



1. The Portrayal of Women's Empowerment on OTT Platforms: A Study of the Netflix series Delhi Crime

Dr. Chitra Tanwar

Associate Professor, Journalism, and Mass Communication,
Government P.G. College, Sector 1, Panchkula, tanwarchitra@gmail.com

Abstract

The Cinema around the world is changing. Apart from full-fledged feature films, web applications like Netflix are taking center stage. People have found a newer way of entertainment. The high TRPs that these web series receive and the kind of international-level content they provide have made them a competitor to multiplex cinema. Women have been an important subject of the stories that cinema portrays. And Netflix is no exception. Among these stories is Delhi crime, a web series that portrays the journey of a policewoman in nabbing the culprits of the infamous Nirbhaya case. This paper will look at the women's empowerment portrayed through the character of the protagonist and other women characters of the series using content analysis.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Cinema, Netflix, Delhi Crime

Introduction

Indian Cinema has come a long way. It has celebrated a hundred years of its existence in this decade. The kind of impact it has on the masses is immense. It is said to be the mirror of society. What has changed is the way people access the medium nowadays. People have found newer more convenient ways of entertaining. Cinema has traveled from theaters to smartphones. Stories told in films are now being made on various platforms. Contemporary technology has come up with new ways of bringing visual media to the palm with the click of a button. With various internet-based applications ruling the current entertainment industry, cinema and series have found a new address in form of web-based applications like Netflix. With the kind of content these sites provide they have changed the scenario of the way, people connect to visual media. The urge to watch stories in multiplexes is receiving a tough completion from these applications. Netflix has been among the leaders of its industry. Its audience-driven content and its ease of availability make it a



favorite among its viewers. People have started enjoying the best of content in the comfort of their homes. They have choices to be spoilt for. Also, these platform mirrors the society we stay in and can impact the audiences in huge ways. Thus understanding these platforms and the content they serve calls for an investigation.

Visual Media and Women empowerment

Films are a mere reflection of society so much so that sometimes they can even influence public opinion or can mold the viewpoint of the public of the society. Kidwai, S., & Ahamad, M. (2002). The Visual medium is one medium that has immense power of influencing the audience. This engagement of the media with the masses is a matter of interest. The role and impact of Media are very significant to accelerate women's empowerment. Social media through its ever-updating apps and networking is an inevitable source of influence on mass. The media at large has been instrumental though not to the degree desired in supporting the movement for women's emancipation by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of women in society Narayana, A., & Ahamad, T. (2016). Media is well-thought-out to be the most significant tool of society in contemporary times as it enjoys the power to be able to connect with a huge number audience. The enabling of women is also very much needed for the socioeconomic growth of any society. Women contribute as creators, teachers, and developers of any human race. The visual media, however, like all media, is good and powerful media to convey to its audiences the stories of these women who have made a place of themselves in society. They stand as symbols of women's emancipation and further inspire other women to follow in their footsteps. Indian cinema has also succeeded in portraying numerous women characters that were powerful enough to inspire a generation. Kidwai, S., & Ahamad, M. (2016). Visual media could contribute strongly to the propagation of the concept of gender equality. It has always reflexively affected and influenced the way society thinks or behaves. Media should bring the spotlight to success stories of well-known, unbeaten & prominent women. As a vital agent of socialization and determining gender roles, its mechanisms for maintaining checks and balances with respect to gender portrayal needs to be strengthened. The media should enable the projection of women in a decent and dignified way and promote respect and dignity to women through portrayal where women have overcome extremely difficult situations. Following this trend, cinema and Netflix of late have come up with women-



driven content. Women are assigned powerful roles where the women who play vital roles in society can be showcased to the audiences. In the series that this paper studies such empowered characters are portrayed and they have conveyed a strong message about criminal mentalities.

The Netflix Effect: Reshaping the Movie Culture

A huge attraction for Indian audiences to the Netflix platform is the recent foray into Indian original programming, a move to slice into the world's second most populous country with access to cheap mobile data, George, R. (2019). The web app of Netflix has entered the lives of internet users in a big way. People have started their multiplex time by watching movies and various other programs on Netflix. When it comes to the content on Netflix, the platform can be seen as a site for audience negotiation. George, R. (2019). The number of subscribers on Netflix has grown by leaps and bounds. It has an estimated 59 million subscribers in the USA alone. It has made its effect felt in all sectors of entertainment. This is known as the Netflix Effect. The effect catapults an unknown actor to fame overnight because many people binge-watch the show.

Before Netflix people went to cinema theatres, and multiplexes rented DVDs, or watched whatever was being run on TV. But now the user can stream content on the device of their choice anytime anywhere. Netflix has completely changed how cinematic content was watched. They no longer have to sit at a place and sit through commercials while watching a show or movie. Consumers have been attracted by the flexibility of being able to watch what and when they want to watch. They don't wish to pay for what they do not want to watch. Netflix produces many original series in keeping in view the likings and interests of the audiences. Delhi Crime was one such show which could have competed with any movie released in a theatre. Netflix has been among the pioneers who have used the technology of the Internet to drive its overall business model. It has allowed Netflix to have huge amounts of data on its customers. This further helps in content generation. It also allows them to segregate content as per the priority of a particular user. Netflix claims that 80 percent of content comes from recommendations of the viewers which is indicative that the strong women-centric content available on Netflix is also a choice of contemporary users. The effect of Netflix has been felt the maximum in the cinema and TV industry. Small films are



also showcased on Netflix which is a new way of experiencing cinema. Netflix has also challenged traditional TV. It has come up with a series of its own.

The success of Netflix shows that viewers want a tailor-made, easy-to-use product.

