

AstraVerse: Gaming Beyond Mortal Borders

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With the substantial rise of smartphone procurement and internet consumption across the globe during the pandemic, gaming has become more widespread. This requires game designers to create new characters, narratives, and game mechanics to keep players engaged and hooked. It is common for game designers to take inspiration from historical events to develop narratives around the historical event. There have been many games with a military backdrop aimed at taking down terrorists post 9/11 or events during World War. Another popular pool for inspiration is mythology. Popular games such as *Age of Mythology*, *God Of War*, *Smite*, *Hades* have been inspired by Roman, Greek, and Viking mythology. This trend of taking inspiration from particular mythologies can be attributed to the presence of major gaming studios in the west and the designer's familiarity with characters associated with those mythologies.

Gaming studios have made a few attempts to build games inspired by Hindu Mythology. Popular games which included elements from Hindu Mythology are *Hanuman: The Boy Warrior*, *Smite*, *Uncharted*, and *Raji*. There have been controversies over games like *Hanuman: The Boy Warrior* and *Smite* copying Hindu gods. Religious groups have raised voices about having Hindu gods controlled by keyboards and losing life and health while progressing through the narrative. The knowledge of the mechanics and abilities of Hindu gods is esoteric and hence has resulted in game designers transplanting the gods from Hindu literature.

The term Avatar, which is a fundamental building block of gaming, originates from the word āvatāraṇam, mentioned in the Hindu scripture Mahabharata (Verse 1.2.34) in the 8th Century BC. The term *ava* means to "descend to earth," and *tr* means to "pass across." Hindu mythology refers to an Avatar as an incarnation of God who descends to earth to fight evil demons, also known as Asuras. Each Avatar in literature has specific abilities, weapons and has been part of narratives fighting evil. The concept of abilities and fighting Asuras with mythical objects all stitched together with a narrative built over to defend moral principles opens up inspiration for developing combinations for game narratives, game mechanics, game objects, and game avatars.

The research team believes it is possible to bisect characters and narratives from different mythologies from the East into the rich game mechanics they offer. We find it possible to establish a taxonomy from Hindu mythology to augment boundaries for game designers to pick inspiration while designing game avatars. Establishing such taxonomies would allow designers to pick mechanics offered by different characters in mythology instead of transplanting the original characters. A permutation of visual representations and game mechanics would allow designers to create fictional, mythical characters suitable for different game narratives. The AstraVerse genre of gaming could have avatars that are built based on inspiration from different mythologies competing, collaborating to solve problems across different mythical universes..