

Cinematic Depiction of Lord Ram in Bollywood Films

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Abstract: This research paper examines the cinematic portrayal of Lord Shri Ram in Bollywood films in different decades. This research also traces how a sacred Sanatan Hindu culture has been adapted to reflect the evolving cultural, political, and moral landscapes of India. Shri Ram is the symbol of religion, justice, and the embodiment of Indian culture. Since the silence era, Shri Ram has been portrayed on the screen as an ideal man in Bollywood cinema. From early devotional films like 'Lanka Dahan' in 1917 and 'Ram Rajya' in 1943 to animated retelling. The research examines how cinema filmmakers have balanced artistic freedom with religious devotion. The present research paper employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the selected Bollywood films focusing on their narratives, aesthetics, audience perception, and shifts in ideological subtexts. The study also addresses the intersection of myth, media, and nationalism particularly how the cinematic representation of Shri Ram has shaped and reflected socio-political movements and campaigns. The study identifies the main challenges faced by filmmakers, including navigating cultural sensitivities, religious expectations, and the commercialization of sacred epics. Ultimately the research paper argues that the depiction of Lord Shri Ram in Bollywood is a dynamic, multi-layered phenomenon that mirrors broader currents within Indian society.

Keywords: Cinema, Bollywood, Lord Shri Ram, Hinduism, Media Portrayal, Cultural representation, National Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Bollywood cinema is not just a medium of entertainment, it is a powerful platform for expressing human emotions, creative ideas, and cultural values. Bollywood cinema has always taken inspiration from Indian mythology and spiritual narrations. The character of Shri Ram is not just a character of spiritual scripture but is deeply associated with and embedded in the religious, social, and cultural consciousness of the people. In our Indian culture, Shri Ram is known as *Maryada Purushottam* (the best among the honorable divine personalities). He is the supreme symbol of truth, religion, ideal governance, and real moral values in *the Ramayana*. Shri Ram's character has transcended religious boundaries and become a cultural and national spiritual icon. Indian Hindi cinema known as 'Bollywood' has portrayed Shri Ram's Image in different forms, which has had a deep impact on the minds of Indian people and the globe.

Indian cinema's presentation of *the Ramayana* is full of religious, spiritual, and devotion to the new form in the modern digital era. The analysis of the depiction of Shri Ram in Bollywood. Cinema is very important for understanding the interrelationship between media, politics, and religion. *The Ramayan*, composed by *Maharshi Valmiki* is not a religious scripture but is a timeless heritage of Hindu. The character of Shri Ram is a source of inspiration not only for Indian people but also for foreigners. Bollywood gave a new height to this ideal character according to the time and presented him with a new perspective. In the year 1913, '*Raja Harishchandra*'

film made by Dada Saheb Phalke. It was a full-length movie in Bollywood cinema. This film laid a strong foundation for spiritual, mythological filmmakers. Movies such as '*Lanka Dahan*' (1917) portrayed Shri Ram and another spiritual character of Ramayan alive on Bollywood screen. From where the strong beginning of such types of films in the Bollywood film industry.

Such films were not only an artistic expression but also a medium for spreading cultural, moral, and spiritual values. Before the Independence of India. The film '*Ram Rajya*' (1943) was created as a history and landmark in Bollywood filmy galaxy. After the independence, the image of Shri Ram assumed the form of a symbol of moral and spiritual communication. This journey does not stop here it is day by day creating new heights, films like '*Sampoorna Ramaya*' (1961) and '*Luv Kush*' (1967) successfully connected people emotionally and spiritually.

By the 1970s Bollywood cinema developed and along with the depiction of spiritual and mythological characters also changed. Ramanand Sagar's television series '*Ramayan*' (1987-88) created history and had a spiritual and positive impact on audiences, although it was not a Bollywood production, its popularity was at its peak. During this time, international animated films such as 'The Legend of Prince Rama' released in 1992 also brought '*the Ramayan*' to the global platform.

