# EXPLORING MYTHOLOGICAL THEMES IN INDIAN ANIMATION FILMS FOR CHILDREN: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper is an attempt to conduct a textual analysis of portrayal of mythological themes in Indian Animation cinema created for children. With the growing popularity of animation as a storytelling medium in India, there has been quite an increase in the production of animated films that take inspiration from Indian mythological themes. This paper tries to examine how these films recreate and present traditional mythological narratives, characters and motifs in a manner understandable and appealing to young audiences. With the help of textual analysis, this research intends to understand the underlying themes, messages and cultural representations that construct the complex layers of animated cinematic medium for children. The paper also tries to understand how such portrayals impact children's understanding of mythology, culture and value system. The methodology involves the selection of a purposive sample of Indian animation films for children, in which a detailed examination of narratives, animation techniques, character development, and cultural nuances is done. By employing a textual analysis approach, this research attempts to deliver perceptions into the ways in which mythological themes are utilized and adapted within the context of contemporary Indian animation for children.

**Keywords**: Indian Animation, Cognitive Process theory, Indian Storytelling, Children, Mythology, Chota Bheem, Animation Techniques

## INTRODUCTION

Animation has for a long time been known as a powerful medium for storytelling, charming audiences of all ages with its ability to merge imagination, creativity, and visual artistry. Indian animation industry has grown remarkably in recent years, with a growing weight on producing content that reflects the nations' diverse cultural heritage and mythology. Within this dynamic landscape, a significant subgroup of animated films is specifically fashioned for children, aiming to entertain, educate, and instill cultural values from an early age (Bajpai, 2014; Bhatnagar Chopra & Trehan, 2019; FICCI FRAMES REPORT, 2023). This research paper investigates the portrayal of mythological themes in Indian animation films designed for children, undertaking a detailed textual analysis to understand how these narratives are adapted and presented within the context of contemporary animation. Drawing upon India's rich mythological traditions, these

films offer a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of storytelling, cultural representation, and childhood development. The significance of this study lies in its aim to uncover the multidimensional mythological storytelling in Indian animation for children. While research studies have been devoted to analyzing various aspects of Indian mythology and its interpretation in literature, art, and popular culture (Cooksey, 2016; Booth, 1995; Nagar, 2006); the specific scrutiny of its representation in animation for young audiences remains comparatively underexplored. By focusing on this niche area, this research seeks to bring attention towards understanding of the role of mythology in shaping children's media consumption and cultural identity. At the center of this investigation is the fact that animation serves as a powerful medium for transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and narratives to children (Routh, 2023). Through vibrant visuals, engaging characters, and imaginative

storytelling, animation films have the potential to kindle young minds, nurturing curiosity, empathy, and appreciation for diverse cultures. Within the Indian context, where mythology occupies a central place in the collective imagination, animated portrayals of gods, goddesses, and mythical beings offers an interesting lens through which to explore mythological storytelling which forms an indelible part of storytelling traditions in India (Narayan, 2006; Pattanaik, 2010; Ganatra, 2021; Desai, 2023).

By closely inspecting the narratives, visual aesthetics, character development, and thematic exploration of a selected sample of films, this research aims to uncover the underlying messages, ideologies, and socio-cultural contexts that inform the portrayal of mythological themes. The paper also aims to stimulate critical dialogue on the ethical, educational, and cultural implications of introducing children to mythological narratives through animated media, offering insights that are pertinent not only to scholars and practitioners in animation studies but also to educators, parents, and policymakers concerned with children's media literacy and cultural enrichment. Through this exploration, it is hoped that this study will contribute to an appreciation of the cultural significance of animation as a medium for storytelling and provide insights into the complex interplay between mythology, childhood, and media in contemporary Indian society.

**Literature Review**

Mythological motifs with worldwide distribution, such as the Fire-theft, the Deluge, the Land of the Dead, Virgin Birth, and the Resurrected Hero, serve as foundational elements in the mythologies of diverse societies. These themes are apparent across different cultures in varying forms but carry similar symbolic connotations, reflecting universal human experiences and beliefs. For instance, the story of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods in Greek mythology resonates with similar themes found in Hindu mythology, where the god *Agni* serves as a mediator between divine and mortal realms through fire. Similarly, flood narratives like the story of Noah's Ark in Judeo-Christian tradition and the Epic of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamian mythology convey themes of purification and renewal amidst catastrophe.

The concept of a Land of the Dead, whether depicted as the Greek underworld or the Egyptian Duat[1], reflects humanity's collective fascination with the afterlife and the journey of the soul beyond death. Likewise, tales of virgin birth, as seen in the story of Jesus Christ in Christianity and the birth of Horus in ancient Egypt, represent divine conception and the astounding nature of life. Finally, the motif of the resurrected hero, exemplified by figures like Balder in Norse mythology and Osiris in ancient Egypt, underscores the cyclical nature of existence and the triumph of life over death. These examples illustrate the universality of mythological motifs across cultures, suggesting a fundamental unity in human experiences and the way societies interpret and express their spiritual and cultural values (Campbell. 1959).

In Gupta's (1989) analysis of Indian cinema, the impact of technological advancements on the perception of reality is explored, particularly focusing on how cinematic technology's introduction into India's pre-industrial society has reshaped the traditional understanding of seeing is believing. In Indian cinema, the line between myth and reality becomes unclear, with cinematic portrayals of deities being perceived as divine entities themselves. This phenomenon, where myth becomes fact on screen, underlines a significant alteration in the Indian awareness of reality within the cinematic context. The infusion of cinematic technology has provided a platform for the Hindu pantheon to thrive and evolve, with political figures using these tools to enhance their professed divinity and garner popular support. The writer also points towards the contrasting perceptions of audiovisual media between Western societies and India. While Western audiences often make nuanced distinctions between fiction and reality in films and television, Indian audiences historically embrace mythological narratives where gods and god-like characters are brought to life on screen. This inclination towards merging myth and reality within the cinematic realm reflects a unique aspect of Indian cultural sensibilities, wherein the

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[1] Underworld in ancient Egyptian mythology

boundaries between the two are often blurred rather than strictly delineated[2].

Indian mythology, deeply entrenched in the Vedic texts, incorporates revered epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa (Valmiki, 8th Century BCE-3rd Century CE)* and *Mahābhārata*[3](Vyas, 3rd Century BCE-4th Century CE), which hold significant cultural and philosophical importance. These epics, comprising thousands of verses, embody Hinduism's values and beliefs. Derived from Vedic hymns, Indian mythology shares common elements with Indo-European mythologies, featuring various deities whose influence is unescapable in Hinduism. Despite their epic narratives, Hindu mythology is often interpreted allegorically, with stories symbolizing moral and ethical dilemmas rather than literal historical events. *Yuga*, representing different epochs or eras, is central to Hindu mythology, shaping its cosmology and understanding of time. The *Mahābhārata* narrates the Kurukṣhetra war and explores the lives of the *Kauravas* and *Pāṇḍavas*, with the *Bhagavad Gītā* offering insights into moral conflicts. Additionally, the *Purāṇas*[4] provide rich narratives explaining ancient Indian society, philosophy, and culture. Indian mythology is a wellspring of inspiration for performing and fine arts, offering themes for musicians and dancers to explore. Its enduring relevance transcends artistic expression, playing a vital role in cultural contexts by evoking awe, explaining the universe's

