



**Honor-Based Violence: A Contextual Analysis of *Pink*, *Parched*, and  
*Lipstick Under My Burkha***

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**Abstract:**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in the form of 17 global objectives, were declared by the United Nations in 2015. With an aim to address interconnected global challenges, these goals are part of the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG Goal 5 calls to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, according to the United Nations, with the target of ending all forms of discrimination, violence, and exploitation of women and girls everywhere. Further, the first target of SDG 16, speaks for the reduction in Honor-Based Violence (HBV), which includes not only murder or killing but even physical, psychological, and sexual violence. The present paper aims to study how HBV is depicted and examined in the films *Pink* (2016), *Parched* (2016), and *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), in the Indian context. There are many concepts, arguments, and ideas layered in the narrative of these films which can lead to some solutions for the reduction of HBV. The paper also scrutinizes all kinds of discrimination, inequalities, and unlawful behaviour women undergo in their daily lives. For the attainment of SDG 2030, all kinds of violence against women must be identified and resolved at the earliest. The films of this study portray the hardships, questions, and conditions of women realistically, living in modern India. The condition is such that it requires the utmost attention and remediation in the Indian subcontinents. Finally, the study leads to a better



understanding of the nature of violence and the reasons causing it, ultimately bringing solutions.

**Keywords:** Film Analysis, Gender Equality, Honor Based Violence, Sustainable Development Goals 2030, Gender Studies

## Introduction:

Film and the media are the most effective mediums for presenting sociocultural pressures and gender dynamics. Despite this, Female-centric films, or Feminist Cinema, have remained a marginalized genre in Indian Cinema so far. Films can contribute to societal narratives and media has the potential to either reinforce or challenge harmful stereotypes prevailing in society. The films *Pink* (2016), *Parched* (2016), and *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016) critique societal attitudes toward gender and violence and advocate for the realistic representation of women's voices in cinema. These films portray the struggles of women seeking autonomy in patriarchal societies that impose strict honor-based family regulations and societal norms. Each film presents characters who challenge these societal norms, showcase resilience, and ultimately assert their rights to make choices about their own lives.

SDG Goal 5 advocates equal rights and opportunities and a life free of discrimination and violence, not only at home but also at work. According to the Targets of 2030 for Sustainable Development, SDG Goal 5 came with nine targets of which six are outcome-based: ending all kinds of discrimination against women, ending violence and exploitation of women, abolishing child's early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, extending the value of unpaid care or domestic labour, assuring women's participation in leadership and decision-making, and guaranteeing full access to universal reproductive rights and health. Most of the women are not aware of their physical rights and their implications. "Among others, women's rights include: physical integrity rights, such as being free from violence and making over their own body..." (Herre et al., 2023) India has a high percentage of 15.9 % of ever-partnered women aged over 15 years who have been subject to physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner in the last 12 months of 2018. (Our World in Data team, 2023)



The psychological ramifications of Honor-Based Violence (HBV) are powerfully illustrated in these films, showcasing the trauma and internal conflict experienced by women. *Pink* depicts the aftermath of sexual violence and public shaming, while *Parched* portrays emotional struggles within oppressive relationships. *Lipstick Under My Burkha* highlights the mental toll of living under constant scrutiny. These representations offer a deeper understanding of the complex personal and inner landscapes that result from HBV, while also discussing how HBV is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and cultural norms, which perpetuate violence against women.

## Research Design

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse the depiction of Honor Based Violence in the films.
2. To examine gender inequality and discrimination layered in the narrative.
3. To bring out the solutions for the reduction of any violence against women.
4. To promote gender equality and women empowerment.

### Hypothesis:

The interplay of feminist narratives and sociocultural commentary fabricated in the film generates a broader discourse on the relationship between gender and media studies, thus offering potential intersections for interdisciplinary studies. When the earlier marginalized and suppressed voice of women got the medium for expression through media culture, it can offer profound insights into the sociocultural condition of women, making it valuable for feminists, filmmakers, and audiences alike.

### Methodology and Techniques:

This qualitative research includes a close-textual analysis of the film and deeper narrative meanings. The narrative analysis scrutinizes the forms of violence against women and tries to unfold the solutions to reduce it. This study promotes interdisciplinary approaches that encourage the integration of gender studies, film studies, and cultural commentary. Such



collaboration enriches the understanding of gender dynamics and their representation in media today, providing a fertile ground for ongoing inquiry into achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Further, it encourages a broader trend in academia to explore film as a legitimate avenue to present sociocultural dialogue and gender dynamics.

