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PADMAVATI, THE MONOLITH OF PATRIARCHY: A STUDY ON THE NATURE OF FEMININE REPRESENTATION

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Abstract

The legend of Padmavati has been a popular one across cultures in India from time immemorial. From Malik Muhamad Jayasi's epic poem to the contemporary movie 'Padmaavat' (2018) by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, the story has gained various colours and dimensions over time. The representation of the character of 'Padmavat' has been a typical one of patriarchal fantasy and imagination. This paper attempts to analyse the history of this construction from a gender perspective using insights from scholars like Kate Millet, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Keywords: Butler, Beauvoir, Gender Studies, Ideology, Millet, Padmavat

Introduction

The paper entitled, "Padmavati, the Monolith of Patriarchy: A Study on the Nature of Feminine Representation" illustrates how the stereotyping and essentializing of women by the male dominated society leads to the formation of women as a subject whose subject hood and identity are constructed in nature. This is dealt with in the first chapter where subjectivity and its nature as a construct are discussed with specific emphasis on women as a construct. This is studied in the light of the theories put forward by feminist theoreticians such as Kate Millet, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Spivak.

Using these theories, the nature of the representation of Padmavati as a construct is analyzed in detail in the final chapter. It studies her nature as a subject in a male dominated society and

why does she enjoy the status of an ideal woman and a goddess and the ideology behind this subject formation is discussed in relation to the Rajput community. It also focuses on the impact of such a figure on the Rajput community, which resulted in the uproars and clashes during the release of the film titled *Padmaavat* as many feared it would distort their ideal of the 'real' Padmavati.

The image of Padmavati is constructed in such a way so as to make the people believe that it was who she was and that those are the qualities of an ideal woman. Women of Hindu society are expected to be like her and not question it. They are conditioned to obey the rules of men without questioning it. Hence we can say that their subjectivity is not something that is part of their essence but it is constructed for them by those in power (men) in order to maintain their superiority

and to control and restrict them. Similarly, the legend of Padmavati is so constructed so as to promote certain ideas and beliefs about women and the society, and to condition the citizens. It certainly has deep layers of ideology working behind it, which will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

Feminist Subject Formation and its Nature as a Construct

This chapter deals with subject formation and the nature of subject as a construct with emphasis on feminist subject formation in relation to Padmavati. Subjectivity is believed to be culturally constructed. It does not form part of an essence that an individual possesses and is not a fixed or timeless entity and is subject to change. A subject is never born or created as a subject but is transformed into one in relation to culture. Subjectivity can mean something having the status of a subject.

Subjectivity refers, therefore, to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary shares of common experience. (Mansfield 3)

Subject hence can always be seen as linked to something outside of it, be it an idea or principle or the society of other subjects. The self is not a separate entity but is one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles. Subjectivity of an individual is formed by his/her relation with the society and is shaped by culture and other things like politics, economy, institutions, communities etc. The individual never lives in isolation with the society and this results in a set of endless interactions between the individual and his surroundings. Subjectivity is primarily an experience and it remains open to inconsistency and contradictions. Subjectivity remains prone to change and is fluid in nature.

Subject formation begins from childhood onwards, by conditioning and socialization. This is done with the help of education. Education is a

means by which children are trained from such a small age to be obedient subjects of the society. They are conditioned to behave in a certain way, which is approved of by the society and hence their behavior is regulated by the society. This does not form part of an inherent essence, but it is non-essentialistic and is a mere construct. There is no validity to the function or role assigned to an individual by the society or by those in power. The individual merely internalizes these values and norms (socialization) and become merely what others want them to be.

There are different types of subject out of which one of the most important one is a politico-legal subject. The laws and constitutions that define the limits of our social interaction understand us as recipients of and actors within fixed codes of power. We are subject to monarch, the state and the law. In liberal democratic societies, this sort of subjectivity demands our honest citizenship and respects our individual rights.

Foucault observed in detail about subject formation. He believed that subjectivity is not a really existing thing and that it's only an invention of dominant systems of social organization in order to control and manage us. For Foucault, they are the broad relationships of power and subordination that are present everywhere in all societies. To Foucault, the subject does not exist as a naturally occurring thing but is constructed by the double work of power and knowledge to maximize the operation of both. Foucault's idea of panopticism can be closely related to this. 'Criminals' were often imprisoned in these institutions would be under constant surveillance which would regulate their behavior and hence construct their subjectivity for them. Even the powers in society such as RSA can be seen as something that has a similar function. It is out of fear and intimidation that we regulate our behavior to suit the norms of the society. Hence, the subjectivity of both the prisoners and those roaming 'freely' in the streets are constantly being analyzed and measured. Hence subjectivity is not the free and spontaneous expression of our interior truth. We are controlled by power and our behavior itself is conditioned. We are made subjects to power and

larger discourses. It is important to understand the subject as being constantly subjected and emerging.

