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Beyond The Damsel And The Deity: Gender, Aesthetics, And The Representation Of Female Protagonists In Indian Video Games

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Abstract:

By using female characters as heroes in Indian video games, the status of women has been promoted, but the commonly-used patterns of representation always have their basis in one of these categories that have been handed down through history: the woman who must be rescued and is therefore part of a narrative damsel in distress or woman as the goddess of myth with her transcendental values and symbols one civilization sign. This study contends that getting beyond both these patterns requires theoretical work anchored not merely on inert strength but also itself be built on body (from the way she was framed to the result in cultural code), on dexterity (what a player can do through her), and on personality because of them, her desires and decisions become the skeleton around which subsequent development spins out. Through the staged, qualitative case study grounded in Raji: An Ancient Epic, MISSING - Game for a Cause, and Venba, supported with extra India-specific examples (Unrest - Devi: A Light in the Dark - Ajnabee: A Stranger Vocal Horror Stories—Gaja), this paper elaborates five major ways of representing Indian heroines: the mythic heroine the activist/survivor the female protagonist who lives with or is apart from family, both at home and abroad the ensemble lead in a civic political drama the contemporary psychological subject Findings show that reasons for moves away from damsel/deity typicity become convincing only when games design the issue at mechanical level (choice architectures, pacing philosophy s of failure), when they interfere with traditions of "gaze" through framing and graphic grammar, and if they approve women as playable outside rescue or worship Paper concludes with a gender-saved design frame for India's game-making scene, stressing representational variety, intersectionality specificity and the grounding aesthetic that is Should be for cultural form of creativity.

Keywords: Indian video games; female protagonists; feminist game studies; postcolonial game studies; gender representation; character aesthetics

Introduction:

For the image of female protagonist in video games, is never only to the question of "how many women appear on screen." Feminist game studies has shown that representation of women in video games is produced through a complex system that includes visual design and camera shots, the actual affordances and restrictions set by gaming hardware, the stories that surround certain kinds of heroic or morally - loaded character production (or "soft") industries along with playing cultures and markets - as well as their broader interpretation by players or communities (Shaw 2014; Gray 2014; Chess 2017; Consalvo 2012). In other words, just because there's one (or more) females appearing within a game does not mean that she will necessarily have her own agency; nor is 'Levelling Weakness' the basis for escape from objectification.

Among Chinese game art teachers, exactly this kind of nuance is necessary—but the conversation in English-language scholarship on video games confronting India has only recently started to acquire stable research vocabularies and case studies. India is widely said to be a mobile-central industry, fragmented market with its cultural heritage negotiating in various ways to address the foreign-injecting concepts of "local culture media"(Zeiler & Mukherjee, 2022). Such negotiation becomes particularly contentious over female protagonists, because the Indian public sphere is already full of fiercely disputed imaginings of womanhood. There is the woman as national symbol; the woman as vulnerable citizen; the woman as spiritual force; the woman as laboring body; the woman as 'modern' consumer; and the woman as heir of tradition.

This study proposes that in Indian video games, women protagonists typically fall into two contradictory but coexisting visual archetypes:

The Damsel template: it is a mate rescue economy where a woman's existence is defined as liability, protection, abduction, moral panic or provocation for men and institutions to act (a structure continuous with a long history of melodramatic and patriarchal narrative devices).

The Deity Template: it is a mate elevation economy where a woman's existence becomes legitimate when her body is mythically authorized, culturally sanctified or stands as an allegory for civilization and moral heritage (a structure continuous with nationalist and devotional visual regimes). These two templates may both appear "advantageous" for a certain period: the Damsel prompts sympathy; the Deity prompts empowerment – which are not quite complete ways to think about the problem. In fact, they both restrict the possible range of women's subjectivity that can be played. The Damsel risks having women become

nothing more than a prop in narrative affairs; the Deity risks making women into some sort of symbolic burden.

The point of this article is that the meaningful question is not simply whether Indian games have women protagonists, but what kind of women do become playable through what aesthetic grammars, and under what agency architectures, arranged.

