

From Canvas to Cinema: How Raja Ravi Varma's Paintings Changed the Visual Language of Anvita Dutt's Bulbbul (2020)

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Abstract

Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020) translates the painterly idiom of Raja Ravi Varma into contemporary cinematic language fusing mythology through an analysis of mise-en-scène, colour, design, framing and character aesthetics. This paper investigates how *Bulbbul* extends Varma's visual vocabulary, particularly depictions of divine femininity, into the film form. This paper also explores how the film transforms Raja Ravi Varma's paintings and aesthetics into cinema language, studying continuity between Indian classical painting traditions and modern cinematic expressions.

The analysis concentrates on colour palette, composition, light, texture and mise-en-scène, showing how these recreate the atmosphere of Raja Ravi Varma's mythic realism. Not only that, it analyses the visual and emotional grammar of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings. It explores why and how the director might have adopted the painter's aesthetic language to convey mood, morality and Indian cultural identity. The goal is to show the importance and meaning of the painterly frames within the film's cinematic storytelling, interpreting them through the lens of a filmmaker. Raja Ravi Varma fused Indian mythology with European realism, turning Gods and legends into human yet divine figures and *Bulbbul* repeats that balance through her heavenly or spiritual yet emotional portrayal. The Director possibly uses Varma's idiom to create a world that feels timeless and devotional instead of being purely narrative. Every visual frame in *Bulbbul* becomes an act of Darshan (a Hindi word which means 'a sacred gaze'), inviting the audience to see rather than just watching it.

The film doesn't copy Raja Ravi Varma; instead, it brings his ideas to life. His paintings make God look like a person, but *Bulbbul* does the opposite by making people look like divine painters. The director may want to bring back Indian mystical images into modern stories, where each shot tells a story about good and evil, purity and corruption and light and darkness.

Keywords: Raja Ravi Varma, *Bulbbul*, Cinematic Visual Language, Colour Palette Symbolism, Divine Femininity, Anvita Dutt, Mythological Continuity, Emotional Realism, Light And Composition, Indian Classical Painting, Symbolism in Cinema, Psychological Depth, Visual Synthesis, Indian Cultural Identity, Narrative And Aesthetics

1. Introduction

Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020) stands out for the way it turns into visual poetry. Set in late 19th-century Bengal, the film does not rely only on the story or dialogue but communicates through its use of light, space and colour. Every frame feels carefully arranged, much like a painting that invites the viewer to pause and absorb its emotion. The visual world of *Bulbbul* carries a remarkable resemblance to the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), one of the most celebrated artists who brought together Indian mythology and European realism. His ability to make divine subjects appear human and relatable gave India its first modern visual language, one that blended spirituality with emotional realism.

Varma's paintings are known for their glowing light, graceful postures and lifelike expressions. He presented Gods and Goddesses not as distant celestial beings but as figures with warm beauty and emotion. His works such as *Damayanti*, *Jatayu Vadham* and *Saraswati* not only shaped popular imagination but also influenced how people began to visualise divinity in daily life. The connection between art and emotion finds new expression in *Bulbbul*, where the Director seems to have drawn inspiration from Raja Ravi Varma's visual sensibility to create a cinematic world that feels sacred, intimate and ethically sensitive.

The visual language of the film, marked by crimson hues, intricate lighting and symmetrical composition, draws on the tonal harmony and rich compositional characteristics of Raja Ravi Varma's works. The interiors appear inspired by grand Bengali Havelis (old zamindari homes/ thakurbaris) rooted in 19th-century Bengali aristocratic architecture, the spaces filled with oil lamps, carved wood and long shadows that breathe a sense of nostalgia. The fabric colours and textures recall the mythological grace and the camera moves as if it were tracing the brushstrokes of a painting. One of the most direct references appears in the scene where *Bulbbul*'s feet are stuck, visually resonating with Varma's *Jatayu Vadham* painting, which portrays the symbolic loss of strength and innocence. The director uses these similarities to turn the painter's artistic vision into moving pictures, turning the still image into a story and the rhythm and the brushstroke into light.

We need to study this relationship because it helps us understand how *Bulbbul* links modern visual storytelling with Indian classical art. The movie doesn't just copy aesthetics; it uses them to make its moral and emotional mood. Darkness stands for mystery and moral conflict, while gold stands for holiness and wealth. The colour red is used to show that red is a divine energy (Shakti). The composition, lighting and set design create a visual connection between the canvas and the screen, suggesting that cinema can also become a form of devotional art when done with such painterly precision. The colour red is used to show that red is a divine energy (Shakti). The composition, lighting and set design create a visual connection between the canvas and the screen, suggesting that cinema can also become a form of devotional art when done with such painterly precision.