mysteries, reinforcing social orders, and imparting timeless life lessons. As a cornerstone of Indian cultural heritage, mythology preserves and shares the profound values and traditions of Indian civilization globally (Narayan, 2006; Pattanaik, 2010; Ganatra, 2021,).
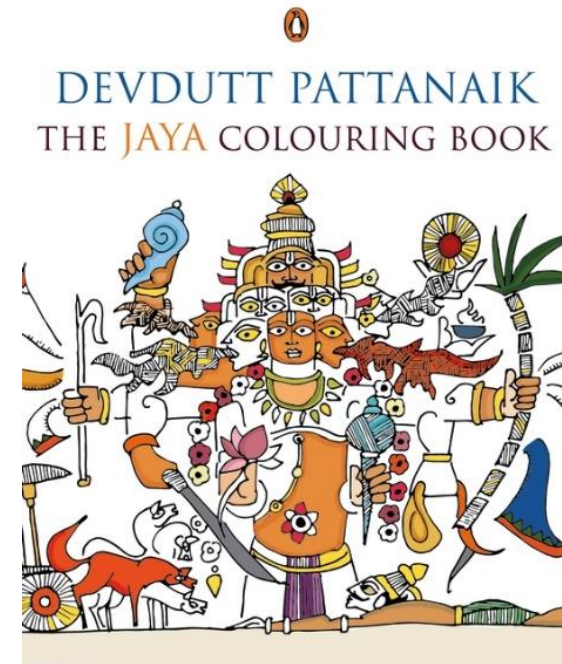


Figure 1: Front Cover of *Jaya* – a retelling of *Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik[5]

The commencement of children's literature in India can be traced back to ancient times, where oral traditions, folk tales, and religious texts served as the earliest forms of storytelling for young audiences. These narratives were often imbued with moral lessons, cultural values, and imaginative elements, catering to the educational and entertainment needs of children within varied groups across the subcontinent. One significant landmark in the development of children's literature in India was the emergence of classical Sanskrit texts such as the *Panchatantra*[6] and the *Jataka*[7] tales. These

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[2] Booth(1995) and Hogan (2009) also emphasizes the importance of mythology and epics in the narrative construction of Indian films, especially the domestic drama genre films (Malhotra and Alag, 2004) ; like *HumApke hain Kaun*

[3] The *Ramayana*, traditionally attributed to Sage Valmiki, is a significant *smriti* (that which is remembered) text from ancient India. It is an important epic of Hinduism, known as the *Itihasas* (History), the other being the *Mahabharata*. This epic narrates the life of Rama, a prince of Ayodhya in the kingdom of *Kosala*. The *Mahabharata* recounts the incidents of Kurukshetra War, a war of precedence between two groups of princely cousins, the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas.*

[4] A *Purana* is a sacred Hindu literature consisting of various collections of myth, legend, and genealogy, which differ widely in their origins and dates of composition.

[5] The Jaya Colouring Book. (May, 2016.). Penguin India. https://www.penguin.co.in/book/the-jaya-colouring-book/

[6] The *Panchatantra*, also known as 'Five Treatises', is a renowned collection of Indian animal fables. Originally written in Sanskrit, it has circulated widely both within India and around the world. The *Panchatantra* is often considered a

ancient fables, believed to have originated around the 3rd century BCE, provide timeless wisdom through animal allegories, moral dilemmas, and captivating narratives. The *Panchatantra*, attributed to the scholar Vishnu Sharma, and the *Jataka* tales, unfolding the previous lives of the Buddha, not only entertained children but also imparted valuable life lessons on ethics, governance, and interpersonal relationships. During the medieval period, the influence of Persian and Arabic literature, brought to India through trade and conquest, contributed to the augmentation of children's literature. Translations and adaptations of classic Persian texts like the *Gulistan*[8] and the *Arabian Nights*[9]

introduced Indian children to a world of fantasy, adventure, and cultural exchange. The colonial era marked an important shift in the backdrop of children's literature in India. British missionaries and educators introduced Western pedagogical methods and literature, including English children's books, to Indian schools and households. However, Indian authors and publishers also began to produce original works for children, often drawing inspiration from indigenous folklore, mythology, and everyday life experiences.



Figure 2: The *Jataka* Tales[10]

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed an increasing interest in children's literature, fueled by the Indian nationalist movement and the push for cultural revival. Visionary writers such as Tagore, Bankim Chandra, and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay recognized the importance of nurturing young minds and penned stories, poems, and plays specifically tailored to children. Tagore's *Kathā O Kāhini*[11] (1900) and *Sishu Sahitya* [12](1909)

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textbook of *niti*, or political wisdom, particularly aimed at kings and statesmen. Its aphorisms typically celebrate cleverness and strategic thinking rather than altruism. The original text combines Sanskrit prose and verse, with stories nested within five frame narratives. The introduction credits a learned Brahmin named Vishnusharman with composing the stories to educate the three foolish sons of a king (*Panchatantra Fables, Animal Tales, Morals*, 2024)

[7] The *Jataka* Tales are a significant collection of Buddhist morality stories, wherein the Buddha recounts episodes from his past lives on his journey to enlightenment. While they form a part of the Pali Canon, the Buddhist equivalent of the Bible, these tales are more akin to folktales than religious scriptures and are appreciated for their entertainment value. Comparable to Aesop's fables, the *Jataka* Tales feature the Bodhisatta, or future Buddha, depicted in various forms such as animals, humans, and deities, navigating through challenging situations with wit and creativity (*The Jataka Tales*, n.d.)

[8] The *Gulistan*, written by Shaykh Sadī in the 13th century, is a renowned Persian literary work that consists of prose and poetry. It is a collection of moral stories, anecdotes, and maxims that offer wisdom and guidance on various aspects of life, ethics, and conduct. The text covers a wide range of topics such as justice, kindness, generosity, love, and humility, presented through engaging narratives and insightful reflections. The *Gulistan* is considered a timeless masterpiece of Persian literature, valued for its profound teachings and enduring relevance in guiding individuals towards a virtuous and meaningful life (Mia, 2014).

[9] *Arabian Nights*, has captivated readers across cultures for centuries. Its complex history of composition and transmission reflects a rich mosaic of cultural exchange and storytelling traditions.

From its origins in oral narratives to its diverse textual manifestations in different languages and editions, the collection continues to inspire fascination and scholarly inquiry. This footnote serves as a brief overview of the complexities surrounding the compilation and translation of The Thousand and One Nights (*The Thousand and One Nights | Summary, Themes, & Facts*, 2023)

[10] *Jataka* Tales. (n.d.). The Jataka Tales: Stories of Buddhas Past Lives. https://thejatakatales.com/

[11] Bengali poetry book written by Tagore

[12] Rabindranath Tagore's approach to children's literature was deeply influenced by his educational philosophy, which prioritized holistic development and individuality over rigid instruction. He believed in nurturing children's curiosity and allowing them to explore the world freely. Rather than focusing solely on moral lessons, Tagore aimed to expand children's imaginative horizons

series exemplify his efforts to create literature that celebrates Indian culture, values, and traditions while promoting critical thinking and creativity among children. The post-independence period witnessed a propagation of children's literature in various Indian languages, reflecting the country's linguistic and cultural diversity. Notable authors such as Ruskin Bond, R.K. Narayan, and lately, Sudha Murty continues to enrich the literary landscape with their timeless tales of adventure, friendship, and discovery. In recent decades, the arrival of digital technology and globalization has transformed the way children engage with literature, paving the way for interactive e-books, animated stories, and multimedia platforms. Despite these developments, the essence of children's literature in India remains rooted in its rich heritage of storytelling, moral instruction, and cultural celebration, ensuring that the journey that began centuries ago continues to inspire and captivate young readers across the nation (Narayan, 1960; Narayan, 2013; Bhatt, 2020; Parikh, 2021 ).