Research Questions:

- What kinds of female protagonists beyond these two stereotypes do Indian games construct at the aesthetic, mechanical, and narrative levels??
- How do costume, posture, the way they look, big signifiers and mythological brink and folk realism: all these are about how woman can exist as a truly won protagonist in Indian games after it is demonstrated?
- Cultural conventions and production contexts (the mobile market, for example, indie pipelines and global audiences) all influence the space allowed for female protagonists.
- What are some guiding design principles and analytic strategies for creating gender-sensitive protagonists in Indian video game contexts?

2. Literature Review: Gender, Representation, and the Indian Game Context

2.1 Feminist Game Studies: Representation as System

A core insight of feminist game studies is that representation is not simply a function of narrative content but also interactive design: the distribution of choice, the structuring of punishment and reward, the pacing of vulnerability, and the affordances that regulate the relationship between playing subject and protagonist's body (Shaw 2014; Ruberg 2019; Chess 2017). Research on gender bias in game dialogue and representation continues to demonstrate persistent asymmetries of voice, narrative foregrounding, and patterns of interaction (Rennick et al., 2023).

Recent studies that use quantitative and mixed methods also report on uneven improvements in gender representation in games: despite more women characters being playable, the patterns of sexualization, limitation of agency and stereotyping remain (De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2024/2025; Lynch et al., 2024). The main implication here for this paper is methodological: "strong female protagonist" is not a sufficient analytical category unless we examine what we mean by "strength" in terms of mechanics, framing, and social meaning.

2.2 Postcolonial Game Studies: Whose Feminism, Whose “Indianness”?

Pioneers of postcolonial game studies have positioned global game cultures and representational conventions as partaking in the structures of uneven cultural power relations wherein mediated templates often render native peoples into legibility for Northern markets, particularly coded through understandings of visual abstraction (Mukherjee, 2017). Amidst this, “Indian female protagonist” is not just a character code - it is a fraught representational category.

In “single game-stories,” according to Rizvi and Mukherjee (2023), complex identities (including caste, religion, queerness, disability and regional difference) are compressed into a flattened signifier governed by a single representational logic. That caution matters here, because damsel/deity templates can quickly solidify into “single stories” of Indian womanhood: either the vulnerable trafficked girl or the mythically empowered warrior goddess-adjacent heroine. Both can blot out other lived realities.

2.3 India-Focused Game Studies: Industry, Culture, and Gender

A field negotiating heritage, regional cultural forms and global game-market pressures is identified by scholarship on Indian game development (Zeiler & Mukherjee, 2022). And in that, gender is a point of not simply representational content but mediatization and cultural legitimacy. Zeiler’s work makes the case for why Indian games with girls and women, such as MISSING or Raji, matter, but these too function as interventions suffused into cultural politics of reception (Zeiler 2023).



Figure 1: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/missing/missing-the-complete-saga>



Figure 2: <https://noddingheadsgames1.artstation.com/projects/28wVGy>

These examples help contextualize female protagonists as both cultural signs and industrial strategies: the designation of “women protagonists” can operate as ethical messaging (serious games), cultural branding (mythic action-adventures) or intimate storytelling (indie narrative games).

3. Theoretical Framework: Beyond Archetype—Aesthetic, Mechanical, and Narrative Agency

This study treats “damsel” and “deity” not merely as character tropes but as systems that regulate agency.

3.1 The Damsel as a Rescue Economy

The damsel template is best read as a rescue economy: the woman’s value is generated through vulnerability, and through social mobilization her vulnerability inspires. Even once a damsel becomes playable, the game can preserve the rescue economy by putting her agency at risk of being fragile, conditional and always under threat.

In some Indian contexts, the rescue economy often meets public anxieties around women’s safety, trafficking and moral panic; when this happens, damsel logics can seem “realist” or “ethical,” all the while reproducing a pattern in which women’s stories become legible only through victimhood. This is exactly the representational risk that feminist scholars call “the politics of suffering”: marginalized subjects facing a cultural visibility predominantly as sufferers’ narratives (Ahmed, 2010; see also intersectional critiques in Rizvi & Mukherjee, 2023).

