

Comparative Analysis of Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra in the Mahabharata and Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev in Bahubali: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Perspective on Masculinity

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex characters of Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra in the Mahabharata and Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev in the Bahubali movie series. By employing Freudian psychoanalytic theory, this analysis delves into themes of masculinity examining how these characters embody and challenge traditional notions of masculinity.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Bahubali, Hypermasculinity, Psychoanalytic, Toxic Masculinity, Disability

Introduction

The Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic, and the Bahubali movie series, a modern cinematic masterpiece, both present rich, multifaceted characters. Among them, Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra from the Mahabharata and Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev from Bahubali stand out for their complex portrayals of masculinity and anti-heroism. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological underpinnings of these characters, particularly in terms of the id, ego, and superego, as well as various defense mechanisms.

Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra in the Mahabharata

Plot of Mahabharata

The Mahabharata written by Ved Vyas is the story of Mahabharata war fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Although the Great War is the main theme of the epic but many fables and episodes are either unconnected or connected directly and indirectly adds to the length of the epic. The main plot of the story begins with Dhritarashtra, the elder of the two princes, being passed over for the throne in favor of his younger brother Pandu, as their father's death occurs. Due to a curse, Pandu renounces the throne and is unable to have children, so his wife Kunti requests the gods to father children for him. While Dhritrashtra was made acting king of Hastinapur. As a result, the god Dharma sires Yudhishtira, the Wind sires Bhima, Indra sires Arjuna, and the Ashvins (twins) sire Nakula and Sahadeva (also twins, born to Pandu's second wife, Madri). The disagreement between cousins causes the Pandavas to leave the kingdom when they plan to burn the Pandavas alive at Varanavata. During their exile, Arjuna wins Draupadi at her Swayamvar and the five brothers marry her, who was born out of a sacrificial fire and won by Arjuna through shooting an arrow through a row of targets, on the request of their mother. There, they meet their cousin Krishna, who remains their friend and companion throughout their journey. Although the Pandavas returned to their kingdom, they were again exiled to the forest for 12 years due to Yudhishtira's loss in a dice game with Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava. This led to a series of great battles on the Kurukshetra field. All of the Kauravas were destroyed, and only the five Pandava brothers, Krishna, and Draupadi survived on the victorious side. Krishna died when a hunter, who mistook him for a deer, shot him in his vulnerable spot, his foot. Along with Draupadi and a dog who was actually Dharma, Yudhishtira's father in disguise, the five brothers set out for Indra's heaven. In succession, Draupadi and the four brothers succumb, yet Yudhishtira alone reaches the celestial gates. Upon undergoing further trials, he demonstrates unwavering loyalty and dedication, ultimately reuniting with his siblings and Draupadi, as well as his adversaries, the Kauravas, to experience eternal happiness.

Character Backgrounds

Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, is portrayed as an ambitious and envious prince. His intense jealousy towards his cousins, the Pandavas, drives much of the conflict in the Mahabharata. Dhritarashtra, his father, is the blind king of

Hastinapura. His physical blindness symbolizes his emotional and moral blindness, particularly his inability to see his son's faults.

Masculinity

Duryodhana's masculinity is characterized by aggressive assertion of power and dominance. He embodies the traditional warrior ethos, valuing strength, bravery, and loyalty. However, his masculinity is also marked by insecurity and a constant need to prove himself, particularly in comparison to the Pandavas. This insecurity often manifests as rage and violence.

Dhritarashtra's masculinity, on the other hand, is more complex. As a king, he holds a position of power, but his blindness makes him dependent on others, particularly his son. His struggle with paternal authority and his reliance on Duryodhana reveals a fragile masculinity, one that is unable to assert itself effectively.

Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev in Bahubali

Plot of Bahubali

Period films may focus on specific incidents or revolve around a person's life but many-a-times movies are set in backdrop of the past but are completely fictional known as Historical Fiction. Bahubali: the beginning begins with a child raised by a childless couple from the great Mahishmati Kingdom and one day learns about his royal lineage, his father's bravery, his mother's struggle, and a mission to overthrow his uncle, an incumbent king. Bahubali: the Conclusion begins with Amrendra Bahubali finding his life and relationships endangered as his adoptive brother Bhallaldev plots against him to claim the throne and becomes a constant threat for him and his wife, Devasena. After Bhallaldev becomes king, he plots and oust Bahubali and his wife from the palace for treason. When Bhallaldev learns his people treats Bahubali as king and becomes jealous. He fools his mother who orders Kattapa to kill Bahubali under the impression that Bahubali was plotting to kill Bhallaldev. When Kattappa unveils the plot to Shivgami, she announced Bahubali's new born son as king of Mahishmati. With army under Bhallaldev control, he tries to kill Shivgami who tries to protect Mahendra Bahubali and runs away with the child. However, Devasena is left behind and imprisoned by Bhallaldev. In order to save Bahubali, Shivgami sacrifices her life and Mahendra is saved by childless couple who raised him as Shiva. When he learns about all the pain and sacrifices of his family, Mahendra attacks and kills his uncle and saves his mother from Bhallaldev's clutches. The story ends with coronation of Mahendra Bahubali.

Character Backgrounds

Bhallaldev, the primary antagonist in Bahubali, is a ruthless and envious prince. His jealousy towards his cousin, Amarendra Bahubali, drives much of the plot. Bijjaldev, Bhallaldev's father, is a manipulative and power-hungry figure who plays a significant role in shaping his son's ambitions and actions.

Masculinity

Bhallaldev's masculinity is defined by his physical prowess and ruthless ambition. Like Duryodhana, he embodies the traditional warrior ethos but takes it to an extreme, displaying a brutal and unrelenting pursuit of power. His masculinity is also marked by a deep-seated insecurity, particularly in relation to his cousin, Bahubali making him a hypermasculine character. Bhallaladeva, portrayed by Rana Daggubati, is a towering and hypermasculine character in the "Baahubali" series.

Bijjaldev's masculinity is more intellectual and strategic. He wields power through manipulation and cunning, often using his son as a pawn in his schemes. This form of masculinity is less about physical strength and more about psychological dominance and control.

Comparative Analysis of Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra with Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev

Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory

Freudian psychoanalytic concepts provide a framework to understand the structure of the human mind, the development of personality, and the underlying motivations and conflicts that influence our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Let's explore some key concepts in Freudian Psychoanalysis:

1. **Unconscious Mind:** According to Freud, the mind is divided into three parts: the conscious mind (accessible thoughts and perceptions), the preconscious mind (thoughts that can be brought into consciousness), and the unconscious mind (thoughts and desires that are hidden from conscious awareness). The unconscious mind contains repressed and unconscious thoughts, memories, and desires that can influence our behavior without our awareness.
2. **Id, Ego, and Superego:** Freud proposed that personality consists of three components. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification of desires and instincts. The ego operates on the reality principle, mediating between the id and external reality. The superego represents internalized societal norms and values, serving as our moral compass. The interplay between these three structures determines our thoughts, feelings, and actions.
3. **Psychosexual Development:** Freud believed that personality development occurs through a series of psychosexual stages

during early childhood: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. Each stage is characterized by a specific focus of pleasure and potential conflicts. Unresolved conflicts or fixation at a particular stage can lead to personality disturbances later in life.

4. Defense Mechanisms: Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies employed by the ego to protect oneself from anxiety and distress. Examples include repression (blocking unwanted thoughts from awareness), denial (refusing to accept reality), displacement (redirecting emotions onto a less threatening target), and projection (attributing one's unwanted thoughts or feelings to others).

5. Dreams and the Interpretation of Symbols: Freud considered dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious." He argued that dreams express repressed desires and fulfill unconscious wishes in disguised forms. Analyzing dream content, including symbols and hidden meanings, can provide insights into unconscious conflicts.

6. Oedipus Complex: Freud proposed that during the phallic stage, young boys develop unconscious sexual desires for their mothers and feel rivalry with their fathers, known as the Oedipus complex. Similarly, girls develop the Electra complex. The resolution of these conflicts forms the basis for superego formation and the development of gender identity.

Analyzing Duryodhana and Bhallaladeva in detail

According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, we can delve into their personalities, motivations, and behaviors.

