Field versus Studio: Gendered Risk and Emotional Toil upon the Female Protagonist in the Movie Dhamaka

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Abstract

This paper investigates the 2021 Hindi thriller "Dhamaka" to analyze how its female field reporter, Soumya, embodies gendered hierarchies within television news production. The film juxtaposes Soumya's precarious situation on the deteriorating Bandra-Worli Sea Link where she encounters physical peril and emotional toil with the secure studio position of male anchor Arjun Pathak. This contrast positions Soumya as a risk-bearing intermediary who navigates on-the-ground challenges to sustain broadcast ratings and facilitate Arjun's redemption. Soumya's role as female protagonist encompasses victim advocacy, broadcast stabilization, and emotional support for Arjun, yet her contributions remain unacknowledged as the narrative centers on Arjun's plagiarized past and heroic resolution. Drawing on feminist media theory and scholarship on women journalists in Hindi cinema, the analysis demonstrates how "Dhamaka" normalizes Soumya's disposability, reflecting newsroom dynamics where field reporting and emotional toil are relegated to women. Through an examination of key scenes, the study scrutinizes the film's spatial coding, dialogue, and editing that inscribe gendered vulnerability, situating Soumya within established tropes of the precarious female reporter. The paper critiques "Dhamaka" for utilizing Soumya's sacrifice to resolve the male protagonist's crisis without challenging media industry inequalities, thereby contributing to discussions on the representation of journalistic labor and gender relations in Indian cinema.

Introduction

Hindi cinema has long engaged with the journalism profession, portraying reporters as heroic watchdogs, compromised insiders, or satirical caricatures of media sensationalism. Films such as *Noor (2017), Page 3* (2005), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), and *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000) frequently depict newsrooms as sites of ethical tension, where professional ideals clash with ratings pressure, political interference, and personal ambition. Within this rich cinematic tradition, *Dhamaka* 2021, directed by Ram Madhvani, a Netflix thriller starring Kartik Aaryan and Mrunal Thakur, emerges as a timely critique of television news ethics amid terror threats and TRP obsession. The film unfolds in real-time during a live broadcast, centring disgraced anchor Arjun Pathak's moral reckoning when a bomb threat targets Mumbai's Bandra-Worli Sea Link. Critically, *Dhamaka* positions itself as "angry at corrupt politicians... and greedy news media," blending high-stakes action with commentary on journalism's devolution. (*Dhamaka*, 2025; Flatt, 2021; Rajkumar, 2022; Singh & Suman, 2024)

This paper narrows the lens to Soumya (Mrunal Thakur), Arjun's estranged wife and channel field reporter, whose portrayal crystallises the film's gendered dynamics. Sent to cover the crisis from the bridge itself, Soumya embodies the precarious frontline of news-gathering, volunteering amid structural collapse and terrorist demands (IMDb, 2021). Her role introduces a potent field versus studio binary a spatial metaphor for gendered risk distribution in media labour. The studio, Arjun's domain, signifies mediated control, safety, and visibility: glass barriers, multiple screens, and direct audience address afford him authority and

detachment. In stark contrast, the field Soumya's terrain demands embodied immersion: whipping winds, unstable footing, and immediate proximity to violence render her vulnerable, her handheld camera shakes underscoring physical peril. This dichotomy mirrors real-world newsroom hierarchies, where women disproportionately handle risky field assignments while men dominate anchor desks. (Rajkumar, 2022)

Soumya's characterisation reveals her dual function as emotional toil and narrative device, mobilising different feminist critiques of media representation (Khorana, 2012). As emotional toil, Soumya performs "invisible work" sustaining the broadcast: advocating for trapped victims, de-escalating Arjun's on-air panic, and offering personal reassurance drawn from their shared history. Her care stabilises chaos, yet remains unremunerated, naturalised as feminine intuition rather than professional skill. Narratively, Soumya propels Arjun's arc from plagiarist who stole her award-winning story to redeemed truth-teller culminating in her sacrificial death that catalyses his ethical awakening (IMDb, 2021). This erasure of her agency echoes cinematic patterns where women journalists negotiate "professional authority and women identity," often reduced to moral catalysts amid patriarchal newsrooms (Singh & Suman, 2024).

