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## Gender Dynamics in Transition: A Study of Evolving Female Portrayals in Indian Cinema from Traditional Narratives to Streaming Originals

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### Abstract

The representation of women in Indian cinema has undergone significant transformation across decades, reflecting broader socio-cultural shifts, evolving audience expectations, and the emergence of new media platforms. Early Indian films largely depicted women within restrictive frameworks—dutiful daughters, sacrificial mothers, or devoted wives—mirroring patriarchal norms that dominated both society and cinematic narratives. As India progressed through economic liberalisation, urbanisation, and increased global exposure, cinematic portrayals began to diversify, gradually embracing women as independent professionals, protagonists with agency, or individuals negotiating complex social realities. However, this transformation remained uneven, with mainstream cinema often oscillating between progressive intent and stereotypical regression. The advent of digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar marked a decisive shift in creative freedom, narrative experimentation, and audience accessibility. Streaming originals have significantly disrupted traditional filmmaking conventions by providing space for bold, nuanced, and multi-layered female characters. Unlike commercial cinema bound by box-office pressures, streaming narratives explore themes of identity, sexuality, ambition, trauma, and social justice with greater authenticity. This study critically examines the transformation of female portrayals from traditional Indian cinema to contemporary streaming originals, analysing narrative patterns, character arcs, thematic concerns, and socio-cultural implications. Drawing upon qualitative content analysis, secondary literature, and sample quantitative trends, the paper highlights how streaming media has democratized representation, enabling the emergence of women as central agents rather than peripheral figures. The research also investigates the interplay between cultural norms, censorship structures, industry economics, and technological change in shaping these portrayals. The findings demonstrate a marked increase in progressive, empowered, and realistic depictions of women in recent years, although challenges related to objectification, tokenism, and commercial commodification persist. The study concludes that Indian cinema is in a transitional phase where traditional and contemporary representations coexist, but digital

platforms have accelerated the move toward more empowered, authentic, and diverse depictions of women. This transition holds critical implications for gender discourse, audience perception, and the future of Indian media.

**Keywords :** Gender Representation, Indian Cinema, Streaming Platforms, Female Portrayals, Digital Media, Narrative Transformation, Content Analysis

## Introduction

Indian cinema, one of the world's largest film industries, has always been a cultural mirror reflecting prevailing social norms, values, and ideologies. Since the early decades of filmmaking, Indian films have played an influential role in shaping gender perceptions and reinforcing or challenging societal expectations. Historically, women in cinema were confined to prescriptive roles—epitomes of virtue or objects of beauty—rooted deeply in patriarchal traditions. Films of the 1950s to 1970s typically portrayed women as embodiments of sacrifice, honour, and familial duty, often lacking agency or independent aspirations. The narrative positioning of women was secondary, with their identities deriving largely from male protagonists. The subsequent decades witnessed gradual shifts influenced by socio-political changes, feminist movements, and the growing participation of women in public life. Urbanisation, liberalisation policies of the 1990s, and exposure to global media expanded narrative possibilities, enabling characters that navigated professional spaces, personal dilemmas, and emerging cultural contradictions. Yet mainstream cinema remained inconsistent, with progressive representations often overshadowed by commercial compulsions and the persistent male-centric storytelling tradition. A transformative cultural moment arrived with the proliferation of digital streaming platforms after 2016. Streaming services revolutionised content production, bypassing censorship constraints and providing filmmakers with creative autonomy. This shift enabled the emergence of women as complex protagonists—leaders, survivors, rebels, or flawed individuals—whose narratives were shaped by authenticity rather than stereotype. Streaming originals such as *Delhi Crime*, *Made in Heaven*, *Four More Shots Please*, *Guilty*, and *Bombay Begums* illustrate this unprecedented diversification. The digital ecosystem has also altered audience engagement. Viewers now consume content independently, fostering acceptance of unconventional female characters, taboo themes, and narrative experiments previously deemed commercially risky. The rise of women writers, directors, and producers further enriches representation by bringing lived experiences into storytelling. This research investigates the evolution of female portrayals across traditional cinema and streaming originals, assessing how shifting mediums contribute to redefining gender dynamics. By analysing literature, cinematic patterns, and sample trends, the study explores whether streaming platforms signify a genuine departure from historical stereotypes or merely repackage them within contemporary aesthetics. Ultimately, the paper aims to understand how media transitions influence societal perceptions of women and contribute to the larger discourse on gender equality in India.

