

Padmavati, the Legendary Woman, From Real to Reel Life

(A Historic-Analytical Perspective)

Abstract

Padmavati, the famous Rajput queen known for her historic jauhar (self-immolation) alongwith several of her companions because of Alauddin's evil-sightedness, is now probably the best feminist model for the Rajput women of Rajasthan. Her real life is full of idealistic landmarks that are almost unattainable by an ordinary woman. Her devotion to her husband and his families, her sense of self-respect and her strength of character-are an unrepeatable history. Every woman of Rajasthan is proud to belong to Rajasthan where Queen Padmavati once existed and won honour to the entire Rajasthani womanhood.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's latest released movie Padmavat (originally Padmavati) has become horribly controversial because of certain changes of historical facts in the movie. The film hurt the feelings of the residents of Rajasthan, and particularly of the Rajput women to whom Padmavati has ever since been a role model. Knowingly or unknowingly, Bhansali through Deepika Padukon, has introduced the character of Padmavati with such personality traits as had nothing to do with real Padmavati.

Designed on the secondary data and with an analytical approach, the research paper is a theoretical study. The data available in the books, journals, newspapers, filmy magazines and the internet sites served as the major source of information on the subject. However, all the steps of research were kept in mind while working on the theme historically. The paper has certain specific glimpses from the reel life of queen Padmavati that have nothing to do with the real life of Padmavati. Hence, the paper as a whole serves as a comparative study of the life of Padmavati in her real life and in the reel life created by the director of the movie in order to satisfy his own fancies. The approach of the researcher is historic and analytical which helped her arrive judicious conclusions.

Keywords: Reel Life, Real Life, Jauhar, Strength of Character, Role Model for The Rajasthani Women, Fancy.

Introduction

Padmini, also known as Padmavati, was a legendary 13th–14th century Indian queen. Several 16th-century texts mention her, of which the earliest source is Padmavat, an epic fictionalized poem written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540 CE. It says that Padmavati was an exceptionally beautiful princess of the Singhal kingdom (Sri Lanka). Ratan Sen, the Rajput ruler of Chittor Fort, heard about her beauty from a talking parrot named Hiranman. After an adventurous quest, he won her hand in marriage and brought her to Chittor. Alauddin Khalji, the Sultan of Delhi, also heard about her beauty, and laid siege to Chittor to obtain her. Many events occurred during the period of the siege, till the fort was finally taken. Meanwhile, Ratan Sen was killed in a duel with Devpal, the king of Kumbhalner, who was also enamoured with Padmavati's beauty. Before Alauddin Khalji could capture Chittor, Padmavati and her companions committed Jauhar (self-immolation) to protect their honour. After her sacrifice, the Rajput men died fighting on the battlefield.

Many other written and oral tradition versions of her life exist in Hindu and Jain traditions. These versions differ from the Sufi poet Jayasi's version. For example, Rani Padmani's husband Ratan Sen dies fighting the siege of Alauddin Khalji, and thereafter she leads a jauhar. In these versions, she is characterised as a Hindu Rajput queen, who defended her honour against a Muslim invader. Over the years, she came to be seen as a historical figure, and appeared in several novels, plays, television serials and movies. However, while Khalji's siege of Chittor in 1303 CE is a

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historical event, many modern historians question the authenticity of the Padmini legends.

In addition to the various literary accounts, there are numerous narratives of the queen's life in the memories of regional communities, preserved through verbal transmission. The oral legends and the literary accounts share the same characters and general plot, but diverge in the specifics and how they express the details. The oral versions narrate the social group's perspective while the early literary versions narrate the author's court-centric context. According to Ramya Sreenivasan, the oral and written legends about Rani Padmini likely fed each other, each version of her life affected by the sensitivities of the audience or the patron, with Muslim versions narrating the conquest of Chitor by Delhi Sultanate under Alauddin Khalji, while the Hindu and Jain versions narrating the local resistance to the sultan of Delhi exemplified in the life of Padmini. The following enlisting throws ample light on Queen Padmavati's real life.

