

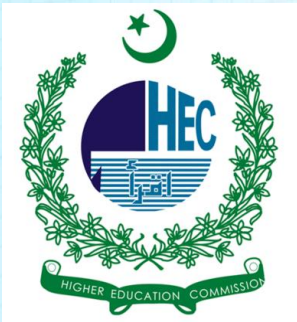
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**Reframing Power through Resistance: A Critical Discourse  
Analysis of Gender in Mirch Masala**



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**Abstract**

Films set in rural contexts reveal how power continues to operate through social hierarchies, gender roles, and cultural practices after political independence. This qualitative study examines power relations in Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1987), analyzing gender hierarchy, colonial legacies, and resistance within patriarchal society. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Film Theory, this study explores how cinematic discourses constructs and challenges major power structures through visual symbolism, character conversation and narrative progression. Using Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model, the study examines micro-level linguistic and non-verbal exchange, meso-level-institutional practices of the authority and control, and macro-level socio-political ideologies that are embedded within the film discourse. Scene-oriented interpretation and thematic coding reveals patterns of domination, submission and defiance, especially focusing on the representation of the collective agency of women against oppressive forces. The findings suggest that *Mirch Masala* not only serves as a story of rural struggle, but also as a discourse of empowerment, defining power as resistance and solidarity. This research underlines the role of visual narratives in shaping public consciousness about gender, class and social justice, demonstrating cinema as a transformative medium of socio-political criticism.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Film Theory, Gendered Power Relations, Patriarchy, Resistance and Solidarity, Women's Collective Agency.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Cinema as Cultural and Ideological Discourse**

Cinema functions as more than entertainment; it operates as a cultural and ideological discourse, comparable to literature (Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith, 2020; Stam, 2017). Like novels, theatre, and poetry, films construct narratives that reflect and reinterpret social realities, human relationships, and institutional structures. However, cinema does not merely mirror society; it actively participates in shaping social consciousness through representation, symbolism, and narrative framing.

As a representational medium, film constructs meaning through characterization,

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dialogue, visual composition, costume, sound design, and spatial arrangement (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). These elements collectively produce ideological messages about authority, gender roles, morality, and social hierarchy. Through such representational strategies, cinema influences how audiences perceive power, obedience, resistance, and identity.

Film scholars argue that cinema should be analyzed as discourse because it produces and circulates ideology (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2020). The study of film therefore involves examining how characters are constructed, how dialogue structures relationships, and how visual symbolism reinforces or challenges dominant norms. Characters often function as ideological agents within the narrative, embodying authority, submission, or defiance. Dialogue reveals relations of dominance and subordination, while silence, interruption, command, and refusal operate as discursive strategies within power negotiations.

Cinema also stages conflicts between authority and resistance. It visually and narratively represents social hierarchies within families, workplaces, and communities, making visible the mechanisms through which power is normalized. At the same time, film provides a space for critique by exposing injustice and dramatizing acts of resistance. Through narrative resolution, symbolism, and collective action, cinema can challenge oppressive structures and reframe marginalized voices (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2020; Stam, 2017; Shohat & Stam, 1994). Thus, cinema may be understood as a discourse of power and resistance. It reflects societal norms while simultaneously offering possibilities for ideological contestation. By analyzing film as discourse, this study examines how power is constructed within human relationships and how resistance emerges from within structured systems of domination.

## **Human Relationships and Social Structures**

Human relationships are foundational to social life. They shape interpersonal connections and organize individuals within families, workplaces, and communities (Giddens, 1984). Relationships can be categorized into various types, including romantic, friendship-based, professional, kinship, and familial bonds.

Romantic relationships are typically grounded in commitment, trust, respect, and emotional intimacy. Friendships may range from formal, limited interactions to close, informal bonds characterized by emotional support and shared experiences.

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Professional or official relationships operate within structured hierarchies and are goal-oriented, often defined by authority and institutional roles (Bourdieu, 1991). Kinship relationships involve siblings and extended family members, while family relationships encompass bonds with parents, blood relatives, and spouses.

However, these relationships are not neutral or purely emotional constructs; they are structured by power dynamics (Giddens, 1984). Within families, workplaces, and communities, authority determines who makes decisions, who speaks, and who complies. Gender, age, social class, and institutional position influence the distribution of power within relationships (Bourdieu, 1991). Thus, interpersonal relationships are deeply embedded within broader social and ideological systems.