Another form of subject formation is discussed by psychoanalysts. Subject is seen as a thing by psychoanalysts. For Freud, we are not born with our subjectivity intact and it is instilled in us as a result of our relation with those in our immediate family relation, especially our parents. This encounter creates an interior crisis within us making us feel that we are separate from those around us. This results in the splitting of the subject into the conscious and unconscious.

What both Freud's idea of subject and Foucault's idea of Subject have in common is their separation from the idea that we possess a free and autonomous individuality that is unique to us and that it develops as part of our spontaneous encounter with the world. An original subjectivity is only an illusion. Both views agree that subject does not come into the world with its essence encapsulated within itself but subjectivity is made by the relationships that form the human context. To psychoanalysis, this is determined by the family relationships defined in terms of gender and sexuality.

Barthes also talked about this idea in his essay "Toys" in which he observed about how seemingly innocent objects like toys carry intentions and ideologies of the adult world. Toys always mean something.

. . . the adult Frenchman sees the child as another self. All the toys one commonly sees are essentially a microcosm of the adult world; they are reduced to copies of human objects, as if in the eyes of the public the child was, all told, nothing but a smaller man, a homunculus to whom must be supplied objects of his own size. . . . The fact that French toys literally prefigure the world of adult functions obviously cannot but prepare the child to accept them all (Barthes 53)

Hence toys only initiate the child into the adult world. Dolls which resemble babies are given to girls and boys are usually given cars, guns etc. This

is to condition them and to make them aware of gender roles from such a young age. "This is meant to prepare the little girl for the causality of house-keeping, to 'condition; her to her future role as mother" (Barthes 53). This is how they go up to assume different gender roles prescribed to them by the society.

Therefore, the differences in the behavior between men and women are not a result of their inherent differences, but it is a result of social conventions and conditioning they are exposed to since childhood. It is often an accepted belief of the society that males are superior to females and the latter are often described in relation to the males in their lives, be it their father, husband or son. They are often stereotyped and are often restricted to their roles as "good" housewives and mothers and any woman seen moving out of this norm is seen as deviant, abnormal and is shunned by the society. Her identity and subjectivity is created for her by the society and culture and she is conditioned from birth onwards. Millet talks about this in her work *Sexual Politics*.

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different – and this is crucial. Implicit in all gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every moment of the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one. In adolescence, the merciless task of conformity grows to crisis proportions, generally cooling down and settling in maturity. (Millet 31)

Millet talks about the various factors through which the power of patriarchy operates. Patriarchy works through ideology. She notes that women are conditioned by patriarchal power which they often support through consent. They believe that they themselves are inherently inferior to

males. She mentions, "Sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to basic patriarchal with regard to temperament, role and status" (Millet 26). Even the nature or temperament of a person is formed on the basis of sex. Males are thus supposed to have aggression, intelligence, force etc. whereas females are supposed to be passive, docile, ignorant, "virtuous" etc. Women are supposed to carry out their roles of being good wives and mothers and men are to be ambitious, achieve etc. Men are seen to have higher status when compared to women. Women are conditioned right from childhood onwards. Millet talks about the power of socialization (way of upbringing and grooming and an influence of culture which results in a differentiation between male and female) and conditioning.

Patriarchy makes women into subjects. It operates in various spheres of the society starting with family, religion, education, work space etc. As mentioned above, conditioning starts with family and they assign various gender roles to males and females. Family can be seen as a mirror of the society. The eldest male is often seen as the head of the family and women are ruled over by them. Children are taught that this is what one would call "a normal family." Women are expected to cook, clean, to look after the children and to please their husbands. Religion cooperates with state and the society and support the idea of the father as the head of the family. In many religions, especially Christianity, the Father is the head.

