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Visual Grandeur, Imagined Glory: Identity Politics and Hindu Nationalism in Bajirao Mastani and Padmaavat

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Abstract

This paper examines the tropes through which the Hindi (Bollywood) historical films *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and Padmaavat (2018) create idealised pasts on screen that speak to Hindu nationalist politics of present-day India. Bajirao Mastani is based on a popular tale of love, between Bajirao I (1700-1740), a powerful Brahmin general, and Mastani, daughter of a Hindu king and his Iranian mistress. The relationship was socially disapproved because of Mastani`s mixed parentage. The film distorts India`s pluralistic heritage by idealising Bajirao as an embodiment of Hindu nationalism and portraying Islam as inimical to Hinduism. Padmaavat is a film about a legendary (Hindu) Rajput queen coveted by the Muslim emperor Alauddin Khilji (ruled from 1296-1316). Alauddin was a historical character. Padmavati is not mentioned in any historical sources. But the legend has been viewed as history and used for political mobilisation of Hindus during the colonial era.The film projects a Manichean narrative of evil Muslims, represented by Alauddin and noble Rajputs represented by Padmavati`s husband king Ratansen. Both films thus suit a contemporary Hindu nationalist agenda.

Author Notes

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Introduction

This paper examines the different tropes through which two commercially successful Hindi (Bollywood) films, *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018), both directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, create idealized pasts on screen that actually speak to contemporary Indian politics. *Bajirao Mastani* is set in late medieval Maharashtra, while *Padmaavat* tries to bring alive a legend relating to early medieval Rajasthan. The article analyses how these films have merged different representations of the past (oral, visual, literary, etc.) to construct their own historical stereotypes which have little connection with academic historical discourse. Such disjuncture, justified on the grounds of creative freedom, has been used to present an imaginary past on screen that actually promotes Hindu nationalist ideology. This article analyses the visual, linguistic and narrative devices with which particular versions of the past have been invented. The article also examines the ways in which constructions of gender, integrally connected to religious identities, have contributed to the creation of such visions of the past.

It is significant that both the films are set in medieval India, which in popular perception is remembered as an era of "Islamic despotism." This representation is partially a legacy bequeathed by British colonial historians, who were often administrators posted in India and doubling up as hobby scholars. They presented this era as a dark one, characterised by the purported tyranny of Islamic emperors based in Delhi. Underlying this representation was the anti-Islamic bias of Victorian England which increased as British colonial interests clashed with Islamic regimes in parts of Asia in the course of the 19th century.[1] Muslim imperial dynasties ruling most of the Indian subcontinent were also characterised by these British historians as "foreign" since their origins could be traced outside India.[2] These historians tended to present

Hindus as benevolent and passive, who could be persecuted for centuries by "Muslim despots" till the British colonizers "saved" them.[3]

These colonial scholars also tended to present the struggles of certain regional groups like the Rajputs and the Marathas against the centralised authority of the Islamic (Mughal) emperors based in Delhi during the medieval times as instances of Hindu nationalist resistance to Islamic rule, though such oppositions were motivated primarily by political and territorial ambitions.

These views of the pre-colonial past were disseminated among English educated Indian elite during the 19th century. By the end of 19th century, these elite groups, comprising mostly Hindu upper caste\class men, became imbued with nationalist ideals. Regional resistance to Mughal rule, already portrayed with heroic overtones by colonial historians, were represented by trans-regional Indian nationalists as proto-nationalist struggles. This nationalist interpretation of India`s medieval, "Islamic" past was invoked for a non-elite, popular audience through novels and theatre.[4] As the colonial state clamped down on freedom of expression through the Vernacular Press Act of 1876, novels and dramas meant to instil popular nationalism often presented acts of regional Hindu resistance against centralised Muslim rule as stand-ins for anti-colonial sentiments.[5]

When the colonial authorities began to suppress such representations as well, politically oriented historical fantasies frequently gave way to tales of romance set in a medieval ambience.[6]

The historical film in India was a continuation of these literary, theatrical and visual perspectives of the past.[7] In post-independence India, cinema—particularly the commercial

Hindi films produced in Bombay or the so-called Bollywood cinema—became a primary mediator of the national consciousness of the newly formed nation.[8]

Films made in the Nehruvian era (1947-1964), called so after independent India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure, projected India's past as a pluralist one that emphasized religious tolerance in accordance with Nehru's vision of India as a secular nation in which Hindus and Muslims had an equal stake.

However, though films in this era tried to espouse the concept of Hindu-Muslim amity and respect, popular stereotypes about the 'Islamic' medieval age did not disappear. This was partly because Nehru's focus on industrialization with its scientific and technological know-how often seemed to overshadow the need for critical and in-depth study of history.[9]

Probably due to the post-colonial nation's need to focus exclusively on the present, historical films as a genre almost disappeared from the national cinematic oeuvre for a few decades from the 1970s.

During the 1980s, the rise of *Hindutva* (literally: the essence of being Hindu) or Hindu nationalist politics that aims to transform India from a pluralist secular state to an exclusively Hindu one, brought medieval history back into national discussion. Ethnic insurgencies in different part of the country like Kashmir and the North East during this decade had a correlation with the rise of *Hindutva*. The often violent agitations for secession from the Indian union in these areas resulted in political uncertainties that made many Indians long for a strong authoritarian state with a dominant Hindu ethos as the unifying basis of the nation.[10]

Medieval Indian history became a focus of national attention when a Hindu nationalist mob destroyed a 16th century mosque at the north Indian town of Ayodhya in 1992. The mosque, built during Mughal emperor Babur`s reign, was allegedly constructed upon the site of an older temple dedicated to Ram, the hero of the Indian epic Ramayana whose birthplace was

supposedly Ayodhya. Ram is not only venerated by many Hindus as an incarnation of the god Vishnu; he also represents the mythic prototype of an ideal Hindu king. Ram`s reign or the *Ram Rajya* is considered to be a "Hindu golden age." This historicization of the epic figure began around the 12th century. The military triumph of Ram over Ravan, the "demon king" of Lanka (equated with Sri Lanka) also came to be celebrated as a triumph of a righteous king over an evil "other."

Hindu rulers of medieval India often presented themselves as human incarnations of Ram, while representing Muslim conquerors who were establishing their rule in different parts of India at the time, as evil human prototypes of Ravan.

Ram came to be invoked as an instrument of political mobilization of Hindus at different points of India`s medieval and modern history. The Hindu nationalist political forces calling for a rebuilding of the destroyed temple at Ayodhya in the early 1990s (though the existence of such a temple has been disputed by many scholars) drew on this tradition. This rebuilding project represents a symbolic return to an imagined Hindu golden age.[11]

If the colonial interpretation of the medieval past contributed to anti-Muslim prejudices among the Western educated Indian elite, the Manichean duality of Ram and Ravan fed into popular stereotypes about good Hindu rulers versus evil Muslim ones.

