

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

HAIR AS A METOPHER FOR FEMINISTIC AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN
INDIAN AESTHETICS BASED ON THE MOVIE *BULBUL* DIRECTED BY ANVITA DUTT

Dr. Edison K Verghese

Associate Professor and HOD

Dept. Of English, Sree Vivekananda College, Kunnamkulam, Thrissur DT.

Email: edisonkverghese@gmail.com



Dr. Edison K Verghese

Article info

Article Received: 11/11/2022

Article Accepted: 17/12/2022

Published online: 21/12/2022

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.10.4.186](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.10.4.186)

Abstract

Every country or community has its own cultural beliefs, rituals and customs that they follow and hence the social meanings of hair alter with respect to the cultural context in which it is put in. The significance of hair and hairstyles in Indian context can be traced back to the Harappan civilisation. An analysis based on feministic and cultural representation of hair in Indian context can give further insight into the various interpretations and connotative meanings that hair acquires throughout the process. Hindi-language movie 'Bulbbul', which was released on Netflix on 24 June 2020, was directed by Anvita Dutt and co-produced by Anushka Sharma and Karnesh Sharma. By involving Indian folk tales, superstitions, myths, fantasy fiction and Bengali culture, the movie portrays the admirable blend of horror, period drama and social criticism. Set in the backdrop of 1880's Bengal presidency, 'Bulbbul' revolves around a child-bride named Bulbbul, and her journey from innocence to strength. Even though the main two characters in the movie are the victims of patriarchal oppression, both of them have their own distinct characteristics regarding their method for survival and attitude. Their hair contributes to their nature and plays a prominent role in the portrayal of their diverse emotions.

Keywords: Bulbbul, Anvita Dutt, Indranil, Sathya, Mahendra, Binodini and Sudip.

'Hair doesn't make the women but good hair definitely helps'. This sentence tells us the significance of hair in the life of women. According to Cambridge Dictionary, hair is defined as "the mass of thin thread-like structures on the head of a person, or any of these structures that grow out of the skin of a person or animal". Biologically, human hair is used for DNA analysis for examining the genetic identity of a person. Other than that, hair doesn't have any intrinsic value of its own. But when

hair is analysed in the socio-political and cultural contexts, it gets diverse and intriguing meanings and connotations. It is not necessary that these interpretations should be similar in every cultural context. Every country or community has its own cultural beliefs, rituals and customs that they follow and hence the social meanings of hair alter with respect to the cultural context in which it is put in. The significance of hair and hairstyles in Indian context can be traced back to the Harappan

civilisation (3300-1300BC). Indian culture is known for its unity in diversity that is established with the helping hands of elements like history, mythology, religion, superstitions, rituals, customs etc.

A feministic analysis of hair in Indian context helps to shed light into its diverse interpretations, and also on the gender norms that is veiled under patriarchal stereotypes. Indian culture is regarded as the mixture of several cultures due to the influence of different religious, political, geographical and social factors. But in the case of hair, Indian culture presents itself with the rich legacy of lengthy and elaborate coiffures. These multifarious and embellished hairstyles reflect statement of personality, ideas, taste and creativity of the people. The hair of Indian women is generally regarded rich in texture and length, as they maintain it with natural oils, without much exposure to chemical products. Indian literature, paintings and mythologies have women represented with long and thick black hair that attracts and mesmerises the viewers. This Indian obsession over long black hair upon women pressurizes the later for similar appearance and hence put their lives in jeopardy. The emphasis on long hair is still visible in the matrimonial profiles of women because of the societal demand for the same. This age-old admiration and glorification of long hair in women led to the elevation of its social status and meanings. More than an adornment, long hair in women began to be considered as the symbol of pride, energy, sexuality, seductiveness, fertility, power, control, instrument of vengeance, depending on the context in which it is put in.

An analysis based on feministic and cultural representation of hair in Indian context can give further insight into the various interpretations and connotative meanings that hair acquires throughout the process. So here, the core material that is chosen for the analysis is the Indian Hindi-language movie 'Bulbbul' which was released on Netflix on 24 June 2020. The movie was directed by Anvita Dutt and co-produced by Anushka Sharma and Karnesh Sharma. 'Bulbbul' became Anvita's first film that met with positive reviews from both the audience and critics regarding its stand on feminism, visual effects, background music and performance of lead actress

Tripti Dimri (Bulbbul) but was criticised for its short length and predictable plot. The lead actress Tripti Dimri won the Filmfare OTT Award for Best Actress in a web original film, for her impressive performance in Bulbbul. It was shot over a period of 33 days in locations near Kolkata and Mumbai. Siddharth Diwan led the cinematography. With inputs from Dutt, the artwork of Raja Ravi Varma and Caravaggio were used as inspiration.

