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**Performing Patriarchy: Disturbing Parallels in the Bhojpuri and Haryanvi Popular
Songs**

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Abstract:

The paper is an account of the discourses and media-texts that permeate the Bhojpuri and Haryanvi public sphere. An attempt is being made to confront the gendered footprints of the popular industries of these two communities through analysis of stage performances and music videos where the body of the dancer emerges as a critical site for patriarchal transactions. The paper uses the theory of male gaze which obsessively represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. The dancer is turned into a passive object who dances her way into performing gender on stage. This act of doing gender on stage mirrors the gender performativity in society. Thus, to understand the position of women, in both the communities, the paper is structured along the following axes - gender, performance, male gaze, analysis of lyrics and visual representations of the dancer's body.

Keywords: Gender, Male Gaze, Patriarchy, Performance, Popular Songs

Introduction

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back" that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (Hooks, 9).

Having a voice is never enough. We need to be heard. In our structured society, the dominant patriarchal ideology, has homogenized women into silent beings. The main idea for our paper comes from the phrase talking back which Bell Hooks uses as a form of resistance, to subvert and create a space for the marginalized i.e. the woman. We make an attempt to deconstruct the hegemony prevalent in the world of entertainment. The female body has always occupied the central position, be it in the item songs of Bollywood or in the popular



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songs of regional music industries. For our study, we have chosen the Bhojpuri and Haryanvi popular songs. The Bhojpuri community is mostly found along the eastern Indo-Gangetic plains, which comprises the districts of western Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, parts of Jharkhand, and borders of Nepal while the Haryanvi community is found along the western Indo-Gangetic plains, which comprises of Haryana, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh and parts of Delhi. Both the entertainment industries produce scores of music videos, which have for long thrived under the shadow of Bollywood. These cultural texts reek of regressive patriarchal discomfort. Thus, in this paper we will locate the deep misogyny and gender stereotypes embedded in the select popular songs and dances. Our analysis will work on multiple levels to bring out the patriarchal prejudices which are reinforced through the production and circulation of these songs.

The system of patriarchy is reinforced by variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial to women of knowledge of their history, the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining 'respectability' and 'deviance' according to women's sexual activities, by restrains and outright coercion, by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power and by awarding class privileges to conforming women (Lerner, 218).

Be it Aristotle who termed woman as 'deformed man' or Plato who saw women as 'weaklings'; women have had little agency to subvert these male dominated discourses and definitions. To be able to deconstruct the category 'woman', at first, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms of patriarchy, which infest our everyday lives. We will begin by unveiling the stereotypes attached with the gendered bodies in popular songs of both these communities.

The first question that comes is what do we understand by popular songs and why have we chosen it for our study? Popular songs are cultural texts, produced and consumed on a large scale. The social and cultural climate of any era is reflected through art, songs being one of them. Popular songs, which heavily draw upon Bollywood item numbers, are cultural indicators to understand the way people perceive of themselves and the world around.



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We will analyse the lyrics which are not mere arrangement of words into sentences, but representations of a composer's ideology as well as that of the larger community. As PrashantGautam of GautamOrkestrasays, "people only want crash double meaning songs. . .all kind of cheap numbers are played and women are forced to solicit as organizers turn pimps." (Dhawan, Singh 2017).

In the second part of the paper, we have analysed the dancers and their performances. Judith Butler, while talking to Julie Phelps, elucidate on body-based performances. She says,

Performance is not restricted to stage...when we talk about gender performance broadly, we're talking about it beyond the stage, in the audience, what we are doing before the show, on the streets and in the public, at the thresholds of public and private, within the home or within the shelter. . . (Phelp, 2013).

We have also analysed how the audience responds to these dancers, who mimic the Bollywood item numbers. Here, we have problematized the position of the audience (spectator). The subjective gaze makes the dancer a passive object who dances her way into performing gender on stage. This act of doing gender on stage mirrors the gender performativity in society. Here, the female dancer performs her femininity and the male viewer performs his masculinity, within the prescribed norms of our society. Thus, the growing sexual intemperance indeed follows from the lyrics to visual representations.

