



The Visual Representation of Indian Mythology in Contemporary Video Games

Naveen Kumar, Vinit Bihari

Department of Fine Art, Chitkara Design School, Chitkara University, Rajpura, Punjab, India

Parthasarathy Pk

Chitkara Centre for Game Design & Immersive Technologies, Chitkara University, Rajpura, Punjab

Corresponding author. Email: naveenbhumra@gmail.com

Abstract

*Indian mythology, with its vast pantheon of deities, epics, and regional folk traditions, has become a wellspring of visual and narrative inspiration for video game developers, both in India and internationally. This case study examines the visual representation of Indian mythology across ten contemporary games, ranging from indie titles such as *Raji: An Ancient Epic* and *Mystic Pillars* to internationally distributed games like *Smite* and upcoming AAA productions such as *The Age of Bhaarat*, *Son of Thanjai*, and *Unleash the Avatar*. Using a descriptive approach drawing on academic literature, interviews, industry journalism, and platform data from Steam, Google Play, and the App Store, the study examines art direction, including character and environment design, colour palette, symbolism, and the negotiation of cultural authenticity within commercial constraints, evaluating each game for genre, art style, popularity, sales or downloads, launch date, platform, and dimensional format (2D or 3D). Findings suggest Indian mythological games occupy a spectrum between decorative iconography and deep, research-driven visual translation of scripture, architecture, and folk traditions such as *Pahari painting*, *Mancala motifs*, and *Dravidian temple aesthetics*, with developers increasingly prioritising authenticity while adapting mythology to global entertainment expectations. The paper concludes that although the sector remains commercially nascent compared to mythology-driven titles from Japan, Greece, or Scandinavia, a clear shift toward higher production values and cultural specificity is visible in projects announced between 2025 and 2026, highlighting video games' potential as digital artifacts that preserve and share Indian mythology with global audiences.*

Keywords: Indian mythology, visual aesthetics, video games, digital heritage, game art, cultural representation, Hindu mythology

1. Introduction



Mythology has long served as a narrative and aesthetic reservoir for the global video game industry. Titles such as God of War (Norse and Greek mythology), Black Myth: Wukong (Chinese mythology), and Hades (Greek mythology) demonstrate how ancient belief systems can be reimaged through contemporary interactive media, generating both critical acclaim and commercial success (Ravi, 2024). Indian mythology, comprising the Vedic, Puranic, and epic traditions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, alongside regional oral and folk traditions, presents an equally rich but comparatively underexplored resource. Scholars note that despite India's vast cultural repository, Indian mythological themes remain underrepresented in globally distributed AAA games relative to other mythological traditions (Udit Hinduja, 2026)

Over the past decade, however, a growing number of Indian and international studios have begun to translate this mythological corpus into interactive visual experiences. Independent developers such as Nodding Heads Games (Raji: An Ancient Epic) and Ogre Head Studio (Asura) pioneered efforts to render Hindu iconography, temple architecture, and traditional Indian painting styles in playable 2D and 3D environments. More recently, larger and better-funded ventures, including Tara Gaming's The Age of Bharat, Ayelet Studio's Son of Thanjai, and Aeos Games' Unleash the Avatar, have signalled an ambition to compete with the production values associated with internationally successful mythological titles (ThePrint, 2026). Visual representation serves as the primary medium through which mythology is communicated in these games. Costumes draw on classical sculpture and miniature painting, environments on temple architecture and sacred landscapes, palettes on symbolic colour, and iconography (lotus, mandala, trident, chakra) on cultural authenticity, together deepening immersion and cultural understanding. This study examines how ten selected games visually construct Indian mythology, drawing on developer interviews, gaming journalism, storefront metadata, and academic literature to compare aesthetic strategies across genres from action-adventure to card-battlers. As games increasingly function as cultural artefacts, understanding this visual representation matters for both scholarship and future development. It contributes to scholarship in game studies, visual communication, and digital heritage, while offering practical insights for creating culturally authentic, mythology-based games.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on mythology in video games has grown substantially, moving from general discussions of narrative adaptation toward targeted inquiries into cultural heritage, representation politics, and religious sensitivity. Scholars argue that games' interactivity enables players to experience narratives through participation rather than passive observation, making them particularly effective for representing historical and mythological themes (Bogost, 2007; Champion, 2015). This review situates the present study within four strands: (1) theoretical work on mythology and heritage in game design; (2) Indian game production as a culturally rooted industry; (3) postcolonial critiques of Indian representation in games; and (4) research on religious controversy and culturally sensitive design.



