

DemEANing women, glorifying war

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CANDID: Amarendra Baahubali is nothing but a killing machine, says the author.



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Sometimes I wonder what has come over Indians. At the moment, they seem to be going crazy about S S Rajamouli's Baahubali: The Conclusion. The film, which opened some 10 days ago the world over, has been filling the coffers like nothing before. It has raked in crores and crores of rupees or millions of dollars.

The first part of Baahubali — which opened in 2015 — was awfully disappointing. And this is what I wrote about it: "SS Rajamouli's Baahubali is an epic in two parts, narrated through spectacular visuals and amazing special effects, including a 30-minute battle scene helmed with admirable precision.

"However, beyond this, the movie with a star-studded cast of Prabhas, Rana Daggubati and Anushka Shetty offers little else. The film suffers in terms of continuity, because its production took more than two years.

"Baahubali, despite its epic dimensions — with a tendency to copy larger-than-life Hollywood heroic tales like Ben-Hur and Troy — fails at some level to draw us into the narrative: even one of the first scenes of a huge statue being erected with the help of slaves works in a very limited way to capture audience attention or set the mood for images of flying swords and falling boulders.

"If Rajamouli thought that his special effects team that drummed up outstanding imagery — lovely waterfalls, magnificent snow-covered mountains and an awesome terrain of the kingdom — would somehow cover up the weaknesses of the movie, he was wrong. Greater detailing and accuracy could have helped. Here is a superb archer and assassin like Avantika (Tamannaah), who fails to notice Shivadu (Prabhas) sitting on a tree above her and drawing a tattoo on her shoulder. Love is really blind, one presumes. And even the shot of Palvaalthevan (Rana Daggubati) taking on a wild bull looks too damn superficial! Performances are passé, and Baahubali ends up being all sound and spectacle — but little else".

Sadly, I would write pretty much the same about part two. However, the latest episode has one major difference. It is extraordinarily violent, and shockingly, it has been allowed public screening with a U/A certificate. This means a child under 12 can watch the film along with its parents.

At a time when the Central Board of Film Certification has been acting like a tyrannical big brother refusing to allow movies like Lipstick Under My Burkha (because of its sexual content) and Aligarh (for its gay theme), Baahubali with a kind of violence that smears the screen with blood and gore has been given the milder dose of certification.

I have for years argued that love, romance and even a dash of sex really do no harm to the psyche of a young adult or a child. For, these are the natural ingredients of life and living. Violence, that too brutish and sadistic, is not, and hence must be kept outside the purview of an impressionable mind.

Several studies in the West have conclusively proved that television shows with aggressive plots tend to create a negative impact on the mind, and Baahubali goes beyond savagery. It exhibits animal cruelty to a pregnant woman. She is chained and tortured and harassed and humiliated.

This kind of imagery will seem shameful in the face of lofty preaching that comes from groups which call themselves upholders of women's rights. Indeed, not a single voice was heard against such viciousness perpetrated on a woman in Baahubali.

However, when it came to women pampering themselves with a bit of independent thinking and freedom, the Board raised a hullabaloo. It found Lipstick Under My Burkha (Lipstick Wale Sapne) objectionable, largely because the women in the film dared to dream and defy conventions.

Take, for instance, the character played by Ratna Shah Pathak in Lipstick Under My Burkha. She is single, above 50 and a darling of the mohalla. People call her endearingly mausi or aunt. But when she is caught reading romantic fiction (and indulging in a naughty

conversation with a guy she adores), she is ostracised. There is another woman in the movie who is being forced into a marriage with a guy she hates, and she dares to get intimate with her photographer boyfriend just before tying the knot. There is a brief scene that hints of sex between the two.

These are what the Board found objectionable. The film director, Alankrita Shrivastava, had to fight before she was given an A tag and this too with a few voluntary cuts.

But, ironically, Baahubali walked away with UA, and probably no excision. It got away with all those bloodthirsty, frenzied scenes, including one that shows a man being beheaded.

I read an interesting article in Daily O that I quite agreed with.

"At night I see their faces: all the men I've killed. They're standing there on the far bank of the river Styx, waiting for me. They say: 'Welcome, brother!'"

"Thus spoke Brad Pitt's Achilles in the 2004 Hollywood blockbuster Troy. Based on Homer's Iliad, Troy was the American movie industry glamourising war in all shades — from its insurmountable glories to its unspeakable cruelties — barely a year after the Iraq invasion of 2003. And in Achilles' tortured self-reflections, especially to Brisesis, but also to King Priam whose son Hector he kills, we find a fleeting acknowledgement of the ultimate impoverishment that war commits on human relationships.

"SS Rajamouli's two-part magnum opus Baahubali, is, however, minus a single line on that fundamental futility of war. Amarendra Baahubali, the central character and the tragic hero of this fantasy gala, doesn't at any point betray a smattering of remorse on how many men he has felled with his sword, his sharp military acumen, his impeccable stratagems, his elephantine strength. The countless men who are killed and cast aside by Amarendra Baahubali's tunnel-vision on war and battle, don't get a passing mention, a casual lament by the good guy, who is a killing machine".

Indeed, Amarendra Baahubali is nothing but a killing machine, and the film shows off his gigantic strength, which is sans any humanism.

It is highly regrettable that as the world stands facing the possibility of catastrophic wars, even a nuclear holocaust, men like Rajamouli celebrate a work that I think is morally debase. Baahubali glorifies war, not peace. It appears to suggest that the most heinous acts like severing one's head from one's torso is okay in war.

No, it is not. And we in India should know this better than anybody else at this point in time. Baahubali — as many have pointed out — may be seen as highly objectionable. Can one disagree with this notion?

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