## **Conceptualizing Power**

Power, in its general definition, refers to the capacity or authority to influence, control, or govern individuals and institutions. Traditionally, power has been associated with political authority or economic dominance. However, modern theoretical frameworks broaden this understanding.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto* (2023), situate power within class structures, highlighting economic relations and class struggle as primary determinants of domination. From a Marxist perspective, power is fundamentally rooted in material ownership and control over the means of production. In contrast, Michel Foucault reconceptualizes power as diffuse, relational, and embedded within discourse. Rather than viewing power as something possessed by a specific class or institution, Foucault argues that power operates through knowledge, language, and everyday practices. He asserts that power is “everywhere,” not because it dominates everything, but because it is produced through networks of social relations (Sheridan, 1977).

“Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth... the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.” This statement highlights that truth is socially constructed and maintained through institutional validation. Discourses determine what is considered legitimate knowledge and who is authorized to speak. Power, therefore, is exercised through educational systems, administrative structures, family norms, and cultural practices.

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As Gaventa (2003) observes, Foucault recognizes that power is not merely coercive but also constructive and positive within society. This dual nature of power, both oppressive and productive, is central to understanding how resistance emerges within structured systems of domination.

## **Power and Human Relationships**

Power dynamics are deeply embedded in interpersonal communication and social interaction. Although often associated with politics and governance, power operates within everyday relationships, including those between teachers and students, employers and employees, parents and children, and husbands and wives.

In many societies, gendered power relations are particularly visible within family structures. Patriarchal norms may position men as decision-makers while limiting women's autonomy (Walby, 1990; Gill, 2018). Similarly, institutional hierarchies regulate speech, mobility, and access to resources. Thus, relationships are structured by implicit and explicit systems of authority that define who speaks, who obeys, and who resists.

## **Context of the Movie**

*Mirch Masala* (1987), directed by Ketan Mehta, is set in colonial India and centers on the conflict between individual dignity and authoritarian oppression. The film follows Sonbai, a village woman, who resists the advances of the local oppressor, the Subedar. When she refuses his demand to spend the night with him, she seeks refuge in a chili powder factory (*mirch masala kharkhana*), where she initially faces skepticism from the women working there. With their eventual solidarity, Sonbai confronts the Subedar, symbolically asserting collective resistance against patriarchal and authoritarian power.

The central theme of *Mirch Masala* is the assertion of personal and communal agency in the face of systemic oppression. The narrative foregrounds gendered power dynamics and highlights how ordinary individuals can challenge entrenched authority through courage, solidarity, and strategic resistance.

## **Problem Statement**

The movie "Mirch Masala" depicts development of resistance in village women influenced by Sonbai who experienced an oppressive environment where the ruler Subedar used to harass women who had no one for their protection as no one was

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willing to sacrifice his life and taking risk of offending the ruler. This study examines how power relations are discursively constructed and negotiated in *Mirch Masala*, particularly within colonial and patriarchal structures, and how resistance emerges from within these systems.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze how power relations are constructed and contested in *Mirch Masala*, with attention to gender, social hierarchy, and colonial legacy.
2. To examine how acts of resistance and collective agency challenge oppressive power and reflect postcolonial consciousness.

## **Research Questions**

1. How are power relations represented and negotiated among characters in *Mirch Masala*?
2. What do acts of resistance and solidarity reveal about the enduring dynamics of power in postcolonial society?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study is theoretically grounded in Michel Foucault's conceptualization of power and discourse, enriched by postcolonial theory and film and media scholarship. Together, these frameworks provide an interdisciplinary lens for understanding how domination operates through language, representation, institutions, and cultural production, and how resistance emerges within those same structures.

Michel Foucault fundamentally redefined the understanding of power in modern theory. Rather than viewing power as centralized, coercive, or possessed by a sovereign authority, Foucault (1972; 1978) conceptualizes power as diffuse, relational, and productive. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), he argues that discourse is not merely a reflection of reality but a system that produces knowledge, truth, and subjectivity. Discourse determines what can be said, who can speak, and how meaning is structured. Thus, power is embedded within everyday practices, language, and institutional norms.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault demonstrates how modern societies regulate individuals through surveillance, normalization, and disciplinary mechanisms. Power operates subtly through institutions such as schools, administrative bodies, and military systems, shaping individuals into "docile bodies." This regulatory power