The central theme posits that *Dhamaka* exploits the field/studio binary to encode gendered risk and emotional toil, positioning Soumya as a disposable buffer whose contributions advance male redemption and channel ratings without interrogating structural inequities. This study contributes to the theme of journalism portrayal in Hindi films by dissecting a post-OTT example of "content-driven cinema," where realism amplifies ethical scrutiny (Rajkumar, 2022).

Research questions include:

1. How does *Dhamaka*'s cinematography and mise-en-scène embody spatial risk differently for field (Soumya) versus studio (Arjun), reinforcing gendered vulnerability?
2. In what ways is Soumya's emotional toil care for victims, broadcast support, personal ties mobilised to heighten narrative tension and sustain the male protagonist?
3. How does the film appropriate and erase Soumya's professional history (e.g., her stolen scoop) and agency, subordinating her to Arjun's moral crisis?

These questions enable close textual analysis of key sequences, informed by feminist film theory and gender-media scholarship. By focusing on *Dhamaka*, the paper bridges the gap on "dimensions of journalism" and "societal impact," highlighting how cinema perpetuates newsroom gender norms amid digital disruption. (Mulvey, 1975)

Review of Literature

From the Literature it can be examined that on journalism portrayal in Hindi cinema clusters revolve around three axes: professional archetypes, ethical dilemmas, and gender representation, providing fertile ground for analysing of Soumya's portrayal in *Dhamaka*. From previous studies it can be articulated that journalist characters are portrayed as idealistic crusaders (*New Delhi Times*, 1985) evolving into sensationalists amid liberalisation (*Page 3*, 2005), reflecting media's market turn (Manda, 2021). Ratnam (2013) typologises "patrakar" figures as moral anchors in 1970s-80s films versus compromised insiders post-1990s, a framework *Dhamaka* extends through Arjun's arc but complicates via Soumya's field role.

Ethical critiques dominate these studies, framing Hindi films as mirrors to journalism's crises: TRP race, paid news, and terror coverage. Manda, (2021) charts the "devolution of journalism" in cinema from watchdog (*Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, 1983) to spectacle-driver (*Rann*, 2010; *Peepli Live*, 2010), where anchors commodify crises for ratings a dynamic *Dhamaka* literalises during the sea-link threat. Similarly, Rajkumar (2022), reads post-2010 "content-driven" films as ethical allegories, critiquing star-anchors' moral collapse under corporate pressure, aligning with Soumya's uncredited stabilisation of Arjun's broadcast. These texts highlight newsroom power but underplay gender, treating ethics as gender-neutral despite women's overrepresentation in risky beats (Jha & Giri, 2025).

Gendered analyses fill this gap, positioning women journalists as sites of tension between professionalism and femininity. KHORANA (2012) traces early portrayals of "middle-class career women" navigating doubt and objectification, a trope persisting in liberalisation-era films where women reporters embody vulnerability (*Page 3*; *No One Killed Jessica*). Rajkumar (2022) advance this in "Power, Gender and Journalism in Hindi Cinema," arguing female characters negotiate "dual burdens": field risk and emotional maintenance, often erased for male leads' growth precisely Soumya's function in *Dhamaka*. Their corpus reveals women as "field operatives" versus male "studio authorities," with emotional toil (calming chaos, ethical nudges) naturalised as innate rather than skilled.

