

**Journal Title:** *Wide Screen*  
**Vol. 9, No.1, July 2022**  
**ISSN:** 1757-3920  
**URL:** <http://widescreenjournal.org>

**NETFLIX, GANGSTERS AND TRANS-NATIONALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF *SACRED GAMES SEASON 1* (2018-19)**

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**Abstract:** This article will take into consideration the first season of the web series, *Sacred Games* (2018-19) created and distributed by the subscription-based global streaming platform Netflix with a significantly wide scale, big budget, and narrative ambitions as opposed to the other Indian web shows of that period viz. *Permanent Roommates* (2014-2016), *Pitchers* (2015-), etc. The show can be characterized by a certain amalgamation between ‘quality’/global (film noir, gangster) and ‘popular’/local (soap opera, Bollywood masala films) genres. As the cinematic and televisual memories of a particular nation can never be abandoned, it produces an interesting mish-mash of genres as well as the subversion of generic conventions in the global order. This article will focus on this mixing and subversion of genres in Indian contents made by global streaming platforms and posit it in binary with Netflix’s formulation of the genre through algorithmic projections, also focusing on how the lack of censorship (circa 2018) operates in the medium and creates a new mode of expression. This analysis will also take into contention the transnational aspects of the streaming platforms and how their contents replicate and diverge from traditional modes of expression in Indian media. Through this analysis, the article will also attempt to enquire into the fact that whether this mixture produces new forms of genre particular to the form of web series or whether the genre gets relegated into a stylistic accessory in the Indian context. Therefore, in this regard, this chapter will also inquire into how the American logics of cinematization and quality television gets attributed in the web series format and whether or not this attribution produces a legitimization of the web series format into a high cultural artifact.

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There is a segment named *Meal Ticket* in the 2018 released Netflix western anthology film called *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, which can be argued as symptomatic of the current mediascape we inhabit. The particular segment dealt with two characters: one being the ‘world-weary.. impresario’ who travels through the snowy and rough frontier landscapes of yore and the other being a paraplegic artist, carried by the impresario in his cart, who attracts viewers and captivates them through his recitation of literary pieces and thereby becoming a source of income for both of them (Scott, 2018). But good times don’t last forever. As the days progressed, the oratorical skills of ‘Professor Harrison-The Wingless Thrush’ were not enough to fetch a profit for either one of them. The audience was far more interested in new forms of entertainment exemplified by an intelligent cock who knows mathematics. The film ends with the businessman buying the cock and throwing away the paraplegic entertainer from a bridge to die as he no longer suited his purpose. The last shot of this short captures the cock in the cart moving through the snow and a sense of melancholia looms large signifying the death of an artist or more precisely, an art form.

As noted by A.O. Scott in his review for the film, ‘Entertainment is poor compensation for the brute fact of mortality, but it’s what we have’ (Scott, 2018<sup>1</sup>). The tension between two forms of media-primarily conceived as a source of entertainment and commercial industry- the old and the new comes into the forefront in *Meal ticket*. In this regard, the role of Netflix projecting as emblematic of the new media and the future of entertainment by projecting as the global multi-media conglomerate should also be considered. However, unlike the short segment, the old media doesn’t completely face extinction (in the case of the short, the literary recitations, and the spectacle of Harrison’s performance). Furthermore, the treatment of the genre that this film tackles head-on- that of a western-is drastically different from its historical as well as contemporary counterparts. The question of the medium also becomes important in this context. In the article to follow, I will look into these questions of assimilation of various media forms and the rethinking of the genre in the streaming platforms with the context of Indian original web series from a global platform like Netflix. For my analysis, I will look into the Netflix original gangster series *Sacred Games* (2018-19), and how the series manifests the generic particularities to address a particular set of spectators. This article will also bring into consideration the question of transnational

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<sup>1</sup> From: “The Ballad of Buster Scruggs’ Review: A Grim Western From the Coen Brothers,” The New York Times, Nov. 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/08/movies/the-ballad-of-buster-scruggs-review.html>, Accessed 28 May, 2019.

narratives including thematic tendencies which will help us to understand the storytelling strategies of the streaming platforms in the transnational mediascape.

Furthermore, as the aforementioned short shows, the question of relevance and spectatorial attention hangs large in every artistic creation. In the current environment of content oversaturation, this issue becomes more important. Any analysis of web series as a form should take into consideration this dialectical relationship between the strategies imparted by the producers to take care of the attention economy and the narrative strategies inherent in the web series itself. By locating these two strategies in contradiction to each other, it can be possible to locate the uniqueness of the form in the global mediascape.

However, this usage of the term ‘transnational’ gets complicated when the original content of a particular market is analyzed, in the case of this article, which will be India. Steven Vertovec notes in this context that ‘cultural commonalities’ should also be regarded as this allows for the accommodation for the exchange of cultural goods (Jenner, 2018: p.191). To create or license, the streaming platforms, therefore, rely on content that has a built-in international reputation, irrespective of its country of origin. For instance, Netflix got positive results in this experiment through their Mexican original show *Narcos* (2015-17), a Spanish language show from a Brazilian director and starring mostly Latin-American actors, dubbed in English and also available with subtitles. However, as a 2016 Wired article points out, how will this approach towards a narrative which has a global potential work out, if say, it finances a Bollywood production for a global audience?<sup>2</sup> What will the generic assumptions be turned into in that scenario? These questions will be attempted to be looked at in this essay through the analysis of the aforementioned series.

### **1. *Sacred Games*: The Games that People Play**

Netflix debuted its first original content in India with the adaptation of author Vikram Chandra’s ‘anti-thriller mosaic’ of a novel *Sacred Games*, starring Bollywood actors Saif Ali Khan and Nawazuddin Siddiqui on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2018, nearly two years after the streaming giant entered the Indian market in January 2016 (Singh, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Billed as the show which will change the landscape

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<sup>2</sup> From “Netflix Isn’t Made for the US Anymore—It’s for the Whole World,” WIRED, Jan 13, 2016, <https://www.wired.com/2016/01/in-the-us-were-now-watching-the-worlds-netflix/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> From “Despair and nihilism in Bombay: *Sacred Games*,” Jabberwock, August 12, 2006, [http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2006/08/despair-and-nihilism-in-bombay-sacred\\_12.html](http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2006/08/despair-and-nihilism-in-bombay-sacred_12.html), Accessed 30th May, 2022.

of Indian television, *Sacred Games* was promoted heavily by Netflix both through online marketing strategy of posting cryptic trailers and a music video by the indie rapper Divine in their Youtube channel and social media handles. Netflix also promoted the show with the installation of huge billboards around every nooks and corner in the metro cities, reportedly spending around 5-6 crores in OOH (Out of Home) advertising<sup>4</sup>. This convergent promotional strategy of Netflix, coupled with the roping in of popular/ non-mainstream Bollywood actors and directors like Anurag Kashyap, Vikramaditya Motwane, shot mostly in local languages viz. Hindi, Punjabi and Marathi can be seen as Netflix's way of identifying its target demographic and catering to them in terms of the Indian market. As can be noted from various interviews available online with Netflix officials, for every international production Netflix focuses on national specificities through assimilation with a particular national market; the viewer's relationship with television, native programming, market-specific ideologies, politics, and history among others. Therefore, despite being a decentred media unit, to cite Couldry, which can be relegated to the concept of 'television without a space' whilst focusing on being a 'transnational broadcaster', Netflix attempts to integrate concepts of nationalization and regionalization in their international productions (Couldry, 2012, cited in Jenner, 2018: p.211). This fact, coupled with the difference of programming in countries, in turn, posits Netflix as a heterogeneous media system that follows transnational patterns of storytelling while firmly locating itself into the country of production. This tension between the transnational and the local forms the basis of a production like *Sacred Games* which is to be analyzed in the following section. For the sake of brevity, the article will focus solely on the first season of the show.

The show revolves around two characters- the ruthless Mumbai Gangster Ganesh Gaitonde and a down on his luck Mumbai cop Sartaj Singh- whose lives connect on the very first episode through a phone call. Originally modeled on the real-life Hindu don Arun Gawli and other prominent mafia figures of '90s Bombay, the introduction of Gaitonde, with his voiceover being intercut with disparate visuals of his gang members being shot at by an assassin brings into the foreground the central narrative crux of the series: the interconnectedness of every seemingly unrelated narrative through power not within the control of man and the conflict between religion

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<sup>4</sup> From: "Netflix India creates buzz through OOH for Sacred Games," exchange4media, Jul 4, 2018, <https://www.exchange4media.com/out-of-home-news/netflix-india-creates-buzz-through-oooh-for-sacred-games-90856.html>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

and individual identity in a country like India. In a way then, to bring in Lev Manovich's contention of the digital cinema, the narrative of the show can also be read as to be attuned with a certain 'fractal structure of new media' (Manovich, 2001: p.51-2) where every element gets assembled into the larger object but maintaining their separate identity, as in every small character has a well-realised world inside them. In this regards, Jean-Francois Lyotard's conception of grand-narratives and mini-narratives which signifies the post-modern condition can be placed in contrast with the modularity provided by new media (Lyotard, 1984). It can be argued that the mini-narratives, the personal narratives that constitute the story of the individual, of personal tragedies, happiness and hope get lost in the structure of the larger grand-narrative of the nation state aligned with elements from the symbolic order and is able to be conveyed and retain its political value only by the modular narrative provided by the 'cultural interfaces', in this case the OTT platforms (Manovich, 2001: p.80).

