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Topic: *Star-Crossed Lovers in Bollywood: Religion and Romance in Bajirao Mastani and Padmaavat*

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#### Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KSK".

Student's Signature:

Date of Submission: 21 May 2019

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*“I lay my life at the sword of thee ... if love is a crime then punish me.”*

*-Queen Mastani, in Bajirao Mastani*

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 General Background**

*Bajirao Mastani* (2015) takes place in late medieval Maharashtra and *Padmaavat* (2018) rekindles a legend of early Rajasthan, both in the era of “Islamic despotism” (Roy, 2018). This was a time of “widespread hostility amongst the Indian Muslims and non-Muslim groups”, when the “Muslim conquest of Hindustan” was ongoing (Aquil, 2012). It is hence beautifully ironic that Sanjay Leela Bhansali retells two romantic tales of this era— one the love story between a Hindu Peshwa and a Muslim princess, the other a story of a Muslim warlord vying to break up two Hindu nobles— given the controversy of interfaith relationships in medieval Hindustan. Upon first glance, it appears that both films have strong, discrete messages regarding Hindu-Islam relations, but is this really the case? Further research into this topic then begs the question: Is religion being used for something more? Utilising Said’s notion of Orientalism, as well as Neoformalism just might help us answer these questions.

### **1.2 Rationale**

The themes in Bhansali’s works are as fantastic as one would imagine them to be; they bear semblance to modern-day societal issues as Bhansali “utilises a historical account to retell a contemporary story” (Gehlawat, 2017). Ever since the era of Islamic despotism, Hindu-Islam relations have been fraught. Perhaps that is why riots sparked in India as protestors took to the streets, opposing the release of *Padmaavat* (2018), for it “feeds into a Hindu nationalist narrative and shows [Alauddin Khilji] as a ruthless marauder”, amidst many other controversies like misrepresenting Queen Padmavati (Bhandari, 2018). On the other hand, whilst *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) idealises a Hindu-Islam relationship, does it not too recycle the same prejudices towards Muslims by having Mastani serve as a courtesan in Pune (a derogatory act imposed on

Mastani by the Rajputs due to her Muslim heritage, despite her title of Princess of Bundelkhand), amongst many other instances?

It should, furthermore, be noted that in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), Mastani was Bajirao's second wife, just as Padmavati was the second woman both Ratan Singh and Alauddin Khilji fell in love with in *Padmaavat* (2018). Falling in love a second time is painted by Bhansali as both an act both fuelled by passionate desire, but also one in which another culture displaces an already pre-existing love in marriages of the same faith. Bhansali truly places a heavy emphasis on religion whilst discussing romance in his films. Hence, through analysing how Bhansali portrays interfaith and non-interfaith relationships, beyond the glitz and glamour of his films, one would be better acquainted with how age-old colonial stereotypes are subtly assimilated within contemporary films, and what auteurs may be trying to get at with such (mis)portrayals.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How does Bhansali portray interfaith and non-interfaith relationships?
2. What are some film mechanisms Bhansali utilises to mould our perceptions of how we perceive characters of different races?
3. In what way does Bhansali, as a Hindu auteur, ‘other’ Muslims in these films?

### **1.4 Thesis Statement**

*Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018) do not merely highlight the impossibility of genuine interfaith relationships in society but rather romanticize and exploit the star-crossed love between Muslims and Hindus so as to craft a romantic film.

## **1.5 Delimitation(s)**

While Bhansali has made sixteen Bollywood films to this day, this paper shall be limited to understanding how religion and romance intertwine in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018). In both films, there are overarching themes of pride, religion and desires and mirrored scenes of *Jauhar* and *Holi* which utilise similar imagery and allusions (Sachdeva, 2018). The two films complement one another, providing greater grounds for intertextual analysis, allowing one to understand how scenes that look the same in both films may postulate differing notions; and how narratives present in both films, may be tweaked style-wise.

While Hindu-Muslim relations may take many forms, for instance wartime alliances, as in the case of Raghav Chetan and Alauddin Khilji in *Padmaavat* (2018); this paper shall solely be focusing on the romantic side of these interfaith relations (which covers not just how love is presented between Muslims and Hindus, but also how this ‘forbidden love’ affects those around them), as well as non-interfaith relations, for both films revolve around a distinguishable duo in love, whether or not of the same religion, whilst the world around them erupts into chaos. The manner in which this timeless love is presented makes a good subject for discussion, especially given the disparity of *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) presenting interfaith relationships as requited love, in contrast to *Padmaavat* (2018) which presents it as unrequited lust.

