Navigating Stereotypes: Portrayal of Hinduism in OTT Web Series, 2018-2020

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Abstract

OTT or "over-the-top" platforms, which facilitate the distribution of film and TV content over the internet, have gained tremendous popularity in India in the last few years. In addition to streaming pre-existing films and TV shows, they produce new original content in the form of web series and other newer formats. Given that the OTT segment is not subject to governmental regulations, content creators can offer varied and innovative content tailored to distinct audience demographics. In addition to entertainment, Indian web series makers also focus on social issues likes patriarchy, racism, inter-religious conflicts, sexuality among others, and portray their stories against the backdrop of certain religious symbolisms, customs and markers. Often, however, in their zeal to locate social evils in the prevalent social milieu, they end up negatively stereotyping Hindus. Through a critical analysis of three popular web series between 2018-2020, this paper investigates the representations of different dimensions of Dharmic religions, especially Hinduism. Using a structural film theoretic approach, the paper specifically attempts to explore to what degree the portrayal of Hindu symbolism and motifs reinforce or dispel specific negative stereotypes against Hindus. The analysis uncovers a consistent trend of negative portrayal of Hinduism in terms of structural elements like camera composition, facial expressions, body language, rituals, and other elements. While absence of regulation allows for greater creative freedom in the OTT space, it also opens the door to content that can be offensive to certain communities, and hence there is a need for responsible content creation by web series developers.

Keywords: OTT Platforms, Hinduphobia, Ghoul, Leila, Paatal Lok

Introduction

Over the past decade, the development of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms in India has been nothing short of revolutionary. OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALTBalaji, Zee5 and others, which deliver content over the internet directly to users, have disrupted the traditional entertainment landscape dominated by television, satellite services, and radio. What sets them apart is their extensive and diverse content library, offering everything from movies and TV shows to original web series, documentaries, and live sports events. Viewers can choose what, when, and where to watch, with the ability to stream content on-demand, pause, rewind, or skip episodes. Affordability is another key factor, as many OTT platforms offer different subscription plans to cater to a broader audience. Another major reason for their increasing popularity is the availability of novel and newer type of content in regional languages and the emergence of regional OTT platforms like HoiChoi in Bengali and ManoramaMAX in Malayalam. This, has led to competition among OTT content providers, with each trying to outdo the other in terms of newer features and differentiated content (Dhiman, 2023, p. 2).

OTT platforms provide content creators the ability and the freedom to explore innovative and more engaging style of story-telling. Content provided by OTT platforms is "not restricted by censors, box office or demographic" (Sundaravel and Elangovan, 2020, p. 489). This creative freedom has allowed for the exploration of unique and diverse narratives, and newer formats of story-telling. However, the absence of regulation also poses challenges, as it opens the door to contentious content, particularly on religious subjects or the usage of religious symbolism within narratives. In a diverse country like India, unregulated content has the potential to widen rifts, fuel religious sectarian divides, and even incite social discord. Freedom of expression is of course of paramount importance; but content creators must ensure that their content does not lead to social disharmony or communal tensions. Moreover, Indian OTT platforms have expanded their reach globally, and this affords them the ability to significantly shape narratives about India in an international setting. A nuanced understanding of religiosity in terms of symbolism and stereotyping is therefore necessary to analyze audience impact, societal ramifications and policy implications.

India is a religiously diverse country where Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and others, including atheists coexist harmoniously. India, as a modern secular democracy with a rich history of cultural pluralism, has been a nurturing ground for indigenous Indian religions alongside Abrahamic faiths. Indian religions, which include Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, are those religious traditions which originated in Indian sub-continent and whose historical development within India is well documented (Hardy, 1988, p. 29). Also known as Dharmic religions, these belief systems share common elements like dharma, karma, reincarnation, and yogic practices among others, and have often been described as polytheistic, pantheistic, monistic and so on and so forth. Abrahamic religions, on the other hand are those religions, which "identify deeply with Abraham, recognizing him as the first to arrive at the truth of monotheism and live out the ideal relationship with God" (Firestone, 2015, p. 3). The Abrahamic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and are believed to have originated roughly 2500 to 1500 years ago in West Asia.