While many discussions around *Bulbbul* focus on its folklore narrative structure, very few explore its relationship with visual art. This paper fills that gap by examining how Dutt may have consciously employed Raja Ravi Varma's style to enhance storytelling. It studies *Bulbbul* as a film that uses Indian artistic traditions as a cinematic language rather than borrowing from Western visual references.

The research, therefore, tries to explore these three central questions:

- A. How does Bulbbul translate the visual and emotional language of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings through its use of lighting, colour palette and composition?
- B. What artistic and psychological purposes might underlie Anvita Dutt's choice to incorporate painterly frames within the film's narrative and visual design?
- C. How do mythological symbols, aesthetic principles and the emotional tone of Ravi Varma's paintings find renewed meaning within the cinematic world of Bulbbul?

This study uses a comparative visual analysis approach and the selected frames from Bulbbul are examined along with notable paintings by Raja Ravi Varma, focusing on elements such as colour palette, composition, lighting, costume and spatial design. The analysis interprets how these techniques are adapted from still imagery to moving visuals, showing continuity between Indian pictorial art and cinematic form.

Ultimately, this research views that Bulbbul is more than a film; it's a visual dialogue between Raja Ravi Varma's canvas and Anvita Dutt's cinema. Through this lens, the film becomes a reminder that the language of Indian art continues to live not only in museums or galleries but also on screen, where brushstrokes turn into light and divine imagination finds motion through film.

2. Literature Review

A review of existing literature helps situate this study within broader academic and artistic discussion about Bulbbul, Indian cinema's visual language and the cultural legacy of Raja Ravi Varma. While several critics and scholars have examined Bulbbul from the perspective of folklore, feminism and Gothic storytelling, few have explored its connection to Indian fine art and painterly aesthetics. This section summarises key works and critical directions relevant to the topic, organised by thematic focus.

A. Folklore and Gothic Symbolism in Bulbbul:

- Bulbbul has been called a Gothic-inspired Bengali folklore film. The film's melancholy, poetic tone has been compared to a modern fable steeped in regional storytelling. Gothic elements like ancestral houses, moonlit forests and an ethically sensitive supernatural are Indianized. These interpretations provide the film's legendary setting for Anvita Dutt's painting.

B. Colour and Cinematic Aesthetics:

- Several conversations highlight the film's vivid red and gold hues, diffused lighting and symmetrical framing. Bulbbul's cinematography creates emotional spaces- say scholars and reviewers. The red hue represents intensity, dedication and divine force, while golden undertones represent warmth and purity. The film's sophisticated visual control reflects Raja Ravi Varma's Indian painting aesthetics. The film's artistic beauty has been noted in popular review, but academic literature rarely links it to Varma's art-historical influence.

C. Raja Ravi Varma's Visual Legacy in Indian Cinema

- The impact of Raja Ravi Varma on modern Indian visual culture has been extensively

researched in art, history and culture. His works combine mythology and realism by giving gods human emotions and physicality. He is considered as the first Indian artist to express the cinematic imagination through his compositions and writings, which predated early Indian films. Varma's aesthetics has influenced 1940s mythical filmmakers and contemporary directors. The direct visual comparison between paintings and current films is rare; making Bulbbul a rich case study.

D. Mythology and Visual Storytelling in Indian Cinema

- Academic research has linked legendary art to Indian film. Raja Ravi Varma's calendar and temple paintings influenced early mythical films. Films use goddesses, devils and divine punishment as visual symbols to convey moral or spiritual notions. Bulbbul internalises epic iconography into its visual form, employing light, gesture and design to evoke the unending fight between good and evil.

E. Visual and Formal Analysis of Bulbbul

- Director Anvita Dutt and cinematographer Siddharth Diwan combined lighting, symmetry and colour to create a setting that reflects Raja Ravi Varma's aesthetic sensibility in Bulbbul (2020), sometimes called 'a painting in motion'. Red symbolises divine energy and emotion, gold purity and holiness while darkness concealment and moral conflict in the picture. The zamindari mansion's lighting and filtered light evoke Varma's balanced compositions and radiant people. The modest careful camera movement lets viewers absorb each frame as a tableau. This stillness, layered composition and warm hues echo Varma's canvas's depth and realism, while critics have noticed the film's beautiful imagery. This study shows how Bulbbul turns his visual principles of colour, light and emotion into film.

