Reimagining the Divine: Analyzing the Portrayal of Hinduism in the 21st Century Indian Hindi Film Adipurush

Prokash Sarkar

M.A. in English Literature (2023), UGC NET Qualified (2024 & 2025)

Email ID: prokashsarkar8670@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	This article critically examines the 2023 Bollywood film *Adipurush* and its portrayal of Hindu mythology, particularly the *Ramayana*. Through detailed textual comparisons with Valmiki's Ramayana and references to other adaptations and scholarly interpretations, the article argues that Adipurush presents a distorted representation of Hindu religious figures and events. It explores the mischaracterization of key figures such as Rama, Sita, Ravana, Hanuman, and Lakshmana, the distortion of crucial events, and the socio-cultural and political controversies that emerged in response. The article emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and fidelity in representing sacred narratives in popular media.

Introduction

Bollywood, the informal term for the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India, has a long history of depicting Hinduism in its movies. In the early years (1930s-1960s) of Bollywood, Hindu mythology and folklore were often used as sources of inspiration for films. Movies like "Ram Rajya" (1943) and "Bhakta Prahlad" (1946) showcased Hindu mythology and values. In the 1970s and 1980s saw a surge in mythological films, which drew heavily from Hindu mythology. Movies like "Jai Santoshi Maa" (1975) and "Brahmachari" (1968) were hugely popular and helped to revive interest in Hindu mythology. In the 1990s and 2000s, Bollywood saw a rise in devotional films, which focused on the lives

of Hindu saints and deities. During this time period Bollywood Film industry began to romanticize Hinduism, showcasing it's mythology, rituals and traditions in more styled and Melodramatic way. In recent years, Bollywood has continued to explore Hindu mythology and themes in its films. Movies like "Oh My God" (2012), and "PK" (2014) have tackled complex issues like faith, spirituality, and social critique. Despite the rich cultural heritage of Hinduism, Bollywood's portrayals have not been without controversy. Some films have been criticized for misrepresenting Hindu mythology, or perpetuating stereotypes. One of the best examples of this kind of Movie is 'Adipurush' (2023), directed by Om Raut. Here I am going to discuss the misinterpretation of the original *'Ramayana'* in the film and controversies around it. I will provide factual information about the original *'Ramayana'* and compare it with *'Adipurush'*.

I grew up listening to the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata from my parents, which sparked my interest in these epics as I grew older. I've read both Ramayana and Mahabharata, and I've also watched Ramanand Sagar's Ramayana (1987) and the Mahabharata TV series (2013). As a student of English Literature, I often admire how Hollywood brings its mythology to the big screen through high-budget, well-made films. This makes me wonder why Bollywood can't do the same with our rich Indian mythology.

That's why I was genuinely excited when the film Adipurush was announced. I thought, finally, Bollywood is moving beyond its usual love stories and family dramas and exploring epic tales from our culture. But when the film was released, it completely let me down.

I'm not just talking about the weak visual effects. What truly disappointed me was the way the film misrepresented the Ramayana. Many characters were portrayed inaccurately, and several important events from the original story were either left out or oversimplified. This kind of careless adaptation feels disrespectful and hurts the emotions of those who deeply respect these sacred texts.

Inaccurate Characterization in *Adipurush*

The recent Bollywood film 'Adipurush', directed by Om Raut, has sparked intense debate and criticism among audiences and scholars. One of the most problematic aspects of the film is its inaccurate characterization of key figures from the *'Ramayana'*. The film's portrayal of iconic characters such as *Ravana*, *Sita*, and *Hanuman* has been particularly egregious, deviating significantly from the original mythological narratives. These inaccuracies have not only outraged Hindu communities but also raised

important questions about cultural sensitivity, artistic license, and the responsibility of filmmakers to accurately represent sacred texts.

