



FROM PRESENCE TO AGENCY: GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN ANIMATION



Kanika Chopra
Assistant Professor
in Business Communications,
Apeejay Institute of Management
& Engineering

✉ kanika.chopra@learn.apeejay.edu

REPRESENTATION WITHOUT AGENCY IS NOT EQUALITY



INTRODUCTION & AIM

Children's animation plays a powerful role in shaping attitudes, values and gender perceptions from an early age. While female characters are visible in Indian animation, they are often denied substantive roles, decision-making power and narrative influence.

This study aims to shift the lens from mere presence to meaningful agency.

OBJECTIVES

- Examine gender distribution in key roles and screen time.
- Analyze narrative agency and character functionality.
- Identify gender stereotypes and their impact.

METHODOLOGY

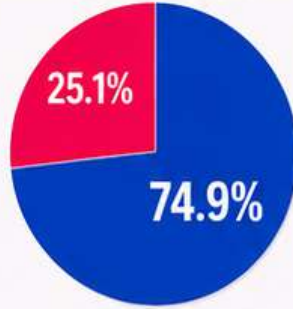
Sample	Popular Indian animated series across TV & OTT
Dataset	80 episodes from 10 widely viewed shows (2010-2023)
Unit of Analysis	Characters, dialogues, actions, narrative roles and visual representation
Coding Framework	Adapted from Geena Davis Institute & UNESCO guidelines
Reliability	Inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa) = 0.82 (Strong Agreement)

“When girls see it, they can be it. But first, they need to see it with agency.”



KEY FINDINGS

1. SCREEN TIME IMBALANCE



- Male Characters (74.9%)
- Female Characters (25.1%)

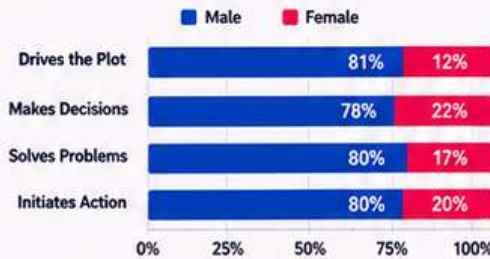
Female characters receive only ~25% of total screen time.

2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION IN KEY ROLES

Role Type	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender Gap (M-F)
Protagonists / Leads	84.6	15.4	69.2
Antagonists	68.8	31.2	37.6
Problem Solvers	82.1	17.9	64.2
Decision Makers	81.0	19.0	64.0
Mentors / Guides	75.6	24.4	51.2
Supportive Characters	31.5	68.5	-37.0

* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

3. NARRATIVE AGENCY (WHO DRIVES THE STORY?)



Male characters dominate narrative agency across all key functions.

4. RESCUE NARRATIVES



87% of rescue narratives are male-driven

13% are female driven or self-rescue

5. STEREOTYPES IN REPRESENTATION



MALE CHARACTERS

- Strong
- Leader
- Problem-solver
- Brave
- Independent
- Rational

VS

FEMALE CHARACTERS

- Emotional
- Supportive
- Dependent
- Caring
- Appearance-focused
- Passive



COMMON TROPE EXAMPLES

- Damsel in Distress
- Love Interest / Sidekick
- Overly Emotional
- Needs Permission
- Sacrificing Self

CONCLUSION

- Indian animation continues to exhibit uneven character presence, where boys drive the story and hold power.
- Female characters are present but marginalized through limited screen time, stereotypical roles and lack of agency.
- Transforming representation into agency is essential for building equitable and empowering narratives for children.

FUTURE WORK

- Expand dataset to include regional language animations.
- Longitudinal study to track change over time.
- Explore audience reception and impact on gender attitudes.
- Develop a gender-inclusive storytelling framework for animators.

TOWARDS GENDER-INCLUSIVE STORYTELLING. FROM PRESENCE TO POWER. FROM TOKENISM TO TRANSFORMATION.