
E-literature in Controversies: Ethnic or Political Propaganda



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Abstract

This paper examines Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Goliyon Ki Raas Leela – Ram-Leela* and *Padmaavat* as forms of postmodern e-literature that reinterpret classical and historical narratives through contemporary cinema. It explores how *Ram-Leela* transforms Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into a story of love, violence, caste, clan rivalry, and social conflict. The paper also analyses the representation of female identity, dignity, courage, and agency through the characters of Leela and Padmavati. *Padmaavat* is studied in the context of historical memory, folklore, religious identity, and controversies surrounding the alleged distortion of Rajput history. The study further examines how cinematic adaptations blur the boundaries between history, literature, legend, and popular culture. Bhansali's visual aesthetics, symbolism, melodrama, music, and characterization contribute to the transformation of literary and historical narratives. The controversies surrounding these films reveal the complex relationship between artistic freedom, ethnic identity, political propaganda, and cultural sentiment. The paper argues that Bhansali's films function as significant examples of contemporary e-literature while provoking debates about representation and historical authenticity.

Keywords: E-Literature, Postmodernism, Cinematic Adaptation, Ethnic Identity, Political Propaganda

Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who is technically sound and astute film maker have something new to change William Shakespeare's Classic love story *Romeo-Juliet* into a story of warring fictions who fell in love with one another. Mr. Bhansali just become impudent, set the story in Gujrat, signed Bollywood's currently best actress Deepika Padukone (*Leela*), teams her up with 'I've got fire-in-my-loins' actor Ranveer Singh (*Ram*) and then let them loose one on one.

Leela is a girl from Sanada clan who falls in lustrous love with her enemy *Ram*, a Rajadi. Their clans have been at war for some five hundred years and the exaggeratedly trigger-happy lot clearly underline that no matter what one *Ram* and *Leela* feel, the rest of the clan only believes in insubordination. Their repulsive mutiny against their own clans comes to fore when they accidentally fell in love.

Firing bullets on opponents is common practice where from the story opens, blood flows and spills profusely, yet of no significance. Where *Ram* is trapping native girls with killer looks and physical exotica; village daughter-in-laws become victims of evil designs. In between that warfare *Ram & Leela* touches, kisses, cuddle and ensure, you can feel their stirring. Unabashedly, the film maker uses his lead pairs real

and reel chemistry, fuses it with sexual tension and asks you to partake in their love-hate relationship. Bhansali is clearly back on home turf with a canvas larger than life, masterfully orchestrated with the color and grandeur that have almost come to define him – He with clearly in a mood to re-invent and break the mould. All female protagonists in Bhansali's films be it Nandini of *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, Paro from *Devdaas*, or Michelle from *Black* and now Padmawati from *Padmawat* are uniquely fascinating, and strong. But this version of his Juliet is a far cry from the coy female protagonists, the sati-savitri or the bubbly, vivacious type so common to our films surpasses all other for its layered complexity. Leela is romantic with a spin. She is not even remotely interested in it unlike Zoya of *Ishqzaade* by Habib Faisal or Nandita for Yash Raj's films' Gunday directed by Abbas Zafar, who enacts tough cop with rough-and-tough Bikram and Bala but when in love can throw caution to the winds and follow their hearts. Leela is plucky enough to take pride in her own sensuality and match every amorous overture with – a fitting reply. But above all she prefers the straight forward direct approach of saying it like it is, suggesting a clear departure from both the Hindi film heroines and the quintessential Indian girl. Most certainly she is a welcome break from the coy coquette batting her eyelids at suitors and yet denying and enjoying interest in them.

Good Indian girls are usually not allowed to wear their hearts on their sleeves in reel and real life, but this one does and with such dignity and natural ease that it is endearing. Bhansali's version of Juliet is dignified brave, innocent and principled, all at once lending her a certain nobility that puts her in a league completely her own. Popular art at large and cinema in particular rely so heavily on stereotypes and broad generalization that even stands out female character in our films is a yeoman's service to the cause of both films and feminism.

Whatever may be the other flaws in *Ram-Leela*, Bhansali, just for its powerful portrayal of woman – Supriya Pathak as the mother is brilliant too – liberating them of gender specific hypocrisies deserves a huge pat on the back. Leela's family, run by her terrifying mother is a matriarchal criminal empire where the men however, much they preen, absolutely defer. The pacing also dips rather badly in the middle and whenever Ram and Leela are separated since power is the engine that makes the whole thing run.