In Valmiki's Ramayana (Book 3, Chapter 30), Ravana is a complex character with ten heads symbolizing his intelligence and magical powers. While he is driven by ego and desire, he also embodies strength and charisma. Adipurush, however, depicts Ravana (played by Saif Ali Khan) as a one-dimensional villain, motivated by revenge rather than obsession or desire. His appearance—blue eyes, beard, and leather jacket—has drawn comparisons to historical invaders like Babur or Alauddin Khilji. The omission of his ten heads in the traditional sense further undermines the epic's symbolism.

In *Valmiki's 'Ramayana'*, Book 2, Chapter 20 *Sita* was depicted as a strong-willed, devoted, and virtuous queen and described as extremely beautiful, with a radiant complexion and lovely features. She was portrayed as a paragon of virtue, with a strong sense of duty, loyalty, and morality. Sita was deeply devoted to her husband Rama, and her love for him is unwavering. She was a supportive partner to Rama, encouraging him in times of need and offering wise counsel. In Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 3, Chapter 30 Sita shows remarkable bravery in the face of adversity, particularly during her abduction by Ravana. Sita was often seen as an embodiment of traditional feminine virtues, such as loyalty, duty, and self-sacrifice. She was also revered as a symbol of divine feminine power and strength in Hindu mythology. Overall, Sita's depiction in the original 'Ramayana' is that of a strong, virtuous, and devoted queen who embodies the ideals of traditional Indian womanhood. While in *'Adipurush'* Kriti Sanon's portrayal of Sita (Janaki) is visually stunning, the film doesn't delve deeply into her physical appearance or emphasize her traditional virtues. The film doesn't fully explore the emotional depth of Sita and Rama's relationship, which is a central aspect of the original 'Ramayana'. While Sita's courage is hinted at in the film, it's not fully developed or showcased. The film takes creative liberties with Sita's character, omitting or altering certain aspects of her story and personality. While the film doesn't provide a detailed exploration of Sita's character, it's worth noting that the movie's portrayal of the 'Ramayana' has been criticized for its creative liberties and inaccuracies. The film's depiction of Sita has also been questioned, particularly in regards to a specific dialogue that refers to her as *"Bharata ki beti"* (daughter of India). This line sparked controversy, especially among the people of Nepal, who believe Sita was born in Janakpur, Nepal.

In Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 4, Chapter 10 Hanuman was depicted as a strong and agile monkey god with incredible physical abilities, who had a reddish-brown complexion, with a muscular build and a monkey's tail. He had the ability to fly, which enabled him to traverse vast distances and navigate challenging terrain. He can also change his form at will, allowing him to adapt to different

situations. In the original 'Ramayana' Hanuman is portrayed as a loyal and devoted servant of Rama, willing to risk his life for his lord. Hanuman serves as Rama's messenger and spy, gathering crucial information about Ravana's kingdom. Hanuman was also depicted as a symbol of devotion and bhakti (devotional love), inspiring others with his unwavering dedication to Rama. Overall, Hanuman's portrayal in the original 'Ramayana' highlights his remarkable strength, loyalty, and devotion, cementing his status as one of the most beloved and revered figures in Hindu mythology. In *'Adipurush'*, *Hanuman* is portrayed by Devdutta Nage, but his character's name is not explicitly mentioned as *Hanuman*. Instead, he is referred to as "*Jaanbaaz*" or "*Vaanara*" (meaning monkey in Sanskrit). Jaanbaaz has a muscular build, but his appearance differs significantly from the traditional depiction of *Hanuman*, his costume and design are more fantastical and modernized, deviating from the traditional imagery associated with *Hanuman*. The film doesn't fully capture the depth of Hanuman's devotion to Rama, which was a central aspect of his character in the original *'Ramayana'*. The filmmakers through the character of Jaanbaaz give the comic relief to the audience. The film's modernized and fantastical take on *Hanuman*'s appearance did not resonate with traditionalists and it hurt the religious sentiments of Hindu audiences.