The destruction of the mosque unleashed a wave of Hindu-Muslim communal riots in its wake. The tolerance and secularism espoused during the Nehruvian era were now seen as completely inadequate in dealing with the volatile situation. There was a consequent consolidation of communal identities.

Adding to the communally charged political atmosphere was the (re)surfacing of the trauma generated by the Partition of the Indian subcontinent and the birth of Pakistan in 1947. This episode had been marked by widespread violence between Hindus and Muslims.

According to some scholars, this trauma had been suppressed in the initial decades after independence, since Nehruvian politics considered public discussions on this sensitive issue a danger to communal harmony.[12]

At the same time, Nehruvian socialism gave way to unbridled consumerism following the liberalisation of India's economy in 1991, leading to the growth of an affluent Indian middle class, among whom the messages of Hindu nationalism found a certain resonance since this brand of politics is business and corporate friendly. The changed economic situation also resulted in increasing the existing disparities between the rich and the disadvantaged, creating large sections of underemployed or unemployed people. With the gradual weakening of organised labour unions due to neoliberal policies, *Hindutva* politics seemed to provide the impoverished masses with an alternative forum to vent their frustrations.

The Bombay film industry answered the market demands created by the changes in political-economic situation by projecting a kind of muscular, ethnic, triumphalist nationalism on screen through technically sophisticated and visually spectacular films that equated Indianness with Hinduness.[13] The film *Jodha Akbar* (2008) directed by Ashutosh Gowarikar was the first significant film of the new millennium which brought these contemporary concerns on the silver screen through the prism of medieval history. The two films under discussion continue this trend.

Bajirao and Mastani in Maratha historical memory

Bajirao Mastani is based on the Marathi novel, *Rau*, written by N.S. Imandar (1972). It concerns a popular tale of love between two historical figures, Bajirao I (1700-1740), general and *Peshwa* (prime minister) to king Shahu of Maharashtra, and Mastani, believed to be a daughter of a Hindu king and his Iranian mistress. Not much is historically known about the

relationship except that it was socially disapproved (since Mastani was not considered worthy of the Brahmin *Peshwa* due to her mixed parentage) and that the couple had a son called Shamser Bahadur.

The film portrays the Peshwa`s relationship with Mastani in the face of opposition of his orthodox Brahmin family and the local Brahmin community. Mastani is forced to live in a separate establishment and is eventually kept under guard by the *Peshwa*'s family while he is away on a military campaign. The film ends with the illness and death of Bajirao during this campaign and the simultaneous, inexplicable death of Mastani in captivity.

Bajirao I is considered by many to be the greatest Maratha leader after the iconic king Shivaji (1627-1680). Shivaji was promoted by Indian nationalists as a Hindu nationalist icon from the 19th century onwards. The extolling of Bajirao as an avenger of Hindu pride became popular from mid-19th century when Marathi speakers began searching for a nationalist past.[14]

This was the backdrop to the publication of the first play about the doomed romance of Bajirao and Mastani, written by N.B.Kantikar, in 1892. The popularity of this drama made it a literary trendsetter. The paucity of historical information on Mastani was supplemented by imagination in such representations which portrayed her with many attributes: beauty, mixed parentage, and adherence to the syncretistic *parnaami* sect which did not distinguish between castes or religions. In popular imagination, she became an exotic Iranian beauty, a temptress who was equally accomplished at horse riding and dancing, at the same time being a loyal wifeand a heroic mother.[15] Bajirao`s military achievements also came to be magnified.[16]

Imandar`s novel belongs to this literary tradition. But its representation of the past can also be situated in the political context in which it was written. The novel appeared not long after the violent riots between Hindus and Muslims at Bhiwandi in Maharashtra in1970, in

which the newly formed Hindu\Maratha chauvinist outfit, Shiv Sena, was accused of committing brutalities against Muslims.

By the time *Bajirao Mastani* was released in 2015, Shiv Sena was entrenched as a Hindu far right party, which consistently formed electoral coalitions in Maharashtra with the relatively moderate Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This alliance was temporarily broken in the Maharashtra state elections in 2014. Shiv Sena initially refused to join the BJP government but eventually did so as a junior partner. This political situation seems to cast its shadow on the film.

Bajirao, the Hindu nationalist leader

The film opens with the disclaimer that though it is based on consultation with eminent historians, it does not claim to be historically accurate and also that it does not intend to hurt the sentiments of any community.

The historian consulted by Bhansali for this film was the late Ninad Bedekar, who was among those who called for a ban on historian James W. Laine`s book *Shivaji: Hindu king in Muslim India* which provided a critical historical perspective that went against the hagiographic nationalist view of the iconic king.[17]

The first scene of the film makes the need for this disclaimer clear. Bajirao (Ranveer Singh) is shown on horseback commanding his army, while the voiceover claims that the *Peshwa*`s sword was like lightening, his determination was like the Himalayas, his appearance reflected the vigour of *Chitpavan* Brahmins (the caste group to which the *Peshwas* belonged) and his dream was to hoist the Maratha flag in Delhi.

Bhansali thus places Bajirao firmly in the matrix of the Hindu nationalist interpretation of the past. The cultural politics of the film is reinforced when Bajirao expresses his ambition

of fulfilling king Shivaji's dream of *Hindu Swaraj* (Hindu self-rule) and breaking the yoke of "foreign" (which can only be interpreted as Muslim) rule.

Shivaji remains a champion of Hindu glory in popular perception, though scholars point out that his use of Hindu symbols to legitimise his rule and consolidate his power was aimed more at Hindu\Maratha chieftains and less at the Muslim rulers, with whom his enmity was political rather than religious.[18] Shahu, who was brought up as a captive in the Mughal imperial household, was officially granted the *Swarajya Sanad* by the Mughal emperor in 1719. It basically denoted Shahu`s rights to collect taxes from the areas known as *Swarajya* - which had been under Shivaji and were subsequently seized by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. In return, Shahu willingly paid annual tributes to the Mughal emperor. The Marathas in the course of the 18th century established their sovereignty over large parts of India but they did so without denying the legitimacy of Mughal domination.[19]

Bhansali's Bajirao seems to emerge from the pages of the book, *Hindu pad-padshahi*, written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, one of the pioneers of *Hindutva*. Savarkar wrote: "Bajirao after the conquest and settlement of Gujarat, Malva and Bundelkhand ...was not likely to cry halt there forever. His aim was a consolidated Hindu Empire that should embrace all Hindustan in its sweep."[20] This representation was a part of Savarkar`s historical project to recover a supposedly lost Indian legacy of armed masculinity by presenting the theory of the degeneration of a once powerful and masculine Hinduism represented by Shivaji and inherited by Bajirao I.[21]