1. The earliest literary work to mention Rani Padmini by name is 'Padmavat', an epic poem written by Indian poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540 CE. According to this version of the story, Padmavati was the daughter of Gandharv Sen, the king of the Singhal kingdom (Sri Lanka).
2. She owned a talking parrot named Hiran, but her father, who disliked her obsession with the bird, had ordered it to be killed. While the bird was able to fly away and save its life, it later fell into the hands of a bird catcher who sold it to a Brahmin.
3. Once the Brahmin brought the bird to Chittor, impressed by its ability to talk, the local king Ratan Sen purchased it from him. The parrot incessantly praised Padmavati's heavenly beauty, which enamored the king who decided to embark on a quest to marry the princess.
4. The bird guided Ratan Sen and his 16,000 followers to Singhal, which they reached after crossing the seven seas. The king began 'Tapasya' in a temple which Padmavati visited after being informed by the parrot, but she left the temple without visiting him and regretted her decision once back in the palace.
5. Ratan Sen, who was about to immolate himself after learning that he missed the chance to meet the princess, was stopped by deities Shiva and Parvati who advised him to attack the royal fortress. He and his followers, still dressed as ascetics, were defeated and imprisoned, but as the king was about to be executed, his loyal bard revealed that he was the king of Chittor.
6. Gandharv Sen agreed to marry Padmavati to Ratan Sen and also arranged 16,000 'padmini' (most desirable) women for his companions. As he began the return journey, the Ocean god created a devastating storm to punish him for his arrogance in winning over the most beautiful woman in the world.
7. Only Ratan Sen and Padmavati survived the storm, but were separated, during which time the daughter of the Ocean god, Lacchmi, appeared

before the king disguised as Padmavati to test his love for her. After he passed the test, the Ocean god and his daughter united them and rewarded them with gifts.

8. As they finally reached Chittor, Ratan Sen, who was already married to Nagmati, witnessed a rivalry between his two wives. Soon after, one of his courtiers, Raghav Chetan, who was banished for fraud, reached the court of the Sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khalji, and described Padmavati's exceptional beauty.
9. Determined to obtain Padmavati, Khalji laid siege on Chittor, but when Ratan Sen offered him tribute to save his wife, he captured him by deceit after feigning a peace treaty. At Padmavati's behest, Ratan Sen's loyal feudatories Gora and Badal reached Delhi dressed as Padmavati and her companions to free him, and while Gora was killed in a fight, Badal escorted Ratan Sen back to Chittor.
10. While Ratan Sen was imprisoned, a neighboring Rajput king, Devpal had made advances to Padmavati. When Ratan Sen returned to Chittor, he decided to punish Devpal for his misdemeanor. This resulted in a single combat duel between Ratan Sen and Devpal during which they killed each other.
11. In the meantime, Alauddin Khalji invaded Chittor again, following which Nagmati and Padmavati committed self-immolation (sati) on Ratan Sen's funeral pyre, with the other women of the fort committing mass self-immolation (jauhar) to save their honor.

Rani Padmavati's Life Depiction in The Film Padmavat

Padmavati is based on Alauddin Khalji's siege of the Chittor fort in 1303, in an attempt to capture the beautiful queen, Rani Padmini. Legend has it that before the plunderer could reach the fort, Rani Padmini and 16,000 Rajput women committed Jauhar (self-immolation) to escape capture at the hands of the enemy. In Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Padmavat, Deepika Padukone is introduced as Rani Padmini, and Ranveer Singh as Alauddin Khalji. The dream scene which produces within it both Deepika and Ranveer being romantic for each other. Thus began rumours that since they couldn't be shown romancing each other in the film, Sanjay Leela Bhansali would capitalise on their pairing by including a romantic dream sequence between Rani Padmini and Alauddin Khalji. It was this baseless speculation that spelled doom for Padmavati. As a result, several political groups have been up in arms against the film for its alleged 'distortion of history', even though several members of the team cried themselves hoarse refuting the existence of a dream sequence.

