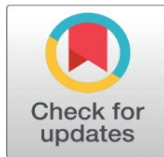
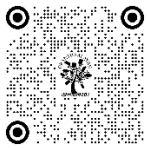


DARK IS THE NEW LIGHT: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE VISUAL NARRATIVE OF INDIAN CINEMA AND WEB SERIES

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ABSTRACT

Indian ancient scriptures contain a rich array of rules, instructions, daily rituals, and customs, which is particularly suitable for a diverse country with its multiculturalism and diverse beliefs. Rasa theory, a fundamental concept in Indian aesthetics that has strong connections to early Indian performing arts such as dance and theater. Contemporary dark films explore themes of violence, crime, moral ambiguity, and the darker aspects of human nature. They often aim to evoke intense and unsettling emotions in the audience. Indian audiences have shown a growing interest in films that challenge conventional storytelling and explore complex and unconventional themes. Films and web series like "Gangs of Wasseypur," "Paatal Lok," "Sacred Games," and "Asur" etc. have received critical acclaim and have been embraced by audiences for their bold narratives and portrayal of darker elements. While there is an audience that enjoys dark narratives, the appreciation of dark cinema among Indian viewers is not universal. However, it has undoubtedly gained momentum and contributed to the evolving filmmaking culture in the country. The goal of this study is to analyze & explore the visual semantics applied in web series with dark themes, aiming to understand their influence on the audience. An exploratory study examines the visual elements employed in popular Indian cinema and web series that portray dark narratives.

Keywords: Rasa, Indian Cinema, Web Series, Dark Cinema, Bold Narratives, Visual Semantics

1. INTRODUCTION

शृङ्गारहास्यकरुणा रौद्रवीरभयानकाः ।

बीभत्साद् भुतसंज्ञौ चेत्यष्टौ नाट्ये रसाः स्मृताः

“Shringaar, Haasya, Karuna, Raudra, Veer, Bhyaankah Veebhats-o-Adbhut Iti Ashto Rasa ShaantsTathaamatah”

Natya, or the Indian performing arts, was the subject of an ancient Indian text referred to as the Natyashastra. It is regarded as the cornerstone upon which Indian theater, dance, and music were built. There is a consensus among scholars that the Natyashastra was written between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. The Natyashastra covers a wide range of topics related to the performing arts, such

as drama, dance, music, and aesthetics. It provides detailed instructions on the art of acting, dance movements, stagecraft, and the emotions (rasas) that performances should evoke in the audience. This all-encompassing treatise is still relevant today, and it continues to exert its influence over a variety of styles of Indian performing art.

The above-mentioned Sloka is taken from rasa theory, developed by Bharata Muni in the ancient Sanskrit text *Natya Shastra*. Rasa theory is a fundamental concept in Indian aesthetics and is closely associated with classical Indian performing arts, including theater and dance. Rasa refers to the emotional flavor or sentiment that a work of art evokes in the audience. It includes feelings like happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, bravery, and calm. The theory suggests that through the performance or presentation of the artistic work, the artist can evoke and communicate specific Rasas to the viewers. The concept of Rasas is a crucial aspect of classical Indian performing arts. Each Rasa is described briefly below.

The Rasa of romantic love, attraction, and desire is called *Shringara*. It covers the range of feelings connected to romantic attachments and the many facets of such bonds.

Humor and laughter constitute a distinct Rasa, which is referred to as *Hasya Rasa* (Laughter). It is characterized by light hearted and humorous sentiments, typically communicated through quips and comical acting.

Karuna Rasa (Compassion): The Rasa of compassion, empathy, and sorrow. It expresses emotions of pity, sympathy, sadness, or loss.

Raudra Rasa (Anger): The Rasa of anger, fury, and rage. It portrays intense emotions of indignation, wrath, and aggression.

Veera Rasa (Courage): The Rasa of courage, heroism, and valor. It represents brave and heroic emotions, often displayed by protagonists and warriors.

Bhayanaka Rasa (Fear): The Rasa of Fear and Terror. It invokes emotions of fright, anxiety, and trepidation.

Bibhatsa Rasa (Disgust): The Rasa of disgust and repulsion. It conveys emotions of revulsion and abhorrence.

Adbhuta Rasa (Wonder): The Rasa of wonder and amazement. It represents feelings of awe, fascination, and astonishment.

Shanta Rasa (Peace): The Rasa of tranquility, serenity, and calmness. It evokes emotions of contentment and inner peace.

Even though the sage Bharata described eight rasas in the *natyashastra* and scholars and aesthetes added one more rasa in later periods, each rasa has its own distinctive qualities, and the prevalence of some rasas among audiences is unusual. Regarding its status as cinema, it is critical to remember that the concept of cinema as we know it today evolved much later than the *Natyashastra*. Cinema as a motion picture art form began in the late nineteenth century, with the Lumière Brothers' first public screening in 1895.

