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## Friction between Cultural Representation and Visual Representation with Reference to *Padmaavat*

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### Abstract

According to the Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, images of objects do not have meaning in themselves. Meaning is generated according to the contextual fixation between the user and the representational significance of that object. The representative meaning of the object when shared by a group of people becomes a cultural practice. It has been observed that when the same cultural practice is represented further in the visual media, in the form of cinema, a conflict arises between the cultural representation of the image and its visual representation. *Padmaavat* (2018), a film directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, went through several oppositions by the different classes of the society across the country, owing to the portrayal of different characters and the social background of the movie. The social discontent created by people revolved around a number of issues: the main issue being a different representation of Rani Padmavati and Allauddin Khilji in the movie, in contrast to the way they are represented and accepted in the popular culture. By using Stuart Hall's conceptual idea of 'representation' in cultural practices, an attempt has been taken to show how a friction is created when an ideology formed through the cultural representation is again represented through the visual media.

### Keywords

culture, representation, movies

## Introduction

Sanjay Leela Bhansali is a one of the renowned film makers of Indian cinema. He is a director, producer, screen writer and a music director of several movies, all of which have been appreciated by audience world-wide. His journey of film direction started with *Khamoshi: The Musical* (1996). Since then, he has created several blockbuster movies like: *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999), *Devdas* (2002), *Black* (2005) and the long list stretches to *Padmaavat* (2018). His films have won a special place in the heart of audience because of their portrayal of the passionate characters, accompanied by unique stage-setting, music and dance that epitomizes the different aspects of art and culture, and conveys a sense of aesthetics pleasure and satisfaction when viewed on the big screen. *Padmaavat*, the latest movie by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, saw its much-awaited release on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2018. The film, a joint production of Viacom18 Motion Pictures and Bhansali Productions, earlier scheduled to be released on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017, received the green signal for the nation-wide release on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

## The Story

The story of *Padmaavat* is set in the reign of Maharawal Ratan Singh of Chittorgarh, at present the province of Chittor, in the state of Rajasthan. The action of the movie revolves around the time when Allauddin Khilji had conquered several kingdoms of north India and had intended to attack the kingdom of Chittor. The story is based on the love and devotion of the beautiful and revered queen, Rani Padmavati (Deepika Padukone, the female protagonist) towards her husband, Maharawal Ratan Singh (Shahid Kapoor, the male protagonist) and the passionate intentions of Allauddin-Khilji (Ranveer Singh, the antagonist) towards Rani Padmavati, finally ending the movie in the battle and Jauhar.

## Questionable Existence of Rani Padmavati

Before proceeding further, it is important to throw some light on the credibility of the existence of Rani Padmavati. The actuality of Rani Padmavati is a debatable issue. Based on the real historical facts recorded by Amir Khusro and Zia Uddin Barany, several eminent Historians and Professors like Harbans Mukhia, the retired Professor of Medieval History at JNU Centre for Historical Studies, Tasneem Suhrawardy, Professor of Medieval History at St Stephen's College, uphold the presence of numerous loopholes in the epic poem by Jayasi. They deny the presence of any queen by the name of Padmavati during the period of Allauddin Khilji's conquest of Chittor. Harbans Mukhia quoted to *The Quint*, "Besides recorded and verifiable historical facts, there is another set of facts too, culturally constructed and embodied in popular memory, told, retold and retold yet again. The Padmavati stories too, like many others, have undergone several mutations" (Ray). Professor Harbans Mukhai's statement clearly states the lack of historical evidence to support the authenticity of Padmavati, as the queen of Chittor, on the contrary, he points towards the culturally constructed facts about Padmavati that have been passed on through generations. Jayasi's *Padmavat*, which is one of the earliest texts to have recorded the facts of Rani Padmavati, cannot be claimed as a record of any historical

facts; it is merely the written format of the previous oral form of folklore. The controversy over the existence of Rani Padmavati has also been a debatable issue between historians like Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, Dasharatha Sharma and Muhammad Habib (Somani). None of the historical facts are able to produce concrete evidence of Padmavati as the queen of Maharawal Ratan Singh, during the years of Allauddin Khilji's attack on Chittor.