### **1.1 The Pre-credit sequence: Significance**

The stylistic pre-occupations are also evident from the pre-credit sequence itself. The opening image of the series is of a dog being thrown from a multi-storeyed building and its subsequent death, with the blood of the dog spattered on the floor is match-cut with the blood of a soon-to-be-dead woman in a closed space. As a musical cue, 'Dharti Kahe Pukarke' from *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) plays while the voice of Ganesh Gaitonde looms large in the background: In this sequence itself, we can see the stylistic features of the show being expertly laid down: the acknowledgment of the 'local' cinematic past and assimilation of it in the global form of web series, use of graphic depictions of violence and crass dialogues which directly targets the belief system of the 'local' spectator. This further indicates the strategy of the OTT platforms to foreground freedom from the C.B.F.C board which is being used to manipulate the attention scarcity of the new spectator.

Moreover, this opening sequence finely brings out a connection between the private and the public acts of violence in the city of Mumbai, which facilitates the whole narrative. In fact, from the perspective of web series production, this opening sequence can be read as a strategy to attract the attention of the spectators who are always in a state of drift. The pre-credit sequence of *Sacred Games* follows the tradition of opening sequences of 'American Quality television'; therefore, further indicating the structural similarity of both, albeit steeped in doses of

‘conspicuous localism’ (Havens, 2018)<sup>5</sup>. This strategy of American Television, in its Indian incarnation, points out to a much more serialized structure where we don’t come back to the opening minutes in the whole season, but it hangs over like a spectral presence, going in line with the diegetic universe of the show itself. This can be read also as a characteristic of OTT platform originals, where the shows are being created and released for a continuous consumption: hence the over-serialization (detailing) of the shows are possible as it demands the spectator’s undivided attention as opposed to the standard network television structure (also found in Indian television) where the device of the recap is used to re-orient the audience’s memory. Furthermore, the death of the gangster in the very first episode works as a cliff-hanger (and is abound in other episodes of the series) and ensures future consumptions which can be read as a re-appropriation of Jonathan Crary’s point regarding attention economy: ‘a revolutionizing of the means of perception’ (Crary, 1999: p.13).

## 1.2. The title sequence: Themes and implications

Before moving on to the show itself, we should take into consideration the title sequence of *Sacred Games*, which goes per the thematic inclinations of the show and with Netflix’s conception of ‘abstraction aesthetic’ (Finn, 2017: p.103). The 35-40 second title sequence coupled with a near ominous/gibberish chant in the background resembled the stylistic pattern (albeit partially) of international shows like *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019: H.B.O). Designed by Indian company Plexus Graphics studio, the title sequence combines close-ups of the Mandala/Chakra (which is the show’s logo; further indicating the inter-connectivity of every event) with newsreel/stock footages of Hindu architectural designs, low-resolution images of nation shaking terror attacks including the Babri Masjid massacre and the 1993 Bombay blast with fleeting glimpses of people getting slaughtered, the transformation of the city itself and Hindu ritual practices (like Dusshera)<sup>6</sup>. In a way, the title sequence, by blending a constructed image (mandala) with seemingly disparate images of riots, rituals, and political figures points out the mythification of the city and the characters who were instrumental in those disruptions. In this regard, the narrative device of

<sup>5</sup> From, “Transnational Television Dramas and the Aesthetics of Conspicuous Localism,” Flow Journal, April 30, 2018, <https://www.flowjournal.org/2018/04/transnational-television-dramas/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

<sup>6</sup> From “Sacred Games on Netflix: Decoding the intricate title credits and logo design,” Architectural Digest, July 10, 2018, <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/sacred-games-netflix-logo-title-design/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

Gaitonde's voiceover can be read as the city's enunciation of a counter-historical narrative that never surfaces in the discourses of the mainstream media.

Furthermore, the intentional deterioration of the quality of the images can be read as a re-construction of a hitherto unknown notion of reality: of a history that is never allowed to be told, by political machinations through national media systems of news, television, and cinema. In a way then, the title sequence prefigures the narrative tensions of the whole series as the show deals with two individuals who are rooted in their institutional origins and belief systems which eventually lead to disorientation as they get disillusioned while serving under symbolic regimes of the state police force and religion respectively.

Furthermore, if we compare the title sequences of the dominant genre that is prevalent in Indian television: soap operas like *Kyunki Saans Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (2000-8), *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki* (2000-2008) etc. we can understand the difference between the conception and execution of them and of local contents produced by international streaming platforms like *Sacred Games* (2018-19) or *Inside Edge* (2017-). The title sequences of the soap operas present a utopic vision of a family, introducing all the central characters in the diegetic space, through the feminine viewpoint, the target demographic of the show<sup>7</sup>. In contrast, the title sequence of *Sacred Games*, with its blending of low-resolution stock/newsreel footage with technologically superior VFX sequences, creates a sense of disorientation in the viewer by disrupting the sense of comfort and unleashing the counter-narrative of the nation itself, thereby conceptualising a new mode of consumption.

Talking about the low-resolution images in general, Hito Steyerl notes how the conservative, hierarchical structure of the neo-liberal media has established a certain cult of the high-resolution image by obscuring the representation of non-conformist/resistant films to a point where it disappeared from the surface into an underground of alternative archives and collectives (Steyerl, 2009). Steyerl points to the distinct quality of the low-resolution images that creates a sense of disorientation for the mainstream – its appropriation of abstraction and representation of a distinct visual idea. The networks (in this case Netflix) in which the poor image circulates constitute both a platform for 'fragile new common interests and a battleground for

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<sup>7</sup> From "Where is the real working woman in our TV soaps?" Communication Today, December 30, 2014, <https://communicationtoday.net/2014/12/30/where-is-the-real-working-woman-in-our-tv-soaps/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

commercial/national agendas' (ibid). Thereby, the combination of high-quality images (i.e. the formation of the mandala) with low-resolution images in the title sequence foregrounds an alternative economy of images which while being derived from the particular cultural paradigm depicts a shared history that contradicts the linear historical structure.

Furthermore, the appropriation of abstraction can also be found in the conception of the show itself. If we consider the platform, the creation of *Sacred Games* is part algorithmic but is designed to fit in within the wider abstraction aesthetic of Netflix which emphasizes the requirement to present a simplified and abstracting notion of complex details to deliver a reliable service. This process, therefore, allows companies like Google, Netflix, Facebook, etc. to operate as a middleman in our online activities and transactions to provide to us a convenient experience, in the process, therefore, controlling our 'space of agency' (Finn, 2017: p. 103). Therefore, to re-appropriate Ed Finn's argument, it can be said that the very fact that the show was created from an algorithmic analysis of user consumption habits brings out partial traces of 'computational authorship' in the show itself (Finn, 2017: p. 105). Considering that this is a show which can be an introduction to a wider range of Indian audiences, (as well as the global audience for introduction to Indian contents) to the interface of Netflix, *Sacred Games* repeats the 'abstract aesthetic' of Netflix itself, creating a distinctive affect for the consumers (ibid). Coming back to the title sequence, the abstract aesthetic gets highlighted through an abstracted view of the city where the political and religious institutions are visible in detailed close-ups, whereas the people exist as abstract constructs- one resembling the faceless mass who are acting as mere agents in the wider political contexts. Thereby, following Ed Finn, it can be argued that this title sequence presents to us an algorithmic view of Mumbai, with all the historical contexts being alluded to through images, resembling a PowerPoint presentation, where the humans are only visible through physical and socio-political traces (ibid).<sup>8</sup> The title sequence of *Sacred Games* can therefore be regarded as a re-appropriation of an 'abstracted material universe' (ibid).

### 1.3. Algorithmic culture and the Logics of Production

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, in the title sequences of its other original programming also Netflix does not focus on individual characters or actors, instead focusing on abstract images which gives an idea of the narrative viz. The German Netflix original *Dark* (2017-2020) or the American show *Stranger Things* (2016-), whereas the shows which introduce the characters in its title credits are animated dark comedy series like *Bojack Horseman* (2014-2020) and *F is for Family* (2015-2021).



As noted by William Uricchio, the question of creative authorship becomes both ‘pluriform and problematic’ when considered from the point of view of algorithm (Uricchio, 2017: p.137). When the content is being created by assessing and reshaping the data to achieve particular ‘data markers,’ (ibid) then, even though the human agency remains pivotal in the production and execution of the show, the human-created content ultimately gets reinstated in the data set abstraction. To look at it from Ted Striphas’s perspective, algorithms, and by extension, the platforms, are used to organize the culture in order to relegate anarchy and be an expression of popular taste (Striphas, 2015).<sup>9</sup> However, in doing so, the platforms, and algorithmic culture, are becoming the new elite who are making all the necessary decisions, but never disclosing their process, ultimately serving the purpose of a capitalist structure in the guise of convenience and comfort to the public. This results in blurring of the lines between authorship and agency. The once supreme human agency gets restructured by the ‘algorithmic intermediary,’ through the Personalised Recommendation System (P.R.S.) which now stands in between the subject and the object. In a way then, the new combinations, as per Uricchio, brings into foreground the possibilities of such collaborations- whether it initiates new collectivities or it just confirms to the age old discourse of power and control is something to be look forward to in the coming days (Uricchio, 2017: p.135). However, considering *Sacred Games* in this context, one can notice tensions within the show itself between the machine and the logic of personalization, as illustrated in the analysis of the title sequence, which makes it a unique text. Borrowing from Ed Finn’s analogy, with its gritty/ unfiltered look at events of Bombay and presence of shadowy figures in lieu of human presence in the credits, the show posits itself as a text about the ‘culture machine’ itself, about the struggle between ‘life and structure’, between certain natural practices and the all consuming nexus of capitalistic forces, the judiciary and other bureaucratic systems ( Finn, 2017: p. 106).

