

# Reel vs. Real: The Cinematic and Historical Portrayal of Komaram Bheem in 'RRR'

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## Abstract:

India is known for its freedom struggle with names such as Mahatma Gandhi, Bhaghat Singh, Sukdev, Rajguru, Veer Savarkar, Subash Chandra Bose, etc. While they played pivotal role in ensuring India's independence, many freedom fighters raised their voice against the local oppression from either the British Raj or existing rulers of the land. One such name that resounds around Telangana is Komaram Bheem. Komaram Bheem(1901-1940) is considered a revered tribal leader from the Gond community, Adilabad district, Telangana, who played a crucial role in the fight against the oppression by feudal landlords and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The famous slogan 'Jal, Jangal, Zameen' (Water, Forest, Land) emphasize rights of adivasis over natural resources and remains the symbol of indigenous rights and self-determination. The movie 'RRR' directed by one of India's most successful directors S.S. Rajamouli presented character Komaram Bheem in their story but with a more fictional and dramatic version. This paper critically examines the contrast between the real-life legacy of Komaram Bheem and his cinematic representation in the movie 'RRR'. The paper attempts to discuss how such powerful historical figures such as Kumaram Bheem and other freedom fighters such as Alluri Sitaram Raju could work together towards unifying Indian population towards their ideology of Independence.

**Keywords:** Komaram Bheem, Alluri Sitaram Raju, Gond, Gondi, Tribal, Jal, Jangal, Zameen, S.S. Rajamouli, RRR, Tribe.

## Introduction:

Kumaram Bheem born in 1901 was a revolutionary freedom fighter who fought for the rights of the Tribals living in the Hyderabad State of British India that was then under the rule of the Nizam and British. Komaram Bheem belongs to the Gond tribe and actively fought for safeguarding and protecting the rights of the forest dwelling population and was ardent against the expansion of certain activities into the forests. His entire life he witnessed how his people were victimized by zamindars through extortion leading to a poor and low standard of living which led to him being lionized as a symbol of Gond rebellion. Following his death, he was deified and his cause for rebellion was studied by Austrian ethnologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf. After 72 years since he died, in 2012 Komaram Bheem's statue was installed in Tank Bund, Hyderabad, marking a recognition of his martyrdom and his right fight against the Nizam. The movie RRR released in the year 2022, portrays a character which is recognized as Komaram Bheem, as a Gond tribal from the Adilabad forests and portrays a fictional plot of friendship between Komaram Bheem and Alluri Sitaram Raju, both of them who never met each other in real life as there is no literature establishing it.

### Review of Literature:

Cinema often lead to a more in-depth influence in people's mindset. The study, "**The impact of movies on the mindset of individuals: exploring the influence of films on attitude, belief, and behaviour**" by (Poornima, Pranov, & Chinnaraj, n.d.) found out that cinema has been used to educate people about certain historical findings and it is explained in detail about how films have an impact on individuals. Similarly, a study "**Using films in the development of historical consciousness: Research, theory and teacher practice**", by (Donnelly, 2020) explains that in the digitally driven 20th century, audiences are increasingly drawn to visual content such as films and virtual reality simulations, with films becoming a favored medium among educators to engage students in learning environments.

Komaram Bheem is a tribal leader who voraciously fought for the land rights and tribal rights of the Gondi people in the Telangana state. As mentioned in the paper, "**Komaram Bheem Adivasi Liberator in the Nizam Telangana**" by (Swamy, 2019) he is regarded as a deity (pen) among the tribal population of Adilabad. Adivasis or tribals of Adilabad started feeling alienated in their own land due to the entry of the non-tribal population into their forest lands as mentioned in the study, "**Indervelli Tribal Revolt**" by (Reddy, 2022) where the tribal population of Adilabad took up arms and rebelled under Komaram Bheem in instances of rebellions against the Nizam for oppression of their land rights. His fight for rights gave rise to hope and aspirations for numerous rebellions such as the Telangana Rebellion of 1946 that contributed to the formation of Telangana state.

The study, "**From Infamous to Famous: The Portrayal of Historical Figures in Modern TV Series – Between Rehabilitation and Celebrity Culture. The Case of Henry VIII and Cesare Borgia**" by (Cadar, 2024), explains the depiction of history in media and cultural artifacts is inherently biased, whether consciously or unconsciously. Historical events and figures are often distorted or exaggerated to align with specific ideological stances or political agendas. In modern portrayals, historical personalities are typically adapted to resonate with contemporary audiences, reflecting current values, mores, and judgments. This transformation often turns them into nostalgic symbols or marketable celebrities designed to appeal to the masses, rather than accurate representations of their true historical selves.

### Methodology:

For this study, an examination of historical records and academic literature on Komaram Bheem's life and struggle was conducted. This includes:

- Reviewing books, articles, and reports by historians and scholars specializing in Telangana's tribal movements.
- Analysing oral histories and recorded narratives from the Gond community and local sources.
- Examining government and colonial documents to understand Bheem's rebellion against the Nizam's rule.

### Film Analysis

A content analysis of the movie *RRR* is carried out to identify the key aspects of Komaram Bheem's cinematic portrayal. This involves:

- Studying the screenplay, dialogues, and character development of Bheem in the movie.
- Identifying fictional elements, exaggerations, and deviations from historical accuracy.
- Examining the film's visual and narrative techniques, including symbolism, cinematography, and action sequences.