In the year 2023, the film '*Adipurush*' presented '*Ramayan katha*' in different forms like digital technology. Computer-

generated imagery and dialogues. But this more creativity and film presentation also gave rise to controversies. These creative changes show that the portrayal of Shri Ram remains a sensitive, deeply debatable subject in society. Thus, Bollywood cinema has not only strengthened religious sentiments but also enriched cultural and social discourse by depicting Lord Shri Ram in different forms according to the time.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the evolution of Lord Shri Ram's portrayal in Bollywood Cinema.
2. To analyze the socio-political impact of these portrayals in India.
3. To assess the role of mythology in shaping national and cultural identities through cinema.
4. To understand audience reception and cultural implications of such representations.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative research design focusing on content analysis and cultural interpretation of Bollywood films depicting elements of Shri Ram or Ramayan. This methodology includes the following major components that are as follows:

Qualitative Content Analysis: This research paper conducts an in-depth, interpretative study of selected films to analyze the story structure, visual language, dialogue, character development, and symbolism of Shri Ram. Also, the thematic emphasis of each film is examined for its ideological basis and aesthetic style.

Film Selection Criteria: The present study includes a purposeful sample of Bollywood and related Indian films that are directly related to Shri Ram and take inspiration from *the Ramayan*. These Bollywood films have been selected for research to represent a broad temporal boundary and diverse narrative perspective.

Lord Shri Ram's Depiction in Cinema: Analysis of Major Films

Lanka Dahan (1917): In the direction of Dada Saheb Phalke '*Lanka Dahan*' released in 1917, this is one of the early silent films of Bollywood. This movie laid the strong foundation of traditional and spiritual mythological cinema in India; it was the first time that Shri Ram and the characters of Ramayan were portrayed on the screen. The interesting thing is that both the characters of Sita and Ram were played by male actors in this movie, as women did not want to act in movies at that time. This film also has historical value and importance because it paved the news for adapting spiritual narrative into the visual medium. The film '*Lanka Dahan*' was the first attempt to bring religious faith and cultural discourses into Bollywood.

Ram Rajya (1943): The Film '*Ram Rajya*' is one of such movies in the history of Bollywood cinema that Mahatma Gandhi saw, it is believed to be the only film Gandhi Ji watched, it is directed by Vijay Bhatt. This film was based on the principles of good and ideal governance, Dharma, and justice. The name of the film '*Ram Rajya*' symbolized Gandhi Ji's political and moral vision of what envisioned

for free India- a society where equality to all, justice to all, and Dharma prevailed. The popularity of this movie brought the religious and mythological film into the focus of socio-political discourse.

Sampoorna Ramayan (1961): Another film by Vijay Bhatt, Sampoorna Ramayana emerged as a cultural tool in the creation of the creation of national spiritual character after independence. This movie presented the story of Ramayana in detail, passing the message of spirituality, sacrifice, and unity along with spiritual sentiments. It was considered a medium of spiritual education as well as national integrity.

Luv Kush (1967): The Film '*Luv Kush*' was centered around the lives of Lord Ram's Sons '*Luv Kush*' and Sita. Both sons were born during Sita's banishment in Maharshi Valmiki Ashram, both twins read the Ramayana and learned the art of war to face the enemies bravely. This Bollywood film not only highlights family relations but also touches on deeper themes such as justice, sacrifices, and Dharma. This film successfully interprets the child's mind, motherhood, and social and self-responsibility.

Jai Santoshi Maa (1975): The film '*Jai Santoshi Maa*' was released in the year 1975, it was directed by Vijay Sharma, a famous and miraculous spiritual film of its time. It was made on a limited budget and gained immense love from the people. This movie's story was based on the devotion, spiritual faith, and devotion and dedication of simple lady Satyawati, who overcame the hardship of life with the divine grace of Maa Santoshi. In the galaxy of Indian cinema, this film has place supreme place and also made a deep place in in corner of the hearts of the rural Indian people. This Bollywood film was released at a time when such types of films decreasing in mainstream cinema, yet its popularity surprised film directors and everyone, it proved that faith and spiritual-based film stories can still influence the Indian psyche.

Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992): The film '*Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama*' was released in the year 1992, it was an animated movie made as a joint initiative of India and Japan, which is considered an example of historical cultural cooperation. Depicting the Story of Ramaya through animation technology was a new and creative innovation. Director Ram Mohan, Koichi Sasaki, and Yugo Sako together made this famous Bollywood movie. This film is not only loved and liked by the Indian people but also by global people. This film was a successful and strong attempt to combine of spirit of pure devotion with modern technical presentation.

Adipurush (2023): Film '*Adipurush*' is a high-budget film made with the latest technologies, starring Prabhash, Kriti Sanon, and Saif Ali Khan. However, there was controversy over its dialogue delivery, way of presentation, and characterization. This movie also raised the debate about whether spiritual dignity can be protected with the use of the latest digital technology.

Secondary Data Collection: This research paper includes a wide range of academic literature. It includes journal

articles, books, and conferences proceeding on mythology, Indian cinema, and culture studies. It also includes textual analysis of relevant religious texts such as Maharshi Valmiki *Ramayana* and its commentaries.

The Cultural Journey of Bollywood Cinema Based on 'Ram Katha'

Bollywood cinema has not only been the medium of entertainment, but it has also been a very effective, influential medium of mass communication and spiritual, social, and cultural expression. The starting journey began with spiritual and mythological stories that are deeply connected and embedded in the Indian psyche. In especially '*Ram Katha*' inspired by the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Tulsi Das's *Ramcharitmanas*, and another local linguistic version deeply embedded and intertwined the spirit of morality, spirituality, Dharma, and ideals in the foundation of Indian cinema. In the year 1913, India's first feature film '*Raja Harishchandra*', was directed by Dada Saheb Phalke. This film not only marked the beginning of Indian cinema but also established that spirituality and mythology are powerful mediums for expressing the spiritual, moral ideas and cultural identity of Indian society.

The film '*Lanka Dahan*' (1917) continued this tradition and portrayed the *Ramayan* in cinematic form. The vital role of Lord Shri Ram and Sita was played by a man named Anna Salunke in this film. This was a courageous and artistic experiment despite the social circumstances and technical limitations of that time. Film '*Ram Rajya*' (1943) presented the concept of ideal governance through the story of Lord Shri Rama. This film was directed by Vijay Bhatt and is spiritually and historically important as it is believed to be the only film that Mahatma Gandhi watched. The message of the film echoes Gandhi's concept of "Ramrajya", a society based on justice, Dharma, peace, and harmony presented by the concept of ideal governance through the story of Lord Shri Rama.

Directors like Babubhai Mistry (in the 1950s and 60s) made a special contribution to spiritual and mythological movies. In the year 1961, films like *Sampoorna Ramayan* and *Luv Kush* (1967) portrayed the '*Uttara Kand*' of the *Ramayan* in an attractive form. In these films, elements like Indian family values, women's respect, dignity, and education were presented through grand sets and music. Actors of that time, like Arun Govil (now a member of parliament from Meerut, UP), made the image of Lord Shri Ram so lively and revered that he started being worshipped as a real spiritual character among the common people of India. In the years 1987-1988, Ramanand Sagar's '*Ramayana*', telecast on television, brought the story of Shri Ram to each and every house. Though it was not a Bollywood production, its cultural reach, viewer impact, and contribution to social consciousness were matchless. It reestablished visual morality and Indian family ideals and paved the way for the retrieval of mythology in the country.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, spiritual and mythological movies returned to theaters, but now they faced a new audience and technical challenges. In 1992, the movie '*Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama*' was internationally considered an animated film that was made

in collaboration between India and Japan. Through this film the *Ramayana* worldwide more popular worldwide. Film '*Adipurush*' (2023), was a high-budget film that attempted to present the spiritual-mythological story in a new way using modern digital technology, VFX, and CGI. On the one hand, the technical possibilities of modern cinema were shown in this film, on the other hand, there were intense criticisms regarding its dialogue, costumes, and presentation. This made it clear that while presenting mythology in the digital era, it has become necessary to maintain a balance between traditional faith, audience sentiment, and modern creativity.

