



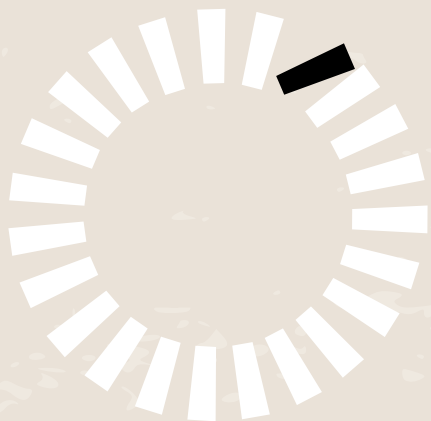
#ViolenceIsNotFilmy

by Breakthrough 

(RE) IMAGINING POPCULTURE

OUR NEW STUDY ON POP CULTURE, WHAT WE WATCH AND
WHY. AFTER ALL, WE ARE WHAT WE CONSUME!





About

Breakthrough

Breakthrough works towards making violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable. We transform gender norms by working with adolescents and youth, their families and communities, as well as by using media campaigns, the arts and popular culture to build a more equal world around us.

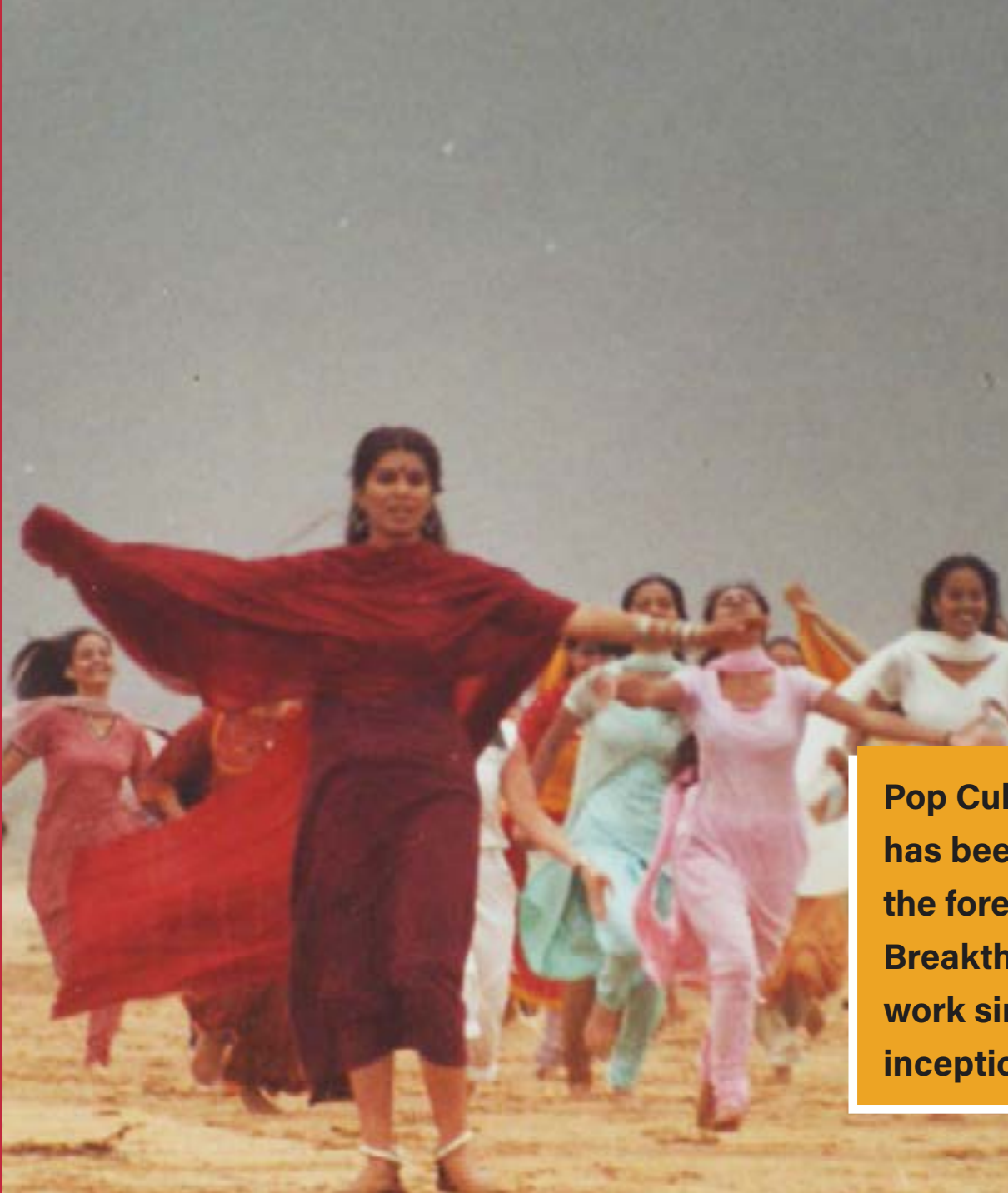


Research developed and conducted by

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Madhu is a freelance researcher and journalist. She holds a PhD in modern history from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and an MPhil in Women's and Gender Studies. She has also trained as a journalist and worked at The Indian Express and The Sunday Guardian. She has written on varied topics including gender, art and cinema.

Research Note: The author would like to sincerely thank all the study participants who graciously gave their time for this. Respecting confidentiality, some participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms marked by an asterisk symbol.



Pop Culture has been at the forefront of Breakthrough's work since its inception.

Mann ke Manjeere remains a pioneering moment in pop culture history embodying a creative way of articulating and mainstreaming conversations around gender violence and women's autonomy.

Taking forward our work of harnessing the power of diverse media platforms to consistently talk about gender, we bring to you our latest project on pop culture and gender. With the growing prominence of OTT (Over the Top) streaming platforms such as Netflix and Hotstar, the times are ripe for an indepth investigation of the shifts in the material realities enabling popular culture. We also ask how gender norms, attitudes and attendant ideas of violence are shaped within this space.

Below are some of the salient aspects of the first phase of our study.

The aim is to use these findings to imagine and produce content that does not normalise and glorify violence, particularly gender based violence.

The dream, as always, is to propel and enable long term change.





