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Masking Domestic Violence Through Commercial Romance in a Visual Semiotic and Subaltern Study of *Akaash Vani*

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Abstract

This research paper examines the representation of marital rape and domestic patriarchy in the Hindi film *Akaash Vani* (2013) through the combined lenses of Subaltern Studies and visual semiotics. Employing qualitative narrative mapping and poster analysis, the study argues that while the film foregrounds hidden forms of domestic violence, its promotional imagery works to "mask" these underlying ideological issues by romanticising traumatic lived experiences for commercial purposes. The paper utilises Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to reveal the tension between social criticism and market discipline in contemporary Hindi cinema. It contextualises how the female protagonist functions as a gendered subaltern subject within the domestic sphere, her suffering continually silenced within the institution of heterosexual marriage. Importantly, the poster utilises traditional feminine symbols of love, closeness, and emotional attachment to disguise the traumatic reality embedded at the core of the narrative. Ultimately, *Akaash Vani* emerges as a critical text that provides an opportunity to acknowledge the violence often ignored in mainstream discourse, while simultaneously demonstrating the limitations of commodified visual representation in popular cinema.

Keywords: Hindi Cinema, *Akaash Vani*, Subaltern Studies, Visual Semiotics, Poster Politics, Visual Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, cinema has been an important form of media that has not only reflected but also impacted the view of society. In India, Hindi cinema plays an even greater role and appeals to people of all classes, genders, and regions of the country. Though mainstream Hindi films have historically been stereotyped as being romantic, having family-oriented melodrama, or spectacle-driven narratives, it is also important to note that there is a growing trend toward addressing pressing social issues, such as domestic violence, gender inequities, and women's rights, in Hindi cinema (Kaur & Sharma, 2017). One social issue that continues to be widely ignored and culturally silenced is marital rape. Marital rape is hidden within the institution of marriage and is often normalised by the patriarchal values of society. Marital rape exists in an uncomfortable place between legal, moral, and socially acceptable definitions (Mandal, 2014).

Akaash Vani is a pivotal text that draws attention to the physical and emotional abuse experienced by a married woman in a household that society finds to be respectable (Sharma & Tripathi, 2024). While framed as a romantic drama, the film deconstructs how marriage operates as a structure of surveillance and domination, wherein the protagonist is routinely denied consent, dignity, and autonomy. The abuse the protagonist suffers is compounded by the violence of her husband, her family's silence about the abuse, and her obligation to protect the honour of her marriage. Consequently, the protagonist's subjugation instantiates a systemic crisis within patriarchal institutions.

Utilising the conceptualisation of the feminist subaltern or silenced woman, analyse the protagonist's character in *Akaash Vani*. The analysis builds upon a larger body of work around Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to explore whether the protagonist can articulate her pain or if her experience is invariably mediated and interpreted by others (Spivak, 2023). Therefore, this film becomes a useful analytical site for exploring how the intersections of gender, marriage and authority create silence. Through this lens, the protagonist is understood as a subaltern female subject whose pain is repeatedly denied, minimised, or institutionalised.

The paper also includes an analysis of a promotional poster of the film as a form of visual rhetoric. Film posters, though primarily commercial

advertisements, constitute a vital yet under-examined dimension of cinematic discourse. They visually summarise a film's themes into many different forms, such as symbolic images, colour, posture, gaze, costumes, and overall composition (Pooranalingam, 2024). Generally speaking, a film poster creates the first public meaning because the audience views the film poster before they experience the narrative. In *Akaash Vani*, the film's promotional poster presents a romantic image of intimacy that obscures the traumatic elements of the narrative. By analysing the disparity between the content of a film's narrative and the film's promotional imagery, a greater understanding can be gained of how commercial cinema negotiates the portrayal of sensitive and difficult social themes.