Deconstructed Stereotypes: Where Patriarchy Feels Thwarted

To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive and docile. The girl is supposed not only to pimp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it grace and charm (Beauvoir 359).

Gender stereotypes are established generalizations about women and men, which are considered as absolute truths. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie notes the single story creates stereotypes. . .they make one story the single story (TED Talks 2009). This single patriarchal story conditions a woman to accept herself as secondary which also ricochets in the Freudian discourse. In Freud's phalli-centric world, normal human is male, and female on the other hand is a creature devoid of penis. According to him, the female can't escape from being



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subordinate to the male by the virtue of her sex. Beauvoir denounces Freud's theory because he doesn't take the social origins into consideration. She says that women do not envy men because of their anatomical superiority. They envy men because of the patriarchal privileges enjoyed by them. Since the (wo)man is 'the other' of the man, it is easy to torment, control, silence and reduce her to a mere object. Luce Irigaray elaborates upon this idea and argues how phallic economy places women as objects to be exchanged in a world dominated by men. The society becomes the market, women the commodity and men the buyer. She argues that the society negotiates the exchange value of a woman on the basis of her use. She expands it further, by comparing woman to capital which needs to be accumulated.

Man must be pleased; but him to please

Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf

Of his condoled necessities ... (Patmore, Angel of the house)

The above lines not only echo the values of Bhojpuri and Haryanvi speaking communities, but also of the Bollywood films. Our society laud the virtues of a dependent woman who maintains a domestic haven with little interest outside her home, husband and children. She is the 'angel of the house'. This idealized image is reinforced at different levels in both society and Bollywood. Where self-annihilation is considered a virtue, women seek contentment catering only to the prescribed gender roles. Virginia Woolf expands this idea of angel in the house.

. . .you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. . .She sacrificed herself daily. . .Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace (Woolf 3).

If a woman dares to revolt against the set binaries, she is termed as a fallen woman (*girihiuaurat*), promiscuous (*badchalan*) or a witch (*chudail*). As we see in the movies, the sanskari heroine is regularly policed through twin modes, of institutionalization and discipline, while the woman in an item song is portrayed as overtly sexualized and is thrown out after the dance sequences "as fitting punishment for her threatening sexuality" (Kasbekar 299). In patriarchal communities, there is an urge to control the sexuality of a woman. Also,



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both the Bhojpuri and Haryanvi communities are agrarian, which is to say the head is a patriarch. The patriarch of the house needs to continually police a woman and control her “sexual abandon and potential infidelity” (Kakar18). This moral order of the society reverberates in Bollywood as well, where the films uphold the ‘official’ definition of femininity of women being traditional within the main plot, while simultaneously provided its targeted audience with the ‘unofficial’ erotic pleasures, through dance and song sequences (Kasbekar, 293).

Bollywood, Male Gaze and manifestation on Stage

In our paper we have restricted ourselves to the heterosexual domain of gaze and how it controls the dancer on stage. The concept of male gaze migrated from Hollywood films to Bollywood and then to the regional stage performances. Laura Mulvey, a film critic, coined the term male gaze which obsessively represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/female (Mulvey 19)”. Thus, the gaze serves as an aggressive medium for male domination. In Indian context, Bindu Nair has analysed Bollywood films based upon Mulvey’s theoretical framework, which is especially evident in the song and dance numbers, specifically item numbers (Nair 53).

Further, we will try to problematize the spectators’ position. The basic premise on which the Haryanvi and Bhojpuri regional industries thrive, is the consumption of female bodies through gaze. The main features of a stage show are the commodification and commercialization of women’s sexuality (Trautner 772). In both the popular industries, from the producers, to the lyricists, to the audience, it is a male dominated space. The only role a woman has, is of a dancer, devoid of all agency. She appears as a sexual/fancy object to the male gaze. Be it on stage or digital platforms, these performances are informed by the reaction of the audience. The success of the performance depends on how a dancer is able to improvise her dance steps to match the mood of the audience. The dancer is then rewarded with whistles, claps and hoots. She does not allow touching of the body, but a peek into the



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cleavage suffices some good tipping. So, these are performances of desire and gazing at the female form from a distance. Thus, the stage shows, are socially sanctioned spaces, where men, irrespective of class differences, come together to derive visual pleasures.

