




# “...Just Needed some Money to Break Free from there”: Multimodal Analysis of Urban Women in Film

Nurdini Tsabitul Chusna<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> School of Liberal Arts, India Institute of Technology Jodhpur, India  
chusna.1@iitj.ac.in

**Abstract.** This article delves into the representation of urban women in the Indian film *Crew*, which intricately depicts the lives of women employed as flight attendants. It explores the dual burdens these women face, balancing demanding careers with family obligations, amidst the broader pressures of urban life in Mumbai. The central inquiry of this article is: What are the images and visuals of urban women in Bollywood film? And how does *Crew* contribute to and reflect upon gender discourse? Employing the multimodal discourse analysis research method and Rick Iedema's six-level tele-filmic analysis within a qualitative exploratory framework and gender discourse, this study comprehensively examines the film. The findings indicate that the gender discourse surrounding urban women has several key themes. These include the responsibility of being the family's primary support system, the societal expectation to maintain an attractive and elegant appearance, and the necessity of securing a prestigious job that brings pride to the family. Through its narrative and visual storytelling, *Crew* offers a nuanced commentary on the complex intersection of gender, work, and societal expectations in the lives of urban women in contemporary India. This film serves as a poignant lens through which the multifaceted lives of urban women are examined. The portrayal of flight attendants is particularly significant, as it sheds light on the specific challenges women face in this profession. These challenges are compounded by the pressures of adhering to societal standards of beauty and elegance, which are often amplified in the urban context of Mumbai. Furthermore, the film underscores the pressure on women to attain and maintain prestigious employment to meet familial and societal expectations. This article, therefore, provides a thorough analysis of how *Crew* navigates and presents these themes, offering valuable insights into the broader discourse on gender roles and the representation of urban women in Bollywood cinema.

**Keywords:** Urban Women, Gender, Multimodal Analysis, Film, Bollywood

## 1 Introduction

The exploration of gender remains an ever-present inquiry within the humanities, enriching our understanding of the human experience. Daily interactions, interpersonal relationships, and societal expectations can all be fruitfully examined through a gendered lens. This approach illuminates the profound influence of masculinity and femininity on our lives, shaping the narratives we construct and the roles we inhabit within the social fabric. By critically analyzing these influences, we gain a nuanced

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appreciation for the multifaceted nature of human experience, recognizing the spectrum of identities and expressions that exist beyond rigid classifications. As our comprehension of gender continues to evolve, so too does our capacity for fostering deeper connections and celebrating the unique ways individuals navigate the world.

The concept of gender transcends a simple definition. It's a multifaceted construct woven from the intricate tapestry of social and cultural contexts. Each individual's unique experiences and interpretations further enrich this complexity. As a result, the definition of gender remains a subject of ongoing exploration and refinement, constantly evolving alongside the societies it shapes and is shaped by.

According to Clarke and Braun [1], gender is a complex system of social categorization and personal identity that differs from biological sex. From a social perspective, gender is a social construct that divides individuals into categories like "men" and "women" based on cultural norms and expectations. It provides information about socially appropriate behavior, roles, and identities, shaping people's experiences and interactions within society. Individual experiences and backgrounds also influence how gender is defined, as it encompasses how individuals view themselves and express their gender in everyday life. We can say, both internal feelings and external social contexts influence society's understanding of gender.

This dynamism is further amplified when examining gender across diverse societies. Established social norms and expectations regarding masculinity and femininity can vary widely. These variations create fertile ground for challenging traditional definitions and fostering a more nuanced understanding of gender identities. Furthermore, the ongoing evolution of these societal norms and expectations adds another layer of complexity. Attempting to arrive at a singular, universally applicable definition of gender in the face of such rich diversity proves a formidable task. However, rather than viewing this fluidity as a source of confusion, we can celebrate it as a testament to the richness of the human experience. By embracing the multifaceted nature of gender, we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. This fosters a more inclusive and empathetic society that recognizes the spectrum of identities and expressions beyond rigid classifications.

The dismantling of traditional binaries has catalyzed a dynamic era of transformation for gender roles. Women, previously constrained by societal expectations to occupy a more passive role within the domestic and social spheres, are now actively shaping their identities and pursuing excellence across private and public domains. On the one hand, the ability to pursue careers and personal aspirations traditionally associated with masculinity empowers women and fosters a sense of personal fulfillment. It dismantles outdated assumptions about femininity, broadening the spectrum of acceptable behaviors and expressions. This newfound freedom also has a ripple effect, positively impacting families and social structures. Women's increased participation in the workforce can contribute to a family's overall economic well-being, while their leadership within the public sphere can lead to more equitable policies and representation.