In the February of 2017, Chittorgarh's Jauhar Smriti Sansthan, a local research group functioning since the 1950s, has arrived at an altogether different conclusion. According to them, "There should be little doubt about the existence of the Rani Padmini, but there is no evidence about Khilji attacking Chittorgarh to conquer her" (Khan). As inferred from the above report, the locals believe in the reality of Rani Padmavati of Chittor, but they do not acknowledge her accountability in Khilji's attack of Chittor, to possess her, as depicted in the movie.

Reference to another historical text like *Khaza'inul-Futuh*, by Khilji's official writer Amir Khusro, who often accompanied Khilji to various war fronts, substantiates evidence of seize of Chittor, but there is no reference of Rani Padmavati in those texts. Hence, it can be concluded that the existence of Rani Padmavati is not supported by sufficient facts, though local groups claim the contrary.

### **Rani Padmavati: A Cultural Representation**

Historical evidences do not support the physical reality of Rani Padmavati, as the queen of Chittor, but a study of the contemporary folklore points towards the existence of the character. It was Malik Muhammad Jayasi, a Sufi poet of around 1540, who had fabricated a poem named *Padmavat*, a heroic romance in Awadhi (a dialect of Hindi in Uttar Pradesh) language. It became immensely popular in the following centuries. Since the 1540s there have been several narratives of the epic poem.

Later, this story was further depicted in the immensely popular comic series of *Amar Chitra Katha*. The preface to the comic establishes the authenticity of Rani Padmavati in Indian culture among the child readers:

In the history of India, Padmini of Chittor holds a very prominent position. She was the perfect model of ideal womanhood. The values cherished by her were threatened by Allauddin Khilji, the mighty Afghan king of Delhi. A lesser woman would not have been able to face Allauddin. But Padmini was not an ordinary woman. She faced her problems with exceptional courage, a living example of virtual womanhood (Sreenivasan 2)

The saga of Rani Padmini heard and read by people through generations has been deeply embedded in the minds or "the shared conceptual maps" of the people (Hall 18). From the character in an epic poem, she got elevated to the rank of the most revered women in the Indian socio-cultural system; although, her historical existence always remained susceptible to credulity.

Stuart Hall, the sociologist and cultural theorist, have explained how legends and folklore have shaped the cultural identity of the people, and have become an integral part of their existence through its practice in various forms for centuries. Using Hall's theory of cultural representation, it can be deduced that the legends of Padmavati was not limited

to generating ideas among people, but it was used to organize and regulate the social practises which influenced the conduct of the people, and consequently started to have real and practical meaning. These concepts, emotions and ideas associated with the name of Padmavati soon took a symbolic form, and it got “transmitted and meaningfully interpreted”, which Hall remarks as “the practices of representation” (Hall 10). Stuart Hall explains how such types of the newly generated ideas slowly acquired a cultural significance. He states, ‘Meaning must enter the domain of these practices, if it is to circulate effectively within a culture. And it cannot be considered to have completed its “passage” around the cultural circuit until it has been “decoded or intelligibly received at another point in the chain” (Hall 10). The perfect image of womanhood, as represented by the character of Rani Padmavati got deeply embedded in the minds of people, especially the women, through various cultural practises. It is only after the message of the devoutness and piety of Rani Padmavati was “decoded” that could it be “received at another point in the chain”, that is, the people of Rajasthan and India. The image of Rani Padmavati formed in their minds, over the years, has elevated her to a respectable and adorable position among the people of this country, especially the Rajput. Her very name is capable of creating a goddess-like imprint in the minds of the people of India across centuries. PADMAVATI has rather become a linguistic sign which Indians use to refer to specific qualities of religiousness, devoutness and piety. According to Hall, this is the process of representation of an image in the socio-cultural scene. Stuart Hall, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, has defined: “Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” ( Hall 17). To explain this phenomenon of the creation of an images in the human mind, something that ‘represents’ the world, and enables one to refer to things both within and beyond the practical and logical world, Hall uses the example of Heaven, Hell, Devil, God; ideas which one has neither seen nor is ever likely to see. Likewise, the name of Rani Padmavati has always occupied a space in the ‘shared conceptual map of the people’ of the people of India. The name of Padmavati generates an idea of religious piety and devoutness in the minds of the people, shared by one and all of the country. The represented image when carried down through the generation results in a cultural practice. All we know today, about Rani Padmavati is through her represented image; something that has occupied a particular position in the Indian culture.