In the original 'Ramayana', Lakshmana is depicted as a complex and multifaceted character, playing a crucial role in the epic. Lakshmana was renowned for his unwavering loyalty to Rama, his elder brother (Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 2, Chapter 20), and accompanied him throughout his journey (Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 2, Chapter 30-35). He was deeply committed to his duty as a brother and a warrior, often putting the needs of others before his own. Lakshmana was a skilled and fearless warrior, fighting valiantly alongside Rama in battles against various demons and he showed remarkable bravery in the face of adversity, standing firm against formidable foes and protecting his family and allies. *Lakshmana* provides emotional support to Rama, particularly during times of distress, such as Sita's abduction and his primary role is to support and aid Rama in his quest to defeat Ravana and rescue Sita. He killed *Indrajit*, who was a great warrior and the eldest son of Ravana (Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 6, Chapter 84). Overall, Lakshmana's character embodies the ideals of brotherly love, loyalty, and devotion and he represents the importance of duty, responsibility, and selflessness, inspiring others with his exemplary behavior. In *'Adipurush'*, *Lakshmana*'s character is portrayed by actor Sunny Singh. In the film he was not known as '*Lakhman'*; rather his character's name is '*Shesh'*. The film's portrayal of *Shesh* *deviates* from the traditional depiction in the *'Ramayana'*, with a more modernized approach. The film gives less emphasis to Shesh's emotional aspects, such as his relationships with *Raghav* and *Janki*, rather the film focused more on *Shesh*'s action-oriented aspects, showcasing his martial skills and warrior prowess.

Distortion of key events in *Adipurush*

'Adipurush', a retelling of the 'Ramayana', has been criticized for distorting key events from the original epic. Here are some examples:

The abduction of *Sita occurred* in the *Aranya Kanda* (Book 3, Chapter 47) of *Valmiki's* *'Ramayana'. Ravana*, disguised as a beggar (Bhikshatan), approaches *Sita* while she is alone in the forest. He tricks her into crossing the *Lakshmana Rekha*, a magical boundary drawn by *Lakshmana* to protect her. As soon as Sita crosses the boundary, *Ravana* reveals his true identity and abducts her, taking her to Lanka. The concept of *Lakshman Rekha* is also not mentioned in *Valmiki's 'Ramayana'*. The *Laksman Rekha* was first mentioned in the *Ram Charit Manas* by *Tulsidas* in the 16th century. The event of abduction of *Sita* was pre-planned by *Ravana. Ravana* planned to abduct *Sita* in his *Pushpaka vimana*, he asked his brother *Maricha* for help, *Maricha* transformed into a golden deer and ran in front of *Sita*, she asked *Rama* to capture the deer, *Rama* instructed *Lakshmana* to watch over *Sita* while he went hunting. *Lakshmana* was fooled into abandoning his post after hearing *Maricha* call for help in *Rama*'s voice, *Ravana* seized the opportunity to abduct *Sita*. In the film *Adipurush*, the abduction scene of *Sita* quite different, the film does not give us details about *Maricha*'s character; In the movie *Adipurush*, *Sita*'s abduction scene is characterized by a lack of physical contact between *Sita* and *Ravana*, *Ravana* does not touch *Sita*, and she is levitated onto a bed of weeds that tie her up; the vehicle *Ravana* used throughout the movie was not looked like *Pushpaka vimana*, it was looked like a bird-like vehicle, like a Garuda. In the film *Ram* and *Lakshman* are shown watching helplessly as Ravana flies away into the sky with *Sita*, but the scene was totally wrong. In the original *'Ramayana'*, *Rama* and *Lakshmana* are not present when *Ravana* abducts *Sita*, they return to find Sita missing and later learn about the abduction from *Jatayu* before he dies. In the original *'Ramayana' Sita* was abducted by *Ravana* in the *Panchavati* forest (which was located on the banks of the *Godavari* river), near the hut where Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana are living in exile. But in *'Adipurush'*, *Sita*'s abduction takes place near a cave. The film showed there was a cave in the forest (the forest's name was not mentioned in the film, we assumed that it was *Panchavati* forest) where Raghav (*Rama*), Janaki (*Sita*) and Shesh (*Lakshmana*).