The existing literature on *Akaash Vani* does not offer much research that supports an analysis of the film using the combined lenses of visual culture and Subaltern Studies, save for a few foundational legal-cinematic intersections (Sharma & Tripathi, 2024). Therefore, analyse how *Akaash Vani* portrays marital rape, female silencing, and patriarchal power and how the promotional poster visually frames those same themes. The goal of combining Subaltern Studies and visual culture analysis contributes to the overall academic debate around gender representation in contemporary Hindi cinema.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Marital rape is one of the most overlooked forms of gender-based violence in India, both socially and in the world of cinema. Although Hindi films are now beginning to deal more with issues faced by women, the abuse that occurs within the domestic sphere is often dismissed, romanticised, or ignored altogether (Kaur & Sharma, 2017). While *Akaash Vani* takes an explicit look at this hidden violence, this film has not been studied extensively with the theoretical frameworks of Subaltern Studies and visual culture.

This study seeks to address how the female protagonist's experience of suffering, silence and resistance is treated within the confines of patriarchal marriage. Furthermore, it analyses how the promotional poster imagery of the film downplays or conceals these realities by representing them romantically. Revealing this divide between the narrative truth and the promotional representation highlights the broader ideological contradictions of mainstream Hindi cinema, which simultaneously critiques as well as reproduces patriarchal ideologies.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the cinematic representation of marital rape and domestic patriarchy in *Akaash Vani*.
2. To analyse the female protagonist as a subaltern subject whose voice is systematically suppressed within marriage.
3. To interpret the visual rhetoric of the film poster and its semiotic construction of gender relations.
4. To explore the contrast between the film's narrative reality and its promotional imagery.
5. To evaluate how contemporary Hindi cinema engages with hidden forms of violence against women.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does *Akaash Vani* represent marital rape and domestic patriarchy within the institutional framework of marriage?
2. In what ways is the female protagonist constructed as a subaltern subject whose voice is suppressed within patriarchal structures?
3. How does the promotional film poster construct cultural myths related to love, marriage, and gender roles?
4. What contradictions emerge between the narrative depiction of violence and the poster's romantic imagery?
5. How does the film contribute to contemporary debates on female agency and gender representation in Hindi cinema?

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The three interrelated frameworks used in this study are feminist film theory, subaltern studies, and visual semiotics.

Feminist film theory helps analyse how cinema represents women through patriarchal structures, objectification, and unequal power relations. It is especially useful for examining the protagonist's lack of autonomy within marriage in *Akaash Vani*. Mulvey (2013) argues that mainstream cinema frequently positions women through structures of looking, control, and male-centred narratives. Studies of Indian cinema similarly note the persistence of sacrificial femininity, domestic obedience, and gender hierarchy (Kaur & Sharma, 2017). Within this study, feminist

film theory acts as the overarching critical perspective that exposes patriarchal power, while Spivakian and Barthesian theories serve as the primary operational mechanics.

Subaltern Studies, especially the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, provides an important framework for understanding women whose voices are silenced by dominant institutions. Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman is useful for analysing how family, husband, and society suppress the heroine's voice and suffering. Her well-known question, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is particularly relevant in examining whether the protagonist's pain is recognised or mediated through patriarchal social structures (Spivak, 2023).

Finally, Visual semiotics, associated with Roland Barthes, is applied to interpret the film poster as a complex system of signs, symbols, colour, posture, and imagery that constructs meanings around romance, marriage, and gender. Barthes' (1985) theory asserts that the meaning of an image cannot only be interpreted as its literal representation, but is also an ideological representation of culture. Thus, film posters shape audience expectations as well as establish larger cultural myths.

The combination of these frameworks has the potential to provide a critical reading of the narrative within the film and its promotional representation. This reading has the ability to challenge gender oppression through storytelling in cinema while also softening the effects of gender oppression within visual culture related to commercial products.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative text-based research design, utilising an interdisciplinary methodology that encompasses narrative mapping and visual semiotic analysis. The primary case study is the film *Akaash Vani* (2013), selected for its explicit focus on the domestic subjugation of women, forced marital compliance, and the structural silence maintained by society regarding marital abuse (Sharma & Tripathi, 2024). A qualitative paradigm is uniquely suited for decoding the dense layers of meaning, ideological representations, and power dynamics embedded within cinematic texts.

The analytical process operates in two distinct phases:

1. **Narrative Textual Analysis:** A close reading of the film's narrative sequence is performed to trace the themes of patriarchy, consent, domestic abuse,

and female resistance. By isolating key thematic segments including dialogue, character interactions, and spatial settings, the study interrogates the structural oppression and silencing of the female subject through a combined feminist and subaltern framework.

