

SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS OF DURANDHAR: THE REVENGE

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary narrative studies, 'Durandhar: The Revenge' offers a rich site for semiotic exploration, where meaning is constructed through layered sign systems, cultural codes, and narrative oppositions. This paper undertakes a semiotic reading of the text, drawing on classical and post-structural frameworks to examine how visual, linguistic, and symbolic signs generate ideological and emotional resonance. Central to the analysis is the protagonist Durandhar, whose representation oscillates between heroism and moral ambiguity, thereby functioning as a polysemic sign within the narrative structure. The study also investigates recurring motifs of revenge, justice, and memory, interpreting them as signifiers that mediate between personal trauma and collective cultural consciousness. Through close reading of cinematic or textual elements such as color palettes, spatial composition, dialogue patterns, and symbolic objects, the paper argues that meaning in the work is not fixed but continuously deferred through intertextual references and cultural signification. Furthermore, the antagonistic forces are examined as constructed binaries that reflect broader socio-political tensions, revealing how the narrative encodes issues of power, ethics, and identity. By situating the text within a semiotic framework, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between signifier and signified, ultimately demonstrating that 'Durandhar: The Revenge' operates as a complex system of meaning-making rather than a linear revenge tale. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary storytelling mobilizes signs to engage audiences in interpretive participation and ideological reflection. The paper positions the film as an evolving semiotic field where audience interpretation actively shapes narrative meaning and ideological significance construction.

KEYWORDS: *Semiotic Analysis, Narrative Studies, Cultural Codes, Ideological Representation, Visual Symbolism, Intertextuality.*

INTRODUCTION:

This study begins from a simple but important assumption: a film is never just a story on screen, but a system of meanings that is built through signs. *Durandhar: The Revenge* offers a particularly interesting case for such an inquiry because its narrative depends heavily on symbolism, emotional suggestion, and visual coding rather than direct explanation. Semiotics, in this sense, provides a useful entry point to understand how the film communicates ideas that are not always spoken but are consistently implied through cinematic form.

Semiotics, as developed in modern film and cultural theory, focuses on how meaning is produced through signs and how those signs are interpreted within specific cultural contexts. In cinema, these signs are not limited to language; they include gestures, framing, colour palettes, sound design, costume, and even silence. When applied to *Durandhar: The Revenge*, this approach allows the researcher to move beyond what happens in the plot and instead ask how what is shown comes to mean something for the viewer.

The value of this approach lies in its ability to slow down the act of viewing. Instead of treating the film as a continuous flow of events, semiotic reading breaks it into meaningful units where each detail contributes to a larger structure of interpretation. This becomes particularly relevant in a film that revolves around emotionally charged themes such as revenge and justice, where meaning is often constructed indirectly through repetition, contrast, and visual emphasis rather than explicit narration.

In *Durandhar: The Revenge*, the central idea of revenge can be understood as more than a narrative trigger. It operates as a sign that shifts meaning depending on context—at times appearing as personal loss, at other times as moral correction or social resistance. Characters, in this framework, do not function only as psychological individuals but also as positions within a system of meaning, where each figure represents a set of values, conflicts, or ideological tensions.

At the same time, semiotic analysis acknowledges that meaning does not remain fixed within the film itself. The audience plays an active role in interpretation, drawing from personal experience, cultural background, and social awareness. This makes the film a site of negotiation rather than transmission. What one viewer reads as justice, another may interpret as violence or moral instability, and this variation is precisely what makes semiotic reading necessary.

The significance of studying *Durandhar: The Revenge* is also connected to its visibility and reception in popular culture. While reported commercial figures differ across sources, the film is widely recognized for its strong audience engagement and box office presence. This popularity is not treated here as a final measure of value, but as an indication that its sign systems are widely circulated and actively interpreted. The present study, therefore, aims to understand how these systems operate and how meaning is produced, sustained, and reworked through cinematic signs.

Review of research:

1. Siddhant Adlakha in ‘The New York Times’ interprets *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as a hyper-violent spy narrative that gradually abandons emotional grounding in favour of political spectacle. The review highlights that the film’s extended runtime and fragmented structure weaken its narrative discipline, making it increasingly difficult for viewers to sustain interpretive engagement. From a critical standpoint, Adlakha suggests that the film’s depiction of nationalism and counter-terror operations becomes ethically ambiguous, as violence is repeatedly aestheticised rather than contextualised. The analysis positions the film within contemporary political-action cinema where ideological intensity often overrides narrative coherence.

