



Portrayal of Women in New Normal with Respect to ‘Bombay Begums’, a Six Episode Web series on Netflix

¹Fouqia Wajid, ²Dr. S.Jenefa,

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of Journalism and Science Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University.

²Professor & Head, Department of Journalism and Science Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University.

Abstract: Audio-visual medium has a powerful influence in shaping cultural perceptions and attitudes towards gender. The gross underrepresentation of women in the film industry is evident. Over the years, due to the increase in the spread of internet facilities and cellular devices, the urban Indian society has become more enabled with modern gadgets of communication like smartphones. With the Covid-19 imposed lockdown across the globe, the OTT medium has become more vibrant and its usage has increased manifold. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar and otherd are widely being used today. They are relatively free from censorship. These features make OTT (Over-the-top) ideal for narrating female oriented stories. True stories are told with female leads that break away from the standard structure where male leads do all the action and female counterparts are left to play secondary roles. Television and films largely represent women in a traditional mould, while the internet has been challenging that mould. Films and Television are much older and well researched areas, while internet based content is relatively new. This paper aims to study the portrayal of women in the new normal with reference to the webseries Bombay Begums, a six episode Indian web series.

Keywords: Digital streaming, OTT platform, representation, web-series, gender role, gender analysis, feminism, video on demand, online content, women, new normal, Bombay Begums, Netflix, Prime Video

1 Introduction

The internet has flourished exceedingly in India. Due to this, web content is vastly consumed. Although web series were launched in India only in 2014, a huge number of platforms and web series have been made. The key feature about the webseries is that it is relatively less censored. Film makers have more freedom to create experimental and out-of-the-box content, which may not have been possible in traditional media like television and radio. Also, web series can be made in a lesser budget, less time and with more freedom. All this has geared-up for creation of a wide palette of web content. A web series is generally a finite series - episodic drama/show. It can be consumed online, anytime, anyplace. It gives way to private watching. It has also created work opportunities for new talent. Due to all these developments, the webseries culture is forming a new wave in India, redefining choice, gender roles and power roles.

People of different age groups watch web content these days. Several OTT (Over-the-top) platforms have been introduced. OTT refers to any streaming service that provides its content over the internet. Each of the OTT platforms brings before us a foray of genres. Once a web series is released, any number of webshows and all the episodes of a show can be watched freely, provided there is a subscription to that platform. Voot, Zee5, Sony Liv, Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, MX Player, Alt Balaj and more have been introduced. According to FICCI EY 2019 report- “A Billion Screens of Opportunities” the OTT sector grew by 59% in FY2019 at INR 17 billion, and it is expected to reach Rs. 24 billion by the year 2021. Due to the increase of online content consumption and less censorship, unique genres and real life issues are getting portrayed in webseries.

This paper aims at clarifying the above mentioned claims by analysing a web series, Bombay Begums, by studying the women characters, their journeys, struggles and their acceptance in the society.



Before the analysis, let us understand the operational definition of a few terms given below:

1.1 Gender identity and gender role

Gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither). This concept is intimately related to the concept of gender role, which is defined as the outward manifestations of personality that reflect gender identity. (Shuvo Ghosh, McGill University Health Center, 2020). Gender is used to describe the characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed, while sex refers to those that are biologically determined

1.2 Gender analysis

Gender analysis identifies and informs action to address inequalities that arise from the different roles of women and men, or the unequal power relations between them, and the consequences of these inequalities on their lives, their health and well-being. Gender analysis refers to the variety of methods used to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other.

1.3 Gender equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. (Gender Mainstreaming, An Overview, New York, 2001)

1.4 Stereotype

Stereotype is a fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people. (Cardwell, 1996). Stereotype is a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing. (Oxford Languages)

1.5 Representation

Representation is how media texts deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, national and regional identity, social issues and events to an audience. Media texts have the power to shape an audience's knowledge and understanding about these important topics.

1.6 Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination is unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on gender. Sexual harassment is a form of illegal gender discrimination.

