

Social Media and Political Protest Case Study- Padmavaat Movie Controversy 2017

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Abstract- Considering the importance of the effect of social media on the participation of public Sphere in various social movements or events, especially those related to protests, it is necessary to study in-depth the role of social media in political mobilization. Social media is a widespread communication platform. Social media certainly plays a significant role in social connectivity and political engagements. This study provides a brief overview of current research in this area with the special context to recent Bollywood controversy. The present paper is all about the recent controversy on Bollywood movie Padmavaat, in which many communal groups came to protest and claim that, the movie has distorted the historical facts and misrepresented before the audience. Some political parties also supported the ban and protest. Thus, the present study is a case study on the role of social media in managing political protest with special reference to Padmavaat Movie controversy. The methodology adopted in this study is both primary and secondary.

Keywords: Social Media, Politics, mobilization, Protest, collective action

I. Introduction

Padmini, also known as Padmavati, was a legendary 13th-14th century Indian queen. Several 16th-century texts mention her, of which the earliest source is Padmavat, an epic fictionalized poem written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540 CE. It says that Padmavati was an exceptionally beautiful princess of the Singhal kingdom (Sri Lanka). Rana Ratan Sen, the Rajput ruler of Chittor Fort, heard about her beauty. After an adventurous quest, he won her hand in marriage and brought her to Chittor. Alauddin Khalji, the Sultan of Delhi, also heard about her beauty, and laid siege to Chittor to obtain her. Many events occurred during the period of the siege, till the fort was finally taken. Meanwhile, Ratan Sen was killed in a battle with Alauddin. Before Alauddin Khalji could capture Chittor, Rani Padmavati and her companions committed Jauhar (self-immolation) to protect their honor. After her sacrifice, the Rajput men died fighting on the battlefield. Over the years, she came to be seen as a historical figure, and appeared in several novels, plays, television serials and movies. However, while Khalji's siege of Chittor in 1303 CE is a historical event, many modern historians question the authenticity of the Padmini legends. The present study is based on the same story of glory and honor. The controversy arises when some communal groups moved against the cinema as there was a scene which involved the romance between Rani Padmavati and Alauddin khilji. The communal groups and Rajput community stand against this scene sequence as they claim the fact and history is misrepresented in the movie.

II. Rani Padmavati's Life Depiction in The Film Padmavat

Padmavaat movie is based on attack on Alauddin Khilji's on Chittorgarh fort in 1303. Alauddin khilji attempt to capture the Chittor fort to capture the beautiful queen, Rani Padmini. It was a great historical story to save to the prestige of Rajput and honor, Rani Padmini along with 16,000 Rajput women committed Jauhar (self-immolation) and to escape capture at the hands of the Alauddin Khilji's. In Sanjay Leela Bhansali's, the director of the movie Padmavati, actress Deepika Padukone who acts as as Rani Padmini, and Ranveer Singh as Alauddin Khilji. The controversy came when the dream sequence shot between Rani Padmavati and Alauddin Khilji's being romantic for each other. Thus, Romantic scene in the film acts as catalyst to gain fire in the Rajput community and people came on the road, demonstrated and the protest became violent. It was unfounded speculation that spelled doom for Padmavati. In consequence, several political groups were against the film for its alleged distortion of history and Rajput honor, while several members of the team are snores refuting the existence a sequence of dream sequence.

III. Review of Literature

Due to the movie controversy, there is a huge protest form the particular community to stop the release of the movie. The film sets were vandalized and shooting equipments were destroyed, it was a big setback to the movie. On January

2017, members of the Shri Rajput Karni Sena destroyed expensive film cameras and other shooting equipments. Not only this, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's clothes were ripped and he himself got assaulted. The director returned to Bombay and issued a clear statement that there are no romantic dream sequence and he did tremendous research very carefully on this topic. [1]

There were huge media coverage on this issue like the Indian express on 28th Jan 2017, mentioned that protestors slap and attack the director Bhansali. The director Sanjay Leela Bhansali was slapped and assaulted by the mob on the shooting set of Padmavaat movie and was badly harassed. Many cinema celebrities like Karan Johar, Ashutosh Gowariker supported Mr. Bhansali and requested people to understand the creativity of cinema and must watch before react. The communal group, i.e. Karni Sena demonstrated angrily at Jaigarh in Jaipur and tried to stop the shooting. [2] The video is gone viral in which protestors damaged the sets and cameras. They are abusing the shooting team and raise the disrespected slogans. The incidents were too violent as it damaged the costly tools and equipments. Earlier it was said that the protest was against the distortion of historical facts and the mis presentation of honor story of Queen Padmavati as stated by Vikram Singh, a Karni Sena activist told PTI that -our basic protest is about the distortion of historical facts which will not be tolerated, but soon as the demonstration and slogans came it was clear that the demonstration and protest was very much political in nature.

