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## **Retelling of Padmavati: A Comparative Study of Anuja Chandramouli's Novel Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Film Padmaavat**

**Priti Vats**  
TGT English,  
Rajkiya Pratibha Vidyalaya,  
Department of Education, New Delhi.

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### **Abstract:**

The stories of Rajputs are one of the most remarkable legends in the history of Rajasthan and constitute an integral part of India. Rajputana refers to the land of Rajputs, the descendants of Hindu warriors of North India, and includes major regions of Rajasthan. In the history of Rajasthan, Rajputs are known for their valour, chivalry, and self-esteem. Even, Rajput women have been portrayed as courageous which makes Rajasthan history striking. They followed their husband in life as well as in death. Even today, Rajasthan proudly sings of the sacrifices that they made for their land by their brave act of self-immolation. One such courageous queen was Padmini, also known as Padmavati, a significant subject of Rajput folklore and Rajputana traditions. Padmini or Padmavati was the queen of the Mewar kingdom (circa 13th or 14th century); married to King Rawal Ratan Singh. She was the daughter of King Gandharvsen of Sinhala and the second wife of King Rawal Ratan Singh. It is believed that Queen Padmavati the epitome of beauty, intelligence, and bravery, chose to commit Jauhar (self-immolation) rather than fall into the hands of the enemy Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi. Many medieval texts mention her chivalrous act of committing Jauhar. Some historians believed that she was a fictional character created by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, however, she is a legendary figure, and over some time she has become a historical figure too. She has captivated readers and audiences with her unforgettable sacrifice and has become a precedent for many generations. She is presented as a strong female with unbeatable courage that created a buzz and gained the attention of many writers, novelists, and cine directors all around the world. Correspondingly, there have been several novels on Queen Padmavati, such as Anuja Chandramouli's Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen (2017), B. K. Karkra's Rani Padmini: The Heroine of Chittor (2009), Ramchandra Shukla's Padmavati ki Katha (2018) and a few more. Likewise, a few cinematic adaptations are Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Padmaavat (2018),

Jaswant Jhaveri's Maharani Padmini (1959), and Ch. Narayan Murthy's Chittor Rani Padmini (1963). The research paper, thus, would take a look at the character of Padmavati in the novel, Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen, and film, Padmaavat, from a comparative perspective. It would critically analyse the representation of Queen Padmavati in the novel and the movie from a feminist angle. It would further bring out the semiotic interpretation of Queen Padmavati in a contemporary context.

**Keywords: Jauhar, Ideological State apparatuses, Semiotic Interpretation.**

## **Introduction**

The stories of Rajputs are one of the most remarkable legends in the history of Rajasthan and constitute an integral part of India. Rajputana refers to the land of Rajputs, the descendants of Hindu warriors of North India, and includes major regions of Rajasthan. In the history of Rajasthan, Rajputs are known for their valour, chivalry, and self-esteem. Even, Rajput women have been portrayed as courageous which makes Rajasthan history striking. They followed their husband in life as well as in death. Even today, Rajasthan proudly sings of the sacrifices that they made for their land by their brave act of self-immolation. One such courageous queen was Padmini, also known as Padmavati, a significant subject of Rajput folklore and Rajputana traditions. Padmini or Padmavati was the queen of the Mewar kingdom (circa 13th or 14th century); married to King Rawal Ratan Singh. She was the daughter of King Gandharvsen of Sinhala and the second wife of King Rawal Ratan Singh. It is believed that Queen Padmavati the epitome of beauty, intelligence, and bravery, chose to commit Jauhar (self-immolation) rather than fall into the hands of the enemy Alauddin Khilji, The Sultan of Delhi. Many medieval texts mention her chivalrous act of committing Jauhar. Some historians believed that she was a fictional character created by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, however, she is a legendary figure, and over some time she has become a historical figure too. She has captivated readers and audiences with her unforgettable sacrifice and has become a precedent for many generations. She is presented as a strong female with unbeatable courage that created a buzz and gained the attention of many writers, novelists, and cine directors all around the world. Correspondingly, there have been several novels on Padmavati, such as Anuja Chandramouli's Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen (2017), B. K. Karkra's Rani Padmini: The Heroine of Chittor (2009), Ramchandra Shukla's Padmavati ki Katha (2018) and a few more. Likewise, a few cinematic adaptations are Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Padmaavat (2018), Jaswant Jhaveri's Maharani Padmini (1959), and Ch. Narayan Murthy's Chittor Rani Padmini

