



The Intersection of Caste and Gender: A Study of Gendered Marginalization of the 'New Indian Woman' in Dahaad

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Abstract

Dahaad web series is presenting a crime thriller on the OTT platform Prime Video in 2023. The series shows that society has not changed because deep roots of violence against women and their identity are a major problem. Anjali Bhaati is the protagonist and she does not exist in a vacuum. She represents the real struggle of women that many women face every day. It highlights how women suffer due to unfair power dynamics and social exclusion.

The series is presenting today's challenge traditional ideas about gender and society. Indian films have portrayed women in stereotypical ways and digital narrative presents a realistic picture of women's lives. They highlight the different challenges how women face because of their identity, unequal power relations, and social exclusion. This research paper explores the critical analysis of the web series and examining the character of Anjali Bhaati as a representation of the 'New Indian Woman.'

The study is an intersectional framework of gender and caste. It examining traditional media does not give enough attention to overlook marginalized women, favoring the experiences of upper-caste and heterosexual groups. It highlights by showing the real-life struggles faced by lower-caste women and showing how

discrimination; they face within the police force. The study analyzes Anjali Bhaati's professional life and her efforts to overcome both her workplace bias and societal prejudice. It argues that she goes beyond the traditional image of either a victim or an ideal heroine. She is shown as a strong and realistic woman who actively fights against the gender and caste-based inequalities present in contemporary Indian society.

This research is important because it shows how OTT platform can help create awareness about gender equality and sensitivity. The series focuses not only on individual behavior but also on the social and institutional systems that contribute to inequality. The series reflects the reality of modern Indian society and encourages meaningful discussions about gender justice. The paper argues that true gender sensitization requires an intersectional approach that considers the impact of caste and economic inequality on women's



lives. It shows that the opportunities, choices, and freedom of the 'New Indian Woman' are still influenced by social and economic conditions.

Keywords: Identity, Social exclusion, societal prejudice, Gender sensitization and New Indian Woman.

Introduction

The OTT platform provides space for narratives that challenge traditional patriarchal values and social inequalities. Women have been shown narrow and conventional stereotypes in Indian cinema and OTT content offers more nuanced and authentic portrayals of female experiences. These narratives highlight the different challenges women face in relation to identity, authority, social exclusion, and unequal opportunities. This research examines these changes through a critical study of the web series. The series is inspired by real-life cases of serial crimes in India. It reflects the realities of contemporary Indian society and highlights the ongoing conflict between modern ideas of progress and deeply rooted traditional beliefs and practices.

Anjali Bhaati is a protagonist of the series, who represents the 'New Indian Woman.' As a police officer, she is confident, capable, and determined, but she also faces many challenges because of her gender and caste. Despite her position, she experiences discrimination and prejudice within her workplace and society. Her experiences in the police system reveals that institutions are meant to provide justice can reproduce social inequalities and exclusion.

This study draws attention to how women, who from marginalized communities are ignored and treated as bias in society. It shows how this neglect and lack of concern can make women more vulnerable to violence. The series criticizes a society that values a respectable public image more than a person's true character.

The series presents a woman who refuses to fit into the traditional roles of either a helpless victim or a perfect heroine through the character of Anjali Bhaati. She is shown as a strong and determined who challenges injustice and discrimination. The study analyzed that the series helps to create awareness about gender equality by encouraging viewers to examine the social structures and biases that continue to influence the lives, opportunities, and freedom of the 'New Indian Woman' in modern India.

Review of Literature

The representation of women in Indian media has been shaped by patriarchal ideas that limited women's roles and identities. In mainstream films and television, women were often portrayed through stereotypical characters such as the 'sanskari' (ideal and obedient) wife or daughter, and the 'vamp' and 'item girl,' that were shown as sexualized figures. These portrayals usually presented women as passive characters whose purpose was to support male narratives, reinforcing traditional gender expectations.

The OTT platform has brought significant changes to the way women are represented on screen. Unlike traditional cinema, digital platforms; greater creative freedom and allow for more realistic and diverse storytelling. Female characters are now often portrayed as independent, complex, and multidimensional individuals with their own ambitions, struggles, and identities. It reflects a social changes and the emergence of the 'New Indian Woman,' who challenges conventional gender roles and actively shapes her own life. OTT content focuses on women's lived experiences, highlighting issues such as workplace discrimination, social inequality, and personal agency.

This study on women's rights and empowerment in India have grown over the years, most research focuses



on middle and upper-class women and often overlooks the role of caste in shaping women's experiences. An intersectional approach helps us understand that women experience discrimination in different ways because their identities are shaped by both gender and caste.

In the Indian context, ignoring caste can overlook the challenges faced by marginalized women in workplaces and institutions. This research is on caste-based discrimination affects women who hold positions of authority and responsibility. This study addresses the gap by examining how caste and gender work together to shape Anjali Bhaati experiences as a police officer.

