



Awakening Shakti: On the Hindu Aesthetics of the Bhagavad Gita from the Scene Design of Padmaavat

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Abstract. This paper focuses on *Padmaavat* in terms of the aesthetics of the scene and spatial design to explore the religious philosophy of *the Bhagavad Gita*, the most famous poem in all Hindu literature. The different scenes in this Indian film can be classified into three distinct categories based on their portrayal of yoga philosophy, varying from superficial to profound. The first category showcases the visual aspect of fortresses and gardens, highlighting the illusion of material nature. The second category portrays the spirit of bhakti and the journey toward the eternal spiritual realm, as depicted in the Ghoomar scene. The third category depicts scenes of sacrifice and self-immolation, illustrating the path toward renunciation. In the film, Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar, akin to the goddess Shakti, exhibit divinity. They battle against evil by sacrificing themselves through self-immolation, all in the name of their country and justice. The film's portrayal of these religious beliefs is skillfully depicted in its scene design, which progressively explores the profound significance behind them, the ancient Sanskrit wisdom. Namely, in comparison to the transient material universe, the soul is eternal, and the spirit of Queen Padmavati is also immortal.

Keywords: Queen Padmavati; *Bhagavad Gita*; spatial context; religious philosophy;

1 Introduction

Padmaavat aroused controversy due to its depiction of self-immolation. In the days leading up to the film's release, there were violent protests and riots in several parts of India.¹ In Haryana, the protestors had attacked several vehicles, including a school bus.¹ However, it is essential to avoid analyzing the events of the 13th century solely through a modern lens. During that time in India, the city-states that followed Hinduism were frequently invaded by formidable Turkic tribes. In the aftermath of the destruction of their city-states, women chose self-immolation to avoid being taken captive by the Turkic tribes. As such, the study of the scene design of *Padmaavat*, coupled with the religious philosophy of *the Bhagavad Gita*, assures a deeper understanding of samsara. Firstly, the outer appearances of the two fortresses convey good and evil, respectively. Moreover, the garden layout offers a glimpse into the impermanence of material nature.

Secondly, in the Ghoomar scene, the metaphysical planning of the Vastu Purusha Mandala allows for an immersive experience of the spirit of bhakti as well as the idea of Purusottama Yoga towards the eternal spiritual realm. Lastly, the self-immolation scene of Queen Padmavati evokes the philosophy of samsara, the continuous cycle of death and rebirth, echoing the verse in *the Bhagavad Gita* stating that neither is it born at any time, nor does it die, the soul is eternal, existing in the past, present, and future². Queen Padmavati showcases a profound devotion to her country as she courageously sacrifices herself through self-immolation. Her essence endures eternally, emphasizing that the soul is not even killed when the body is killed². On this basis, this paper endeavors to offer an insightful comprehension of the Hindu aesthetics of *the Bhagavad Gita* as portrayed in the scene design of *Padmaavat*.

2 Enlightenment of Cultivation: Insight into the Laws of the Material Nature

2.1 Good and Evil

In the world, all living beings originate from two distinct categories: those that are considered good and those that are deemed evil.² As per Hinduism, good and evil are viewed as opposing forces that shape the fundamental attributes of the entire world. This concept is also prominently reflected in the visual composition of the film. *The Bhagavad Gita* outlines 26 specific practices that encapsulate the divine nature, including the cultivation of spiritual knowledge, charity, self-control, and the performance of sacrifice². Conversely, qualities such as pride, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance are associated with an evil nature². *The Churning of the Ocean of Milk*, a story of gods and demons harnessing Vasuki as a rope to turn Mount Mandara and recover the lost elixir of immortality, symbolizes the interplay between good and evil forces in the universe, with the combination of these forces giving rise to the material universe. Within the film, two distinct character archetypes are developed based on this principle. One archetype embodies divine nature, as exemplified by the King of Mewar and Queen Padmavati. The other archetype embodies evil nature, personified by Sultan Aladdin. The film also includes contrasting scenes to highlight these divergent character archetypes.