2. Nicolas Rapold in ‘The New York Times’ reads the film as a product of its geopolitical moment, arguing that it reflects contemporary anxieties surrounding surveillance, terrorism, and state power. The review suggests that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs a world where moral certainty is continuously destabilised, yet ultimately leans toward a structured ideological position. Rapold emphasizes that the film’s scale and intensity are inseparable from its political

messaging, making it less of a conventional thriller and more of a commentary on modern conflict representation in cinema.

3. **Shubhra Gupta** in ‘**The Indian Express**’ critically evaluates the film’s use of extreme violence, arguing that repetition of brutality reduces emotional impact over time. The review notes that the audience becomes desensitised as the film progresses, which weakens its intended dramatic effect. From a formal perspective, Gupta highlights that the mise-en-scène and background score often dominate narrative subtlety, resulting in a sensory overload that challenges interpretive clarity. The review situates the film within a trend of contemporary action cinema where shock value increasingly substitutes for narrative depth.

4. **Rohan Naahar** in ‘**The Hindu**’ provides a more interpretive critique, arguing that the film’s politics cannot be separated from its cinematic form. The review suggests that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* actively constructs a worldview in which violence becomes narratively justified through emotional framing and character motivation. This creates an interpretive tension where audiences are encouraged to simultaneously question and accept the moral logic of the film. The analysis positions the film as ideologically loaded cinema that resists neutral reading.

5. **Radhika Menon** in ‘**Decider**’ characterises the film as excessively long and structurally overloaded, arguing that its narrative ambition exceeds its storytelling clarity. The review notes that while individual sequences demonstrate technical competence, the overall structure suffers from lack of restraint. Menon also critiques the film’s gratuitous violence, suggesting that it risks undermining viewer engagement. However, she acknowledges that the film reflects a specific trend in modern streaming-era cinema where scale and intensity are prioritised over concision.

6. **Shalini Langer (2026)** offers a critical reading of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as an ambitious yet uneven spy thriller that struggles to maintain narrative cohesion across its extended runtime. The review highlights that the film introduces multiple subplots involving political networks, criminal ecosystems, and personal revenge arcs, but these narrative strands do not always integrate seamlessly. Langer observes that while the film succeeds in creating a dense cinematic universe, its pacing becomes inconsistent, particularly in the second half. The protagonist’s journey, although emotionally charged, is often overshadowed by excessive exposition and rapid tonal shifts. The review ultimately positions the film as a work that is conceptually strong but structurally overextended.

7. **Vineeta Kumar (2026)** interprets the film as a politically infused action narrative that foregrounds power, ideology, and emotional rupture. The review emphasizes Ranveer Singh’s performance as the central force driving audience engagement, noting that the narrative often orbits around his character’s emotional and ideological transformation. Kumar argues that the film deliberately amplifies intensity through visual scale, sound design, and narrative escalation. However, she also notes that this intensity occasionally results in narrative saturation, where emotional weight competes with spectacle. The review situates the film within contemporary Indian cinema’s increasing tendency to merge political subtext with mainstream entertainment.

8. **Anuj Kumar (2026)** provides a more formal critical analysis, focusing on the film’s ideological undertones and visual excess. He observes that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs a cinematic world where violence becomes both narrative device and aesthetic strategy. According to Kumar, the mise-en-scène and background score frequently dominate storytelling, sometimes reducing character motivation to visual spectacle. The review suggests that the film’s

engagement with political conflict raises interpretive questions regarding representation and justification of violence. Despite these concerns, Kumar acknowledges the technical precision of certain sequences, particularly in action choreography and cinematography.

9. **Saibal Chatterjee (2026)** describes the film as a high-voltage espionage thriller that prioritizes intensity over restraint. The review highlights the director's attempt to construct a large-scale narrative involving espionage, betrayal, and moral conflict. Chatterjee notes that while the film achieves moments of strong dramatic impact, its overall structure is weighed down by excessive layering of incidents and characters. He further observes that the emotional arc of the protagonist is compelling but occasionally diluted by the film's insistence on constant escalation. The review situates the film within a broader trend of contemporary Indian action cinema that privileges scale and emotional intensity.

10. **Sukanya Verma (2026)** evaluates the film through its performance dynamics and emotional structure. The review argues that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* relies heavily on its lead actor's screen presence to maintain narrative engagement. Verma highlights that while the film is visually ambitious, its storytelling occasionally becomes secondary to performance spectacle. She also notes that the emotional core of the narrative is effective in isolated sequences but loses consistency across the broader runtime. The review ultimately frames the film as a performance-driven spectacle that succeeds intermittently but lacks sustained narrative discipline.