From the scenery of a Bulbul (a tropical African and Asian songbird known for its melodious voice) making its nest, to Rabindranath Tagore's portrayal of women, many things inspired Anvita Dutt. By involving Indian folk tales, superstitions, myths, fantasy fiction and Bengali culture, the movie portrays the admirable blend of horror, period drama and social criticism. Set in the backdrop of 1880's Bengal presidency, Bulbbul revolves around a child-bride named Bulbbul, and her journey from innocence to strength. The film delves into the idea of aristocratic Bengali women embracing Western ideologies of freedom. Even though Bengal is portrayed as changing outside, the women in the house are fragile, hopeless and yet sensible. Dutt's depiction of Bulbbul intends to make the viewers empathise with the character thereby stressing on the female feelings and experiences.

Even though the main two characters in the movie are the victims of patriarchal oppression, both of them have their own distinct characteristics regarding their method for survival and attitude. Their hair contributes to their nature and plays a prominent role in the portrayal of their diverse emotions. The priority given to hair in Indian culture is not a newly established practice. Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata also incorporates the decisive role of hair in channeling the nature and atmosphere of the scene. In such contexts, the hair of the character alone has the ability to express the emotion and atmosphere. In Ramayana, it was a hairpin that Sita gave Hanuman as a message to Rama. The hair of Kaikeyi while demanding her boons from Dhasharatha was open and disheveled. Moreover, the heart-rending scene of Draupadi getting harassed and molested in Mahabharata later witnessed her vengeance and fury through her disheveled and flying hair. Similar symbolisms

regarding vengeance, manipulation, sexuality etc. can also be seen in Bulbbul using the hair of the female characters. In addition to this, it also gives a view on the Hindu custom of head shaving among Brahmin widows. Even though complete head shaving is associated with asceticism, this particular ritual of head shaving of Brahmin widows implicitly illustrates the oppressive and slave like life of women in a 'manmade' world.

The sexist policies behind hair abide within every religion. In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he asks, "Doth not nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (1 Cor. 11.14-16). In Islamic religion, women are advised not to reveal their hair and ask them to cover their hair completely using a hijab. The inequality in such practices related to hair is justified in each of these religions by using their holy texts and myths. This imposes restrictions upon every gender but tends to bring more burdens upon women due to the strong influence of patriarchy. Because, most of the times, girl children are brought up in such a way that their life is intended to orient only around marriage. This enhances their necessity to improve their appearance so as to please the societal and marriage demands. When it comes to appearance, hair occupies a crucial position in Indian culture. As a result, people have to adhere to the cultural norms behind hair even if they don't want to. Gradually the hair of a person contributes to their identity.

Hair is often employed to define one's identity. This happens due to the social meanings and common interpretations that are engraved upon hair through the continuous and generalized influence of the society. For example, Indian culture values long hair on women than short hair. Short hair on women is often regarded as the symbol of western influence and thus associates her identity with bold, unconventional and modern. Similarly, short hair is preferred for men as long hair is considered feminine. This tradition divides the male and female social identity into two categories.

Hair is considered as a source of one's identity which is lost in the case of head shaving. But the journey of such shaven hair into the realm of international hair trade can be seen at the Tirumala temple at Tirupati. Lots of women shave their head there and offer the hair to the deity. But little do they know that these hairs are collected and exported to companies around the world in order to sell them as hair extensions and wigs. Hair is also used to define group identity. The men of Sikh community can be easily identified by their turban. Likewise, the women belonging to Islamic religion can be identified using their custom of covering hair completely using hijab. The army and the police have a particular type of haircut that is mandatory for their identity. While some of the practices are conducted for the purpose of discipline and professional reasons, others are carried out in the name of beliefs and tradition instead of individual choice. This paper entitled "Hair as a Metaphor for Feministic and Cultural Representation in Indian Aesthetics" deals with the analysis of how hair is implemented to establish societal and cultural norms, thereby interpreting the feministic and cultural aspects behind the representation of hair in Indian context. It also emphasizes the inter-relation between hair and identity and how hair contributes to the assessment of identity within the societal and cultural stereotypes.