The paper argues that an intersectional perspective is necessary to understand why some women continue to face exclusion and discrimination even when they occupy powerful positions. This research highlights that professional agency for the 'New Indian Woman' depend on overcoming deeply rooted caste-based barriers within social and institutional structures. OTT platforms have changed the way social issues are represented in Indian media. Unlike traditional television and mainstream cinema, digital platforms provide greater creative freedom and allow creators to address important social concerns such as corruption, gender discrimination, caste inequality, and institutional bias. Web series have become an important medium for reflecting the realities of contemporary Indian society.

Dahaad presented as a crime thriller, the series goes beyond suspense to examine the effects of patriarchy, caste discrimination, and institutional failure. It highlights the challenges faced by marginalized individuals and encourages viewers to think critically about social inequalities. This research views of the series not only as a work of entertainment but also as a meaningful text that raises awareness about the structural issues that continue to shape the lives of many people in India.

The Research Gap

he series has received praise for its engaging story and suspense; most discussions about the series focus mainly on its crime-thriller aspects. Anjali Bhaati faces challenges due to both gender discrimination and caste-based prejudice. While some studies discuss the representation of women in Indian cinema, there is limited research on how Anjali's experiences as a police officer reflect the larger social and institutional inequalities faced as a 'New Indian Woman' in contemporary India.

This study addresses that gap beyond the crime investigation and examining the social and institutional issues presented in the series. It explores how power, discrimination, and inequality operate in the institutions such as the police force. The paper shows how digital storytelling through characters like Anjali Bhaati can help raise awareness about gender and caste discrimination and encourage viewers to question the structural inequalities that continue to exist in modern Indian society.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the representation of the 'New Indian Woman' within the context of contemporary digital storytelling (OTT platforms) and how it diverges from traditional mainstream cinema.
- To examine the intersectional challenges that faced by Anjali Bhaati, specifically looking at the overlapping effects of caste and gender in her professional environment.
- To analyze the portrayal of 'invisible victims' in the series and explore and how systemic apathy toward marginalized communities shapes the investigation of crime in India.



➤ To address the existing research gap by moving beyond the series' crime-thriller narrative and undertaking a deeper sociological analysis of institutional and structural inequalities.

This research paper aims to provide a sociological analysis of the web series. The study focuses on the representation of the 'New Indian Woman' through the character of Anjali Bhaati. It examines the challenges she faces as a woman from a marginalized caste and explores how caste and gender together shape her experiences in the workplace. The study investigates how institutions such as the police force can become spaces of discrimination and inequality rather than impartial systems of justice.

The study critiques the 'performative morality' represented by the series' antagonist, showing how a respectable public image can conceal harmful and violent behavior. It also examines the representation of 'invisible victims' and explores how systemic indifference toward marginalized communities influences the investigation of crimes. This paper evaluates Dahaad as a tool for promoting gender awareness and seeks to address a gap in existing research by moving beyond the series' crime-thriller storyline to examine the deeper social and structural inequalities faced by women in contemporary India.

Research

Methodology

This research examines the 2023 web series Dahaad through a qualitative method and it explores the themes of caste, gender, and institutional authority. The study is focusing important episodes and scenes that show the experiences of Anjali Bhaati, and her struggles with gender discrimination, caste-based prejudice, and challenges within the police system. These scenes are analyzed to identify recurring themes such as gender inequality, caste discrimination, institutional bias, and 'Performative Morality.'

The research explores the narrative and visual elements of the series, how it represents social realities and raises questions about power, justice, and inequality. The systematic approach analyzed the portrayal of the 'New Indian Woman' and her experiences within contemporary Indian society.

Theme of the Series The theme of the series is the struggle of a modern woman who working in a male-dominated system. Anjali Bhaati is a dedicated police officer who faces discrimination because of her gender and caste. She is capable and hardworking and she is often underestimated and treated unfairly by her colleagues. The series shows that caste and gender biases through her experiences exist within important institutions such as the police force.

The series draws attention to the neglect of women from marginalized backgrounds. The antagonist appears to be a respectable and trustworthy person, which allows him to hide his crimes for a long time. This reflects how society judges people based on their public image rather than their actions. It highlighting these issues that encourages viewers to question social prejudices and pay greater attention to the experiences and voices of women who are often ignored.

The series is divided into six parts:

Missing Women, The Devil Incarnate, In Plain Sight, The Love Letter, A Leave of Absence, An Impossible Choice, The Stakeout and New Beginnings

Analysis of the Key Characters

Anjali Bhaati - Anjali Bhaati is the central character of Dahaad and represents the 'New Indian Woman.' She is a dedicated police officer who faces discrimination because of her gender and caste. She remains committed to her work and fights for justice. Through her character, the series highlights the difficulties



women face in male-dominated institutions and shows how bias and indifference affect the investigation of crimes against women.

Anand Swarnakar - Anand represents the idea of 'performative morality' in Dahanu. He appears to be a respectable, educated, and trustworthy man, who makes people believe he is innocent. However, behind this image, he is responsible for serious crimes. The series shows how society judges people by their reputation rather than their actions. Anand highlights the danger of blindly trusting who appear respectable and exposes the hypocrisy of a society that values image more than truth and justice.

