

REPRESENTATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI FILM

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi kekerasan seksual dalam film Gangubai Kathiawadi, yang berbentuk interpretasi berupa kata, gambar, video, dan perilaku. Film berjudul Gangubai Kathiawadi yang merupakan film biografi dari India berkisah mengenai seseorang yang diperjualbelikan ke rumah bordil. Data dalam rangka menjawab pertanyaan penelitian atau mencapai tujuan penelitian. Film ini mengambil pendekatan isu sosial kekerasan seksual yang diterima oleh perempuan. Dalam penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis semiotika dari Charles Sanders Peirce yang merupakan salah satu kontribusi penting dalam studi tentang semiotika. Stigma buruk yang melekat dalam diri pekerja seks komersial (PSK) membuat sebagian orang merasa berhak melakukan apa saja terhadap mereka. Representasi kriminalitas dan kekerasan dalam film Gangubai Kathiawadi menghadirkan tanda atau simbol kriminalitas dan kekerasan yang dilakukan terhadap para pekerja seks komersial.

Kata kunci: Representasi, Kekerasan Seksual, Perempuan, Film, Gangubai Kathiawadi

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of sexual violence in the film Gangubai Kathiawadi, which takes the form of interpretations in the form of words, images, videos, and behaviors. Gangubai Kathiawadi, a biographical film from India, tells the story of a person who is traded to a brothel. Data is used to answer research questions or achieve research objectives. This film takes an approach to the social issue of sexual violence accepted by women. This study uses qualitative descriptive research. Using qualitative descriptive methods with a semiotic analysis approach from Charles Sanders Peirce is one of the essential contributions to studying semiotics. The bad stigma attached to commercial sex workers (PSK) makes some people feel entitled to do anything to them. The representation of criminality and violence in Gangubai Kathiawadi presents a sign or symbol of crime and violence committed against prostitute workers.

Keywords: Representation, Sexual Violence, Women, Film, Gangubai Kathiawadi

INTRODUCTION

Cases of sexual violence against women in the world are increasingly concerning. In general, the forms of violence in Indonesia recorded by data from service institutions and Komnas Perempuan that out of 13,428 cases, 15,466 forms of violence were recorded, the most cases of sexual violence were 2,228 cases of sexual violence out of 5,831 cases based on the form of violence (Komnas Perempuan, 2023). According to data published by (*Violence Against Women*, n.d.), globally, around 1-3 (30%) women worldwide have been subjected to sexual violence by their partners or non-partners, and more than a quarter of women aged 15-49 years have experienced sexual violence. Despite the low rate of sexual violence, it cannot be underestimated. The absence of disclosure of the case to the legal process, lack of evidence, and actions committed by the perpetrator are not classified as moral crimes regulated in the Criminal Code or internal causes of the victim, such as the mental burden of the victim and family so they do not want to process legally (Siregar et al., 2020).

Sexual violence against women is an act of torture against women that results in sexual harm, such as forced sexual intercourse and rape (Dayakisni, 2009). Sexual violence refers to any sexual activity in which the form can be in the form of an attack, namely the onset of suffering in the form of physical injury or without attacks such as emotional trauma

obtained from forms of violence, namely being seduced, poked, forcibly hugged, and raped (Salamor & Salamor, 2022). According to (NOVIANI P et al., 2018), violence that occurs in a woman is due to the value system that positions women as weak beings and inferior to men.

The film industry is one of the cultural sectors with a broad global market target (Laily & Purbantina, 2021). The film becomes a way for the director to convey his message to the wider community. Films generally highlight a societal event or phenomenon (McQuail, 1987). The development of visual narratives can complement each other to convey information from the media they use (Sabri & Adiprabowo, 2023). The context of violence in a film is a visual or verbal representation of violent acts in various situations, ranging from physical battles to severe crimes. Violence can bring a sense of happiness to the perpetrators, and it isn't easy to eliminate (Haryatmoko, 2007). Film is a medium of artistic expression that provides a path of expression of creativity and a cultural media that depicts or represents human life and the personality of a nation (Surahman, 2017).

In communication media, films are used as entertainment and public education media (Siswanto et al., 2022). According to (Adiprabowo, 2018), films have a mission of educational communication to the public, and understanding the message a film conveys requires visual reading. Selling films with the

theme of violence against women, especially in countries that still adhere to patriarchal culture, is not an easy thing (Nurulita & Primadini, 2021). However, violence-themed films can make the issue of sexual violence against women a particular concern for society and the government.