## **1.6 Significance of Research**

Firstly, it should be noted that Bhansali’s works have been said to “reiterate colonial stereotypes about Muslim men and infuse them with a contemporary terrorist dimension” and “[re]present the complex ideal of Hindu femininity in a globalised consumer culture” (Roy, 2018). Bhansali’s works are a direct vestige of India’s colonial past, but also a manifestation of prevailing prejudices and political reality in society (Baldwin, 2017). However, such

representations provide insufficient room for the nuances of history. With selective representation and bias comes anger as artistic forms in Bhansali's 'Hindu fundamentalist' films are prized over feelings of certain communities. Through unravelling discourses of said films, this paper shall engender these critiques with justifiable evidences from the films, and highlight the consequences of such (mis)portrayals.

Secondly, Indian cinema, as a whole, has been criticised to be a "Cinema of excess", "loosely structured in the fashion of cinema and attractions" (Vasudevan, 2000). Bollywood's almost candylike gorgeousness, along with its trademark dramatizations and romanticization are not unheard of. However, this paper believes that the gorgeousness of the Bollywood "Cinema of excess" has a significance. This paper hence links how dramatizations present in a "Cinema of excess" potentially contributes to the conception of 'the Other'. Consequently, through othering, the cultures of certain individuals could be watered down and/or debased. For instance, though the elaborate song-dance sequence '*Gaji Biji Gola Ayinadhi*' from *Padmaavat* (2018), Khilji is, along with his Muslim-majority army who partake in the dance with him, inadvertently othered by being presented as wildly uncouth, a villain in Padmavati's story, and not a lovestruck suitor of hers, even though he was one too. This notion shall be expounded upon further in Chapter 4 of this paper.

### **1.7 Limitation(s)**

One, this paper only analyses the relation between religion and romance in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018), and is thus not a complete analysis of said films, which deal with other themes such as pride and desires as stated by Sachdeva (2018), which are also worthy of analysis. How religion and romance intertwine in these two films of Bhansali's, and

the theme of love itself, cannot be said to be the sole theme of both films. Thus, this paper does not cover other possibly significant aspects of the films.

Two, this paper selectively examines two of sixteen films Bhansali has previously produced and is not speculative of Bhansali as a director overall. Instead, this paper examines two of Bhansali's more controversial films to understand what it is about them that results in specific implications and audiences' reactions.

## **2 Literature Review**

This chapter introduces what researchers have said pertaining to the film culture of Bollywood as well as brings forth two theories pertaining to this paper— Orientalism and Neoformalism.

### **2.1 Bollywood as a ‘Cinema of excess’**

When one thinks of film in India, their mind immediately goes to ‘Bollywood’, a term describing Indian Cinema that gained wide currency in the last decade or so. Originally a word of “unconcealed derogatory intent”, over the years, it has come to assume a “more and more neutral stance, appearing as a term of description rather than disapprobation” (Dissanayake, 2004). Nevertheless, popular Hindi cinema has been cited as a “Cinema of excess”, one of corporeal and affective excess.

According to Dirks (2016), the term “Cinema of excess” is derived from “Extreme Cinema”—a genre of film distinguished by excessive sex and violence. Asian Cinema’s rising prominence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century contributed to the growth of this genre, branching it out into various subgenres. One example would be the “Cinema of excess”, encompassing films that need not necessarily concentrate heavily on elements of gore and bloodshed, but are instead, simply be overly-grand and gilded. Indeed, Bollywood does fulfil these requirements. It is an attraction, “yet another competing element, along with song picturizations, item numbers, stunts, dialogue, and special effects” (Bose, 2013).

Additionally, Bollywood’s hallmark dramatizations and exaggerations are meant to thrill and excite, to add on to its ostentatious splendour. Yet, Bollywood’s means of glamorisation, especially of relationships, can lead to unrealistic expectations of love amongst other misconceptions as Bollywood films. This departure from realism means Bollywood films are not be a genuine reflection of our contemporary society. However, as previously mentioned in

Chapter 1.6, this paper aims to rebut this notion that vital themes (such as love in the context of this paper) are lost in Bollywood's excessive extravagance. This shall be achieved through highlighting how Bollywood's own form of Orientalism does serve a purpose in enriching films, as well as how it contributes to the theme of love.

## 2.2 Film Analysis

This section explores the concept of 'the Other' as well as Neoformalism which are crucial elements in understanding the portrayal of star-crossed love that draws on stereotypes of culture and class.

