**Critique 4 - Asura :Vengeance - Empathy**

**-Kunal Patil**

**About Asura :**

 Asura is an indie, 3rd person orthogonal, top-down view, Hack 'n' Slash game set in a fantasy world inspired by the richness of Indian mythology. It displays heavy rogue-like elements and a unique procedural skill tree that changes on every play. According to Indian mythology, Asuras are the constantly power-seeking demigods with good or bad spirits. The Asuras keep fighting with the Devas, the kind-hearted good Gods to gain more power.

 However, in the context of the game the story goes like : There once was a kingdom, ruled by a peaceful King. One day, a yogi(spiritual master) visited the kingdom and warned the King that his kingdom will face a turmoil unless a sacrifice was made to the god. The king got terrified and ordered his soldiers to search for a sacrifice. While searching, the soldiers cease upon a teenage boy with no history. They take him to the King and start burning him alive. As the fire crawls up through the boy's body, there is a flash of light that partially impairs the sight of all the people in the kingdom. The boy's body turns into ashes and the King is relieved upon dodging a dystopia. But, the boy is saved by the Raskshasas(demon Gods) and they sacrifice themselves to turn him into an Asura(a powerful evil God) to take his vengeance and bring justice to his soul. Personally, I have a knack for the god-like powers and the intense storylines concealed in the Indian mythologies. This brings us to our first point in the critique: the Passion.

 As explained by Docspy, " Passion is more than just enthusiasm or excitement, it is ambition that is materialized into action to put as much heart, mind, body and soul into something as is possible." Passion cannot be considered as a mere liking of a particular entity, but it is a pool of intense emotions towards a certain entity that connects yourself with it in an inexplicable way. Passion has many explanations and definitions. In this context, it means the absolute enticement towards a particular thing which excites oneself and brings up his thirst for knowledge and experience in that particular area. This definition of passion, in some cases, leads to our main point : the empathy.

**Empathy:**

 Empathy can be defined as putting oneself into the place of another person and trying to experience the same emotions as him. Most of the games today try to bring the 'empathy' aspect more into their game-play. They either make you go through the situations you can connect with/ familiarize with or put you through emotions that you might have felt or sympathize with the situations the particular player is going through. They try their best to make you empathize with your character in every sort of way possible, so while playing you always keep maintaining the magic circle around yourself. They entice you with the story-lines and the game-play and intrigue you in thinking about how the storyline/game would become more interesting as you proceed. The passion towards a certain aspect in the game (it can be the power, the character or the environment) gives rise to and proliferates the empathy. The empathy further fascinates you into maintaining your interest and keep putting your mind, heart and soul into the game. But, how can the empathy be classified? How do the designers use it in the games?

 There are various types of empathy listed below:

1) Emotional or Affective empathy:

 The affective empathy can be explained as the emotions you go through when you witness the experience of a certain entity(person, character, etc.) going through a particular situation. Games build up these emotions by serving you with some familiar story-lines/ environments, heart-warming or heart-melting scenarios. They would build up a back-story for your character and walk you through it, familiarizing you with him. They would also bring a character which you are already familiar with and make you explore the boundaries of the character as well as the environment. There are further 2 types of emotional empathy:

- Sympathy :

 Sympathy is defined as the gathering of emotions when you see another person suffering or experiencing something painful/ heart-breaking. You try to understand the situation the other person is going through and feel bad that this is happening to that person. Games use this type of empathy to make the player feel the intense emotions and curiosity of the character. The game : 'Ori and the will of the wisps' conveys the same genre where you are introduced to a back-story of an alone alien creature named Ori, who is away from his planet and he find a companion on the current planet. You(as Ori) have a good time with your companion but, due to some circumstances he dies. The designers walk you through the whole story and then the real game-play begins. By making you empathize with Ori, the designers make you play through the story and let you connect with your character.

- Situational:

 The emotions which pour out due to the self revolving feelings of discomfort or anxiety which replicate(to some extent) to the experiences/situations of the character can be tagged down into situational empathy. Games deepen these emotions by mixing up the sympathy and the situational empathy to create a game-play which maintains the interest and the curiosity of the player to a great extent. One among such games is 'Anew : the distant light', where an alien child is stuck all alone on a planet and is in search of his parents. Another part within this type is the decisional empathy, where the emotions you face are a result of the type of decisions the character is made to go through.

- Environmental or Story/ Character-based empathy:

 The enormous amount of emotions you go through when you familiarize yourself with the world around you, the character you are playing, the terms used for all the spectrum of entities used in the game, basically the overall structure of the game can be classified into this category. 'Asura : Vengeance' intrigues me to my core as I find all the things mentioned above at one place. Alike most of the Indian kids, I have been hearing about stories from Indian mythology from everyone around me. The intensity of the stories was so intriguing that I had always pictured the forms of its execution. Playing as a character in the environment I am familiar and most comfortable with, proliferates my empathy level and makes me feel proud, excited, curious and interested throughout the game-play.

2) Perspective-based or Cognitive empathy:

 The familiarity you feel when you develop a tendency to imagine and understand the psychological perspectives of a certain character and his surroundings fall under this category. All the first person shooter games use this empathy to make the player stay interested in the character.

 Each and every game introduces empathy to different levels and extents. The game only blossoms if the players can connect with the characters, environment and the game-play in a way which motivate the curiosity in them to always reach out for something more. Asura, helps me build up all the set of emotions I feel comfortable with all under the same roof. Similarly, each player has his own genres and interests which tickle his passion and likings in a certain way. The game should concentrate entirely upon the intended target audiences' empathy and passion points and should consider/ look out for all the set of emotions he needs to go through, and is comfortable with, and walk him through them step by step. I would like to end by quoting Georgios K. Yannakakis and Ana Paiva from 'Emotion in Games' as 'Games are designed to offer affective experiences which are influenced by player feedback and players are willing to go through e.g. frustrating, anxious, and fearful episodes of play to experience involvement and powerful emotional gaming.'