3.2 The Deity as a Legitimacy Economy

The god app is a legitimacy economy: female protagonism becomes culturally legit when mythically licit, allegorically raised, or civilization opted. Some templates can be genuinely empowering - mythic stories represent a deep well of resources for women’s power imaginaries-but it also runs the risk of rendering the female protagonist a mere carrier of cultural obligation instead of an individual subject.

This is particularly significant in games that are marketed internationally as “Indian” or “mythic,” where the female protagonist becomes the place where “authentic Indianness” is staged for an international gaze. The protagonist’s body, then becomes a kind of cultural interface: She must be hip enough to play in the present but “traditional” enough to mark heritage. The result is not just a matter of aesthetics; its ideology written in costume logic, posture, gaze framing and moral narrative architecture.

3.3 Three Interlocking Agencies

To assess whether a game transcends damsel/deity binaries, this study assesses protagonists across three interlocking agencies:

Aesthetic agency: how the protagonist works-camera, costume logic, body proportion, animation grammar, gaze regimes, cultural signifiers.

Mechanical agent: what the player can do via (her)movement freedom, choice architecture, combat/avoidance options, negotiation system, refusal options and failure-states.

Narrative agency: do her desires and choices shape the story-does she drive what happens, or simply respond?

A given protagonist might shine in one dimension, while being more subdued in others. A woman who fights (mechanical agency) may still be served up as a voyeuristic object (low aesthetic agency). An aesthetically agentic female character may still be a narratively instrumented one. The “beyond damsel/deity” move requires that all three align.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative comparative study based on interpretive textual analysis, visual analysis and ludic-mechanical reading. The method takes a major approach, treating games as both cultural texts and interactive systems; this orientation has been developed in feminist game studies (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006) and critical cultural game scholarship (Shaw, 2014; Ruberg, 2019).

4.2 Case Study

Three anchor cases were chosen as they occupy different representational zones of Indian/India-connected game production:

Mythic girl-hero: a myth-archer in an Indian context action au: Raji: An Ancient Epic (Nodding Heads Games, 2020)



Figure 3: <https://www.digit.in/features/gaming/raji-kaliyuga-by-nodding-head-games-revealed-at-xbox-partner-preview-with-dual-heroes-unreal-engine-5-and-bold-new-third-person-gameplay.html>

Serious “game/activist survivor”: MISSING: Game for a Cause — a mobile serious game focused on trafficking awareness that places the player within constrained choices.

Diaspora/domestic protagonist: Venba (Visai Games, 2023) — a story-based cooking game centered on an Indian Tamil mother and dealing with migration and family.



Figure 4: <https://www.pcgamer.com/venba-is-an-upcoming-cooking-game-about-an-indian-mother-restoring-her-lost-recipes/>

More India-specific examples are drawn on to elaborately contrast the taxonomy and demonstrate representational diversity:

Unrest (Pyrodactyl Games) a multi-protagonist civic-political narrative featuring a princess and a peasant girl.

Devi: A Light in the Dark - detective girl protagonist rural India narrative framing.

Ajnabee – The Unknown - psychological horror starring a female lead

Vocal Horror Stories – Gaja — Woman protagonist from Chennai, interactive through voice.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

Each anchor case is treated via: protagonist aesthetic grammar (attire, body framing, camera logic, movement style) mechanical agency architecture (what play permits/precludes; how failure is managed) narrative and moral framing (who cares about whose goals; what emotions are demanded) representational pitfalls and props (how damsel/deity systems are resisted or reproduced).

5. Case Studies

5.1 Raji: An Ancient Epic — Mythic Heroism and the Burden of Cultural Legibility

Why this case matters: Raji has become a touchstone for discussions of Indian game “heritage aesthetics” and for arguments that Indian games can have women protagonists at their mythic centers (Zeiler 2023; Chaudhury 2023). But its successes also create an equivocal representational field: the protagonist’s empowerment comes via divine selection and mythic duty.