Furthermore, the central characters of *Sacred Games*- the dreaded gangster Ganesh Gaitonde and the world weary cop Sartaj Singh, following Finn’s argument, can be read as people

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<sup>9</sup>This formulation of Striphas’s is itself derived from Mathew Arnold’s work *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869. Arnold pointed out that in order to maintain the idea of cultural dominance in an increasingly democratic social order, the elite class invested in educational institutions to educate ordinary citizens into their notion of acceptable culture. This tendency is also seen in the original Doordarshan broadcasting model, although it was a statist intervention, where they adopted a developmental approach to educate and develop the newly independent citizens. For Arnold therefore culture becomes ‘a principle of authority’ (a particular tradition of ideas, values, tastes etc.) in order to counteract the anarchist tendencies that threatens the elite and thereby shape the society (Arnold, 2006, 61).

with an abstracted notion of emotionality who test the limit of the moral compass of the spectator (Finn, 2017). In the very first episode itself, along with the opening sequence of a dog being killed, there are other instances of people getting brutally murdered, mostly by the gangster Ganesh Gaitonde, including his own mother and his lover. Further, not just the act of violence is being shown in the show, with disturbing close ups of the dead bodies, it also gets internalised into the twisted logical paradigms of the show itself and that of the local Indian audience through the constant reference and attempts to draw parallels with characters from Hindu mythology, in this case Aswathama which further complicates the moral universe of the show. Further, the show extensively uses the narrative device of a voice from the dead, ala *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) which connects both the present and the past timelines into a cohesive whole and further making the spectator complicit with the gangster's world by providing an 'intense and personal feeling' facilitated by interactive participation (Newman, 2009)<sup>10</sup>. This feeling in turn encourages the spectator to consume the content in a continuous pattern in order to sustain their relationship with the protagonist in the attempt to understand his motivations in the diegetic universe governed by the corrupt nexus of politicians, religious leaders and the judiciary. Further, the show also creates an increasing sense of alienation for the spectator, especially in its first season, where the characters who are shown to be morally upright and valiant, thereby working as audience surrogate, undergoing their own redemptive journeys like constable Katekar or RAW agent Anjali Mathur. They are shown to be killed in a matter of fact way like several characters of *Game of Thrones* (2010-2019) or *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), negating the notion of control and agency in the diegetic universe. As Chuck Tryon points out, bingeing shows is concurrent with active viewing practices as the spectator has to create their own schedule to watch the bundle of episodes rather than being dependent on the linear broadcast schedule (Tryon, 2012). However, the aforementioned events provide an element of shock and unpredictability to the narrative proceedings further facilitating the spectator to be attentive towards the show and add sufficient incentive to continue watching it in one go, thereby also simultaneously negating the apparent notion of spectatorial agency and control that Netflix and the other platforms proudly publicizes.

However, as Mark Andrejevic rightly points out, data helps to create strategies for audience retention (Andrejevic, 2007). This over-reliance on data might also facilitate a cultural trend

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<sup>10</sup> From "TV Binge," Flow Journal, January 23, 2009, <https://www.flowjournal.org/2009/01/tv-binge-michael-z-newman-university-of-wisconsin-milwaukee/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

emphasizing enclosure and surveillance (ibid). In the universe of the show itself, this idea of enclosure and surveillance plays an important function where the show is populated by devices of control and surveillance in every layer. In a world increasingly dominated by data governance and surveillance, especially in a post-pandemic society, where the individual is just another data set in a long chain of data sets, the characters feel much more enclosed and suffocated in the claustrophobic space that the show creates through invasive technologies. In the first episode of the show, the identity of Ganesh Gaitonde, the wanted gangster, is simultaneously revealed through different voice recognition/ geo-location software and CC TV footages by the two main characters, Sartaj and Anjali, through which they get entangled into the web of crime and conspiracies. Further, the show also depicts various ways the characters manipulate the technological intricacies to map and make sense of the increasing complexities they are being thrown into, further making them aware of the way they are controlled in the post-modern world. For example, when the plot to extract information from Gaitonde's associate Bunty through sting operation fails, Sartaj throws himself into the gangster's hands to save Nayanika, the police informant, in the heat of the moment. The limitations of technology lays bare in this sequence and the desire to execute human agency takes centre stage and he fails considerably, laying bare the futile existence of the individual once again in this increasingly connected world. The characters in a way mimic the condition of the spectators, with a proliferation of screens and intruding technologies both inside and outside of the diegetic space. Also, the usage of archival footages in the show, as mentioned above, some of which were not immensely circulated in previous incarnations of mainstream media further brings forward the almost ubiquitous/all powerful nature of the platform, where the alternative local history is finally coming to the forefront and getting integrated into the mainstream primarily due to lack of censorship from any statist forces, but through global capitalist interventions. Further, the usage of technologies in a rather persistent and invasive manner throughout the narrative makes the content much more relatable and accessible for the spectator especially the 'global' audience as the plot points facilitated by technology provides a reference point for them along with other generic tendencies which will be discussed in the later sections.

Further, through the framing device of the voice-over which in a way addresses the audience directly, the show also brings into focus the disruption of the myth of personalization which is advocated by Netflix. Ganesh Gaitonde becomes the 'aesthetic personification of

Netflix's algorithmic attention for us' - Gaitonde addresses Sartaj personally (who is the only moral centre of the otherwise corrupt universe), and by extension the audience, thereby in the process making us uncomfortable, exposing the hypocrisy of the world we live in, all the while making sure that we will be intrigued by his story (Finn, 2017: 108). The techniques used in the show (usage of newsreels/ archival footage from crucial points of national history, manipulation of the spectator through the extensive voice over and usage of self-reflexive dialogues) try to establish a synchronicity between content and the interface which creates the illusion that the interface is listening to the user, by feeding back recommendations to them. Thus, by encouraging the users to engage in a commodified interaction with the system, the interface exemplifies the notion of control in a network society (Chamberlain, 2010). Taking note of Gilles Deleuze's formulation, it can be argued that data becomes the crucial unit of power in a controlled society where the corporations exploit the illusory notion of freedom and agency to create user profiles, which in turn allows them to exert profit from the users (Deleuze, 1992).

However, the profit exertion itself is a complex and multi-faceted process and can be understood through certain marketing strategies imbibed by Netflix. As noted by Chuck Tryon, Netflix's strategy of releasing all the episodes simultaneously, as a singular unit, simultaneously enables the spectator to engage in more attentive viewing regimes where he/she is more acquainted with the previous episodes (Tryon, 2012). The innovative techniques used in storytelling- viz, usage of non-linear narrative, subtle visual and musical cues to accentuate the tensions in the narrative increases cognition in the narrative. Further, this spurs a participatory discourse as 'viewers' can discuss cliffhangers of the show or unfolding narrative enigmas in online discussion boards or social media platforms. For instance, after the first season of *Sacred Games*, ended with a cliffhanger of Sartaj finally making sense of the patterns and discovering the underground chamber of Ganesh Gaitonde with dead Trivedi tied in the chair, the social media platforms and discussion pages on Reddit and Quora became abound with many theories. Many users also pinpointed certain images from the sequence or created detailed videos where they observed the show intricately and brought out details which were not apparent in first viewing to make sense of the cliffhanger. While fan activities surrounding particular cultural artefact is nothing new, here it becomes interesting as it is tied to Netflix's marketing strategies too. Netflix promotes their content focusing on the fact that people will feel left out in cultural conversations or will be provided with spoilers in social media handles through circulation of memes or videos if they don't devour the

content at one go. Thereby, following Mareike Jenner's contention it can be argued that, Netflix encourages a form of immediacy and a shared notion of collectivity which is akin to the strategies of liveness imparted by broadcast television, thereby reaffirming the notion of 'televisual flow' which validates the instant mode of consumption (Jenner, 2018).

However, in this notion of seemingly uninterrupted flow, where the spectator can create/ regulate their own speed of consumption and with the wider cultural appropriation of memes and reels based on particular shows and series created by the users themselves, which in turn increases the viewership of that content, they become a part of the flow themselves, of the always expanding and never ending feedback loop, and simultaneously unifying the different forms of visual communication into a singular flow which might allow the audience to appreciate, consume and enjoy the original content due to recognition from certain memes/ reels or for the creation of the same. For instance, although *Sacred Games* Season 1 was duly promoted in the metro cities through banners and social media teasers, after the release of the show and the virality of certain memes/ clips from the show, taken out of context, the show got more attention from consumers which created considerable hype for the second season of the show (The funniest Sacred Games memes, 2018). This form of affective labour, to borrow from Michael Hardt's conception, got transformed into the viewing numbers of the show itself and allowed Netflix to take into consideration the social media handles to promote their content more aggressively especially in India, as is seen in the later days through the promotional strategies of mainstream Bollywood films like *Class of '83* (2020) and *Sooryavanshi* (2021) and also international shows like *Sex Education*(2019-) or *Bridgerton* (2020-) where the stars of the respective films/shows are shown to be reacting to their own memes/ comments about them, as a way of rewarding the viewers for their active participation and dedicated viewership – a symbiotic relationship marked by production and manipulation of affects to make sure the seemingly uninterrupted flow of content and associated assemblages go on (Hardt, 1999). To bring back Ed Finn again, as he rightly points out, the contemporary strategies of marketing and the recommendation system themselves have become the new form of authorship which demand a new and active mode of literacy from the spectators to participate in the consumption process (Finn, 2017) . This notion of authorship gets further complicated when the question of altgenres generated by the Netflix algorithm comes into play which we will look at in the next section.

