2. From *Dhanurveda* to *Dharma-Rajya*: Indigenous Military Philosophy in Baahubali

Dr. Trivedi Nikunj P[1]

1. Associate Professor, Department of Languages – English Area, School of Humanities and Social Sciences JAIN (Deemed to be University), 9th Block Jayanagar Bangalore-560041
Email Id- t.nikunj@jainuniversity.ac.in

Dr. Aishwarya J.S[2]

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Languages – English Area, School of Sciences, JAIN (Deemed to be University), JC Road, Bangalore-560027 Email Id- jsaishwarya@jainuniversity.ac.in

1. Introduction

S. S. Rajamouli's Baahubali: The Beginning (2015) and Baahubali: The Conclusion (2017) have been frequently praised on their splendid visual fantasy and mythical world-making. Nevertheless, the reason behind their grand combats and heroic drama is an advanced interaction with the native Indian knowledge systems - at least of warcraft (Dhanurveda), statecraft (Arthashastra), warrior morale (Kshatra-dharma) and the state of a moral (Dharma-rajya). The films not only form Mahishmati as an imaginary realm but also as a civilizational place where war is perceived as an ethical obligation, where the kingship is embedded with moral power and where victory was justified not by their (military) victory but by the reinforcing of the social justice.

This essay analyses the ways in which Baahubali movies translate and remake the indigenous militaryphilosophies on screen using the textual traditions of the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Dhanurveda, and Arthashastra of Kautilya. The films are dramatizing an ancient political controversy: Is might right because it is strong that it is ethical that orders its rule? through the opposition of the two characters, Amarendra Baahubali and Bhallaladeva.

2. Dhanurveda and the Embodied Knowledge of Warfare

Indian martial traditions historically conceptualize warfare not simply as force but as a science of controlled action, where physical skill is inseparable from mental discipline. "The Dhanurveda, traditionally regarded as an upaveda (subsidiary text of the Yajurveda), It is recognized both as a Shastra (military science) and an intricate Kala (art or practical aspect), dealing comprehensively with martial arts, military training, weaponry, and rules of engagement and outlines the training of the warrior through precision, balance, breath control, and restraint." (Basham 112). For over 7000 years, India has had a high tradition of metallurgical skills. The first evidence of metal in the Indian subcontinent comes from Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, where a small copper bead was dated to about 6000 B.C.E. This marks the beginning of an extraordinary tradition of material science.

The history of metallurgy in the Indian subcontinent began prior to the 3rd millennium BCE, with metals and related concepts mentioned in various early Vedic age texts. Metals that are

listed in the Rigveda as being used as examples of gold, silver, copper and iron can prove to be evidence of the fact that metallurgical knowledge was important in the time of the Vedic (c. 1500-500 BCE).

The movies reiterate the fact that mastery of Dhanurveda and metals - are the key to the creation and maintenance of Dharma-rajya because the warrior caste (Kshatra-dharma) is determined by the principle of the indomitable defense of the realm and the observance of the righteousness.

This is because the defensive frameworks as expressed in Dhanurveda have their practical implementation in the statecraft as it is described in Arthashastra of Kautilya. Whereas Dhanurveda gives the technical knowledge (e.g.: archery, sword fighting), Arthashastra the gives strategic, administrative (and political) structure. Such a combination is essential: a good ruler (Raja) should use the methods of Dhanurveda scripture in the Arthashastra principle of government according to which war is a natural place of politics. This involves the use of intricate strategic military formations (Vyuhas) to ensure that army strengths are brought out to the maximum and vulnerability of the enemy exaggerated. More so, the text by Kautilya does not reject the use of open battles alone (Prakasha Yuddha), but also other type of warfare like covert operation (Gudayuddha), and covert warfare (Kutayuddha) which were also used during the political struggle in Mahishmati.

Amarendra Baahubali is an example of such tradition: his fighting manner is that based on a clear mind, reducing efforts and evaluation of a person, which is the idea of Atmajaya - conquering the self first before conquering others (Bhagavad Gita 6.5).

