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From Passion to Possession: Reading the Male Gaze in *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*

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Abstract:

In Bollywood, the whole question of the male gaze keeps resurfacing—partially because certain films lean so heavily into obsession and dominance while calling it “love.” The title of the paper, “From Passion to Possession: Reading the Male Gaze in Kabir Singh and Animal” gets at what it is trying to do: trace how Kabir Singh (2019) and Animal (2023), turn masculinity into something shaped by exaggerated desire, almost like the camera itself is breathing down the protagonist’s neck. What the paper is essentially doing—though, maybe not without its own blind spots—is looking at how Sandeep Reddy Vanga stages this gaze in both films. And it is not just about what looks sexy on screen; it spits into the psychological and cultural stuff that ends up shaping how men and women are expected to feed, react, or even exist in the story. In each film, the lead men —Kabir and Ranvijay—treat love as a kind of territorial claim. The women who surround them evolve into satellites that move around their moods instead of people with their own gravitational pull. So, the argument is that these depictions don’t just show patriarchy; they support it by making passion feel more like ownership. Mulvey’s idea of the male gaze still works here. The visuals, the plot’s structure, and even the sentimental outline of a scene all work jointly to generate a charged environment where masculine authority looks normal and female agency is gradually taken away. Laura Mulvey’s theoretical approach helps reveal how visual pleasure in these two films is guided by masculine desire, situating women as passive recipients of attention, love, and even violence. This research paper also disposes both films within broad Indian cinema trends that celebrate defective male characters while ignoring female subjectivity. It emphasises how emotional vulnerability in these two films is wired in violence. The male gaze in these popular films continues to evolve, but remains deeply rooted in patriarchal desire. The conclusion of the paper highlights the need for remaining the visual language of love and masculinity in Bollywood to promote emotional equality and mutual respect. Finally, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion about gender portrayal in post 2010, Indian cinema, offering a evaluative reading of male, emotionality, visual subjectivity, and audience complexity in sustaining toxic gender stereotypes under the pre-takeoff, love and realism.

Keywords: Male Gaze, Bollywood Cinema, Toxic Masculinity, Passion and Possession, Cinematic Techniques

1. Introduction:

In Indian society, the Bollywood cinema has long been a mirror reflecting the changing cultural ideologies. Yet, despite this evolution, the representation of stereotypical gender roles often remains deeply confined within patriarchal frameworks. The Indian director Sandeep Reddy Vanga, in both of his films, *Kabir Singh* (2019) and *Animal* (2023), has generated intense discussion about glorifying masculinity and romanticising controlling behaviour under the tag of passion. The main idea of this study, "From Passion to Possession: Reading the Male Gaze in *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*", highlights how these two films use the language of love, desire, and male aggression to reinforce the cultural dominance of the male gaze while normalising emotional abuse.

Laura Malvey's significant idea of the male gaze shows a critical foundation for interpreting these narratives. In Laura Malvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", she asserts that the Bollywood mainstream media fixes women as spectacles—to be looked at, admired, or controlled—while men assimilate agency, power and narrative direction. This theoretical approach becomes particularly relevant in evaluating the character arcs of Kabir Singh and Ranvijay Singh, who understand the full emotional film and identity not through mutual affection, but through mastery over the women in their lives. In both films, passion operates as a tool of control, transforming intimate relationships into spaces where dominance is created as devotion and submission as love.

Critics such as Joshi and Arya have argued in their paper "Polarities in Gender Representation – *Kabir Singh* and *Thappad*" that "*Kabir Singh* formalised toxic masculinity by portraying its protagonist's fascination and violence as a symbol of sincerity and debt," accelerating how the film normalises these traits as markers of emotional authenticity (9). Close-up shots of Preeti underscore her quietness, submissiveness, and shyness, characterising her as a projection of male desire instead of an autonomous individual. The *Animal* uses this kind of visual reasoning on a much larger scale in the same manner. The protagonist, Ranvijay Singh, exhibits a state of hyper-regression, characterised by weighted emotional intensity—a man torn between familial duty, neglect, and love. Some critics argue that Vanga's negative depiction of "alpha masculinity" is problematic because it portrays physical dominance as the measure of a man's worth and identity (Chakravorty et al. 83-91).

