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From Page to Platform: Aesthetic and Narrative Transformations in Netflix's Adaptation of *Sacred Games*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the adaptation of Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* into the globally distributed Netflix series, examining how the shift from print to digital streaming reconfigures the source material's narrative, aesthetic, and ideological dimensions. Grounded in contemporary adaptation theory, the study investigates how the novel's narrative complexity, character introspection, and philosophical meditations are transformed into visual metaphors, suspense-driven episodic pacing, and dramatised political allegory suited to binge-watching cultures. Rather than viewing the series as a mere replication of the literary text, the paper positions it as a platform-specific reinvention shaped by factors such as transmedia marketing and audience analytics. It further analyses how the adaptation amplifies religious and political themes to resonate with contemporary socio-political climates while omitting or simplifying specific philosophical and cultural nuances. Through a comparative and theoretical approach, the research highlights the influential role of streaming platforms in shaping modern adaptation strategies, illustrating how culturally rooted literary



works are reimagined as globally accessible audiovisual narratives within a dynamic and evolving media ecosystem.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation Studies, Streaming Platforms, Sacred Games, Cultural Translation, Narrative Transformation

FULL PAPER

1. Introduction

The process of adapting literature into visual media, most notably cinema and, more recently, digital streaming series, has a rich and layered history. Adaptation, often perceived as the act of retelling, transforming, or recreating a narrative across different formats, has always been central to storytelling practices. From early silent films based on Shakespearean plays to modern multimedia franchises built on novels, adaptation has served as a bridge between print and performance. Scholars such as Linda Hutcheon emphasise that adaptation is not mere replication but a form of 'creative and interpretive transposition,' one that adds new layers of meaning while retaining traces of the original (Hutcheon 8).

1.1. Adaptation - Historical Trajectory

Historically, the transition of text to screen allowed filmmakers to engage with established narratives while reaching broader audiences through the sensory immediacy of audiovisual storytelling. This became especially prominent in the early 20th century with literary works like *Gone with the Wind* or *Pride and Prejudice*, which were not only adapted multiple times but reinterpreted to reflect contemporary ideologies and aesthetics. The process of adaptation involves both preservation and transformation, as directors reinterpret source material through the lens of their socio-cultural milieu and cinematic language (Sanders 17).

For creators, literary adaptations offer a unique opportunity to visualise complex themes and abstract ideas that may be difficult to convey through prose alone. The act of adaptation becomes a form of creative authorship, a collaborative reinvention rather than a derivative product. In the context of Indian visual culture, this is particularly evident in adaptations like *The White Tiger*, *Leila*, and *Sacred Games*, where dense literary narratives are converted into visceral visual experiences. These adaptations are not simply translations of text into visuals but rather dynamic reinterpretations that respond to contemporary political climates, social tensions, and audience expectations.

1.2. Streaming platforms' influence on Adaptation works

In the 21st century, the boundaries of adaptation have expanded significantly, especially with the advent of streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+, which have democratised both the consumption and production of adaptations. These platforms have made it possible for long-form storytelling to happen. They let creators add more to story arcs, explore character psychologies more deeply, and try out nonlinear timelines. Deborah Cartmell says that "the contemporary adaptation is no longer limited by time-bound film structures but benefits from the expansive potential of serialised streaming" (Cartmell 113).

Streaming adaptations often employ slow-burn story arcs, complex character development, and experimentation with various genres. This lets creators stay true to the depth of the original work while also trying out new artistic ideas. The Queen's Gambit (based on Walter Tevis's novel), The Handmaid's Tale (based on Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel), and The White Tiger (based on Aravind Adiga's Booker-winning work) are all examples of this. These adaptations are not simply translations of text into visuals; they are reconstructions shaped by platform-specific aesthetics, episodic structuring, and interactive viewer engagement. As Deborah Cartmell emphasises, '*adaptations in the digital age are no longer evaluated merely for fidelity but for their cultural relevance and narrative mobility*' (Cartmell 113). This mobility enables layered storytelling, where novelistic complexity is retained and extended across screen time.

The influence of streaming platforms has also catalysed a shift in adaptation studies, encouraging scholars to go beyond fidelity criticism and engage with the politics of the platform, audience reception, and algorithm-driven content production. Linda Hutcheon's argument that '*adaptation is repetition, but without replication*' (Hutcheon 7) becomes even more relevant in the streaming context, where the adaptation often becomes a standalone cultural product, reproducing core themes while inventing new narrative forms. The adaptation of Vikram Chandra's Sacred Games into a globally accessible Netflix series is a fitting example; it demonstrates how streaming allows for a deep, episodic exploration of crime, religion, and politics while visually reimagining a sprawling literary universe for a transnational audience.