1.7 Sexual objectification

Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person solely as an object of sexual desire.

2 Review Of Literature

Web content is widely consumed. The Internet goes beyond economic and societal barriers. Due to this feature, web content has been spreading extensively, and several OTT platforms have been launched, like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Sony LIV, Zee5, MX player, Alt Balaji, Hotstar and many more. These platforms have defined their own content style. Generally they concentrate on liberal and out-of-the-box topics, the content which generally does not get greenlit on traditional media. Due to less censorship, the OTT platforms can break the mould set by



traditional media. The web shows do not require huge budgets or starcast. Many new faces have got the opportunity due to webseries. They have also created work opportunities for other technical and service related jobs in the industry.

In traditional media, portrayal of gender roles has been a matter of debate. One of the prominent perspective in the early stages of film analysis from a feminist point of view was Gaye Tuchman's work titled, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media" (1979). This study mainly focuses on the under representation of women in mass media." According to Mulvey (1975), "Hollywood films put the spectator in a masculine position with the image of women on the screen as an object of desire, the male gaze. It is constructed through the camera lens that acts a proxy for the audience's eye". Web series portray gender roles and women characters in a much real and respectful light. Graving issues likes body shaming, gender inequality, screen time disparity, gender based discrimination, problems related to sexual orientation and more have been dealt with on OTT platforms, thus impacting audiences.

2.1 Sexual Orientation

People with different identities have started opening up lately. There is a significant LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual, and/or agender) community worldwide. Sex is different from gender. People with different gender identities are identified differently. According to the American Psychological Association, 2012, sexual orientation is not a definable category; rather, it occurs on a continuum (as cited in Molerio & Pinto, 2015). As stated in Planned Parenthood Organisation, 'Sexual orientation is about who you're attracted to and who you feel drawn to romantically, emotionally, and sexually. It's different from gender identity. Gender identity isn't about who you're attracted to, but about who you are— male, female, genderqueer, etc. This means that being transgender (feeling like your assigned sex is very different from the gender you identify with) isn't the same thing as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Sexual orientation is about who you want to be with. Gender identity is about who you are.'

In the detailed research done by Bailey et al. (2016) on sexual orientation, it has been found that women more than men experience same-sex orientation and their sexual attraction exhibit changes over time. It has been noticed that suppressing homosexual behavior leads to stress and suppression among homosexually oriented people.

2.2 Gender-based discrimination

"To all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful, and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams." (Hillary Clinton)

From times immemorial, women have been suppressed in many ways. Even in modern day and age, women are discriminated against on different levels. Educated, career oriented and successful women also face discrimination at home and in workplace. Traditional media has not done enough to bring these issues to the surface and uplift women. Due to less censorship, less fear of TRP (Television Rating Point) and more openness to experiment, OTT platforms are doing their bit in portraying women as central characters and highlighting real women issues, their journeys and struggles. Media impacts culture and society, and this change in portrayal of women in webseries has impacted people. Gender discrimination means unfair treatment of an individual based on their sex, especially the unfair treatment of women compared to men. Individuals discriminate against women based on work, food and nutrition, their fertility choices and healthcare (Tiwari, Mathur & Awasthi, 2018). These gender based differences widen the gap between men and women in society. It has been found in a study that gender differences are even found in the access and control of resources. (Raju, 2014). Women have lesser privilege to access resources. This will certainly put them behind men in the race.



3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory provides the theoretical approaches to understand film from a feminist perspective. According to Smelik (2016), Feminist film theory came into being in the early 1970s with the aim of understanding film as a cultural practice that represents and reproduces myths about women and femininity. Different waves of feminism contributed to understanding representation of women from several perspectives like, class, race, colour, ethnicity and so on.

3.2 Judith Butler's Gender Performativity

According to Butler (1988), gender is socially constructed, based on the norms embedded within the society as cultural interpretation and performed by individuals as a studious act.

3.3 Stuart Hall's Representation in Film medium

Hall (1989) opines that, 'Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people.' Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture.