In contemporary India, Muslims and Christians collectively constitute approximately 15% of the population, actively contributing to the nation's growth and enjoying the benefits of prosperity. It is important to note while in certain Indian states, Dharmic religions are considered numerical majority, in a global context, they are seen as minority religions. However, the reverse isn't necessarily true, as both Islam and Christianity wield substantial influence worldwide. When seen from a majority-minority lens, it is often assumed that the Dharmic religions by virtue of being majority religions in India, are perpetrators of religious violence. In 2006, the then Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh said that minorities, particularly Muslims, must have the first claim on resources so that benefits of development could reach them equitably (Singh, 2006). The Communal Violence (Suppression) Bill 2005, later re-drafted as Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2011, was an example of an actual legislation based on this premise. Although rejected in 2014 because of its contentious and discriminatory clauses towards so-called majority religions and dominant communities, it had been hailed by many for its pro-minority bias and dubbed as an important "step towards addressing the inequality and anguish faced by minorities in India" (Peer, 2011, p. 146).

The framing of social issues on the basis of some measure of majoritarianism continues to inform and influence politics, academia and popular media in India. One such example is the idea of "*dara hua Musalman*" or scared Muslim, based on the premise that Muslims in India are scared of professing their faith. It is alleged that they are victims of state sanctioned discrimination and religious violence carried

out by Hindu groups. There is little in the way of evidence to support claims of Hindu-majoritarian violence; Sharma (2018), for example, shows how such conclusions are often based on a selective reading of evidence and faulty research. Yet this type of narrative is quickly picked up by international media outlets and academia and disseminated without proper fact-checking. Political groups often engage in divisive vote-bank politics that involve appeasing certain communities at the cost of others, resulting in a misplaced sense of privilege among certain segments. As noted by Merchant (2022), political parties in the last few decades have 'successfully "othered" the Muslim community" in the name of vote-bank politics and special largess, especially during election time when "they are lionized." This type of divisive narrative, which pits the minority Muslim community against the so-called Hindu majority, has unfortunately increased societal divides and reinforced a sense of separatism and victimhood within the Muslim community.

Contentious narrative of this nature, where the Dharmic religions are portrayed as perpetrators of communal tension, has also seeped into mass media in its various manifestations, including Bollywood films, TV shows and web series. This, shapes the prevailing discourse on social issues, especially identity debates in a religious context, leading to polarized views with no scope for negotiations. Films have an enormous impact on societies by giving birth to 'new trends, ideas and traditions' and by building opinions at a societal level (Banerjee and Kakade, 2019, p. 48). Bollywood's widespread national and international reach "heightens Bollywood's significance as a potent discursive tool that serves the purpose of legitimizing (and illegitimating) certain identity claims" (Hussein and Hussain, 2015, p. 285). It would not be wrong to extend the same argument to the case of web series on OTT platforms, given that such web-content can be easily consumed anywhere across the globe.

As noted earlier, web series streaming on OTT platforms in India often incorporate elements of religious symbolism, customs, and cultural markers to contextualize their narratives. However, in their pursuit of highlighting societal issues within the prevailing social landscape, some shows end up perpetuating negative stereotypes about specific communities. This research paper is specifically dedicated to examining the portrayal of Hinduism in Indian web series on OTT platforms and the extent to which they reinforce these negative stereotypes. While Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have received more scholarly attention, the misrepresentation of Hinduism and the phenomenon of Hinduphobia in media remain relatively under-explored areas of study (Juluri, 2020, p. 155). The paper takes a specific focus on web series, a relatively uncharted territory in this context and critically analyzes three Hindi web series produced between 2018 and 2020: *Ghoul* (2018), *Leila* (2019), and *Paatal Lok* (2020).

In terms of methodology, a structuralist film theoretic approach has been used for this exercise. According to structuralism, a film is a set of patterns or structures, and the meaning of a film is derived from understanding these patterns and the relationship between them. Accordingly, a set of codes have been adopted to analyze the role portrayals, and the purpose of the analysis is to classify the stance adopted towards Hindus as positive, neutral or negative. For each year in the time-period of 2018 to 2020, one popular web-series has been selected, where there is significant social interaction of Hindus with Muslims or Christians. The codes adopted for analyzing the role are based on the framework suggested by Banerjee and Kakade (2019, p. 36):

- Camera Composition (Lighting, Camera angle)
- Facial Expression and Body Language
- Dressing Sense/Attire
- Language

- Rituals/Religious practices
- Profession
- Perceived Message

One limitation of this study is a relatively small sample size and the choice of a three-year period between 2018 to 2020. Further widening of the number of years under investigation and the inclusion of regional language contents in Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi and others, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of Hinduism in Indian web series.