Gangubai Khatiwadi covers various aspects of the main character's life, including aspects of sexual violence in prostitution. This film takes an approach to the social issue of sexual violence accepted by women. The depiction of violence in this film may be sensitive and will have an impact on viewers, but through this film, viewers are shown many stories that occur to women for sexual violence. According to (Asti et al., 2021), film is a crucial part of the system that individuals and groups use to send and receive messages. Films that contain educational elements can help the character of a nation become good, and films need support from the wider community (Adiprabowo & Widodo, 2023).

In 2023, there was research on the Representation of Liberal Feminism in Gangubai Characters in the Film "Gangubai Kathiawadi" which is researched (Azmi, 2023). This research focuses on feminism represented in the film Gangubai Kathiawadi. From the findings of the researchers, the representation of women contained in the film presented how the main character and prostitute women fought for the right to justice and the right to education for their children.

From previous studies described by the researcher above, there are similarities in the object of research. Researchers see opportunities for the study of the object of this study that discusses the representation of sexual violence against women. Based on the explanation that has been explained, how the representation of sexual violence against women in the film Gangubai Kathiawadi.

METHOD

Researchers use research methods to collect data, analyze information, and conclude the data obtained. Research methods systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data to answer research questions or achieve objectives. This study uses qualitative descriptive research. The descriptive method aims to describe the facts and characteristics of a particular group systematically, factually, and accurately (Jalaluddin, 2004).

Using qualitative descriptive methods with the semiotic analysis approach of Charles Sanders Peirce is one of the essential contributions to the study of semiotics. According to (Shofiani, 2021), qualitative research was chosen because the data is descriptive according to the problem raised, prioritizing data description. After all, semiotic research emphasizes meaning in data. Charles Sanders Peirce developed a complex system of semiotics by discussing various aspects of how signs work in communication. In Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, there are several main

points, namely the form of the sign (representation), the meaning of the sign (interpretant), and the reference of the sign (object). The meaning of a sign is the understanding given to a sign, where the true meaning is in our minds and encourages people to give meaning. According to (Rambe et al., 2022), Pierce's sign and meaning is a structure and a cognitive process called semiosis.

According to (Mulyana, 2017), there is no natural relationship between the symbol and the referent (intended object); for example, there is no relationship between the presence of butterflies at home and the arrival of guests. This research is based on efforts to build thoughts studied in more detail and formed by words and actions. Defining signs is the ability of humans to reflect on themselves by observing others' points of view (Kunandar, 2019).

Data were researched and collected based on the marks in this study. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis is because, in his theory, there is an understanding and depiction of the complexity of signs in human interaction not only in the mind of individuals but also about the reality of social and cultural interactions such as the forms of criminality and violence in the film *Gangubai Kathiawadi*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gangubai Kathiawadi is an Indian biographical film directed by Sanjay Leela

Bhansali and released in 2022. The film follows the life of Gangubai Harjivandas, known as Gangubai Kothewali, an influential and controversial female figure in India as a mobster and prostitute who later became one of the most respected figures in the Kamathipura slum in Mumbai, India. His life was documented in a book called *Mafia Queens of Mumbai* by S. Husain Zaidi. The film, starring Alia Bhatt as the main character, successfully brought the character Gangubai.

The film, which was ranked 10th most popular Netflix watch globally, tells the story of Gangubai, a simple girl lured into becoming an artist by her lover. Still, unfortunately, she was sold to a brothel in Kamathipura in 1956. During her life, she faced suffering and violence that occurred to her, including torture from brothel owners. However, with her courage, she rose and became an influential figure in Kamathipura. She fought for labor rights for prostitutes and education for children of prostitutes who were discriminated against, eventually winning the hearts of many.

In the film *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, based on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, the following signs of criminality and violence are found:

Selling Victims for Prostitution

- **Sign**



Figure 1 Selling Gangubai to a Prostitution House
(Source: Netflix)

- **Object**

In the figure above, at 00:18:06, Gangubai is locked up in a dark room, and Shella's aunt offers water to Gangubai but is refused by Gangubai, and finally, Shella's aunt splashes it on Gangubai. Gangubai wants to go home, but Shella's aunt grabs her chin and says that her lover sold Gangubai for 1000 rupees, or the equivalent of 191,300,000 rupiah. Using a two-shot shooting technique with a medium long shot that shows the two people, Gangubai and Madu, who are engaged in conversation.