3.4 Hegemony

According to the Britannica dictionary, Hegemony is defined as the dominance of one group over another, often supported by legitimating norms and ideas. The associated term hegemon is used to identify the actor, group, class, or state that exercises hegemonic power or that is responsible for the dissemination of hegemonic ideas.

From times immemorial, women are hegemonized by men in personal and professional spheres. Be it from the responsibility of the kitchen or the primary responsibility of children's upbringing, it is a woman's duty. The expectations are quite instinctive. And history has conditioned men to hegemonize over women, and women to be submissive. It is believed that no two leaders can lead the show, there needs to be one authority, and the other to be slightly subservient to his authority, and the structure of the society has been laid on this principle. But the validity of this principle needs to be questioned.

3.5 Cultivation Theory

"Cultivation theory is a communications and sociological framework which posits that long-term exposure to media shapes how the consumers of media perceive the world as well as conduct themselves in life." (Nabi & Riddle, 2008). Cultivation theory (or cultivation analysis) was introduced in the 1960's by the Hungarian-born American professor George Gerbner as a means to examine the influence of television on viewers. The findings of Gerbner were later expanded upon and developed by the American screenwriter Larry Gross. This theory implies that those exposed to media interpret social realities according to how such realities are portrayed in the media.

4 Objectives

This research paper aims to apply qualitative thematic analysis to examine how webseries play a role in creating new normal. The webseries studied for this paper is Bombay Begum.

4.1 The following are the specific objectives of this paper:

- 1) To explore and analyse the feminine traits of leading female characters on Indian OTT platforms.
- 2) To examine the representation of various patterns and themes portrayed in the web series - Bombay Begums.
- 3) To analyse the portrayal of women characters which set a new normal in Indian society.



5 Research Questions

This paper tries to answer the following research questions:

- 5.1 What are the emerging feminine traits and key roles portrayed on OTT platforms like Netflix?
- 5.2 What are the various patterns and themes portrayed in the web series related to gender performativity?
- 5.3 How does the portrayal of women play a key role in creating a new normal?

6 Research Methodology

Literature Review showed that the most common methods used for analyzing gender- related subjects and parameters were qualitative thematic analysis. In this research paper, the theories of gender representation have been tested by using qualitative thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is originally defined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke for psychology research. This analysis has utmost importance in this research paper in analyzing the gender representation in the web series Bombay Begums.

6.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reading through a data set, and identifying patterns in meaning across the data. Thematic analysis was widely used for gender related studies. “The investigator thoroughly examines the datasets to identify common themes, ideas and patterns of meaning that arise recurrently. With Thematic Analysis, a researcher can focus mainly on analyzing meaning across the whole dataset or examine a specific facet of a phenomenon intensely” (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

Thematic Analysis is a phase of six-step analysis. The six faces of the approach are as follows:

- 6.1.1 Familiarization
- 6.1.2 Code generation
- 6.1.3 Looking for Themes
- 6.1.4 Reviewing Themes
- 6.1.5 Defining Themes
- 6.1.6 Writing Report

Braun and Clarke suggested this mode of TV in 2006. Firstly, the familiarization has been done by watching all the web series episodes of Bombay Begums. Then generating a table of code was done based on the character traits shown in the web series. Next phase is identifying themes; the cluster of codes were done in order to search for the themes emerging from the dataset, i.e. all 6 episodes of Bombay Begums. Majorly, four common patterns were observed. And then, four themes were identified and defined to do the literature review. Moreover, the last phase of the Thematic analysis is done by examining the four themes by identifying dialogues and relationships that the five main protagonists have with other characters in the web series.