As Hutcheon notes, adaptation must be understood as a '*double process of interpretation and creation*' (Hutcheon 20). In that regard, creators become co-authors, engaging in a dialogue with the source text while embedding their own ideological, aesthetic, and narrative intentions. Contemporary adaptation, especially in the digital era, is thus no longer an act of fidelity but one of transformation, where the adapted work becomes a standalone narrative shaped by its platform, audience, and cultural moment. In analysing Sacred Games, this paper draws upon these theoretical positions to understand how the original literary text is reimagined through the lens of global

streaming culture, contemporary Indian politics, and platform-specific narrative strategies.

1.3. Overview of *Sacred Games* (2006) by Vikram Chandra

Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006) is a monumental work of Indian English fiction that intricately weaves together the personal, political, and mythological landscapes of modern India. Spanning over 900 pages, the novel offers a sprawling narrative that intertwines the life of Sartaj Singh, a weary and disillusioned Sikh police officer in Mumbai, with the confessional memoirs of Ganesh Gaitonde, a powerful and enigmatic gangster. Chandra's narrative technique draws heavily from postmodern literary structures, blending multiple timelines, nested stories, and a rich linguistic tapestry that includes English, Hindi, Marathi, and Punjabi. The novel moves fluidly across genres, crime, political thriller, philosophical, and fiction, anchoring its complexity in themes of violence, religion, nationalism, and existential introspection.

Critics have praised *Sacred Games* for its ambitious scope and nuanced characterisation. The novel engages deeply with India's post-independence history, Hindu-Muslim tensions, globalisation, and the rise of religious fundamentalism. According to literary scholar Priya Joshi, the novel exemplifies '*a Bombay noir that resists simplicity, offering instead a thickly layered, multilingual narrative of nation, identity, and trauma*' (Joshi 218). Chandra's inclusion of extended digressions into the lives of minor characters such as Jojo Mascarenas, Inspector Katekar, and even unnamed gang members serves to humanise the narrative and challenge linear storytelling conventions. These 'inset narratives' are central to the novel's thematic inquiry into fate, morality, and the interplay of the personal and the political.

1.4. Cultural and Critical Impact of the Netflix Adaptation

The adaptation of *Sacred Games* into a two-season Netflix series, directed by Vikramaditya Motwane and Anurag Kashyap, marked a watershed moment in Indian digital storytelling. Released in 2018–2019, it was Netflix's first original Indian series, and it quickly garnered both domestic and international attention. The show retained the dual narrative structure of the novel, focusing on Sartaj Singh (played by Saif Ali Khan) and Ganesh Gaitonde (played by Nawazuddin Siddiqui), but made significant aesthetic, narrative, and thematic transformations to suit the demands of streaming audiences and the episodic format. Visual stylisation, cliffhangers, and political allegory became central tools in attracting a binge-watching audience.

Critically, the series was celebrated for its high production values, unflinching social critique, and narrative ambition. Scholars have noted that the adaptation brought literary fiction into the realm of mass entertainment while maintaining a sense of intellectual engagement. As adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon argues, adaptations are not secondary to their source texts but become '*autonomous works that can speak to*

their own cultural and historical contexts' (Hutcheon 121). In this sense, the Netflix adaptation recontextualised *Sacred Games* to reflect India's contemporary anxieties, including nationalism, media control, communal violence, and digital surveillance, transforming the philosophical noir of the novel into a politically urgent thriller.

The series also expanded the role of characters and themes. For instance, the figure of Guruji, a relatively minor character in the novel, is elevated to a central antagonist whose apocalyptic ideology drives the second season. This move has been interpreted as a reflection of India's rising religious extremism and the global popularity of dystopian narratives in digital media. As Deborah Cartmell observes, '*the affordances of streaming platforms enable both expansion and intensification of narrative worlds'* (Cartmell 95). Through such strategic narrative shifts, *Sacred Games* functions as more than just a book-to-screen adaptation; it becomes a cultural product embedded in transnational storytelling, Indian politics, and algorithm-driven viewer engagement.

Moreover, the show's global distribution via Netflix allowed it to bypass traditional censorship barriers and reach diasporic and international audiences with unprecedented immediacy. This global reach amplified the show's impact and raised new questions about representation, audience reception, and cultural translation. Mareike Jenner argues that streaming television offers 'glocal content' that is simultaneously rooted in local cultures and designed for global markets (Jenner 42). *Sacred Games* exemplifies this duality; it retains its Indian sensibilities while engaging with universal themes such as power, corruption, and fate, thereby validating the idea that contemporary adaptation is a transcultural negotiation rather than a one-way translation.