2. **Visual Semiotic Analysis:** The official promotional poster is treated as a primary visual text. Guided by Barthesian semiotics (Barthes, 1985), the analysis deconstructs specific visual elements such as spatial composition, facial expressions, body language, colour palettes, costuming, and typography to understand how the poster manufactures meanings regarding romance and marriage that run counter to the actual narrative.

7. ANALYSIS

Film Narrative Analysis

Marriage as a Patriarchal Institution

Akaash Vani shows us that the institution of marriage is based on an established social structure involving male authority and female subservience as opposed to being a source of companionship or emotional support. While marriage is portrayed in mainstream Hindi films as a celebration of romance and family-oriented events, *Akaash Vani* destabilises these mainstream ideas by revealing the coercive realities of marriage that are hidden behind ceremonial traditions.

Through Vani's experience, marriage emerges as a way of removing a woman's individuality, autonomy, and consent while still allowing her to consider herself free to make her own choices when it has actually been dictated by her family, who are motivated by an urgency related to the rush of marrying off her daughter after her sister had eloped. The decision of the parents to rush into Vani's marriage illustrates their belief that a daughter's sexuality and future related to marriage should be in the control of her family.

From a feminist perspective, *Akaash Vani* critiques the manner in which women have been functionally positioned as symbolic bearers of family honour while their husbands continue to wield decision-making authority. Vani's emotional wants are placed below the authority of her parents in order to marry someone who allows her to remain safe. Her body remains negotiable within the family structure because of the value of obedience to their parents above the value of consent to marry the person of her choice.

The film redefines marriage as an institution that legitimises the existence of unequal gender relations through the language of tradition, duty, and respectability.

Honour Culture and Forced Consent

A main theme of the film is honour culture and its relationship with women being forced into making choices; Vani agrees to marry not out of any real desire, but rather because she feels an emotional burden from the humiliation to be brought upon her family after Shivani's elopement to a different caste. It illustrates how consent can appear freely given in a patriarchy but is instead produced through guilt, fear and emotional pressure.

There are repeated scenes showing neighbours, relatives and others ripping into Shivani's actions and asking what kind of marriage Vani expect. These scenes show that honour is more than a value held by an individual family, but it is actually a system of social policing that is upheld through surveillance and collective judgement; thus, personal choices become public dishonour.

Through subaltern studies, Vani's silence becomes politicised; she does not overtly oppose her situation because honour culture denies women the opportunity to speak freely and meaningfully (to have conditions that allow her to do so). Therefore, her silence is not just an acceptance of her situation, but rather is a direct result of having been coerced by structural means.

In addition, the film critiques the use of arranged marriage when that form of marriage is transformed into a means of forced compliance. The film ultimately distinguishes between the practice of arranged marriage and the patriarchal abuses of power associated with that practice; in Vani's case, her marriage is used primarily as a method of restoring honour to her family, rather than being a reflection of her own. Thus, the film highlights how honour culture converts daughters into instruments for social restoration while simultaneously disguising coercion as parental "care."

Domestic Violence and Marital Rape

The most innovative aspect of the film and one of its main contributions to the dialogue about domestic violence is its demonstration of domestic violence in ways that go well beyond the conventional definition associated with physical assault. The film demonstrates that abuse can take many forms, including psychological, emotional, and sexual, and is a routine part of daily life. This contradicts the idea that

violence only occurs when an individual suffers an injury to the body.

Ravi's treatment of Vani creates fear in the home; his actions of controlling her, intimidating her, humiliating her, and treating her with coercive entitlement create a violent atmosphere in the marriage. The film presents violence in marriage not only as a singular act (i.e., one time at one place), but as an ongoing, structurally dominant (i.e. materially and symbolically) part of married life.

The sequence of events of the wedding also demonstrates how the film subverts the myth of love associated with marriage. Through the fact that Vani experiences distress, does not want to have intercourse with Ravi, and experiences an emotional breakdown, the visually romantic image of sexual intimacy that exists in mainstream Hindi cinema is questioned. Additionally, the film questions a patriarchal assumption that marriage confers on a husband automatic sexual access to his wife's body.

