

Review:

Mukherjee, Souvik. 2022. *Videogames in the Indian Subcontinent. Development, Culture(s) and Representations.* Bloomsbury

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The book *Videogames in the Indian Subcontinent. Development, Culture(s) and Representations* is the first ever comprehensive presentation and discussion of material spanning over all nations of South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Discussed by the leading expert on the theme, it offers both an overview of as well as numerous detailed examples of both, historical and contemporary developments. Appropriately, this work also situates the regional characteristics in larger global contexts and cultural flows, and contemporary developments in historical contexts.

Keywords

videogames, games, South Asia, India

The book *Videogames in the Indian Subcontinent. Development, Culture(s) and Representations* is noteworthy for several reasons. Among but not limited to these are that, firstly, it stands out as the first ever comprehensive work focusing on the yet still (very) understudied field of games and gaming in and as related to South Asia. The book, appropriately, focuses on India with the region's longest history and most complex gaming landscapes but also summarizes central information for Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—material that only existed in scattered sources so far. Secondly, the book fittingly situates these regional characteristics within larger global contexts and cultural flows, applying, among others, transculturation and glocalization as frames. And thirdly, the reader can rely on a solid embedding of all the aforementioned discussions of contemporary developments in historical contexts, largely building on the author's own accomplished research work.

The book's 249 pages are structured to begin with an introduction to videogames in the Indian Subcontinent, to then proceed in three main sections: development; cultures; and representation. Each of these sections opens with contextualizing discussions and ends with concluding remarks. The book's concluding part contains, among other regularia such as a bibliography and an index, two long appendices: on the timeline of the discussed developments in each nation as well as on the detailed results of a survey that was done in preparation for this book. The survey asked several specific questions around the overarching theme “how far videogames influence culture, and are seen as cultural artifacts in the Subcontinent” (p. 228).

In its opening part, the book introduces not only earlier scholarship, the used theoretical lenses, and its own structure, but also points the reader to a number of specifics that impact researching games and gaming in the geographical area. For instance, extracting information on especially historical developments in games and gaming needs to rely on the regions' “scattered archive” (e.g., p. 7). That is, with the lack of organized collections, “oral history accounts and ephemera prove to be important sources as do tangential references in histories of computing” (p. 8). Another important factor is that

“gaming as a phenomenon is mostly studied as a Western preserve” (p. 5), and the frames, discussions and results that have emerged from this previous research are not always and certainly not directly applicable in or comparable to the region’s diverse and complex (cultural, social, etc.) settings.

The main part opens with a section on Development, divided into a history and a current scenario part. The history section encompasses not only videogame history but also discusses digital technology history in the region, as a necessary preamble for the arrival and prevail of videogames. In the current scenario part, the author uses, e.g., material from interviews with game developers, to highlight exemplary interesting and successful videogame developments.

The book’s second section on Cultures contains two parts, as well. This section’s first part offers contextual backgrounds on ludic cultures beyond videogames, that is, on the long and diverse non-digital game cultures of the Subcontinent, discussed by the leading specialist in this field of study. The following part on digital gaming cultures puts the spotlights on the gamers and summarizes prior studies on gaming cultures in India. It also makes some exemplary recent public debates and controversies around games and gaming in the region available to the reader, underlining the fact that without any doubt, games and gaming have become influential factors in the shaping of culture and society everywhere around the globe.

In its last part, the book focuses on the region’s representation in globally produced games. Namely, the author discusses the “pervasive, if mostly unwitting, orientalism in the portrayal of the region and its culture” and “cultural (mis)representation” (p. 135). Fortunately for the reader, the author can yet again rely on his own extensive and acknowledged previous work on this theme when giving numerous examples for this. This section, Representation, also contains parts on regional game studies, on local cultures and representations in and of videogames, and on videogames as represented in other local media. It concludes with a subchapter on diversity (including but not limited to issues of economic and linguistic disparities, gender, race, caste, and subalternity), summarizing that “While the Subcontinent has

neither seen an overtly vast gender divide and discrimination [...] nor such movements corresponding to the Black Lives Matter [...], it is still to witness issues of digital divide based on gender, class, caste, economic prosperity and religion.” (p.173).

In summary, *Videogames in the Indian Subcontinent. Development, Culture(s) and Representations* is a must-read for anyone interested in games (videogames as well as non-digital games) in South Asia. For the first time, a book offers a comprehensive, reliable presentation and discussion of material spanning over all nations of South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Yet, this is by far not the only applaudable achievement of the book. Specifically notable features making this a highly valuable resource also, of course, include the author’s outstanding expertise, as the leading researcher on this theme for decades, and the accessible writing style and structure of the book. All these qualities combined allow both academic audiences as well as readers not yet familiar with or not with an explicit or sole academic interest in the theme a pleasant and inspiring reading experience, to become acquainted with and deepen their understanding and knowledge of the diverse, complex characteristics of videogames in South Asia.