6.2 Characters in Bombay Begums - Webseries

6.2.1 RANI

This character is played by Pooja Bhatt. It is a deeply layered character. On one hand, Rani is a headstrong, career driven woman who does not budge to any threat or condition. She is someone who goes to the extent of standing by her position and not stepping down, even if the entire band of men in the Royal bank of Bombay is against her leadership, and finds multiple ways to fire her. Rani is bold, wild and mad about her work. This causes insecurity in the male colleagues. She cannot take ‘no’ for an answer and the ego of men cannot accept this. Rani is a



mysterious character who gets hot flashes every now and then. She gets out of the meetings often to wash her face. Other characters doubt her health, if she is fit enough to manage the Royal bank of Bombay. They assume that she has hit menopause and is unfit for the position. Multiple myths about menopause surface and it becomes a point of conversation. Even the viewers largely feel that there is something wrong with Rani and doubt her capacity to lead the giant Royal Bank of Bombay.

6.2.2 Fatima

Fatima is a woman who is stuck between keeping her husband happy, having a baby, and the choice of bettering her career by accepting the Managing director's post offered to her. Fatima is smart, intelligent, and very successful in her career. She married her classmate from IIM, but he is not as successful as her. There is a drift regarding this between the two. Though her husband is a good man with no prominent ill-will, he cannot bear the fact that his wife is doing better than him. When they have been failing at multiple IVF procedures to have a baby, her husband uses it as a weapon to convince her that her career has become an enemy to having a happy family life.

Unfortunately, Fatima believes in it. Though she is a highly career driven and a modern woman, she is pushed to believe that it is because of her deeds and activities, God has punished her. She confides about this in her friend, who then counsels her that it is not true. Fatima has been juggling between career and family life. When she realises that her husband deeply craves to have a baby of his own, she finally offers him to hire a surrogate; the child may have her husband's sperm and another donor's egg, because fatima's eggs are not suitable for the procedure. Her husband happily agrees and the couple becomes highly motivated to carry forward the procedure. Whereas Fatima loses interest and is quite depressed about the fact that the child is not going to be biologically hers. The marriage falls apart when she gets into a sexual relationship multiple times with her colleague from London. Fatima is honest about this and she confesses to her husband regarding this, which will finally make him leave her.

6.2.3 Shai

This character narrates the webseries. Shai is an interesting youngster who is confused; and is desperate for love and affection. She still lives in the past, talking to her late mother. She is in a deep conflict with her step mother Rani. She neither accepts Rani as her mother nor treats her well, despite Rani's constant attempts to pacify her. Shai is an artist, loner, who talks to her mother through her artwork and wants to get close to her classmate Imran while he doesn't pay any attention to her. She doesn't mingle with her classmates a lot and doesn't have many friends. She gets invited by Imran on his birthday and she is on cloud nine. She gives him her book of artwork which he throws it in a dustbin. Shai craves for Imran's attention and gets exposed to drugs in utter desperation. She abuses drugs and faints in the bathroom. Family comes to her rescue, this is when Rani opens up about her past and makes her believe that no matter what, she doesn't have to oblige to be assaulted in any way by any person. Rani and Shai finally bond.

6.2.4 Ayesha

A small town girl, bound by many expectations from her family in Indore. There are several suitable alliances poured in for her from her mother. Whereas in Mumbai, Ayesha is exposed to a new world where there is freedom of thought and lifestyle. She gets kicked out by her landlady because she is caught red handed by her for smoking and drinking. Then her real struggle begins, the biggest conflict in this character's arc is to find a separate place to stay. She goes to the office as she doesn't have any other place. She had been fired from her job that morning by Fatima. Despite all the pleading, Fatima doesn't fire her. She encounters Rani and explains her situation to her. Rani hires her back. Ayesha then goes to her ex-boyfriend's home where he lives with his girlfriend. In the middle of every night, she is obliged to have sex with him. Later she falls in love with a singer and explores lesbian life with her. Ayesha realises that she is bisexual. At the end, after many ups and downs at work and personal life, she



gets a place of her own, without having to share it and provide sex in return. Meanwhile, she stands up for herself when a senior male manager sexually assaults her. She faces a huge amount of opposition from her seniors, even women managers. But finally they all come together to fight the evil.