However, there are some parallels between the *Natyashastra* principles and the art of filmmaking. Both mediums share the goal of telling a story and evoking emotions in the audience. The *Natyashastra*'s emphasis on dramatic expression, use of body movements, and conveying emotions aligns with the visual storytelling capabilities of cinema. Cinema is a stunning example of what can be achieved when art, literature, and science are brought together. Art and literature are both reflections of life, representing different moments in life, whereas science is concerned with studying man and the world he inhabits. Therefore, cinema, which

is essentially a combination of these three elements, invariably depicts man and his life in society. There is no denying that the movies are a reflection of society in and of itself.

(Monaco James, 2009) French theorists distinguish "film" and "cinema": "filmic" relates to real-world context, "cinematic" to aesthetics. English adds "movies," emphasizing economic aspects. These terms interconnect: "movies" are for consumption, "cinema" is high art, and "film" is the broadest term. The cinematic canon's deep history is shaped by film's rapid evolution as a communication medium, technological advancements, and economic cycles, necessitating continual adaptation for survival.

(Singh, 2019) mentioned that current decade is transforming society and the economy, with Indian cinema benefiting from technological growth. The rapid rise of the Internet and smartphones is reshaping Indian TV and cinema, enabling audiences to access content via social networks, new digital platforms, and wifi sticks. Web series on platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar are most popular, followed by movies, driven by the demand for entertainment on OTT applications. (Basu et al., 2022) says that Over-the-top (OTT) services allows consumers to access entertainment directly over the internet on devices such as smartphones, smart TVs, laptops, tablets, and more. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 69.8 million households utilized OTT platforms in April 2020 (Comscore, 2020).

Modern movies can be found in a wide variety of genres, appealing to viewers all over the world. Action films that put viewers in the middle of high-stakes situations, comedies that make them laugh out loud, and dramatic explorations of the human condition. While the unsettling tales of the Horror genre continue to send shivers down our spines, the imaginative worlds of Science Fiction carry us forward into the technologically promising future. Fantastical worlds stimulate imagination in fantasy, and thrillers maintain suspense. Stories of adventure take us on exciting journeys, stories of romance tug at our heartstrings, and stories told through animation bring vivid worlds to life. Musicals harmonize storytelling and song, Historical films bridge us with the past, and Biographies illuminate remarkable lives. War genres confront conflicts, Mysteries unravel enigmas, and each genre contributes to the vibrant tapestry of cinematic artistry. D3 Furthermore It is interesting to note that human nature has a tendency to seek out terrible occurrences. This tendency is part of what makes human nature so fascinating. emphasized that people in contemporary societies have a propensity to travel to disaster-affected areas for tourism. This tendency is attributed to the fact that people in modern societies are more curious, so deaths and gruesome events have gained the attention of tourists. This phenomenon has been conceptualized as "dark tourism" or "so-called disaster tourism." this genre has become really popular in today's time, specially amongst the millennials and gen z.

This research paper aim is to understand the societal and cultural factors that have led to the emergence and growing popularity of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series and to identify key themes and narrative elements in dark-themed Indian cinema and web series which has impacted viewers. Further, it assesses the reception and impact of dark-themed content on Indian audiences.

To find the answer, a cross-sectional research methodology has been followed. Data collection uses both primary and secondary methods: secondary data from journals and books, and primary data from survey questionnaires.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The pre-text for a literature review provides a concise introduction to the significance of the review. It sets the stage by highlighting the purpose, which is to critically analyze existing research and synthesize relevant information. This valuable tool aids in identifying gaps, informing research questions, and building a foundation for scholarly work.

India's rich cultural and demographic diversity offers numerous opportunities for OTT providers to engage a broad range of viewers. India's OTT (Over-the-Top) service market is experiencing remarkable growth and is among the world's leading markets. This growth is expected to continue, driven by government initiatives like Digital India. High-speed internet accessibility and more affordable subscription rates have led to a 20% increase in India's OTT market, boasting over 420 million viewers and 120 million active paid subscriptions. On average, Indian OTT viewers spend approximately 70 minutes a day streaming content. Increase in OTT viewership is not solely attributed to the pandemic but has been steadily growing over recent years, with usage spiking to 2-3 hours daily during the pandemic. This trend transcends generations, with both Gen Z, millennials, and Gen X allocating significant time to these platforms. The Indian OTT streaming video market is currently in its second expansion phase and is projected to generate around \$3 billion in revenue by the end of 2022, constituting 7-9% of India's entertainment industry revenue. The subscriber base is anticipated to reach 50 million by 2023, potentially propelling the OTT industry's value to ₹12,000 crore by the end of 2023, reflecting a remarkable 36% growth rate from the ₹2,590 crore earned in 2018.

