

Social Commentary and Narrative Reflexivity: A Study of Meta-Storytelling in Made in Heaven

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Meta-narrative is the overarching framework of storytelling that gives meaning to small narratives within a story within a social and cultural context. This study focuses on the web series named Made in Heaven, both season 1 and season 2 on Amazon Prime to describe the use of meta-storytelling. This research investigates in which way Indian weddings function as an in-depth narrative that stages broader discourses on gender, patriarchy, caste, as well as sexuality within the contemporary society in India. The reflexive structure as well as social commentary are considered in this study for describing meta-narratives. This research study uses qualitative content analysis of both seasons of the mentioned web series for exploring the construction of the story and representation of meta-storytelling through embedded social commentary and narrative reflexivity. The analysis of the study highlights how the narrative structure of the web series amplifies the social critique of the web series named Made in Heaven, considering the contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: meta-storytelling, narrative reflexivity, made in heaven, social commentary, social critique

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1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Meta-narrative is considered as a postmodern storytelling device that challenges the process of traditional storytelling by acknowledging the self-aware narrative (Arias López et al., 2023). It is mainly significant as it draws attention to the mechanism of narration. Here, the story reflects on its own process of construction by integrating social commentary. Cultural, social, and political realities are constructed and represented through social commentary in meta-storytelling. With the help of narrative reflexivity, reflection on the construction of the story itself is emphasised in meta-storytelling. In the case of web series like *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime, meta-narrative becomes a powerful tool that reveals the contradictions of modern contemporary society (*Made in Heaven*, 2019). This web series critically examines the lavish Indian weddings by focusing on gender, caste, class, sexuality, and patriarchy. The narratives in the web series tell the personal stories of the narrators as well as portray different aspects of the society. The illusion of seamless narration has been broken through narrative reflexivity in *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime. It mainly highlights a deeper truth by creating self-aware narratives. Along with that, in *Made in Heaven*, the meta-storytelling process embeds social commentary on model hypocrisies, patriarchal traditions, and queer identities (*Made in Heaven*, 2019). The strategy of dual narratives mainly helps to enhance the position of the web series in global discourse and represents the cultural relevance in society. The web series named *Made in Heaven* is examined through the lenses of social commentary as well as narrative reflexivity. This web series is an instance of understanding how Indian OTT platforms adopt meta-storytelling techniques through their digital content.

Statement of Problem

Meta-storytelling in Western cinema as well as literature has been widely explored. However, in digital platforms in India, the emergence of meta-narrative or meta-storytelling is still underexplored (Herrada Valverde et al., 2025). *Made in Heaven* is one of the popular web series on Amazon Prime, which has employed social commentary as well as narrative reflexivity for interrogating several societal norms.

This research sheds light on the use of social commentary along with the narrative reflexivity in meta-storytelling, considering the web series named *Made in Heaven*, both season 1 as well as season 2. This study focuses on how the dual identity of both protagonists in *Made in Heaven* is shaped through meta-narratives. In addition to that, strategies of storytelling to draw the attention of the audience are another key aspect that is clearly explained in the studies by considering narrative reflexivity as well as social commentary.

2. Literature Review

Meta-storytelling and its Key Feature

Meta-narrative or meta-storytelling is a key process of storytelling that makes the audience aware of the story and the mechanism of the construction of the story itself. The meta-storytelling is quite effective and significant for engaging the audience in the process of narrating the story by breaking the fourth wall. From the point of view of Yacavone (2021), it can be stated that expectation and needs of the audience is also acknowledged in the meta-narrative. This process is helpful in highlighting the mechanism and process of narration, such as transformation in perspective, interruption, which may raise questions about the reliability of the storyteller, and also self-reflexive commentary. Self-awareness is one of the core features of meta-narrative. Here, the story can reflect its own construction by acknowledging its fictional status. Intertextuality is another feature of meta-narrative (Roche, 2022). It mainly employs narrative reflexivity for exploring the process of story construction, considering the perception of memory, identity, and truth. The narration ought to be visible for that reason; meta-narrative focuses on not only entertainment but also influences several critical engagements with how the meaning of a story is produced through narratives (Horstkotte, 2009). It helps to create layered narration for the viewers who follow the plot and subplot while focusing on the procedure of the storytelling. In order to disrupt linearity in the story, meta-storytelling is useful by incorporating multiple narrators and fragmented timelines. Metafictional devices such as intertextuality and self-referentiality destabilise the notion of the objective truth of narration. Meta-storytelling is nothing but a narrative along with the commentary on that narrative. This can be seen in film, literature, and also in digital media.

