



Women, Crime and Power: A Postfeminist Study of Delhi Crime Season 3

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of gender, crime, and institutional power in Delhi Crime (Season 3) within the context of contemporary Indian OTT culture. Drawing on the concept of ‘Postfeminist sensibility’ by Rosalind Gill, the study aims to examine how Delhi Crime Season 3 constructs a postfeminist imaginary of female authority in law enforcement by placing women simultaneously in positions of institutional power (police) and criminal power (antagonist), while still measuring their success against patriarchal benchmarks. Through close readings of the six episodes, including dialogues and visual mis-en-scene, the paper explores themes of gendered authority, motherhood, trafficking, and patriarchal control, while also attending to moments of agency, professional competence, and everyday resistance. The paper argues that the series reflects contemporary tensions surrounding gender and power, and reflects on how Indian crime narratives negotiate women’s lived realities in a changing media landscape.

Keywords: Cinematography, Delhi Crime, Feminist Imaginaries, Indian OTT, Postfeminism, Transgressive Femininity

Introduction

India’s streaming platforms have become central cultural sites where crime, gender and authority are reimagined. Respondents in a study by Koravi reported watching internet series for three to six hours daily, with many viewers judging the depictions of crime and violence on screen to be influential in shaping their

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perceptions of real-world criminality (29). Scholars also note that the relative freedom of over-the-top (OTT) platforms has enabled more direct engagement with taboo or previously marginalised women's issues, thereby producing new representational possibilities compared to traditional television or mainstream cinema (Rashmi and Sood 2116).

In modern India, roles of women are changing due to new social and economic conditions. This is slowly transforming the idea of femininity. While women have always been very visible in Indian films and media, today's OTT series present new perspectives on gender. These may not completely dismantle dominant structures, yet their coexistence with conventional portrayals signals that hegemonic gender norms remain contested rather than being absolute (Bose and Mishra 904).

To understand these shifts, the paper draws on the distinction between normative and transgressive femininity. Normative femininity refers to the dominant, culturally idealised, and socially rewarded form of femininity that aligns with and helps sustain existing power structures, particularly hegemonic masculinity (Connell 836). Women are expected to perform femininity in ways that accommodate men's interests and desires while reinforcing women's subordination. In contrast, transgressive femininity describes performances or expressions of femininity that consciously or unconsciously violate, challenge, or cross the boundaries of normative femininity. This can include behaviours that are predominantly perceived as "masculine", such as assertiveness, independence, ambition, or leadership, without softening it to appear palatable and rejection of domestic or passive roles (Schippers 87).

Delhi Crime series celebrates its global acclaim, including its 2020 International Emmy Award for Best Drama Series, and further extends the franchise's long-standing postfeminist orientation in its recent season. Across all seasons, the series has

been carried forward by a woman protagonist, DCP Vartika Chaturvedi, whose leadership within a male-dominated policing structure has been depicted with definite institutional legitimacy. However, Season 3 marks a significant narrative shift with the show positioning a female antagonist for the first time. This makes the season particularly relevant for an inquiry into postfeminist articulations of female authority and deviance. The season also frames its postfeminist sensibility by featuring women across different institutional spaces like police officers (DIG, ACP, SI), medical officers, judges, journalists, and others, thereby suggesting a system that appears, at least narratively, to accommodate women's competence and mobility. Additionally, subtle *mise-en-scene* like a brief filler shot of two young girls playing football in a public park (Delhi Crime 3.1 00:33:42), though only a few seconds long, symbolically reorients the space as one where girls exercise agency and freedom. Similarly, one of the trafficking clients, John-ji, is shown living with his wife and 'two daughters' (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:16:16), a minute but significant detail that complicates his moral positioning and reflects how patriarchal structures simultaneously shelter and endanger women.

This paper examines how Delhi Crime Season 3 (hereafter Delhi Crime S3) constructs postfeminist female authority by positioning women simultaneously within institutional power (policing) and criminal power (antagonism), while continuing to evaluate them through patriarchal benchmarks. Reading Delhi Crime S3 through a postfeminist lens helps to expose how contemporary media can stage women's empowerment while retaining underlying constraints. Rosalind Gill's influential work on postfeminist media culture self-management, and the appearance of agency, even where normative demands on women position it as a "sensibility" characterised by discourses of individual choice, persist (147). In accordance with this paradigm, women's visible authority can coexist with, and even

depend upon, an intensified expectation of self-regulation, emotional labour, and domestic competence.

