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## LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND POWER IN THE FILM GUNJAN SAXENA: NAVIGATING MASCULINE SKIES

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### ABSTRACT

*There is a persistent prevalence of androcentrism and male-centric perspectives in cultures, which are profoundly ingrained in the consciousness of both genders. This prevalent mentality influences numerous spheres, including mainstream media, which significantly shapes societal perceptions. Despite women's increased participation in professional spheres, they often assume the primary responsibilities of family management, which undermines their achievements. Women remain undervalued compared to their male counterparts, facing disparities in remuneration and opportunities for decision-making. Additionally, despite the fact that more women are enrolling in higher education, many of them return to household duties after marriage, which lowers the workforce participation rate. The paper analyses the portrayal of working women in contemporary Hindi film Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl on Netflix, exploring how the protagonist overcomes societal challenges to achieve success. The research employs feminist stylistic analysis to evaluate narratives of resilience and determination.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Inequality, OTT, Working Women, Working Mothers, Indian Cinema.

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### INTRODUCTION

The changing dynamics of gender roles and duties in contemporary society have profoundly altered traditional views of labour, identity, and agency. Women have achieved significant progress in professional sectors (McKinsey, 2024), contesting entrenched patriarchal conventions

and establishing their presence in areas traditionally controlled by men (Germain et al., 2012). Notwithstanding these accomplishments, enduring societal expectations frequently restrict women to dual roles, necessitating that professional ambitions coexist with an inequitable distribution of household duties. This disparity highlights persistent gender inequities that hinder women's work-life balance. From a linguistic standpoint, these inequalities are not only manifested in tangible conditions but are also profoundly ingrained in the language and discourse that shape society's views of gender.

The contrast between women's professional achievements and cultural perceptions of their responsibilities remains a critical issue. Despite women advancing in male-dominated fields, their achievements are frequently eclipsed by systemic obstacles and cultural stereotypes. Women often encounter unequal opportunities and biases within the organizations (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). These prejudices are expressed through language and discourse, reinforcing notions of women's alleged inherent propensity for caregiving and domestic responsibilities. These linguistic and discursive representations perpetuate systemic inequities, undermining women's contributions in the professional realm and reaffirming their primary obligations in the private sphere. This study employs a feminist stylistic approach to examine how language in media portrayals, particularly in biographical films, reinforces or contests established norms.

This study examines the biographical film *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl*, which narrates the experiences of one of India's pioneering female Air Force pilots and her challenges in a male-dominated profession. The film depicts Gunjan Saxena's journey as a tale of empowerment while simultaneously functioning as a platform for the reproduction, negotiation, and contestation of broader cultural discourses around gender roles. From a linguistic standpoint, the film offers a rich basis for examining how linguistic selections, narrative frameworks, and stylistic features influence the construction of gendered identities and power relations.

The primary objective of this research is to analyse how Gunjan Saxena employs language to portray women's professional ambitions and the challenges they encounter, especially within patriarchal environments. Utilising feminist stylistics, the study examines the film's dialogues, character interactions, and narrative structure to reveal the concealed power relations and ideological foundations inherent in the text. Feminist stylistics, as a methodological framework, examines how language components such as vocabulary, grammar, and narrative techniques mirror and perpetuate cultural perceptions of gender. This paradigm aims to elucidate how the film creates its depiction of female agency, empowerment, and opposition to patriarchal standards.

### **Language, Authority, and Gendered Depictions**

Language is a powerful instrument that influences societal perceptions and promotes cultural conventions. Linguistic representations in the context of gender can assist to normalise inequalities, portraying them as intrinsic or unavoidable. The recurrent linkage of women to caregiving responsibilities and men to leadership positions is evident in societal behaviours and is further reinforced by language selections. This is apparent in media representations, where women are frequently defined by their relational roles (e.g., mothers, daughters, wives) instead of their own accomplishments. Such representations exacerbate the marginalisation of women's professional identities, depicting their achievements as extraordinary rather than standard.

