



REDEFINED NARRATIVES- HEROES AS CRUSADERS FROM VICTIMS TO UNDERDOGS

Dr. Smriti Rai*

Assistant Professor,
Darjeeling Hills University, Mungpoo, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India
Email: smreetee26@gmail.com.

Dr. Pooja Basnett

Assistant Professor,
Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India

ABSTRACT

The narratives of the heroes have been redefined due to the emergence and popularity of Over-the-top television (OTT) platforms. The representation of the heroes in Indian web series has been seen as saviour of the world, strong female leading characters and representing groundbreaking and radical leads in the previous studies like Munshi,2012; Kanwar & Singh,2021, Vaishnav,2022, Agarwal & Das,2022. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge the gap between the representation of heroes as victims of despicable acts and thus emerging as underdogs as the study deals with intricate details of identity, class, caste and gender through the discourse of crime in the web series Sacred Games, Season 1. The study has been done using Representation Theory as Theoretical Framework and Critical Discourse Analysis as methodology. The findings have shown stereotypical representations of gender and socio-economic conditions of heroes who tries to break the typecast. The results also show the odyssey of heroes as victims of evil acts eventually leading them to become pathfinders and trailblazers against the fight against crime. As a result, this research will give the literature on web series and digital platforms another perspective.

Keywords: Heroes, Victims, Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation Theory, Identity, Socio-Economic status, Sacred Games

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of the development of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, are propelling the current wave of innovation in the media and entertainment sector. India as a country is at a promising position that finds itself at a crossroads of noticeable threshold with the sudden change in the entertainment industry. The diverse population of India and its contribution from both urban and rural sectors have been attributed tremendously to decreasing costs and cost-cutting mobile data packages. As a result, there has been a significant increase in access to smart gadgets and other digital equipment. Over-the-top (OTT) services have grown in popularity in the country due to several factors, including the growing availability of high-quality content in foreign and regional languages, the widespread usage of the internet, ad-free television, and highly used popular concept of

binge watching in the streaming platforms (Saha & Prasad,2021).

Both the popularity of Indian and international over-the-top (OTT) platforms-with the latter making major penetration into the Indian market-has contributed to the increase of OTT platforms in India. The development in popularity of Indian platforms like VOOT, Zee5, Hotstar have strong presence followed by global over-the-top (OTT) platforms like Amazon and Netflix. They have been a contributing factor in making notable gains in the Indian market (Gowda & Mandge, 2021). Previously regarded as a luxury, over-the-top (OTT) video services are now a commodity. An increasing consumer base in India are becoming accustomed and habituated to it. International companies like Netflix and Amazon Prime have been gradually increasing their market share in India, even as Indian

streaming services like Jio Cinema and Hotstar have become more well-established (Sundaravel & Elangovan, 2020). With some OTT platforms allowing in-app purchases or advertising, OTTs have quickly been adapted by consumers across paid and free subscription platforms, although making it accessible only via the internet. As a rapid source of entertainment, India alone now has over 40 existing platforms operating fully (Dwivedi et al., 2024).

There can be a greater room for expansion in the future owing to favourable demographics, pertinent and interesting material, free content, and a variety of premium content subscription options available in the market. The widely dispersed populace watches nearly one-eighth of the day in front of their preferred drama, TV series, or film, and has access to their favorite entertainment on numerous and multiple screens. In India, different business models have been developed by regional, national, and international firms for content provision and income generation. In contrast to virtual platforms, there has been a significant change in the client touch-point, the future is far more reliable. Indian production companies have already moved to these platforms eliminating the much-anticipated wait for Fridays to release their films and television series. They invest millions in releasing the first episodes of dramas or online series since this will be the next generation of television, replacing cable, satellite, and direct-to-home providers. With consideration for the comfort of the audience and the consumer-driven relationship, it is a fantastic substitute for movie theatres and multiplexes (Saha & Prasad, 2021).

Online streaming material and web series have become a necessary element of daily life. The popularity of web series and streaming services has grown significantly in India in recent years; in western nations, they have already largely supplanted television, and India is not far behind (Gupta, 2023). Numerous research has investigated various facets of Indian web series. As Gupta (2023) and Dhiman (2023) calls for more research on the effects of the widespread usage of vulgar and obscenity in language in web series like *Sacred Games* released in 2018 on Netflix. Mukhopadhyay (2023) on the other hand has focused on web series' derogatory depictions

of Hinduism, especially regarding symbolism and rituals. Ashraf (2022) narrates the complex religious ideologies and political structures of characters of *Sacred Games*. Vaishnav (2021) looks at how feminism is portrayed in a few different web series, highlighting the possibility of content that breaks stigma. Paunksnis (2023) too has the representation of women in the web series-Four More Shots while most Indian film depictions of gender have adhered to a traditional Brahmanical patriarchal trajectory which challenges the stereotype of the Indian woman as a self-reliant, powerful individual—a representation that not only misrepresents the realities of Indian women but also blocks doors for further feminist action. The production of web series and internet streaming material in India has increased dramatically during the past ten years. Because millennials are hooked to over-the-top (OTT) platforms, many companies like Netflix, Amazon, SonyLIV, Hotstar, MX Player, Eros Now etc. are making significant investments in local content to boost the diversity and variety of content available. The rush to produce more material to draw viewers has seriously compromised the value-added or caused a substantial deterioration in content quality (Gupta, 2023).