Given the shifting landscape of media consumption, especially in the age of streaming platforms, this study seeks to critically examine the aesthetic, thematic, and structural transformations that occur when a complex literary narrative is adapted into a serialised digital format. Using *Sacred Games*, Vikram Chandra's 2006 novel and its 2018–2019 Netflix adaptation, as a central case study, this research aims to explore how the process of adaptation engages with broader questions of cultural translation, narrative reconfiguration, and platform-driven storytelling. Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders, and Deborah Cartmell wrote in *Contemporary Adaptation Theory* that the main goal is to figure out how adaptation works as a creative reinterpretation instead of a reproduction. Specifically, the study looks at how the adaptation achieves fidelity, character change, narrative compression, and thematic reworking in line with changing audience expectations, media capacity, and global streaming conditions. The next part goes over the research design, theory, method of collecting data, and coding methods used to look at and analyse the literary and visual texts carefully. The study's goal is to show how adaptation works as a way to reimagine literature in the digital

age by using current academic theory and systematic qualitative research as a base for the analysis.

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study utilises a qualitative interpretative approach, under the umbrella of literary and screen adaptation studies. The research aim is to present a close comparative study of Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006) and the Netflix adaptation (2018–2019) in consideration of the principles of Contemporary Adaptation Theory. Qualitative content and textual analysis allow for an exploration of narrative structure, aesthetic transformation, cultural translation, and character development in both versions. Given that the act of adaptation involves a dynamic negotiation of meaning across time, media, and audience, this approach facilitates a contextual, layered, and theory-driven interpretation of narrative shifts (Hutcheon 7; Cartmell 92).

The research does not aim to judge the adaptation based on fidelity but to understand how and why the narrative has been reimagined. This aligns with Thomas Leitch's post-fidelity paradigm, which views adaptation as a creative and interpretive act that reflects the socio-cultural conditions of the new text's production and reception (Leitch 68). By comparing the source text with the adapted version, this study highlights how streaming platforms such as Netflix mediate literary content for global audiences while reshaping its thematic, formal, and ideological dimensions.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is underpinned by Contemporary Adaptation Theory, primarily drawing from the work of Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders, Deborah Cartmell, and Thomas Leitch. Hutcheon's conceptualization of adaptation as '*repetition without replication*' allows for an open-ended exploration of how meaning shifts when a narrative is transformed across media. Sanders' theory of cultural translation (Cartmell 19) supports the study's interest in how the adaptation recontextualizes Indian literary motifs for a global audience. Cartmell's work on the impact of digital streaming on narrative form (Cartmell 113) offers insights into how platform aesthetics affect adaptation strategies. Leitch further enables a rejection of fidelity discourse in favour of analysing the adaptation's new narrative function, medium-specific affordances, and audience refunctioning. This theoretical framework also informs the codebook, a central tool in this research, allowing abstract concepts (e.g., genre shift, character transformation) to be operationalized and traced systematically across both media.

2.3. Data sources and Sampling

The primary data for this study consists of Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* (2006) and its screen adaptation in the form of the two-season Netflix series *Sacred Games* (2018–2019), directed by Vikramaditya Motwane and Anurag Kashyap.

The decision to focus on this text and adaptation is deliberate and theory-driven. *Sacred Games* is a significant cultural artifact that occupies a unique space in Indian literary and digital media landscapes. The novel, with its intricate narrative structure, multilingual composition, and exploration of socio-political themes, presents a rich source text for adaptation analysis. Its transformation into a globally distributed Netflix series marks a historic shift in Indian storytelling, bridging literature and digital seriality while navigating the politics of cultural translation, genre reformulation, and globalized reception. In the context of adaptation studies, *Sacred Games* provides a compelling case to examine how contemporary streaming platforms reshape the aesthetic and narrative integrity of a novel to suit transnational consumption and algorithm-driven storytelling.

The primary sources analysed include the full text of Chandra's novel and all 16 episodes of the Netflix series across its two seasons. These are treated as complete narrative artifacts and are analysed comparatively. Specific narrative segments such as Gaitonde's early rise and fall, Sartaj Singh's investigation, the framing of religious politics, the character arc of Guruji, and the climactic nuclear threat are selected using purposeful Sampling. These segments were chosen because they represent major thematic and structural pivots in both the novel and the series, allowing for a precise comparative evaluation of narrative strategies, character transformation, and ideological emphasis. The Sampling is therefore selective but comprehensive, covering a cross-section of scenes that exhibit significant adaptation-induced transformations.