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becomes internalized; individuals begin to monitor and discipline themselves according to dominant norms. Foucault's later work, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), further expands this idea by asserting that power is omnipresent because it is produced through networks of social relations. Crucially, he argues that resistance is inherent to power: "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978). Resistance does not exist outside power but emerges from within its structures. This principle is central to understanding how marginalized subjects negotiate domination. Building on Foucault's theory of discourse, Norman Fairclough (1989) integrates these insights into Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), emphasizing that language both shapes and is shaped by social structures. Fairclough argues that discourse functions at three levels: textual, discursive practice, and social practice. Recent developments in Critical Discourse Studies stress the interdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis and its application to media texts as sites of ideological struggle (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Through this framework, power relations can be examined in dialogue, institutional interactions, and broader ideological systems. Thus, discourse analysis becomes an effective method for examining how authority and resistance are constructed in cultural texts, including film.

Postcolonial theory further contextualizes Foucauldian power within imperial histories. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) demonstrates that colonial domination was sustained not only through military and economic control but through representational discourse. Said argues that the "Orient" was constructed in Western narratives as inferior, irrational, and backward, thereby legitimizing imperial rule. Colonial authority was reinforced through intellectual production, literary works, and cultural representations, which shaped perceptions of colonized societies. Said's work aligns with Foucault's assertion that knowledge and power are inseparable (Gordon, 1980). Domination is therefore justified and normalized through narrative framing. Contemporary postcolonial scholars such as Loomba (2015) and Bhabra (2014) further emphasize that colonial power structures persist within modern institutions, epistemologies, and global hierarchies, demonstrating that colonial discourse remains embedded in present social formations.

Extending this critique, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) interrogates the position of the subaltern; those marginalized subjects excluded from hegemonic discourse. In

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her influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak argues that colonized women experience double marginalization: they are silenced by both colonial authority and indigenous patriarchy. Even when subaltern subjects attempt to speak, their voices are often mediated, appropriated, or rendered unintelligible within dominant frameworks. Silence, therefore, is not passive absence but a structural condition produced by systems of exclusion. Spivak’s intervention is crucial for analyzing gendered oppression within colonial contexts, as it foregrounds the epistemic violence embedded in representation.

Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) introduces the concepts of mimicry and hybridity to explain the ambivalent dynamics of colonial power. Mimicry refers to the colonized subject’s imitation of colonial authority; “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). This imitation reinforces imperial dominance while simultaneously exposing its instability. Hybridity, meanwhile, describes the cultural intermixing that disrupts rigid colonial binaries. Colonial authority is thus never absolute; it is marked by contradiction and ambivalence. Bhabha’s theory helps explain how local elites may internalize and reproduce colonial ideologies, sustaining hierarchical systems even in the absence of direct imperial control. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) also criticizes Frantz Fanon’s (1952) notion given in “Black Skin and White Masks”. Leela Gandhi (1998) states that while commenting on Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin and White Masks*, Bhabha announces that in postcolonial discourse memory is important but sometimes “hazardous bridge between colonial and the question of cultural identity”.

While Foucault and postcolonial theorists provide conceptual tools for understanding discourse and domination, film and media scholarship situates these dynamics within cinematic representation. Contemporary film theory conceptualizes cinema as a meaning-making system in which visual style, editing, and narrative form actively construct ideology (Stam, 2017; Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). Dialogue, mise-en-scène, lighting, camera angles, and editing all contribute to ideological construction. Cinema does not merely depict social realities; it actively shapes them. Laura Mulvey’s (1975) theory of the “male gaze” further reveals how mainstream cinema reproduces patriarchal structures by positioning women as objects of visual pleasure. Feminist film theory emphasizes that representation is never neutral; visual

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framing can either reinforce gender hierarchies or challenge them. Recent feminist media research further argues that gendered representation continues to operate through subtle postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that reshape rather than eliminate patriarchal power (Gill, 2018; McRobbie, 2009). Similarly, Shohat and Stam (1994) argue that cinema serves as a site of ideological negotiation in postcolonial societies. Films may reproduce dominant narratives or function as counter-discursive interventions that expose structures of oppression.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives converge on several key insights. First, power is discursively constructed and embedded in everyday practices (Foucault, 1972; Fairclough, 1989). Second, colonial domination is sustained through representational narratives that define the colonized as inferior (Said, 1978). Third, marginalized subjects, particularly women, experience structural silencing within hegemonic discourse (Spivak, 1988). Fourth, mimicry and hybridity reveal the ambivalence and instability of colonial authority (Bhabha, 1994). Finally, cinema functions as an ideological apparatus that produces and contests meaning through visual and narrative strategies (Mulvey, 1975; Stam, 2017).

