

# Reimagining the Divine: Analyzing the Portrayal of Hinduism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Indian Hindi Film 'Adipurush'

Prokash Sarkar<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study examines how the 2023 Hindi film *Adipurush* reimagines one of South Asia's most enduring sacred narratives—the Ramayana—and how this reinterpretation triggered widespread cultural, religious, and cinematic debate. While Bollywood has long adapted Hindu epics for the screen, *Adipurush* marked a bold attempt to modernize the story through stylized visuals, contemporary dialogue, and altered character arcs. The analysis shows that these creative choices led to significant departures from Valmiki's traditional text, particularly in the portrayals of Rama, Sita, Ravana, Hanuman, and Lakshmana. The film also modifies key events such as Sita's abduction, Hanuman's journey to Lanka, and the climactic battle, often simplifying or omitting essential symbolic elements. These deviations not only sparked aesthetic criticism but also raised concerns about cultural accuracy, religious sentiment, and the ethical responsibilities of filmmakers adapting sacred narratives in the 21st century. The public response—including media debates, court observations, and calls for censorship—demonstrates how deeply mythological stories remain woven into contemporary identity and collective memory. By analyzing both the narrative distortions and the controversies surrounding them, this study highlights how cinematic reinterpretations can influence communal values and reshape the cultural life of ancient epics. The discussion ultimately reinforces the need for thoughtful, respectful storytelling when adapting foundational religious texts for modern audiences.

**Keywords:** *Adipurush*, Ramayana, Hindu mythology, Bollywood, cultural representation, adaptation, religious controversy

---

<sup>1</sup> An Independent Media Researcher – India

## Introduction

**B**ollywood, 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 its 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 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' from my parents, which inspired me to learn about 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' in my adulthood. I have read the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata'; and I have also watched Ramanand Sagar's Hindi TV serial 'Ramayana' (1987) and the Hindi TV serial 'Mahabharata' (2013). Being a student of English Literature, when I see how other film industries like Hollywood film industry portray their own mythology through their movies, somewhere I also wonder if our Bollywood film industry can't make such high budget movies based on our mythology. That's why when the film 'Adipurush' was announced I was very excited, thinking that finally in the 21st century Bollywood is moving away from its boring love and family drama movies and focusing on mythological movies.

But when the film was released, it shattered my excitements and expectations around the film. Here I am not talking about the VFX or visual experiences, but the misinterpretation of Ramayana epic. The film showed inaccurate characterization

of many characters and omits or simplifies some of the key events from the original 'Ramayana' epic, which hurts our religious sentiments.

#### 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 the original Valmiki's 'Ramayana', Book 3, Chapter 30 (Valmiki, 1999). Ravana was described as having ten heads, symbolizing his extraordinary intelligence, strength, and magical powers, who uses his intelligence and magical powers to outmaneuver his enemies. He was a proud and arrogant king who was driven by his ego and desire for power. He kidnapped Sita and attempted to awe her with his immense wealth and fortune, as one of incomparable valor, strength, fame and brilliance, and enticed her with the wealth of the world, gifts of spectacular gems, ornaments, perfumes, garments, unimaginable luxury and comfort. And there was a depiction of a great battle between Ravana and Rama where Ravana was defeated by Rama.

Overall, we can say that in the original 'Ramayana' Ravana was depicted as a complex character. However, in Adipurush, Ravana is presented as a menacing evil king, lacking the depth and complexity attributed to him in the ancient text. The movie depicts Ravana as being motivated by a desire for revenge against Rama, rather than solely by his obsession with Sita. Unlike the traditional depiction of Ravana as a cruel and abusive captor, 'Adipurush' shows him treating Sita with respect and kindness. 'Adipurush' depicts Ravana as having reduced magical powers compared to the traditional mythology.

When the teaser of the film was released in October 2022 it was criticized for various reasons, one of the reasons was Ravana's looks in the film (Lahri, 2022; Chikhliya, 2022). The character of Ravana was played by Saif Ali Khan. The film provided his look as Ravana with a beard, blue eyes and wearing leather jackets which made social media users question if he was playing Ravana, Babur or Alauddin Khalji in

the film. The film is also criticized for not portraying Ravana's ten heads side by side. In the film it is shown over-the-top. Ravana was an important figure in Hindu mythology and culture, and his depiction in 'Ramayana' had significant cultural implications. The film's misrepresentation of Ravana's character has been criticized for being insensitive to Hindu cultural and religious traditions (Bhatt, 2023).

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 (Valmiki, 1999). 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 (Bhatt, 2023; Muntashir, 2023).

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 (Valmiki, 1999). 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 (Bhatt, 2023)

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) (Valmiki, 1999). 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). (Valmiki, 1999). 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 (Valmiki, 1999). 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 Aranya-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 flew 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 sunk 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 leg 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 its 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' (Valmiki, 1999). 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 criticized 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 organizations, who has called out for a ban on this film.

Right after the teaser was released in October 2022, the makers were criticized 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

criticized 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 criticizing 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 criticized for looking like an "animated film". Another poster was also criticized for hurting the religious sentiments as according to the 'Ramcharitmanas', all the characters of the Ramayana wear a sacred thread called Janau, which is worn by those who follow the Hindu religion, however in the posters it was not worn by the characters (Tulsidas, 2010). Manoj Muntashir Shukla wrote the dialogues of Om Raut's film 'Adipurush'. The dialogues of the film were criticized 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 a 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

- 
- Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha files complaint against Adipurush. (2023). The Indian Express. <https://www.indianexpress.com>
- Bhatt, V. (2023). Controversy erupts over Adipurush dialogues: FIR filed, calls for ban. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>
- Chikhliya, D. (2022). Comments on Adipurush teaser and VFX. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com>
- Court slams Adipurush depiction of Hindu gods. (2023). NDTV. <https://www.ndtv.com>
- Lahri, S. (2022). Reaction to Adipurush teaser. India Today. <https://www.indiatoday.in>
- Muntashir, M. (2023). Interview on Adipurush dialogues controversy. Aaj Tak. <https://www.aajtak.in>
- Raut, O. (Director). (2023). Adipurush [Film]. T-Series Films; Retrophiles.
- Tulsidas. (2010). Ramcharitmanas (P. P. Mukherjee, Trans.). Motilal Banarsidass.
- Valmiki. (1999). Ramayana (R. K. Narayan, Trans.). Penguin Classics.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	9-Sept-2025
<i>Revised</i>	13-Nov-2025
<i>Accepted</i>	2-Dec-2025
<i>Published</i>	15-Dec-2025

---

Declarations:

Author's Contribution:

- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions**
- **Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Prokash Sarkar

prokashsarkar8670@gmail.com

---