*(2018), *Article 15*(2019), *Thappad*(2020) revolves around a single event that proves to be both cataclysm and catalyst. The central question of the movie reflects how lightly our society reacts to socially accepted practice of violence. The film uncovers casual sexism of romantic relationships. The movie calls for the need to question even the smallest manifestation of violence be it a seemingly simple slap.

Anubhav Sinha's this direction is women-centered which narrates tale of a beautiful married couple. In a sudden incident, the male character slaps his wife (Taapsee), forcing her to re-examine the relationship. Well, let Taapsee re-examine her relationship meanwhile let us re-examine ourselves.

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for the rights of women on the grounds of equality of sexes. Feminism is not just important for women but for every sex, gender, caste, creed and more. It empowers the people and society as a whole. A very common misconception is that only women can be feminists. It is absolutely wrong but feminism does not just benefit women. Feminism takes the gender roles which have been around for many years and tries to deconstruct them. This allows people to live freely and empower lives without getting tied down by traditional restrictions. Feminism has had a life-changing impact on everyone, especially women. If we look at history, we see that it is what gave women the right to vote. It was no small feat but was achieved successfully by women. Feminism in India is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and opportunities for women in India. It is the pursuit of women's rights within the society of India. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, feminists in India seek gender equality: the right to work for equal wages, the right to equal access to health and education, and equal political rights. Indian feminists also have fought against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws.

The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases: the first phase, beginning in the mid-19th century, initiated when reformists began to speak in favour of women rights by making reforms in education, customs involving women; the second phase, from 1915 to Indian independence, when Gandhi incorporated women's

movements into the Quit India movement and independent women's organizations began to emerge; and finally, the third phase, post-independence, which has focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage, in the work force, and right to political parity. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. India's patriarchal culture has made the process of gaining land-ownership rights and access to education challenging. In the past two decades, there has also emerged a trend of sex-selective abortion. To Indian feminists, these are seen as injustices worth struggling against and feminism is often misunderstood by Indians as female domination rather than equality. As in the West, there has been some criticism of feminist movements in India. They have especially been criticized for focusing too much on privileged women, and neglecting the needs and representation of poorer or lower caste women. This has led to the creation of caste-specific feminist organizations and movements.

'The feminist viewpoint of spouse abuse holds that violence stems from inequality in power relationships between men and women. Feminism particularly radical feminism has done more to help those harmed by domestic violence than any other movement. Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women. It views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex and as a result oppressing women and privileging men.

Thappad is not only about gender equality. It is also about respect for women. The reel is on a tour to spread awareness against domestic violence, encouraging women to stand by themselves and their self-respect. *Thappad*'s tagline says it before anyone else can – "bas itni si baat"(is that all)? This is referring to an incident when an

incensed husband slaps the wife Amrita (Taapsee panu) at a party “just a slap then”? are her lawyer’s exact words.

Thappad is the story of a single slap. A blow to the cheek that Vikram, angry, frustrated, little drunk, inflicts on his wife Amrita, who is attempting to steal him away from an escalating conflict. The movie takes place in an affluent Delhi home. Vikram is an ambitious hardworking executive. Amrita is a cheerfully dutiful housewife. They seem snug in their respective roles. But one night drinks into sharp focus the iniquity of their relationship. It’s almost as if Vikram slaps Amrita awake from a slumber and then it becomes impossible for her to fall back into that facade of domestic tranquillity, in which she is, without a doubt, a second class citizen. The beauty is that director Anubhav Sinha, who has co-written the film with Mrunmayee Kagav Waikul, does not tell this story in a strident tone. He does not demonize men or create shrill drama. He simply and quietly reveals the patriarchy, which is embedded so deep into our culture that even women who are independent and successful can’t escape it.