The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of all six episodes of the season. The thematic analysis approach is used to identify recurring narrative and visual motifs like authority, aspiration, domestic responsibility, and gendered vulnerability. By doing so, the article posits an argument that postfeminist sensibilities in contemporary Indian OTT crime series do not simply mark a break from earlier, more patriarchal narratives; rather, they reconfigure gendered power in ways that make female authority visible while still subjecting it to moral and domestic discipline.

Power Negotiation and Aspirations

Foucault argues that power circulates through all social relationships rather than residing in any single institution or subject (94). Extreme physical violence produces fear and horror, making people conscious of the authority of the supreme sovereign. This framework becomes crucial for reading Meena, the main antagonist of the series, who is also the head of the human trafficking racket, where her apparent empowerment often emerges from the same violent logics that oppressed her. Her powerful monologue (Delhi Crime 3.6 00:38:39- 00:41:04): “Tu pehli naa hai jo mujhe marna chahti hai,” (You are not the first person who wants to kill me), followed by the story of how her grandmother tried to drown her and her twin sister in a giant milk container. “. . . Meri dadi, manne aur meri jurwa behen ne paida hotehi dudh ke bade patile me dubana chahti thi . . . Phir aaya husband. Vyah karke sochi mei, mei uski har hawas ki sikar banungi, choti si thi mei, bohot choti. Isliye mujhe jo thik laga maine kya. Dharti ka boj kam ho gaya” (When we were born, my grandmother wanted to drown me and my twin sister in a big container of milk . . . Then came my husband. I become a victim of his every lust. I was little, so little. So, I did whatever felt right

to me. One burden on the earth was reduced at least . . .). After subtly hinting at the murder of her husband, she further claims, “Tanne beda hai, mere kaaran kitni chodiya apne narak se nikalke bohot badiya jiban jeene lageya hai . . . Puch Rohtak mei kisi se bhi puch . . . pariwar basaye maine, nayi nasal paida hui mere karan . . . maine un chodiyone wohi hathiyar di jo zindagi ne mere te di, khud ki value ki samajh aur iss kutti behenchod duniya se ladne ki takkat.” (You know how many girls, because of me, came out of their hell and began living better lives... Ask anyone in Rohtak. I helped establish families; new generations were born because of me. . . I gave those girls what life had given me, an awareness of my own value and the strength to fight this bastard world). Even when she encountered the truth that she is not a saviour but has destroyed girls’ lives by forcing marriages and trafficking them, her reply, “Sab dhanda kare he, sab dhanda hi kare he, is desh ke har kone me chori bechi ja rahi hai. Kabhi dahej tayi, kabhi bachcha paida karan tayi, aur kabhi marda ki hawas shant karan tayi. Dhanda ho raha hai. Bas tarike nyare nyare se. . . ” (Everyone is doing business, everything is business. In every corner of this country, girls are being sold. Sometimes it is for dowry, sometimes for producing children, and sometimes to satisfy men’s lust. The transaction remains the same; only the forms change. . .) reveals her psychological negotiations in a patriarchal world and how she chose to deal with it. She has learned to weaponise the male gaze and turn it into business capital, even at the cost of other women. Her claim that “Mardo ne kaabu karna ek kalaa che” (Controlling men is also an art) (Delhi Crime 3.6 00:10:37), signals a strategic mastery of patriarchal techniques, but her rising anger, culminating in stuffing a cloth into a coughing girl’s mouth, also reveals how trauma has eroded her empathy. Here, power does not liberate; it mutates into cruelty.

Villains are powerful narrative figures who cross moral and social boundaries. They are often portrayed as equally strong and intelligent as the hero, but lack moral values. Their actions

are driven by greed and manipulation (Cohen 4). Although Meena challenges traditional gender norms through her agency and authority, her violent and inhuman actions place her within the moral universe of the villain or antagonist sphere, reinforcing anxieties about deviant femininity.