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### **The Representation of Padmavati in Anuja Chandramouli's Novel *Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen***

Women's writing allows them to express and release deep-seated emotions and desires among women. She has frequently been portrayed as less worthy, passive, and emotional beings in the patriarchal society. One cannot deny that many classical writings have traditionally depicted her as an object of beauty, submissiveness, and delicateness, to break this convention, women writers have frequently felt compelled to write their own stories to challenge and subvert these representations. Additionally, a greater emphasis has been placed on diverse and empowering representations that emphasize women's strength, intelligence, and diversity. Anuja Chandramouli's novel *Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen* shares the story of Queen Padmavati, who holds significant cultural value in Rajasthan's history. Chandramouli not only unearthed the protagonist, Queen Padmavati but also exhibited other female characters in a significant way. As a gyno reader, one interprets the contemporary female characters possessed by every female in a patriarchal society. In Chandramouli's novel *Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen* one could see the exaggeration of beauty as one of its major themes. Chandarmouli presented Queen Padmavati as the epitome of beauty and as a conventional aspect of beauty in its true sense, "Her natural complexion was so fine and flawless; it was an ornament in itself. Beauty like her need no enhancement. Her translucent skin gave a certain lustre, leaving aglow with radiance" (13). On the contrary, Malika Jahan, Jalaluddin Khilji's daughter and Allaudin's wife, was not so beautiful, "She was no great beauty but an expert in disguising her flaws. Her most effective cosmetic aids included worms, snake venom, and goat blood. Even the red dye she used to paint her lips with was extracted from a rare bloom that was toxic to the touch." (Chandramouli 10) Malika Jahan used the unconventional aspect to beautify herself which challenged the traditional norms and celebrated uniqueness. This includes embracing unconventional methods to beautify their body and to encourage self-acceptance, allowing individuals to express their authentic selves. A woman in a patriarchal society is always judged by her beauty, and she manifests it in different ways to justify her identity in society, whereas beauty is a subjective and multifaceted concept that can be

manifested in various forms, from natural to artificial, from kindness to inner qualities. Queen Padmavati was beautiful and confident that she had no insecurity or fear of losing her husband to anyone, whereas Nagmati, although King Rawal Ratan Singh's chief queen, felt extremely uncomfortable after losing him to Padmavati, "Fear, envy, and insecurity escalate to the point when her skeptics become more threatening than others. She enlisted the help of unscrupulous, dark magical beings to damage Padmavati's beauty." (Chandramouli 95) The conversation between Queen Padmavati and Queen Nagmati (Chapter 9) 'Jauhar' clearly depicts the women's vulnerability to affected by negative emotions. Although, both of them were queens, beautiful, and in positions of authority, but they could not save themselves from the basic female characters of fear, jealousy, and insecurity. Queen Nagmati, King Rawal's first wife, "who had decided, she loved him only after losing him to Padmavati, was broken-hearted and refused to be comforted no matter how much Ratan tried to pacify her expensive gifts." (Chandramouli 95) Chandramouli has presented the basic female emotions of jealousy and insecurity, critically. In Indian culture, it is prominent that a person, an idea, or entity is worshipped as God or Goddess. This process of evolving a human being into a god or goddess is called 'Deification'. Chandramouli's Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen has ample references where Rani Padmavati is treated as a Goddess. Queen Padmavati is paired with many Indian goddesses. In the opening of the narrative, her mother affectionately calls her 'blessed with the spirit of Durga Mata herself' (Chandramouli 15). At the royal procession the townspeople, 'enthusiastic folks in the crowds showered her with flowers, comparing her with Goddess Lakshmi' (Chandramouli 57). "On auspicious occasions the groom's female relatives visited her daily, bearing gifts, and Padmavati was displayed to them in the guise of every single one of the 1008 manifestations of Goddess Lakshmi" (Chandramouli.60). At the time of Jauhar, 'The women of Chittor tore out their hair as grief got the better of them. They threw caution to the winds, and one after the other, they threw themselves into the flames with reckless abandon, Padmavati's name on their lips (Chandramouli 212). The women involved did not take their husbands' names or any god's name; on the other hand, they followed in the footsteps of Queen Padmavati. Queen Padmavati has a parallel connotation to 'Kannagi' or 'Kannaki Amman', a legendary character from the Tamil epic *Śilappadikāram*, The Jewelled Anklet. 'Kannagi' is a virtuous and iconic figure known for seeking justice for her husband, Kovalan, who was executed. Kannaki's story is a central theme in Tamil literature and culture, symbolizing the pursuit of justice and the strength of a woman's character. Similarly, in Rajasthan, Queen Padmavati is revered as the Goddess of Chastity. At Chittorgarh Fort, there is a temple where the idol of Queen Padmavati, along with Queen Karnavati and Queen Phoolkawar, is still