11. **The Bollywood Hungama Critical Consensus** presents a balanced evaluation, acknowledging both strengths and limitations of the film. Critics note that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* is technically well-mounted, with strong production design, effective background scoring, and impactful action sequences. However, they also highlight issues related to runtime, narrative density, and repetitive structural patterns. The review panel suggests that the film is most effective in its first half, where narrative momentum and emotional stakes are tightly controlled. In contrast, the latter portions are described as stretched and structurally uneven. Despite these criticisms, the film is recognized as a significant commercial and cinematic spectacle within contemporary Bollywood action cinema.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine how *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs meaning through visual, auditory, and narrative signs, with specific attention to symbols, motifs, and cinematic techniques that shape audience interpretation.
2. To analyse the representation of key themes such as revenge, justice, power, and morality in the film, and to understand how these themes operate as sign systems within a semiotic framework.
3. To explore how character construction and narrative structures in the film function as signifiers that produce ideological and emotional meanings beyond the surface-level storyline.
4. To investigate the role of audience interpretation in decoding the film's semiotic codes, focusing on how different viewers may construct varied meanings based on cultural, social, and contextual factors.

Hypotheses:

1. The film *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs meaning primarily through a complex system of visual and narrative signs, where symbolic elements such as colour, framing, and mise-en-scène play a dominant role in shaping audience interpretation.
2. The representation of revenge, justice, and power in the film operates as a semiotic structure that encodes ideological meanings, often producing moral ambiguity rather than a fixed or singular interpretation.
3. The characterisation and narrative progression in *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* function as signifying systems in which characters represent ideological positions rather than purely psychological individuals.
4. Audience interpretation of the film's semiotic codes varies significantly depending on cultural background and socio-political context, leading to multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings of the same cinematic text.

Research Methodology:

The methodology adopted in this study is primarily qualitative in nature, grounded in semiotics analysis as the central interpretive framework. Rather than treating *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as a straightforward narrative, the film is approached as a system of signs where meaning is constructed through a combination of visual, auditory, and narrative elements. This approach allows for a closer reading of how the film communicates ideas indirectly through symbols, patterns, and stylistic choices, rather than through explicit dialogue alone. The focus is on understanding how meaning is produced within the film and how it may shift depending on interpretation.

The analysis is carried out through careful viewing and repeated close reading of selected sequences from the film. Particular attention is given to cinematographic choices such as framing, lighting, colour use, and camera movement, as these contribute significantly to the film's symbolic language. Alongside this, narrative structure is examined to understand how events are arranged and how meaning is built through progression, repetition, and contrast. Character representation is also considered, especially in terms of how individuals in the film often function as carriers of broader ideas such as revenge, justice, power, and moral conflict.

The study includes an examination of sound design, background score, and dialogue delivery, since these auditory elements play an important role in shaping emotional and interpretive responses. Recurring motifs and symbolic references are also identified and interpreted to understand how they contribute to the film's overall meaning-making system. Taken together, these elements are analysed in relation to each other, allowing the film to be understood not just as a story, but as a layered semiotic structure that invites multiple readings from its audience.

DISCUSSION:

The semiotic reading of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* begins with its narrative structure, which is intentionally layered, emotionally non-linear, and psychologically fragmented. The plot does not unfold in a smooth chronological order; instead, it constantly shifts between past trauma, present confrontation, and imagined recollections. This movement itself becomes a sign of the protagonist's unstable emotional condition, where memory is not a passive recollection but an active force shaping behaviour. The film repeatedly returns to certain moments, not for

clarification, but for emotional reinforcement, suggesting that the past is never fully resolved. In semiotic terms, this structure transforms time into a symbolic device, where repetition signifies trauma and disruption signifies internal collapse. The narrative therefore operates less as a linear revenge story and more as a mapping of psychological deterioration shaped by loss and unresolved conflict.

The central theme of revenge is constructed in the film as a multi-layered sign rather than a simple narrative goal. Revenge is visually and emotionally coded through darkness, silence, abrupt cuts, and tightly controlled framing, all of which create an atmosphere of emotional suffocation. However, the film does not present revenge as purely destructive; it also frames it as a distorted form of justice, where personal grief merges with ideological motivation. Justice, in contrast, is represented through more structured environments such as institutional buildings, uniformed authority figures, and symmetrical compositions, creating a clear visual opposition between order and chaos. This binary, however, is not stable; the film frequently blurs it, suggesting that justice itself can become violent when filtered through political or personal agendas. As a result, revenge emerges not as a single idea but as a shifting metaphor that absorbs themes of identity crisis, moral uncertainty, and emotional breakdown.