#### 1.4. The Genre Question

As noted by Rick Altman, distribution and exhibition platforms exert a deterministic power behind how audiences perceive genres (Altman, 1984). However, if we take into contention how Netflix approaches genres and enlists them in its formulation of 19 genres and 400 subgenres, as noted by Daniel Smith-Rowsey, this notion behind genre gets complicated (Smith-Rowsey, 2016). In this section, I would like to explore the question of genre and how it gets reconfigured in the Netflix original productions, through *Sacred Games* (ibid). Netflix, through its algorithmic projections, creates and negates certain genres which can be an indication of the larger problem of genre extinction. The very notion of what constitutes as ‘cinema’ is thereby challenged and transformed by Netflix. Netflix uses the process of intentional instability to create genres which can be read as a by-product of an increasingly postmodern-capitalist world where the private definitions get obliterated by private/ corporate enterprises (ibid).

As Smith- Rowsey further notes, there has been an increasing sense of dread among film scholars with regards to this newly formed genre modulation of Netflix and other streaming platforms enabled by the process of micro-tagging and creation of subgenres (ibid). For example, *Sacred Games* is tagged under the subsection of the Hindi Language T.V. Programme, T.V. Programmes based on books, Indian Programmes, and Mystery Programmes. As can be seen, even in serialized narratives, the earlier notions of the genre get distorted considering the increasingly emerging number of subgenres that Netflix demonstrates in its interface. But, as Sheri Chinen Biesen notes, the new form of transmedia storytelling gets appropriated by the easy availability of a certain genre at a domestic setting, as in the classic Hollywood film noirs, (Biensen, 2016).<sup>11</sup> In a sense, Netflix helps in the projection of a unique cinematic (albeit through serialized narrative, by releasing a whole season at one go) vision which helps in the reintegration of cinephilia and the genre question in a medium-specific manner. This attitude of Netflix also gets reflected in their shows, particularly in *Sacred Games* where two different genres, that of gangster films and neo-noir reinstates the national history by deploying the tropes of the genre to bring into foreground the repressed (i.e. erstwhile devoid of representation) elements of a nation in flux.

As is akin to film noir, the show depicts an urban space full of characters- characters who are isolated and crippled in a moral predicament- who are trapped in situations not wholly created

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<sup>11</sup>As Biensen notes, borrowing from Henry Jenkins’s formulation of convergence culture, transmedia storytelling allows the flow of content across multiple media platforms provides the audience to engage with the media texts in innovative ways which produces new meanings as a result of the intersection between platforms and contexts (Biensen, 2016).

by them but from which they can never break free and whose implications they had to follow (Sanders, 2006 ).When we first meet Sartaj, the under-performing Sikh cop suffering from a divorce and the failure to follow the path of honesty laid by his father constable Dilbagh Singh, he is visibly distraught between giving false testimonials in an encounter case to save his superior officer Parulkar and to speak out the truth regarding the encounter, where the unarmed guy named Zunaid gets killed due to his religion. However, true to the tropes of film noir, there is an ironic acceptance of the absurdity of his existence for Sartaj when he shoots the boy who killed Katekar: the shots being arranged in the same pattern as the Zunaid encounter scene and Sartaj finally confronting his demons and succumbing to the same degeneration as his superiors in the police force. The inherent meaninglessness of lives in the desolate dystopia of Mumbai comes a full circle. Mumbai itself is divided into two sections throughout the show highlighting the class disparity that traverses and connects Sartaj and Gaitonde. The city is presented through two conflicting points of view- Gaitonde considers it his love whereas Sartaj is suffocated in the morally corrupt cityscape from which there is no respite. The show is mostly shot in the night where Mumbai appears as space ‘wreathed in shadows’, with a predominant usage of yellow lights which brings out a sense of doom (Vasudevan, 2002: p. 62). Although the show abides through international generic codes and stylistic intricacies, fate acts in the narrative as an ‘ever-receding and untraceable authority’, to quote Ravi Vasudevan, which depicts the dark underbelly of the prevalent social domains (ibid).

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However, the sense of completion itself in a serialized narrative with no sense of immediate closure can be read as paradoxical. Nonetheless, the characters of Sartaj and Gaitonde act as a mirror image of one another, which is further elucidated with the editing pattern of the show- acting as a narrative thread to jump conveniently between two different timelines, two disparate spaces and in a sense, two different genres. This jump however is also connected by the device of Gaitonde’s voiceover, who although commits suicide in the very first episode haunts the diegetic space by acting as a spectral presence where the city seems to confess about its gradual degradation through her erstwhile lover. As noted by Maureen Turim, deriving from Freud, the voice over element in film noir or the device of the flashback in films like *Out of the Past* (1947), *Sunset*

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<sup>12</sup>Talking about Bollywood action films that represent a sense of urban anxiety and fear by juxtaposing them with a sense of excitement, Ravi Vasudevan notes how the exploration of abstract spaces becomes important in films like *Parinda* to bring out the essential narrative meaning. In this regard, to bring out the dark underbelly of a social domain and reinstate the sense of dread in the urban milieu, fate operates as an opposing force of intervention.

*Boulevard* (1950) etc. allows the spectator to ‘listen analytically’ as well as accepting the ‘Final Fatality’ of the hero’s journey which is marked by a certain repetition compulsion punctuated by the death drive (Turim, 2014: p. 179).

As Steven M. Sanders notes, existential freedom can be regarded as the ‘pulled thread’ that embodies noir narratives and is further signified by its treatment of the choices of the past by the individual in a radically different way than that of existentialism’s maxim of free will (Sanders, 2006: p. 98). Ganesh Gaitonde, therefore, becomes the ideal signifier for such a world view. The use of voice-over, in *Sacred Games*, akin to classical film noir, therefore can be read as following the tropes of confessional flashbacks which provides a sense of (partial) narrative closure mirroring the genre’s inherent fatalism where the spectator remains fully aware of the fate of Gaitonde. Thereby, the voice-over pre-figures the future in the past, who himself is haunted by the sins of his past, foregrounding ‘the vanity of existence...in the relativity of all things’, to paraphrase Arthur Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer, 1970, quoted in Sanders, 2006: p. 94). For example, in the episode ‘Sarama’, when a close confidante of Gaitonde is killed by his rival Suleiman Issa, he beats up and curses one of his gang members Bunty and the voiceover narrates that Bunty will be cursed to die like a dog and when the narrative shifts to the present day the disembodied organs of Bunty are scattered on the street. This device, therefore, creates a sense of incongruity which in turn produces dark humor, between the perceived seriousness of the gangster image and the “longer view” which points out the perishable nature of human existence (Nagel, 1971, quoted in Sanders, 2006: p. 100).

However, as film scholars have contended since the 1950’s, the figure of the gangster in American films brings into focus the expression of a social fantasy of being able to wage a war from the body of an individual where the illusion of possession of power through individuality and machismo gets prioritized (Martin, 2018, Schatz, 1981, Warshow, 1948 et al ). The figure of the gangster, as noted by Robert Warshow, from a sociological perspective, therefore brings out the pleasure-principle of operating within his whims of climbing the social ladder as well as the reality principle of the moral order where the gangster has to die, given his choices and decision to operate in the other side of the law( Warshow 1948). As Adrian Martin notes in his essay, *Mr.Big*, the revisionist phase of the Hollywood gangster genre, (viz.films like *Scarface*(1983), *The Untouchables* (1987), etc.) celebrates not a larger-than-life individualism but the subjective position of the individual itself. Therefore, the gangster genre is largely concerned with the



individual subjectivity and operates within a dual structure. In one end, it celebrates the idea of an all-powerful individual who is imagined as ‘body in action, and action as the exercise of control and power’, where the power of consumption is celebrated wholeheartedly (Martin, 2018: p. 247). On the other end, however, it operates on a level of introspection as tests the limit of the body of the gangster who finds himself increasingly in a situation out of his control, culminating into a bloody and brutal outcome subjected in the body (ibid). The individual, therefore, believes he is in power but the power remains in the hand of the progressive powers. To bring back Robert Warshow, the gangster throughout his life attempts to be an individual by asserting his desires and working towards it but suffers and eventually dies because of being an individual. *Sacred Games*, in a way, re-appropriates this treatment of the revisionist gangster genre. However, from the 5<sup>th</sup> episode, the body of the secular gangster becomes subjected to the exploration of the myth of its generic origin through subjecting the body to its bloody limits by positing it against things that are suddenly beyond the control of Gaitonde, with a loss in the support structure. Therefore, Martin’s contention of individualism and paranoia existing in a binary relation can be observed in the gangster part of the narrative, directed by filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, where in the first half, the individual is in the seat of power, with an all-encompassing sense of ownership. But owing to the long-form narrative, Kashyap creates self-awareness of the gangster genre and brings forward the impact of religion as being something uncontrollable and a supreme centre of power which henceforward will control the individual (ibid).