However, this phenomenon also presents a significant challenge. The pressure to excel in both the domestic and professional realms can create a significant burden for many women. The concept of a "work-life balance" becomes an ongoing negotiation, often fraught with feelings of inadequacy or guilt. Furthermore, traditional gender norms regarding household chores and childcare often remain stubbornly

entrenched, creating an uneven distribution of responsibilities within families. Dismantling these outdated expectations and fostering a more equitable distribution of labor requires a concerted effort from individuals, families, and workplaces. Ultimately, navigating the complexities of evolving gender roles necessitates a nuanced approach. Acknowledging the challenges women face while celebrating the opportunities that accompany this societal shift is paramount.

Within the Indian socio-cultural context, urban women continue to grapple with gender disparities in household responsibilities. They dedicate significantly more time to unpaid domestic work compared to men [7]. This imbalance severely restricts their availability and capacity to participate in formal employment, consequently amplifying their economic vulnerability. Despite the openness of urban women to pursuing professional work in the current climate, deeply ingrained cultural expectations often lead them to face pressure in fulfilling both domestic and professional roles.

The film entitled *Crew* exemplifies the dual roles that urban women often navigate, balancing both domestic responsibilities and public careers. As highlighted by [timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com) [9], the film centers on the lives of three flight attendants—Geetha Sethi (played by Tabu), Jasmine Kohli (played by Kareena Kapoor), and Divya Rana (played by Kriti Sanon). These women are employed by Kohinoor Airlines, a company teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. In a desperate bid to save the airline and secure their livelihoods, the trio embarks on a risky mission to smuggle gold from India to the Middle Eastern country of Al Burj. This illegal operation underscores the complex and often difficult situations women can find themselves in, as they struggle to distinguish between what is necessary for survival and what crosses into greed. The film thus sheds light on the blurred lines and moral dilemmas that arise in the face of economic and personal pressures.

Dhamija [2] posits in her journal article that urban women generally have greater social, economic, and political opportunities and freedoms than their rural counterparts. These advantages encompass access to employment, education, and healthcare services, along with increased independence and mobility. However, despite this wider access, urban women still encounter discrimination in both the workplace and domestic spheres. This challenge stems from the persistent societal expectation that women excel in both domains, creating a burden due to the lingering influence of traditional gender roles within the domestic context.

Urban women face the constant challenge of balancing paid work with household and family responsibilities. This dynamic, disproportionately faced by them, significantly shapes their trajectory towards economic advancement and social status. Limited time for career development due to societal expectations of excelling in both spheres creates a double burden, leading to role conflict and feelings of inadequacy. This can impact their overall well-being and influence their social interactions and perceived status within the community.

Despite the potential economic and social freedoms offered by urban life, significant obstacles continue to hinder the empowerment of urban women. These obstacles include gender discrimination and unequal access to resources, as powerfully depicted in the film "*Crew*." While the film's thrilling plot revolves around three flight attendants embarking on a daring gold-smuggling mission, it serves as a captivating backdrop to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by working women in urban

environments. The film delves deeper, showcasing the pervasive nature of gender discrimination in the workplace, often manifested through wage inequality and limited promotion opportunities. It further exposes the societal burden placed on women to excel in both their professional and domestic spheres, a concept the film terms a "double burden." This constant pressure to fulfill both roles can lead to feelings of inadequacy and role conflict, ultimately impacting their overall well-being and potentially influencing their social interactions and perceived status within the community. By weaving these social realities into the narrative, "Crew" transcends the action genre, offering a nuanced commentary on the complexities of urban life for women. The film serves as a thrilling adventure and a springboard for discussions on gender equality and the ongoing fight for women's empowerment in modern society.

## 2 Method

This research will employ multimodal discourse analysis and Rick Iedema's six levels of tele-filmic analysis within the framework of qualitative exploration and gender discourse. Rick Iedema emphasizes the importance of examining how various modes of communication—such as language, images, sounds, and gestures—interact to construct meaning in media texts. Iedema's approach integrates social semiotics and discourse analysis, focusing on communication's dynamic and context-dependent nature [6].

