

***Chiraiya*: Drama, Social Thriller, JioHotstar, 2026, Stars: Divya Dutta Sanjay Mishra , Prasanna Bisht. Directed by Shashant Shah and produced by SVF Entertainment.**

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A Feminist Literary Review

“Shaadi sahmata ka patra nahi hoti.”

Not all stories are mere entertainment; some question the very root of the social fabric. *Chiraiya* is one of those rare cinematic representations that do not come as melodrama but as a moral critique. It challenges the audience to recognise the violence behind marriage with its strong narration that disturbs, unsettles and sometimes puts us in utter discomfort, yet keeps us bound to every scene. It not only conflates patriarchy as an abstract ideology but as a very ordinary domestic practice which is enabled through silence, duty and emotional programming. It is not only a web series, but a feminist literary artefact about modern India. *Chiraiya*, released on 20 March 2026 on JioHotstar, is a six-episode Hindi drama series, written and created by Divy Nidhi Sharma and directed by



Shashant Shah, produced by Shrikant Mohta and Mahendra Soni for SVF Entertainment. Based on the Bengali show Sampurna, the show features Divya Dutta as Kamlesh, along with Prasanna Bisht, Sanjay Mishra and Siddharth Shaw. The series explores the provocative and taboo topic of marital rape, one of the most unacknowledged and unaddressed forms of domestic violence in India.

Both critics and viewers have argued that *Chiraiya* effectively exposes the myth that sexual access is legitimised by marriage, and how marriage is often misused to excuse coercion in the name of duty. *Chiraiya* (a small bird), the very name serves as a metaphor for a fragile creature that is loved as long as it is ornamental and captive and is praised for its soothing,

meek chirping, but is not permitted to fly beyond its captive walls. Thus, this is the metaphorical status of the Indian wife in patriarchy. They are worshipped as Devi for their inherent qualities like sacrifice and selflessness, and are expected to fall in line with their male counterparts.

Plot Construction and Domestic Realism

The drama is set in the typical setting of an Indian middle-class family where propriety, custom and silence govern social relations. Kamlesh seems like the perfect daughter-in-law; she is obedient, malleable and passive. She carries out her wifely duties unobtrusively and is the social ideal of feminine virtue. But this picture of normalcy is disturbed by Pooja, her newlywed sister-in-law. Pooja speaks of the violence of her wedding night, the rape that is veiled by the socially acceptable discourse on the wedding night and a woman's rights. Her experience is not seen as an aberration but as part of a larger system in which women are forced to give up their bodies and words, and to fight for legitimacy. What is most upsetting about the story is that the family is not concerned with justice, but with the so-called social-familial reputation. We come to the conclusion that a crucial matter like consent is trivial in the face of ostentation. Ironically, the husband is not a ruthlessly complex masculine figure, but a respectable member of society. What attracts our attention is the normalcy he maintains regarding the incidents, which makes it all an act of crime on his part. The patriarchy in this case is not external; it is internal, where the chief of the family, who all the time talks of right and wrong, forgets in a moment when it comes to women's independent say in matters like 'mutual consent'. The greatness of the series is in the unspectacular nature of suffering. It is the silence that is violent, making the domestic environment unsettling. It is not a question of whether it is wrong; we know it is. The question here is why? Despite the knowledge that it actually is, we still don't want to call it violence because it takes place in the context of marriage.

Feminist Thematic Framework

Chiraiya is a radical feminist work that rejects the patriarchy that a woman's body belongs to her husband after marriage. The series suggests consent is not a ritual formality but a precondition for human dignity. Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" can be applied to the behaviours these women demonstrate regardless of their ancestry. They all are portrayed as obedient, silent and sacrificial beings. In *Chiraiya*, the wife is considered as daughter-in-law, mother and purveyor of honour, but very rarely as an individual. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* states that, to be free, one needs "a room of one's own". Pooja possesses neither, her bedroom is not a haven, but rather an invasion. Her muteness is not shyness; it is protection. The series also shows how

patriarchy is not only maintained by men but by institutionalisation. Bell hooks calls to mind that "Patriarchy has no gender". Women can also act as gatekeepers of oppressive practices in support of an honour code. Hence, *Chiraiya's* marital rape is not only physical, but also psychological colonisation.

Kamlesh as a Round Character

The Dynamic Heroine Kamlesh is one of the most exciting feminist heroines of recent Indian OTT stories because she is not a heroine from the very beginning. She is ordinary and thus, universal. Adopting E.M. Forster's terminology from *Aspects of the Novel*, Kamlesh is most certainly a round character who develops in moral complexity. As a young woman, Kamlesh is a typical "good woman", a compliant, controlled and timid. She doesn't challenge patriarchy at first because she has internalised it. Her journey towards feminism is slow, agonised, and realistic. She transitions from passive to active, from subservient to aware. This development is according to the genre of the 'bildungsroman' (novel of development), where change is from within out. Like the heroines of feminist novels, Kamlesh knows that silence doesn't maintain peace; it maintains patriarchy. As a result, she does not rebel, but she does realise. She is no longer the victim but the observer and commentator of patriarchy.