Caste Dynamics

According to the written historical resource and documented contents, name Padmavati is not mentioned anywhere in the history of Rajasthan. The character of Rani Padmavati mentioned in the write-up of Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi who mentioned the name of Padmavati after around 250 years of khilji's victory of Chittor. Jayasi lived 1000 km away from the Chittor, in Faizabad. Thus, it is also concluded that the story of rani Padmavati and khilji is not clear and still need more clarification and the facts and written contents are not matching. And the stores sometime even said that the character Padmavati might be a fictitious, but the tradition of chair by Rajput females are historical facts.[3] The Rajput females captured after the war and ill-treated by the enemies, sold in market and their dignity violated by putting them in the HARMS of kings. In order to escape from these inhuman treatments and humiliations. The females of Rajputs kingdoms often do char (Immolation). The Bollywood movie is based on the same story where Rajput queen protests the honor and respect of Rajput females from Muslim rulers, Allauddin Khilji in the 14th century. The film has indefinitely delayed its release amid fierce protests and violent threats by right-wing Hindu groups who charge the movie distorts history and depicts a romantic scene between Muslim king Alauddin Khilji and Padmavati, the Hindu queen, who historians say is fictional.

Senior journalist and Political analyst, Satish Mishra of the observer Research Foundation in New Delhi questions Why the authorities did not oppose those who threaten violence. "The government is responsible for the safety of the environment so that people can be creative, be it poetry or cinema," he said.

Historians are shocked by the claims that the film distorts the story and emphasize that there is no clear evidence that Padmavati existed. It is said that she became a folklore thing after she arose in the 16th century Sufi poems, "Padmavat, "as a beautiful Queen that he committed" Jauhar," a media practice in which women from the Royal family walked in the funeral pyre to avoid being taken prisoner. But their repeated statements did not make any impact on Karni Sena, whose members belong to the caste, claiming that its origin is from Queen Padmavati. [4]

Finally, the Political analyst concluded that " today India is influenced badly with rumors about caste and narrow political interest came out of it. This best example is best suits the situation as because of this dispute, which nothing to do with historical facts. Such disputes had also occurred in the past, but still Indian society is giving a lot of room for such political incidents and are really growing".

IV. A Marketing Campaign Before the Elections

This is not the first time the film, in India, has been attacked by protesting groups that seem to emerge out of nowhere. The various films were under fire from critics because they reportedly hurt the feelings of some religious communities, some ethnic groups or even some castes. [5] Sometimes the accusations are true, but very often they are irrelevant or completely absurd. Even one word can be considered reprehensible, which can lead to litigation or street protests. Perhaps the craziest load was imposed on one of Bhansali's first films when a man criticizes found that he condemns that the name of the God RAM appeared in the film's title. The controversy in Padmavati movie was also one of the marketing steps by the political groups to motivate them against caste politics to make voters out of the mob. In the name of the community and glorious history, the political group is campaigning for polarization of powers and voters before the Gujarat elections. The political groups and political analysts state that these all controversies and statements were planning to create an atmosphere of caste and religion before Gujarat election. The are same discourse the political role of government was also remarkable as there were several statements given by many chief ministers and other ministries which made the controversy highly politically oriented and socially polarized. The turning points came when the Central Minister Nitin Gadkari says "People have a right to be offended... Filmmakers should not distort historical facts." And he's added that freedom of expression is not absolute. Of course, people have a right to

be offended. It's probably the right exercised with most gusto in India these days. But to be offended means to not read a book, to not watch a film, to not listen to a song. To be offended can even mean a call to boycott a film.

The **West Bengal Chief Minister** tweeted, "The Padmavati controversy is not only unfortunate but also a calculated plan of a political party to destroy the freedom to express ourselves. We condemn this super emergency. All in the film industry must come together and protest in one voice."

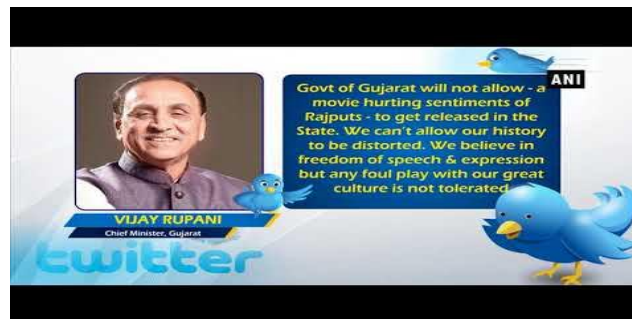
Politician Mr. Shashi Tharoor coded that, "today said the controversy surrounding Hindi film 'Padmavati' was 'totally absurd'. Participating in an open forum on 'Freedom of Expression' during the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) here, Tharoor said nobody should have the right to say what should go on in a movie or a book. "The whole controversy against 'Padmavati' is totally absurd. We have reached a critical point where those who claim to be offended manage to get their way," the former Union minister said. Therefore the entire controversy was very much political and based on certain ideology. The interference from the political parties and communicable groups made it very clear that the protest was planned and backed by some political groups. [6]