In *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl*, the language and story structure embody these relationships, simultaneously contesting and upholding conventional gender conventions. The film emphasises Gunjan Saxena's professional accomplishments, depicting her as a pioneer in a male-dominated sector. Nevertheless, it contextualises her challenges within a wider dialogue that highlights her fortitude against a patriarchal framework, rather than examining the framework itself. From a feminist stylistic viewpoint, this dichotomy prompts critical enquiries on the function of language in shaping narratives of empowerment and the degree to which these narratives either undermine or reinforce patriarchal ideas.

### **Feminist Stylistics and Media Narratives**

Feminist stylistics provides a critical framework for analysing how language and stylistic elements in texts—whether literary or cinematic—reflect and sustain power dynamics. This method analyses various levels of linguistic representation, including word selection, sentence construction, conversation, and narrative context. Feminist stylistic analysis may examine how particular vocabulary selections (e.g., diminutive expressions or gendered adjectives) perpetuate stereotypes or how syntactic structures portray women as passive or inferior. The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the ways in which gendered identities are influenced by thematic focal points, character development, and narrative patterns.

In *Gunjan Saxena*, talks and character interactions with other characters are crucial for examining gender issues. Conversations between Gunjan and her male colleagues frequently expose subconscious preconceptions against women's competencies. Not only this, her family also has typical perceptions regarding gender roles. Her brother and mother represent the societal views and are not happy with her career pursuit in the Air Force. These biases manifest in dismissive remarks, interruptions, and condescending tones, all of which covertly support male supremacy in professional environments. The film's narrative framing frequently positions Gunjan's accomplishments as indicative of her exceptionalism, suggesting that her success is an outlier rather than a reflection of systemic advancement for women.

This research employs feminist stylistic analysis to investigate the role of language and narrative factors in creating this tension. The employment of empowering language at moments of triumph juxtaposes the dismissive rhetoric utilised by male characters in times of struggle, establishing a dynamic interplay between resistance and reinforcement. The film's depiction of home and familial ties illustrates the persistent influence of traditional gender norms on women's experiences, despite their engagement in professional environments.

The dialogues in *Gunjan Saxena* serve as a valuable resource for feminist stylistic analysis, uncovering the power relations and ideological presuppositions inherent in quotidian language. The film often contrasts Gunjan's aggressive vocabulary with the dismissive or sceptical rhetoric of her male coworkers, underscoring the obstacles women encounter in exercising their agency within patriarchal settings. This linguistic disparity not only mirrors the overarching gendered power dynamics but also highlights Gunjan's tenacity and will.

Moreover, the film employs narrative methods, including flashbacks and inner monologues, to elucidate Gunjan's personal conflicts and motivations. Stylistically, these tactics humanise her character and offer a counterweight to the extrinsic hurdles she encounters, resulting in a nuanced depiction of her journey. Nevertheless, the dependence on individualistic tales of

empowerment may obscure the systemic nature of the obstacles she faces, potentially promoting the notion that gender inequality is an issue of personal strength rather than institutional reform.

This study emphasises the significance of examining linguistic representations in media to comprehend and confront the cultural narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. Feminist stylistics critically examines how language and discourse reinforce or challenge conventional gender norms, serving as a valuable instrument for enhancing discussions on gender, power, and representation in modern society. Viewed through this perspective, Gunjan Saxena exemplifies not merely a narrative of personal empowerment but also a platform for examining the overarching societal frameworks that persist in influencing women's roles in both professional and household domains.

### **Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl**

The discrepancy between women's professional successes and cultural ideals of their obligations towards family remains a fundamental issue. Although women have made significant progress in male-dominated areas, their gains are sometimes shadowed by institutional impediments and cultural assumptions. These prejudices are communicated through language and speech, promoting conceptions of women's alleged intrinsic aptitude for caregiving and household activities. These linguistic and discursive representations reinforce systemic inequities, weakening women's contributions in the professional arena and stressing their principal obligations in the private sector.

*Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* (S. Sharma, 2020) is a biographical drama film directed by Sharan Sharma and produced by Dharma Productions and Zee Studio released on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 on Netflix. The movie, set in the late 20th century, is a fictionalized and dramatized account of Gunjan Saxena's Air Force career, starring Janhvi Kapoor, and utilizing artistic liberties to enhance the events for cinematic expression.

### **Breaking Gender Stereotypes**

#### **Excerpt 1**

Anshuman: "*Ladakiyan pilot nahibanti hain*" (Girls don't become pilots) (Sharma, 2020 (S. Sharma, 2020, 07:00))

Anshuman's Father: "*Kon battameej yah sab sikha raha hai tumahy?*" (Which impudent fellow is teaching him all this?) (Sharma, 07:16).

**Analysis:** The above dialogues reveal Anshumann's thinking, which conforms to general societal norms that women do not become pilots. His statement reflects the power dynamics of a patriarchal society where certain roles and professions are deemed unsuitable for women. It holds a view that men are suitable for such professions. Anshuman's father's response exposes the ingrained sexism present in society. The father's disbelief and anger at the notion of women becoming pilots symbolise the wider societal opposition to gender equality.

#### **Excerpt 2**

Anshuman: "*Pilot nahin to air force, air force nahin hoga to astronaut ban jayegi, agar NASA ne bhej bhi diya to superman ban jayegi, agar woh bhi nahin hua to Gunju aisa karna ki tu apne andar hava bharke fuga bankar ud jaana. Tere man mein jo aye woh tu kar kyonki yahan to tujhe koyi kuchch kahane ya rokne wala to hai hi nahin.*"

(If not a pilot, an air force, if not air force, may be an astronaut, if NASA sends, you will become a superman, if even that fails, then Gunju you inflate yourself like a balloon and float away. Do whatever you like because there's no one here to say anything to you or to stop you.)

**Analysis:** Flying plans used to be considered as a male-dominated area. Becoming a pilot in the Airforce is even more taboo. In her early childhood Gunjan faces patriarchal discrimination from her brother Anshuman in whose misogynistic views Gunjan cannot become a pilot as that is the sole domain of males and women can only take up lower-end jobs such as that of air hostesses: he asks Gunjan to hold a pot and to ask "Sir, veg or non-veg?" In a report Vermij notes, "In most cultures, military women are expected to fill traditional gender roles such as taking care of the family and running the household. In many cases, these expectations, along with overt or unconscious biases, lead to communities shaming military women" (Vermeij, 2020). In the given example Anshuman is also able to see Gunjan in a role of a caregiver not as an independent person who can fly and take difficult decisions in the hour of need. He wants Gunjan to confirm to the norms laid down by the society for boys and girls; he is angry with her for violating those norms.

### Excerpt 3

Gunjan: Ma: "*Maa mujhe pilot nahi banna*" (Ma...Ma, I don't want to be a pilot.)

Mother: "*Jyotshi ji sahi kehte the. Shukar hai Bhagwan ka*" "The astrologer was right. Thank God." (Sharma, 21:14)

**Analysis:** A few minutes later Gunjan informs her that she is going to join the air force and shows her the advertisement in the newspaper. Gunjan's Papa who supported and helped his daughter in this matter pretends his unawareness and begins to read the advertisement in which girls are allowed to join the Air Force for the first time. On the one hand her father comments, 'Wonderful. Patriotism (*des sava*) is in your blood. I'm proud of you...both.' Ma says that she doesn't want to do *des seva*, she just wants to fly planes. Gunjan's mother and brother don't approve of her decision to join Air Force as it is a male-dominated field.

