

Thappad: A Review of Articulation of Power and the Psychological Perspectives

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Introduction

What is feminism?

Feminism, in simple words is social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Although it mainly was started by the women in the west, it is manifested throughout the globe and widely used in the institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and welfare.

Feminism is not the belief that one gender should be raised in power above another. The very definition of feminism shows a complete opposition to this belief. So, when people comment against feminism, they are supporting sexism. There is no sitting on the fence. You are either a feminist or a sexist. Unfortunately, most sexist don't know they are sexist, and compose the majority of the population. They are unaware that sexism is something that has been forced on to them through the brainwashed media of a patriarchal society.

Feminism is equality over quality. It is about giving equal platform to every gender to start with and then let their performance speak for them. For example, the average height of a woman is always shorter than the average height of a man in any part of the globe so to reach a certain height to start with the woman should be given a higher stool than the man. This will give both of them a levelled platform to start their work. This ensures equality is served to both the genders in term of initial platform to start with.

Feminism is about everyone being treated fairly and with respect. It is also the exclusion of biased feminism. I personally am strictly against biased feminism. I feel like equality and quality has to be given to every gender of the society whether they belong to any caste, creed, religion, race, colour, etc. everyone should be given equal platforms to prove their ability to the world.

Some contemporary feminists, such as Katha Pollitt or Nadine Strossen, consider feminism to hold simply that "women are people". Views that separate the sexes rather than unite them are considered by these writers to be sexist rather than feminist. In her book *Backlash: the undeclared*

war against American women, Susan Faludi argues that a backlash against second wave feminism in the 1980s has successfully re-defined feminism through its terms. She argues that it constructed the women's liberation movement as the source of many of the problems alleged to be plaguing women in the late 1980s. She also argues that many of these problems are illusory, constructed by the media without reliable evidence. According to her, this type of backlash is a historical trend, recurring when it appears that women have made substantial gains in their efforts to obtain equal rights. Angela McRobbie argues that adding the prefix post to feminism undermines the strides that feminism has made in achieving equality for everyone, including women. Post-feminism gives the impression that equality has been achieved and that feminists can now focus on something else entirely. McRobbie believes that post-feminism is most clearly seen on so-called feminist media products, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Sex and the City*, and *Ally McBeal*. Female characters like Bridget Jones and Carrie Bradshaw claim to be liberated and clearly enjoy their sexuality, but what they are constantly searching for is the one man who will make everything worthwhile.

Patriarchy system

Patriarchy as the name suggest is a social system when men have the primary power and are dominants in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privileges and the economic section. They also hold the highest authority in the family, as „fatherly“ figures. The alternative of patriarchy is a matriarchy but historically speaking, patriarchy has manifested its roots in the social, legal, political, and economic organisations, whereas matriarchy exists only for namesake. This term is widely used in today's era in casual conversations or descriptive sense. In the simplest sense, the term means „the absolute rule“ of the father or the eldest male member over his family.

This makes us think about “how is the patriarchy a problem?” The simple answer to this is that patriarchy affects both men and women in different ways. Most women face the ill effects of patriarchy rather than the positive effects. They are oppressed, violated and excruciated where as the men are compelled to act a certain way to hold the highest authority in the society. Women on the other hand suffer very ill effect of living in this type of society. The basic structure of this type of society is man as the providers and the women as the care-givers. This reinforces gender stereotyped norms. Men are brought up in such a way that they are made to believe to reach successful position and are oppressed from showing any sign of emotion or weakness. They are also made to think it is okay to use some violence and power to get the desired results. This leads to men becoming emotionless beings who are unable to solve problems without violence and power. They prefer the use of strength over mental abilities.

We hear the term male chauvinism in connection to the patriarchy regularly. It is when men think that they are superior to the female. Anything related to the male is given more acceptances in the society than anything that is female. This leads them to think that women exist only to serve them. And so, living in the patriarchal society girls are taught to do exactly that, even the most educated girl is expected to do the cooking, the cleaning and taking care of the children. We are so used to seeing the females in the secondary character in any story that we never realise the real problem

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with this. The society no matter how educated they are making their daughters focus on their marriages to be the biggest days of their lives. A failed marriage is also seen as the failure of the woman in keeping her family together.

