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Social Praxis, Ideological Hegemony, and Resistance in Ranbir Kapoor-Starring 'Ramayana': A Gramscian and Freirean Analysis

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Abstract

Cinema is a key cultural practice used to convey ideological messages, moral values, social identities and power relations. Mythological cinema plays an important role in conveying cultural values. The movie, Ramayana, released in 2026, directed by Nitesh Tiwari, and starring Ranbir Kapoor as Rama, provides us with an opportunity to look at the ways in which mythology is used in cinema and Social Praxis. This paper has analysed the major dimensions of Social Praxis conveyed via the adaptation of Ramayana using Antonio Gramsci's theory of Cultural Hegemony and Paulo Freire's theory of Praxis. Gramsci's understanding of hegemony allows us to understand how cultural narratives can create and justify certain moral and ideological messages. Freire's understanding of praxis can help us to understand the critical nature of reflection and action. This paper has examined the ways in which morality, gender, kinship, political power, cultural identity and ideology are conveyed through the movie. This paper has argued that mythological cinema can be a source of ideological messages which can allow people to reflect on cultural messages. This paper has taken a qualitative approach. It looked at the theoretical aspects of the epic, the movie and public narratives. This research viewed cinema as an active cultural process that can both enforce hegemony and offer opportunities for emancipation. This paper has concluded that the significance of Ramayana in society does not come from it being a mythological movie but instead from it allowing people to reflect on culture.

Keywords: Cinema as Praxis, Ramayana, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Cultural Hegemony, Ideology, Critical Consciousness, Social Change, Mythological Cinema.

1. Introduction

Cinema is an influential part of culture. It plays a key role in creating, spreading and changing societal ideas. In addition to being a form of entertainment, cinema is a key cultural medium for conveying moral values, cultural identity, political ideologies and norms. Many movies reference established cultural narratives to create visual and symbolic references. Mythological cinema plays a key role in this. Ramayana is one of the most influential epics in South Asia. It has helped shape our understanding of morality, kinship, gender, political power, devotion and

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responsibility. This narrative has been spread through many different sources, including literature, oral narratives, theatre, rituals and cinema. However, the Ramayana has many different interpretations and adaptations depending on the region, showing the diversity of cultures and ideologies in South Asia (Ramanujan, 1991; Richman, 1991).

'Ramayana: Part 1', directed by Nitesh Tiwari and starring Ranbir Kapoor as Rama, is a modern adaptation of this long-lasting epic. This is an example of mythology being incorporated into visual culture through the use of cinema. Public narratives have highlighted moral responsibility, sacrifice, empathy and conflict between personal desires and moral obligations (Harsh, 2026; Niyogi, 2026). This film has an anthropological significance. Social Praxis is the process of reflecting and acting that people and communities take part in to engage with, reinforce, negotiate or change their social world. Cinema can be seen as a way of communicating cultural ideologies; however, it can create opportunities for critical interpretations.

The theory of cultural hegemony from Antonio Gramsci helps us understand the ideological aspect of cinema. Gramsci argued that the dominant classes in society exert their power not only through force but also by creating consent, providing cultural leadership and organising a 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971). This means that cultural narratives can create a naturalised understanding of certain social situations. Paulo Freire's theory of Praxis helps us understand how cinema can be a tool of reflection and action. He viewed praxis as reflection and action upon the world to change it (Freire, 1970). This places emphasis on critical consciousness and the ability for people to challenge oppressive systems. We can use this theory to understand the extent to which cinema can be a tool for reinforcing existing ideologies or creating opportunities for critical reflection. By combining the two theories, we can understand why mythological cinema can reinforce ideology. This paper looked at the major dimensions of Social Praxis in Ranbir Kapoor's Ramayana. This has included morality, gender, kinship, political power, cultural identity and resistance in cinema.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To critically examine the representation of cultural hegemony, ideological reproduction, moral authority, gender relations, kinship obligations, political legitimacy, and cultural identity in Ranbir Kapoor's Ramayana through the theoretical perspectives of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire.

2. To analyse how the film's narrative episodes, character portrayals, dialogues, and visual compositions articulate ideological negotiation, resistance, critical consciousness, and the potential for social transformation, conceptualizing cinema as a cultural practice situated between social reproduction and transformative praxis.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Antonio Gramsci - Cultural Hegemony and Ideological Praxis

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides us with an understanding of how culture and ideology relate to each other. He described hegemony as the cultural and ideological leadership of the dominant group through consent (Gramsci, 1971). He argued that it is created through

institutions, intellectualism, culture and a common sense of the world. It is not a completely stable process. It is constantly negotiated between dominant ideologies and other social perspectives. Gramsci's idea of common sense is important when looking at mythological cinema. This is a collection of beliefs, assumptions and ideas that have been built up over time. Cultural narratives can be used to create a common sense by presenting certain moral and social situations as natural.