The boys and girls, in their childhood itself, are socialised in the use of their language, social and cultural behaviours and by saying that girls don't become pilots Anshuman is reflecting only what he has learned about what the gender roles boys and girls are socialised to play in society. Anshuman's father rebuffs Anshuman and tells him that a man or a woman flying the plane, both are called pilots, and the plane doesn't care who flies it.

### Dismantling Gender Barriers in Career Progression

#### Excerpt 4

Shekhar: "*Gunjan tum kamzor ho aur defence mei kamjori ke liye koi jagah nahin hai.*" (You are weak Gunjan and in defence there is no place for weakness) (Sharma, 01:09:20).

**Analysis:** The dialogue suggests that Gunjan, a female character, possesses an inherent lack of strength. This statement exemplifies a gender stereotype that suggests women possess lower physical and mental capabilities compared to men, especially in challenging domains like defence. The comment fails to assess Gunjan's potential, determination, and individual abilities. Her abilities are unfairly disregarded simply because of her gender. The dialogue highlights the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, specifically in relation to certain professions being deemed suitable only for men. By implying that Gunjan's gender is indicative of vulnerability, it



perpetuates the notion that leadership and defence are inherently masculine domains. Mills notes that “Masculinity has often been posited as the direct opposite of femininity. One of the defining features of masculinity is seen to be aggression, which is often considered to be a biological part of being male...” (Mills, pg. 130). The misogynistic attitude of Wing Commander Dileep Singh and male pilot officers prevents her from flying sorties during her early training. On one occasion, he says “We are done, boys”, after the Commanding Officer questions Gunjan’s poor performance. The dialogue literally and metaphorically excludes her from the briefing room. It is noted that male-dominated fields rarely provide welcoming or accepting environments compared to other disciplines, such as education or nursing (Ward, 2008).

Male pilot officers hesitate to fly with Gunjan on various pretexts, such as fear of crying in emergencies or not wanting to die while training because of a girl. Gunjan’s fellow officer requests Dileep Singh to cancel the sortie with Gunjan saying, *Training ground par ladki ke hathon marna nahi chahta sir* (I don’t want to die on training ground due to a girl sir.). Generally, women are considered weak; therefore, dying due to a girl is a humiliation rather than dying at the battlefield. The diminutive form “*ladki*” (girl) instead of “*aurat*” (woman) or “*officer*” highlights how even trained, professional women are linguistically reduced to childlike status in male-dominated fields. He calls her “*ladki*”, referring to her gender rather than acknowledging her by her name or professional identity. Losing to a man may be seen as unfortunate, but losing to a *woman* is perceived as humiliating.

Pilot officer Shekhar, when asked by Wing Commander Dileep Singh if he too is afraid, agrees to fly with her but refuses to give her control. The Air Force has not been a place for women; as a result, the infrastructure, including women's toilets and changing facilities, was unavailable. The Wing Commander feels that women have no place in the Air Force.

However, Wing Commander Dileep Singh humiliates Gunjan by stopping her briefing and handing it over to Pilot Officer Shekhar and when Gunjan asks the reason for it, he further humiliates her by compelling her to have a wrist wrestling match with Shekhar.

A study reveals that women serving in the military experience impediments such as the expectation to meet the same standards of respect as men, bias, discrimination, and restricted prospects for professional advancement (Alessandra Rosa da Silva et al., 2022).

Unlike Dileep Singh, the Commanding Officer shows his gender-neutral attitude and himself flies with Pilot Officer Gunjan Saxena to test her flying abilities. After her flying performance is marked as good by the Commanding Officer, Gunjan is happy and confident and walks to the canteen. On the way to the canteen, the misogynistic behaviour of the two employees against a woman officer is observable, they skirt to avoid saluting the Pilot Officer Gunjan, with one saying to the other, “Madam is approaching. Turn quickly.” The intentional neglect of honouring Gunjan symbolises their rejection of her power and status. In a military institution, saluting serves as a formal recognition of hierarchy and respect. By circumventing this gesture, her male colleagues linguistically and behaviourally indicate her perceived lack of legitimacy as a superior officer.