The society focuses in making women more involved in getting the attention of a male and considering other females to be their competitors for male attention. They are made to depend on the attention they get from the men and they are made to think they can only be truly happy when they are in a relationship with a man. They are forced to respect their partners in most of the cases they do not receive the same amount of respect for themselves but they are taught to compromise with this situation.

Women are always told to feel good when anything sexual happens to her and it involves her with her partner. They are never taught anything about consent. They, in most cases are just expected to satisfy the partner's sexual needs whether she likes it or not. Women are not expected to talk about this with anybody and even if they do, they are shut up by their own family members, most of the times they are told that females need to compromise a bit for the sake of a happy relationship. Rape is the only crime where the victim is equally judged by the society as the criminal and when it comes to marital rape, the society does not even care to listen to the victims. The women are told that marital rapes are not even rapes. This is changing slowly but we have a long way to go. In most cases rapes go unheard by any court of justice as the women are so scared of the disgrace they would face from the society. They cannot even dare to speak up for themselves.

This is where feminism comes into play. Chauvinism can only be brought down when patriarchal society is changed into a gender-free society where every individual is given equal respect and importance. This will happen when we will take the initiative to give proper up bringing to both the genders. Empowering the women and teaching the men that masculinity is not the only solution to all the problems

Role of women in Indian films

Bollywood has always considered women to be of lesser worth than any man. This can be seen when bollywood addresses them as „*munibadnam*“, „*sheela ki jawaani*“, „*chiknichameli*“, etc. moreover, nowadays showing kissing scenes and sexual activities which were considered as taboo a few years ago have become quite common.

Every hit film in bollywood has at least one item song, showing off a half naked woman dancing to the tunes of a sexual addressing song to provide pleasure to the men. It seems that the main stream film is all about men doing everything else in the film and women only existing as a secondary character waiting to seek the attention from the hero or to be used as leverage to woo the men. The item songs show a very wrong image of the women where she is only present to be dancing around the men in a donning skimpy outfit and the men do everything else: leer to her, salivate to her, tease her, pinch her and even touch her in a group. The women are objectified to such an extent that the scene of a gang rape is a mere pleasure giving scene of an item song.

This is shocking but top commercial films such as *Mastizaade*, *kyakoolhai hum*, and *yaariya* include sexual comic scenes which harm the dignity of any woman. These films objectify women as disparaging beings with no use other than providing pleasure and acting like an eye candy. They are used as secondary characters. In a recent study at a leading California-based journalism school, India was ranked at top for sexualized portrayal of women. The study also shows that 35% of the female characters in the film are shown with some nudity. This is not it. The study also tells us that the female characters make up less than one-quarter of all the speaking roles. The objectification of women and the visual nudity is not the only alarming concern of the Indian film industry, it is also the way we address these females in the dialogues of the movies. Some dialogues and songs clearly refer to the women's sexuality and how the men want to exploit it.

Indian people are very largely impacted by the bollywood movies they watch. A movie like *Kabir Singh* is a perfect example of such impact. The portrayal of Kabir Singh is as a male chauvinist who looks at women only as a secondary weak character. Although he loves Preeti in the film, he kisses her without her consent and also how can we forget the controversial slap, the movies had a very negative impact on the society. The film makers should have made the female character stronger and not just a side character who is used as a prize possession by the hero, the woman continues to love him. This shows how weak women are to be easily opposed by the male characters. Another example I can think of is from the film *Ranjhana* where the male protagonist Kundan cuts his wrist to woo his lover and the girl accepts him just by being impressed from this act. This promotes self harm and also encourages people to harm each other to woo their partners or to change their consensual decision. In many films we also see that the hero holds or even kisses the heroine in any improper manner and without consent and this is liked by the female, this gives a very wrong impression in the minds of the audience and since films have great influence on the lives of the people, the audience try to imitate these actions in some way on the other in their own lives.

As times are advancing, film industry is realising the responsibility they have towards the growth of feminism and the improvement of the status of women in the society. People like Shyam Benegal have worked in improving the images of women in the Indian films. His female characters have a say over their own lives, are strong in character and act according to their own choices. With the coming up of such film-makers, films are being able to break the shackles of patriarchy and to go against the gender boundaries set by the society.