### 2.2.1 *Orientalism* (Said, 1978)

Edward Said (1978) is recognised by literary critics to be a notable theoretician of Postcolonialism, a subject discussed in his book *Orientalism*. Said argues that colonisation itself comes about due to an "uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political, power intellectual, power cultural, power moral." (p.12).

"Power cultural" is an important aspect as to why Asian and Middle Eastern countries were oftentimes colonised. In the context of medieval Hindustan, a power asymmetry developed between Muslims and Hindus due to different practices and ways of life, such that bluebloods of both religions began clashing over territories to expand their empires and exert dominance over the other (Aquil, 2012). At the start of *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), this is especially evident as Bajirao is made a Peshwa to continue the Maratha Empire's expansion into countries like Afghan, and in the process, killing many Muslims, whom the Hindu Rajputs saw to be their

enemies. Indeed, Said's theory interweaves with the narratives of Bhansali's films, already signifying that Orientalism plays a huge role in shaping Bhansali's films.

However, not all colonisations have solely been spurred in the pursuit of territorial expansions, as Said writes, there were “pre-Romantic and Romantic representations of the Orient as exotic locale” (p.118). This perceived notion of Oriental beauty is part of the mental act of colonization. In fact, in *Padmaavat* (2018), it was Khilji's obsession with Padmavati's beauty that led to him invading Chittoor so as to find her in what he called “a war in the name of beauty”. Thus, countries oftentimes experienced colonization such that men could get hold of lusty women, renowned for their flawless beauty. However, in the case of Hindustan, intermarriage was frowned upon due to prevailing prejudices and the caste system of India then and now, as evident in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015)— whereby Mastani's royal status does not discount the fact that she is half-Muslim. Because of this, soldiers who served as colonizers and women from the countries colonized oftentimes merely had frivolous affairs. However, it is when these flings turn into a full-on love and commitment, as was the case between Bajirao and Mastani, that things get interesting.

Oftentimes when this happens, society frowns upon or even outright rejects these lovers. It is then that the notion of ‘the Other’ emerges, with ‘the Other’ being an individual/group/entity (of a subordinate social category) who helps inform an opposing community’s image through them being rejected as a member of society. Indeed, the action of ‘othering’ an individual is based on conscious or unconscious assumptions that a certain identified group poses different characteristics unorthodox in society; in doing so, ‘the Other’ would have an own sense of identity created for and imposed upon them (p.205), and potentially loses a part of themselves by living through the eyes of others.

Within the films the author is analysing, it is Muslims who are predominantly being othered through the perspective of a Hindu auteur. Through watching the films, audiences' understanding of who a Muslim is would hence be: he/she who is not Hindu. In fact, in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), it is Mastani, not Kashibai, who calls herself Bajirao's "mistress" and not "wife", highlighting that she continues seeing herself as someone inferior to Kashibai due to her religion and differences.

More significantly, this paper shall be adapting Orientalism such that it is not necessarily 'the West' that conquers 'the East', but rather colonies within 'the East' itself that invade one another in their pursuits of territorial expansions. By reading the films through this lens, it tells us something about the lens too: that being Said's postulations are a universal theory, that colonisation manifests between groups with power and groups without power, and is unbound by one's race. In fact, Bhansali himself can be viewed as a coloniser for now, he has the power to reshape history and confirm existing biases in society through changing chronicled history on his own accord.

In hindsight, the primary contribution of Orientalism would be to serve to understand how and why Bhansali, as a Hindu auteur, 'others' Muslims in his films, as well as place driving factors of colonialism in the context of the films.

### **2.2.2 Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996)**

In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, Bordwell and Carroll (1996) propose the theory of Neoformalism, which postulates "the engagement of emotion in the context of an aesthetic representation" helps in "defamiliarization" (p.134). "[D]efamiliarization", in this case, means that through the manipulation of the viewers' emotions, formulaic objects and personae in films can be twisted to enhance the viewers' perceptions of the familiar. Specifically, viewer's

emotions are manipulated through the incorporation of “cinematic apparatus which so readily deceives spectators” (p.533) in films. Cinematic devices like camerawork, lighting and editing guide viewers’ perceptions towards salient narratives the director wants to emphasise, through rewriting how they perceive the world around them to be.

For instance, one of the controversies surrounding *Padmaavat* (2018) would be the fact that Khilji has been repeatedly “defamiliarized” throughout the film. Most audiences would know Khilji as a Muslim warlord. However, through Bhansali manipulating his identity, audiences begin to lose sight of Khilji as a king, but instead, see him as a barbarian and womanizer, dehumanising him.