“ . . . Ye duniya aisa hai madam, koi aurat apna bal bute pe koi tarraki kar le naa, toh sab jal bhun jata hai. Ab aap ko dekh lo, aap ladies honeke bawajud itna bada police officer hai, toh inko toh jalan hota hoga naa, kyu bhaiya? Arrey thoda toh hota hoga” (. . . This world is like this only, madam, if a woman progresses through her self-determination and inner strength, everyone starts burning with jealousy. Just look at yourself! Despite being a woman, you are such a senior police officer. Of course, they must feel jealous, right brother? At least a little) (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:39:44 - 00:39:57), even though this statement by Kalyani, one of the players of the human trafficking racket about DIG Vartika Chaturvedi, wasn't accepted by the male police officer standing there as he defied it with his expressions, but this highlights the dominant narrative that exists for female police officers, as it is predominantly considered to be a male job; violent crime has relations with masculinity not feminine roles. She was trying to capitalise on the dominant narrative of male ego being bruised by females in higher posts than them in traditionally accepted male-centric fields, like in the police. These negotiations occur not only at the level of formal responsibility but also through subtle, often symbolic acts in which gendered expectations and male ego become part of the organisational landscape of power (Connell 834).

Scholars have long shown that power in institutions is neither neutral nor evenly distributed but is enacted through everyday interactions that discipline bodies, regulate behaviour, and mark certain subjects as more legitimate than others (Foucault 84). Policing, in particular, has been theorised as a paradigmatically gendered organisation, one whose norms,

hierarchies, and occupational identities are built around historically masculine ideals of toughness, aggression, and command (Acker 139; Rabe-Hemp 426).

The scene where Vicky, another member of the human trafficking racket, is rubbing oil on Meena, aka Badi Didi's feet (Delhi Crime 3.3 00: 26:01), shows how power dynamics change gender roles. Men do not touch women's feet; on one hand, women are being bought for marriages, sold for money, etc, but the power shift makes Badi Didi sit in a superior position in the entire system where a man is rubbing oil on her feet. Reading these moments with Foucault's idea of power as relational helps us see that authority is produced in interactions, not only by formal rank; the gestures are produced as effects of Meena's position within the syndicate, and they reconstitute what counts as dominance in that micro-field (94). In the very same scene, the series also employs romance as a strategic tool. In mainstream films and series, men frequently use romantic gestures to persuade women during moments of disagreement. Here, due to the power reversal, Badi Didi reverses this pattern. When Vicky is not fully convinced about their next plan of action, she gently moves closer, rubs the oil off his hands, and kisses them while softly saying, "Sab ho jayega, tu saath hai naa" (Everything will work out, since you are with me).

The use of close-up shots and extreme close-ups in the above-mentioned scene highlights the nuanced intimacy between them. Moreover, the cinematography uses a subtle camera angle tilt in accordance with the power dynamic. A low angle emphasises Badi Didi's dominance, while a slightly high angle is employed as the camera focuses on Vicky (Delhi Crime 3.3, 26:01). She maintains a superior position in their business dynamics, yet her gendered identity comes into play as she offers him emotional assurance that things will succeed if he stays by her side.

Additionally, Meena's masculine sitting posture (Delhi Crime 3.5 00:18:05) and the blunt, angry language she uses, "Mei apne pyaar te bol rahi and aap kaanpe charh ke muut raho" (I'm talking to you nicely, and here you are pissing in my ears?) (Delhi Crime 3.5 00:24:04), depicts a refusal of normative feminine softness. At the same time, her behaviour reads as a strategic response to past abuses. Butler's insight that gender is performed through repeated acts explains that Meena's authority is not a stable essence but an enacted position; her posture, commands, and the men's servility together create the spectacle of power. In Episode 1 (00:23:35), one of the goons stands to the left, seeking permission to leave from Kalyani, a member of the trafficking syndicate, who is seated comfortably in a chair. This reversal of expected power dynamics defies traditional notions of feminine comportment and authority. The use of a long shot brings the entire scene into focus, highlighting the spatial relationship between the characters and reinforcing Kalyani's position of power.

A long shot is used to bring the entire frame into light. This acts as a minute signifier of how feminism in the present time is changing from the dear old traditions in an agnostic setting of crime.

