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The Emergence of the Strongest ‘I’: A Psychological Analysis of Central Character Amarendra Bahubali in S.S. Rajamouli’s Bahubali: The Beginning and Bahubali 2: The Conclusion

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Abstract:

The paper entitled, The Emergence of the Strongest ‘I’: A Psychological Analysis of the Central Character Amarendra Bahubali in S.S. Rajamouli’s Bahubali: The Beginning and Bahubali 2: The Conclusion is an attempt to look deep into the psyche of the character Bahubali, who despite of the strong opposite currents swam to his ultimate goal. As the heir to the throne of the mighty empire Mahismati, Amarendra Bahubali was fostered and groomed by Rajamatha Sivagami. Along with his cousin Bhallala Deva he learned weaponry and royal administration from Sivagami. Amarendra, different from Bhallala Deva developed a highly moral and pure mind with strong principles and beliefs. The identity he had developed was of a strong, firm and gentle ruler. The formation of his identity was not a short term process but it occurred from his very childhood days onwards. Thus began the emergence of his strongest “I”. In the present world where people’s principles and beliefs change according to the situations they go through and incidents happen, Amarendra Bahubali is a person worth studying and following. The film shows that the person with the strongest decisions to make will remain immortal in every one’s heart.

Keywords: Film studies, Identity, Concept of self, Development of mind and psyche, Emergence of “I”.

Introduction

The famous Swedish director Ingmar Bergman once said that no other art passes our conscience in the way film does and it also goes directly to our feelings and even into our souls. What he said is always relevant. Film is such an influencing form of art. It can affect a person’s mind, heart, thoughts and feelings. As films are mirroring the society, people in search of the society’s essence take films as raw materials for the research. Films depict what a society is and what a society once was through the life dripping characters they portray. Literature is all about life and people who are keen to find out lives that are unknown to them. So, film which portrays even the dark realities and simple representations of lives will remain in the hearts of spectators for a long time.

That is why here, in a humble attempt to dig out the real “I” within an ideal individual, a film and its characters are taken into consideration. S.S. Rajamouli’s films Bahubali: The Beginning and Bahubali 2: The Conclusion, which have created such a huge sensation among Indian and international audiences by all means deserve a close inspection. The central character himself became a living role model and an icon of the perfect husband, son and ruler in the minds of those who saw him onscreen. The central character is here taken into consideration not only because he became a heartthrob among the audiences but also because we do expect to see such a person among us, as a ruler, as a husband, as a son and also as a guide with strong and unchallenging principles. Our political leaders who lead our country, our young generation who are to become the backbone of our society, parents who should give proper guidance to their kids with their own lives and we, the common people who choose those who rule us are all projected through a single character who possesses the best and the normal of what we want.

“I”: The Essential Phase of Self-awareness.

Social psychologist Roy Baumeister in his paper “The Self” says that people grasp the basic meaning of self by various methods. He continues:

The first is the experience of reflexive consciousness, that is, conscious attention turning back toward its own source and gradually constructing a concept of oneself. When you lie awake in bed late at night, thinking about your failures and inadequacies, or glorying in your triumphs; when you look in the mirror or step on the scale or read your resume... you pause to wonder whether you are the sort of person who could ever do such a thing; ... Without them, self would have no meaning or value and would hardly exist at all. Self begins when awareness turns around in a circle, so to speak. (680)

Amarendra Bahubali became aware of himself when he began to hear a lot of questions pointing him as the answer.

Baumeister continues about self; “Selfhood is almost unthinkable outside a social context, and selves are vital for making interpersonal relationships and interactions possible. Selves are handles and tools for relating to other people” (680). Amarendra saw his image as in a mirror when he began to communicate with his people. Through these interpersonal relationships that he began to know himself and his very own purpose.

American psychologist and philosopher William James wrote in his work, *The Principles of Psychology*, “A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind” (179). Amarendra Bahubali was thus an individual of thousands of social selves. His people loved him for who he is and what he did for his people. He was one among them, never a ruler who was closed away in his castle.

E.T. Higgins in his paper, “The self- digest” says:

Self-knowledge is not primarily sought in isolation for its own sake...people construct a "self digest" that contains useful information about the self, and the driving question behind the construction of the self digest is not "Who am I?" but rather "What is my relation to the world?" In this view, self-knowledge is pursued for the sake of adaptive benefits of improving person-environment fit. Knowing the self is a means, not an end in itself, and the nature of the self-knowledge reflects this pragmatic, interactive focus. (1062)

Bahubali, as a young boy became aware of his self not only because he was taught and trained to become the ruler of his country, but also because he had a questioning mind to seek out his relationship with what all things and people he saw around him. He asked himself the relationship he has with the world around him. He found out that he is not only the heir to the throne but also one among the common man and a God-like person upon whom all the hopes of his people are made upon. He didn't look into his heart to find out his desires for him, but looked into the hearts and minds of his people through their eyes to see what they longed for. He found his complete self in those who looked up at him. He quenched his thirst by filling his peoples' hearts with love and adoration towards him. He found his self and was a man of selfless motives.