A normal and healthy human body is built in such a way that each and every part of it contributes to the totality of its working. From head to toe, each part has its own purpose and importance in maintaining the whole system. For instance, the human hair is a source of heat insulation and cooling. This enables the human body to balance itself in varying climatic conditions. Hair also protects the human body by preventing the entry of dust particles into the skin. Hair in scientific terms is described as a protein filament that takes its roots from hair follicles. But in literary terms, hair is interpreted to a far more range which yields to its diverse meanings and connotations. In a stereotypical and conventional society, appearance has its upper part in the assessment of a person's character and nature. Hence hair too has become a defining and accustomed feature of individual

identity by the continuous and pedantic influence of the society. Indian culture and history traces back the significance of hair and hairstyles even to the early periods of Harappan civilization (3300-1300 BC). Ancient texts and sculptures portray the exuberant hairstyles and elaborate coiffure. Both men and women adorned their elaborate hairstyles with various jewels, tiaras and fillets. While women arranged their hair in curls, knots, buns and braids, men combed their hair back which is then knotted or coiled with the support of a fillet.

The Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) is considered as the earliest metrical work of the Dharmasastra textual tradition of Hinduism. It is in the form of a discourse given by Manu, the progenitor of humankind, to a group of seers, who beseech him to convey the law of all the social classes. Manusmriti advocates that "I should immediately punish anyone who, out of wickedness, dishonours someone by snatching and dragging him by his hair." The punishment would be to cut off both his hands. This depicts the elevated and sacred position given to uncut hair as it is an eminent symbol of its possessor's prestige and pride. This is further emphasized through the religious texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavat Gita. The Hindu gods are represented with uncut hair in sculptures and texts.

Hair plays a pivotal role when it comes to human identity. Hair attributes individual characteristics to its possessor which corresponds to his or her actions, nature or behaviour. The thick matted hair of Lord Shiva symbolizes his wild nature, fury and power. The dreadlocks represent his profuse control over mind and senses which enabled him to lock and domesticate the wild and unruly river goddess Ganga so that he could release her in an organized way for the welfare of the humanity. The unbound, untidy and unruly hair of Goddess Kali symbolizes her wild, violent and fierce nature. It hints at her barbaric and unorganized character that is not willing at any cost to be tamed or to be shackled. Even though goddess Durga has unbound hair like Kali, her hair is well-combed and tidy. This implies her civilized nature which can also be transformed into a ferocious one if the proper conduct is not given to her.

The representations of goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati also have loose and unbound hair. But Parvati has well-combed, tidy and bounded hair. This attributes to her role as an ideal wife and mother who is bounded by domestic duties. Curly hair indicates the strategic nature of Lord Krishna. He is civilized and controlled but not so simple. His frisky and intricate nature is contrasted by the silky and straight hair of Balram which signifies his straightforward nature. Well-combed, organized and bounded hair represents a well-organized and perfect rule follower like Ram which is why he is called as Maryada Purushottam. All these shows that both men and women had long hairs. Hair is considered as a source of power and energy by many communities. In rituals like sarpampattu and thumbithullal, women tend to shake their hair loose in a hysteric manner, signifying the vibrant energy and state of trance which is believed to be caused by the deity possessing the body and mind of the person. All these resulted in the Indian obsession over long and thick black hair which further became one of the most challenging and traumatizing impediment for Indian women.

Bulbbul is an Indian Hindi-language movie, written and directed by Anvita Dutt and co-produced by Anushka Sharma and Karnesh Sharma. The film noted for its admirable blend of horror, period drama and social criticism was released on Netflix on 24 June 2020 after shooting for thirty-three days in locations near Kolkata and Mumbai. Moulded with Bengali folk tales and mythical elements, the film was welcomed with a positive reception. Even though it was criticized for its short length and predictable plot, Bulbbul was appreciated for its conspicuous feministic approach and bewitching audio-visual effects. Set in 1881 Bengal presidency, Dutt took special cares to incorporate the fairy tale narration along with the gothic and mythical elements. All these culminated in the release of Bulbbul which was mostly applauded for its idea of aristocratic Bengali women embracing Western ideologies of freedom.

