
Retelling Of Indian Mythology through Video Game: A Study of Raji: An Ancient Epic

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Abstract:

This research article explores the depiction of Indian mythology in the Video Game *Raji: An Ancient Epic* with the objective of how the game reinterprets traditional mythological narratives through digital media. The study incorporates *A.K. Ramanujan's* notion of *tellings vs version/variants, story vs discourse, and relational structure* and *Roland Barthes' notion of myth as a second-order semiological system* for the argument that the video game maintains cultural continuity through reinterpretation of well-known mythological episodes. The study also illustrates the game reconfiguration of mythological elements into contemporary semiotic structure allowing traditional symbols into second order signifiers, enriched with new cultural significance within modern aesthetic frame.

Keywords: Indian mythology, Raji: An Ancient Epic, Video Game, Roland Barthes, A.K. Ramanujan

Introduction

Video games in contemporary technological era have become a kind of cultural artefacts that re-narrate civilizational- memories. These have now evolved from a mere entertainment source to a wonderful interactive medium and powerful cultural texts which can preserve, reinterpret and disseminate the Indian mythological narratives. *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, developed by *Nodding Heads Games*, in 2020 is remarkable for one of the most considerable Indian interventions to this evolving form. With the addition of visual brilliance, evocative music, and mythological narratives, the game invokes classical mythologies and historical traditions to represent gods, demons, and cosmic and celestial conflicts. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the video game *Raji: An Ancient Epic* re-creates Indian mythology by using *Roland Barthes's* theory of *myth as a second-order*

semiological system, which has been discussed by him in his important work *Mythologies* (1957) and the concept of *tellings vs version/variants, story vs discourse, and relational structure* based on the concept of *A.K. Ramanujan's* argument which has been described by him in his essay, *Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation*, for a conference on *Comparison of Civilisations* (1987), at the University of Pittsburgh.

There are many studies available that emphasized gender or heroism in *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, this study hems in itself to the representation and telling of Indian mythology which have been illustrated and are the part of game's plot and narrative. As for example; the divine figures of *Durga, the demon Mahishasura, Vishnu and his divine avatars, Bhūmi Devī, Garuda, and Nāga*. This study is able to identify how video game's incorporation of Indian Mythology guarantees the continuation of mythic awareness in the digital setting.

Theoretical Framework

1.Barthes's Semiotics of Myth

Mythologies (1957), a collection of essays by written by *Roland Barthes*, in the part of his essay *Myth Today* he tried to show that how cultural objects carry ideological meanings. According to him myth is not just a traditional story, rather, it is a way of meaning and a curriculum of communication that transforms cultural signs into something that carries broader social messages. His work is important for the acknowledgement of the meaning conveyed by the contemporary mediums and digital media platforms. Following the *Ferdinand de Saussurean* principle of the basic *semiological first order system*, such as *sign, signified and signifier* he defines myth as a *second-order semiological system* in which the complete sign of the first order turns into a new signifier in the second order system that in turn incorporates new layers of meaning to it. In this way the second order system according to *Barthes* can be considered as the second system metalanguage (language that communicates about the first language) that reuses existing signs to generate new cultural meanings.

In the video game *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, first-order signification in mythological elements are: Goddess *Durga's trishula, Vishnu's chakra, Goddess Durga and her battle with Mahisasura, Vishnu and his Dashavatara, story of Garuda and Naga, and Bhumi Devi*. At this point all these carry the traditional religious and cultural meanings. When we implement the second order signification to these mythological elements in the video game, it transforms in various ways such as; *Goddess Durga and her battle with Mahisasura* which is represented by the battle between *Raji* with *Mahabalasura* in the plot of the game becomes the symbol of resilience, empowerment, and moral clarity for the audience of the video game. The *Dashavatara of Vishnu* becomes the framework for the cyclical victory of good over evil. The story of *Garuda and Nagas* carries the meaning of moral themes, *Bhumi Devi* becomes the symbol of ecological responsibility, and the divine weapons are symbolical for inner strength and spiritual consciousness.

Thus, the video game *Raji: An Ancient Epic* transforms traditional mythology into an interactive and contemporary semiotic network that retains both the properties of preservation and reinterpretation of traditional meaning.

2. A.K. Ramanujan's notion of tellings vs version/variants, story vs discourse, and relational structure

The core concept behind cultural continuity lies in the endurance of myths through adaptation and translation from form to another. Mythologies are still relevant not because they are static, instead each age retells them in some Or the other new forms. He shows in his essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas* that Indian myths are not singular and fixed texts instead it have varieties of regional, cultural, and performative retelling and telling, each of which maintains the essential narrative structure while modifying details to suit local sensibilities (Ramanujan 131-160). Cultural continuity, which is the process by which myth is adapted into new media, geographical locations, and aesthetic demands, depends on the fluidity. Similarly, in *Raji: An Ancient Epic* there are various telling and retelling of mythological stories in the form of playable structure (that have been discussed in the second order semiological system).