Schools again teach the children that a family has a hierarchy and each person has a definite role to play. This idea is propagated through fables and other stories. Children are taught that if they disobey law, they would be punished by the law keepers and at home, their misbehaviours would be punished by fathers. Boys are taught to be strong and are scolded for crying or for being weak and girls are expected to be weaker. They are raised up to be ideal daughters, wives and mothers. An individual growing up with this idea imprinted in their minds. Boys are expected to be good at science, mathematics and so on and humanities are often associated as a subject for girls. This discrimination based on gender roles is carried on even to the work

space. Women are expected to stay at home and be a home keeper. However, recently, there has been a change and women have entered the work sphere. Women are given only menial jobs where they are paid less. Even if they manage to get a good job, they are often paid lesser than their male counterparts.

Therefore, the subject-hood of women is constructed for them by the society which in itself is largely patriarchal. Society and culture are responsible for the creation of gender and specific gender roles. These roles are often viewed as the ideal or appropriate behavior for a person belonging to a specific sex, and are responsible in the construction of gender. Gender is constructed. Hence the idea of an essential woman can be seen as a mere construct influenced by culture. Gender, according to Beauvoir is not biologically determined but is culturally constructed. It is not determined by sex but is determined by culture. Culture writes gender on the body. The society constructs an idea of what a woman should be and impose it upon women, which they become. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 273). This statement seeks to destroy the essentialist idea which claims that women are born feminine and says that they are rather constructed by social indoctrination and culture. Here, the idea of biological determinism is questioned.

Since Padmavati is only a creation of the masculine fantasy, her qualities do not form part of her real essence but it is only a construction. Butler, therefore, can be seen as the most important person to study about Padmavati as her studies deal with the non-essence. She questions the essentialist view of gender. Gender often means having to adhere to gender normative roles and behaviors. Gender is a performance and this performance reinforces the essentialism of gender categories. When gender is essentialised, we believe that there are essential differences between genders which manifest themselves in differences in gender performance. An individual usually follows the standards set by the societal norms and accept and imbibe their gender roles. It is when they follow and adhere to this that gender becomes essentialised.

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (Butler 179)

We can note that, throughout history, men have always assumed a dominant gender role, and women have always remained submissive to men. For this subordination to be unquestioned, it must seem natural. Feminists question this “naturally” privileged state of men. They even question the binary of gender and gender roles prescribed to male and female. “There is no reason to assume that gender also ought to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (Butler 10)

Gender is hence only a performance. This performance is an ongoing one. Rather than the individual creating the performance, the performance produces the individual. Every individual is subordinated by power and this subjection is seen necessary for the existence of the subject. Judith Butler talks about this in her work *Gender Trouble*. Butler understands power not only as something which is responsible for the formation of a subject but also as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire. She believed that feminist theories had assumed a faulty premise that there is some existing identity or essence to women. But she believed that the very subject of women is not understood in stable terms. According to Butler, there is no inherent, essential ‘womanness’ or femininity. She says that feminist subjects are discursively constituted by the political system (juridico-legal system) which is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. The very structure is favoring men. The common belief is that law represents man or woman and that the essence or identity is a naturally preexisting one. But according

to Butler, law creates the subject and conditions him/her. The idea of female subject as we understand now is only a product of law which constructs an essential female subject.

To Butler, the traditional feminism assumed that the term woman denoted a common identity, which according to her is a faulty assumption. She says that gender is not a homogenous, monolithic idea constituting of an essential male or an essential female. Gender intersects with various other discourses like race, ethnicity, sexuality etc. There is no fixed subjectivity but it is constructed and is a product of all these interactions.

Butler says there is no universal notion of feminism and no universal female issue. There is no universal patriarchy. Gender oppression is more cultural than universal. We make such claims that patriarchy and feminism are the same everywhere only to strengthen feminist position. It is a fictive universality. There is no stable female subjectivity.

As already mentioned, subjectivity is often constructed by those in power. It can be by the juridico-legal structure of the society or merely the powerful elites. In a patriarchal society, it is men who construct the ideal image of a woman and therefore construct her subject hood for her. However, feminist subjectivity can also be constructed by external power structures. Padmavati’s act of jauhar can be studied in relation to Spivak’s understanding of Third World Women. The British reinterpreted Indian discourse of Sati. They saw the act of sati by the Indian women as barbaric and hence essentialised the act and those who committed it as uncivilized. What we understand of sati now is the western discourse of it.