The dissertation is a feministic analysis of the movie *Thappad* which focuses on the lives of seven women. The movie does not limit itself to the life of Amrita but women from various strata of the society. It discusses the life of women especially married women belonging to different classes of the society.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMINISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE THAPPAD

The central trope of the film revolves around Amrita (also called Amu), the spouse of Vikram, who has been living with great zeal and enthusiasm at a very early and prime phase of her marriage. Amrita is committed to lead a happy life. She has decided to lead a life of housewife and endeavours make her husband and family happy. For this she is very meticulous and takes an utmost care of her husband in every activity. Her day begins with the preparation of tea and serving it to her husband. She also supports in arranging and keeping all the important papers in the office files of Vikram when he sometime gets late in leaving for office. Amrita is shaped as an icon of perfection as she lives out her everyday life having happily quit her promising career as a dancer. The only remnants of her dancing are poor consolation in the form of Kathak lessons she gives to her neighbour's daughter. The director Anubhav establishes this from the first scene in which Vikram is preparing for a meeting and casually ordering Amrita to get his file, get the printer fixed. We see their daily routine – she wakes up early, get everything in place, runs after him with his wallet and coffee as he gets into his car. The name plate on their house has only his name on it. Amrita and her mother-in-law are invisible inhabitants. But until that slap, Amrita does not question any of it.

From the first few scenes of the film, it is clear that the shared life of the protagonist, Amrita, and her husband, Vikram, only has room for his dreams, ambitions and career. The individual lives of the women in the house are focused on ensuring that Vikram receives exactly what he needs. The structural patriarchal division of labour is

reproduced where the work done by man is labour, whereas the work done by women of the house is their duty.

Vikram rarely acknowledges Amrita's dedications. Even then there is a perfect environment for the husband in the family. Amrita, in spite of this, feels happy with her husband as a housewife.

One day when all the members and relatives assembled in his house to enjoy a party which Vikram has thrown on account of the promotion which he will soon get in the company at London. All is going well in the party until he receives a call from his superior Thapar, who informs him that he won't be getting a desired profile that he is looking for in London. This is not something that Vikram has desired. Vikram comes to know that instead of holding the top position in the company there in London, he has to work under the Supreme Boss. His dreams of achieving the highest desired post thus get shattered. He gets upset and exchanges the hot talks with this member who is also one of the advisory members of the committee present in the party. Vikram is now sure that some conspiracy has been hatched against him by the members of the committee for which he could not retain the desired designation in the company. Hence, on hearing this news, his inner conscious and ego did not allow him to accept the promotion and he exchanged heated discussions with the member and scuffled him for cheating. Amrita on seeing that her husband was getting out of control with the board member, gently approaches towards Vikram with an intention to settle the matter but is unable to gauge the intensity of his anger, Vikram in the heat of the moment hits a tight slap on her in presence of all the friends, relatives and guests present at the party. Anubhav stages the slap with skill. Sound leaks out of the frame. Amrita's face as she walked away is frozen, like she can't fully comprehend what has just happened. What happens in the movie next is ever more telling. She walks around like a zombie while family

members sagely advisors her to get over it. But she is not ready for that. She rearranges the living room without knowing what she was really doing. In one scene Amrita is lying with Vikram in bed but staring at him like she does not know him anymore.

Thappad's power comes from these carefully constructed insights. It is a tightly knit screenplay in which throwaway line tells us everything we need to know – like when Vikram see their single working female neighbour driving by in an expensive car he derisively ask –“yeh kya karta hai? “(what’s she really doing). Amrita replies that she is hardworking. Those who are non- confronting to the patriarchal conventions are considered to be the bad side of the coin.

The movie characters are so packed with flesh and layering and are placed in situations that hit hard because they ring so true. They are the women who refuse to remain invisible. She thought that this slap is not only to her but to dignity of women at large. She took the slap seriously, and thought this is not only a personal embarrassment but social insult to her. She could not nullify the echo of the slap. She instantly decides that she would not continue to stay with Vikram and made up her mind to give a legal notice of divorce to him. When Vikram returns to the house she maintained an impasse. Finally, she decides to discuss the matter with her parents. Her mother, Sandhya, however, pacifies her for taking such a bold and stern decision of separating herself with Vikram at such a trivial incident. For her mother this slap may be an insignificant one but for her it seems that the whole world is crashing down. She pacifies Amrita not to take the matter so seriously, forget it soon and return to her husband and live with him as usual. Here, her father does not support her mother, Sandhya. He stays strong like a pillar with her daughter, thinking how could such an incident of domestic violence take place between them?