The director of these two films establishes a visual continuity where the male character not only frames representation but also regulate the viewer's moral alignment. The public is led to commiserate with violent or flawed characters, personifying their violation as expressions of love or the result of past trauma. This research contends that the consistent glorification of such characters reflects Bollywood's unresolved conflict between modern notions of love and traditional patriarchal values. The conception of the male gaze advocates that these images deliver not just as a cinematic device but was contemplation of deeper social and cultural issues rooted in love, control, and power. This study reevaluates how *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* challenge conventional Bollywood norms by

operating masculine desire into an insistence of power, where passion deliberately evolves into possession.

2. Literature Review:

Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" declared and circulated the perception of the male gaze. It is a fundamental approach for examining how visual narratives perform separation in gender and power relations. She confronts that mainstream Bollywood films embrace a male-oriented prospect, diminishing women to mere visual spectacles while positioning men as the effective turnout and agents within the narrative. Grounded in psychoanalytic and feminist film theory, this approach on screen into spectacles, escalating their physical presence rather than their feelings or inner experiences. (Mulvey 22-34;).

Bollywood reinforces key elements of media representation and perpetuates gender stereotypes through explicit as well as subtle visual strategies. According to scholars like Kharat and Joshi, Bollywood's tendency to portray women as docile, compliant, and primarily decorative has profound effects on audience attitudes and broader cultural tensions. Examining the narratives of both classic and contemporary films reveals that character interactions and camera techniques collectively diminish the individuality of female characters, depicting them more as instruments in advancing the male protagonists' emotional arcs than as fully developed individuals. The dominance of genres such as romance and action, which prioritise the male characters' pursuit of fulfillment while undermining female agency, further reinforces this pattern (Kharat 12; Joshi 45).

Kabir Singh and *Animal* are examples of the persistence of these visual conventions. In both films, the protagonist embodies extreme versions of transforming love, relationships and subjugating masculinity into struggles for authority and emotional possession. For the movie *Kabir Singh*, some critics claim that the film normalises immoral behaviour—verbal abuse, physical violence, and persistent courtship—and masks them as passionate gestures of love. The director of the film rarely gave voice to the female character, Preeti. Instead, she is largely confined to the margins of the narrative, serving as a silent and suffering with Kabir's emotional volatility.

Conceptual discussions around *Animal* have built on this work, especially concerning the progression of the male gaze to accommodate new forms of hyper masculinity and aggression. The central figure in the movie *Animal*, Ranvijay Singh incorporates even more violent and self-destructive model of manhood than Kabir Singh. Studies indicate that the film praises hegemonic masculinity: rampage, separation, and emotional repression are valorised, while the Department of female characters-mothers, sisters or partners-is a systematically weakened or erased. The scholastic literature recognises the pattern as a constant problem in contemporary Indian Cinema.

Recent reviews of several articles and essays pays attention to the impact of these portrayals on public discords. Movies such as *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* have raised controversy and discussion on

social media and in the print media, with actors themselves sometimes expressing regret for being a part of such projects deemed misogynistic or harmful. These debates illustrate the intersection of creative responsibility, audience, complexity and industry economics. Despite this, *Kabir Singh* was an economic blockbuster—an outcome that, critics claims, speaks volumes about the market, the appeal of toxic masculinity, and the consistent allure of the male gaze in the Bollywood cultural imagination.

To uncover these trends for them, it is also important to reference Indian feminist theorists and critics. Shoma Chatterji and Meenakshi Shedde, among others, have indicated the continuous relationship between media representation and society expectations: what seems on screen not only mirrors but also often expands cultural stories of desire, compliance, and control (1-216; 1453-1457). The literature reviewed establishes three interconnected dynamics: the conceptual foundation of the male gaze, the insistence of gender stereotypes in Indian cinema, and the real- world outcomes of these representations. Movies, such as *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*, serve as stern reminders of how passion can be weaponised into “possession” and how media acts as both a mirror and a decay gender politics in India.