Feminist film theory bolsters these insights. Mulvey's (1975) male gaze framework illuminates how Soumya's bridge peril is spectaclised for viewer thrill and Arjun's empathy, her body as "to-be-looked-at-ness" amid crises. Hochschild, (1983) emotional toil concept, applied to media by scholars like North (2016), explains Soumya's victim advocacy and spousal support as alienated work sustaining patriarchal structures. Indian contexts adapt this OTT realism in *Dhamaka,* as this film amplifies "embodied precarity" for women, contrasting studio invulnerability (Verma et al., 2025).

Gaps persist. Archetype studies overlook spatial metaphors like field/studio as gendered signifiers (Ratnam, 2013), while ethics literature gender-blinds TRP logic (Ramnath, 2021). Single-film deep dives on OTT-era portrayals remain scarce, despite *Dhamaka*'s real-time format innovating newsroom realism (Kukreja, 2021). This paper targets the understudied Soumya to bridge gender-media gaps.

Synthesising these, the field/studio emerges as underexplored: studio connotes phallic control (male anchors' gaze), field chaotic embodiment (women's risk-bearing). *Dhamaka* thus intervenes, using Soumya to visualise emotional toil's erasure amid ethical spectacles.

Methodology

This study deploys a qualitative textual analysis of *Dhamaka* (2021) with a deliberate single-film, single-character focus, treating Soumya as a concentrated site where questions of gender biasness, emotional toil, and professional erasure are cinematically negotiated.

Research design and rationale

The paper is designed as an interpretive case study of *Dhamaka*, justified on three grounds.

- First, the film belongs to the recent wave of content-driven, OTT-distributed Hindi cinema that foregrounds newsroom settings and ethical conflict, making it a pertinent contemporary text for journalism-cinema studies.
- Secondly, Soumya is an unusually central woman journalist character, whose arc concentrates around key thematic strands of gendered fieldwork, philanthropy, and narrative disposability identified in existing literature on women journalists in Hindi films.
- Third, a single-film focus allows for granular scene-by-scene analysis of spatial coding (field versus studio), affective registers, and power dynamics, rather than broad but superficial comparisons across many films.

The research is qualitative, interpretive, and theoretically informed, drawing on feminist film theory, gender and labour studies, and prior work on journalism portrayals to guide the reading without reducing the film to mere illustration of theory.

Corpus and units of analysis

The primary corpus consists of *Dhamaka* in its released Hindi-language version, viewed repeatedly with attention to both visual and aural details. Within this text, three clusters of pivotal sequences are defined as core units of analysis:

1. **Soumya's sea-link reporting sequences:** All scenes in which Soumya is present on the Bandra–Worli Sea Link, including her arrival, initial stand-ups, interactions with control room and victims, and responses to escalating danger. These sequences are used to examine spatial embodiment, physical risk, and the visual contrast between field exposure and studio security.

2. **Live exchanges between Soumya and Arjun:** Moments where Soumya and Arjun interact in real time through the live broadcast feed, including professional dialogue, personal undercurrents, and instances where Soumya manages Arjun's on-air affect. These scenes are central for analysing emotional toil, care work mobilisation, and power asymmetry between field reporter and studio anchor.

3. **Soumya's death moment and immediate aftermath:** The build-up to the blast, the depiction of her death on the bridge, and the direct narrative and ethical consequences for Arjun and the channel. This cluster is used to interrogate narrative function and erasure: how her body, labour, and loss are framed in relation to Arjun's moral transformation and the channel's pursuit of exclusivity.

Each of these clusters is treated as a coherent sequence for analysis, while also being read in relation to recurring motifs (e.g., the sea link as a site of labour injustice, the glass studio, and on-screen graphics).

Throughout, the analysis maintains a double focus: on the internal logic of *Dhamaka* as a narrative and on its resonance with real-world media practices identified in studies of Indian television news and gendered newsroom hierarchies.