3. Methodology

• Primary Text

- * Anvita Dutt's 2020 Hindi film Bulbbul, produced by Clean Slate Films, is the main source for this research. Set in 19th-century Bengal, the film's visual style blends realism with mythology. While studying Bengal's Zamindari system in history, the scholar saw the video in 2021 and October 2025. On the second viewing, the film's frames resembled Raja Ravi Varma paintings. This discovery was reinforced by web sources and critical reviews, prompting the idea of analysing the film's visual language as impacted by Varma's art.

• Method

- * The study uses qualitative and comparative visual analysis. Bulbbul sceneries and frames are comparable to Raja Ravi Varma's Jatayu Vadham, Damayanti, Saraswati and Shakuntala Patralekhan paintings. To find Varma's aesthetic ideas in the film, each comparison examines lighting, colour palette, frame, composition and symbolic meaning.

• Tools

- * The following tools are employed in the study:
 - Frame-by-frame observation and shot analysis of the film Bulbbul with the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma.

- Digital reproductions of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings are accessed through archival sources.
- Secondary research, including film reviews, interviews with the cinematographer and scholarly writings on the film's visual design.
- Analytical notes compiled during repeated viewing for consistency and accuracy.

• Approach

- * The interpretive, art historical research places *Bulbbul* in Indian visual culture's border context. As a visual text, the film's beautiful visuals, aesthetic composition and emotional tone are emphasised. What matters is how cinematography recreates Raja Ravi Varma's spiritual and visual mood, not storyline or performance.

• Theoretical Framework

- * Indian aesthetic theory, notably *Rasa* (essence of emotion) and *Bhava* (expressive feeling) is used to analyse the film's visual design's emotional resonance. Visual semiotics and aesthetic critique are used to interpret colour, light and composition as communicative instruments.

4. Analysis/Discussion

A. Lighting, Colour and Composition: Recreating the Painterly Sensibility of Raja Ravi Varma

- *Bulbbul*'s lighting, colour and arrangement carefully reinvent Raja Ravi Varma's painting sensibility for film. Instead of copying Varma, director Anvita Dutt uses his vocabulary of blazing light, rich symmetry and legendary realism to create frames that operate as *Darshan*, affording the audience a sacred look. The skilfully composed graphics make every shot appear painted rather than filmed, encouraging audiences to absorb spiritual and emotional overtones with each tableau.
- *Painterly Light and Glow*: *Bulbbul* replicates the signature glow present in Varma's canvases using soft, diffused light and golden hues throughout its interiors and character close-ups. The use of oil lamps, long shadows and natural golden light helps invoke nostalgia, sanctity and intimacy. Lamp-lit spaces echo the devotional atmosphere in Varma's mythological depictions, making every cinematic frame radiate warmth and spiritual tension.
- *Colour as Emotional and Divine Symbol*: A deliberate palette of crimson and gold dominates the film's *mise-en-scène*, directly referencing Varma's tools for portraying divinity and human emotion. Crimson, often used to evoke *Shakti* (divine feminine energy), signals moments of transformation and spiritual power; gold emphasises sanctity, prosperity and inner luminosity. Darkness is not just absence but conveys mystery and moral conflict. Through measured use of colour, the film constructs a visual language that is emotionally charged and rooted in Indian mythic symbolism.
- *Composition and Framing Echoing Painting*: *Bulbbul* uses static camera setups, layered compositions and purposeful symmetry like Varma. With minimal camera

movement, viewers may watch each scene as a living picture, focusing on posture, gesture and spatial harmony. Interiors, inspired by magnificent Bengali havelis, feature carved wood, rich fabrics and painterly stances to match Varma's legendary tableaux. Bulbbul's renowned foot scenes resemble Varma's "Jatayu Vadham", blending story with symbolic loss, innocence and metamorphosis.

- Bridging Genres and Traditions: Bulbbul shows how Indian cinema can continue the devout vision of its classical ancestors with artistic lighting, expressive colour and harmonious composition. The film's visual grammar brings Varma's celestial brilliance, emotional restraint and spiritual symbolism to modern storytelling, confirming Indian art's continuity from canvas to screen.
- This approach elevates Bulbbul beyond mere folklore adaptation; it becomes a meditation on the emotional and aesthetic possibilities of visual art recreated in contemporary cinematic space.