Petrinec and Stojic (2025) examine character design rooted in underrepresented mythologies, Croatian Slavic mythology in their case, as a means of preserving intangible cultural heritage, arguing digital art can revive neglected narratives while balancing authenticity with reinterpretation. This heritage-preservation theme recurs throughout the literature. Vandewalle (2023) proposes that games such as Age of Mythology, Smite, and Hades function as "interactive mythology museums," collecting and presenting myths structurally similar to ancient mythography, carrying genuine educational potential. Leng et al. (2025) formalise this into a "Culture-Expressive Design for Games" model, evaluating titles such as God of War, Ghost of Tsushima, and Black Myth: Wukong against criteria of cultural encoding, mechanics-narrative integration, and technical feasibility, concluding that well-designed cultural games can balance authenticity, engagement, and constraints. A substantial body of postcolonial scholarship interrogates heritage-driven design, often using Raji: An Ancient Epic as a case study. Chaudhury and Chaudhuri (2023) evaluate Raji's accuracy against Indian mythic tradition, noting missed opportunities for nuanced representation. Murray (2023) applies Kobena Mercer's "burden of representation," arguing non-Western games face disproportionate pressure to stand in for an entire culture. Mukherjee (2016) situates such analyses within the marginal position of postcolonial theory in game studies. Roy and Deshbandhu (2021) and Chakraborti (2015) extend this, showing how Indian digital spaces and India-themed Western games reproduce orientalist framings. de Wildt et al. (2019) add that "avatar" traces to Hindu tradition, its appropriation by Western tech culture exemplifying unacknowledged absorption of Eastern elements.

A final strand addresses risks of depicting deities in commercial products. Bosman (2019) catalogues critical and denying depictions of religion in games. Maram et al. (2024) propose "AstraVerse," a culturally sensitive design process validated against Hindu mythology, finding higher appraisal from Hindu respondents than controversial portrayals from shipped games, implicitly referencing the 2012 Smite/Kali backlash; their related Reddit-discourse analysis identifies themes around "blasphemous" elements and religion as design space. Albar (2022) shows, via the Indonesian title Escape from Naraka, that even culturally proximate developers can misrepresent sacred material.

This study synthesises these strands, which rarely converge in a single account. Zeiler (2021) and Raji-focused scholarship (Chaudhury & Chaudhuri, 2023; Murray, 2023) offer deep single-title analysis, while Vandewalle (2023) and the Black Myth: Wukong literature offer comparative frameworks. Yet limited comparative visual-art analysis spans the full range of Indian mythological games. This study addresses that gap by applying a consistent, art-direction-focused lens across ten titles spanning genres, platforms, and eras.

3. Research Objectives

1. To analyse the visual art strategies of ten Indian-mythology-inspired video games, tracing each to its mythological and regional artistic roots.
2. To assess these games' cultural authenticity, reception, and market performance to trace the evolution of Indian mythology's visual representation from early low-budget titles to contemporary AAA productions.

4. Game Selection Criteria for Case Studies

Figure 1 presents the selection criteria used for choosing the ten video games analysed in this study.

Selection Criteria for Case Study Games		
S No.	Game	Selection Criterion
1	 AN ANCIENT EPIC	 Indian mythology-based, internationally acclaimed, and visually rich.
2		 Upcoming AAA mythology title with a modern interpretation of Indian epics
3		 Indie mythology-inspired game like Hindu & Buddhist philosophy
4		 One of the first Indian console mythology games
5		 Mobile mythology adaptation
6	 BATTLEGROUND OF THE GODS	 International game featuring Hindu deities
7		 Focuses on South Indian culture & heritage inspired game
8		 Explores Indian spiritual concepts
9		 Upcoming mythology-inspired game and original IP based on Avatar concept
10		 Culturally inspired indie puzzle game celebrating Indian heritage.