Iedema's multimodal analysis diverges from Broadwell's tele-filmic approach. While Broadwell focuses on thematic analysis informed by theories like auteur theory, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and semiotics, it overlooks the socio-political aspects of the audience and the power dynamics in production, particularly subject selection, framing, and editing choices. To address these limitations, Iedema proposes a six-level tele-filmic analysis framework. This framework aims to connect the sociopolitical context of television films with how viewers connect the content moment by moment. Furthermore, Iedema incorporates social semiotics, as developed by Hodge and Kress (1988), Lemke (1995), and Thibaut (1997). This approach emphasizes political understanding, reader positioning (how the text positions the audience to interpret it), and the practical benefits of a detailed analysis. Iedema argues that analyzing content from the audience's perspective leads to a more comprehensive analysis. It goes beyond what is simply displayed on screen and delves into the sociopolitical and cultural forces shaping interpretation.

Iedema argues that social semiotics focus on how viewers are positioned by the television program in question. It analyzes how the program promotes certain loyalties and social values while potentially marginalizing others [6]. He further emphasizes that social semiotics doesn't solely focus on individual signs, but rather on the process that creates social meaning – the "text." Signs serve as analytical categories, while the "text" itself is a social construct [6]. This distinction highlights that a television program is not just a collection of signs; it's a social product reflecting broader societal processes. Importantly, Iedema argues that the relationship between the audience and the content isn't a passive one. Instead, viewers' interpretations are influenced by their social, ethnic, economic, and gender backgrounds, and even the

researcher's knowledge or "coding orientation" (the framework through which they analyze the program).

Iedema adopts a multifaceted approach, drawing on tele-filmic analysis and social semiotics, to delve deeper into a television documentary portraying the clash between a large hospital's clinical and administrative departments. The documentary constructs a narrative that prioritizes a specific viewpoint, effectively presenting the internal struggles and tensions that simmer beneath the surface of the hospital environment.

Iedema's analysis goes beyond simply describing the narrative. He meticulously analyses how specific film techniques, like editing choices, camera angles, and how shots are framed, all contribute to the construction of meaning within the documentary. For example, he explored how close-up shots of patients evoke empathy while contrasting them with wider shots of harried administrative staff, potentially creating a sense of disconnect between the two groups. Furthermore, Iedema incorporates social semiotics, a theoretical framework that emphasizes the social and historical context surrounding visual representations, along with their inherent political implications. This allows him to move beyond the film's surface and expose the deeper connections between the documentary's formal structure and the broader socio-political environment of the healthcare system. By analyzing these connections, Iedema can reveal the underlying assumptions and power dynamics within the hospital, potentially exposing biases or highlighting the challenges faced by different departments within the institution. This method expands on the original points by providing a more detailed explanation of Iedema's analytical approach. For more details about Rick Iedema's six-level tele-filmic analysis method, see Table 1.

**Table 1.** Rick Iedema's six-level tele-filmic analysis

Level	Description
1 Frame	A frame is a salient or representative still of a shot
2 Shot	In a shot the camera movement is unedited (uncut); if the camera's position changes this may be due to panning, tracking, zooming, and so on, but not editing cuts
3 Scene	In a scene the camera remains in one time-space, but is at the same time made up of more than one shot (otherwise it would be a shot)
4 Sequence	In a sequence the camera moves with specific character(s) or sub-topic across time-spaces; when it is hard to decide whether you're dealing with a scene (1 time-space) or a sequence (multiple time-spaces), this is because editors may render time-space breaks as either more obvious (-> sequence boundary) or less obvious (-> scene boundary)
5 Generic stage	Roughly, stages are beginnings, middles and endings; each genre has a specific set of stages: narratives tend to have an orientation, a complication, a resolution and maybe a coda; factual or expository genres may have an introduction, a set of arguments or facts and a conclusion, or an introduction and a series of facts or procedures
6 Work as a whole	Depending on the lower levels, the work will be more or less classifiable as a particular genre; the primary distinction is between 'narrative' (fictional, dramatic genres) and 'factual' (expository, thematic, issue-oriented genres); genres are predictable relations between social-cultural, industrial-economic and symbolic-mythic orders

Iedema's multimodal analysis, draws upon social semiotics, a theory further substantiated by Halliday's [6] hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that all processes of meaning construction inherently perform three simultaneous functions. Building upon Halliday's framework, Iedema argues that all forms of meaning creation, encompassing visual elements in fictional and documentary films, music, spoken language, and even

sequences of sounds, fulfill three overarching functions, also known as metafunctions. These metafunctions are representation, orientation, and organization. Leveraging Iedema's multimodal approach, this article will investigate the following research questions, (1) How are urban women visually portrayed in Bollywood films? (2) how does Crew contribute to and reflect upon gender discourse?

