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## **Thappad: A Slap to Patriarchy**

(A Film Review)

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*Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society.*

(Beauvoir, 445)

Modern women of 21<sup>st</sup> century struggle and long to establish their identity. These women not only harbour their dreams to live happily with their husband but also wish to live with equal dignity. They do not wish to follow age-old beliefs and stereotype culture of their houses as had been set by their forefather and the parents of their family, for in this tradition, all the male members of the family would go for outdoor works and nearly all the chores of the households were the responsibility of their female counterparts. But for these neo-classical women, this old culture has been conditioned because of the patriarchy. They have leapt this patriarchal boundary and made a paradigm shift in their life style and work culture. Such issues of women have been taken very skillfully in a recently launched [released on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2020] feminist movie *Thappad* [Slap] by Anbhav Sinha, the director. Anbhav, in this regard, has endeavoured to bring a complete justice to his film by bringing a domestic issues faced by almost all the women when they got married and begin their new phase of life with their husband. *Thappad* is, in fact, a very powerful parable of women's empowerment or scathing ironic indictment of the way that empowerment is subverted.

The issue in the film is seemingly solvable. Amrita [Tapsi Pannu] comes from an upper middle class family of Delhi receives a slap from her husband Vikram. The husband, a poor guy, is bewildered by what he sees as her over-reaction. Though for him it may be "*Ek thappad hi to hai*" [It is only a single slap] but for a neo classical modern women it means a lot. This incident puts Vikram in no-win situation. The film thus, tears at the hypocrisy of the middleclass patriarchal culture. It depicts seven families wherein all the female counterparts fall the victim to

domestic violence either mentally or physically, and majority of them could not settle down happily with their husbands and as a result have separated from them.

The main story of the film revolves around Amrita (also called *Ammo*), the spouse of Vikram, who has been living with great zeal and enthusiasm at a very early and prime phase of her marriage. Amrita is committed to lead a happy life. She has decided to lead a life of housewife and endeavours make her husband and family happy. For this she is very meticulous and takes an utmost care of her husband in every activity. Her day begins with the preparation of tea and serving it to her husband. She also supports in arranging and keeping all the important papers in the office files of Vikram when he sometime gets late in leaving for office. When Vikram skips his breakfast to reach office on time, Amrita runs after him with a roll of *paratha* till the car window where he begins for his office, to offer him atleast a morsel so that he may not remain hungry during the office hours. But Vikram rarely acknowledges Amrita's dedications. Even then there is a perfect environment for the husband in the family. Amrita, inspite of this, feels happy with her husband as a housewife.

One day when all the members and relatives assembled in his house to enjoy a party which Vikram has thrown on account of the promotion which he will soon get in the company at London. All is going well in the party until he receives a call from his superior Thapar, who informs him that he won't be getting a desired profile that he is looking for in London. This is not something that Vikram has desired. Vikram comes to know that instead of holding the top position in the company there in London, he has to work under the Supreme Boss. His dreams of achieving the highest desired post thus get shattered. He gets upset and exchanges the hot talks with this member who is also one of the advisory members of the committee present in the party. Vikram is now sure that some conspiracy has been hatched against him by the members of the committee for which he could not retain the desired designation in the company. Hence, on hearing this news, his inner conscious and ego did not allow him to accept the promotion and he exchanged heated discussions with the member and scuffled him for cheating. Amrita on seeing that her husband was getting out of control with the board member, gently approaches towards Vikram with an intention to settle the matter but is unable to gauge the intensity of his anger, Vikram in the heat of the moment hits a tight slap on her in presence of all the friends, relatives and guests present at the party. Stunned, Amrita thought how could her husband whom she loves so dearly, slap her in this august gathering. She thought that this slap is not only to her but to

dignity of women at large. She took the slap seriously, and thought this is not only a personal embarrassment but social insult to her. She could not nullify the echo of the slap. She instantly decides that she would not continue to stay with Vikram and made up her mind to give a legal notice of divorce to him. She rushed to her house and released her tension by separating the furniture of the room. When Vikram returns to the house she maintained an impasse. Finally, she decides to discuss the matter with her parents. Her mother, Sandhya, however, pacifies her for taking such a bold and stern decision of separating herself with Vikram at such a trivial incident. For her mother this slap may be an insignificant one but for her it seems that the whole world is crashing down. She pacifies Amrita not to take the matter so seriously, forget it soon and return to her husband and live with him as usual. Here, her father does not support her mother, Sandhya. He stays strong like a pillar with her daughter, thinking how could such an incident of domestic violence take place between them? Here, Vikram comes to in-law's house (Amrita's parents) to persuade her to return home but it does not work. He wanted to take Amrita back, but she does not budge. Vikram returns to his house thinking that after some days she would forget and return to him and they would once again live harmoniously. But the matter does not resolve and Amrita approaches to a lawyer, Netra, who herself was a victim of her husband for not giving due respect to her ambitions. Netra, after discussing with Amrita about the case, eventually arrives at the view that such quibbles do occur in every household between a wife and a husband. She therefore should not take the matter so seriously and adds that such trivial matters carry no weight to be filed for the case of separation. She advises Amrita that she should solve such issues calmly and amicably with her husband. Amrita is however hurt so deeply that she doesn't want to reconcile with Vikram and makes up her mind and is adamant in giving divorce to him. She is steadfast on this issue. She doesn't want to live with Vikram anymore. Here, Vikram, however regrets but doesn't apologize. On the contrary, he after brooding deeply makes his final decision to consult and discuss the matter with his own lawyer. His lawyer, after reviewing the matter, too advises to solve the matter amicably and should live happily once again. He (lawyer) went to the extent of saying that if such a sundry matter is taken seriously, more than fifty percent of the marriages would end in a divorce. Vikram takes the slap lightly and does not accept his blunder for his ego does not allow him to surrender before his wife. However, in an attempt to bring both the spouses [Amrita and Vikram] together the two layers with their respective clients meet in Netra's office but it is of no avail! On the contrary, Amrita

