

AVATAR: INSPIRATION FROM INDIA

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Even before I watched the movie, I felt that there was a link between the film, Avatar, and the great Epic of India, Ramayana, since the word 'Avatar' is distinctly Indian. Yet to this day, I have never heard of any reference to this most obvious link in any publication, except in Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, in which it is said that James Cameron said "(Avatar is) an incarnation of one of the Hindu gods taking a flesh form." On the specific reason for the choice of blue as their skin color, Cameron said "I just like blue. It's a good color ... plus, there's a connection to the Hindu deities, which I like conceptually." Hence my attempt to bring out some of the key relationships, which come to my mind, including some of what has not been said even in Wikipedia.

"In **Hinduism**, Avatar or *Avatāra* (**Devanagari, Sanskrit** for "descent" [viz., from heaven to earth]) refers to a deliberate descent of a deity from heaven to earth, and is mostly translated into English as "**incarnation**", but more accurately as "appearance" or "manifestation" (Wikipedia). In the film, a human being named Jake Sully, is transformed into or manifested as a humanoid of another distant planet, that is as an Avatar. Pure coincidence?

The color of this Avatar is blue and he has a tail. He has large eyes and pointed ears. He is nimble on his feet and moves on tree branches and jumps at ease. He is tall, intelligent, well-built and heroic. The entire description, to the tail, fits the description and character of Hanuman, a very important personality in the epic Ramayana and considered by many as the eleventh incarnation or Avatar of Lord Siva. Even Jake's lady-love in the new planet, Neytiri, occasionally cries out like a hanuman, a monkey species. Incidentally, even Rama himself, around whom the epic Ramayana is told, and Lord Krishna the central figure of Bhagavad Gita, were blue too. Also, the very generic name to cover all monkeys, to which the species hanuman belongs, is Ba-Nara, meaning humanoid. A coincidence?



Hanuman.
(artist unknown)

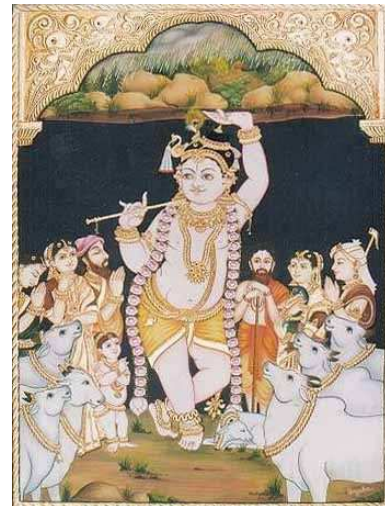


Avatar.
(slide from the movie)

Hanuman, the son of the wind god Pavana, simply picks up an entire mountain, since he could not identify a specific medicinal plant on the mountain. This scenario, in which an entire mountain rests (almost floats?) on the hand of Hanuman, is well-documented in Ramayana. Also well-documented is young Krishna's picking up an entire mountain to provide shelter to people. Remember the floating mountains in the film? A mere coincidence?



Hanuman carrying a mountain.
(artist unknown)



Krishna carrying a mountain.
(artist unknown)

In the film, Avatar and his fellow beings in the new planet, the Na'vis, use domiciled birds for flying. Birds even aid them valiantly (consciously?) in their war against the invaders. So do other animals. In Hinduism many deities have birds as their

carriers. Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, has the owl. Goddess of learning, Saraswati , has the swan. Deity Vishnu's carrier is Garuda, a mighty bird, on whose back he rides alone and also with his wives. In Ramayana, Garuda's son Jatayu fights Ravana, when he abducts Sita and sacrifices his own life in his heroic attempt to rescue her. In the war between Rama and Ravana, not only Hanuman and his monkey brigades but other animals also help Rama. Again a coincidence?



Vishnu flying on Garuda.
(artist unknown)



Jatayu fighting Ravana
(artist: Ravi Varma)

A vast majority of the people of India adhere to non-violence. A vast number abhor killing any animal and some avoid killing even insects and a good many people are strict vegetarians. All mountains, rivers, lakes on one hand and animals and trees on the other are considered as male and female personalities and sacred. Hence came the well-known phrase “sacred cow”. Even clouds are addressed as personalities in the great classic, Meghaduta (meaning cloud-messenger) of the great poet Kalidasa. Likewise, Na'vis, the humanoids of the planet Pandora, shun killing of other animals and worship trees. They kill only in self defense using bows and arrows as their weapons, just like the warriors of Ramayana. In both cases, the wars take place in rain forests. Again a coincidence?



Rama at War
(artist: Alex Ross)



Avatar at War
(slide from the movie)

Above facts are not intended to minimize in any way the epic film Avatar, created by James Cameron, who also gave us another highly memorable film, Titanic. What is very important is the way Cameron has used many of the characteristics of Ramayana, be it consciously or subconsciously, pervaded them and created an altogether new and magical but at times overwhelmingly violent story, using superb new digital techniques, in which however, ultimately good prevails over evil, just like in Ramayana.