

The Subtle Influence of Hindu Doctrines on Film Industry: A Case Study of Movie Avatar

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Abstract : Hindu culture and religious doctrines such as caste, reincarnation, yoga, nirvana have always proved a popular theme for the film industry. The analyzing of these motifs in the movies with a scientific approach enables to individuals either to comprehend the messages and deep meanings of films or to understand others' religious beliefs systems and daily lives in a properly way. The primary aim of this study is to handle the subtle influence of Hindu doctrines on cinema industry by focusing on James Cameron's film, Avatar and its relationship with Hindu concept of avatara by referring to original Hindu sacred texts where this doctrine is basically clarified. The Sanskrit word avatara means to come down or to descend. Although an avatara is commonly considered as an appearance of any deity on earth, the term refers the Vishnu's descending on earth. When the movie avatar and avatara doctrine are compared, various similarities have noteworthy revealed. Firstly in the movie, Jake is chosen by Eywa to protect Pandora from evils. Similarly in the movie, avatar is born when there is a rise of jealousy and unrighteousness. The same concept is found in avatara doctrine. According to this belief whenever righteousness (dharma) wanes and unrighteousness (adharma) increases God incarnates himself as an avatara. In Hindu tradition, the ten avatars of Vishnu are the most popular. This standard list of ten avatars includes the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar, the Man-Lion (Narasimha), the Dwarf, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, the Buddha and Kalki. In the movie the avatar has tail, eyes, nose, ear which is similar to Narasimha (half man-half lion) avatara. On the other hand use of bow and arrow by Navis in the film, evokes us Rama avatara whose basic gun is same. Navis fly on a dragon like bird called Ikra and ride a horse-like quadruped animal. The vehicle for transformation of the avatar in the movie is also resemblance with the idea of Garuda, the great mythical bird, which is used by Vishnu in Hindu mythology. In addition, the last avatara, Kalki, will be seen on a white horse according to Puranas. The basic difference is that for Hinduism avatara means descent of a God, yet in the movie, a human being named Jake Sully, is manifested as humanoid of another planet, this is called as avatar. While in the movie the avatar manifests himself in another planet, Pandora, in Hinduism avatars descent on this world. On the other hand, in Hindu scriptures, there are many avatars and they are categorized according to their functions and attributes. These sides of avatara doctrine cannot be also seen clearly in the film. Even though there are some differences between each other, the main hypothesis of this study is that the general character of the movie is similar to avatara doctrine. In the movie instead of emphasizing on a specific avatara, qualities of different Vishnu avatars have been properly used.

Keywords : film industry, Hinduism, incarnation, James Cameron, movie avatar

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