



10. Indian OTT Platforms and A Study on the Role of Antagonist on Psycho Thriller Web Series

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Abstract

The psycho-thriller genre of film could be any film that has either a basic psychological premise as its core theme or characters representing specific psychological issues or symptoms. A prototypical psycho-thriller is that movie in which a (psychological-fiction) theme like a psychological ability, disorder, or other such phenomenon is at the core of the plot. The lockdown marked by the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new normal to the people including a new way to interact, communicate and choose new innovative modes of entertainment. The OTT industry with its prominent service provider brands like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Voot etc. has been continuously making headlines every day by churning new attention-worthy content. Web series have penetrated the lives of millions in the world as well as the Indian audiences during this pandemic with the advent of various OTT platforms. The study was conducted through analysis of the thought process of the antagonists in the selected psycho thriller web series on OTT platforms. The selected series were observed closely to have a better understanding of the Antagonistic characters and analyse the impact it had on the actor's career portraying those roles. The secondary data for the study comprises other related findings through various newspapers, journals, books, websites, digital publications, etc.

Key Words: A study, Indian OTT Platforms, Antagonist on Psycho Thriller, Web Series.

Introduction:

For most entertainment during the lockdown was more of watching videos, browsing through social media websites, and binge-watching series on online platform. The lockdown marked by the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new normal to the people including a new way to interact, communicate and choose new innovative modes of entertainment. The OTT industry



with its prominent service provider brands like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Voot etc. has been continuously making headlines every day by churning new attention-worthy content. Web series have penetrated the lives of millions in the world as well as the Indian audiences during this pandemic with the advent of various OTT platforms. These streaming services have grabbed eyeballs with a bouquet of offerings across genres. The last decade witnessed a phenomenal growth in the consumption of the internet across the globe. It was after 2014 that the phenomenon of ‘web series’ started in India, and created a large viewership with its large variety of content.

Those days are gone when families used to sit together and watch television. Indian audience watch foreign series enthusiastically, but they have also been equally promoting Indian web series with revolutionary content fascinating the audience. With changing times, traditional television viewing culture has evolved into binge watching on digital platforms thrilling those known as the millennial as well as most of the older generations. This new wave of digital visual culture came into beginning a few years back starting with YouTube with shows like TVF Pitchers, Permanent Roommates and Bang Baja Barat. As the internet became a place full of choices the casting of actors to plays a vital role in the reception of a web series became a big thing as well. Making the producers of this series very particular about producing fresh and relatable content with powerful casting that can seek millennial’s attention.

A psycho thriller is a film genre that depicts a psychological theme as the central aspect of its characters or the plot. ‘The psycho thriller genre of film could be any film that has either a basic psychological premise as its core theme, or characters representing specific psychological issues or symptoms. A prototypical psycho thriller is that movie in which a psy-fi (psychological-fiction) theme like a psychological ability, disorder, or other such phenomenon is at the core of the plot.’

“Psychological Fiction” has a psychological component to it which are generally the broadly construed psychological elements such as neurotic (internal) conflict, identity (character) development, and emotional (dramatic) motivation, as they are the necessary ingredients of every story and script. Psychological thrillers series are those which feature unseen dangers, untrustworthy characters, and unsettling suspense. The best psychological thriller shows incorporate elements of suspense, drama, and intrigue to keep its characters along with the viewer’s guessing and keeping them on edge.

Objectives:

- To focus mainly on analysis of the Antagonist’s characters in selected psycho thriller web series.
- To examine how the portrayal of an antagonistic character have made a mark for the actors.