Higgins continues, "The self is...not a simple object but rather a construct. It is not directly perceived or known; instead, the person (with the help of others) builds up a body of beliefs about it" (1076).

We cannot undertake the process of evolution of our own identity and personality. That evolution needs essential enzymes to boost it. Those enzymes are the people who are associated with our life. They guide our roots of personality to the inner most depth of development. They provide our self with proper and essential nourishment with which our identity and personality develop as we grow.

Sivagami is an important character in the movie. She is responsible for all the good things Bahubali learned. And, she taught him the principles and values that a real and ideal king should always possess. Thus, Bahubali builds up an ideal self of a future king with the guidance of Rajmata Sivagami Devi. Bahubali formed his own unique self with the proper grooming of Sivagami. She led him peacefully through all the turmoil that a person comes across when his identity develops. Her powerful guidance made Amarendra a man of rock solid identity and courageous decisions.

He promised Devasana, his future wife, "From today till my death I will be yours" (Bahubali 2; *the Conclusion*). He made this promise with all his heart. He was able to make this promise and keep it only because he was a man of unchanging words. He was ready to sacrifice his throne, his position and also his palace to keep this promise. He was even ready to raise his voice against Sivagami, his guide just because his promise was much more important than anything in the world. It was Sivagami herself who taught him to be strong enough to keep one's promise for the sake of the principles and values in which one believes.

Developmental psychologist Jane Kroger wrote in her work, “Identity Development during Adolescence”, “Identity-achieved individuals have shown such personality features as the high levels of achievement motivation and self-esteem” (211). We could see Amarendra Bahubali as an identity-achieved individual. He proved himself worthy when he showed high levels of self-esteem. Baumeister says, “Self esteem may be defined as the positivity of the person’s evaluation of the self. Thus self esteem is the evaluative aspect of the reflexive consciousness: it makes a value judgement based on self-knowledge” (694). Amarendra Bahubali believed in what all things he practiced and also practiced what he strongly believed. How strong the opposition was, that firm his decisions were. When he evaluated himself, he was satisfied with what he was and was so proud of himself. If a person is that confident to give himself the best score for his own self-esteem evaluation, he is the one with the strongest “I”. Before he promises, he evaluates his whole self. If he is that sure of what he says and what he does he will promise that and will never regret. Regrets are for those who don’t believe in what they promise or say and those who are unsure about themselves when they evaluate their self-esteem.

Kroger says, “Developmental patterns have been examined over more points in time, and the study of identity-status patterns of change and stability has been extended into the years of early and middle adulthood” (211). Amarendra Bahubali, from his childhood days onwards was asking himself a lot of questions. He did what his mind strongly asked him to do. Through his childhood to his adulthood and till the day of his death, his words, deeds and beliefs were scrutinized by himself. He did what his mind commanded. He did it and never looked back. That is what Baumeister says, “The accumulation of self-knowledge is guided by three main motives: people want accurate self-knowledge, they want confirmation of what they believe, and they want favourable feedback” (700). Amarendra had this self-knowledge, confirmation and the favourable feedback from those who understood him completely.

Baumeister continues, “Undoubtedly the most obvious and proactive way that the self participates in social life is through self-presentation, which is defined as people's attempts to convey information about or images of themselves to others”(703). Amarendra was not a man who intentionally wanted to show his bright side to his people. He was a man of concrete beliefs and he just lived with it. Here, he presented himself before himself and was happy with what he saw in him.

The Emergence of the “I”

Amarendra Bahubali became a strong person not because he was born into a mighty family. He became strong only because he had a strong belief in himself; in what he thought, did and wanted. Here lies the importance of the concepts of “I” and “me”, which defines how strong a person’s mind and self, is. A person with the strongest decisions and never looks back at what he did or what he said is the man with the best and firm “I”.

The well known American sociologist George Herbert Mead in his notable work *Mind, Self and Society* says, “If one determines what his position is in society and feels himself as

having a certain function and privilege, these are all defined with reference to an “I”, but “I” is not a “me” and cannot become a “me”” (81).

Here, Mead says about a person’s identity with reference to society, which became the cause for the development of social psychology. Our hero, Amarendra Bahubali was a person of high privileges. He was the heir to the throne of a mighty empire. From the very first day of his life, a very heavy duty was vested upon him. The very act of newborn Bahubali holding the finger of Rajamata Sivagami itself showed the silent promise he gave her. The promise was to serve and protect his people till the last day of his life in this world. He, even without his own knowledge got hold of his position. He, while receiving the guidance from Sivagami from childhood onwards, developed into a young boy of unique character.

One person’s identity will develop by the long process of questioning. Amarendra began to ask questions to himself. He looked outside and saw common people, his people. His mind asked himself to find the difference between those who are inside the palace and those who are outside the mighty walls. We saw the beginning of this search when boy Amarendra looked outside his royal mead hall and watch Kattappa, the royal slave guard and warrior whom he considered his own uncle, having his food with the common soldiers. He went outside and asked Kattappa to share the very ordinary meal of soldiers with him, their future King. When Kattappa told him about the protocol, he asked, “Why are you talking about customs?” (*Bahubali: the Beginning*).