Thus, this study synthesizes Foucauldian discourse theory, postcolonial critique, and film theory to examine how power circulates through institutional practices, gendered norms, and representational systems, and how resistance emerges within these very structures. By situating cinematic narrative within broader socio-political discourse, the literature establishes a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing power not as a fixed possession but as a dynamic, contested field of relations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative approach. It employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to delve into the film *Mirch Masala* to achieve its research objectives. Postcolonial theory shapes the analysis, particularly Foucault's ideas about power (1989, in Sheridan, 1977). Furthermore, feminist film theory helps examine how the film demonstrates gender and patriarchal norms (Mulvey, 1975; Fairclough, 1995).

Although they come from different academic fields, CDA, feminist film theory, and postcolonial theory are purposefully integrated. Through in-depth analysis of language, interaction and communication, CDA can reveal subtle power dynamics at

the micro and meso levels (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). Specifically, the legacy of colonialism is one of the historical, cultural and ideological contexts in which postcolonial theory places these dynamics (Said, 1978; Loomba, 2015; Bhabra, 2014). Feminist film theory highlights gendered power structures, female agency, and resistance (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2018). In the form of methodological combination, the study provides a multifaceted understanding of social agency, resistance and oppression. This analysis is constructed by examining the enactment of power in particular interactional excerpts and how these acts reflect broader social, historical and gendered hierarchies.

The methodology employs scene-oriented interpretation with thematic coding to identify patterns of domination, silence, and resistance. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA is applied across three levels:

1. **Micro-level** (interaction): Analysis of dialogue, speech patterns, and linguistic choices to reveal character subjectivity, negotiation of authority, and social positioning (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).
2. **Meso-level** (practices): Examination of character actions, behaviors, and social interactions within the narrative context, including institutional or collective dynamics (Bhabha, 1994).
3. **Macro-level** (ideology): Consideration of overarching social, cultural, and colonial ideologies, highlighting how power structures and patriarchal norms shape the film's discourse (Foucault, 2013; Said, 1978).

#### **Analysis via Dialogue**

Characterization through dialogue provides insight into the cognitive and emotional dimensions of characters. Choices in vocabulary, syntax, stress, pitch, pauses, and dialect convey social class, education, and economic background. As Boggs and Petrie (2008) highlight, understanding these linguistic markers is essential to interpret characters' attitudes, motivations, and relational dynamics. This approach enables the identification of power hierarchies, gendered norms, and resistance strategies embedded in speech, and is particularly relevant for analyzing subaltern voices and the negotiation of authority (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994).

#### **Analysis via Actions**

Actions serve as important indicators of character and social interaction. They reveal

underlying personality traits and moral tendencies. Boggs and Petrie (2008) emphasize that character is most authentically reflected through intentional actions. These are intertwined with the narrative progression. The study analyzes the interactions among characters within an oppressive setting. By doing so, it explains the dynamics of resistance, collective agency and social negotiation. This includes challenges to patriarchal control, acts of solidarity and resistance among women. This reflects the concepts of mimicry and hybridity in post-colonial theory (Bhabha, 1994).

### **Integrating Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives**

Feminist film theory guides the examination of gendered hierarchies, stereotyped female portrayals, and patriarchal structures, highlighting how women assert agency and resist oppression (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2018). Postcolonial theory informs the analysis of subaltern perspectives, mimicry, and hybridity, exploring how marginalized characters navigate and challenge historical and social power (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). The combination of these frameworks with CDA provides an integrated and multidimensional analytical lens, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how power is constructed, contested, and collectively resisted in *Mirch Masala* (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

### **ANALYSIS OF MOVIE**

*Mirch Masala* imagines the persistence of colonial and patriarchal power in a post-colonial society. Although the era of colonial rule has formally ended, its traces remain in social hierarchies, individual psyches, and local power structures (Said, 1978; Loomba, 2015). The film depicts how authority is exercised, assimilated and contested, particularly through the characters of Subedar and Mukhi and the resistance put up by women.