Significance:



With the continuous trending of web series among Indian audiences/viewers, OTT platforms have become a safe zone for content creators and filmmakers to explore and exhibit their creativity in a free form providing viewers some really intriguing and thought-provoking content. The new digital age with its web series have brought into focus characters that are grey rather than black and white like those back in the days when every film or TV show had a hero, a heroine and a villain, the hero being the epitome of all good and the villain being a bad character thorough and thorough. Nowadays the OTT platforms have change that in case of both the Antagonist and the Protagonist, as the flaws in the character of the protagonist is explored as well as an attempt at empathy for the antagonist is also evoked through the storytelling process of these web series. There are many such web series on any Indian OTT platform where the antagonist of the show has been able to outshine the protagonist through the portrayal of the character and make the audience sympathise with the villain even though they really do not agree to the steps taken by him/her.

Methodology:

It is believed that every individual is uniquely the sum of every experience they have ever had in their entire life. The experience gained from certain events have shaped them as to how they make decisions and display specific behavioural traits. According to the behavioural personality theory it is believed that personality is the outcome of a person's interactions with their surroundings. This behavioural perspective or behaviourism helps in connecting those incidents and behaviour that predict how the personality of a person was being shaped.

The study was conducted through analysis of the thought process of the antagonists in the selected psycho thriller web series on OTT platforms. This research study was exploratory in nature, and qualitative research method was being adopted by analysing the content of the plot of the selected series and analysing the behavioural traits of the antagonist as well as the impact the of the portrayal of the antagonist's role had on the actor's career in the selected series. Primary data was collected through content analysis of the selected Indian psycho thriller web series on OTT platforms selected purposively through pilot survey. The selected series were observed closely to have a better understanding of the Antagonistic characters and analyse the impact it had on the actor's career portraying those roles. The secondary data for the study comprises other related findings through various newspapers, journals, books, websites, digital publications, etc.

Analysis:

The following Indian series were analysed to get a better understanding of the content of the plot as well as the role of the antagonist.

1. Asur (Voot): It is a thriller web series that inclines dominantly towards the mythological history of the streets of Benaras and how it gets connection with a modern-day criminal named Asur. The plot involves Nikhil Nair, a forensic-expert-turned-teacher, who returns to his roots in the CBI getting into the investigation of a mysterious and suspense-filled chase against the serial killer 'Asur'. Nikhil Nair along with his mentor Dhananjay Rajpoot

faces all events in the web series to unravel the true identity of the killer, who challenges them in every way possible. One of the most intriguing yet sinister villains on OTT platform is Shubh Joshi from *Asur*, portrayed by Vishesh Bansal (as the teenage boy) and Amey Wagh (as the adult), who according to his father for being born in a *Asur* nakshatra has to suffer from traumatic childhood and that led him to channelize his talent towards negativity and started believing that he is an avatar of *Asur Kali*¹. According to him when this world will be full of misdeeds and bad people and when there will be no humanity left only then *Kalki*² will be born and he wanted to challenge *Kalki*. He ardently believed that *Asurs* always were the victims of injustice.

2. Paatal Lok (Amazon Prime Video): It is a crime thriller series where a lower ranking cop lands the case of a lifetime when four suspects are nabbed in the assassination attempt of a prime-time journalist. The case turns out to be a devious maze where nothing is what it looks like. The pursuit of it leads him to the dark netherworld- the “*Paatal Lok*”, and to shocking discoveries in the past of the four suspects. *Hathoda Tyagi* portrayed by *Abhishek Banerjee*, who after leaving his mark with his amazing comic roles in Bollywood films has brought a whole new character in Amazon Prime Video’s psycho-thriller web series ‘*Paatal Lok*’. *Hathoda Tyagi* was a divisive character, on one hand he was a sinister hammer-wielding killer who showcased the characteristics of a villain but on the other hand, his motivations of doing such deeds made the audience empathise with his character. He portrayed a dark character which was not any usual character to be seen on screen, *Hathoda Tyagi* managed to send chills down the spine making the audience shiver in all the freakish ways.