THE WHY



To **map online
content**

**consumption habits
of young people**



To **explore how**

gender and violence

**are deployed as
popular cultural
tropes**





THE GOAL

To counter normalising violence by building processes that foreground gender progressive ways of content imagination, creation and presentation.

HOW

**Qualitative study
comprising focus
groups discussions
with young people and
individual
interviews with
content creators**

19 FGDs with youth aged 18-25 years, 13 IDIs with
content creators



KEY INSIGHTS

How is Pop Culture Consumed?

- ★ Pop Culture is not Homogenous
- ★ Privilege and Consumption are Interlinked
- ★ Youtube is King
- ★ Medium is central to how content is imagined and deployed

Whither Gender in Pop Culture?

- ★ Messaging is key, important to interrogate point of violence
- ★ Lack of resonance of 'women oriented content' with audience
- ★ Increasing gender representation to counter misogyny
- ★ Challenge stories which reinforce the idea that women are women's worst enemies



POPULAR CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION



'Pop Culture' and 'Audience' are not Homogenous but Hybrid entities

The study demonstrates the importance of unpacking terms such as 'popular culture' and 'consumers' and sharpening conceptual clarity around them. It is important to unravel particulars of local cultures as they amalgamate with diverse traditions to form this hybrid pool of global, regional and local cultural trends.



Accounting for India's Gaping Digital Divide

Ability to watch online content on popular streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon is a matter of privilege considering how a vast majority of participants we spoke to said that they largely used free apps and platforms. Moreover, internet data was cited as a concern and limitation by few. Another important finding pertained to the skewed consumption habits vis a vis gender. In our initial FGDs it was evident that more boys watched online content than girls, particularly those from semi urban and rural areas. This was a result of a plethora of factors including girls helping out at home and undertaking household work, not owning personal mobiles and not enjoying unsupervised access to devices.