Those caveats aside, visual splendor and hot-blooded melodrama mostly win out our rickety (shaky, unsteady) pacing and scripting heart. Bhansali makes strong use of visual signifiers, particularly guns, which are introduced immediately and pervade throughout which in spite of being wielded by literally almost everyone in the film is never treated casually. There is always great import to the way in which the guns are held and used, and the effects of their use are never elided. The other main recurring reference skewering male vanity and pride gently though unsubtle is to peacocks, which make a number of rhetorical and physical appearances. And so "*Ram-Leela*" is a handsomely crafted entertainer with good songs and plenty of good kind of adieu tears. For the most part, *Ram Leela*, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's most commercial work has nice doses of ROACH and RAS^a. Since the plot is Shakespearean the maker has the arduous task of telling you this story on an opulent scale. Vintage places and daunting deserts are fitted with precision. Deepika is breath taking and in top form. Ranveer displays his six packs and histrionics with fans ease. Applaud for Riccha Chadha and Supriya Pathak Kapur for being the talent they are. In *Ishqzaade* that had a similar plot of love-hatred relationship was ostentatious but more authentic; the pathos in the relationships was missing and the last shot where Ram and Leela fall in slow-motion in to the water, on straight backs is contrived. Ranveer Singh's roar is identical to that of Ajay Devgun's in *Singham*, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's tribute to Rohit Shetty...!

On the other hand in *Goliyon Ki Raas Leela* where two rival clans have been warring for some 500 years and find themselves in present day, presiding over compelling and competing on criminal empires to spend their days armed to the teeth in open conflict in the streets of their village. The heir apparent to the poorer of the two clans (Ram), disdains the gun violence that takes up so much of their day-to-day existence, preferring to hang-out with his buddies and sell porn DVDs. One fateful day of 'Holy Celebration' Ram sees, and instantly falls in love with his female counterpart in the rival clan, Leela. Mutual the feelings are, due fall in love and as per; love ties "Romeo and Juliet", of Shakespeare, the lovers have to deal with the conflict between their respective clans, infusing repercussions of skirmishes between them, ultimately prefers to sacrifice their lives to end the saga of killing on the eve of Dushera when goodness outwits evil and wins to spread the message of love.

Goliyon Ki Raas Leela – Ram Leela and Padmawat the films in controversies fits neatly within what one might expect from Sanjay Leela Bhansali's literary adaptations a visually opulent, proudly melodramatic entertainers with same cast and great songs and outstanding performances make these films gargantuan block-busters of postmodernist e-literature. It would not be impertinent to disclose here that subjects and script chosen by Sanjay is historicized and is inspired by the legendary characters of their times who had out lived their lives in such vicious circumstances with all ruthlessness that survival of a common man was next to impossible, but hats off to those people who were so great in their lives and modest to individual characters that till date they are living examples to modern world and possess an exemplary status that no one come near to their stature. We do visualize, and even conceptualize the modesty in our way, but the reality is still a virgin end, far away an enough reach to acquire in this life.

As does the story reveals Rani Padmawati¹ of Chittorgarh a staunch and chaste woman of Rajputana who possess charismatic ardent beauty of unequal match, become a mad obsession for Khilji ruler. Whose beauty spread rumors too far off places and become envious to many rulers' oppressive nature, who were hell bent upon capturing her from the hands of Raja, instigated by their lustrous fix to dominate the 'Troy'² waged innumerable wars to get her, but in vain. The satanic impulse "monuments of miseries, tortures and follies and instruments of destruction"³ conjure them in non-existential world where they are summoned by the 'Satan' to deliver the satanic ruse and usher the idealistic picture of astute jealousy to mitigate her respect and pride. Her iconic character unblemished and uncompromising, retaliates and threw away all worldly proposals of Khilji and commits '*Jauhar*'⁴ along with her other thousands of companions, to spread the message that Khilji's power and pleadings can kill and win physically but spiritually and metaphysically cannot surmount their dignity.

The pictorial cinematography is laid in fair northwestern India, where the brutal genocide had actually taken shape. The chaotic mayhem which partook an offensive martyrdom by the ladies of Rajputana Clan who benumbed every Khilji oppressor, be it the invader Alauddin Khilji himself or any of his soldiers who had waged and raided the Chittor Fortress with the expectation to plunder and ravage the modesty of Rajputana women but had become prey to commiseration instead, and guilty of killing innocents because of their unsought advance. The film tells the story of a 14th Century Hindu queen and a Muslim Emperor Alauddin Khilji's attack on a kingdom of Mewar (Chittor), after he was smitten by the beauty of its queen, Padmavati, who belonged to the Hindu Rajput caste⁵. Ethnic Hindu groups and a Rajput Caste organization allege that the movie includes an intimate scene in which the Muslim King dreams of becoming intimate with the Hindu queen. The BBC⁷ explains why Hindu right-wing and caste groups believe it distorts history. Sanjay Leela Bhansali has said the film does not feature such a "dream sequence" at all. But rumors of such

a scene were enough to engage right-wing Hindu groups who called for the film to be banned.