3. Rudra: The Edge of Darkness (Disney plus Hotstar): The series is set in the Special Crime Unit of the Mumbai Police. The show is a procedural psychological crime thriller which revolves around DCP *Rudraveer Singh*, who is under the system’s radar despite being one of its best minds at work. The show mostly focuses on the tactics used by *Rudra* to catch criminals and the cat and mouse chase between the cops and the psycho killers. *Rudra* is not a cop to play by the rules but one to lure the criminals into their own darkness in order to catch them in the act. As the series *Rudra* deals with a new case each episode, there are six antagonist all total, yet *Aliyah Choksi* (portrayed by *Raashii Khanna*) is shown as the prominent antagonist of the series, who is obsessed with *Rudra* and can go to any extent to gain his attention. *Aliyah* is a genius science prodigy who for the fun of it kills her parents without any remorse. She lacks empathy and treats her prey as her little science project and riling up *Rudra* becomes her favourite source of entertainment.

Findings and Conclusion:

Amongst all the villains portrayed in the arena of OTT web series, serial killers are those who are being hated the most. Their characters are outright evil, brutal and who are ready

¹ Who according to Hindu mythology is a asura who will come in Kali Yuga.

² Is an avatar of Lord Vishnu, who appears at the end of Kali Yuga.



to do anything to achieve their objectives/goals. Shubh Joshi from Asur (portrayed by Vishesh Bansal and Amey Wagh) is one such serial killer, who got into his evil ways right from his teenage years when his father used to torture him and deemed him as Asur for being born in a Asur nakshatra, as well as for being the sole reason of his mother's death during childbirth. He was a brutal serial killer who had influenced many inmates from his prison to be his blind followers, who believed in his preaching of Asurs being the victim of injustice.

Though there were many Shubh Joshis in the show, Vishesh Bansal's portrayal of the character as the young Shubh was spine chilling and through the character Shubh Joshi, the marathi actor has proven himself as a power house of talent. According to audiences and critics, Vishesh Bansal's Shubh Joshi, was a highly intelligent human who used his knowledge for evil and can definitely be referred to as a strong villain contender on the OTT platform.

While Hathora Tyagi from Paatal Lok (portrayed by Abhishek Banerjee) may appear gruesome and dangerous, he cannot be termed as a villain in general terms. As a fact, towards the end of season 1 of the series Pataal Lok, it was quite established that he was not a bad person at all. Abhishek's character doesn't speak through the series and yet, he was able to evoke fear in the eyes of the viewers through his powerful acting. Hathoda Tyagi was a soft-hearted person who loved dogs and had a moral reason for committing those murder in the school.

Abhishek Banerjee as Paatal Lok's Hathoda Tyagi garnered a huge fanbase after his quiet and applaud-worthy performance and he was very much appreciated for it. Having played comic roles in films like 'Jaana' in Stree and 'Mahinder' in Dream Gril, 'Hathoda Tyagi' in Paatal Lok came as a big turning point in Abhishek's career where he had to step out of his comfort zone taking up the shoes of an intense criminal character. Taking a different path in his initial acting career is indeed a tough choice for any actor who has established his persona in a particular genre but Abhishek has stunned the audience with his dark and intense character in the series. Paatal Lok proved to be a turning point in Abhishek's life, making him an overnight sensation on the OTT platform. For her first ever digital project in Hindi language, Raashii Khanna shared screen space with a celebrated actor like Ajay Devgn and had managed to establish an effortless chemistry on screen as Aliyah Choksi. With an impactful performance as a psychopath accused of the murder of her own parents, Raashii Khanna has earned praises from both the audience and critics alike.

In a dark, intense backdrop, Raashii's portrayal of Aliyah Choksi was a layered personality, challenging yet interesting at the same time. The actress caught everyone's attention with her role. It can be concluded that the villains of today put forward by these OTT platforms with their web series have become much more relatable to the audiences for the added humane traits to the characters as today's audience wants to see a villain that they can understand and form an empathetic connection with. Thus, the actors who have broken the shell of stereotypical villains are being appreciated by the audience and being praised for their

portrayal of the character forming a fan base for such negative roles, earning them fame and helping them get recognition in the acting business.

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