Literature Review

Scholars have systematically studied negative stereotyping of specific religious groups in films. Shaheen (2003, p. 171) in his study of more than 900 Hollywood films, shows how 95% of Arab Muslims are portrayed as evil religious fanatics, rapists, and power-hungry villains. Native Americans and their indigenous religious traditions have been negatively portrayed in Hollywood movies and Berny (2020) argues that the disappearance of the so-called "noble Indian" is symptomatic of a "whitening" process of America, where only the majority community thrive, while the Natives become increasingly marginalized and then eventually disappear. Grigat (2021, p. 160) in his analysis of anti-Semitism in media shows how movies have been used to systematically perpetuate anti-Jewish biases. In 2012 the Iranian state broadcaster launched a series of 10 animated films in English, meant for a global audience and made available on YouTube, that denied the Jewish Holocaust and painted Jews in a pejorative way. Films, have therefore been misused to perpetuate harmful religious stereotypes and prejudices, undermining the essential principles of tolerance, respect, and cultural understanding that should guide global cinema and India is no exception to this undesirable practice. Zafar and Amjad (2018, p. 97), in their content analysis of ten Bollywood movies from 2009-2013 and 90 Muslim characters, concluded that only 1 in 4 Muslim character is portrayed positively. Khan and Bokhari (2011, p. 2) lament how the portrayal of Muslims in Hindi movies has changes from "Nawabs and aristocrats" to "gun totting Jihadis."

Roy (2014) points out that till early 200s, Sikhs were represented in Bollywood movies either as "brave warriors or as uncouth rustics." While post-2000 popular Hindi films feature Sikh characters in prominent roles, the Sikh community continue to find their portrayal in Hindi cinema problematic. Levy (2016) says that the portrayal of minority communities in Hindi cinema range from "merely shallow to downright offensive." A typical Parsi family, for example, is usually shown as "arriving in a grand old car packed with kids and piloted by a bespectacled little man in a black conical hat." Hindu customs are often also depicted in a pejorative manner in Indian movies. In the award winning 1973 Malayalam movie *Nirmalyam*, there is a symbolic depiction of 'act of mating' inside the inner temple compound, and there is also a scene where the protagonist spits at the village deity (Thiyyadi 2018). Juluri (2020, p. 166) based on a content analysis of media representation of Hindus in American media outlets like New York Times, NPR and others, argued that "several tropes commonly recognized as colonialist, racist, and orientalist in nature in the critical media and cultural studies literature appear in Western media depictions of Hindus and Hinduism." He goes on to say that such negative depictions make their way to India-specific productions on OTT platforms like Netflix and even in mainstream Hollywood movies like *Slumdog Millionaire* (Juluri, 2020, p. 154).

Analysis and Results

Ghoul (2018)

Cast: Radhika Apte as Nida Rahim, S. M. Zaheer as Shahnawaz Rahim, Manav Kaul as Colonel Sunil Dacunha, Mahesh Balraj as Ali Saeed, Ratnabali Bhattacharjee as Major Laxmi Das

Ghoul (2018) is an Indian horror streaming television miniseries produced by Netflix. The story is set-in a totalitarian near-future India and revolves around the interrogation of a dreaded terrorist Ali Saeed in a secret government detention camp. The series begins by portraying a dark and disturbing dystopian future, where India is a police state, and signs like "Terrorists are among us" are common, and the definition of terrorists has been broadened to include student protestors, opposition party leaders, religious fanatics and other dangerous anti-nationals. *Shuddha*-Hindi (Sanskritized Hindi) speaking military personnel under the aegis of the Ministry of National Protection are busy raiding the homes of Muslims and confiscating 'seditious' materials which include encyclopedias, books on nursery rhymes, geography, arts and whatever material they can get their hands on. Such confiscated books are then publicly set to flames, while children and their parents watch in numb horror. Not satisfied with merely burning 'seditious literature', the State invades the home of Muslims, and kidnaps them in order to convert them (*wapsi*) into an ideal citizen (*avitr avitra*). Muslims are routinely stopped while travelling and searched for weapons, contrabands and even beef. The fascist Hindu government has shut down all universities, clamped down on all avenues of free knowledge acquisition and also has defined a set syllabus which people dare not transgress lest they be detained and thrown into the *wapasi*-camps. "Matra-bhumi ki jai" or "Long live our Motherland" has become the new national motto.

