

Mythical Association of Male Body in *Baahubali Series*

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Abstract

This study entitled as “Mythical Association of Male Body in Baahubali Series” explores how S.S. Rajamauli destabilizes the cinematic convention of the constructed female body in consideration of the male gaze in the Bollywood film industry. It investigates the entertainment industry’s presentation of the male body for both the male and female gaze in Baahubali Series. Moreover, the manuscript highlights the glorification of the male body through rigorous training and constant maneuver in resonance with the Eastern mythologies and Hindu scriptures. The study discovers the reworking of myth and archetype in film and an ideal male body prepared in gym centers and training institutions. Cinematic representations of Bhima, Krishna, Lord Vishnu and Arjuna mythologize male bodies. The research paper examines the texts from the perspectives of Body Studies and the body myth from the Eastern epic traditions, including Mahabharata, Ramayana and Hindu hymns. Similarly, the body of Baahubali rehearses Bhima and Krishna, the body of Bhalla Deva with Duryodhana and the body of Bajjala Deva with Dhritarastra. The Hollywood film industry’s projection of the body with resonance of myth and archetype subverts the traditional notion of body as impure trivial thing. Since the representation of the body in Bollywood movies has barely been explored, this study can be significant source for the researchers of myth, movie and masculinity in the future.

Keywords: body, mythologize, cinematic representation, idealization, Bollywood

Baahubali Series, a movie directed by S.S Rajamauli, is a heroic story of Pravash-starred Mahendra Baaahubali who avenges death of his father Prabhas starred Amarendra Baahubali by killing his uncle Rana starred Ballala Deva and releasing his captivated mother AnuskaShetty starred Devasena who awaits her son for 25 years. The movie has been divided into two parts i.e. Baahubali the Beginning and Baaahubali the Conclusion.

Baahubali1 begins with Shivagami saving the baby Mahendra Baahubali sacrificing her own life in the river. However, the baby is rescued by Sanga and her husband who grows up as a mighty and handsome Shiva with indefinable courage and power and is capable of accomplishing the tasks that a normal mortal being can never even dream of. He aspires to climb water fall (Jal Parvat) from his childhood and succeeds it following the mask of Avantika, his beloved for whom he decides release of Devsena (Anuska). The muscular Shiva sneaks into Mahismati and almost manages to rescue Devasena until he is attacked by Satya Raj starred Katappa who realizes that Shiva is the Mahendra Bahubali, the son of Ameendra Baahubali. Then, the story goes to flashback where Amarendra Baahubali and his cousin brother Ballala Deva are raised

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by Shivagami, wife of Bjjala Deva and is deprived of the throne in spite of being elder son due to his physical weakness. Both of them grow up as mighty, fearless and knowledgeable warriors who need to prove their capacity by killing Kalkeyas, a new threat to their kingdom. Though Ballala deva manages to kill Kalkeya, Baahubali is announced as their new king because of his wisdom and love for his citizens. Shiva after knowing his real identity as Mahendra Baahubali asks “if my father was so strong who killed him?” Kattappa with teary eyes says, “I betrayed him and took his life” and the film ends.

Baahuabli the Conclusion continues the flashback of Amarendra Bahubaali and is journey to Kuntaladesh where he falls in love with the mighty and skilled princess Devasena, who also becomes the love interest of Ballala Deva. Baahubali chooses Devasena over his position as the king and becomes commander in chief. The plotting of Ballala Deva gets successful when Baahubali and Devsena get banished from the kingdom but happily live with the commoners. Ballala Deva further plots to convince Shivagami that Baahubali is plotting to kill him as a revenge who decides to save her son and orders Kattappa to kill Baahubali who stabs him back. Devasena delivers a baby and goes to the palace where Kattappa has already revealed about the immense love of Baahubali for Shivagami. Then Shivagami vows to protect the baby Mahendra Baahubali but is attacked by her own son and his henchmen. Thus, Sivagami flees to save the baby which is the starting point of Baahubali the Beginning. The climax is all about war between Mahendra Baahubali and Ballala Deva where Baahubali manages to throw Ballala Deva in the pyre of wood collected by Devasena for 25 years and is burnt alive by her. The movie ends with reunion of Baahubali, Kattappa, Devasena and Avantika where Baahubali is introduced as new king of Mahismati.