3. Analysis and Discussion: The Male Gaze and Cinematic Power Structures:

In the movies *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*, the director Sandeep Reddy Vanga transforms the male gaze into both stylistic device and a moral compass that shows the narrative ethos. The leading figures of these films—Kabir Rajdheer Singh and Ranvijay Singh—incorporate the feminist theorist’s term “hegemonic masculinity,” which combines emotion repression, aggression, and preparation into a romanticised ideal of manhood. The camera constantly privileges, their perspective, turning women into extensions of male suffering and verifying Mulvey’s contention that visual pleasure “is structured around the male’s gaze of control” (Mulvey 22-34).

3.1 The Case of *Kabir Singh*: Visual Possession and Emotional Control:

The central scene that highlights male gaze manipulation in the movie *Kabir Singh* occurs early in the narrative when Kabir Singh first encounters Preeti on the college campus. The visual emphasises his gaze through a slow, unilateral tracking shot that follows Preeti's movements without offering her perspective. As Mulvey described, Preeti’s silence, juxtaposed against his assertive body language shows her adhering to her role as the "courier of meaning, not the maker of the meaning”.

The “slap scene” in the movie, the most debated, where Kabir slaps Preeti during an argument, further visualises male dominance. This framework places Kabir is at the core, while Preeti’s reaction is shattered through over-the-shoulder cuts—a cinematographic tactic that diminishes emotional subjectivity while spotlighting his tension. Some colleges argue that this structure technique indirectly favours , saying view words to empathise with Kabir's outrage rather than Preeti's humiliation, creating what Nikhat Perveen finds as a “spectacle of toxic intimacy” that confuses violence with passion

(Perveen 44-46). Kabir Singh constantly calling Preeti “meri bandi” (my girl) shows his possessive language and his ownership-driven view of love. The movie’s visual attitude reflects the same power dynamics often portraying Preeti from behind Kabir’s shoulder, symbolically seen through his eyes. Furthermore, the film’s closing sequence—where acceptance occurs without sincere apology—demonstrates how Indian cinema narratives often acquit male lawbreakers through emotional justification.

The movie’s ending scene, where Kabir and Preeti reunify after a protracted dissolution, is critical for comprehension the self-control inherent within the narrative. Particularly, Kabir proposes no acknowledgement of his misconduct during the whole duration of the movie. Alternatively, the receptiveness between the couple is implicit and chiefly mediated through Kabir’s emotionalism, which glorify hardships, forgiveness, and conciliation (Joshi 9). In this sequence, Kabir promises Preeti: “Ab kabhi dard nahi dena tujhe, meri bandi” (I will never hurt you again, my girl). This possessive vocabulary, possessed, concurrently situations self-possession as a form of forgiveness while evading responsibility for past violence and compulsion. The movie thus shares in a wide heritage of bollywood media, where male offenders are vindicated through fascinating representation of regret and love, efficiently ignoring violence as part of masculine passion and intense intricacy (Rangan). Cinematically and narratively, the ending outcome authorises male possession and self-control as conventional factors of exotic partnerships, formalising toxic masculinity. The camera often frames the couple closely together, highlighting harmony but abolishing the control inequalities and trauma nourished by Preeti. The narrative cessation thus justifies patriarchal ideals that compare patriarchy and intense supremacy with exotic accomplishment while reducing the intentness of offensive control. This scene summarizes how *Kabir Singh* engages the male gaze to formulate toxic masculine possession, inserting it flawless within expressive validation. Feminist critiques have sagged this as a precarious narrative that threatens celebrating dangerous gender ethics in pop culture (Perveen 44-46).

3.2 The Case of *Animal*: Hyper-Masculinity and the Institutionalization of Violence:

As in the movie, *Kabir Singh* portrays desire as domination; *Animal* converts domination into moral destiny. The patriarchal conditioning that creates toxic masculinity expands through the father-son relationship. Ranvijay's aggression, though condemned verbally, is continuously glorified visually through hero framing (low angle), shots, slow-motion entries, and orchestral crescendos. The pivotal scene in the movie highlights this when Ranvijay, after surgery, react to his wife, Geetanjali's concern by remarking, “I will slap you like I like to slap men.” This dialogue, which grotesquely erases distinctions between intimate care and violence, is followed by a show transition to Geetanjali's soft expression as he plays their moaning audio through earbuds, suggesting sexual memory as a pacifying force. Some critics argue that this outcome is where Vanga's visual confuses eroticism with control,

framing female submission as emotional resolution.