In the film, the Chittorgarh Fort, the abode of Queen Padmavati, serves as a symbol of divinity. The concept design of the Chittorgarh Fort is inspired by the historic Chittorgarh Fort, located in the Mewar region of Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, as depicted in Fig. 1a. However, the film exaggerates the fort's appearance through special effects, making it taller and more grandiose than the original one. This exaggeration serves to not only emphasize the fort's military strategic significance but also depict it as Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva and his consort, goddess Parvati. The fort symbolizes the pure and noble love shared between the King and the Queen of Mewar, embodying their divine nature of upholding the true Dharma and principles as well as their unwavering devotion. As per Hinduism, when Prakriti (female), the Sanskrit designation of the original nature and the primordial matter, contacts with Purusha (male), the Sanskrit

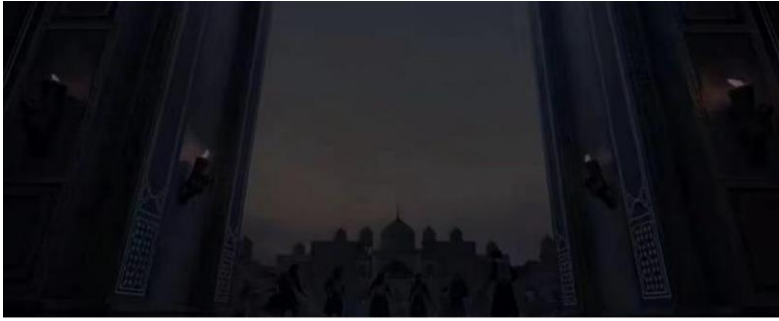
designation of the cosmic man or the soul, it starts a process of evolution that leads to the creation of the ultimate reality or universal spirit³. This scene also implies that the King and the Queen, akin to Shiva and Parvati, embody Purusha and Prakriti, respectively. Shiva is the Hindu God of Destruction, and their union symbolizes the spiritual symbol between the Brahman and Atman of Purusha and Prakriti, as well as the social ideology of a kingdom ruled by a divine king. All these elements contribute to the film's sense of divinity.

Contrary to the Chittorgarh Fort, the imperial palace of the Delhi Sultanate, where Sultan Aladdin resides, depicts an evil nature. As depicted in Fig. 1b, The Chittorgarh Fort, majestic and vividly colored, symbolizing a divine nature, creates a striking contrast with the Islamic invader, the Delhi Sultanate, whose imperial palace is in somber hues. In the case of the abode of Sultan Aladdin, it is constructed on flat terrain. The Chittorgarh Fort, by contrast, is erected on towering hills, symbolizing the spiritual superiority of the Rajput people over the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and showcasing their divine spiritual strength. Those with an evil nature believe that the pursuit of sensory gratification is the primary requirement of human civilization, which fills them with immeasurable anxiety that persists until their demise². In the film, Sultan Aladdin's schemes against the throne and his desire for beauty are viewed as morally wrong. According to Islamic beliefs, blue holds significant symbolism, which is associated with ideals such as perfect peace, truth and trust, surrender, loyalty, eternity, and lasting traditions and values⁴. Additionally, it is utilized in the ornamental design of Islamic architecture to symbolize reverence for the sky. Interestingly, in the film, Sultan Aladdin's abode is portrayed in a dark and menacing shade of blue-black instead of a bright and pure blue hue. This depiction serves to symbolize that Sultan Aladdin's evil deeds contradict religious beliefs and allude to the unfathomable depth of his evil desires.

For humans, qualities detached from the ordinary contribute to liberation, while qualities associated with evil result in bondage². A close-up shot in the film shows Sultan Aladdin, a Muslim invader, standing alone at the base of Chittorgarh Fort, appearing very insignificant. Chittorgarh Fort symbolizes the pinnacle of faith in the film, suggesting that even though the invaders have eventually conquered the fortress and acquired material wealth, they have been defeated by the Rajput people in terms of their spirit and faith, appearing insignificant and powerless.



(a)



(b)

Figs. 1 Comparison Between Two Fortresses from *Padmaavat* (2018)

2.2 The Illusion of Material Nature

According to Hinduism, the material universe people inhabit is seen as an illusion. This is due to the belief that these bodies, which have an end and suffer peculiar destruction, are declared to belong to the embodied soul, which is eternal, indestructible, and immeasurable². Moreover, humans are influenced by three modes of material nature, including goodness, passion, and ignorance. The mode of goodness generates attachment to pleasure²; the mode of passion generates attachment to action; and the mode of ignorance, veiling knowledge, generates attachment to negligence². In the film, Sultan Aladdin is more driven by passion and ignorance, as evidenced by his cravings for uncontrollable desires. Queen Padmavati, by contrast, embodies the mode of goodness, surrounded by happiness and detachment. The design of fortresses, gardens, corridors, and royal bedchambers in the film reflects the mode of goodness in material nature while also highlighting the underlying emptiness of the material universe.

