



Deconstructing Power and Gender Dynamics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Domestic and Sexual Abuse in 'Criminal Justice 2: Behind Closed Doors'

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54392/ijll2611>

Received: 01-05-2025; Revised: 05-03-2026; Accepted: 17-03-2026; Published: 21-03-2026



Abstract: The dominant patriarchal standards continue to govern society, resulting in the subjugation of women through discriminatory practices, domestic abuse, and sexual assault. In numerous instances, women are not regarded as equal individuals, but rather as objects for the sake of male exploitation. Intimate partner violence is a reality which includes physical and sexual abuse along with the controlling behaviour. Media is a reflective tool for society. The portrayal of gender discrimination in the Indian web series encompasses several perspectives and conveys multiple meanings. In the web series 'Criminal Justice 2: Behind Closed Doors' we witness the sexual abuse of a woman in marital relations. Such issues remain hidden mostly because females do not reveal them due to the shame attached to it and suffer both mental and physical agony. The police, influenced by patriarchal norms, fail to investigate the underlying truth of crimes. The present study undertakes feminist critical discourse analysis of the sexual and mental abuse against women in the webseries 'Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors-seasons 2'. The webseries has eight episodes from which dialogues manifesting power imbalance and gender stereotypes are randomly selected for the study. A total of fourteen dialogues were analysed carefully using feminist stylistics and Critical discourse analysis. Both the approaches help us understand and uncover the inherent sexism and power structures in the language and society. The textual analysis of the selected dialogues revealed the use of misogynist and sexist language by the male characters on the prosecution side.

Keywords: Domestic abuse, OTT, Sexual violence, Feminism, Gender discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

Gender inequality is a pervasive phenomenon observed worldwide, primarily attributable to the intrinsic patriarchal frameworks that exist throughout societal institutions. As a consequence of this disparity, they are also susceptible to acts of aggression. In an article on violence against women, WHO report notes that it "is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights" (WHO, 2021). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), over 30% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate relationship abuse or non-partner sexual violence at some point in their lives. (WHO, 2021)

Domestic violence has been prevalent in the society since ancient times. It is also practiced as a form of dominance and a means to control women (Ubillos-Landa et al., 2020). It is defined as "a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner" (United Nations, 2023). Abuse involves a range of behaviours, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological activities, as well as the use of threats, which exert power over another individual. This encompasses a range of actions that induce fear, intimidate, instil dread, manipulate, cause harm, humiliate, assign blame, inflict injury, or wound an individual (United Nations, 2023).



Representation of domestic violence in media is very scanty in television and films. Often an image of happy family life is projected which is changed in post-liberalization scenario (Gaur & Khan, 2022). Narratives in traditional media like films and television present domestic violence either in a sensationalized manner or it is normalized. Alam & Haque (2021) conducted a study on Indian Reality TV show *Big Boss* examining the issues of gendered language in the show. The study concludes that in order to attract viewers the show sticks to the societal norms and encourage body shaming, slurs and abuses (Alam & Haque, 2021). A study by Biswal (2023) examines the representation of domestic violence in Indian cinema using textual analysis of the selected films. The study concludes that many depictions earlier were focused on the physical aspect. Showcasing women as powerless. But in the contemporary era it has evolved and shifted to present emotional and mental aspects (Biswal, 2023). The portrayal of domestic and sexual abuse in media is limited in television and films, which frequently depict an idealised image of romantic bliss or familial politics. It is a sensitive issue that is oversimplified in television and movies. Now, with the emergence of OTT platforms in India such kind of grave issues are also being raised with the nuanced portrayal of victim's agony. However, these are often inspired from foreign series as is the case with *Criminal Justice 2: Behind Closed Doors*. Many of the studies focus on traditional film and television narratives which hardly focus on this aspect. There are inadequate studies on representation of domestic and intimate partner violence in media. Only few studies have explored dialogue, lexical choices and discourse analysis in OTT narratives and how these media representations reproduce, negotiate or challenge gender power relations. The present study aims to address this gap by understanding linguistic patterns, lexical choices and gender discourse. It explores how patriarchal mindset is manifested via language and whether the series breaks or promotes gender stereotypes. The series focuses on various aspects such as mental and psychological trauma of the victim, the lacuna in the legal system and the prevalent patriarchal mindset of people in the society via its dialogues. The language that the characters in the series use lays bare the prejudice and sexism.