The Portrayal of Shri Ram in Bollywood Cinema

Shri Ram is considered the 'Maryada Purushottam' and the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He had considered a divine sacred and influential place in Indian cultural, spiritual, religious, and social life. His divine personality is not limited to mythology alone he is the deal of truth, devotion, and Dharma, which deeply resonate for generations. Bollywood cinema, which is India's most dominant storytelling medium, has continuously shaped and transformed the divine image of Shri Ram. In the early age of Bollywood cinema, movies based on spiritual, religious, and mythological tales were very popular. The portrayal of Shri Ram in such movies was extremely spiritual, devotional, and respectful. These movies were based on direct adaptations of spiritual, and religious scriptures such as the *Ramayana*. Shri Ram was depicted as an ideal son, a just king, a devoted husband, and an embodiment of Dharma. These films used classical hymns, mantras, and prayers, creating a spiritual atmosphere. The divine image of Lord Shri Ram was in the traditional form like the crown on the head, bow and arrow, royal robes, and saffron tilak on the forehead. This portrayal matched the art of temples and religious, religious paintings, which made the audience instantly recognize him and a feeling of devotion. The cinematic depiction of Shri Ram in Bollywood was not only spiritual but also a reflection, of the socio-cultural values and ideals of the time. Shri Ram's divine personality becomes a symbol of virtues like social justice, truth, sacrifice, and honor. The concept of *Ram Rajya* the ideal of just and equal rules for all, imagined a harmonious and orderly rule in society through these films. These movies went beyond spiritual, and religious stories and became a mirror of social and political ideas as well.

After independence, the image of Shri Ram emerged as a symbol of cultural unity through Bollywood cinema, connecting the people of diverse India. Such spiritual and mythological movies reinforced shared moral and cultural values. As Hindu identity-based political movements gained momentum, especially in the late 20th century, the aura of Shri Ram took on political and ideological dimensions as well. During the *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement, the portrayal of Shri Ram came to be seen not only as a religious deity but also as a symbol of cultural nationalism and political expression. Some films of the time reflected these political contexts, showing the tensions between myth, faith, and contemporary political reality.

Myth, Morality, and Movies: Shri Ram as a Cultural

Icon in Bollywood

Bollywood cinema played a vital and unique role in presenting the ideals of Shri Ram Especially in those times when India was going through political and cultural conflicts, such movies were not only a means of entertainment but also became pillars of social spiritual, and religious consciousness. Babubhai Mishra's 'Sampoorna Ramayan' in 1961 was one such film that brought the story of Shri Ram to the screen with grandeur and spiritual depth. The Ramayan is considered a living scripture, which gave the people the opportunity and feel and understand this epic. This film not only awakened spiritual and religious sentiments but also kept a cultural heritage alive.

In the year 1948 '*Ram Bhakt Hanuman*' emphasized devotion and reverence for Lord Hanuman. The film portrays the role of Hanuman as his trusted aide to Lord Rama and his devotion and dedication to him, which ignites a flame of faith and inspiration in the hearts of the audience. During the colonial period, when people's literacy rates in India were very low, these films became an educational medium for those who could not read spiritual scriptures. Bollywood Cinema established a mass-cultural dialogue that strengthened spiritual and social unity in the country. The immortal character of Lord Shri Ram inspired the Indian society of that time to follow the path of justice, morality, and truth.

Such movies not only represented spiritual and religious tales but also played an important role in preserving the cultural soul of the country and passing it on to the new generation Especially during India's freedom struggle, the ideal of Shri Ram and the dream and concept of '*Ram Rajya*' became a symbol for the Indian people, giving the message of just and egalitarian rule.