The plot of the movie revolves around the life of the main protagonist Bulbbul. Born in a Bengali family, little Bulbbul is confronted with her marriage to Indranil, a middle aged person solemnly

called as Bado Thakur. The only comfort that she finds at her new home is Sathya, the little brother of Indranil. Both children spent time with each other by playing and narrating stories of a demon woman, Chudail. With an ample interweaving of flashbacks throughout the plot, viewer is taken to the reality where a young and handsome Sathya is returning home from London after five years. Meanwhile Mahendra, the mentally challenged twin of Indranil was killed in what was believed to be a Chudail's attack and his widow Binodini now lives in the outhouse. Indranil has left the village and Bulbbul has taken over his responsibilities. Sathya and Bulbbul find drastic changes in each other which create a new tension between them. In the interim the village witnesses a few deaths which are believed to be the actions of the Chudail. Sathya goes for hunting the Chudail at night along with other villagers but he ends up finding the presence of the village doctor, Sudip at every crime scene. His jealousy aroused by Sudip's and Bulbbul's closeness fuels to the context. He forcefully tries to take Sudip to Calcutta on the suspicion of being the murderer. But on their way through the forest, they are encountered with Chudail. It is revealed through flashbacks that Bulbbul is the Chudail. Binodini poisons Indranil's mind with the affair of Sathya and Bulbbul. Indranil sends Sathya to London in order to separate them. Later Indranil becomes convinced about the affair due to a misunderstanding along with Binodini's influence. Enraged, he mercilessly beats and mutilates Bulbbul's feet with iron bar and leaves the village. Further the bedridden Bulbbul is ruthlessly raped by Mahendra which causes her death. With the intervention of supernatural elements, Bulbbul is brought back to life. It is portrayed that her symbolic transformation is caused by the goddess Kali in order to kill the men who abuse and murder women. She murders these types of men secretly at night causing the villagers to think it as the deeds of Chudail, who is distinguished by her backward feet. At present, Sathya sets fire to the forest to kill the Chudail but it becomes too late when he realizes that Bulbbul is the Chudail. A year later, Indranil returns to his empty house after Sathya has departed, fearing he too has become like his brothers. One night, Indranil

is awoken from his sleep by Bulbbul, who emerges from embers and presumably kills Indranil to take revenge.

The characters in the movie are peculiar from one another in nature, attitude, ideas, behaviour and motives. Likewise, each of them has been attributed with disparate hair types and hair styles that are identifiable with their characteristic norms. Bulbbul has a curly hair which was braided at back before Sathya left for London. Her hair was not completely well secured and combed at that time. Her curly hair indicates her complicated mind. Although she was not happy with her married life and new home, she tried her best to hide her inconvenience in front of her husband. Despite being sister-in-law, the abstruse relationship between Bulbbul and Sathya becomes her only solace. This intricate mind of Bulbbul is reflected in her messy and curly hair.

The hair of women shown in the movie is bounded at most times, especially in the presence of men which speak of the limited and confined life of women under the cultural oppression that is set forth to adhere with the norms of patriarchy. Binodini's straight hair is always tied up into a knot at her back. Even though she is enclosed within the restrictions propounded by the male dominated society, she has entrenched herself with bold and devious maneuvers in order to crown herself with power and possession. Her strategic and astute nature is reflected through her twisted two-sided braiding of hair when she is sent to summon little Bulbbul before Indranil. Her desire to win the position of 'bade bahu' of the house and envy towards Bulbbul is revealed in the same scene. Her hair also renders assistance to her manipulative nature. The distinct personalities of Binodini and Bulbbul can be seen when Binodini asks Bulbbul to oil her hair in order to delay her meeting with Sathya. Binodini controls her husband by pulling him by his head, who gets excited after seeing Bulbbul. The scene implicitly reveals Binodini domesticating her husband. The controversial song "kolonkini Radha" sung by Binodini in this scene represents her plan to establish a gossip about the affair between Sathya and Bulbbul. Her hair being oiled and nurtured adds to her developing manipulative

nature.

The interpretation of Binodini's hair is only a mere example of the connotative meanings of hair in the context of Bulbbul. The connotative meanings of hair supplement to a farther extend. More than an adornment, hair is considered as a symbol of seductiveness, pride, fertility and vengeance. The perception of women's hair in relation with the intertwined concepts of sexuality and marriage is evident in the two-thousand-year-old Sanskrit text, Kama Sutra. It stresses on the critical aspect of hair in sexual encounters several times. In a translated version, the text lists "dressing the hair with unguents and perfumes and braiding it" as an art to study, describes women's hair during sexual positions as being "loose and flowing," and instructs lovers to look for "good hair" among other things, including wealth, connections and a healthy body in marriage prospects. The result ended up in Indian obsession over long and thick black hair. Thus a woman's beauty and fertility was slowly and tactically instilled in her long hair. This instillation is deeply rooted in Indian culture that it prevails still in the contemporary world with a firm substratum. Long and thick black hair became mandatory in search for a bride as people perceived it to be the underlining feature for a woman to become the most eligible contender for the position of wife.