thought that she will begin despising Vikram with time. Her hatred with Vikram would pave the way of their separation. Later, when Amrita got pregnant, the news reached her husband but she still does not cultivate any desire to reconcile with him. Vikram tells her that she should not terminate her pregnancy for which Amrita agreed.

In the story, there were several subplots: Amrita's maid, Sunita, who comes from lower strata of the society, is also faces a domestic violence. She invariably has been beaten and slapped by her husband for not even committing any mistake on her part. Despite the brutality of her husband, Sunita like a dutiful wife continues to lives with her husband. Her agony and frustration is due to her illiteracy and poverty of her family. Her anger against her husband, however, blows up at last.; Amrita's neighbour, Shivani, who too is separated from her husband lives with her little daughter of 13, to whom Amrita gives training of dancing; Another pair, Lawyer Netra and her husband, inspite of belonging to a learned elite class, fall victim of gender issues. She gets hurt deeply by her husband whenever she steps up and shows sign of her progress in professional career. She was looked down upon by her husband for her winning spirit. He considered her career an offshoot of his elite position in the society. In fact, her husband is jealous of the progress she makes in her field. He instead of appreciating her, feels jealous of her whenever she is exposed to the public applause and appreciation after winning pivotal cases in the court. She feels neglected and consequently is demoralized in the path of her progress.

Amritia's mother, though living happily during her entire span of life, is not untouched of gender inequality either which she unfolds in the last phase of her life. She opens the secret which is an eye-opner to her husband. As she unlocks her heart and tells her husband that she had always kept her inner urge and dream shut. She wanted to become a singer which her husband knew well but she never put her dream as a prerogative for she knew that it may hamper their relationship. Who knows that she could have proved herself to be the top talented singer? Hence, each of the female counterpart in the family is under the clutches of their husband's desires. These families are culturally conditioned in patriarchy in some way or the other that still persist in the society.

But here, Amrita, like a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman, holds the steering of the vehicle of life on her own. She made her own decision. Her choice defines that she is not a stereotypical woman who submits herself before her counterparts. She is determined and committed to create her own

space and longs to lead a dignified and an independent life. As Amrita in one of the interviews with the reporter Ms. Barkha Dutta in one of the TV channels proclaims that “Woman and man can become one in marriage but they cannot become equal”. Somewhat similar view has also been asserted by Simon de Beauvoir in the ‘Introduction’ of his famous work *The Second Sex* when she says, “One is not born a woman but becomes a woman” (108) The myth is broken and Anbav Sinha seizes this opportunity and carves a niche which resulted in the form of ‘Thappad’. Another Radical feminist Kate Millet (1934- ) known for her fearless attack on patriarchy, quotes in her famous work *Sexual Politics* (1970) the commentary of Blackston as:

By marriage husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.... But though our law in general considers man and wife as one person yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered as inferior to him, and has to act by man’s whims and fancies. (68)

Millett believes that not only before marriage but even after a woman’s legal existence remains suspended. Hence, the bold step taken up by Amrita must be an inspiration to all women. To get separated on such a trivial matter, as getting slapped, may not be agreeable to some viewers in a patriarchal society. This, in fact, is the beginning of breaking of the conditioned belief and tradition that man reserves the right to suppress women and can move her at his whims and fancies. We should not forget that this is a man made society wherein all the norms in the past were laid down by the men and the society is governed accordingly. But Anbhav Sinha by bringing a feminist theme in the film has shaken and revolutionized the prevalent patriarchal mindset of the society where “‘victory’ always amounts to hierarchy, the hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organization to man”. (Cixous, 579) Thus A paradigm shift is observed in how women of 21<sup>st</sup> century are empowered as they deal with the issue of patriarchy and try to establish their own identity in the world at large.

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Born and brought up in a family devoted to traditional Indian values, Dr. Kosta is ever willing to probe into the changing trends of thought. His first book published, entitled as: **The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in Myths and Gender** evinces a liberal mind, keen to embrace justice and truth. He combines a scientific temperament with deep faith in the religious and cultural heritage of India.

Dr. Kosta has acquired his higher education from Rani Durgavati University, Jabalpur. His M.Phil dissertation was on 'Aesthetic Theory of John Keats'. He has more than 12 research papers published in various national and International Journals in India. He is the founding editor of *Deekshaan* Annual magazine published from Govt. Arts College, Panagar, Jabalpur (M.P). He has also to his credit a minor research project on well known American English literary critic Elaine Showalter. At present he is guiding more than 05 research scholars perusing for Ph.D from RDVV, Jabalpur. Feminist issues are his thrust area of research work.