

# A WORLD WITHOUT ITALY

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against the strongest unseeded team of the competition, Sweden.

Yet one would have expected them to move past Sweden, a team whose biggest achievement at the World Cup is a runners-up finish, back in 1958 on their own soil. But Italy did not only fail to win either of those matches, they also failed to score in 180 minutes of football, despite dominating possession for most part of the two legs. It was as much as a tactical failure from Italy boss Gian Piero Ventura as much as it was a failure of his charges to break down a resolute and disciplined



Swedish defence. The one deflected goal from the first leg proved to be the deciding factor as the men in blue huffed and puffed around the Swedish penalty box, without any outcome whatsoever.

So who is to blame for all this? A lot of people, including the 69-year-old coach Ventura and his employer, the highly controversial Carlos Tavecchio. Ventura was a provincial coach whose greatest achievement thus far had been taking Torino from Serie B in 2011 to the Europa League round of 16 in 2015. However, he never managed any top Serie A clubs and had only the 1996 Serie C title in his trophy cabinet. His

appointment was made by Tavecchio, a man who is more renowned for inciting racism, xenophobia and misogyny than for his footballing acumen.

These people failed to read the warning signs that were getting more and more pronounced ever since their triumph in 2006. Since that famous night in Berlin, Italy have only managed to win one of their World Cup finals and were eliminated from the group stages in the following two competitions. They did, however, reach the final of Euro 2012 and made it to the quarterfinals of the 2016 edition, but pundits will say, those squads far exceeded their potential, thanks to the innovativeness of Cesare Prandelli and Antonio Conte. These two coaches, in those two particular tournaments, took two aging squads and turned them into something that was much bigger than its parts. Those performances only masked the fact that Italy was an aging team, devoid of young legs and the ability to play fantasy football.

That brings us to the core of the problem, which is a dearth of local talent coming through the systems in Italian football.

A few statistics will help illuminate the argument. For the record, the last time a Serie A club—an Inter Milan team which had fielded 11 foreigners in their starting 11 in the final match—won the Champions League was in 2010. The last time an Italian side contested in a UEFA Cup/Europa League final was in the last century. And there has not been an Italian Ballon d'Or winner since 2006.

Thankfully, in the wake of this debacle, both Ventura and Tavecchio have left, and hopefully someone with a lot more pedigree in European football will take charge. Italy still produces the best coaches in Europe—in the last two years, three of the top five European leagues were won by Italian coaches—so finding a good coach with a vision will not be hard, but whether he will be provided with the right kind of environment and a forward-looking system, remains to be seen.

There are plenty of problems at the heart of the Italian system, and they need to be fixed pretty soon because a country that has produced players like Meazza, Piola, Mazzola, Riva, Facchetti, Zoff, Rossi, Baresi, Baggio, Maldini, Buffon, Nesta, Cannavaro, Del Piero and Totti should be too much of a miss at the world stage.

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## SPORT

## ENTERTAINMENT

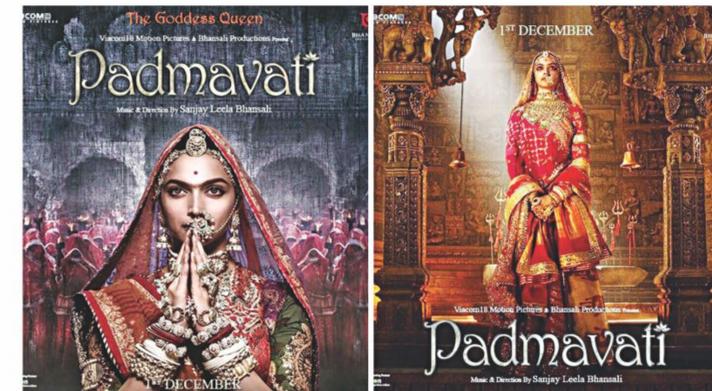
Over the last few weeks, the row over Bollywood filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's upcoming film, *Padmavati*, has taken over the national consciousness in India. That a Hindi filmmaker could hit the nerve of a despotic, extremist group that calls itself the Rajput Karni Sena, is not new to the regular news-reading *janta* of urban India. What's new is the form of threat to freedom of expression that has taken shape in the discourse of the controversy—one that is extreme to the point of a dead body being discovered outside Nahargarh Fort in Rajasthan with a graffiti reading, "We don't just burn effigies, we hang them." The police haven't been able to establish whether it was murder or a suicide. In the meantime, the British Board of Classification (BBFC) passed the film with a 12A rating and zero cuts, following which the Karni Sena leader went on one of the primetime news channels in the country, called upon his "fellow Rajput brothers" and threatened to burn down British theatres that will screen the film. We see before us the resurgence of the misplaced pride of a community with a glorified past, where the stories of valour against insurmountable odds are now yellowed and possibly lost in time.

But before we delve into the hows and whys of the matter, let's roll back a little. To begin with, it's not uncommon for Bollywood to come under the radar of extremist groups and individuals. Bollywood films have often drawn ire because of the creative liberties filmmakers take for their projects that are loosely based on historical figures or events. In 2008, *Jodhaa Akbar*, starring Bollywood A-listers Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan and Hrithik Roshan, and directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, drew sharp criticism from the Rajput community. In 2005, Aamir Khan-starring *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* had a petition filed against it in the High Court for its portrayal of the historical figure who

led the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In 2001, *Asoka*, starring Shah Rukh Khan, became infamous for going completely off the rails when it came to historical facts.

Bhansali, for one, has courted such controversies before, with his *Goliyon Ki Raasleela: Ram-Leela*, an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which highlights a relationship between a man and a woman of two warring communities. A Delhi court

stayed the release of the movie (as per the suit filed by six petitioners), stating that the film hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus. It went on to be banned in Uttar Pradesh. In his next film, *Bajirao Mastani*, about Peshwa Bajirao who falls in love with a warrior princess, Bhansali went on to put a long disclaimer right at the beginning of his film stating that it doesn't claim to be an accurate representation of historical facts. It still got banned in



# PADMAVATI THE NEXT FILM TO HIT THE EXTREMIST NERVE

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Pakistan for being "anti-Islamic". A few of the film's shows were cancelled in Pune, Maharashtra for "distorting historical facts".

*Padmavati* has been under constant attack since day one, ever since it was in the process of getting made—right from when Bhansali's set was vandalised by the Rajput Karni Sena when he was filming at a fort in Jaipur in January this year, to stoking debates on national television screens that questioned the director's liberties while making the films. A crucial question that came forth was: who was Padmavati? The film is based on the legend of Padmavati, a Hindu Rajput queen, who was written with much flair and pomp in an epic poem by Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540. Titled *Padmavat*, the poem goes on about the queen, the wife of Ratan Sen, the Rajput ruler of Mewar, who committed *jauhar* (self-immolation) after her husband's kingdom was laid siege by the Turkish-Afghan ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, Alauddin Khilji. It has been historically noted that the mention of Padmavati came almost 224 years after the death of Alauddin Khilji, who ruled between 1296 to 1316. It hasn't been established whether Padmavati and Alauddin Khilji ever had a history together. Historian Pushpesh Pant states in an interview by *The Quint*, "There may have been a character called Rani Padmavati but the legend of Padmavati is not entirely a historical fact." The poem itself ends with Jayasi's words: "I have made up the story and related it."

As our historical texts increasingly get lost in translation among the urban masses instead of being found, the latest casualty, that of *Padmavati*, is one for the books. In the process, though, what may have worked in its favour is the interest in the film and how it will turn out for its box-office success.

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