6.2.5 Lily

This character played by Amrutha Subhash is deeply layered. She is a brave dreamer who sells her body and entertains people in order to survive and take care of her only son. She is madly dedicated to her son and can go to any extent to protect his future and give him a respectful life. There are several situations where she is called a Randi and is defamed in front of her child. She is pained and is ready to fight back. Most importantly she still dreams, dreams big and dreams different. She manages to blackmail Rani for money and cracks a deal with her. In this way, her goal of establishing a factory and creating a respectful life for her son begins. She misbehaves with a local corporator and he creates several troubles for her on the way. But Lily is brave and never gives up. She fights till the end and achieves her share of respect.

Based on the characters shown in the web series, the below given list of codes has been put together for various character traits shown in the web series.

Bisexual
Vulnerable
Confused
Ambitious
Victim of sexual assault
Small town girl
Dependent for shelter
Headstrong
Ambitious
Passionate
Good mother
Scarred by her past
Leader
Victim of sexual assault
Confused
Vulnerable
Career driven
Talented
Self dependent
Successful than spouse

Religious
Extra marital relationship
Headstrong
Motherless
Vulnerable
Emotionally weak
Artist
Loner

These above given codes will be used to do the qualitative thematic analysis on female characters in the webseries Bombay Begums. These codes will also be used to answer the research questions and look at how a new normal is created by the changing representation of flawed yet powerful real women in webseries.

7 Rationale For Coding

The OTT industry has grown tremendously in the last few years. People subscribe to at least one OTT platform. Due to the widespread viewership and relatively more liberal approach, the censorship is not stringent. The representation of gender has been altered to a large extent on OTT platforms. The chosen web series - Bombay Begums especially portrays women of different ages, professions, ambitions, with different personal and professional life problems. We shall try to understand how it has created a new normal.

After watching all the episodes of Bombay Begums, a thematic pattern was observed. This pattern was then coded structurally. The coding themes that were used for this study cover all the major events, subject matter and the character traits of the female characters shown in the web series. The coding themes were observed persistently in the web series. Thus the given themes approach the datasets well, and they study the evolving female traits of the key female characters of the web series.

8 Analysis And Discussion

Media is called the 4th estate. It is highly influential and plays a key role in shaping opinions. The representation of subjects in the media impacts the role of those subjects in real society. Similarly, the representation of women impacts their roles in real life. Therefore, the qualitative thematic analysis of web series is essential to study and understand society's perspective towards gender and its issues.

Bombay Begums portrays five women of different age groups. From a 49 year old woman, Rani who is about to hit menopause, to a teenager Shai, their age related developments, their trajectory, and personal and professional issues are dealt well in a grasping manner in the webseries. These characters are flawed, like any human, and their stories deserve to be told.

8.1 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

In this paper, Bombay Begum's five female protagonists' representations, struggles, thought processes and ideas will be studied.



Sl.No	Characters	Traits
1.	Ayesha	Bisexual Vulnerable Confused Ambitious Victim of sexual assault Small town girl Dependent for shelter
2.	Rani	Headstrong Ambitious Passionate Good mother Scarred by her past Leader Victim of sexual assault
3.	Fatima	Confused Vulnerable Career driven Talented Self dependent Successful than spouse Religious Extra marital relationship
4.	Shai	Headstrong Motherless Vulnerable Emotionally weak Artist



		Loner
5.	Lily	Headstrong Manipulative Emotional Loud Mother Dreamer

Therefore, the following table of traits will analyze the different characters to see how females are represented in the webseries, and how the new normal is set by their representation.

8.1.1 Fertility

Woman's gender, sex and fertility do not decide a woman's self worth. In the case of Fatima, she is a middle aged woman who has been trying for a baby for quite some time. After several attempts of IVF, right at the beginning of the series, Fatima conceives. That is treated like an achievement and the sole purpose of a woman's life. Fatima is highly talented and smart. She has done far better than her husband in career. This puts her on a higher pedestal than her husband professionally. But the moment the role of a mother comes into play, very instinctively the woman's career takes a backseat, or at least is expected to by the society. Her husband suddenly withdraws his support with the news of her pregnancy. He doesn't think twice before asking her to quit the job after his promotion at work, and asks her to look after the baby. And Fatima, being successful in career, does not resist this notion, because she is conditioned to believe that the responsibility of raising a child is mostly hers. Later when there is a miscarriage, the relationship faces tribulations. Distance between husband and wife widens. Even before her husband alleges her, Fatima herself gets into depression and self blame. She believes that it was her responsibility to be a mother, and if she fails at it, she fails at everything. Nothing else matters.