Going back to Netflix’s contention of genres then, as noted by Ian Bogost and Alexis Madrigal, through this combination of the human intelligence of the taggers, ‘with the machine intelligence of the algorithms’, Netflix has created numerous tags and micro-genres, the film equivalent of which are still not available in their curated library<sup>13</sup> (Bogost and Madrigal, 2014). To refer to Striplhas’s argument on algorithmic culture, this empty genres produced through multiple permutation and combinations, also might let the creators to write films or series with regards to the algorithmic quantification of genre (Striplhas, 2015). The breaking down of a film or a show into multiple variables has allowed Netflix to describe the cultural relationship among films and television shows (Finn, 2017). The micro-tagging system therefore becomes important

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<sup>13</sup> From, “How Netflix Reverse-Engineered Hollywood,” The Atlantic, January 2, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/how-netflix-reverse-engineered-hollywood/282679/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

to expand the terrain by being able to measure ‘complex cultural concepts’ into quantifiable forms of data (Finn, 2017: p.93).

As Mareike Jenner points out in her book on Netflix, the fiction shows which are created by accumulating algorithmic data of user behaviour conforms to the reproduction of the generic structures and existing systems of Hollywood authorship and stardom instead of challenging the limits of the medium as Netflix markets it to be (Jenner, 2018). The ultimate goal of their original content – be it ‘quality television’ dramas like *House of Cards* (2013-2018) or *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) or standard regressive single-camera sitcoms like *The Ranch* (2016-2020) or *Fuller House* (2016-2020) – to maintain the entrance flow, makes it concurrent to the strategies of the linear television. If you like one type of shows, you will be provided in abundance with shows with similar tone and within the same genre to maintain this illusion of familiarity, as mentioned earlier. In this regard, let us consider *Sacred Games* Season 1 here. In the show, especially in the gangster portions, the narrative is structured in such a way that it feels overly familiar for anyone who is remotely aware of the tropes of the particular genre which contributes to the constitution of Ganesh Gaitonde’s subjectivity as a figure of the mythical gangster. The Gangster’s desire to be powerful (seen in the flashback of Ganesh Gaitonde’s childhood and the desire to own Mumbai)- early days of struggle (working in Hindu Hotel and getting abused there by the owner evoking his desire again) - initial rise to power after eliminating adversaries (the killing of his mentor Salim Kaka) the machismo of the gangster being signified by a tiger- his assemblage of the gang-sweet taste of success (the killing of Momin to ensure his dominance in Kailashpada) – his rise in the social ladder- eventual fall. Although, since the show operates within the realms of the long-form serialised narrative and the death of Ganesh Gaitonde is not really a mystery, the eventual fall is elongated in conjunction with the noir part of the show, the rest of the genre tropes are fully realised within the first four episodes of the show itself.

Further, as Sudipto Basu argues in his article on the Amazon Prime Crime drama series *Patal Lok* (2020), the show achieves, albeit unconsciously a sense of total annihilation of any sense of possibilities of the future, fully negating the ideological strand of developmental realism prevalent in the ‘70s art film movement and bringing into foreground a political unconscious which is entrenched within the dominating and segmentative structures of casteism, which Basu terms as cynical realism (Basu, 2021). Although there is a marked difference between the two shows, with its focus on the past and religious segmentation and unfolding as an alternative historical document

of a secret past through the voice over of the upper caste Gangster, *Sacred Games* also imbibe in itself a sense of cynical realism in the current political climate where there is a permeable sense of decay, corruption and violence always in the play, and the future of the financial capital of the country, which even if saved by Sartaj, doesn't indicate a brighter one, as is also articulated through the contrasting aesthetic devices of the show, of shabby government buildings, dingy apartments and vibrant cityscapes. So much so that the tagline of the second season brings forward the morally ambiguous question: Is the World Worth saving? Therefore, I would like to argue that, in the show created by global media conglomerates for a transnational audience, through visible identifiable markers of altgenres, there exists a tension between the algorithmic conceptions of the genre and that of the traditional formulation of the genre. It gets further problematized with the pervasive presence of religion throughout the narrative, pointing out a certain failure of negotiation of the 'local' histories in the narrative and an underlying sense of unrest and dread that runs through the unconscious structure of the narrative and occasionally lays bare.

To bring back Adrian Martin, the body remains at the centre of the gangster genre with the incorporation of bodyguards in the narrative who work for the central character (Martin2018). However, in this show, the bodyguards and his friends are killed by Gaitonde himself in a bout of paranoia and sudden exhibition of violence, internalising the pessimistic fervour of the city in himself and he becomes the protector of his own body as well as his community. But before this rise the figure has to undergo rites of sacrifice, as is experienced in the last episode of the season where he is tortured brutally by the agents of the symbolic order- the police commissioner, the right-wing politician, and the religious leader. The rise of the gangster in the Indian context therefore can never be complete without the protection or safeguard of religion which will transform the gangster into an Aswathama like immortal figure.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.5. The logics of Possession

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<sup>14</sup>Ashwathama was a character from the great Indian epic Mahabharata and a fearless warrior who fought for the Kauravas in the great battle of Kurukshetra. He was believed to be immortal and a ferocious warrior. He was brought up by Dronacharya, an expert warrior who lived a simple life, in extreme poverty and hence was despised by him (like Gaitonde's original father). Like Gaitonde, he had the ambition of upward mobility and considered himself an supreme individual because he was born with a gem in his head. Gaitonde, in the very first episode, which was also named after him, proclaims he is immortal, thereby providing the title for the episode. Interestingly, every episode of the show is named after certain Hindu ritual or mythical figure-further signifying the embedding of religion in the narrative as an inescapable fact of the character's lives, regardless of their personal beliefs.

As noted by Steven Sanders, the American film noir as a genre is traditionally enacted against a secular backdrop where the characters live in a godless space (Sanders, 2006). Belief in God and religion rarely appears as operating principles in any classical film noir narrative. The characters in the noir universe are psychologically & morally corrupt who are eternally doomed. However, in the Indian context, and thereby, in *Sacred Games*, religion has coded the reality of the characters in such a manner that it resembles a pre-conscious structure. All the characters in the diegetic universe are possessed and haunted by the effects of religion in some way or the other. The show is rife with metaphors from Hindu religious texts so much so that the episode titles are derived from them. The parallel narratives of Gaitonde and Sartaj might seem disparate in their generic approaches but get assimilated through the undercurrent of a layered patriarchal structure where the failure of the state allows religion to emerge and operate as a force field. Religion becomes the much-eluded object of desire that haunts most film noir narratives (Copjec, 1993). And like the most unobtainable object of desires, it takes a hold of the human body and disorients it from inside out. This replacement is much more lethal as religion exists in these conditions in a molecular and viral form which is impossible to recognize and which operates through the possession of the body itself. Every major or minor character in this show is driven through this possession logic. For example, a ‘minor’ character like Katekar who is shown as a loyal police officer and a family man has a hatred for the Islamic community probably unbeknownst to himself.

This logic of possession however comes into its ultimate manifestation in the 7<sup>th</sup> episode of the series, ‘Rudra’, where Gaitonde finally performs the role of the Hindu don by killing Muslims of all ages and occupations in a montage sequence, to avenge the death of his wife, which he thought was the doing of Isaa after the ‘93 Mumbai blast. But this is revealed to be a plot by the nexus of the symbolic figures of police, politician, and religious leaders to make him understand the significance of religion. Thereby, in Indian noirs, the noir form moves into the horror realm as it is over-determined by the social structure which values the right of performance and the mimicking of the capital. Here one can observe a slightly occult logic of genre mixing taking centre-stage which makes genres unable to be separated from each other and certain histories forces genres to function in a more unified manner. In the logic of the new capitalism, of consolidation of the Netflix brand, the stories of Gaitonde and Sartaj get interweaved.

Capitalism, therefore, intensifies social forms through the form of nationalism and organizes the social principle through the intensification of the capital and pagan rituals which can

only be understood as a possession. Towards the end of season 1 of the series, after an endless period of intense torture, Gaitonde loses control of himself and gets possessed by the voice of his third father figure, which helps him to live through the attack by Isaa's men and Parulkar. The possession of the body through religion is further intensified through the convergence logic. As rightly mentioned by Ana Ashraf in her paper on *Sacred Games*, Gaitonde's 'transgressive will', which dominates his early career as a gangster by leading a life in his own terms and going against any and every metanarratives prevalent in the society ultimately becomes a victim of the all pervasive symbolic order punctuated by religion ( Ashraf, 2021: p.9).

In a way, Kashyap and Motwane expertly trace the history of religious fanaticism through the history of television and mass media itself. The whole gang of Gaitonde (which had the semblance of secularism at the beginning) is shown to be enjoying Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* (1987-1988) and is later shown to be fighting over a tape of political leaders insisting on building a temple in Ayodhya-the two sides of the same coin which attempts to inculcate the hatred of communities. As noted by Arvind Rajagopal in his seminal work *Politics after Television*, the creation and simultaneous broadcasting of the 'mythological soap opera' genre, was instrumental in the formation of a distinct televisual culture in India , transcending the class boundaries and solidifying the pro- Hindu imagery of BJP as a political party (Rajagopal, 2001: p. 278). As Rajagopal further mentions, through the ritualised consumption of the mythological soap operas, the audiences were able to feel 'the absence of a lost utopia' punctuated by self sacrifice which rendered the erstwhile divisions of class and power irrelevant and instead focused on the possibility of recreation of the utopia through the formation of a collective punctuated by Hindu nationalism (ibid).