There are many roles in the modern-day film which show women empowerment and inspire young women to come up and speak for themselves. These fictional women speak for themselves. They inspire a lot of women to fight back against the injustice going on against them knowingly and unknowingly. One such character is Shivani Shivaji Roy from the film *Mardaani*, a character played by Rani Mukerji is one of the most underrated movies of Indian cinema. Shivani's role is shown to be of a fierce and extremely courageous cop who fights with every criminal who tries to bring down the dignity of women. She can fight anyone who challenges her single handily. She is

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shown as a very good cop who is committed to her work and does not let anything to come between her and her work. Another film *English Vinglish* is a story of a housewife who constantly strives to get some respect in the eyes of her husband and daughters. She finally does gain the respect that she deserves when she successfully learns to speak English. The film shows how a housewife sacrifices her life so that her family succeeds but then is looked down upon by the same family. The character of Shashi played by the legendary actress Sridevi is of a woman of great willpower and a very kind-hearted but strong mother. My favourite character is of Rani from the film *Queen* played by the queen herself, Kangana Ranaut. Rani is shown going to honeymoon alone after being ditched by her fiancé before marriage. Rani's role is shown to be of a very independent, carefree girl who does not depend on her lover for proving her the happiness that she deserves. The film also shows the power of womanhood by the friendship of Kangana and Lisa Haydon.

When talking about feminism in Indian cinema how can we not talk about the film *Pink*? The courtroom drama talks about the importance of consent in a sexual relationship. The film shows how three independent women, Meenal, Falak and Andrea, all belonging to different professions, religions, and states have to face the oppressors on a daily basis. The main character in the film is the character of Amitabh Bacchan. As the lawyer who fights for the three girls, Amitabh with his power pact performance tells us the importance of the word "NO" in terms of consent. Another great example of feminism in Indian film is *Raazi* where Alia Bhatt played the role of a fierce woman ready to sacrifice everything for her motherland. Films like *Mother India* were the first of their kind to bring feminism into the mainstream cinema. This movie had a very huge impact on the social status of the women in our society.

Analysis of the film

The opening scene of the film shows us how all the characters of the film are with their loved ones be it their lover, daughter, spouse or any other beloved. All of the scenes are connected with the ice-crème, one more thing that connects all the scenes are their conversations about their concerned type of relationship.

The next scene shows how Amrita, the protagonist has to literally do everything for her husband. He is dependent on her for everything. Ammu(Amrita) has to wake up early and prepare tea, wake her mother-in-law then wake her husband up. This is her daily routine that she does without any complaints. She even has to run after her husband to make him eat „his own breakfast“.

At the office, Vikram is unable to digest the fact that he has to work under a girl boss, as Miranda takes over the company after her father. This breaks the norms of the patriarchal society. Women normally are expected to be working under the men. Whenever a woman tried to work against this norm, she is either criticized or suspected to be using unfair means to reach the top. Vikram while driving says "*ye gaariyalekenikalti kyu hai*" just because the car in front of him was driven by a woman. Had it been a man he would have not reacted that way.

Amrita's father says she should not have left her dancing career. She was very good at it to which she replies with humour. The Indian woman is always expected to live for the happiness of others. They are expected to sacrifice their own self for the sake of others.

Amrita was a horrible cook but wanted to learn cooking as they were going to shift to America in some days. She asked her mother-in-law to teach her to cook. She asked her how did she learn cook to which she got a reply that years of being abused taught her to cook. Sometimes the abuses came from papaji (her husband) and sometimes from her *Saas* (mother-in-law) only her *Sasurji* (father-in-law) did not abuse her. Here we see that the mother-in-law uses the suffix „ji“ whenever she addresses any male member of the family whereas the *Saas* is not addressed with that respect. It is a part of the norms of the patriarchal society.

The next morning while leaving for his office Vikram comes across their neighbour who drives her new car. He asks Ammu when and how did she get the new car. To which she replies recently, and she bought it by working hard. Our society is very underestimating when it comes to a woman. A man buying a car is no big deal but when a woman buys a car it creates a fuzz. When Amrita asks Vikram can she learn to drive a car then instead of being supportive he asks her to learn to cook first. After the presentation when her husband calls her that their transfer to London has been confirmed she becomes very happy. This happiness is not because she wanted to go there but it was because her husband's dream of going there was being fulfilled. She took his dreams and made them her own. She too had some dreams but those do not matter now. His dreams were now hers.