The series also takes an interesting stand, as in one of the scenes, the goons are shown serving food to the victims, a reversal of the gendered role of serving; yet in that very scene, one of the men blinks a side eye, signalling a vulgar sexual expression. "Khaa le nahi toh Kalyani Didi tujhe kha jayegi" (Eat it up otherwise Kalyani Didi will eat you up), coupled with a roaring expression (Delhi Crime 3.1 00:21:01-00:21:08), thereby demonstrates that role-reversal in power does not automatically erase the sexualised gaze that underwrites gendered power on screen (Mulvey 6). Close-up shots and a slight camera tilt are used to underline the power dynamics at play. Every time the girls, the victims, appear in this sequence,

the camera adopts a high angle, subtly exposing their underlying vulnerability. This demonstrates that even when women occupy superior positions in the criminal hierarchy, role reversal in power does not erase the sexualised male gaze directed at the girls below them.

Also, Meena's dressing and especially her use of a pallu (veil) in public settings of her village, marking her as "a respectable woman" reveals the subtle internalisation of patriarchal expectations even by a woman like her who commands an organised crime syndicate. In these public moments, she strategically negotiates social expectations by performing normative femininity through markers of modesty and respectability. Meena's authority is thus deeply postfeminist in its individualism; her rise is not a feminist transformation of structures but a personal survival strategy that mirrors the very brutality of the world that shaped her.

The series also stages the embodied politics of aspiration through motifs of appearance and the body. Women's bodies are presented as powerful, yet always needing control, correction, and constant work to meet narrow ideas of attractiveness (Gill 149). The dialogue in Ep 3 "yeh makeup hai naa, yeh hathiyar hai. *Kis cheez ka? Admiyo ko kaboo mei rakhne ka...*" (This makeup... this is a weapon. A weapon for what? To keep men under control...) dramatises the postfeminist paradox (00:12:53-00:13:03). Red lighting dominates the scene, with a touch of yellow light adding a sensuous feel. In this dimly lit atmosphere, close-up shots of bright lipstick, make-up and low-cut dresses with plunging necklines, visually frame the female body as an object of display and evoke the aesthetic of commodified sexuality.

Bodily presentation is framed as an autonomous choice and a tactical technology of power; yet, its social meaning is always mediated by a gendered economy in which "beauty" operates as

a modality of social control. Furthermore, it overlooks crucial questions about how representation works on subjectivity, particularly the internalisation of socially produced and media-driven beauty ideals (Gill 151).

Nevertheless, Delhi Crime S3 frames these power dynamics within a largely postfeminist logic where women can claim agency and occupy positions of power, but their authority is presented as an individual achievement rather than as evidence of institutional transformation. The series highlights women's capacity to command, yet it rarely points to broader structural shifts that would make such authority stable or equitable. In short, the season stages powerful female figures and role reversals, yet it does so within a frame that makes empowerment look like an individual tactic rather than a structural reordering.

Domestic Responsibility and Family Life

The series frames domestic conflict not as structural inequality but as a failure of emotional adjustment, a hallmark of postfeminist discourse. Research has long documented that the family and household remain deeply gendered sites of labour allocation, emotional expectation, and structural inequality, even as women enter public sphere jobs (Davies and Carrier 35). The scene where Devinder's new partner comments on the work of officer Neeti, "*kafi suna hai unse tumhare bare me... it is brilliant, the work you are doing*" (Heard a lot about you from him... It's brilliant, the work that you are doing!) (Delhi Crime 3.1 00:12:31-00:12:34). This admiration of Neeti's work contrasts with his (her ex-husband's) unmet expectations of a 'normal family', which was apparently not possible because of her nature of work. The concept of a normal family is a tricky one. In a normal family, the answer to how much devotion is expected from a woman in her household and in her professional work remains blurry. His repeated insistence on "tumhe pata hai mei humesha se ek proper family chahta tha, woh bhi tumhare

sath” (You know right, I always wanted a proper family, that too with you) (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:12:04-00:12:10) lays bare a latent expectation that, despite formal equality in career choice, the emotional and temporal costs of her policing work are still to be borne by her alone. Although both partners accepted each other’s demanding professions: his in the army, hers in the police, the series invites viewers to scrutinise the unspoken question of how much work commitment is tolerable for a woman without jeopardising domestic intimacy.