While Khilji is a historical figure, most historians believe there is very little evidence Padmavati existed in real life. But some historians, largely based in Rajasthan disagree. Malik Muhammad Jayasi (1477-1542) was an Indian Sufi Poet and Pir of 16th Century. He wrote in the Awadhi language, and in the Persian Nasta'liq script. His best known work is the epic poem *Padmavat* (1540)⁶, who himself described the work as pure fiction. The poem extols the virtue of Padmavati who committed jauhar to protect her honor from Khilji who had killed her husband, the Rajput King Rawal Ratan Singh aka Ratan Sen of Chitrakot (Chittor), in a battle. Instigated by Padmavati and Rani Nagmati the first Rani of raja Ratan Rawal, women in the community burnt themselves after their men were defeated in battles to avoid being taken by the victors. But it came to be seen as a measure of wifely devotion in later years. Historians point out that Jayasi's ballad was written more than 200 years after the historical record of the invasion by Khilji. They say the folklore around Padmavati has been problematic as they have glorified sati. But Padmavati is deified and held as a symbol of female honor among Rajputs even today.

References:

"Roach": a silver-green European freshwater cyprinid fish (*Rutilus rutilus*) also a curved cut in the edge of a sail to prevent chafing or to secure a better fit. Since 1828 Merriam- Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/roach>.

The RAS oncogenes (*HRAS*, *NRAS* and *KRAS*) comprise the most frequently mutated class of oncogenes in human cancers (33%), stimulating intensive effort in developing anti-Ras inhibitors for cancer treatment.

Padmavati was an exceptionally beautiful princess of the Singhal kingdom's King Gandharvasena and Queen Champavati of Sri Lanka. Ratan Sen, the Rajput ruler of Chittor fort, heard about her beauty from the talking parrot named Hiranman. After an adventurous quest, he won her hand in marriage and brought her to Chittor

(Troy is the name of the Bronze Age city attacked in the Trojan War, a popular story in the mythology of ancient Greece, and the name given to the archeological site in the north-west of Asia Minor (now Turkey) which has revealed a large and prosperous city occupied over millennia a city of Homer's Iliad. Troy and Trojan War later became a staple myth of Classical Greek and Roman literature, in which Helen also known as beautiful Helen of Argos, or Helen of Sparta, was said to have been the most beautiful woman in the world. She was believed to have been the daughter of Zeus and Leda, and was the sister of Clytemnestra, Castor and Pollux, Philonoe, Phoebe and Timandra. She was married to King Menelaus but abducted by Paris and carried off to Troy. This resulted in the Trojan War when the Achaeans set out to reclaim her as was promised.

Frye, Northrop.1957. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

In Chittorgarh, locals believe, there were three jauhars- in 1567, when Akbar attacked Chittor (the royal family escaped through a secret route and the jauhar was led by a woman named Phool kanwar); in 1535 when Bahadur Shah of Gujrat attacked the fort and Rani Karnavati committed jauhar along with other women; and celebrated as an act of valour, equaling the bravery of men who were killed in battle. So much so, there have been protests over the film in different parts of the country since January 2017 when members of the Karni Sena, a Rajput caste group, vandalized the set and slapped

Mr. Bhansali. The protests intensified in November as the movie's original date of release -01 December – approached.

Rajput community members burnt effigies of Mr. Bhansali, and Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje said the film should not be released until “necessary changes are made so that sentiments of any community are not hurt” Karni Sena patron Lokendra Singh Kalvi in Jaipur called Bhansali a “cultural goon”, “trickster” and regular offender” and said the movie's release being put off was a part of his continued “drama” the onwards women protesting against the alleged distortion of history in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film Padmavat, threatened to commit jauhar if the release of the film was not stopped.

The Rajput ceremony of Jauhar, 1567, as depicted by Ambrose Dudley in *Hutchinsons History of the Nations*, c.1910

”Who is more beautiful, I or Padmavati?, Queen Nagamati asks to her parrot, and it gives a displeasing reply...”; an illustrated manuscript of Padmavat, c.1750

Media platform of British Broadcasting that reported CBFC on 18th January has approved the film Padmavati.