These old spiritual films of Bollywood are still important for study and appreciation in a socio-cultural context. They conveyed the depth and diversity of Indian culture to the masses through Bollywood cinema and even today such movies remain an integral part of the cultural heritage of India.

Lord Shri Ram: A Symbol of Socio-Political Vision in Modern India

After the country's independence in 1947, the depiction of Lord Shri Ram was not limited to religious but also assumed socio-political importance. The leaders like Mahatma Gandhi dreamed of establishing '*Ram Rajya*', which was not just a word but a symbol of a good governance system, where there was peace for all, equality for all, and prosperity for all. All these values of Ram Rajya are still considered the basic principles of democracy today.

In our country, Lord Shri Ram is worshipped as an ideal king, obedient son, ideal brother, and philanthropist leader. For this reason, Bollywood directors have been effectively presenting their image, idealism, and glory in movies. The name of Shri Ram has not only been a subject of spiritual reverence but also became an ideal symbol for political

leaders, especially during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

Political movements like Ramjanmbhoomi strengthened cultural identity and socio-political consciousness in the country. During this movement, the name of Shri Ram was wisely utilized in politics to establish his image as a cultural and political ideal. The symbol of Shri Ram in politics played an important role in unifying the masses, reviving socio-cultural pride, and channeling political aggression in leaders.

'Ram Rajya' on Bollywood Screen

The story of Lord Shri Ram is used in the movies of this era as a metaphor for political ideas in addition to being a religious story. The film '*Ram Rajya*' (1943) was directed by Vijay Bhatt; it was at the height of India's freedom struggle. It represents the rules of Lord Shri Ram as an ideal rule and compares it with colonial oppression. This film placed special emphasis on virtues such as honesty, compassion, and self-sacrifice. These qualities that Gandhi ji urged the nation to adopt. In contrast to the early mythological films, post-independence depictions began to portray Lord Shri Ram as a more relevant character. Emphasis began on their human qualities and leadership challenges.

Contemporary Challenges to Lord Shri Rama's Depiction.

Over the last 30 years, the landscape of Bollywood cinema shifted dramatically. Such as the emergence of multiplexes in big and small cities in the country, global audiences, digital technology, and new ways of conveying tales. These changes complicate the portrayal of holy and pious characters like Lord Shri Ram. The filmmakers and directors try to balance respect for religious sentiments with the demand for modern cinematic entertainment.

Adipurush controversy (2023): The film '*Adipurush*' directed by Om Raut and starring Prabhas as Ram, is a recent high-profile example of this tension. The movie tried to use advanced visual effects to recreate the epic battle between Lord Shri Ram and Ravan. This film's controversy was the product of the depiction of the Hindu epic. Ramayan, especially its dialogue, visual effects, and character portrayal. Many people believed that the film went too far from traditional Ramayan, it hurt the religious sentiments of the people and the film failed to capture the essence of the story of Ramayan. It adopts a stylistic, cinematic interpretation rather than a classical one. Some aspects of the movie's narrative have been simplified, aimed at achieving a broader commercial appeal.

From Myth to Media: The Cinematic Journey of Lord Shri Ram

Television serials like Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* (1987) became a cultural phenomenon, which led to the image of Lord Shri Ram becoming more embedded in the famous imagination. Digital platforms now allow for multiple reinterpretations, democratizing access but also intensifying debates over authenticity. The cinematic depiction of Lord Shri Ram in the past century mirrors the developing cultural, political, and sociological landscape of

India.

From devotional, idealistic movies accomplished by scriptures, to symbolic stories mirroring India's dream of nation-building, and to today's commercial controversial reimagining of the image of lord Shri Ram This transition from tradition to modernity illustrates the deep divisions in Indian Society. Thus, the story of Lord Shri Ram in Indian Film is not just about a God, but the eternal identity of India.

Lord Shri Ram's Socio-political Influence: Religion Politics, and Cinema

Lord Shri Ram, the revered prince of Ayodhya and the hero of the Ramayana, has emerged far beyond his origins as a mythological and religious figure. He symbolizes many things in the country today. Essentially, the story of Lord Shri Ram was a moral and spiritual guide, showing, ideal virtues and kingship. In the holy land of Mother India, the notion of Ram's reign has become a symbol of an ideal kingdom, and good governance for every ruler.

