

## Research Article

# A Study on the Framework of Analyzing Female Portrayal on OTT Screen (Especially Reference to Indian Web Series)

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## ABSTRACT

“It is fascinating, it cringes, and it is OTT”. With over 300 million active users per month per the Brand Equity Foundation, 2020 OTT has become one of the largest platforms in existence. With the establishment of digital media platforms like Amazon Prime, Netflix, Disney Hot star and other OTT streaming services, the web stories are viewed as an absolute platform for narrating female-centric stories and reflecting their ideology. Such web-series culture initiates the new wave of narrating women-centric stories reflecting their realities and also break the stereotype culture of women in India. A number of shows, series and a creative content such as Aarya, four more shots please, Tribhanga, Delhi crime that have done well and exploring a lot of female oriented narrative. The rise of digital content in the form of web series began abruptly in 2014. These web series were not only acknowledged womanhood but also focus on topic that are not raised up by mainstream media such as LGBTQ issues, dysfunctional relations, untold stories. Web series have embarked to highlight gender identity, normalize sexuality and showcase women real stories. The study aims to illustrate the ideology of Feminism in the selected Indian web series. This paper aims to analyze the content centered around the aspirations and struggles of women. The researcher has taken some Indian web series for this analysis and examine how they represent Feminism philosophy and also explore their blemish breaking content. The research is conducted by summarizing the data gathered from Web series through textual analysis and observation. This study helps in understanding the change in women centric content and also Scrutinize how these Web series are breaking the chain of T.V. soap operas and Stereotype of women Identity.

**Keyword:** Women-centric, Web series, Textual analysis, Stereotype, Feminism ideology, Digital media

## INTRODUCTION

(Pallavi, 2021) women plays the most vital role in development of any country and community. Dr B.R. Ambedkar has said a very beautiful quote for development of any community “I measure the progress of a community with the degree of progress women have achieved.” (women’s web, 2020). This quote displays

the significant role of women in developing the community. Use of digital platforms accelerated in India quite late but geared up very soon and outshining various benchmarks in the world of digitization. As digitization geared up in our country, people got hooked to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. The last decade witnessed a phenomenal growth in the consumption of the Internet across the

globe. But it was just after 2014, that the web series phenomenon started in India and with no time it created a large viewership with its large variety of content. As a result of the internet revolution it is observed that there has been growth in digital channels as well, from surfing for information on Google and YouTube to digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney Hot star, Amazon Prime and voot (Pallavi, 2020). With the introduction of Netflix, Amazon prime, Hot star and various other streaming service and their original content, the web series culture in India is regarded as a new wave of narrating women stories reflecting their realities. This paper aims to verify these claims by analyzing the content centered around the journey aspirations and struggles of women.

Leading Ott platforms Alt Balaji has partnered with women -only social network. She-Roes to grow its engagement with women content consumer who form 55% of its viewership. In these the portrayal of women breaking the T.V. stereotype and the patriarchy system which were displayed on screen from so long. The portrayal of strong empowered women with female lead protagonist breaking barriers and setting new benchmark in shows. (Brand Equity, 2019). This paper would further analyze web series which have women protagonist deals with female centric content. Previously, Indian cinema and T.V. serials have continued to portray a stereotypical image of women which either objectify her or be as an obedient “Sanskari” daughter, wife, which is widely accepted and appreciated. But with the introduction of women - oriented web series, shows or characters that depicts a more real image of women, their journeys, struggles and friendship is a freshly welcome and appreciated e.g. Four more shots please, Tribhanga, Liela, Puspavalli etc. These such web series not only celebrate womanhood but also focus on topics that are not taken up by mainstream media such as LGBTQ issues, dysfunctional relations. Web series have attempted to highlight gender identity, normalize sexuality and showcase women real stories. Bollywood usual stalking roles portrayed by men are often romanticized. Turning from this “cliché” Pushpavalli sets an example and also offers

an unique narrative of woman’s obsession with a man. This new wave of women oriented content gives a challenge to the unrealistic portrayal of woman on screen is very much new and somewhere it is accepted by this realistic world of viewers. These series are cringe comedy and showed us that women can also have shades of grey and yet be playing a protagonist because women doesn’t necessarily have to be “all good” all the time (Shreya, 2020). This study aims to analyze the portrayal of the ideology of feminism in the selected Indian web series. For this impetus study the researcher has selected Indian web series for analysis and examines how they represent feminism philosophy their stigma breaking content.