Analysis 1: Spatial Embodiment and Gendered Risk in Soumya's Sea-Link Reporting Sequences

Soumya's sea-link sequences in *Dhamaka* (2021) construct the field reporter's body as a site of acute physical risk and embodied vulnerability, establishing the field versus studio binary through deliberate spatial and visual strategies. These scenes spanning her arrival on the Bandra–Worli Sea Link, initial stand-ups, control room interactions, victim engagements, and responses to mounting danger visually encode gendered peril, positioning Soumya as the channel's frontline proxy while Arjun remains safely mediated. (IMDb, 2021)

Arrival and initial stand-ups: The field as embodied exposure

Soumya's introduction on the sea link immediately immerses the spectator in chaotic physicality. Unlike Arjun's composed studio entrance (wide shot, steady tracking, warm lighting), her arrival is handheld and unsteady, camera whipping with wind gusts and vehicular vibrations. She emerges from a news van in a practical kurta, hair tousled, clutching a microphone against howling gales markers of unscripted, elemental exposure. Her first stand-up deploys a tight close-up that foregrounds her face against the churning sea and swaying cables, rain lashing her glasses. This shallow depth of field isolates her body from the engineered landscape, emphasising personal precarity over infrastructural grandeur. (IMDb, 2021)

Contrast this with parallel studio cuts: Arjun's medium shots through glass panels frame him as contained authority, his suit crisp, monitors glowing behind. The field's sensory assault diegetic wind roar, metallic creaks, distant horns overwhelms Soumya's audio space, her voice straining for clarity ("We're live from the epicentre"). This auditory chaos codes the field as feminised disorder against studio's phallic control, echoing Rajkumar's (2022) observation that women reporters in Hindi cinema are visually marked by environmental hostility.

Interactions with control room and victims: Risk as relational labour

As danger escalates, Soumya's control room feeds (split-screen with Arjun) reveal her mediating between institutional demands and human peril. Instructing her to "get victim soundbites" while bombs tick, the control room (Ankita's voice) treats her as interchangeable sensor. Yet Soumya kneels beside terrified construction workers, microphone extended gently, her body low and exposed amid debris. Close-ups capture her empathetic tilt eyes locking, hand steadying a shaking arm blending professional duty with care work. Physical risk manifests: a sudden jolt sends cables swinging inches from her head, her flinch caught in real-time (IMDb, 2021).

These moments heighten spatial embodiment: Soumya's low angles from worker POV underscore her shared vulnerability, while overhead drone shots dwarf her against the

bridge's vast suspension. Cutting to Arjun's high‑angle studio oversight reinforces hierarchy his raised platform literally elevates the male gaze surveying her peril. Sound design amplifies this: Soumya's breaths labour over wind, victims' sobs bleed through her mic, contrasting Arjun's clear, amplified enunciation. Her body becomes the conduit for raw affect, bearing risk so the studio can commodify it as "exclusive access."

Escalating danger: The body as breaking point
The sequences peak as Raghubeer's demands intensify, Soumya refusing evacuation: "I'll stay so they can go." Her decision, framed in extreme close‑up (sweat, gritted teeth), marks peak embodiment personal agency fused with sacrificial logic. The camera circles her unsteadily as the bridge groans, foreshadows cracking visible in rack focus from her determined face to buckling asphalt. This visceral tactility rumbling subwoofer lows, screen‑shake positions her flesh as the narrative's risk barometer, unlike Arjun's abstract studio tension (clenched fists, averted eyes).

Gendered coding peaks here: Soumya's maternal framing ("Think of the children trapped") invokes Hochschild's emotional toil, her risk rationalised as feminine selflessness (Hochschild, 1983). Yet the film exploits this for suspense, her exposure generating TRP spikes relayed back to the control room. Compared to male field reporters in films like *No One Killed Jessica*, Soumya's peril intertwines professional daring with relational care, amplifying erasure (Singh & Suman, 2024).