2. METHODS:

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), states that a theory proposes countless connections between various ideas. As a result, theories may influence the creation of the researcher's preferred research outcomes. The study of representations has long been important to language and cultural studies. The representation theory developed by Stuart Hall will be the main source of information used in this study to comprehend language, codes of power, meanings formed from them, and how they function as representational systems.

Language provides meaning to objects through representations, which is how our thoughts are represented and how meanings are deduced from them. The process of representation is impacted by the way that representations take on different meanings depending on the context. The language of discourse is represented through the "*preferred meaning*" (Hall, 1997: p. 228) which is interpreted in the manner that has been

decoded by the audience who has perceived the message. The three philosophies that comprise representation are constructionist, purposeful, and reflective (Hall, 1997). There are high chances within the discourse when the identities are defined again, contested or sometimes confirm the power dynamics in a social structure when language is concerned. Through the representation of identities, the Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology has always been understood to create the interwoven concept of identity, crisis and power that are indistinguishable within the discourse. The discourses can be analyzed into linguistic representations of the ideas of identities, crisis and power both on a small and larger sociological framework. Power in discourse deals mainly with how language is deployed to construct, uphold, or dispute social authority and hierarchies as power is distributed through discourse and its practices (Fairclough, 2010). As perceived by VanDijk (1997), discourse has been related to representation of power and its dominance which results in the resistance of power inside the discursive practices in relative contexts. The shift in the dominant media practices from traditional to digital platforms has led to the change in the shift of media power dynamics. Where the traditional media held the hegemony in the construction of ideas, concepts and identities through media texts, there now seems to be a changed narrative on the difference between "*media power versus people power.*" The depiction of class, gender, social inequality in media tends to traverse the dominant ideology through the media power and its relative discourse. Hence, the effect through the lens of media power has a subsequential impact on representations of individuals and groups (Neary & Ringrow, 2018: p. 9).

Therefore, as argued by Liamputtong (2009), discourse analysts have stated that the discourse has been seen as an interpretation of a phenomenon in a detailed matter giving much attention to details. The core concept of using Critical Discourse Analysis in this study has been to understand the concept of language. Language has been treated to study how it works on the reflection, interpretation, and description of the world. Therefore, the Representation Theory, in this study, can be interpreted in terms of a change from politics of representation of itself to politics of

relations. According to Stuart Hall's idea of representation, representation is addressed as evolving relations in a distinct phase and ushering in a new phase. Thus, representation theory is helpful to place an individual through a talk because language existed long before an individual or group did within the discourse. The language around identification is "*rooted in the logic of identity*" (Morley, 2019: p.65).and pertains to the self and other, the individual and the collective, the subject and the object (Morley, 2019: p.65).

Identity has been evolutionary in its nature. It connotes the meanings and "*process of identification*" (Hall, 1989: p.28) as it is always "*within the representation*" (Hall, 1989: p. 49). The media is a key factor in the construction of communal identities. In creating these collective identities, it signifies the othering and is intricately entwined with the power and social systems (Jedlowski & Thomas, 2017). As put forward by VanDijk (1998, p. 22), ideological representation is frequently expressed along "*Us versus Them dimensions*", where speakers of one group typically choose to present themselves or their own group in positive terms and other groups in negative terms. According to vanDijk (2005), narratives and ideas are socially produced and, as a result, linguistically expressed, and vice versa. Additionally, ideologies are referred to as the reflection of common attitudes and represent the individual or group's personal understanding and perception. It is said that ideologies project attitudes, ideas, conventions, etc. that shape a person's identity. In addition, vanDijk (2005) argues that "*discourse analysis is basically ideology analysis*", "*ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies*" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 17). The representation on political ideology in the formation of political identity has been categorised through various "*political groups*" who have definite patterns in the discursive environment. This is further enhanced by "*political actors*" who are active members belonging to political environment consisting of leaders setting the narrative of political discourse. Consistent with the assumption, political relations also embed the structure of the nature of behaviour of individuals or groups acting within the discourse. Political

identity has been referred to recognise individuals and groups as per their political affiliations. It represents the concept that individuals and groups consciously affiliate themselves to the groups and ideologies which develops the attitude towards prejudice, hegemony and monopoly (Sajjad et. al., 2018: p.202; p.203)

2.2 Literature Review

The OTT platforms have created a strong narrative about the representations of heroes and victims in the web series. The heroes here are discussed as police heroes who have been victimized through immoral and evil acts of practices. These acts have further led them to break away from evil practices and thus their rise from the fall of their disgrace. These representations over the OTT can have a significant impact on the representations of both individual and collective identities, gender, class and caste represented through the heroes as victims in the web series.

2.2.1 Heroes and victims

The heroes, victims and villains play an indispensable triangle in building the narrative of the melodrama. The fundamental concern of melodrama is relating and representing the ideas of justice and injustice, and this characterological framework is essential to it. Furthermore, as it began to emerge around 1800 and eventually extended throughout media, melodrama has been regarded as the defining contemporary narrative style (Pribram, 2020). As defined by Jasper et. al (2020), heroes are powerful and good. On the contrary, villains too are powerful but cunning. Although weak, victims morally deserve the compassion and assistance and support by heroes. When turning from victims to heroes, oppressed and harmed groups must overcome crucial obstacles. Therefore, heroes are those who aid to the victims and transforms them into heroes.