Nida Rahim, the main protagonist, a newly recruited military officer, is shown as being a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, who is also a nationalist and fiercely loyal to the regime in power, which happens to be a Hindu supremacist government. Her father, Shahnawaz, on the other hand, is fiercely opposed to the fascist state, and defends the right of his people to their customs and books (*kitab*). Nida, being a staunch nationalist even reports her father to the academy, so that they can convert him into an ideal citizen. She is then sent to the Meghdoot 31 Advanced Interrogation Centre, where the dreaded terrorist Ali Saeed is detained and is ordered to help in the interrogation process. Through the course of the series, she realizes that her naïve believe in the impartiality and incorruptibility of the State is completely misguided. Her transformation is achieved through the supernatural device of a ghoul, a man-eating demon-like being, usually associated with Arabic folklore.

Throughout the series, Hindus are painted negatively as conniving, violent, racist, and supremacist hate-mongers, who are out to exterminate Muslims in the name of nationalism. Muslims, on the other hand, are shown as upstanding citizens and as victims of Hindu supremacy. Das constantly questions Nida's loyalty to the State given that she is a Muslim, and even confronts her directly about this. In a clear reference to Sita's trial by fire in Ramayana, Das mocks Nida and says that her job at the interrogation center is like an *agni-pariksha* (trial by fire) for her to prove how *avitra* (pure) she is. The chilling and eerie background music, shaky camera work, use of dark tones and colors, politically loaded words like *desh-bhakta*, nationalists, sedition, *wapasi* (a euphemism for conversion to Hinduism), and the employment of Hindu symbolisms in a negative context, perpetuate and reinforce negative stereotypes. The different elements have been summarized in Table 1.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Camera Composition		✓	
Background Music		✓	

Facial Expression and Body Language		✓	
Dressing Sense/Attire			✓
Language		✓	
Rituals/Religious practices			✓
Profession		✓	
Perceived Message		✓	

Table 1: Codes for Ghoul (2018)

Leila (2019)

Cast: Huma Qureshi as Shalini, Siddharth as Bhanu, Leysha Mange as Leila, Seema Biswas as Madhu, Rahul Khanna as Rizwan Chaudhary, Sanjay Suri as Joshiji

Leila (2019) is an Indian Hindi-language dystopian drama web series produced by Netflix. Set in a dystopian future, where a totalitarian regime is at the helm, the story is about a woman Shalini, who tries to find her missing daughter. The year is 2047 and India is no longer a secular democratic nation but a Hindu fascist state called Aryavarta, where everyone has to say "Jai Aryavarta" (Hail Aryavarta!) similar to the Nazi salutation 'Heil Hitler'. The nation is ruled by a despotic Brahmin leader Dr Joshi, whose motto is "Peace by Segregation." Cities are divided into exclusive sectors where only one community can live, and sectors are divided by sky-high walls. Phones are not allowed and people cannot go to different sectors without an entry pass. Marriages between castes and religions have been banned by the Hindu supremacist state. Strict segregation of people is the norm and there is a total collapse of infrastructure. The protagonist Shalini is a modern liberal Hindu woman who is married to a Muslim man, Rizwan and has a daughter called Leila.

The opening scene shows an urban upper-middle class happy family having a fun time at the in-house pool, and speaking in a mixture of Hindi and English. Suddenly they are attacked by a group of *pagdi*-wearing Hindi speaking Hindu supremacist goons, who beat up Rizwan and Shalini. Shalini is imprisoned in a patriarchal Hindu ashram-like indoctrination camp, a woman welfare center, where women are pejoratively addressed as *randi* (Hindi term for prostitute), beaten, tortured, and made to do menial tasks like polishing boots, collecting pebbles, ostensibly to convert them into *Adarsh mahila* (ideal women). Women are forced to 'purify' themselves in a communal tub filled with dirty water and made to recite the mantra repeatedly: "I am blessed to have been born in this land. My lineage is my destiny." At the end of the program, women have to give a *shuddhi-pariksha* (test of purity) in order to show that the indoctrination has been successful. Those who fail the test will spend the rest of their lives in the ashram, living a life of hard labor and drudgery. The rest of the story is about Shalini's attempt to escape from a life at the dreaded labor camp, her subsequent capture, the discovery that her husband is dead, life at the camp and how she attempts to find her daughter, only to discover that Leila is safe but being brainwashed into becoming an Aryavarta militant. The series ends on a cliff-hanger when her daughter declares that Aryavarta is her mother and, ignoring Shalini, runs to Sapna, the erstwhile maid who had been raising her till now.

