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OTT Platforms: The Voice of Silenced Women

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Abstract

The rise of digital OTT Platforms embarked the transformative journey in Indian entertainment landscape in the last few years. It represents the dynamic and multifaceted portrayal of women. This article highlights how OTT platforms act as a voice of silenced women who were stucked in stereotypical role and their struggles, challenges, voices have long been marginalized or sidelined in traditional media narratives. By avoiding the outdated censorship and commercial pressure, OTT platforms reflecting nuance and resilience portrayal of women's experiences beyond intersectionality. Digital platforms illustrate women from marginalized groups, rural backspaces, oppressed caste, LGBTQ+ identities and those who scuffling daily life issues, barely explored on the silver screen. Through the case study of web series such as Delhi Crime, Bombay Begums, Made in Heaven and Aranyak, this paper evaluates that how OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Jio Hotstar, Zee5 and others created space for the modify the depiction of women and focusing how reshaping female characters, amplified hidden voices of women and contributing to vital culture shift towards gender inclusivity. These platforms also considered the viewers perception and societal impact of these storytelling. OTT platforms are not only conferring space for entertainment but rather than the transformation of the society. Additionally, the article explores the role of digital freedom, creative autonomy and approach of audience to allowing such stories flourish. These digital platforms are not only vehicle to drive the entertainment but act as a cultural space where alternative female voice are heard, validate and amplified. This paper focuses on the impact of the OTT platforms in changing image of women.

Keywords: Indian OTT platforms, Feminism, Women Empowerment, LGBTQ+ representation, Societal shift

Introduction

OTT (Over-the-top) platforms are the manifesto of transformation to bring revolutionary changes through promoting content directly to the audience via the internet. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Jio Hotstar, Zee5 and others, sidelined the stuffy cinema and television networks which are influenced by censorship, market pressure and commercial interest. Therefore, OTT platforms shape intersectional, diverse and bold storytelling relevant to society. These platforms have improved and are promoting the changing image of women in Indian cinema. Historically, female characters were limited to submissive and stereotypical forms like dutiful wives, obedient daughters and as objects of love interest, rarely presented the complexities of women's real-life experiences. Representation of women was defined with the lens of the male gaze and fasciated within traditional cultural expectations and stigmas, which failed to address the real-life challenges of women which they were faced in society.

Additionally, OTT platforms provide creators freedom to fabricate such content that portrays an empowered image of women, catering to niche as well as global audiences. These platforms lean on subscription-based revenue rather than advertising and can take creative risks. These digital platforms were increasingly used by filmmakers and content creators to magnify those stories that were considered controversial and noncommercial. These women-centric narratives deal with the theme of intersectional challenges, gender discrimination, domestic violence, objectification, harassment, mental health, and more.

OTT platforms not only showcased these themes but also portrayed the leading role of women in the cinematic industry, such as protagonists, writers, directors and producers. This shift helps to reflect diversity in women's portrayal from an idealized version to an empowered one, with the female perspectives not the male gaze. For example, Indian series like *Delhi Crime* and *Bombay Begums* explore the real-life experiences of women, highlighting their strength, resilience, trauma and growth. These stories are dynamic and complex, mapping women are not just victims or supportive characters, but multidimensional human beings. These platforms have generated a cultural shift in how women are depicted in media. Through the provision of open, flexible, creatively rich landscapes for narratives, they are empowering women to express their voice and reclaim those stories that were historically subjugated and lurking in traditional media. This shift marks a significant step towards promoting gender equality in the entertainment industry and beyond.

Challenging Patriarchal Structure

Over a prolonged duration, patriarchal ideology has dominated the media that molding the narratives and limiting women's roles. In many cinematic productions, such as films and television shows depicted female characters as dependent, controlled and secondary to male leads. They were defined according to deep-rooted domestic spaces as sacrificial mothers and devoted wives. Whenever women were portrayed in a lead role and empowerment that aligned with idealized and confined to moral binaries, either portrayal is pure and rebellious. This format of representation emphasizes gender hierarchies and conditions audiences to accept a limited and distorted portrayal of womanhood.