Here began the process of knowing himself. He isolated himself from the real identity as Prince and tried to find the real “I” within himself. Though they seem similar, the concepts “I” and “me” are different. Mead continues, “The “I” does not get into the limelight; we talk of ourselves, but do not see ourselves. The “I” reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking these attitudes we have introduced the “me” and we react to it as an “I” (81).

Here, “I” is always the active part. Amarendra Bahubali, who tried to find the real “I” within himself tried to develop a strong “I”. He deviated from the actions and decisions what a Prince was supposed to do and take. His “I” was always right in a very unique way. He got himself out of the comfort circle of assumptions, prejudices, rules and traditions of the royalty and generated a new and rare identity. There are various proofs for this emergence.

When his cousin Bhallala Deva believed in his power, Bahubali believed in himself, the whole person including his feelings, beliefs and limitations, if any. When Bhallala Deva followed the traditions and rituals before a war by sacrificing an animal to Goddess Kali Devi, Bahubali wasn’t ready to sacrifice the innocent animal but offered his own blood to the powerful Goddess of war. When Bhallala Deva was heartless enough to sacrifice the lives of his own people to kill the enemies, Bahubali won the war by protecting his people. When Bhallala Deva wanted nothing but the throne, Bahubali wanted to keep his promise to the woman he loved, his future wife.

What his "I" did and what his "me" remembered were never different. His "I" was that strong and thus his "me" didn't regret. He never had regrets. He might be sad when he lost the love of Sivagami, the most important person in his life, but he never did regret about what he did and what he chose. George Herbert Mead says, "The 'I' is in a certain sense that with which we do identify ourselves" (81).

Actually our "I" is like a small person within ourselves. We identify this person with ourselves. We ask this person within us, everything we plan to do or believe in. We have a special concern about this little 'our self'. What we do is what this little person tells us to do and what we believe is what this "I" strongly believes.

Mead says, "The 'I' is his action over against that social situation within his own conduct, and it gets into his experience only after he has carried out the act. Then he is aware of it. He had to do such a thing and he did it. He fulfils his duty and he may look with pride at the throw which he made" (81).

Yes, the "I" of Amarendra Bahubali was unique and he could identify himself with the active part of his self called "I". According to Mead, the attitude of others around us towards us constitute the organised "me". Bahubali, when decided to keep his promise to his lady love, earned the hatred of Sivagami, but he remained strong because he knew very well that his "I" was right and will always be right. The strongest "I" evolves in the strongest environment. Since childhood, he was guided and motivated by the strongest person in his family, Rajamata Sivagami Devi. She taught him to uplift the principles and beliefs no matter what. She, even denying the words of her husband and the court men was ready to raise the newborn Amarendra as her own son. She is one of the strongest characters in the film.

Conclusion

George Herbert Mead says, "The individual not only has rights, but he has duties; he is not only a citizen, a member of the community, but he is one who reacts to this community and in his reaction to it..." (91). Amarendra Bahubali was never away from his duties. He was a man of principles and a man of strong promises. He was the future king of Mahishmathi and later he became the 'Senapati'. He lost all his positions and proudly took the position of the loyal husband of Devasena and the servant of his own people. Though he was out of the royal fort he was happy and was always with the people of Mahishmathi who never left him. His strongest "I" made him enable to fulfil his duties to his people, as their protector.

Mead continues; "The 'I' is the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in his own experience" (91).

Amarendra Bahubali was strong enough to accept even the most painful rejection from Sivagami. It was because he never regretted what he said and did. He had no regret because what he did and believed came from his own self. His self was the product of the long

process of development from childhood to adulthood. His self was planted by Sivagami and watered by her guidance and cared by the environment and people around him. His strongest self developed into the strongest “I”. The most active part called “I” gave him the best advice to follow what his heart said. His decisions were never based on emotions but were based on the solid beliefs he had about himself and what he should be. If he was guided by his emotions, he would never have won the heart of Devasena. It was not any kind of worldly emotions that pulled Amarendra to her heart, but the strong act of promise that showed how strong his personality is.

Other than a box office hit, Bahubali movies taught us a lot about life. Through the central character Amarendra Bahubali, it showed the never dying nature of the strongest “I”. Even after his death, even after a new generation was born, the name of Bahubali was in the hearts and thoughts of each and every Mahishmathi people. He was alive even after his death. He also gave his people a precious gift, his son Mahendra Bahubali. A strong “I” gave rise to another strong “I”. We see that Mahendra, like his father too is a man of strong decisions, words and promises. Amarendra Bahubali will live through his son. Such a person with such a strong “I” can never ‘die’.

Amarendra Bahubali was not a mirage, it is a hope. The film shows us the real importance of a solid self. It portrayed the power of “I”. It put forward a role model for all rulers, sons, husbands, brothers and citizens. So, in these present social political situations where our administrators and so called leaders change the colour of their “I” as soon as the society’s tastes change, Amarendra Bahubali is a man who cannot exist. But, if there is a single person with such a strong and positive “I”, that single person alone can make magic happen to our society, to our people and thus, to our country.

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