#### **Power Relations**

Power in the film is primarily embodied by Subedar and locally reinforced by Mukhi. The Subedar exercises authority through fear and punishment, while the Mukhi, although powerful among the villagers, is ultimately subordinate to him (Foucault, 1989, as cited in Sheridan, 1977). For example:

1. When a villager broke Subedar's vinyl record accidentally, he was brutally beaten and abused (15:40–17:05).

2. Although Mukhi has the power to decide about all the village affairs but he is powerless in front of Subedar. He has no option except of obeying and being submissive in front of the Subedar, as seen when he reached the factory to take Sonbai (1:39:08).

These examples demonstrate the hierarchical nature of power; even local authorities are motivated by fear of the ultimate oppressor. Women, in particular, have limited agency, with little control over education, labor, or social life, reinforcing the male-dominated social order (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2018).

### **Postcolonial Themes**

The film illustrates several postcolonial concepts as theorized by Bhabha (1994):

**Mimicry:** The Mukhi and Subedar replicate colonial authority through arrogance, ridicule, and coercion.

1. Mukhi ignores his brother Mohan's advice about his relationship with Radha (06:29–06:33).
2. He and other villagers mock the professor by throwing a newspaper at his face (07:45–07:54).
3. Mukhi violently reacts when informed of the Subedar's predatory intentions towards women, defending his "belongings" (1:29:39–1:30:20), mirroring Subedar's own enforcement of property rights (e.g., the vinyl record).

**Hybridity:** The film shows how colonial power sticks around, but it also highlights moments of local response. Take Sonbai and the women – they come out in their own way to fight against the Subedar, throwing chilli powder at him (1:55:38). On the other hand, Mukhis and Subedars adopt old colonial strategies to maintain control (Bhabha, 1994).

**Subalternism:** It comes into play in the way of life of the villagers. They lose their basic rights and remain silent even when forced or threatened (Spivak, 1988):

1. The Subedar's men march in and take villagers' food and livestock against their will, but nobody stands up to them (13:04-13:28).
2. Mukhi and the villagers, unable to reach any firm decision about whether to surrender Sonbai, falsely assured the Subedar that they had agreed to send him on the condition that he would never demand another woman, and when questioned about this condition, they placed the blame on the professor, hiding the truth for

fear of punishment (1:34:48-1:36:57).

**Internalized Oppression:** Even someone as influential as Mukhi ends up looking helpless in front of the Subedar (1:39:08). Fear and old hierarchies still run deep, even after formal independence (Foucault, 1989, as cited in Sheridan, 1977). It's like people have become slaves in their own country. They follow orders and keep their heads down, not because they lack power on paper, but because fear keeps them in line.

### **Gendered Oppression**

Patriarchal power significantly governs the lives of women (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2018):

1. **Denial of education:** Mukhi forcibly withdraw his daughter from school, perceiving her education as a challenge to the male power (1:16:08).
2. **Labor and entertainment:** The women are forced to work in the Masala factory (56:13-57:19) and dance to entertain the men, especially the Subedar (25:15-30:06).
3. **Constant surveillance:** Patriarchal norms dictate women's clothing, movements, and behavior, enforcing obedience and limiting freedom. It can be seen where Mukhi was informed by other people about his wife Mukhiyaani enrolling their daughter Munni in school, after which he rushed to withdraw his daughter and also confronted his wife for making such a decision without his consent, considering it a challenge to his authority and a threat to his social standing (1:16:8).

These scenes highlight how power works not only physically but also psychologically and culturally, shaping women's identity and internal compliance.

### **Resistance and Collective Agency**

Resistance emerges when women challenge oppressive power (Sheridan, 1977; Bhabha, 1994):

1. Sonbai's refusal to submit and her act of slapping the Subedar (53:49-55:03) mark the initial rupture in the power structure.
2. Initially, the village women are seen hesitant to act against Subedar and other male figures, but Sonbai's courage inspires collective resistance. It's evident where Mukhiyani alongwith other women can be seen throwing crockery on men in

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order to protect Sonabai, no matter each was beaten up and dragged into the house (1:36:57).

3. In the climactic scene, women pour red chili powder into the Subedar's eyes (1:55:38), transforming a seemingly powerless object into a tool of defiance.

These acts exemplify Foucault's notion that power generates counter-power, showing that resistance can emerge even within tightly controlled hierarchical systems (Foucault, 1989, as cited in Sheridan, 1977).