### **Different Interpretations of Padmaavat**

Ramya Sreenivasan, author of *Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in Indian History c.1500-1900* exclusively deals with the different narratives of *Padmavat* from circa 1540 to 1930. Through investigation, Sreenivasan discovered the different narrative of the epic poem that has come into existence as and when it became popular. She says:

In the early nineteenth century James Tod, Resident of the East India Company of the Rajput States, compiled his account of the region’s history based on the oral and textual traditions of Charanas, Bhats and Jains—these being the chroniclers,

genealogists and scholars to the Rajput chiefs. Tod's Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1829-32, henceforth Annals) recast pre-colonial Rajput traditions within a colonial perspective which shaped his retelling of the Padmini story as well. Subsequently, in a fourth major revisions, the reception of Annals in the late nineteenth century Bengal produced at least a dozen of Bengali versions, mainly from the new middleclass, the *bhadralok*. (Sreenivasan 3)

From a Sufi mystical romance of the sixteenth century the poem got reshaped by various caste groups, regional elites, and other communities into their own distinctive versions for satisfying various political ends. The legend of Padmini has been used for elucidating gender norms and creating heroic memories of the past. Ramya Sreenivasan, who did a comparative study of the different narratives of Padmini over four centuries in different parts of India, shows a change in the narratives as they circulated across the different parts of the country. She says:

What is clear is that narratives in Rajasthan patronized by local Rajput elites, diverged from Jayasi's account. The focus in Rajasthan was not in courting and marrying the queen – an emphasis that had been central to Jayasi's Sufi ethics. Instead, these somewhat latter narratives of Padmini focussed on the exemplar honour of the Rajput in defending their queen and kingdom against Sultan Allauddin Khilji (Sreenivasan 3).

Again if we look at Bengal, another place where the story had become famous, the central theme changed to a "reinterpretation of the emerging nation's medieval history in which 'patriotic Hindu' had resisted 'Muslim invader'" (Sreenivasan 3).

In this context, Stuart Hall says that meaning is the result of something that is not fixed. If meaning of an object depends on the social and cultural conventions, 'then meaning can never be finally fixed' (Hall 23). Hall says, 'The main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, but in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice - a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean' (Hall 24). So every time with the change in the ruling party, the theme of *Padmavat* underwent some changes. In this context, Hall has shown the role of power and ideology in endowing different meaning to an object or image.

### **The Indian Film Industry: Bollywood**

The first successful motion picture to be made in India was the year 1913, when Raja *Harishchandra* by Dada Saheb Phalke was released. Since then, several films like *Mohini Bhasmasur* (1913) *Lanka Dahan* (1917) *Keechaka Vadham* (1918) *Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra* (1917) were produced in the era of silent films. The mythological theme was later replaced by social themes in the pre and post-independence era in movies like *Kisan Kanya* (1937) *Aurat* (1940), *Awaara* (1951), *Shree 420* (1955). In this context, it is worth mentioning that the mythological and the socio-political incidents of the country formed the background of a large number of movies which shaped the consciousness of viewers, who viewed it over the span of several years and formed a distinct image of India in their minds. Therefore, it can be inferred that though films attempt to portray the real incidents and situations from the past, a gap always remained

between the things that had really occurred in the history and that being shown on the screen.

Next to the mythological and socio-political movies, there developed another significant form of films, called the romantic masala movies, from the 1970s onwards. These types of films were generally filled with romantic scenes, songs and dance in some exotic locations, and some action sequence stuffed within it. The film industry has a plethora of such movies and very soon this strain became the predominant genre across the country and especially Bollywood.