Later when the couple decides to go ahead with a baby by hiring a surrogate anyway, and only Arijay's (husband's) sperm would be used with a donor's egg, Fatima is unable to come to terms with it. She feels extremely left out and almost blames herself for her inability to produce eggs, which is clearly not in her hands. The idea that a woman's fertility alone defines her worth, is problematic.

8.1.2 Sexual Orientation

Ayesha is a small town girl who comes to the big and happening city of Mumbai to climb the ladder of success. She is ready to give anything it takes for success. She, at the beginning of the series is shown to have boyfriends and she hangs out with them quite well. So, Ayesha does not have a glaring problem with men. But slowly we see her journey in which she explores her sexual orientation. She falls in love with a girl and experiences different aspects of love, gender orientation, and comes to accept it without much chaos. Ayesha gets physical with both her male colleague and her lady love who is a singer. She lives with the singer only to realise that she expects an exclusive relationship and not an open one. Ayesha doesn't mind leaving her partner's house because of this. She later lives with her colleague. He develops feelings for her. When he confesses his feelings for her, she tells the truth that she is also interested in women. The webseries shows that there is still a sense of fear and taboo in society. First time Ayesha kisses a woman, she runs away immediately without looking into her eyes. It is only after the singer makes her comfortable the next time they meet, Ayesha accepts her sexual orientation.



8.1.3 Gender Based Discrimination

Rani as well as Fatima face this. Fatima is expected to quit her job and look after the baby because she is a woman. When she gets offered to be the Managing Director of Royal Bank of Bombay, her husband's first reaction is of despair and anger, and not of celebration. He goes to the extent of making a phone call to the HR (Human Resource) himself and pressuring her to reject the offer, which surprisingly Fatima abides by because she is unable to ascertain if her career is more important than motherhood and family. The idea that both are important, and both can be carried on smoothly hasn't been thought of. Eventually, she finds a way to accept the offer.

Rani on the other hand is not in a healthy physical relationship with her husband. It is almost an agreement to maintain a family life in front of the world. Her husband is still in love with his first wife who is no more and Rani doesn't get the love she deserves. They are expected by the society to lead a happy married life in order to prove her strength and balance of mind to lead the royal bank of Bombay. Because of this, she does whatever it takes to portray a happy family image. The moment her step son finds out that Rani is in a relationship with another man, his instant reaction is of violence, hate and anger, without recognising her dissatisfied family life which pushed her to love another man. Also, Rani has faced constant discrimination at the hands of her colleagues because she is ambitious, bold and headstrong. These traits are considered to be of a man, and a woman possessing these qualities is considered to be a mad. Many times, her colleagues refer to her as 'Junglee'.

Lily is an important character in the webseries. She is a fighter and does whatever it takes to achieve what she determines to. She faces defamation and disrespect all the time, because of which her son is unhappy. She promises him respect. During her struggle, a local politician blatantly says that she is going beyond the path that the society has defined for her and promises to get her back to the place where she belongs. Though she begs and pleads with him not to interfere in her work, he destroys her factory set up many times. Her lover too shows her his back when she decides to go with him to Dubai. Basically in a world of cheaters and selfish people, Lily finds her way out.

9 Findings

- The OTT platforms are flourishing. They have a sizable audience share. Hence they play a key role in shaping the perspectives and outlooks of people. This impacts women's role immensely. How women are showcased before the world is impacted by women's portrayal in webseries. It affects the way people perceive gender roles. Gender roles portrayed on OTT platforms are completely different from the way women are portrayed in traditional media like television and films. Television and films have a very conservative idea on feminism and the way women are portrayed. This has impacted our society considerably. Whereas with the arrival of web series, this conservative option has begun to change, which is a good sign. Thus web series are redefining the new normal.