- **Interpretant**

There are various forms of sexual violence, one of which is sexual exploitation, which is an act for sexual gratification and profit in the form of money, socio-political, and others, such as the practice of prostitution (Komnas Perempuan, 2013). Crimes such as human trafficking are unlawful and detrimental crimes that cannot be left alone. Several factors influence crime, such as urgent economic needs, employment, and welfare (Putra et al., 2021). In the scene, there are signs depicting human trafficking and the

existence of underage marriage, which violates the laws of both India and the rest of the world.

The rise of criminality, such as human trafficking throughout the world, including from developing countries, has become the world's concern, especially in the United Nations (Widiastuti, 2010). In a scene in the film Gangubai, Kathiawadi depicts human rights violations in the form of slavery committed by brothel owners. According to (Rosnawati ., 2016), Organized crime includes a group whose main activity is obtaining illegal profits that violate criminal law or exercising power through criminal activity.

Catcalling to Woman

- **Sign**



Figure 2 Catcalling to Woman
(Source: Netflix)

- **Object**

In the figure, at 00:25:40, Gangubai is in front of the cinema, about to watch a film with his friends, but is confronted by a strange man who tries to flirt or catcall Ganggubai with sensual eyes to Gangubai. The picture uses a two-shot shooting technique with a long shot that shows Gangubai uncomfortable after being teased by a strange man in front of a cinema.

- **Interpretant**

Based on the specific results of the picture above, the researchers found a sign that in the picture, there was catcalling to Gangubai, who was going to watch a film and was crowded. Catcalling is also a form of sexual violence that leads to sexual harassment of the victim. The act of catcalling is a term for an act of verbal harassment, namely in the form of whistling or comments that aim to seek attention to the victim in a sensual form and lead to sexual so that catcalling is included in the category of sexual harassment (Hidayat & Setyanto, 2019). Usually, catcalling is done by individuals or groups of people who make sexual or obscene comments to others without the consent of the victim. Some people still think that catcalling is just a joke, but they do not pay attention and do not care about the victims who have experienced it.

Interactions in the form of symbols in catcalling actions impact communication patterns between perpetrators and victims of catcalling (Zahro Qila et al., 2021). The symbol formed after catcalling perpetrators aims to disturb someone who refers to sexual directions. In the interaction between the perpetrator and the catcalling victim, a symbol indicates the perpetrator degrades the victim. According to (Pitaloka & Putri, 2021), the consequences of sexual harassment bring severe consequences for victims, such as being intimidated, humiliated, degraded, and even

to the point of causing psychiatric disorders to victims.

Trauma to Sexual Violence

- **Sign**



Figure 3 Trauma to Sexual Violence
(Source: Netflix)

- **Object**

In Figure 3, at minute 02. 01. 59, where when Kamli's friend Ganggu died after giving birth, Ganggu told her to tie a rope around Kamli's leg and said that men could not be trusted even with corpses. The 3rd figure, using a medium closeup shooting technique, shows Ganggu holding a newborn child by Kamli.

- **Interpretant**

Based on the specific results of the image above, researchers found that there were signs that the figure showed that the traumatic state of Ganggubai requested that the dead Kamli should be tied to her legs so that the corpse would not become a victim of rape. Ganggubai realizes that even to death, sexual violence can occur. This happens because Gangubai has trauma from sexual violence, namely emotional, psychological, and physical reactions that arise as a result of sexual violence.

The traumatic suffering received by women both during and after violence provides excessive fear of women who experience sexual violence (Harkrisnowo, 2000). This statement is corroborated by research conducted by (Kango, 2009), that women who experience sexual violence suffer trauma caused by patriarchal community culture that causes violence against women both in the domestic environment (family) and public environment and then known as gender-based violence.

The film, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, cannot be separated from social issues still widely carried out worldwide, especially in India. As a filmmaker who contains a person's biography, the director must present a narrative story that will later be conveyed neatly about the meaning of the messages presented in the film. Gangubai Khathiawadi's film is based on the true story of a prostitute from Mumbai, showing things that are rarely highlighted by the wider community, such as violence received by prostitute workers and discrimination from society itself against prostitute workers.

Film, which conveys messages to the broader community that entertains and educates, is the image of a film. Not only as a means of showing a mere fictional story, but the film also shapes and elevates the reality of life. Many messages contained in a film are moral messages and inspirational messages. Besides being a spectacle, films' functions are

guidance and entertainment that can contribute to the audience (Suryanto, 2018). In film scenes, real human life is often shown, such as help, regret, forgiveness, and so on, and it impacts the community to prioritize the common interest (Ikhsan & Adiprabowo, 2024).