Along with primary sources, this research utilizes secondary data in the form of academic articles on adaptation theory, critical reviews of the novel, and the series. These sources offer contextual and reception-based data that supplement textual analysis. While audience responses are not formally coded, they add to a rich understanding of how adaptations redo narrative structures to meet the demands of different groups of viewers. Collectively, these sources of data enable an advanced, theory-informed comparison between the original text and its adaptation, within the rich terrain of adaptation studies.

3. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter elucidates the findings obtained from a comparative analysis of Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* and its adaptation to Netflix, structurally organized on a pre-designed codebook based on modern adaptation theory. The analysis is dealt with thematically under seven basic code categories: Adaptation Form (ADAPT-FORM), Thematic Re-coding (THEME-RECODE), Character Transformation (CHAR-TRANSFORM), Genre Shift (GENRE-SHIFT), Intercultural Translation (INTER-CULT), Visual Code Substitution (VISUAL-CODE), and Reception Reconfiguration (RECEP-RECONFIG).

3.1 Core Analytical Dimensions and Codes (Thematic Analysis)

Code Category	Code Name	Definition/Description	Indicators	Examples
Narrative Structure	NARR-COMP (Narrative Compression)	Simplification or shortening of complex plots or timelines.	Fewer character arcs, dropped insets, linear progression.	The series drops Sartaj's mother's backstory.
	NARR-REORD (Reordering Events)	Events are reordered to enhance suspense or accessibility.	Changed chronology, flashbacks.	Gaitonde's past is given episodic flashbacks.
Character Depth	CHAR-REDUC (Character Reduction)	Reducing internal monologues or side character development.	Less introspection, removed arcs.	Jojo's backstory is simplified in the series.
	CHAR-EXPAND (Expansion)	Added new characters or expanded minor ones.	New motivations, roles, and emotional arcs.	Batya Abelman was introduced in the series.
Thematic Representation	THEME-POL (Political Theme Amplification)	Themes like communalism or corruption are heightened or dramatized.	Dialogue, visual metaphors, and plot focus.	Guruji's cult becomes a doomsday threat in the series.
	THEME-PHIL (Philosophical Depth)	Retention or reduction of existential, spiritual, or ideological themes.	Monologue, narration, literary references.	Gaitonde's Vedantic musings are reduced to brief voiceovers.
Cultural Context	CULT-REP (Cultural Representation)	Reflection of local culture, language, and identity.	Use of language, setting, and behaviour.	The novel's trilingual narrative becomes multilingual, with subtitled scenes.
Visual vs Textual	VISUAL-SYM (Visual Symbolism)	Use of cinematography to replace descriptive prose or abstract ideas.	Light, framing, and colour symbolism.	Guruji's ashram uses white light to signify purity.

	TEXT-INT (Textual Interiorization)	Narration or internal monologue in the novel.	Stream of consciousness, diary, memoirs.	Gaitonde's long philosophical reflections.
Genre Shifts	GENRE-THRILL	Move from literary noir to commercial thriller.	Cliffhangers, action, pacing, and genre tropes.	More shootouts and chase scenes in web series.
Audience Impact	RECEP-ENGAGE (Audience Engagement Shift)	Audience perception and emotional response differ across media.	Interviews, meme culture, online responses.	'Apun hi Bhagwan hai' meme virality.
Omission or Innovation	OMIT-ARC (Omission of Arc)	The entire narrative or subplot is excluded in the adaptation.	Missing characters or events.	Sartaj's father's police legacy was omitted.
	ADD-ARC (Additive Arc)	Storylines or characters are added to enhance narrative flow.	New plot developments.	Guruji's apocalypse plan is not in the book.

The most common coded category was CHAR-TRANSFORM (14 instances), and this suggests that character reinterpretation was a necessary component of the adaptation process. For instance, the novel's brooding and introverted Sartaj Singh is transformed in the series into a more active and proactive character with agency in stopping the apocalypse, a choice based on serial thriller genre conventions. Likewise, the elevation of Guruji from a peripheral philosophical character in the novel into a principal villain in the series is an exercise in narrative compression and platform-driven dramatization.

ADAPT-FORM and VISUAL-CODE were important, showing how complex writing and deep thoughts are translated into visual imagery. Flashbacks, stage design, and voiceover by Gaitonde replace Chandra's descriptive narration. For example, in the novel, Gaitonde reflects on the concept of sin, while the series shows these reflections in images like fire, shadow, and religious imagery. This follows Hutcheon's idea of the adaptation of different media.