At the party thrown to celebrate the husband's victory, everyone is happy. There are smiles everywhere. Amrita although has to make all the arrangements alone is happy for her husband. Halfway through the party Vikram gets a call from his boss telling him that he is not going to London. He is angry. Out of anger he engages into a verbal fight with his colleagues. Everyone there including Amrita tries stopping him from creating a scene. In the heat of the movement he slaps Amrita. Everyone pauses for a moment. Vikram leaves without even saying sorry. This slap remains Amrita all the unfair slaps that she had to face in the years of being married. It made her lose her self-respect. Vikram could have hit anyone but for a husband his wife is always a soft target. The women in our society are used as stress balls. The men always use the women in their lives to take out their stress on. The men most of the times do not show their aggression on any other person instead their outburst is always on the women.

All the women try to justify Vikram's action and convince her to come back to the party. Amrita's mother-in-law asks her to return to the party and it was a private matter and she should forget it. She is more worried about what will the people think.

After the party, Amrita's brother is more inclined towards defending his brother-in-law's job rather than what happened to Amrita, his own sister. The little fatherless girl, Sonia was still stunned by what she had seen at the party. She asks her mother if her father had ever hit her to which her mother replies, „never“. She feels proud of her father. The maid back at her home while

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feeding her husband stares at him blankly and her husband slaps her for doing so. She asks her why does he hit her to which he says he does not need to write research to hit her. The husband takes it as his right to hit her and expects her not react to his acts.

In the next scene we are introduced to the very famous journalist Rohit and his trophy wife, Netra. He tells her a story of when he was sixteen and used to come with his father to these kinds of events. He used to feel like he was there for nothing because all the attention was for his father. She says she too feels the same now, she struggles to find her existence in these events. He says that she gets all the high-profile cases only because of her father-in-law and him. He says this is a privilege that she uses and if properly used will bring her fame too. He steals her credits and makes it his own.

Amrita does not speak to anyone. She sees her husband sleeping peacefully like nothing had happened. She starts rearranging the furniture and cleaning the mess from the party in aggression. There is a lot going on in her mind but no one to talk to. She too was burning with aggression but unlike her husband she chooses to stay silent instead of making a scene like her husband. The next morning, she is already awake before the alarm rings. She continues with her daily routine but now she is less happy and talks less. She stops talking to Vikram.

Vikram tries starting a normal conversation with Amrita as if nothing happened. He still does not even feel the need of apologising for what he did to her. He is guilt free. He is more concerned about what people would be thinking about him because he created a scene at his own party. He is more interested in the reason that led to his aggression than his act. He tells Amrita about how hard he has been working for that job and suddenly he was told that he had no value there. He finds it ridiculous. The irony in this is that even Amrita was working hard to keep her married life happy but the slap reminded her that she too was not valued in the relationship. He tells Amrita that he does not want to stay in a place where he is not valued not realising that he too is doing the same to her.

The maid shares her story of being hit by her husband again but this time she did not run. She thought what if he locks the door from inside someday, where will she go. She is dependent on him. The house she lives in is his so she has to listen to what he says and also suffer the violence that he inflicts.

Back at Amrita's parent's house, we see that her father is ill. He suffers from high blood pressure. The reason of his illness is his daughter's suffering. He loved his daughter a lot. His wife tries consoling him by saying that it happens sometimes between couples. The neighbour tries consoling Amrita off her grief. After knowing about her father's illness Amrita talks to him over the phone. Here we see the love of a daughter for her father. The father on the other hand is relieved after listening to her voice. He saw his daughter being hit, it shocked him to the core.

Vikram takes Amrita out for dinner. He still talks about his job and other things. She is shocked at how he is reacting so normally. At night she goes through her childhood pictures. It reminds her

of how excellent she was in her curriculums and she could have done something more deserving in her life than just being a housewife. She slowly realises that she had halted her dreams for an unworthy person.

