

DEPICTION OF HINDU MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS IN CARTOONS: A CASE STUDY OF CHHOTA BHEEM

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INTRODUCTION

Animation has always captured the attention of people regardless of their age or gender (Noiwan & Norcio, 2006). The deep history of animation can be dated back to the Paleolithic period, where people used to depict their observations on the cave walls with abstract images of real life beings or things (Wildgen, 2004). The cartoons and animation are the most popular programs and accounted for 85 per cent of TV viewership ratings (TVR) in the genre in 2011 (Ernst & Young, 2012). Cartoons have now become a major field of study and research and are not mere entertainment programs.

The first studio to be dedicated for animation works was founded by Raoul Barré, namely Barré Studio in the early twentieth century. The animation films were distinguished with the formation of Disney Studios by the Disney brothers, Walt Disney and Roy. O. Disney. They produced feature films based on fairy tales like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Cinderella* (1950), *Lady and the Tramp* (1959) to name a few (Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund & Tanner, 2011). Their alliance with Pixar studios, owned by Job Steve from 1991 onwards, resulted in an array of commercially successful movies, most of them nominees or the winners of awards. The animation series were also gaining hype among children exposed to the media at that period of time. *Crusader Rabbit*, created by Alex Anderson set a beginning to the animation series for small screen in the year 1948. By the latter half of the twentieth century, Hanna-Barbera productions were dominating the North American television cartoon channels with their hit shows *Ruff and Reddy*, *The Huckleberry Hound Show* and *Tom and Jerry*.

The first Indian animation film was made during early twentieth century, named *Agkadyanchi Mouj*. The film was made by Dhundiraj Govind 'Dadasaheb'

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Phalke (Wright, 2005). It was followed up by several other important Indian animation movies. In 1940s, Cartoon Film Unit was started by the Film Division which was established by the Indian government. The viewership statistics suggest that the nature and quality of content is the key driver. We need to note that in the early years of cable and satellite television in India, while indigenous content on children's television was based on mythology, programming was dominated by Western content (Jaggi, 2014).

Animation movies created in India were mostly based on Indian mythological or historical characters and also had ethical, religious and moral lessons and values for viewers in it, sometimes explicit and at other times implicit. The Indian animation industry is more indulged in outsourcing programs rather than creating in house productions. This is predominantly for foreign animation industries rather than developing own stories (Hirata, n.d). Even in this condition, the Green Gold Animation Pvt. Ltd., were able to produce an animation serials for children, *Chhota Bheem*, which now is the most popular series among children (Ormax, 2013).

Indian animation is intensely connected with Indian mythology. India has an indispensable and extravagant history and habit of story-telling. The kids in India grow up listening to the stories of great kings and gods from their grandparents; most of these stories, a part of the great Indian epics, Mahabharata or Ramayana. Hence when the animation industry wanted to tell stories to children, the characters from these epics were unavoidable, as per the antiquity. Moreover, the mythological and historical characters were also the superheroes to the kids in India, as there are fantasies and magic associated with them. This paved the way to the creation of Indian small screen superheroes such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Krishna*, *Ganesh*, *Hanuman*, and *Luv Kush* and so on. *Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama* (1992) is a notable animation film. A child's mind is crucial in grasping and imitating anything they are exposed to which is also interesting to them. Therefore children are found to be following the religious views and practices of the popular Chhota Bheem irrespective of their own religion and practices (Maqsood & Amer, n.d).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the content and influence of these TV series among children (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Gadberry, 1974; Hapkiewicz, 1979; Jusoff & Sahimi, 2009). The children are more attracted to the cartoon and learn better from them because of their well written scenarios, audio, the visual effect and the attractive colors in them (Eker & Karadeniz, 2014; Habib & Soliman, 2015; Hassan & Daniyal, 2013). The two main issues that impact children's television in India are the content demand of 24/7 channels which is not being met by animation sector in India, and mythological themes of indigenous content which tend to get repetitive and restrict their prospects (Jaggi, 2011).

The content of Chhota Bheem teaches children a good lot of things such as helping others, obeying the elders, hospitality, venerability, friendship and like

the same, whereas, it also highlights the muscle power over the mind power, giving children a notion that victory over evil is ultimately with the help of your fist (Kannan, 2014). Chhota Bheem has indeed become a fierce milestone in the Indian animation, on the authority of a study by Jones. T.(n.d), on Creating Content (ment) for Children. Das and Bhattacharyya (2016) explain the reason for the success of Chhota Bheem, as children are found to be relating themselves and their living environment to that of the character Chhota Bheem. Apart from English and Hindi this cartoon program is available in vernacular languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Bengali which exponentially increased the audience of Chhota Bheem.