British in 1815 prevented the widow suicide of Rani of Sirmur. In the act of abolishing Sati, they gave the impression that the West is the best and has the most civilized form of justice. They labeled the natives and their practices as uncouth and barbaric. This was in real only a method adopted by them to establish their power over the colony. They made the natives believe that sati is a barbaric act by propagating the view that “white men are

saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 2121) It can also be noted that Rani of Sirmur, being a woman of influence and high birth is excluded from all mainstream history texts and her attempt to speak was misinterpreted. She is also a subaltern. Sati was originally a holy act that proved the woman's loyalty to her husband.

Hence the identity and subjectivity of a female subject is constructed for her by the males of the society. This is done by conditioning them psychologically and physically from childhood. These views are accepted and promoted even by other women of the society. It is propagated through many mediums such as law, education, religion, economy, myths, legends, literature, and films and even through media. This is done so as to satisfy the selfish motives of those in power. Women are oppressed and are made into subjects so that men can feed their desire for power and control. This is the very same need that drove them to conquer and subjugate other groups and nations throughout history. Since men feel the need to as much as power as they can, they do not share it with women, who are left devoid of power or control. Women are even denied their own identity and the right to make decisions in life, which in turn is seen as the responsibility of menfolk. They are often seen even by religions as sinful, evil and indecisive, who lead men to their fall. This naturally gives men the right to rule over women.

Those who enjoy a superior position do not want their authority to be questioned. Here, men do not want women to question their authority and they want to make women believe that they are inferior to men. Men also believed that they have more physical strength compared to women, which they directly translated into political power. Their physical stamina gave them a sense of superiority over women. In addition to this, their sexuality is also seen as a taboo and sinful.

Hence women are always expected to remain obedient and timid. Their primary roles are to be an obedient and shy daughter, to be a beautiful and unquestioning wife, and to be a good and nurturing mother. In the end, she is always expected to be a homemaker and is confined to the four walls

of domestic life by the patriarchy. They are not allowed to voice their opinions as men do not want women to question them or overtake them. They are nothing more than mere pawns, subjects, in the hands of men. As this practice continues, these views about women are seen as stereotypes that define women and those who try to break these stereotypes or move away from it are labeled as evil, impure, mad, etc. and are punished by the society. Though women are made into subjects by the dominant male society, the ideology behind this subject construction is even more harmful and threatening.

Ideology behind Padmavati as a Patriarchal Construct and a Community Image

This chapter focuses on the ideology behind the representation of Padmavati as the ideal woman, why do people see her as a goddess and what made it possible. I would also like to discuss why she's made into a subject by the patriarchal society and what is achieved by this representation.

Women are seen as subjects whose subjectivity is constructed for them. They do not have any essential inherent subjectivity but it is constructed by culture and various socio political factors and the dominant patriarchal discourse. Similarly, Padmavati can be seen as a mythical figure whose subjectivity is constructed. There are also doubts regarding the existence of such a figure. She is believed by some to be a legend whereas many believe that she truly existed. Padmavati was conditioned by the male dominated society and was made to believe the fact that women were inherently weaker than men. She imbibed the view that women are to remain loyal to their husbands and should remain chaste and meek even if that means giving up their own lives.

Padmavati is represented as a woman who believed and moreover obeyed such notions propagated by the patriarchal society, in order to restrict women. She, like many other women of her time took this notion to heart and believed it to be true. This is the direct result of socialization and conditioning as mentioned by Millet. They were always made to believe that they were to lead a

religious and holy life and were taught to be obedient to males since childhood. When they confirmed to such notions of patriarchy, they were often hailed and revered as goddesses. An example is the deification of Padmavati for her act of Jauhar, which she willingly did as she was taught that this is the right thing to do.

“Chittor will witness another war, one that is unseen and unheard of. And that war will be fought by us women. Our enemies shall watch how we turn our agony into victory. It is time to reignite the holy fire that stood witness to our oath, that only death will do us apart. We shall offer ourselves to the holy fire and perform Jauhar. Those who lust for our bodies will not even get their hands on our shadows! Our bodies will be reduced to ashes, but our pride and honour will remain immortal. And this will be the biggest defeat of Alauddin’s life.”
(*Padmaavat* 2:27:40)

This is a monologue made by Padmavati in the film, which talks about the act of jauhar, which would eventually lead to Khilji’s defeat. She was made to internalize the fact that self-immolation is an act of preserving ones chastity and honor not just of herself but also of her husband. This according to Spivak, was the original intention behind performing Sati until the British reinterpreted it.