Children's Film Society of India[13] despite its struggling journey in India has produced

some commendable films to induce the imagination and creative zeal of children; one example includes *Jawab Aayega* (Chugtai and Lateef, 1968), a film which celebrates the relationship children share with nature. *Jawab Aayega* stands out for its ability to tap into children's imagination through a dynamic blend of aesthetics and narrative. Another film, *Masterji* (Khote, 1964), is a standout in children's cinema due to its stark realism. The film, produced by the Children's Film Society, accentuates the importance of education in uplifting underprivileged children. It follows the story of Masterji, who, after losing his job, finds purpose in teaching orphaned children like Ramu. Despite facing financial struggles, Masterji's selfless dedication inspires his students to learn and succeed. The film, with its grim portrayal of poverty, highlights the society's contribution in promoting values of compassion and community upliftment through education. *Charandas Chor* (Benegal, 1975), marked the screen debut of Smita Patil, a prominent figure in India's parallel cinema movement. The film is an adaptation of Habib Tanvir's[14] folk-tale play. The Indo-Russian film *Kala Parvat* (Black Mountain) (Sathyu and Zagurdi, 1970) was shot in the Karapur forests of Karnataka. This collaboration underlines CFSI's[15] efforts to foster cultural exchange and cooperation across borders through filmmaking. The *Shabistan* collection of CFSI

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by exposing them to a diverse range of literary works, including his own poems, songs, and plays, as well as ancient epics. He incorporated elements of nature and cultural themes to engage children in a world of creativity and exploration. Despite criticism from some quarters, Tagore's varied writings for children, including stories and allegorical texts, demonstrate his evolution as a writer for young audiences. His later works reflect a shift towards allegorical and fantastical modes, challenging societal norms and presenting children as the civilizational 'Other'. Similarly, the excerpt from Zlata's Diary underscores the devastating impact of war on children's lives, highlighting the loss of a normal childhood experience amidst conflict-induced suffering. Overall, Tagore's philosophy of education shaped his approach to children's literature, emphasizing creativity, exploration, and the preservation of childhood innocence. (Roy, 2023)

[13] The Children's Film Society India (CFSI) was founded in 1955 by Pandit Nehru, the aim was of invoking children's imagination, empathy and critical thinking through indigenous cinema. Since its inception, CFSI has funded and distributed a wide range of nuanced content for children, including feature length films, short films, animation films, television series, and

documentaries. Some of the most notable talents in Indian cinema have directed films for CFSI, contributing to its rich catalogue of over 250 films in 10 different languages. CFSI supports cinema that offers quality entertainment for children, with the aim to broaden their thinking faculties and encourage observation and reflections on the world around. With the help of film screenings across the country, CFSI has managed to reach approximately four million children annually, solidifying its aim to strengthening the children's cinema in India and promote Indian-produced children's films globally. (*Children's Film Society, India*, n.d.)

[14] Habib Tanvir (1923–2009) was a famous Indian playwright, poet, and actor, known for his work with small communities in Chhattisgarh through the *Naya* Theatre, which he founded in 1959. He was showered with many national and international awards, including the *Kalidas Samman, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship*, and the *Padma Bhushan*. (*Habib Tanvir | Seagull Books*, n.d.)

[15] Acronym for Children's Film Society of India

films[16] reveals how it served as a stage for filmmakers and artists from diverse backgrounds to collaborate during the 1960s and 1970s. In spite of being outshined by their other works, renowned directors such as Sathyu, Benegal, and Abbas contributed lesser-known films to CFSI. The collection also includes works by women directors like Parvati Menon[17], highlighting their significant role in Indian cinema. It highlights the importance of examining how filmmakers addressed formal aesthetic challenges in depicting the world through a child's perspective (*Looking at the World through a Child's Eyes: Films from Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) | Modern Endangered Archives Program*, 2022). Producing children's films, including creating content that is both entertaining and educational while catering to diverse interests and adhering to censorship regulations is challenging. Additionally, funding and distribution can be challenging due to perceived commercial viability issues.

Regarding myths in animation, they work well for children because they provide fantastical storytelling that captivates their imagination. Myths often feature heroic characters, magical creatures, and epic adventures, appealing to children's sense of wonder. Moreover, myths convey important moral lessons and cultural values in visually engaging ways, making them both entertaining and educational for

young audiences (Gautam, 2008). Assamese children's films, *Ishu* (Utpal Borpujari, 2017) and *Xhoixobote Dhemalite*[18] (Bidyut Kotoky, 2016) are important films from the category of vernacular children's films in India, *Ishu* sheds light on the prevalent issue of witch-hunting in Assam through the perspective of a child, and the latter portrays the violence and social disturbances of 1980s Assam. *Ishu* is the first Assamese film in a decade to be produced by the Children's Film Society India (CFSI), while *Xhoixobote Dhemalite* is the first Assamese film to receive commercial release in the US. Both films have received international acclaim and recognition, marking a significant milestone for Assamese cinema (Telegraph India, 2018).

By scrutinising the relationship between discourses of childhood, national identity, and socio-economic shifts in India, Banaji (2016) analyses the representation of childhood in Hindi cinema. She explores the evolving symbolic significance of children on screen, tracing their transition from metaphors for the nation or truth-bearers to portrayals of cleverness, cuteness, and consumerist adolescence. Banaji contends that the evolving cultural and symbolic meanings of children on screen are correlated with the growing economic investment in middle-class children in India.

Bollywood adolescents are young viewers, typically teenagers or young adults, who actively consume films produced by the Bollywood. These adolescents constitute a significant portion of Bollywood's audience and play a pivotal role in shaping the reception and understanding of popular cinema in India. Through their discussions and viewpoints, they provide valuable insights into how they engage with various themes presented in Hindi films, including childhood, class, representation, and societal norms (Banaji, 2012).

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[16] The Shabistan Film Archive is a non-profit entity dedicated to the conservation and accessibility of Indian and South Asian cinema. (*Shabistan Film Archive*, n.d.)

[17] Parvati Menon, a filmmaker with extensive global experience and a graduate of the Film and Television Institute, Pune, is known for her focus on purposeful and entertaining cinema for young audiences. She has held key positions at the Children's Film Society India and has been recognized internationally as a delegate, resource person, and jury member at various film festivals. Her films, including *Triyatri* (1990), aimed at young college entrants, have received widespread acclaim for their portrayal of self-discovery journeys. Additionally, Menon conducts specialized workshops alongside her filmmaking endeavors. *Deolali Days* (2019) marks her debut novel. (*Parvati Menon's Author Page - Notion Press | India's Largest Book Publisher*, n.d.)

[18] Means Rainbow Fields

Figure 3: Poster of *Boot Polish*[19]

Children's cinema in India has sprouted as sudden bursts throughout the lifespan of cinema in India, we cannot say that there has been an organized sector for children's films. As Prasad (1998) mentions in his seminal work on Indian popular cinema that due to its disorganized business the content also was affected; so is true for children's films; though we had films which had plots or subplots which spoke to children but these films had a varied audience due to its *masala*[20] nature; infusion of multiple plots and a need for a mass audience; Gupta (2008) in his book at length dwells on this necessity of mass appeal Indian cinema. Indian cinema's earliest days saw the emergence of films that often included elements appealing to children, such as mythological stories and folk tales. Films like *Lanka Dahan* (Phalke, 1917) and *Sairandhri* (Painter, 1920) depicted these stories in a cinematic format. The 1950s and 1960s are considered the golden era of Indian cinema. Films like *Boot Polish* (Kapoor, 1954) and *The Apu Trilogy* (1955-1959) by Satyajit Ray, though not exclusively made for children, resonated deeply with younger audiences due to their universal themes and relatable characters.