Subjectivity is explored as well as meta-storytelling can challenge the boundaries between representation and reality.

Concept of Social Commentary in the Context of Meta-narratives

The term social commentary is one of the core practices of reflecting upon, critiquing, and also analysing economic, social, as well as cultural and political realities through different forms of expression, such as digital platforms, cinema, and literature as well. It acts as a mirror to contemporary society, which exposes injustices as well as highlights inequalities by promoting critical thinking among viewers (Yang, 2023). Social commentary not only documents different problems but also often challenges different dominant ideologies to encourage the public discourse by making this a powerful aspect of cultural critique. Meta-narrative is the overarching as well as universal story or concept, which was popularized by Jean-François Lyotard. It claims to explain social development, human progress, and human history. Several narratives, such as capitalism, modernization, and democracy present themselves as truths. On the other hand, during the postmodern era, meta-narratives are questioned for the tendency of silencing marginalised voices and diverse experiences (Qihua, 2024). The concept of meta-narrative or meta-storytelling intersects with social commentary by the constructing, the authority, or reinforcing them. It is one of the self-reflexive techniques that helps the creator to draw attention to the constructed story. Meta-storytelling helps to understand how stories are shaped. It can be understood that the audience should be aware of the process of shaping narratives for understanding the reality. In order to tie up the social commentary to the meta-storytelling or meta-narratives it is possible to critique societal issues by questioning the framework of the story through which the contemporary society can perceive the truth (Jones, 2023). Social commentary disrupts and interrogates as well as reimagines the stories which govern the social life. The relationship between social commentary and meta-storytelling is important to understand how stories are being told in the contemporary society.

Concept of Narrative Reflexivity through the Lens of Meta-storytelling

In order to make a story self-aware, it is required to understand the concept of narrative reflexivity. Narratives help to draw attention to the construction of the story as well as the artificiality and process of the storytelling. The concept of narrative reflexivity helps to understand how stories can reflect upon themselves and also highlights how narrative itself shapes the overall meaning of the story (Paparini et al., 2021). It mainly challenges the contemporary notion which stories are a mirror to the reality. It also helps the audience to understand how stories are shaped and crafted as well as mediated. In the case of meta-storytelling, narrative reflexivity plays a pivotal role. Meta-narrative occurs when a story goes beyond storytelling but also comments on the process of making narrative itself. Here, characters of the story break the fourth wall and directly communicate with the audience. In the case of meta-storytelling, the audience is not passive but actively aware of the process behind it. In order to destabilise the linear narratives, narrative reflexivity in meta-storytelling is quite significant (Jackson, Anderson & Maben, 2021). How a story can construct the overall social meaning as well as truth by directly communicating with the audience is an instance of meta-storytelling. Meta-narrative also helps to shape. The lived experience of the characters within a story. Narrative reflexivity not only entertains but also serves as a critique of narrative ideology as well as cultural assumptions. It helps the narrators in exposing the power of narration themselves by making the audience actively aware of what is being told and how it is being told.

3. Theoretical Framework

French literary theorist Gerard Genette stated that how a story can be told effectively. Key elements of this theory are narrative, narration as well as story. In addition to this, description is one of the indispensable parts within the narration (de Castro, 2021). It is quite feasible to apply this theory for understanding the meta-narrative, considering the narration and also description.