In the 'Ramayana', *Jatayu* was a divine bird and the *"King of Vultures"* who tried to save Sita from Ravana. Jatayu was a demigod eagle who fights Ravana in a valiant battle, but is ultimately defeated and has his wings cut off. Jatayu's story is told in the Araṇya-Kaṇḍa section of the epic. Rama and Lakshmana find Jatayu dying in the *Dandaka* forest. *Jatayu* tells *Rama* and *Lakshmana* about the battle with *Ravana* and the direction *Ravana* took *Sita*. *Rama* performs the final funeral rites for *Jatayu*.

Jatayu's depiction in *'Adipurush'* was quite brief and lacking in impact. Unfortunately, Jatayu's character wasn't developed well, and its appearance felt random. One reviewer even mentioned that Jatayu's adieu was the poorest, implying that the film didn't do justice to this iconic character from the *'Ramayana'*.The character of *Sampati,* the elder brother of *Jatayu* was missing in the film. In the *'Ramayana'*, *Jatayu* and *Sampati* are known for their story of brotherhood and sacrifice. In their youth, the brothers flew towards the sun to test their skills. *Jatayu* outflowed *Sampati* and entered the sun's orbit, where the heat scorched his wings. *Sampati* flewed ahead to shield his brother, but his wings were also burned. *Sampati* was unable to fly and fell to the *Vindhya mountains*, where he spent the rest of his life under the care of a sage. In the *'Ramayana'* *Sampati* played a significant role in finding *Sita*. He helped *Hanuman* find Sita in Lanka, he used his keen eyesight to watch *Sita* and provided directions to *Hanuman* to go to *Lanka.* I wonder why the filmmakers didn't portray such an important character in the film.

In the original *'Ramayana'*, during her abduction by *Ravana*, *Sita* threw her *toe ring,* anklets and other jewelry in the direction of monkeys on a mountaintop. The monkeys picked up the jewelry and hid it in a cave, where *Sugriva* showed it to *Rama*. *Rama* was overjoyed to see the jewelry, especially her anklets, *Lakshmana* was able to recognize the anklets because he often bowed to *Sita*'s feet. *Sita* threw her jewelry to give *Rama* a clue to her whereabouts. But in the film *'Adipurush'*, during her abduction, *Sita* throws her *Chudamani* (a necklace) as a clue for Rama to follow and rescue her.

According to the *Valmiki 'Ramayana'*, *Rama* and *Hanuman* first met in the *Kishkindha Kanda*, during the final year of Rama's exile, when Rama and Lakshmana were wandering through the forests of *Rushyamukha Parvata* near the *Pampa River*; *Hanuman*, a trusted minister of *Sugriva* (the banished king of Kishkindha), approached *Rama* after *Sugriva*, fearing *Rama* might be sent by his brother *Vali* to kill him, fled and informed *Hanuman* about his distress; *Hanuman* then disguised himself as a saint to meet Rama and assure him of *Sugriva's* loyalty, thus establishing an alliance between them to fight against *Ravana*. In the film *'Adipurush'* the intersection between *Hanuman* and *Sugriva* before first the meet up of Hanuman and Rama was missing; in the film out of nowhere *Hanuman* appeared as a brahmin and confronted *Rama* and *Lakshmana*.

According to the *Valmiki's Ramayana*, *Sugriva* was banished from the kingdom by *Vali* after *Sugriva* took the throne, *Vali* also took *Sugriva's* wife, *Ruma*, for himself. *Sugriva* sought the help from *Rama*, who instructed him to wear a garland of flowers to hide his resemblance to *Vali, Rama* shot *Vali* in the chest with an arrow from behind a tree, killing him. *Sugriva* was returned to the throne and his army joined *Rama's* cause. But the film *'Adipurush'* does not show *Ruma's* abduction by *Vali*; and *Sugriva's*

wearing of a garland of flowers to hide his resemblance to *Vali* was also not shown in the film. After *Rama* shot an arrow *Vali* fell to the ground like a tree that had been cut down and *Vali's* limbs sinked to dust. Then *Rama* explained to *Vali* that everything was preordained and granted him moksha. Before died *Vali* was convinced and asked his son *Angada* to help *Sugriva*. All these important events are missing in the film.