As Bordwell and Carroll (1996) move on to write, the spectator “would thus be hard-pressed to resist the apparently super-real images and sounds presented as their only stimuli in this hermetic environment” (p.535).

Processes of “defamiliarization” are further accentuated in a “Cinema of excess” as the very gorgeousness and vast excessiveness of the scenes would mean audiences would be too absorbed in soaking up each scene to critically evaluate and question the ethics of presenting a scene or a figure in a certain light.

Neoformalism is hence pivotal to this paper as it provides a platform for scene-by-scene analyses to comprehend how even the smallest of details used in the staging of a film can help shape the film-goers cognitive processes while perceiving the film.

### **3 Methodology**

In order to examine how Bhansali presents the relationship between religion and romance through interfaith and non-interfaith marriages in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018), this paper, shall adopt one literary and one film theory as scaffolds for the following research. These theories are Orientalism and Neoformalism respectively. An important point to note is that the paper will toggle between said modes of investigation so as to cover as much breadth and depth as possible, while providing a meaningful research.

In fact, 12 scenes from both films were selected for analysis— including landmark scenes contributing to the portrayal (which orientate viewers towards their perception of the ‘forbidden romance’ between Hindus and Muslims) as well as scenes analogous to each other that be contrasted to draw out the similarities and/or differences of both films.

Specifically, the paper utilises Orientalism to understand classism in the films through analysing how Muslims are ‘othered’ by Hindus, as well us understand what spurs cities within ‘the East’ to colonise one another.

Neoformalism provides the paper with frameworks guiding the analysis of cinematographic details (mise-èn-scenes, camerawork, lighting...). It serves to establish a link between theoretical concepts of Orientalism and how scenes created by Bhansali fulfil Said’s postulations.

## **4 Discussion and Analysis**

This chapter will be targeted at the analysis of how religion and romance intertwine in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018) from three different angles: the othering of Muslims, consequences of falling in love, and star-crossed romances.

### **4.1 The Othering of Muslims**

In both films, Muslims are othered, and are presented to displace pre-existing Hindu-Hindu relationships.

#### **4.1.1.1 The Curse of Mastani**



*Fig 1&2. In Bajirao Mastani (2015), Bhanu curses Kashibai, saying they shall both lose their husbands.*

From the beginning of *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), Mastani is hinted to be a curse whom befalls Kashibai, Bajirao's first wife. When we are first introduced to Kashibai, we are also introduced to Bhanu (Kashibai's childhood friend), who brings the ashes of her husband Bajirao allegedly killed. She places a curse on Kashibai, stating that that she too, like Bhanu, would soon lose her husband and pine for his love.

Mastani does not appear in the film yet, but when she does, she is inadvertently othered as, to audiences, it is Mastani whom displaces Bajirao and Kashibai's marriage and pre-existing love. It is also arguable that Mastani is "defamiliarized", even objectified, as audiences would view her as a curse who befalls upon Bajirao and steals him from Kashibai.

#### **4.1.1.2 Alauddin Khilji, a Barbarian?**



*Fig 3. One of the most striking scenes of Padmaavat (2018) would be that of Khilji eating meats in his burnt tent.*

Throughout *Padmaavat* (2018), Khilji is distinctly othered by Bhansali. He is not a gentlemanly lover who woos Padmavati, but is, rather, a brute and barbarian, a third wheel in Padmavati and Ratnasimha's love, as Mastani was presented by Bhansali in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015). In fact, it can be said that Khilji is defamiliarized, for most would know him as a king. However, now they see him as a gruesome, frightening savage who wants to disrupt Padmavati and Ratnasimha's relationship.

#### 4.1.2 “Pinga” and Mastani’s Identity



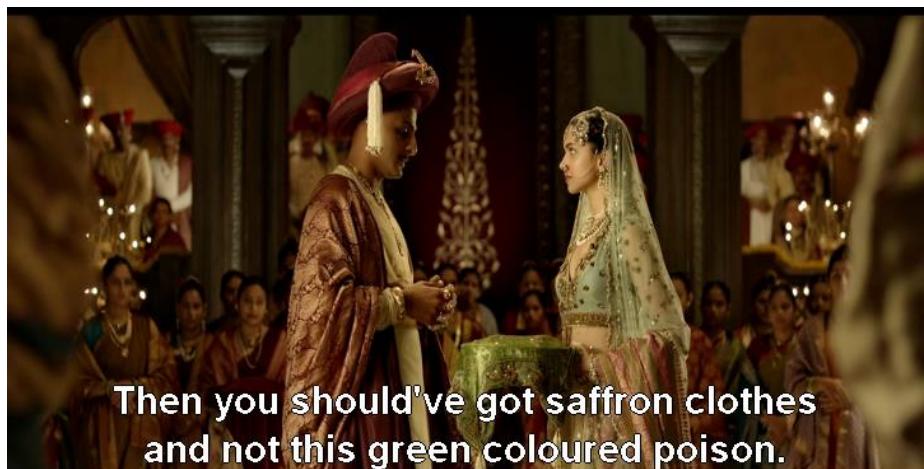
Fig 4. Mastani joins the dance in “Pinga” from *Bajirao Mastani* (2015).