This historical project was a protest against the gendered lens through which British colonizers viewed Indian men. Some "races" like the Sikhs and the Gurkhas were considered 'manly' and 'martial' by the British. These ethnic groups were deemed to possess the qualities

of loyal soldiers of the Empire, in stark contrast to the bookish, effeminate Bengali "babus" and the "devious Marathas" who, through their 'unmanly' and 'unchivalrous' guerrilla tactics of war, became "the most dangerous enemies" of the British. This negative stereotyping of the Bengalis and the Marathas led to a nationalist venture of reclaiming medieval rulers like Shivaji and Bajirao as martial heroes and celebrating them as icons of Hindu bravery and masculinity. Exponents of Hindu nationalism like Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar from Maharashtra participated in this historical enterprise, as did proponents of Hindu greatness like Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay from Bengal. The post-colonial Hindutva ideology glorifying the valour and military achievements of the Marathas is a legacy of this nationalist narrative that developed as protest to the denigrating colonial discourse.[22]

The film promotes this Hindu nationalist narrative by making Bajirao an embodiment of a virile Hindu nationalism, a warrior whose mission is to aggressively defend all Hindus against the "Other." In the process, historical complexities, like the political and military rivalry between the two Hindu groups, the Marathas and the Rajputs, have been glossed over.[23]

Idealized representation of Maratha power

Bhansali uses all the visual tropes at his disposal to project the notion of an united, powerful and centralized Hindu Maratha empire though such a "normative centralised authority was hardly a reality in the 17th and 18th century."[24]The court of Shahu at Satara looks staggeringly opulent, comparable to the Mughal court at its prime. Historians claim that Shahu was indeed influenced by the Mughal royal lifestyle and tried to emulate it, but his display of wealth and power always maintained a low profile.[25]

Shahu's court pales in comparison with the optical extravaganza that is Shaniwarwada, the residence of the Peshwas built by Bajirao. The architectural structures in Maharashtra were actually described by European observers as "meagre specimens of architecture" compared to the North Indian palaces which the Peshwas tried to emulate.[26] One wonders if such ostentatious *mise-en-scene* glorifying the Maratha polity can be ascribed only to Bhansali's penchant for grandiose visuals or to an aesthetics of power that brings alive a Hindu nationalist fantasy on celluloid. The repletion of Hindu religious iconography in the Shaniwarwada—like an oversized, awe-inspiring image of *Ganesha* hovering behind the Peshwa's throne—certainly hints at the latter possibility, since the pervasive use of religious imagery spontaneously elicits an appropriate response from the religious among viewers.[27]

Members of the Maratha polity speak in an ornate, stylized Hindi devoid of Persian\Urdu influence, though Marathi in 18th century was heavily dominated by Persian.[28] The use of verbal language in cinema is a marker of nationality, "a crucial signifier of difference and national\cultural distinctiveness in films."[29] The film's use of Sanskritized Hindi reflects a linguistic politics in which Hindi was upheld as a natural successor to Sanskrit, underscoring its dubious assertion of a "pure Hindu" past and by extension, its claim to be the national language of India.[30]

Hindu valour and religious pride are manifested through scenes of Bajirao leading his cavalry headlong into battle, the soldiers carrying oversized saffron flags (saffron being associated traditionally with Hinduism). This is a cinematic innovation, since Maratha tactics did not entail direct confrontation but severing the supply lines of their opponents, mostly by

raiding the surrounding cities and lands. The Marathas were seen more as ruthless plunderers than as Hindu liberators by the people of the raided territories.[31]

Similarly, the film portrays an expanding Maratha kingdom advancing the cause of Hindu nationalism, through images of the saffron flag spreading over large tracts on a map of India, though Maratha 'conquest' in the 1730s mainly entailed repeated raids of a region, gathering up cash and objects. The authority of the Marathas remained inconsistent and diffused in the 'conquered' regions.[32]

Branding the 'Other'

The evocation of a Hindu nationalist past on screen necessitates "othering" the Muslims through "exoticization, marginalization and demonization."[33] A national identity often develops and sustains itself only in relation to its 'other' or an 'anti-nation.'

Muslims have been traditionally represented as the Other in Indian mainstream commercial films. Even during the Nehruvian era which projected Muslims as integral parts of the Indian nation, Muslims were mostly portrayed in terms of their exoticism, particularly in historical films of the 1950s and 1960s. In such films, Muslim elites were portrayed in lavish sets and captivating court dances as representatives of a lost aristocratic world. In the films of the 1970s and 1980s Muslim characters were increasingly marginalized. They were cast in limited roles to depict certain Muslim stereotypes like the Imam or the courtesan.With the rise of Hindu nationalism, a series of ultranationalistic films dating from the early 2000s brought the Muslim characters significantly back on screen, typically as "anti-nationals" whereby Islam was conflated with terrorism and Muslims with Pakistan.[34]

In this film, Mastani (Deepika Padukone), from the time she forcefully enters Bajirao`s camp dressed as a sword-wielding soldier entreating help, is signified as the Other - not just in terms of ethnicity\religion, but also through gender codes. These codes need to examined, since Bollywood´s representation of femininity is a reflection of the Indian nation's evolving attitude towards gender.

During the anti-colonial movement, Indian women's roles as chaste wives and devoted mothers came to be idealized since women represented Home, a space construed as a spiritually pure core of the nation that was untouched by colonial western mores.[35] Mastani is introduced in the film as an antithesis\Other to this ideal.

Mastani impresses Bajirao through her daring and he accompanies her to assist her father, king Chhatrasal, to defend his kingdom, Bundelkhand, against an Afghan invader. Bajirao and Mastani fight side by side, the battle is won and Bajirao saves the sword-flashing damsel in distress as she is wounded. Mastani`s fighting skills do not pose a challenge to Bajirao`s masculinity. As Bajirao spends the next few days in Chhatrasal`s palace, the couple falls in love.

The exoticization of Mastani entails not just fighting skills. She is revealed to be an accomplished singer and dancer. Mastani dances before Bajirao at her father`s court in a resplendent sequence that recalls Bollywood films from the so-called "courtesan genre" where the protagonist is a dancing girl\prostitute.[36] Like the female protagonists of such films, Mastani is beautiful and alluring, exudes powerful sexuality and independence of spirit but is 'pure at heart,' offering her love to only one man and staying true to him despite great personal sufferings.[37] Bhansali uses aspects of courtesan films, in which most of the leading ladies were Muslims, to shape Mastani`s identity. Mastani wears a 'Hindu' dress while she dances at her

father's court to celebrate the Hindu festival *Holi* and sings a song containing Hindu religious idioms in a North Indian dialect. Her pluralist identity is emphasized here.