The show is laden with scenes of mythological soap operas broadcasted in the background, in spaces of collective consumption but it slowly moves into the foreground, with the climactic reveal of Season 1, in Sartaj's house, further signifying the transcendence of the generic elements through the all pervasive lens of mass- media and religion. This corrupt nexus of mass media, mafia, and religion duly exposes how religion moves in distributing affect and symbolic logic through the body.

### **1.6. The Question of Masculinity:**

In the world of film noir, as many scholars have argued, there is an assimilation of new forms of utopic organization where the woman figure is excluded. If and when present, the woman exists as the femme fatale figure, which lures the protagonist into a web of deceits and lies. The liberal

figure of the *femme fatale* is posited as a spectral fear of male castration and therefore has to die in the course of the narrative. The death is also necessary as it posits a threat in this conception of the new order and the celebration of raw narcissistic masculinity. This new order is desired and anticipated in film noirs which goes against the logic of ideal family life and civil society. Similarly, the ideologue of nationalism in a neo-liberalist state gets preoccupied with the remodelling of society by the creation of new identities and value systems. This remodelling will help in the realization of the subject to be 'individual' and achieve success by following their desires which will in turn produce an ideal neoliberal subject. Therefore, the neo-liberal narrative also creates an 'emancipatory impulse' for the oppressed sections of the society, which includes women from diverse backgrounds to be finally able to participate actively in this new economy (Paunksnis and Chakraborty, 2020: p.4). Although the neo-liberal economy promotes a gender-neutral environment that is adept in the creation of new subjectivities, in a predominantly patriarchal society like India, these tensions between generic conventions and gender roles can create a sense of anxiety in masculinity which is expressed in a polysemic neo-liberal text like *Sacred Games* (ibid). While there are many instances of this masculine crisis evident in the text, for the sake of brevity, my argument will keep in focus the character of Sartaj Singh and the women intertwined with his life to address this issue.

When the first time the audience is introduced to Sartaj, it is in a tight close-up, through which the camera slowly moves out and locates him in the middle of an investigation of a corpse stuck in a den, echoing Sartaj's condition of claustrophobic helplessness. In the first episode, in the sequence where he enters his own house, there is a sense of lack and emptiness evident in the space equating that of his personal life and the composition of the interior shots-with domestic elements arranged in a cramped-upstate. Soon after, Sartaj and the viewer, come to terms with the futility of his existence-the lack of water then symbolizing the impotence of Sartaj in the machinations of the system. In the same episode, he is shown to be stalking his wife obsessively and calmly, signifying the emotional lack and the pathos of the character. Furthermore, he is a Sikh cop, a caste who is represented primarily in Hindi films within the limitations of being a jovial, dumb, and macho stereotype with films like *Singh is King* (2008), *Mubarak*, (2017) *No Problem* (2010) and numerous others exploiting this trope to limitless permutations and combinations. What *Sacred Games* does, from the very first go, along with casting a Bollywood

A-list actor Saif Ali Khan as Sartaj Singh, is to destroy the stereotype associated with a Sikh character and thereby commenting on the masculine crisis in a neo-liberal economy.

Sartaj is visibly clueless when Gaitonde calls him up, but soon after, the phone call, becomes an attempt for him to reassert his fragile masculinity. In a way then, he starts as a typical film noir protagonist, who is in the grip of desperate emotional needs and sexual desire but has to act against a backdrop of human duplicity and the threat of death/ obsolescence. When he finally starts investigating the case from the 2<sup>nd</sup> episode with instructions from an intelligence officer, we get to experience how the voice of the past (Gaitonde) keeps controlling his present moorings thereby intertwining them in a single unit.

The character of Sartaj, therefore, can be read as the neo-liberal subject who has lost all his hegemonic patriarchal power and authority and is now in a position of social castration as noted by Runa Chakraborty Paunksnis and Sarunas Paunksnis in a 2020 article and can be seen in other New Bollywood films like *Ugly* (2014), *Trapped* (2016), *Raman Raghav 2.0* (2016), *Titli* (2015) (Chakraborty and Paunksnis 2020). Therefore, as Lalitha Gopalan rightly notes, the 'urban fringe' films can be perceived as a critique of the mainstream industry (Mazumdar, 2011: p.155, Gopalan, 2002). True to the narrative conventions of these films, the women that he comes in contact with through the course of this investigation are independent working women who, on the surface, are more confident in their identity than Sartaj is Anjali Mathur, the raw agent who works in the same case and has a separate narrative track of her own, can be read as a mirror image of Sartaj Singh who is competent in her job but is being pressured to resort in her desk job and uses facts and reason to commence her investigation. Sartaj, on the other hand, is impulsive and is unable to fit his patriarchal position in an increasingly over-crowded city. His existential crisis, therefore, finds a sense of purpose when he convinces television actress Nayanika to spy for her gangster partner Bunty regarding the impending nuclear attacks and offers to save her by hook or by crook. It is to be noted that in the shots where Sartaj is seen keeping an eye on Nayanika uncannily resembles (structurally) the shots where he repeats the action with his ex-wife. In a way then, his object of desire, of obsession has now shifted. In both of the cases, the women are shown as hazy presence. This act of his, to become the saviour of Nayanika, underpins the nihilistic implications of his actions. As noted by philosopher Nolen Gertz, this act of helping others makes us view us as helpful and others as powerless (Gertz, 2018). Therefore, the act itself represents a nihilistic replacement of the impotent self with a sense of artificial superiority as well as nihilistically

replacing the humanity of the other with a sense of artificial inferiority (ibid). Sartaj's saviour complex reignites when he gets a call about her whereabouts and finally agrees to let go of his value system and agrees to give a false testimony, which again was a nihilistic exercise, to begin with. It is to be noted that when he fails in his endeavour of rescuing Nayanika in episode five, he again returns to his position of keeping an eye on his wife- the desired object remaining always in flux.

However, through the next few episodes, amidst a journey of personal loss and redemption, Sartaj takes on the role of the saviour by reasserting his masculine identity through the veils of the symbolic order. In a way then, the inherent meaninglessness of the noir space depicted in the show is duly contrasted by Sartaj's character arc. The character of Sartaj, therefore, brings meaning in this corrupt nexus of Mumbai and his project to save Mumbai attains a realizable and positive value to it. The gender roles and the generic conventions, therefore, culminate in a complementary position. It is also to be noted that Sartaj is the only character in the show, whose religious identity has not affected his actions in the diegetic space, however the symbols of his religion helps him in dire situations, further pointing out the all pervasive nature of religion. It can be argued that the first season is the journey of Sartaj Singh from 'being to becoming' a secular figure who will wage the war against ritualism that is prevalent in the narrative. However, the aspiration of the new order through a nationalistic discourse can only be put into conflict when pitted against secularism. In this regard, the loss of thumb of Sartaj and other wounds that are inflicted in his body can be regarded as the end of his fragmented existence in the post-globalization era and coming in terms with his subject formation: albeit in the pessimistic sense of the term which noir depicts. This is clear when he finds out about the death of Anjali in the hospital bed reflecting in front of his mother the transitory nature of life itself and while doing so finally embraces the city and his duty to protect it.

This stance can be interpreted as running counter to the liberal ideology that Netflix proclaims through its shows on a global scale. Therefore, here we see a tension between the transnational and the national as is evident with the allegedly defamatory dialogues that are projected against Rajiv Gandhi and other prime ministers and their regime in the web series. As Couldry notes, 'the point of origin' of a particular cultural text doesn't necessarily determine the circulation of the text around the globe or how it is received on a global scale (Couldry, 2012 quoted in Jenner, 2018: p. 288). When a show like *Sacred Games* is being telecasted outside of its



cultural context it can generate and produce new meanings. It is to be noted then, Netflix's shows are produced for the transnational audience from the very beginning of its production. Sam Ward pointed out concerning Netflix's strategy of expansion in the U.K. that it tends to integrate itself with the local media ecosystem instead of having any intention to displace it (Ward, 2016 quoted in Jenner, 2018: p. 135).

I would like to argue that though *Sacred Games* demonstrates Netflix's engagement with the national ecosystem, it also showcases the way the transnational gets negotiated by the nation when being streamed within the aegis of the current nationalist government and their policies regarding censorship in film and television which runs counter with Netflix's liberal usage of expletives, violence and full frontal nudity, at least until 2020. As mentioned earlier, the controversy regarding Rajiv Gandhi being referred to as a 'pussy' was later replaced to 'wimp' in the subtitles and the positioning of the women character can very well be deduced as a transnational strategy to put into focus the condition of women in India. To derive from Monika Mehta's argument on Indian film censorship, new regimes of technology and media, operating on outside the borders of state authority thereby can broadcast potentially subversive elements in their contents, without the fear of control, thereby facilitating new modes of creativity (Mehta, 2001).