## Analysis of the Film:

### *Pink* (2016):

The film opens with the background voice of girls and boys greeting each other, laughing, and making jokes. Suddenly, the first scene shows one man with a head injury, and the other two carrying him, taking him to the nearest hospital. Their talk in the car revealed that they feared the incident would not become a police case. In the parallel scene, the girls come out in a hurry and take a taxi to return home. A small blood stain is visible on the neck of one of the girls, Minal. The highway signboard 'Welcome to Delhi' indicates that they are coming from the outskirts of Delhi. These initials of the film set the tone that the story is bound to be tense and smiling and laughing will be heard only in the background.

The injured man was Rajveer Singh, who met the girls at a Rock Concert with his friends Raunak Anand, aka Dumpy and Vishwa. Minal Arora is the girl who hit the bottle on Rajveer's head in his room in the RS Resort. Falak Ali, her other friend, was outside with Vishwa, her school friend, and Andrea Tariang was with Dumpy in another room. After that incident, the boys started threatening the girls when Ankit Malhotra, Rajveer's close friend got involved. The landlord of the girls' apartment got a threatening call to throw them away from the apartment. Andrea is being followed on the streets and Minal is getting calls to be humiliated. The landlord was knocked down by a bike and threatened again on the road by Ankit. When Falak meets Vishwa to resolve the things, Vishwa, in a typical male voice, suggests apologizing by saying, "After all... you are all girls. I mean... If this thing goes on who will be more humiliated? They or you?" (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 00:29:14) When things got worse, Minal go to the police to file a complaint against the boys. But the policeman instead tries to convince her not to file a case otherwise their daily life will be ruined. Falak reacted strongly with disdain when Rajveer used slang words for Minal on the phone. Vishwa tried to convince Rajveer to



forget but Ankit clearly revealed his ugly mindset: “What am I doing? I am just following traditions. One needs to show women their place.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 00:34:36)

Falak got a viral sexually explicit photoshopped troll post on social media, resulting in losing her job as it can damage the company’s image. Ankit and Dumpy with two more boys, abducted Minal and molested, blackmailed, and threatened her not to reveal this to anyone in a moving car. Minal is highly traumatized and finally lodged a complaint for molestation but the police didn’t take any action as Rajveer is backed up by his politician uncle. On the next morning, police arrested Minal on the charge of IPC 307- Attempt to Murder. At this point, Deepak Sehgal, a reputed but retired lawyer, living in the neighbourhood, came to their rescue. Minal was deliberately arrested on Friday so she didn’t get bail immediately, but the lawyer filed an emergency bail plea since women and minors can get bail even for non-bailable offences.

When the case came before the court, Minal was charged with ‘Attempt to escort’ and soliciting, under IPC section 320 to be read with 324 ‘Causing grievous injury’ and ‘Attempt to murder’ by the prosecution. With the proceedings of the court, the humiliation is doubled when the girls are accused of running prostitution and asked insulting questions regarding it. Every common detail of their life is taken as evidence against them: living alone in the apartment, coming late at night, wearing particular clothes, having male friends, etc. Dipak Sehgal, the defence lawyer points out, that in our society, clearly, the clock determines a person’s character. (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:18:36) Because the girls come late at night they are termed ‘bad’ in character. It is the sick mind of men that makes this kind of assumption and which should be questioned. Lawyer Sehgal points out, “When girls walk down the road alone at night, cars slow down, windows get rolled down.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:18:40) Andrea has to face double humiliation being a North Eastern girl, she points out in the court, “Sir, I feel as a North-Eastern girl, I am being harassed more than the average Indian girl on the street.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:09:10) Girls’ going to the resort for dinner voluntarily is taken as their bad intentions and willingness for physical relations. That leads Dipak Sehgal to make “A Girl’s Safety Manual”, where he satirically declares the first rule, “Any girl should never go anywhere with a boy alone... because by her doing that, people presume that since



she had willingly come there, they have been issued a licence to touch her inappropriately.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:10:46)