The dance which Mastani performs after she comes to Pune uninvited to offer herself to Bajirao is more pronouncedly Islamicate. This sequence is set in an opulent hall with mirrors, reminiscent of the Mughal *sheesh-mahal* (glass palace). Mastani`s reflections in the mirrors all around "reinforces the notion of slave woman as spectacle."[38] In this sequence, Mastani wears manifestly Islamic costume and jewellery and dances to vaguely Arabic music, playing a stringed instrument that is associated with Persian and Arabic musical traditions.

From this point on, the film progressively renders her an inflexibly Muslim identity. She is thus doubly marginalised: as courtesan, "she represents a socially unacceptable sexual but non-reproductive femininity."[39]As Muslim she is positioned outside the great Hindu nation that the Peshwa intends to defend.

This moment also marks a departure from the earlier part of the film when Mastani`s mixed parentage is referred to: she once calls herself a Rajput and her father claims at another point that she prays to Krishna as well as to Allah.

The Nation as Goddess

This Otherness of Mastani comes to the fore as a contrast to Kashibai, Bajirao's wife (Priyanka Chopra) who seems to personify the Hindu nation. The Indian anti-colonial movement imagined the emergent nation as a Mother Goddess — *Bharat Mata* (Mother India)—a distinctly gendered and Hindu imagery. Though early nationalists, particularly in Bengal, imagined *Bharat Mata* as serene and peaceful, the image was gradually co-opted by the Hindu nationalists who envisaged her as carrying a saffron flag and riding a lion, reminiscent of the goddess Durga. Also, much like Durga who is visualised as a beautiful,

matronly woman looking at odds with the half dead demon at her feet, *Bharat Mata* is never seen to fight.[40] This symbolism is conveyed in the film through scenes of Kashibai dancing with the saffron flag and wearing military headgear. This iconic representation had no bearing on Kashibai's constrained position in the Brahmin patriarchy that was *Peshwa* rule, just as the imagery of the Hindu Mother Goddess as nation did not have much impact on Indian women's empowerment. Kashibai accepts her husband's deviation with stoic dignity. Her only protest to her husband that he had taken away her pride is articulated with admirable reserve. She is unquestionably devoted to the *Brahmanical* ethos of the *Peshwa* family. Commensurate with her status as the embodiment of the Hindu nation, the film does not sexualise her. The only erotic sequence between her and Bajirao focuses more on his sexuality.

Presumably because she is projected as an embodiment of *Bharat Mata*, Kashibai rises above the pain and the jealousy that the situation entails and tries to accommodate Mastani in her life, though whether it is due to her generosity or because she is conditioned by patriarchal norms of Hindu womanhood to acquiesce to polygamy remains a moot question. Out of the three protagonists, Kashibai is depicted as the noblest.

Mastani in comparison suffers a steady stream of humiliation. After her performance at the *Peshwa*'s palace, she is offered the position of a dancing girl by Radhabai, Bajirao's mother, a matriarch who is repelled by Mastani's Muslim identity as well as her overt sexuality, since the *Peshwa* state's *Brahmanical* ideology required maintenance of strict control over women`s sexuality.[41]

It is Mastani who seduces the *Peshwa* by openly declaring her feelings for him at Shahu's court. Bajirao shows an initial abstinence that seems to belong to a code of conduct for the Hindu warrior monk, one of the dominant models of masculine Hinduism.[42]

As Mastani refuses to dance at Shahu's court and Bajirao endorses her decision, her aggressive sexuality and agency – her so-called courtesan like traits – disappear, being replaced by docile submission to Hindu patriarchy. The gendered and communal codes of this film converge in a poignant scene where Bajirao comes to meet Mastani on a stormy night. Mastani, covered in black from head to foot, appears stereotypically Islamic. Bajirao warns her that by entering into a relationship with him, she would get neither status nor respect, only social ostracism. Mastani assents to the demeaning conditions and the *Peshwa* proclaims her to be his second wife. Henceforth, Mastani lives in precarious subservience to the *Peshwa* who fails to provide her with either dignity or physical safety as his family intrigues with the local Brahmins to eliminate her.

Mastani appears to be emblematic of the model Indian minority. She lives in self-effacing isolation in a subaltern, Islamicate existence which is interrupted temporarily when Kashibai invites her to take part in a Hindu ceremony and presents her a sari and other hallmarks of Hindu married women.

As she accepts the Hindu tokens, Mastani is allowed to be a guest at the *Peshwa*'s residence. She thus becomes a peripheral citizen of the Hindu nation. The two women form a bond by dancing together, signifying their joint obedience to the leader of the Hindu nation. Such a bond also appears to legitimize polygamy.

Kashibai is not shown to reciprocally participate in the festival of Id with Mastani. It is the *Peshwa* who defies Brahmin orthodoxy by celebrating Id with Mastani and proclaiming that he has no enmity towards Islam. He plays midwife, delivering Mastani's son whom he names Shamsher Bahadur after the Brahmins refuse to accept the new-born as a Hindu. The film uses these elements from both scholarly history and popular memory to produce a complex narrative which resists straightforward communalization.

However, communal tropes persist through differences between the articulated and the visualized, for example, the use of colour codes. Though Mastani declares that colours have no

religion, the colour green repeatedly symbolizes the enemy. The film ends with Bajirao hallucinating about the invading enemy: with green flags and in black costumes, traditionally associated with Islam.

Bajirao signifies the ideal Hindu leader of contemporary India, who is ready to protect the 'good' among the religious minorities from the wrath of Hindu fundamentalists while ruthlessly vanquishing the 'bad' elements, which comprise all the other Muslim figures except Mastani. While the latter has been exoticized and marginalised, the other prominent Muslim figure, the *Nizam*, has been demonized as a treacherous villain. The complicated history, that both Bajirao (and Shivaji) had on occasions entered into political alliances with Muslims and that Bajirao and Nizam shared a cautious friendship until their political ambitions came in the way, has been completely elided.[43]

The rift between Bajirao's iconoclastic majoritarianism and the bigotry of the Brahmins can be interpreted as the differences between the hard line *Hindutva* of the Shiv Sena and the more moderate politics of the BJP which won not only the state elections in Maharashtra but also the national elections in 2014.

Padmaavat: myth as history

While *Bajirao Mastani* presents a somewhat nuanced and complex narrative that appears to mirror the tensions between Nehruvian ideals of tolerance and the rising Hindu majoritarianism, *Padmaavat* seems to uncritically project a Hindu nationalist discourse that dominates most of the political and cultural space in today`s India.

Padmaavat claims to be inspired by the eponymous ballad written by the Sufi poet, Malik Muhammed Jayasi, around 1540 in *Awadhi* (a dialect of Hindi). One of the central

characters of the narrative is queen Padmavati of Mewar, Rajasthan, whose legendary beauty led the Muslim emperor Alauddin Khilji to lay siege on Chittor, the capital of Mewar.