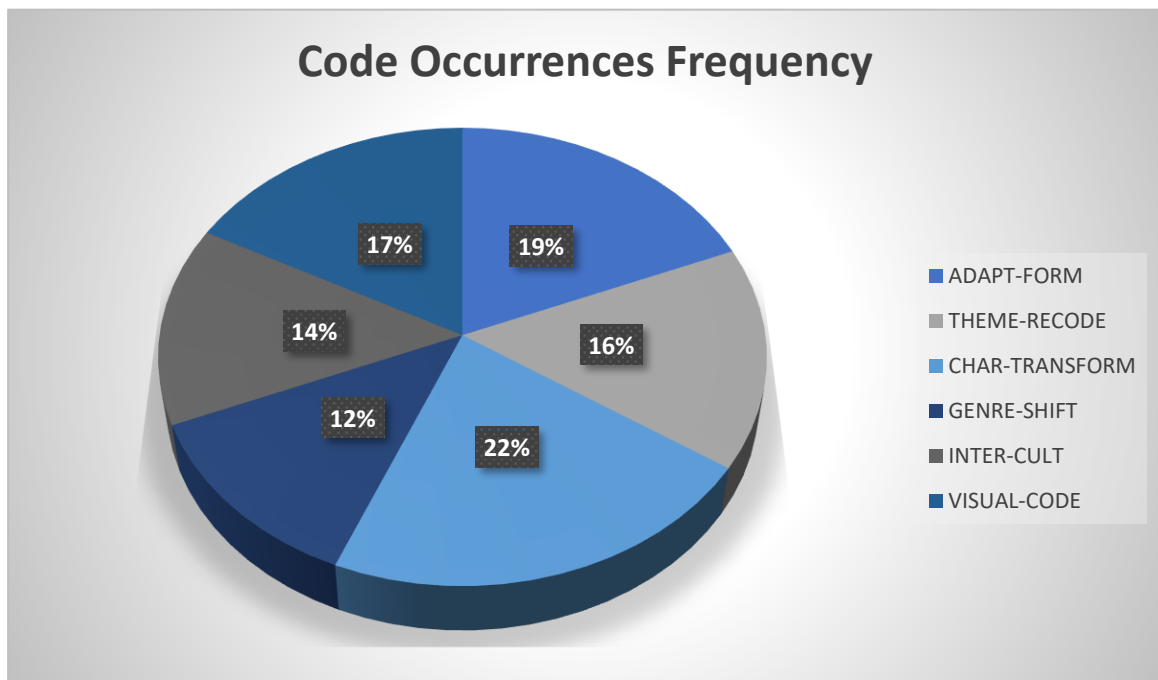


Fig 3.1.

THEME-RECODE and INTER-CULT categories reveal how the Netflix adaptation reformulated the novel's introspective meditations on fate and dharma into critiques of political extremism, media corruption, and urban violence, making the story resonate with both Indian and global audiences. This shift demonstrates Sanders' principle of adaptation as cultural rewriting, where the adapted text functions not merely as translation but as transformation to fit the sociopolitical contours of its time and medium. These findings suggest that adaptation, particularly in the streaming era, is a dialogue between narrative heritage and contemporary consumption patterns, mediated by technological, aesthetic, and ideological forces.

3.2.1. Narrative Structure and Pacing

Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* employs a nonlinear narrative, alternating between the present-day investigation of Inspector Sartaj Singh and the retrospective, memoir-style narration of gangster Ganesh Gaitonde. Inset chapters further enrich this structure, brief yet powerful interludes that explore the lives of minor characters such as constables, gang members, and citizens affected by the criminal world. These subplots are utilized to provide a human touch to the overall story and to add to the socio-political context. The novel's slow, thoughtful, and introspective tone sets the pace. It often goes off on tangents to think about things like identity, violence, history, and fate. The web series, on the other hand, changes the story into a dual timeline format, choosing a more linear and streamlined narrative and leaving out many side stories to focus on two main arcs: Sartaj's search for the truth

and Gaitonde's rise and fall. Following the rules of Netflix's global streaming audience, the series moves faster, is tenser, and is meant to be watched all at once. The book has almost 900 pages of literary and philosophical content, but the show condenses it into 16 tightly cut episodes over two seasons, using cliffhangers and suspense to keep people interested.

