

## Feminist narratives in Indian digital television: A discourse analysis of *Scoop*

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The portrayal of women in media often perpetuates gender disparities, limiting their participation and the impact of their issues. This study addresses the gap in understanding how journalism practices, particularly in India, navigate these challenges, using the web series *Scoop* as a lens to explore feminist realities within the media industry. **Purpose:** This study aims to dive into how the *Scoop* series displays women and feminist ideas through the lens of the feminist theories of Laura Mulvey. **Methods:** This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis approach and looks closely at the narrative, character development, and cinematic écriture of the series. **Results:** It reveals that the series has a different point of view from traditional stereotypes; Jagruthi Pathak, as the female lead, is portrayed as a versatile and strong character facing challenges in a male-dominated journalism world. It also exposes how journalism commonly feminizes labor, emphasizing the mix of gender, power, and professionalism. **Conclusion:** This study concludes by noting that *Scoop* has pushed feminist stories in Indian media, providing us with a leveled look at females in journalism while handling deep-rooted gender biases. This study also accentuates how essential comprehensive storytelling is for promoting gender equality and its challenge in patriarchal norms. It also makes room for more diversification and allows media representation. **Implications:** This research advocates for more women to participate in media production and storytelling, stressing needing narratives that shake up societal norms and inspire real change.

**Keywords:** Feminist media; gender representation; Indian web series; media representation; women empowerment

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## INTRODUCTION

People are getting more involved with television by watching it and making suggestions, which is a more significant trend in media convergence (Garba, 2024), where journalists do more than report news; they also help shape the audience's total media experience (Banjac et al., 2024).

Sen Dada, a well-known journalist based on renowned crime reporter J Dey (played by Prosenjit Chatterjee), is involved in a gruesome murder case in the Mehta (2023) Netflix web series *Scoop*. This narrative explores the intricate dynamics between the media, the underworld, and the Mumbai police (Maity & Jain, 2025). In the fervent pursuit of achieving a prominent position, Jagriti Pathak (portrayed by Karishma Tanna) sacrifices various aspects of her life, such as her social interactions, familial commitments, and quality time with her ten-year-old child, ultimately immersing herself in the clandestine realm of Mumbai's underworld. While cultivating a relationship with danger, she establishes acquaintances with the upper echelons of the Mumbai police, legal professionals, and organized crime syndicates.

The portrayal of the female gender in Bollywood films and web series has been the subject of several studies conducted in India (Agarwal & Das, 2022; Khadilkar et al., 2022; Khan & Taylor, 2018; Nandakumar, 2011; Sarkar, 2012; Singh & Suman, 2024; Yadav & Jha, 2023). Debates have been sparked among many feminist academics all over the world

because of the stereotyped representation of women displayed in Indian media. The portrayal of women in commercial Indian films has been subject to several stereotypes because of historical and sociological constraints (Nandakumar, 2011); however, this has considerably changed over time. According to Nandakumar (2011), the male gaze is frequently employed in the cinema industry of India to objectify women. The public appreciates the main girl, who is blossoming, youthful, and charming, looks beautiful to the male protagonist, and dances sensually to music (Ganti, 2013; Nandakumar, 2011; Pendakur, 2003). Considering the advancements that have been made, most commercial films nowadays feature women in supporting or minor roles. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004), the conventional portrayal of women in Indian cinema is mainly influenced by historical and cultural influences. In the beginning, women were not allowed to appear in films due to the cultural restraints that existed at the time (Ganti, 2013). In addition to that, male actors have significantly higher salaries than female performers.

Most of the studies that have been done on gender representation in Indian media have been on mainstream Bollywood movies, TV shows, and news media. Research on gender representation in Indian digital streaming content, particularly investigative crime dramas, is scarce. Netflix series *Scoop* (2023) is a unique chance to look at how gender roles are

organized in the context of journalism ethics, power structures, and sociopolitical stories. Unlike other studies that looked at gender stereotypes in traditional media, this one takes a close look at how the roles of women writers are changing in digital media, which is an area that has not been studied much in the academic literature yet. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the character of Jagriti Pathak and investigating how the series presents the challenges faced by women in journalism within a male-dominated society.

Furthermore, while feminist narratives have been increasingly explored in Indian cinema, studies on feminist representation in Indian television web series remain limited. Existing research has concentrated mainly on mainstream Bollywood productions, leaving a gap in understanding how digital platforms portray complex female characters and gender struggles in journalistic settings. By focusing on *Scoop*, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on feminist narratives and objectification in Indian media and assess whether web series provide a more progressive representation of female professionals than traditional Bollywood films.