There are constant allusions to Hindu supremacy and Hinduism is portrayed as a debauched cult which propagates patriarchy, slavery, discrimination and violence. In this re-imagination of a dystopian future, there is no nuance or subtlety. The so-called good people speak ordinary Hindi or Hindi interspersed with English, while those who are evil, which include the Hindu supremacist ideologues and their foot-soldiers,

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speak either Sanskritized literary Hindi or the rowdy Hindi of crude hooligans. Whenever scenes of violence, torture, crime or depravity are portrayed, the colors orange, ochre or reddish-brown, associated with supporters of Aryavarta, are displayed, either prominently in posters or subtly through head-gears. The purpose is to associate all manners of negativity with Hinduism, given that saffron and shares of orange are usually considered auspicious by Hindus. The portrayal of Hinduism is quite prejudicial, and the perceived message is that Hindus are intrinsically bad, espousing all type of evils like caste-ism, discrimination, male chauvinism, minority persecution and violence, and that nationalism in India is deeply religious in nature, associated as it is with a supremacist ideology. The different elements have been summarized in Table 2.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Camera Composition		✓	
Background Music			✓
Facial Expression and Body Language		✓	
Dressing Sense/Attire		✓	
Language		✓	
Rituals/Religious practices		✓	
Profession		✓	
Perceived Message		✓	

Table 2: Codes for Leila (2019)

Paatal Lok (2020)

Cast: Jaideep Ahlawat as Hathiram Chaudhary, Ishwak Singh as Imran Ansari, Neeraj Kabi as Sanjeev Mehra, Abhishek Banerjee as Vishal "Hathoda" Tyagi

Paatal Lok (2020) is an award-winning, critically acclaimed Indian Hindi-language crime thriller web television series on Amazon Prime Video. Besides its plot, the series has been praised by scholars like Banerjee (2020) for its depiction of social realities of caste, class and gender violence, as well as Dalit's assertion to defy upper-caste dominance. The story revolves around two policemen, Hathi Ram Chaudhary and his partner Imran Ansari, who investigates for suspects, Vishal Tyagi, Tope Singh, Mary Lyngdoh, and Kabir M, charged with the assassination attempt of a high-profile journalist and news anchor, Sanjeev Mehra. Mehra is a self-described left-liberal media-man who is at odds with a presumably right-wing political dispensation. The police and the CBI, who later take up the investigation, are shown as covering up the plot; the CBI foists an Islamist angle and blames Pakistan's ISI for attempting to eliminate prominent journalists and foment unrest in India.

Kabir, the only Muslim suspect, they claim, is actually a Pakistani agent, and jihadi literature is retrieved from his house. Ansari does not buy this, since he is aware that Kabir cannot read Urdu. Later, it is learnt that Kabir's family was a victim of an attack by a frenzied Hindu mob, which lynched his brother, and this trauma causes him to become a thief. Kabir's father laments the fact that he never even allowed his son to freely practice Islam, yet the Indian state has labeled him as an Islamic terrorist. On investigation by Chaudhary and Ansari, Tyagi, a Brahmin, turns out to be a notorious felon and murder, who has been killing people since his school-days in Chitrakoot. Tyagi is later found to be associated with Bajpayee, a corrupt and dangerous Brahmin politician from Chitrakoot, who turns out to be the mastermind behind the

entire plot. The real target, as the investigators find out later, was not Mehra, but Tyagi, who was supposed to have been killed in a police encounter, and would have been so but for the arrival of a media van.