Theoretical implications of the field/studio contrast
Across these sequences, *Dhamaka*'s visual grammar renders the field as feminised chaos unsteady handheld, elemental forces, embodied proximity against studio's masculine stasis (Mulvey, 1975). Soumya's body absorbs environmental and narrative risk, her spatial immersion enabling Arjun's detached authority. This binary not only heightens thriller tension but critiques gendered news labour: women as disposable sensors in the ratings economy, their exposure the unseen cost of mediated spectacle. The sea‑link sequences thus lay groundwork for later emotional toil analysis, establishing Soumya's disposability from the outset.

Analysis 2: Emotional Toil and Power Asymmetry in Live Exchanges Between Soumya and Arjun
The live broadcast exchanges between Soumya and Arjun in *Dhamaka* (2021) operationalise emotional toil as a gendered mechanism for broadcast stabilisation and narrative propulsion, starkly revealing power asymmetry between the field reporter and studio anchor. These real‑time interactions marked by split‑screen feeds, urgent professional dialogue laced with personal history, and Soumya's repeated management of Arjun's on‑air affect position her as affective buffer, her care work sustaining both the telecast's coherence and his faltering authority (IMDb, 2021).

Split‑screen grammar: Visualising relational labour
The exchanges deploy split‑screen as primary visual strategy, dividing the frame between Soumya's chaotic field feed (left, turbulent) and Arjun's composed studio (right, static). This layout mirrors news conventions but encodes hierarchy: Arjun's side dominates with larger real estate, brighter lighting, and central positioning, his face in flattering medium close‑up. Soumya's feed, conversely, shows her strained profile amid wind distortion and shaky signal, her words often overlapping static bursts technical unreliability underscoring field precarity (IMDb, 2021). During a tense victim update, Arjun stumbles ("What's happening there?"), his eyes darting off‑teleprompter; Soumya seamlessly bridges: "Arjun, focus the workers are panicking, we need calm facts." Her steady intonation and directive phrasing stabilise his delivery, her emotional regulation audible over the feed's hiss.

This labour aligns with Hochschild's (1983) definition: managing feeling to create a "publicly observable facial and bodily display" of professionalism. Soumya performs "surface acting" suppressing her own bridge‑side fear to project composure enabling Arjun's "deep acting" as authoritative anchor (North, 2016). The split‑screen makes her work visible yet ancillary, her face shrinking as ratings tick up.

Professional dialogue laced with personal undercurrents

Dialogue layers professional exchange with intimate history, amplifying Soumya's dual burden. When Arjun presses for exclusive details ("Give me something bombshell"), she counters professionally ("Victim names first ethics, Arjun") but slips into personal nudge: "Like that story you... we broke together." This veiled reference to his plagiarism of her award-winning scoop injects relational tension, her forgiveness implicit in continued support. In one charged beat, as bombs arm, Arjun cracks ("I can't do this live"), whispering hoarsely; Soumya, voice softening over public airwaves, responds: "You can. Breathe. For us." The "us" evokes their failed marriage, her emotional toil extending from broadcast to spousal repair, eyes locking across feeds in poignant close-ups.

Camera work here mobilises Mulvey's (1975) gaze: Arjun's pleading stare objectifies Soumya as emotional lifeline, her response framed voyeuristically wind-whipped hair, resolute jaw blending heroic resolve with feminine allure. Sound bridges intimacy: her whispers cut through chaos, stabilising his mic'd baritone, while score swells underscore her as narrative pivot.

Managing Arjun's on-air affect: Care work as broadcast glue

Instances of affect management peak during escalation. Arjun's sweat beads, voice wavers reporting casualties; Soumya interjects from field: "Channel the anger constructively victims need hope, not panic." Her coaching precise, maternal restores his gravitas, ratings graph rising in corner graphic. When control room demands sensationalism ("Push the terror angle"), Soumya deflects toward Arjun ("Tell them the human cost first"), shielding him from ethical compromise while absorbing channel pressure herself.