The remark suggests that Gunjan's promotion or acknowledgement stems from the Commanding Officer's (CO's) favouritism rather than her own competencies. This illustrates a pervasive cultural prejudice wherein women's professional accomplishments are often ascribed to external influences like affirmative action, favouritism, or nepotism rather than to their skill or diligence.

This phrase undermines women's achievements and reinforces the idea that they cannot succeed based only on their own merit.

**Excerpt 5**

In another conversation her colleague comments “*CO sahab ki meharbani se madam sir ban rahi hain*” (Co sir’s indulgence is making “Madam” a “Sir”) (Sharma, Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl, 1:06:17).

**Analysis:** In this conversation inherent sexism is evident. The process of becoming “madam” a “sir” is presumed derogatory by Gunjan’s male colleagues. The male colleagues’ failure to acknowledge Pilot Officer Gunjan Saxena by her appropriate rank, preferring instead to address her as “Madam,” undermines her professional identity. The title “Madam” is not neutral; it implies a departure from the standard of male leadership in a predominantly masculinised environment such as the military. This linguistic choice highlights the skewed presumption that authority and competence are inherently masculine traits, and referring to a woman in power as “Madam” rather than recognising her title serves to diminish her position.

The remark suggests that for a woman to attain power or acknowledgement in the job, she must surpass her femininity and adopt characteristics typically associated with masculinity (i.e., a “Sir”). This metaphorical framework links leadership and competence with masculinity, while femininity is deemed fundamentally incompatible with authority. The pejorative tone of the statement indicates that women's accomplishments in male-dominated sectors are regarded as unnatural or attained through preferential treatment rather than through merit.

Gunjan demands equal treatment from Dileep saying “*Sir mujhe izzat dene se aap logon ki izzat kam nahi hogi*” (Sir, respecting me will not mean any less respect for you.). She understands that for Dileep, acknowledging a woman’s competence is equivalent to threat to male authority. By asserting that respecting her won’t diminish Dileep’s respect, she reframes equality as mutually beneficial. This disrupts the patriarchal notion that empowering women threatens male authority.

**Excerpt 6**

Wing Commander Dileep Singh: *Gunjan Kya kar rahi ho? Pagal ho gayi ho kya* (Gunjan, What the hell you are doing? Have you gone mad?)

Gunjan: *Haan sir, pagal ho gayi hon. Main toh pehle se hi pagal hon sir. Main pagal ho yeh sochne ke liye ki agar main mahnat karke achchi pilot ban gayi toh main iss unit ka hissa ban paungi. Sir, sirf main hi nahi mere papa bhi pagal hain. Bachpan se kehte aye hain ki cockpit mein ladka baithe ya ladki dono pilot hi kehlate hain. Jhut haina. Pagal hain papa. Unhe thode hi na pata tha ki yahan ake panja ladana padega apne apko sabit karne ke liye. Kushti thode hi karne ayi hon sir. Plane udana hai mujhe, uthana nahi.* (Yes, sir I’m mad. In fact, I’ve been mad from the start. I’m mad to think that if I work hard and become a good pilot, I can be a part of this unit. It’s not just me, my father’s mad, too! He always said gender doesn’t matter in a cockpit, that men and women are both called pilots. It’s a lie! Papa’s mad! He didn’t know I’d have to arm-wrestle to prove my worth here. I don’t want to be a wrestler, sir. I want to fly planes, not carry them.)

Dileep Singh: *Gunjan bas.* (Gunjan. Enough.)