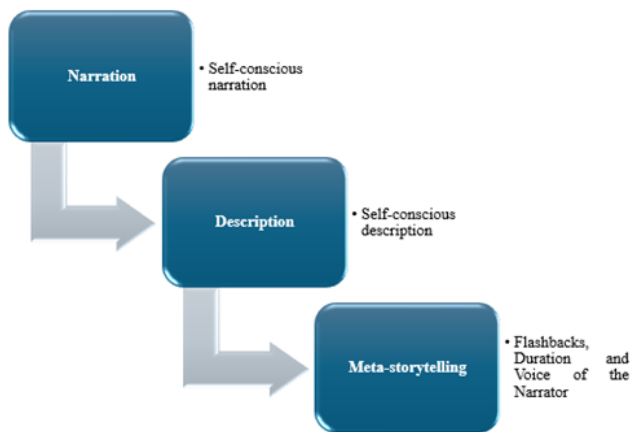


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

While evoking the concept of meta-narrative, it is pivotal to differentiate concept of grand narratives given by Jean-François Lyotard and concept of meta-fiction or meta-storytelling. The concept of metafiction focuses on narrative construction whereas meta-narrative focuses on cultural truths also. So in this web series, social commentary is interrogated by considering the representational strategy of the story.

4. Research Gap

From the existing literature, it has been acknowledged that meta-storytelling or meta-narratives considering the narrative reflexivity along with social commentary are not discussed in an in-depth manner, as this is an underexplored area in Indian digital platforms. So, this study focuses on the meta-storytelling in *Made in Heaven* and explains how narrative reflexivity as well as social commentary is used in this web series.

5. Research Objectives

1. To analyse the narrative reflexivity and social commentary in *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime
2. To investigate the relationship between narrative reflexivity and meta-storytelling, considering the web series named *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime
3. To find out the different elements of meta-storytelling that are used in *Made in Heaven* to meet the audience's expectations

6. Research Questions

1. How are narrative reflexivity and social commentary described in *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime?

2. How do narrative reflexivity and meta-storytelling correlate with each other in *Made in Heaven* on Amazon Prime?

3. What are the different elements of meta-storytelling used in *Made in Heaven* in meeting the expectations of the audience?

7. Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study focuses on the qualitative method to analyse the observation of the web series, considering the meta-narratives.

Research Philosophy

Philosophy of the research refers to the belief that helps to decide the process of conducting the overall research (Mbanaso, Abrahams & Okafor, 2023). In this study, interpretivism philosophy is followed in order to generate the overall comprehension of the phenomenon. This philosophy is useful for conducting qualitative research.

Research Approach

In addition to this, the research approach is the general procedure and plan before deciding on the procedure of the research (Bianchi, 2021). In this research, an inductive approach is applied here for analysing qualitative data.

Data Collection and Analysis

Among numerous research strategies, the researcher has chosen to use content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is used for this research study. By analysing each episode of season 1 and season 2, qualitative content analysis is conducted to meet the objectives of the study. Non-numeric data based on the theme of the web series are considered for the data collection as well as analysis. Unit of analysis is scene as well as dialogues.

Sampling Process

In order to conduct this research, purposive sampling is selected as the researcher has to choose a sample as per the purpose of the study. This web series has total 16 episodes including in both seasons. From *Made in Heaven*, a total of 16 episodes are selected based on the purposive sampling as this sampling helps the researcher to choose the sample as per the purpose of the research. From season 1, 9 episodes are chosen, and 7 episodes from the season 2 are taken as a sample of the research.

The sample size is 16 episodes, and the unit of analysis is characters, visual symbols such as set design and costumes, themes, and dialogues.