Intertextual Analysis with Heroines of the Past

From passivity to protest, Kamlesh is part of a strong lineage of literary and film heroines who embark on their journeys within beautifully adorned domestic prisons and eventually come to realise the violence embedded in their walls. Her story is similar to Nora Helmer's in *A Doll's House*. Nora seems to live in the ideal home, but her husband's sweet words, "my little skylark", "my squirrel" demean her. Kamlesh too lives in a home where compliance is valued, but individuality is sacrificed. The great Nora slam door of the last act became one of feminist literature's most iconic. Kamlesh's act of rebellion is more subtle. In refusing to accept violence, Kamlesh slams her own door. If Nora declares, "Before all else, I am a human being", then Kamlesh realises this truth in her conscience. Here comes another example of the kind with the film *Thappad*. In this film, Amrita's words "Bas ek thappad... par nahi maar sakta" make a political slap. In *Chiraiya*, the violence is more invisible as it is legalised in marriage. Amrita's resistance is against visible violence; Kamlesh's is against invisible violence. Both raise the point that suffering is not virtuous. Kamlesh also bears some similarities to Jaya from *That Long Silence*. Jaya's silence is imposed. She realises that in order to bring peace to the home, women must disappear. Kamlesh starts with the same conviction, taking silence as wisdom. Yet they both realise silence is only a cover for violence and not for peace. So, Kamlesh is beside Nora's door, Amrita's refusal, Jaya's silence. Certainly, not a repetition, but a

continuation. She is a part of the feminist lineage of heroines from acquiescence to articulation.

Social Role of the Dialogues

The dialogues of *Chiraiya* are effective because they are not "theatrical". They come from everyday realist domesticity and hence have an impact. Patriarchy is not necessarily opposed through big statements like "ghar ki izzat," "shaadi ka farz" or "samaj kya kahega." The line "Shaadi sahmati ka patra nahi hoti" is not just dialogue, but social activism. It upends the legacy of marriage, effectively putting consent on hold. Like Nora's declaration of person, Amrita's refusal in *Thappad* or Jaya's agonised silence in the face of silence, Kamlesh's dialogue is a gesture of political defiance. These words are not adornments; they are insurgent. They make cinema an ethical issue.

Cinematic Language and Social Effect

Chiraiya's cinematography heightens the claustrophobic space of the house. Windows, doors, and even dining rooms are shut and dark, suffocating with bed as a site of horror. The house itself is a metaphor identifying a beautiful and glamorous outside, a claustrophobic inside. The series doesn't use music, but silence is used to effect. The impact of silence is greater than the effect of music here, and this technique maintains the dignity of the topic, and leaves discomfort unsanitised. Such a film has a big social impact. In broaching the topic of marital rape, *Chiraiya* deals in a realm that can be difficult for law and culture to navigate. While some applauded it as a productive discussion, others dubbed it "anti-men." Such a reaction is evidence of the need to discuss the issue. A film is not always successful if it makes us feel good, but sometimes it achieves the aim if it makes us feel bad by raising crucial questions. So the films such as *Chiraiya* have an educational role. It shows us that marriage is not a possession, silence is not acquiescence, and suffering is not a sign of commitment.

Audience Reception and Critical Response

The most potent feature of *Chiraiya* is the way it resonated with viewers, emotionally and politically. The series was not just a viewing experience, but also a conversation and an emotion that was experienced, especially by women who identified with the silences of Kamlesh. The story was lauded for drawing attention to the taboo topic of spousal rape and emotional abuse that occurs in the socially sacrosanct institution of marriage. *Chiraiya* confronted the audience with the reality that law often sanctions oppressive practices, rather than liberates and emancipates. Critics praised the symbolism of spatial relations and the absence of melodrama. The heroine was not considered passive but rather a literary trope that inexorably became ethical resistance. There were also some criticisms of the film from a

conservative audience upset by the challenge to traditional family life. As feminist scholar Bell Hooks writes, "Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion". *Chiraiya* fulfils that function of communication by publicising private pain.

Conclusion: From Victimhood to Voice

Chiraiya is not just a social drama, but a feminist literary work that converts domestic realism to confrontational realism. It reveals the violence behind ritual, law and family honour, and it places the spectator in a position where they can face the injustices of this world. Kamlesh is a heroine because she is ordinary. She is not heroic because she fights back; she becomes powerful because she finds a voice. Her life is a great epitome of feminist literature, from muteness to speech, from role to person. As Kamlesh finally realises, "Main toot nahi rahi... main samajh rahi hoon. This realisation is very significant from a feminist point of view, because it turns pain into knowledge. It breaks through the popularly held perception that a woman who rejects marital exploitation is hysterical; rather, it claims intellectual awakening of being a dignified self.

Finally, the message of the series is not to become a captive bird, but to learn to sing your own music and choose your sky to fly.

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