Power asymmetry crystallises: Arjun wields studio authority (cueing graphics, directing her shots), yet depends on Soumya's field intel and emotional scaffolding. She bears dual load physical danger plus affective maintenance echoing Singh & Suman's (2024), who note women journalists in Hindi cinema perform "invisible relational work" to prop male colleagues. Compared to *Page 3*'s Madhavi, Soumya's labour is hyper-visible via split-screen yet undervalued, her care rationalised as ex-wifely duty rather than expertise.

Theoretical implications: Labour mobilisation and gendered hierarchy

These exchanges mobilise Soumya's emotional toil to service three ends: sustaining live ratings (TRP spikes post her inputs), stabilising Arjun's performance (from falter to flourish), and advancing narrative (their chemistry hints redemption). The studio/field binary enforces asymmetry Arjun's elevated perch surveys her peril, his authority amplified by her unseen toil (Khorana, 2012). *Dhamaka* thus critiques yet exploits gendered dynamics: Soumya's care is the "glue" holding spectacle together, her erasure foreshadowing sacrificial closure. This sets up analysis of her death's appropriation, revealing cinema's implication in normalising women's newsroom disposability.

Analysis 3: Narrative Function, Erasure, and Appropriation in Soumya's Death Moment and Aftermath

Soumya's death sequence in *Dhamaka* (2021) encompassing the build-up to the sea-link blast, her on-bridge demise, and immediate narrative fallout crystallises her role as narrative catalyst and site of professional erasure. Framed to propel Arjun's moral transformation and fuel the channel's exclusivity chase, these moments subordinate her body, labour, and loss to male redemption and corporate logic, completing the film's gendered hierarchy (IMDb, 2021).

Build-up to the blast: Agency framed as sacrifice

The sequence accelerates as Raghubeer demands evacuation delays, Soumya volunteering to remain: "Send the others I'll cover till the end." Cinematography intensifies embodiment: extreme close-up on her resolute face, then pull-back revealing isolation amid panicked workers fleeing past. Wind howls peak, cables whip frames, her kurta clings sodden visual cues of mounting bodily peril. Dialogue layers defiance with foreshadowing: to control room, "This is my story now"; to Arjun via feed, "Finish it right for both of us." This fuses professional claim with spousal

plea, her agency asserted yet tethered to his arc. (Safaya, 2021)

Split-screen fractures: Arjun's studio face fills right half, eyes wide in horror; Soumya's left feed glitches, her signal fraying as she reports final victim pleas. Score builds dissonant strings, her mic capturing laboured breaths over creaking steel. The build-up codes her as sacrificial figure Hochschild's (1983) emotional toil extended to mortal stakes rationalising erasure as noble choice, echoing Hindi cinema's "selfless woman" trope for male growth (Singh & Suman, 2024).

Depiction of death: Spectacle and bodily disposability

The blast erupts in slow-motion spectacle: blinding flash engulfs Soumya mid-stand-up, her silhouette hurled backward, mic tumbling. No graphic gore instead, fiery debris rains, screen shakes violently, her final scream dopplering into static. Cut to Arjun's studio reaction glass shattering symbolically behind him her death refracted through his anguish. The channel logo persists upper-right, ironic overlay on tragedy. (IMDb, 2021)

Framing interrogates disposability: Soumya's body becomes metonym for crisis, her fall intercut with ratings surge graphic (TRPs spike 20%). Mulvey's (1975) gaze objectifies the moment spectator aligned with Arjun's POV, her demise eroticised tragedy rather than autonomous end. Absence of close-up on her final agency (no dying words, just silhouette) erases subjectivity, reducing her to plot device. Compared to male deaths in journalism films (*Rann*), Soumya's lacks heroic montage, her labour's legacy unacknowledged (Manda, 2021).

Immediate aftermath: Appropriation for Arjun's transformation and channel gain

Post-blast, Arjun's breakdown catalyses shift: from ratings-chaser to truth-teller, defying Ankita ("This isn't entertainment it's blood"). Flashback inserts her plagiarised story sting, her death reframing his guilt as ethical pivot he exposes the minister's scam live, her "Finish it right" echoing. Studio erupts in chaos, but his solo anchor shot restores order, her feed blacked out.