The advent of animation in India opened up new possibilities for children's entertainment. Films like *Hanuman* (Samant, 2005) and

*Krishna Aur Kans* (Veturi, 2012) showcased Indian mythology in visually stunning animated formats, appealing to younger audiences. The production of children's films in India has historically been sporadic and disorganized, facing various challenges such as fragmented power structures, language barriers, financial skepticism, and cultural resistance to content aimed at young audiences. Additionally, the diffused nature of power, production, and distribution within Indian film industries has made it difficult to effectively coordinate efforts in creating and distributing children's films. Furthermore, India's linguistic diversity presents challenges in reaching a wide audience, and financiers have been hesitant to invest in children's films due to cultural perceptions that view them as insignificant.

Despite these challenges, there has been an evolution in children's entertainment preferences, especially in urban areas like Mumbai, where children are increasingly exposed to and knowledgeable about various aspects of teenage culture. This includes discussions on relationships, career aspirations, societal issues, and national identity. Consequently, Indian commercial films with appeal for children started to hybridize Western visual appeal with Indian narrative and thematic structures, exemplified by films like *Koi...Mil Gaya* (Roshan, 2003) and its sequel *Krrish* (Roshan, 2006), which blended Hollywood-style fantasy with Bollywood melodrama and musical sequences. Moreover, Bollywood films began addressing contemporary themes and family dynamics, reflecting the changing social landscape in India. This includes topics such as premarital sex, alternative sexualities, live-in relationships, and divorce, reflecting the evolving attitudes of urban middle-class youth towards societal norms and responsibilities. However, challenges persist within the infrastructure supporting children's cinema in India, particularly within organizations like the Children's Film Society, which has faced issues of inefficiency, fraud, and corruption. Despite these obstacles, there is a growing recognition of the importance of quality children's content in shaping young minds and enriching cultural experiences. As such, there is a continued effort to overcome these challenges and produce meaningful and engaging children's films that reflect the

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[19] *Poster of Boot Polish*. (n.d.). IMDB. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046799/

[20] A name given to mass appeal or commercial or popular Indian cinema due to the mingling of various genres that it has

diversity and dynamism of Indian society (Brown, 2015).

Adolescents in India engage with a variety of media platforms for entertainment, with newspapers being the most widely accessed medium, followed by magazines, the internet, mobile phones for SMS, and social networking platforms such as Facebook. While cinema remains a popular choice for entertainment, especially in theaters, television also serves as a common platform for viewing movies among adolescents. Key motivators for adolescents to attend cinema halls include seeking sensory stimulation, curiosity, and an interest in the artistic aspects of cinema. However there are concerns regarding the direction of the film industry, with power shifting to business entities that may prioritize commercial interests over social implications. The commercialization of cinema raises apprehensions about its potential negative impacts on society and moral values. Despite existing research on the global effects of cinema, the study highlights a lack of exploration into the behavioral and sociological impacts of cinema on adolescents in India. (Ruchi and Manju, 2013).

Children demonstrate varying levels of media literacy, with some showing the ability to identify and interpret multiple media messages simultaneously. This suggests a certain level of awareness and comprehension of the content they consume. Understanding the source of media content is crucial for children as it helps them recognize the constructed nature of media and make informed choices about what they consume. This aspect of media literacy aids in fostering a critical perspective on the media they engage with. Children's emotional responses to cartoon programs play a significant role in their interaction with media content. Emotions such as joy, fear, curiosity, and affection are commonly observed, indicating a strong connection to the stories and characters depicted in cartoons. The easy accessibility of television, mobile phones, tablets, and other devices emphasizes the pervasive influence of media in children's lives. The ownership of personal devices and preferences for specific content reflect the evolving media landscape and its impact on childrens' viewing habits. Cartoon programs serve as valuable platforms for children to acquire soft skills, cultural

values, and moral lessons. Indian cartoons like *Motu-Patlu*, Roll No. 21, and *Chota Bheem* are specifically designed to convey educational messages and facilitate positive learning experiences (Bhatnagar Chopra & Trehan, 2019).

The emergence of modern animation in India has significantly transformed the landscape of children's entertainment and education, integrating age-old oral traditions into new formats. This phenomenon not only preserves intangible heritage but also extends its influence globally, despite criticisms of historical and cultural distortions. The intertwining of oral traditions, folklore, and animation in India is interesting to note especially how traditional storytelling is transcreated for contemporary audiences. For instance, the storyline of the animation film *Chhota Bheem and the Throne of Bali* (Chilaka, 2013) draws from a popular Balinese folktale, flawlessly blending regional folklore with modern animation techniques. Similarly, other animation projects in India have drawn inspiration from Indian mythology and folklore, creating a rich treasure of storytelling for children. The paper also discusses the theory of 'Three Worlds of Experiences', which describes how folklore shapes children's understanding of themselves and their environment through inner, outer, and immediate outside worlds. It highlights the educational value of folklore in teaching moral lessons and social values to young audiences. Despite concerns about cultural preservation and accuracy, the integration of mythology and folklore into modern animation reflects a dynamic cultural landscape (Bajpai, 2014).

There has been a growing demand for imaginative and creative programming among Indian children, who often in past have found foreign-produced cartoon shows more appealing than local content. The children's market in India presented significant opportunities for the Japanese content industry in early 2000s, driven by India's increasing consumerism, particularly among the youth. Insights into the reception of Japanese content among children and parents in Pune, gathered through a group interview, provided firsthand perspectives on how Japanese content was perceived by the target audience. In summary, these findings shed light on the changing landscape of children's

television in India, the impact of Japanese content, and the potential opportunities and obstacles faced by both Indian and Japanese media industries. The research brought attention to the stark under-representation of female characters in Indian children's cartoon programming, with only 36.1% of characters being female compared to 63.9% male characters. Television, including cartoons, have played a crucial role in shaping children's perceptions of gender roles and identities in India. Media representations of gender in children's TV shows have impacted how children understand and internalize societal norms related to masculinity and femininity. (Jaggi 2014; Jaggi, 2015; Jaggi and Reddy, 2017).

Mythological themes and characters hold appeal across cultures, making animation films based on mythology attractive to global audiences. These films can foster cross-cultural understanding, as seen in examples like *Hercules* (Clements and Musker, 1997), which modernized Greek mythology for a wide audience. Animation's flexibility allows filmmakers to explore imaginative worlds and creatures, as demonstrated in *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2001), drawing from Japanese folklore. However, adapting mythology from different cultures carries risks, such as appropriation or misrepresentation.

Some Western animations have faced criticism for appropriating Indigenous or non-Western mythologies without proper acknowledgment. Additionally, modern reinterpretations of myths may deviate from traditional stories, sparking controversy among purists. In summary, while mythology in animation offers creative opportunities and cultural richness, filmmakers must tread carefully to maintain respect for the source material. Approaching mythological themes with sensitivity and authenticity ensures that animation films continue to captivate audiences while honoring our diverse storytelling heritage. While Disney and Pixar have long been dominant in the global animation scene, Indian filmmakers have made significant strides in reshaping animation within the country.