Here, Vikram comes to in-law's house (Amrita's parents) to persuade her to return home but it does not work. He wanted to take Amrita back, but she does not budge. Vikram returns to his house thinking that after some days she would forget and return to him and they would once again live harmoniously. But the matter does not resolve and Amrita approaches a lawyer named Netra, who herself was a victim of her husband for not giving due respect to her ambitions. The successful women's rights lawyer, stuck in a loveless, abusive marriage cannot so easily walk out of her own marriage because part of her professional success comes from being attached to a famous father in law. Netra is a victim of domestic violence who choose to remain in the abusive relationship. The movie provides the viewers with several male characters who are products and perpetrators of patriarchy and pose a threat to women. In a nuanced scene after she wins a high profile important case, her regressive husband makes a throwaway comment about how loudly she wears her success, as opposed to great men, like his father, who would shrug off his many successes.

Netra, after discussing with Amrita about the case, eventually arrives at the view that such quibbles do occur in every household between a wife and a husband. She therefore should not take the matter so seriously and adds that such trivial matters carry no weight to be filed for the case of separation. She advises Amrita that she should solve such issues calmly and amicably with her husband. Amrita is however hurt so deeply that she does not want to reconcile with Vikram and makes up her mind and is adamant in giving divorce to him. She is steadfast on this issue. She does not want to live with Vikram anymore.

This movie is indeed about a single, resounding slap that sends shock waves so strong that the next two hours are spent calming the turbulence. When Amrita's lawyer asks her to let go of it she replies – 'just a slap, par nahi maar sakhta'(he cannot slap

me). Further she tells her that the single slap had made her realise all the inequalities that she has been going through. She further adds that the single slap made her realise what she really wanted in her life- self -respect and love. What hurt her even more is that her husband(Vikram)is not even ready to apologize to her for his act. He tells her that 'shit always happens, but people always move on'. He further added that he had invested his whole life in his career that he could not bear when he lost his opportunity and took that frustration on Amrita. But then Amrita replies that she had invested her whole life in him but she does not love him anymore, so she wanted a divorce.

Here, Vikram, however regrets but does not apologize. On the contrary, he after brooding deeply makes his final decision to consult and discuss the matter with his own lawyer. His lawyer, after reviewing the matter, too advises to solve the matter amicably and should live happily once again. His lawyer went to the extent of saying that if such a sundry matter is taken seriously, more than fifty percent of the marriages would end in a divorce. Vikram takes the slap lightly and does not accept his blunder for his ego does not allow him to surrender before his wife. However, in an attempt to bring both the spouses [Amrita and Vikram] together the two lawyers with their respective clients meet in Netra's office but it is of no avail! On the contrary, Amrita thought that she will begin despising Vikram with time. Her hatred with Vikram would pave the way to their separation. Later, when Amrita got pregnant, the news reached her husband but she still does not cultivate any desire to reconcile with him. Vikram tells her that she should not terminate her pregnancy for which Amrita agreed.

The film's central question is repeated multiple times in the narrative as we see Taapsee navigating through dilemmas, internal and external. Is 'just' one slap enough reason for a woman to seek divorce? In doing so, the film closely examines our attitudes towards domestic violence, both as a society as well as a legal system. Purportedly

educated and well-meaning people constantly trivialise the slap, ask if there is more to it – is he cheating? Is she having an affair? Clearly a man raising his hand to his partner is not taken seriously, its scale and harms constantly diminished as society gets to work telling the woman that what happened to her was not a big deal. In a country where domestic violence is an acknowledged problem, it reveals that even in the higher reaches of the class division, patriarchy and misogyny continue to protect perpetrators of abuse. *Thappad* takes Bollywood's usual idea of feminist discourse a little further, discarding obvious motifs for a more nuanced and therefore more challenging look at issues faced by Indian women. Taapsee's character is not a high powered professional with complete economic empowerment, but instead a housewife who cooks for her husband and takes joy in having created a household. At the same time, she is not the docile housewife that has been the staple of Indian narratives – while she supports her husband and cares for him, she does not tolerate his abuse, and takes on a challenging fight despite widespread opposition.

