



Research Article

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Representation of Technology, Society and Morality: Review of the Web Series 'ASUR'

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ABSTRACT

We are living in an era of OTT platforms. Multiple web series are available on different platforms. Some kinds of content are rare to find, one such Web Series is 'Asur'. The series dealt with the combination of Mythology and Science & Technology. On the broader aspect, it shows the impact of the wrong use of technology on the society and morality with a base of Indian Mythology. This series is about the battle between Kali and Kalki. Kali is the evil power and Kalki is the virtuous power according to Hindu Mythology. Asur aka Shubh believes that he is the incarnation of kali on earth and wants to change the era by bringing the Kalyug on its peak by doing unjust and bringing the evil side of everyone out of their soul. This research paper sheds light on the Representation of Technology, Society and Morality in Web Series 'ASUR'.

INTRODUCTION

Over the Top (OTT) video platforms, once considered a luxury, are today a commodity (Kumari Tripti, 2020). In just a few years, OTT services have gone from being a niche streaming option to one of the most popular ways of entertainment. Unlike TV content, OTT audiences have the flexibility to surf across a slate of high quality and diverse content in multiple formats, categories, genres and languages. It ensures to provide viewers with quality, exclusive and original content. Some contents make their way to keep the audience awestruck. One such Web Series that makes for a compelling watch to everyone is ASUR. It is created by Gaurav Shukla, who is also a co-writer, and directed by Oni Sen.

In the digital series 'Asur', Bollywood actor Arshad Warsi plays the role of Dhananjay Rajpoot (DJ), a Senior Forensic Expert. Warsi portrays a broody, intense, egoistic and a sensible forensic expert unlike his onscreen persona. DJ is determined to unravel the intricate mystery behind

the murders and their connections to the killer. Arshad's commendable performance adds depth to the character. A popular TV heartthrob, Barun Sobti portrays the role of Nikhil Nair, DJ's former student and trusted associate. Nikhil is also a forensic expert who turned into a teacher. He grapples with a conflict between his personal and professional life. His disheveled appearance portrayal suits a kind hearted man, constantly fighting a battle between his mind and emotions. Both Arshad and Barun cordiality adds depth to the show.

The whole story of ASUR revolves around the philosophies of Hindu mythologies. According to the Hindu Folk Tales, when kalyug (the present era) will reach its peak of injustice, the 10th and final incarnation of Lord Vishnu will take place and will be the reason for the demise of Kali (the evil power).

Due to the traumatic childhood experiences, the asur aka Shubh Joshi believes that he is actually the incarnation of the evil i.e. Asur, who tries to challenge Lord Vishnu to

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incarnate on earth as the world is at its peak of kalyug. The killer after doing murders poses a question in front of everyone that whether we are born evil or we bring our inner evil out when forced into a tough situation. Shubh wanted to transform the society into an Anarchy (a society which is lawless, disordered and without government) where everyone will do whatever they want, without any kind of system or rules. In this people will commit more sins and everyone will reveal their true and evil side which is exactly what the Asur wants.

The most exceptional thing about Shubh Joshi was his ability of learning and his knowledge. He was a miraculously god gifted child who can read and understand the Whole Bhagavad Gita by just flipping its pages. But eventually he uses all his knowledge and wisdom in the mass destruction.

As said, the biggest weapon of the evil power kali will be Technology. Similarly he uses the modern systems and software to spread hatred among people and uses the weapon against the creator of the weapon.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To analyze the impact of technology on society represented in web series 'Asur'
- To understand the representation of Morality in 'Asur'.

METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative research to understand the various aspects of the web series 'Asur'. For the aim of fulfilling the target of the research, qualitative data were collected. Review of various literature and research papers were done. Hindu mythological scriptures were read and information about technology was collected. The 'Asur' web series was deeply evaluated to extract the important information. Various media reports were analyzed to understand the view of critics on 'Asur'.

Review of literature

There are several researches which have been done to understand the various aspects of OTT. The research paper: 'Web Series and Web Movies and their psycho-sociological impact on netizens in India' by Anindita Chattopadhyay, tells about the impact of content of web series on the audience. Often while making a series, violence, foul language, sex, substance abuse, and crime are depicted which have a direct impact on human psychology. To showcase reality, morality is often compromised in the making, which should not be done.

Publication on "Cinema in the World of OTT and the Ethics of Visual Representation in a Fictional World" by Rahul Mahajan and Dr. Santosh Kumar Gautam states that many youngsters now-a-days find it easier to binge OTT rather than visiting theaters because of the flexibility of time, genre and mobility. The content available on the OTT platform must have ethical values. Human is greatly influenced by his/her thoughts and actions.

Representation of technology

In the 21st century, technology is developing at a fast pace. Every single thing which was before done manually is now done by machine. The era of Artificial Intelligence is approaching. Many experiments are under process. The time is about to come when the number of robots working will be more than the number of humans involved in any field. AI could have a fundamental transformative impact on our world, with many experts believing human-level intelligence will be developed within decades. Soon the machine will have power to perform and function like humans. The development of technology enables connectivity and mobility across the world.