### **1.7. The transnational aspects of Sacred Games**

However, in this section, we will talk about how *Sacred Games* can be read as a transnational text which brings out commonalities in societies separated by borders but connected through mediatization and globalization. As noted by Mareike Jenner, the binge model introduced by Netflix helps to linearize time for viewers across the globe by making the shows available on the same day (Jenner 2018). Although transnational broadcasting is nothing unique in the history of media, Netflix and other platforms like Amazon Prime Video reinterprets the term itself through their wide library of content and ease of access. Therefore, streaming platforms promote themselves as distinct media forms to attract different markets. This means, in a global media system, the protocols (media practices, regulatory frameworks, access to different media) vary. The streaming platforms, therefore, in order to operate in different media conditions and through different contents must have shows that have transnational appeal to target a wide range of audiences. The focus for Netflix therefore remains on the commonalities than on the differences. If we take *Sacred Games* into contention then, unlike Indian televisual landscape in general, which

is populated by soap operas and serials that focus on the overly dramatized trials and tribulations of the concept of ideal families and is targeted to the ‘lowest common denominator’, we will notice that Netflix followed the notions of American quality television and invested heavily for it (Jenner, 2018, Thompson, 1997, K. Thompson, 2003). The linkage between American television and ‘quality television’ therefore heavily informs the narrative structure of *Sacred Games*, which therefore carries certain traces of ‘America’ in itself, despite being created by largely Indian creators and technicians and using local languages of Marathi, Punjabi, and Hindi.

*Sacred Games* uses a narrative structure that borrows directly from American television series like *Lost* (2004-10), *This is Us* (2016-2022), Netflix’s own *Orange is the new black* (2013-2019), *True Detective* (2014-) among others where two different narrative threads—one set in the present and other being revealed as a flashback run simultaneously in the heavily serialized narrative which helps the audience to get into the psyche of the central characters (as many of them figure in both the timelines), which contributes to the binge structure of the show as it operates under the principle of ‘How did we get here?’ and sustains audience interest (Mittell, 2015). To deduce the mystery behind why Gaitonde committed suicide and how he is connected to Sartaj, one has to stay invested in both the narratives at the same time. This opening sequence of Gaitonde committing suicide therefore can be read as a definitive fact in the narrative, which Jason Mittell, defines as a narrative statement (ibid). This non-linear mode of storytelling is completely new from the Indian perspective and to borrow from Jason Mittell’s terminology, *Sacred Games* introduces the device of “complex storytelling” in the Indian context (ibid). The device of narrative complexity, as Jason Mittell notes, refers to the redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narrations. This tendency leads to open-endedness of the narrative and significant changes in characters, in contrast to Indian serial melodramas where everything stayed the same (ibid). There remains a complete narrative arc of an episode that is resolved in that episode partially with the remaining loose threads being continued in the next episode. In most of the episodes, Gaitonde’s narratives have a closed structure. However, the present part of the narrative which unfolds like a paranoid thriller keeps the open-endedness of the serialized narrative intact.

Another feature of American complex quality narratives is the device of parallel editing which helps to accentuate the connections between two characters or two separate events, therefore making it more serialized. The paranoia thriller structure is borrowed from shows like *24* (2001-14), where the countdown of 24 hours pops up in the screen and points out to the immediacy of

the narrative. The countdown also elevates dramatic tension in the serialized form which again retains the attention for the next episode. Furthermore, the usage of music, Bollywood songs, and background scores along with the use of single takes, slow-motion shots, split-screen techniques borrowed largely from American television series and films helps in the creation of a ‘Quality t.v.’ aesthetic which pertains the accessibility of a text in transnational scales.<sup>15</sup>

The background score of *Sacred Games*, composed by Alakananda Dasgupta served the same purpose as it is mostly used in sequences of wordless actions. In a sense, the score works as an extension of the character’s emotions and is also used in a circular manner signifying the fate of the characters in the narrative. For example, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> episode ‘Halahala’, the music used in the long sequence during which Anjali Mathur finds out that most of the Gaitonde gang is killed by someone resurfaces in the 7<sup>th</sup> episode, minutes before she is killed in the hands of the terrorist Malcolm Murad. The immersive quality of the soundscape makes the spectator more aligned to the machinations of the plot and the several wordless sequences allow the viewer to undergo a cognitive experience as same as the characters, as is seen in the sequence where Sartaj, with Katekar’s blood all over his khaki uniform, goes to confront Katekar’s wife-the background music detailing his anguish and pain. Apart from the background music, the sound is also used in an immersive manner that resembles its American counterparts. The use of immersive soundtrack, however, can also be seen through the lens of leveraging of digital technologies which include the usage of Dolby Atmos 5.1 surround sound to provide a more complete and intense experience for spectators only who are watching the show, by streaming it in television but when consumed through technologically inferior devices like laptops and mobile phones with headphones, it provides a different aural affect. In a way then, through the inculcation of immersive soundtracks which elevates the experience of consumption in different mediums, Netflix acknowledges the increasingly trans-medial consumption and in a way, facilitates it.

Netflix’s transnational figuration can be further traced which makes visible the tension between the ideological imperative of the nations and the cultural assimilation that pertains to a particular media text to appeal the audience of a decentred media system not only through the

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<sup>15</sup> In this regards, it is also to be noted that the composition of the shots for the show was also done keeping in mind the modern day mobile spectator who consume contents mostly in their smartphones. As Sylvester Fonseca, D.O.P. for the show noted: ‘I did know that the series would mostly be watched on smaller screens, especially smartphones. I kept that in mind in terms of the compositions, since on smaller screens, even an interestingly done wide shot will lose its detail’. (Ramnath, 2018)

technical appropriation of American televisual structure in a global scale but also through the domestication of particular texts through options of dubbing and subtitles: thereby integrating with the national media systems.

However, this grammar of transnationalism is rooted in the apparent superior universality of the western cultural value system which can be understood differently in different regions. In fact, this idea of facilitation of American Quality Television and Complex Television can be read as a form of cultural imperialism, where the hierarchy always lies in the hands of the supreme power, in this case that of the streaming platforms. However, as Adrian Athique argues, imperialism is not only understood by a transnational presence but has to understand through the strategic intention to enter and dominate a particular market (Athique, 2016, quoted in Fitzgerald, 2019: p. 101). This strategic intention, duly adapted by Netflix through its production of content in vernacular languages in countries throughout the globe to emerge as the truly global platform, as mentioned earlier, is not a novel strategy in itself as was observed in earlier transnational network models of linear television like that of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox or H.B.O. but what is interesting in this scenario is that Netflix adapts a certain transnational aesthetic/ grammar as mentioned earlier to create their fiction shows. This is done by Netflix primarily by positing genres as a significant point of communication between the spectator and the industry where it had to fit into certain tonal and aesthetical alignment of already existing texts and altgenre categories predetermined by the algorithm (Jenner, 2021). As pointed out by Fabrizio Tassinari, while transnationalism acknowledges the nation state and refers to a certain movement between them, it often stands in opposition with the nation state and its associated notions of community and identity (Cuccioletta, 2001, quoted in Stolz, 2021: p. 148). As Mareike Jenner notes in a 2021 article, Netflix's adoption of the grammar of transnationalism is facilitated by a complete 'denationalisation' of the texts where the 'local' is duly negated in favour of the wider cosmopolitan audience (Jenner, 2021: p. 197). Further, as Robert Watts and G. Stolz argues, the denial of place and the reduction of it into some generic sense of locality becomes important for the transnational reception of the show, whether or not it is genuinely portrayed in the text itself as the 'transcultural media experience' depends primarily on the celebration of cultural similarities which solidifies the notion of cosmopolitan and truly global audience (Watts, G. Stolz et al 2021: p. 203).

However, as Adrian Athique points out in another article, the success of a certain content which is made for a global cultural exchange rooted in one particular culture has to have a

significant amount of critical/ commercial success in the dominant culture first to appeal to a wider audience (Athique, 2014 quoted in Stolz, 2021: p. 150). In this regard, the concerns and demands of the local media consumers becomes important. Especially in an increasingly diverse market like that of India, where as per recent reports, Netflix is struggling to attract significant consumers with reportedly 5 million subscriber base in the current scenario, positing them in the third position in the extremely competitive market of India (Thakur, 2022)<sup>16</sup>. Although, there are reasons like high subscription costs, piracy, no added benefits like Amazon Prime or Hotstar behind the low numbers, one can argue that a significant lack of narratives/ content that cater to the diversities of the nation state is a primary reason. Talking specifically about Netflix original content made for India since *Sacred Games*, most of them like *Leila* (2019-), *Selection Day* (2018), *Ghoul* (2018), *Bard of Blood* (2019), *Bombay Begums* (2021) among others, some of which gathered significant critical praise, failed to turn into subscriber base. These shows mostly dealt with narratives and situations that although being familiar to certain extent were mostly generic in their narratives and execution without any intricacy while some of them were catered mostly to the ‘elite’ subscriber base and aligned to the global liberal political worldview that Netflix propagates. While there are occasional shows like *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* (2020) which dealt with the phishing network in Jharkhand and gained significant popularity, there is no significant original content to keep the ‘local’ audience hooked into the platform unlike the competitive platforms.