Duryodhana, a pivotal character from the Hindu epic Mahabharata, exemplifies certain aspects of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Duryodhana is primarily driven by his Id, representing his unconscious and instinctual desires. He is motivated by his greed, envy, and thirst for power. These desires lead him to make impulsive decisions without considering the long-term consequences. Duryodhana shows a lack of ego development, which represents the reality principle. He fails to strike a balance between his desires and external reality. Instead, he indulges in self-serving actions, often disregarding the well-being of others. Freud's Oedipus complex suggests that during early childhood, individuals may develop unconscious desires for the opposite-sex parent and perceive the same-sex parent as a rival. Duryodhana's strained relationship with his father and his envy towards his cousins, the Pandavas, can be linked to unresolved Oedipal conflicts and a subsequent thirst for power.

Bhallaladeva, from the movie "Baahubali," showcases traits that align with Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Unlike Duryodhana, Bhallaladeva demonstrates a stronger ego presence. He possesses a highly developed sense of self, displaying self-centeredness, arrogance, and a need for superiority. Bhallaladeva's actions are driven by his ego, seeking control, power, and dominance over others. Freud's theory incorporates the concept of narcissism, where individuals excessively focus on themselves and their own desires. Bhallaladeva's narcissistic tendencies are evident in his belief that he is the rightful heir to the throne, leading him to oppress others and engage in ruthless behaviors to maintain his superiority. Bhallaladeva's relentless drive for power can be linked to an inferiority complex. His constant need to prove himself better than others stem from deep-rooted feelings of inadequacy, likely stemming from childhood experiences and familial dynamics.

Both Duryodhana and Bhallaladeva represent flawed characters who demonstrate the darker aspects of human nature and the consequences of unchecked desires and motivations. Their actions are often impulsive and driven by deep-seated insecurities and jealousies. They highlight the influence of early childhood experiences, unresolved conflicts, and the interplay between the Id, Ego, and Superego in shaping their personalities and behaviors driven by their primal desires for power and dominance.

Dhrithrashtra was born blind, and this physical disability made him feel inadequate from a very young age. He had a strong desire for power, which he fulfilled by becoming the king of Hastinapur. However, his blindness also made him extremely overprotective of his son, Duryodhana. This overprotection is a result of Dhrithrashtra's fear of losing his son and the power he has over the kingdom. This desire to protect his son and maintain his power can be seen as a manifestation of Dhrithrashtra's unresolved psychological conflicts and repressed desires.

Similarly, if we look at Bijjaldev, we can see that he also exhibits several Freudian concepts. This character can be seen as archetypal 'father', who act as societal figures that serve to uphold norms and bring order. Bijjaldev was shown to be ruthless and manipulative, using his power to maintain control over his subjects. This desire for power can be seen as a manifestation of an unresolved psychological conflict, possibly stemming from early childhood experiences.

Furthermore, Bijjaldev exhibit traits of the 'id'. His characters show many signs of excessive greed, anger, violence, and other animalistic instincts. This behavior is likely due to repressed memories and unresolved psychological trauma from early childhood experiences.

In conclusion, through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, we can see that Dhrithrashtra and Bijjaldev share a

commonality of "unresolved psychological conflicts" transpired from their early life experiences. They represent the ego and superego. Dhritarashtra's actions are often mediated by his internal conflicts and moral dilemmas, while Bijjaldev's manipulations are driven by a strategic understanding of societal norms and power dynamics.

Hypermasculinity and Toxic masculine Traits

Hypermasculine men are individuals who adhere to or embody exaggerated, stereotypical characteristics associated with traditional masculinity such as physical strength, dominance, aggression, toughness, and the suppression of emotions.

These men often strive to display and assert their masculinity in various aspects of their lives, including appearance, behavior, and social interactions. They may exhibit traits like assertiveness, competitiveness, risk-taking, and a desire for power and control which are toxic traits of masculinity. Hypermasculine men may also prioritize traditional gender roles and hold beliefs that reinforce the idea of male superiority and the need to adhere strictly to societal norms.

Both Bhallaladeva and Duryodhana embody hypermasculine and toxic traits in different ways. Bhallaladeva displays hypermasculinity through his overwhelming physical strength, imposing presence, and authoritarian rule over his subjects. He uses aggression, manipulation, and violence to maintain control and reinforce his power. His toxic traits include a lack of empathy, narcissism, and a deep-rooted need for validation.