2. Literature Review

Language often reflects power hierarchies prevalent in the society. Menegatti & Rubini (2017) observe that sexism and gender discrimination are often manifested through language and it is reflected in daily conversations through lexical choices. Slovka (2022) explains sexism as a discrimination on the basis of sex or gender or on the belief that discrimination is justified as men are superior to women. Sexism encompasses views, ideologies, and concepts that privilege one group (typically male) over another. Sexism involves practices, institutions, and methods of oppression based on gender, usually against women. It is reflected in our daily conversations. Sara Mills elaborates in her book how men and women use language and how sexist language is used in our daily conversations and representation in media texts. Quoting David Lee she writes, "Given that language is an instrument for the assignment of the phenomena of human experience to conceptual categories it is clearly not simply a mirror that reflects reality. Rather it functions to impose structure on our perceptions of the world. Language is...highly selective, and in this sense ... the process of linguistic encoding involves a significant degree of abstraction away from 'reality'" (Mills, 1995). According to Robin Lakoff (1973), 'women's language' originates from early childhood socialisation. Girls are urged to communicate in a manner that reflects their femininity, engage with dolls, put on elaborate gowns, and refrain from 'rough' play, so physically manifesting cultural norms of femininity. Lakoff's work highlights how linguistic traditions often reinforce women's subordinate position in the society.

Critical Discourse Analysis examines diverse characteristics and settings which help in understanding of texts. Discourse can be shaped by diverse ideologies and socio-political power structures. In both the family and society, males occupy a more prominent position than women and the latter endure discrimination in the workplace, family, and society. Dijk notes that "Power and domination are often structured and institutionalized" (Dijk, 1993). Fairclough explores how the relationship between language and ideology works and he states that "ideologies reside in texts" (Fairclough, 2010). He argues that texts serve several functions, encompassing two primary social processes: the dissemination of information and the depiction of the world, with social interaction (Fairclough, 2010). Language analysis is an important aspect of gender discourse. Sexism is linked to traditional ideologies concerning gender roles and appears archaic (Mills & Mullany, 2011). Linguistic markers or presupposition analysis can be employed to detect overt sexism, which has historically been associated with the expression of discriminatory attitudes towards women, indicating that women are regarded as inferior to males (Mills, 2008). Mills categorises sexism into overt and indirect sexism. She describes that it can be manifested in various overt ways, like words and meaning, naming, dictionaries,



generic pronouns and nouns, insult terms for women, semantic derogation and use of first names, surnames and titles. It is customary to employ specific terms and generic pronouns for addressing women. Dictionaries and grammar texts have institutionalised it. She asserts that male-specific pronouns, such as 'he' and 'his,' function as generic pronouns. In her opinion using affixes like 'lady' and '-ess', '-ette', '-enne', '-trix', and so on to refer to women devalues them and make them appear as amateurs since they deviate from a masculine universal norm (Mills, 1995). Indirect sexism is a sort of irony that masks sexist discourse through innuendo, humour, and ingrained sexism at the level of presupposition (Mayoriska *et al.*, 2022). These studies aid in comprehending how language echoes gender power dynamics within society. They demonstrate the crucial role of language in shaping and reinforcing gender dynamics in media narratives. Present studies hardly investigate conversations focusing on how these representations reflect, negotiate or content power dynamics. This study attempts to fill this gap by analysing linguistic trends, lexical choices and gender discourse by selecting a web-series.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed qualitative analysis as a research methodology. This study seeks to examine the portrayal of domestic and sexual violence in Season 2 of the web series Criminal Justice, with a particular focus on its depiction as an ingrained and tolerated societal standard. The series contain eight episodes and for the present study all the episodes have been watched carefully. A detailed critical discourse analysis and feminist stylistics analysis of the media text is performed to conduct the study. The objective of the study is to explore the gender discourse in the web series and to uncover inherent sexism in the dialogues. For this, dialogues, manifesting power imbalance or gender stereotypes, are selected randomly and analysed using critical discourse analysis. Discourse is a way of structuring our knowledge and social practice which manifests in particular ways of language use and other symbolic forms in specific institutional settings and power/knowledge systems get organized into texts (Foucault, 1972). Gender differences embedded in film texts are important since as they classify reality which projects social meanings about men and women in the non-human world, addressing an ideology of sex roles and identities into the language itself (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The paper also attempts to uncover sexism in various dialogues using Sara Mill's feminist stylistics. Feminist stylistics is a method used in literary analysis to investigate how language, specifically in literature, echoes and sustains gender disparities and stereotypes.