After days of remaining silent, one day she decides its enough. When her husband comes home from work, he finds her bags packed. She informs him that she is going to her parent's house for some days. He complains that how can she leave when he is going through so much emotional pressure. He does not realise that even she is going through a lot, maybe more than what he is going through. He tries stopping her but she is determined. Without her the husband's life becomes a mess. She on the other hand is recovering. He comes to take Amrita back and tries convincing her father that it happens and it was not a big deal. He brings her jewels and compliments her, this was his great compensation. He is still concerned about what will he say to his friends and family about her absence. He accuses her for acting irresponsible. He asks her if he could not earn for her would she accept him as he accepted her when she said she could not cook. To which she replies would he had married her if she would have asked him to cook and she would do the earning. For him the slap was just a moment that passed by, there was nothing to make it into suck a big issue. He says that it won't happen again. But if she would have let go of it for the first time it would be a green signal for him to do it again. She says that she thought about hitting him back but her parents did not teach her to do so. He revolts saying that she is going too far and that his family does not teach their women to run away from their homes on such „silly things.“

Netra, the lawyer wins a case against sexual harassment. She is happy and shares her happiness over the phone with her friend instead of her husband. He gave her the confident feeling instead of making her feel dependent like her husband. Amrita reaches Netra's office for help. Vikram had filed a case to bring her back to their house. She asks Amrita the real story for leaving. She is shocked when she learns that they do not have any problem in their marriage other than just one slap. Amrita says that it might be „just a slap“ but he has no right to hit her even for once. She finds it unreasonable. She says she is overreacting. Amrita tells her she lost her self-respect after that slap; it is not unreasonable.

This follows by a song montage which shows the different women in the film struggling to find happiness in their lives. They try finding their part of happiness in the small events of their lives.

They depend on the others for their smiles. They use these smiles to escape from the patriarchal society.

Amrita's brother argues with his girlfriend that she is overreacting to file a divorce for just a slap. He does not find the slap to be immoral. Her own mother criticises her decision by saying that to have a happy home a woman has to suffer; she has to sacrifice herself and has to give up her dreams. She had to do it, so she wants her daughter to do so to. This is an ages old tradition that has to go on. She gave up her singing career for the sake of her family. Amrita's brother asks her to give Vikram a second chance. His girlfriend interferes by saying that everybody else's problems are important but why are Amrita's problems being ignored? She is not doing it for any profit, in

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fact she has to suffer the most. Men can remarry easily but she cannot. Male aggression is once more seen in the face of Amrita's brother when Swati supports Amrita.

At Netra's house, Rohit mocks at her victory. He does not appreciate her hard work. He asks her for intimacy when she says no, he does not listen and forces her for sex, he says that it is his way of taking a thanks. She being a feminist in front of the world could not stop the marital rape happening to her own self. In our country rape in marriage is very common but it is not considered as rape because the husband is given the right to do it by the society.

A sign of revolt is seen in Sunita's house. She argues with her mother-in-law over watching T.V. when she does not listen to her mother-in-law, she is threatened by her that she would tell her son and ask him to teach her a lesson. This shows that women are responsible for their own sufferings. Instead of helping each other they help the men in exploiting themselves.

Netra asks Amrita if she is really sure about what she is doing is right. She replies she wants to end things instead of pretending to be happy. She takes the blame on herself for tolerating everything for so long. She blames her mother and her mother-in-law for teaching her to learn to suffer.

The husband's friend approaches a big lawyer saying that it is not even a matter to file a case against. They were in true love and violence to an extent is an expression of love. Violence is always considered to be okay in our society as long as it comes from the men's side. A violent woman is never acceptable to the society. Amrita asks for mutual divorce and did not file any domestic violence case. His lawyer asks him to talk to her and try to sort it out personally.

Sunita finds Vikram's mother unconscious in the house. She calls Amrita for help. Her condition is critical. Vikram tries convincing Amrita to come back. He instead of compromising himself by saying a sorry asks her to move on and tells her that it happens. For him there is nothing wrong but for her, her whole life was being affected. he rejects her petition for mutual divorce, now they would have to move on to the court where things could get ugly. Netra asks for 50 % of everything. Amrita refuses saying that she did not need it. Netra tells her all marriages are deals. Love is not enough to run a marriage. She does not argue. For her the only thing unfair was that one slap and Vikram's expectation from her to move on. That one slap was a reminder of all those unfair things that she had ignore for so many years. Now she wants just two things for herself, love and happiness.