The advancement of the film industry started to have an intimate connection between the films and its viewers; so deeply was it rooted that its dominance began to be felt everywhere: consumerism, socialism, acts of heroism and leisure. Appadurai & Breckenridge comments on the growing impact of films in the life of the viewers: 'film is perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national mythology of heroism, consumerism, leisure, and sociality' (8). Thus, in India films deeply penetrate the lives and the emotions of the viewers and give them a sense of national identity not only through their art and culture but an ideology that unites the country. It is because of this sense of national identity and an ideology created by the Indian films in the mind of its viewers that a film like *Padmaavat* had to suffer a nation-wide abuse and condemnation.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmaavat* is a commercial movie which portrayed the famous story of Rani Padmavati. The story revolves around the queen, her pious existence and her ultimate sacrifice. Though this is the central theme of the film as well as the folklore, the film gave rise to a huge conflict and uproar to which the entire nation responded, few months prior to its release. The crux of the contention was a shift in the hierarchical position of Rani Padmavati, from the high pedestal of the "shared conceptual maps" of the masses, to that of a heroine of a commercial movie, and from there it bifurcated into several other issues. This change became a sensational issue and the cause of conflict throughout the country.

The reason behind the chaos and confusion over the film, *Padmaavat*, is not the parallel existence of the film industry and the socio-cultural life of the people, but the infringement of one into the other. Bhoopathy reiterates this intense relationship; he says, "Cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation" (505). Bhoopathy's claims assert the extent to which visual representation, that is, cinema, reflects the Indian culture and its prevalent practices in the society. Many a time, films assume a greater dimension than their actual forms in the socio-cultural life of the people. Bollywood dance, songs and fashion is mirrored everywhere in Indian culture. Dwyer and Patel appreciates the creative expression of Bollywood movies; something that has evolved over time. They say, "Today the cinema commands the respect accorded to any other form of creative expression. In the immense complexity of creative process, it combines in various measures the function of poetry, music, painting, drama, architecture and a host of other arts, major and minor" (Dwyer and Patel 7). This intimate relationship between the Bollywood films and Indian culture has another aspect added to, and it is affirmed by Bhoopathy's statement, when he says, "Cinema is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected" (Bhoopathy 505). Therefore, films in India are capable of

bringing a change in the social milieu as well as render a sense of national identity though they may present a distant and distorted echo of periods of Indian history which the people consider real and effective.

### Controversies Involving the Movie

The story of the film is alleged to have offended the sentiments of Rajput Karni Sena, an organisation functioning in Rajasthan for several years. According to them, the film is a distortion of history and a misrepresentation of Rani Padmavati of Chittor. Rani Padmavati is a highly revered queen of the Rajput clan and the Rajput could not bear to see her representation in a different form in a commercial movie. Long before its release, *Padmaavat* had to overcome number of controversial issues; the major ones as listed by *Hindustan Times* is as follows:

- Romance between Allauddin Khilji and Rani Padmavati

The president of Karni Sena organisation, Narayan Divrala, alleged the film director, he said, ‘We have learnt that the filmmakers are portraying the film as a love story between Allauddin Khilji and Padmini, which is a blatant distortion of history. That is why we stopped the shooting and told the makers that we won’t let them continue unless they make changes.

- History being distorted

Distortion of history by the film has been a unanimous claim by the leaders of the ruling party (BJP) to the Rajasthan Royals, the cricket team of the state of Rajasthan. Raj Bansal, the film distributor of Rajasthan even rejected the purchase and distribution rights of the film till the settlement of the controversy. Diya Kumari, a member of the erstwhile royal family of Rajasthan and BJP MLA, also supported the claim, she said, “I will not allow any distortion of the valiant history of Rajasthan and sacrifice of its people in fighting barbarians by movie *Padmavati*”. (*Padmavati: From Deepika Padukone’s Ghoomar to Khilji*)

- Allegations against the Ghoomar dance

A very strong protest was hurled against Deepika Padukone’s performance of the Ghoomar dance. Maharajkumar Vishvaraj Singh, son of Mahendra Singh of Mewar, the 76<sup>th</sup> Maharana of Mewar dynasty, hurled a scathing remark against the Ghoomar dance. He said,

The song Ghoomar and publicity material that has released, establishes gross inaccuracies that transgress the limits of dramatic licence. If the film professes to be history, and its maker goes on record to claim that he has kept in mind cultural sensitivities, it is an artistic and historic fraud to portray an incorrectly attired courtesan-like painted doll in the song as the very ‘queen’ the film purports to pay obeisance to. (*Padmavati: From Deepika Padukone’s Ghoomar to Khilji*)