The erotic and seductive nature of hair is often employed to manipulate others for one's own advantage. Binodini manipulates Indranil by taking advantage of her seductive side. Her hair in this context is in loose and flowing nature which complements to the significance of hair in sexual encounters as pointed out in the Kama Sutra. The influence of hair in the act of manipulation has been immensely exploited from books to movies. One can trace such a scene in the ancient text of Ramayana in which Kaikeyi takes advantage of the boons that she had received from Dasharatha in order to exile Rama into the wilderness for fourteen years and to crown her son Bharata as the king of Ayodhya. Seeing Kaikeyi in a pathetic condition with disheveled hair, Dasharatha was indeed stricken with the seriousness of the situation. Even though Kaikeyi manipulated Dasharatha chiefly by her poisoned words, her dishevelled hair intensified the

scenario, warning Dasharatha to become prepared for what was coming.

The erotic and sexual feeling that arouses from touching or seeing hair is most commonly head hair, is known as hair fetishism. Hair fetishism is also called as hair partialism and trichophilia. The arousal by head hair may arise from seeing or touching very long or short hair, wet hair, a certain colour of hair or a particular hairstyle. Another variety of hair fetishism includes the arousal from pulling on or cutting the hair of another person. The sexual value of hair arises only when it is associated with cultural context. It does not possess any intrinsic sexual value by its own. While some cultures regard hair as attractive and erotic, some conceives it as not aesthetic. In Islamic culture, women are advised to cover their hair in public. Only family and close friends are allowed to see their hair. They use hijab or similar clothing in order to cover their hair completely. But this is not at all expected from men. This similar custom of covering hair by women is also visible in Semiticism, Christianity and Hinduism. Even European women were expected to cover their hair after marriage during the middle ages. North Indian Hindu women are supposed to wear ghoonghat after marriage and at the time of prayer at temple. In such contexts, head covering adds to the symbol of marriage. Correspondingly, Christian women are expected to cover their head during prayer. Hair is often apprehended with sacred beliefs and rituals which vary in slight extend according to the respective religion and culture. Following are some of the cultural practices that is associated with hair.

The Sikh community strictly adheres to the custom of uncut hair with a turban and unshaved beard. There are mainly two reasons for this custom of securing uncut hair. The Sikh philosophy strongly believes in following the will of God and the uncut hair symbolises their appreciation for God's natural creation. It was Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikh community who declared the necessity of wearing a turban as it is thought to complete the human form in all respects. Initially, only people of the higher castes were allowed to wear a turban. Guru wanted the Sikhs to attain equal position like that of the highest prince of the land.

Thus by wearing a turban the ages-old monopoly of ruling class was overthrown. Gradually, the uncut hair with a turban and uncut beard became Sikh identity.

Jainism is rooted mainly on the three principles of nonviolence, non-absolutism and non-possessiveness. Therefore, asceticism has a profound role in Jainism. Due to the intense effect of nonviolence, they forbid to kill any living creature, even down to the nits in the hair. As a result, most of their hair will taper off at the end. Jain Sadhus are noted for their ritual of hair plucking ceremony in which the hair on face and scalp of the Sadhus are plucked by others. The intention of the ceremony is to endure pain thereby motivating followers to take the path of renunciation of worldly things. Head shaving or Mundana is mainly associated with asceticism. A Hindu Sannyasin shaves his head completely in order to symbolize his disinterest and renunciation from pleasures, desires and prejudices of the material life.

The head shaving of widows in Hindu tradition is yet another frequently debated and disputed topic. This tradition is chiefly forced on Brahmin widows to enforce monasticism over them. The identity of a widow is manifested in white clothes, shaved head, pale face etc. A widow is compelled to live a colourless life for the rest of her life without considering her opinion. The ostensible judgement of the patriarchal monarchy over a woman's life deprives her of her individual choices and desires.