Further still, the film illustrates that sexual intimacy is not based on consent but that it is an obligation. The husband assumes he has the right to possess Vani's body without questioning her. From a feminist perspective, the film shows how marriage supports male entitlement to female sexual agency.

The film also enlarges the scope of the definition of domestic violence through Vani's admission to her mother that she feels trapped, constantly insulted, and emotionally tortured. The first reaction of Vani's mother, when Vani tells her she is not happy, is to ask Vani if he has hit her. The fact that Vani's mother's question focuses on husband-to-wife violence demonstrates that the socially defined standard of domestic violence is limited to incidents where a victim has a bruise. Therefore, the psychological abuse and coercive sexual abuse Vani experiences are perceived as normal matrimonial conflicts.

In summary, the film makes visible the violence that often occurs in families that are accepted by society as respectable and, therefore, become acceptable behaviours due to the cultural norms of marriage, being an ideal wife, and being the ideal partner.

Subaltern Silence: Can Vani Speak?

The status of Vani through most of the film can be analysed within a framework of Subaltern Studies, specifically referencing the question posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak regarding whether or not a

Subaltern has the ability to "speak" (Spivak, 2023). While Vani can't be considered entirely without a voice, her voice exists in several contexts where it does not have an audience. Her pain and suffering are articulated by the people around her, but repeatedly interpreted, belittled, and diluted. This matches what visual culture scholars identify as the "architecture of silence," where the subaltern's internal structures are systematically suppressed by immediate social networks (Kumar, 2024). When she tries to express the reality of her abusive relationship, her parents dismiss her pain as a temporary disagreement and respond with consolation, mediation, or guidance, advising her to stay in the relationship until it passes. They do not identify her pain as an act of systemic abuse. Thus, as the example shows, while there are many ways to silence someone, the most frequent silent practice is not that of prohibition; it is that of dismissal, reinterpretation, and misrecognition.

As Vani lives in her husband's home as his wife, her voice has little authority compared to his voice, since the normative structures of patriarchy legitimise the husband's authority over his wife. In the context of her parents' home, her emotional truth is less important than family honour. In both homes, while she is physically there, she is not politically present. As a result, the film presents silence as being socially constructed rather than individually chosen. Vani's inability to articulate resistance to her husband's abuses is a result of her emotional dependence on him, her fear of being ostracised, and her conditioning to feel obligated to fulfil her duties as a virtuous wife. In Vani's circumstances, subaltern women possess language, but are ultimately excluded from being acknowledged.

However, over the course of the film, Vani's expression of silence evolves to an expression of self-awareness. Once Vani begins to name her abusive circumstances as abuse, her voice becomes an instrument of resistance rather than just a form of communication. The shift from her hidden suffering to her explicit rejection of her husband's authority marks her transformation from an object of patriarchy to a subject of her own right. In this sense, the film moves beyond simply posing the question of whether a Subaltern can "speak" and instead asks what changes to the normative social order must occur for the Subaltern's voice to "matter" (Spivak, 2023).

Mise-en-scène and Visual Oppression

In addition to its plot and dialogue, *Akaash Vani* uses visual imagery to express Vani's emotional and

social state. By employing various aspects of mise-en-scène such as lighting, framing, setting, costumes, and the spatial arrangement of scenes, the film communicates the contrasts between freedom and confinement, desire and duty, and individuality and patriarchal domination.

In the first college scenes, the cinematography includes bright lighting and open areas, animation, and youthful energy. In these instances, school, friends, and romantic partners are all able to share freedom and opportunity; Vani's emotional expressiveness, mobility, and vitality indicate her humanity. These places serve as symbolically rich sites representing both who Vani is now and who she wishes to be in the future.

However, in the family home and later in the husband's home, mise-en-scène features include darkened lighting, enclosed interiors, rigid movement, and sustained silences. Visually, these spaces function to create a climate of constant surveillance, discipline, and repression; in domestic spaces, Vani is often depicted sitting alone, waiting, serving, or at the edges of the frame, thereby reinforcing her isolation and inferior status in relation to others. This visual containment isolates her as a "subaltern within the subaltern" space of the domestic setting (Kumar, 2024).