### Comparative Framework

A structured comparison is drawn between historical facts and cinematic fiction using the following parameters:

- **Contextual Background:** Bheem's resistance against the Nizam's oppression vs. the film's depiction of him fighting the British.
- **Characterization:** The historical Bheem's leadership, strategies, and ideologies vs. the larger-than-life heroism as seen in *RRR*.
- **Cultural Representation:** How tribal identity, traditions, and struggles are portrayed in the film compared to real historical accounts.
- **Narrative Intent:** The motives behind the film's reinterpretation of Bheem's story and its alignment with popular cinematic trends.

### Impact Assessment

The study also evaluates the broader implications of the film's portrayal on public perception, historical consciousness, and tribal identity. This involves:

- Analysing media and audience reactions to *RRR* and its representation of Bheem.
- Assessing how such portrayals influence public understanding of indigenous resistance movements.

By employing this multi-pronged methodological approach, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how historical figures are reshaped in popular culture and the consequences of such reinterpretations.

### Analysis:

Kumaram Bheem historically is recognised as a Gond Tribal leader and a revolutionary leader who led the armed fight for rights and freedom against the Nizam of Hyderabad. His slogan Jal, Jangal, Zameen (Water, forest, Land) became the symbol of indigenous resistance and self-rule.

As explained in ([Indiaculture.gov.in](http://Indiaculture.gov.in)) digital repository, the story of the Tribal armed rebellion and his fight for rights was due to an incident in which the death of an emissary sent to Nizam's court to negotiate for tax reduction and easing forest laws. It was this incident that led Kumaram Bheem's father to be a part of the revolt against such actions. Following his father's footsteps Bheem also grew up learning about the various atrocities committed on his people. Bheem was ardently against the Nizam's autocratic and oppressed rule and wanted to free his people from the hold of the Nizam. The slogan Jal, Jangal, Zameen took for the Gond tribes ignited the hunger for freedom and self-rule.

### Film Analysis

*RRR* was a film with resounding success that portrayed Komaram Bheem as a near-in-destructible hero with physical superhuman strength that fought for the people. The movie focuses on the fight between Kumaram Bheem and the British Raj where it shows Kumaram Bheem in Delhi as he is infiltrating the British forces and launching an attack to rescue a kidnapped tribal girl.

The film also focuses on the lasting friendship of Komaram Bheem and Alluri Sitaram Raju, and their fight to gain arms to initiate an armed struggle against the British. The film shows many ups and downs in their friendship but they unite to stand against the common British enemy.

### **Comparative Framework**

A structured comparison is drawn between historical facts and cinematic fiction using the following parameters:

- **Contextual Background:** Komaram Bheem's actual resistance was against the Nizam and their atrocities committed against his people and their oppression of their farming rights, whereas the movie RRR shows his resistance to be against the British Raj along with Alluri Sitaram Raju who wants to lead an armed movement against the British.
- **Characterization:**
  - The historical Bheem's leadership, strategies, and ideologies that raised the hopes of the Gond people for self-rule and land rights were not mentioned in the movie, but rather his fictional goal of saving a child from the confinements of the British and was portrayed to be nearly indestructible with close to super human strength.
  - The punishment scene of Komaram Bheem is entirely fictional that sees him sing a song that raises the feeling of nationalism among the peasants surrounding him, thereby leading to an attack on the British personnel as he begins to fall to the ground after being severely whipped by the character portraying Alluri Sitarama Raju.
  - Komaram Bheem was known for his guerrilla warfare and alertness, but the movie portrays him as a young and naïve tribal man whose only mission is to save a girl child from the confinements of the British.
  - The famous Naatu Naatu song that is portrayed as a competition between the British and India (Bheem and Sitaram Raju) is purely fictional.

### **Impact Assessment:**

The movie received widespread applause as it was an artistic masterpiece with a lot of artistic freedom and creative liberties. The movie was acknowledged across all spectrums of fields and received many awards for its musical intent. There were some issues raised on the issue when Komaram Bheem wore a skull cap as a method to hide his identity from the British officers. This issue was raised by a few political leaders but was brushed aside by the director as he emphasized that the movie was fictional and the intent behind the scene was to hide Bheem's identity.

The movie more or less excludes any involvement of the Nizam in helping the British bring down Komaram Bheem and the Nizams atrocities on the tribals are not focused in the movie, giving it a positive outlook on the actual real-life scenario during the Nizam rule, which was the utmost opposite.

While the movie focuses on great freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh and Subash Chandra Bose but does not show Mahatma Gandhi or Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, this caused the movie to be termed as giving importance to violent freedom fighters rather than non-violent fighters.

### **Conclusion:**

The movie is a fictional story between Komaram Bheem and Alluri Sitarama Raju. The events that occur between them are purely for cinema and an artistic outlook from the director's perspective where he shows two of the most revered freedom fighters from the Telugu states fighting together for a common goal. The movie was made for entertainment purposes and to raise awareness about Komaram Bheem's name, even though there is no accurate reflection of his life and adversity.

Though having many differences and omissions from real-life scenarios, the movie appeals to the Telugu-speaking audience reminding them about the struggle for freedom and rights through the portrayal of Komaram Bheem and Alluri Sitarama Raju. Although the film does include elements of his tribal identity, it exoticizes rather than authentically represents his cultural background and struggle. His ideology, resistance tactics, and political goals are overshadowed by the film's mythological and hyper-nationalistic approach. This dilution of history has broader implications, as it risks replacing real struggles with fictionalized heroism, shaping public memory in ways that misrepresent Adivasi history and resistance movements.