This development seems to be very exciting but is actually quite dangerous. The generation is not thinking about its consequences. This can prove to be very harmful for human beings. Technology, though assisting us, gradually makes human handicaps. We, the humans, use the AI for each and every task to be performed by us which leads to the loss of our skills. Slowly the technology will conquer us and the human will be good for nothing and will be without any skill. Skills or the aptitude of the being makes every single individual different from each other. Today we are living in an era where all these developments are pointing towards the strength of an economy which is true and that's why everyone is pleased to see this. The danger can occur if technology slips out of control.

The most dangerous and important among technology is the rise of AI (Artificial Intelligence), Robotics, Quantum Computing etc. as it has reached the zenith of unbelievable achievement, accomplishing the missions which were once myths and fantasies of the human imagination. AI which is trending now, has its own various aspects like:

- Deep fake Technology- Capability of creating realistic fake videos and audio. The technology has reached a level where it can copy a human's voice and his or her features. It is accurate to a level where we can't distinguish between the original and the fake audio and video. This technology was clearly depicted in Asur and had a really worse impact on society and people.
- Autonomous Weapons- Without any proper control, these weapons can be misused. These are the kind of weapons used for mass destruction and don't even require proper human intervention. The software itself identifies the target and then force is applied. The machines are programmed in a way that all the details are provided to them beforehand and they just execute it independently.
- Terrorist Attacks- AI can be accessed by anyone easily which can result in dreadful terrorist attacks. Nowadays by using all such autonomous weapons and high technology, it is quite easy for anyone to schedule a terrorist attack and prepare all the machines and softwares accordingly.

'Asur' has the representation of all these destructive sides of technology. Shubh plans and traps everyone in his web of AI. He has killed many people by using his extensive knowledge.

Everything in the universe has a positive and a negative impact on us. Once the machine starts dictating the do's and don'ts to humans, the destruction is not very far. The same thing has happened with the victims of the trap laid by Asur. Unknowingly, they granted him access to their personal and professional lives. The question now occurs that how the Asur was keeping record of each and every action done by his targets?

If we keep a thorough check on our lifestyle, we can easily find it out. When we download any application or activate any application it asks for certain type of permission like to allow camera or microphone or the location. Now if we are granting all the access of our devices to a bigger system, it simply means that we are providing them all our personal information. This is the root cause of the whole situation, which means that we are always under surveillance. There is always a camera fitted on all our activities which is keeping a regular eye on our day to day work.

Thus, technology should be developed and used in a way that promotes social harmony and spiritual advancements.

Technology meets mythology

Another question that occurs is whether the mythology is truly related to technology? Does it state anything about technology?

Some great mythological legends state that Kalki, the 10th and final incarnation of God, will advance technology in the war of Dharma. AI might be one of his tools to eradicate Adharma, and why not!?

In Ramayana and Mahabharata also, bows and arrows were used to kill adharma, then why not in the modern tech world?

Mythologically; Mantra, Tantra and Yantra can be used to restore balance, where 'Mantra' states 'Man', mind allows persons to think and most of our actions are based on our thoughts. Thus we must inculcate good and moral values.

'Tantra' states 'Tan' 'Body', which indicates labor, the body is responsible for carrying out our actions.

'Yantra' states Technology, digital devices.

"The need is to develop a lot of empathy (Mantra) and human (Tantra) and Technology (Yantra) connect in order to create a balance" said Devdutt Pattanaik, a renowned author and mythologist. Basically, to create a balance in society, the balance between our inner and outer self is necessary. If we notice the asur only wants everyone to believe that there is evil and humans don't have any morality.

He challenges the goodness of everyone by keeping them in tough situations where humans were kind of

forced and manipulated to commit sin. This is what Asur wants, he does not want to kill anyone, he wants to transform every good soul to a bad one and that is his main target.

Nikhil Nair, the officer in-charge who understands the philosophies and ideologies of Asur and still was trapped in the web of Asur. One thing that Asur teaches us is that no matter what the situation is, morality, virtue and ethics should never be forgotten. This is the foundation upon which this whole universe is built, stronger the bricks of the foundation wall, the stronger the building will be. To create a pure atmosphere outside, one must be pure from inside. These are some qualities that stay with us lifetime, everyone will be recalled by their deeds after death.

Asur clearly depicts that though humans are kind at heart but they have some evil inside which reveals out when they are into tough situations. Asur is a kind of criminal and thriller based series which has the power to engage its audience throughout. The whole series is based on the concept of "Duality of Human Nature".

Concept of duality of human nature

The whole series explores the battle that goes inside a human mind and body between good and bad. But the main thing that matters is not virtue or vice, instead, it is the choices made by people matter. Asur is the accurate example that during the difficult situation even the virtuous human can take the vicious decision because they are not left with any moral option. Most people wouldn't harm their loved ones, even if they are in wrong. This is the complexity of human behavior which is highlighted in the series.