### Web Series in India

Gone are the days where families sit together and watching television. While the Indian audience enthusiastically watched foreign series, they equally promoted Indian series, which came up with fascinating revolutionary content. With changing times, traditional television culture has evolved into digital platforms and thrilled all those millennials as well as most in the older generation. In the new wave, the digital visual culture’s actual turn came up with YouTube a few years back when they started to show TVF Pitchers, Permanent Roommates and Bang Baja Barat. Since then, the web series phenomenon has expanded its viewership in India. Good web content was catalysed through platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Alt Balaji, TVF and others. With increasing internet accessibility in India, content consumption went up to further levels. Digital renaissance has brought a handful of fresh and robust content to the audience to consume a whole new buffet of entertainment. Even Indian consumers become ready to pay a premium for quality and global content on Netflix or Amazon Prime. As the internet is full of choices, consumers who have a short attention span always demand snack-sized contents. Hence, the quality of the production, content, and casting plays a vital role in the reception of a web series. Therefore, the producers are very particular about producing fresh and relatable content that can seek millennials’ attention (TEAM, 2019).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sarkar Srijita, 2012 in her study “An Analysis of Hindi Women- Centric Films in India” opines that even though Bollywood produced many women-centric films, there is still a long way to go before they become mainstream. In reality, there has been a spike in women-centric cinema in the last decade, with these films attempting to convey optimistic messages about women’s strength and influence in Indian society. This depiction may have a dual meaning: it may be an effort to avoid giving the incorrect message to the general public that women are submissive in their cultural livelihood and therefore should be viewed as wanted by men; it may also have a political or social significance. Hindi films, which deal with these ideas in general, can convey a positive message regarding women in Indian society. Thus, women-centric films at the very least seek to change the attitude of Indian woman, which could involve introducing reform in how they raise their children, educating their sons to be respectful of women, or contemplating a strong alternative such as getting out of an abusive marriage or declining to approve a marriage proposal by refusing to comply with dowry requests. (Srijita, 2012). Welson Tracy, 2018 in her article “The Role of Women in OTT Entertainment Advances” conclude the rise of over-the-top allows for live and on- demand entertainment over the internet wherever and whenever consumer wish which means you can watch the global modern shows on any number of devices : television screen, computer screens, tablets or mobile phones. OTT brought encouragement in women centric content and change the cliché portrayal of womanhood also give inspiration with more women helping drive the creation and customization of content and also provide opportunity for new content writers and also give content liberty and freedom to the thoughts of the directors (Welson, 2018). Roy Tasmayee (2019), in her article “OTT Platforms a Boon for Women-Centric Content” implies that from YouTube to Netflix to Amazon prime video, Alt Balaji, Zee 5 and regional platforms like Hoichoi all have been focusing on content led by a woman cast. The platform is the last one year has produced and promoted more women -centric content than what

mainstream has done in last five years. OTT however is completely free of such bias content driven by women in leading roles are also no more only about family drama or the usual saas bahu repertoire (Tasmayee, 2019). Wardhan Pallavi (2020), in her study “Female Representation in Indian Web Series- Myth or Reality” opines that Indian web series has seen a massive growth in content that begs to differ from that Bollywood. Most of the web series that have content centred to women are unrelatable. Women living in cities other than Mumbai, Bangalore or metro cities won’t be able to relate with these shows. Most of women centric shows aired on web series have women who are either powerful or have women coming from privileged backgrounds. The gender disparity in accessing the internet cant go unnoticeable. Even if the web series continues to create more and more woman empowering content, if it doesn’t reach its right audience, it is all a waste (Pallavi, Voice of margin, 2020).

## OBJECTIVES

- The present study aims to analyse the portrayal of the ideology of feminism in the selected Indian web series.
- It attempts to understand the diverse ways in which feminism is portrayed in India’s selected popular web series.
- To explore woman as empowerment Entity.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the objectives, the researcher selected : ‘Pushpavalli’ (Amazon Prime), ‘Lust Stories’ (Netflix), ‘Made in Heaven’ (Amazon Prime), ‘Four More Shots Please’ (Amazon Prime), ‘The Test Case’ (Alt Balaji). The methodology of the study involves textual analysis of selected Indian web series. The textual analysis consists of observations and the portrayal of various female characters. Through textual analysis, the researcher can interpret texts such as films, TV programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, and graffiti to get a sense of people’s approach to the world around them in

specific cultures at specific moments. Every society gains a better understanding of their own cultures by seeing the different ways in which reality can be interpreted because, in that attempt, they begin to see the limits and benefits of their sense-making practices.

‘Textual analysis’ is a technique for analysing media types ranging from simple films to more subtle forms such as news narratives, television series, films, and commercials. The researcher performed a ‘textual study’ of selected Indian web series for this research paper. The researcher looked at the interactions between feminist views of female protagonists and feminist philosophy in a few Indian web series for this analysis.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT

### The Test Case

The Hindi web series came in 2017, on Alt Balaji. The series is based on the gender differences and how a woman thrives to be equal. Protagonist captain ‘Shikha Sharma’ who is training to be first woman test case in a combat role with the Indian Army is the only woman in a group of Indian Army officers training to join special forces. The story revolves around her journey of overcoming challenges at home to biases by her colleagues despite being an intelligent and a highly motivated individual. This is the story of the first female army general and how she strived to be what she wanted. The series portrays a starve of woman to make her own identity with her hard work and intelligence. It also highlights the struggles and hurdles which she faced during the journey of achieving her dreams.