Later, the reality came before everyone that Minal had hit the bottle on Rajveer because he tried to force himself on her. She admits to the judge, “Sir, he grabbed me! Wouldn’t let me go... it is a disgusting feeling when someone touches you without your will.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:22:08) Since Minal was drinking alcohol with them, Rajveer presumed that she wouldn’t even mind for having physical relation. Here, a girl’s drinking of alcohol becomes a tag of ‘being available’ for men. Minal’s past relations with her boyfriends were also taken as her being promiscuous by Rajveer and his friends. Finally, Lawyer Sehgal asked Minal about that particular night when the incident happened, “And since you were a woman of questionable character in the eyes of the accused Rajveer Singh and his friends... On that day, at that moment, what did you do to make it clear that right now I am not interested in sex?” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:42:43) Minal with a scattered voice answered, “I pushed. I said leave me, don’t do this... I said no.” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 01:43:13) Rajveer’s forcible attempts were resisted again and again by Minal but when he tried to push her to the bed, Minal hit the bottle on his head to protect herself. It was a girl’s one-step in her self-defense and cannot be termed a ‘crime’. Dipak Sehgal, in his closing arguments of the case, depicts the alarming truth of men-women sexual relations, “‘No’ is not just a word, it’s a complete sentence. It doesn’t need any logic, further explanation, or any definition. ‘No’ simply means ‘No’... whether the girl is an acquaintance, a friend, a girlfriend, a sex worker, or even your wife! No means ‘No’. And when someone says so, you stop!” (Roy Chowdhury, 2016, 02:06:20)

### ***Parched (2016):***

*Parched* depicts the life struggle of four women in a desert village where the whole society is afflicted with age-old rigid societal norms, child marriage, evil practices of patriarchy, marital rapes, and physical and psychological abuse. Rani is doing a child marriage of his son Gulab because that is the only social way of marriage there. Gulab mentioned his future wife as ‘goods’ – a means of a commodity when he called his mother, “Is she any good? Worth the





money?... If the goods (the girl) turn out to be rubbish, I will sell it to a ragman!” (Yadav, 2016, 00:04:35) On the other hand, Janki, the child bride has a school friend Hira who respects her and wants to marry her. But since his parents couldn’t afford the dowry, they couldn’t marry. To stop the wedding with Gulab, Janki cuts off her hair.

Lajjo is trapped in an abusive marriage with an alcoholic husband Manoj who constantly beats her. She failed to conceive a child and hence was declared infertile by her husband and society alike who is not aware of the fact that even the male can be infertile. Bijli, an erotic dancer and sex worker, working in a traveling dance company, is the only friend of Lajjo and Rani with whom they can relieve their hearts. When the Village Council convened to address local issues, the true nature of this societal body emerged. Champa, a village girl, who has run away from her in-laws' home, was forced to return there against her will. When she was still forcibly driven to return, she revealed the poignant truth to her mother in blatant words, “Mother! Don’t send me back... My brother-in-law forces himself on me! All the men in the house don’t miss an opportunity to rape me. Even my father-in-law!” (Yadav, 2016, 00:13:35)

Rani used to be beaten by her husband in the past but when she saw the same thing happening to her daughter-in-law she finally resisted. Gulab left the house with his male arrogant by saying, “I want to see how you both run this house without a man!” (Yadav, 2016, 01:39:05) Bijli’s only hope of liberation lies in Raju, the pimp’s accomplice. However, Raju utterly shattered her heart and hopes with the declaration that he wants to replace Sharma to become her new pimp, “Run away with me. We’ll go to Delhi. I’ll handle all the business. And you will be my queen!” (Yadav, 2016, 01:30:52) With Bijli’s help Lajjo finds a man with whom she finally became pregnant. Her pregnancy proved the infertility of her alcoholic husband. While beating Lajjo when she declares her pregnancy, he accidentally falls into the fire and Rani comes to the rescue of Lajjo. Rani sells her mortgaged hut and gives some money to Hira so that he can start a new life with Janki. All the women, except for Janki, find no solace in men and ultimately decide to leave them behind to start a new journey on their own.



## ***Lipstick Under My Burkha (2016):***

The initial sequence introduced the four female protagonists, who lived in the same neighborhood in the densely populated region of Bhopal, India. The story of Rosy who is the heroine of an erotic pulp fiction book titled *Lipstick Dreams*, is narrated in the background, which is actually read in secrecy by Buaji, a 55-year-old widow and proprietor of Hawai Manzil. She has even forgotten her name and has to recollect it when a young swimming coach asks her. Many middle-aged women and widows face the misconception that they don't have any sexual desire left in them, Buaji, originally Usha Parmar, suffers at the hands of her nephews and their wives. Buaji used the alias 'Rosy' when she had an urge to talk with the swimming coach Jaspal. So, even, she is, in a way wearing Burkha by taking the name 'Rosy', as she knows that society will not accept her desires at this age. She is rudely humiliated in front of all the neighbors, when her family members surprisingly raid her room, for keeping erotic storybooks and a swimsuit.