Sexual and Psychological Abuse in Marital Relations: A Critical Examination

The Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors-season-2 focuses on the marital relations between the married couples, especially on the sexual and mental abuse. Bikram Chandra and Anuradha Chandra are the main couple around whom the crime, sexual and mental abuse story revolves. Sub-Inspector Harsh Pradhan and Assistant Sub-Inspector Gauri Pradhan, and Madhav Mishra and Ratna Mishra, and Nikhat's parents are the subsidiary couples with various degree of troubled relationships.

Reframing Marital Consent: Protection or Prison

Dialogue 1

ACP: Ek kaam karo jab medical ke liye le jaoge... test her for rape. (When you'll take her for medical exam... test her for rape.)

Sub-Inspector Harsh Pradhan: Rape?.. kyun woh husband-wife hain na? (Why? They are husband and wife.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: Sub-Inspector Harsh Pradhan and Assistant Sub-Inspector Gauri Pradhan represent another pair in the series. Unlike Bikram Chandra and Anuradha Chandra, Pradhan and Gauri share the same profession and work at the same police station. Both are collaborating for work purposes. This establishes a specific level of equity in existence. However, Pradhan demonstrates a conventional societal perspective regarding domestic violence and rape.

This suggests that marriage is characterised by the agreement of both parties involved. Pradhan's assertion that they are husband and wife reflects a traditional patriarchal perspective, whereas Gauri's response of "Yes sir" indicates her acceptance without questioning the underlying assumptions. He is unable to consider the possibility



that Anu might be going through domestic violence and sexual abuse. Pradhan has patriarchal mindset and fails to understand why a wife would stab her husband; he's not interested in the reason for the stabbing. As Gauri scrutinises her husband's manipulation of Rhea, he challenges her empathy for Rhea on the basis of her gender. She asserts that he is free to express his opinion, but he should not challenge her duty.

Jessie Krienert in the study *An Examination of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence: Comparing Marital and Non-Marital Incidents Employing NIBRS Data, 2008-2012* observes that the phenomenon of marital rape was initially documented in a scholarly article in 1977 (Gelles, 1977). It was subsequently acknowledged as a criminal offence and subjected to legal prosecution in 1978. However, it took an additional twenty years for marital rape to be universally recognised as a criminal act throughout the United States (Krienert & Walsh, 2018).

Ghosh in his paper notes that "it was not until 1983 that domestic violence was recognized as a criminal act in India" (Ghosh, 2004). According to Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, acts of physical and psychological harm perpetrated against a woman by her spouse and extended family members are legally acknowledged as a cognizable offence and subject to punishment as prescribed by the legislation. He also notes that Police officers and legal professionals are both constituents of a societal structure dominated by patriarchal norms, which unfortunately perpetuates the acceptance of domestic violence. These agencies may not always take into account offences involving physical abuse, and particularly those involving mental abuse. These actions are perceived as efforts by the husbands to "discipline" their spouses (Ghosh, 2004).

It is widely believed that the male partner has obtained permanent consent after the couple's marriage. Although Section 498A of the IPC exists, marital rape remains unrecognised as a criminal offence in India. Lawyer Prabhu expresses a similar perspective, asserting that marital rape is not a crime.

Dialogue 2

Prabhu: "Basically unnn logon ke pass koi aur daleel bachi nahi thi. Toh rape ka charge laga diya. But thankfully, hamare kanoon mein marital rape koi crime nahi hai. The judge won't buy it. Aur agar unhone use mann bhi liya toh hum appeal file karenge."

(Basically, they don't have any evidence left. So, they accused him of rape... But thankfully, according to our law, marital rape isn't a crime. The judge won't buy it. And even if she does accept it, we will file an appeal.)

Mandira: Main apko iss case mein isliye layi thi kyunki hamin laga tha Anu hi doshi hai. (I brought you in for this case because we thought that Anu is guilty.)

Prabhu: Aap iss case ko ek aurat ke nazariye se dekh rahi hain. Par main ek prosecuting lawyer hoon. Meri zimmedari hai ki woh aurat jisne apne pati ko mara hai use sakht se sakht saza mile. That's it. (You are looking at this matter as a woman. But I am a prosecuting lawyer and my responsibility is to make sure that the woman who killed her husband receives the harshest, most severe punishment. That's it.)

Mandira: Bataur e wakeel aapko nahi lagta ki kanoon sirf purshon ke adhikaron ki suraksha ke liye nahi bana hai? (But, as a lawyer, don't you feel that the laws aren't made only to protect men's rights?)