As Mastani enters the scene of “Pinga”, there is a distinct segregation between her and the rest of the Hindu women, hinting she is treated differently due to her Muslim lineage. It was Kashibai whom invited Mastani to dance in “Pinga” and while this invitation was meant to be one of a dance battle, it is evident that as the dance progresses, Mastani does not dance on her own accord, but rather, it is Kashibai who guides her to follow, to conform to the dance. Mid-way through the dance, the two women are already moving in perfect harmony.



*Fig 5. Mastani and Kashibai pose mid-way through the song “Pinga” as the song breaks.*

Fig 4 is displays noteworthy chorography for Mastani is seen to lay at the feet of Kashibai, suggesting subservience, and consequently, the fact that Mastani is below Kashibai in the hierarchy of the royal's system, even though both women are wed to Bajirao.



*Fig 6. Mastani othered for wearing green to Kashibai's baby shower.*

However, the most striking thing in the whole of “Pinga” is that Mastani chooses to wear a red saree. Previously, Mastani was denied entry to Kashibai’s wedding shower as she wore a green saree. She was othered, and utilising Said’s lens, it can be said that an identity was formulated for Mastani, for a Muslim, and that is a Muslim is one who wears green. Bhansali too defamiliarizes the colour green to associate it with Muslims. He connects colours to religions, in other words.



*Fig 7. Bajirao’s mother handing Mastani red robes of dishonour.*

Yet Mastani refused to wear red as even before this, she was given red robes of a courtesan to wear (linking to Said’s idea that individuals of the Orient are othered due to their sensuality and sexuality). She still had pride then, but through the course of the film, through being shunned by society, this pride ebbed away as Mastani was desperate to find some form of acceptance. In the end, as Mastani chooses to wear a red saree in Pinga, it can be said that she is trying to break away from Bhansali’s proposed visage of a Muslim. In doing so, she discards her ‘Muslim-ness’, trying to become Hindu by choosing to wear red as she believes a Hindu should. Once again, defamiliarization occurs as audiences do not see Mastani as a Muslim

anymore, but rather a Hindu, or at least someone trying to be a Hindu. Through this, Mastani's otherness comes to the fore as a contrast to Kashibai, the perfect Hindu wife of Bajirao.

It is thus impossible for genuine interfaith relationships in society between Muslims and Hindus as Muslims are predominantly othered, and as such relationships would mean having one party to give up their own identity as they are forced to conform with society.

#### 4.1.2 Romanticising Ghoomar



*Fig 8. Padmavati dancing Ghoomar in Padmaavat (2018) for Ratnasimha.*

Despite the fact that “Goomar” is not performed by a Muslim, the author still chose to include the song-dance routine here as “Ghoomar” is a clear way as to how even Hindus like Padmavati can be othered in Bollywood. Othering in Bollywood predominantly manifests in song-dance routines as these dances orientalise and exoticify individuals, especially due to Bollywood’s overconcentration on traditional elements of the Indian culture.

Traditionally, Ghoomar is a folk dance performed by Rajasthani communities, performed by the common people. This is what makes “Ghoomar” so controversial, for a Rajput queen’s

legacy is tarnished as she is performing the dance of the commoners. Ghoomar is also traditionally a dance performed to honour the goddess of knowledge, Saraswathi. However, Bhansali's "Ghoomar" does not serve this purpose. It is romanticised and meant to be a flirtatious gesture on Padmavati's part to Ratnasimha, and as the song's lyrics do not correspond to that of traditional folk songs. Padmavati is hence othered as she is presented as she who departs from culture, and she who takes away meaning from a dance.

However, why Bhansali chose to defy social politics and have Padmavati dance "Ghoomar" is quite significant. "Ghoomar" is meant to be a dance capturing Padmavati's love of her husband. "Ghoomar" is significant as Bhansali needed such a scene in *Padmaavat* (2018) to romanticise such pure, beautiful love and juxtapose it to the madness of Khilji's obsession with Padmavati. Bhansali hence can be said to exploit love in his films for he twists culture too.