5.1.1 Aesthetic Agency: Respectability, Mythic Framing, and the “Cultural Interface”

Raji’s visual design is not built through the hypersexualized attack that has so often been applied to women protagonists in global action games historically; instead, her body is presented as culturally “appropriate,” athletic and action legible. That’s an important change: it means Indian games can refuse sexualization as the default way to make women visually “marketable.”

The question is not just sexualization, but symbolic burden. The lead is placed within a mythic landscape rich with cultural signifiers. Within this framework, the protagonist becomes a vessel, an interface through which “Indianness” becomes legible to viewers. A postcolonial critique helps illuminate the stakes here: a female protagonist, if she must bear cultural heritage as her representational work, can become secondary herself to civilizational symbolism (Mukherjee, 2017).

A crucial aesthetic tension arises: the game’s mythic visual vocabulary gives culturally rooted identity but also reinforces the deity template — implying that women protagonists are legitimate as long as they’re adjacent to myth.

5.1.2 Mechanical Agency: Combat, Navigation and the Politics of ‘Violence as Empowerment’

Mechanically, Raji takes its cues from both old and new: the protagonist is active in play — she fights, stumbles across terrain and stands up to threats head-on. It’s a clear break from the damsel rescue economy, because the player doesn’t protect Raji as much as they agency through her.

Yet feminist game studies warn that “combat capability” can be a reductive definition of empowerment (Chess, 2017; Shaw, 2014). The deeper question is: does the game’s mechanical agency enable moral choice, refusal, negotiation, care or relational agency—or does agency retain its combative character? Much of Raji is designed to serve action advancement; the protagonist’s agency is considerable yet comes wrapped up in a genre mold that continues to shape subjectivity through violence and mastery.

5.1.3 Narrative Agency: Myths of Rescue and Authorization

The protagonist’s journey rests on the mechanics of rescuing her younger brother and a divine-chosen narrative structure. Rescue plots are not, in themselves, any more anti-feminist than fiction about women rescuing women undermines the damsel template — but rescue plots tend to tether agency and moral obligation together. In such structures, the class of the protagonist’s desires can find itself subordinated to duty: she is heroic precisely because she must be.

And this is where the “beyond deity” turns into a precise analytic criterion. A mythic heroine can be empowering, yet if her protagonism is justified mainly via divine selection she’s still not outside of a god-adjacent legitimacy economy. As Zeiler (2023) notes, the implications of such representations in Indian games are significant; Chaudhury’s analysis explores how Raji negotiates “Indian ethos” across aesthetics

and mechanics. Collectively these works hint to Raji as both a representational intervention, and a space where cultural politics and heritage storytelling engage in gendered legitimacy.

Game for a Cause — The Activist/Survivor Protagonist and the Ethics of Constrained Agency.

Why this case matters: MISSING reorients the representational field from mythic empowerment to social realism and activism. It frames female protagonism not as blessed by divine right but resilient against structural violence — a move with high ethical stakes.

5.2.1 Aesthetic agency: Rejection of glamour, construction of vulnerability

The presence of the body in MISSING is not framed as spectacle, but the visual regime emphasizes fear and constraint, danger. Feminist critique knows that this includes refusing sexualization but also warns that women's visibility risks being issued based on vulnerability narratives: the protagonist becomes playable through suffering, not when she embodies desiring (Ahmed, 2010; Rizvi & Mukherjee, 2023).

The aesthetic logic here is ethically driven: to create awareness of trafficking by making discomfort rather than pleasure fantasy. Situating games such as MISSING within the context of digital anti-trafficking awareness-raising work, O'Brien (2019) critically analyzes how these and other similar games are designed to potentially mobilize empathy and affective responsibility through their interactive systems.