Prabhu: I'll see you. (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: Prabhu's arguments are debunked in the court. Still, he continues to speak in a misogynistic voice. His dialogue with Mandira exposes conventional ideas that women tackle situations emotionally, whilst men employ practical reasoning. His speech indicates that a wife's murder of her husband constitutes a more horrific criminal offence than a husband's rape of his wife. Following Anu's disclosure in court, Mandira confronts Prabhu as a woman and questions his biases against women. It also illustrates the power dynamics between men and women in society. Foucault contends that disparities in power dynamics generate knowledge. The disparity in power dynamics between men and women results in a greater volume of literature concerning women in libraries compared to that regarding males (Mills, 2003).

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh in his paper *Chattels of Society: Domestic Violence in India* discusses issues related to domestic violence in India and how the patriarchal mindset is reflected in the legal system. It observes that one of the primary factors that dissuades women who have experienced abuse from reporting incidents of domestic violence



is the apprehension that doing so may result in their displacement and lack of a permanent residence (Ghosh, 2004). Ghosh also observes that domestic violence can be employed to remove a woman from her position, deprive her of her assets, and, in certain instances, gain custody of the children (Ghosh, 2004).

Presuppositions in sexist language are the underlying assumptions, biases, and convictions regarding gender roles and identities that are deeply embedded in language. Sexist language frequently entails underlying presumptions regarding the superiority or inferiority of specific genders, so reinforcing conventional gender stereotypes and maintaining injustice (Mills, 2008).

Female self-oppression and desire to match male expectations

Dialogue 3

Nikhat's Mother: Tu abhi yeh sab nahi samajhti... jab nikah ho jayega tab baat karenge (you won't understand this now. We'll talk once you will get married).

Nikhat: kya nikah ammi... izzat bhi koi cheez hoti hai. (Marriage? What about your self-respect.)

Nikhat's Mother: Agar kisi ke liye dil mein pyar ho na... toh use badh kar aur kuch nahi hota. (There's nothing greater than loving a person (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: Nikhat's parents are another pair depicted in the series. She and her mother reside together, while her father stays elsewhere with his young, newlywed bride. Remarrying and relocating while abandoning the elder wife and daughter is an undesirable scenario. It is an insult and mentally taxing to the elder spouse and their child. Nikhat, now a lawyer, is separated from her father. Nikhat's mother intends Nikhat to communicate with her father, who has wed another woman.

In the above conversation, Nikhat's mother is ready to sacrifice her self-esteem in the name of love. She keeps on emphasising the need to make sacrifices to keep marriage intact. She is even ready to make any kind of sacrifice for her husband. Kapur and Cossman write in their book, "Familial ideology naturalizes and universalizes the construction of women as wives and mothers, as economically dependent, as passive, dutiful and self-sacrificing..." (Kapur & Cossman, 1996).

Dialogue 4

Anu: "agar main uss din ice-cream nahi bhoolti toh..." (If I hadn't forgotten the ice cream that day, then...)

Nikhat: "Toh kya hota Anu" (What would have happened, Anu?)

Anu: I wouldn't have disappointed him. (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: In the above dialogue, Anu keeps blaming herself that she disappointed Bikram because she forgot to buy ice cream. She is very ashamed of herself for disappointing her husband and attributing blame to herself. Women's acceptance of violence against themselves highlights the widespread influence of societal norms and power disparities deeply rooted in patriarchal systems. The acceptance of abusive behaviours by women is generally influenced by a combination of cultural conditioning, economic dependency, and fear of punishment. These factors collectively restrict women's ability to assert themselves and confront such behaviours. Moreover, cultural narratives that attribute blame to victims or normalize violence contribute to maintaining a culture of silence and acceptance among women.

Anu and Nikhat's mother continuously try to match up with their husband's desires and expectations in a hope that they will be rewarded with love. However, both fail in their pursuits.

Women are ashamed to talk about violence against themselves. During the trial, Rhea tells the court that she used to sit on stairs when she didn't feel sleepy, she heard her dad saying softly to her mother: "kutti ban!" (Be a bitch!) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020) Later, during the questioning Anu reveals that Bikram was raping her and having anal sex with her. When Nikhat asks why didn't want anyone to know what he was doing to her, she says, "kyunki mujhe sharam ati hai" (Because I feel ashamed) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).