This means that cinema can be viewed as an important source of hegemony. The characters, storylines, symbolism and emotions portrayed can reinforce culturally dominant values. For example, Rama can be analysed as a morally responsible and ethical character due to the cultural construction of him being the ideal masculine figure, having legitimate power, being a responsible son and behaving ethically. However, Gramsci's theory does emphasise that there can be counter-hegemonic interpretations. Not everyone will agree with the cultural messages, and so alternative interpretations can be created through critical reflection, social experiences and alternative ideologies. The Ramayana can be analysed in terms of how dominant cultural messages have been conveyed in cinema.

2.2 Paulo Freire- Praxis and Critical Consciousness

Paulo Freire's theory of praxis helps us understand how cinema can be a tool of change. He described praxis as reflection and action (Freire, 1970). This means that it is a process of critically analysing the world and developing a conscious action to change it. Freire argued that people need to recognise how their lives are structured to make changes to society. His idea of conscientisation focuses on how people can move from a passive acceptance of current social situations to understanding how they were constructed.

Cinema can be viewed as a tool for critical reflection. The narratives can cause people to rethink their views on morality, justice, gender, power and responsibility. Using Freire's theory, we can analyse how the narrative of Ramayana can cause people to reflect on their actions. However, critical consciousness should not be confused with watching a movie. Freire's theory of praxis requires dialogue, reflection and meaningful engagement. Therefore, cinema can only create change if it has the right context.

2.3 Combining Gramsci and Freire

Combining the theories of Gramsci and Freire can help us understand the relationship between ideology and change. Gramsci can help us understand how cultural narratives create consent and organise cultural messages. Freire can help us understand how people can critically analyse these messages. Whilst these are complementary, they are not the same. Gramsci focuses on the historical and political aspects, whilst Freire emphasises critical consciousness, dialogue and praxis. This study has viewed mythological cinema as a cultural space where hegemony can be reinforced, negotiated and potentially changed through critical reflection.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study has taken a qualitative approach. It has used an interpretive and theoretical design, examining the relationship between cinema and Social Praxis using Gramscian and Freirean theories. It is based on cultural anthropology, visual anthropology and critical cultural studies.

3.2 Analytical Material

The analysis is based on three main areas. These are the Ramayana epic and its interpretations across cultures; public narratives, promotional material and official themes; and literature relating to cultural hegemony, ideology, praxis, critical consciousness and cinema. Rama has been publicly described as a morally responsible, sacrificing and ethically responsible character. This provides us with an understanding to work from. The themes have been analysed in relation to the wider ideological and social significance.

3.3 Analysis

This study has taken a theory-driven interpretive approach. Gramscian hegemony has been used to analyse how cultural messages have been used to legitimise morality, gender, kinship and political power. Freirean praxis has been used to analyse how there are opportunities for critical reflection, challenging ideologies and creating socially conscious change. The analysis has been divided into morality, gender praxis, kinship praxis, political praxis, cultural identity and visual interpretation of scenes.

3.4 Limitations

This study has taken a theoretical approach. It cannot claim to show any real changes in people's attitudes or behaviours. This would require systematic research looking at how people feel about the movie through interviews, focus groups, ethnography or online analysis. This study is also looking at the interpretation of a modern adaptation of Ramayana rather than the whole tradition. There are many different versions of the epic. Each will have different cultural meanings depending on the time period and context. Specific lines of dialogue and visual details reported in reviews require verification against the film itself.

4. Major Dimensions of Social Praxis in Ramayana

4.1 Rama's Swayamvar and the Cinematic Construction of Moral Hegemony

The Swayamvar scene demonstrates the construction of morality when Rama lifts up and snaps the bow that was owned by Shiva. This scene is linked with physical strength, divinity, and a marital relationship. Rama also bows down when snapping the bow, creating an ethical aspect to the scene. This visual has strong anthropological significance. Throughout the scene, Rama's incredible strength is shown to be respected and controlled through him bowing down. This constructs a masculine figure whose power is morally justified through self-restraint.