- Society has been bent towards patriarchy. Patriarchy is deep rooted in our society. This has been glorified in most films made in India and abroad from several decades. Patriarchy has been dictating a poor and weak portrayal of women in films and television. Women are expected to remain weak, submissive and less ambitious. It has become very difficult to ignore patriarchy. In such a scenario, 'Bombay Begums' places an important step in the fields of gender equality and equal respect. Bombay Begums has indeed helped rewrite a new definition of women and womanhood. It has challenged several chauvinistic notions in the series related to both, women's personal and professional life.

- Though society follows strict norms for gender, it is becoming more inclusive due to progressive content. This will certainly have an impact on society and people's mindset. Sensitive issues that were once considered taboo in traditional media are spoken about and given the due space on web content. Though a lot more openness and inclusivity is required, the journey has begun. The OTT platforms have been challenging myths, superstitions and meaningless ideologies, which will bring a much needed change in the society. In the webseries, LGBTQIA



is seen in a more inclusive light and people have begun to deal with it with sensibility. The scenario hasn't changed fully, it may need more time, but the process has begun.

- The traditional media prefers strong men and submissive women, be it traditional saas-bahu serial where men take charge of the family and women are expected to do karwa chauth, fast for men's long life, and overall be submissive, or modern action film where men do all the decision making, they take lead in action, and women are for their support, entertainment or as a love affair on the side. Most screenplays fall into the trap of primary men and secondary women characters. Such portrayals of female characters impact society. Only a few women characters are shown to be liberal, progressive and challenging. Women characters are getting redefined and thus creating a new normal.

10 Conclusion

The representation of women need not be flawless. Flawed women need not scar the normal functioning of the society. Expectations from society for women to be perfectly submissive, sensible, in itself is a flawed thought process. To err is human. Be it men or women, they can be flawed. The amalgamation of the good and the bad is what makes us humans, and balances the society. Honest portrayal of reality is what is required in society. For example, Rani is an ambitious woman who takes care of her husband's kids, and who also has an affair with another man because her husband doesn't give her what she needs. Such a character is real, there are women with several good and bad qualities. Rani also stands against sexual assault and exploitation. Fatima on the other hand is an ambitious woman. This doesn't make her any less than an imaginary woman who dedicates everything for her family and doesn't think twice in constantly sacrificing. The glorification of unrealistic hard work and selflessness needs to end. Lily is a bar dancer, but she deserves respect and has the right to dream to be a business woman. Ayesha though has her own ways of getting things done from people, she still takes a stand against sexual assault. Shai who doesn't treat her step mother well, abuses drugs and stages puberty to get attention, takes a stand for Rani when she speaks the truth. These women are mad, flawed, yet real and awesome. And their stories need to be told. Flaws are human reality, and reality needs to knit the new normal.

By this paper's findings, we can conclude that gender representation in media influences people's perception. Web content has become a catalyst of change. Web Series have challenged the regressive mindset. More inclusive, liberal, equal, and real representation of women can lead to a more balanced and just portrayal of women in media, and that can help in creating the new normal. It can help shape a better society.

Women's rights, their sexuality and orientation get a window in web series. A single woman plays many roles in a lifetime, in both personal and professional lives. This makes their personality multilayered. Web Series portray women's characters in great detail. Bombay Begums speaks about the issues faced by women in the corporate industry in the city of Mumbai and how each of them survives. It can be inferred from the thematic analysis that progressive women are creating a new normal for women in India. In a deep rooted patriarchal society, such webseries is the need of the hour.

11 Limitations

The paper's primary focus was to study female characters and their representation in society. Women's lives, their issues, their struggles and the characters were taken into consideration for study. Male characters, their issues and struggles are not discussed here.

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