Different Hindu myths display the ideal male bodies like that of Arjun, Bhim, Duryodhan, Dhritarastra, Krishna and Ram. Their physiques have been presented as the perfect bodies with strength and mind. Similarly, Baahubali series highlights that the perfect ideal male body is not only the western treasure but Hinduism also explores its own agenda of perfect male body which needs further exploration. The research shows that the movie, through the use of eastern context, sets the new philosophy of ideal male body and therefore it is significant in the body, myth and film studies.

The study attempts to explore how *Bahubali Series* glorifies male bodies projected in the cinema world in association with eastern Hindu myths. It shows that the bodies thought to be impure and trivial can be made divine correlating with godly bodies. It is largely based on eastern mythical aspects. It tries to show the bodies of the heroes in the movie world are ideal like that of the gods. An ideal body is not only the subject matter of Western society but the Hindu philosophy also has defined the ideal body in various scriptures. In the Eastern context, the body of God Narayana (one of the Tridevaas) is considered to have an ideal body with long arms and legs and a broad chest. Moreover, the body of the dancing Shiva (another Tridevaa) is considered to have an ideal body. Similarly, the long epic Ramayana defines Rama as an ideal male. In Mahabharata, Krishna (reincarnation of Lord Vishnu) is claimed to have an ideal body.

In the Hindu myth, too, there are heroes with different types of bodies. The heroes in the myth are presented as courageous, skillful, bright, pleasing, and eternal. Lord Vishnu is supposed to have ideal male body with long hands and legs, attractive naval and pleasing figure. The ideal body of Lord Vishnu is described in Puranas as:

Bearing the auspicious sign of srivatsa ... on his handsome, bright, large and raised chest. His chest, heart and lotus like palms are vestal. In his luxury (amusement), he is most pleasing to (Goddess) Lakshmi in befitting the cosmic-machine moving, who is detached, eternal ... and unblinkingly (constantly) adored by gods. (105)

The quote displays that Lord Vishnu's body is a perfectly pleasing body to look at and take pleasure. It is the matter of entertainment for the worshippers and followers of him. It further shows that the male body has been a matter of pleasure since god's time. In the same way, in Bahubali Series is all about the depiction of perfect standard of male body which is equally accepted by modernity as well as Hindu mythical Gods like Shiva, Krishna and Vishnu who have example of Dharma bodies.

According to Dharma Sastra, Krishna is defined as the most stunningly beautiful spiritual form. The term Krishna means 'all attractive'. He is the carrier of the peacock feather on his head. He is well known for his dark complexion which is similar to dark rain cloud. His hair is black and curly. He wears a unique gem called 'Kaustuba' and wears the garland of ever green fresh flowers around his neck and the sole of his feet are decorated with auspicious symbols. His best plaything is flute which he plays so sonorously that even the earth dances in its melody. Similarly, he is said to have enchanting smile that lures everyone. His clothing is compared to lighting.

Other accounts say that Krishna's enchanting smile is irresistible, as are His attractively moving eyebrows. His clothing resembles lightning. His wide eyes, delicate hands, reddish-soled feet, and His deep navel often draw comparisons to the beauty of lotus flowers. The luster of His dazzling toe nails is compared to moonlight, and He always appears in the fullness of youth.