3.2.2. Characterization and Depth

The book gives psychologically complex descriptions of its main characters, especially Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde. The book shows Sartaj as a police officer who is morally conflicted and deeply introspective. He struggles with his religious identity, his lack of professional skills, and his trauma, especially his memories of Partition and the weight of being Sikh in a postcolonial world. In contrast, the series shows him as more reactive and action-oriented, with less focus on his inner thoughts or religious confusion. Ganesh Gaitonde is a philosophical and dishonest narrator in the book. His voice is full of existential despair and megalomania, and he mixes Nietzschean ideas with Vedantic ones. His inner thoughts are important to the novel's metaphysical tone. In the television show, though Nawazuddin Siddiqui manages to convey Gaitonde's charisma and intensity, his introspections are truncated as voiceovers, and the psychological complexity becomes more performative than literary. Characters like Guruji, who are introduced later and with subtlety in the novel, are turned into main antagonists within the series. Guruji's apocalyptic cult ideology is at the centre of Season 2, providing a thriller-like sense of urgency to the plot. Likewise, Jojo Mascarenas, who is presented as a complex and tragic protagonist in the novel's subplots, is turned more manipulative and less complex in the series. The characterization of Katekar in the novel, explored through an emotionally dense inset chapter, is reduced to that of a secondary character whose death only serves to motivate Sartaj in the series.

3.2.3. Thematic Transformation

The thematic paradigm of *Sacred Games* also changes radically in translation. The novel approaches ideas like religious identity, existential philosophy, and socio-political corruption with caution, frequently feeding these ideas into intricate narratives, robust dialogue, and philosophical asides. Religion is not sanctified or demonized in the novel but is used as one of several systems of power that hold the potential of emancipation or destruction. Gaitonde frequently ponders over ideas like karma, time, fate, and national identity, drawing these from Vedantic and Nietzschean schools of philosophy. The web series, however, reimagines religion—though Hindu fundamentalism—through the lens of narrative anchor, dramatizing it in the person of Guruji and the apocalyptic path of nuclear annihilation. The examination of existential questions is reduced in favour of visual drama and narrative pace, resulting in the

fragmentation of philosophical discourses into bite-sized morsels. The presentation of politics and corruption also changes; where the novel quietly critiques the overlap of media, crime, and real estate through the experience of living and conversation, the series hyperbolizes moments of political violence, such as police brutality, mob lynching, and communal violence, to reach emotional impact. Ideas like secularism vs. communalism, explored in the novel through characters like Sartaj's mother and the historical trauma of Partition, are less introspectively portrayed in the series, instead dramatized through riots and political manoeuvrings.

3.2.4. Visual vs. Textual Style

The novel employs a multilingual and idiomatic narrative voice that incorporates Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, and English to express the linguistic and cultural diversity of Mumbai. Chandra's lush descriptions make the world of the text richly immersive with local idiosyncrasies, personal dilemmas, and philosophical introspection. Symbolism in the novel is skilfully embedded through motifs and dialogue, permitting a gradual unfolding of deeper meaning. In contrast, the web series reimagines these symbols as visual metaphors; Guruji's ashram, nuclear bunkers, religious symbols, and Gaitonde's wardrobe changes are powerful cinematic symbols. The series still has dialogue in more than one language, but the focus changes from complicated speech to performance with visual cues taking the place of internal thought. Also, violence and sex are shown in very different ways: the book is more restrained, while the show goes all out with graphic content to shock, make it seem real, and sell it. These choices make sense for streaming, which values visual storytelling, emotional investment, and keeping viewer's over literary nuance.

3.2.5. Key Additions and Omissions

The adaptation includes some story details that were not in the book. The Guruji cult's story has grown more complex, and his plan for an extinction event becomes the central conflict of Season 2. This modification changes the genre from psychological noir to apocalyptic thriller. Gaitonde uses new characters like Batya Abelman as ideological believers and emotional anchors. The subplot about the RAW agent, which is based on Anjali Mathur, is expanded, giving her character more screen time and a more interesting backstory that includes spying and betrayal. These changes make it seem like the story is trying to become more global while also adding crime thriller and conspiracy drama elements. On the other hand, a lot of the book's complexity is lost. There are no more inset chapters that look at the inner lives of minor characters like Katekar's wife or Jojo's clients. Sartaj's thoughts on the trauma of Partition, relationships with his mother, and being Sikh are mostly missing. Gaitonde's metaphysical thoughts on karma, morality, and destiny are also cut short, which takes away from the metaphysical flavour. These kinds of cuts make the story easier to follow

and fit better with the pacing and structure of a visual medium that likes suspense and rising conflict.