Protest Intensified

Even after the Supreme Court decision, the protest did not cease. In Sirsa (Haryana), the Bhansali Scarecrow was burned by members of the Rajput community. Royal family of Mewar, Maharaja Vishvaraj Kumar Singh, wrote a letter to Union Minister Smriti Irani and Censor Board, Chairman of the Board of Prasoos Joshi. The Head of State of Rajput Uttar Pradesh Abhishek Som promised to give 5 Crores to the man who beheaded Sanjay Lila Bhansali and Deepika Padukone. "Whoever brings the head of Sanjay Lila Bhansali and Deepika Padukone will be rewarded by Rs. 5 Crore. Rani Maa Padmavati sacrificed her life with 16,000 other women in the Jauhar and Bhansali raised the issue of her courage by showing it in a bad light in her film. The Maharashtra government gave security to the film director. The statement was entirely communal and after that the state of Rajasthan along with other parts of the country caught fire and millions of rupees property were burnt and vandalized. [7]

The role of social media in intensifying the protest and adding the flavor of Politics.

Social media was flooded with various comments and the allegation from political leaders. The protest became full of the political arena to promote the particular ideology for the political benefits. [8] This actually intensified the protest and the entire protest became an arena for political struggle and a game to convince a vote bank.



V. Discussion and Analysis

Social Media as Political Weapon Vs Freedom of Expression

Freedom of speech is one of the most valuable rights in a modern democratic state. India was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the importance of this valuable principle by incorporating it into its Constitution. Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution of India. It grants freedom of speech and expression to all the citizens of the land of India. However, it is affected by public health, morality, security, Indian integrity, defamation, incitement to crime, etc.. But, in General, the law allows creative expression and dissemination of ideas. The protests were actually against the creative expression of the director of some historical events. In fact the disputes were related to the film Padmavati Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The film, which was based on the story of Queen Padmavati, who courageously gave her life by committing "Jauhar" to save her honor, faced many difficulties to get his release. Various groups, including Karni Sena of Rajasthan, have called for a ban on his release because they fear that the film may undermine the prestige of their community. The allegation was very clear from these communal and radical groups that representation of fact, in the name of cinematic freedom is wrong, it may damage the communal prestige and honor. Various political parties raised this issue in the Gujarat elections. Thus, the entire situations were politically motivated and raised for political benefits.

Milking issue for Political Mileage

The dispute on Padmavati movies has brought an odd attitude of the political groups as they see only the benefits out of this controversial issue for their electoral profits.

Many political parties and radical groups have supported the ban on the movie, but the way these groups are acting certainly raise the question that is these all are only limited till ban or have some political perspectives. During the protest, it seems that they always tried to impress the communal groups rather than the real issue of distortion of historical facts these all protest were backed by any political party and their specific motives.

The main victim of this short-sighted trend was that writers and artists. In many cases that the movie is banned by the government for proper examination. Political leaders need to meet their work of lifting the human mal-administration not to fill such issues without serious consideration. [9] It should be remembered that, if someone has a true claim about the content of the film or art, he/she the possibility of the Court to secure justice. The country will follow as a condition for the rule of law, not being subject to intrusion or invasion.

Use of Social Media during Protest

Use of Social media as a general platform to motivate and unify common people for the protest. The questionnaire used for the research is mainly analytical in nature. What exactly social media do for the motivation, kind of message propagated and what changes it brought among the people who start taking interest in the mobilization and became active members of the group. [10]

An initial review of frequencies for general users and protest-media users supports a dismissive understanding of digital media’s role in the Padmavati protests. In the protest related to Bollywood Movie Padmavat controversy 2017, the analysis is mainly based on the social media, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and YouTube. Among all these media, the highest ranking digital media (Facebook, with 72%). These relative scores are especially striking considering the highly wired nature of the sample.