In the final fight sequence, where Ranvijay massacres enemies to reconcile with his father, this logic of emotional redemption through violence is extended. As the film reviews have noticed, even the soundtrack (“Papa Meri Jaan”) transcends familial neglect into justification of hyper-regression. Sandeep Reddy Vanga eyes romanticises and male trauma as the utmost key to relational healing, effectively centering toxic masculinity as both the injury and the weapon. Additionally, in an outlining courtroom setting in *Animal*, Ranvijay faces his family and the legitimate network with determined anger and communicative compel that incorporates his toxic masculine identity. The scene is cinematically produced with close-ups on Ranvijay’s burning voices and low-angle shots that promote his appearance as an unconquerable alpha male (Vanga 01:57:30–02:00:00). During the quarrel, he proclaims: “Mai janta hu tune ah tak jo kuch bhi kiya hai vo isliye kiya kyonki andar se tu ek criminal hai or kuch phi sahi nahi hai Baba” (I know everything you’ve done; you did because inside you are a criminal, and nothing is right, father) (*Animal* 01:58:15–01:58:35). He condemns the hollowness of familial counterfeit and affirms his volcanic vengeance as justified and required: “jitne bhi gale katne mere naan par kaat le mai janta hu, 20 saal pale ahi yeh sad the na?” (Cut anyone’s throat in my name, I’m aware, this has been going on for 20 years, hasn’t it?) (*Animal* 01:59:00–01:59:20). Visually, the scene unites hostility, swift cuts, and an anxious background music to celebrate Ranvijay’s brutality as a bold approach against corruption and familial treachery. The rhetorical battle reflects his belligerence in dominant scenes, advocating violence as an institutionalized technique for conserving masculine pride and authority. This sequence underscores toxic masculinity’s entrenchment within social and legal institutions, portraying violence as not only excusable but necessary for relational and moral order.

Throughout *Animal*, Geetanjali’s personality is constantly cinematically captured within decorative framework or understated lighting, bolstering her domination within the male gaze. Her narrative function as motivator and passionate reporter for Ranvijay further institutionalizes patriarchal binaries of power. To instance, when Geetanjali support Ranvijay throughout his panic attacks, the camera drags on her caring face while her voice-over frames his susceptibility as a manhood crisis to be arranged or conquer (Vanga). Generally, these scenes strengthen how *Animal* compose ultra-masculine as a standardised cinematically produced network of brutality and power. The movies’ harmonious and coherence strengthen toxic masculine identity through a cyclical portrayal of trauma, aggression, and suppressed fragility, formalised as essential to male identity.

4. Research Gap:

Existing scholarship on *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* has largely focused on themes such as toxic masculinity, violence, and patriarchal structures. However, these studies often overlook the specifically visual and affective dimensions through which the male gaze operations. This gap points

to the need for further inquiry into how visual style and emotional appeal sustain gendered power relations on these films. Most existing studies focus on narrative structures, character psychology, and the social implications of these films. They tend to interpret them mainly as representations of hegemonic or toxic masculinity, rather than examining in detail how cinematic techniques translate passion into possessive ways of looking and shape spectatorial alignment. There is a notable lack of research that brings together by Mulvey, with recent studies on masculinity and spectatorship. Few analyses demonstrate how elements such as camera movement, framing, shot duration, and soundtrack in Vanga's films work to construct the heroine as an object of "passionate" possession. Most comparative analyses of *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* either examine the films independently or link them only through broader discussions of discourse and controversy. What remains largely absent is a detailed, scene-by-scene comparison that focuses on the gaze and explores how desire, control, and punishment are visually articulated. There is also a lack of empirical research that connects audience reactions- such as enjoyment or discomfort—to identifiable viewing patterns. A study entered on "From Passion to Possession" therefore addresses a crucial gap by connecting formal visual analysis, male gaze theory, and audience reception within a comparative framework.