YouTube Rules

Most FGD participants (particularly amongst economically underprivileged youth) used the platform to stream various kinds of content such as motivational videos, stand up comedy, prank videos etc. Some participants also said they watched international content such as Turkish, Pakistani, Chinese and Japanese shows on YT (all these

shows had subtitles). The provision to watch content in lowres also enabled more access, cutting across class barriers. YT also facilitated watching shorter videos which also seems to be a preferred format due to the fact it didn't exercise undue pressure on one's time and did not consume too much data



Dynamics between Medium and Content

Choice of medium and format critically influences viewership patterns. For example, Janardhan* who is with a prominent research agency that works with TV production houses pointed out serials were envisioned bearing in mind the busy and chaotic lives of homemaker women. Popular serials are aired during prime time which is also the time when most households have dinner. This means that women would be cooking and handling the kitchen whilst watching the serials leading to significant dramatic pauses in the narrative styles of TV Serials to provide adequate time for super busy moms to get from the kitchen to the TV.

ANAMIKA*, A COMMISSIONING EDITOR AT A WEB PLATFORM, TALKED ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL DYNAMICS WITH REGARD TO THE SUCCESS OF CONTENT. “FOR EXAMPLE, WE TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT PEOPLE IN GORAKHPUR WANT. THE IDEA THAT ALL CONTENT WILL WORK EQUALLY EVERYWHERE IS A MYTH.”



POPULAR CULTURE, GENDER AND VIOLENCE



Messaging is Vital and Moral Compass is Key

Scriptwriters and actors pointed out that violence and machismo were often easy ways to dramatise and grab audience attention. They stressed on the importance of ascertaining the use of violence, to ask- "Is violence used to titillate? To what purpose is it used?" Films such as Bandit Queen, Sairat and Soncheriya were provided as powerful examples of careful deployment of violence. In each of these films violence was strategically used to drive home a larger point and not mindlessly thrown in or glamorised. The films also demonstrated how violence at the confluence of gender and caste might be cinematically interrogated.



Reimagining the 'Modern' Liberated Empowered Woman

Numerous FGD participants pointed out the dearth of content and stories that captured the everyday lives of ordinary women. Almost always 'modern' or empowered women were depicted in a hyper sexualised manner, often smoking and/or drinking. The FGDs reiterated the urgent need to reinvent the liberated woman onscreen. Recent shows and films that were created and advertised as women oriented stories, such

as Veere di Wedding, Four More Shots Please etc., were largely lost or unknown to young women in rural and semi urban areas. Narrative arches celebrating female camaraderie, considering the long history of paying homage to enduring male friendships in Hindi cinema, is a necessity.





Incorporating the 'Female Gaze'

Increased representation- both reel and in the creative and material processes involved in producing content- was provided by numerous creators as an important mechanism to check misogyny and sexism in content. Scriptwriter Pallavi talked about how her presence in writing rooms enabled a healthier conversation around gender and women in stories. The work of women scriptwriters such as Kanika Dhillon, Juhi Chaturvedi and Alankrita Srivastava attest to the fact that involving more women in the processes of production led to better written and more complex characters, particularly that of women.



Breaking the Cycle of Women as Agents of Patriarchy

Study demonstrated the importance of unravelling the subterranean mechanisms of patriarchy, prominent being the notion that women are women's worst enemies.. Most onscreen depictions of women's relationships reaffirm this age-old adage- what screenwriter Pallavi* referred to as the practice of "showing women doing patriarchy's dirty work." Cultural representation of conventional saas-bahu relationships coupled with anecdotal experiences of women working towards harming other women is a vicious circle that needs to be broken and it has to be done at the level of culture and via wholesome representation.





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