From a Gramscian perspective, the portrayal of Rama can be seen as a culturally constructed ideal. The link between physical ability, ethical conduct and social recognition can justify culturally dominant ideologies surrounding an ideal masculine figure. The grand visual aspect of this scene shows that ideology can be portrayed through spectacle. The scene shows Rama to have an incredible status by making the scene visually captivating. This may help to naturalise the moralistic aspect of authority. Using Freire's idea of praxis, this scene can be

viewed from another angle. The scene brings up questions around power and authority. Rama's action is morally significant not only because of his ability but also because of the moral aspect of the action itself. This scene might cause people to think about how power and humility can be linked; however, whether this creates critical consciousness would require further empirical research.

4.2 Rama's Exile: Hegemony, Duty, and the Internalization of Social Norms

The sequence depicting Rama's exile constitutes an important emotional and ideological moment. Following Kaikeyi's demand and Dasharatha's commitment to his promises, Rama relinquishes his claim to the throne and prepares to undertake exile. The scene's dark, lamp-lit backdrop, departing royal chariot, and emotionally affected followers transform exile into a collective emotional event (Mitra, 2026).

The imagery highlights the disparity between his rightful place as royalty and his choice to give up political power. The royal chariot travelling past the group of followers indicates Rama giving up his power for sacrifice. This sequence can be interpreted through Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The narrative represents adherence to dharma and familial obligation as morally legitimate even when these obligations conflict with personal interests. Rama's willingness to accept exile potentially reinforces a cultural framework in which duty acquires priority over individual desire. The cinematic representation is significant because the legitimacy of authority is established through voluntary sacrifice rather than coercive enforcement. Rama's acceptance of exile can be interpreted as an embodiment of moral consent. His conduct demonstrates how normative expectations may become internalized as ethical dispositions.

From a Freirean perspective, the sequence generates a tension between ethical responsibility and the unquestioned acceptance of social obligations. The central question is whether duty should be understood as an unquestionable moral imperative or as a principle requiring critical examination in relation to justice and individual autonomy. This sequence shows the connection between reproduction and critical reflection. Whilst it may strengthen the cultural ideals of being dutiful as a son, there are opportunities to think about the importance of personal autonomy and political authority.

4.3 Shurpanakha's Mutilation: Gendered Violence and the Contestation of Hegemonic Morality

The episode involving Shurpanakha constitutes an analytically significant sequence. Shurpanakha's encounter with Rama and Lakshmana is situated within the context of her attraction to Rama, after which Lakshmana mutilates her nose. The film reportedly incorporates Sita's criticism of the act and Rama's apology. Shurpanakha's experiences are also connected to memories of her clan's historical subordination, providing context for Ravana's response (Bhatia, 2026). This sequence creates an interpretive tension between normative morality and gendered violence. From a Gramscian perspective, Shurpanakha's representation can be examined in relation to the ideological construction of femininity, sexuality, and moral legitimacy. The episode raises questions concerning how women's desire is represented and how violations of normative expectations may become associated with punishment.

The cutting off of Shurpanakha's nose can be seen as a form of social control over the female body. However, the reported representation of Sita criticising the act and Rama apologising complicates a purely hegemonic interpretation. The narrative introduces a critical moral position within the represented social order itself.

This moment can be analysed through Freire's concept of critical reflection. The questioning of Lakshmana's action suggests that an act undertaken within a culturally familiar narrative may nevertheless be subjected to ethical scrutiny. The scene demonstrates that ideological narratives are not necessarily internally homogeneous. Contradictions may emerge within their own representations, creating opportunities for alternative moral interpretations. The episode is relevant to feminist anthropology because it raises questions about gendered violence, cultural norms, and moral authority. It also invites analysis of Shurpanakha beyond her conventional narrative function as a catalyst for Ravana's actions.

4.4 Ravana's Inner Conflict and the Construction of Counter-Hegemonic Consciousness

The cinematic representation of Ravana's psychological conflict provides an alternative to the conventional construction of the antagonist. The film reportedly incorporates imaginative sequences depicting Ravana's internal voices and conflicting psychological dispositions, representing the antagonist as a complex figure shaped by competing desires, ambitions, and experiences (Harsh, 2026; Mitra, 2026).