There is no contradiction or dissonance between Taapsee as the caring wife and as a woman fighting for her right to exit a marriage after her husband's actions shatter her idea of the loving relationship they share. While traditionally films have subsumed personas of female characters within those of males around them – as wives, daughters, sisters – *Thappad* resoundingly reinforces their individuality and autonomy. It also shifts the focus to the men who are perpetrators of domestic violence and the dynamics of a marriage and family. While the husband's lashing out is explained away as a consequence of stress at work, he asks his wife to 'move on', without as much as apologizing a single time for his actions. The assertion of a traditionally masculine ego does not allow him to introspect and truly seek redemption from his wife, but instead focuses on browbeating her into not continuing with seeking divorce. On the other hand,

it shows her father as a conflicted figure – while he accepts and supports his daughter’s decision to seek a divorce, one can see that he is quite distraught by the very concept of divorce – shining a light on the gulf in attitudes between generations. The film manages to convey so many different aspects of a domestic dispute, and does so with immense sensitivity. Amrita is an urban upper middle class woman who is privileged to have the support and understanding of her family and social circles (at least from her father, brother’s girlfriend and neighbour). She also has access to one of the leading lawyers, Nethra (Maya Sarao), in the city. While the plot clearly is located within a privileged section of the society, there comes the question - do women from social classes lower than that of Amrita’s have the opportunity, familial or societal support to walk out of abusive marriages?

Sunita (Geetika Vidya), a domestic worker in Amrita’s house, is also shown to be facing violence and abuse in her marriage. She speaks about the abuse with Amrita early in the film but the latter does not respond to it and goes about her work as usual. Amrita’s family is aware of the abuse encountered by Sunita, yet they are unresponsive because they see domestic violence as normal in the lower classes. It is only when Amrita herself is slapped that she begins to view it differently. The husband (Pavail Gulati) is shocked much more by his wife’s reaction to the slap than the fact that he actually executed the slap! He takes her quiet anger as an over-reaction because patriarchy has taught him to internalise that a husband’s slapping of his wife is no big deal.

Breaking the mould of the Hindi cinema heroine with gusto is Amrita, who refuses to play the sacrificial lamb or be bullied into a happy ending. She takes her time and space to question the routine of her marriage. She rightly asks: why did he feel comfortable enough to deliver that slap in the first place? Such a relief to see a

determined woman in the face of opposition by people around her, starting from her mother Sandhya (Ratna Pathak Shahh), mother-in-law (Tanvi Azmi), brother Karan (Ankur Rathi), even her own lawyer Nethra (Maya Saraoo) before she takes up her case. Supports include her father Sachin (Kumud Mishraa), maid Sunita (Geetika Vidya Ohlyann), sister-in-law Swati (Naina Grewal) and neighbours Sania (Gracy Goswami) and Shivani (Dia Mirzaa). It's the deep-rooted, subtle and often unspoken form of sexism that *Thappad* tries to address. The main reason for Amrita's motivation for a divorce is not the slap. It's the way Vikram and his family handle the situation post the event. His conversations with Amrita revolves around his justifications for that action and never appears apologetic about it. He is self-centered, lost himself in his quest for career aspirations. So much so, that the leaving of his wife is more of a logistics issue rather than an emotional one. He does value her absence but easily compensates it by increasing his maid's wages. But the maid Sunita refuses to accept the raise.

All that being said, Vikram is not inherently this person. It's evident that his upbringing has made him so. Men, in this culture, are not subjected to any domestic commitments apart from a few moral and financial obligations. This onus is then put on women- who then can only dare to have a professional career and carry out the jugglery for her entire life. The sacrifices, the troubles, the "emotional investment" (which Vikram also had, but for his company) that housewives like Amrita go through are never admired, nor respected. For years, housewives are seen as second-class members of the family – including the women themselves. This bubble of acceptance of the way things are, bursts for Amrita with that slap. It is the brilliance of the screenplay by Mrunmayee Lagoo that above all, planned and crafted this masterful story. One of the laudable aspects about the film is the explanations that Vikram offers in his defence; it can as easily be thrown back at him,

by replacing just a few words: “I’ve slogged for three years. That’s a lot of time. Forget the hard work. There’s the emotional investment too. I used to think of this company as my own. Then I realised no one values me.”(41:04-41:22)