(Pandian & M. R, 2023) Pointed out that according to Nielsen's survey of over 30,000 people in 61 countries, the changing tastes and habits of viewers everywhere with regard to video on demand. Eighty percent of respondents said they watch movies online, and TV shows were watched by nearly half of respondents also 66% of sampling population stated. The ability to watch multiple episodes of a show in one sitting was a major incentive for subscribing to VOD (video on demand) materials. A study conducted by (Singh, 2019) found that OTT (Over-the-Top) applications are transforming TV and film consumption habits in India, offering convenient services, personalized experiences, and access to international content. The Indian audience perceives these changes in a positive light, attributing them to the medium's convenience, content quality, affordability, and innovative experimentation. The study indicates a promising future for OTT applications in India, driven by factors like widespread smartphone usage, international media collaborations, digital media quality, and cost-effectiveness.

Traditionally, Indian consumers have been accustomed to watching new releases at cinema theaters only. But now, India is the fastest-growing OTT market in the world. Several movie studios released their films directly on these OTT platforms to avoid time delays and revenue losses amid the pandemic. In 2021, the monthly subscription for Netflix was Rs.199 for a single device, and multiple people could watch a movie with that single subscription pack. However, the average cost of watching a film at a theater for a family of four was around Rs.840. Despite the benefits provided by OTT movie releases, says (Basu et al., 2022) also consumers spend on average two hours per day on OTT and have at least two OTT platforms. The adoption of OTT platforms is primarily driven by five key factors: quality, convenience, content, pricing, and features. (Sindagimath et al., 2023) says one may wonder why, starting in the 21st century, Darker narratives have begun to emerge and have gained significant popularity, with some achieving top box-office success

and receiving critical acclaim. (Paunksnis, 2016) argues (In context with Indian cinema) that a distinctive and evolving form of Hindi cinema emerged, defying easy categorization. This new cinematic expression, sometimes referred to as a genre, style, or phenomenon, departed from the dominant melodramatic narratives of the 1990s and earlier decades. Instead, it began to focus on portraying the darker aspects of life in neoliberal India, exploring urban and small-town existence, depicting violence, and illustrating the alienating impacts of urbanization and globalization. This cinematic shift can be described as "anti-melodramatic," showcasing characteristics of anti-realism. It has been termed variously "new Bollywood," "new Hindi cinema," "Hindi noir," and, more comprehensively, "dirty realism." The term "dirty realism" draws inspiration from a literary genre that emerged in the United States in the late 1970s, as well as a range of cinema styles characterised as "dirty" that appeared in Russia and Latin America during the 1980s and thrived in the 1990s. Very similar to this (Mariani, 2021) it was observed that during 1970s-1990s, the current generation of Hollywood filmmakers, who grew up on classic Hollywood, is giving way to a younger group influenced by television, comic books, and video games, driving further narrative innovation. Additionally, (Kethan M & Mahabub Basha S, 2023) argues that movies influence Indian culture, particularly youth, fostering emotional development and societal change. The study documents cinema's influence on Indian culture, focusing on attitudes and lifestyles over time. This includes changes in marriage norms, the rise of live-in relationships, the transition from joint to nuclear families, evolving food preferences, clothing choices, career decisions, and belief systems. During adolescence, individuals form their identity, self-esteem, and forge new relationships with peers, the opposite sex, families, and the community. This phase involves self-exploration, experimentation in areas like sexual relationships and substance use, and significant influence from the media and peers. (İzmir et al., 2022) claimed in their study that "bad is stronger than good". Taylor (1991) supported this view by stating that negative events arouse stronger psychological responses than positive events. It can be said that what is negative has a stronger impact on life and therefore requires more attention. (Harrison & Frederick, 2022), people enjoy viewing images of Terror, violence, and death. Today's culture is rife with instances of this horrible entertainment. media environment. His study followed the traces of the dark concept in the cinema industry and coined a new term called dark cinematography.

3. OBJECTIVE

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable shift towards darker narratives that explore themes of crime, psychological intricacies, and moral ambiguity. This shift has captivated the attention of both creators and audiences, reshaping the way stories are told and consumed in India.