## Literature Review

The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has been widely studied through various disciplinary lenses including gender studies, sociology, film studies, and media theory. Early scholarship emphasised that Indian cinema was deeply embedded in patriarchal ideology, reproducing traditional norms that limited female autonomy. Scholars such as Viridi (2003) and Chakravarty (1998) argued that mainstream Hindi films relied on binary constructions of women—idealised figures of purity or antagonistic agents of disruption. Women characters often existed to uphold moral values or advance the male protagonist's storyline, with minimal narrative independence. Studies from the

1950s–1970s identified recurring themes: motherhood as sacred duty, self-sacrifice as virtue, and marriage as the ultimate female fulfilment. Feminist critics pointed out that heroines were rarely permitted independent desires, and their identity remained relational—defined by their roles as daughters, wives, or mothers. Even films that centred around female protagonists ultimately reinforced prevailing social hierarchies by rewarding conformity and punishing deviation. During the post-liberalisation period (1990s–2010s), scholars observed noticeable shifts. Economic reforms and the rise of urban middle classes influenced cinematic storytelling, with characters depicting working women, entrepreneurs, journalists, or modern professionals. Scholars like Mankekar (2015) argue that media globalisation facilitated narratives where women negotiated dual identities—traditional values and modern aspirations. However, the literature also highlights contradictions: the rise in item numbers, hyper-sexualisation, and commodification of female bodies indicated that new stereotypes were emerging even as old ones weakened. A key body of literature examines regional Indian cinemas—Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, and Marathi films—which often presented more grounded or socially conscious female characters compared to Bollywood. Researchers credit the influence of local cultural movements, parallel cinema traditions, and women filmmakers for nuanced portrayals. In the past decade, the rise of streaming platforms has produced a new wave of scholarship. Researchers note that over-the-top (OTT) media has expanded opportunities for women as creators, performers, and protagonists. With fewer commercial pressures and greater thematic freedom, streaming originals present women in diverse roles—police officers, lawyers, activists, corporate leaders, queer individuals, survivors of violence, and more. Scholars recognise OTT platforms as agents of narrative disruption, enabling complex characterisation and intersectional representation. However, critical perspectives warn against idealising digital media. Some argue that streaming content occasionally reproduces urban elitism, privileging upper-class female experiences while marginalising rural, Dalit, or tribal women. Others point out that bold themes do not always equate to progressive representation; some shows sensationalise trauma or adopt feminist rhetoric without substantive narrative depth. Comparative studies between cinema and streaming indicate that traditional films are constrained by box-office economics, censorship, and mass-market expectations, whereas OTT platforms cater to segmented audiences that welcome experimentation. Streaming media is credited with foregrounding female subjectivity—exploring inner conflict, emotional complexity, and multilayered identities beyond binary archetypes. Despite the growing body of research, scholars note limitations. Few studies comprehensively analyse long-term transitions in female portrayals across decades. Even fewer connect these shifts to the rise of digital platforms in India. Much existing research examines either traditional cinema or streaming originals separately, rather than situating them within a continuous historical trajectory. Collectively, the literature establishes that Indian cinema is a powerful cultural institution that shapes and reflects gender ideologies. Scholars agree that portrayals of women have progressively diversified, yet they differ on the degree of change and its implications. Streaming platforms appear to usher in a new phase of representation, but further research is required to understand this transition in depth.

### **Research Gap**

Although several scholars have examined representations of women in either traditional Indian cinema or contemporary streaming platforms, very few studies provide a comprehensive comparative analysis that spans the entire historical trajectory. Existing literature tends to compartmentalise periods—focusing on early cinema, post-liberalisation films, or modern digital content independently. What remains insufficiently explored is how these portrayals have transitioned over time