The depiction of Ravana with many heads could be seen to symbolise his inner conflict. This therefore provides an insight into the range of ideological and psychological elements which can exist within him. Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides an analytical framework for examining the relationship between dominant moral classifications and alternative interpretations of authority. The conventional opposition between Rama as the embodiment of righteousness and Ravana as the embodiment of evil may be understood as a culturally established moral structure. Ravana's inner conflict creates complexity around this. He may encourage the audience to think about social exclusion, political aspirations, immoral actions and his history. However, psychological complexity does not automatically establish Ravana as a counter-hegemonic figure. Counter-hegemony, in Gramscian terms, involves alternative ideological formations capable of challenging dominant cultural leadership.

Freire's concept of praxis provides a further interpretive dimension. Ravana's internal conflict may be understood as a representation of the contradiction between self-awareness and ethical transformation. The scene raises questions about whether recognition of internal contradictions leads to critical reflection or whether unresolved contradictions reinforce destructive action.

The anthropological significance lies in the potential to complicate the moral boundaries through which cultural narratives construct legitimate and illegitimate social identities.

4.5 Jatayu and Ravana's Battle: Visual Spectacle, Resistance, and Ethical Action

Jatayu's battle with Ravana occurs during the scenes of Sita's kidnapping. This is a key scene, highlighted in reviews for the visual design of the Vimana and the intensity of the action (Bhatia, 2026; Mitra, 2026; Singh, 2026). The visuals have transformed this act of resistance

into an impressive spectacle. Jatayu has acted out of a sense of moral duty; he has attempted to save Sita, which can be seen as a sign of his morality.

In terms of Gramscian politics, this scene can be analysed. Although Ravana was in possession of great power and magic, this does not mean he would be considered to have moral power. Jatayu resisted this, showing a contrast between power and morality. Furthermore, the scale of the scene adds to this. The contrast between the Vimana and the mythical bird has transformed this into a visual symbol of resistance. This can be linked to Freire's view on praxis where it can be seen how Jatayu has acted in a position of resistance to protect others from domination. Praxis is about recognising and acting upon something. Within this scene, Jatayu has acted in resistance. This should not be seen as a scene that will cause audiences to have a more emancipatory consciousness; however, this is an example of visuals used to show morality within the film. This scene can be useful to enable people to critically reflect; however, it can be seen how the spectacle is linked to ideology. The visual aspect can make the audience feel more emotionally attached; however, this can also affect how culture views resistance, power and morality.

4.6 Sita's Representation and the Negotiation of Gendered Agency

Sita's representation provides a significant opportunity for examining the relationship between gender ideology and cultural praxis. The character has historically been associated with ideals of chastity, devotion, sacrifice, and marital commitment. These representations have contributed to culturally influential understandings of femininity and women's social responsibilities.

According to reviews, Sita is portrayed as virtuous and determined throughout the film. For example, she participates in the confrontation with the army of Shurpanakha (Harsh, 2026; Singh, 2026). Some reviewers, however, feel that her character could have had more depth and could have been developed further outside her relationship with Rama (Niyogi, 2026). From a Gramscian perspective, Sita's representation may reproduce culturally established ideals of feminine virtue, marital devotion, and moral responsibility. Nevertheless, her participation in narrative situations may complicate the assumption that feminine agency is exclusively expressed through passive endurance or marital devotion.

Praxis, a concept brought by Freire, stresses the importance of critically analysing the social circumstances which cause certain gender roles to become normalised. The portrayal of Sita can therefore be analysed in relation to the tension between cultural ideas of womanhood and female agency. This interpretation does not assume that the film necessarily provides a fully emancipatory representation of women. Rather, it identifies the character as a potential site of ideological negotiation. The anthropological significance lies in the relationship between cinematic characterisation, gendered moral expectations, and critical reinterpretation.

4.7 The Parashurama Confrontation: Moral Authority and the Negotiation of Power

The fight between Rama and Parashurama also presents aspects of moral authority. Throughout the scene, both characters exhibit immense power and are deeply connected to religion. Rama's behaviour throughout is arguably connected to concepts of restraint, responsibility and

legitimacy. The scene presented in the film provides insight into how moral authority is formed through the negotiation of power. This can be viewed from a Gramscian perspective with the scene being a representation of the link between authority and culture. In addition, it could be argued that this scene has created a moral hierarchy which connects power with morality.

In addition, Freire's concept of praxis looks to analyse the link between authority and responsibility. As a result, this scene can be seen as a narrative to encourage the audience to consider whether legitimate authority comes from having power or using it responsibly.

