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## WHY NAAGIN CONTINUES TO RULE IDIOT BOX

When the third season of *Naagin* was launched by Colors this June, it became the number one show among Hindi general entertainment channels. It has stayed on top of the charts since. But Sameer Nair is also partly responsible for making *Naagin* famous.

The programming veteran and the current chief executive of Applause Entertainment, a content production studio, Nair has a celebrated quote where he talks of the huge content opportunity between *Naagin* and *Narcos* (an American crime drama on Netflix) for video streaming platforms. When Nair mentions *Naagin* at one end of the spectrum, he is not poking fun at this genre of programming.

"*Narcos* currently caters to the upper, upper crust of the 100 million and *Naagin* to the giant base of the 800 million. The opportunity for content lies in the increasingly affluent urban mass in between," he says. He adds that both are excellent pieces of entertainment content.

Incidentally, *Naagin* started under his watch in 2015 when he helmed Balaji Telefilms Ltd, the Ekta Kapoor-owned production house. Surprisingly, even though its third season has come after a year-long gap, the story about *ichhadhari naagins* (female snakes who take human form at will) set in modern times, is an instant hit. It is clearly a show made for TV which is a linear, appointment-driven, rating-dependent, one-size-fits-many, mass entertainment vehicle, according to Nair.

Colors chief executive officer Raj Nayak claims that for a channel that believes in disruptive programming, *Naagin* is yet another experiment to explore the unexplored space of fantasy. It was launched to break the clutter of almost similar kind of fiction shows across channels on weekdays and non-fiction shows on weekends. "Hence when *Naagin* was first launched in November 2015, it redefined the weekend family viewing habits," he says.

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The first season of *Naagin* was indeed a mega success. The show stayed on top of the charts for its entire season. In fact, the seasons format works for *Naagin*. "If we run the show for years without a break, it will lose its novelty, shine and even viewership. Thus it's imperative for such a concept

to have a season break to keep that novelty alive," he adds.

*Naagin* season 3 launched with an average viewership of 10.8 million in Hindi speaking markets in urban India, the highest opening for any fiction across Hindi GECs in the BARC regime. BARC or Broadcast Audience Research Council, the TV viewership measurement agency, launched its services in April 2015. The first season of *Naagin* was sampled by 290 million viewers across India. The third season numbers, though currently lower, are expected to surpass its first season.

Surprisingly, *Naagin* has a 65% skew towards urban markets. That could also be because Colors positions itself as an urban, premium Hindi entertainment channel. But Nayak is quick to add that *Naagin* is a big success in rural India, too, and is now being dubbed in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Bangla.

Why *Naagin* continues to top the ratings chart is not hard to see. Though the concept was earlier seen in films, it was a first for TV with its larger-than-life visuals. "It is a concept which has mass appeal, with full masala ingredients such as romance, revenge, family drama, suspense and twists beyond imagination. It's a visual treat that viewers want to experience again and again," says Nayak. Brand expert Ambi M.G. Parameswaran says that while doing his doctorate (on religiosity and consumer behaviour) and while writing his book (*For God's Sake*), one thing that kept coming back was the fact that Indian consumers continue to be very religious even as they embrace modern technology. "So, *Naagin* with its mythological, religious connotations has been a hit with all TV viewers. I suppose the story line has been modernized a lot from the original mythological roots where *Naagin* came from," he says.

Nair says he wouldn't hazard a sociological and psychological reason for the show's popularity, "but look around you in Hindu religion and mythology and you find snakes (*naags*) everywhere... Vishnu reclines on one, Shiva has one around his neck... snakes form an integral part of our collective ancient past, there are legends of naagas inextricably linked to every myth in Hindu pantheon. So, I guess a well-told modern-day interpretation of an ancient belief unconsciously resonates more than we can imagine."

But would he make something similar for a streaming platform? "Most definitely, yes. Maybe not so many episodes, but a darker, multi-layered, multi-season drama series with a terrific ensemble cast and a contemporary take on the subject," he says.

Shuchi Bansal is Mint's media, marketing and advertising editor. Ordinary Post will look at pressing issues related to all three. Or just fun stuff.