The film portrays a connection between the garden, corridor, and Queen Padmavati's bedchamber, highlighting the goodness of Queen Padmavati. The square Persian garden adjacent to her bedchamber serves as a place for the couple to relax and spend time together. As depicted in Fig.2a, A significant scene showcases the King sitting on a golden swing in the corridor while the Queen stands before him, applying auspicious red powder to his forehead. This scene commemorates the Festival of Holi, symbolizing the love between the goddess Radha and her beloved, the god Krishna. It represents not only a wife's love for her husband but also encompasses the blessings of a pre-battle ritual. In this scene, the corridor is comprised of a sequence of Persian-inspired arches that serve to provide ventilation. Situated behind the golden swing is the royal bedchamber's gate, where the couple can enjoy a fine view of the garden. The walls surrounding the gate are also embellished with numerous Persian-style niches that house a collection of portraits depicting Indian women, created in the Persian miniature style. Furthermore, the entire corridor and bedchamber are constructed using white marble, like the Taj Mahal, with intricate floral patterns carved throughout. Certain areas even feature an abundance of mirror elements that shimmer in the candlelight. The film's portrayal of the garden and bedchamber draws inspiration from Persian art, showcasing

the beauty and allure of femininity. The director skillfully combines elements of Hindu mythology, specifically the goddess Radha, with the intricate floral decorations in Persian art. This artistic fusion creates the breathtaking and flourishing Golok, the residence of Radha and Krishna. Through this visual representation, the film not only captures the divine nature of the Queen but also highlights her tender side, akin to the goddess Radha. Furthermore, it symbolizes her unwavering loyalty to love, setting the stage for her ultimate sacrifice after the King's demise and the destruction of their kingdom.

In the film, the garden in front of the Queen's bedchamber portrays a Persian-inspired paradise, symbolizing the underlying emptiness of the material universe. It embodies the essence of a traditional Persian garden. As depicted in Fig. 2b, a feature of Persian gardens is that they are separated by walls. Within these walls, it represents the imagery of an Islamic paradise—a place of purity, pleasure, and opulence.⁵ In the film, the Persian garden combines elements of Islamic teachings and Hindu beliefs, the walls surrounding which are shaped like an equilateral quadrilateral, symbolizing paradise. Conversely, in Hinduism, the square represents the tangible and imaginative material universe. Those who seek spiritual enlightenment must venture into the square-shaped material universe and strive to practice in order to reach paradise. Additionally, the film showcases four pools that mirror the royal bedchamber constructed from white marble, creating the illusion that the royal bedchamber within the pools appears indistinguishable from the actual one. The director enhances this effect by placing candles around the pools, and the candlelight reflecting in the water adds an aura of enigma to the surroundings. In Hinduism, the material universe is filled with fantasies and illusions. The mirroring of the royal bedchamber in the pools blurs the line between reality and illusion. This mirrors the mysterious power of Shakti, the Universal Mother, who creates the illusion to test humanity. This also illustrates the transient nature of the material universe, just like a human being, after discarding old clothes, wears new clothes. Similarly, the soul, after discarding the old bodies, acquires new ones.² Even though Sultan Alauddin raids Mewar to fulfill his own material desires, it does not bring tranquility to his soul, as he is unable to overcome his inner avarice. Consequently, he remains entangled in the repercussions of his deeds and endures suffering. The illusory universe depicted in the pools distorts one's perception and hinders the realization of truth. Thus, only by dedicating oneself to practice and restraining inner greed can one attain the bliss of liberation.



(a)



(b)

Figs. 2. Garden Layout of the Chittorgarh Fort from *Padmaavat* (2018)

3 Root of True Dharma: Mysteries of Purusottama Yoga

3.1 Pious Bhakti

As per Hinduism, it is considered that engaging in bhakti is of utmost importance. This aligns with the teachings of *the Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna emphasized, “Only by resorting to me from the soul and engaging in scripture-based worship, you will obtain the benefit from me ².” This bhakti is often depicted in Indian films through ritual singing and dancing. These rituals involve offering sacrifices and singing praises to the deities, thereby expressing reverence for life and showing respect to the divine. According to *the Bhagavad Gita*, for those loving devotees who surrender all their actions unto me and absorb their minds in me, I soon become a savior from this world of the ocean of death ². One of the most iconic ritual dances showcased in the film is the Ghoomar, which exemplifies the spirit of bhakti to God among the Rajput people.

