

‘Sacred Games:’ India’s gritty Netflix series debut



CHENNAI: Netflix’s first Indian original series made its debut on Friday, the first of a slate of new shows aimed at the vast Bollywood entertainment market. “Sacred Games,” based on the 2006 novel by Vikram Chandra, is a thriller set in Mumbai with a cast of police officers, politicians and spies, and stars some of Bollywood’s biggest personalities, including Saif Ali Khan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Radhika Apte.

The movie is a full of gangsters, prostitutes, corrupt policemen, inter-religious animosity and terror all bathed in blood and gore. Helmed by Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane, the series unfolds in 2004 and avoids the minutiae of the literary work while retaining its spirit. Crafted with a touch of brilliance, superbly suspenseful and terrifically thrilling, the eight-hour-long film is divided into six episodes in season one.

What “Sacred Games” loses out on in terms of storyline novelty is made up for by riveting performances. As Inspector Sartaj Singh, Khan portrays a man in a dilemma and conveys pained restlessness after he gets a call from one of the city’s most dreaded dons, Ganesh Gaitonde (Siddiqui). Gaitonde tells Singh that he knew his father, an honest cop, and then shoots himself, but not before warning him that Mumbai will be destroyed in 25 days.

The clock begins its ominous ticking, its pendulum swinging between Singh’s own troubled present and the mysterious message from the crime boss, whose murderous tendencies and rise as a crime lord play out against India’s tumultuous political and social events.

A strong critique of the nation’s growing fundamentalism, the narrative is pushed forward by a diverse group of motley characters — Anjali Mathur, an upright officer in India’s Research and Analysis Wing, is portrayed by actor Radhika Apte with all the seriousness the role deserves, while the crime boss’s adoring wife, Subhadra (Rajshri Deshpande), knocks a bit of sense into her brutish husband and a senior policeman, Parulkar (Neeraj Kabi), fights the tsunami of temptations.

While the many characters give the story depth, it does make the narrative difficult to follow as the back and forth, racy style could leave viewers rushed off their feet.