## 4.2 Consequences of Falling in Love

The pernicious ramifications of a Muslim and Hindu in love, as spun up by Bhansali, reaffirms the impossibility of such interfaith relationships.

### 4.2.1 The manifestation of violence

This paper opened by situating the films in medieval Hindustan, when there were prevailing prejudices between Hindus and Muslims. Hence, interfaith relationships were widely frowned upon as no one could bring themselves to see that "love has no religion" [to quote from *Bajirao Mastani* (2015)]. Indeed, Bhansali presents interfaith couples of that time to face violence from society.

In *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) this violence is brought upon Mastani, a Muslim, by the Brahmins. Ironically, the attack on Mastani occurs on the night of Ganesh's prayer, a night of holiness.

The song “Gajanana” continually switches between Mastani and Kashibai. It shows them moving in sync even though they are apart from one another. [e.g. As Kashibai opens the doors of the prayer room, Mastani bursts through doors of Mastani Mahal as assassins chase her.]



*Fig 9&10. Mastani fighting against her assassins and Kashibai fighting against her conscience in Bajirao Mastani (2015).*

It is as such that Mastani is inadvertently othered to Kashibai. Kashibai seems to be the perfect Hindu wife, who personifies Hindustan. She is by her husband's side during Ganesh's prayer. Meanwhile, even though Mastani attempts to defend herself from the Brahmins, she utilises violence, and in doing so, undoubtedly destroys the sanctity surrounding Ganesh's prayer. Meanwhile, in *Padmaavat* (2018) the violence incurred is vice versa, on Hindus by Muslim.

This is quite interesting on its own as Bhansali is considered by many to be a Hindu fundamentalist, so having him put Muslims in any sort of position of power is rare.

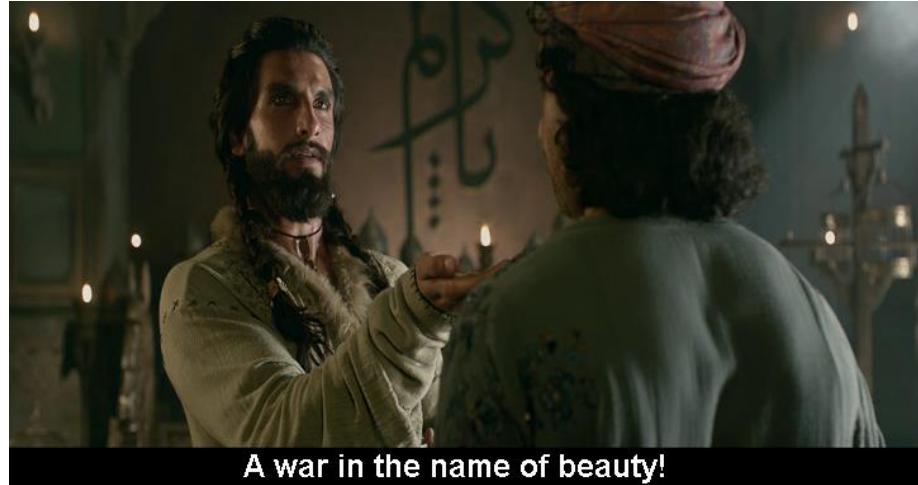


Fig 11. Khilji declaring war in Padmaavat (2018).

However, as *Padmaavat* (2018) progresses, it is abundantly clear that the power dynamics between Khilji and Padmavati flips around. The Rajput queen fights Khilji's violence with more violence of her own.

As defined by Said (1978), colonisations may be spurred due to the fact that individuals of the Orient are prized for their beauty. In *Padmaavat* (2018), Padmavati is objectified by Khilji, who wages a war to 'win' her from Ratnasimha. In the long run, the resulted in the whole Rajput population of Chittoor dying, the men at the hands of Khilji's soldiers and the women by performing *Jauhar*.

Such is the impossibility of genuine interfaith relationships, in the eyes of Bhansali, as they evoke violence and bloodshed.

#### 4.2.2 Goodbye, love

Aside from just violence, another key argument Bhansali makes to disrepute interfaith relationships would be that they could erode pre-existing love. Given that Mastani and Padmavati are both the second woman Bajirao and Khilji fell in love with respectively, it is handy for Bhansali to exploit this historical detail to make the claim that all interfaith relationships displace pre-existing romances.