The centrality of male spectator and his pleasure informs every aspect of stage performance on popular songs. The stage is therefore, a site of contest. The only woman, at the centre of the stage, is surrounded by all male spectators.

In addition to this, the camera shoots and is angled in such a way that the gaze is invited to certain parts of the body, such as eyes, breasts, buttocks, lips; this combined with the dance moves, which imitate sexual movements consisting of pelvic thrusts and heaving breasts, zoomed in by the camera, lead to sexualisation and objectification of the woman's body, for the benefit and pleasure of the male spectator (Nair 53-54).

So, we see, there is a confrontation between the male gaze and the female body. Both the song writer and choreographer appropriate the misogyny of the spectator. Thus, the body of the dancer is a victim of gaping misogyny: distorted, disarticulated and reconstructed.

In the phalli-centric world, the dancer is the castrated being while the penis bearer, i.e. the spectator has a fear of castration. So, the spectator uses gaze as a weapon to disembody the female. To explain gaze, Mulvey goes to Lacan's mirror stage argument where a child recognizes the self, which is the base for the formation of ego. This self-awareness leads to misrecognition where he identifies himself as superior. Lacan argues that there is an intimate relationship between the object of gaze/desire and the gaze. The gazer is threatened by an omnipresent real on which he tries to project his narcissistic fantasy of reality. Thus, Lacanian gaze shows that the spectator's desire is nothing but a lack, which he fulfils by his gaze to derive pleasure out of the dancer's body.

The gaze then pierces hard, takes control and castrates the woman and seek voyeuristic pleasures out of her body. This is also explained by Nair where she says that the woman's 'lack of penis', or the threat of castration which she poses, identifies woman as the



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‘Other’ (56). Thus, male gaze is the manifestation of unequal power, between the gazing man and gazed upon woman.

Analysis of Lyrics

For our analysis, we have compared two popular songs from each of the community to bring out the parallels in the perception of women. From the Haryanvi community, we have chosen *Kidnap hojavegi* and *Solid Body*. From the Bhojpuri community we have chosen *Kidnap hojaibu* and *Chalisamiyanapetohre chalet goli*.

1A. Lakmekachorijotukajralagavegi,

Lead lagakekaanameinjogaanetubajawegi,

Uchiediaalesandlepaharkejoavegi,

Kidnap hojavegi.

Club wali beat pe step jodikhavegi,

Pissakaghamandjonuetujamavegi,

Berabhinalagega, Tugayabhojavegi,

Ho kidnap hojavegi.

Dare you don the Lakmekajal,

Dare you listen to music on leads,

Dare you come wearing high heels,

Know that you will be kidnapped.

Dare you dance to the beats of club,

Dare you brag of money,

Know that you will be disappeared

Know that you will be kidnapped.



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B. Dhuludawat road pechalehukaichichaal

Dekh k gore gaalkatahuho jai bawaal

High heel ke sandal pehn k itnakamarhilaibu

Kidnap hojaibu

Ankhi me gad jai tohar design, Kenamaari bola line

Sachbaatkahelakahediljani, karatarurupkiramain

Dilkohumrakhawabdikhakr, bhabitnakhaibu

Kidnap hojaibu.

Your killer walk beats the dust off the road

A glimpse of your rosy cheek wracks a havoc

Dare you whine your waist on high heels

Know that you will be kidnapped.