Likewise, Duryodhana can be seen as a hypermasculine character due to his obsessive pursuit of power, dominance, and social superiority. He perceives these traits as essential to his masculinity and constantly seeks validation through displays of strength and superiority. Duryodhana's toxic traits include excessive pride, jealousy, arrogance, and an inability to accept defeat or acknowledge the rights of others.

Both characters also demonstrate a disregard for the well-being and happiness of those around them. They exhibit toxic masculinity by perpetuating a culture of aggression, manipulation, and abuse. Their behavior often leads to the suffering and destruction of others, including their own family members and subjects. It is important to note that while hypermasculinity and toxic traits are prevalent in these characters, they are not representative of healthy or positive forms of masculinity. The portrayal of these traits serves to highlight their negative consequences and the detrimental impact they have on individuals and society.

In summary, Bhallaladeva and Duryodhana share hypermasculine and toxic traits characterized by aggression, dominance, a need for power, and a lack of empathy. Their insecurities drive their actions, leading them to commit numerous immoral acts in their pursuit of power. Their actions and behaviors showcase the destructive effects of these traits on themselves and those around them.

The portrayal of masculinity in both the Mahabharata and Bahubali is shaped by cultural and narrative contexts. In the Mahabharata, masculinity is closely tied to the warrior ethos and the duties of kingship. In Bahubali, masculinity is portrayed through both physical prowess and strategic cunning, reflecting a more modern understanding of power dynamics.

Disabled masculinity refers to the portrayal of characters who, despite having physical disabilities or limitations, challenge societal norms and exhibit strength and resilience.

In "Baahubali," Bijjaladeva is depicted as a disabled character with a physical impairment in one of his legs. Despite this disability, he compensates through intelligence, cunningness, and manipulative tactics. Bijjaladeva displays a complex persona, utilizing his disability to his advantage, seeking power and control, and expressing his masculinity through dominance over others. While he does not fit the traditional portrayal of disabled masculinity, his character showcases the complexities of disabled characters within the narrative.

In the Mahabharata, Dhritarashtra represents a different aspect of disabled masculinity. He is blind from birth, which symbolizes his lack of vision both literally and metaphorically. Dhritarashtra is depicted as a flawed and insecure character, who lets his disability become a hindrance rather than an opportunity to evolve. His desire for power and validation leads him to make poor decisions, favoring his son Duryodhana and engaging in unethical actions. Dhritarashtra's portrayal highlights the negative portrayal of disabled masculinity and the consequences of allowing ego and insecurity to dictate one's actions.

Comparing both characters, Bijjaladeva and Dhritarashtra, we observe that Bijjaladeva tends to exhibit more hypermasculine traits, utilizing his cunningness and manipulation to assert dominance. On the other hand, Dhritarashtra's character leans more towards disabled masculinity, as his blindness serves as both a physical and metaphorical limitation that influences his actions and decisions in the Mahabharata. Dhritarashtra's reliance on his son and his internal conflicts reveals a fragile masculinity, one that struggles to assert itself effectively. Bijjaldev's intellectual and strategic approach to power represents a different form of masculinity, one that relies on psychological dominance rather than physical strength. It is essential to acknowledge that disabled masculinity and hypermasculine characters portray different aspects of

masculinity, each with their own complexities and nuances. The characters of Bijjaladeva and Dhritarashtra exemplify these different aspects within their respective narratives, offering a broader understanding of the portrayal of masculinity in different contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra in the Mahabharata and Bhallaldev and Bijjaldev in Bahubali offer rich, multifaceted portrayals of masculinity and anti-heroism. By applying Freudian psychoanalytic theory, a deeper understanding of the psychological underpinnings of these characters can be gained and the ways in which traditional notions of heroism and masculinity are embodied and challenged.

The complex interplay between the id, ego, and superego, as well as the various defense mechanisms employed by these characters, reveal the deep-seated insecurities and jealousy towards their cousins and thirst for throne and power drive their actions. Through their struggles and ambitions, these characters offer a nuanced exploration of power, morality, and human nature.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis of these characters highlights the enduring relevance of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in understanding complex literary and cinematic characters. By examining the psychological underpinnings of these characters, a deeper appreciation for the ways in which they reflect and challenge our understanding of heroism, masculinity, and the human condition can be gained.

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