Figure 1: Selection Criteria for Case Study Games | Source: Author

5. Comparative Overview of Selected Games

Table 1 summarises the ten games examined in this study according to genre, art style, popularity, commercial performance, launch date, platform availability, and dimensional format.

Table 1. Comparative summary of ten Indian mythology-themed video games.

S No.	Game	Genre	Art Style & Artistic Influence	Popularity	Platform	Dimension
1	Raji: An Ancient Epic (2020)	Action-adventure	Hand-painted Pahari miniature style with 3D rendering, Rajasthani architecture	Game Awards 2020 Best Debut nominee, Won a total of 36 game awards	PC, Switch, PS4/PS5, Xbox One	3D (2D shadow-puppet cutscenes)
2	The Age of Bhaarat (expected 2026)	Action RPG / dark fantasy, adventure	Cinematic AAA realism with Indian temple and forest motifs	High anticipation, viral reveal trailer	Steam, consoles TBA	3D
3	Asura (Vengeance Edition) (2017)	Action roguelike	Stylised top-down dark fantasy inspired by Indian mythology	85% of 554 Steam Positive reviews, NASSCOM GDC 2017 Game of the Year	PC (Windows, Mac, Linux)	2D/2.5D top-down
4	Hanuman: Boy Warrior (2009)	Action-adventure	Calendar-art devotional realism, God of War-inspired	Notable as first India-made PS2 title	PlayStation 2	3D
5	Ramayana (RTS) (2010)	Real-time strategy	Low-poly stylised historical RTS, Classical epic illustrations	Mixed reviews – 64% of 17 Steam reviews positive	PC (Steam)	3D
6	Smite (2014)	Third-person MOBA	Realistic stylised fantasy, pantheon-specific	40+ million lifetime players, Active esports circuit	PC, Xbox One, PS4, Switch, Amazon Luna	3D
7	Son of Thanjai (Expected 2026-2027)	Open-world action-adventure	Photorealistic historical recreation of Chola-era South India	High anticipation; viral Xbox/Steam trailers	PC, Xbox Series X/S, PS5	3D
8	Moksha (card battler) (Expected 2026)	Strategy card battler	2D illustrated collectible-card art, Symbolic sacred environments	10,000+ Google Play downloads	Mobile (Android, iOS)	2D
9	Unleash the Avatar (2026)	Action RPG / soulslike	Photogrammetry-based dark-fantasy realism with Indian motifs	Viral trailer – 50M+ combined views	PC (Steam); consoles	3D
10	Mystic Pillars (2019)	Puzzle (Mancala-based)	Hand-drawn 2D folk-art, temple architecture and traditional landscapes illustration	Positive critical reception, GDC Indie Megabooth & BitSummit Gaiden selections	PC, Switch, PS5, Mobile/Tablet	2D



6. Case Studies

The following ten case studies provide a comparative analysis of video games that incorporate Indian mythology. Each case study explores the visual design, artistic style, and cultural representation that developers employ to interpret mythological themes in interactive digital media.