As stated by Shafer & Raney (2012), in India, especially in Bollywood films, what constitutes a Bollywood hero is typically male. However, it is difficult to define hero in the similar connotation because the meaning of the term has changed throughout time. Generalising with some illustrations of a typical Bollywood hero, hero is typically portrayed as a multi-talented masculine

character with an attractive physical appearance. Bollywood heroes are not just attractive on the outside; they are also talented singers and dancers with a captivating aura. Furthermore, hero repeatedly plays the role of the catalyst that makes society aware of its moral obligations. Thus, heroes are thought to support and maintain the dominant social order. So, far as Indian web series are concerned, the victims are mostly represented through the symbols of traditional point of view with various means to oppress them by making them seem helpless, submissive, and suffering from low self-esteem (Kanwar & Singh, 2021).

The general point of view of studies as per Zimbardo (2011) with regards to social construction of police heroes, have been defined that being a hero is not the exclusive domain of a small number of people. Conversely, it is believed that it is possible for anyone to become a hero. However, he also takes issues with the current trend of interpreting the idea of heroism quite broadly. He argues, heroes are people who, despite the significant risks to their personal health or well-being, have demonstrated a powerful and extraordinary willingness to act in the public interest or on behalf of those in need and are in crisis.

As put forward by Terpstra & Salet (2020), not only is the hero envisioned, but he also piques the interest of others. In crime dramas, police officers are typically portrayed as heroes who stand in for the defense of the vulnerable victims. They are also endowed with immense power that allows them to defend everyone, everywhere, at any time. The fact that a hero alludes to significant conventions, values, and communal aspirations is more significant than the excitement and adventure that are frequently connected with them. The hero might be viewed as a role model in this way. In addition, the hero can serve crucial communal roles by collectively strengthening group cohesion and upholding accepted social norms and values. At similar times, the hero can fall into disgrace too. There are various ways that these disgraces can occur and are visible. It can happen due to the audience's glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes, the hero can find himself in danger. As a result, viewers get to witness the hero's true self or learn about secrets that are kept hidden which

later gets revealed. In retrospect, it is evident that the individual who initially gave the impression of being a hero was a villain or coward in reality. As a result, the hero and the character's honesty and integrity are questioned, which could erode faith in the hero's power. Hence, leading to lose the public's trust in the police. This in addition is negatively impacted through corruption by police to be specific.

Drawing the reference from web series like *Narcos* and *Fariña*, the viewpoint of the heroes as characters and their moral evaluation is evident as they intercalate between the concept of representation as either victims or heroes. The perception of "victimized heroes" (Gutiérrez Delgado, 2023: p.925) as portrayed in those web series appears to support corruption and social decay at all levels, obscuring the lines between right and wrong and resulting in a situation of relative evil (Gutiérrez Delgado, 2023). As put forward by Braithwaite (2011), the victimized heroes in the dramas have often been represented through the hero's continual physical abuse resulting in being shot, burned, battered, and tormented. This representation has undermined the customary morality and thus the heroes are weakened and undervalued.

Pribram (2020), argues that the roles of the heroes, victims and villains in the melodrama and the distinctions between the classic roles of victim, hero, and villain are frequently blurred in modern television dramas, which combine these characters into a single protagonist. However, the trio is still present in most popular genres, demonstrating the melodramatic imagination's enduring ability to explain our societal surroundings. Nonetheless, situations in which a single protagonist embodies the three personalities of victim-hero-villain demonstrate a late modern decline in faith in the possibilities of heroism. Even if resisting one's victim status is synonymous with heroism, heroic virtue can no longer effectively defeat offenders; instead, it must be fought with the same strategies employed by villains to succeed.

2.2. 2 Representations: victims to heroes through nefarious acts.

The well accepted and typecasted image of a hero has mostly been in uniform or wearing badges of honor. The image of heroes has been

the archetypal character who bring reassurance and possess a good physique and benevolent character. However, the term hero has evolved with the evolution of human nature and culture along with the concept of heroism. From God-like characters, heroism is now seen in self-made individual, whistleblowers and possess common man characteristics who has traces of negativity inside him (James & Lane, 2020).

Stark (1987) argues that the portrayal of exaggerated fictional law and order and problem-solving scenarios in crime series may lead to the stereotyping and friendly representation of police officers' roles. Thus, it has also stood for the development of organizations that have the utmost faith in the police's judicial system and all of its institutions.

The representation of crime and justice has often been approached through the point of view of "vigilante justice" (Reyns & Henson, 2010: p.50) as the heroes fight against the villains by using violence to control crime, end victimization and prevent crime. Hence, the heroes, in their interactions with criminals due to victimization are shown extremely aggressive towards them (Reyns & Henson, 2010). In India, a discourse on caste is unavoidable because it is integral to the other discourse components that shape social structure. In India, castes have always been treated according to the characteristics of their group. Because of this, any unlawful activity has been linked to lower caste people, who have been stigmatized as criminals for engaging in such acts. Because there was never hard proof of the crime, the criminals were only suspected of coming from lower castes, which made their identification of these caste-based offenders always arbitrary. In contrast, the upper castes have not been affected by criminal activities.