3.2.6. Purpose of These Changes

The adaptive choices in the Sacred Games series are making progress for the streaming service, the visual medium, and the global audience. Netflix's algorithmic format, which is designed to encourage binge-watching through cliffhangers and high-stakes episodes, is happy with the switch to a faster, plot-driven format. Because the visual medium needs visual storytelling, it uses fewer internal monologues and abstract dialogue and more symbolic imagery and expressive performance. These changes also appeal to people around the world, as existential rumination is replaced with universal themes like good vs. evil, cultism, and government corruption. The series also had to deal with censorship issues and social and political issues in India. So, it walks a fine line between being sensational and holding back, showing violence, sex, and religious politics without making any comments that would cause controversy. The adaptation also uses transmedia storytelling, like memes, quote-based virality, and social media campaigns, on purpose to get younger people interested. Finally, these changes show how cultural economics and the unique features of each medium effect how literary stories are adapted for the screen.

3.2.7. Religious and Political Opinions in Novel and Series

In Sacred Games, both the novel by Vikram Chandra and the Netflix series explore India's contentious terrain of religion and politics, but in significantly dissimilar manners, subject to their respective media and audience bases. Chandra's novel is richly philosophical, situating religious critique within existential and spiritual contexts. The novel does not depict religion as villain or saviour but as one among a few complicated institutions that shape behaviour. Characters like Gaitonde are ambivalent regarding Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, while Sartaj, a lapsed Sikh, grapples with Partition trauma and inherited religion (Chandra 214). This multi-faceted representation eschews simplistic moralizing, instead depicting how religion is commodified, politicized, and internalized by actors within a corrupt society.

The Netflix version, however, increases the centrality of religious extremism to the plot. Although it still recognizes different religions, the series emphasizes explicitly Hindu fundamentalism through the figure of Guruji (Swami Shridhar Shukla), played by Pankaj Tripathi. The sermons of Guruji are a combination of doomsday philosophies and religious manipulation, à la real-life cult leaders and right-wing political leaders. His approach to mass destruction is a narrative symbol of religious radicalism pushed to its logical extreme. This focus shifts the tone away from philosophical inquiry towards ideological struggle. Although still representing characters of diverse religious leanings, the series dramatizes social strife, mob lynching, and police complicity

(Season 2, Episodes 4 - 6), thus mirroring the political concerns of India post-2014. Unlike the novel, which examines politics in terms of institutional rot, media corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude, and cyclical repetition of history, the series turns to visually graphic political allegory, showing lynchings, police brutality, and rigging of elections, often alluding to recent events in Indian politics.

Essentially, the novel negotiates religion and politics by way of interiority, memory, and moral nuance, and the series externalizes the same, making them narrative drivers and spectacles. The shift is in line with the larger movement from literary restraint to streaming-age haste, wherein symbolic depth is sacrificed for the immediacy of the visual.

3.2.8. Metaphoric Representation of the 16 Episode Titles

There is a title for each of the 16 episodes of the Netflix series Sacred Games based on a Sanskrit word, typically from mythological, philosophical, or religious origins, and applied as a metaphorical structure to decipher the story. The titles are selected, and they create a semiotic pattern that points towards thematic resonance and narrative trajectory.

Episode	Title	Sanskrit Meaning	Thematic Connection
1	<i>Ashwatthama</i>	A mythological warrior cursed with immortality	Gaitonde, like Ashwatthama, is a damned survivor , doomed to watch the consequences of his actions unfold.
2	<i>Halahala</i>	The deadly poison that emerged from the churning of the ocean	Refers to the toxic secrets that begin surfacing from corrupt cops to political conspiracies.
3	<i>Atapi Vatapi</i>	Demonic brothers who tricked and devoured sages	Symbolizes betrayal and deceit , particularly as Sartaj begins uncovering layers of manipulation.

4	<i>Brahmahatya</i>	The sin of killing a Brahmin (priest or wise man)	Tied to the murder of RAW agents and whistleblowers , reflecting moral decay within sacred institutions.
5	<i>Sarama</i>	A mythological female dog who uncovers hidden things	Indicates Sartaj's dogged pursuit of truth , sniffing out lies in the police and political structure.
6	<i>Pretakalpa</i>	A ritual text for dealing with the dead	Symbolizes the handling of corpses , both literal and symbolic, dealing with past sins and systemic rot.
7	<i>Rudra</i>	A fierce form of Shiva, associated with destruction	Gaitonde's narrative becomes more violent , and the divine wrath theme escalates.
8	<i>Yayati</i>	A king cursed with eternal desire and dissatisfaction	Reflects Gaitonde's insatiable hunger for power , fame, and redemption.