- Glorification of the negative character of Allauddin Khilji

Allegations were also directed at the strong characterisation of Allauddin Khilji, the antagonist of the story. In a letter to the Union Minister Smriti Irani and the director Sanjay Leela Bhansali, the Haryana minister Vipul Goel remarked, “There is anger among the people of Haryana, like many other states, regarding the film glorifying the

negative character of Allauddin Khilji rather than our own rich history” (Padmavati: From Deepika Padukone’s Ghoomar to Khilji).

- Propagation of Sati

A case was filed against the film, at the Allahabad High Court, for its intentional propagation of sati. The case, however, was not taken up by the High Court, which awaited the clarification from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

Assault on the director, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, started as early as January 2017, a year prior to its release, while working on the sets of the movie in Rajasthan. For a prolonged period, of more than a year, things continued to get from bad to worse, with criticism pouring in from the entire nation leading to its delayed release on the 25th January 2018. Numerous attempts to withhold the production of the film by the people, initially of Rajasthan and later many other parts of India, shows the picture of an agitated mob against a movie that supposedly projects a historical and cultural fact. Agitation that started merely as a protest by the local group, soon took the form of national protest.

Situation deteriorated to the extent that posters of the film and effigies of the director were burnt, bounty was announced on the director and the actors in the lead role. The mob agitation was not only limited within the Rajput and the Karni Sena, but involved a number of political parties, making it a nation-wide issue that made the headlines for several months. This led to the ban on the film in many states and later its delayed release. Chief Minister Shivraj Chauhan called Padmavati Rashtra Mata (mother of the nation) and had announced, “The film which distorts facts and disrespects 'Rashtra Mata' Padmavati will not be allowed to screen in any part of Madhya Pradesh” (Padmavati row: Film banned in Madhya Pradesh).

A whole lot of protests and allegations were undergone by the film prior to its certification by the Central Board of Film Certification’s (CBFC). The clearance from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) brought the following changes listed in the *Hindustan Times*:

1. Change the disclaimer to one that clearly does not claim historical accuracy.
2. The title is to be changed from *Padmavati* to *Padmaavat* – as the filmmakers have attributed their creative source to the fictional poem *Padmavat*, and not history.
3. Modifications to the song Ghoomar, to make the depiction befitting to the character being portrayed.
4. Modifications to the incorrect / misleading reference to historical places.
5. Addition of a disclaimer which clearly makes the point that the film in no manner subscribes to the practice of Sati or seeks to glorify it (Padmavati becomes Padmaavat).

As discussed earlier, facts supporting the existence of Rani Padmavati as a historical figure are very weak. The image of Padmavati that emerges out of the various literary sources is so varied and complicated that claims about the authentic portrayal of the queen in the movie, could not be approved. But as the people have an entirely different notion of Padmavati in their mind, the film had to add a disclaimer to prove its source from Jayasi’s *Padmaavat* and not to any history.

## Analysis of the Plot

The narrative of most of the plots in media is based on the five stages of narrative theory proposed by Tzvetan Todorov (Wall and Rayner). The first is the stage of equilibrium, that is, when peace prevails everywhere in the beginning of the movie. The opening scene shows Singhal Princess Padmavati having mistakenly wounded Maharawal Ratan Singh. Hereafter, she gets into the process of healing his wounds and this brings them closer. They get married and the scene shifts to Mewar, the capital of Chittorgarh, where the newly-wed couple begin their marital life. On the other side of the story, there is Allauddin Khilji. Allauddin Khilji too gets married to Meherun Nisa in Afghanistan.

The second point is the disruption of the equilibrium. Allauddin kills his uncle and ascends the throne of Delhi Sultanate, while Raghav Chetan, the Brahmin priest, is banished out of the Mewar for secretly spying the newly-wed couple. The peace and calm that dominated the scenario gets disrupted either way and seeds of the upcoming disturbances are sown.