worshipped on auspicious days. We can further link 'Padmavati', Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the 'Übermensch', or Superman. In the book, *The Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), Nietzsche's Superman is a mythical figure who overcomes all barriers to attain his or her goals, in essence, it represents strength. Queen Padmavati represents her strength throughout the novel and finally becomes Nietzsche's 'Übermensch' by accepting an excruciating demise to protect her honour from adversaries and become a superhuman being for many married women in Rajasthan.

### **The Cinematic Representation of Padmavati in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Film Padmaavat**

Bollywood, or Indian cinema, is a dynamic and vibrant film industry. It is the world's largest film-producing industry. Bollywood films are known for their vibrant, eloquent sets, elaborate songs, and dance sequences and have an extensive variety of genres that involve romance, drama, action, and comedy. The top directors in Bollywood capture the attention of the masses by choosing subjects that create controversies in society. Genres like epic, classical, and historical themes are popular among contemporary directors and audiences. Sanjay Leela Bhansali is a well-known director of Bollywood-directed *Padmaavat* (2018) in Indian cinema. *Padmaavat* is a historical drama film based on Queen Padmavati, a legendary queen known for her beauty, intelligence, and courage; starring top Bollywood actors like Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh, and Shahid Kapoor. This movie created a buzz for its expensive sets, vibrant costumes, and outstanding performances. Over the years, the epic of Queen Padmavati has been adopted and narrated in various forms, including plays, films, and TV shows, but the film '*Padmaavat*' is a notable adaptation of the epic poem written by Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi in the 16th century. Jayasi's work is not a historical account but a work of fiction that is a blend of love, sacrifice, and the triumph of honour. The disclaimer for the film states that:

The film *Padmaavat* is inspired by the epic poem "*Padmaavat*", written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, which is considered a work of fiction. The film doesn't infer or claim historical authenticity or accuracy in terms of the names of the places, characters, locations, spoken languages, dance forms, costumes, and or other details. We do not intend to disrespect, impair, or disparage the beliefs, feelings, or sentiments of the person(s), community(es), culture(s), custom(s), practice(s), or tradition(s). (*Padmaavat*)

The abovementioned disclaimer itself doubts the credibility of characters, places, locations, etc. Thus, the movie is an adaptation of epic narrative mode into a telling through audio-visual mode. Such a shift entails alterations, which are often due to the specificities of each mode. In such a shift, characters and plot are generally narrative elements that undergo a

major transformation. The film presented a pseudo-traditional and highly romanticized fundamentalist attitude to make it commercially successful. The story revolves around Queen Padmavati, but the roles given to King Rawal Ratan Singh and Alauddin Khilji are no less. In the film, Bhansali presents Queen Padmavati as glamorous and alluring in many scenes; for example, in the song Groomer, she is appreciated for her elegant performance. The Rani Padmavati and King Rawal Ratan Singh relationship looks strong in the film. The Holi celebration scene where Rani Padmavati and King Rawal Ratan Singh are dyeing each other's faces and ankles with brightly coloured powder is an intimate and tender sequence that makes us believe that the couples are deeply in love with each other. Rani Padmavati helps King Rawal Ratan Singh to make important decisions in the scene where she defiantly tells King Rawal Ratan Singh's treacherous Brahmin adviser to expel him from their reign. The Jauhar (self-immolation) scene was highly glorified in the film with loud music and red colour. Apart from the romance with King Rawal Ratan Singh, the dreamy intimate scene with Alaudin Khilji was also fantasized in the film. Due to this Padmaavat was mired in controversy before its release. Several Rajput caste organizations, including Shri Rajput Karni Sena from Rajasthan, and its members protested and later vandalized the film sets, claiming that the film portrays a Rajput Queen Padmavati, in a bad light and hurt the feelings of Rajputs. They had also assaulted Bhansali on a film set. Despite all this widespread criticism and controversy, the film was successful commercially at the box office after certain modifications and was well-received by audiences. It was praised for its lavish sets, stunning visuals, and powerful performances by the leading actors. The music was also highly appreciated. Overall, Padmaavat is known for its elaborate production values, compelling storytelling, and performances by its cast, making it a notable entry in Indian cinema.