Kitchens, beds and narrow interior space images are frequently repeated and convert the household into a place of discipline rather than refuge. Though beds are typically portrayed in romantic films as being associated with intimacy, they are also associated with fear, oppression, and control of one's body. By turning the visual representations of these film tropes upside down, *Akaash Vani* also causes the destabilisation of the conventional notions of marital happiness that have long been articulated in cinematic representations. Therefore, Vani's experience of oppression is represented not only in the events of the narrative but also in how the visual representation of space constructs domestic life as a place where patriarchy is a structural element of everyday experience.

Resistance, Divorce, and Female Agency

The ending of the movie *Akaash Vani* is important because it turns around conventional notions that women should do anything possible to keep their marriage intact. By choosing to divorce, the character Vani completely rejects patriarchal endurance politics, which expect women to endure abuse for the sake of "family honour" and to be viewed as respectable by

society. Vani's resistance is also powerful in that it occurs after she has endured significant silence, fear and emotional conditioning. She not only takes on her husband's violence against her but also her parents for putting pressure on her to consider compromising. By questioning why a daughter should have to bear the consequences of her parents' mistakes, an opportunity is created for Vani to expose the gendered reasoning that has determined that women are responsible for keeping up the family reputation.

In terms of a feminist viewpoint, divorce in the film is not seen as a failure but rather as the reclamation of self. It is an expression of Vani's legal, emotional and ethical claim to bodily autonomy, dignity and personhood. The challenges she represents to the belief that a "woman" should remain passively, forgivingly and sacrificially abused are also evidence of the extent to which she has reclaimed power for herself. As a result, the film redefines the idea of honour in terms of self-esteem, positioning Vani to value her humanity over any sense of honour concerning the male-dominated systems of prestige in her life. Through this process, Vani has recast the way women are characterised in mainstream Hindi cinema. She is depicted as entering into her own freedom by conscious choice and direct conflict with abusive systems rather than through some combination of a male knight in shining armour or romantic association with men. The film, therefore, presents a definition of female liberation that is not only an escape from patriarchal oppression but the right to make one's own definition of life, irrespective of the influence of patriarchal values.

Contemporary Significance of the Film

Akaash Vani continues to be significant for its representation of violence hidden in everyday life. In the aftermath of discussion on issues such as consent, women's rights and intimate partner abuse, this film offers insight into the early development of broader public debate about those issues. The film further serves to illustrate social respectability and the potential of those social institutions to reinforce and perpetuate inequality and coercive behaviours (e.g. family, marriage). This film illustrates not only that individual acts of violence are often not limited to "deviant" individuals, but that commonly held and everyday cultural values (e.g. honour, adjustment, obedience and silence) contribute to maintaining such abusive behaviours.

It is also important to consider the shift in how women are portrayed in film in comparison to

characters like Vani, who develop from being portrayed solely as obedient daughters or suffering wives to being women who name those who have wronged them and seek their freedom. This shift is consistent with the evolution of female subjectivity in Hindi cinema, where female characters increasingly challenge patriarchal representations of women. The film converts private suffering into public discourse about violence against women. It provides an opportunity for viewers to challenge the normative language of tradition, family, and marriage.

8. POSTER SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Poster as Visual Text

A poster for *Akaash Vani* facilitates not only publicity but also forms a cultural text which assists audiences in determining what to expect from a film before experiencing the narrative itself. A film's themes can typically be summed up in a single image on its respective poster. The themes are communicated through aspects of the poster, including its composition, colour, posture of the subjects, facial expressions, costumes and spatial arrangements, which contribute to creating the meaning of the film rather than simply representing it.

For *Akaash Vani*'s poster, it communicates ideas relating to emotional closeness, youthful romance and attachment. These visual representations of these ideas apply to the conventions of romantic dramas within mainstream Hindi cinema. This is done by illustrating the film's protagonist(s) as loving, yearning and emotionally re-established members of society prior to the viewer experiencing any parts of the film dealing with issues such as coercion, abuse, and resistance. The tagline "Love gets a second chance", which Barthes (1985) refers to as anchorage, further directs the viewer to an independent romantic evaluation of the image.