Case Study 1: Raji: An Ancient Epic

Released in 2020 by Nodding Heads Games, *Raji: An Ancient Epic* set out to build a game rooted in Indian culture. Drawing on the Mahabharata and Ramayana, it frames protagonist Raji as an avatar of Durga, wielding divine weapons from Vishnu and Shiva against the demon lord Mahabalasura, with environments referencing medieval Rajasthani architecture, notably Jaisalmer's Patwon ki Haveli. Visually, it translates Pahari miniature painting into three dimensions, blending hand-painted textures with modelled environments, while cutscenes use 2D shadow-puppetry to link the narrative to Indian folk art. Mandala patterns, geometric symmetry, and narrative wall carvings turn architecture into a storytelling device, with the palette shifting from desert ochres in Thar Desert sequences to jewel-toned temple interiors, symbolising the contrast between mortal struggle and divine sanctuary (80Level, 2018). Gameplay combines acrobatic parkour with movement drawn from Indian dance and martial arts, and the game earned a Best Debut Indie Title nomination at The Game Awards 2020, a first for an Indian title. Reception was mixed, scoring 46% on OpenCritic; critic Adesh Thapliyal praised its feminist recasting of myth while noting its implicit erasure of Muslim influence on Indian visual culture. Overall, *Raji* exemplifies a research-driven approach to visual translation, citing specific art traditions and monuments rather than generic imagery, setting a benchmark for later Indian studios (Ravi, 2024).

Case Study 2: The Age of Bhaarat

Announced in 2025 by Tara Gaming Ltd., co-founded by Amitabh Bachchan and others, *The Age of Bhaarat* aims to establish an Indian AAA presence. Drawing on Itihasa and Ramayana-adjacent motifs, players defend the realm of Anandpur against Rakshasa demons, with combat grounded in motion-captured Kalaripayattu. Concept art favours religious iconography, including an Om-inscribed temple and rudraksha-mala costuming, with gameplay promising vertical traversal and cinematic terrain. Its dark palette contrasts corrupted and sanctified spaces, and its reveal trailer drew wide coverage, positioning it alongside *Black Myth: Wukong* as a culturally rooted mythological blockbuster. Still unreleased, its 100-person team spanning Paris, Montreal, and Pune marks a departure from earlier indie-scale Indian titles, signalling a maturing AAA investment climate (ThePrint, 2025).

Case Study 3: Asura

Developed by Hyderabad-based Ogre Head Studio, founded by Zainuddeen Fahadh in 2014, *Asura* was released in April 2017 as one of the first Indian PC games to achieve global Steam distribution. It draws broadly on Indian cosmology, casting the player as a reincarnated demon battling through five fortresses, replacing a conventional skill tree with a "Janam Kundli" mechanic rooted in Vedic astrology to separate cultural inspiration from religious doctrine. Its stylised, top-down dark-fantasy aesthetic favours enemy and boss designs drawn from Indian mythos, with angular silhouettes evoking temple sculpture over photorealistic anatomy, while each fortress carries distinct theming linking gameplay to mythological cosmology. Holding an 85% "Very Positive" Steam rating and winning Game of the Year



at the 2017 NASSCOM conference (Steam, 2026), Asura shows that mythological identity can be conveyed through abstracted, procedural systems rather than literal retelling.

Case Study 4: Hanuman: Boy Warrior

Released on 25 March 2009 by Hyderabad-based Aurna Technologies and published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, Hanuman: Boy Warrior was the first PlayStation 2 game developed entirely in India and the first console title playable in Hindi (Dubey, 2009). It dramatises Hanuman's childhood and youth in a "good over evil" narrative, though its release drew criticism from Hindu commentators, including Rajan Zed, for trivialising sacred narrative. Character design followed Indian devotional calendar art conventions, though reviewers noted its design closely resembled God of War. Gameplay combined platforming, vine-swinging, and mace combat powered by "Om" pickups, launching with around 10,000 units against a projected 45,000 annual sales. Reception was overwhelmingly negative, scoring one out of ten from IndianVideoGamer for unoriginal design, yet it remains a benchmark illustrating the early limitations Indian studios faced adapting devotional iconography for 3D consoles.

Case Study 5: Ramayana: The Game

Distributed on Steam, this real-time strategy game adapts the Valmiki Ramayana into a wargame format, with players commanding Rama and Lakshmana's monkey army against Ravana across the epic's canonical arc, presenting itself as a faithful strategic adaptation (Malik, 2014). As a budget RTS title, it favours low-polygon, top-down units prioritising troop-formation legibility over the ornate modelling seen in Raji, with muted-green forest sequences contrasting the fire-toned siege of Lanka to reflect the narrative's escalation from hardship to war. Holding a "Mixed" Steam rating (64% of 17 reviews positive), it reflects a niche, modest-scale production (Malik, 2014). It demonstrates the genre flexibility of Indian epic material: unlike the action-adventure framings of Raji and Asura, the Ramayana narrative adapts readily into a strategy structure, given its themes of army-building and siege warfare.