Figure 4: Poster of *Hanuman* (2005)[21]

*Hanuman* (Samant, 2005), stands as a milestone in Indian animation history, bringing the mythological superhero *Hanuman* to life with breathtaking visuals and a compelling narrative. Its success marked a turning point for Indian animation, inspiring more adaptations of Indian mythology. *Krishna: The Birth* (Chilaka, 2006) portrays the childhood adventures of Lord Krishna, *Roadside Romeo* (Hansraj, 2008) marked India's entry into 3D animation, charming audiences with the story of a lovable dog navigating the streets of Mumbai. Its contemporary humor and modern animation techniques appealed to viewers of all ages. *Arjun: The Warrior Prince* (Chaudhari, 2012) reimagines the epic *Mahabharata* from the perspective of *Arjuna*, showcasing a unique visual style and mature storytelling that demonstrated Indian animation's ability to tackle complex narratives. *Chhota Bheem and the Curse of Damyaan* (Chilaka, 2012) marked the big-screen debut of the popular children's animated series *Chhota Bheem*. *Delhi Safari* (Advani, 2012) is a socially relevant animated film addressing environmental issues. Its

21 *Hanuman- The Film*. (n.d.). Amazon. https://www.amazon.in/Hanuman-Limited-Collectors-Archi/dp/B0083T3B88

strong message, coupled with colorful characters and humor, resonated with a wide audience.

*Ghatothkach: Master of Magic* (Rao, 2008) brings to life the adventures of the mythological character *Ghatothkach*[22], showcasing the diversity of Indian storytelling through its blend of mythology and animation. *Motu Patlu: King of Kings* (Kadav, 2016) marks the transition of the popular animated series *Motu Patlu* to the big screen, reaffirming the enduring appeal of beloved Indian animated characters. *Baahubali: The Lost Legends* (Rajamouli, 2017) this animated series expands on the epic *Baahubali* franchise, bringing the grandeur of the films into the realm of animation and showcasing the versatility of Indian animation (RVCJ, n.d.).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the representation of mythological characters and narratives in Indian animation films for children, analyzing how these themes are adapted and interpreted within the context of the animated medium.

2. To explore the cultural significance and educational value of mythological content in Indian animation films for children, investigating how these themes contribute to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and moral values.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to David Bordwell (1989) understanding and interpreting films involve two distinct processes: comprehension and interpretation. Comprehension reveals the outward meaning of a film, while interpretation uncovers concealed meanings. These meanings can be psychological or sociological interpretations and are not subject to testing models. Comprehension focuses on explicit meanings, while interpretation investigates implicit and symptomatic meanings. Bordwell emphasizes that interpretation involves charting out semantic fields, which are conceptual structures built

from textual cues, and articulating arguments that offer novel and valid insights. Bordwell also discusses how semantic fields are formed using various attributes of cinema, such as the film industry, technology, maker, history, screening situation, spectator, and theories. He suggests four types of semantic fields: clusters, doublets, proportional series, and hierarchies, which are applied to the film with the help of schemata and heuristics. Mapping semantic fields onto a film is a selective process due to the subjective nature of critics, the polysemy of cinema, and the disjunction between meaning and material. In terms of cognitive perspective, Bordwell highlights the structured and processed nature of mental representations in film spectatorship. Narrative films utilize historically developed conventions like schemata and heuristics, and viewers construct stories based on perceptual cues. Cognitive film theory suggests that emotional responses to films are closely linked to our evaluation and assimilation of textual information, with character playing a significant role in emotional engagement. Overall, Bordwell emphasizes the importance of rigorous, theoretically ambitious criticism that considers both explicit and implicit meanings, as well as the cognitive processes involved in film spectatorship.
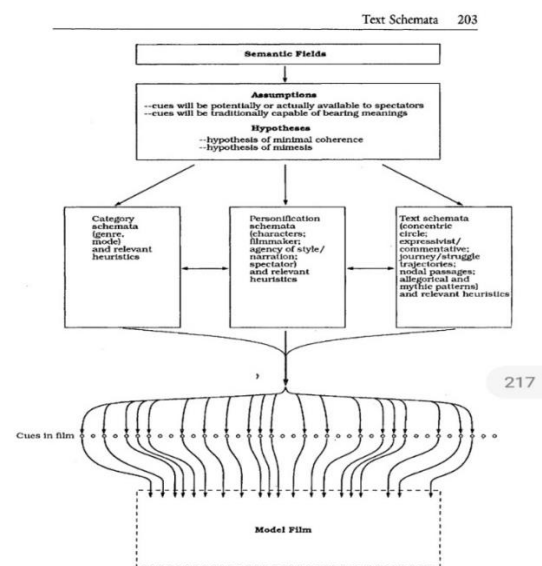


Figure 13. A cognitive model of critical interpretation

Figure 5: Cognitive Model of Film Interpretation[23]

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[22] A vital character in the epic *Mahabharata*, supposedly son of brave *Bheem* one of *Pandava* brothers (considered an avatar of *Hanuman).*

[23] Bordwell. David. (1989). Cognitive model of Film Interpretation. From *Meaning Making* (p.

Process-based cognitive animation theory an extension and subtle branch of cognitive theory which builds the concepts of cognitive theory for animation offers a nuanced framework for understanding the intricate interplay between cognitive processes and animation. This theoretical approach investigates how viewers perceive, process, and interpret the visual and auditory stimuli presented in animated content. Central to this theory is the examination of how animation captures and sustains viewers' attention through various techniques such as movement, timing, and visual complexity. Moreover, it investigates how selective attention shapes the way viewers process information presented in animation. Memory processes are also a key focus, with research exploring how animation impacts viewers' encoding, storage, and retrieval of narrative details, character traits, and emotional experiences. Comprehension is another critical aspect, with scholars analyzing how viewers construct mental models to make sense of the narrative, characters, and themes depicted in animation. Additionally, process-based cognitive animation theory examines the problem-solving activities elicited by animation, including predicting plot developments, inferring character motivations, and resolving narrative conflicts. By elucidating these cognitive mechanisms, this theory provides valuable insights into how animation influences perception, cognition, and learning processes in viewers (Bordwell, 1989; Torre, 2014).

Indian storytelling works in contrast to western storytelling; thus, while analyzing the two animated films *Chota Bheem and the Throne of Bali* and *Chota Bheem and Krishna* it's important to consider *rasa* theory[24] (Hogan, 2008; Roy, 2017) to fully grasp the storytelling here through animation besides cognitive

theory and cognitive process theory elements. The *misc en scene* of the film, the art direction, camera work, character creation (stereotypical here) or the *syuzhet* and *fabula*[25] of film all elements that encompass a film, even the digressions like song and dance or the dialogues and diegetic and non-diegetic sound everything will fall within the paradigm of Indian storytelling and poetics. Thus, while analyzing epic and folklore inspired narrative, *rasa* infused storytelling should also be taken into consideration. The model created below will be used to analyse the text of the sample films chosen. Both the films that have been chosen are a purposive sample chosen on two criteria; one that the protagonist is an Indian animation character and two it's one of the most famous creations from India which in itself is a bigger brand than the parent company Green Gold Media and the creator Rajeev Chilaka. Also both the films have components of mythology in narrative, thus, making the choice even more justified (Banerjee, 2018; G.G. Ltd, 2023; G.G. Ltd, 2023).
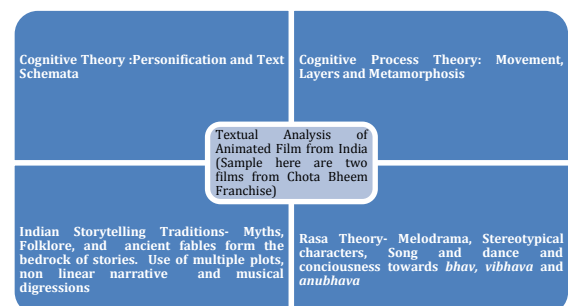


Figure 5: The framework which will be used to analyze the films

203) by David Bordwell, 1989; USA: Harvard University Press

[24]Bharata Muni, an ancient Indian philosopher, introduced the concept of *rasa*, or emotional sentiments, in performing arts around 200 B.C. According to him, the audience's experience depends on the emotions portrayed by actors. This theory heavily influences Indian cinema, guiding aspects such as acting techniques, music, and audience engagement.