Sommer & Rubin (2013) state that rejection and ostracism can make someone wonder if they are really that desirable to others. In turn, social expectations determine the mental and behavioral techniques that people utilize as a coping mechanism for rejection. People react to rejection by bolstering and fortifying their relationships, specifically when they think that others would appreciate and accept them. Nonetheless, individuals tend to distance

themselves and undervalue their connections if they feel that others will not find them attractive and acceptable. Self-esteem is a trait to measure an individual's sense of overall acceptance by others which are often influenced by how they react to rejection. Williams et al (2013) puts forward that the discomforting yearning to fit in and have the sense of belonging to be a part of the group is prevalent in an individual or a group. However, due to the widespread occurrence of ostracism, practically every person experiences some degree of social rejection and exclusion in almost all of one's connections, whether they are with friends, family, coworkers, or complete strangers. This leads to intense feelings that will eventually lead to modifications in behaviour.

The police identity is dependent upon the strength of the forces operating behind them. To establish a space within the state and distinguish between the many forms of criminal activity repression, strategies for othering through the discourse of crime have been employed. The analysis of power dynamics during an interaction within the institution is made possible by power and its accessibility in the organization. The idea of power includes the whole idea of how to use it, over whom, with what goals, and with what anticipations (Jamieson and McEvoy, 2005). The manner that crime is portrayed in crime series fosters an internal community that occasionally feels threatened by outside forces. Every ideological difference's authoritative development is discussed (Clarke, 2004). The goal of the system is to keep the community's status quo equilibrium intact, therefore the crimes carried out by law enforcement officials seem less humanitarian when one considers that they are necessary for the advancement of society. There are several meanings associated with discourse. Revolution is deeply ingrained in the profoundly held beliefs that are concealed under the system's constitution in order to preserve peace (Tifft and Sullivan, 1980).

3. METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis examines the connection between speech and the intricate social construction of the community (Fairclough, 2013). Critical Discourse Analysis has been used as methodology for this study. It will focus on important ideas that will

support and reinforce the methods for obtaining knowledge. The reason for using this methodology is because Critical Discourse Analysis looks at how language establishes and highlights societal power relations and the changes in the power dynamics of an individual and a community. In context to the representation of identities, as stated by Salih (2025) Critical Discourse Analysis highlights the power dynamics and its creation within a society. It also highlights how narratives of representation within the discourse outlines, shapes, stereotypes and discloses the power dynamics within the existing society. The framework of Critical Discourse Analysis in the study has helped to understand the discursive practices which reference to representation. This will also outline the intricate relationships of representations of identity, caste, and gender in terms of media power and identity within media discourse in crime web series.

vanDjik (1993; 2013) states that the goal of Critical Discourse Analysis is to address the relationship between discourse and the social ties that make up the social structure of a community. In addition to the micro level of language, discourse, and text, the macro level of dominance from different organizations that engage in the practice of power domination. This leads to the exploitation of positions, which introduces social injustice and robs society of equality. Critical Discourse Analysis examines the power held by the powerful as well as their effects on one another and their own personal viewpoints.

As put forward by Liamputtong (2009), the Critical Discourse Analysis helps to understand the social construction and production of ideas and their relativity in the real world. The use of Critical Discourse Analysis helps in understanding the significance of identity in society and studying it from the viewpoints of power and social role (Clegg, 1989). This study has been done using the general principles of critical discourse analysis of Teun A. vanDjik's discourse (vanDjik, 1993; 2013). The study was done by building clear research questions and objectives. This was followed by purposively choosing the data and reference texts. After the collection of relevant data, they have been analyzed which followed the principle of critical reading that not nothing in texts will be

accepted and nothing will be rejected (Gill, 2020).

The study aims at answering the following objectives.

- To study the patterns of heroes falling into disgrace, instability, and social stereotyping.
- To find out how the representation heroes portrayed in the web series become savior of the world.

Besides these major objectives, the study aims at answering the following research questions.

- In what ways has the web series' depiction of heroes—from victims to heroes—traced the journey from victims to underdog through nefarious acts?
- In what ways have been the stereotyping of heroes been portrayed in the web series?
- What are the various portrayals of heroes as victims through discriminatory lens?

3.1 Sampling

The researchers have adopted purposive sampling technique for this study. This is because, purposive sampling technique enables to find samples which provide rich information and enable appropriate application of the available resources determining samples which fulfills the criteria of the research (Etikan et al., 2016).

According to Campbell et al (2020), purposive sampling is taken to fulfill the research objectives. This methodology has also been used to explore meaning making of the linguistic and visual representation within the discourse. Therefore, samples which have specific purpose to serve giving equal chance of inclusion to bring out the depth of understanding in the study.

In this study, the researchers have taken the web series Sacred Games, season one. The sample for the study has been based on the ratings provided by IMDb (IMDb, 2018). It has also been taken according to the awards and nominations it received in the web series category (Filmfare, 2019).

3.2. Methods of Data Analysis

Initially, the MAXDQA Analytics Pro 2020 software was used to create transcripts for the samples that was selected. The data transcripts were coded using the same software while

keeping in mind the research concerns that the project seeks to address. Consequently, 227 codes were generated inside the data. After then, the codes were examined and sorted into themes for results, findings, and conclusion.