Case Study 6: Smite

Smite is a free-to-play third-person MOBA launched in 2014 by Hi-Rez Studios, featuring deities from world mythologies, including a Hindu pantheon comprising Ganesha, Agni, Kali, Rama, Ravana, Bakasura, Kumbhakarna, Vamana, and Shiva. Each deity's design references specific episodes; Kali's abilities draw on her origin in the Devi Mahatmya, destroying the demon Raktabija (Smite Wiki, 2026), with characters rendered in saturated jewel tones and iconographic attributes like multiple arms and animal mounts. In 2012, the depiction of Hindu deities sparked controversy when Rajan Zed criticized Kali's revealing attire, leading to a redesign by 2013; however, by the time Shiva was introduced in 2022, Hi-Rez had transitioned to engaging cultural advisors. With over 40 million lifetime players as of 2020 and an active esports circuit, Smite is the most commercially successful title in this study, its trajectory from controversy to consultative redesign offering an instructive case in negotiating religious sensitivity.

Case Study 7: Son of Thanjai

Announced by Chennai-based Ayelet Studio, Son of Thanjai is an open-world action-adventure set in an alternate-history Chola Empire of 1011 CE, written by Tamil screenwriter Madhan Karky, known



for Baahubali and Endhiran (Hollywood Reporter India, 2026). Rooted in Chola history, it draws on King Rajendra Chola I and Tamil architectural achievement, including the Brihadeeswarar Temple. The world uses the Tamil "Tinai" landscape system, dividing regions into plains, forests, ports, and arid lands, while combat centres on the Surul Vaal whip-sword, rendered with photorealistic fidelity depicting Chola-era life, including Therukoothu performance and jaggery-making. The developers foreground linguistic authenticity, with Tamil-language audio and English subtitles alongside Kalaripayattu-based combat, positioned against the historical erasure of South Indian culture in mainstream media. Strong anticipatory coverage ahead of its 2027 release reflects an emerging trend toward regional, rather than pan-Indian, mythological identity as a commercial asset.

Case Study 8: Moksha

Developed by Mumbai-based Spybird Interactive Studio, Moksha is a mobile card battler reimagining the Mahabharata as a fast-paced, two-minute competitive game, with over 10,000 downloads on Google Play (Google Play, 2026). Cards represent figures like Arjuna, Karna, Bhishma, Draupadi, Duryodhana, and Ghatotkacha, each ability drawn from a signature trait, such as Bhima's strength or Shakuni's loaded dice, rendered in a 2D illustrated style prioritising recognisability over detail. Its structure, allocating cards across six "sacred locations" in a bluffing format, mirrors the multi-front Kurukshetra narrative. As a niche title, Moksha shows mythological IP deployed across the full spectrum of complexity, from AAA to lightweight mobile formats.

Case Study 9: Unleash the Avatar

Developed by Bengaluru-based Aeos Games, Unleash the Avatar is a self-funded soulslike RPG built in Unreal Engine 5 with roughly 40 developers. Set in the alternate India of Vishwapur, where the boundary between Naraka and Earth has collapsed, the game follows Vikram, who wields a fragment of Vishnu's essence against Asuras and Rakshasas, loosely inspired by Ramayana-adjacent themes. Aeos Games scanned over 1,000 real-world Indian assets, including fifteenth-century architecture and textiles, to build a "dark fantasy India" aesthetic. Combat merges soulslike mechanics with abilities like "chakra" attacks and a Vishnu-referencing "feather prism" transformation, with enemies drawing on figures like Kinkara, servant of Yama. Its October 2025 alpha trailer drew an estimated 50 million views, with strong Bilibili reception prompting comparisons to Black Myth: Wukong.