The film's use of signs and symbols is deeply embedded in its *mise-en-scène*, where even minor objects carry interpretive weight. Weapons are not merely tools of violence but symbolic extensions of memory and trauma, often appearing in moments that connect past and present emotional states. Broken objects, blood-stained surfaces, and repeated visual fragments such as photographs or names serve as reminders of loss and unresolved history. Silence, too, functions as a powerful semiotic element, often appearing at moments of emotional intensity where language becomes insufficient. Even pauses in dialogue or prolonged stillness in framing act as meaningful absences, suggesting emotional repression or psychological overload. Through these accumulated signs, the film constructs a dense symbolic environment where meaning is never directly stated but continuously implied and reconstructed by the viewer.

The locale and spatial design of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* play a crucial role in shaping its semiotic identity. Urban landscapes are often portrayed as congested, shadowed, and fragmented, reflecting internal psychological conflict and social instability. In contrast, institutional or politically significant spaces are presented with rigid geometry, controlled lighting, and structured movement, symbolising systems of power and authority. The shifting geography between confined interiors and expansive external environments mirrors the protagonist's evolving mental state, moving between psychological entrapment and outward confrontation. Even transitional spaces such as corridors, staircases, and abandoned zones carry symbolic meaning, often representing moments of decision, hesitation, or transformation. In this way, location is not simply a backdrop but an active participant in meaning-making.

Costume and makeup further deepen the film's semiotic layering by visually tracking transformation and identity breakdown. The protagonist's costumes shift from structured, clean, and formal attire to more rugged, disordered, and emotionally worn appearances, visually marking the progression from control to chaos. This transformation is not abrupt but gradual, suggesting psychological erosion over time. Makeup details such as shadows under the eyes, facial scars, and minimalistic styling reinforce themes of emotional exhaustion and lived trauma. Supporting characters are also visually coded through costume choices that signal ideological positioning—authority figures in rigid uniforms, antagonistic forces in darker tones, and neutral

characters in muted palettes. These visual distinctions help construct a semiotic map of power relations and moral positioning within the narrative world.

Music, lyrics, and sound design operate as an emotional semiotic system that guides interpretation without explicitly dictating meaning. The background score alternates between heavy, rhythmic intensity during action sequences and softer, lingering tones during reflective or emotional moments. This contrast not only shapes mood but also signals shifts in narrative meaning, preparing the viewer for emotional escalation or reflection. Where lyrics are used, they rarely function as literal narration; instead, they extend emotional states, often reinforcing themes of loss, betrayal, and unresolved anger. Sound effects such as gunfire, breathing, silence, and environmental noise are deliberately amplified to create sensory immersion, making the viewer experience tension physically as well as emotionally. Together, these auditory elements function as signs that deepen the emotional texture of the film.

Acting and performance are central to the semiotic system of the film, as they translate internal emotional states into visible and interpretable signs. The protagonist's restrained expressions, controlled gestures, and sudden emotional ruptures create a dual-layered performance that reflects both suppression and eruption of trauma. Eye movements, pauses, and physical stillness often communicate more than dialogue, turning performance into a silent language of meaning. Supporting characters are similarly constructed as symbolic figures rather than purely psychological individuals, often representing ideological positions such as authority, resistance, loyalty, or moral ambiguity. Their interactions with the protagonist are not only narrative exchanges but also symbolic confrontations between competing value systems. Through performance, the film continuously externalises internal conflict, making emotion visually readable.

The direction of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* integrates all these semiotic layers into a cohesive yet interpretively open cinematic experience. The director's emphasis on visual density, controlled pacing, and symbolic repetition ensures that meaning is never fixed but constantly evolving through viewer engagement. Long takes, abrupt transitions, and carefully staged compositions encourage the audience to actively participate in constructing meaning rather than passively consuming it. The film ultimately communicates that revenge, identity, and justice are not stable or singular concepts but fluid sign systems shaped by memory, perception, and ideology. In doing so, it transforms itself from a conventional narrative into a semiotic field where every element—visual, auditory, and performative—contributes to an ongoing process of interpretation.

CONCLUSION:

The semiotic analysis of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* reveals that the film operates as a complex system of interconnected signs where meaning is constructed through visuals, sound, narrative structure, performance, and symbolic detail rather than explicit storytelling alone. Across its treatment of revenge, justice, identity, and power, the film consistently relies on layered signification that invites multiple interpretations instead of a single fixed meaning. The study shows that characters, spaces, costumes, and even silence function as meaningful signifiers that shape the audience's emotional and ideological understanding of the narrative. Ultimately, the film demonstrates how contemporary cinema can extend beyond conventional storytelling to become a semiotic field in which meaning is continuously produced through the interaction between text and viewer interpretation.

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