From a semiotic point of view, the poster is signifying meaning(s) that are ideological and exceed their mere physical appearance. A close embrace is indicative of security; a soft gaze is indicative of trust; a close bodily position is indicative of fulfilling an emotional need; and so on. Although the above meanings appear natural, they are culturally produced and socially learned. As a result of the poster being the viewer's first opportunity to negotiate ideas about the film's politics, it also creates a framework for the viewer's understanding of the film as romantic while simultaneously postponing their understanding of

some deeper, darker truths represented in the film's narrative.

Composition, Gaze, and Gender Coding

The *Akaash Vani* poster design prominently features the lead actors in a way that represents hetero romantic relationships as the primary focus of the story. Placing the main characters centrally indicates importance. Alignment provides balance, which promotes harmony, emotional connection and stability in their relationship. These arrangements predispose the audience to relate this film mainly to a romantic connection rather than to structural conflict.

Another important aspect is the gaze, which both characters exhibit. Both of the lead characters are smiling; however, the male (*Akaash*) is slightly taller than the female (*Vani*) and is leaning into her. *Akaash* is the "doer" of the embrace, and she is the "receiver." As they look either at each other or at a distance while looking at something, the image evokes feelings of intimacy, nostalgia or unfulfilled desire while creating an emotional connection without confrontation through violence.

Gender codes can also be discerned via the use of body posture and body language in this image. *Vani* is dressed in bold colours, making her the "focal point" of the visual composition. Her posture places her "inside" the male character's personal space, suggesting that women are a decorative element and therefore are a vehicle granting purpose and meaning to the male character's journey. The male character projects strength and being upright or in control, guarding. The male character projected stability and authority. On the other hand, the female character portrays vulnerability, dependency and softness, therefore promoting the female as receptive, not independent.

Using a feminist understanding of filmic imagery, images such as those of *Akaash Vani* replicate established norms for gender and the way in which males and females relate to each other (Mulvey, 2013). Even when subtle, image codes help audiences frame the manner in which they perceive the roles of males and females within heterosexual relationships. In conclusion, the *Akaash Vani* poster is not an unbiased presentation of male and female characters, but rather it is a cultural interpretation of the genders in the context of the established cultural codes governing views, power and sexual desire.

Colour, Mood, and Romantic Myth

The colours and lighting of the "Akaash Vani" poster establish an emotional identity for the film. In the title and the leggings of the female protagonist, the lively pink colours contrast with the white and blue of the male protagonist, which represent the conventional definitions of gender. Pink is associated with being feminine, soft, and romantic, whereas the male has more neutral clothing, suggesting he is more real-world. Light, muted, warm, pale-coloured, or muted romantic colour palettes frequently create feelings of tenderness, nostalgia, yearning, and emotional closeness. By creating a visual landscape using colour, these elements create an effective love story, instead of a male-dominated, trauma-driven narrative structure.

Even in the context of a "wholesome" library, the lighting and camera angle on the female character highlight both her smile and her beauty, maintaining her position as the primary object of the viewer's appreciation. This use of lighting also develops the emotional representation, as light and polished surfaces tend to give off an impression of beauty, balance, and emotional depth. These aesthetic devices are used by the film industry to soften the emotional conflict in a film, which allows the audience to identify with the film more effectively.

The semiotic use of these elements maintains what Roland Barthes (1985) calls a cultural myth; they create the image of heterosexual love being associated with need, security, and fulfilment, a value system that is concealed from the viewer until the unequal power relations become evident in the film. By establishing romance as an emotional language, the poster supports the displacement of unacceptable social realities with idealised visual fantasy.

Poster and the Silencing of the Subaltern Woman

The poster was studied through the lens of Subaltern Studies as another (tertiary) form of silencing. While the film recounts Vani's suffering, coercion, humiliation and resistance, these experiences are removed from the public record of the poster and replaced with a romanticised intimacy and commodified struggle expressed in the language of love (Kamble & Biswal, 2023).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (2023) question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is pertinent in this instance. Vani attempts to articulate her pain from a patriarchal marriage in the film; however, her attempt to communicate her suffering is subsumed within the commercial representations of the promotional poster.