Lord Krishna is also known as Adhokshaja who is beyond the material senses. It's easy for us to see matter. The Supreme Person is hundred percent spiritual, and we need spiritual vision to see Him. Krishna says in the Bhagavad-Gita that He keeps a curtain of illusion (Maya) between Himself and those who have no affection for Him. It is Lord Krishna's wonderfully best quality that makes him divine. In the same light, Both Amanendra and Mahendra Baahubali in Baahubali Series are Krishna like figures in terms of their color, trickster attitude and their strong stand point for truth and justice.

In addition, Gupta claims that Baahubali is the periodless tale of the hero called 'Shiva' who is royal by birth but grows in faraway land, aspires to climb waterfall and his biggest challenge to meet his beloved. The rest of the story unfolds that makes him acquainted with his real identity. Gupta displays:

Strapping Shiva (Prabhas) has a strange fascination for a faraway mountain

peak, where he can see the outlines of a castle. His attempts at leaping across cliffs first leads him to the beautiful Avantika (Tamannaah) and her group of rebels, and then to the distant kingdom which has the tied-up-in-chains-for-twenty-five-years Devasena (Anushka Shetty), suffering the indignities heaped upon her by the cruel King Bhallala (Rana Daggubati) and his father (Nasser). Rajamouli doesn't bother giving us a date for the film. It is closest to a 'period', part myth, part everything else. (Indian Express, n. p.)

The above quote shows that Rajamouli has successfully delivered his audiences with timeless myth because it carries the story of 'Shiva' who climbs the Jaal Parvat after several attempts to meet his dream girl who turns out to be a warrior fighting for releasing their captivated queen Devasena who turns out to be his mother and rest of the story comes to light.

Baahubali Series contains considerably a large amount of mythological elements related with Hinduism. In fact, when we look upon the characters of Amarendra Baahubali and Mahendra Baahubali, both played by Prabhas, we cannot stop various mythological characters like Bhima, Ajuna of Mahabharata and Rama of Ramayana and the god Shiva of Hindu mythology.

Mahendra Baahubali, like Bhima, is a fighter with immense strength to overcome any difficulties. Firstly, he aspires to climb the Jaal Parvaat, that is, waterfall, and keeps on trying until he succeeds to get a close view of his beloved Avantika (Tammannah). In one of the scenes, when Avantika encounters with Shiva, later revealed as Baahubali, he claims that he has climbed waterfall only for her. She exclaims 'only lord Shiva can do this!' This statement shows what the strength of Baahubali is or his strength is equivalent to lord Shiva. Similarly, in one of the scenes, Shiva carries Shiva Linga on his arm displaying his perfect and heavily built body. He walks fiercely and confidently as if Lord Shiva is walking. And, when he accomplishes his task of placing Shiva Linga under Jaal Parvaat to give him holy wash to fulfill his mother's wish, his bravery is further exposed by song "Kun hai whoo" (who he is). The song states that "he has brought with him eternal light spreading everywhere" which is equivalent with Stotra which states "Shiva's head is glorified and has a fire flaming on the surface of his forehead". As the song describes, Shiva has happy and shiny face glorified with happiness after he accomplishes his task. And because of his mighty deed, he is able to bring glory and satisfaction in the faces of everyone who witness his task. Moreover, every brave act of both Mahendra and Amarendra Baahubali brings happiness and delight among his subjects as they feel blessed under their commands. The song further states "his strong arms can turn the tide of history". The song turns true as Amarendra Baahubali tries to change history of Mahismati bringing equality among his subjects but he is unsuccessful due to potting made by his brother Balladeva (Rana). However, this dream is fulfilled by his son Mahendra Baahubali conquering the devil and bringing peace and justice in his kingdom which delights all his citizens.