Padmavati is described as a woman who didn’t appear in front of strangers and especially men. There is an instance from the epic where Khilji is only allowed to see her reflection and not her real self. “If I can save even one life by showing my face, then I accept this humiliation” (*Padmaavat* 1:26:51). This viewing of women by outsider men was considered as an act of impurity by the Rajput male dominated society. Her subjectivity and identity is hence already formed for her, which she obeys. All these are merely ideologies propagated by the male society to restrict and hinder women. Women based on their sex are assigned gender roles and are expected to be good wives. This is exactly what we can see in the case of Rajput women. They are made to “become” women by the influence of culture and society, as Beauvoir puts it. This is how

ideology operates in the society. There is “domination by consent” as Gramsci puts it.

. . . that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power not by direct and overt means but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression. (Abrams 208)

Jauhar is an act of self-immolation. Padmavati, along with many other Rajput women, jumped into the Jauharkund when their husbands were defeated in battle and when they were sure of Khilji’s victory. They didn’t have a say in their own lives and were blindly following the customs and traditions, which they believed to be true and the right thing to do. They believed in the idea of chastity, which in real is only a myth propagated by the patriarchal society in order to control women. The notion of an ideal Hindu woman is propagated through myths like that of Padmavati which are told and retold over the centuries. Though there are many versions to the tale as already mentioned in the previous chapter, what all of them have in common is the act of Jauhar by Padmavati and her portrayal as an ideal woman who is an embodiment of chastity, purity and bravery. This is done so as to create a stable image of an ideal woman and how she should be. Looking at her representation from a post structural point of view, there is no essential femininity or feminine qualities possessed by Padmavati but it is attributed to her by the male society. This is what Butler observes about gender. According to her, gender cannot be viewed in binaries alone and there are no essential feminine qualities possessed by women.

Padmavati is often seen by many Hindus as the perfect example of an ideal woman. The legend in itself is immersed in deeper layers of ideology. Ideology refers to:

The beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and by recourse to which they explain, what they take to be reality. An ideology is, in complex ways, the product of the position and interests of a particular

class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate, the interests of the dominant economic and social class. (Abrams 205)

Ideology operates in different levels in *Padmaavat* (both the epic poem and the movie). The portrayal of Padmavati as the ideal of all women in itself is a patriarchal construct and has ideology working behind it. The image of Padmavati as made popular by the Rajasthani version helped in the creation of her as an ideal woman, glorified for being chaste and loyal, who sacrificed her life not just to protect her virtue but to preserve the honor of her husband. She is seen as a woman who is meek, gentle and is almost seen as a puppet in the hands of a patriarchal community. She is often denied her agency and even in history (though there's no concrete history on her existence), she is "silenced" when she is not given a choice of her own except to jump into her husband's funeral pyre which is again a result of the Hindu ideology which is deeply rooted within every woman of that time and which can be seen among some conservative class of people even today.

Padmavati is also often objectified in terms of her physical appearances and is seen as a source of pleasure to the beholder. This image is one propagated by men to promote an image of 'ideal' woman they prefer. Hence, through these various myths and legends, they created an idea of women which deeply influenced many men and women, which led to the stereotyping of women. Women themselves too accepted this generally accepted ideas and beliefs about how they should behave and conduct themselves. This is where ideology plays an important role. Hence women were always seen as a group who has to be extremely religious, be subservient to gods, their parents and husbands, which reinforced the patriarchal rule in society and this view was seen as the norm, which was not to be broken. Again this notion regarding what is to be seen as beautiful in women and what not is an idea that men promote which is again subject to change. We can see that earlier men saw fat, chubby women as beautiful but later on this notion underwent change and women change to match this idea that

men create and promote. So women in a way are on a perpetual journey to please men. This is where hegemony operates as women unknowingly accept the idea of how a woman should be, which is used as a tool of domination.

In contemporary India we can witness a growth of communal ideologies and it is this along with the common traits and belief and religion which form the foundation that holds together their community. Any sort of representation which tends to deviate from the one accepted by the community is branded as a heretic view. The Rajput community is built upon a certain common spirit or trait that the members share such as that of their religious identity, marital spirit, pride, and above all patriotism. Rajput warriors were often known to fight until the last man alive. Similarly, the Rajput women were seen to be the most ideal type of women according to Hindu mythology. They were seen to be very loyal and even committed suicide when their men were defeated on battlefield. Padmavati is described as an extremely pious and chaste woman and is hailed as a goddess by the entire Rajput community for being so.