Leela Visaria in her article observes that "Even when physically injured, women remain silent and suffer it alone. Further, societal norms that tolerate and accept violence are widely prevalent in Indian society and an adherence to them prevents from seeking care." (Leela Visaria, 2008)

Silencing and Dismissing Female Thought

Dialogue 5

Pradhan: Policewali tu bhahar hai... ghar mein meri baiko hai (You're a policewoman outside the house. At home, you're my wife.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: In the above dialogue, Pradhan keeps asserting his dominance at home. It suggests that no matter at what position a woman is working, she is always inferior to her husband at home. It also reflects power dynamics between the husband and wife.

Within feminist stylistics, the act of males censoring and disregarding female thinking is a clear demonstration of gendered power dynamics that are deeply ingrained in language. This suppression frequently manifests itself through linguistic techniques such as interruption, invalidation, or appropriation, thereby marginalising female voices in discourse. Through the exclusion of female viewpoints, males uphold a dominant and controlling way of speaking that gives importance to their own experiences and beliefs, while at the same time devaluing the power and legitimacy of women's contributions.

Dialogue 6

Pradhan: Tujhe usse itni sympathy kyu hai? Woh ek aurat hai isiliye? (And why do you have so much sympathy for her? she is a woman, that's why?)

Gauri: Tum mere bare mein kuch bhi keh lo lekin meri duty ko leke koi sawal mat uthana. (You can say anything about me but don't ever question my duty.)

Pradhan: Haan, haan Gauri madam. Majhi baiko. Mujhe malum hai tu pehle ek police officer hai uske baad ek aurat. (Yes, yes, Gauri madam. My sweet wife. I know you're a police officer first and then a woman.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: Here Gauri questions her husband's manipulation of Rhea. Pradhan keeps negating and invalidating Gauri's point. Pradhan dismisses Gauri's questions and points out that she is sympathizing with another female on the basis of her gender. He also tries to show that she is becoming emotional which is clouding her judgement. His reply to his wife "I know you're a police officer first and then a woman", points out his thinking that police profession is male-centric. Here he keeps asserting his dominance using words like "Majhi Baikoo" and at the same time reminding her that her prime duty is towards her husband and family. Pradhan's comment creates a hierarchy between her professional identity and her gender. Such type of assertion of dominance to maintain hierarchy allow men to exercise their authority (Ubillos-Landa *et al.*, 2020).

Dialogue 7

Pradhan: Yehi main keh raha tha. Choti-choti cheezon mein hum ulajh ke reh jate hain. Kya kiya, kyu kiya. Gauri, Bikram Chandra ne aisa kuch bhi nahi kiya tha jisse Anu Chandra ka crime justify ho. (This is what I was saying. We get stuck in these tiny details. What did they do? Why did they do it? Who did it? Gauri, Bikram Chandra didn't do anything that can justify Anu Chandra's crime.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: After giving statement in the court both Pradhan and Gauri argue again. Pradhan is angry with Gauri for answering truly about the course of Anu's confession in the police station and questions her about it. He doesn't want to know the reason behind the crime. He simply wants to punish the woman who murdered her husband. Whereas Gauri speaks the truth while giving a statement in court, Pradhan lies when he is asked whether he tried to manipulate Anu's mind before registering her statement. They run into arguments and he tries to assert his dominance and enforce his beliefs on her.



Dialogue 8

Pushpa (Jail Inmate): Yahan na koi nahi samjhega. Yahan na tere se zyada giri hui, kamini, ghatiya aurat aur koi nahi hai. Chori kar, daka daal, murder bhi kart ere ko chod denge... par pati ka murder... bahenchod... teri chamdi udhed kar kuton ko khila denge (No one here will understand. There's no one as low-down, loathsome and contemptible as you here. Steal, rob or even murder anyone, we'll let you go. But killing your fucking husband, we'll rip you to pieces and feed you to the dogs! (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: Women commit many crimes but killing the husband is understood as the worst crime by a woman. In the barrack a woman prisoner beats Anu because she has killed her husband. Her tone is accusatory and reproachful. She uses the terms like "giri hui" (low-down), "kamini" (loathsome) and "ghatiya aurat" (contemptible) for condemning her morally and position Anu as morally deviant. She upholds the belief that women should not go against her husband at any cost. This transgression is unforgivable as compared to other crimes like robbery and murder. It shows the attitude of the society where women also outcast another woman who goes against her husband. Ishani, another jailmate, saves her and tells that most women here in jail were treated worse than animals by their husbands but they still consider a husband's murder to be the biggest sin. She tells Anu that society branded her a murderer without knowing their story or asking for their reasons.