She is not shown as a victim of violence but rather as a romantic heroine defined by her heterosexual relationships. This leads to an understanding that while subaltern women begin speaking in the form of narrative, marketing systems continue to articulate their voice. Her daily lived experiences are translated into a commodity of visual pleasure, resulting in an aesthetic softening of the politically urgent aspects of the narrative in the publicity. Thus, the poster perpetuates the conditions of marginalisation of women's suffering that the film endeavours to challenge through its narrative structure; it reproduces the same patriarchal representation systems that deny women's voices.'

Concealing Violence Through Marketing

The poster for *Akaash Vani* has one main flaw: it does not even depict what happens when marital abuse is present. While the movie includes marital abuse, force, and a woman's suffering, the poster omits any sign of fear, force, injury, restraint, or distress associated with being abused. There is no evidence of violence shown to the public.

The exclusion of violence from the promotional image carries ideological meaning. Commercial publicity often takes social issues that are difficult and turns them into an emotional narrative that can be marketed. The politics surrounding consent and the oppression of women in the home are communicated through familiar visual codes of love, beauty and intimacy. What is presented as a traumatic experience in the narrative becomes a consumable experience in the marketplace.

The way in which violence has been excluded from the promotional image is indicative of the way in which mass market film marketing operates. Films which contain content that makes people uncomfortable are typically "repackaged" in a way that makes the film aesthetically safe and commercially viable. Audiences are encouraged to understand the film through romance rather than through confrontation. From a critical standpoint, the poster illustrates how capitalism uses advertisement to neutralise radical narrative context. In this case, the narrative questions patriarchy in marriage, while the promotional image reduces the tension by creating a sentimental appeal. Thus, the poster illustrates that cinema critiques patriarchy in narrative and oppresses that critique in promotional form.

9. POSTER VS NARRATIVE CONTRADICTION

The way that Akaash Vani's promotional poster contrasts with its film narrative highlights how cultural politics shape the film. The film's narrative portrays marriage as a site of abuse, surveillance, and an absence of consent, while its promotional poster frames relationships through beauty, desire, and a sense of connection.

Although they are both expectantly communicating with viewers, these two different representations expose two parallel economies of meaning. The film's narrative tries to expose the hidden domestic violence that exists within marriages, while the promotional poster attempts to encourage viewers to come to the theatre to see a romance that they are familiar with. The narrative dismantles patriarchal myths, while the poster partially reinstates them by using conventional visual codes.

From a critical perspective, the tension between the two representations is not incidental but rather is structural. The majority of mainstream cinema operates under the guise of presenting a progressive storyline and yet remains commercially tied to formulas of desire (such as romance) and gender normativity. The promotional poster is where the social critique and the market disciplines of maintaining or restoring patriarchal mythology intersect. The narrative of the film has viewers confront violence that is hidden in respectable marriages, while the promotional poster provides them with reassurance through the emotional fantasy of romance. The contradiction between the two representations exemplifies how cinema can simultaneously maintain and resist patriarchal ideology.

In conclusion, the representations of the promotional poster and the film narrative should be analysed together, as their contradiction illustrates the ideological pressures that exist within contemporary Hindi cinema.

10. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The interdisciplinary analysis of *Akaash Vani* yields eight foundational findings regarding gender dynamics, institutional marriage, and the politics of visual representation:

- i. Marriage as a Patriarchal Institution: The film juxtaposes the classic definition of marriage as an ideal in Hindi cinema with a view of marriage

that engages female choice, autonomy, and dignity in particular.

- ii. Marital Violence Beyond Physical Abuse: Domestic violence occurs not only as a physical act but also through psychological humiliation, emotional suffocation, coercive sexuality, and everyday domination. Thus, the narrative expands traditional definitions of domestic violence.
- iii. Female Protagonist as a Subaltern Subject: The female protagonist experiences a lack of being heard, dismissed or normalised by family and society, and her experiences are reflective of those of female subalterns in that, within patriarchal structures, she cannot communicate to others through her speech.
- iv. Honour Culture Produces Female Silence: Family honour acts as a disciplinary mechanism through which women are pressured into giving up happiness, tolerating abuse and remaining silent for the sake of the family or the reputation of the family.
- v. Resistance Through Legal and Personal Agency: The protagonist's use of the legal system and her determination to end her marriage signal her reclaiming her dignity, autonomy and self-identity.
- vi. Poster Imagery Contradicts Narrative Reality: The film depicts trauma and oppression, but the poster image of the film emphasises romance, intimacy and emotional softness; thus, creating a tension or gap between narrative politics and promotional representation.
- vii. Cinema Simultaneously Challenges and Reproduces Patriarchy: The study demonstrates that mainstream cinema critiques patriarchal violence in its storytelling while at the same time using stereotypical notions of gender in its promotional materials.
- viii. Contemporary Hindi Cinema in Transition: The film reflects an evolving cinematic culture that is increasingly addressing women's oppression through film. However, commercial expectations and traditional visual codes continue to shape how women are represented.

11. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate how Bollywood engages with unrecognised forms of gender-scaled

harassment, yet retains its commercialised tendencies. The narrative critically exposes marriage as a patriarchal institution in which consent, dignity, and female autonomy are systematically undermined. The film's story also questions the dominant way in which mainstream cinema describes marriage as a natural place of safety, devotion, or fulfilment. From the perspective of Subaltern Studies, the protagonist is represented as a woman whose voice is marginalised as a result of family hierarchy, marriage-based oppression, and social obligations. The fact that the woman cannot speak out against these injustices indicates that the silencing method is not directly oppressive, but can manifest through other pathways, specifically through the way society dismisses her feelings, through society normalising her feelings, and through emotional pressure. The film, therefore, extends the question of whether the subaltern can speak toward the issue of whether patriarchal society is willing to listen.

In viewing promotional posters for the film, an apparent contradiction also appears. Although the film's narrative examines the traumatic impact of marriage through coercion, physical resistance, and lack of freedom under the force of threat, the way the promotional poster uses romance imagery downplays the effects of violence against women within marriage. This contradiction demonstrates that mainstream films can offer new and more progressive narratives, while still relying on the existing visual system to provide conventions that appeal to the market. Consequently, the analysis suggests that Bollywood cinema exists within a contradiction of competing ideologies. It opposes patriarchy in the storytelling structure, but it still partially supports it in terms of promotional advertisements, iconic conventions, and business marketing of the film. Thus, *Akaash Vani* is important not just for its subject matter but for revealing how cinema can serve as both a place of resistance and a site of ideological compromise.

12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Akaash Vani* offers an invaluable and highly critical exposure of marital rape, honour culture, and the structural erasure of the female voice within the domestic sphere. The protagonist's journey from silent suffering to legal rupture mirrors the broader systemic battles for bodily autonomy and dignity fought by gendered subaltern subjects across contemporary society. Concurrently, the semiotic analysis of the film poster exposes how commercial

marketing machineries use highly romanticised imagery and traditional gender codes to mask urgent social critiques. This profound contradiction highlights the ongoing tension between radical narrative art and market discipline within mainstream Hindi cinema. Rather than staging an uncompromised challenge to the patriarchal social order, the film remains partially bounded by the visual economies of commercial distribution. Nevertheless, *Akaash Vani* stands as a landmark cinematic text that successfully forces private domestic trauma into the public sphere, significantly altering the cultural discourse surrounding female agency, consent, and patriarchal authority in contemporary media.

13. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The only subjects studied in this research are qualitative textual and visual semiotic analyses of a single film, *Akaash Vani* (2013), and its promotional poster. As a result, the conclusions reached as a result of this analysis are interpretative instead of being generalizable to all representations of women, marriage, or domestic violence in Hindi cinema. In addition, the focus of the research is to some degree on narrative meaning, character portrayal, and non-iconic visual symbolism rather than on audience reactions or production context from an industrial standpoint. Therefore, any responses from audiences, box-office issues, or marketing strategies unrelated to the posters selected for analysis are beyond the scope of this study. The research does not conduct a comparative analysis of other films that address the same themes. Future research will expand the limitations of this study using comparative, audience-focused, and interdisciplinary methods.

14. FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Future research can create a comparative study of *Akaash Vani* and other Hindi films regarding domestic violence, marital abuse, women's oppression, and relationships in patriarchal family structures to establish patterns of contemporary cinema. In addition, scholars are able to examine audience reactions, internet movie poster culture, and transformations in the representation of women in contemporary Indian cinema.

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