Review of Literature

Vandalization of the sets and destruction of the equipments (January 27, 2017). On January 27, 2017, members of the Shri Rajput Karni Senavandalised the sets of Padmavati in Jaipur and destroyed expensive film equipment. Not just this, they assaulted Sanjay Leela Bhansali and tore his clothes. Forced to abandon the shoot, the filmmaker

returned to Mumbai. Sanjay Leela Bhansali Productions issued a statement to clarify that there was no romantic dream sequence and that they had been "carefully researching" the subject. The statement also said that they "do not want to hurt any sentiments". After the assault, Sanjay Leela Bhansali had told India Today, "I am (fine), you have to go through this humiliation sometimes to make a film in this country."

The Indian Express (January, 28, 2017). Protesters slap and attack Sanjay Leela Bhansali...

A defenceless Sanjay Leela Bhansali was seen getting slapped and assaulted by a mob on the sets of *Padmavati*. Bollywood celebs such as Karan Johar and Ashutosh Gowariker have come out in Bhansali's support. Sanjay Leela Bhansali was slapped and assaulted on Friday by members of Karni Sena who staged an angry protest at Jaigarh fort in Jaipur where Bhansali was shooting for his next, *Padmavati*. In a video that has gone viral, protesters are seen running amok, damaging cameras and other shooting equipment while raising slogans and spewing abuses in Hindi.

Protesters entered in large numbers and started getting violent before the crew of *Padmavati* could even blink. The mob soon surrounded Bhansali who was seated in front of a monitor. Even as his team tried to shield him and take him to safety, the mob unleashed its fury on the defenceless director and slapped and assaulted him as can be seen in the video.

The protesters then turned their ire towards the costly film equipment and smashed to the ground almost everything that they could lay their hands on. The film stars Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh and Shahid Kapoor. None of the stars were present during the ruckus. "The film is presenting wrong facts about *Padmavati*. Our basic protest is about distortion of historic facts which will not be tolerated," Vikram Singh, a Karni Sena activist told PTI. This is the same body which earlier protested against Ashutosh Gowariker's *Jodhaa Akbar*. It has raised objections against *Padmavati* saying that the film incorrectly portrays Rani Padmini.

Hindustan Times (April, 15, 2017). Sanjay Leela Bhansali slapped on *Padmavati* sets: Bollywood tweets in shock. Bollywood has expressed anger after Rajput Karni Sena workers created ruckus and vandalised the sets of filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati* in Jaipur, saying the entire film fraternity should come together and take a stand. Bollywood celebrities, including filmmakers Karan Johar, Farhan Akhtar, Ram Gopal Verma, Anurag Kashyap and Madhur Bhandarkar along with actors Hrithik Roshan and Sonam Kapoor have expressed their anger after Rajput Karni Sena workers created ruckus and vandalised the sets of filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati* in Jaipur. In a series of social media posts, they stressed the entire film fraternity should come together and take a stand.

Deccan Chronicle (November 3, 2017). Protest March by Shri Rajput Karni Sena. On November 3, the Shri Rajput Karni Sena led a protest march from Chittorgarh's *Padmavati Jauhar Kund* to

protest the "unacceptable" content of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film. Lokendra Singh Kalvi, patron of the Sena, issued a warning to the filmmaker, "Pehle thappad khayega the, ab joote khayega (He was slapped last time, but this time, he will be beaten with shoes)."

Hindustan Times (November 11, 2017). Reacting to the recent series of protests and demands seeking ban on Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati*, eminent historian and professor emeritus in Aligarh Muslim University Prof Irfan Habib has said Rani *Padmavati* is not historical but an imaginary character and her existence has always been debatable. "Though Alauddin Khilji had won Chittor, during that period there is no mention of any character as *Padmavati* in history," he said. Elaborating further, the historian said that after 250 years of the Chittor incident, Malik Mohammad Jayasi for the first time mentioned *Padmavati* in his creation 'Padmavat'. "But Jayasi has mentioned that the princess of Singhaldeep (presently Sri Lanka) *Padmavati* was married to Raja Ratan Singh of Mewar. *Padmavat* is a long poetry collection and is an integral part of our literature. Official historian of Mewar darbar Shayamal Das has described *Padmavati* but in some other context," he said.