B. Emotional and Psychological Depth: Translating Varma's Human Expressions Into Cinema

- By converting Raja Ravi Varma's gift of human expression into cinematic language, Bulbbul offers viewers not simply narrative but immersion in its characters' inner worlds. Varma's paintings notoriously humanise holy and mythic beings with sympathetic emotions, beautiful poses and delicate gestures. Director Anvita Dutt mixes camera, lighting, mise-en-scène and actor performance to create an intimate and mythological psychological reality in the picture.
- Raja Ravi Varma's heroines have soft, thoughtful looks, dignified but emotionally charged poses, and a gentle dignity that hints at their inner lives. Bulbbul's silence, look, and controlled movements show Varma's feminine calmness. Soft glows, shadow play, and being alone in space can all show how someone is feeling without using words. For example, when the main character looks inside or sits in the light of a lamp, it clearly reminds us of Varma's images of introspection, which gives the character spiritual and emotional depth.
- Bulbbul copies Varma's artistic calm by using long takes, little camera movement, and well-composed frames. This strategy encourages viewers to "see" emotion through posture, space, and gaze, rather than just "watch" it. Body language and facial expressions make the psychological reality stronger, just like Varma's brush made fun of small changes in emotions. Unlike Varma's still images, Bulbbul's characters show how they feel by changing the lighting, colour, and frame.
- Both Varma and Dutt share a deep sensitivity to feminine psychological complexity. In Bulbbul, the protagonist's transformation from innocence to spiritual power is visualised not simply as external change but as a gradual unfolding of internal strength. Her emotional journey is coded in symbolic motifs crimson for Shakti, shadow for mystery and realised in nonverbal performance. By borrowing Varma's emotional grammar and adapting it to cinematic rhythm, Bulbbul presents the heroine's internal struggle, agency and transcendence as a visual meditation on resilience and divinity.

- Ultimately, Bulbbul's visual and emotional grammar does not merely imitate Varma; it interprets and expands his legacy in motion. Through painterly light, psychological composition and embodied performance, the film explores the full range of human and divine feeling, reaffirming Indian art's ability to express complex psychological states in moving images.

C. Artistic and Emotional Purpose: the Integration of Varma's Aesthetic in Bulbbul's Narrative World

- Bulbbul integrates Raja Ravi Varma's aesthetic as both an artistic and emotional strategy, creating a narrative world that feels timeless, devotional and visually poetic. The film does not simply imitate Varma's painterly language; instead, it interprets and expands upon his legacy, using his visual principles as narrative tools that deepen meaning and emotional resonance throughout the movie.
- The director blends Indian mythology with modern sensibility to create a realm beyond the ordinary using Varma language. Every frame becomes a Darshan a sacred viewing inviting the spectator into a thoughtful, almost mystical engagement with the film. Every shot is carefully designed and emotionally charged in this way, turning cinema into living art. Varma's brilliant light, layered compositions and symbolic colour give Bulbbul's world beauty, gravitas and visual harmony.
- Varma's genius was communicating his subjects' divinity and humanity; Bulbbul does this by making human feeling near-mythic and symbolic. The film's reds and golds reflect emotional and psychological states, highlighting transformation and spiritual strength. Lighting and spatial composition mimic Varma's depictions, giving characters (particularly Bulbbul) quiet dignity, moral complexity and a religious air. Instead of explicit performance, emotional resonance creates an engulfing moral and aesthetic milieu that blurs human and heavenly lines.
- Bulbbul's interiors evoke 19th-century Bengali zamindari homes, lighted with oil lamps and adorned with warm shadows and luxurious textures like Varma's legendary paintings. Minimal camera movement encourages calm viewing of each scenario. This integration offers the narrative a uniquely Indian rhythm rooted in classical traditions but original in cinematic language in addition to visual splendour.
- Bulbul revives Indian aesthetics for modern audiences by capturing Varma's artistic calm, expressive colour and narrative symbolism in film. Instead of visual homage, the emotional and artistic goal is to create a narrative atmosphere where myth, emotion and visual culture evolve. This synthesis helps the film convey deeper truths about morality, trauma, transformation and perseverance, bringing Indian cinematic storytelling in line with its artistic legacy.

D. Symbolic Reinterpretation: Colour Palette, Lighting and Moral Undertones in Bulbbul

- Bulbul's symbolic reimagining of the colour palette, lighting and moral undertones pulls from Raja Ravi Varma's pictorial language to create a rich cinematic mood that conveys sophisticated spirituality, morality and emotional intensity. Crimson represents Shakti, the

divine feminine power and gold symbolises purity, prosperity and holiness in the film. Shadows and darkness symbolise mystery, concealment and moral problems in the story.