The third is the recognition of disruption. Allauddin is attracted by the music played by Raghav Chetan and he confesses his desire to possess anything that is beautiful. Sometimes later, Raghav Chetan narrates to him the beauty of Rani Padmavati and that sets his passion ablaze. The reason for the disruption of the equilibrium is recognised, and this leads to the fourth stage.

The fourth point is an attempt to repair the disruption. Allauddin's desire to possess Rani Padmavati makes him lay a siege on Chittor for six months. Unsuccessful in his attempts to capture Mewar, and his intention to win the hand of Rani Padmavati, he feigns peace and is permitted to enter the palace on the occasion of Holi. On request, he gets a momentary glimpse of Padmavati through reflection. Unsatisfied and infuriated on not having seen the queen face-to-face, he tactfully imprisons Ratan Singh which culminates in the war and the defeat of the Rajput. The film ends in Jauhar being committed on large scale.

The last point of Todorov's five stages of narrative theory is the reinstatement of equilibrium. A new set up prevails, bringing an end to the earlier one. Rajput lost their land to the Delhi Sultanate and Allauddin Khilji took over Mewar; Rani Padmavati along with other women sacrificed herself in Jauhar.

Claude Levis Strauss, the French structural anthropologist, had extensively studied the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic arrangements in the story of the Oedipus myth in his influential paper 'The structural study of Myth' (Fulton 34). 'The analysis of the "themes" of a narrative into binary oppositions, like the antithetical paradigms of Levi-Strauss's interpretation was extensively used in narratological studies' (Fulton 35). Applying the theory of binary opposition to this movie we deduce, the opposite sides have been portrayed through the characteristic traits of Maharawal Ratan Singh and Allauddin-Khilji; the former, the privileged for having Rani Padmavati as his wife, and the latter the unprivileged for not having her. Though the characterisation of Allauddin Khilji has been under stern criticism, its negative depiction was necessary to bring dramatic effects in the movie.

The analysis shows the resemblance of the film with the epic poem of Jayasi. But repeated translation of the epic through the centuries in different parts of India has shifted its central theme; a fact proven by the investigation of Ramya Sreenivasan.

### **Visual Representation of *Padmaavat***

The first version of the movie in Hindi is *Maharani Padmavati* produced by Delite Movies during the reign of black and white movies in Bollywood. Shyam Benegal too documented an episode on Padmavati in his documentary, 'India: A search' But these representations did not face any objections from anywhere, as did Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmaavat*.

The difference between the film *Maharani Padmavati* and *Padmaavat* is very marginal, but still *Padmaavat* had to confront a social uproar. One of the major causes for such a social upheaval can be attributed to the social organisation called Shri Rajput Karni Sena which came into being since 2006. It was this social organisation that took notice of the discrepancies in the movie and brought it to public notice, creating a national uproar. Besides the activities of the social organisation in Rajasthan, the characters of Rani Padmavati and Allauddin Khilji as portrayed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali were different in their intensity and passion from the earlier version of the movie. According to the 'intentional approach' of representation, discussed by Stuart Hall in the theories of representation, the author or the speaker "imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language", (25). So, as seen earlier, every time *Padmaavat* was rewritten by a different author, it acquired a new meaning. Like the earlier authors, Sanjay Leela Bhansali too had given his unique touch to the portrayal of different characters in the movie, which may not have been acceptable to the Rajput and later the whole of India, and hence, the uprising. However, a few small changes led to the safe release of the film across the country.

The major point of controversy in the movie was a romantic dream sequence between Rani Padmavati and Allauddin Khilji; a scene greatly misconceived by people throughout the country. Bhansali had given a clarification through a letter written to the Rajput chief regarding the misconceived notion of such a scene (Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Agreement letter to Karni Sena). The notion of the film projecting a dream sequence between the two got rectified when the film was viewed for the first time by the dignitaries of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

The second major issue was the distortion of the historical facts. History reveals Allauddin's conquest of Chittor was a part of his greater conquest of India where Rani Padmavati of Chittor had no role to play, though her existence is a questionable issue. According to the film, Rani Padmavati was the reason for Allauddin's conquest of Chittor; a fact claimed to be a distortion of history by the people. The entire issue was settled when Bhansali's *Padmaavat* claimed its allegiance to Jayasi's *Padmavati*.