The web series *Scoop* depicts the Mumbai police designating Pathak (Karishma Tanna) as the primary suspect in the homicide case involving the esteemed journalist Sen Dada. The series draws inspiration from the real-life account of Jigna Vora (Jagriti Pathak) and serves as a compelling narrative that holds significant

value for journalists (Maity & Jain, 2025). It underscores the importance of exercising caution while interacting with subordinates, as they can betray one's trust in pursuit of immediate recognition and prominent media coverage.

Consequently, contemporary films are frequently organized and constructed around the hero, who empathizes with and defends the heroine in a male-dominated culture. The portrayal of women in these films continues to be that of content fillers. It is common for women's violence or assault to be shown in Bollywood commercial films excessively (Saikia, 2021). Kidnapping, marital rape, and other forms of sexual assault against women have been praised in a variety of contexts. Eve-teasing is a term used to characterize teasing women in public, such as comments about their looks, attractiveness, and appearance (Rana, 2023).

Regarding women in Indian society, Hindi films dealing with these issues can potentially send a positive message. Thus, women-centric films, at the very least, seek to change the attitude of Indian women, which could involve introducing reform in how they raise their children, educating their sons to be respectful of women, or contemplating a strong alternative such as getting out of an abusive marriage or declining to approve a marriage proposal by refusing to comply with dowry requests (Sarkar, 2012).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing discourse analysis as the primary method to examine the portrayal of feminist realities in the Netflix web series *Scoop* (2023). The qualitative approach can provide in-depth insights into the narrative, character development, and the form (cinematic écriture) of the series, which are essential for understanding the complexities of gender representation in media (Harfouche, 2021).

As an interpretive method, discourse analysis aims to dig deep into the origins of these images, how they are displayed, and how they convey social viewpoints. It is essential to analyze the composition of the images, including the elements that are included or omitted. Dissimilar to semiotic analysis, which mostly focuses on symbols and signs, moreover, discourse analysis's focal point is the intention that is implied in the context of the story and has era-specific nuance. It enables the researcher to explore the context in which these representations arose and their purpose in a community (Ortega-Alcázar, 2012). Therefore, discourse analysis offers an effective method for investigating complex issues and scenarios, as it helps researchers to uncover deeply roots beliefs that shape communication patterns—findings that might be difficult to obtain with other analytical methods (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

This study's main data source is the six-episode of the series *Scoop*. The series was

selected because it is based on the true incident faced by women reporters in the structurally dominated field of crime journalism (Maity & Jain, 2025); this makes it a pertinent case study for examining feminist narratives in Indian media. In addition, to achieve details analysis, the series was watched focusing on conversations, character relationships, symbolic visual, and narrative framework to ensure a thorough analysis.

The discourse analysis was conducted in several stages. Key scenes, dialogues, and character arcs were analyzed to uncover how the series addresses gender bias, workplace discrimination, and societal expectations. Feminist media theories and prior research on gender representation in Indian cinema and web series are utilized to analyze the content (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004; Sarkar, 2012).

The analysis focused on three main dimensions. The first is narrative structure, which examines how the storyline of *Scoop* reflects feminist ideologies. It includes analyzing the protagonist's journey, the challenges she faces, and the resolution of her struggles. Special attention was given to how the series portrays the intersection of gender and power within the media industry, a theme often explored in feminist media studies (McMillin, 2007). Character Development: The portrayal of Jagruthi Pathak, the female protagonist, was scrutinized to understand how her character challenges traditional stereotypes. This involved

analyzing her interactions with male colleagues, her approach to professional challenges, and her personal growth throughout the series. The study drew on Nandakumar's (2011) analysis of stereotypical portrayals of women in Indian cinema to contrast Jagruthi's character with traditional representations; Cinematic Écriture: identified and analyzed visual techniques in films or series can either reinforce or challenge the long-standing stereotypes associated with the female spectator in journalism (Harfouche, 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, digital streaming platforms in India have begun to present more complex and nuanced portrayals of women journalists compared to traditional media, which tend to confine them to clichéd or secondary roles (Sharma & Srivastava, 2024; Singh & Suman, 2024). This change can be seen in productions such as *Scoop* (Mehta, 2023), *Dhamaka* (Madhvani, 2021), *The Broken News* (Waikul, 2022), and *No One Killed Jessica* (Gupta, 2011). These films and series attempt to present a more relatable reality of women journalists, showcasing their professional challenges, ethical dilemmas, and personal sacrifices. However, despite the progress in representation, the male gaze still plays a significant role in how women in journalism are portrayed. Often, traditional gender dynamics are maintained, albeit in a more modernized form. Using Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory, this study will dissect how women journalists are represented in digital

media through three main aspects: narrative, how the story constructs their experiences and the challenges they face; characters, to what extent they are depicted as having control over their lives or being trapped in the dynamics of gender inequality; and cinematic forms, how visual techniques in films or series reinforce or challenge stereotypes that have long been attached to women in journalism (Harfouche, 2021). Table 1 analyses six episodes of *Scoop* (Mehta, 2023).