Binodini in *Bulbbul* is a tactical manipulator who weighs herself before anyone. Unlike *Bulbbul*, she chose to become a potential parasite that could leech onto the mind of the head of the house by adhering to the societal norms and order. She has the capability to ignite a fire that could burn down the whole relationships around her. Even though she is portrayed as a negative character, her desire for power and wealth are extrinsically revealed in the movie. But all her dreams and plans are shattered with the death of her husband. The key to experience the luxury was her husband Mahendra. After his death, she is forced to lead a colourless life. An interesting fact is that while culture removes the

red sindhoor from her forehead, it fails to remove the red blood which is innate in her. Binodini is not emotionally affected by Mahendra's death rather than losing her luxurious life. Her hair is shaved, forcing her to follow a monastic life. She is even forbidden from living in the mansion, leaving her no choice other than to live in the outhouse. The patriarchal society entraps a widow for satisfying their male ego and justifies their actions in the name of sacred culture and dedication towards God. But in contrast to this justification, Binodini reprimands and condemns the Almighty for putting her into this state. She expresses her complete disapproval and disappointment in experiencing the traumas of a widow have to suffer. She claims the God have done injustice with her even though she devoted her entire life worshipping. Even though Binodini was forcefully shaved and shoved to monasticism, her tactical mindset never altered a bit. She deliberately uses her manipulative power again, this time to create misunderstanding between Satya and *Bulbbul* by disseminating a forged story on the affair between Dr. Sudip and *Bulbbul*. Satya's jealousy and rage proves Binodini's success in her plan. While analysing *Bulbbul*, it is noted that she kills Indranil only at the end. Even though Indranil's absence is the rational cause for this delay, it can be also interpreted as *Bulbbul*'s loss of power in the material world. If *Bulbbul* killed Indranil at first, then she too would have to forcefully accept the status of widow, leading to the shaving of the head. Here her hair acts as the source of power and vengeance.

Binodini represents the culturally tamed women who are bounded by the fence made of thorns and shattered glass pieces which encloses and twists at her every step towards individuality and liberty. Like in *Ramayana*, this fence is coined as "Lakshman rekha" by the patriarchal society which veils its sadistic agenda under the mask of protection. Only those women are socially accepted who passively abides within the rules and regulations conducted within the fence. Due to the recurrent intrusion of the patriarchal norms and modulations, a woman's mentality slowly begins to believe in the male version of an ideal woman to be the exact truth. Religion and culture are severely used as the tools to inject these remorseless

stereotypes into the mind of women. The perfect example for the exploitation of religion and culture with relation to hair can be seen at the Tirumala Venkateswara temple at Tirupathi. The temple has an eccentric ritual of offering head hair to the presiding deity, Lord Venkateswara. Women shave their head at the temple and offer it to the deity as a token of gratitude for granting their wish. Thousands of women arrive at the temple every day to offer their hair. For women, hair is their pride and most admired asset. Hence they sacrifice their long hair to the deity, indicating the submission of their treasure, which they have been nurturing for a long time. The intense impact of cultural beliefs over human beings has a universal appeal. Even the Red Indians, both men and women believed their long hair to have supernatural powers. As a result, they never cut their hair except the first head shaving after birth.

While long hair implies restrictions and boundaries for women, men find them as a way to break the social restraints. The long matted dreadlocks of Lord Shiva become a pertinent example in this context. Lord Shiva is always considered unique and divergent from other Hindu Gods in many aspects. While other Gods are depicted as modest and decorous in their appearance and nature, Lord Shiva appears to be wild and unconventional. While the rest of the Gods are represented with neat and civilized hair, Shiva stands out with his matted and unruly hair. It is to be noted that Shiva's hair is longer than other Gods, which is considered as unconventional and improper for men even in the contemporary world.

As opposed to religious and cultural contexts, shaving the head of women also symbolizes shame and punishment. History traces the head shaving of women as punishment to the period after the Second World War. The French women who were accused of collaborating with the Nazis were paraded through Paris in 1944, barefoot, shaved and with swastikas daubed on their faces, deliberately drawing parallels with prisoners in the Nazi death camps. Moreover, the dark history of Salem witch trials testifies men shaving women's heads in search of witchery marks. Witch hunting is still prevalent in India. A woman who is identified as witch is tortured

in hideous manners depending on the crime she did and the village in which she dwells. Reports shows some were forced to walk naked through the village, were gang-raped, had their breasts cut off, teeth broken or heads tonsured, apart from being ostracized from their village. In some cases, they were forced to swallow urine and human faeces, eating human flesh or drinking the blood of a chicken.