*Fig 12. Kashibai sets fire to a cloth that captures the reflections of Bajirao and Mastani together in Bajirao Mastani (2018).*

In *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), Bhansali would have intended for us to fall in love with Bajirao and Mastani, who are together throughout the film despite societal pressure. However, most audience members fell in love with Kashibai, Bajirao's first wife who puts aside her pride and

prejudices to let her husband be happy. It hence breaks audiences' hearts to see lovely Kashibai look at her husband sharing an intimate moment with Mastani without telling her where he went. Kashibai is certainly "defamiliarized", audiences do not see her as Bajirao's first wife anymore. Now, it is not Mastani, but Kashibai who is a third wheel in Bajirao and Mastani's strong, robust love.

To tie this back to the thesis, Kashibai, now a third wheel, hinders Mastani and Bajirao's love from blossoming. As Kashibai and Mastani sing in "Pinga", Bajirao will never be able to wholeheartedly love either one of his wives; he shall always be held back by his love of the other. Hence *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) portrays interfaith relationships being unable to take flight as they displace pre-existing romances.

*Padmaavat* (2018) shares a similar sentiment to this.



Fig 13. Mehrunisa speaks to Khilji after setting Ratnasimha and Padmavati free in Padmaavat (2018).

Khilji's wife, Mehrunisa, demonstrates loyalty to her husband, Khilji throughout the film. She stays by his side even after he murdered her father, even as he constructed his own harem... However, the breaking-point was when he waged a war to kidnap Padmavati. Mehrunisa's love for her husband, which had been diminishing steadily, completely evaporated. She goes behind

Khilji's back to set Padmavati and Ratnasimha free, defying her husband (which in patriarchal Hindustan was considered unacceptable).

Hence, in both cases of Kashibai and Mehrunisa, their husbands' interfaith relationships with another women stirred jealousy, anger and sadness, diminishing their love for them.

#### 4.3 Star-Crossed Romances

In both films' ending scenes, Bhansali does something scary. He highlights the impossibility of interfaith relationships by glorifying death. He plays on the idea of star-crossed romances—love that inadvertently ends in quietus.

In *Padmaavat* (2018), Padmavati and all the Rajput women immolate themselves, displaying a resistance to Khilji. Yet at the same time, this demeans interfaith relationships, for a whole community of Hindu woman would rather kill themselves than be seen by a Muslim man.



*Fig 14&15. The Rajput women perform Jauhar in Padmaavat (2018).*

*Jauhar* is romanticised—the elaborate scene shows scores of women, dressed in saffron, moving towards a raging, almost unreal, fire. The phantasmal nature of the fire only adds to glory that the Rajput women associate with their deaths, a notion reaffirmed as the camera itself zeros-in on Padmavati smiling as she nears death (for the Rajput Queen knows that she has won the war even if Khilji won the battle). Tragedy is portrayed to be stunning and mesmerising; and that is unethical.



*Fig 16. The Rajput women invoke Shakti.*

Furthermore, before *Jauhar*, the Rajput women are seen chanting “Jai Bhavani!” (“Hail Durga!”). Whilst it can be interpreted that they are summoning courage before self-immolation, this act of chanting the name of a Hindu goddess reaffirms their allegiance with the Hinduism, and not Islam. Padmavati’s ‘Hindu-ness’ is once again reaffirmed in this scene. Through the Rajput women’s chanting, Padmavati is defamiliarized to be an incarnation of the goddess Durga. She is the Goddess Queen. *Padmaavat* (2018) ends off with Khilji yelling at a shut door,

as the silhouette of Padmavati burns in the fire. This ending scene reaffirms the whole message the film has been trying to convey thus far: love between a Muslim and Hindu can never happen.



*Fig 17&18. The war Khilji waged to get a glimpse of Padmavati was pointless.*

Another important thing to note is that in the final few scenes of *Padmaavat* (2018) constantly alternate to and fro between Padmavati performing *Jauhar* and Khilji battling the Rajput women.

The same phenomenon occurs in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015). As the film's narrator recites a prophecy previously dictated in the film, the scene constantly flickers between the tower where Mastani is imprisoned and the lake where Bajirao battles his hallucinations.