### 3 Result and Discussion

This article will be divided into four sections, each examining a different aspect of the representation of urban women in the film Crew. The discussion will provide an in-depth analysis of gender dynamics and their impact on women in urban India, highlighting key themes and character portrayals.

#### 3.1 Women as the primary income earners in the household

According to a Pew Research Center study [5], India presents a complex picture regarding women in leadership positions. Indian society appears to be embracing a more open view towards female participation in politics, with a significant portion (over 10% according to the survey) believing women can be even more effective leaders than men. This trend aligns with the idea of India progressing towards greater gender equality in public life.

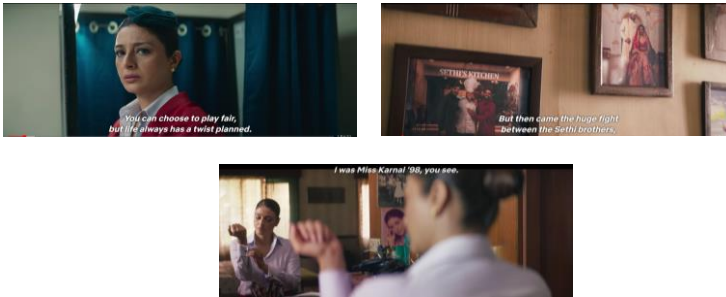
However, a segment of the population embraces female leadership, a significant portion still holds onto traditional gender roles. This highlights a potential dissonance within Indian society. The acceptance of women in political leadership might not necessarily translate to equal opportunities across all aspects of social life. Mitter (1991), as cited in Dhawan [3], argues that the traditionally subordinate role of Indian women is often justified by citing sacred texts, creating a social and cultural framework that reinforces male domination. Women who accept this role are seen as fulfilling their societal duty. The ideal Indian wife is typically portrayed as a devoted and self-sacrificing mother and housewife, worthy of respect and love. Undoubtedly, many Indian women have embraced these traditional roles, internalizing the ideals of sacrifice and familial duty. However, the persistence of these traditional expectations (or demands of the role) can have complex consequences. While they may provide some women with a sense of purpose and social acceptance, they can also restrict their educational opportunities, career advancement, and personal autonomy. This potential conflict highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of gender roles in contemporary India.

Economic, political, and social developments in India significantly influence contemporary understandings of women's roles. These developments have led to innovations in the lives of urban middle-class women, who are increasingly taking on new roles that come with their own set of social pressures. One such new role is that of the family's primary breadwinner. This shift often arises from women securing better and more stable jobs than their husbands, fundamentally altering the traditional family dynamic.

The opening scene of the film "Crew" introduces the background of each character in the film crew. Among them, Geeta Sheti's character embodies the struggles and resilience of women who become the family's financial backbone. Despite coming

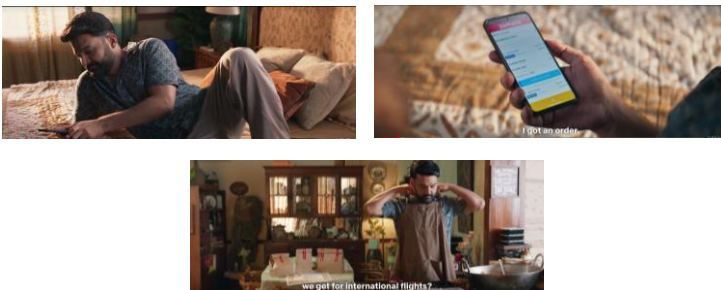
from a well-known and wealthy family, a conflict forced the Shetis into bankruptcy. Consequently, Geeta, leveraging her past as a beauty queen winner (Miss Karnal'98), secured a job as a flight attendant to support her family.

The film portrays Geeta Sheti's character as someone with a nurturing and loving nature, deeply invested in her family's well-being. This is evident through the transition of the camera shot close-up of her expression, which shows an expression of worry and alertness with the narrative dialogue "You can choose to play fair, but life always has a twist planned" which shows that what happened in Sethi's life who worked as a flight attendant was not Sethi's dream, but the circumstances that led him to work as a flight attendant. air hostess. scene transition changed to the a wall picture that depict the journey of Geeta and her family, culminating in the circumstances that necessitate her role as the family's breadwinner, see picture 1.