Amrita then files for divorce, but Sunita continues to endure physical abuse on an everyday basis. While she does retaliate at the end of the movie and confronts her husband’s abusive behaviour, the director could have done better in portraying her story arc. Sunita, the skeletal domestic who works in Amrita’s house is beaten up so badly by her horrible husband on a daily basis that one day, she finally takes a knife and challenges him to kill her. When he does not, she beats him up right back till he backs off, scared to see this new wife. Sunita is fed up of being beaten up for being “barren” though she keeps telling her husband to go in for a fertility test himself. Patriarchy plays an important role in domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Domestic violence occurs in and is perpetuated from the abuser’s belief that is acceptable and justifiable. The most regretful thing in the domestic violence is that the people who are involved in the violence does not recognize themselves as abusers or victims. They often consider violence as a common and natural part of the relationship.

Like motherhood wifeness is an important tool which patriarchy use to position women under men. According to Anderson “Feminist scholars argue that domestic violence is rooted in gender and power and represents men’s active attempts to maintain dominance and control over women”(Anderson 655).

All the women, except Sunita, are shown to take substantial steps in dealing with their unhappy relationships. Amrita goes in for a mutual divorce, Nethra separates from her husband and boyfriend to start a new life, Amrita's mother-in-law forgives her father-in-law and goes on to live with him, her brother changes his mindset and his

girlfriend forgives him and stands by him. These women characters therefore have the prospect of happiness and contentment in their lives as they've either mended their relationship or have come out of it.

However, Sunita faces an uncertain future as her husband's character is not shown to have changed. While Amrita regains her self-respect, Sunita is just seen celebrating her first move against her husband.

There are physical abuses, sexual abuses, emotional assaults, honour killing which are the various manifestations of domestic violence. Physical abuse is the most common form of domestic violence. It is considered as a natural process in marriage where the husband is expected to tame and control wife if she deviates from husband's rule. This is evident in the case of Sunita.

Sunita: Why did you hit me?

Husband: Do I need a licence to hit you?(32:40-32:43)

Sunita's husband is the representative of men who consider that women have to be beaten and controlled. Domestic violence especially physical abuses are normalized by men and women both considering it as the man's right. There are women who romanticize domestic violence and men who boast how they control their wives through slaps.

While the men of the upper class families are given an opportunity to express that they've realised their mistake in the end, Sunita's husband is just shown as a one note abuser. The director could have shown Sunita's husband too evolving in his character even through a simple gesture.

The plot can be cited as a perfect example of Louis Althusser's (1971) 'Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).' In his book, Althusser explains ISA as realities that present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of specialised institutions (religion, media, caste, myths and so on). This has an immediate effect on society to maintain its ideology, be it regressive as well. The storyline of *Thappad*, when looked at from this perspective, normalises class inequalities by not showing us Sunita's options to get out of the abusive relationship. Instead, it shows her deriving her happiness without any conclusive assurance that she is not going to face the abuse again.

By reiterating existing class inequalities through its visual depiction and solely emphasising the rich woman's struggle for respect and happiness in her marriage, the story underplays the reality of physical abuse faced by lower class women.

Amrita's resistance is valid and ultimately vindicated because she is the perfect victim, blameless to a fault—the kind that patriarchy allows as resistance, insofar that its very structure is not destabilized. She is the perfect wife, loved by everyone in the family, someone who does not believe emotional labour equals capital and care-work deserves to be economically validated, a woman who makes her life about the man in her life— in short, the perfect candidate for patriarchy's concession.

Thappad is not just about domestic violence. It's about the deep rooted patriarchy that has been passed down generation after generation. In no way does the film portray women as helpless victims of the system and men as evil propagators. It shows that men and women alike have subconsciously internalized a system that puts the needs, happiness, desires, and priorities of everyone in a family ahead of those of a woman. The entire story revolves around that one slap in Amrita's life but successfully

brings light to the stories of all the other women in the film: her maid, who is accustomed to daily domestic violence, her lawyer who fights for women's right but lacks any, her neighbour who is a single mother, her mother and mother-in-law who have been conditioned into putting their family's happiness before theirs, and her brother's girlfriend who does not get respect from her brother. In all of these women's stories, this one Slap drives them to move forward.