The Hindu (January, 08, 2018). Sanjay Leela Bhansali's controversial Hindi film *Padmavati*, which stars Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh and Shahid Kapoor, will release on January 25 as *Padmavat*. "It will release as *Padmavat* on January 25. The film has got U/A certificate," sources in Viacom18 Motion Pictures told IANS. *Padmavati* — now *Padmavat* — was earlier slated for release on December 1 but got stuck after the Karni Sena claimed that the film distorted historical facts related to the Rajput community.

Objectives of the Study

1. Going through the life history and biography of Queen *Padmavati*
2. Being familiar with the married life of Queen *Padmavati*
3. Peeping into the evil mindedness of Alauddin Khilji
4. Going into the depth of the causes of the Jauhar
5. Exploring the similarities between the incidents in the film *Padmavat* and in the life of *Padmavati*
6. Exploring the causes of the Rajputs' disapproval of the movie *Padmavat*

Hypothesis

1. Queen *Padmavati* is a role model for the women of Rajasthan.
2. She is known for her devotion to her husband and families.
3. Her exceptional beauty caught the evil eyesight of Khilji.
4. She preferred Jauhar to her submission to the man other than her husband.
5. The film director Sanjay Leela Bhansali made a film on the life of Queen *Padmavati*.
6. In the film, Deepika Padukone acts as *Padmavati* and Ranveer Singh acts as Alauddin Khilji.

7. The Rajputs all over India and particularly in Rajasthan are full of wrath because of the malpresentation of the facts.

Research Methodology

The paper is thoroughly a theoretical study made on the facts and chronicles available in the various forms of literature and electronic media, such as, books, journals, thesis, documentaries, films, and internet sites that provide an incredible stuff required for the research in the concerning field and on the selected theme. In order to ensure the scientific element in the study, the scholar started from the point of the study of some of the relevant selected reviews on the theme. Then, strictly observing the implications and steps of social science research, the hypotheses were formulated and tested, the collected secondary data from the various sources were classified and interpreted. Throughout the work the focus was on the historical interpretation of the problem selected for the purpose. In this way, finally, the findings and conclusions were made alongwith the generalization that when the history is misinterpreted or misrepresented through literature, stage or films, protests take place, as history is history, and nobody has right to change it in his interest.

Analysis and Interpretation

The life history and biographies of Queen Padmavati say that she was a devoted wife of the Rajput ruler Ratan Sen. Her devotion to her husband and her bereavement that finally resulted into her Jauhar immediately after the death of her husband makes her an ideal woman. To her, womanhood, honour, dignity and self-respect were above other things. The track of Jauhar was taken by her simply in order to protect her honour as Ratan Sen's wife. As far as the movie with the changed title 'Padmavat' is concerned, despite some similarities between the real life of Padmavati and her portrayal in the movie through the actress Deepika Padukon, the stuff is indigestible. Most of the hypotheses that formed the basis of the study were found to be accurate.

Findings & Conclusion

The history of the world witnesses that when there is any change or alteration in the chronicles through stage, films or printed literature, protests take place and cause imbalance in the social system. It is required that nobody should change the chronicles and historical facts for the sake of providing entertainment to the people. History is not meant for any change. Once something becomes history, it is unaltered history for ever. The situation becomes the worst when some great legendary or historical personality is depicted as what he or she was not in reality. It is true that the real life and the reel life of the

actors is entirely differently, but it does not mean that the historical personalities are presented with certain changes.

At present Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film Padmavati with its changed title 'Padmavat' is in limelight. Its teaser, then the release of its songs and the depiction of the characters through them etc. caused a horrible chaotic and uncontrollable situation all over India. Several Rajput and organizations claimed their opposition to its release on the ground that in the film the facts associated with Queen Padmavati are changed, and that the role model for the Rajput women in Rajasthan is no more than a dancer whose sole concern is to fascinate Khilji. Obviously, the film hurt the feelings and sentiments of the people. Hence, its release was postponed. However, the court allowed the release of the film after its title was changed from Padmavati to Padmavat. It being a matter of the self respect of women and culture, nowhere in Rajasthan it is released so far. The dream scene in the film is the root cause of the chaotic situation all over India. It is obviously against the culture of Rajasthan, and it evidently reflects the director's playing with the history of Rajasthan and with the biography of Rani Padmavati.

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