

Chapter 8: The ambivalent gaze: Feminization, post-feminism, and the political economy of gender representation in Indian Ott media

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Abstract: The shift toward a more female-centric landscape in Indian media, especially across OTT giants like Netflix and Amazon Prime, marks a major turning point in how stories are told and who gets to tell them. This paper looks at how digital streaming has changed the game for women, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. Using a mix of feminist theory and media critique, the article explores the complicated reality of this newfound visibility. On one hand, these platforms have opened doors for diverse female voices and fresh perspectives; on the other, this progress is often tied to a ‘marketable’ brand of feminism that treats empowerment as a commodity, potentially favouring profit over true social change.

By diving into popular series like *Made in Heaven* [1] *Delhi Crime* [2], and *Four More Shots Please!* [3], this study examines how modern Indian womanhood is portrayed through the lenses of class, sexuality, and city life. While these shows celebrate women as bold and independent, their stories are often limited to a world of urban wealth and traditional beauty standards. At the same time, the rise of directors like Zoya Akhtar and Alankrita Shrivastava shows that women are finally claiming more power in the director’s chair. However, even with these breakthroughs, the industry still struggles with deep-seated inequalities in who actually holds the keys to the kingdom.

We have moved past the era of just counting women in the credits. In the world of OTT, we are seeing a fundamental shift in the Indian gaze, a new way of looking at womanhood that feels more authentic and bold. Yet, this progress exists in a delicate balance: it is at once a powerful step toward liberation and a calculated move in a post-liberalization market.

Keywords: Feminization, Gender Representation, Indian OTT Media, Political Economy, Post-feminism.

1 Introduction

The landscape of Indian popular culture is undergoing a profound paradigm shift, driven primarily by the rapid expansion of Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming platforms. This transition, from traditional, tightly regulated broadcast and theatrical circuits to decentralized, subscription-based digital ecosystems, has catalyzed what may be described as the *feminization* of Indian media. This concept extends beyond the quantitative increase in women’s presence on screen; it signifies a deeper transformation in the mechanisms of cultural production, the nature of media labour, and the ideological structures that shape gendered representation.