Dialogue 9

Sudha: "Kaun marad nahin marta ! Bistar main jo karta tha vo bhi jhel leti thi. Par Sanju" (Which man doesn't, madam?... I could deal with whatever he did in bed too. But Sanju...)

Anu: "Kyu. Sanju ko bhi marta tha vo...?" (Did he hit Sanju too?)

Sudha: "Bahut kuchch karta tha vo Sanju ke sath. Saala madharchod!" (He did a lot more than that with Sanju. Bloody... Bloody motherfucker!)

Anu Asks her: "Aap usko chhod kyon nahin deti?" (Why don't you leave him?)

Sudha: "Tu apne marad ko kyon nahin chhodi re? Kya kiya vo tere ko maara? Affair kiya? Bistar main jabasjasti karta tha?... Tu karne deti thi usko?" (Why didn't leave your man? Has he affair? Did he use to rape you? Did you let him?)

Anu: "Rokti bhi nahin thi." (Didn't even stop him.)

Sudha: "Tera marad toh shaadi karke haq jataya... mera toh shaadi bhi nahi manaya aur..." (At least your husband married you first. Mine didn't even bother marrying me.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: Here Sudha, a jail inmate, tells Anu that her husband also used to beat her. Her question indicates how wife beating is common in our society (Fathima, 2022; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997). Whether, married or not every woman is beaten by her intimate partner. Sudha's question, "Kaun marad nahin marta" (Which man doesn't beat), presents domestic violence as a routine and socially accepted norm and part of marital relationship. It has been naturalized in the society that women hardly speak against it because of the fear of becoming an outcast in the society and lack of institutional and legal support to them. By comparing her situation to Anu's marital situation, Sudha clearly suggests that formal marriage provides justification for male dominance.

Dialogue 10

Ratna tells Madhav that "aap ko pata hai ham auraton ko bachpan se sikhaya jata hai ki hamko grihasti main sahan shakti ki murti banana padega. matlab ghar main chahe jitna atyachar ho raha ho ham auraten apne pati ke khilaf muhn nahin kholengi. Hamare relation ko saat mahina ho gaya hai lekin ab tak naa to aap ab tak bed share kiye hain aur naa hin dosti ka hath aage badhaye hain. Lekin hamne kisi ko kuchch nahin kaha hai, naa to hamari family ko aur naa aapki amma ko." (Women are taught from childhood to be an example of tolerance in the family and no matter how much suffering they undergo at home, they will never speak against their husbands. Even after



seven months of marriage you have neither shared the bed nor extended a hand of friendship but I haven't told it anyone anything, not to my family nor to your mother) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: Wife beating has become a norm in the society. Women hardly speak about it because of the fear of becoming outcasts in the society. (Richard B. Felson, 2000) observes that the control motivation in intimate partner violence states that assaults committed by husbands against their wives are primarily driven by a desire to exercise control. Victims of assault, especially women, are frequently held responsible for the violence they endure. This mentality of blaming the victim redirects attention from the wrongdoers and instead places it on the actions or behaviours of the victim. Consequently, women may have feelings of shame or hesitation when it comes to sharing their experiences, due to the fear of being judged or not believed by others. Women are taught from childhood to bear everything in silence. Here, Ratna doesn't tell her mother about the problems in her marital life. These patterns demonstrate how patriarchal ideology is internalized in everyday lives and reproduced through everyday practices.

Dialogue 11

Pradhan's mother: Hamara vansh khatam karne ka irada hai kya? (Does she plan on ending our lineage?)...

Pradhan: Kya bolti hai aai. Bachcha usko bhi chahiye (What are you even saying, Mother? She also wants a baby.

Pradhan's mother: Usko bole uski duty jeep mein baith ke seeti bajane ki nahi hai. Hamara vansh aage badhane ki hai. (Tell her that her duty isn't to sit in a jeep and blow a whistle. It's to propagate our clan.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: This is a stereotypical thinking where a woman's first duty is considered towards her family and reproducing children. Focusing on career and professional duties is considered secondary in our society. Professional aspirations are often greeted with suspicion or disagreement, as they are seen as diverting away from her main duties in the household. When a woman decides not to prioritise caregiving or is unable to meet these expectations owing to personal circumstances or work goals, she may encounter people making moral judgements against them leading to a guilt complex in women (Aarntzen *et al.*, 2023).

Dominance and Control

Dialogue 12

Nikhat: In pictures ko dekh kar toh lag raha hai ki jaise woh Anu ki har ek cheez pe kadi nazar rakhta tha... uski puri dincharya pe. (Looking at these pictures. It seems like he was keeping a close eye on each one of Anu's activities. Her entire routine.)

