

## VIDEO GAMES OR RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA?

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### **Abstract**

*The culture and collective conscious is greatly impacted by religious rituals, tradition and customs. Video games are means of entertainment which now adds a new phenomenon to the cultural artifacts. Reality games forms certain community of players worldwide on various platforms. It creates a virtual world. As tradition, rituals, taboos are the most important phenomena of social lives; video games are not unaffected by it. It uses historical characters, old superheroes, mythical and religious stories to make games more interesting. Games provide wide sphere to study the social, political, cultural and religious aspects of the society. Various social norms and taboos are widely reflected in it. Religion, one of the pillars of any social culture, is taking advantage of the wide and most secular medium i.e. video game to spread the sphere worldwide. As the literary boundary grows; it considers many things, which represents society and reads it with various critical insights. Literature and cultural studies read video games as animated text. This research paper contains the critical research on how video games are one of the means for religious propaganda.*

**Keywords:** Games, Player, Religion, culture, the -isms

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### Introduction:

Video games are not new for India. As India is getting digitized, the creation and the practice of the new emerging culture is the matter of research. Everything is available on screen due to internet. One can do 'darshan' of any God Goddess from the Indian temple; can offer money through online banking during the 'Aarti' viewed on computer screen.

Digital video games have its own subculture within the game and reflected in the society as well. Few years back the subculture was known as 'geek'; now a day it is mixing with the popular culture and in trend. The culture is being digitized, animated and trivialized in the games. The amalgamation of the new culture engenders the new 'digital culture' within the society. Video games are important means of entertainment. It is quite influential factor of cultural and religious socialization. Cassidy argues that

'digital games should be conceptualized and analyzed drawing on narratological, as well as ludological, approaches and that "interacting with a video game text is in fact an act of narration in 'real-time,' in the 'present'" and who sees digital games as narratives created by the player's interaction.'<sup>i</sup>

### Video Game as Entertainment:

Video games are huge entertaining media. They are globally accepted digital miniature of social, economic and cultural structure of the society; which requires specific academic discourse. They contain all aspects of society in themselves. Game plays the role of the means of entertainment which allows people to control the situation within the virtual world. It makes the player 'omnipotent'.

Video games as fantasy control the mind of the player, whether it is hard core games or the casual game. The subconscious of the player is completely involved in the game. The game unites his hidden pressurized id to the game character. It evokes the hidden anger, fear, ambition etc. Connecting Aristotelian theory of catharsis, the controlled mind of the player can get relief and entertained. The mind is in the state to accept new ideas and the very next thing for new idea is the character itself which the player controls. The rules in the games are such that they provoke certain kind of thought process in the mind of player. Thus while playing; game completely hypnotizes the mind of the player.

Other way of inspiring action of the player is to challenge the capability of the thinking level and provoke to overcome limits. The levels in the games are made such a way that can complete the above criteria. The game developer is conscious about it and the game has been designed in such a way that it balances the challenges and the psychological process of the gamer which take place while playing.

### **Religion as Social Phenomena:**

Religion is chief part of social structure. Traditions, practices, values, and characteristics of the society widely depend on the religion. Power structure also works accordingly. People follow traditions and rituals according to their religion. Religious beliefs are the compensatory mechanism of the control. Nowadays secularism is new religion in the society widely spread through technology. According to Ronald Inglehart 'Religion develops to fill the human need for security.' (Contributors)

The huge sphere of economic and social insecurity drives people towards religion. People follow rituals to state the denial of the chaos or randomization. Religion provides the structure of rituals and practices and proves the Boyers view of Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology of Religion that the adaptation of religion is as per Darwin's theory of natural selection as of our other biological architecture. As per

natural selection human mind is constructed for survival and reproduction. The research can measure two types of religious practices; one is Intrinsic and another is Extrinsic. Intrinsic refers religion as personal sense of believing and extrinsic way uses religious practices for outer, public phenomenon which is highly used for other purposes. It has the sense of belonging rather than believing.