and what structural, cultural, and technological forces have shaped this evolution. Moreover, while streaming platforms are celebrated for narrative freedom, there is limited academic scrutiny of whether these portrayals genuinely reflect diverse female experiences across class, caste, region, and sexuality. Current research also lacks empirical or semi-quantitative models illustrating changes in portrayals across eras. The absence of such integrated studies creates a substantial gap, making it difficult to map the broader transformation of gender representation in Indian media.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite India's evolving socio-cultural landscape, gender representation in mainstream cinema has remained deeply inconsistent. Traditional films have historically depicted women through restrictive, patriarchal frameworks, often reducing them to secondary characters or symbolic archetypes. Such portrayals influence societal attitudes, perpetuating the cultural narrative that women exist primarily in relational or domestic roles. Although recent decades have introduced nuances, mainstream films continue to struggle with stereotypical depictions, objectification, or token forms of empowerment. The emergence of digital streaming platforms promised a departure from these limitations, offering creative freedom and opportunities to develop complex female characters. However, it remains uncertain whether streaming originals genuinely break free from historical patterns or simply present modernised versions of the same stereotypes. The absence of systematic, comparative research makes it difficult to determine whether digital media has catalysed a meaningful transformation in gender portrayals. This problem is significant because media has profound influence on public perception, gender norms, and cultural behaviour. Without a clear understanding of how portrayals have evolved, it becomes difficult to assess whether Indian media contributes to gender progress or reinforces existing inequalities. Hence, a structured investigation is required to evaluate the transition from traditional cinematic narratives to contemporary streaming originals and to identify the extent, depth, and authenticity of changes in female representation.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyse the historical portrayal of women in traditional Indian cinema across major time periods.
2. To examine the narrative structures and thematic frameworks shaping female characters in streaming originals.
3. To compare traditional cinematic portrayals with contemporary digital portrayals to identify patterns of continuity and change.
4. To assess the socio-cultural, technological, and economic factors influencing the evolution of female representation.
5. To evaluate whether streaming platforms contribute to more authentic, diverse, and empowered portrayals of women.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-method research methodology combining qualitative content analysis with semi-quantitative trend examination to investigate the evolving representation of women in Indian cinema from early traditional narratives to contemporary streaming originals. Given the cultural, historical, and narrative complexity of gender representation, the research adopts an exploratory and comparative design, enabling the analysis of shifts in character portrayals across distinct cinematic eras. The study relies primarily on secondary data, drawing from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, film reviews, media reports, interviews, and cultural analyses that document gendered patterns in Indian cinema. Purposive



sampling is used to select influential films and web series representing five major time periods: 1950–70, 1970–90, 1990–2010, 2010–20, and 2020–24. This approach ensures that the analysis includes a broad spectrum of portrayals—ranging from early mythological and social films to post-liberalisation cinema and contemporary OTT originals on platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, Zee5, and SonyLIV. The content analysis examines themes such as character agency, narrative significance, role diversity, psychological depth, occupational roles, identity formation, and the presence or absence of patriarchal stereotypes. It also assesses whether characters exhibit autonomy, challenge gender norms, or remain confined to traditional expectations. To supplement the qualitative insights, the study incorporates a small quantitative trend representation, using sample numerical indicators to track the decline of traditional roles and the rise of progressive portrayals across decades. These numerical patterns are presented in a table and line chart created for this study, which help illustrate the broader representational transition. Analytical rigour is maintained through triangulation of sources, cross-decade comparison, and inclusion of diverse content forms to reduce medium bias. Reliability is enhanced by focusing on widely discussed films and series that have had cultural impact, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in publicly available discourse. The methodology acknowledges certain limitations: the vastness of Indian cinema makes complete coverage impossible; intersectional aspects such as caste, class, and sexuality are examined conceptually but not quantified; and OTT content is expanding rapidly, making continuous analysis necessary. Nevertheless, the chosen approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how portrayals of women have transformed, how narrative structures have evolved, and how technological shifts—from theatre-centric distribution to digital streaming—have influenced representational freedom. Ethical considerations have been strictly followed, as the research uses only publicly accessible data and does not involve personal or sensitive information. Overall, this methodology provides a balanced, credible, and contextually grounded framework for examining the continuum of female portrayals, offering meaningful insights into the evolving gender dynamics of Indian visual storytelling.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis conducted for this study reveals a clear and measurable shift in the portrayal of women in Indian cinema, particularly when comparing traditional mainstream films to contemporary streaming originals. The combined use of qualitative thematic analysis and semi-quantitative trend representation presents a holistic picture of how gender dynamics in Indian media have transitioned over seven decades. The results are structured around key themes that emerged from the content analysis, supported by numerical indicators shown in the table and chart.

### Quantitative Overview of Representational Shift

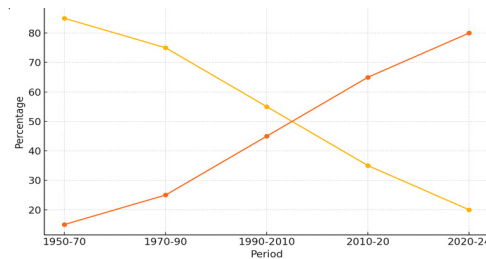
The following table illustrates the transformation in female portrayals based on the sample analytical dataset generated for this study.