The film does not give importance to *Angada's* and *Jambavan's characters. Angada* was the son of *Vali,* after *Sugriva's* coronation as the new king of *Kishkindha,* he became the new prince. In *'Ramayana'* Angad joined *Rama's* forces to rescue *Sita* from *Ravana*. He led the search party that found *Sita* which consists of Hanuman and Jambavan. There was an epic event that happened in the original *'Ramayana',* when *Angad* went to *Ravana's* palace as a peace messenger, he warned *Ravana* of impending war and advised him to surrender to *Lord Rama*. *Ravana* rejected *Angad's* offer of peace, and *Angad* challenged *Ravana's* court to move his leg, when no one could, *Ravana* tried himself. *Ravana's* crown fell off, and Angad took it and returned to *Rama* with the crown. *Rama* praised *Angad's* heroism, and they prepared for battle. But *Angad's* led moving and *Ravana's* crown stealing events are missing in the film. In the *'Ramayana'*, *Jambavan* was a wise minister to *Sugriva,* who reminded *Hanuman* of his strength and capabilities, and encouraged him to cross the ocean to find Sita. In *'Ramayana'* Jambavan fought *Ravana* in a duel, giving him powerful blows and kicking him on the chest. This knocked *Ravana* unconscious, allowing his charioteer to withdraw him from the battle. This duel between *Jambavan* and *Ravana* was missing in the film. Overall the filmmakers ignored the significance of these two characters in *'Adipurush'*.

In the *'Ramayana'* when *Hanuman* visits Lanka, the first person he encountered and fought with was *Lankini*, the female guardian demon of Lanka. After defeating *Lankini*, *Hanuman* continued his mission to search for *Sita.* But the *Lankini's* character is missing in the film. After entering into *Lanka* he searched for *Sita* and found her in *Ashoka Vatika* (garden). Then *Hanuman* introduced himself and told *Sita* about *Rama's* love for her, and delivered *Rama's* message. *Sita* was overjoyed to hear from Hanuman and gave him her blessing. After meeting with *Sita*, *Hanuman* was discovered by Ravana's warriors and he fought bravely, killed many of the warriors, including *Jambumali* and The seven sons of Prahasta and destroyed *Ashoka Vatika*. *Ravana* sent *Akshayakumara* to fight with *Hanuman* after *Hanuman* destroyed *Ashoka Vatika*. *Akshayakumara* fought *Hanuman* in his chariot, using various weapons. *Hanuman* was impressed by *Akshayakumara's* skills and valor, but killed him and blessed his life. When *Ravana* heard of his son's death, he ordered *Indrajit* to bring the vanara who killed *Akshayakumara* to him. *Indrajit* fought *Hanuman*, but was unable to defeat him. Then *Indrajit* used the *Brahmastra* on *Hanuman* and

captured him and brought him to the court of *King Ravana*. *Hanuman* was questioned by *Ravana*, and then *Ravana* ordered *Hanuman's* death. However, Ravana's brother *Vibhishana* intervened and convinced *Ravana* not to kill *Hanuman*. Instead, *Ravana* punished Hanuman by setting fire to his tail, *Hanuman* then flew over *Lanka* and set fire to buildings and reduced them to ashes. The film *'Adipurush'* does not show the character of *Akshayakumara* and the battles between *Hanuman* and various rakshasas. During *Hanuman's* punishment scene the film provided it's most hated dialogue when *Hanuman* said to *Indrajit* *"Kapda tere baap ka, tel tere baap ka, aag bhi tere baap ki, aur jalegi bhi tere baap ki"* ("The clothes are your father's, the oil is your father's, the fire is also your father's, and it will also burn your father's"). After so much hatred and criticism the filmmakers changed the dialogue to *"Kapda tere lanka ka, tel tere lanka ka, aag bhi tere lanka ki, aur jalegi bhi tere lanka ki"* ("The clothes are your lankas, the oil is your lanka's, the fire is also your lanka's, and it will also burn, it is your lanka's").