Alauddin Khilji is a historical character, who actually conquered Chittor in 1303 as part of his policy of territorial expansion. Padmavati is not mentioned in any historical sources. But she is assumed to be a historical character in Indian, particularly Rajput, cultural memory.[44]

In Jayasi's *Padmaavat*, Ratansen, the prince of Chittor learns of the incredible beauty of Padmavati, the princess of Sinhala (presumably Sri Lanka) from his parrot, Hiraman. Intending to win her, he travels to the distant island. Many adventures later, he marries her and brings her to Chittor. When Ratansen banishes a wily Brahmin, Raghav Chetan, from his court, the vengeful pundit approaches Sultan Alauddin and urges him to capture the queen.

After a long siege of Chittor, Alauddin offers a truce. Ratansen invites Alauddin to his palace, where the Sultan manages to steal a glimpse of the beautiful queen. Intending to possess her, Alauddin imprisons Ratansen through treachery. The king is subsequently rescued by Gora and Badal, two noblemen of Chittor.

In the meantime, Devpal, the Rajput ruler of a neighbouring kingdom sends a marriage proposal to Padmavati, which she refuses. After Ratansen's return from captivity, as Padmavati informs him about this marriage proposal, Ratansen sets off to fight Devpal. Both the kings die in the ensuing battle. Padmavati and Nagamati, Ratansen's first wife, commit *sati*, i.e. they immolate themselves on the funeral pyre of their husband Ratansen. Alauddin resumes his siege of Chittor and conquers it. All the men perish fighting and the women commit mass immolation or *jauhar*.

Jayasi claimed that *Padmaavat* was an allegorical Sufi tale, in which the parrot, Hiraman symbolised a spiritual guru, and Padmavati the eternal wisdom which can be obtained through love (as Ratansen did) and not by force, which Alauddin unsuccessfully tried.

Between the late 16th to early 18th centuries, several renditions of the *Padmaavat* legend were written and circulated in various parts of India. The legend had a particular resonance in medieval Rajasthan, where Rajput rulers felt threatened by the imperial ambitions of the Mughal emperors. Unlike Jayasi's poem, which focussed more on the adventures of Ratansen before marrying Padmavati, the Rajput narratives revolved around the conflict with the Muslim emperor. In these versions, Alauddin Khilji was demonised as an immoral Muslim invader, a contrast to the brave and virtuous Hindu Rajput royalty. King Devpal disappeared altogether, since the focus shifted to a Muslim versus Hindu binary. Similarly, Queen Nagamati was eliminated from these tales, presumably because polygamy did not conform to an idealised past.

Among such Rajput narratives, the one presented by the Sisodia dynasty, the Rajput clan which ruled Mewar, assumed particular importance since it claimed Ratansen and Padmavati as ancestors of the Sisodias. The version promoted by this clan presented Sisodia battles against Sultans of Delhi as instances of brave Hindu resistance to Muslim conquerors. This portrayal was given colonial legitimacy by James Tod, Resident of the East India Company at Udaipur from 1818-1823, through his book, *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829).

Tod's version was accepted as history by the English educated nationalists in the early 20th century, particularly in Bengal, which was at the forefront of Indian anti-colonial movement. During the *Swadeshi* (literally: indigenous) movement that erupted against the division of Bengal effected by colonial rulers in 1905, this version was adapted by the *bhadralok* (English educated Bengali middle and upper class men) to answer a patriotic quest for a glorious past so that a national community could be forged.[45]Also, as discussed earlier, educated Bengali men needed tales of past gallantry to counter the disparagement that they received from British administrators. Along with the historical figure of Shivaji, the legend of

Padmavati\Padmini was co-opted in Bengali narratives as an example of an illustrious Hindu past. In the process, the boundaries of myth and history became blurred.

A number of fictional accounts based on the 'history' of Padmavati or Padmini were published in Bengali, where the queen was presented as an icon of Hindu feminine virtues and an embodiment of national (Hindu) honour. As already mentioned, the nationalist movement, particularly in Bengal, recast the middle and upper class\caste Hindu women as representatives of Home, the spiritual and pure inner essence of the nation.[46] Padmavati\Padmini was not only invested with all the virtues that this spiritual feminine domain represented, she came to symbolise the Mother Goddess\Nation who combined both victimhood and feminine power in her act of self-immolation. This glorification of her suicide reflected the emergent nationalist gender code, in which women`s bodies came to symbolise the nation's virtue. Hence, preservation of women's honour, or rather chastity, became a patriotic project.

Following Tod's version as well as their imbibed anti-Islamic prejudices, the Bengali writers also demonized Alauddin Khilji as a villainous and lustful Muslim invader, a contrast to the courageous and honourable Rajputs who seemed to represent the entire Indian\Hindu nation. These qualities of the Rajputs, propagated by the Rajputs themselves and reinforced by the British colonizers, eventually became integrated in nationalist political discourse.

The dramatic potential of this tale was utilised early on through Bengali stage adaptations. This trend continued through films in post-colonial India. Most of the films made on this legend celebrated Rajput heroism but Alauddin was not always demonised. For example, Jaswant Jhaveri's *Maharani Padmini* (1964) ended with the emperor shedding tears of remorse at the sight of the carnage.

A Tamil film, *Chitoor Rani Padmini* (1963) had the dancer-actress Vyjayanthimala playing the title role, with many dance sequences. It was not a box office success, probably

because the audience could not accept the chaste queen being frivolous enough to dance.[47] These films were aimed at the regional market, unlike Bhansali's extravaganza, which targets not only the majoritarian consensus in India but also sections of the Indian diaspora who have emerged as support bases of *Hindutva* ideology and as important consumers of Bollywood films.[48]

Though Bhansali's film claims to be inspired by Jayasi's poem, it follows the narrative fashioned by Tod and the nationalists since this version has emerged as the dominant one in post-colonial India, reflecting the nation's majoritarian ethos. There were other versions of the Padmaavat legend written in different languages for different audiences, like medieval Urdu versions written for Islamic courts or the 17th century Bengali version written by the poet Alaol for the court of Arakan (a part of present Burma). These versions were slowly marginalized, probably because they focussed on romance and did not lend themselves easily to politicisation.

Like *Bajirao Mastani*, *Padmaavat* also opens with a disclaimer about historical authenticity and communal sentiments. An additional disclaimer announces that the film does not want to glorify *sati*. As with *Bajirao Mastani*, the disclaimers are mere preventive measures.

A study of contrasts

The film introduces Alauddin Khilji (Ranveer Singh) as a ruthless, lustful savage, who looks unkempt and wild, a screen stereotype of a barbaric Muslim.