The divinity of bhakti in the ritual dance of Ghoomar is evident in the spatial design and the craftsmanship of the Queen's attire. Ghoomar, also referred to as ghumar, is a traditional folk dance of Rajasthan. Originally performed by the Bhil tribe as a form of worship to the goddess Saraswati, it was later embraced by other Rajasthani communities. The newly married bride is expected to dance the Ghoomar upon being welcomed to her new marital home. ⁶ This ritual dance is specifically orchestrated to occur in a quadrangular courtyard located within the Chittorgarh Fort. To create a visually stunning scene, the majority of the setting consists of computer-generated special effects. The invasion of the Turkic tribes has led to a blending of Islamic and Hindu artistic styles, which is evident in the architecture of the quadrangular courtyard. For instance, during the Ghoomar, the courtyard is surrounded by multiple pavilions of various sizes, resembling Islamic architecture. The largest pavilion, where the King sits, offers the best vantage point to enjoy the entire ritual. To capture the divinity of the ritual dance and the devotion of the Rajput people to Hinduism, the courtyard is embellished with a multitude of intricately carved niches. These niches are adorned with traditional Hindu motifs and house statues of Hindu gods and goddesses, as well as sparkling candles

used in Hindu rituals. The entire courtyard of Chittorgarh Fort is constructed with locally sourced yellow sandstone, contributing to a profoundly religious ambiance. Furthermore, the director focuses meticulously on the costumes featured in the film. The ensemble most widely worn by the women in Rajasthan has been a combination of an upper garment (the puthia, or kanchli and kurti), a lower garment (the ghagra or skirt), and the veil (the odhna) draped to flow across the upper and lower parts of the body⁶. Furthermore, the dancers wear costumes adorned with intricate gota embroidery, which is exceptionally exquisite. What sets it apart is that both the Queen and the dancers drape a cloth with traditional Rajput patterns above the waist. In Hindu traditions, a stitched garment was considered impure, and even today, especially in rural areas⁶, the practice of draping unstitched cloth is used as a covering for the upper body at marriage ceremonies and religious occasions⁶. This showcases that the bhakti expressed during a wedding ceremony is blessed by the gods and acknowledged by society. Additionally, the Ghoomar also solidifies the impact of Queen Padmavati within the Rajput community.

Furthermore, the director effectively captures the essence of bhakti in the Ghoomar through the color language. Queen Padmavati, the protagonist in the film, dons a long skirt adorned with a red and gold border, while the other dancers also wear long skirts in vibrant colors to add a festive ambiance to the wedding. However, the hues of these costumes, as well as the courtyard, are muted throughout the entire film, enveloped in a rich brown tone, resulting in a cohesive effect, as depicted in Fig. 3. The director's choice to tone down the vibrant color also mirrors the mindset of Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar undisturbed by honor and dishonor, heat and cold, joy and sorrow, and criticism and praise². Devotees like Queen Padmavati neither become joyful nor sorrowful when gaining or losing material possessions². As per *the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, when the mind loses desires even for objects seen or described in traditions or scriptures, it acquires a state of utter desirelessness that is called non-attachment⁷. Sultan Alauddin, as an invader, employs deceitful schemes and ruthless methods to fulfill his own desires. He sacrifices his own army, destroys Mewar, and kidnaps the King, all in pursuit of Queen Padmavati's beauty. These dishonorable actions result in his notorious reputation and demonstrate his lack of moral character. The Queen and the King of Mewar, by contrast, embody a divine nature. They adhere to principles during times of war and possess a sense of patriotism, prioritizing the greater good over personal gain. They exemplify the true Dharma taught in Hinduism and demonstrate control over material desires and cravings. Their unwavering spirit leaves a lasting impression on the world. Furthermore, the use of dark shades of brown also suggests that even during the celebration, there is an underlying feeling of turmoil. Ultimately, Sultan Alauddin employs deception to bring about the downfall of Mewar. Consequently, the wedding celebration featuring the Ghoomar is akin to mourning in this country.