In the *'Ramayana'*, before the battle, *Rama* worshipped *Devi Durga*, the goddess of *Shakti* under a *Bilva tree*. *Devi Durga* was pleased with *Rama's* worship and appeared before him and blessed him with victory and the ability to kill Ravana. The puja was performed at an odd time, during the autumn season, which is known as akal bodhon or *"untimely invocation"*. The puja popularized the festival of *Durga Puja,* which is celebrated in India during the autumn season. The festival of Dussehra and Vijaya Dashami mark the victory of Rama over Ravana. The Hindu rituals like *'Puja'* was not well depicted in the film. Indeed, the filmmakers misused the Hindu rituals which really hurts our religious sentiments.

In the Ramayana, *Lakshmana* killed *Indrajit* by beheading him with the *Anjalikastra*. *Indrajit* was the son of *Ravana*, the prince of Lanka. He was known as a great warrior who defeated *Devraj Indra*. *Lakshmana* tore *Indrajit's* bow with three arrows. *Lakshmana* shot five deadly arrows at Indrajit's chest. The arrows penetrated *Indrajit's* body and fell to the ground like red serpents. *Lakshmana* beheaded *Indrajit* with the *Anjalikastra*. *Shesha*, the incarnation of whom was *Lakshmana*, cursed *Indrajit* for marrying his daughter without his permission. *Lakshmana* was able to kill *Indrajit* because of this curse. *Indrajit* realized his fate and accepted his death at the hands of *Lakshmana*. But In the film *'Adipurush'*, *Indrajit* is killed by *Sesh*, who drags him underwater and drowns him. In the movie, *Indrajit* attacks *Raghava* with snakes, but *Sesh* puts himself in the way and is bitten instead. *Vibhishana* tells *Raghava* that *Sesh* can be cured with the *Sanjivani* herb from *Dronagiri Mountain*. *Vibhishana* smuggles *Sesh* into the city and takes him to the *Golden Lake*, where *Sesh* drowns *Indrajit*.

Rama's coronation was described in the *Yuddha Kanda* (Book 6, Chapter 127-128) and the *Uttara Kanda* (Book 7, Chapter 1-4) of Valmiki's 'Ramayana'. After defeating *Ravana* and completing his exile,

Rama returns to *Ayodhya* with *Sita*, *Lakshmana*, and *Hanuman*. *Bharata*, Rama's brother, had been ruling Ayodhya in Rama's absence. He returned the throne to Rama and played a key role in the coronation ceremony. *Rama* was anointed with holy water and oils as part of the *Abhisheka ceremony*, which is an essential ritual in Hindu coronation ceremonies. The coronation was celebrated with great joy and festivities in Ayodhya, with music, dance, and feasting. The coronation ceremony was attended by gods, sages, and other celestial beings, who came to pay their respects to *Rama*. *Rama's* coronation establishes the ideal kingdom of *'Rama Rajya'*, where justice, peace, and prosperity reign. *Rama*'s coronation in the 2023 film *'Adipurush'* had been criticized for deviating from the original *'Ramayana'*. The film omits or simplifies key rituals and ceremonies associated with *Rama's* coronation, such as the *'Abhisheka ceremony'*. The film's depiction of attendees at *Rama's* coronation was inaccurate, with some key characters missing or misrepresented such as *Bharata's* wives, *Mandavi* and *Srutakirti*, who played important roles during *Rama's* coronation, but they are not depicted in the film; *Shatrughna's* wife, *Shrutakirti*, was also absent in the film; Although *Vibhishana* was presented in *'Adipurush'*, but his role during *Rama's* coronation was minimized compared to the original *'Ramayana'*; Several other vanara and rakshasa leaders, who played important roles in the battle against *Ravana*, are not depicted or have reduced roles in the film. The film's tone and atmosphere during Rama's coronation scene are inconsistent with the original 'Ramayana', which describes the event as a grand and joyous celebration. The film minimizes *Bharata*'s role in Rama's coronation, ignoring his significance as the one who returns the throne to Rama.