The real problem in the story is not the slap but why it happened. As Amrita says, that one slap brought to light all the problems in her life that she was dismissing. Through Amrita we start questioning ourselves and all the times that we brushed aside the little things that hurt s and tolerated things we shouldn't have out of obligation. This film is a *Thappad* to us all who have knowingly or unknowingly reinforced the patriarchal ideas. Even Amrita's father who shows the most concern for Amrita and acknowledges how wrong the slap is, fails to notice the oppression his own wife faced. But like him, we should all actively recognize our own mistakes and correct ourselves. Finally, *Thappad* is a film that we all need to see for it is honest and impactful portrayal of our society. A hard-hitting dialogue from the movie is delivered by Amrita's mother-in-law, played by Tanvi Azmi. She says, "It's your mother's fault, she told you to stay silent". They also inspire the younger generation to follow the barbaric system. The victims of domestic violence, who are usually women and children remain in the relationship due to several reasons.

In the skilfully made *Thappad*, women have been stationed in various roles, like a game of chess. Their moves, their positions and their powers, all maneuverer in the square columns of black and white of the chessboard with the agenda of drawing the checkmate after a smart game, on a hard hitting message. The film thus shows how women too contribute to propagating patriarchy.

After the slap, while Amrita is keenly waiting for an apology or solidarity, consolation or a delicate enquiry about her state from her mother-in-law, all she receives is, “Did Vikram sleep well?” When she goes to her parents’ house, it is her mother, Sandhya (Ratna Pathak Shah) who says during a small argument with her husband, “Women have to learn tolerance to keep the family together. One has to suppress her feelings.” And ‘one’, is of course, women, always.

It includes power and control of the abuser over the victims, culture, financial dependence on the abuser, fear, shame and children. In the case of Amrita’s mother in law the reason was her children and financial dependence. Amrita’s mother wanted to pursue singing. Even though she got a husband who was understanding she suppressed her wishes as her mother inculcated the belief that she had to remain a housewife to raise the children. The conversation between Amrita and her father provides a picture of her mother.

Father: She spent her life making other people happy. Making Kachori for Vikram, Tehri for me and pasta for Karan.

Amrita: Some people are happy by making others happy.

Father: Mother’s don’t have a choice . They should save some happiness for themselves.(17:15-17:26)

Strictly note where the advice of a woman’s role, responsibilities and duties come from. “My mother said a home is more important. Her mother taught her home is more important,” says Sandhya. From women, or more specifically, mothers. It seems that this culture of suffering in silence is being handed down through generations, only to keep things in order and easy for the patriarch to keep propagating patriarchy. And

in the case of Sunita, the domestic worker, her mother-in-law also encourages her son's violence towards his wife

The beautiful neighbour Shivani (Dia Mirza) is a widow and cannot imagine marrying again as her husband was too precious to be replaced. She is a kind of woman who do not fit into the conventional roles of wives thereby limiting men from harassing them physically, sexually, and emotionally.

We also see Shivani, the "new woman" – resolute, determined and kind. Although her screen time is not that long, with her simple yet powerful dialogues, she represents an embodiment of both valour and grace: "I would like to believe men are wonderful people. So I prefer to pretend I didn't hear what you just said" and "I'm happy as I am." On the other side, we also see Netra, a fierce and bold lawyer, winning cases and advocating women's rights. What comes as a shock is how those same rules fail to apply with her partner and how it is ironic that one of the first things she tells Amrita is: "Every relation is flawed. One has to mend it." What she does not explicitly say is who she means by "one" and what she means by "mend".