To comprehend this phenomenon fully and its implications, the following objectives have been articulated: -

- 1) Understand the societal and cultural factors that have led to the emergence and growing popularity of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series
- 2) Identify key themes and narrative elements in dark-themed Indian cinema and web series.
- 3) Assess the reception and impact of dark-themed content on Indian audiences.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a comprehensive and mixed-method study that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches, primarily characterized by its descriptive nature. In order to gather a broad and in-depth perspective, a cross-sectional research method was employed to acquire primary data, while supplementary data were sourced from a diverse range of secondary resources. This dual-method approach ensures a robust and holistic understanding of the subject under investigation. Also, for this study, a non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to collect the primary data

1) Target Population and Sample Size

In this research study the target population comprises millennials and Gen Z, two influential demographic groups shaping modern entertainment consumption. The decision to focus on these cohorts is grounded in their significant impact on content trends. With a sample size of over 100 respondents, the study strikes a balance between feasibility and robustness. This size, while not extensive, ensures a diverse range of perspectives and allows for valuable insights into the evolving visual narratives of Indian cinema and web series among these key generational demographics.

In this study, a non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized to facilitate the survey. This method involved selecting survey participants based on their availability and accessibility, rather than through random or systematic means. It was chosen for its practicality and efficiency, making it feasible to collect data from individuals who were readily accessible and willing to participate.

2) Questionnaire Design and Development

The survey questions were made with care, following some important rules. These rules are about making the questions easy to understand, related to the topic, not unfair, in a logical order, and giving people different choices to answer. It was made sure that the questions aligned with the designed objectives, and an expert review was done before floating to check the validity of the questionnaire. The survey had questions that were short, simple, and easy to understand. It covered the important parts of the topic with a mix of closed and open-ended questions and LIKERT's scale.

3) Data Analysis and Interpretation

The information gathered from the survey questionnaires was organized, and the questions were studied to focus on the important answers related to the research goals. These findings were then displayed using tables and charts as shown and interpreted below:

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

It is observed from Table:1 that 83.6% of respondents are from the age group of 18-24 years, 11.8% from the age group of 25-34 years, 3.6% from the age group of 35-44 years and 0.9% from the age group of 45 and above years.

Out of 110 respondents, 72.7% are female and 27.3% are male as shown in Table-1. Respondents are from different occupations, 85.5% of respondents are students, 13.6% are working professionals and 0.9% are from other professions. It is to be noted that no homemakers and retired were participated in the survey.

Table 1

Table 1 Demographic Data of Respondents			
Demographic Parameters	Categories	Responses (%)	Responses (Nos)
Age (Years)	18 - 24	83.6%	92
	25 - 34	11.8%	13
	35 - 44	3.6%	4
	45 - above	0.9%	1
Gender	Female	72.7%	80
	Male	27.3%	30
	Others	0	0
Occupation	Students	85.5%	94
	Working Professionals	13.6%	15
	Homemaker	0%	0
	Retired	0%	0
	Others	0.9%	1

4.2. MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS

This analysis provides an overview of the media consumption habits of the survey participants. The largest portion (30%) watches Indian cinema or web series once a week, followed by those who watch "Less than once a week" (26.4%). A significant portion also watches "2-3 times a week" (24.5%) and "Rarely or never" (19.1%).

4.3. AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT REGARDING INDIAN CINEMA AND WEB SERIES

- **Exploring Darker and More Intense Themes in Indian Cinema and Web Series**

The data reveals a mixed engagement with darker and more intense themes in Indian cinema and web series among the participants. A substantial portion provides "Agree" and "Neutral" responses (40.9% and 34.5% respectively), indicating that many watch such content regularly, but a sizable group holds more neutral or occasional views. Moreover, a significant number express positive engagement, as evidenced by "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses (11.8% and 40.9%, respectively), demonstrating active interest and enjoyment of these narratives.

However, there is also a minority, approximately 13% of participants, who disagree and strongly disagree with frequent consumption of darker-themed Indian content. In summary, the data reflects diverse engagement levels, with a substantial and positive segment along with a portion that is neutrally inclined.

- **Realistic Portrayal of Societal Issues in Darker Narratives of Indian Cinema and Web Series**

A substantial segment of the audience actively gravitates towards narratives with darker themes in Indian cinema and web series. According to the gathered data, a noteworthy 77.3% of consumers believe that contemporary cinema provides a realistic portrayal of the modern world, with 27.3% expressing strong agreement with this perspective. Conversely,

only a marginal percentage of users express disagreement, with 17.3% adopting a neutral stance, 1.8% strongly disagreeing, and 3.6% holding a moderate disagreement. This empirical evidence underscores the prevalent inclination of the audience towards narratives that reflect a more somber and realistic depiction of the world in Indian cinematic productions.