Rehana Abidi, a college-going fresher, loves to wear jeans and a T-shirt but instead has to remain in Burkha for the sake of her parents' wish. She was once scolded for dancing at a wedding because a girl's dancing or singing in a public place is a shameful thing for her stern and religious parents. Her oppressed voice finally got a scathing outburst when she participated in the ongoing protest against the ban on jeans:

"There is no end to rules in a girl's life. Don't sing, don't dance, you'll shame us. Don't walk like that people will stare. Keep your eyes down, what people will say! Don't breathe, your heaving will attract attention! Don't wear lipstick, you'll have an affair! Don't wear jeans, you'll create a scandal! I want to ask the authorities what exactly will happen! Why does our freedom scare you so much? Don't we have the right to live freely? We want our right! Our right to jeans! Our right to live!" (Shrivastava, 2016, 00:25:35)

Rehana is the only worker in her father's sewing shop where she worked till late at night as there is always a whole load of work to complete. Dhruv, her college friend, for whom she started feeling affection, also distances himself when her footage of stealing in the mall is exposed. She never gets any support or affection from her father or supposed lover. When her





crime of theft is revealed, her father forbids her from going to college, snatching away her only hope of feeling liberated.

The beautician Leela runs a beauty parlor and has some ideas regarding the destination wedding business with her lover cum photographer boy Arshad. Leela's mother is also a victim of society who is deserted by her drunken husband when he is heavily in debt. She was forced to work as a nude art model to raise her daughter and clear the debts. Her life made her a dead statue that can look beautiful only as an artwork. Arshad has a domineering nature and humiliates Leela when her wedding plans fall through. He used insulting terms to her in the middle of the street and left her bereft. On the other hand, Manoj, her fiancé, treats Leela with respect but at the same time wants her to be just a mundane housewife who is supposed to take care of his giant family. It leads her to return to Arshad but she is horrendously abused while having sex in his bathroom at night. Both the males put Leela in limbo, and she has been placed in a state of uncertainty for the choice of her life partner.

The secret saleswoman Shireen Aslam is entangled with a highly sexually oriented and dominating husband whom she cannot resist. Rahim, her husband, repudiated the use of protection while having sex, on account of which she got multiple abortions and had to take contraceptive pills after every night they copulated. Even their conjugal is brutal and doesn't involve any such affection from his side. He uses Shireen as a sex object to satisfy only his sexual gratification while Shireen craves his affection. Shireen's door-to-door sales work can provide her with an identity and purpose for living but she has to keep it a secret because it can be utterly disdainful for her husband. When finally, Rahim came to know about Shireen's secret work as a saleswoman, he sexually assaulted her so begrudgingly as a punishment for defying him. He mocks her intentions of becoming a sales trainer and tells her to give up the job and remain at home as he is the only one to decide things in their home.

The future of all four women is at the hands of men as it mostly happened. Despite being the owner of Hawai Manzil, Buaji is at the stake of his nephews who are ashamed of her desires. Once a reputable person in the neighbourhoods, she is now thrown away on the streets just because she likes to read erotic storybooks secretly. Rehana's only opportunity to set herself



free from all constraints is taken away by his father, who forbids her from having any dreams. Leela is abused mercilessly at the hands of the person whom she sees as her life partner, on the other hand, Shireen's personal and professional life is utterly smashed with a blow by her husband who himself is having an affair and is jobless.

## Conclusion:

Honor-Based Violence (HBV), as portrayed in these films, provides a critical insight into the cultural and societal expectations placed on women. *Pink* uses courtroom battles to highlight how society often blames victims, while *Parched* examines the stifling limitations imposed by marriage and tradition. *Lipstick Under My Burkha* critiques the hypocrisy surrounding societal double standards regarding female sexuality. These films challenge the audience to reconsider their perceptions of honor and gender roles, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of women's experiences. HBV is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that prioritize male honor over women's autonomy. A multi-faceted approach that includes legal reforms, community education, and media representation should be advocated to combat HBV.

Another important and visible aspect in the films is the need for solidarity and friendship among women in the face of HBV. Each film underscores the bonds formed between female characters as a means of resistance and support against oppressive structures. The realistic portrayal of women's struggles and transformative journeys in the narratives can further inspire real-life movements for gender equality and social justice. Men must understand that if women want 'pink and parched lipstick under their burkha' it must be their choice.



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