Gunjan: *Nahi sir, aaj sunlo. Mujhe aaj pata chal gaya hai ki problem kya hai. Problem meri kamzori bilkul nahi hai, ap logon ka dar hai. Apko dar hai ki kahn yeh madam, sir na ban jaye*

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*warna salute karna padega. Hai na? Aur usmein toh ap logon ki mardangi khatam ho jayegi...* (No, sir, today you listen. I finally understand the problem. The problem isn't my weakness, it's your fear. You are scared that if this "Madam" becomes a "Sir", we'll have to salute her. Right? And that'll be the end of your masculinity...) (Sharma, 2020, 1:11:47)

**Analysis:** Wing Commander Dileep Singh and male Pilot officers celebrate their ideological victory of male over female, of strong over the weak, of 'we' over 'them' where male holds the power and female succumbs to it. But Gunjan disrupts all this. The Wing Commander Dileep Singh asks her if she has gone mad. He tries to assert his power dominance over Gunjan. She reacts to it by saying the above lines thereby exposing their chauvinist ideals.

She highlights the contradiction between the idea of meritocracy that she and her father used to hold and the reality of systemic discrimination that she is facing at present. Her rhetoric emphasises her exclusion based on her gender without even considering her skills.

Dileep's inquiry ("*Pagal ho gayi ho kya?*") embodies the prejudice that women who resist authority or assert themselves are considered crazy or "mad." This encourages the societal belief that women should adhere to passive, submissive roles. She exposes their fear of losing power by revealing the male officers' anxiety ("*apko dar hai ki kahn yeh madam, sir na ban jaye*").

### **Balancing Marriage, Child Care, and Career Paths**

Gender biases are very common at workplaces. Women are considered as caregivers and physically and mentally weak as compared to the male counterparts. When it comes to the working mothers, the problem is more challenging. Roopali Sharma note that "In the hustle of striking a balance between family and work, working mothers need to make a choice every time" (R. Sharma & Dhir, 2022). Similarly, Behera and Padhi observe that adjusting between these two realms becomes difficult for these working mothers, as almost no one is willing to share their responsibilities at work or home (Behera & Padhi, 1993). Despite this, many women start working for numerous reasons. However, when it comes to working women, it is perceived that while a working woman may have a higher socio-economic status compared to a housewife, it is also true that she is overwhelmed with multiple responsibilities both at home and in the office (Behera & Padhi, 1993).

### **Excerpt 7**

Gunjan: *Pilot officer Saxena ke room ki chabi dena.* (Keys for Pilot Officer Saxena's room, please.)

Junior officer: *Haan haan pehle Saxena sahab ko toh bulaye.* (Sure, call him.)

Gunjan: *Main hi hon* (I'm Pilot Officer Saxena.)

Junior officer: *Are aap toh ladies ...* (But you're a woman...)(Sharma, 49:16)

**Analysis:** This incident highlights that Air Force is completely male-dominated field and even junior officer refuses to believe that a woman can be a pilot officer. He is surprised that Officer Saxena turns out to be a woman. It reinforces power imbalance, highlighting the shock and discomfort that arise when women occupy traditionally male-dominated roles. Gunjan's assertion, "*Main hi hon*" (I'm Pilot Officer Saxena), is an act of resistance against gender biases. By asserting her identity and authority, she challenges the officer's assumptions.



### **Excerpt 8**

Dileep Singh: *Kaafi dhamakedar entry ki hai apne. Ate hi gents toilet mein tufan macha diya. Bataye iss veerta ke liye konsa medal diya jaye apko?* (What an explosive entry. You created quite a storm in the gent's toilet. What medal should you get for this show of courage?)

Gunjan: *Sorry Sir. Gents' toilet mein nahi jana chahti thi lekin emergency thi. Bahut dhoonda par ladies toilet mila nahi.* (I didn't want to go to the gent's toilet but it was an emergency. I searched everywhere but couldn't find a ladies' toilet.

Dileep Singh: *Mila nahi kyonki ladies' toilet hai hi nahi.* (Because there no ladies' toilet.)

Gunjan: *Kyun Sir* (why is that, sir?)