In another instance, during a tense moment between Vartika and her husband, Vartika asks, “Who’s saying this, the additional commissioner or my husband?” He replied, “The additional commissioner believes that you have behaved irresponsibly, and the husband frankly is just fed up” (Delhi Crime 3.4 00:32:38-00:32:53). The scene uses dim yellow-brown lighting and a muted colour palette that creates a heavy and tense mood. Although the sequence is structured as a conversation through close-up shots, the couple is intentionally not placed within the same frame. This visual separation signifies how professional pressures slowly disrupt family relations and shared domestic harmony.

In postfeminist media cultures, gendered work-family conflict is often framed as a matter of choice and self-management rather than as a reflection of structural inequalities in labour division; women, in this framing, must both care and perform, even as institutional support for such balancing is absent. Against this backdrop, Neeti’s response to Devinder, “Akeli hoon but lonely nahi” (I’m alone, but not lonely) (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:12:28), asserts her emotional self-possession while foregrounding the self-sufficiency expected of her. Moreover, the visual framing of Devinder’s sadness humanises the male character’s vulnerability and subtly challenges traditional notions of masculinity. In the court canteen scene after the divorce (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:14:55), a wide shot shows him

seated alone on the right side wearing a blue sweater. The table occupies the centre space in the frame, while the empty chair on the left creates a visible void. The lighting is dim and dull, and the entire colour palette is desaturated and muted. This visual language communicates the grief of divorce, using blue as a traditional cinematic signifier of melancholy. Additionally, his soft expression of melancholy was enough to destroy the age-old expectation of masculinity, where men show no emotion. Similarly, when Devinder visits his wife's flat to collect his belongings (Delhi Crime 3.4 00:29:50), the sequence is captured in warm yellow lighting and earthy tones of brown and white, with only faint maroon accents on the bedsheet and lamp. These warmer colours initially suggest a lingering sense of intimacy and domesticity. However, the light blue window, framing the background of the close-up and mid-shot of them bidding a final farewell, intensifies the emotions of separation. These instances reinforce the quiet cost of the work-family divide for both partners.

In Ep 4 (00:22:30-00:22:43), a man shouts, “Tu apne bachchedani ko muh bandh karo hai? Apno muh bandh rakh. 4 lakh rupeye deo Kusum ko. Apne hisse ko khet becho. Puro paiso thare se wasoolungo” (You have had your tubes tied, right? Now keep your mouth shut. I paid 4 lakhs rupees to Kusum. Sold my share of the field. I’m going to make you pay for it now), this reflects what Kandiyoti terms the patriarchal bargain, in which rural women remain bound to systems that treat them as reproducers of lineage rather than autonomous individuals (285). Moreover, in many rural parts of India, brides are frequently treated as economic liabilities, expected to ‘repay’ through fertility, obedience, and silence. The series mirrors this lived reality, showing how the rural patriarchal order persists unchanged, even as urban women in the same narrative universe negotiate postfeminist forms of agency.

Postfeminist discourse cultivates particular maternal femininities, making maternity highly visible, public, and incoherent. Despite varied identities, these representations share beliefs that 'good' mothers are empowered, self-responsible, and solely in charge of managing work and family (Delaney and Sullivan 1699). Often, cultivating a life that takes the professional and domestic spheres into account is referred to as creating balance, but it can also be read more nefariously as urging women to chase after an illusion of control. Contemporary media often show motherhood as a personal responsibility rather than a social or structural issue. Women are expected to handle the challenges between caregiving and professional life through their own emotional strength, adjustment, and individual choices (Gill 153). This critical take on motherhood becomes sharper with the significant dialogue of Vartika Chaturvedi, "This is the most selfless and selfish thing you'll ever do" (Delhi Crime 3.6 00:8:38), spoken as she sees the adoption papers lying in front of Neeti. The entire scene is dominated by a black and grey colour palette. Both women are wearing black clothes, and the scene is lit with cool white lighting that feels low and subdued rather than bright. In a close-up shot, Neeti's face clearly reveals her inner emotional turmoil. The question of taking responsibility for a child is not a joke in a society like this, but the nature of her job raises questions about whether she will be able to provide not just monetarily but also emotionally, in terms of time and care, for what the child needs. In the postfeminist realm, mothers who work are often given the message that they are responsible for attaining balance between embracing the feminine while seeking success in the masculine world of work (Delaney and Sullivan 1697).