The interpretation of hair in various contexts yields to the extraction of diverse meanings. To make a bet is a commonly perceived scene. But it is more common in India to make bet with the condition of shaving head or beard of the loser. The loser may have to shave his head or beard, or both, partially or completely depending on the winner's demands. To demand such thing in a bet elucidates the pride vested in hair. The tuft plays an eminent role when it comes to Brahmin identity. Even though an untied tuft denotes mourning and grief in the context of the death of a closed one, it also represents vengeance. For instance, the Indian teacher, philosopher, economist, jurist and royal advisor Chanakya (350-275 BC) was once insulted by the Nanda king, which even led to pulling him by his hair. Enraged by the king's insult, Chanakya untied his topknot and vowed not to tie his hair until he uproots the whole Nanda dynasty and establishes dharma in Magadha. Only when Nanda dynasty was overthrown by Chandragupta Maurya by implementing Chanakya's strategies, he oiled and tied up his hair-knot. Unniyarcha in the Vadakkan Pattukal pledges not to tie her hair until she takes revenge on Chanthu for his betrayal. Similarly, in Mahabharata, Draupadi was humiliated and abused by the Kauravas after the Pandavas lost to them in the gambling game. Dushasana drags her to the court by her hair which enrages Bhima, who pledges to cut off Dushasana's hands as they touched Draupadi's hair. They further insult her by verbal abuses and even try to disrobe her mercilessly in the court before everyone. Inflamed by the molestation that she had to suffer, Draupadi vowed not to tie her hair until the wrong done to her is avenged. After Kurukshetra war, Draupadi washed her hair with the blood of Dushasana and only tied it thereafter. Here, hair symbolizes defiance and rebellion.

In Ramayana, when Sita was abducted by Ravana, Ram sends Hanuman to find her in Lanka, so as to inform her of his presence. Hanuman showed her a ring that Ram gave him in order to convince her that he was sent by Ram. Sita gave her only hairpin that is left to Hanuman as a message for Ram. This hairpin here symbolizes her chastity. Through this hairpin, she informs that her honour stand in a precarious position. In Indian culture, a parted hair represents a deflowered woman whereas a plaited hair represents a young virgin. Thus from hair to hairpin, there are many diverse interpretations and connotations that gradually came up with the growth of culture and societal beliefs.

Hair is also considered as an instrument of torture. Even from the early paintings to the modern media, the scene of pulling someone by their hair, especially of a woman, stimulates spontaneous emotions like anger, sympathy and grief. Moreover, the image of grasping a woman's hair with firm fists obliquely symbolizes the invader's control over her. In *Bulbbul*, the furious Indranil pulls Bulbbul out of the bath tub by her hair before assaulting her mercilessly. In the case of Bulbbul, Indranil mutilates her feet by continuously beating her, ensuring her wings to be chopped off which had the potential to lead her to freedom. Dutt uses the portrait of Ravana swaying his sword on Jadayu while he tries to save Sita in this scene.

Hair becomes a metaphor for taming a woman in many contexts. Indranil and Mahendra try to tame Bulbbul by inexplicitly exploiting her hair. Hair attains the position of a mere tool or instrument for implementing their rules and norms along with the physical atrocities and brutalities that they have propelled against women. If one brother mutilated her feet, the other raped her while she was bedridden, struggling for her life. Men tend to find pleasure in forcing himself and thereby invading a woman who does not come in terms with them and resists them. The opportunist Binodini, who has taught herself to cling to the patriarchal norms for existence, asks Bulbbul to keep her mouth shut in order to cloak her mentally challenged husband's deeds. She wipes out the blood of sin caused by her husband and asks Bulbbul to remain silent. She tries to convince her to forget what happened by enticing

her of the massive wealth and power that awaits her. She says that such secrets are quite innate in large mansions. This implies that Binodini too might have suffered similar offences which caused her to hush herself and to obey the masters. Her straight and neatly combed hair emphasizes her plain and straightforward advices whereas Bulbbul's curly and messy hair projects her complex yet renewed mind.

The supernatural and mythological elements stand out in *Bulbbul* from beginning to the end. The overpowering mysterious red moon and red colour have a dominating role in the movie. While Draupadi and Chanakya completed their revenge on their enemies indirectly by employing powerful warriors, Bulbbul followed the path of goddess Kali. Even though goddess Kali is worshipped with utmost dedication by her devotees devoid of their gender, women are not at all encouraged to adapt her unbound and unruly long hair that symbolizes her fierce and wild nature. There is a popular phrase in India that there resides a Kali in every woman. Women are expected to behave as Parvathi in society but it is thought that the Parvathi can transform into Kali if she is mistreated. This customized belief can be clearly seen in *Bulbbul*. But there is no mention about staying in between Parvati and Kali.