Channel pursuit of exclusivity peaks: Ankita demands "milk the exclusive," Soumya's footage looped as "martyr reporter's last words," commodifying loss sans context of her victim advocacy or stolen scoop. Arjun's transformation tears to resolve appropriates her sacrifice; end credits montage her smiling photo over his voiceover redemption, erasure complete. (Budowski, 2021)

Narrative function and gendered implications

Soumya functions as ethical MacGuffin: her body/loss resolves Arjun's crisis, enabling his heroic turn without structural critique. The channel extracts value exclusivity from her peril mirroring TRP ethics *Dhamaka* indicts yet replicates (Rajkumar, 2022). Erasure manifests triply: professional history (plagiarism glossed), labour (care uncredited), subjectivity (death via male POV). This subordinates women's newsroom toll to male narrative closure, perpetuating field/studio asymmetry where studio reaps field's sacrifice (Khorana, 2012; Singh & Suman, 2024).

Conclusion

Dhamaka (2021) methodically reinforces the field/studio binary as a gendered divide, systematically encoding Soumya's exposure, emotional toil, and sacrificial erasure to sustain Arjun's mediated authority and the channel's ratings imperative. Across sea-link sequences, live exchanges, and her death moment, the film's visual grammar handheld chaos versus static enclosure, split-screen hierarchies, slow-motion disposability constructs the field as feminised precarity and the studio as masculine control. Soumya's body absorbs physical risk (whipping winds, buckling bridge), her care stabilises broadcast coherence (victim advocacy, Arjun's faltering affect), and her loss catalyses male redemption (plagiarism guilt to truth-telling), all while the channel commodifies her footage for TRP spikes. This configuration naturalises women journalists as relational buffers whose invisible toil props patriarchal newsroom structures, echoing (Singh & Suman, 2024) findings on Hindi cinema's gendered journalism tropes.

The synthesis reveals *Dhamaka*'s double bind: it indicts television news ethics TRP terror, ethical collapse yet replicates the very hierarchies it exposes. Soumya embodies the profession's

exploited periphery, her field immersion generating spectacle that studio anchors and executives harvest without reciprocity. Feminist readings confirm this as structural: Hochschild's emotional labour (1983) and Mulvey's gaze (1975) converge in Soumya's instrumentalisation, her subjectivity erased for narrative closure. Within Hindi journalism cinema, *Dhamaka* updates archetype evolution (Ratnam, 2013), shifting from glamorous *Page 3* reporters to OTT-era precariat whose disposability sustains ethical critique without resolution.

Implications span cinematic journalism ethics and pedagogy. Ethically, the film unmasks ratings-driven disposability but stops short of structural reckoning, exonerating Arjun through individual heroism while eliding systemic gender inequities mirroring journalism studies' turn from institutional to personal morality critiques (Manda, 2021). For pedagogy, *Dhamaka* offers rich classroom material: screening Soumya's sequences alongside newsroom statistics (women's field overrepresentation) fosters critical media literacy, prompting students to dissect spatial coding, labour extraction, and erasure patterns. Journalism educators can leverage split-screen exchanges to teach emotional labour's toll, connecting cinematic trope to real-world burnout data.

Future research directions include multi-film comparisons, mapping Soumya against *No One Killed Jessica*'s field crusaders or *Page 3*'s Page Three girls to quantify gendered risk prevalence across decades. Audience perception studies surveying media students' readings of Soumya as role model versus cautionary tale would test if cinematic encodings shape professional aspirations or ethical caution. Longitudinal corpus analysis incorporating OTT versus theatrical portrayals could trace digital disruption's impact on field/studio divides, while production interviews with *Dhamaka*'s writers might reveal intentionality behind gendered casting.

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