- **Embracing Unconventional Narratives in Indian Cinema and Web Series**

A significant majority of Indian moviegoers, totaling over three-quarters, perceive a distinct shift in the film industry's approach to depicting society in recent releases. A notable 56.4% of viewers not only acknowledge but also appreciate this departure from traditional cinematic norms. This positive sentiment is further affirmed by 20.9% of customers who strongly agree with the notion. In contrast, a limited percentage of users express dissent, with 4.5% registering disagreement, 1.8% strongly disagreeing, and 16.4% maintaining a neutral stance. This data reflects a prevailing recognition and endorsement of the industry's novel approach among the majority of the audience, underscoring a noteworthy evolution in the cinematic portrayal of society in contemporary Indian films.

- **Changing Preferences: The Rise of Darker Narratives in Response to Complex and Thought-Provoking Content**
- **Reflecting Modern Indian Society in Darker Narratives in Indian Cinema and Web Series**

The assertion that cinema serves as a reflection of its society is a perspective often advanced in scholarly discourse. Through an interpretive lens, it becomes apparent that a significant majority, exceeding 79%, of consumers concur that the evolving landscape of Indian cinema aligns more closely with contemporary societal issues. Notably, 19.1% of respondents express strong agreement with this transformative shift. A moderate percentage, accounting for 14.5% of responses, assumes a neutral stance, while a minority, constituting 6.3% (4.5% disagree and 1.8% strongly disagree) of consumers, registers disagreement with the perceived alignment of new Indian cinema with current societal issues. This discerning data underscores the prevailing consensus among the majority of viewers regarding the cinema's responsiveness to and representation of contemporary social concerns in India

- **Cultural Diversity Shaping Darker Narratives in Indian Cinema and Web Series**

In the context of cultural diversity shaping darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series, notable (53% agree and 19.1% strongly agree) respondents express agreement with this proposition. Additionally, 23.6% maintain a neutral stance, while a relatively small proportion, 2.7%, disagrees with the idea. This data suggests a prevailing acknowledgment and acceptance among a significant majority of respondents regarding the impact of cultural diversity on the emergence of darker narratives within the realm of Indian cinema and web series.

- **The Appeal of Darker Narratives in Challenging Cultural Norms**

A significant majority, comprising strongly agree and agree at 13% and 59%, expresses agreement with the notion, while 23.6% assume a neutral stance. A relatively small proportion, 2.7%, registers disagreement. This indicates a widespread acknowledgment and acceptance of the idea that

modern Indian cinema is actively engaged in challenging and deconstructing traditional norms, reflecting a nuanced and evolving narrative landscape in the industry.

- **Engaging Complexity: Darker Narratives in Indian Entertainment with Intriguing Characters and Unpredictable Plots**

A substantial majority (>70%, 45.5 percent agree, and 29.1 percent strongly agree) of participants agree with this characterization, while 18% maintain a neutral stance. Conversely, only a modest 4.5% disagree and 2.7% strongly disagree, expressing disagreement. This data underscores a widespread recognition and positive reception of the incorporation of darker narratives, intricate characters, and unpredictable storylines in the realm of Indian entertainment.

- **Forging Deeper Emotional Connections: Exploring Darker Emotions and Experiences in Narratives**

This data underscores a prevalent acceptance and recognition of the deliberate exploration of darker emotional themes and experiences in narrative content, suggesting a discernible interest and openness among the audience toward such storytelling approaches in the surveyed population. A substantial percent of respondents (16.4% strongly agree and 53.6 agree) express agreement with this thematic exploration, while 25.5% maintain a neutral stance. In contrast, a minimal 2.7% register strong disagreement.

- **Stimulating Conversations: Darker Narratives as Catalysts for Addressing Overlooked Societal Issues**

This data highlights a widespread acknowledgment and endorsement of the notion that darker narratives serve as influential vehicles for bringing attention to and addressing societal issues that may otherwise be overlooked, emphasizing the potential societal impact of such storytelling approaches. The study reveals strong consensus among participants, with 80% expressing agreement, 14.5% maintaining a neutral stance, and a minority of 5.4% registering disagreement.

- **The popularity of darker narratives will lead to a positive transformation in the Indian entertainment industry**

The survey results reflect a diverse range of opinions regarding the potential impact of the popularity of darker narratives on the Indian entertainment industry. While 39.1% of respondents express agreement with the idea that this popularity will lead to positive transformation, a slightly larger proportion, 44.5%, maintains a neutral stance. A notable 10% of participants register disagreement with the notion. This nuanced response suggests varying perspectives within the surveyed population regarding the anticipated influence of darker narratives on the positive transformation of the Indian entertainment industry.