Following B.G-Stolz, therefore it can be argued that shows like *Sacred Games* can be considered a transnational offering as it happens to have a certain ‘foreignness’ imbibed in it which is a part of its appeal- the ‘local’ histories, socio- political contexts, relationships with media and other cultural specificities cannot be contained within the generic structures and aesthetic choices and can only be enjoyed by a global audience with the specific details taken into consideration (Stolz, 2021: p. 146)). This notion is further solidified by Tim Goodman, where he points out in his review of the show, ‘ But the bigger goal might be a *Narcos*- like play to an open minded

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<sup>16</sup> From, “Is Woke Content Harming Netflix’s India Business?” Outlook, April 21, 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/business/is-woke-content-harming-netflix-s-india-business--news-46653>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

international audience that wants to see something familiar but foreign at the same time' (Goodman, 2018)<sup>17</sup>.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to look at the debates surrounding the cultural legitimatization and questions of genre mixing in the newly emergent web series format, specifically in Indian context, through the formal and stylistic analysis of the first season of the Netflix original show *Sacred Games* (2018-19). As the analysis showed us, there is a certain mode of opulence-from its narrative complexity to usage of stylistic images and non-diegetic devices like sound, that comes with shows made by the global streaming platforms which was noticeably absent in other incarnations of the form in India (pre-2018), viz. in TVF. Although this difference in scale can be attributed to a bigger budget and involvement of media conglomerates, it can also be argued to be operating from a sense of cinematic aspirations that is in discourse with the mainstream commercial Hindi films. In a way then, it can be argued that the radicality of the form, resulting from a lack of censorship in the medium, allows the creators to engage in morally ambiguous subject matters. However, in this regards, it might be noted that, regardless of the genre, the realistic core that drives most of the web series narratives itself becomes the ideology of the new form. As mentioned in detail previously, the show is predominantly driven by a cynical worldview, which gets re-organized throughout the course of the narrative with the characters.

The re -organization of the worldview becomes apparent with the deployment of the trope of a coming-of-age narrative in most of the shows in the Indian OTT space, especially in those produced by the global media conglomerates, Amazon Prime Video and Netflix regardless of the genre. In this case, it is to be noted that in Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* (2006), the character of Sartaj Singh was a successful police officer who got embroiled in the cat-and- mouse game to save the city. For most parts of the novel, Sartaj remains a passive observer and a well-respected officer as the narrative unfolds through him. However, in the case of the show, the character was deliberately changed by show-runner Vikramaditya Motwane to a downtrodden police officer battling his inner demons and the law simultaneously so that his ascension to heroism

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<sup>17</sup> From, "'Sacred Games': TV Review," The Hollywood Review, July 6, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-reviews/sacred-games-review-1125388/>, Accessed 30 May, 2022

creates a certain sense of character development and a relatable protagonist who resembles the noir hero but ultimately gets succumbed into a coming-of-age narrative to protect his city. This narrative device, as well as certain other aesthetic choices can be argued as a result of catering to the global audience as a part of Netflix's strategy of transnational storytelling as is demonstrated in the earlier sections of the essay, where the generic/ easily identifiable parts of a 'local' show becomes crucial to capture audience attention. Further, based on the algorithmic projections and logics of personalization that Netflix uses as a major governing tool for greenlighting projects, the question of 'computational authorship', as noted by Ed Finn also gets crucial, where data sets always have the upper hand, thereby complicating the traditional genre expectations of the show themselves (Finn, 2017: p. 103). In case of *Sacred Games* therefore, the global generic conventions of cinema gets re-appropriated in the medium of big budget cinematic Indian web series with an appropriate mixture of the 'high' (global genres, logics of cinematization etc.) and 'low' (Bollywood conventions of dance sequences, extra-diegetic excess like depiction of graphic violence, spewing of innovative abuses among others) to create a form which can inculcate stories which are radically different from the mainstream conventions of the Hindi film industry due to its subject matters and representation. As I have demonstrated, in this process the big budget web-series format deploys the conventional notions of genre into a scattered fragmented mode in a molecular, binary opposite and algorithmic way throughout the narrative, to fit into the micro-tagging system and to satisfy a global consumer base. However, as I have demonstrated through the analysis of the show itself, the socio-political contexts, the adaptation of cynical realism and by extension the cinematic and televisual memories of a particular nation i.e. the 'local' emerges as an unconscious political structure which complicates Netflix's positioning as a transnational media conglomerate which champions a certain global conformist mode of content consumption. Therefore, although there are plenty of examples in the show as I have demonstrated above where the show adheres to the global conception of a Netflix original (which can be easily bingeable with plenty of hook points in the show to grab the spectator's attention and creating an immersive experience by adhering to the logics of personalization among others) however, *Sacred Games*, at least in its first season, attempts to break the sense of convenience and comfort that the global platforms advocate. This is done primarily through the portrayal of logics of possession and how religion and in particular religious differences, communal conflicts form a crucial truth of the nation state which is seldom portrayed in the Bollywood movies that were the primary identifiers

for Indian cinema for a large section of global audience. By not adhering to a certain generic expectation or conformism of the algorithmic data set, *Sacred Games* can be regarded as a ‘cultural exception’ in Netflix’s chart of Indian originals (as well as in debates of algorithm being relegated to cultural gatekeepers through their recommendation system) which entertains as well as forces the global audience to be aware of the ‘local’ conditions, the success of which is still not replicated by the platform in the Indian context.

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### **Selected TV/Web series**

24. Created by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran, Imagine Television and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television, 2001-2010.

*Bard of Blood*. Directed by Ribhu Dasgupta and Jay Dev Banerjee, Red Chillies Entertainment, 2019.

*Bojack Horseman*. Created by Raphael Bob- Waksberg, Tornante Television, ShadowMachine et al, 2014-2020.

*Bombay Begums*. Created by Alankrita Shrivastava, Endemol Shine India and Chermin Entertainment, 2021

*Breaking Bad*. Created by Vince Gilligan, High Bridge Entertainment, Sony Pictures Television et al, 2008-2013.

*Bridgerton*. Created by Chris Van Dusen, Shondaland and CVD Productions, 2020-.

*Dark*. Created by Baran bo Odar and Jantje Friese, Wiedemann & Berg Television, 2017-2020.

*F is for Family*. Created by Bill Burr and Michael Price, Wild West Television, Gaumont Animation et al, 2015-2021.

*Fuller House*. Created by Jeff Franklin, Jeff Franklin Productions, Miller- Boyett Productions, Warner Horizon Televisions, 2016-2020.

*Game of Thrones*. Created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, H.B.O. Entertainment, 2011-2019.

*Ghoul*. Created by Patrick Graham, Blumhouse Productions, Phantom Films et al, 2018.

*House of Cards*. Created by Beau Willimon, MRC, Trigger Street Productions et al, 2013-2018.

*Inside Edge*. Created by Karan Anshuman, Excel Entertainment, 2017-.

*Jamtara- Sabka Number Ayega*. Created by Soumendra Padhi, Tipping Point, 2020.

*Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii*. Created by Ekta Kapoor, Balaji Telefilms, 2000-2008.

*Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. Created by Ekta Kapoor, Balaji Telefilms, 2000- 2008.

*Leila*. Created by Urmi Juvekar, Open Air Films LLP, 2019.

*Lost*. Created by Jeffrey Lieber, J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof, Bad Robot Productions, ABC Studios et al, 2004-2010.

*Narcos*. Created by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard and Doug Miro, Gaumont International Television, 2015-2017.

*Orange is the New Black*. Created by Jenji Kohan, Tilted Productions and Lionsgate Television, 2013-2019.

*Patal Lok*. Created by Sudip Sharma, Clean Slate Filmz, 2020.

*Permanent Roommates*. Created by Arunabh Kumar, The Viral Fever, 2014-2016.

*Ramayan*. Created by Ramanand Sagar, Sagar Arts, 1987-1988.

*Sacred Games*. Created by Vikramaditya Motwane, Phantom Films and Reliance Entertainment, 2018-2019.

*Selection Day*. Created by Marston Bloom, Anil Kapoor Films and Communication Network & Seven Stories Ltd. , 2018.

*Sex Education*. Created by Laurie Nunn, Eleven Film, 2019-

*Stranger Things*. Created by The Duffer Brothers, 21 Laps Entertainment, 2016-.

*The Ranch*. Created by Don Reo and Jim Patterson, Ranch Hand Productions, 2016-2020.

*This is Us*. Created by Dan Fogelman, 20<sup>th</sup> Television, Zaftig Films, 2016-2022.

*True Detective*. Created by Nic Pizzolatto, Anonymous Content, H.B.O. Entertainment et al, 2014-.

*TVF Pitchers*. Created by Arunabh Kumar, The Viral Fever, 2015.

**Selected Films**

*Class of '83*, Atul Sabharwal, Red Chillies Entertainment, 2020

*Do Bigha Zamin*, Bimal Roy, Bimal Roy Productions, 1953

*No Problem*, Anees Bazmee, Anil Kapoor Films Company Rawail Grandsons Entertainment and Software Pvt Ltd Spice Entertainment, 2010

*Raman Raghav 2.0*, Anurag Kashyap, Phantom Films, 2016

*Satya*, Ram Gopal Varma, 1998

*Scarface*, Brian De Palma, Universal Pictures, 1983

*Singh is King*, Anees Bazmee, Hari Om Entertainment, 2008

*Sooryavanshi*, Rohit Shetty, Reliance Entertainment Rohit Shetty Picturez Dharma Productions Cape of Good Films, 2021

*Sunset Boulevard*, Billy Wilder, Paramount Pictures, 1950

*The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, Ethan Coen, Joel Coen, Annapurna Pictures Mike Zoss Productions, 2018

*The Untouchables*, Brian De Palma, Paramount Pictures, 1987

*Titli*, Kanu Behl, Yash Raj Films, 2014

*Trapped*, Vikramaditya Motwane, Phantom Films, 2016

*Ugly*, Anurag Kashyap, Phantom Films, 2013