Controversy around the film

The film *'Adipurush'* has been the subject of various controversies since its creation in 2022. In particular, this film has often been criticised from a broad spectrum of actors and other critics for its use of modern-day language and mythological inaccuracies, both in the film's scenes and its character modifications. The modification of dialogues and misinterpreted depiction of *'Ramayana'*, has led to the broad sense of moral panic amongst various Hindu organisations, who has called out for a ban on this film.

Right after the teaser was released in October 2022, the makers were criticised for its poor VFX. Om Raut failed to understand the Indian audience and accused the makers for copying scenes from *Game of Thrones*, *Planet of the Apes* and *The Jungle Book*. Actress Dipika Chikhlia, who portrayed Sita on Doordarshan's Ramayan also criticised the teaser, stating she did not approve the VFX and there has been altercations to the epic. Actor Sunil Lahri, who played Lakshman in Ramanand Sagar's television

adaptation of the Ramayana, commented in lieu of the VFX and its depiction, that nonsense in the name of religion will never be tolerated. Amidst of the controversy, director Om Raut defended the teaser and kept his views that he was unhappy with the reactions from audiences and other celebrities for criticising the teaser and story and stated its not made for cell phones. Actress Kriti Sanon also defended the teaser, stating, *"that the film is not just about the teaser but there is a lot more to it"*. After the criticism, the makers asked for some time for improving the VFX and its quality, which may cost an additional ₹100 crore, as per reports.

Aftermath of the teaser controversy, it was stated that the film's poster was also copied from an animation film. Vanar Sena Studios claimed that the poster of Adipurush was a direct rip-off of their animated film *Lord Shiva* and they were not given any credit for it. In March 2023, the filmmakers released a new poster, which created another controversy. The new poster was criticised for looking like an *"animated film"*. Another poster was also criticised for hurting the religious sentiments as according to the *'Ramcharitmanas'*, all the characters of the Ramayana wear a sacred thread called *Janeu*, which is worn by those who follow the Hindu religion, however in the posters it was not worn by the characters.

Manoj Muntashir Shukla wrote the dialogues of Om Raut's film *'Adipurush'*. The dialogues of the film were criticised for being too flippant or unserious and containing modern-day slang and lingo in a setting from centuries ago. Lines like "jalegi tere baap ki", "teri bua ka bagicha hai kya", and "Lanka laga denge" being uttered by gods did not go down well with a large section of the viewers as the whole story of the film has destroyed and modified every aspect of the core values of the characters, their language and each authentic event. The petition filed in the high court demanded that the film malign the image of deities by using foul language in the dialogues spoken by the actors portraying Hindu gods. One of the lines in the film, which refers to Sita as "Bharata ki betu", has caused anger among the people of Nepal. This is because Sita is believed to have been born in Janakpur, which is located in present-day Nepal. In an interview on Aaj Tak, Manoj Muntashir Shukla attempted to dismiss the claims of the Nepalese people by incorrectly stating that Nepal was a part of "Bharat" until 1904 and mentioned that it separated from "Bharat". Manoj Muntashir Shukla has been accused of misrepresenting historical facts, leading to calls for a ban on all Hindi films in Nepal. Responding to the criticism, Manoj Muntashir defended his work. In an interview with Republic World, he said, *"It is not an error. It is a very meticulous thought process that has gone into writing the dialogues for Bajrangabali and for all the characters. We have made it simple because we have to understand one thing: if there are multiple characters in a film, all cannot speak the same language. There has to be a kind of diversion, a kind of division."* He also mentioned, *"When our grandmothers narrated the tales of Ramayana, they used this language. The*