### Four More Shots Please

This series streaming exclusively on Amazon Prime Video. The series follows the story of four unapologetically flawed women, two in their thirties and two in their early twenties who are struggling with four typical problems of their own. They live, love, make mistakes and discover what really makes them tick through friendship and shots of tequila in millennial Mumbai. The story revolves around female friendships, their lives as

a single parent and single women, their flourishing and failing careers, their relationships and their routine lives. The series broadly focussed on breaking taboo’s through a character Umang Singh a P.T teacher from Ludhiana and becoming a Gym instructor in Mumbai and also a bisexual and constantly tries to recuperate from the pangs of a breakup she has given by her girlfriends. The story highlights the true meaning of love, friendship and how woman can make their life without any back support of man.

### Made in Heaven

The series broadly portrays today’s India’s potent blend of vintage norms and newness where tradition jostles with modern aspirations against the backdrop of ‘Big Fat Indian Weddings’. The protagonist is both confident and insecure at the same time. As the show progress we witness more layers to her character. Throughout the series we witnessed a struggle between her mind and heart. The series depicts that woman can be vulnerable without losing her own identity, she’s courageous enough to tell about adulterous to her husband. This show unravels the problem of homophobia, dowry, and class that every wedding faces. Every episode centres on a new wedding which raises topics such as misogyny, honour killing, party politics and more. The series feminises the image of a ‘Big Fat Wedding’ by gazing at it from the eye of woman.

### Lust stories

The Netflix original Indian based web series consist of exceedingly simple stories but are capable enough for breaking taboos like teacher obsession with her student, an extramarital affair, a servant’s relationship with her employer and a newly married couple and their bedroom problems. In this series ‘Lust’ takes the centre of space and it is often unresolved and considered as taboo. The characters struggled to explain the reasons for their actions and relationship status on a notoriously prude culture that equipped with the tools to do so. The older generation is uniformly depicted as conservative, and for them, sex is neither seen nor heard of, and it should be referred to

as shameful. The show portrays characters drinking, swearing, and talking about sex openly. Perhaps the web series indirectly points to the necessity of sex education in our society.

### Pushpavalli

The Amazon Prime original web series 'Pushpavalli' tells us a unique narrative of a woman's obsession with a man. Pushpavalli played by Sumukhi Suresh, is a normal girl next door character. The story is cringe-comedy, but as the story progresses, the love story plot evolves into a serious obsession and later leads to serious stalking. Though we cannot agree with stalking and obsession, the story shown us that a woman can have shades of grey and yet be playing a protagonist because a woman protagonist does not necessarily have to be "good" all the time. Pushpavalli offers us a unique narrative of woman's obsession with a man, that also lead into stalking. Though the premise is supremely dangerous, but to challenge the unrealistic portrayal of women onscreen is very much new.

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Many web series have become popular through the increase in accessibility of digital platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Hot star, Alt Balaji, Zee5, Voot and others. Web series dramas like 'Made in heaven', 'Four more shots please', 'Pushpavalli', 'Ghoul', 'Lust stories', 'Mirzapur', 'What the folks', 'Little things', and 'A girl in the city' had strong female characters and drew attention for their performances. The female representations in these series are modern, independent, strong, progressive and realistic. Digital streaming platforms have the potential to experiment with new and gripping content. The present study points out the fact that the ideology of feminism is visible in Indian web series, and they get decent appreciation from the audience. What shields Indian web series from the threat of aping commercial Bollywood is the freedom to explore real Indian urban lifestyles and their sensibilities without any regressive censorship or crowd-pleasing tactics. Indian web series is brimming with fresh talent, experimenting with the visual medium and are definitely

on their way to becoming an exciting and thriving industry. Web series have shown to the Indian audiences that a woman can be ambitious, career-oriented, enjoying power, and at the same time, she can embrace her sexual desires and be feminine. A woman does not need to be tough, masculine, and a rebel to be taken seriously. She can be as feminine and at the same time embrace success, be ambitious and complex. She can be someone who fights for justice on men's behalf or could be someone who loves and enjoys sex way more than a patriarchal and judgmental society expects her to. These web series gave us such women.

### CONCLUSION

Indian web series has seen a massive growth in content that begs to differ from that Bollywood. It has helped in capturing the interest of the audience. These women centric web series offers creative freedom to the makers as an ideal space to experiment with topics that are sensitive and triggering. Thus, the appealing content is able to hold up the audience expectations of consuming diverse subjects and issues. The Indian web series have shown a better understanding of millennial women than Bollywood and tv soap operas. It is clearly evident from the study that the content which is being shown in web series satisfies the ideology of feminism. One of the most widely held misconceptions about feminism is that it is only appropriate for Western countries and not for Indian tradition and culture, which is incorrect. The huge rise in feminist web series is indicative of movement toward a more egalitarian and fair society. Even now, there is a lot to cover, particularly when it comes to content in regional and local languages, but the future of digital content remains promising, especially with the rise in viewer support for feminist content.

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