5. Findings:

While wide research has been regulated on the male gaze and its prevalent influence in global and Bollywood cinema, several research gaps remain possible when interrogating specific concurrent Indian movies like *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*. These findings show the need for further nuanced research that moves beyond wide critiques of toxic masculinity and cinematic objectification to concentrate on intersecting psychological, cultural and viewer-based perspectives. This study highlights corners that require scholarly attention to strengthen the agreement of male gaze dynamics in contemporary Indian cinematic texts. First, there are many researches concentrate on visual and feminist viewpoints of male gaze theory, there is a scarcity of study interrogating how these movies involve with psychological complexities. This study highlights how male protagonists whose emotional weakness are fused with debate impressions. In both movies *Kabir Singh* and *Animal*, the central figures are men whose personal identities are influenced by the impact of traumatic expressions, the guidelines or pressure form a family regarding behaviour or achievements, and society's perception of masculinity. Nevertheless, scholarly discussion has constantly reduced these representations of mere intensification of toxicity, not exposing the subtle psychological dynamics that drive this character. Unique research might evaluate more deeply how these furious contradictions influence people's reactions, their benevolence and their perceptions of men's mindset. A more nuanced view would provide an intense understanding beyond simply categorizing masculinity as good or bad, recognising the complexity and variety in masculine identities and expressions.

Second, highly existing study strikes the male gaze mainly as an oppressive cinematic system;

however, little attention has been given to evaluating the industrial, commercial and economic mechanisms that perpetuate these visual gatherings. Films like *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* relish significant corporate achievement, potentially due to their complicate representations of gender. Examining the functions of producers, celebrity culture, consumer behaviour, and marketing strategies may assist uncover why masculine myths continue to experience. Understanding these organised portrayals will help to establish the male gaze within the wide media economy, shifting the concentrate from morally textual analysis to huge structural examinations of Bollywood media.

Eventually, the relative aspect of how the male gaze is portrayed around different genres and by varied film makers in contemporary Indian film industry remains underdeveloped. Although *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* share the same director and explore similar themes, there remains significant scope to compare how the male gaze and male subjectivities evolve or remain consistent in other popular films—particularly those directed by women, those that focus on women’s perspectives, or those that explore different forms of masculinity. Such as comparative inquiry would highlight visual innovations or acts of resistance, thereby enriching feminist film criticism by incorporating a diverse range of artistic styles and ideological perspectives. Hence, future scholarship on the male gaze in Indian cinema must move over static textual analysis to cradle view diversity, psychological nuance, economics industry and comparative genre study. Managing these research gaps will furnish a more comprehensive understanding of hoe male gaze rehearsals use, nurture, and convert within India’s developing cultural and visual landscape. By doing so, it can unlock pathways for more impartial and critical remarks on gender and visuality in one of the global’s biggest film industries.

6. Conclusion:

The evaluation of *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* reinforces how Sandeep Reddy Vanga cinema turns into a repository of toxic masculinity and the visual politics of the male gaze. Both movies intentionally blur the line between passion and possession, preparing a psychological plan in which authority, violence, and fascination are mistaken for emotional truth. The protagonists of these movies occupy worlds where passion becomes a shield and women become reflectors of male trauma. This visual narrative not only normalizes patriarchal domination but also elevates aggression as an acceptable form of male expression, affirming Laura Mulvey’s idea that Bollywood privileges “the gaze of the male subject” (Mulvey 22-34).

Through in-depth study of major scenes, it becomes visible that the cinematic language constantly favours the male’s emotional arc. In the film, *Kabir Singh*, Preeti's silence and obedience serve as cinematic quotes for devotion; the visual framework of Preeti as passive and delicate, while Kabir's brutal outbursts are visually romanticised as signs of pain and passion. In *Animal*, similar approaches enhance run Vijay's violence into a moral inheritance rather than a behavioural flow. The hyper-stylised slow-motion fight sequences, turn equal into spectacle, suggesting that fertility is

synonymous with heroic masculinity. Concurrently, both films portray regressive gender template where women are not agents of emotion but objects of redemption. Finally, the study claims that Sandeep Reddy Vanga's cinematic storytelling properly reaffirms the historical gender binary, where men act and women absorb. Yet the hypercritical response to both films signifies a shifting discord: audiences, particularly younger women, and feminist scholars are beginning to question this inherited visual gaze. Indian cinema should unfold from composition to consciousness, reviewing love as reciprocity rather than worship. Hence, Bollywood Cinema might finally displace passion with partnership and possession with understanding.

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