### **A Semiotic Interpretation of Padmavati: Comparative Analysis of Novel Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen and Film Padmaavat**

In female writings, the concept of feminism is prominent. The aspects of women's oppression by patriarchal society have been pointed out in multiple ways. It depicts the real condition of women in society. Chandramouli in her novel has given significant importance to all the substantial female characters like Leelavati (Padmavati's mother), Malika Jahan (Jalaluddin's daughter), Rani Nagmati (first wife of Ratan Singh), and Devalla Devi (Hammira's daughter), who committed Jauhar in Ranthambore before Queen Padmavati did at Chittor. From the gyno reader's perspective, Chandramouli has done justice to all the female characters in the novel and brings out strong feminist intent. Whereas Bhansali's film is more

commercially bent and reflects patriarchal dominance throughout the film. The character of antagonist Allaudin Khilji looks big in front of male protagonist King Rawal Ratan Singh. The depiction of intimate scenes of Queen Padmavati and Allaudin Khilji through dreams leads to controversies. It hurts the religious and political sentiments of the local people of Rajasthan. The inclusion of romantic scenes and dance performances by Queen Padmavati was glamorized to draw the attention of audiences and deviate the film from reality to fantasy. Still, the movie was liked and was successful at the box office. Semiotics is the study of the symbols and signs used and their interpretation. The film Padmaavat extensively uses semiotic representations that are noticeable. The excessive use of the colour red represents passion, love, and valour often associated with Queen Padmavati. The colour black symbolizes power, dominance, and ruthlessness associated with Alauddin Khilji. The glamorous costume worn by Queen Padmavati symbolizes her grace and royalty, adorned with heavy Polka jewellery, which is traditional and exclusively worn by Rajasthan Royal Families, whereas Allaudin Khilji, wearing a black costume in the film, represents opulence and ambition. The removal of all jewellery at the time of self-immolation becomes a symbol of honour and sacrifice. The mirror represents self-reflection, identity, and beauty. It holds significance in the film and is used as a metaphor throughout the narrative. These semiotic representations are used to enhance the story of Queen Padmavati in the film. The film Padmaavat promotes some patriarchal ideologies that are relevant to women and can be further understood concerning Louis Althusser's theory of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Louis Althusser defines two types of apparatuses that exist in the state: the first is Repressive State Apparatuses, which work on citizens massively and predominantly by repression to instil values and ideology of the state onto its citizens; the second type is the Ideological State Apparatuses, that function massively and predominantly by Ideology; as a result, citizens become submissive not through violence but by avoiding scorn and humiliation. It is further interlinked with the capital theory of Louis Althusser, where he proposes three forms of capital: cultural, symbolic, and economic. Queen Padmavati is represented as Althusser's cultural capital, symbol capital, and economic capital. Chandramouli represented Queen Padmavati as both cultural and symbolic capital in her novel. Queen Padmavati has become a cultural character after self-immolation, and she can be seen as a cultural artifact that has been capitalized on by patriarchal society. Her story has been passed down through generations as a part of the Rajput oral tradition; in this sense, Queen Padmavati can be represented as an embodiment of cultural capital; a symbol of resistance against Muslim invaders, and a tale of female empowerment and sacrifice. The word Jauhar is associated with Queen Padmavati only, whereas there were many other Queens who committed

Jauhar after her. In the film, she can be seen as the symbol of the capital in terms of her glamorous beauty, adorning her dresses with vibrant colours and traditional Rajput polka jewellery, which creates a buzz in modern society. After the release of the film, almost all the brides in India embraced Queen Padmavati's attire in their procession. Furthermore, in the film Padmaavat, Queen Padmavati became an economic capital as her story reached out to the masses and the place where she committed Jauhar became a tourist place, and the running market where imitations of Queen Padmavati jewellery and dresses attracted the attention of many tourists. The controversies surrounding Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Padmaavat, the story of Queen Padmavati have been used as a means to gain social and economic advantage. The controversy surrounding her story highlights the close relationship between capital and culture.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper critically analyses the epic historical female character of Queen Padmavati from a feminist viewpoint concerning Anuja Chandramouli's novel Rani Padmavati: The Burning Queen and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film Padmaavat from a comparative perspective. The paper also included the standout semiotic interpretation of both the novel and the film. Through this research, it can be concluded that there is a scope for exploring and analysing substantial female characters, i.e., Leelavati, Malika Jahan, Rani Nagmati, and Devalla Devi, which have played an integral role in providing a glimpse of the female self, have ample scope for research, and would add another brick to the area of feminism.

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