- **Personal Entertainment Preferences: Seeking Darker Narratives in Indian Cinema and Web Series**

The survey results indicate a predominant inclination towards a preference for darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series, with 46.3% (12.7% strongly agree and 33.6% agree) of respondents expressing agreement. A notable portion of the respondents, 35.5%, maintained a neutral stance on the matter, while a smaller but still significant 14.5% disagreed and 3.6% strongly disagreed with the preference for darker narratives. These findings suggest a substantial audience interest in exploring and consuming content with darker themes within the realm of Indian cinema and web series.

- **Indian filmmakers and content creators should continue producing darker narratives in the future to cater to changing audience tastes.**

These results provide an overview of the respondents' agreement with the statements related to darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series. The majority of respondents' express agreement or strong agreement with these statements, indicating a positive attitude toward darker themes in Indian entertainment.

4.4. RELEVANCE OF THE THEMES AND NARRATIVE ELEMENTS IN DARK-THEMED INDIAN CINEMA AND WEB SERIES

To analyze and rate the relevance of the themes and narrative elements in dark-themed Indian cinema and web series, average ratings for each theme based on the provided scale were calculated. The options on the scale were: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Numerical values to these ratings were assigned (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5), and then calculated the average rating for each theme.

Below are the average ratings for each theme:

i	Crime and Criminal Underworld	4.00 (Agree)
ii	Moral Ambiguity and Ethical Dilemmas	3.77 (Agree)
iii	Psychological Thrills and Mind Games	4.17 (Strongly Agree)
iv	Social Injustice and Inequality	3.08 (Neutral)
v	Antiheroes or Morally Complex Protagonists	4.04 (Agree)
vi	Plot Twists and Unpredictable Endings	3.65 (Agree)
vii	Exploration of Human Desires and Obsessions	3.69 (Agree)
viii	Atmosphere of Tension and Suspense	3.69 (Agree)
ix	Deep Exploration of Characters' Emotions and Traumas	4.00 (Agree)
x	Elicitation of Empathy for Characters Despite Their Flaws	3.65 (Agree)
xi	Reflection of Societal Issues and Realities	3.23 (Agree)
xii	Critique of Political and Institutional Corruption	2.81 (Neutral)
xiii	Dark and Atmospheric Cinematography	3.50 (Agree)
xiv	Symbolism and Metaphorical Representation	2.77 (Neutral)
xv	Prompting Thought and Discussion about Complex Themes	3.42 (Agree)
xvi	Challenging Audience Expectations and Norms	2.77 (Neutral)

These ratings reflect the perceived relevance of each theme and narrative element in dark-themed Indian cinema and web series based on the responses provided. Themes like "Psychological Thrills and Mind Games" and "Antiheroes or Morally Complex Protagonists" received higher average ratings, indicating strong agreement with their relevance. On the other hand, themes related to "Political and Institutional Corruption" and "Symbolism and Metaphorical Representation" received lower average ratings, suggesting a more neutral stance on their relevance.

4.5. RECEPTION AND IMPACT OF DARK-THEMED CONTENT ON INDIAN AUDIENCES

- **Dark-themed content effectively evokes intense emotions and feelings.**

The survey results indicate a strong consensus among respondents regarding the emotional impact of dark-themed content, with a combined 74.5% expressing agreement (51.8%) or strong agreement (22.7%) on the effectiveness of such content in evoking intense emotions and feelings. A moderate 18.2% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small 2.7% strongly disagreed. This suggests a widespread belief among the surveyed individuals that dark-themed content is successful in eliciting profound emotional responses, underscoring the potential significance of emotionally charged narratives in the creation and reception of media content.

- **The emotional depth found in dark-themed content resonates with real-life experiences, enhancing its relatability.**

There was a lot of agreement among survey respondents that dark-themed content is relatable. In fact, 78.2% agreed (55.5%) or strongly agreed (22.7%) that the emotional depth of such content is similar to real life. A moderate 17.3% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small 3.6% disagreed.

- **Dark-themed content often sheds light on societal issues that are often overlooked or ignored.**

These results suggest a prevailing belief among the surveyed individuals that dark-themed content serves as a platform for addressing and highlighting societal issues that may be marginalized or neglected. The survey results show that most of the people who answered agreed that dark-themed content is important for society. In fact, 78.1% agreed (53.6%) or strongly agreed (24.5%) that this kind of content often brings to light problems in society that are not given enough attention. A notable 18.2% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small 1.8% disagreed.

- **Reflecting on Social and Moral Themes in Dark-Themed Content**

This suggests a prevailing belief among the surveyed individuals that dark-themed content frequently engages with and reflects upon social and moral issues. The survey results indicate a notable consensus among respondents regarding the reflective nature of dark-themed content on social and moral themes, with a combined 71% expressing agreement (45.5%) or strong agreement (25.5%). A moderate 22.7% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a minority of 6.4% disagreed.