Your design is fixed in my eyes, how can one not flirt

I speak the truth; your beauty is unmatched

You lull my heart with dreams, dare you show attitude

Know that you will be kidnapped

The above songs blatantly perpetuate the rape myths: women like to be taken by force, women who visit clubs are easy catch and to wear particular kind of clothes is an invitation for sex. The lyricist has internalized the rape myths and has failed to comprehend the concept of consent. Aggression against women is justified by women's choices and nature. The rape/abduction is the price a woman must pay for her exposure of what should have remained 'veiled'. These songs reverberate with the dominant ideology and convincingly persuade a woman to believe that her conduct is nothing less than an invitation to abduct her. The lyricist and singers are nowhere close to gender sensitization which brings



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us to the bigger picture of how these songs reflect upon the position of women in both Haryanvi and Bhojpuri communities.

In this male-centric world, a woman who seeks enjoyment of any form is pervasive. Just by using earphones, they are able to stimulate men as we see in the line, *lead lagakekaanameinjogaanetubajawegi, kidnap hojavegi*. In rural areas, the use of electronic gadgets by young women is impermissible. There is a staunch belief that young women get spoilt by electronic gadgets as it becomes a medium through which they get exposure to the outside world. Thus, all form of entertainment is prohibited for women. As Kakar says, a woman can either be a nurturing mother or an evil seductress. Once she steps outside the house, her sexuality becomes a threat to men, which needs to be regulated. In our *desi* culture, the idea of a woman being conscious of her sexuality is foreign. If a woman celebrates herself, there is a justification that the woman deserves to be punished for arousing the man. In the songs we see how the women are reduced to kohl-stricken eyes, rosy cheeks, sexy objects, who could be kidnapped and raped. In the real world, the rapists are often found alleging that women wear heavy make-up to lure men. We see, a power struggle between the pursuer and the pursued. If a woman has more wealth, the man feels threatened, as is reflected in the line *pissakaghamandjonuetujamavegi, kidnap hojavegi*. If there is any chance for a woman to show some agency, by taking control of herself, and not being carried away, the fragile ego of the man is hurt and he tries to instil a fear inside the woman, as in the lines, *dilkohumrakhawabdikhakr, bhabitnakhaibu, kidnap hojaibu*. In both the songs, men try to reclaim their territory through physical power.

A woman is weighed on beauty constructs fixed by the patriarchal society. She is narrowed down to the shapeliness of her body. From slim body, to narrow waists, to toned legs and round hips, her abilities are reduced to these 'anatomical features'. In fact, our materialistic culture demand women to heighten their natural beauty to cater to the aesthetic sense of men. The toned legs, mascara, high heels act as visual foreplay for the men. Women feel compelled to wear them. Nancy Etcoff says "women are not only powerless but mindless" (4). Here, we will primarily focus on high heels, as in the lyrics of song A, *uchiediaalesandlepaharkejoavegi*, and song B, *high heel ke sandal pehn k itnakamarhilaibu*.



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The obsession with the female body has sexualized female footwear. High heels are symbols of submission of women to patriarchal gender roles. High heels are quintessentially feminine. It accentuates the curves and adds to sexuality of the female body. Though, there are enough scientific reasons to support the side effects of high heels, but women feel compelled to wear them. There is a common belief in the Haryanvi society *lugaiyankadimaggodanmein ho sae* (a woman thinks from her knee). The woman is perceived as someone irrational and impractical. On the same line, her choice of wearing heels is also considered superficial. Even if it is a visual treat to the man, the heels add to the vanity of the woman. In the songs, we see how high heels actually put restrictions to the female body. The normalization of sexual assault or rape culture is glaring through the choice of words. The songs are a testimony to the way in which society harbours a fetishes and demonizes the high heels as well as the wearers, i.e. the women.

*2. ATuthada main madi, Na miltajodaho,
Bhaiyank sun marjaangi, na maar marodaho,
Terelaadkarungathaade, Tuhojagithaadi re, (2)
Mahinebhitar ban jagi, Teri solid body re.
Bin aayikhetimein, Balamlaavenabaddha,
Na sarke mere kahni, Chadtaaave se jadda.
Ajay hoodakarlehanga, Je ibbboliaddi re.*

You are beefy and I brittle, are we any match,

Hold back or I will die, I swear!

The bigger my love, the bigger your body,

Sooner, you'll have a solid body.