The findings presented in Table 1 show ambiguity in the representation of female journalists in the *Scoop* series (2023). In this case, the protagonist, Jagruti Pathak, is shown as a woman who is brave, ambitious, and assertive in her work. However, this series also maintains elements of the male gaze, indirectly reproducing the traditional gender dynamics of women in films. Referring to Mulvey (1975), the inequality that occurs between women and men in cinema is formed to fulfill the satisfaction and desires of male audiences which are rooted in patriarchal culture in society and the media.

In relation to the narrative in this film, Jagruti Pathak is often shown to be placed in a position that is dominated by men, either through seduction, sexual objectification, and suffering. A narrative pattern can be identified from the entire episode in the analysis results where Jagruti Pathak, although depicted as a professional, ambitious, brave, and intelligent female journalist, still cannot escape the representation of women as objects in the

**Table 1 Analysis of Six Episodes of *Scoop***

Episode	Scene	Narrative	Characters	Cinematic Écriture
1	Harshvardhan tries to divert Jagruti Pathak's interrogation	Harshvardhan tries to seduce Jagruti Pathak not to interrogate him by giving her perfume and teasing her	Jagruti Pathak's character is a professional female journalist who is brave in uncovering a case when confronted by a man named Harshvardhan who is the head of JCV and is married.	The camera position when Harshvardhan and Jagruti Pathak are facing each other is shown at a low angle, while Jagruti Pathak is also at a low angle.
2	Jagruti Pathak tidies up her child's clothes, takes him to bed and accompanies him to bed at night.	Jagruti Pathak cannot escape her role as a housewife and raises her only child without her husband's role.	Even though Jagruti Pathak's job is perilous, she still cares for her child and always does her job of tidying up the house as a woman.	Jagruti is always decorated with soft music and a warm background in every scene with her child.
3	Jagruti Pathak and Ajitesh are alone in a hotel room	Jagruti Pathak entered a 5-star hotel room with her boyfriend Ajitesh and then they had sexual intercourse	Despite having a firm and ambitious character, Jagruti also seems to be good at seducing the opposite sex.	When the two of them are having sexual activity for a short duration, Jagruti's expression is highlighted in close-ups to create an impression of sensuality in women.
4	Body check as Jagruti Pathak is about to be sent to jail	After Jagruti was sentenced and entered prison, in her sad feelings she had to go to prison and have her body inspected until she was naked by a female warden in a rough manner.	In this scene, Jagruti, who usually looks firm, brave, and professional, is shown sad, disappointed, and depressed.	As Jagruti's clothes are stripped off one by one, the camera shots vary including closeups, midshots and wideshots.
5	Jagruti's past when she was still with Darshan	Jagruti is breastfeeding her child and is then barged in and humiliated by a drunk Darshan.	In this episode, Jagruti's past is shown that she was a woman who suffered from her abusive husband.	In bad cases, the breast part while breastfeeding is still shown even though it is given a black-and-white color effect, which is a sign that this is a flashback.
6	Jagruti is free from charges and prison	After he was released from prison and his good name was cleared, he then went to his house and took a shower	Jagruti is moved as contemplation of the lousy incident that befell her bears fruit	The appearance of body parts when bathing from head to shoulders is still shown through a variety of shots, such as highshot and midshot, to cover the vulgar parts.

Source: Research Result, 2025

patriarchal sphere. It can be seen when she faces the manipulative Harshvardhan, who tries to seduce Jagruti by forcing her to accept the perfume he bought to weaken Jagruti's position

as the person who will interrogate him. This implies that women's attractiveness can be used as a negotiation tool, which is a classic pattern in the male gaze where women are more valued



for their attractiveness than their intelligence (Imhanobe, 2025). Women are not placed in roles that allow them to control a situation. Instead, they are present to be observed from an objectified perspective (Mulvey, 1975).