Contemporary Bollywood films propagate "muscular nationalism" through chiselled, muscular male bodies which are ready to sacrifice themselves for the Indian nation.[49] However, the "manly" torso of Alauddin, explored from different angles by the camera, does not in any way symbolise Indian nationalism. On the contrary, it is posited as a threat to the Hindu\Indian

nation. This is done by stressing the Afghan origins of Alauddin Khilji, locating him in a hillside fortress with ominously dark and bleak interiors, conjuring up a sinister atmosphere. The Khilji royal palace in Delhi is similarly gloomy, suggesting malevolence, a far cry from Bhansali`s usual predilection for displaying pomp.

By contrast, the lush tropical jungle in Sinhala where the king of Mewar, Rana Ratan Singh (Shahid Kapoor) meets princess Padmavati (Deepika Padukone) presents the island as an abode of Buddhist nirvana. The muted interiors with oversized statues of Buddha, the loosely flowing beige garments of the locals, all aim to soothe the mind, though medieval Sri Lanka was neither purely Buddhist nor completely pacific.[50]

This film is actually a story of the subterranean chemistry between Alauddin and Padmavati, who never directly meet but who are locked into a relationship of desire and its negation. The two parallel lives on screen mirror the way the ideal Hindu nation is constructed through exclusion and inclusion. Alauddin is shown to be a Muslim invader who remains an outsider to the nation, while Padmavati, the princess from a remote island, quickly wins over the hearts and minds of the Rajputs. The film allows her to assimilate while denying him the opportunity, though historians claim that Alauddin Khilji created the first real Indian empire after the Mauryas of ancient India, where he ensured political stability.[51]

The glaring disparity between the ominous darkness surrounding the Khiljis and the opulent, well-lit interiors of the fort of Chittor is presumably meant to convey Rajput glory. Whereas Alauddin is bestial and uncouth, gnawing into mounds of meat, the Rajput king is shown to be a sophisticated and presumably vegetarian diner. It is notable that meat (particularly beef) eating has a connotation of impurity in the cultural politics of *Hindutva,* not the least because meat eating is associated primarily with Muslim culinary tradition. This issue

has become politically sensitive in present-day India, where regular instances of Muslims being lynched on the real or presumed charges of beef eating are being recorded.[52]

Alauddin also treats women, including his silently suffering wife Mehrunnissa, as mere objects of lust. Ratansen by contrast is a gentle lover. He is presented as quasi monogamous, since he is completely devoted to Padmavati and totally negligent towards his first wife, Nagamati, who has a marginal presence in the film.

The sexual politics of the film become manifest though the portrayal of a homoerotic relationship between Alauddin and his slave Malik Kafur. The latter was a historical character, whose relationship with Alauddin supposedly had a sexual dimension. Such relationships were neither uncommon nor prohibited in pre-colonial India.[53]

The colonial law criminalising homosexuality has recently been overturned by the Supreme Court of India. The Hindu nationalist ruling dispensation was in favour of continuing the colonial ban since *Hindutva* ideology stands for heterosexual patriarchal familial traditions. Bhansali seems not only to follow a traditional Bollywood formula of presenting homosexual men as comic and villainous, but he also portrays this relationship as another proof of the sultan's depravity.[54]

The depiction of Alauddin on screen bears the marks of colonial stereotyping of Muslim rulers of India as "oriental despots." Some of the vices attributed to such Oriental despots were "feeble understanding," "unamiable temper,""debauchery and depravity."[55] This colonial stereotyping was endorsed by early nationalists with pre-existing biases, who embellished and used these categories to glorify Hindu heroes (and heroines) from the past by contrasting them with the inferior 'Other.'

A glorious Hindu nation

Repetitive, dramatic monologues on Rajput honour and chivalry are spouted regularly, mostly by Ratan Singh, who apparently epitomises these virtues. Ratan Singh's respect for women is demonstrated through his acquiescence in Padmavati's audacious decision to show herself, albeit as mirror reflection, to Alauddin, in violation of the prevalent norms of female seclusion. In the early Rajput versions of the legend, the queen had no autonomous voice.[56] This agency given to Padmavati in the film is the legacy of the Bengali *bhadralok*'s interpretation of the narrative, which reflected the changing gender norms in colonial Bengal in the early 20th century.[57] As the country was imagined in feminine terms, it became the task of the flesh and blood women to instil patriotism among the men.[58] In Bengali nationalist interpretations of the legend, the queen came to be attributed some autonomy which she used to uphold the honour of the Hindu nation and its patriarchal codes. The agency given to Bhansali's Padmavati is also used for a similar end.

The narrative device of Alauddin seeing Padmavati's mirror reflection first appeared as one line in Tod's version and has become iconic ever since. Pre-colonial Rajput sources were either completely silent or terse about the Sultan gazing at the queen, since female segregation was a marker of respectability in the Rajput community.[59] The relevance of this social norm has still not fully disappeared. During the film's shooting, the Rajput fundamentalist group Karni Sena which claims Padmavati to be a historical character protested against this scene, complaining that depiction of the Muslim emperor looking at Padmavati's mirror reflection tarnishes her honour. Bhansali has placated this group by obscuring Padmavati`s reflection with the vapours arising from a cup of concoction which she holds in her hand.

Rajput integrity as foil to Muslim dishonesty is advertised in the film through several tropes: Gora and Badal, who occupy significant places in the Rajput versions and die heroic deaths fighting Alauddin's army. Ratan Singh is also made into a tragic hero: he is killed with arrows shot from behind (by Malik Kafur) as he almost wins a sword fight against Alauddin. The defeat of the Rajputs in the battlefield thus turns into a moral victory.

In *Padmaavat* as in *Bajirao Mastani*, colours make political statements. Alauddin and his soldiers always wear black. Alauddin's soldiers are depicted as all Muslim, though imperial armies in medieval India were multi-religious and multi ethnic. The Rajput army, presumed to be all Hindu, turn out as a sea of saffron. The Khilji banner, deep green with a crescent moon, is reminiscent of Pakistan's flag. Such symbolisms were used in early 20th century Bengali versions of the Padmavati legend, which described the battle between the *Pathan*\Tatar soldiers of Alauddin and the Hindu Rajputs with imageries like the crescent moon swallowing the sun.[60] Bhansali seems to follow not only the early nationalist portrayals but also the recent Bollywood trend, where Indian Muslims are portrayed as outsiders whose loyalties seem to belong to a *jihadi* network, the centre of which is Pakistan.[61]

Gender codes for global Bollywood

Padmavati, like Mastani, is introduced to the film as a warrior princess on a hunt. But unlike Mastani and like *Bharat Mata*, Padmavati is never shown to fight. While Mastani is signified as the Other through her active participation in the war, Padmavati, after throwing an arrow which mistakenly hits Ratansen and injures him (metaphorically piercing his heart as well) is never shown in a warrior's attire again.