Mahishmati is a tactical use of force, which offers material science. This warcraft was based on the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) of metallurgy (Loha Shastra) which is reported in the Vedic scriptures and the Shilpa Shastras. This expertise was comprised of complicated mining, smelting and craft of specialized and high-grade materials such as the mythical Wootz steel. This scientific control of material science and thermodynamics proves the fact that even the defense itself was viewed as a composite art (Kala), which is a combination of the physical technique and strategy and material excellence.

In the Kalakeya war sequence, Mahishmati army uses the organized formations, synchronized drum signals and equipment as in the case of the strategy of Kautilya Arthashastra. The strategic innovation of the "Baahubali- the application of fire-infused cloth shields in the attack of infantry depicting a very indigenous form of adaptive warcraft; wherein intelligence and superior awareness of proper ground formations are considered its main priorities over raw power. The films, therefore, do not bring out war as spectacle in isolation, but as an organized body of knowledge, which is disciplined and creative approaches..

3. Ethics of the Warrior – Kshastra Dharma

The Mahabharata enlightens about the role of the warrior (kshatra-dharma): the warrior must not engage in fighting, but he must maintain the righteousness (dharma) using the power only in the case of necessity (Hiltebeitel 231). This principle is always in power in Amarendra Baahubali. Instead of fighting at first, he tries to find a middle ground through negotiation

and conversations, takes the safety of civilians first and the war being the last subject of use which he rules by morale.

Bhallaladeva on the other hand is a depiction of adharma (rule without morals/ethics). His ego and ambition to be a king is because of his egotism, which is a political model where the power acts as its own justification. The comparison resembles the one between Yudhishthira and Duryodhana of the Mahabharata, and Rama and Ravana of the Ramayana. Strength without dharma in civilizational values is thus the reverberation in the narrative by Rajamouli. The movies imply that no one is born to be a true sovereign but rather it involves earning it because this means that the king becomes legitimate once his actions perpetuate welfare and honor of the citizens.

(Coomaraswamy 91)

4. The Responsibilities of Kingship - Arthashastra

The Arthashastra -The Responsibilities of Kingship.

Arthashastra by Kautilya provides the responsibilities of a ruler as favouring justice, guaranteeing the people wellness, averting exploitation, and preserving the morality and the social order (Kautilya 1.4). Amarendra Baahubali is the personification of all such obligations: He gets to the villages, he hears the complaints and he puts the needs of the community on the first ranks rather than the mainstream politics. His monarchy is characterized by a matter of reciprocity and not hierarchy.

Bhallaladeva, on the contrary, turns Mahishmati into a place of fear and anarchy where, the power is gathered into the hand of one and the opposition is suppressed by all means. The change of the kingdom as the visual representation of the annihilation of dharma takes place: the palace gets darker, the citizens turn quiet and social places lose their life. The movies graphically fictionalize the message that states that political authority melts down in circumstances in which authorities give up ethical responsibility. (Chatterjee 101)

5. Ecological Awareness and Territorial Intelligence

Baahubali terrain, forests, waterfalls and rivers are not beautiful items--they are useful sources of military and cultural information. Climbing of Sivudu up the waterfall is metaphorical representation of the shift between the instinctive power and the responsibility of civilization, which reminds the Indian symbolic meaning of water and renewal and cleansing..

Battle strategies also reflect ecological intelligence: terrain shapes formation, vegetation provides cover and water bodies determine tactical movement. "This aligns with indigenous war texts that emphasize harmonizing warfare with the rhythms of nature, rather than opposing them." (Gadgil and Guha 46)

6. Conclusion

The film Baahubali brings back old Indian views of war, where fighting was not just about strength, but also about doing what is right, caring for the environment and staying connected

to spiritual duty. Amarendra Baahubali triumphs not because he is the strongest, but because he is guided by dharma. Bhallaladeva falls because power without ethical foundation destroys itself.

Thus, the films offer not merely entertainment, but a cinematic restoration of Indian civilizational philosophy, urging contemporary audiences to reconsider how societies define power, leadership and justice.

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