Analysing Delhi Crime –Women empowerment tailor-made for Indian audience

True crime dramas are often attractive but don't essentially make for the calmest viewing experience. Shock, grief, and rage usually get tangled as you watch the story unravel. The series Delhi Crime was available for the audience on Netflix from 22 March 2019. The brutal gang rape of Jyoti Singh (Nirbhaya) on a bus in New Delhi became worldwide news in 2012. Widely known as the Nirbhaya rape incident, it was a landmark case that led the Indian government to amend existing criminal laws on sexual violence and rape. Rajan, B., Kundu, D., & Sarkar, S. (2022). The incident brought mankind face to face with brutality committed by six men on 23-year-old paramedical students of Delhi in December 2012. The series has been directed written and created by Richie Mehta, an Indo Canadian Filmmaker. The series is a dramatized representation of the chase for nabbing the culprits between 16 and 21 December 2012. That is from the day of the horrific incident to the day of the final arrest. Delhi Crime a gritting seven-episode crime series has been directed by Richie Mehta and constructed around the bus gang-rape incident that shook the national capital in Delhi. The series was based on the case files of Delhi Police about the investigation of the infamous Nirbhaya Gang rape in Delhi. It revolves entirely around Nirbhaya's case and the reflection of Delhi society, this series is also cop-centric. Mohamed, N. H. B. J. (2020). This series redevise the real-life examination where a team of police officers is asked to go on a countrywide manhunt to capture the culprit. By basing the premise of Delhi Crime on an actual incident that shook the conscience of the national and international public, this television series is situated within the intimate intersection of politics and media ecologies. Bhattacharjee, S. (2021). The show puts to light the stories of women. One among them is this brave woman who faces the most inhuman behavior but still wanted to survive. She will live as an example among itself of how women's empowerment was portrayed. A part of the series shows how she has this never say die attitude. The confession of one of the culprits said that she tried her best to fight back which triggered his anger. On the other hand, the chief investigation officer portrayed DCP south



district, Vartika Chaudhary portrayed by actress Shefali Shah. Another strong woman character is the victim's mother who constantly fights her own emotions and keeps a brave face in front of her daughter and the world. The sub-inspector Vimla played by Jaya Bhattacharya and trainee officer, Neeti Singh played by Rasika Duggal fight their own battles and emerge winners in their lives. They are timely supported by the men in their lives.

Vartika is in charge of the investigation team and showcases the traits of a true leader. She is a police officer and homemaker with a teenage daughter, thus sharing dual responsibility. This shows that she is capable of handling both responsibilities simultaneously. She wants her daughter to stay in India and make a career for herself. While her daughter considers Delhi unsafe the empowered officer believes that she can take care of it. The way she talks to male officers shows that she is in command and never apologetic for her gender. The way she handles the sensitive case shows that she is strong and emotional at the same time. She is not shy about showing her human vulnerability. It seeps through her conversations with her daughter, husband, and her other support staff. She is an inspiring example of an empowered woman in contemporary times.

The other female character Neeti Singh is assigned the responsibility of taking care of the victim and her ailing family. Neeti in her quench to be an independent woman has shifted base to Delhi from Chandigarh. She becomes emotionally and dutiful while dealing with her responsibilities. On one hand, where she is seen weeping at the critical condition of the victim, she also takes part in a protest at India Gate. She shows the true nature of humanity and selflessly performs her duties. At times she even sacrifices her personal needs to stick to her goals. She is an example of the journey that one goes through while being empowered. She shows that being true to yourself and nature and having the will to be responsible are the real traits of being empowered by a woman.

Another example of an empowered woman character in the series is, Vimla. She too is a homemaker and a cop. She is a dutiful woman. She does not allow anyone to take the law into her hands. In one scene where she and her colleagues catch hold of the sixth culprit who appears to be minor. Even after the insistence of her colleagues to book him as an adult, she carries out her duties as per the book. She does not let her emotions overpower her duty toward the law.



It can be drawn that women are prodigiously valued in a Delhi Crime based on their identification as a mother, wives, or employees. Women are portrayed as independent even though them being, over-emotional, and confined to tough jobs like that of police officers. Series like Delhi Crime have provided an opportunity to present women as empowered in contrast to some contemporary prime-time narratives that have relapsed to formulaic depictions wherein independent women are shown as those requiring guidelines and by the story's end relapse to being doormats or shadows. Delhi Crime celebrates Indian women whose activities focus on but are nowhere limited to the domestic realm. The show showcases strong women taking the center stage and owning up to their flaws and desires providing fluidity to the narrative. The show wants us to believe that the characters are ambitious and justify themselves at every point. Their strong-headedness, badass nature, and unapologetic selves provide a distinctive base to their characters with the introduction of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and various other streaming services, and their original content, the web series culture in India is regarded as a new wave of narrating women's stories, reflecting their realities. The characters of Delhi Crime can be considered as contemporary, progressive and quite relatable. IPS Officer Vartika Chaturvedi in Delhi Crime showed us that women are empowering, and fierce, they have great leadership qualities and they root for one another (Wardhan, 2020).

Conclusion

To conclude we can say that Netflix has established itself as an effective Visual medium and its audience is growing in bounds and leaps. Delhi crime was a successful show which ensured faith in police and justice in the country. The policewomen ensured that justice was served to the victim. They were well supported by all others sections of society. To bring such a story to the screen needed a lot of hard work and sensitivity which was taken care of by the series makers. Such portrayal maybe will, in a small way, contribute to changing the mindset of people to build a safer society. It can contribute further to society by selecting more women-centric content and using its power to influence the audience and make the world a better place to live in.



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