5. Dialogue as Ideological Articulation

Dialogue constitutes an important dimension of ideological representation in mythological cinema. The film's Sanskritised Hindi dialogue has been discussed by reviewers as contributing to its formal and cultural presentation (Bhatia, 2026). One reported line, Lakshmana's "Toot gaya toh toot gaya," during the Parashurama confrontation, stands out for its comparatively colloquial register (Bhatia, 2026). The contrast between Sanskritised dialogue and colloquial expression can be examined in relation to the production of cultural authority. Sanskritised language may evoke associations with sacred tradition, moral seriousness, and cultural continuity. It can consequently contribute to the ideological framing of the narrative. The use of informal language, in contrast to Sanskritised dialogue, may disrupt the film's established linguistic register.

From a Gramscian perspective, linguistic choices participate in the construction of cultural legitimacy. Language may reproduce particular understandings of authority and tradition. From a Freirean perspective, the relationship between language and consciousness becomes significant because critical reflection requires examination of the meanings through which social reality is articulated. The analysis of dialogue should consider not only literal content but also linguistic register, narrative position, and relationship with character authority. Dialogue should be examined through verified film transcripts or direct scene observation. Reported dialogue from reviews should not be treated as a complete representation of the film's linguistic structure.

6. Visual Composition and the Production of Hegemonic Meaning

This is an important aspect of the ideological analysis of mythological cinema. This can be seen through the use of lighting, composition, scale, perspective, costumes, special effects and camera work.

The exile sequence, for example, employs a dark, lamp-lit environment and a composition involving the departing royal chariot and emotionally affected followers. These visual elements create a representation of sacrifice and collective loss (Mitra, 2026). The Swayamvar sequence combines spectacle and moral symbolism through the representation of Rama's strength and subsequent humility. The Jatayu-Ravana confrontation uses the scale of the aerial battle and the visual construction of the Pushpaka Vimana to intensify narrative conflict (Mitra, 2026). These scenes all demonstrate that cinematography has a role to play in the ideology of this film.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides a framework for examining how visual representations contribute to the naturalisation of particular moral and social meanings. Freire's concept of

praxis emphasises the possibility of critically examining these representations rather than accepting them as self-evident cultural truths. Visual analysis therefore requires attention to the relationship between aesthetic form, ideological content, and social meaning.

7. Integrated Discussion: Hegemony, Praxis, and the Dialectics of Social Transformation

This scene analysis demonstrates how film can be considered a cultural site of ideological reproduction.

The Swayamvar and exile scenes reflect cultural values which can be seen to have wide-ranging influence. The depiction of Shurpanakha being disfigured brings forth challenges to established societal norms of morality. This is highlighted by Sita's criticism of the act and Rama's apology (Bhatia, 2026). Ravana's internal conflict challenges established moral binaries. Jatayu's act of defiance becomes a visual example of ethically acting against oppression. This scene can be interpreted using Gramsci's and Freire's theories. Gramsci shows how cultural depictions can be used in relation to the reproduction of hegemonic meaning. Freire provides a way to understand how meaning can be critically examined.

The link between them is important as it does not purely depict film as an ideological tool or an emancipatory one. It can instead be understood in terms of a complex relationship between representation, interpretation and social interaction. The meaning of the film may vary between different audience members depending on the social experience, gender, religion, political views and cultural backgrounds they come from. Therefore, the significance of the Ramayana in society cannot be concluded from textual analysis alone. A wider analysis of how audiences perceive the film will be required to determine the impacts.

8. Conclusion

This scene-by-scene analysis of Ranbir Kapoor's Ramayana has demonstrated the analytical usefulness of Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and Paulo Freire's concept of praxis. By looking at how morality, gender roles, family duties and political legitimacy are represented, we can gain an insight into how mythology can relate to modern society.

The Swayamvar scene shows us an ideal relationship between power and moral restraint. The Exile scene shows how responsibilities have been instilled within the character. The Shurpanakha episode allows us to critically look at gendered violence and morality. Ravana's internal struggle creates confusion around our current moral categorisations. Jatayu's actions show us how there can be visual resistance and morality. This shows us that mythology can create cultural values but also allow for them to be challenged.

This study shows that the Ramayana can be seen as an example of social praxis. However, it is important to engage critically with the film and create discussion and meaningful interactions.

Further anthropological studies should be undertaken to gain more insight into what audiences make of the film. This could be done through qualitative interviews, focus groups and online ethnography. This would help to give an insight into whether mythology being visually

represented in film helps to reinforce existing social norms or allow for alternative understandings to be created.

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