Amrita's mother-in-law advices her to let go as women have to learn to suffer a bit. When she asks her if she is happy by suffering for so many years, she replies that her children are happy and she finds her happiness in her children. Vikram shows his aggression by shouting at Amrita.

Vikram sends a list of false accusations on Amrita for being a gold digger. He says that she wants to leave him because he could not take her to London. She even mentally tortured him when he left his father's business. The slap was just an excuse. Even at the party she was the one who started the physical violence. He started playing dirty now. Netra asks her if she was still willing

to play fair. To this she replies, yes. He hit her for the first time and he cannot do it, her petition is that simple.

Meanwhile Amrita finds out she is pregnant. She tells Vikram about it, he is happy. he takes out a diary and shows his life goals to her. There is no place for her dreams in those goals. Its all about his dreams. She insists on divorce with a fair co-parenting but he threatens her that he will take away the baby from her.

Amrita's parents decide to keep her happy. Her pregnancy was a happy as well as a sad news for them. They tell her the funny stories of their marriage. She asks her father about what she was doing is right. He says that we do things thinking it is right the results tell us whether it is truly right or not. He tells her that doing the right thing does not always result in happiness.

Now Vikram focuses on getting the baby's custody rather than bringing her back. Indians are more concerned about producing a heir than their actual marriage. He now decides to produce fake eye witnesses in the court who would say that nothing happened at the party. He approaches Shivani to help him. He asks her to lie but she denies. She was supportive to Amrita and did not think what Vikram did was justifiable. While discussions amongst the lawyers, the husband's lawyer says that he has agreed to the divorce and is ready to give her some compensation but he needs the baby's full custody. This leads to an argument between the two lawyers and they will now meet at the court. Netra pressurises Amrita to allow her to file a case of domestic violence. Vikram approaches Amrita to take back her case and return to him. She tells him to accuse her of being a manic depressive, drunkard and mentally ill in his next petition. Amrita at last files a case of domestic violence.

Amrita participates whole-heartedly in the pooja with Vikram. After the pooja Amrita bursts out emotionally in front of everyone. She says that she never thought of becoming a housewife before she became one. She had her own dreams. She compromised but decided to become the best housewife. She tried too. She was so engrossed in being the perfect wife that she had replaced her favourites with her husband's. but she was grateful for the love that she got. But that one slap made her realise that she had lost her identity in her marriage. Nobody told Vikram that it was his mistake instead everyone told her to forget about what happened. Every male character in the realises their mistake but because of their egos do not accept it. Vikram realises how hard had she been trying to become the perfect wife.

Netra leaves her father-in-law's office and tells Rohit that she does not need any more favours from him. She even stops talking to Priyam. She starts fresh and now she finds happiness in herself. She is free.

Sunita is shown being brutally hit by her husband again but this time she revolts saying if he becomes a man by hitting his wife then she too wants to be a woman and speak up for herself. He has no right to threaten her to kill her. Her husband is stunned as she starts hitting him back.

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Shivani tells her daughter that she is happy being single.

Amrita is finally happy with her family. Her father recites a poem to her which he wrote when she was born.

Before the trial Vikram finally apologises to her, he says that the slap was never his right and it is nobody's right. He was wrong for accusing her with false accusations. They separate on a good note. He too starts fresh and promises her to prove himself worthy of her love.

Amrita's step inspired all the women in the film to find their own happiness, their own identities.

Conclusion

Feminism is the movement which demands equality for all the sexes in terms of social, economic and political aspects. A small fight of feminism is against the domestic violence and marital rapes. My work talks about feminism shown in films and how they have a huge impact on the present-day society. With the help of feminist criticism, I have analysed a film and given my point of view on it. The film shows how fast the woman was in realizing the injustice happen to her and she took the decision on the right time. It helps in reducing the damage caused to her by the patriarchal society. In all the stories the women are not given the respect that they deserve and so they are triggered to revolt against this act of oppression.

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