8. Findings and Analysis

The web series named Made in Heaven was created by Rima Kagti and Zoya Akhtar and streamed on Amazon Prime. The story of this series focuses on the self-aware narrative, considering the meta-storytelling. Main findings from the season 1 as well as season 2 are explained below:

Portrayal of Narrative Reflexivity

Self-aware narrative is portrayed through a wedding in this web series on Amazon Prime, considering the feature of narrative reflexivity. In this context, it has been identified that there are certain fractures that disrupt the subplot of the Bollywood wedding in Made in Heaven, such as hidden sexuality, patriarchy, caste, religious intolerance, and so on (Made in Heaven, 2019). These fractures help to expose the contradiction within a perfect wedding in Indian society. On the other hand, protagonists named Tara and Karan act as the mediators between critique and spectacle. Tara, as well as Karan, both deal with hypocrisy in their early life but confronts those challenges by curating a perfect wedding in the society (Made in Heaven, 2019). It is because Tara is trapped in an unsuccessful marriage, whereas Karan is afraid of a homophobic society, as he hides his queer identity. Different shots, video recordings as well as reflective surfaces position the audience as both critic and participant of the web series to make them understand that they are watching a constructed reality.

Presentation of Meta-storytelling

Each episode of the Made in Heaven web series contains a different story that can comment on the socio-political reality of India. The curated wedding in the web series by Tara and Karan has become the stage for narrating other stories, considering the Indian society. Flashbacks are also used in this web series (Made in Heaven, 2019). In season 1, in some episodes, the use of a dead narrator helps to add a meta layer in the story by letting a dead speak back to the living, which mainly destabilises the linear narration. In season 2, reflexive camera work is used for showing confrontation with the systemic power. Deliberate meta-commentary is used in this web series by using melodrama, music, as well as grandeur for subverting it.

Utilization of Social Commentary

This web series focuses on patriarchy as well as gender, considering different vital fractures such as dowry negotiation and so on (Made in Heaven, 2019). In this series, there are certain reflexive moments that highlight how the mentioned practices are normalised in the society. On the other hand, the narrative of Karan is meta-critical. Police brutality as well as internalized stigma, are represented in Made in Heaven, considering the narrative of section 377 (Made in Heaven, 2019). In addition to this, in season 2, upper caste privilege and Dalit identity are portrayed by using different reflexive dialogues.

In season 1, hypocrisy in urban weddings is shown, whereas commentary on queer visibility, caste, and communalism is shown in season 2 of Made in Heaven. Visual metaphors as well as narration are key aspects in both seasons of the mentioned web series on Amazon Prime.

Component	Details
Unit	Scene and dialogues
Codes	Themes: Section 377, Gender, Dowry and Caste
Intercoder reliability	100 scenes are coded and 85 scenes are considered as coders agreed on 85 scenes. $P_o = 85/100 = 0.85$ $P_e = 0.50$ (as per category proportion) $\kappa = (0.85 - 0.50) / (1 - 0.50) = 0.70 \rightarrow$ substantial reliability
Excerpt	S1E2: "We expect a car" (Dowry/Gender) S1E9: Police: "Disgusting people" (Section 377)

Table 1: Coding protocol

9. Discussion and Conclusion

From the above findings, it can be stated that both seasons of Made in Heaven highlight different aspects of contemporary Indian society. Along with that, several visual intertextual aspects, such as cultural artefacts, are also used in this web series, considering narrative reflexivity in meta-storytelling. On the other hand, in the case of episode 4 of season 2, a mid shot is used for framing the dowry demand of the groom's family where Tara said "*This is extortion, not tradition.*" These factors help to meet the first research objective. In addition to this, the layered narration of this web series helps to understand the relationship between meta-narratives and narrative reflexivity by critiquing the aspirational created image of urban Indian society, considering the second research objective.

In episode 9 of season 1, Karan got arrested under section 377. This is shot with close-up to critique the violence in state by showing the visibility of queer identity. Different elements of meta-narratives are shown in the web series to meet the third objective. Flashbacks, visual symbols such as mirrors and a camera, as well as voice-over of the protagonist, are the core elements of meta-storytelling that have been shown in the web series. It can be concluded that the aforementioned web series, named Made in Heaven, is an example of cultural text that engages the viewers by reflecting on societal norms which is quite deeply rooted. Meta-storytelling of Made in Heaven on the OTT platform, like Amazon Prime, acts as a mirror to society.

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