Both Amarendra and Mahendra Baahubali symbolize victory of truth over evil. We can also compare Baahubali as Bhima, a perfect wrestler. According to Mahabharata,

Bhim is supposed to have the strength of 10,000 elephants. In similar way, Amarendra Baahubali faces every sort of destructive combats. Like a fierce warrior with loving heart, opposite qualities within himself, he combats with Kalekeya and nearly kills him. In Mahabharata, Bhima stands opposite to Dhuryodhana in terms of strength and power. Bhima always fights for truth, righteous and justice. He can never tolerate injustice but always shows immense respect towards his mother's and brother's Yudisthira's decisions. In the same way, Amarendra Baahubali fights for justice and doesn't hesitate to sacrifice his throne for truth. However, he, too, is loyal towards his mother respecting her each decision. In Baahubali 2, Amarendra Baahubali obeys his mother's decision twice. Once by choosing Devasena to keep his promise and second by living the life of commoner going out of the palace fighting for truth.

Balladeva contrasts with Amarendra Baahubali in every possible ways and only similarity between them is their immense physical strength. He is crooked and a great conspirator who can do anything for the lust of power and position just like Duryodhana who conspired and dethroned his Pandaava brothers. Dhuryodhana is best remembered for his physical strength, warrior skill, tyrannical nature, and lust for women and power. Here, in Baahubali series, Ballala Deva portrays the character of Dhuryodhana because of his physical strength, tyrannical nature, lust for Devasena, his skill with his pet weapon mace, his lust for power and position and so on. The physical toughness between two can be seen in the final part of Baahubali 2 where Mahendra Baahubali and Balladeva fight with equal strength and for a while it seems quite impossible for them to win each other. In Mahabharata, Bhima fulfill his wife promise to let her bathe her hair with Duryodhan's blood. In the similar way, Mahendra Baahubali fulfills his mother's promise by letting her burn Balladeva in the pyre prepared by her.

The characters of Mahendra Baahubali and Amarendra Baahubali can be compared with Yudisthira of Mahabharata because of his constant faith in dharma and truth. Yudhishtira, the eldest brother of Pandavas, can even sacrifice himself for dharma and truth. He is the perfect ruler and a perfect human. So is Amarendra Baahubali in Baahubali 2 who happily sacrifices his luxury, comfort and even his kingdom for the sake of dharma. He selects dharma's side in one of the scenes when Devasena is asked to be wife of Balladeva in court. He protects her claiming that he has promised to protect her dignity at any cost. And when his mother Shivagami asks him to choose between throne and Devasena, he remembers Shivagami preaching where she says: "For a word given in a good faith, for upholding truth and justice, to protect the code of dharma oppose whoever the offender is. Even if it the god, don't be afraid. This is the law of dharma. And righteousness of the warrior's clan" (n. p.). As the given quote speaks in favor of truth, justice and dharma, Amarendra Baahubali is seen choosing truth in any condition. So, he falsifies Shivagami for not being able to choose what is right or wrong before compelling a girl to marry someone else, that is, Balladeva without knowing what is there in her heart. Similarly, Amarendra Baahubali is loyal towards his land Mahismati in any condition either he is in the power or not. In one of the scenes of Baahubali 2, he beheads commander Setupaty for touching females of

his kingdom which is also against dharma. Moreover, he grows fierce when the court refuses to listen to the truth spoken by his wife Devasena who is pregnant at the time which is against the raj dharma. For the offense, he is banished from his royal life along with his wife and before leaving he says: “On the one hand is the law you trust, on the other is dharma you taught. Between the two this sword you gave me made me choose between paths of righteousness. Even if I’m banished under reproach, I’ll serve and sacrifice my life for Mahismati” (n. p.). As the quote claims Amarendra Baahubali lives, fights and dies for the sake of righteousness for which he is immensely loved and supported by people. He is down to the earth and gives first priority to his words rather than his comfort. Be it when Ballaladeva cunningly kills Kalakeya for the throne in Baahubali 1 or be it when he becomes king of hearts by his constant service to the citizen of Mahismati, it is obviously his dharma. The same is followed by Mahendra Baahubali who walks in his father’s path of dharma. In fact, he kills Balladeva to save righteousness in his kingdom just like Mahabharata was fought for the reconstruction of truth and dharma.