Don't pluck the tender flower yet,



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Don't get any closer or I will freeze,
Dare you not yield, Ajay Hooda will coerce.

2B Sab dhyanlelajilaturajaniaaj

Nahikarabutubigademijaz (2)

Hairangwajilakehunahiboli

Chalisamiyaana me ajtoharechaltegoli

Toharpatalukamartohartirachhinajar

Dilkailebachoriho

Kari kajarakedharlagejaan

Maar badurupkekatoriho

Motarijawanikejodosarkehukhole

Chalisamiyana me ajtoharechaltegoli

O! Listen today, the entire district is consumed in you

Your continuous refusal angers me

That I am a goon, you should know

Bullets are fired in the tent for you

Your wasp waist, your sultry eyes

You steal my heart away

You dark kohled up eyes captivate me

Your beauty titillates me



Dare not anyone devour your opulent body

Bullets are fired in the tent for you.

Hegemonic masculinity is the most desired form of masculinity, and it “drives understanding and expectations of what it means to be a man” (Hunter et al.2). The idea sprouts from the gender stereotypes which we have already talked about. The man is laddish; he is hot-blooded, someone who has less tolerance and maintains an indifferent attitude towards a woman. For a man, violence is a major part of his identity. We have often seen in movies how the masochistic hero single handily beats up armed goons and save the heroine, the damsel in distress. Media conditions women to conform to the misogynistic ideology of the hero, where objectification is accepted and violence is internalized. This becomes problematic when martial rapes are normalized. The woman has to oblige her man and must not resist his advances for it may lead to rape. Rape culture is “a culture where rape and other expressions of sexualized violence occur with some frequency, and where societal attitudes about gender and sexuality normalize or trivialize this violence (Steibert, 18). These popular songs aid in the construction of the macho male thereby promoting rape culture in our society.

In a close patriarchal system, erotic desires of a woman are considered a taboo. The idea of consent exists vaguely. As we see in the above songs, the voice of the woman is unheard and unacknowledged. The song A, *Solid Body* presents the listener with image of a man, joining a woman in bed and persuading/coercing her into having sex. In the *Haryanvi* song, the woman considers herself weak. Her insecurities and fears are trivialized. The macho man does not understand consent. When the woman questions the man, as in the line *tuthada main madi, namiltajodaho*, the man insists on having sex with her and says she will have a plump body sooner. The woman thinks it's normal to submit. In the Bhojpuri song too, we come across this line *nahikarabutubigademijaz*, where the man says the woman will face consequences if she denies him pleasure. Her slim waist, sultry eyes as in the song B, *patalukamar, tirachhinajar* is why the man wants to devour her. Her body attracts him. We



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see in the line *motari jawanikedosarkehukhole*, the man wants to possess the woman's body and have full control on her. Patriarchy denies a woman agency in sex, she is not allowed to indulge in plea. The institution calls for a woman's total submission and agreement with her 'man'. Although it is not explicitly suggested but the world of the songs is tinted with violence like the lines of song A, *Ajay Hoodakar le hanga*, and song B, *samanyameinchalitohrechaltegoli*. The premise of the song is large scale representation of society, where women are at the receiving end of violence. The female body becomes a site upon which assault could be staged to contest a competing masculinity (Kumar, 98). These songs show how women are subjected to everyday violence in the interconnected system of control and coercion and how they undergo emotional/physical violence in a structured domestic/public space(s).

Visual Representations: Where gaze meets the body

In today's world, we are constantly bombarded with different kinds of images which have a far-reaching impact; they not only reflect on the existing cultural beliefs but also pave way for new cultural ideologies. The rationale behind the selection of the pictures from the Bollywood item songs to the regional popular songs is to gain understanding of the portrayal of women and female sexuality. In these pictures we see the heroines dancing to the tunes of item songs. The portrayals are overtly sexualized where the gaze of the camera and use of light focuses on the body of the dancer. In the background we see the male gaze at work.