3.2 Journey towards the Eternal Spiritual Realm

Human actions and choices are always influenced by the consequences of karma and the effects of the material universe. However, one who is free from illusion, false prestige, and false association, who understands the eternal, and who is done with material lust, attains to the eternal kingdom². In the material universe, there exists a banyan that symbolizes the numerous illusions that surround us. To overcome these illusions, one must firmly wield the weapon of non-attachment and cut down this deeply rooted banyan. After doing so, one must seek a place from which they will never return and surrender to the Supreme Person.² Therefore, the true purpose of yogis is to perceive the illusions of the material universe and embark on a journey toward the eternal spiritual realm. The Vastu Purusha Mandala depicted in the Ghoomar scene embodies the philosophy of Purusottama yoga.

In the Ghoomar scene, the use of square and circle reflects the philosophical journey from the material universe filled with cosmic illusions to the eternal spiritual realm. This ritual dance also incorporates a profound religious philosophy, particularly by employing the Vastu Purusha Mandala. The Vastu Purusha Mandala is a philosophical diagram that provides a foundation for Hindu aesthetics, linking physical distance, religious position, and universal scale in both time and space. As shown in Fig. 4, the basic form of the Vastu Purusha Mandala is the square, and the square is the important and ideal geometric form in Hindu philosophy, which represents the earth. The circle represents the universe and is considered the perfect shape, without any beginning or end, suggesting timelessness and infinity, a typically heavenly feature.⁸ In the film, the dance scene's spatial layout includes a courtyard designed as a quadrilateral with nearly equal sides, resembling the square perimeter of the Vastu Purusha Mandala. This architectural choice symbolizes the material universe, which, in Hinduism, is filled with cosmic illusions, injustice, and suffering. According to Hindu belief, the goddess Maya created this make-believe universe as a divine play. As a result, the Ghoomar dancers in this universe express their yearning for the eternal spiritual realm and their devotion to the divinity and the Para Brahman through the art of dance. The circular arrangement of dancers, led by Queen Padmavati, aligns with the circular pattern found within the Vastu Purusha Mandala. This represents the infinite universe, which exists beyond the constraints of material existence, time, and space. Furthermore, the dancers transition from a square formation to a circle, conveying the philosophical idea in Hinduism that one must transcend desires and move from the illusory and finite material realm towards the eternal and detached universe to achieve liberation. After congregating in a circular arrangement, dozens of dancers begin to twirl. Their large skirts generate vibrant circles as they twirl, mirroring the vitality of the Hindu cosmos. In Hindu mythology, there exist numerous deities and corresponding factions, each supreme deity embodying a distinct universe, such as the Vishnu universe, the Shiva universe, and the Shakti universe. In the Karanodakasayi Vishnu, innumerable universes emanate from the pores of Lord Krishna². The elaborate movements of the Ghoomar provide a tangible manifestation of the invisible universe, demonstrating the worship and admiration for the vitality of the Hindu cosmos.

Furthermore, the arrangement of the Vastu Purusha Mandala incorporated in the Ghoomar also symbolizes the divine nature of Queen Padmavati. The Ghoomar is a tribute to the goddess Saraswati. The goddess Saraswati, the consort of Brahma, the Creator, is one of the avatars of the goddess Shakti, the Universal Mother. Brahma, the Creator, imparted knowledge of the ancient scriptures, the Vedas, to humanity. Similarly, the goddess Saraswati, with her melodic veena, diffused the harmonious wisdom of music across the earthly realm. Hence, the film also suggests that Queen Padmavati, akin to the goddess Saraswati worshiped in the Ghoomar, possesses wisdom and noble virtues. Furthermore, the film showcases Queen Padmavati's astuteness as she strategically journeys to Sultan Alauddin's palace to save the King of Mewar. Moreover, during the Ghoomar, Queen Padmavati gracefully performs at the heart of the courtyard while the other dancers encircle her. This conveys the idea that Queen Padmavati, akin to the goddess Saraswati, the Prakriti of Para Brahman, earns admiration from the women of Mewar. By observing the Ghoomar scene using the Vastu Purusha Mandala, the square courtyard symbolizes the earthly realm, the outer circle formed by the dancers represents the human realm, and the inner circle formed by the dancers surrounding Queen Padmavati represents the celestial realm of the goddess Saraswati. This showcases that the Queen, like endeavoring transcendentalists, situated in self-realization, can see all this clearly ². As per *the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, indifference to the subtlest elements, constituent principles, or qualities themselves, achieved through a knowledge of the nature of Purusha, is called supreme non-attachment ⁷. This also suggests that one must overcome the three modes of nature, including goodness, passion, and ignorance ⁷, to approach the Supreme God, achieve liberation, and reach the eternal spiritual realm.