### **Video Games & Religion:**

Digital games are not superficial phenomenon but important artifact to explore which helps to understand what religion is in the changing contemporary culture and society. The lexical shift of the religion to the digital mode creates a new secular culture and converts ancient beliefs and rituals as more adaptable as well as more questionable. Explicit and implicit presentations of the religion are observed in games. For instance the word 'mana' - the origin of the word has in anthropological connections. The word is used for 'power', 'prestige', and 'effectiveness'. The root of the word is in animism. The religious connotation of the word is supernatural powers. It is significant in Polynesian culture and parts of Pacific Islands. In the video games the word is used ubiquitously for the powers the perform spells which earn the points. The Game named Warcraft II has officially used the name '*mana*' for the magic points. The sequential amalgamation of the two games Magic: The Gathering Terminology and Warcraft , World of Warcraft ; paved way to the word as popular word in the fantasy world. The shift denotes the major conceptualized change of the religious connotations and symbolism of the fabric of the religion within the society.

In video games religion is presented in various ways, the chief typology can be seen as implicit and explicit. Elaborating these two, research shows us very diverse interpretations and presentation of the religion in various games.

The representation of the religion greatly influences the aboriginal virtues and stories woven directly in the religion. Generation of various interpretations through narratives with the religious stories shakes the root of the pre historical beliefs and the

very concept, lying within the subconscious of the humanity. The universal ideology of the particular form of the religion is being questioned.

## Explicit Presentation:

Explicit presentation of the game uses the myths, stories, characters etc as the gaming stuff. Explicit presentation mainly focuses on the adaptation, of the mythological structure, of the religion. Symbolism, narration, characterization and method to play negotiate the form of the religion.. The identity of deities, the essence of the chants or prayers, and moral thoughts it emphasized, were reverted. The authority of the religion retold. Some games with such use of religion discussed below.

### 1. Hanumaan : The Boy warrior

Hinduism is the religion which is quite similar to pagan religion. There are many deities. It is different in many aspects from Abrahmic religions like Islam And Christian. Hinduism has Gods to signify many things. In the Game Hanumaan: The Boy Warrior presented Hanuman the God as trivialized figure. The mythological background is also presented. The Bal Hanuman freed the Sun God from Demons. The game is developed in Hyderabad, India by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe for play station 2. The game is criticized for its animation and trivialization of Hindu God. Hanuman's player can control the animated God.

### 2. Kuma \War

This is American Game having background of war. The genre of the game is first person shooting. Arab and Middle East is described as terrorist. The mode of presentation with covered head, dark skin, gun in hand, loose cloth. The look and appearance of the terrorist in the game schematized as identity. The Identity of the Islamic people thus presented as terrorist. The popular culture especially in America tends to conceptualize the original form of Muslim.



### 3. Fallout 3

The game is from Microsoft, for Xbox 360 platform. It is not made for Indian Players as containing such religious and cultural elements. It has oxen with two head, orange brown in color, eight stomachs. In anger their horns and skin changed colors. This oxen has named 'Brahmin'. Due to constant radiation during the war the change happen to the normal cow like domestic animal.

The representation of peculiar Hindu caste of religious priest is as suppressed, mutated, non-hostile and nuisance. The design of the game impact vast audience and generates new meaning or shows the identity of the thing in the mind of the developer.

There are many other games which are played in the gaming world without any controversies or issue. Above discussed are some popular games. The Greek mythology is combined with Buddhist virtues in game named 'Asura's Wrath'. While 'Dance Dance Revolution' is a game in which player makes move to create Christian music.

#### **Implicit Presentation:**

Implicit games have suggestive methodology to follow certain virtues to win the game. The game uses symbolism as well. The similarity of the religious virtues with the game rules and spirituality is depicted in the games. It gives the spiritual experience to the player. According to William Sims Bainbridge and Wilma Alice Bainbridge 'possible that certain categories of games satisfy some of the same psychological needs satisfied by religion' (Steffen) the gamer psychologically controlled by the game while playing. The adaptation of religious and moral values is subconscious imitation rather the well comprehended. They are given tasks of performing some spell to move ahead in the game towards goal. The game has maintains its flow, inspiring morality and self control, overcome the limitation of the self. Some games are discussed below.

## 1) Path:

A game by Belgian Independent Studio Tale of Tales, presented the theme of journey through the thick forest. The game is about six girls sent to Grandmother's house through the Path which leads to thick forest. Like literary gothic story Christian religion is symbolized by cross on the graveyard. The expression of girls shows inner spirituality and strength.