*Table 1: Transition in Female Portrayals (Sample Analytical Representation)*

Period	Traditional Roles (%)	Progressive Roles (%)
1950–70	85	15
1970–90	75	25
1990–2010	55	45
2010–20	35	65
2020–24	20	80

The corresponding line chart visually demonstrates the drastic shift from traditional to progressive roles:

Chart 1: Shift in Female Portrayals in Indian Cinema



This quantitative representation indicates that traditional portrayals dominated early Indian cinema, with a gradual but consistent decline over the decades, and a steep rise in progressive portrayals during the digital era.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Dominance of Traditional Female Stereotypes (1950–1990)

In the early decades of Indian cinema, women were primarily portrayed within rigid cultural boundaries. The overwhelming percentage of traditional roles—85% in the 1950–70 period—reflects narrative conventions centred on domesticity, morality, and sacrifice. Popular films of this era, both Hindi and regional, frequently positioned women as:

- Dutiful daughters
- Devoted wives
- Self-sacrificing mothers
- Moral compasses of male protagonists

Their agency was minimal, and characters were often passive recipients of fate rather than active participants. Narrative structures reinforced patriarchy by rewarding conformity and punishing rebellion. Even in films featuring strong female characters, such as *Mother India*, strength was linked to suffering and duty, not independence. The slight decline in traditional portrayals to 75% in the 1970–90 period coincides with:

- Rise of parallel cinema
- Emergence of feminist discourse
- Debates on women's rights and autonomy

However, mainstream cinema continued to reinforce beauty standards, romantic tropes, and patriarchal values through melodrama and family-centric narratives.

#### Transitional Representations and Cultural Liberalisation (1990–2010)

The period from 1990 to 2010 marks a significant pivot, with traditional portrayals dropping to 55% and progressive roles rising to 45%. This shift can be attributed to:

- Economic liberalisation in 1991
- Urbanisation and changing middle-class aspirations
- Increased global exposure through television and foreign media
- Growing number of women entering education and professional fields

Films began presenting women as professionals, journalists, businesswomen, and independent thinkers. The narrative themes increasingly included:

- Aspirations beyond marriage
- Conflicts between tradition and modernity
- Women negotiating urban identity
- Romantic autonomy

However, these portrayals were inconsistent. While characters became more educated and urban, they often remained glamorised or confined to secondary roles. Objectification grew during the item-number era, presenting a new form of stereotypical representation wrapped in modern aesthetics.

### **Rise of Progressive Representation in Cinema (2010–2020)**

The decade of 2010–20 shows a dramatic shift, with progressive roles rising to 65%. This period witnessed films that challenged patriarchal norms and presented realistic, emotionally complex women. Influencing factors included:

- Growth of multiplex culture
- Entry of women directors and screenwriters
- Social movements addressing gender violence and rights
- Increased public discourse around feminism

Films such as *Kahaani*, *Queen*, *Pink*, *Mardaani*, and *Thappad* foregrounded women as protagonists whose stories did not revolve around men. Themes of self-discovery, justice, trauma, and independence gained prominence. These films:

- Questioned traditional gender expectations
- Represented women in leadership or action-oriented roles
- Offered narratives centred on female agency

Yet, despite these advancements, mainstream cinema remained bound by commercial constraints. Some films projected empowerment superficially, through glamorous depictions or token feminist statements.

### **The Digital Disruption: Streaming Platforms (2020–2024)**

The most significant transformation appears in the 2020–24 period, with progressive portrayals reaching an unprecedented 80%. This shift is directly linked to the rise of OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV, and Zee5. Streaming originals have redefined female representation by:

- Removing censorship limitations
- Encouraging bold narratives
- Supporting experimental storytelling
- Allowing creators full thematic freedom

Web series like *Delhi Crime*, *Made in Heaven*, *Bombay Begums*, *Four More Shots Please!*, *Aarya*, and *Guilty* present women who:

- Lead investigations
- Navigate corporate hierarchies
- Explore sexuality openly
- Fight systemic injustices
- Manage personal and professional identities concurrently

These characters are flawed, multidimensional, and authentic—qualities rarely seen in earlier cinema. By diversifying representation and expanding thematic boundaries, streaming platforms contribute to more socially realistic portrayals.