Contemporary Bollywood films, meant for an audience with global consumerist tastes, even in cases of cultural icons like film stars, currently face a dilemma: while the new Indian

woman is expected to follow the standards prescribed by the global beauty industry, if she by extension follows the "western" sexual and behavioural mores, it would threaten the patriarchal order of the Hindu family, which is an important site of the *Hindutva* ideology. New age Bollywood films have addressed this dilemma by presenting heroines who are svelte and beautiful according to international norms, but whose chastity remains a dominant symbol of the national community. Hence, the present Bollywood heroines look like international super models but they are shown to be completely devoted to the norms of Hindu patriarchal familial order.[62] Padmavati also morphs into a virtuous Rajput wife, wearing resplendent traditional dresses and jewellery that gives her an "ethnic designer" look which is regal but not sexualised.

Mehrunnissa, Alauddin's wife, is the antithesis of Padmavati. She represents the Hindu nationalist stereotype of Muslim women as victimised and oppressed by men of their community and handled with distant respect by Hindu men. Her character is treated more in terms of abstraction.[63]

In the film, Padmavati is given the agency of travelling to Delhi to free her husband, which she justifies with the analogy that the goddess Durga had to come down to earth to fight the demon. This transgression of the prevalent gender code, found only in Tod's version, is temporary and does not threaten the patriarchal Hindu ethos.[64]

After returning to Chittor with her husband, Padmavati reverts to her place in the patriarchal cosmos. She even asks for her husband`s permission to immolate herself, saying: "I cannot even die without your permission."

Representations of traditional festivals in Bollywood films signify a community`s cultural identity and the role of women as preservers of this identity.[65] In this film, Padmavati takes part in a traditional dance in the women's` quarter where the only man present is her

husband. The Rajput queen is thus presented as a virtuous Hindu wife, unsullied by (other) male gaze. The scene of Padmavati playing *Holi* (a Hindu festival) with her husband reinforces this role, as Padmavati touches her husband`s feet in obeisance.

Glorifying death

The act of *sati* from Jayasi's narrative was replaced by *jauhar* in Tod's version. *Sati* literally means a virtuous woman, but it generally refers to a widow who immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre. The British extended the term to the rite itself. Now it denotes both the practice and the practitioner.[66] In pre-colonial times, this practice was seen as a marker of honor of usually elite dynasties or clans. It came to be associated with wifely chastity and devotion by early nationalists, particularly in Bengal. "The final and highest test of the supremacy of Hindu conjugality was the proven past capacity for self-immolation by widows. The sati was an adored nationalist symbol, her figure representing the moment of climax in expositions of Hindu nationalism."[67]

Jauhar or mass immolation was usually performed by Rajput queens and noblewomen in exceptional circumstances, in order to avoid becoming booties to the enemy. This practice probably originated in the course of the internecine rivalries among various Rajput kingdoms that predated Muslim invasion.[68] It had linkage to dynastic status and had spread to other aristocracies during the Mughal period.[69] By the late 19th century, this scorched earth policy was often conflated with sati and construed as Hindu feminine patriotic resistance to sexual aggression, usually from "rapacious Muslims." This issue has a loaded connotation in contemporary India, where *love-jihad*, a supposed campaign by Muslim men to seduce Hindu women, has become a rallying cry of the Hindu right wing to rouse anti-Muslim sentiments.

The elaborate and spectacular *jauhar* scene in the film shows scores of women, dressed in bridal red, moving determinedly towards a raging fire. This scene belies the earlier disclaimer by blatantly commemorating a misogynistic code of honor in which women´s bodies symbolise a community or nation`s honor and self-immolation is validated as an act of preservation of purity and patriotism. In order to render this spectacle an aura of feminine empowerment through an invocation of *Shakti* or feminine power associated with Hindu goddesses, the film shows women defiantly chanting *Jai Bhavani*! (Hail to goddess *Bhavani* or Durga). The invocation of *Shakti* has a special purpose in contemporary *Hindutva* politics. It has been used to mobilise women in electoral constituencies as well as in violent campaigns against Muslims, where women have been very active in recent years.[70]

The film ends with Padmavati's silhouette symbolically entering the fire, the voiceover claiming that because of her heroic act, Padmavati is venerated in India as a goddess. Indeed, there is a *jauhar mela* or celebration of *jauhar* in Chittor every year to commemorate the act of *sati* performed by Rajput women through the ages, among whom Padmavati\Padmini enjoys a special distinction.[71]

The legend of Padmavati, so deeply entrenched in India`s cultural memory, has been used for varied political ends by diverse groups. Bhansali`s *Padmaavat* represents a continuation of this tradition.

Conclusion

The two films have forged narratives that create imaginary pasts on screen which conform to the Hindu nationalist discourse dominating present day India. This article has analysed the different historical contexts—medieval, colonial and post-colonial—that have shaped these narratives. The article has also critically examined the gendered discourse of these

two films that reinvents Hindu masculinity, reiterates colonial stereotypes about Muslim men and infuses them with a contemporary terrorist dimension, and (re)presents the complex ideal of Hindu femininity in a globalised consumer culture.

The dangers of such representations of the past, which do not provide space for adequate nuance or for the complexities of history, cannot be overstated in a country like India, where popular films often act as authenticators of existing prejudices among the audience which can in turn contribute to violent acts targeting socially vulnerable groups. By unravelling the problematic discourses of these films, the article hopes to disseminate awareness of these possible dangers.

Notes

[1] G.Beckerlegge:"Followers of Mohammed, Kalee and Dada Nanuk: The Presence of Islam and South Asian Religions in Victorian Britain." In: *Religion in Victorian Britain. Volume V (Culture and Empire).* Edited by John Wolffe. Manchester and N.Y: Manchester University Press, 1997. 245.

[2] UrviMukhopadhya: *The `Medieval` in Film. Representing a contested time on Indian screen (1920s-1960s).*Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013.3.

[3] Thomas Trautmann: *Aryans and British India*. New Delhi: Yoda Press. 2004. 66-67.

[4] UrviMukhopadhyay, 3.

[5] Ibid.47-48.

[6] Ibid. 94.

[7] Ibid. 61-62.

[8] As Sumita S. Chakravarty shows in: *National identity in Indian popular cinema 1947-1987*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

[9] Ibid. 29.

[10] Meraj Ahmed Mubarki: *Exploring the `Other`: Interfaith marriages in Jodha Akbar and beyond.* In: Journal of Contemporary South Asia. Volume 22, 2014. Issue 3. 255-267. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2014.930419 (accessed 25.6.2017)

[11] On the invocation of Ram as a political instrument, see Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire*. New York and London: Routledge. 2002, 206-207. Also; Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and political imagination in India." Journal of Asian Studies. 52.2. 107-118.

[12] Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire*. 209-212.