Some of the codes and themes generated for the analysis are victimization, professional discrimination, perceived to be saviour, need to prove, defeat evil, keen vision, persistence, low self-esteem, ideologically manipulated, chosen for a reason, female heroes looked down upon, family issues, breaking the rules, positive ethics, male heroes more in number, discrimination against social class etc.

3.3 Results and Findings

The coded data was first combined into different categories. Then after combining the codes were segregated to various themes. Each theme was further segregated to meet the requirements according to the objectives and research questions formulated. Furthermore, data which were not required for the research was eliminated. Finally, only the data which were pertinent to the research were analyzed which answered the specific objectives and research questions.

Research question:

In what ways has the web series' depiction of heroes—from victims to heroes—traced the journey from victims to underdog through nefarious acts?

The findings have been segregated into two categories for the above research question. The journey of the heroes has been traced firstly from victims to heroes and secondly as the rise of the underdog heroes.

The following are the indication of the findings from victims to heroes:

- *Victimization:* Heroes in the Sacred Games are victimized due to their lack of political connections. The way representations acquire distinct meanings based on context has an effect on representation (Hall, 1997). Heroes are seen as an outcast in their own police fraternity. This leads to torture, shaming, blaming and lowering of dignity by their colleagues. Through the lens of Gutiérrez Delgado (2023), heroes have been victimized within their own trajectories. Their journey has been portrayed though the lens of insecurities owing to their own turmoiled personal

relationships and lowered confidence in their own worth and abilities as police officers. Due to this, they are represented as low-performing police officer. *"Nothing will change and nothing will happen as for the past ten years, all I have managed is to catch Sonu Pickpocket"* (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. episode 1, 0:11:45) Their only accomplishment in their entire career for controlling crime has been highlighted as a satire and is compared to menial crimes like catching a pick-pocket. Owing to their lowly careers they are often assigned cases which are demeaning, whereas the other contemporary corrupt police officers are assigned high profile cases. Heroes get deprived of the opportunities to shine in the fraternity owing to victimization by their colleagues. The study, on the other hand finds no victimization through caste in the social structure (Reyns & Henson, 2010).

- *Ideological manipulation:* As put across by Neary & Ringrow, (2018) media power has the ability negotiate dominant ideology within the discourse. The study indicates that heroes are swayed easily as they cannot withstand the pressure from his colleagues as they manipulate them into creating false case of terrorism against an innocent victim, who gets wrongfully killed in the police encounter. Heroes' ideologies are seen to be weak as they cannot withstand the gravity of truth turning blind eye to deliver justice to other victims of crime. There has been a distinct representation of class discrimination within the organizations revealed through texts like *"Did you forget what we told you last time? Tell me. Are you going to turn us all in?"* (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p.1, 0:07:02). The heroes are persuaded without any difficulty as they break rules to climb up the social ladder and break the stigma associated with them. They adopt illegal practices with nefarious acts and manipulate the law to their advantage to achieve their goals.
- *Low self-esteem:* Heroes suffer from extreme low self-esteem in their workplace. Texts like *"Get a hold of yourself, or you'll end up in the small arms unit. You can sit and clean revolvers for a month"* (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p.8, 0:02:17)

represents portrayal of heroes suffering from low esteem. They are often looked down upon due to under confidence. This represents the heroes as victims of oppression under the hands of seniors and colleagues in the organization. Fraser (2000) and Crenshaw (1991) states that identity politics gives representational structures thus finding justice for hierarchies, visibility, and recognition. Heroes are often ridiculed, hence, they fall prey to the abusive colleagues and seniors in their workplace.

- *Need to prove:* Owing to low self-esteem, heroes go out of their comfort zones to prove their worthiness. As contested by Jamieson & McEvoy (2005) the concept of power determines how, when, who uses it and with what purpose and outcome. The heroes are seen to possess covetous nature as they try to win favors and show strong desires to own the same respect and work that their colleagues possess in the organization. However, in their quest to prove their worth and find recognition (Fraser, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), they follow the path of self-discovery and later build resilience to the malicious practices in the organization. This has been revealed through texts such as *"Do you know the motto of the Mumbai Police? Sadrakshanay Khalnigranay. Protect the law, destroy evil. Do you know what our motto is? We protect those who protect the law. So our mottos are similar"* (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 7, 0:27:51) which brings about clear revelations of conscience amongst the heroes. The intertwined narratives of heroes and their ideologies with respect to good vs evil has been put across by Pribram (2020). The colleagues of heroes indulging in corrupt practices like bribery, manipulation of truth, destroying evidence, politics, murders of innocent people and framing people for crimes they did not commit pave way for the heroes to be the trail blazers for uncovering the truth and corrupt practices.