The character of Chhota Bheem is also intimately associated with bravery which is one of the most highlighted characteristics in Indian mythology, and also is a quality the parents tell their children to develop. In a household where both the parents are working, a kid spends more time with TV programs and shows, which in return strongly influences the kids. Now they know what they have to wish for (Jain & Kaul, n, d).

The mythological characters Krishna, Ganesha and Hanuman are introduced in Chhota Bheem through special Chhota Bheem movies and sequences. These characters appear to have come to help Bheem in his mission against the evil and to save the city. They provide Bheem with valid advice and physical protection. The script has made sure that the deities who come to help Bheem in his quests are "chhota" as well. It is the chhota Krishna, chhota Ganesha (bala ganesha) and chhota Hanuman (bala hanuman) who come for Bheem's help. Apart from providing help through advice and action, the mythological characters do not miss to charm Bheem and his friends along with the audience with their supernaturalism and fantasy.

This research tries to understand the reach of Indian mythological characters among children, how the same influences the kids and in what ways, with Chhota Bheem as a case study. The research also focuses in identifying what is so magical in Chhota Bheem that children are passionate about; along with what impact does it have on the personalities of today's children, the affecting parameters attained from Mythological characters in Chhota Bheem, and to identify the time spent by children on watching Chhota Bheem.

The researchers chose Chhota Bheem as a case study instead of other similar shows because it is one such rare show which has included Ganesha, Krishna and Hanuman as well.

METHODOLOGY

The researches required certain answers regarding the kids' viewership patterns and preferences regarding the show Chhota Bheem. It also required certain answers

from the parents as well regarding their wards' preferences on the show Chhota Bheem. The researchers conducted a survey where the parents were asked questions satisfying both the above mentioned criteria. Apart from survey, personal interviews were also conducted to get a detailed answer and deeper views on the research problem.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Out of the 300 responses collected, 243 are the usable ones. The results declare that 51% of the kids between the age group of 2 to 7 watch Chhota Bheem. Researchers have studied that kids who watch TV programs for more than 3 hours a day falls under the category of heavy viewer ship. This study found that 16% of the kids watch TV programs for 3 hours or more a day, which is brim to the heavy viewership.

Sixty six percent parents from the population concur that Chhota Bheem is the most preferred animation series by their children, which proves the Ormax (2013) statement that ChhotaBheem is the most popular animation series among children in India. 56% of the children watch Chhota Bheem up to an hour a day whereas 26% of the sample population watch Chhota Bheem for one to two hours. Among that 40% of the kids watch Chhota Bheem during the evenings. Inducements could be that, children above the age of 3 are kept busy in the mornings readying them up for the school. When they are back from school, they find Chhota Bheem more interesting than open playgrounds and games. As a result, children who are inclined to high viewership are mostly found to be obese. Another main reason for kids' coherence to Chhota Bheem is their parents themselves, for they leave kids with the cartoon on television and it gives them enough time to carry on with their work or chores (Habib & Soliman, 2015). At times they are also found to be demanding the children to study their portions and only then would they be let to watch Chhota Bheem. A 20% of the population watches it during the day time consisting of the kids who are not school going. This happens possibly because the parents find it an easier and a very effective way to engage their kids which gives them ample time for all their other works.

The passion for Chhota Bheem doesn't end there. Apart from watching Chhota Bheem on TV, 36% of kids watch downloaded episodes of Chhota Bheem, among which 56% of the kids watch the downloaded episodes of Chhota Bheem up to 2 times and 31% watch it from 3 to 5 times a day. Most of the parents download the Chhota Bheem episodes to keep their kids busy so that they are not disturbed. One of the parents that researchers interviewed mentioned that the kids love Chhota Bheem so much that they don't even move around while watching. Chhota Bheem to them is the most efficient baby sitter. This indirectly makes the child addicted to Chhota Bheem. Justifying the craving for Chhota Bheem, the majority – 53% of kids watch the episodes of Chhota Bheem when aired repeatedly on TV.

It is interesting to notice that 26% of the kids watch Chhota Bheem on Youtube as well besides watching it on television. Most of these kids are from the families who have an annual income of 6 lakhs or more – families who can afford computer, laptop or other such devices and the internet, or in other words middle class and above. The researches in this study identified that watching Chhota Bheem is not affecting the studies. Only 26% of the sample population marked that the watching of Chhota Bheem has affected their children's academic progression.