The common people believe that history is a form of ultimate truth and that it is monolithic and linear. They are not willing to accept any form of alternative interpretations of history and take what has been recorded in history books as solid facts which are unalterable. History is in fact constructed by those in power, especially the dominant class or the elites, to promote their own interests. They alter the real history to suit their own liking. They include additions, deletions and alterations of the real incidents in the history books that they create. History books in India are usually aimed at promoting the Hindutva ideology among readers and such books are promoted in our nation. They do not give any space to alternate interpretations in fear that their authority will be questioned and subverted.

Padmavati is one such figure whose historical validity is not known and yet finds a space in history books written by many Rajputs, Hindus and others who believe in her existence. This image created in the minds of the people has created a lot

of hindrance in the freedom of expression of artists who have tried to work on this area. A recent example is that of the movie *Padmaavat* which had to be banned in certain places, and was censored as people believed that the work distorted “historical facts” and that it presented an “unrealistic” representation of the character which is far from the image of her as a demigod. In fact the legend and character has attained a permanent status and fixity over time.

Padmavati can be called as a construction of the Rajput community, who has gained a permanent status over time. There is no essential femininity or divinity to her. Many things in society are essentialised by certain communities or by individuals in power based on their personal interest or desires. This essentialism is a dangerous tendency. This can be viewed in relation to the idea of nation. The idea of nation is not a concrete one. There is no essential or inherent meaning to nation or nationalism but it is the people who attribute certain meaning as to what a nation is and should be. Benedict Anderson talks about nation as only “an imagined political community” in his work titled *Imagined Communities*. “. . . nationality . . . nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (Anderson 4). He says that meaning of what a nation is, changes over time and is never permanent. For example, India today is understood not as it was understood during the time of colonialism. Instead, it is done so on the basis of Hindutva ideology that is propagated by those in power. They believe India rightfully belongs to Hindus. This ideology is a constructed one and is not an essentialist one. They do not promote the interests of the myriad communities present in India but instead, they seek to promote only the ideas and desires of Hindus.

Similarly, the ban of beef in many parts of India is based on the belief that it is a deity to be worshipped, which is believed by the Hindu community. There is no inherent holiness or purity to the animal, but the Hindu community attributes these meanings to the cow and as a result forms certain stereotypes. This belief resulted in killings of people who consumed or bought beef. This view can be read in connection to the idea of women as

impure, which prevents them from entering Sabarimala. Women are not essentially impure but their menstruation is associated with impurity by men, who think it would pollute the temple and cause a disgrace to their deity.

From these examples we can observe that seemingly solid ideas such as nationalism, religion etc., are nothing but abstract, without a permanent set of ideas. They attain their meaning through people, who attribute meaning to it. People fear change and as a result, the dominant group creates a set of ideas, which are subjective in nature, about something and form some generalizations. These views are seen as essential or inherent quality of that particular thing.

In the case of Padmavati, as already noted in Chapter One, idea of an ideal woman is an age old concept. This view was taken up by a specific community, who made it their own by attributing to this woman their identity and the qualities and values that they desire and fear in women. This led to this ideal woman in attaining a concrete nature. This woman was hence constructed not by one or two individuals but she came into being as a collective effort of the entire community. As a result, over time she became the representative of the entire community and became their collective unconscious. Any attempt made by others to reinterpret or question the authenticity of the image of Padmavati is seen as a distortion of facts by the community. This results in violent conflicts as they do not want their views, ideologies and in turn their superiority to be questioned.

This is the reason why groups such as the Karni Sena vandalized the sets of the film. Protest began from January 2017 onwards in different parts of the country, including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, which are governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. Once they realized their ideologies were under the threat of being questioned, they took recourse to external power. This is how RSA operates. It refers to, “State power is maintained by what Althusser terms repressive structures, which are institutions like the law courts, prisons, the police force, and the army,

which operate, in the last analysis, by external force” (Barry 158).

Karni Sena attacked and destroyed the film set in Rajasthan and even slapped the director Bhansali. The set was then moved to Maharashtra but protests still continued. BJP stood in the forefront with the protests. The conflict was based on a rumor which suggested that there would be an intimate scene between the Rajput Queen Padmavati and the Muslim Sultan Alauddin Khilji in spite of Bhansali’s statement that the film does not feature such a “dream sequence” at all. This enraged them as it distorted their history.