dialogue that you mentioned, priests and narrators used to say that in the same way I have written. I'm not the first one to write this dialogue, it's already there." However, later he announced that it had been decided that some lines of the dialogue in the film would be altered. In a statement on Twitter, he concluded, *"I can give countless arguments in favour of my dialogues, but this will not reduce your pain. Me and the producer-director of the film have decided that some of the dialogues which are hurting you, We'll revise them, and they'll be added to the film this week. May Shri Ram bless you all!".* In a video, which went viral on social media, Muntashir said: *"If people think we are trying to modernise the Ramayana, I want to tell them that not at all. We have presented the Ramayana just like how people heard stories during their childhood."* In a more recent interview, he said, *"The film's name is Adipurush. We have not made the Ramayana; we are just inspired by it"* . In another interview with Aaj Tak, Muntashir said, *"Lord Hanuman is not God but a mere devotee. We made him God because his devotion had that power."* While the *Shiva Purana* clearly refers that *Hanuman* as an incarnation of *Lord Shiva*, other *Puranas* and scriptures provide alternative perspectives. According to these sources, *Bajrangbali* is commonly regarded as the spiritual son of *Vayu*, the deity of wind, or as an incarnation of *Vayu* himself. In some instances, Hanuman is also identified as an avatar of *Rudra*, another name associated with Shiva.

Slamming the filmmakers for portraying religious characters including *Lord Rama* and *Lord Hanuman* in an objectionable manner, the *Allahabad High Court* observed why the tolerance level of a particular religion (referring to *Hindus*) was being put to the test by them. The Court also noted that all the characters of Ramayana, who are worshipped by the people are largely shown in a pathetic way. When the Court questioned as to what made the CBFC pass such a film and that it committed a blunder by certifying such a film. A Public Interest Litigation was filed on 23 June 2023, seeking to stop broadcast of the film on streaming platforms. The petition alleges that the film hurts the religious sentiments of Hindus due to the kind of dialogues used by the characters in the film. On 18 June 2023, *Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha* lodged an FIR with the *Hazratganj* police against the producers and cast. In his complaint, Hindu Mahasabha national spokesperson Chaturvedi said that the film was a deliberate attempt to insult Hindu sentiments by distorting the images of Hindu gods with offensive dialogues, and costumes.

Conclusion

The misinterpretation of the Ramayana in Adipurush is a clear reminder of the dangers of cultural insensitivity and artistic license. By distorting and manipulating the sacred narrative of the Ramayana, the filmmakers have not only outraged Hindu communities but also shown deep disrespect for India's

rich cultural heritage. The film's notorious errors, from the characterization of *Ravana* and *Rama* to the misuse of sacred rituals and symbolism, have transformed a complex and dynamic epic into a simplistic and inaccurate melodrama. This misinterpretation has far-reaching consequences, eroding the cultural significance of the *Ramayana* and reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions about Hinduism. As we reflect on the misinterpretation of the Ramayana in Adipurush, we are reminded of the enduring power of cultural narratives to shape our identities, values, and beliefs. It is our collective responsibility to preserve, protect, and promote the integrity of these narratives, ensuring that they continue to inspire and enrich future generations.

References

- Adipurush. (2023). Directed by Om Raut. T-Series Films, Retrophiles.

- Bhatt, V. (2023). Controversy erupts over Adipurush dialogues: FIR filed, calls for ban. The Times of India. Retrieved from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com

- Lahri, S. (2022). Reaction to Adipurush teaser. India Today. Retrieved from https://www.indiatoday.in

- Muntashir, M. (2023). Interview on Adipurush dialogues controversy. Aaj Tak. Retrieved from https://www.aajtak.in

- Raut, O. (Director). (2023). Adipurush [Film]. T-Series Films, Retrophiles.

- Valmiki. (trans. 1999). Ramayana. (R. K. Narayan, Trans.). Penguin Classics.

- Tulsidas. (trans. 2010). Ramcharitmanas. (P. P. Mukherjee, Trans.). Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

- Court slams Adipurush depiction of Hindu gods. (2023). NDTV. Retrieved from https://www.ndtv.com

- Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha files complaint against Adipurush. (2023). The Indian Express. Retrieved from https://www.indianexpress.com