5.2.2 Mechanical Agency as Constrained Choice: Realism, Not Failure

While many mainstream games mistake agency for freedom, serious games tend to structure agencies through constraint to simulate oppressive systems. In MISSING, limited choice is not disempowering but is instead a simulation of coercion: the player's frustration is the signal.

This is where ethical reading of mechanical agencies needs to occur. Feminist theories of agency in games recognize this; they argue that agency is not simply "more options," but meaningful choice within a system communicating values, using Ruberg (2019) and Blomgren (2023). In MISSING, decision is always a matter of what not to do, which might make up the whole point of having choice.

Yet the representational risk persists: if the dominant playable female character in Indian serious games is the girl they would traffic to other countries, the field risks reproducing a "single story" of Indian femininity as traffic victim, confirming the warning issued by Rizvi and Mukherjee (2023).

5.2.3 Narrative Agency: The Ethical Player, the Survivor and the Responsibility

The story puts you in charge of the protagonist's survival, building a moral economy of choice. Such frameworks can yield ethical engagement, yet they also run the risk of reducing the protagonist into a vector for educating the player. The protagonist's subjectivity can turn instrumental: her suffering exists so the player may learn.

So, MISSING goes beyond deity framing, though risks becoming a trauma template. Its contribution is deep as awareness media; its limitation appears if it becomes representative of the shape “serious Indian female protagonism” must have.

5.3 Venba — Domestic Play, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Reinscription of Protagonist Legitimacy

Why this case matters: Venba shifts female protagonism from mythic duty and trauma survival to everyday life, memory and relational negotiation. That transition matters to breaking the damsel/deity binary, because it affirms women as drivers of narratives without needing redemption or deification.

5.3.1 Agency Aesthetic: The Ordinary Body and the Rejection of Spectacle

The central figure is framed via domestic situations, kitchen scenes, small talk and family time, instead of the pitch of mytho-spectacle or danger zone. This framing matters politically: it argues that the lives of regular women are both playable and worth playing.

Rizvi and Sridharan’s DiGRA paper does the explicit work of analyzing Venba through what they call “the aesthetics of diaspora,” explicating how food, memory, and cultural packaging operate as representational devices in the game. The protagonist being nobody elevated into symbolic deity hood, but rather the game also treating her, through quotidian cultural work instead of mythic force, as culturally significant.

5.3.2 Mechanical Agency: Care as Procedure, Memory as System

Cooking mechanics can seem, at first glance, like the simple reinforcement of domestic stereotypes. But the fundamental analytic task is to interpret domestic mechanics as procedural meaning. Feminist scholarship has claimed that games express ideology through mechanics; a domestic loop becomes a system of agency when it structures narrative consequence and emotional negotiation (Bogost, 2007; Ruberg, 2019).

Recipes in Venba are not just to-do lists; they function like procedural archives. Under pressure of migration, cooking turns into an interactional form of cultural continuity. Here, agency is not violent; it’s cultural negotiation, relational decision-making, memory work. This is a significant broadening of what “female agency” might look like in Indian games.

5.3.3 Narrative Agency: Motherhood Without Sanctification

Motherhood will inevitably tend toward the deity template—mother as sacred figure, moral center, nation-symbol. Venba refuses to present motherhood as wholly sanctified by so staging it as conflictual and emotionally complex, even messy, rather than purely idealized. The protagonist’s subjectivity is not a moral high ground; she is someone who experiences love, and frustration, and compromise, and loss.

Thus, Venba provides one of the most compelling “beyond damsel/deity” moves: It validates its protagonist without rescue logic or mythic authorization.

6. India-Centric Expansion Cases: Extending the Repository Beyond the Anchor Trio

One of the issues in Indian game studies is that small titles don't always make it into the mainstream. But a few India-agnostic games widen the representational purview, reinforcing the case that Indian female protagonism is diversifying.

6.1 Unrest – Civic-Political Female Subjectivity via the Ensemble Storytelling

Unrest is a multi-protagonist tale set in an India-inspired world, featuring a princess and a peasant girl among its characters. Its design matters because it places female subjectivity in civic contexts: class, caste, famine, social unrest and political negotiation.