Amrita's father is a notable character in this movie. It is very unusual in an Indian household to see a father joyous over the fact that his daughter has left her husband's (Vikram's) house and returned, but that's Amrita's father for us. That one step of leaving her husband's house taken by her gave him enough courage to become oblivious about what anyone thinks. He knew then that his daughter had waged a tough war and he needed to stand with her because "kayi bar sahi karnehi ka result happy nahi hote"(right does not always ends in happiness). There is a scene in the movie where 'Karan' Amrita's brother misbehaves with his fiancée. Their father gets enraged. He was furious because there was repressed anger within him already. He saw his daughter

get publicly slapped by her husband, and there was nothing that he could do because of the society. A lot of us today feel we have achieved wakens by understanding the underlying issues in society and acting appropriately but thanks to our culture some things are so deeply seeded in our minds that we never realise they could impact the other person negatively no matter how trivial they seem to us. Most often women are the victims of such practices. Amrita's father was a progressive man but he too was a victim of our cultures ingrained patriarchy. He said he did the right thing by asking his wife to pursue her passion but when she refused to do that he never questioned why the decision was contradicting her happiness and when his wife makes him realise this he understand and admits his mistake. He also had control over his ego and anger. He valued the happiness of his loved ones more than opinions of strangers.

When Amrita approaches Nethra (Maya Sarao), a matrimonial lawyer who sits in her famous father-in-law's chambers, the lawyer begins to look at her own marriage to a hot-shot star journalist (Manav Kaul), an arrogant man who never forgets to remind her that she owes her success to his now-paralytic father's practice she inherited and also to his own fame as a journalist. This man has no clue that his wife is having a torrid affair with a much kinder and humane young Chef who understands her perfectly and gives her the space she needs. But Nethra walks out of it all including the affair because she wants to start life afresh.

The relationship between the In-laws of Amrita and Netra are also interesting. In the case of Amrita and Netra, while the couples have split on ground of 'irreconcilable differences', they firmly remain in contact with their in-laws. Amrita specifically tells her mother- in-law that the fight is only between herself and Vikram. Netra continues visiting her father-in-law and showing her affections towards him. Feminism is sometimes misunderstood to mean dominance over men. *Thappad*, with

its unflinching story, declares that the fight is indeed for an egalitarian society where everyone is respected.

This is essentially a character-driven story each character fleshed out to add a new dimension to the narrative honed to near perfection by every single actor whose performance is so organic that you begin to believe that they are real. *Thappad* is not about domestic violence that its title may indicate. It is rather, a critique of patriarchy in the subtlest of manner where a husband's slapping of his wife, in public or in private space, planned or in the heat of the moment, humiliates and insults not just the victim but also the victimiser. It shows him up as less than a human being because though he is shocked that his wife wants to leave home, it never occurs to him to apologise to her for his behaviour. By the time he realises this, it is already too late. The slap is a reminder for the wife Amrita (Taapsee Pannu) that her position as wife, daughter-in-law and so on is more a put-on than she ever imagined. Her name which means "immortality" is as much a lie as her life is. But the same applies to the husband whose name Vikram which means "valour" is equally a lie.

Millett believes that not only before marriage but even after a woman's legal existence remains suspended. For patriarchy to function and flourish, both sexes have to abide by the rules and propagate it, filling in on their separate and unique parts. Hence, the bold step taken up by Amrita must be an inspiration to all women. To get separated on such a trivial matter, as getting slapped, may not be agreeable to some viewers in a patriarchal society. This, in fact, is the beginning of breaking of the conditioned belief and tradition that man reserves the right to suppress women and can move her at his whims and fancies. We should not forget that this is a man-made society wherein all the norms in the past were laid down by the men and the society is governed accordingly. But Anbhav Sinha by bringing a feminist theme in the film has shaken and

revolutionized the prevalent patriarchal mindset of the society where “‘victory’ always amounts to hierarchy, the hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organization to man”. (Cixous, 91) Thus a paradigm shift is observed in how women of 21st century are empowered as they deal with the issue of patriarchy and try to establish their own identity in the world at large.

CHAPTER THREE

Conclusion

One of the strongest narrative devices used in the film is the repetition of Amrita's domestic routines as a homemaker. Most of the Indian women could relate to this. The movie uses the depiction of this routine, the tempo of background music and Amrita's smile as an indication of normalcy and willingness at first, and formidable fatigue, post slap. It also places Amrita, like all homemakers, beautifully at the fulcrum of the routine, orchestrating it all whilst staying remarkably invisible, even to herself.