Mahatma Gandhi wished that the holy and ideal concept of 'Ram Rajya' one day or the other day would come to India and the leader would remain good for the betterment of the people. He invoked the people to follow the true path of Shri Ram's idealism. In Bollywood, Lord Shri Ram's name has been the favorite of directors and filmmakers. In the early age of cinema, a movie was released in 1947 named 'Ram Rajya' connected and presented Shri Ram as a symbol of nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya was based on Ram's idealism. Apart From this television has not gone behind, In the year 1987 Ramanand Sagar's 'Ramayana' represented Bhagwan Ram in his world-famous series. Arun Govil played a vital role as Bhagwan Ram in this Television series.

Audience Reactions & Cultural Responsibilities in Portraying Lord Ram

The depiction of Bhagwan Ram in Bollywood cinema has affected memories, imaginations, and cultural renaissance in a positive way. Bhagwan Ram represents ideals of morality, humanity, and generosity for all human beings. Besides this, he is ideal for rulers. Bollywood cinema has shaped the audience's vision and emotional attachment to him.

Bollywood's early films like 'Ram Rajya' (1943) and 'Sampoorna Ramayana' (1961) played a vital and important in fostering a devotional environment among the audiences. Both films provided faithful acceptance of the stories of the Ramayana and Bhagwan Ram. As the number of television sets in India increased Bhagwan Ram's related audio-visual content and stories also increased. A recent Bollywood movie 'Adipurush' (2023) tried to reimagine the character of Lord Ram by using visual effects, the latest uses of technologies, and a new storytelling style. Such types of filmmaking styles targeting youth's global audience, frequently navigate a challenging balance between innovation and cultural sensitivity. Adipurush film has faced a lot of criticism due to some controversial dialogue. Lord Ram is not just a mythical character but a symbol of idealism and humanism.

As a result of this emotional and spiritual attachment, there is increasing concern about how Lord Shri Ram is portrayed on screen. Films that stay true to conventional qualities are usually received with enthusiasm while those that are overly commercial or wrongly perceived often face criticism.

Balancing Artistic Freedom and Devotional expectations is challenging.

Depicting a spiritual and revered deity like Shri Ram in films has been a complicated subject in the Bollywood film industry. On the one hand, directors and filmmakers want to live to bring their creative imagination to the big screen, while on the other hand, people expect them to maintain respect and reverence for divine personality. In the present time, modern cinema techniques and special effects have given directors and filmmakers a new possibility to create spectacular and captivating images, and scenes. With the use of these latest technologies, olden-times-driven events and battles can now be shown more effectively than ever before. But sometimes these complex visuals, instead of a simple and emotional presentation, create confusion and dissatisfaction in the minds of the people. Thus, in portraying the stories of Shri Ram, directors, and filmmakers not only have to enhance the art form of their Bollywood cinema but also have to take full care of the spiritual sentiments of the audience. They need to find a balance so that neither their artistic liberty is limited nor the feeling of devotional respect is weakened.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of the divine personality of Lord Ram in cinema is not just a spiritual story but also presents a deep understanding of our society and culture. Bollywood movies conveyed the spiritual story of Shri Ram to the people not only as entertainment but also as a moral education and spiritual education. In Bollywood films, Lord Shri Ram is depicted in movies as the symbol of religion, the ideal king for people, and as 'Maryada Purushottam' (the best among the honorable divine personalities) for the people of India. At the same period, some movies also depict his human aspects and emotional conflicts, which makes the people feel connected to him. The portrayal of Lord Shri Ram is not limited to spiritual and religious sentiments only, but it is also connected to Indian culture, people, and politics. The divine image of Shri Ram in Bollywood cinema has been changing from time to time and even today he is a centre of morality and spirituality for the people of Mother India.

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