Karni Sena protested stating that there should be a nationwide ban on the film and all this led to the delaying of its release. Padmavati was then censored and a number of changes were made, which were suggested by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

There are no cuts suggested in this film by CBFC - only five modifications. These are as follows: Firstly, to change the disclaimer clearly to one that does not claim historical accuracy. Secondly, the title to be changed from *Padmavati*; the discussed change is to *Padmavat* as the film-makers have attributed their material/creative source as the fictional poem *Padmavat* and not history. Thirdly, make modifications in the song *Ghoomar* to make the depiction befitting the character being portrayed. Fourthly, modify the incorrect/misleading reference to historical places. And lastly, add a disclaimer which clearly makes the point that the film in no manner subscribes to the practice of sati or seeks to glorify it. (Jha)

All these controversies and uprisals by Karni Sena show us how much the image of Padmavati has attained solid state in the minds of the people. This image is constructed by people of the very same community in order to control and attain power. They promote the Hindutva ideas of chastity, loyalty and also promote patriarchal ideals. There is also solidification of the Hindu religion and communal consciousness development through Padmavati.

She is seen as an extremely pious Hindu woman who, in order to preserve her chastity and the honor of her husband commits Jauhar, an act of sati. This act is glorified both in the epic and in the movie where it is shown as the right thing to do. The woman is not given any choice of her own but she is to do what her religion and tradition taught her is the right thing to do. Padmavati promotes the Hindu value of chastity, purity, honor etc. through this act. Also, Ratan Sen and other Rajput men are glorified in the movie for their valor and righteousness which is contrasted with the demonizing of the Muslim community of the Khiljis of Delhi. They are shown as men who fight valiantly till their last breath and in spite of oppressive circumstances, never adopt any unfair means to win the war. “Eminent journalists like Dr. Ved Pratap Vedic and Rajat Sharma have stated that the movie has absolutely nothing that is objectionable and insulting to the pride and culture of Rajputs” (Pandya).

Conclusion

Hence we can conclude that the legend of Padmavati is not an innocent creation of Malik Muhammad Jayasi, but it was constructed as a means or a vehicle to promote the interests of the Hindus and Rajputs alone. It is only the Rajputs who are hailed and glorified and people belonging to other religion, such as in the case of the Muslim Emperor Khilji, are demonized. The legend in itself is a construct, which, over the years has attained a concrete nature in the minds of people and as a result, sought its way into history books.

This solidification of her image, how it is done, its nature as a construct and the ideology behind it are discussed in this project. This stereotyping of women is done by the dominant male society to control and establish their power over women. There is no inherent or essential femininity to women, but it is only a construct. So is gender and gender roles. Women are hence seen only as a construct of male fantasy. This subject formation of women by patriarchal society is learnt with the help of theories formulated by Millet, Beauvoir, Butler and Spivak.

The final chapter discusses how Padmavati is made into a subject and how her identity was

formed by the Rajput society. It discusses in detail the non-essentiality of Padmavati and the ideology behind her demigod image. Her transition from an individual to a community figure is discussed, which resulted in the formation of a collective unconscious among the Rajput community. This construct, therefore, reached a monstrous proportion. Her representation by the Rajput male society created an impact in the minds of the people which resulted in the solidification of her image as a goddess in the minds of the people. The Rajputs and Hindus did not want this image to be distorted or her supremacy to be questioned. As a result of this, many uprisals and riots took place during the release of the film titled *Padmaavat* as the Rajputs feared that their queen would be misrepresented. However, this act contains layers of ideology behind it. It ultimately tried to uphold the supremacy and importance of the community in itself.

Today, Padmavati is seen as a woman who is pious, loyal, and chaste who strictly adheres to all the patriarchal norms promoted by the Rajput society. Her act of jauhar can be seen as an example to this as she gave up her life to uphold her own dignity and the honour of her community.

The epic by Jayasi titled as *Padmavat* is seen as the first written record and the most reliable source of the legend from which writers of later years adapted, including historians. Tracing the history of the legend, it is easy to note that such a historical figure never existed and is merely a figment of Jayasi's poetic imagination. Her identity and subjectivity are constructed for her. She was made to follow all the gender roles prescribed as normal of a woman and her individual voice is smothered by tradition and culture which she blindly followed. Therefore, by extension we can say that what the legend does is to promote the ideologies of the elite section of the society and by doing so promotes the Hindutva ideology.

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