**Picture 1.** Transition scene of Geeta Sethi’s Character

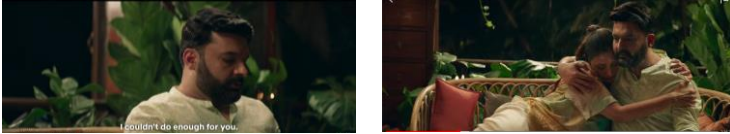
Sethi's life story sheds light on the gender pay gap within the household. The scene depicting Sethi's husband receiving an online food order serves as a microcosm of this disparity. We see her husband's earnings fluctuating based on the number of deliveries he receives each day, highlighting the irregular and unpredictable nature of his income (see picture 2). This scene subtly conveys the financial dependence placed on Sethi, contrasting with a potentially more stable income typical of many husbands.



**Picture 2.** Sequence Sethi’s husband working on food online orderer

the next scene was pointed out, The conversation between Sethi and her husband poignantly underscores the challenges they face due to his fluctuating income (see picture 3). His remorseful statement, “Geetu, sometimes I feel...I couldn’t have

enough for you.” reveals his internal struggle with being the primary financial provider. The sadness in his voice not only reflects his own limitations but also the potential strain it places on their relationship. Sethi's response, a hug offered with warmth and understanding, speaks volumes about her unwavering support. This act of affection goes beyond simply accepting the situation; it demonstrates her unwavering commitment to their partnership and her willingness to share the burden of financial responsibility.



**Picture 3.** Scene Sethi and her husband

Sethi's story transcends the individual narrative and becomes a powerful social commentary on the experiences of urban women in contemporary India. We see her transformed into the family's anchor, a role necessitated by her husband's limitations as the primary breadwinner. This economic precarity creates a complex web of challenges. Not only do these women grapple with the emotional strain of their husbands' struggles, but they must also navigate the often-unforgiving realities of the professional world. Sethi's story compels us to consider the societal factors that contribute to this situation, along with the strength and resilience required of women who navigate both domestic and professional spheres in such circumstances.

### **3.2 Women's responsibility to be the esteemed daughters of their families**

The rise of educational and professional opportunities for women is a cornerstone of the evolving dynamic between genders within families and society as a whole. This transformation has redefined expectations, particularly within families. The emphasis has shifted towards daughters achieving strong academic backgrounds and pursuing successful careers. This newfound ambition, however, still upholds the importance of women's contributions to family well-being, a constant concern for many urban women. Urban women leverage their diverse skillsets and talents to navigate their ability, excelling in professionals that demand women to allows them to make significant contributions to the family's overall well-being. It's important to acknowledge the societal shifts that have paved the way for these opportunities, while also recognizing the challenges and triumphs women face as they redefine their roles within families and the workforce.

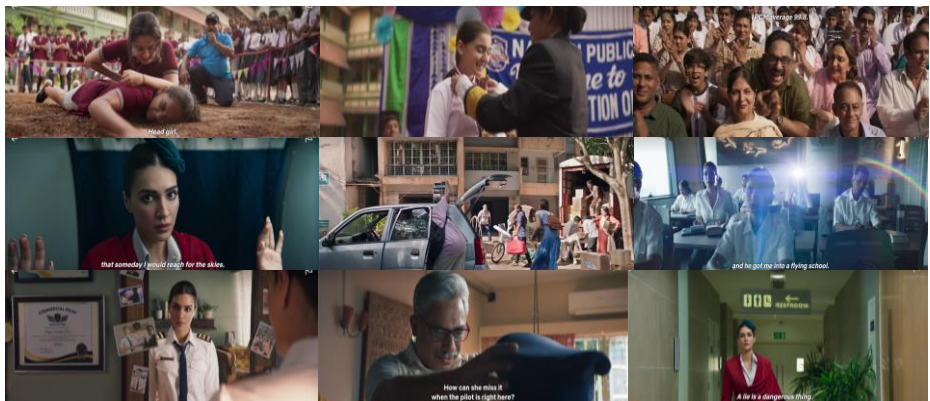
Urban women are the cornerstone of social and economic progress, acting as the driving force behind the well-being and prosperity of their families and communities. Research by Olah, Richter, and Kotowska [4] highlights the importance of perseverance and resourcefulness for these women, who navigate a complex world of domestic responsibilities and professional aspirations. Even highly educated women face numerous challenges, from societal expectations to limited resources, in their endeavors to uplift the lives of their loved ones and communities. However, by pursuing career advancement, they gain not only personal fulfilment but also the economic power to overcome these social obstacles. This, in turn, fosters improvements in the overall quality of life for themselves, their families, and society as a whole. As



women gain financial independence and influence, they can advocate for changes that benefit everyone, promoting gender equality and breaking down barriers that have long impeded progress.

