

Editorial

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Guest Editors for the Special Issue

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Press Start 2024 Editorial Board

Vol. 10 No. 2: “The Playful Postcolonial: Culturing Videogames in India” Special Issue (November 2024)

When we posted the call for papers for this special issue, hosted with great enthusiasm by *Press Start*, we began by highlighting how game studies in India has found itself at an important turning point within the field. This turn was signified by a “waking up” to the discursive possibilities and critical engagement of what game developer Ernest Adams (2009) had called, nearly fifteen years ago, “the sleeping giant” of the gaming industry—India. While we were aware that this giant represented a complex and diverse gaming culture that had strong affinities with the rest of South Asia and the postcolonial Global South (Mukherjee, 2017; Mukherjee & Hammar, 2018), we were also aware of how young the discipline of game studies actually is in India. While working on this special issue, we continued to be cognisant and mindful of the fact that there is a lack of in-depth scholarly engagement pertaining to videogames in/of India within the larger discipline, supplemented by the knowledge that the videogame industry often plays into colonialist ideologies as part of its capitalist framework. At the same time, this issue is informed by our conscious move to acknowledge and celebrate possibilities of resistance and subversion housed in the gaming cultures of India.

Our call for papers invited authors to critically engage with this complex space that we referred to as “game studies in India.” In reaching out to

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undergraduate and (post)graduate students, we wanted to platform some of the youngest minds of this discipline, and with *Press Start's* support, this issue is a testament to the quickly growing, lively field under study. Our authors engage in diverse ways with the questions that were part of our vision for this issue, whether it was decolonising pleasures of play (Jayanth, 2021), the particular brand of negotiating play as gamers and game scholars in India, or re-imagining how videogames mirror and affect India in the popular imagination and on the ground. This issue is a small but colourful snapshot of India within the larger map of game studies. Through this snapshot, our contributors respond to some of the most glaring absences in games research in a playful and erudite redressal.

This special issue is, as we see it, but a beginning for more vibrant games research from India as part of the networks of South Asia and the Global South—a beginning we hope will inspire more questions, more discussions, more scholarship, and more critical play! This gigantic step is possible through the work of our authors who have engaged and responded to our questions, affording positionality, context, and specificity to address the complexities of gaming cultures in India.

Soham Adhikari and Aritro Bhattacharya's "Fleshthetics of the Postcolonial Body: Examining Contested Identities in the Works of Studio Oleomingus" is a direct and robust response to the central question of contested identities and phantom histories that informs game studies in India and the Global South. Through an in-depth analysis of Studio Oleomingus's *A Museum of Dubious Splendors* (2018), *In the Pause Between the Ringing* (2019), *The Indifferent Wonder of an Edible Place* (2020), *The Uncertain Repetitions of Truth* (2020), and *Folds of a Separation* (2022), Adhikari and Bhattacharya present a novel theorization of the postcolonial body (the Flesh) and its Plasticity to explore what they call "Fleshthetics." This article presents a potent way of reading "postcolonial reality and the affective subjectivity(-ies) it symptomizes" (p. 25) and enriches postcolonial investigations within and beyond game studies.

On the other hand, Chaitanya Solanki and Deepak John Mathew's "Enter the Backrooms of *Tattva Bhoomi*: An Educational Game for Middle School Students in India" is a document journaling the game development and the design process that went into creating the authors' educational game, *Tattva Bhoomi*. The game, which aims at teaching chemistry concepts to middle school students in India, is also used by the authors to discuss and illustrate their criteria for assessing the effectiveness of multimedia design, namely "technology selection, task analysis, content representation, and interactivity" (p. 47). This article provides an engaging framework for studying games and applying design criteria to ludic production in the education sector in India.

"Curating a Boardgames Museum in India" is an exciting interview with scholars and boardgames collectors Souvik Mukherjee and Amrita Sen. Conceptualised as an *adda*¹-style interview, we delve into a deeper understanding of the geopolitical dimensions of creating, curating, and studying boardgames in India, all from the balcony of one's home. Mukherjee and Sen give a detailed account of what the museum means to them and their visitors as a space that represents the past, present, and future of boardgames and play in India. The interview brings to the reader a material history of a games archive in India through practice and play, showcasing the interconnected nature of boardgames in India and the Global South.

Finally, Samya Brata Roy's review of Souvik Mukherjee's (2022) book *Videogames in the Indian Subcontinent: Development, Culture(s) and Representations* discusses Mukherjee's immense project of studying the gaming culture in and of the Indian subcontinent. Roy's initial comments are structural in nature, discussing the book's three sections on "Development," "Cultures," and "Representation," before engaging with Mukherjee's reference to Adrienne Shaw's (2013) question: "How do you say gamer in Hindi?" (p. 109), which becomes a deeply charged quest that underlies much of the book's central argument. Through this review, Roy engages critically with Mukherjee's book while also responding with a repartee of his own, questioning what it means to look for South Asian alternatives to standardised norms within games scholarship.

Together, these comprise a special issue we are proud of and enthusiastic to put forth into interested hands, with hope that it brings to our readers as much excitement and joy as we felt while putting this collection together.

The special issue is possible thanks to everyone who encouraged its conception from its very first days, fostered it with collaborative energy, enthusiasm, and perseverance. We thank our dedicated reviewers, the patient and diligent editorial team of *Press Start*, and, of course, our excellent authors, all of whom have come together to make sure that this special issue reaches its audience in its best form. Thank you for being playful postcolonials!

References

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¹ Bengali term for "an informal symposium-like conversation with multiple speakers where everything under and beyond the sun can be discussed" (DiGRA India, 2021, para. 1).

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