Fig. 3. Ghoomar Scene Design from *Padmaavat* (2018)



Fig. 4. 2.0 Vastu Purusha Mandala, Containing the Cosmic Man, Purusha

4 Awakening the Power: A Journey towards the Perfect Realm of Renunciation

4.1 A Battle Full of Spirituality, Love, and Sacrifice

The portrayal in the final temple scene depicts the fighting spirit of the women of Mewar. This parallels the teachings of good prevailing over evil outlined in *the Bhagavad Gita*, that either you will die in battle and attain heaven, or after conquering the battle, you will enjoy the kingdom of earth ². Inspired by these teachings, Queen Padmavati and the women of the Mewar fight with a deep sense of spirituality, love, and sacrifice. Holding joy and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, they prepare to fight for the sake of fighting ². Moreover, the ritual performed in the temple showcases their unwavering devotion, as they act with detachment and seek no material rewards ³. Ultimately, they achieve victory over their enemies in a spiritual realm, akin to the goddess Sati.

In the film, the architectural design of the temple emphasizes the bravery of female warriors, including Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar. In the final scene, Queen Padmavati leads all the women in a ritual at the temple, preparing for self-immolation in defense of their country. While the palaces of Chittorgarh Fort have been destroyed in real life, the temple section remains relatively intact, built as per the Indo-Aryan style of temples with a curved shape resembling the appearance of corn or bamboo shoots ³. However, in the film, the temple design deviates from reality and follows a Dravidian-style structure with a stepped pyramid shape. This difference is primarily due to the portrayal of Queen Padmavati as being from Sri Lanka, hence incorporating a strong Dravidian influence in many scenes. The temple showcased in the film is made of green sandstone and granite, which are typical materials used in the Dravidian architectural style. This is different from the yellow sandstone commonly used in the northern part of ancient India. The temple structure comprises various elements, including the main shrine (vimana), the sanctum (garbhagriha), the hall (mandapa), and the superstructure (shikhara). In Sanskrit, the term "vimana" originally refers to the aerial chariot of the gods, but in this context, it represents the entire temple or the main shrine. ³ The temple in the film resembles the Dravidian architectural style of the famous Pancha Rathas, which literally translates to five chariots, and figuratively refers to the Pandavas, the five powerful sons of Pandu in *the Mahabharata*. Therefore, the appearance of the temple in the film is mainly inspired by the Dravidian style, portraying the temple as a colossal chariot of a deity. On the shikhara of the temple, numerous canopy-shaped shrines are found, adorned with intricate carvings of Hindu goddesses on the walls and pillars. As Queen Padmavati leads her people out of the temple, preparing for self-immolation, the entire temple looks like a chariot, symbolizing her readiness to combat evil as a warrior goddess. The director also pays careful attention to detail by placing several bells at the temple's gate. As the Queen emerges from the temple gate, maids ring these bells, reminiscent of the goddess Chandraghanta, the married form of the goddess Parvati, who uses bells to dispel demons and safeguard Mount Kailash in Indian mythology, as depicted in Fig. 5a. Hence, the architectural style of the temple

follows the Dravidian tradition, reflecting the strength of Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar in their ability to ward off evil like the divine goddess.

Furthermore, the conclusive ritual portrayal in the temple depicts Queen Padmavati's actions as brimming with spirituality, love, and sacrifice. The temple's interior is designed to resemble a chaitya, featuring a rectangular hall encompassed by a corridor of stone pillars. The area where the statue of Shiva Lingam is situated has a curved surface, facilitating the Parikrama ritual, as depicted in Fig. 5b. Parikrama refers to the act of circumambulating or walking around the stupa, an important ritual, and devotional practice. The end of the hall is thus rounded, like the apse in Western architecture.⁹ In Mewar, the predominant belief system is Hinduism. Therefore, instead of a stupa, there is a statue of Shiva Lingam at the end of the hall. Beneath the statue of Shiva Lingam is a depiction of the female reproductive organ, referred to as the Yoni. Shiva Lingam represents the male reproductive organ. The combination of these two statues symbolizes the union of Purusha and Prakriti. The surrounding altar of Shiva Lingam is adorned with numerous tridents, which are the weapons of Lord Shiva symbolizing power and destruction. Lord Shiva is considered the Supreme God, also known as the God of Destruction. In the age of the final dharma, Lord Shiva will perform the Tandava and wield his trident to bring about the destruction of the world. However, following the destruction, Lord Shiva will also recreate the world. Just as Queen Padmavati conveys to the priest in the temple, she approaches her role as the Queen of Mewar with a mindset characterized by spirituality, love, and sacrifice. All scripture-based actions in their entirety culminate in true spiritual knowledge². Queen Padmavati also worships the statue of Lord Shiva with the same mindset, which is why she does not fear self-immolation or death. Therefore, Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar consider self-immolation for the sake of their country an honorable act. They firmly believe that death only signifies the demise of the physical body, while the soul will be reborn in other forms, thus ensuring the immortality of the spirit.