Vidya Rana's backstory exemplifies the responsibilities shouldered by urban women. The film tells us that Rana and her family migrated from the small village, Nanheri, Haryana to Mumbai. During her school days, Rana was known for her bravery and outspokenness against injustice. She was also intelligent and consistently topped her class. Her dream since teenage years was to become a pilot. To help her achieve this dream, Rana's father even took out a loan to send her to aviation school. However, pursuing a pilot career proved challenging, and ultimately, fate steered her towards becoming a flight attendant. Rana's story exemplifies the unwavering determination and adaptability often required of urban women who navigate both societal expectations and personal aspirations.

The film effectively portrays Rana's life-changing journey through contrasting scenes. Initially scene, we see Rana consistently excelling in school, a source of immense pride for his father. This idyllic image is disrupted by the family's move to Mumbai and Rana's pursuit of flight school. A dramatic shift occurs when the camera zooms in on Rana's face, his expression conveying a mix of determination and disbelief as the voiceover narration highlights, 'In fact, an astrologer once predicted I'd reach for the skies. What a fraud!' This disillusionment is juxtaposed with a scene showing Rana in Mumbai with his family, embarking on his flight school journey. The film then cuts to the present, where we see Rana, dressed in a pilot, preparing for work. The scene continues after Rana comes out of the house and changes into a flight attendant's uniform. This final scene highlights the gap between Rana's initial dream and the reality of his present career, see picture 4.



**Picture 4.** sequence of Vidya Rana’s life background

The film portrays Rana's journey as a poignant exploration of ambition, sacrifice, and the weight of familial expectations in contemporary India. Her initial academic excellence and unwavering dream of becoming a pilot paint a picture of a determined young girl with unwavering support from his father. The family's decision to relocate to Mumbai and take on debt to finance Rana's flight school education highlights the significant lengths families go to to empower their children, particularly

daughters, who often face societal pressures towards more traditional career paths. However, the harsh realities of the job market and potential gender bias within the aviation industry become apparent when Rana's dream of becoming a pilot is unrealized.

Rana's choice to keep his job as a flight attendant a secret from her family stems from a complex web of emotions. The deception is fueled by her fear of disappointing them after the immense financial investment they made in her education. This reveals not only her ambition but also her deep sense of responsibility towards her family's well-being. Furthermore, Rana's act of repaying her father's loan underscores her maturity and desire to alleviate the financial burden on her family. Despite the setback, Rana hasn't abandoned her dream of becoming a pilot. She persists in her search for a pilot position, a testament to her unwavering determination and resilience. Rana's story resonates with the experiences of many young women in India who navigate societal expectations, filial obligations, and the pursuit of their aspirations.

### **3.3 Women and the demand for self-determination**

The demand for self-determination among women is a powerful and ongoing movement, emphasizing the right to make independent choices about their lives and bodies. This movement spans across various spheres, including political, economic, and social arenas. Historically, women have faced systemic barriers that limited their autonomy, but the fight for self-determination has steadily gained momentum.

Self-determination is a fundamental human desire that extends beyond simply having individual rights. It's about having the agency to shape your life path and make choices that reflect your values and goals. This includes creating a society where women's choices are accorded the same respect and weight as men's. In urban environments, where social structures may be more flexible and opportunities more abundant, women often have greater freedom to pursue their aspirations. This can involve actively participating in the social sphere, advocating for change in their communities, or carving a path for themselves in the professional world. By demonstrating their capabilities and contributions in these areas, urban women can determine their destinies and inspire and pave the way for future generations of women.

In the film *Crew*, Jasmine's character is a powerful example of an independent woman who actively shapes her destiny. We discover her past, revealing that Jasmine comes from a broken home, raised solely by her grandfather after her parents left. This experience of navigating her teenage years without parental figures undoubtedly shapes Jasmine's character. It fosters a sense of resourcefulness and a steely determination to carve out her path. The environment she finds herself in likely pushes her to use all means necessary to gain recognition and establish herself. Jasmine's belief that money is a crucial determinant in all aspects of life could be a coping mechanism developed during her challenging upbringing. Financial security might represent stability and independence, something she might have lacked in her early life.

The opening scene for Jasmine's character acts as a potent introduction, unveiling glimpses into her personality and motivations. The scene subtly suggests her cynicism towards romantic love. We see her entangled in a dramatic situation – a marital dispute where the wife is aware of Jasmine's presence in their home. Jasmine's nonchalance is

evident; she uses a bathrobe and departs without a care for the disarray she leaves behind. However, a crucial detail emerges – she takes the Gucci wallet belonging to the unfaithful husband. This sequence hints at Jasmine's primary focus on acquiring wealth.