In addition, outside of her main job, Jagruti Pathak remains tied to her domestic role as a mother who raises her only child in the absence of her husband. This shows that even though she is an independent and brave protagonist, the responsibility of the house still sticks to her. The aspect of her sexuality is also not spared from the show where through a short scene when Jagruti enters a hotel room with her boyfriend Ajitesh and has sex which reinforces the idea that women in films often have to be narrated in the context of romantic relationships and eroticism to remain interesting in the story (VanDale, 2021). However, when the narrative shows the condition when she loses control of her life, Jagruti shows her body in a vulnerable condition such as when she is forced to undergo a series of rough body inspections when she is about to go to prison or when we are shown a flashback that reveals how she was treated degradingly by her husband while breastfeeding her child. In the climax, even though Jagruti is acquitted of the charges in the end, the narrative still connects her recovery with her body, which is shown when Jagruti is taking a shower while looking at the mirror. This certainly explains that women's bodies are not only a form of object of suffering but also a symbolic element in the resolution of the story (Ward, 2016).

This analysis shows that even though Jagruti is a protagonist who is portrayed as strong, professional, brave and ambitious, the narrative direction still shapes her within the structure of the male gaze where the existence of women is always associated with their bodies, whether as objects of temptation, domestic figures, sexual objects, victims of violence or also as symbols of recovery after suffering.

Women in films are often reduced when they are shown and become sexual objects (to-be-looked at ness) (Mulvey, 1975). In the film *Scoop*, Jagruti Pathak's appearance is shown as a brave and independent professional figure, but her character development still follows a pattern that reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. In episode one, Jagruti is shown as an assertive woman with control in her work. For example, when she is required to face Harshvardhan, who tries to seduce her to weaken her position as the person who will interrogate her. However, even though she is depicted as a woman who is empowered and has the capacity in the realm of work, the narrative still shapes her into a domestic role that requires her to be a loving mother who takes care of children and housework. This shows that the traditional role of women still sticks to her even though she has a job that demands intellectuality and courage.

As the story develops, Jagruti's abilities are increasingly eroded when she is often shown as a sexual object, for example when she has a relationship with Ajitesh, then experiences humiliation during a body inspection in

prison, to flashbacks of her suffering due to her bad husband. This narrative directs Jagruti from a strong professional figure to a figure who experiences emotional and physical subordination (Rashmi & Sood, 2021; Ward, 2016). The climax is when Jagruti is acquitted and released from prison. She reflects on her suffering, and again, her body becomes the center of attention in the bathing scene. This explains that women in films are often narrated through their bodies in vulnerable conditions and recovery. Thus, although the film *Scoop* attempts to present women with abilities, Jagruti's character is still constructed and maintained as a visual and narrative object in a structure that exists from a male perspective.

This discussion looks at how the use of cinematic techniques in the film *Scoop* depicts Jagruti Pathak. It can be seen that even though the protagonist is presented as an independent and strong female journalist, the way the camera depicts her still follows the classic pattern of the male gaze. For example, when Harshvardhan seduces her at a low angle and Jagruti at a high angle, Jagruti visually shows an imbalance of power. There are also other scenes where Jagruti is with her child, working and experiencing harassment in prison. The cinematography technique continues to shape her into a typical role as a loving mother, a seduced woman, a sensual object and a vulnerable figure. Even in episode 6, when Jagruti manages to get out of prison, during the moment of taking a shower while reflecting, her body is still the focus. This

scene seems to show that her recovery must also be visualized through physical exposure. The series portrayed that even though there are efforts to build a strong female character, however, this series displayed that Jagruti is not free from objectification. The way that men consider women not only as an individual who has full control over their lives but also as figures who are constantly observed and judged through their bodies.

## CONCLUSION

The *Scoop* series (2023) highlights both the progress and the persisting challenges how the representation of women in digital media. The series attempts to provide space for female characters to be portrayed as skilled and courageous, but it still retains elements of the male gaze. It is evident in how women are visually presented and structured and the depiction, often putting them in vulnerable or sensualized situations. This study suggests that despite shifts in how women are represented, the male gaze continues to influence their portrayal in films.

Furthermore, while *Scoop* challenges traditional gender stereotypes in Indian journalism by emphasizing the lead character's battles against some pretty rigid institutional and structural challenges, at the same time, the presence of Hansal Mehta as a male director, despite his vocal stance on gender issues, may contribute in a bias in the narrative and visuals shaped by the male gaze.



At the same time, the study does point out that digital platforms often allow for more complex and critical portrayals of gender and power dynamics in journalism compared to conventional media. To foster more balanced gender narratives, media creators should engage with journalists and gender studies scholars while ensuring greater female representation in executive roles. Future research should dive into broader media trends, cross-cultural comparisons, and audience perceptions to deepen the understanding of how digital media shapes gender narratives in contemporary storytelling.

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