

# A FEMINIST READING OF BAAHUBALI (FRANCHISE)

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**Abstract:** Auteur theory of cinema says that any film we watch in reality is the brainchild of its director which means, he is the only one responsible for turning an idea into reality through his imagination and creativity. S.S Rajamouli's films of Baahubali franchise (*Baahubali: The Beginning* and *Baahubali: The Conclusion*) are basically pure fiction films but surprising the film critics and trade analyst, emerged as highest grossing films of all time. These films broke the stereotype associated with female leads by portraying women as equally informed about their rights, choices and autonomy as men. The female characters in both the films of Baahubali (franchise) never take back seat in comparison to their male counterpart and proved their worth by emerging as balanced individual who can be lover or a warrior according to the need of hour. This paper is an attempt to critically analyze both the movies using feminist lens by throwing some light on three main women characters of movies and various aspects of movies which promote gender equality and women's rights.

**Index Terms-** Stereotype, Genre, Women, Equality, Portraying, Cinema

## I.INTRODUCTION

SS Rajamouli's, *Baahubali: The Conclusion* is on the dream run at the box office of the country. It has already collected more than 1500 corers box office collection till date, becoming the first ever Indian film to do. ("Baahubali 2: The Conclusion' box-office collection", 2017)

"SS Rajamouli's film *Baahubali: The Beginning* holds out many promises: of adventure and romance, love and betrayal, valour and weakness and it delivers magnificently on each of them."(Gupta, 2015)

From the date of release, it broke the record of 2014 release Hindi film PK by surpassing the magical figure 800 corers worldwide and still going strong. After more than three weeks of release, it became the first film in the history of Indian cinema to achieve this milestone. Even originally made in regional Telugu and Tamil languages magnum opus *Baahubali 2* was also dubbed in to Hindi language. It has gained similar popularity among the Hindi speaking audience of northern states which is crazy for pure Bollywood movies which is amazing and surprising at the same time. It is on the verge of becoming first film who has earned 500 corers in Bollywood in which all major stars are from Tollywood or Telugu film industry which were not so popular or heard often among Hindi speaking audience. *Baahubali: The Conclusion* is the second part of much awaited SS Rajamouli's dream film project *Baahubali: The Beginning* released in July 2015. It was also an epic fiction film made from budget of 1.80 corers making it the most expensive Indian film ever made in the history. Shiksha(2017) reported on NDTV, *Baahubali* Part first and part second had a combined budget of approximately 450 corers which is also a record as far as budget of movie is concerned.

Bahubali meaning "one with strong arm" was the idea of K.V.Vijayendra Prasad father of SS Rajamouli who once told him a story of a woman who carries a baby in her hand while crossing a river and saving the future king of the kingdom by sacrificing her own life. Kattappa is another character which interests him through his selfless service towards the kingdom of Mahismati. Tales of Amar Chitra Katha comics also act as source of inspiration for the director Rajamouli, who took risk of making country's most expensive epic fiction film ever. It has emerged as a trendsetter for the people, associated with cinema, who believe in taking risk and have faith in them. Arka Media Work film Production Company kept faith on the director's dream and the concept of *Baahubali* become reality as motion picture showing the world what an Indian film maker can do with his imagination and hard work providing the resources and having faith in his ability. *Baahubali: The Beginning* has become the highest grossing film of year 2015 and fourth highest grossing film of all time. It also won for Best Special effect and Best feature film maiden Telugu film to achieve this Honor. The storyline of the movie is also quite different showing the female leads equally powerful role, wise and even marching ahead their male

counterparts and directing them. Popularity of the movie is understood by the fact that made in Telugu and Tamil but at the same time dubbed in Hindi, Malayalam, German, French, Japanese and English.

According to Sudhir(2017), Baahubali(franchise) is more about the stories of three women than the simple clash between the protagonist Baahubali and the antagonist Bhallaladeva. Real ‘heroes’ of Baahubali 2 are Sivgami and Devsena. Shivgami, the queen of Mahismati, is shown as very decisive, authoritative and a woman of principle. Devsena, princess of Kuntala kingdom and the best half of the great warrior Amarendra Baahubali, is shown as very tough, confident, prideful and feminine but still strong. The story is the clash between the principles of two great women. Various film critics raved the movie for its visual grandeur, semi-mythological story and impressive characters.

This paper is an attempt to do feminist reading of both the movies of Baahubali (Franchise) by throwing some light on 3 main women of movie and various aspects of movies which promotes gender equality and women’s right.