The communication process involves individuals sharing things about themselves, from feelings, opinions, ideas, or thoughts (Adiprabowo & Wibowo, 2024). Gangubai Kathiawadi shows the interaction of communication between perpetrators of sexual violence and victims of sexual violence. Interactions, whether exchanging thoughts, feelings, or opinions, exist for deviations such as fraud, bullying, sexual harassment, or violence (Musyaffa. R. A. & Effendi, 2022).

This representation results from a selection process in which one aspect of reality is highlighted, and other aspects of reality are displayed (Prasetya & Rahman, 2020). Representations can be words, images, sequences, stories, and so on, representing feelings, insights, facts, and more in media, language, and communication (Harley, 2010). Representation can be interpreted as a representative action or a representative situation that can represent symbols, images, and everything related to what is meaningful (Kartini et al., 2022). Representation in a film can be interpreted as a process or technique used to represent or convey concepts, ideas, or reality through text, images, video, sound, and

verbal and non-verbal behavior. The media has a vital role in representation because of the presentation and construction of facts for an audience that receives various representations about the world, others, and even ourselves.

Criminality and violence committed by perpetrators are considered a way to resolve a conflict by intimidating and controlling victims. Evil is still a frightening threat to humans in running their lives. Many factors encourage perpetrators to commit crimes, including economic, psychological, educational, and work factors. The impact of physical and verbal violence includes depression, feelings of inferiority, loss of self-confidence, injury, and even an effect on self-image (Nasirin, 2022). Victims of sexual violence will be filled with feelings of resentment, anger, and hatred that were initially directed at the person who harassed them and then spread to objects and others (Fu'ady, 2011). Violence experienced by women is a very inhumane act, where women are entitled to human rights protection and human freedoms in all fields (Zumi & Marpuri, 2022).

Commercial sex workers, abbreviated (PSK), are generally women who are the successors of the family and nation generation, so the existence of healthy women physically, spiritually, and socially is essential (Saputro, 2023). Jobs that rely on beauty and body to make others passionate and serve sex with men for a fee are prostitution or commercial sex workers (Surbakti et al., 2020). Many terms

are used to refer to perpetrators of prostitution, such as prostitutes. However, leaving aside that commercial sex workers (PSK) are immoral acts, they also have human rights that need to be protected.

The phenomenon of sexual harassment against women, especially in the workplace, is increasingly rife. Sexual harassment in the form of seduction, sexual inducements, and even violence is expressed with indirect or overt threats. Sexual behavior that involves threats or warnings is considered sexual harassment, even if it is just whistling. Sexual harassment often occurs due to biological factors that want to be fulfilled. In a society that is still thick with patriarchal culture, power is in the hands of those of the male sex, who are considered masculine, and women, who are regarded as subordinates who can be underestimated and considered feminine (Kurnianingsih, 2015). The existence of a distinction between men and women that is still embraced by the patriarchal society is very detrimental to women; the distinction of status, roles, rights, and behaviors makes women not have the freedom to express their own opinions (Ramadhani & Adiprabowo, 2023).

Overall, Gangubai Kathiawadi's film manages to voice the problems often experienced by prostitute workers who usually get violent. Social issues that spread in the world, such as human trafficking crimes, make it a particular concern for governments around

the world. This film can indeed be made to satire the many crimes and violence experienced by victims, especially prostitute workers who are often underestimated for their human rights. Sexual violence makes victims who are abused get physical and mental injuries.

CONCLUSION

The representation of criminality and violence in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* presents a sign or symbol of crime and violence committed against prostitute workers. *Gangubai Kathiawadi* is a depiction of the reality of social issues that underestimate crime and violence against victims. This is shown by the signs and objects in the film so that there is an interpretive meaning following qualitative descriptive methods with Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis used by researchers.

Gangubai Kathiawadi's film, through signs, objects, and interpretations from Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis, shows the representation of sexual violence received by women. Sexual harassment is shown in the form of catcalling, punching, slapping, and other obtained by women in the film *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. The meaning of the interpretation of the form of criminality and violence in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* is presented by the director neatly, namely with a profound description of makeup, clothing, and setting, especially the acting of the cast. This film is

expected to deal with crime and violence quickly and thoughtfully, not just underestimate the criminality and violence received by victims.

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