The gray shade of morality

Does morality have some specific definition that goes with every situation? No, it is something whose result depends upon the situation. Like for example, everyone knows that killing someone is not good and is not moral but, on the other hand, we can give death sentence to the one who has committed any crime. Like this, morality does not have any proper side. Neither it is black nor white, it has the shade of gray.

Impact of past experiences

Asur also tells us about the impact of a person's past life experience on their future. Let's understand this with an example from the web series 'Asur'.

When Shubh's mother was pregnant with him, his father was trying to make his wife deliver the baby in the 'Shubh Muhurat' (the time in which Devtas are born) and he tries to influence all the doctors also. Unfortunately his wife fell down the stairs which led to the birth of Shubh in the 'Ashubh Muhurat' (the time in which Asuras are born) and after giving birth to Shubh, his mother passed away. Shubh was brought up in a family without any female, his father used to curse him all day and blame him for the death of his wife. Shubh was never loved by his father. His

father used to believe that he is actually an Asur as he had a lot of miraculous power like he started talking just after his birth, he has the ability to read the whole Bhagavad Gita by just flipping pages. After experiencing the traumatic and disturbed childhood, one day he himself killed his father and the Asur turned into a reality.

The role of emotions

Emotions are the main reason behind the confusion. Emotions are the only thing that can drive a man crazy with love, fear, revenge, hatred or jealousy. Humans sometimes feel the strong urge to do any action because of their emotions. These emotions don't allow any character to make the right or the logical decision.

Great qualities in the evil power

This series of Asur is genuinely something that helps us to look into our own behavior. Though Shubh is the evil power, he has something in his personality that everyone must possess. First of all, he has his own beliefs, and he respects them. He doesn't let himself or his beliefs down due to someone else's point of view. Secondly, he has a great quality of leadership. He is a born leader and knows how to convey anyone, in other words, he also knows the manipulative language. Thirdly, he has the strong faith in himself that he can change the world. He was all alone in the beginning but never lost hope. (Singh Shivendra, 2023)

DISCUSSION

In this modern era, where everyone is affected and inspired by the content they see online a lot, their actions are changing. The 'Asur' web series has the depiction of crime in it which may increase the criminal aspect in society. As at the end, people behave the way they see. Continuity in the showcase of crime in such content can turn harmful. Morality on the other hand depends on a person's decision taken in a specific situation.

To be specific the word AI or Artificial Intelligence is though a single term but consist of even broader aspects. In the Asur series, the villain was predicting the future actions of people, he was able to keep an eye on each and every action of the humans and all this was because of the access to the person's mobile phone. Assessing one's camera and movements throughout the day, simultaneously other data sources like geolocation and app usage patterns are also integrated into this system. As the AI algorithm analyzes the data, it starts making predictions about the next future actions taken by the person based on the identified pattern. Though this was just a web series and practically human behavior is very complex to understand but still this technology is something that can destroy anything.

Asur believes that every man is a moon and every moon has a dark side. One aspect of the series strongly believed that everyone is fake, every soul is impure, has hidden desires, fear and does not have morality at all. The duality of human behavior shown in the series forces the viewers

to question their own moral compass while considering the circumstances that can push individuals to make ethical choices. Though everyone has some beliefs and principles that guide their lives.

Asur challenges those beliefs by putting them in a complex situation where they are forced to make unethical decisions.

Recommendations for future research

AI is a broad concept and it is not limited to a single research. There are various tools and techniques under this concept which can create or on the other hand, can destroy anything. There are various other web series which show the impact of high technology on society like 'SHA my virtual Girlfriend' 'Sacred Games' etc.

We also require a vast spectrum of research to understand the idea of morality and mythology on people.

Artificial intelligence is a huge thing in its own term; it requires various researches to understand it better.

The Asur web series ends with an interesting story about kali and kalki and how kali is not limited to a single body, which means that he keeps on changing the body. The story includes the two generals of kali- Koka and Vikoka, who were boon by Lord Brahma that till the time they will remain with each other, neither of them can be killed. Researches can be conducted on this mythological part.

CONCLUSION

Technology is the tool which is making our life comfortable and easier than expected. It is a mechanism which is responsible for the increasing lethargy in humans, and also has its dangerous side. The technology and the software created by humans have a destructive impact in the long term. Although, today all these technologies are under human control, the time is about to come when this statement will be way too around as depicted in the Web Series Asur, which follows the idea of Kali and Kalki in Indian Mythology. It shows how technology and this increasing AI has a destructive and harmful impact on our society. This series covers the aspect of Hindu Folk Tales to the psychological killing in the high tech era. As we say that no person is good or bad, it is the matter of the decision taken in a particular situation.

Asur, as a whole is a great and engaging series and moreover, we should not forget that this is just a fictional story right now which has the chances to be proven right in the coming years. Besides, everyone has their own interpretation of the series, this is like a spread of information while informing them.

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