[25] David Bordwell, a renowned film theorist, discusses the concepts of *fabula, syuzhet*, and film style in his analysis of cinema. *Fabula* refers to the chronological sequence of events within a film's story, representing the narrative structure independent of its presentation. *Syuzhet*, on the other hand, encompasses how these events are arranged and presented within the film, including narrative techniques like flashbacks or non-linear storytelling. Film style encompasses all formal elements and techniques used by filmmakers, such as cinematography and editing, to create meaning and evoke emotions in the audience. Together, these concepts provide a framework for understanding how narrative elements are constructed and presented in cinema, shaping the viewers' experience and emotional engagement with the film (Bordwell, 2008).

**Analyzing** *Chhota Bheem and the Throne of Bali*

The film begins with a gripping and intense sequence portraying a terrifying scenario where a baby is snatched away by wild animals, accompanied by a methodically crafted soundscape that heightens the tension. Through masterful 2D animation techniques, a wild forest is brought to life, setting the stage for the unfolding narrative. It is in this moment of peril that Bheem, the valiant protagonist, emerges as the ideal of hope; in close-up and high angle shots which make him look like a *veer yodha*[26]. The credits sequence showcases Bheem's valor through dynamic montage of his combat prowess, captured in action poses accompanied by his iconic battle cry. The animation employs layering and movement processing to seamlessly depict close-ups and mid-shots, enhancing the immersive experience for the audience.

Transitioning to the serene setting of Princess Indumati's palace[27], the aesthetic beauty is emphasized through vibrant colors and exquisite interiors, evoking a sense of grandeur and elegance. The *Pappi do pappi*[28] scene injects humor into the narrative, eliciting laughter from the audience and serving as a catalyst for Indumati's awakening to reality. This moment, invoking the *hasya rasa* or the emotion of laughter, adds depth to the character dynamics. Raja Indravarma, Indumati's father, consoles his daughter with a moving song, following the beloved tradition of song and dance sequences in Hindi cinema. This musical interlude not only adds to the cultural richness of the narrative but also provides a moment of emotional resonance for the characters. From the suspenseful opening to the emotional nuances woven into the fabric of the story, each

element is carefully crafted to captivate a truly immersive cinematic experience.

Indravarma- *kai sadiyon purani hai ye kahani tumko sunani, dharti par swar tha …bali bali har taraf hriyali* [29]



Figure 6: A still from the film - *Rangda*[30] a mythical demon from Balinese mythology depicted in the animated film *Chota Bheem and the Throne of Bali*

The introduction of *Rangda* is marked by her ominous presence, depicted with red eyes and a grey, indistinct figure, instilling a sense of foreboding in the audience. The stark use of colors such as red, yellow, and purple evokes the *Bhibhasta Rasa*[31] or the emotions of terror and astonishment, intensifying the impact of her character. The mythic battle between *Barong* and *Rangda* unfolds amidst a palette of blue, red, and yellow, symbolizing the clash of forces and the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The transition from the pages of a book to the mystical realm of Bali adds layers of intrigue and fascination to the narrative adding the component of metamorphosis into narrative which animation can do impeccably.

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[26] Brave warrior

[27] Bheem is a resident of fictional Indian village Dholakpur and King Indravarma rules it, Indumati is his daughter; other recurrent characters of Bheem-scape are his friends Raju, Jaggu- The monkey, Kalia and Dholu, Bolu. Tun Tun mausi is another frequently recurrent character; she is the one who makes Bheem's magical laddoos

[28] A bunch of frogs requesting princess Indumati to Kiss them

[29] Indravarma singing praises of the beauty and rich life of Bali

[30] The *Barong* is a traditional masked character found in Bali, Indonesia, often associated with the unidentified creature known as *keket*. It is commonly seen during celebratory events and is revered by the Balinese people as a symbol of health and good fortune. The Barong stands in opposition to *Rangda*, also known as *Calonarang*, who is viewed as a witch. In a dance-drama featuring the Barong, which may include the iconic *kris* dance where performers use heirloom swords, the *Barong* engages in a magical combat with *Rangda.* (*Barong | Traditional Dance, Protective Spirit & Masked Figure*, 2009)

[31] Emotion of fear

The scene of the *Tantrik*[32] worshipping *Rangda* is imbued with tension and anticipation, as his hoarse laughter and powerful dialogue seek to awaken her. The juxtaposition of the *Tantrik's* reverence with *Rangda's* terrifying laughter creates a tangible sense of dread, heightening the film's suspense. Returning to *Dholakpur*, a long shot of the *Rajyasabha*[33] captures the grandeur and significance of the setting, while Raju and Jaggu's praise of Bheem strengthens his status as a hero. Their chants intensify Bheem's strength and prowess, further solidifying his role as the central figure in the narrative. As the story progresses, a ship voyage transports the characters to Bali, setting the stage for *Rangda's* manifestation. At precisely 16 minutes into the film, Rangda materializes in present time, depicted in an aerial shot as the *Tantrik* summons her. Her appearance, captured in a close-up shot, elicits both fear and awe, highlighting her formidable presence and the imminent threat she poses.

Indravarma- *Kai sadiyon purani hai ye khani dharti par swarg… khushiyon ka nagar sab acha hai kisi ka na darr …ye jagah batao bali… har par yahan diwali …seedi ye swarg wali…*[34]

The narrative of the ancient tale unfolds, portraying a land of bliss and harmony, Bali, where fear has no place and joy abounds. This peaceful representation is presented through a song, painting a picture of Bali as a heavenly abode where every corner exudes the festive spirit similar to Diwali. The visual montage accompanying the song further enhances glimpses of Bali's diverse landscape, vibrant sea life, and majestic architecture, all adorned with locals dressed in traditional attire. The ominous takeover of Bali by *Rangda* and *Liak*[35] unfolds under the cloak of darkness, evoking negative energy through demonic laughter echoing in the background. This portrayal invokes the *Bhibhasta Rasa*, eliciting feelings of terror and apprehension among the audience, as they witness the kingdom succumb to the forces of evil.

The introduction of Arjun, the warrior prince, at the 22-minute mark, marks a pivotal moment in the narrative. As the story progresses, Bali falls under *Rangda's* control, setting the stage for the arrival of *Bheem, Indravarma*, and their companions. Humor and friendship are interjected into the narrative through the banter between *Kalia* and *Dholu-Bolu*, providing moments of humor amidst the approaching conflict. The detailed depiction of the ruins and landscape of Bali adds depth to the setting (Layering, metamorphosis and sound at play in animation).