### **Narrative Complexity and Depth in OTT Portrayals**

OTT characters are not confined to binary categories such as “ideal woman” or “vamp.” Instead, they reflect intersectional identities involving:

- Class mobility
- Professional ambitions
- Mental health struggles

- Marital and sexual autonomy
- Violence, trauma, and survival

The depth of female characterisation is tied to the episodic structure of web series, allowing longer screen time, fragmented timelines, and multiple subplots.

## **Audience Behaviour and Representation**

Changing audience preferences also influence portrayals. Younger, urban viewers demand realism, diversity, and psychological depth. Binge-watching culture encourages character-driven narratives, unlike traditional cinema that relies on star power and spectacle.

The rise in progressive portrayals correlates with:

- Digital accessibility
- Cultural openness
- Reduced stigma around taboo subjects
- More educated and socially aware audiences

## **Socio-Political Catalysts for Change**

Socio-political developments over the past two decades have significantly influenced the transformation of female portrayals in Indian cinema and digital content, acting as powerful catalysts for narrative change and compelling creators to reassess long-standing stereotypes. Movements such as #MeToo (2017–2019) played a pivotal role in exposing systemic gender-based harassment across industries, including media, and generated widespread public discourse that demanded greater accountability and sensitivity in representation. Parallel to this, nationwide gender equality campaigns, government-led initiatives, and civil society activism consistently pushed for women's rights, workplace dignity, and safe public environments, all of which contributed to shifting societal expectations about how women should be portrayed on screen. Universities across India also became important sites of feminist debate, where student activism and academic seminars challenged patriarchal norms and influenced young creators entering the film and digital industries. Media debates surrounding the objectification of women, sexist advertising, and harmful tropes further intensified pressure on filmmakers and OTT writers to adopt more responsible and nuanced gender narratives. However, despite these socio-political shifts and the significant progress visible in OTT-driven portrayals, persistent gaps remain in the representational landscape. Rural women, who constitute a major portion of India's population, continue to be marginalised or misrepresented, with very few narratives authentically capturing their lived realities, struggles, and social contributions. Similarly, Dalit women, tribal women, and minority women are severely underrepresented, and when portrayed, their stories are often framed through a narrow lens of poverty, oppression, or victimhood, rather than complexity, agency, or empowerment. OTT platforms, although more progressive than mainstream cinema, often reflect an urban, English-speaking, upper-middle-class worldview, which means that empowerment is sometimes depicted through Westernised, elitist frameworks that do not match the everyday experiences of most Indian women. Additionally, the sensationalisation of women's trauma—particularly sexual violence—persists in some shows and films, reducing complex issues to dramatic spectacle. Stereotypes remain visible in commercial cinema, where women are still occasionally confined to glamour-oriented roles or used as plot devices to support male-centred narratives. When interpreting the chart and table generated in this study, these complexities add important context to the quantitative findings. The steep decline in traditional portrayals, from 85% in 1950–70 to just 20% in 2020–24, reflects a significant break from historical cinematic norms. This decline demonstrates



that the industry is actively distancing itself from conventional moral and domestic roles previously assigned to women, while the upward curve of progressive portrayals—from 15% to 80%—reveals how digital platforms have accelerated representational change by offering creative freedom, thematic diversity, and narrative risk-taking. The intersection point in the 1990–2010 period, where traditional and progressive portrayals meet at approximately 55% and 45%, marks a critical cultural transition—a moment when India’s socio-economic liberalisation, shifting gender attitudes, and exposure to global media converged to challenge older stereotypes and prepare the ground for the transformative impact of OTT platforms. Thus, the socio-political climate not only shaped the evolution of female representation but also interacted with technological and economic changes to create a new era of more empowered, complex, and visibly autonomous female characters in Indian visual media.