### **DISCUSSION**

Colonialism refers to a system in which individuals are ruled by an outside authority within their own territory (Said, 1978; Loomba, 2015). The ruler is called the colonizer, while the one who is ruled is called the colonized. This relationship establishes a master-slave dynamic between the two. In colonialism, the colonized population is deprived of its fundamental rights and forced to follow the instructions of the colonizers, their own will becomes irrelevant. This position is called subalternism (Spivak, 1988). Even in the post-colonial period, people often continue to think like the colonizers because their minds remain influenced by colonial ideology. Ancestors who experienced colonial rule transmit these strategies to the next generations (Bhambra, 2014).

In the film *Mirch Masala*, the narrative can be effectively analyzed through Foucault's theory of power (1989, as cited in Sheridan, 1977). It is clear that both Mukhi and Subedar misused power. Mukhi denies her brother the right to choose his life partner, physically attacks the professor when he criticizes Mukhi's authority, and ridicules others (such as the professor). Similarly, the Subedar prioritized his own interests over the welfare of others and ignored the consequences of his people's actions towards the villagers.

Power is also exercised by snatching away the rights of women. Mukhi prevented his daughter from getting an education and reprimanded his wife for facilitating it. Women were forced to dance to entertain the men and were forced to work in a chili factory instead of being allowed to study. This reflects how women were treated as a means to satisfy male desires (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2018).

Power extends beyond physical coercion, influencing the behavior of individuals against their own wishes. Everyone in the village, including Mukhi, remained silent in

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the presence of the Subedar out of fear, so much so that they falsely implicated the professor and pushed him into the swamp. The subaltern influence of power is further illustrated by the fact that, with the exception of the Muslim man Abu Mian, no men were prepared to protect the women (Spivak, 1988). Ultimately, the women themselves protested and overthrew the centurion (Foucault, 1989 as cited in Sheridan, 1977).

The most influential character in the film is that of Subedar. Although the Mukhi has authority over village decisions, he is powerless before the Subedar. The Mukhi acts as a subordinate, even though he is the local ruler (Bhabha, 1994). The psyche portrayed in the film, where girls are viewed as inferior and expected to submit, is still prevalent in modern society. Boys often have greater access to resources and opportunities, even in urban settings, which causes conflict and discrimination among siblings. This demonstrates how power, which influences experiences and social interactions, is both materialistic and intangible. Girls are subjected to submission, whereas boys use dominance to exercise power (Gill, 2018). Despite these destructive consequences, power also inspires resistance, which results in constructive transformation. In film, resistance enables marginalized individuals to achieve autonomy, as demonstrated by rural women (Sheridan, 1977; Bhabha, 1994). Initially, women feared their husbands' subservience and domestic authority, internalized oppression and remained silent. They endured persecution and abuse because they believed they did not have the power to act.

Ultimately, inspired by Sonbai's courage, the women protested. Sonbai's refusal to surrender, her act of slapping the Subedar and her decision to take shelter in the chilli factory exemplify the emergence of agency. The women collectively confronted the Subedar, symbolically claiming autonomy by employing red chilli powder as a tool of resistance. Sonbai's leadership demonstrates how the abuse of power simultaneously promotes the development of counter-power, enabling marginalized individuals to challenge oppression and find liberation (Sheridan, 1977; Bhabha, 1994).

### **CONCLUSION**

Mirch Masala offers a powerful critique of colonial and patriarchal domination in the rural Indian context. Ketan Mehta portrays a society in which individuals, especially

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women, are denied autonomy and the freedom to express their concerns. Since villagers are significantly submissive in raising their voice or act freely under the oppressive power structures, the film portrays the subaltern conditions.

In the movie, power goes beyond coercion and physical violence. It functions by controlling people's attitudes, actions, fears and social interactions. The Subedar's character is centered on power, showing him having absolute control over both men and women as he uses fear as a tool for maintaining his control. While people like Mukhi represent internalized subordination within hierarchical systems. Similar to this, patriarchal power is perpetuated by family structures, which objectify women and turn them into objects of male desire.

However, the film also affirms that resistance is feasible. Portrayed via the Sonbai's defiance and the village women's unity, power is demonstrated as dynamic and relational in the narrative. By creating counter-power, oppression gives gateway to change and agency. *Mirch Masala* characterizes power not only as a mean of domination but also a source for resistance and empowerment. This underlines the potential of cinema as a medium of socio-political criticism and social consciousness.

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