The next mythical character we remember after watching Baahubali is the character of Arjuna. Arjuna of Mahabharata is recognized for his sharp skills of pet weapon bow and arrow and for his cleverness. It is the skill of bow and arrow through which he successfully wins Draupadi in swoyembaar ceremony where he has to perfectly shoot the right eye of fish by looking its reflection in the water. The very act makes Draupadi lose her heart to him. In the same way, Amarendra Baahubali can set his target perfectly which he does in one of the remarkable scenes with Devasena where he teaches her the skill of using three arrows at the same shot during the attack of Pindaris in her kingdom. His skill of using bow and arrow and killing dozens of enemies at the same time is captivating. Arjuna is also a perfect warrior with farsightedness. And, so is Amarendra Baahubali who handles the war field perfectly with correct strategies which can be viewed in the war with Pindaris and Kalkeya where he wins wisdom.

We do remember another mythical character Krishna while watching Baahubali. Krishna is popular as a trickster, innovator, play maker and protector of dharma. We find same characteristics in Amarendra Baahubali as well as Mahendra Baahubali. Amarendra Baahubali’s disguise as a commoner and his tricks to win the heart of beautiful Devasena is presented beautifully. Like Krishna, Amarendra Baahubali has perfect craftsmanship in war. He tricks, befools and kills hundreds of enemies in the war with Kalkeya using kerosene dipped clothes. Like Krishna, Amarendra Baahubali is an innovator who works in the favor of his citizens by using his innovative skill to build comfort for them. In one of the scenes, Amarendra Baahubali as a commoner in Baahubali 2 is shown using his mind and traditional engineering tools to break rocks and to pull off water for his citizens. Like Krishna, Baahubali (both Amarendra and Mahendra) has dark complexion and is equally loved by all citizens. Both Amarendra Baahubali and Mahendra Baahubali believe in Dharma or virtue for which they can sacrifice their life. When we talk about Krishna, we cannot forget Radha (one of the Gopinees who loves and is loved by Krishna) The scene, where Devsena sings a song in Gopika Purnima, portrays about Rass Leela of Krishna, the trick he uses for stealing hearts of many Gopinees specially Radha. The song says: “Kana soo Jara” which is

intended message sent from Devsena to her Krishna, that is, Amarendra Baahubali where she confesses her guilt directly asking herself “why did I lose my mind to send you before the bull?” This is the confession made by comparing her loved one with Krishna.

How can we miss the character of Dhritarastra, Duryodhaana’s father when we talk about Mahabhaata? The character of Bajjala Deva, Balladeva’s father, resembles Dhitrarastra who couldn’t get the throne despite being the eldest son because of his physical inability. He couldn’t become a king because of his blindness. As a result, the throne was given to his younger brother Pandu. In the same way, in Baahubali Series, Bajjala Deva is deprived of his throne because of his physical weakness i.e. his one hand is undeveloped. In one of the beginning scenes of Baahubali 2, Kattappa informs him that Baahubali would be coroneted as king in upcoming Dasharaha. Here, Bajjala Deva states:

History repeats itself. The throne meant for me was given to my brother. And now the throne meant for my son is being bequeathed to my brother’s son! Should my son, grandson, and great grandson also toil for generations? Dog answer “why was I not crowned as king then? Is it because I’m disabled? So what if one hand is incapacitated.... (Baahubali 2)

The given line reflects history of Dhritarastra who was not coroneted on the ceremony because of his disability. That is why; Bajjala Dev recollects extreme hatred for Amarendra Baahubali as he is the son of his same brother who was coroneted instead of him. So, he equally conspires along with his son to banish and kill Baahubali.