The following are the indication of the findings as the heroes become underdogs:

- *Defeat evil:* The heroes as their identity are perceived to be, have been chosen for a reason. This has been showcased through media texts like *"If you tell them who called*

they'll forget about Sonu, the pickpocket" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. episode 1, 0:11:59). They become the whistleblowers and torch bearers of controlling crime and therefore leading to practicing "vigilante justice" (Reyns & Henson, 2010: p.50) in the society. Defeating the evil and its corrupt practices become a priority for the heroes as they finally get the revelation to become the saviour of the world against malicious crime. They overcome their low self-esteem and find their true worth as they deliver justice to the under privileged and deprived (Fraser, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

- *Positive ethics:* Although faltering with manipulation for the desire to be accepted into the group, heroes have positive ethics inherently embedded in them like the archetypal heroes (Jasper et. al, 2020). Their ethics of good over evil overpowers them as they stop the nefarious acts done by their colleagues and villains. This has been indicated through texts like "Nayanika... She did not get justice. It was my fault. My stupidity. I should have told you." (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p.7, 0:27:51).
- *Persistent with keen vision:* As put forward by Hall (1997), the representation of heroes bearing good moral characters has derived how thoughts are represented and meanings are constructed out of it. Heroes are portrayed as persistent with their aim of achieving their goals. Through texts like "Sartaaj, where are you? We'll parade you naked around the city, b***d! Wherever I am, I'm doing my job, sir." (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p.7, 0:31:46) heroes have been seen to continue the job despite discrimination related to class within the organizations. Once the target has been set, they pursue the target to safeguard the interest of the society. They prove to have keen vision and can foresee the danger lurking around in the society. They are persistent to eradicate the malpractices and evil from the society.

Research Question:

In what ways have been the stereotyping of heroes been portrayed in the web series?

The following are the findings that result in stereotyping of portrayal of heroes in the web series.

- *Perceived to be saviour:* The heroes are perceived to be the saviors and whistleblowers of the organization (James & Lane, 2020). The representation of power and dominance has been portrayed to demonstrate power dynamics and its dominance within the discursive practices (vanDijk, 1997). Heroes have been laid with the responsibility to eradicate the nefarious acts and practices within the organization such as corruption, red tape and impugning the existing moral system within the organization. The media texts like "You'll change my destiny - We'll change each other's. If you tell them who called they'll forget about Sonu, the pickpocket. In twenty-five days straight from Sonu, the pickpocket, to Gaitonde. What crazy luck you have!" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 1, 0:15:30, 00:33.43) reveals distinct discourse of perception of heroes as saviors. Although the hero comes from lower socio-economic class, the villain chooses him as the saviour which has been explicitly revealed through texts like "You have 25 days. Save your city" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 1,00:33.43). The heroes have been stereotyped due to their social backgrounds and socio- economic status thus leading to overshadowing of their competences and proficiencies. The heroes work towards reformation of guidelines and standards which are redundant, and prevent or hinder positive decision-making in saving the people. Heroes although portrayed as wreck less rakes, they work towards transformation of excessive rules and hence are represented as advocates of truth and justice. Heroes are ultimately shown as ordinary men possessing extraordinary power, compassion, benevolence, and Kindness. Thus, distinct characteristics are revealed that makes them apart from the villains, who too are powerful, but despicable and appalling.
- *Gender inequalities:* The representation of heroes has been stereotypically prototyped as male heroes. Most heroes comprise of male, whereas there is only one female hero in the series who is stereotyped though the lens of patriarchy (Paunksnis, 2023). This discourse has been portrayed through media texts such as "Thank you Anjali. Your contributions to this

case have been duly noted. I will have a team look into it" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 7, 0:04:07) after a leading female police officer has been duly discredited as per the gender discrimination. Here again, the display of dominance constructed through power has been established (vanDijk, 1997). The female hero is dressed as men as she is represented to showcase her strength and exercise her authority as equivalent to men. The clothes of female hero that she is dressed in are often seen to be representing male attires. Paunksnis (2023), states that women in some media have been portrayed as independent, fierce and self-reliant, only to be challenged through patriarchal course. There has been stereotypical representation of female hero, where her forte, talent and her competence must be compared to that of male. Female hero represented in the web series is expected to possess similar physical vitality, stamina and muscle strength to showcase her position as the superior in combatting crime and fighting with the villains. Although represented as superior in rank to male heroes in the series, she is often victimized owing to her gender, where the male colleagues outnumber her and disregard her superior rank in the organization. She is quick to be judged for a single mistake and therefore, that becomes the benchmark for her incompetence in handling a tough job. The female hero falls victim under the conspiracy within the organization, as she is speedily removed from the case, after achieving breakthrough in a major case and is replaced by a male colleague.

- *Overshadowing of heroes:* Female hero is overshadowed by male colleagues due to the gender discrimination as they are often questioned about their credibility and competence with regards to their work. This has been reflected through media texts such as "We have to get to him before the RAW officers do." (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 5, 0:03:47) where the RAW officers imply to female lead police officer on the rescue mission. On the other hand, male heroes are overshadowed in their work due to jealousy, resentment, and grudge against them by their colleagues. The jealousy of colleague has

been revealed through texts like "How come you found out about this? Why are you doing this? Because you like her? Bunty will not give in easily. There will be gunfire for sure. Should I teach you how to take the safety off the gun" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 5, 0:03:56). The texts have a clear indication of discrimination of the hero by colleagues in the organization representing class discrimination through satire remarks and sexist comments. The societal pressures are seen as a burden in fulfilling their roles as heroes and meeting the success that has resulted in representing the feelings of insufficiency, frustration, and disillusionment in heroes (Terpstra & Salet, 2020). They are not given due recognition and understanding due to higher officials possessing shrewdness and therefore lacking good sense of power and judgement to make them more inclusive within the organization. This has been reflected through texts where low socio-economic conditions overshadow the heroes. They are often seen as the other in the organization as they are represented as astute while demonstrating the capacity to appropriately appraise situations or individuals using it to their advantage.