Anger expressed by women is often coded as deviant or morally dangerous, reinforcing the belief that 'good women' maintain composure to preserve family honour (Chakravarti 581). When Kalyani tells Neeti, "Arrey itna ghussa kaheko naak me rakhti ho? Grihasti kharab ho jata hai. . . shaadi waadi ho

gayi tumhara ya khubsurat jawani vardi me hi gawa doge?” (Why are you so angry? Your married life will be spoiled like this. . . Are you married or not? Or are you wasting your youth in this uniform only?) (Delhi Crime 3.2 01:24:30), the anger here is not treated as a basic human emotion but as a gendered violation that threatens domestic order. This reflects the expectations of normative femininity, where emotional control, patience, and domestic harmony are treated as essential feminine virtues. The subsequent remark on wasting her youth on work echoes patriarchal norms that evaluate women primarily through marriageability and domestic performance.

Contemporary postfeminist cultures often frame women’s aspirations around balance, mutuality, and personal fulfilment within intimate life (McRobbie 5) rather than outright rejection of domesticity. Many Indian professional women imagine ‘shared domestic responsibility as the marker of a good marriage.’ This is evident in Ep 3 (00:22:14 - 00:22:22), on being asked what kind of life SI Simran wants, she tells, “mereko toh simple life chahiye. Apna kaam karo, sabki maddad karo. Ghar pe jake mera pati mere liye kulche banaye aur mei uske liye rotiya seku’. (I want a simple life. Do my own work. Help others. Come back home where my husband has cooked kulche for me, and I’ll make roti for him). They both work and make dinner together ; he makes one dish and she also makes another. Proper work division, an ideal life expected by a working woman with a sense of equality.

Gendered Authority and Vulnerability

The gendered vulnerability of the women is depicted in the brothel raid scene through intelligent cinematography (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:08:11). The sequence uses blurry, desaturated flashback visuals combined with red and yellow lighting to create a tense, unsettling atmosphere of fear and exploitation. God rays or crepuscular rays, falling dramatically on DIG

Vartika Chaturvedi, heighten the sense of vulnerability surrounding the girls and the helplessness embedded in the system.

Foucauldian accounts of power show that domination becomes embedded in ordinary social relations and routines; extreme force and the routine threat of violence normalise a sovereign order in which some bodies are more exposed and less protected (37). Delhi Crime S3 repeatedly stages this structure at the intimate level, showing how gendered vulnerability is lived, internalised, and contested. In Episode 1, Rahul is dragging Khushi into the car; out of anger she slaps him and immediately says “sorry,” but his reaction to the slap is to pull her hair and drag her to the car while saying, “Saali dimag kharab ho gaya hai” (Bitch, have you lost your mind) (00:43:01). The difference in immediate reflexes of both of them shows how gendered norms are internalised. Her apology versus his abusive retort speaks volumes about asymmetric gendered entitlement to anger. Women’s anger is disciplined and apologised for, whereas men’s anger is enacted and justified. Literature also shows a similar pattern, where social expectations train women to control their emotions to maintain domestic calm, while men’s violent reactions are often naturalised or excused (Kandiyoti 274).

Kalyani’s lines, “Waah madam, aap toh humko aisa ghabrai diye. Aisa ankh bada bada karke, emotion le aaye chehre pe. Chehra bhi bohot khubsurat hai, aap hindi film ka heroine ban sakte hai...” (Madam, you really gave me quite a scare. With those big, big eyes and all that emotion on your face. Your face is also so pretty, you can easily be a heroine in the Hindi film industry...) (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:41:37-00:41:48). Here, a woman weaponises gendered expectations, invoking beauty and fear, to manipulate the investigating officer. This complexity shows that vulnerability can be both imposed and performed.