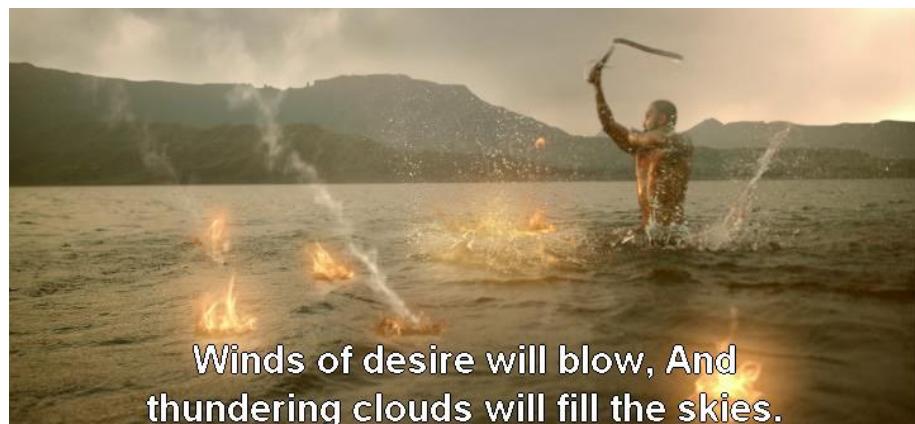
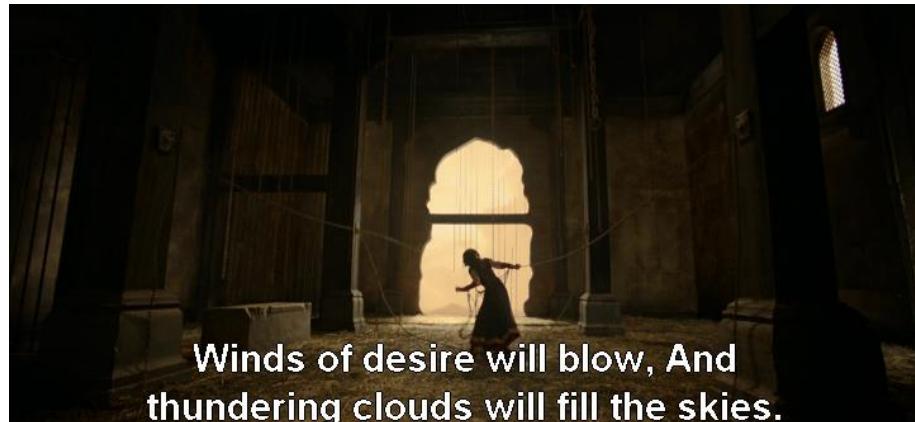


Fig 19&20. *Bajirao and Mastani are one and the same* in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015).

Two lovers in a struggle for their lives are defamiliarized and are presented as the one and same. This romanticises Bajirao and Mastani's relationship, as they move in sync with one another despite being miles apart. In other words, they are meant for each other.

However, it is arguable Bhansali exploits their love, so as to craft a romantic film. The struggles for their lives are romanticised and presented as almost fantastic. Aside from just moving in

sync, the two die concurrently. This adds elements of ingenuity and falseness in their romance, which as mentioned in Chapter 2.1, is quite commonplace in Bollywood. To a certain degree, through such unrealism, their interfaith romance (which captivated audiences thus far) loses its meaning and truth, and becomes purely fantastic.



*Fig 21&22. The deaths of Bajirao and Mastani.*

Bajirao might have won numerous battles, but he could not win the one he fought for Mastani. The duo could only be married in death, and this notion brings out the impossibility of interfaith relationships in a predominantly Hindu society.

## 5 Conclusion

*Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018) exemplify the unlikelihood of genuine interfaith relationships in medieval Hindustan, one reason being as Muslims are othered, and are presented to lose their identity and heritage in interfaith relationships. However, extensive research does tell us it is equally likely for Hindus to be othered in Bollywood's song-dance-routines, a manifestation of a "Cinema of Excess". A "Cinema of Excess" hence bears some value for it can be used to help shape actions of othering. However, even then, the othering of Hindus does not disrepute relationships as much as how the othering of Muslims does so.

Furthermore, Bhansali does exploit Hindu-Muslim romances through romanticising and glorifying death. The forbidden nature of interfaith relationships, the manifestation of violence and the erosion of pre-existent romances all serve to highlight the impossibility of interfaith relationships.

Additionally, romanticization and othering and even defamiliarization are accentuated with cinematographic techniques: primarily colour palettes, mise-èn-scenes, and camerawork.

There are two areas in which further research can expound upon. Firstly, as these two films are based off historical sources, they could be studied in tandem with said sources to understand how certain departures from history enriches the theme of romance. Secondly, Bollywood films could be contrasted with Western films dealing with the Orient such as *Miss Saigon* (2016) to understand if directors of the East and West share similar sentiments when it comes to the portrayal of interfaith relationships.

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