Bulbbul's inadequate clothing, open unbound hair and her backward feet prompted the villagers to think her of as a chudail (demon woman). There are many different versions of chudail in India according to the varying culture, geographical region and myths. In Hindu mythologies, the well behaved Yakshini's and their male counterpart Yaksha's are believed to be the attendees of Kubera, the treasurer of Gods. But the mischievous and vengeful ones are most dangerous as they tend to harm the human beings. In Kerala, a Yakshi is considered as the spirit of a woman who died in an unnatural way. The folklores of Kerala are abundant with the terrifying stories of Yakshi. Meanwhile in North Indian culture, a woman who dies during childbirth or pregnancy or from suffering at the hands of her in-laws is believed to transform into a Chudail and returns to avenge her enemies, especially the males of her family. Most of these supernatural figures are perceived with unbound and unruly long hair. Here,

hair stands as a symbol of energy and vengeance. A Chudail is also known as a tree-spirit as she is often said to latch onto trees. Bulbbul also uses trees to hide and hunt her enemies at night. Trees resemble hair in its structure. Just like a hair growing out from its follicles, a tree takes its roots from soil. Similarly, hair also resembles a tree in its ability to become a habitat. In the play Nagamandala (1988) written by Girish Karnad, hair becomes a habitat for the snake to reside in. It is a source of energy and life. Kerala folklores often have the Yakshi's associated with trees. It is believed that Yakshi abides on palm trees. Bulbbul's connection to Mother Nature and the solace put forward by the latter balances each other. When Sathya put the forest on fire, Bulbbul too got engulfed in it, projecting the natural bond between them. A woman's mental and hormonal states are thought to be associated with the moon. It takes 28 days for the moon to revolve around the earth. Likewise, a woman's menstrual cycle is approximately 28 days. Anvita Dutt illustrates this natural bond through demonstrating the various changes happening to moon in relation with Bulbbul and the presiding red blood colour. Bulbbul attains the label of Chudail when she sets out to avenge the men who abuse women and children.

Hair which is normally considered as an essential part of appearance gets far more interpretations and connotations when analysed in the light of cultural and feministic perspectives. While Bulbbul transforms herself due to her circumstances, her hair too transforms with a view to sustain her. It becomes one of her sources of identity. The same happens in the case of other characters. Books, films and paintings have always exploited hair to its maximum in order to intensify and gratify the viewer's eyes. The exotic depictions of a woman's hair are a usual feature of the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma. The meaning of hair gets altered according to the cultural context in which it is used. Other than that, hair does not have any meaning of its own.

WORKS CITED

Bulbbul. Directed by Anvita Dutt. Performances by Tripti Dimri, Paoli Dam, Avinash Tiwary, Rahul Bose, and Parambrata Chattopadhyay. Clean

Slate Filmz, 2020.

"Bulbbul." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 13 June 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulbbul.

Ghosh, Devarsi. 'The Beautiful can also be Frightening': Anvita Dutt on her Fantasy Thriller 'Bulbbul'." Scroll.in, 22 June 2020, scroll.in/reel/965097/the-beautiful-can-also-be-frightening-anvita-dutt-on-her-fantasy-thriller-bulbbul.

Pathak, Ankur. *Bulbbul' Director Anvita Dutt on Film's Depiction of Abuse, its Idea of Violent Justice and Men*. HuffPost, BuzzFeed Inc, 3 July 2020, www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/bulbbul-director-anvita-dutt-interview_in5eff297fc5b612083c5ac5d8..

Babu, Ajith. "Kannur Woman in Love with her Moustache, Makes a Style Statement." Lifestyle, Onmanorama, 30 July 2020, www.onmanorama.com/lifestyle/beauty-and-fashion/2020/07/30/moustache-style-statement-woman-kannur.html.

"Harnaam Kaur." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 2 June 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harnaam_Kaur.

Pandey, Geeta. "India Arrests After Women's Heads Shaved for Resisting Rape." BBC News, BBC, 28 June 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india_48783253.

"Hair Thieves Striking Fear in India." BBC News, BBC, 3 Aug 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40749640.

Rao, A Srinivasa. "Tirumala Temple Earns Nearly Rs 200 Crore from Auctioning Human Hair in 2011-12." Indiatoday.in, Living Media India Limited, 5 June 2012, www.indiatoday.in/india/south/story/tirumala-temple-earns-huge-money-from-auctioning-human-hair-104425-2012-06-04.

Trueb, Ralph M. *From Hair in India to Hair India*. International Journal of Trichology, Medknow Publications, 2017,