## **II.POTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN BAAHUBALI**

Apart from Baahubali heroic in the both parts of film, the other thing that interest the audience the most is the portrayal of mainly three women characters Ramya Krishnan as Sivagami, Anushka Shetty as Devasena and Avanthika, played by Tamannaah. All of these women in some way or other shaped the future and fortune of Amrendra Baahubali and his deserving son Mahendra Bahubali with the help of their life principal, teaching, love and compassion according to the need of hour and kingdom of Mahismati.

### **3.1.SIVAGAMI (RAMYA KRISHNAN)**

Sivagami is the symbol of matriarchal system in which woman is head of the family or state and enjoys full attention and respect as the center of authority. She is self disciplined leader whom nobody can challenge and her promises are treated as laws, as told by her to countrymen from time to time- “ Yeh Mera Vachan Hai Mera Vachan Hi Hai Shaasan” (This is my promise and my promises are my rules).

In common language her dedication and inclination towards the people of Mahismati is applause worthy and commendable. She is a born leader as shown in both the movies of Baahubali (franchise). After the sudden demise of her brother and sister in law and due to physical disability of her own husband Bijjaladev (Nasser), she had no choice left to become the caretaker to the state of Mahismati with the help of Kattappa and ministers till the time her nephew Amrendra Bahubali and her own son Bhallaladeva become capable enough to rule the kingdom. She never differentiated between her son and nephew and breastfeed both which shows her motherly side. She provided both the sons best of education and military training required to become a capable leader. When both of them grew up to become strong contenders of the throne, she declares that whoever kills their next enemy in war would be crowned the next ruler.

After the war, she declares Amendra the king of the empire because according to her, he fought like a king in the war. Sivagami fails to understand the evil intention of her own son Bhallaladeva. Sivagami was made convinced by the father-Son duo that Bahubali has become threat to the kingdom and is after the life of the king so should be killed by Kattappa. After the death of Baahubali, Sivagami came to know about the bloody planned murder. As a gesture of repent, she instantly names son of Amrendra as Mahendra Baahubali and publicize that he will be new king of Mahismati. She also apologies to Devasena about her partial behavior towards her and at last saves her only son from Bhallaladeva. She sacrificed her life in order to save life of Mahender. She emerged as a woman of principles, decisive and fair in decision making.

### **3.2.DEVSENA (ANUSHKA SHETTY)**

A fascinating quality about the character of Devasena was her confidence and strong belief in justice. She made us believe that truth will prevail sooner or later no matter what are the consequences. She is charming, bold yet kind by nature. She is skilled warrior and great archer, always looking forward to improve her skills through regular practice and hard work. Her bravery is such that when her kingdom Kuntala was attacked by the enemies, she does not buckle but tackles the situation with enormous patience. The persona of Devasena attracted Amrendra Bahubali apart from her looks. Her martial skills are unique and praise worthy even men of most powerful kingdoms of that time including Mahismati cannot stand against her in battle field. Devasena is a loyal wife who instantly takes stands against the people and incident which she thinks are unacceptable and unjust. She is very straightforward and courageous enough to say what is right and

what is not even in the courtroom full of people. These qualities make her stand out in the crowd. She is strong women, for whom patience is the key to achieve her goal. Her determination can be seen by the way she waits for her son to come back and take revenge from the Bhallaldeva. The character of Devsena broke the gender stereotype by showing woman as equally vigorous, skilled and authoritative as men. She is very courageous women who cut the fingers of Sena nayak (head of the army) to save her dignity. She is shown as a royal woman who can wield the bow and arrow with finesse and in true sense eligible wife of Baahubali.

### 3.3.AVANTIKA (TAMANNAAH BHATIA)

The third important female character that adds interest of viewer in the film and makes the plot mysterious is of Avantika played by Tamannaah. She is shown as member of rebellious warrior group engaged in a war with kingdom Of Mahismati in order to free their beloved former queen Devasena who is suffering in captivity of Emperor Bhallaladeva from past 25 years due to his personal jealousy for rejecting him and choosing his younger brother Amrendra Bahubali as her husband. Avantika falls in love with Sivudu later known as Mahendra Bahubali only child of Devasena and Amrendra Bahubali. She was impressed with the fact that Sivudu was searching her with help of a mask, she lost in waterfall which accidentally reached to him and even climbed the dangerous waterfall only to meet her. Avantika was helped in her rescue mission to flee Devasena by Sivudu (Mahendra Bahubali) which was ultimately unsuccessful. Avantika was very beautiful lady but she was forced to hide her looks under the mask of efficient warrior with a focused vision to achieve the goal of his group through planned guerrilla warfare. She always ready to accept any responsibility given to her regardless to danger of life made him perfect choice as soul mate of Mahendra Bahubali.