In one scene, the following line, “Sania kuch time pehle humare sath hi thi. . . Woh bhikhari gang ko baich diye. . . subah subah Sania ko le jate the aur shyam ko commission ke sath humko de jate the. . . Humko laga sania ko wohi bech deti hoon, roz roz ka kaun tension palega madam” (Sania was with us until some time ago . . . She was sold to the beggar gang... Every morning they would take Sania away and return her to us in the evening with their commission... I thought I might as well sell Sania to them myself — who can bear this daily tension, madam”) (Delhi Crime 3.5 00:10:10-00:10:40) reveals how caregiving roles can be subverted within criminal economies. The traditional caregiver becomes an exploiter. This breaks the age-old idea that women are naturally nurturing. Instead, it reveals that social pressures and survival needs can lead to morally ambiguous choices.

Many sequences document how rural patriarchy institutionalises abuse as normal. At a public gathering, a woman recounts being married at fifteen and beaten, “Jante hai, 15 saal ki chodi thi, jab vyaay kiya yare aayi. Sidha Raxal te Rohtak. Ekli, par us wakhat lugayiya thi kaha gaon mei? Naa. Aur apke Tau, bahar de pathar and bhitari te maum. Pehli lathi te maar maar ke chodi se aurat banagi. Woh kehte, teri ungli me takat na hai chodi kaisi bhuni roti banawe. Lekin unki sakhti ne *majboot bana di bohot...*” (You know, I was a 15-year-old bride when I first came here. Straight from Raxal to Rohtak. Alone. But at that time, were there any women in the village? None. And your uncle, strict from the outside and soft from the inside. His daily beatings eventually turned me from a girl into a woman. He would say that my arms had no strength to make even a simple roti. But this cruelty made me tough...) and the crowd offered no opposition (Delhi Crime 3.3, 1:05 - 2:01). Such acceptance matches ethnographic accounts of rural areas where early marriage, corporal punishment of wives, and the social sanctioning of male violence are part of the lived environment (Kandiyoti 289). Scenes where men assert gatekeeping like

“Mujhe kaho, Sunita aurat hai mari” (Tell me, Sunita is my wife) (Delhi Crime 3.4 00:08:32) demonstrate that women’s public presence is mediated through male authority; to speak to a woman, one must obtain a man’s permission.

In Episode 2, the line “no one misses missing girls” (Delhi Crime 3.2 00:07:02) becomes an important statement to be noted. It reflects the social normalisation of girls’ disappearance as insignificant. This disregard is echoed later when a 14-year-old young girl says, “choti bachchiyoko chod hi toh dete hai, ya phék dete hai kahi marne ko. Paida hote hi boj jo ho jati hai” (The little girls are left alone, or thrown away to die. They become a burden to the family the moment they are born) (Delhi Crime 3.200:27:30). This one statement reveals the condition of the girl child in many parts of India, and how even the young girl in the scene has internalised it as a universal truth.

Episode 4 continues the theme when a man says, “Hukum, hum aurat ki bohot jyada izzat kare hai, bohot jyada, bas woh apni daire me rahe” (Sir, we respect women a lot, a lot, as long as they don’t cross their boundary) (Delhi Crime 3.4 00:10:25). This demonstrates how men decide the boundaries for women. They call it respect only when women stay within the limits set by them. Soon after the aforementioned scene, the men of the family declare, “*Suno pure gaon ki izzat ka sawal hai... agar e baat ne eyai jane diya toh gaon ki baki auroto ki bhi himmat ho jayegi. Sunita maro tractor jalake gayi hai...*” (Listen, this is about the entire village’s honour... if we let her go this time then the other women of the village will also dare to do the same. Sunita burned my tractor and left...) (Delhi Crime 3.400:11:01-00:11:15). This shows how important it is for patriarchy that women remain quiet and under the control of men. If one woman takes a courageous step, others may be inspired. They attach the “honour of the village” to the obedience of women. Postfeminist critiques show that ideas of culture and honour are often used to control women while being presented as tradition.

Another form of patriarchy is shown through saviour behaviour in Episode 3: “Mei kyu jail jayunga? Gandh se nikala hai maine, sambhla hai. Shaadi karke family di usko maine. Uske baap ne kya kiya pata hai apko? 10 saal ki thi tab bech diya tha. Aur uska chacha behenchod, Kumar, shadi ke liye lata tha aur uske sath ganda kaam karta tha. . .” (Why will I go to jail? I have saved her from that shit. I married her and gave her a family. You know what her father did? She was 10 years old when he sold her. Her fucking uncle Kumar. He brought her here to marry her off, and then molested her. . .) (Delhi Crime 3.3 00:05:38-00:05:53). This shows how patriarchy functions in everyday life, and how “saving” a girl often means marrying her young instead of educating her. Fathers and uncles take the role of guardians while selling the girls to sexual predators. This highlights the gendered vulnerability of young girls in society and how the language used with reference to protecting them is actually used to justify control.