- **Dark-themed contents are intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking.**

These findings suggest a prevailing belief among the surveyed individuals that dark-themed content is intellectually stimulating and capable of prompting thought. Results demonstrate a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the intellectual and thought-provoking nature of dark-themed content, with a combined 78.2% expressing agreement (52.7%) or strong agreement (25.5%). A moderate 22.7% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small 6.4% disagreed.

- **Exposure to dark-themed content influences the perspective on societal issues.**

These findings suggest a prevalent belief among the surveyed individuals that exposure to dark-themed content plays a role in shaping perspectives on societal issues. Results indicate a notable consensus among respondents regarding the influence of exposure to dark-themed content on perspectives related to societal issues, with a combined 74.6% expressing agreement (49.1%) or strong agreement

(25.5%). A moderate 20.0% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small percentage of 4.5% disagreed, and an even smaller 1.8% strongly disagreed.

- **Dark-themed content spreads awareness of the various challenges faced by individuals and communities.**

Based on the results of the survey, it appears that the majority of respondents hold the view that dark-themed content is effectively utilized to raise awareness regarding the various difficulties encountered by communities and individuals. Further results reveal a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the awareness-spreading potential of dark-themed content, with a combined 80% expressing agreement (53.6%) or strong agreement (26.4%). A moderate 15.5% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small percentage of 2.7% disagreed, and an even smaller 1.8% strongly disagreed.

- **Appreciation of creative and artistic presentation of dark-themed content (cinematography, direction, etc.).**

The survey results underscore a substantial appreciation for the creative and artistic presentation of dark-themed content, with a combined 78.2% expressing agreement (41.8%) or strong agreement (36.4%). A moderate 14.5% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively small percentage of 5.5% disagreed, and an even smaller 1.8% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest a prevailing belief among the surveyed individuals in the significance of cinematography, direction, and related artistic elements in enhancing the quality of dark-themed content.

- **The use of symbolism and metaphor in dark-themed content adds to enjoyment and understanding of the narrative.**

The findings of the survey reveal a significant agreement among participants concerning the positive impact of symbolism and metaphor on the comprehension and enjoyment of dark-themed material. In total, 73.7% of the respondents expressed agreement (46.4%) or strong agreement (27.3%) with this statement. A relatively minor proportion of 1.8% strongly disagreed with this assertion, whereas a moderate 22.7% maintained a neutral stance. The results of this survey indicate that the majority of respondents hold the view that symbolic and metaphorical elements have a beneficial effect on the depth of the story and the level of interest of the audience when it comes to content with a dark theme.

- **Dark-themed content influences an individual's entertainment preferences and choices.**

According to these results, there is a noticeable but not overpowering belief among the people who took the survey that dark-themed content influences people's entertainment preferences. With 63.6% agreeing (43.6%) or strongly agreeing (20.0%), the survey results show that respondents are in general agreement that dark-themed content influences individual entertainment preferences and choices. A substantial 27.3% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion, while a relatively smaller percentage of 8.2% disagreed, and an even smaller 0.9% strongly disagreed.

- **The popularity of dark-themed content will encourage more diverse storytelling in Indian media.**

These findings suggest a prevalent belief among surveyed individuals that the popularity of dark-themed content has the potential to encourage greater diversity in storytelling within the Indian media landscape. The survey results demonstrate a significant consensus among respondents regarding the potential influence of the

popularity of dark-themed content on fostering more diverse storytelling in Indian media. A combined 80% expressed agreement (53.6%) or strong agreement (26.4%), while a moderate 17.3% maintained a neutral stance on this assertion. Only a small percentage of 1.8% strongly disagreed.

Overall, it is clear that a sizable portion of the Indian audience enjoys dark-themed content. The majority either agrees or strongly agrees that such content evokes intense emotions, is relatable, and raises awareness about societal issues. Additionally, it is perceived as intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking. Many also appreciate the artistic aspects and believe that its popularity will encourage more diverse storytelling in Indian media.

However, there are varying opinions, with some respondents neutral or in disagreement. Nevertheless, it's clear that dark-themed content has a substantial impact on the audience and contributes to meaningful discussions and reflections on societal issues and artistic creativity.

5. RESEARCH OUTCOMES-FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objective 1: Societal and cultural factors that have led to the emergence and growing popularity of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series.