The cultural continuity can be understood through *Raji: An Ancient Epic* in a more comprehensive way by applying *A.K. Ramanujan's* notion of *tellings vs version/variants, story vs discourse, and relational structure*. He prefers to consider the word *telling* instead of *versions* or *variants*. Because according to him the word variants or versions emphasizes a single and fixed original form which other deviate by contrast when he talks about *telling*, he mentioned that, it has its own authority and can be shaped by its own language, community and medium (Ramanujan 130-160). *Raji: An Ancient Epic* is a telling and retelling of *Devi Mahatmaya* depicted in the form of her battle with demon *Mahisasura*, who defeated all the devas of heaven. In the game narrative it has taken as plot of the battle between *Raji and Mahabalasura*. The initial theme where demon kidnapped *Golu* and *Raji's* quest for rescue her brother is the telling of *Rama* and *Laxmana* quest for *Sita* in *Ramayana*. Here the quest is not for wife but theme of cosmic balance and triumph of good over evil is same. The divine journey of *Raji* is similar to that of *Rama* who took birth as normal human being for such motive. So, this video game is an example of digital telling of mythology instead of an adaptation.

In his work *Ramanujan* distinguishes between story and discourse. According to him the underlying story might be same but the discourse (style, structure, texture, rhetoric etc.) can be radically different (Ramanujan 135-160). This is how we can say that it is an ideal way for reading/playing a video game which represents mythological stories (here the discourse means the visuals, game mechanics, game levels, design, interface, and sound). In the video game entire game is based on the conversation between *Goddess Durga and Vishu*, the portrayal *Devi Mahatmaya and Vishu Dashawatara* have been done by 3D painting on

the walls. Most specific example of telling mythological stories in an action-adventure video game is its battle which has been represented by the acrobatic mechanics.

Ramanujan observed that there are various *Ramayanas* but they are still be called as *Ramayana* and the reason behind this is that they share *a shadow of a relational structure* (*Ramanujan* 135-160). *Raji* goes with this idea by echoing the relational template than to copying any fixed episodes. As for example demon lord vs human and God (*Mahabalasura* vs humanity and the devas), a youthful human hero chosen by Gods (*Raji*) which reflects *Rama* as *Vishnu's* chosen incarnation, in case of *Raji*, who is a female hero, is inspired by *Devi Durga*, and the weapons used by *Raji* in the video game is the example of the divine and human alliance.

Depiction of Indian Mythology in Raji: An Ancient Epic

There various mythological stories that have been used in the video game. The eternal battle of *Goddess Durga and Mahishasura*. The goddess *Durga* in the video game is the divine narrator and protector of *Raji* as well. Her story, has been derived from the *Devi Mahatmya*. This mythology narrates the story of the creation of the goddess and her victory over the demon *Mahishasura*. *Mahishasura*, reimagined as *Mahabalasura*, embodies the chaos in the video game.

Vishnu and the *Dashavatāra*

The most intricate mythological representation in *Raji* is *Vishnu's* ten incarnations (*dashavatāra*), where *God Vishnu* himself narrated each signifying story and the restoration of cosmic order on the Earth. The avatars are depicted through murals on the wall which has its own ludic significance.

Bhūmi Devī: The Earth as mother and symbol. *Bhūmi Devī* personifies the Earth, in the contemporary world whose suffering under demonic invasion (exploitation of environment and natural resources) motivates divine intervention. Temples related to her representation in the game is the symbol for both ecological and moral dimensions. Her presence in the game reminds players or the audience that they are the interactively participating in the game thus gives them experience of human's responsibility toward its creation.

Garuḍa and Nagas, mythology of an allegory of devotion for the contemporary audience. *Garuḍa's* story of rescuing his mother from bondage appears through a series of narrative murals.

Conclusion

The video game *Raji: An Ancient Epic* demonstrates that Indian mythology remains a living content for various medium. Through *Roland Barthes's* semiotic framework and his notion of *myth as a second-order semiological system* that has been discussed in his work *Mythologies* (1957), the game can be understood as a modern mythic text where divine symbols become communicative signs which translates the mythological elements into ludological and narratological environment. The idea of cultural continuity described in this work, reveals how traditional mythological narratives still sustain by renewing their medium

from oral chant to written scripture to digital interaction. This is one of the process or a way through which we can preserve the cultural mythological narratives for our younger generation.

Representation *Durga's triumph, Vishnu's avatars, Bhūmi Devī's compassion, and Garuḍa's devotion, Raji* transforms the cosmic imagination of India mythology into a participatory narrative. It bridges the gap of the centuries of cultural memory by affirming that mythology, far from being a relic, continues to shape the moral and aesthetic imagination of the present. Eventually the study concludes that the video game illustrates the game reconfiguration of mythological elements into contemporary semiotic structure by allowing traditional symbols into second order signifiers, enriched with new cultural significance within modern aesthetic frame.

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