The series shows how normalised domestic violence produces both resignation and occasional revolt. Women internalise the logic that silence protects them. “Madam mere admiko mat batana ki humlog *baat kiye... pata lag gaya toh maar maar ke kapal phod dega*” (Madam, please do not tell my husband about this conversation. If he gets to know, then he will beat me to death) (Delhi Crime 3.3 00:30:09-00:30:20) says Janki. Additionally, “kiska report likhaye madam? Maa baap ka jo humko yaha bech diye? Ya sasural waloka jo beta ke intezaar me humko rakha hua hai?.... Nahi madam, hum yaha jeena sikh liye... *aap bas inlogo ko pakad lo*” (Who will we report about? Our parents who sold us here? Our in-laws who are keeping us in the hope of a son? No madam, we have learned to survive here... You please catch these culprits) indicating accommodation to constrained lives (Delhi Crime 3.3 00:30:25-00:30:35). The visual language in this scene further supports the above argument. She (Janki) is framed on the left side of the screen in a side profile, with half her face hidden behind her hair.

This deliberate framing creates a sense of concealment and half-visibility, visually signifying her hidden existence and the quiet way she has learned to survive within her constrained life.

Conclusion

The analysis of Delhi Crime S3 reveals how crime narratives on Indian OTT platforms have shifted in the post-COVID viewing culture, in which audiences increasingly turn to realistic, socially grounded stories. Within a male-dominated society where issues such as women's safety, harassment, and structural inequality persist, the series offers a layered portrayal of gendered vulnerability, authority, and resistance. While Indian entertainment has evolved from objectifying women to placing them at the centre of narratives, crime genres continue to expose the tensions between renewed representation and persistent patriarchal expectations (Rashmi and Sood 2122). Rather than presenting fixed identities, the series shows women constantly negotiating between normative expectations of care, restraint, and respectability and transgressive assertions of authority, anger, and autonomy. The web series format, with its regional grounding and middle-class focus, contributes to this shift by moving away from traditional melodrama and adopting a more realistic and socially conscious tone.

Across the episodes, the depiction of missing girls, trafficking networks, gendered violence, and the burden of "honour" illustrates how patriarchy continues to shape the lives and choices of women and young girls. Scenes of emotional vulnerability, such as police officers like Neeti momentarily losing composure (Delhi Crime 3.100:37:24), underline the human cost of these systems. Conversely, moments like a young girl saluting a woman officer, Neeti Singh (Delhi Crime 3.4 00:04:23) signal the quiet optimism that change is possible, revealing how representation can inspire future imaginaries. The series also complicates moral binaries through characters who

blur the lines between victimhood, survival, and crime, reflecting broader scholarly arguments about trafficking as a socio-political issue rather than a simple victim-rescuer narrative.

At the same time, the portrayal of women in positions of authority, like police officers, inspectors, and even antagonists, pushes against the traditional representation of women as emotionally driven, weak, or merely passive victims in the crime genre. Even when their emotional responses surface in subtle ways, these women navigate professional demands with competence and resilience. In contrast, the female antagonist's coldness disrupts the stereotype of women as inherently nurturing, reminding viewers that gendered expectations shape our reading of both heroism and villainy.

Overall, Delhi Crime S3 maintains a clear postfeminist stance by foregrounding women's experiences within systems of power and by giving visibility to female agency across different social positions. No character remains entirely normative or transgressive; instead, femininity appears fluid, negotiated through circumstance, institutional constraints, and survival strategies. Yet it also reflects post-feminist tensions, where women carry heavy expectations to be professional yet empathetic, strong yet restrained, survivors yet moral guides. The series does not resolve these contradictions but presents them as part of contemporary womanhood in India. By doing so, it not only mirrors the socio-cultural realities of gendered lives but also opens space for new conversations about justice, autonomy, and representation in Indian crime narratives.

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