Jasmine's cynicism towards romantic relationships resonates with a challenge often faced by urban women. Her statement, "My parents were madly in love when they got married, but love alone is not enough. Everyone keeps saying 'Have a child and everything will fall into place,' but that didn't solve a thing, and here I am," reflects this sentiment. The societal pressure to prioritize romantic fulfilment and child-rearing as the keys to happiness can be particularly at odds with the realities of urban life.

For many urban women, like Jasmine, circumstances and personal ambitions may necessitate prioritizing financial stability and demanding careers. This can create a conflict between societal expectations and the realities of building a fulfilling life in the city. Jasmine's experience suggests that romantic love, while desirable, may not be enough to overcome the challenges faced by urban women striving for professional and personal success.

Financial independence remains a critical obstacle for many urban women. The relentless pressure of modern life fuels the perception that money is the gateway to happiness. This perception is further exacerbated by the stark economic inequalities inherent to urban environments. Housing costs, childcare expenses, and the rising cost of living all contribute to a sense of financial insecurity. Beyond financial pressures, urban women often juggle a complex web of responsibilities. The demands of family life, the pursuit of professional success, and the fundamental desire to control their destinies create a constant struggle for balance. Societal expectations can further complicate this equation, often picturing romantic fulfilment and child-rearing as the ultimate path to happiness. This can create a sense of conflict for urban women who may prioritize career advancement or financial stability over traditional family structures.

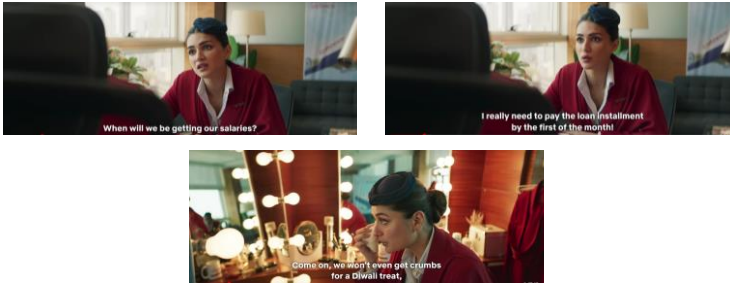
### **3.4 Low wages and pressure to maintain a beauty standard**

Urban environments present women with a complex web of challenges extending far beyond the domestic sphere's traditional confines. While cities unlock doors to professional opportunities and personal growth, they can also place a disproportionate amount of pressure on women to maintain a domestic presence. This creates a double bind, forcing women to navigate the professional world while still being expected to fulfil societal expectations associated with home life. This relentless juggling act is further compounded by the persistent reality of gender inequality in the workplace. Low wages, limited opportunities for career advancement, and the constant threat of sexual harassment are just some of the obstacles women encounter.

Furthermore, some companies perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards, adding another layer of pressure to navigate professional success. These factors combine to create a uniquely demanding environment for urban women. The constant need to manage professional aspirations, societal expectations, and personal well-being can lead to heightened stress and feelings of inadequacy.

The film, *Crew*, cleverly utilizes its narrative to depict the tension caused by gender inequality in the workplace. The story opens with three flight attendants, all women, facing financial hardship due to withheld salaries. This conflict materializes in a scene where Divya Rana inquires about her unpaid wages. Her dialogue, "When will we be

getting our salaries? I really need to pay the loan instalment by the first of the month," poignantly highlights the vulnerability of female workers when their wages are delayed. This vulnerability is further emphasized by Jasmine's cynical statement, "Come on, we won't even get crumbs for a Diwali treat, and you are expecting a bonus?" (see picture 5). This line not only underscores the issue of unpaid wages but also hints at a larger problem of wage inequality faced by working women, where bonuses and fair compensation seem like distant dreams.

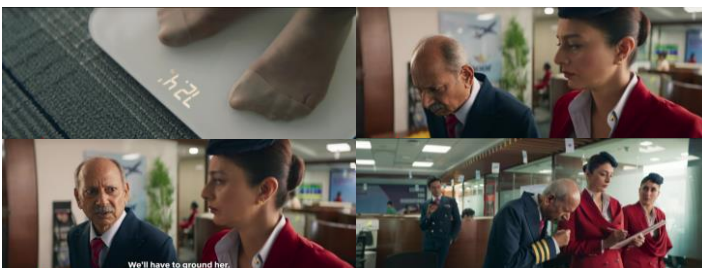


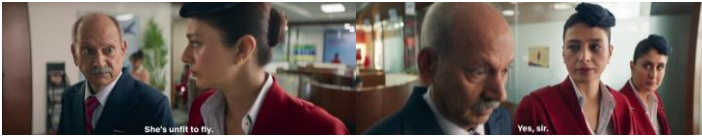
**Picture 5.** scene when Vidya Rana asks about unpaid salary.