Research Question:

What are the various portrayals of heroes as victims through discriminatory lens?

The following are the findings that result in discrimination of heroes as victims in the web series.

- *Professional discrimination:* As stated by Morley (2019), language and identity are deeply rooted in the formation of us and them. The discernment towards the heroes by their colleagues add to the discrimination and therefore make them as victims. Female hero is seen to be easily submissive compared to the male heroes. This adds to the construction of individual identities of female heroes as weak and undermined (Jedlowski & Thomas, 2017). As determined by Hall (1989: p. 28), the representation of collective and individual identities has been found "within the representation". Colleagues judge the characters and abilities of heroes through the discerning lens and hence affects their judgement. This class discrimination has been portrayed through texts like "They

are our men. Criminals turned informants after their tryst in jail. If things go wrong, we'll say we had got a tip from them that they were blackmailing a builder and got away with six lakh rupees. These are for your protection (pointing at guns). They fired, and we fired in response. We do not know anything about Bunty. You got it?" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 5, 0:04:46). This represents victimization of heroes to compromise the ethics planting evidences and creating a scapegoat of criminals who were not involved in the crime. The sagacious nature of superior officers lack ability to see the far-sightedness of the scope the heroes' capabilities. The bigotry nature of prejudice towards the heroes holds on to their opinions and beliefs that they are inept, unprofessional, and unsuitable in their job makes the discrimination very evident in the series. The biasness towards the heroes due to their narrow-mindedness and corrupt practices are distinctly apparent in the web series which has been mirrored through texts "If you do not come, tomorrow's report will state that you killed Junaid" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 1, 0:07:51).

- *Family background:* Heroes are seen to be struggling between their family and professional life. As put forward by Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), the texts have close intersections between socio-economic conditions and the portrayal of gender. The societal pressures like low socio-economic status and unstable career of heroes marks distinct discrimination of the heroes in the web series. This is further represented by individual struggles of the heroes as they struggle to create a mark in their professional front with their own family lives in shambles. They deal with broken families, disowning by family members and failed relationships with their spouses. In this web series, the marital discord of the main protagonist explores the complex relationship he faces with his former partner. The partner sees him with low socio-economic condition and hence considers him as a failure. This has seen to be affect his professional life which is reflected through texts such as "It is a good thing Megha left you at the right time" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 1, 0:08:33). He deals with loneliness, lack of

communication, conflicts with his colleague, resentment for his partner and troubled career. The hero in the series seems to have an intertwining family secret which leads him to become the chosen one to be the saviour of mankind against the fatal criminal activities to befall in the city. The series depicts the challenges of coping with social stigma and becoming emotionally and financially stable in order to be successful in their careers.

- *Socio- economic status:* The web series has represented a direct relationship of the success of heroes in their careers with their socio-economic status (Hall,1997). The formation of political identities based on class and socio-economic status have distinct patterns which stereotypes individuals and groups (Sajjad et. al., 2018). Their failure to attain financial stability has resulted in the prejudice and biases upon them to gauge their aptitude in their job allotted. The heroes in the web series have been represented from humble backgrounds. This results in stereotyped notion of carrying the load and pressure to perform their best. This narrative has been further reinforced by the discrimination they face due to low economic background. The intersection of heroes and their class representing socio-economic condition has been explicitly mentioned in the texts like "Home is not something you leave behind; it is what you come back to in the evening. Mom, do you remember my bat? The cricket bat? Where did Dad get it from? It was imported. Dad could not afford such an expensive bat" (Motwane & Kashyap, 2018, p. 6 0:07:31). Heroes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have been depicted in ways that perpetuate prejudices about poverty or class as they are portrayed as sluggish or uninformed, reinforcing prejudices about people belonging from impoverished backgrounds. This classification within the discourse of economic status, however, has not been defined through caste. The findings show that heroes try to fit into the societal structure with their zeal to perform in their work and thus break the stereotype about them for being slow, idle, unsuccessful, and lazy,

traits which are usually attached with lower socio-economic level of people. The study has also portrayed that there has been no discrimination on caste where victims have been defined as perpetrators of crime (Reyns & Henson, 2010).