The other was the queen dancing in the darbar; a sight never possible in reality, but on the other hand that specific song and dance has been a crowd-puller. Though initially unacceptable by the people, the song and the dance were kept intact in the movie, with only some minor changes brought about in the dress of Padmavati.

The last issue of contention was the exaggerated character of Allauddin-Khilji. Initially the character of Allauddin may appear to have been glorified, but the power-packed character of the antagonist is an essential part of the film. Without a powerful antagonist, the narrative structure of the film would not have had the capacity to give a sense of pleasure and satisfaction to the audience. The issue of narrative structure in a commercial movie have been discussed by Fulton, Huisman, Murphet, Dunn in their book *Narrative and Media*, they assert, “The consequence of this economic structure is that film narratives have to be ‘commercial’; that is, they have to fit a standard pattern and set of expectations, or what is often termed a genre. Genres themselves are not ‘natural’ or inevitable, but have a practical function: to create a market and an audience’ (3). The market and the audience are the two most important factors for a commercial movie, and the director has to bear these while making a movie. The film’s team had finally justified their claims regarding the content of the film by getting a clearance from Central Board of Film Certification (Taneja).

After the clearance of charges levelled against it, and making five minor changes as suggested by Central Board of Film Certification, *Padmaavat* secured a nation-wide release on January 2018. The title of the film was changed from *Padmavati* to *Padmaavat*, showing its direct allegiance to Jayasi’s story and not a film based on the life of Rani Padmavati. So to pacify the agitated people, the film had to add a few disclaimers (‘Padmaavat’ makers state disclaimers loud and clear via advertisements).

## Conclusion

Films in India have been very close to the life and culture of the people of the country. Some reflection of the film industry is there in every stratum of their lives, be it fashion, art and culture, or some object or tradition that is culturally represented. Films are like a mini India in all its colours and vibrations. Through the years, films have been able to create a sense of national identity, though many a time it makes use of the distant and distorted echo of image, which is considered by people as real. In the case of *Padmaavat*, people considered the film to be a projection of historical facts of the country, and hence the huge protest against the film. Interesting enough, history does not have any evidence to prove the existence of Rani Padmavati; on the contrary, the other part of the movie, that is, Allauddin’s conquest of Chittor is authentic. Seen with an unbiased eye, the film reveals the juxtaposition of historical and literary facts, which many a time is done by the director of a commercial movie, because unlike documentary the main aim of a commercial movie is entertainment.

The crux of the entire hue and uproar of not only Shri Rajput Karni Sena of Rajasthan, but almost the entire north India, was the lack of similitude between Rani Padmavati of the film and the image of Rani Padmavati formed within the ‘conceptual maps’ of the people across the country. It was unacceptable to the people to consider Rani Padmavati the way she was projected on the screen, and also the lascivious intentions of Allauddin towards Padmini, and hence, the uprising.

Film industry like any other industry, is a place to earn money. Narratives rooted in the socio-cultural issues of the nation don’t function as mere cultural device. Stories are created such that they “provoke imagination”, connect to emotion, and stimulate

fantasies’, reiterates Lull (Lull 173). The prevalent cultural practices in the society take on fantasy and imagination of the directors and authors and become appealing to human emotions through the art forms like films and novels. To make movies entertaining to the audiences, it should not only supply information, but also connect emotionally with the viewers; otherwise the film would be a documentary.

Film, a popular form of art, as well as mass entertainment, is an amalgamation of culture and imagination, besides being a source of profit. A film that germinates from the popular culture or some social event is coloured by the imagination of the film-maker and director at the various stages, and is released to entertain the audience, with profit being the only motive. A movie is always a joint venture of three things: culture, imagination and profit and the importance of none of these three can be overruled. The film *Padmaavat* is a visual representation of the era of the middle ages in India. In doing so, its representation in the movie may have introduced few diversions from the prevalent cultural ideologies, but these diversions were necessary, for the plot and character to develop, and to turn the film into a source of popular entertainment. Lastly, this film is not social documentary; it is a film with entertainment as its motive. Hence, a friction between the visual representation of an image and the cultural representation of the same image is inevitable.

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