Madhav: Hisab-kitab hai yeh. (This is a logbook.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

This indicates that Bikram was controlling not only her mind but even her physical activities.

When Nikhat asks Anu what happened that night, Anu reveals that

"uss raat Bikram ne mere saath zabardasti ki" (That night Bikram raped me.)

She says, "Yah meri punishment thi. Ek achchi biwi na hone ki punishment thi." (This was my punishment. Punishment of not being a good wife.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: ACP Mr. Raghu tells SI Mr. Pradhan that there is something strange about photographs of toiletries found in Bikram's phone. Pradhan says that he has already gone through them many times and a lot of time has been wasted on them. When ASI Gauri comes, Mr. Raghu sends Pradhan out and entrusts Gauri to go through the photographs and report to him. She takes the photographs home and sees them again. She tells Raghu Sir (Salian sir) that there is a pattern in the photographs: one photograph in the morning and another in the evening. It seemed that he was keeping an eye on her: "How much shampoo Anu used, which undergarments she wore...Everything." Madhav and Nikhat see these photographs and conclude that it seems Bikram was keeping a close eye on each one of Anu's activities.



Androcentrism refers to a cultural, societal, or ideological viewpoint that places men and masculinity at the forefront, considering them as the standard or norm. It is a value system that puts the masculine perspective over the female viewpoint, affecting multiple domains (Newton & Zeitoun, 2003). This often leads to the exclusion or marginalisation of women and femininity. This viewpoint prioritises male encounters, viewpoints, and principles as the focal point of social, political, and cultural existence, while concurrently undervaluing or disregarding the encounters and contributions of women. It is reinforced through various social institutions, laws, and practices that define gender roles. Here lawyer Dipen Prabhu is an apt example of an androcentric male.

Institutional Discourse and the Moral Framing of Violence Against Husbands

Dialogue 13

Dipen Prabhu: ... Ek acchi grihasti ke liye nari ka kartavya nisth hona bahut zaroori hai. Aur isiliye main Anu Chandra ko ek missal banauga taki koi bhi aurat apne ghar ke prati dharm ko apmanit na kare (To keep a good home, it is important that the woman of the house honours her duty. And that's why I'll make an example out of Anu Chandra, so that no woman ever disrespects her duties towards her home.) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020)

Analysis: The statement places moral duty on women. Rather than having autonomous and personal choices, they are associated with self-sacrifice and loyalty (as indicated by words "kartavya nisth hona"). The words "missal banaunga" imply social punishment and its glorification. It also indicates punitive action, which becomes a tool for patriarchal discipline. The lexical term "apmanit na kare" frames insubordination as a moral crime.

Dipen's speech asserts that women should fulfil their duty towards the household at all costs. Here, he positions himself as a moral judge and executioner to those who deviate from their path. His tone is didactic and religious, enforcing hierarchy through moral speech.

Dialogue 14

Dipen Prabhu: "Iss aurat ne na sirf ek pratishthit vakeel ki hatya ki hai, isne apne kutumb ko hi khatam kar diya." (This woman has not just murdered a renowned lawyer, she has also destroyed her own family) (Sippy & Arjun Mukerjee, 2020).

Analysis: Women are often seen as care givers (Sharma *et al.*, 2016) and if any woman does not meet with those expectations, she is seen as a bad person in society. Such women face social stigma and judgemental attitude of the society. This attitude is deeply ingrained in the society about the gender roles. In both statements, the emphasis is on the moral conduct of women and their duty towards their husband and family. Women often do not report cases of domestic violence due to the issues of privacy and fear of retaliation and sympathy for the offender (Felson *et al.*, 2002). Prabhu uses the words "iss aurat" (This woman) to accuse Anu. This term encompasses centuries of patriarchal conditioning, cultural expectations, and moral scrutiny to which women in Indian culture are consistently exposed.