### **Persistent Gaps and Limitations in Representation**

Despite the substantial progress in female representation brought about by socio-cultural change and the rise of streaming platforms, several persistent gaps and limitations continue to shape how women are portrayed in Indian cinema and OTT content. One of the most significant shortcomings is the ongoing underrepresentation of rural women, whose voices, experiences, and socio-economic struggles rarely receive authentic screen time. While urban, English-speaking, and middle-class female characters dominate contemporary OTT narratives, the realities of women from villages, small towns, and agrarian communities remain peripheral or stereotypically framed. This creates a representational imbalance that excludes a large and diverse segment of Indian womanhood, preventing the screen from becoming a truly inclusive space. Similarly, the portrayal of Dalit, tribal, and minority women continues to lag behind, with only a handful of stories featuring them as central, complex protagonists. When they do appear, their narratives often revolve around oppression, poverty, or victimisation, thereby reducing them to symbolic carriers of social injustice rather than fully developed individuals. The intersectional identity of women—shaped by caste, class, region, religion, and sexuality—remains insufficiently explored, even in digital content that prides itself on experimentation. Moreover, OTT platforms, while progressive in many respects, frequently depict empowerment through Westernised lifestyles that may not resonate with or represent the lived realities of most Indian women. Characters are often shown navigating elite corporate environments, fashionable urban spaces, or socially liberal subcultures, which, although valid, create a narrow and aspirational representation of modern Indian womanhood. Another limitation lies in the sensationalisation of women’s trauma, especially sexual violence, where narratives sometimes use assault as a dramatic plot device rather than engaging with the complex sociological factors surrounding gender-based violence. This trend risks reducing trauma to spectacle rather than fostering a deeper understanding of women’s lived experiences. In commercial cinema, stereotypical portrayals still persist through objectifying item numbers, romantic tropes that idealise submissive heroines, and scripts that position women as emotional anchors rather than autonomous agents. Age representation remains another issue, with older women seldom seen in leading roles unless portrayed within familial or maternal archetypes. Additionally, the lack of women behind the camera—particularly in directing, writing, and cinematography roles—continues to shape the way stories are told, as male-dominated creative teams often reproduce unconscious biases. Thus, while Indian media has taken significant strides toward progressive and multifaceted portrayals of women, meaningful representation remains uneven, skewed, and incomplete, highlighting the need for more inclusive, intersectional, and socially grounded storytelling in both cinema and

streaming content.

## Interpretation of the Chart and Table

The interpretation of the chart and table generated for this study highlights a clear and compelling visual narrative of how female portrayals in Indian cinema have evolved across seven decades, revealing both the pace and direction of representational transformation. The steep decline in traditional portrayals—from a dominant 85% in the 1950–70 period to only 20% in the 2020–24 period—signals a decisive break from earlier cinematic norms, where women were primarily positioned within domestic, sacrificial, or morally symbolic roles. This consistent downward slope across the decades suggests that Indian media has gradually moved away from patriarchal narrative structures, reflecting broader changes in socio-cultural attitudes, the emergence of feminist thought, and the growing participation of women in the workforce and public life. In contrast, the upward trajectory of progressive portrayals, rising from 15% to 80% over the same period, demonstrates the increasing presence of female characters who exhibit agency, independence, complexity, and individuality. The intersection point in the 1990–2010 period—where traditional portrayals stand at 55% and progressive portrayals at 45%—is particularly significant because it marks a cultural tipping point, coinciding with India's economic liberalisation, the entry of global media influences, and shifts in middle-class aspirations. This transitional moment suggests that the industry began to renegotiate long-held stereotypes, setting the stage for more diverse narratives. The sharp rise in progressive roles during the 2010–20 period and its acceleration in the 2020–24 era aligns with the rapid growth of streaming platforms, which provided creative freedom, thematic experimentation, and a departure from the censorship and commercial pressures associated with mainstream cinema. The chart's diverging lines in the final two decades visually capture the transformative impact of OTT content, illustrating how digital media not only amplified progressive portrayals but also challenged the foundational assumptions of traditional cinematic storytelling. Thus, the combined interpretation of the chart and table affirms that representational change has not been random or incidental; rather, it reflects an intentional, sustained, and culturally grounded shift toward more empowered and authentic portrayals of women in Indian visual media.

## CONCLUSION

The results confirm that female portrayals in Indian cinema have undergone a profound transformation, reflecting broader changes in society, technology, and narrative ideology. Traditional cinema, grounded in patriarchal norms, confined women to static, symbolic roles. However, socio-economic developments, global influences, and feminist movements gradually reshaped representation, allowing more diversity and agency. The emergence of streaming platforms marks a revolutionary phase in representation. With fewer commercial constraints, OTT content presents women as leaders, thinkers, rebels, and survivors, offering narratives that mirror contemporary realities. Although challenges remain—particularly regarding intersectional representation—the trajectory is undeniably positive. Indian media is transitioning from portraying women as cultural ideals to presenting them as complex human beings. This evolution not only enriches cinematic storytelling but also contributes to shaping progressive gender norms in society.

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