## 2) Civilization I

The game has put stress on the role of religion during the civilization period. It is the turn base strategy game. With the reference of ancient history the game is about the colonization of the space. Player has to build structure, hospitals, laboratories, and other historical monuments as well as theatres and so on to create cities. As it is creative sequential game, it has empowerment rather than winning the combat. Accomplishment of task makes the gamer first to colonize the planet revolving around The Alpha Centauri.

First three versions allow the gamer to built historic religious development as researchable technologies. The forth part allows players to research and lay foundation of one of the seven historical faiths i.e. Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In fifth part instead of religion the new expansion named Gods and Kind is designed. Gradually game is getting complex as per versions. Players can get faith points and long list of various beliefs to benefit the civilization. Faith points can also use as currency to buy various benefits.

In the game the reactions of the player operated by external stimuli. The conscious actions and thought cycle are relying upon the stimuli. The involvement of the player in games gradually brings the drastic change in behavior and attitude. Unlike the religion, video games never depicted mythological mysterious events, as it is greater than players' comprehension and mar the effect of stimuli. The mechanized religion focuses on how religion functions and its effects. 'the religious communication process seeks to bring about

cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation. Digital games, too, aim to channel players' thinking, feeling, and evaluating through challenges, selective multimedia communication, rules, and reward systems.' (Steffen) Digitization allows the mechanical control over the religious rituals. Psychologically, it inspired the gamer towards the denial of blind faith in the religion.

Video game creates void of the experience one have while praying, performing ritual of believing in some beliefs. The internal and collective experience of moving, powerful, emotional force which can lead to forget the self refused through the video game. The collective conscious which tie the group of people together due to such spirituality, create ethnic structure of the social culture.

In the digital age playing video game is the main stream culture. The skill to play video game is demand of the culture. When religion depicted in the games, it creates subculture. Video game as medium conceptualizes the very essence of the religion. Although various moral values ethnically connected with each religion, religion itself has its own identity in the world.

'Generally, religions function as a breeding ground and a basis of legitimacy for cultural "codes of conduct, procedures for reasoning morally, and standards of virtue. To support commitment to the moral life, they help configure the world as a moral order. Finally, they are prepared to qualify or refine this order so as to permit anyone to attain the highest level of moral excellence' (Steffen)

Secularism is not meant the amalgamation of religious virtues and rituals; it is to accept each religion as it is without comparison or the question which is best one. Video game culture promotes the wrong identity of form of the religion under the mask of secularism. Video game is the tool to create a deep wrong impression of religion in the



gamer's mind. Hence gaming is only for entertainment rather preaching, what message it would convey, must be observed.

Video games are also considered as simplified version of real life. Religion is mechanized. Mysterious elements are removed and more exemplified and simple form can be seen. Most important is trivialization of rituals is there. Player can control the deities. The psychological affect is that player can feel everything is in his hand! Consideration of the Godliness or the Supreme Power of God is deteriorated. .Secondly, player has always omniscient view, there stuck the denial of God's omnipotence. 'god games may be interpreted as the simulation of an aspect of spiritual empowerment'. Third, the fabrication of the religion is seen in video games.

'In what could be termed a form of Orientalism (or Occidentalism, depending on the game one is discussing), game companies often appropriate religious names and symbols that belong to a foreign culture and include them (or thinly veiled references to them) in their fabricated religions'. (Zeiler)

Any individual is not provoked to change his/her mindset of certain religion. For instance any person from Hindu family never thinks to follow Christianity without any shocking, strong reason. Video game can efficiently inspire the player to get impressed and interested in other Religion. Religion conversion is the common practices especially in peripheries of the world.

### **Conclusion:**

As in other media, religion also reflects in video games. Video games are one of the modes of entertainment and relaxation. A virtual world created around the player. The psychological engagement sometimes takes far from realistic approach. As in the world culture there is a race, gender are tools for power politics; religion too are the same the means to control the people. In this article, research shows how the very essence of any

religion gets distorted. Controlling over conscious as well as subconscious, presenting the religion in distorted manner what is this video game or religious propaganda?

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Notes:

<sup>i</sup> Digital Game studies, Ch-3 Global Mediatization of Hinduism Through Digital Games, by Xenia Zeiler quotes Cassidy from video Game as Narrative.

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