This portrayal serves a crucial purpose beyond simply mirroring the struggles of urban working women. By exposing these inequalities, the film crew ignites a conversation about the root causes of the problem. Social norms that undervalue women's labour, coupled with a lack of robust legal protections, can create a breeding ground for exploitation. The film compels viewers to question these norms and advocate for policies that ensure equal pay for equal work.

The film adeptly utilizes the characters' profession as flight attendants to unpack the pervasive issue of workplace beauty standards. Flight attendants have long been subjected to a rigid and often unrealistic beauty ideal. This expectation goes beyond simply maintaining a neat appearance; it often encompasses specific physical attributes, weight restrictions, and even dictates aspects of personal style like makeup and hairstyles. By placing its narrative within this highly regulated professional environment, the film crew cleverly exposes the objectification of women's bodies and the pressure to conform to a narrow definition of beauty in exchange for professional acceptance.

The scene depicting the flight attendants' weigh-in is a powerful critique of the industry's unrealistic beauty standards. Sethi, overseen by Mr. Rajvanshi, the chief supervisor, conducts the weigh-in. As each flight attendant steps on the scale, Mr. Rajvanshi announces their weight, his tone laced with judgment. The flight attendants' faces, etched with a mix of annoyance and resignation, reveal the emotional toll of constant scrutiny (see picture 6).





**Picture 6.** Kohinoor air hostess weighing scene

When Sheetal's weight is declared above the arbitrary limit, disqualification becomes a symbol of a deeper power struggle. It's not just a company policy violation; it's a microcosm of the fight against a system that prioritizes aesthetics over competence. Despite the disappointment flickering across her face, Sheetal's defiant response transcends a simple dismissal. When Mr. Rajvanshi starts coughing uncontrollably, her sarcastic "Yes sir, unfit." exposes the hypocrisy of the airline's policy.

This portrayal transcends the specific case of flight attendants. It serves as a microcosm for the broader societal pressures that women face across various industries. From expectations in retail and hospitality to subtle biases in corporate environments, women are often judged not just on their competence but also on their adherence to these often unwritten beauty codes.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, "Crew" transcends the limitations of a typical heist film, transforming into a powerful and multifaceted social commentary on the lives of urban women in contemporary India. Its brilliance lies in its ability to weave a captivating narrative with a nuanced exploration of the complex challenges these women navigate.

The film dismantles the stereotypical portrayal of female criminals as solely driven by greed. Instead, it presents them as individuals burdened by a web of societal expectations and a yearning for economic security. We witness their relentless struggle to balance professional aspirations with the demands of family, all within a system riddled with gender inequality. This portrayal is far more nuanced than the typical "good versus evil" dichotomy often found in heist films.

"Crew" courageously tackles critical issues that are often relegated to the margins in mainstream cinema. The relentless pressure on women to conform to unrealistic workplace beauty standards and the persistent gender pay gap are brought to light, forcing viewers to confront these deeply ingrained societal biases. Furthermore, the film doesn't shy away from depicting the "double burden" faced by many urban women – the pressure to excel in their careers and societal expectations of family pride. This portrayal can be deeply relatable, sparking empathy and understanding in viewers who may recognize these struggles in their own lives or the lives of the surrounding women.

Beyond sparking emotional connection, "Crew" compels viewers to engage in critical reflection. By presenting its characters as complex individuals navigating social and economic pressures, the film encourages us to consider the root causes of these challenges. The prevalence of workplace discrimination, and societal expectations, all come under scrutiny.

"Crew" serves not just as a compelling narrative but also as a potent call to action. Its ability to spark conversations about gender roles and the empowerment of women extends far beyond the theater walls. It empowers viewers to become agents of change in their own communities. By advocating for policies that promote equal pay, and dismantle discriminatory beauty standards, viewers can contribute to dismantling the very systems that constrain the lives of the women portrayed in the film.

"Crew" stands as a powerful reminder that social change can be ignited by art, and that even a seemingly simple commercial film can hold the potential to inspire a movement towards a more equitable future for all. Moreover, the film's significance lies in its contribution to a broader movement for gender equality. By challenging traditional narratives and depicting the multifaceted realities of urban women's lives, "Crew" joins a growing body of art that disrupts the status quo and paves the way for a more inclusive future for women in cinema and society at large.

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