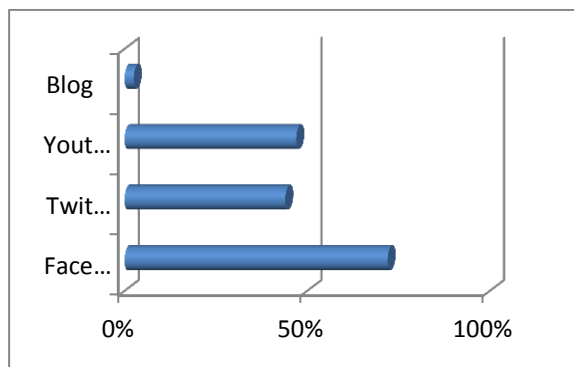


Figure1: Popular Social Media during Protest

In Figure1, the use of media during the protest and in general has been shown, a comparison of the general user and protest media user frequencies highlights a more

compelling distinction for digital media. As shown in the Figure 2, there are not much different, in fact, the Facebook is an evergreen social media for the protestors with the highest ranking after YouTube i.e. 85% contents are presented as the audio,video and written form and its multimedia effect makes the information very realistic and easy to believe, in turn, suggests that some media are better suited to use in protest scenarios. Facebook is really social in nature as it reaches everywhere.

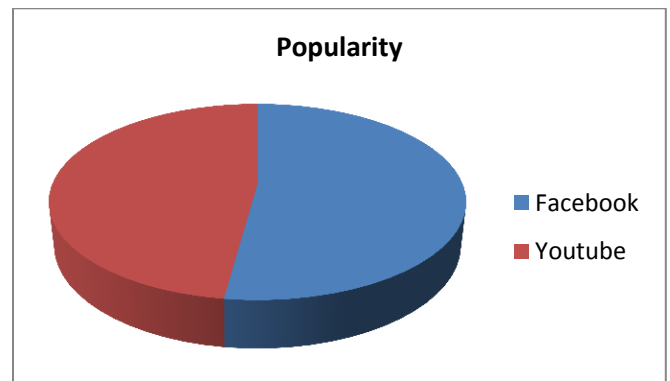


Fig.2: Popular Social Media during Protest

Figure3, indicates the use of media as their degree of use and availability, the social media as discussed before was very significant during protest. The respondent indicates the kind of information disseminated through the social media, i.e. “important,” “informative,” and “motivating”. [11] It shows the level of information used by the protestors, if the information is not of use or very significant or very motivating, the group act in a similar way to encourage others for the best action and demonstration. In that way Facebook is treated as a most valuable mode of information dissemination and expression.

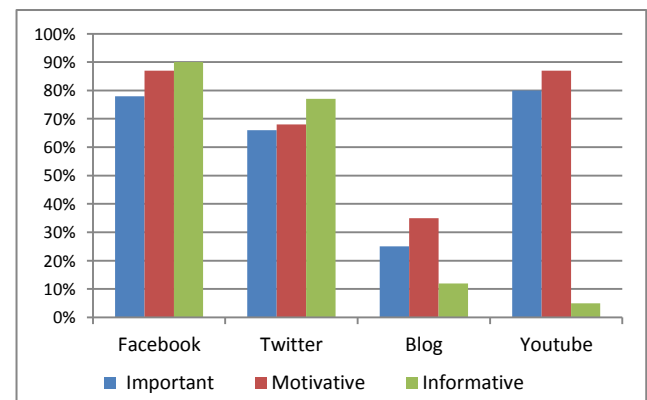


Figure 3: Rankings by Possible Score

VI. Conclusion

A preliminary descriptive analysis of the primary and secondary data suggests that digital media certainly have a

wide acceptance. The use of social media is so widespread that it not only contributing in social networking, but it also enhances the social awareness, including the knowledge regarding public policy, motivation for social development and engagement in political activities. So, social networking sites have a great power of socio-political mobilization. [12] Social media in particular are an integral and dynamic part of the media landscape. This is particularly evident in the transnational speech shown by the social media, particularly Facebook and twitter. The transnational composition and nature of this media tool in present time are new and convincing. However, the data sets suggest a demonstration link between the scale of political speech and sound contentious activity. Geographic dynamics identified in the set of tweets # Padmavati and high scores of protesters, attributing twitter with motivating content, in good agreement with the allegations of the coordinators of the demonstration that the transnational attention represented by twitter made a significant contribution to the morale of protest by passing the experience “will fight for the identity of the Rajput”.

The analysis shows the role of social media, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, provides content (updates related to mass mobilization, picture, video, messages) as an ingredient for the protest and help in coordinating strategies and balancing the protest demonstrations. Social media consistently build a bridge between digital and entrenched social networks in the public sphere. In this case study of the Bollywood film Padmavaat controversy 2017, the situation was almost same and it came to the conclusion that social media were used extensively to motivate the public sphere for the protest in different part of India.

Finally, we can conclude from all the data and related literature that the protest and controversies were political in nature and were managed, coordinated and propagated effectively with the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter. In concrete, social media have changed the assumptions on which social forces are mobilized and came on street with clear motives and political orientations.

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