SS Rajamouli's Bahubali movies are not just about the story which calm down our nerve by telling us who will be the next king of Mahismati kingdom, nor is the story only about the revenge and victory of good over evil but as far as understanding of cinema is concerned it's the depiction of certain principle necessary for giving the confidence and acknowledging the power both physical and mantel toughness which the various female leads of the movies showcase from time to time not as second fiddle but a driving force making the millions female audience believe that if Sivagami, Devasena and Avantika could challenge the system in real life they could do the same in real life for a better tomorrow.

1. Devasena and Bahubali walk hand in hand – Devasena impressed Bahubali not just with her beauty but even by the techniques of martial arts. She is accomplished warrior and archer in the whole Kuntala region but was never satisfied and constantly working on shaping her skills through constant practice. She is quick learner when Bahubali teaches her the art of shooting multiple arrows at once she mastered the art in no time and the duo fights the enemies together with great courage and ultimately Devasena succeed in saving her motherland from the enemies with the help from love of her life the great Bahubali. Movie scene of Devasena and Bahubali fighting together sets the tone for the lifelong relationship between the two equal personalities based on pillars of equality.
2. Value of consent -*Bahubali 2: The conclusion* attempts to focus on true nature of consent. Movie scene when Devasena and Bahubali return to Mahismati after their marriage from the Kuntala kingdom, Devasena fearlessly questions the move of rajmata Sivagami Devi proposal of finalizing a wedding of her with his own son Bhallaladeva without considering the princess's consent in the matter.
3. Kuntala's princess won't entertain sexual harassment- Devasena is a lioness in the forest of Mahismati is a kind lady with a heart of gold and virtuous and devoted wife of Amrendra Baahubali for whom punishing the culprit is more appropriate option than bearing sexual harassment. Movie scene authenticate this fact by showing Devasena cutting the finger newly appointed army chief when he tried to touch her unethically considering him weak and helpless women but the most satisfactory part of the scene was Baahubali fully trusting Devasena in this incident and even scolding her to kill the person who don't respect women and at the end of the scene he takes the revenge from the commander of the army by slitting her neck in front of citizens of the kingdom.
4. Strength and Courage- movies of franchise of Baahubali depict women as mentally and physically sound personalities performing every duty given or demanded from them over the period of time. Sivagami is a lady of just character as shown in a movie scene of Baahubali – the beginning where she choose Amrendra Baahubali over her own son denotes the courage within. Devasena a true warrior and companion of Baahubali believes in speaking her mind out without bothering of consequences .she suffers the torture given by Bhallaldev in wait of her son for 25 long years tears rolls from audience eyes seeing Devsena in the captivity in various movie scenes. Avantika the least talked female character of the movie mostly shown in the first part of the movie is responsible for helping Mahendra bahubali reach the Mahismati kingdom. The song sequence between Baahubali and Avantika pumped audience too limits.

- Promotion of Gender equality-Sivagami was requested to become the head of state after the death of his brother in law as shown in the opening sequence of Baahubali -the beginning shows the trust of ministers and citizen on her administrative qualities. Amrendra Baahubali the eligible contender of the thrown happily take Devasena's side when Rajmata ask him to choose between her and the crown this scene of Baahubali the conclusion mold the movie to new direction. When Mahendra Baahubali become king he takes the pledge in the name of his grandmother spread positive message of change called gender equality.

### III.CYNICAL VIEWS ON BAAHUBALI(FRANCHISE)

"The notion upheld in this film is men who fight and destroy walls like iron are real men. Avantika is molested by Sivudu in order to make her more "feminine"."-Karthika S Nair (Feminisminindia)

According to Anna MM Veticad, the scene showing the romance between Shivudu(Prabhas) and Avantika (Tammanah) in Baahubali first shows the act of sexual assault of heroine by the hero by stripper her and touching her without her consent. She called it 'Rape of Avantika'. She also points out Indian audience are so accustomed to see these type of 'aggressive display of love' and dominance of male that it does not cause outrage among audience. (Thehindubusinessline)

Many media critic condemned the movie on the ground of being sexist.

### IV.CONCLUSIONS

In spite of getting above critics, Baahubali by R S Rajamouli when seen from the feministic lens scores high marks. It defies not only the Telugu cinema's sexism but also challenge the stereotype roles played by women in Indian cinema. Women of Baahubali are shown very courageous, impregnable and defensive unlike the other Indian movies where they are shown as fragile victims. Not only women but men are, through the character of men, are presented as the agents to promote gender equality and women's rights.

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