The secondary characters in the series help to show the social and institutional challenges faced by Anjali Bhaati. Devi Singh represents traditional and patriarchal attitudes within the police force, while colleagues like Paralkar reflect the everyday sexism and indifference that women face at work. Although they are not direct antagonists, their behavior helps maintain a biased system. These characters show together that Anjali's struggle is not only against a criminal but also against a larger system that limits the opportunities of women.

The 'New Indian Woman' Professional Discrimination

Anjali Bhaati represents the New Indian Woman; she is educated, independent, and dedicated to her work as a police officer. She is recognized for her professional abilities and commitment to justice. Her role as a police sub-inspector reflects her confidence and determination to succeed in a field that is dominated by men. She faces many challenges in her profession, police force. She is judged for her gender and caste rather than her abilities. Her colleagues frequently question her authority and overlook her opinions, revealing the deep-rooted biases that still exist in institutions. These experiences show how women face discrimination in professional spaces.

Anjali must constantly prove herself while carrying out her duties. She works harder than many of her colleagues to gain the same level of respect and recognition. Her struggle highlights the difficulties faced by women who challenge traditional social norms and seek equal opportunities. Through her character, it portrays the strength, resilience, and determination required for women to succeed in contemporary Indian society.

An Invisible Victim: Caste, Gender, and Apathy

In the series, most of the victims are women from poor and marginalized backgrounds. Many of them are unmarried and face social and economic difficulties, making them more vulnerable. These women are viewed by their own families as 'Burdens' to be discarded or burdens through marriage. Anand Swarnakar takes advantage of their situation because he knows that these women are not only emotionally starved for validation but are also the least likely to trigger a frantic search if they were to go missing. They become easy targets for his crimes.

The series highlights the role of social and institutional apathy in these cases. Families are reluctant to report their daughters missing because they hesitate to file missing person reports, fearing that the social stigma of a daughter 'eloping' will ruin the family's reputation, while the police assume that the women have left voluntarily. This lack of concern delays investigations and allows crimes to continue. It shows how caste, class, and gender influence the way victims are treated and how justice is denied to marginalized women. The series criticizes a system that values some lives more than others based on social status and background.



It provides a searing critique of how institutional apathy and systemic bias dictate the administration of justice in contemporary India.

An Antagonist as a Reflection of ‘Performative Morality’

Anand Swarnakar represents the idea of “performative morality”. He appears to be an ideal and respectable man and he was a Hindi lecturer, He was a caring brother and husband and a trusted member of society. Because of this positive image, people believe he is honest and trustworthy person. However, behind this respectable appearance, he is responsible for serious crimes.

The series shows how society often judges people by their social status, behavior, and reputation rather than their actual actions through Anand’s character. Many people assume that someone who appears polite and respectable cannot be dangerous. Anand is not a villain who lurks in the shadows; he is a product of a culture that mistakes a gentleman’s exterior for moral integrity. It challenges this belief by revealing how such assumptions can hide the truth and protect wrongdoers. The series highlights the importance of looking beyond appearances and recognizing that harmful individuals can exist even behind the image of a good and respectable person.

Resistance and Agency: Moving Beyond the ‘Victim’ Role

Anjali Bhaati challenges the traditional portrayal of women in Indian cinema. She shown as a helpless victim or an idealized heroine, she is presented as a strong, intelligent, and determined police officer. She relies on her skills, hard work, and commitment to justice rather than seeking approval from others. Through her investigations, she proves that women can be effective leaders and decision-makers in positions of authority.

She faces discrimination and resistance from her colleagues and senior officers. Despite these challenges, she continues to follow the evidence and fight for justice. She speaks up against unfair treatment and refuses to ignore important cases, even when others dismiss them. Her actions show courage, resilience, and a strong sense of responsibility.

The series highlights the importance of standing against inequality and giving a voice to marginalized people through the character Anjali. Her journey demonstrates that true empowerment comes from perseverance, integrity, and the willingness to challenge systems of discrimination. In this way, she becomes a powerful representation of the ‘New Indian Woman.’

Conclusion

Dahaad is more than a crime-thriller series. It offers an important insight into the social realities of contemporary India by highlighting issues related to caste, gender, and institutional power. The series shows the challenges faced by women who try to succeed in professional spaces while dealing with discrimination and social prejudice.

The series reveals how marginalized women are ignored by society and institutions. It demonstrates how a respectable public image can hide harmful behavior and how society sometimes values reputation more than justice like as the character of Anand Swarnakar. The experiences of the victims further expose the impact of social apathy and inequality on the delivery of justice.

The series serves as a powerful medium for raising awareness about gender equality, caste discrimination, and social justice. It encourages viewers to question existing prejudices and recognize the importance of treating all individuals with dignity and fairness. By bringing these issues to the forefront, the series contributes to a broader discussion about creating a more inclusive and equal society.



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