Thappad set about with a tone of subtle commentary on the lives of most Indian women. The subtlety of tone in the beginning established normalcy, how comfortable we are with all of it, and more importantly, how well Amrita was with it. The slap in the film is placed very consciously, right in the midst of the household being depicted as liberal; where Amrita uninhibitedly dances at a party as her family looks on indulgently. No judgement, censorship and orthodox suppression - upper class families in India often took pride themselves on these matters. The slap, or as various characters on the movie repeatedly keep calling it, 'just a slap', is deafeningly loud, public, emancipating and brazenly unrepentant. It begins to dismantle characters, and through them a culture we are all guilty of nurturing. With the slap begins the unfurling of self-realisation and actualisation of the 'slap', and justifications and excuses by the slapper and his patriarchal paraphernalia. By virtue of simple relentlessness and elegant understanding of what the slap implied, Amrita, over the course of movie, wins the hearts and the divorce. Taking us through an emotional voyage, we all find an Amrita in and around us who wants just two things in her life – happiness and respect.

Thappad is special – not only because of its pitch-perfect craft but more importantly for talking about something that is rarely read, heard, or discussed in this society. It dares you to look within and smash the deep-rooted patriarchy that we have incubated unconsciously.

It's written with the hope that the Amritas of the world do not need a slap to wake up to their reality. And their Vikrams would always win her over with happiness and respect. The Indian society has always nurtured patriarchal system, where a woman is supposed to follow the orders given by men and not to speak against them..

The essence of *Thappad* is not just the slap as its title suggests, but rather the structural entitlement enjoyed predominantly by men in intimate relationships. The film is a journey exploring that sense of entitlement and questioning societal forces that allow it to seep into intimate relationships, to the extent that it takes an act of physical abuse to recognise years of disrespect, insensitivity and neglect.

The movie *Thappad* is meant to be a wake up call for our world. It exposes the ingrained misogyny and superiority of not only the lead character's husband but also shows bits and pieces of that misogyny in the lives of people that surround her. The movie goes beyond the class to show that even if our lives are different on the surface, deep down we struggle with the same issues.

The movie delivers a strong statement of feminism. It clearly criticizes the traditional concept that Indian marriages propagate. It has a tendency to normalize the violence towards females or subordinate genders within marriages. Anubhav Sinha's two hours 21 minutes long social drama is made for a society that rarely talks about the emotional and psychological effects of domestic violence. Irrespective of your gender or economic status you will see something of yourself in *Thappad*. In a society which

always teaches us that women must be tolerant, the film *Thappad* asks ‘why is it that women are the only ones to be tolerant?’ Towards the end of the movie where everyone realizes that it was not Amrita’s mistake, her mother-in-law says “It’s not your fault. It’s the fault of us mothers and fathers, we never taught our sons that they could not slap a woman”. This is the fact that our society needs to understand. One thing this movie taught every individual is that we must learn to respect ourselves and learn to be happy in whatever choices we make. It’s okay if a girl does not like to cook or manage the home. It’s equally fine if a man does not want a settled corporate career and pursue something else. The key is happiness and valuing oneself. Towards the end of the movie, the main lead Amrita confessed that when anyone would ask her what she wanted to do when she grows up, she does not remember saying that she wants to be a housewife, probably she never wanted to be one. We as humans are never conditioned to follow our dreams. So, while Amrita’s father always wanted her to pursue her passion for dance, her mother on the other hand silently instilled those values where she chose to be a happy housewife. Dreams are meant to be lived. The movie also teaches that we should not compromise our life and happiness for anything. In the movie, it is shown how women breath fresh air and compromise almost everything. They crave love and attention from their husbands but still are happy to be in the marriage because the society will.

Towards the end of the movie majority of us would think that Amrita could have forgiven Vikram and has yet again started a new life as he has finally realised his mistake and has apologized to her. It’s natural that we could think that way and end up in the conclusion that after all it was ‘just a slap’ and he deserves a second chance. This happens because our society is structured in that way. The Director Anubhav Sinha in one of the interviews revealed that he too believed in second chances and he could have

given the movie a happy ending. But if this movie also shows a happy ending like most others then people would definitely leave what had happened in the movie when they leave the theatre. He wanted audience to feel uncomfortable and take the movie with them and think about it so that it could bring some change in our society

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