The preparation for battle intensifies, accompanied by traditional Bali music, heightening the emotional resonance of the scene. Arjun's transformation into a formidable warrior, fueled by the power of *Dholakpur ka Ladoo*[36], epitomizes the fusion of action and emotion. As the climax approaches, the looming threat of *Rangda's* power is palpable, conveyed through low-angle shots and menacing close-ups accentuating her terrifying presence. Her declaration of intent to unleash destruction upon the world adds to the mounting tension, drawing the audience deeper into the narrative's emotional landscape. From the serene depiction of Bali's beauty to the looming threat of *Rangda's* wickedness, the interplay of visuals, music, and dialogue is captivating.
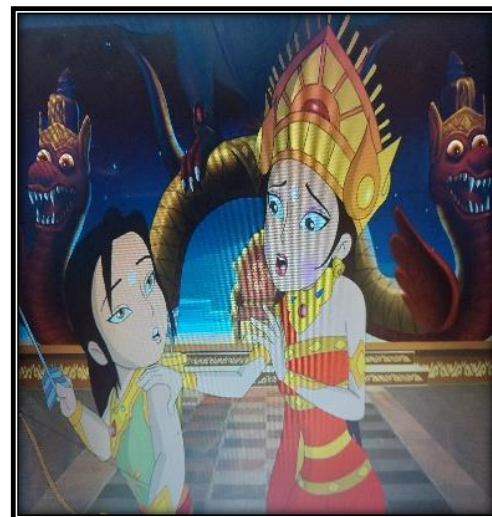


Figure 7: Arjun running from the palace

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[32] Someone who knows the realm of black magic

[33] The palace hall where king sits with his council of ministers to work on day to day matters

[34] This song along with the visual montage depicts the richness of landscape and luxury in Bali

[35] Rangdas' demon servants

[36] The metaphorical elixir that is used by Bheem in films and TV episodes to gain power and win over enemies; this is made by *tuntun mausi*; chutki's mom

*Hum mein taaqat bhar balshaali*
*Yahan ke raaj kumaar*
*Naam hain arjun*
*Bali mein hum shakti ke avtaar*
*Dhanush baan ho ya apne hatho*
*Mein ho talvaar*
*Nahin chukata kabhi nishaana*
*Karte hain jab vaar*[37]

At 50 minutes into the movie, climax is depicted by these lines of *Rangda*; she is the most powerful right now; attracting powers of black magic through extreme worship of the devil.

*Rangda* (CU and MCU) [38]– *main apni shaktiyon se agong parvat*[39] *hila dungi aur barong ki achai bhari duniye ko khatam kar dungi…ha ha ha*

The film incorporates mythological motifs such as Campbell's hero myth[40] and the timeless battle of good versus evil. Stark colors and imagery drawn from Balinese and Indian myths are simplified to cater to younger audiences' understanding. At the one-hour mark, the concept of the *Vanar Sena*[41], inspired by the epic *Ramayana*, is introduced. These elements combine to create a rich *narrative* that engages viewers of all ages while honoring cultural traditions and inviting exploration of moral themes. While preparing for the ultimate fight against *Rangda*, when all are tired and unhappy; Bheem and group of friends infuse *veer* rasa through the song:

*Hum na rukenge hum na jukenge*
*Tufaa se ghabhara ke*
*Rum rum pum pum*
*Rum rum pum pum*
*Ektaa mein shakti hain*

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[37] Arjun- the prince of Bali singing his own praises

[38] Close-up and medium closeup camera shot

[39] The holy mountain Agong which has Barong's temple and he is believed to meditate underneath it; Rangada wants to kill Barong and destroy Bali

[40] The Monomyth, conceived by Joseph Campbell in *Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1949), delineates the archetypal heroic journey where a protagonist embarks on transformative adventures before returning home. This framework proves invaluable for analyzing and comparing narrative traditions spanning diverse temporal and cultural landscapes.

[41] Prince *Ram* in *Ramayana* fights demon *Ravana* with the help of monkey king *Sugreev's* troupe

*Sabko ye bata denge*
*Rum rum pum pum*
*Rum rum pum pum*[42]

As Bheem pushes into the depths of the forest, he crosses paths with a formidable warrior tribe, while Arjun sets forth on his mission to seek out *Barong*, the mythical guardian who holds the key to confronting *Rangda's* menacing presence. Amidst the dense foliage, Arjun finds himself under attack by a swarm of snakes, only to be rescued by *Barook*, the venerable leader of the serpent community entrusted with safeguarding Barong's sacred sanctuary. Meanwhile, the *Baligak* tribe, renowned for their skill in weapon crafting, equips Bheem with the necessary arsenal to face off against the dreaded *Rangda*. It is during this time that Bheem undergoes a transformative experience, attaining the *Paramvir* Avatar, a manifestation of his inner strength and resolve, preparing him for the impending showdown. As the narrative unfolds, Arjun embarks on a quest in search of *Karis*, the legendary weapon of *Barong*, which holds the potential to turn the tide against *Rangda's* onslaught. However, as the imminent threat looms over Bali and its people, Bheem finds himself locked in a fierce battle with the immensely powerful *Rangda*. Despite his valiant efforts, Bheem succumbs to unconsciousness, while Arjun struggles in vain to secure *Karis*, the elusive weapon. With the climax fast approaching, the forces of *Rangda* close in, threatening to overwhelm the stressed populace, including our protagonists and their valiant associates. Yet, in a twist of fate, Bheem stumbles upon the coveted *Karis*, although by accident, as Arjun's efforts prove futile against the demonic prowess of Rangda.

In the denouement of the tale, *Bheem* experiences a mystical encounter with *Barong*, unlocking a reservoir of untapped power within him. Empowered by this newfound strength, Bheem engages *Rangda* in a titanic struggle, ultimately emerging triumphant and bringing about the demise of the malicious demoness, thus restoring peace and harmony to the land of Bali. Through its intricate narrative and mythical symbolism, the film explores themes of courage, perseverance, and the eternal struggle between light and

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[42] We are strong and invincible

darkness, captivating audiences of all ages with its timeless tale of heroism and redemption.

## Analysing Chota Bheem and Krishna



Figure 8: A still from the film introducing *Kirmada* as all powerful

Montage song- *Chota bheem aur krishna chota bheem…sankat ke jab badal chaaye poori karne ko trishna aa jate hai krishna..*[43]

*Dholakpur pe khatra aaya kirmada sar pe mandraya sab ka mann ghabraya poori karne ko trishna aa jate hain krishna*
*Khush hai mann hi mann ke andar chutki raju jaggu bandar poori karne ko trishna aa jate hain krishna…*

The film commences with a long shot of a desert battleground, accompanied by the eerie cry of the wind. A lone soldier, riding on horseback, rushes towards the camera, his face etched with terror as he describes the imminent threat of *Kirmada* and his formidable demon army. The soldiers, overwhelmed by the sheer terror of *Kirmada's* forces, flee in panic. The voice of *Kirmada* reverberates ominously as a close-up reveals his menacing red eyes and terrifying expression, evoking the *Bhibhasta Rasa*—a sense of terror and astonishment. Kirmada's dominance extends across the land, with only Dholakpur remaining unconquered.

When *Kirmada's* messenger arrives in Dholakpur, delivering the ominous demand for surrender, Bheem's resolute response emphasizes his recognition of *Kirmada's* dark

power. Indravarma, the king, and his soldiers rally, with Bheem to prepare for battle. The animation here is simpler and lacks detailing as compared to the *Throne of Bali* which has intricate detailing in *misc en scene*. The portrayal of Indumati and Chutki, in stereotypical roles of caretakers rather than active participants in the fight reverberates with the studies mentioned in literature review (refer to findings in Jaggi 2014; Jaggi, 2015; Jaggi and Reddy, 2017). This portrayal reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations, limiting the potential for nuanced character development. However, the overarching narrative of unity and courage in the face of adversity still resonates, offering valuable themes for viewers of all ages.

