

Chapter 8

Devdutt Pattanaik's Queer Archives as Decolonial Queer Praxis: Rewriting Myth in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines Devdutt Pattanaik's *Queer Archives* as a digital intervention that reclaims mythological memory to advance decolonial queer historiography in South Asia. Moving beyond thematic readings of mythology, the chapter argues that Pattanaik's project rehistoricizes gender and sexual plurality by recovering narratives, iconographies, and cosmologies marginalised under colonial and heteronormative epistemologies. Situating *Queer Archives* within the frameworks of Digital Humanities and Queer Digital Humanities, the chapter demonstrates how digital storytelling, online archiving, and public scholarship function as tools of counter-archival practice. Ultimately, the article proposes that digitally mediated myth operates not merely as cultural narration but as a strategy of memory-making that reshapes queer historiography, expands the archive beyond institutional repositories, and reimagines the digital public sphere as a site of decolonial possibility.*

1. INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL QUEER NARRATIVES

The early 21st century has witnessed a sweeping transformation in how identities are formed, shared, and expressed, driven in large part by the rise of digital platforms

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and networked communication. These platforms, ranging from social media sites to specialised online communities, have led to the creation and circulation of narratives that extend beyond conventional cultural and physical boundaries. In these new digital environments, individuals and groups within the LGBTQ+ community perceive these platforms as important nodes of identification, belonging, and support, paving the way for forms of self-expression and community formation that were previously invisible or had to confront societal constraints. The democratisation of personal and mobile devices has fostered a vibrant landscape where individuals can perform any identity, enabling narratives that challenge normative culture, leading to “Digital Queerdom”.

Digital Queerdom can be defined as an internet where queerness is the default rather than a mere elective, with rhetorical choices (Kays, 2022). This formulation also implies that digital queerdom operates as an oppositional structure, where identity is continuously negotiated against normative cultural frameworks rather than merely expressed. While analogue-based identity creation is limited, digital identity exceeds those limits. The internet empowers users to perform any identity or idea without divergence, reinforcing the notion that queerness is in opposition to static identity. The internet allows queer individuals to safeguard their identity while remaining connected and to perform their queerness. This anonymity protects individuals and fosters the creation of “Safe Spaces” or “Virtual Communities” where queer netizens can interact, perform, and connect, even if they have not met in physical spaces. For instance, the formation of vibrant queer communities on platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. For example, hashtag-based communities such as #BiTok on TikTok or queer support networks on Facebook illustrate how users actively construct identity-based publics on these platforms (Wood, 2022, pp. 303–304). The concept envisions a queer digital future, implying a continuous process of redefinition and re-examination of queer concepts in evolving digital environments.

The emergence of diverse digital narratives is essential, given the historical Western-centric bias. Devdutt Pattanaik’s seminal work, such as *The Man Who Was a Woman*, directly confronts this limitation, asserting that “there is no timeless and universal attitude towards things queer” (Pattanaik, 2002/2014, p. 12). He meticulously demonstrates that different cultures express and repress sexuality in different ways at different times, countering the pervasive quest for a “normal and natural Utopia” that imposes a singular worldview or way of life. Pattanaik’s scholarship decolonises queer studies by illuminating the ancient legacy of gender fluidity and diverse sexualities within Hindu lore, effectively countering the reductive notion that queer identity is a Western import. Pattanaik, through his *Queer Archives* (Pattanaik, 2025), interrogates how faith intersects with homophobia, asking intriguing questions about the selective activism that addresses Islamophobia but not “Islamic

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