These OTT digital platforms are challenging and dismantling these conventions by highlighting women-centric stories. With less commercial and censorship pressure, these platforms help to transform patriarchal attitudes towards women. Women are now playing multifaceted roles, navigating their own ambitions, trauma, desires and dilemmas. They display a progressive portrayal of women without judging them and depicted women are not rich in their own right, they make mistakes, face internal and external complexities, so these struggles make them real and relatable. For instance, the main character of the *Bombay Begums* series, Rani, a high-ranking bank CEO not portrayed in the traditional version but is empowered in male dominated area. This type of portrayal of antagonism of stereotypes invites the audience to understand and value women as human beings, not as objects. Moreover, these digital platforms highlighted those stories that have long been considered

taboo in traditional Indian cinema, like female sexuality, menstruation, harassment, rights to choose their partners or profession based on their own terms and conditions. The depiction of such a theme in a series, questioning on the outdated societal norms that promote patriarchy or hinder women's empowerment. These platforms challenge Deep prejudice and open the door to inclusive thinking.

Another important aspect that has been investigated is that these web series represent intersectional identities. Women from different castes, regions, classes and orientations are finding space on OTT platforms. Web series like *Delhi Crime*, the protagonist, DCP Vartika Chaturvedi (Shefali Shah), powerfully balances her role as a woman in power and a woman with duties in the patriarchal system. *Lelia*, a series about a Hindu girl married to a Muslim man who was against societal rules and considered a stigma or crime. *Bombay Begums*, this series shows the multilayered role of women with different generations and socio-economic backgrounds, like CEOs, sex workers, and teenagers. These series showcased how women have to face multiple challenges. These platforms redefined cultural narratives and promoted equality beyond patriarchal norms. They highly contributed to a media environment where women are not silenced or sidelined but empowered. This transformation is varied not only for progressive, inclusive media but also for fostering an equitable and reflective society.

Addressing Issues of Gender Inequality and Social Justice

OTT platforms make a great contribution to challenging gender inequality and outdated societal issues that have long been underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream cinema. Unlike traditional entertainment structures that prioritize commercial appeal over meaningful content. OTT platforms have scorched the traditional portrayal of women and represent them as empowered in every corner of the world. These platforms build a space for serious social issues, particularly those that affect women like domestic Violence, sexual harassment, marital abuse, gender Inequality, workplace inequality, harassment and complexities of female identity and autonomy.

One of the most influential aspects of OTT platforms is their unflinching approach to hard subjects. For instance, *Delhi Crime* (Netflix), based on real life incident 2012 Delhi gang rape case does not sensationalize the crime but rather than showcase a nuanced and respectful account of the investigation while shading light on the ferocious realities of sexual violence against women in India. It emphasizes not only horrifying incidents but also the psychological toll it takes on police survivors, police officers and society as a whole. This prompts the audience to consider how such crimes are handled in real life and initiates significant discussions on violence, justice and systematic failure. Similarly, *Made in Heaven* (Amazon Prime Video) showcased elite Indian weddings to expose the hypocrisy, patriarchy and sexism that frequently lurk beneath supposedly elegant customs. In series, the female characters deal with issues like harassment, violence, domestic abuse and societal taboo, all while trying to assert their independence in a judgmental and patriarchal society. These digital platforms are prominent for their powerful lens for highlighting these issues from women's perspectives and avoiding the normalization of these challenges. They also provide free space for women as director, producer and creator. This transformation in authorship gives authenticity to the narratives, so the audience feels the live experiences are not abstract. Through this action, OTT content not only empowers women but also the viewers, who could find courage, validation, or resonance in seeing their realities displayed on screen.

Redefining Womanhood through Storytelling

OTT Platforms are powerful sources that depict women's lives with authenticity, nuance and depths beyond traditional media, where women are often limited and have to live their lives accordingly to familial and societal norms. OTT shows and films prioritize women as central figures over men and offer to illustrate their own stories in their own voice, not others. This transformation plays a vital role in influencing the audience because, as the audience watches on screen, they try to

follow that pattern in their own lives. Web series as *Bombay Begums*, *Four More Shots Please!* and *Delhi Crime* illustrate this transformation.

In *Bombay Begums*, a story about five women, Rani, Fatima, Laxmi, Ayesha, and Shai from different walks of life, each of them facing issues of ambition, desire, power, survival and motherhood. This series does not flinch from depicting their flaws and moral dilemmas and offering them to be vulnerable yet powerful, something rarely afforded to female characters in traditional structure.

Similarly, *Four More Shots Please!* expose the lives of four urban women navigating careers, relationships and identity crises. This show challenges traditional gender roles by showcasing women who boldly vocal about their sexual and emotional needs. This series is against the acceptance of women as limited, submissive, or self-sacrificing.