4. CONCLUSION

The web series traces the journey of heroes from victims to heroes through cliched stereotypical representation of identity of heroes in terms of their characterization, depiction, and classification. The entangled interrelationship of media power, identity and representation theory emphasizes on the ground of the meaning-making of social identities, values and ideologies are built and compromised. As Hall (1997) puts across that representation is an active meaning and ideology making process. The media power in the web series has worked symbolically influencing public perception, marginalizing some social realities while legitimizing others. Mystifying characteristics like family secrets, troubled dreams and past experiences, lower economic background and unnerving restlessness marks the representations of the heroes as they create a picture-perfect representation of them who are considered as the underdogs and later rise to save the world. Fraser (2000) and Crenshaw (1991) have aptly put forward that identity politics rises as a reaction on representational structures and becomes a critique of existing representational hierarchies, emphasizing the fight for justice, visibility, and recognition. The web series intricately show cases the victimization of the heroes through discrimination in their workplace, societal and personal relationships, socio-economic backgrounds and gender inequalities. This also exemplifies heroes' need to find recognition and prominence within the collective identity in the group that they belong to. From the theoretical perspective of Representation Theory by Hall (1987), narratives are often constructed through language. The caste and crime, especially involving lower castes have been an inevitable narrative that manifests the activity of the criminals in the Indian media context (Reyns & Henson, 2010). The study reveals that the crimes related to castes do not hold a bold and significant narrative in terms of collective identity, but rather this has been defined through socio-economic conditions which manifests the crime scene. The identity of

heroes and victims has been duly represented through victims of circumstances fueled by greed, revenge, disadvantages, and sacrifices.

According to Jenkins (2006), in the modern digital world, storytelling has evolved into a fluid and participatory technique, toppling the conventional divisions and relationship between audiences and content creators. Both dominant and anti-hegemonic voices are augmented by digital platforms, opening new avenues for political mobilization and identity expression. The result shows that there are representations of women as heroes, but the domain mostly comprises of male (Paunksnis, 2023). The individual identity of female hero is initially introduced as strong and possessing similar competent characteristics of persistence, compassion, bravery, and skillfulness equivalent to male heroes. However, her roles diminish as she completes her contribution in highlighting the male heroes and then she is pushed towards the periphery owing to gender inequalities. She is effortlessly replaced with male counterparts and fall victims in the hands of malevolent villains. The web series could have been more inclusive of female leads with additional and solid representations in terms of ratio and roles in the web series. Their role of involvement in solving the crime could have been more robust rather than just having to contribute towards the development of the male character as the hero in the story.

Livingstone (2019) expresses, that there are complex moral difficulties created by democratization of expression through digital platforms. There is a distinct change in the narrative of representation of identities of heroes in contrast to the earlier representation and depiction of heroes in crime series. The web series now shows that the heroes are represented as common men who are flawed and imperfect. They are grappled with insecurities, frustrations, need to showcase their talents and breaks the law to climb up to the professional hierarchy within the organization. Although represented with benevolent character, they do not seem to uphold the high values and morals in becoming the saviour unlike the narrative of heroes in previous studies. Unlike previous representations of heroes as good looking, machoistic physique, strong character and strength (Jasper et al., 2020; Shafer & Raney,

2012; Zimbardo, 2011; Terpstra & Salet, 2020), the findings also reveal that heroes in the web series are subservient, beaten and down trodden. They are represented as common people grappled with every day issues and do not have any social worth in their existence and identity. In the digital spaces, audiences are actively involved in choosing the correct moral interpretation of messages, their resistance, rejection and opposition of messages as they continuously try to make meaning-making through these messages (Livingstone, 2019). The results show that heroes can particularly be manipulative, scheming and conniving to achieve their goals and justify it with the notion of being the guardian and protector of the weaker sections.

The study further shows that web series represents a continuous conflict over media power and cultural authority resulting in constant negotiation choosing right morals which further adds to the ambiguity in terms of representation in digital storytelling space. Stereotypical professional discrimination owing to personal judgements and biases of the contemporary and senior colleagues within the organization are one such issues highlighted in the web series (Sajjad et. al., 2018). The ambiguity is resolved through the tenacity of the heroes and their persistent nature. They gain acceptance thereby, defining the journey of heroes to victims and their rise as the underdog. Their role as trail-blazers in bringing justice and protecting their own beliefs and principles helps them to rise beyond the politics of power and injustice (vanDijk, 1997). However, it is to be noted that the moral and political boundaries of representation are constructed by both producers and audiences in ways that either reinforce or undermine existing hegemonic rules and customs (Fairclough, 2010). The findings reveal through the Representation Theory by Hall (1989, 1997, 1998) that the web series could have represented nuanced characters in different shades and narratives to portray the diverse positive/negative representation. The web series however represents negative portrayal and discrimination of ethnic minority communities like Muslims. They are represented as troublemakers and deviants creating nuisance in the society. Positive representation of ethnic minority could have been used as a transformative tool for

inclusive and multicultural cultural discourse in the OTT platform. In conclusion, it will be up to the producer and the consumer in the digital space to decide whether or not societies can continue to tolerate discrimination, inequality, and disparities in how they handle these issues and add to the media power dynamics and identity politics.

5. FUTURE SCOPE

The future scope of the studies can underline the various emblems that glorify crime and its representations in crime web series. The study of fictional representation of law and order and crime solving methods can also add to the further scope of studies. The future study can also focus on police as perpetrators of crime instead of their representations as heroes and saviors of the world. In conclusion, this study further lacks the study on the representations of criminal heroes who are worshipped and their crimes are overlooked on the pre-text of karmic justice and injustice done upon them by society. Furthermore, the scope of the study can be extended to other web series of similar themes like Paatal Lok and Delhi Crime in Netflix, which will have an added value in multiple web series to improve cross- textual generalization of the representation of heroes, victims and villains. Therefore, with the above scope of future studies, it may result in adding valuable resources to the literature of heroes, victims, villains in crime web series across OTT platforms.

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