Case Study 10: Mystic Pillars

Bangalore-based Holy Cow Productions released Mystic Pillars around 2019, a story-driven puzzle game later ported to Steam, Switch, and PlayStation, and remastered with 4K textures and expanded voice-over support. Set in the fictional kingdom of Zampi, it draws inspiration from Hampi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Karnataka, weaving Indian deities into a narrative of drought and restoration, with hand-drawn 2D artwork offering a folk-illustration aesthetic distinct from Raji's 3D realism (Khalid, 2020). It reimagines Ali Guli Mane, a South Indian Mancala variant, as a spatial-logic puzzle, and a 2026 update added a crossover chapter with the Kannada film Kantara. By translating a traditional board game into a digital puzzle, it provides a non-combat model for embedding Indian heritage into interactive design. Its support for more than twenty languages and a Kannada voice-over demonstrate linguistic inclusivity, contributing to its favourable reviews and selection for the Indie Megabooth GDC Showcase in 2020.



7. Findings

Across the ten case studies, several patterns emerge. First, titles diverge between those adapting specific textual sources directly (Raji, Hanuman: Boy Warrior, Ramayana: The Game, Unleash the Avatar) and those using mythology as a flexible design resource without committing to literal scripture (Asura, Smite, Moksha). Second, art style correlates with production budget and studio maturity: earlier, lower-budget titles like Hanuman: Boy Warrior relied on devotional calendar-art conventions and derivative 3D modelling, while better-funded productions like The Age of Bhaarat, Son of Thanjai, and Unleash the Avatar employ cinematic realism, motion capture of traditional martial arts, and photogrammetric scanning of real locations. Third, regional specificity has become an increasingly prominent strategy; where earlier titles favoured a generalised, pan-Indian visual vocabulary, recent projects like Son of Thanjai and Mystic Pillars foreground regional identity, Tamil-Chola heritage and Karnataka's Hampi and Kannada culture respectively, suggesting a shift from monolithic to pluralistic representation. Fourth, cultural authenticity functions as both a design value and a risk-management concern: Smite shows that depicting Hindu deities in a commercial, internationally distributed product can generate controversy, prompting more consultative design over time, whereas Indian-developed titles like Asura and Raji frame authenticity as creative differentiation and national pride rather than primarily a risk to manage (ThePrint, 2026). Finally, dimensional format correlates with genre rather than mythological fidelity, puzzle and card-based titles (Mystic Pillars, Moksha) favour illustrated 2D art, while action-adventure, RPG, and MOBA titles favour 3D realism, indicating that visual dimensionality is driven primarily by gameplay genre conventions rather than the source mythology itself.

8. Conclusion

This case study shows that the visual representation of Indian mythology in video games has moved substantially beyond the derivative, technically constrained efforts of the late 2000s, exemplified by Hanuman: Boy Warrior, toward the more confident, research-driven, and regionally specific visual language seen in titles like Raji: An Ancient Epic, Son of Thanjai, and Unleash the Avatar. While commercial success remains concentrated in a few titles, most notably Smite, with its established Hindu pantheon, the Indian development ecosystem has, over roughly fifteen years, built growing capacity to translate scripture, regional folk art, and traditional games into visually distinctive interactive experiences. The comparative analysis further suggests that cultural authenticity is not a fixed design goal, but one negotiated differently depending on studio origin, target audience, and commercial context.

9. Future Scope

Further research could examine how Indian and non-Indian players perceive cultural authenticity in mythological game design through player surveys, and compare Indian titles with Chinese, Japanese, and Norse-inspired games to identify transferable design lessons. The 2026-2027 releases of The Age of Bhaarat, Son of Thanjai, and Unleash the Avatar will test whether India's AAA ambitions yield lasting success. Greater diversification toward regional, rather than pan-Hindu, material, as seen in Son of Thanjai and Mystic Pillars, points to scope for exploring Dravidian, Northeastern, tribal, and Buddhist-Jain traditions still absent from current titles, while AI and photogrammetric tools may let smaller studios match larger productions' visual fidelity, broadening the range of mythological narratives in the medium.



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