(a)



(b)

Figs. 5. Interior and Exterior Design of the Temple from *Padmaavat* (2018)

4.2 Death and Rebirth

In the final scene of the film, Queen Padmavati leads all the women in self-immolation as a sacrifice for their country. They achieve a state of renunciation. Namely, they are free from attachment, absent of egoism, endowed with patience and enthusiasm, and free from vices in the success and failure of the action. According to Hinduism, the soul, eternal and unchanging, cannot be perceived by the eyes or understood by the mind. Because one who is born is certain to die, and the dead are certain to be reborn.² Therefore, Queen Padmavati calmly faces her self-immolation, displaying a dauntless spirit like that of the goddess Sati.

The spatial design in the scene where women set themselves on fire represents the concept of death and rebirth. The act of self-immolating in the film is influenced by the ancient practice of Sati. Sati is derived from the name of the goddess Sati, who self-immolated because she was unable to bear her father Daksha's humiliation of her and her husband Shiva. The term "Sati" was originally interpreted as a chaste woman.¹⁰ During the 7th to 17th centuries, there was a prevalent practice that emerged due to the invasions by the Turkic tribes. At that time, Indian women who faced the prospect of forced prostitution and enslavement opted for self-immolation to avoid this fate. Hence, the practice of Sati, as portrayed in the film, not only depicts women sacrificing themselves for their deceased husbands but also portrays it as a courageous act of resistance against Sultan Alauddin. In the film, Queen Padmavati leads the women out of the temple, forming a circle around the large pool in front of it, considering it an altar. They consume cannabis leaves together to alleviate their pain, pass through a small door, and proceed toward the location for self-immolation. The film presents a close-up of the women, capturing the moment when a multitude of them hurriedly enter through a small door, resulting in a visually confined scene, as depicted in Fig. 6a. The location where self-immolation takes place is a temporary structure constructed along a pathway that leads to the temple in Chittorgarh Fort. The area designated for this self-immolation ritual is not particularly spacious, especially after numerous women hurry inside, mak-

ing it seem very narrow. This brings us to the concept of garbhagriha, or womb chamber, in Hindu architecture, from the Sanskrit words “garbha” for womb and “griha” for house¹¹. The size of the interior space in Hindu temples is not particularly spacious. The sanctum, known as the garbhagriha, is dedicated to fertility worship. Consequently, the restricted area for the self-immolation ritual in the film also serves as a symbol of the cycle of death and rebirth.