Other than understanding the devotion children possess for Chhota Bheem, this research also helped in comprehending the impact of Chhota Bheem and other similar animation series and television on children. 70% of the parents agree to the fact that children imitate their favorite Chhota Bheem character in certain situations and again 70% of the parents also accept the behavioral change identified in their children after watching Chhota Bheem. A child's mind is crucial in grasping and imitating to anything they are exposed to, which is also interesting to them (Maqsood & Amer, n.d), and the above results legitimize the quote. In addition to the imitation, 60% of the kids have acquired the language and accent used by the characters in Chhota Bheem as well.

The impacts the cartoons have made on the children were much more perplexing when around 50% of the parents acknowledged that their children are factious when it comes to watching Chhota Bheem. It is shocking to see that 36% behave in an aggressive manner when not allowed to watch Chhota Bheem or if the television is turned off or even when the power goes while they watch. Also 47% of the parents concede that kids adhere to violence after watching Chhota Bheem. Chhota Bheem is an action oriented cartoon. Bheem along with his closest mates and other mythological characters defeat the evil with a lot of stunt actions involved, which emphasizes that muscle power is the ultimate source to victory. Not to the researchers' surprise, 56% of the parents believe that aggressive behavior, impaired eyes and an injured brain is the result of watching cartoon programs, yet their kids are exposed to it. This may be because the parents want more time for their other important works without being disturbed. Are they working to give their children a better future while leaving their children to the television? This provides scope for further research in this area. The solution for this issue is in the hands of the parents only.

The results provide us with the fact that 24% of kids started eating more laddoos after watching Chhota Bheem. Fascinatingly though Chhota Bheem has become an indispensable part of children's life. 57% of the parents said that there has been no negative influence of Bheem and party in the family relationships and friendships of the children.

Chhota Bheem is not the only modern time superhero; he has got competitors like Luv Kush, Gatolkach, Krishna and Roll. No: 21 featuring Krishna as its leading

character. 57% of the kids do watch other mythological character based cartoon series as the above. What attracts and anchors the kids to these mythology incorporated cartoon series is the action performed by the mythological characters, the portrayal of mythological characters and the magic and fantasy involved around them.

Children are found to be following the religious views and practices of the popular Chhota Bheem irrespective of their own religion and practices (Maqsood & Amer, n.d). Around 55% of the children follow the religious practices portrayed in Chhota Bheem and 46% of the children are influenced in their religious perspectives. The children are more attracted to the cartoon and learn better from them because of their well written scenarios, audio and the visual effect and the attractive colors in them, which our traditional teaching method lacks (Eker & Karadeniz, 2014; Habib & Soliman, 2015; Hassan & Daniyal, 2013).

Meantime, an intriguing observation makes it clear that Bheem is not the only character that leads the show to its efficiency. The frequent visits of the mythological kids' favorite characters, Krishna, Ganesha and Hanuman are also the factors behind the series to be the kids most loved show. The results got it that 34% of the children say Krishna is their most favorite mythological character in Chhota Bheem where as 23% have Ganesha as their favorite character and the remaining 43% voted for Hanuman. But on contrary to the likeability, 40% of children choose Krishna as their role model while 30% vote was acquired by Hanuman and Ganesha each. Children admire Bheem mostly for his bravery, followed by his playfulness, venerability and loyalty.

On the whole 60% of the parents believe that children find it difficult to differentiate between the real and the fantasy world.

CONCLUSION

According to this research, children are overly exposed to television these days and the mythological characters in the cartoon series attract them the most. Specifically kids admire the actions performed by the mythological character. The age old godly characters from the epics and mythology are now reinvented as super heroes by the animation film makers. In some cases kids themselves prefer to spend time watching television and cartoon whereas in majority of the scenarios parents who use television and cartoons as a medium to keep the child distracted from the real world and at the same time keep them engaged in something, without disturbing them. Children, being overexposed to these kinds of shows are found to be adopting violence in their real life, believing that the physical strength is the only solution to solve a conflict or defeat evil.

The mythological characters portrayed in these cartoon series are quite contrary to their actual nature in the original epics. Bheem in the epic is a character who is

unexceptionally strong, gigantic, arrogant and impulsive in nature, whereas in the series, Bheem is given a character that almost resembles to that of Arjuna, Bheem's brother in Mahabharata. On the other hand, Bheem in the series is accompanied by his loyal female friend - Chutki, a younger brother kind of mate - Raju, and a faithful monkey Jaggu in all his adventures, which resonates the characterization in Ramayana, where Rama is accompanied by his wife Sita, Lakshman and the faithful friend Hanuman in his adventures. So Chhota Bheem provides the younger generation a soup of Ramayana and Mahabharata, sprinkled with prominent characters from both the epics, like Krishna and Hanuman, and the deity common in both the epics, Ganesha, who also happens to be a favorite of the kids. For by the soup, the series have managed to be the most watched and loved by the kids, parting and anchoring the Hindustani culture and traditions to them.

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