Dileep Singh: *Kyon ki yeh jagah ladies ke liye bani hi nahi.* (Because this place isn't made for women.) (S. Sharma, 2020, 49:00)

**Analysis:** The above dialogue suggests Gunjan's superiors perceive no role for women in the Air Force. She is consistently subjected to rigorous scrutiny by her male colleagues because of her gender. Dileep's sarcastic comment embodies the prejudice that women are disruptive and ill-suited for male-dominated environments. By characterising Gunjan's use of the men's restroom as a "storm," he underscores the cultural expectation that women conform to conventional gender roles and avoid circumstances that contest these norms. It is also disclosed that there is no space for her to change her attire. Her colleagues are reluctant to fly with her, anticipating that she will become agitated in circumstances of an emergency. The absence of basic facilities for women underscores the systemic obstacles that hinder their complete integration into the armed forces. A newspaper report reveals a low acceptance of women in leadership roles among male soldiers. The vulnerability of female soldiers to sexual harassment, physical fitness limitations, and the lack of sufficient infrastructure, such as separate sleeping spaces and restrooms, contribute to the restricted involvement of women in the armed forces(Panicker, 2021).

### **Excerpt 9**

Gunjan: *Main controls le lu?* (Should I take controls?)

Shekhar: *Nahi nahi. Main uda lunga, tum aram karo.* (No. I can manage. You relax.) (S. Sharma, 2020, 57:29)

**Analysis:** Gunjan's fellow officers don't even consider her fit to fly due to her gender. They consider her weak arguing that women can't drive cars and thereby drawing a conclusion that she won't be able to fly a chopper. In the above dialogue, it is suggestive that males think that women get tired easily therefore she should relax and sit. On another occasion, Dileep Singh asks Shekhar to do briefing whereas the Commanding Officer allowed Gunjan to lead the briefings.

Gunjan's inquiry to Shekhar highlights her individuality as a pilot officer and her determination to contribute. Shekhar's dismissal undermines her autonomy and endorses the patriarchal belief that women are incapable of leadership. This dialogue underscores the challenges women encounter in male-dominated environments.

In the given conversational exchange, Shekhar asserts control, excluding Gunjan from demonstrating her ability. This illustrates the overarching power disparity in which male officials exert dominance and assign women to subordinate positions. The language used here supports

the notion that men are the inherent leaders and decision-makers, whereas women are portrayed as subordinate or incompetent.

**Excerpt 10**

Anshuman: *Papa jab se Gunju paida hui hai usko aapne sar pe chadha rakha hai... mujhe yaad hai jab hum ladke cricket khelte the, toh kisi ki bhi behen ko nahi khilate the... lekin apne Gunju ko khilane par majboor kiya... late night show mein picture dekhne diya... Kabhi bhi uski kisi bhi baat par rok tok nahi ki. Aur ab aap use Air Force join karne de rahe hain. Aur aap toh Army mein reh chuke hain, aapko toh pata hai kitna mushkil hota hai wahan...* (Ever since Gunju was born, you've indulged her every whim... When we were kids, we didn't let anyone's sister play cricket with us. But you made us include Gunju with the boys. You let her go to the cinemas late at night. You never limited her in any way. And now, you're letting her join the Air Force? You were in the Army. You know how tough it is there. (Sharma, 21:54)

**Analysis:** Here is Gunjan's brother Anshuman is expressing his frustration over his father's decision to let Gunjan join Air Force. He tries to dissuade his father from doing so by arguing that it is a male-dominated field and raising concerns for Gunjan's security. The given dialogues showcase how girls are not allowed to play with boys in childhood and late-night cinema shows are completely banned for women. However, Gunjan's father has allowed her to break these societal norms for women.

Gunjan's brother Anshuman tries to dissuade her from joining her duty as an Air Force pilot by showing her a picture of her passing out parade where she is the only woman, while the other ten are males. He says that he can only try to make her understand this reality of this world and its thinking. Gunjan faces misogynistic treatment from male pilot officers and other employees, the lack of lady toilets and changing space for female pilots, due to which she misses her first sorties.