Through these comments, Prabhu is not only designating Anu Chandra as the defendant in a legal proceeding but also morally condemning her for transgressing the limits of conventional norms of femininity. According to him, it is not just the murder of an individual but she became the cause of family's destruction. In addition to murder, she has perpetrated a heinous offence by failing to fulfil her obligation to protect the family and its traditions. For him a woman should be "kartavya nisth naari" (Dutiful woman) and should be faithful to their husbands at all costs. Her actions represent a violation of her obligations as a wife, mother, and safeguarder of the family's integrity. She is presented as the annihilator of family harmony and society order by killing her husband, having transgressed the valued values of patience, subservience, and sacrifice expected of Indian women. This kind of victim blaming is an example of hostile sexism as described by Slovka (2022). Anu's trial is represented as a moral decline instead of only as an act of legal offence in his words. He evokes the stereotype of an ideal woman as a sort of indirect sexism. Mills contends that discussions regarding sexism evoke stereotypes that are universally recognisable. Cameron (1998) asserts that gender hierarchy exists not inside the discussion itself, but in the interpretations of the participants. In discourse analysis, context-specific and localised relational dynamics influence perceptions of gender and power, challenging the dominant paradigm of male supremacy and female subordination. Cameron asserts that stereotypes



concerning men and women are complex and should not be reduced to simplistic views, as they are dependent upon circumstance. We must acknowledge the systematic disparities that foster prejudices (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of dialogues at word and phrase level.

Word/Phrase	Analysis
<i>Majhi baiko</i> (My sweet wife)	Pradhan says it to his wife Gauri. The dialogue becomes a vehicle to assert his dominance.
<i>Iss aurat</i>	Prabhu uses these words in the court to accuse Anu of murder. This term encompasses centuries of patriarchal conditioning, cultural expectations, and moral scrutiny to which women in Indian culture are consistently exposed. Through these comments, Prabhu is not only designating Anu Chandra as the defendant in a legal proceeding but also morally condemning her for transgressing the limits of conventional norms of femininity. According to him, it is not just the murder of an individual, but she became the cause of the family's destruction. In addition to murder, she has perpetrated a heinous offence by failing to fulfil her obligation to protect the family and its traditions. Her actions represent a violation of her obligations as a wife, mother, and safeguarder of the family's integrity. She is presented as the annihilator of family harmony and societal order by killing her husband, having transgressed the values of patience, subservience, and sacrifice expected of Indian women. Anu represents moral decline instead of only acting as a legal offender in his words.
<i>kartavya nisth naari</i> (Dutiful woman)	Prabhu uses this for women. Prabhu supports the idea that women are the only ones who preserve moral and familial integrity.
<i>Magarmachch ke asu</i> (crocodile tears)	Pradhan uses this phrase for Anu, suggesting that she is trying to escape the punishment. His tone is accusing. He implies that Anu is fabricating her plight to escape the punishment.
<i>Kuttiya (bitch)</i>	A jail inmate uses it for Anu. In Mills's opinion, using affixes like 'lady' and '-ess', '-ette', '-enne', '-trix', and so on to refer to women devalues them and make them appear as amateurs since they deviate from a masculine universal norm (Mills, 1995).
Sentimental	It is used by Mandira for Nikhat. According to her, a lawyer should not be overcome by her emotions and lawyers "should protect their clients at all costs".
Cold-blooded attempt to murder	It is used by Pradhan for Anu. The statement indicates his bias towards Anu. He doesn't want to investigate the motive behind the crime. Instead, he is simply accusing her of committing the crime.
<i>Sahan shakti ki murti</i> (Example of tolerance)	Ratna makes an observation about women's upbringing and how they are expected to behave in domestic life.

4. Conclusion

The study demonstrates how Trial by Fire represents patriarchy, domestic abuse, and gender inequality through discourse in a contemporary OTT narrative. Using feminist critical discourse analysis and feminist stylistics, the selected dialogues reveal how language functions as a tool of control, silencing, victim blaming, and gendered power reproduction. Male characters frequently employ authority, presupposition, accusation, and dismissive lexical choices to reinforce patriarchal dominance, while female characters are often positioned within silence, emotional restraint, or internalised submission. At the same time, the series also presents competing voices that question these structures, especially through courtroom exchanges and resistant female perspectives. This shows that the web series does not merely reproduce patriarchal discourse, but also exposes and challenges it. The analysis highlights how discourse in digital media can simultaneously reflect social realities and encourage critical awareness of them. The findings suggest that OTT platforms have significant value for discourse-based studies of gender because they



provide rich linguistic and narrative material through which social ideologies are constructed, contested, and circulated. Overall, the study contributes to media discourse research by showing that gender oppression in audiovisual narratives is not conveyed only through events or themes, but also through specific linguistic patterns, framing strategies, and interactional structures. Further research may extend this approach to other digital narratives for broader comparative understanding of gender representation in streaming media.

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Author Contribution Statement

Both the authors equally contributed and approved the final version of this work.

Has this article been screened for Similarity?

Yes

Conflict of interest

The Author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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