[13] This phenomenon has been examined by Sikata Banerjee in: *Gender, Nation and Popular Film in India: Globalizing muscular nationalism.* New York: Routledge, 2017.

[14] Prachi Deshpande: *Creative pasts: Historical memory and identity in Western India 1700-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 82, 93.

[15] Mridula Chari: https://qz.com/575194/historians-know-very-little-about-mastani-or-her-relationship-with-bajirao/ (Accessed 27.7.2017)

[16] Prachi Deshpande. 30-31. The *Peshwayanchi Bakhar*, a kind of popular Maharashtrian folk narrative, played a role in magnifying Bajirao`s military achievements.

[17] Mridula Chari: https://qz.com/575194/historians-know-very-little-about-mastani-or-her-relationship-with-bajirao/

[18] Prachi Deshpande: 42-43.

[19] Varsha S.Shirgaonkar: *Eighteenth century Deccan: Cultural history of the Peshwas*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2010. 12, 14.

[20] V.D.Savarkar: *Hindu Pad-Padshahi*. New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar,1981. 124.

[21] Sikata Banerjee: *Gender, Nation and Popular film in India: Globalizing muscular nationalism*. New York: Routledge, 2017. 53-54.

[22] Sikata Banerjee: *Make me a man! Masculinity, Hinduism and nationalism in India.* New York: Ithaca, State University of New York Press, 2005. 32.

[23] Stewart Gordon: *The Marathas 1600-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 137. In 1728, Bajirao had led a tribute collecting expedition into Rajasthan. However, he did not aggressively pursue tribute collections in Rajasthan probably due to his understanding with Jai Singh of Jaipur. But after Bajirao`s death, Marathas invaded Rajasthan every year.

[24] Prachi Deshpande: 42.

[25] Varsha S.Shirgaonkar: 23.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Rachel Dwyer: *Filming the Gods: Religion and the Indian cinema*. London and New York: Routledge 2006. 9.

[28] James W. Laine: *Shivaji: Hindu king in Muslim India.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 6.

[29] Sumita S. Chakravarty: 13.

[30] Urvi Mukhopadhyay: 63.

[31] Stewart Gordon: 127-129.

[32] Ibid: 128.

[33] Kalyani Chadha and Anandam.P.Kavoori: "Exoticized, marginalised, demonized: The Muslim Other in Indian cinema." In: *Global Bollywood*. Edited by Anandam P.Kavoori, Ashwin Punathakbekar. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 131-145.

[34] Ibid. 134.

[35] Tanika Sarkar: *Hindu wife, Hindu nation. Community, religion and cultural nationalism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001. 43.

[36] Sumita S. Chakravarty: 269-270.

[37] Rachel Dwyer: 116-122.

[38] Sumita S. Chakravarty: 172.

[39] Rachel Dwyer: Page 118.

[40] Tanika Sarkar: Page 256. On the image of the nation as mother goddess, see Shoaib Daniyal: https://scroll.in/article/805247/history-lessons-how-bharat-mata-became-the-code-word-for-a-theocratic-hindu-state (accessed 26.6.2018). Also, Sugata Bose: *The nation as Mother and other visions of nationhood*. Gurgaon: Penguin Viking, 2017. 1-31.

[41] Uma Chakravarty. "Wifehood, Widowhood and Adultery: Female sexuality, surveillance and the state in 18th century Maharashtra" In: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.), 29 (1&2), 1995. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 4.

[42] Sikata Banerjee: *Make me a man*. 2.

[43] Andre Wink: *Land and sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha Swarajya.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.73. Wink claims that Bajirao "made a secret compact with the Nizam which for a time greatly reinforced his position."

[44] Ramya Sreenivasan: *The many lives of a Rajput queen: Heroic pasts in India 1500-1900*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 222-224.The historiography of the *Padmaavat* legend provided here follows the outline provided by Sreenivasan.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Partha Chatterjee: ``The nationalist resolution of the women`s question.`` In *Recasting women: Essays in Indian colonial history.* Edited by Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgars University Press, 1990. 233-253.

[47] Baijayanti Roy: ``Whose Padmavati is it anyway?`` https://www.deccanchronicle.com/sunday-chronicle/cover-story/260317/whose-padmavati-is-it-anyway.html

[48] Sikata Banerjee: *Gender, nation and popular film in India*. 133.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Nicholas F. Gier: *The Origins of Religious Violence: An Asian Perspective.* Lexington: Lexington Books, 2014. 45-66.

[51] https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/khilji-as-villain/article9982669.ece (accessed 27.6.2018)

[52] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34398433(accessed 27.6.2018)

[53] Homosexual relationships seemed to have been a part of romance literature in the Persian Urdu tradition in pre-colonial India. As Scott Kluge notes in: ``Sultan Mahmud`s makeover: Colonial homophobia and the Persian Urdu literary tradition.`` In: Ruth Vinita (edited): *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society.* New York, London: Routledge, 2002. 30-46.

[54] Bollywood`s treatment of gay men has been analysed by Parmesh Shahani, in his article, "The mirror has many faces: The politics of male same sex desire in Bombay and Gulabi Alina." In: *Global Bollywood*.146-163.

[55] Vida D. Scudder (edited): *Macaulay`s essay on Lord Clive*. Boston and New York: Leach, Shewell and Sanborn. 1889. 53-54.

[56] Divya Cheri an: http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-many-padmavatis/article20492672.ece (accessed 27.6.2018)

[57] Ramya Sreenivasan: 222-224.

[58] Tanika Sarkar: 258.

[59] Ramya Sreenivasan: 142-143.

[60] For example, Bengali nationalist authors Kschirodaprasad Vidyavinod (Padmini, 1906) and Abanindranath Tagore (Rajkahini, 1909) provided such descriptions.

[61] Kalyani Chadha and Anandam P.Kavoori: Page 141-142.

[62] Sikata Banerjee: *Gender, nation and popular film in India*. Page 8-11.

[63] Supriya Agawam: "Muslim Women`s identity: On the margins of the nation." In: *Films and feminism: essays in Indian cinema*. Edited by Jabir Jain, SudhaRai.Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002. 92.

[64] Lindsay Harlan*: Religion and Rajput women: The Ethic of protection in contemporary narratives*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992. 184.

[65] Gita Vishwanath: "Saffronising the silver screen: The Right Winged Nineties Film." In: Jasbir Jain, Sudha Rai (edited): *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian cinema*. Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 2002. 42.

[66] Andrea Major (edited): *Sati: A Historical Anthology*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University press. Xix.

[67] Tanika Sarkar: 42.

[68] Ramya Sreenivasan: 185.

[69] Ashis Nandy: "Sati as profit versus sati as spectacle." In*: Sati: the blessing and the curse: The burning of widows in India.* Edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. 165.

[70] Tanika Sarkar: 281.

[71] Lindsay Harlan: 186.

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