The 'India Discrimination Report 2022' by Oxfam India reveals that women in India face discrimination in the job market, even when they possess the same educational qualifications and work experience as men. This discrimination is a result of social and employers' biases. The Oxfam analysis also reveals that discrimination is a significant cause of the country's low Women's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (VP, 2022). This discrimination is a result of the perception that women should stay at home to take care of children and elderly members of the family.

**DISCUSSION**

Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl portrays strong female protagonist who challenge the traditional gender norms and do not conform to societal expectations. Gunjan Saxena's narrative focuses on her journey of overcoming gender biases and asserting her right to be treated as equal in a male-dominated field. In the film one officer asks Dileep to stop the sorties as he fears if any emergency occurs and if Gunjan starts crying then how will he handle her and chopper? Male officers are hesitant to fly with her. The film explores the topics of sexism and determination, showcasing a feminist perspective that coincides with the themes of warfare and gender. A careful analysis of the film reveals how gender stereotypes and inequalities exist in society. Mills notes that language prioritises male experiences and opinions while marginalising or censoring female ones, perpetuating power disparities (Mills, 2008). While elaborating on feminist stylistics at the level of discourse Mills observes that in workplaces, both females and males are

frequently portrayed in roles that conform to stereotypes (Mills, 1995). However, in the film, Gunjan does not conform to these stereotypes. Gunjan is projected in a role of an Airforce pilot. These domains are considered as male-dominated. Gunjan also asserts herself and says “*plane udana hai mujhe, uthana nahi*” (I want to fly planes, not carry them.) (S. Sharma, 2020).

In the film, Gunjan struggles to find her career as air force pilot. She has to fight with the traditional stereotypes attached to women which require women to confine themselves in the domestic space and become caregivers. Gunjan had to show her both mental and physical capabilities. Gunjan faces misogyny both from her brother as well as her officers and co-pilots in the Air Force. The film delves into the topics of selflessness and the societal pressures on women who aspire to make a career in the fields dominated by men. In the film’s narrative, Gunjan is asked to return to the base camp after her fellow chopper is hit during the war. Since it was risky to help the pilots, the officer in charge forbids her to go after them. The news spreads and her security becomes a major issue as in a television broadcast a politician expresses his concerns over her being taken as prisoner of war. The manifestation of her resistance to patriarchal conventions is clearly apparent in her interactions with male characters. The film recognises her accomplishments and perseverance in defying societal conventions. The film offers a versatile portrayal of a woman's life by highlighting both her professional achievements and personal hurdles thereby avoiding simplistic generalisations. As discussed in the given dialogues, she has to face ingrained sexism in society not only at home but also at workplace. The depiction of gender roles and responsibilities in the film provides significant insights into how language and narrative influence society's ideas of women's agency and empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

In today's modern world, women continue to bravely challenge and confront the deep-rooted sexism that still persists in our society. The film Gunjan Saxena also presents a nuanced portrayal of women in military exploring her accomplishments in her career as well as the obstacles she encounters as a result of her gender. Gunjan Saxena emphasises the issue of gender discrimination within institutions and the struggle for equal rights in the military. She asks her brother to change his attitude. Gunjan says, “*Duniyan ki chchodo dada, khud ko badlo. Shayad aapko dekhkar duniyan bhi badal jaye.*” (Leave the world aside brother, change yourself. Perhaps seeing you the others will also change) (Sharma, 01:28:20). The film ends with two songs expressing the triumph of gender equality and the equal role of daughters in India's glory. The songs express love and pride in the daughter of India, ask boys to prepare for a coming storm and not to waste their ego on her as she'll walk all over it. In conclusion, OTT platforms are portraying women in multifaceted roles with complex characterizations exposing the inherent bias and sexism towards women in terms of language. The films urge the audience to change their attitude towards women.

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