The entire series portrays Hindus in a very negative way. They are shown as being prejudiced and intolerant bigots who routinely persecute Muslims and refuse to drink water offered by Muslims. The setting again appears to be a Hindu-supremacist state at the center and that impression given is that attacks on hapless Muslims by sloganeering Hindu supremacist goons in saffron themed clothes are quite normal. The choice of Chitrakoot as a setting for the series is quite contentious, given its importance as an important Hindu pilgrimage site and its strong association with Ramayana. Both Tyagi and Bajpayee, hardened ruthless criminals, are residents of Chitrakoot. In fact, Brahmins are depicted in a poor light as being violent, murderous, hypocritical, racist and casteist villains. Bajpayee, for example, carries *Ganga-jal* (water from Ganges) ostensibly to purify himself after meeting Dalits. There are other controversial scenes like that of a Brahmin temple priest cooking non-vegetarian food and serving it inside a temple. The combination of these deft tropes interspersed with the main storyline, the use of negative imagery associated with Hindus and sophisticated color palette and camera-work creates an impact at a subliminal level, thereby creating a far-greater impact. The different elements have been summarized in Table 3.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Camera Composition		✓	
Background Music			✓
Facial Expression and Body Language		✓	
Dressing Sense/Attire		✓	
Language		✓	
Rituals/Religious practices		✓	
Profession		✓	
Perceived Message		✓	

Table 3: Codes for Paatal Lok (2020)

Discussion

The findings of the structuralist film theory analysis of the three selected web series, *Ghoul* (2018), *Leila* (2019), and *Paatal Lok* (2020) are summarized in Table 4.

	Ghoul (2018)	Leila (2019)	Paatal Lok (2020)
Camera Composition	Negative	Negative	Negative
Background Music	Negative	Neutral	Neutral
Facial Expression and Body Language	Negative	Negative	Negative
Dressing Sense/Attire	Neutral	Negative	Negative
Language	Negative	Negative	Negative
Rituals/Religious practices	Neutral	Negative	Negative
Profession	Negative	Negative	Negative
Perceived Message	Negative	Negative	Negative

Table 4: Consolidated summary of findings

The analysis uncovers a consistent trend of negative portrayals across various elements. In terms of camera composition, facial expressions, body language, dressing sense/attire, language, rituals/religious practices, profession, and the perceived message, all three series exhibit predominantly negative representations. These portrayals often associate Hinduism with negative traits, such as violence, discrimination, and intolerance. The use of specific colors, symbols, and imagery reinforces these negative stereotypes, contributes to a systemic bias against Hinduism. The three cases presented here, therefore, shed light on systemic bias against Hinduism in web series. While none of these series refer to the terms Hinduism or Hindus explicitly, the presence of Hinduism as the religio-cultural backdrop against which the plots unfold is evinced through the use of Hindu imageries, symbolism, and scriptural allusions. These depictions, woven into the main storyline with the use of negative imagery, a sophisticated color palette, and camera work, reinforce negative stereotypes against Hindus.

In *Ghoul* (2018), Hindus are portrayed as conniving, violent, racist, and supremacist people intent upon persecuting Muslims in the name of nationalism. Symbols from the Ramayana, such as the *agni-pariksha* and the purity of Sita, are taken out of context to paint Hindus as extremists. *Leila* (2019) constantly alludes to themes of Hindu supremacy, depicting Hinduism as a violent cult perpetuating patriarchy, slavery, discrimination, and violence. The constant association of the colors orange, ochre, or reddish-brown with the evil *Aryavarta* supporters reinforces the negative imagery of Hinduism, since Hindus considers such colors auspicious. *Paatal Lok* (2020) also portrays Hindus negatively, especially the Brahmin community, depicting them as prejudiced and intolerant bigots who routinely persecute Muslims. The choice of Chitrakoot as the site where all the evil plays out is also problematic, given that Hindus consider it a scared pilgrimage site.

The phenomenal success of the web series program format on OTT platforms in India has revolutionized the way content is created and consumed. One cannot deny that these platforms have democratized viewing, offering a vast array of innovative content that caters to niche audiences while also addressing broad societal issues and confronting taboo subjects. They are undeniably poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of entertainment, not only in India but also across the world. Unlike traditional media such as films and television, which are subject to reasonable restrictions in line with the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution, OTT programs operate in a relatively unregulated space. While this allows for greater creative freedom, it also opens the door to content that can be deeply offensive to certain communities. In an era where digital platforms have become a primary source of entertainment and information for a vast audience, the narratives woven into these series can shape and mold people's understanding of various religions and cultures. Negative portrayal of specific communities have the potential to affect how different communities perceive and interact with one another and deepening divisions.

In conclusion, this study underlines the importance of critically examining the portrayal of religious and cultural elements in web series and the potential impact it may have on societal perceptions and harmony. It is imperative for Indian content creators to develop OTT content responsibly, striking a delicate balance between the principles of free speech and their societal obligation to not denigrating any religious group or community.

Filmography

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