Ramayana is another Hindu epic based on how a son should be or how the ruler should be. In the same way, Baahubali series is highly dominated by the concept of ideal ruler and son. Rama is a loyal son, a loyal prince, a daring and loving husband and most importantly, the ideal ruler who can cross any extremity to keep his subjects happy. He killed learned devil like Ravana to keep his wife Seeta back and even banished the same wife for public’s sake. He is a perfect son of his mother who happily went to baanbasa (jungle’s life) for fourteen years only to keep his step mother Kaikeyi’s words. In the same way, Shivagami is also not the real mother of Baahubali but he shares such a bond that is highly appreciable and undefinable. In the song “Jeeyoo re Baahubali”, mother son relation is defined in a wonderful way. The song states: “even death doesn’t scare him because he is always risking his life for his mother’s sake”. Similarly, the popularity of Baahubali as an ideal leader is also described in the song “jeeyo re Baahubali” which states:

Your glory states far and wide
Long live Baahubali!
‘You are dearer to us than our lives’
Everyone is going to sing
And keep singing, in your praise. . . (n. p.)

The song sings the glory of Baahubali and his popularity among public. In fact, both Amarendra Baahubali and Mahendra Baahubali fight with Ballaldeva so that peace, equality and justice can be established in Mahismati. And when Mahendra Baahubali

avenges Balladeva, he vows in his coronation as follows: “In our kingdom those who believe in hard work and justice will walk with their heads held high. And if anyone thinks of harming these good people whoever it may be, their severed head will burn in the flames of hell”. The speech Mahendra Baahubali reminds us about the people in the Ramrajya under Maryada Pursotam Rama who sacrificed everything to get his kingdom in order and justice.

In this way, this paper proves that Hindu mythology does talk about male for the glorification of male Gods. The Hindi sculpture and holy scripts glorify the body of Lord Vishnu, Shiva and Krishna more specifically. In the context of the Baahubali Series, the body of Baahubali can be compared with the body of Lord Vishnu because of his broad chest and long hands and arms. Similarly, Baahubali has dark complexion as Krishna has. Baahubali can also be compared with Lord Krishna due to his trickster image which he uses to win the heart of his beloved and during war time. Like Shiva he is ferocious and the destroyer of human-looking demonic like Kalakeya and Bhalla Deva who are black spot to humanity.

This research also displays that the plot and the characters of Baahubali Series parallel with the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Like the two cousin brothers, Kauravas and Pandavas fight for the throne and justice, Baahubali is all about the war between two cousin-brothers Bhalla Deva and Amarendra Baahubali and his son Mahendra Baahubali to get the throne of Mahismati. However, like Kaurava especially Dhuryodhana, Bhalla Deva fights for greed, power and position whereas like Pandavas, Baahubali fights for the establishment of truth and justice. So, we can compare Baahubali with the character of Bhima of Mahabharata for his inhuman strength which he shows while carrying Shivalinga made up of stone and taller than him. Likewise, we can compare Bhalla Deva with Dhuryodhana of Mahabharata who is equally mighty and powerful as Bhima. Similarly, Baajala Deva, Bhalla Deva’s father parallels with the character of Dhritarastya of Mahabharata. As he is dethroned from the throne of Hastinapur because of his blindness, Bajjala Deva is dethroned because of his physical disparity and so on.

The study also unveils that *Baahubali Series* merges the concept of male body with the concept of super human strength that falls under the mystical occult. The hero of the movie i.e. Baahubali (both Mahendra and Amarendra) as well as the villain Bhalla Deva aren’t only attractive to look at because of their well-chiseled and carved bodies rather the strength they carry is the superhuman one which can be either performed by God or the superheroes. Baahubali and Bhalla Deva are like mythical heroes and villains who can accomplish any task either by strength or the magical strength. They look like charmer or magician who can control wild and untamed animals. Like God Krishna carries Goverdhan Parvaat Baahubali is capable to carry the unimaginable weight of Shivalinga and so on. The concept of superhuman strength is blended with the masculinity projected with chiseled bodies. Anyway, the study substantiates that the concept of glorification of male body is not entirely the western ideal but it is also the part of Hindu mythology.

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