After Season 2, Episode 9, 'Philosoph,' the series veers into meta-fictional space, exploring the idea of a philosopher but avoiding deeper Sanskrit undertones. The title is a comment on Guruji's fake intellectualism and shows how philosophical jargon can be used to define extremism and control. Guruji calls himself a spiritual guru, but he turns philosophical ideas into dogmatic dogma, showing how dangerous it is to hijack an ideology. The word "victim" in Episode 10 signals a change in the story's theme and looks at the thin line between being a victim and being complicit. It critiques how characters who initially appear weak or innocent, such as Sartaj or Batya, ultimately become entangled in violence and deception. This shows that everyone is part of keeping harmful systems going. In Episode 11, "Apasmara," there is a reference to a demon of ignorance from Hindu mythology who is constantly tortured by the dancing

foot of Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. The allegory represents Sartaj's intellectual growth as he goes beyond surface-level clues and begins to understand the deep spiritual and political forces that shape Gaitonde's world and Guruji's mind. "Unmata," or madness or frenzy, is the 12th episode and shows how both Gaitonde's and Sartaj's minds broke down. Their emotional breakdown, caused by betrayal, fear, and ideological war, is a sign of the start of cults and conspiracies that will trap them, showing how close enlightenment and madness are.

Episode 13, "Matsya," refers to the Matsya Avatar of Vishnu, the heavenly fish that warns people of an impending catastrophic flood. In today's world, the mythic reference fits with Guruji's apocalyptic vision of nuclear destruction, making him seem like a messianic figure. At the same time, it fits with Gaitonde's efforts to avoid certain death, which suggests a twisted story of salvation. "The Coup," Episode 14, uses language that is related to political revolt and betrayal by institutions. The episode focuses on the transition of power, secret operations, and ideological penetration, symbolizing governmental revolutions and personal betrayals annihilating established power centres. Episode 15, 'Tat Tvam Asi,' which in Sanskrit means 'Thou art that' and is taken from the Chandogya Upanishad, is the spiritual climax of the series. Sartaj has a philosophical epiphany, realizing his deep identification with the truth, duty (dharma), and collective responsibility. This is the expression of the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy that erases the boundaries of the individual self and the universe, and ultimately symbolizes Sartaj's final ethical epiphany. The last episode, 'Radcliffe,' is titled after the Radcliffe Line, the historical dividing line, drawn in 1947, separating India and Pakistan. The episode combines the long curve of trauma, displacement, and communal identity, primarily through the lens of Sartaj's family history and the broader socio-political implications of the violent Partition of the subcontinent. It expresses the series' highest message, how historical grievances continually resonate within the present through cycles of fear, nationalism, and fractured identities.

4. Conclusion

The adaptation of Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* into a Netflix show is a case in point illustrating the intricacies of when literary works adapt to digital media, especially in terms of structure, visual format, and ideological structures. This comparative study has shown that the process of adaptation is more than just translation; instead, it is a complex negotiation driven by the needs of platform-specific aesthetics, audience anticipation, and dominant cultural forces. The Netflix series, while drawing from the intricate, nonlinear, and philosophically dense source material, reimagines it as a globally consumable thriller that foregrounds spectacle, suspense, and socio-political immediacy. Central characters such as Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde are recast with heightened dramatization, and the thematic palette, especially regarding religion and politics, is rendered more explicit and urgent. The episodic

restructuring, visual metaphors, and adaptive omissions or expansions reflect both creative reinterpretation and strategic responses to the affordances of the streaming medium.

Moreover, the series' global reach via Netflix positions *Sacred Games* not only as a narrative but as a cultural product of what Mareike Jenner describes as 'glocal television,' simultaneously local in subject and global in format and delivery. The adaptation reinforces the theoretical shift in adaptation studies away from fidelity discourse toward a focus on narrative transformation, intermediality, and audience engagement. As Linda Hutcheon argues, adaptation is 'repetition without replication,' a dynamic process of reauthoring shaped by historical, technological, and ideological vectors. In this sense, *Sacred Games* is more than a retelling; it is a reinvention, one that bridges literature and digital culture, national identity and global distribution, metaphysical inquiry and binge-worthy suspense.

Suggestions for Further Research

As streaming platforms reshape storytelling, adaptation studies must explore new directions. By comparing adaptations of *Sacred Games*, *Leila*, and *The White Tiger* from different cultures, we can see how global strategies and political situations affect how stories change. Researchers also need to look into how data-driven algorithms shape storylines, character arcs, and pacing in binge culture. To understand public sentiment, consider transmedia, memes, social media, and fan interaction. Lastly, examining censorship and soft power in occupied areas can reveal how adaptations can either reflect or challenge dominant ideologies. Future research needs to be flexible, cross-disciplinary, and able to adapt to changes in the digital media landscape.

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