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Picture A1



Picture A2



Picture B1



Picture B 2

Picture A1 is of Kareena Kapoor dancing to the tunes of *Fevicol se* while Picture A2 is of Jacqueline shaking her body to the remix version of *Ek Do Teen*. To compare the Bollywood item numbers with the regional stage performances we have taken Picture B1 and Picture B2 which shows the Haryanvi stage dancer, Sapna Choudhry. Sapna started out as a popular singer for cassette recording companies. She shot to stardom with the massively successful music video *Solid Body*. In picture B2, the dancer performs on *kidnap hojavegi*. Be

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it Kareena Kapoor, Jacqueline Fernandes or SapnaChoudhary, we notice how the male gaze which includes gaze of both the spectator and the camera are at work. As Mira Nair says, the dancers lack penis, so she is already castrated. The man possesses a penis but there is a fear of castration which prompts the phallogentric male to gaze back. We see how they ogle at the dancers, reducing them to mere body parts. Picture B reflects upon the collective sub consciousness of the crowd. Such pictures and videos that get circulated in the digital media makes us question the cultural constructs prevalent in our society. So, we see how the reception of Bollywood item songs are in line with the audience reaction to the regional stage shows.



Picture C

Picture D

Picture E

The above pictures speak volumes about the infestation of misogyny in our society. In picture C we see the Bhojpuri Dancer Neha. She wears minimum clothes in an attempt to woo the audience while in picture D, Haryanvi dancer SapnaChoudhary is dressed in a traditional *salwarkurta*. No part of her skin is visible. But in both the pictures, the audience react in the same way. Here clothes aren't a factor. Both the women are sexualized and reduced to flesh. In picture C, we see the reaction of public. The audience objectifies the dancer. Her body parts are clicked for pleasure. The visuals are aided with sexist lyrics. No matter how popular these dancers are, their bodies remain available for easy violation.

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Picture F



Picture F1

Picture F is of the popular Bhojpuri dancer Monalissa on stage while picture F1 is of Katrina Kaif's trendsetting song *Sheila ki Jawani*. To lure the audience, both the regional orchestra organizers and the director of Bollywood movies, demand the women to be skimpily clad with heavy makeup.

The costumes which are often revealingly cut, brightly coloured with shimmering sequins, along with make-up techniques such as, brightly coloured glossy lips, cleavage rouged darker than the rest of the body, and navel tattoos and piercings, all add up to turn the woman in to a spectacle (Nair, 53).

Dancer's body is used to create a spectacle. Her stage shows are swarmed by scores of people. She is highly desirable to men in audience who would otherwise despise her for 'questionable' morals. This reflects upon the hypocrisy of our communities, that even if the man of the house derives pleasure from such dance shows, a woman cannot aspire to become like her.

Conclusion

Thus, the sexualized portrayal of women in the popular songs reflects upon the internalization of misogyny and prevailing gender inequalities in our communities. The songs give-in into oft-repeated metaphors of the insatiable sex drive of men, women who are objectified, and controlled through violence. By analysing the gaze, one gets to know how the female body is turned into an object of pleasure. Gaze is thus a participation in hegemonic



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ideology based on oppression of women by controlling the production of images in real and virtual world. These songs shape women's everyday experiences and they often translate into real world experiences ranging from emotional abuse to rape. The lyrics paint horrible and agonizing situations which aid in the abduction and rape of old age, minor, infants and women suffering from mental and physical ailments. A sexual assault or kidnapping is clearly a violation of an individual's physical autonomy, but when it comes to a woman, the patriarchal societies seem to lay claim over her body which result in her (un)freedom.

Determining the sexual references can be challenging as some of the songs are suggestive and not explicit. The content analysis of the select songs paves the way for future studies investigating the relationship between popular music and patriarchy. Also, studying gaze open our eyes to the presence of misogyny and non-consent in our popular songs. The study can be taken further with masculinity as the central concern in the same songs. Popular songs are produced keeping traditional conceptions of masculinity in mind; most of such songs display hyper masculinity. The theoretical tools used for this study can be applied to masculinity as well. Thus, it would be interesting if the study brings out similar results.

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