Bheem- *kirmada kaale jadu ka malik hai …Maharaj senapati chalo yudh ki tayari kare*[44]

In Bheem's quest to combat Kirmada's daunting magical abilities, he encounters *Achi Pari*, a mystical being whose imposing presence and booming voice contradict her kind intentions. Through her guidance, Bheem gains the knowledge necessary to confront Kirmada head-on. Returning to the battlefield with newfound resolve, Bheem faces off against Kirmada, who taunts him with chilling confidence. Undeterred, Bheem harnesses the magical powers bestowed upon him by *Achi Pari*, initiating a fierce battle against Kirmada. As the clash between Bheem and Kirmada unfolds, the simplicity of the 2D animation serves to emphasize the raw intensity of the conflict. Though lacking the intricate *mise-en-scène* of the *Chota Bheem and Throne of Bali* film, the straightforward visuals remain effective in conveying the urgency of the showdown. Kirmada is shown in high angle shots, close ups and extreme clos-ups; his figure is half human half animal probably inspired from demons in Greek mythology; red eyes, claws and a heavy voice with terrifying laughter yet sarcastic when he speaks gives Kirmada an overpowering personality and evoking *Adbhuta* rasa (wonder, amazement and surprise) and *veer* rasa. Also through *Kirmadas* movement and metamorphosis (Torre, 2016) he creates a sense of awe, magic and surrealism. His story when rendered by *Dhuni*

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[43] Singing glory of Krishna as the ultimate saviour

[44] Kirmada is extremely powerful magician

baba[45] reminds one of the stories of selling soul to devil like Dr Faustus (Marlowe, 1592) or Voldermort in Harry Potter series (Rowling).

Kirmada, employing his dark magic, launches a barrage of attacks against Bheem, setting the stage for a showdown of epic proportions. Amidst the chaos, moments of levity arise through the antics of *Raju, Kalia*, and *Rakshas*, injecting humor into the intense battle scenes evoking *hasya rasa*. Through *Achi Pari's* guidance and Bheem's indomitable spirit (*veer rasa*), the stage is set for a clash of titans, as the forces of good and evil collide in a battle that will determine the fate of Dholakpur.

Bheem –*tum imandaari se nahi lade*
Kirmada- *main kabhi imandaari se nhi ladta[46]*

Bheem's unwavering integrity shines through as he steadfastly rejects Kirmada's offer to join forces, despite the consequences. This act of moral courage lands Bheem and his companions in prison, as Kirmada's demonic minions wreak havoc throughout Dholakpur, plunging the once peaceful kingdom into chaos. In the face of adversity, Bheem and his team devise a daring escape plan from their confines. Crafting a secret tunnel beneath the prison walls, they work tirelessly to ensure their freedom. However, not all are able to flee, as *Kalia* and *Dholu-Bolu* find themselves unable to keep pace.



Figure 9: A still from the Film; *Kirmada* in overpowering position

Meanwhile, *Kirmada* grows increasingly impatient, demanding information on *Bheem's* intentions and expressing concern over his waning patience. Amidst this turmoil, *Bheem*

seeks counsel from *Achi Pari* once more, only to discover that even her powers are constrained by *Kirmada's* malevolent influence. She advises him to seek out *Dhuni Baba*, hinting at a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness that has enveloped Dholakpur.

Kirmada - *batao mujhe bheem ka irada kya tha…mera dhairya kam ho raha hai*

In a pivotal moment of the narrative, *Dhuni Baba* reveals the dark truth of *Kirmada's* origins to Bheem, shedding light on the source of his formidable powers. The revelation unfolds amidst an atmosphere of tangible dread, as darkness blankets the scene and ominous thunder roars in the background, evoking a sense of threatening and terror. The use of atmospheric elements such as darkness and thunder triggers emotional responses rooted in evolutionary instincts, heightening the viewer's sense of unease and apprehension (Bordwell, 1989). As *Dhuni Baba* unveils the sinister pact forged by *Kirmada* with the devil, the audience is confronted with the chilling realization of the villain's unkindness. The portrayal of *Kirmada's* pact with the devil serves as a narrative device to deepen the sense of conflict and raise the stakes of the story.



Figure 10: A still of *Krishna* from the film

In this one-hour film featuring *Chota Bheem and Krishna*, the depiction of *mise-en-scène*, battle scenes, Dholakpur, and encounters between protagonists and antagonists are relatively straightforward. Both the background settings and animated characters are presented with simplicity. The use of language incorporates *Hinglish*, suggesting a lack of elaborate work on time, era, and

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[45] Spiritual guide, another recurrent character in Bheem series

[46] Bheem accusing Kirmada of not fighting ethically; the accusation is remorselessly accepted by the latter

contextual nuances within the story. For instance, when *Kirmada* invites *Bheem* to join his team, the dialogue lacks depth in exploring the time, era, or context of the narrative; *Kirmada* literally uses the word s – *Bheem meri team join kar lo*[47]

Moving forward, when Krishna appears in the jungle after Bheem and his friends escape from Dholakpur prison, he is portrayed as a simple boy who herds cows, plays the flute, and engages in friendly banter with Bheem. Despite being a well-known mythical character in Indian households, Krishna's collaboration with Bheem adds an interesting twist to the tale. In this portrayal, Krishna is depicted as a blue-skinned boy with a flute and peacock feather on his head, embodying characteristics of a cow herder while displaying wit and intelligence. References from the *Mahabharata* are drawn upon when *Bheem* decides to confront *Kirmada*, with Krishna assuming the role of his charioteer, reminiscent of the *Krishna-Arjuna* relationship in the Kurukshetra war. However, the portrayal remains simple and entertaining, with Krishna depicted more as a friendly neighborhood boy rather than solely as a deity. It is only on rare occasions that Krishna is depicted with god-like qualities, with his surreal powers ultimately aiding Bheem in defeating Kirmada and restoring Dholakpur to its former glory.

*Krishna- main tumhara sarthi banuga kirmada ke saath tumhari ladai mein…*[48]

**CONCLUSION**

This research paper investigates the mythological storytelling within Indian animation films designed for children. Through a textual analysis, we have tried to explain the intricate ways in which these films reinterpret, adapt, and present traditional narratives, characters, and motifs from Indian mythology. By weaving mythological themes into their narratives, these films not only entertain but also educate young audiences about their cultural roots and shared heritage. Moreover, they offer a creative space for reimagining ancient tales in a manner that

resonates with contemporary sensibilities and engages with the evolving needs of today's children (Pattanaik, 2010; Ganatara, 2021; Bhatnagar Chopra and Threhan, 2019; Bajpai, 2014).

Indian animation storytelling can become more nuanced, intricate and in-depth in the tradition of Miyazaki (Qu and Cao, 2023; Anymation, 2020; Hernández-Pérez, 2016) and Del Toro (Delgadillo & Delgadillo, 2022; CBC News: The National, 2023; Extended interview: Filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and more, 2023) if the filmmakers emphasize more on research w.r.t myth and folklore and also the cognitive abilities of children. This research emphasizes the importance of animation as a powerful tool for fostering cultural literacy and promoting intergenerational dialogue. Though film creators in India can use their observational faculties like Miyazaki and create layered meanings with the use of mythology and contemporize the myth and broaden the audience base of animation films in India like Del Toro has done for Hollywood.

While this study has focused on Indian mythology as a whole, future research could go deeper into the diverse regional mythologies of India. Each region boasts a unique treasure of myths, legends, and folklore, offering rich material for animated storytelling. Comparative analyses could examine how different regional mythologies are represented in animation and how they contribute to the cultural identity of specific communities. Exploring how children engage with and interpret mythological themes in animation through audience reception studies would offer a deeper understanding of the impact of these films. By conducting interviews, surveys, or focus group sessions.

The study relies on the selection of a representative sample of Indian animation films for children. However, the process of selecting films may have introduced bias, as it is based on subjective criteria such as availability, accessibility, and researcher discretion. Indian animation films for children are produced in various languages and cultural contexts, reflecting the linguistic and regional diversity of the country. Textual analysis inherently involves interpretation, and researchers bring their own perspectives,

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[47] Bheem join my team

[48] I will join you in your battle against Kirmada

biases, and interpretations to the analysis process. While efforts are made to maintain rigor and objectivity, the subjective nature of interpretation may influence the identification and analysis of mythological themes, messages, and cultural representations in the films.

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