- The findings regarding the societal and cultural factors contributing to the rise of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series offer crucial insights into this growing trend:
- Significant Audience Engagement: The data underscores the notable level of engagement with Indian cinema and web series. With 30% watching once a week and 24.5% watching 2-3 times a week, it is evident that Indian audiences are actively embracing these forms of entertainment, including those with darker themes. This enthusiastic consumption points to a burgeoning interest in such narratives.
- Frequency of Consumption as an Indicator: The fact that a substantial segment of respondents frequently watch Indian content signifies a burgeoning appetite for narratives that delve into the darker aspects of human experiences. The correlation between the rise of darker themes and the viewers' recurrent engagement suggests that these narratives resonate with the audience and play a pivotal role in their growing popularity.
- Revealing Audience Preferences: By unearthing patterns of consumption, this discovery offers valuable insights into the preferences of the audience. The audience's willingness to delve into dark-themed content hints at these narratives addressing specific desires and expectations among viewers.
- Cultural and Societal Significance: The elevated frequency of consuming such content is likely tied to the cultural and societal significance of darker narratives. Delving into why these narratives strike a chord with Indian audiences requires an examination of the cultural and societal influences that shape storytelling and the viewers' preferences.

Objective 2: Identify key themes and narrative elements in dark-themed Indian cinema and web series.

The analysis of respondents' ratings for the relevance of various themes and narrative elements in dark-themed Indian content reveals several key findings: Themes related to "Psychological Thrills and Mind Games" and "Deep Exploration of Characters' Emotions and Traumas" received strong agreement, indicating that these elements are highly relevant and engaging to the audience. Elements such as

"Crime and Criminal Underworld" and "Antiheroes or Morally Complex Protagonists" are also perceived as relevant, with "Psychological Thrills and Mind Games" receiving the highest average rating (4.17), indicating strong agreement.

Certain themes like "Critique of Political and Institutional Corruption" and "Symbolism and Metaphorical Representation" received more neutral ratings, suggesting that not all viewers find these elements equally engaging or relevant.

Objective 3: Assess the reception and impact of dark-themed content on Indian audiences.

The analysis of the respondents' agreement with statements about dark-themed content in Indian cinema and web series reveals the following key findings: A majority of respondents' express agreement or strong agreement with these statements, indicating a positive attitude toward darker themes in Indian entertainment. Dark-themed content is perceived as emotionally evocative and relatable, shedding light on societal issues that are often overlooked. It is also seen as intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking. Respondents appreciate the artistic aspects of these narratives, such as cinematography and direction, and believe that the popularity of dark-themed content will encourage more diverse storytelling in Indian media.

While there are varying opinions, with some respondents expressing neutrality or disagreement, it is evident that dark-themed content has a substantial impact on the Indian audience, contributing to meaningful discussions and reflections on societal issues and artistic creativity.

These findings emphasize the necessity of delving into the societal and cultural factors driving the emergence and growing acceptance of dark-themed content in Indian cinema and web series. They confirm the existence of a substantial audience for such narratives and underscore the imperative need to grasp the cultural and societal catalysts of this phenomenon. This understanding is essential for filmmakers, content creators, and researchers navigating the intricate dynamics of the Indian media landscape. The results indicate that the popularity of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series can be attributed to their significant relevance to the audience, incorporating elements like psychological thrills and character exploration. These narratives are accepted by a significant segment of Indian audiences, impacting their emotions, perspectives and raising awareness of societal issues. The study further suggests that dark-themed content contributes to the enrichment of artistic and narrative diversity within Indian media.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper effectively accomplishes its objectives by shedding light on the emergence and growing popularity of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series, identifying key themes and narrative elements, and assessing their reception and impact on Indian audiences. The study underscores the high engagement of Indian audiences with cinema and web series, especially among those who consume them frequently, indicating a rising interest in darker narratives. The research highlights specific themes like "Psychological Thrills and Mind Games" and "Deep Exploration of Characters' Emotions and Traumas," receiving strong agreement, signifying their relevance and audience engagement, which are pivotal in driving the popularity of darker narratives. On the other hand, themes related to political and institutional corruption or metaphorical representation receive more neutral ratings, reflecting varying levels of audience engagement. Additionally, the analysis highlights that dark-themed content is well-

received, evoking emotions, fostering relatability, and serving as a conduit for raising awareness about societal issues. It is also seen as intellectually stimulating, promoting thought-provoking discussions and reflections on complex themes. Furthermore, the appreciation of artistic aspects indicates that dark-themed narratives encourage diversity in Indian media storytelling.

Further, this research enhances understanding of the societal, cultural, and thematic factors contributing to the rise of darker narratives in Indian cinema and web series. It affirms the substantial audience for these narratives and their significance in shaping the evolving landscape of Indian entertainment. As dark-themed content continues to captivate Indian audiences, these findings are invaluable for content creators, filmmakers, and researchers navigating this dynamic and evolving media landscape.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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