In addition, the internal structure of the self-immolation scene also serves as a representation of Queen Padmavati's divinity. The spatial design of the self-immolation ritual includes two levels of winding corridors on either side and a descending staircase, with a stack of funeral pyres at the bottom of the staircase, as depicted in Fig. 6b. In the film, there are multiple female handprints carved into the winding corridors. These handprints hold significance in Indian history, as they represent the honor bestowed upon widows who sacrificed themselves for their husbands. In the past, these women were honored with Sati stones or altars to commemorate their actions. For instance, the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur features a stone with carved handprints of women who self-immolated in the 18th century. The film, released in 2018, received widespread protests in various regions of India due to its perceived endorsement of the outdated practice of Sati. However, in order to fully comprehend the film, it is important to consider the historical context of the 13th century and the director's portrayal of women's self-immolation. These women are not only sacrificing themselves for their deceased husbands but also for their honor and devotion to the country. The director deliberately crafts a descending staircase for the women to walk down before self-immolation, which serves as a visual representation of the steep stairs commonly seen in Hindu temples, such as those in Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Consequently, the staircase in the film symbolizes the depth of their religious devotion. In the film, Queen Padmavati is shown holding a cloth that bears the handprint of the King as she leads a group of women down the stairs. The film highlights the moment when the Queen descends the staircase, placing special emphasis on her act of self-immolation. As she stands on the staircase, she exudes a divine presence, akin to the avatar of the goddess Shakti, the goddess Sati. With a devout expression, Queen Padmavati fearlessly leads the women down the staircase toward self-immolation. Just like the goddess Shakti willingly reincarnated as Sati, the daughter of Daksha, for the betterment of the world, Queen Padmavati calmly faces self-immolation. In order to preserve the well-being of the world and the dignity of Shiva, Sati set herself on the fire of yoga, opposing the evil intentions of Daksha's existence. In the film, Queen Padmavati emerges from the temple and walks toward the location of her self-immolation without saying a single word. Only an elderly woman sings praises to her, proclaiming "Long Live the Queen", because, like the heroic deeds of the goddess Sati, it makes words superfluous. As the film concludes, Queen Padmavati serenely walks into the funeral pyres, and her silhouette gradually fades within the flames, symbolizing the purification of her soul. This poignant moment echoes Queen Padmavati's earlier statement in front of the temple: "Those who lust for our bodies would not even get their hands on our shadows." Sultan Alauddin, throughout his lifetime, will never catch a glimpse of the shadow of Queen Padmavati, and his insatiable greed will never be satisfied. This represents his greatest failure in life. As per *the Bhagavad Gita*, the soul cannot be burned by fire, dissolved

by water, dried by air, or cut by weapons ². The demise of the body leads to the rebirth of the soul.

In the film, Queen Padmavati and the women of Mewar are depicted as following the true Dharma, with a strong emphasis on honesty and adherence to rules. Their unwavering devotion to sacrifice has garnered them legendary status, as illustrated in the film when it is stated, "Our bodies will be reduced to ashes, but our pride and honor will remain immortal." The physical demise of Queen Padmavati is just the start of her legacy. Future generations regard her as a revered deity in history, with her essence being everlasting.



(a)



(b)

Figs.6. Self-immolation Scene Design from *Padmaavat* (2018)

5 Conclusion

Both the depictions of the paradisaal atmosphere of the Persian garden and the graphic layout of the Vastu Purusha Mandala in the Ghoomar scene are created as an introduction to the final scene of Queen Padmavati's self-immolation, which holds significant symbolism of destruction. This symbolism encourages profound contemplation, partic-

ularly against the backdrop of today's technologically advanced society, where machines and technologies have greatly enhanced human existence and productivity and humanity is steadily progressing towards a post-human era. Despite these advancements in material life, human desires remain insatiable. This can be compared to Sultan Aladdin in the film, who is depicted as being in a state of passion and ignorance. As a result, "man's will, not heaven, decides," a prevalent notion, has emerged. Hence, it is imperative for us to engage in self-reflection, considering the inevitability of death and the continuous cycle of destruction and recreation of the material world. Just like when Jiang Xun visited Angkor Wat, the ancient ruins of Hinduism that had stood for thousands of years, he couldn't help but reflect on the transient nature of empires and humans. He remarked, "Both empires and humans will be reduced to ashes someday. Angkor Wat allows us to step into this scene of destruction and contemplate the absurdity of existence, perhaps even with a hint of bitterness ¹²." This aligns with the teachings of *the Bhagavad Gita*, instructing us to be absent of attachment to the enjoyment of the pleasures of the senses, absent of egoism, and repeatedly reflect upon the distresses and faults in birth, death, old age, and disease ², thereby taking immense pleasure in obtaining detachment.

Moreover, the spirit of Queen Padmavati, who selflessly sacrificed herself for her country, is immortal. She, like an avatar of the goddess Sati, is bestowed with the divine power of Shakti. Additionally, in the final scene, the Queen gracefully steps into the flames. Her serene smile bears similarity to Jiang Xun's depiction of the Khmer smile at the Bayon Temple, which embodies love and hatred, transcends the boundaries of life and death, and is as pure and graceful as a lotus emerging from a muddy pond ¹². Hence, the heroic deeds of Queen Padmini also serve as a revelation, highlighting that the material world is an illusion. A reverential person who has won over his senses is devoted to obtaining the true spiritual knowledge of the Supreme God, and after gaining this knowledge, he, without any delay, soon attains the Supreme Peace ².

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