Here, agency doesn't take the form of mythic power or rescue survival; here it manifests as political survival and ethical navigation. Ensemble storytelling also subverts about single-story logic by multiplying perspectives; female protagonism comes off as one among several social positions instead of the emblematic symbol.

6.2 Devi: A Beacon in the Night – The Girl Detective and “Everyday Investigation”

In rural India, a detective girl protagonist, on a time-bound investigation structure. This points to a representational mode in which female agency is cognitive: observation, interrogation, deduction. It is neither damsel nor deity; it accords with investigative subjectivity.

6.3 Ajnabee — Tawakkul and Vocal Horror Stories — Gaja — Psycho-Logological Subjecthood and Contemporary Urban/Regional Femininity

Both center female protagonists in psychologically and horror-driven experiences situated in the context of contemporary Indian life. Horror often flirts with gendered vulnerability, but it can also foreground women as epistemic agents: the one who knows, investigates, resists and survives. They point to nascent Indian genres in which female protagonism develops not from mythic legitimacy but psychological complexity.

7. Indian Female Protagonist Taxonomy

Rather than treating “female protagonist” as a monolithic category, this taxonomy partitions Indian/India-connected female protagonists by the representational system through which they become playable. The goal is not to lock down types but to offer a provisional analytic that can scale as additional Indian gaming comes into scholarly view.

Taxon	Core Logic	Typical Agency Structure	Key Aesthetic Regime	Example Games
Mythic heroine	Legitimacy through heritage/myth; civilizational stakes	Combat/traversal mastery; destiny framing	Mythic spectacle + cultural signifiers	Raji: An Ancient Epic
Activist/survivor	Ethical realism; social harm as narrative center	Constrained choice; survival logic	Anti-glamour realism; vulnerability framing	MISSING : Game for a Cause
Domestic/diaspora protagonist	Everyday life as meaningful; identity continuity	Care-as-procedure; relational negotiation	Intimate domestic realism; affective detail	Venba
Civic-political ensemble heroine	Social systems (class/caste/politics) shape subjectivity	Dialogue/choice; ethical navigation	Social realism + institutional framing	Unrest
Contemporary psychological subject	Inner life and fear as play space	Investigation/exploration; epistemic agency	Horror/psychological aesthetics; atmosphere	Ajnabee – The Unknown, Vocal Horror Stories – Gaja
Investigative girlhood	Girl as knower; time-bound inquiry	Deduction, questioning, clue systems	Everyday realism + urgency	Devi: A Light in the Dark

Table 1. Indian Female Protagonist Taxonomy in Indian/India-Connected Games

Interpretive point: The strongest “beyond damsel/deity” movement occurs when a game legitimizes a female protagonist through ordinary subjectivity, plural agencies, and social complexity rather than through rescue or reverence.

8. Comparative Synthesis: What “Beyond” Actually Requires

8.1 More Than Damsel: Reframing Vulnerability as Situated, Not Defining

The damsel trope reduces female identity to vulnerability. To move beyond it is not to ban vulnerability (which would be politically dishonest), but to redeploy it, redefining of place rather than defining.

In MISSING, vulnerability is at the center — and meant to be ethically motivated — but representationally we risk trauma as a mode of female playability.

In Venba, vulnerability isn't the emotional fragility or relational tension (as opposed to physical victimhood).

In Raji, vulnerability exists but is subsumed beneath heroic mastery and mythic duty; vulnerability forms part of an empowerment arc.

The comparative insight is that “beyond damsel” exists when vulnerability does not serve as the narrative purpose of the character but rather one aspect of her lived universe.

8.2 Aterior to Divine: Dismantling the Symbolic Overhead

Feminine Mitra(s) legitimizes female protagonism through symbolic elevation. To transcend that, we must let women protagonists be culturally specific — while refusing to turn them into cultural allegory.