Delhi Crime, while showcasing cruelty and borrowing from real-life crime, also focuses on a woman IPS officer (played by Shefali Shah) heading the investigation with passion, dignity and intelligence. Her powerful character became the epitome of the strength of women in male-dominated spaces and high-pressure environments. Mainly, she is not romanticized and idealized but as the leading character of the series, her struggles are depicted as real and engaging and offering an authentic, grounded portrayal of women. These web series promote women's empowerment through their diverse narratives and offer women to be the voice of their own stories. They highlight the theme of career ambition, sexual freedom, mental health, domestic violence, harassment, motherhood, class divide and gender discrimination, offering the audience a wide range of womanhood in contemporary India. Moreover, these kinds of multidimensional stories made women free to see their own life struggles on screen, fostering a sense of representation, justification and support. OTT play a crucial role in refining cultural discourse by depicting powerful women who are strong enough to make decisions about their professional and personal lives. They challenge the outdated patriarchal beliefs and promote gender equality.

Redefining Narratives and Reshaping Cultural Discourse

OTT Platforms have become a transformed space for women where women are not confined to the margins of storytelling. They are depicted in progressive form, asserting control over their narratives and dismantling persistent media stereotypes, unlike traditional cinema, which limited women to passive and supporting roles but when series present women as the central character with depth, agency and Individuality. The married woman displays the emotional and sexual awakening of a conventional homemaker, Astha, as she develops a deep connection with another woman, Peepika. This story is beyond the same sex love ideology, emotional independence and became the voice of dissatisfied women who are trapped in rigid societal beliefs. By showcasing an inner journey of the female character in this series redefines what it means for a woman to express her Identity outside of motherhood and marriage. In the same way in *Delhi Crime* depicts women not only as victims but also as the leaders of justice. DCP Vartika Chaturvedi leads a risky investigation and presents women in positions that reshape the image of women in law enforcement. The space of women in the OTT landscape is significant in transforming society through its narratives.

Engaging International Communities and Advocating Transformation

Global accessibility is one of the most transformative phases of OTT platforms, which engage a global audience with women-centric stories with a specific local cultural landscape. This limitless nature of digital streaming offered powerful women-centric stories from India to be viewed and appreciated by a global audience, thereby fostering the voice of silenced women in mainstream cinema. Series like *Delhi Crime* and *Leila* on Netflix tackle the daily life challenges of women, such as gender-based violence, objectification, harassment, authoritarian control and women's resilience in the form of systematic oppression.

Furthermore, Indian Digital platforms' content increasingly depicts multilayered female characters from urban working professionals and mothers to LGBTQ+ individuals and women from marginalized societies. The diversity resonates globally, illustrating that while cultural contexts may differ, the core struggle and gender equality and dignity are shared worldwide. Additionally, the global unveiling of Indian input facilitates cross-cultural empathy and learning. For instance, international viewers watch the movies like *Bombay Begums* or *Four More Shots Please!*, they are not only entertained audience but also educated and made aware about the complexities of socio-cultural Indian women face in the corporate, domestic system, or the pursuit of personal freedom. The impact of this global approach extends beyond viewership. It boosts oneness among women worldwide, enhances transnational feminist discourse and promotes awareness of specific gender issues that may influence policy, education and activism. These platforms are driving the cultural diplomacy and societal shift, molding how women's stories are heard, illustrated and valued around the world.

Conclusion

Women, the Voice of Future on OTT Platforms

OTT Platforms played a significant role in redefining Indian women across the border and represent progressive images of women on the silver screen that aligns with the real world. One of the most crucial phases of progressive portrayal of women is empowered women behind the camera as writers, directors, producers and showrunners. These platforms offer opportunities to women to present their own story through their own lenses, so that can be more authentic, diverse and mirror real-life experiences. These powerful women creators challenge the stereotypical portrayal of women that has historically existed in traditional cinema and television.

Moreover, the commercial and critical success of female-centric content such as *Delhi Crime*, *Bombay Begums*, *Four More Shots Please!* and *Made in Heaven*, showcased the increasing demand for women-centric stories that highlights their real-life struggles, complexities of gender, identity and empowerment. This growing attitude of the audience towards women-centric narratives is emphasizing OTT platforms to invest in more inclusive and bold storytelling.

OTT platforms remain agents of social change. These platforms' accessibility and freedom from traditional censorship provide creators the freedom to tackle taboo subjects like sexual harassment, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive freedom from a female point of view. This strengthens OTT platforms, amplifying women's voices that were silenced. In essence, OTT platforms are not just a way to change the image of women, but also how women are depicted and who gets to tell the story. As women hold the creative and leadership roles in the industry, so the viewers became more receptive to authentic and empowering content. Moreover, the future of women's representation in media looks strong, brighter, inclusive and justified than ever before.

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