While mythic India provides a sense of cultural specificity for Raji, it runs the peril of trapping the protagonist as heritage interface.

Cultural specificity within Venba revolves around food, language, migration and intergenerational negotiation — cultural meaning accrues through the mundane instead of mythical obligation.

Unrest locates femininity within political economy instead of civilizational symbolism.

For Indian games, an important implication is about differentiating cultural rootedness with symbolic duty. An Indian-coded woman protagonist need not bear the burden of representing India.

8.3 Aesthetics as Ideology: The Gaze Regime and the Animation Grammar

Representation isn't just “what the character is,” but how the game sees her. Feminist media analysis has long understood gaze as an ideological structure; games exacerbate it because the camera is attached to player control (Mulvey's logic reformulated through game studies; see also Shaw, 2014; Gray, 2014; Ruberg, 2019).

In the anchor cases:

Raji renounce hypersexualized spectacles for the most part, relying on action-legible framing that affirms respectability and heroism.

MISSING won't play glamour; aesthetic choices are in service of ethical seriousness, risking instead that female visibility will be contingent on suffering.

Venba eschews spectacle by grounding itself in domestic spaces and affective intimacy, upending the visual economy of what is “worth playing.”

So, aesthetic agency isn't cosmetic; it is at the heart of transcending damsel/deity.

Mechanical Agency: The Most Reliable Test

Mechanistic agency exposing representational truth since it shows what the system allows the protagonist.

Raji offers movement mastery and combat success (high mechanical agency), but only within a genre where agency is master/violence.

How to muster the discursive power required in practicing MISSING structures that bind agency justice (as meaningful constraint) and interface sets of legitimate, ethically difficult questions on empathy and play? (O'Brien, 2019).

Through care work and dialogue choices across Venba, a language of agency is built, invalidating non-violent agencies.

The main argument would be that Indian games can contribute to broader forms of female protagonism by developing diverse types of agencies, not only combat-related and outside the spheres of suffering.

9. Design Implications: Toward Gender-Attentive, Culturally Rooted Protagonists in Indian Games

Based on the analysis, the following principles function as both scholarly conclusions and practical design implications for Indian game development contexts:

- Pluralize “female agency” beyond combat and beyond victimhood.
Empowerment should not require violence; seriousness should not require trauma.
- Separate cultural rootedness from symbolic burden.
Cultural specificity should emerge from lived contexts, language, space, labor, and relationality—not only from mythic elevation.
- Treat camera and animation as ethical decisions.
Avoid gaze regimes that convert protagonists into spectacle; design movement grammars that express character ethos.
- Refuse “single story” pipelines.
Develop representational plurality across class, caste, region, religion, disability, queerness, and migration experiences (Rizvi & Mukherjee, 2023).
- Build feminist mechanics, not only feminist narratives.
If the narrative claims agency but mechanics remove it, the system contradicts the story.
Conversely, mechanics can create agency even within ordinary life contexts.

10. Conclusion

Although Indian games are becoming increasingly self-aware in making women playable, playability does not mean representational freedom. The damsel and the deity remain categories that police what kinds of feminine subjectivities can be rescued from avatar-space and raised to symbolic bulwark via verticality. Through the analysis of female protagonists via aesthetic, mechanical and narrative agency this paper

demonstrates how most valuable divergences manifest in games when women are legitimated beyond their status as objects for saving or adoration through routine subjecthood, plural agency loops and a realism that is grounded in cultural particulars but does not function as a burden to culture at large.

The new Indian lady hero archive is a more fertile medium than the singular, patriarchal hero: the mythic heroine (Raji), the activist/survivor (MISSING), the diaspora mother (Venba), civic-political ensemble heroine (Unrest) investigative girl (Devi), and contemporary psychological subjects (Ajnabee, Gaja) prove that Indian games can narratologies women as agents of battle, ethics, memory, politics and knowledge. The work for research and design is to continue expanding this representational field with academic rigor, intersectional sensitivity and mindful of how aesthetics and mechanics subtly determine who gets to be a subject in play.

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