- The prominent crimson hue symbolises metamorphosis, divine vitality and emotional intensity, emphasising spiritual awakening or moral reckoning. Gold tones in the mise-en-scène reinforce holiness and inner light, matching the film's style with Varma's paintings, where colour conveys more than visual beauty it imbues scenes with moral and emotional importance. These colours make the film a visual narrative of good vs evil, purity versus corruption.
- Bulbbul uses gentle, diffuse and warm lighting to recreate Varma's paintings' shimmering effect, giving characters and spaces a sacred and timeless air. Devotional art uses light to symbolise spirituality and emotional weight. Long shadows and poorly lit interiors reveal secrets and moral difficulties, framing the characters' excursions between light and darkness to reflect their ethical and psychological states.
- Film's well created visual language places Bulbbul in a moral cosmos where visual signals represent spiritual purity versus worldly corruption. The red moon and fire motifs add mythic complexity and reinforce the film's Indian cultural and religious symbolism. Varma's mythical imagery is reinterpreted in cinematic terms to explore divinity and humanity, using colour and light to show the heroine's change and the story's emotional stakes.
- Bulbbul uses colour and light to convey current themes of pain, perseverance and transcendence while evoking Indian creative traditions. The film's visual symbolism brings art and reality together, making each frame a meditative experience that transcends storytelling to become sacred watching, echoing Raja Ravi Varma's visual philosophy.

E. Mythological Continuities: Reimagining Varma's Divine Figures in the Narrative of Bulbbul

- Bulbbul blends mythological symbolism with emotional and visual depth to reinterpret Raja Ravi Varma's divine characters through cinema, creating a conversation between traditional Indian art and contemporary storytelling. Its narrative and visuals inspire the divine while keeping moral complexity rooted in Indian culture and spirituality.
- The film employs visual motifs inspired by Varma's paintings such as divine femininity and cosmic elements like the red moon, fire and flowing saris to symbolically represent themes of transformation, morality and divine energy. These motifs are embedded in the narrative, reinterpreted through movements, gestures and lighting that transform static mythic images into dynamic cinematic expressions.
- In Varma's paintings, gods and goddesses often personify moral virtues and cosmic principles, depicted with both human emotion and divine radiance. Bulbbul emulates this by portraying its characters as divine beings or moral archetypes through composed postures, expressive gazes and symbolic use of colour and light. This visual language underscores the internal struggles and moral conflicts faced by the characters, creating a mythic resonance that elevates their emotional journeys.
- The narrative imbues mythic figures with contemporary moral undertones. Bulbbul's visual and thematic language bridges the divine and the human, depicting divine figures with

relatable emotions and human foibles. The film's reimagining of Varma's divine figures thus serves as a metaphor for moral resilience, inner strength and spiritual awakening, framing a timeless struggle between good and evil within a culturally rooted context.

- Using painterly composition, luminous lighting and symbolic colour palettes, Bulbbul elevates mythic imagery into a cinematic language that continuously echoes Varma's aesthetic principles. Each scene functions like a devotional tableau, blending myth with moral allegory and transforming divine figures into narratives of inner moral conflict and spiritual transcendence.

F. From Stillness to Movement: Transforming the Painter's Canvas Into Cinematic Time

- From stillness to movement, Bulbbul masterfully transforms Raja Ravi Varma's static painterly compositions into dynamic cinematic narratives. This transition involves reinterpreting the profound emotional and spiritual depth of Varma's paintings through filmic techniques that evoke a sense of divine realism and emotional authenticity.
- Varma's paintings are renowned for their delicate balance of calm, repose and deep emotional expression, often depicted through serene poses, gentle gazes and luminous light. In Bulbbul, these qualities are translated into cinematic form through deliberate use of minimal camera movement, layered compositions and carefully controlled lighting. Each shot mimics a painter's tableau constructed with symmetry, precise framing and a stillness that invites viewers to pause and contemplate, turning every scene into a visual meditation.
- The film's slow pacing and measured camera movements allow each frame to breathe like a painting in motion. Cinematographer Siddharth Diwan employs soft, diffused lighting to emulate Varma's glowing aesthetic, while colour palettes dominated by golds, reds and shadows evoke the divine and mystical. These choices create a rhythm that echoes the steadiness of the painted canvas, while the subtle shifts in light and posture introduce a sense of internal transformation and emotional progression.
- The transition from stillness to movement also signifies the inner journeys of the characters. Bulbbul's poised silence, reminiscent of Varma's heroines, is imbued with spiritual significance and emotional resilience. The restrained gestures and gaze-led compositions serve as visual allegories of psychological depth conveying inner conflict, longing and spiritual awakening without explicit dialogue. This technique makes the characters' internal states palpable through their posture and the painterly framing of each scene.
- Cinematic movement is further intertwined with mythic symbolism. Motifs like flowing saris, the red moon and fire are not only visual symbols but also dynamic elements that animate the mythic universe. These motifs, set within composed, painterly frames, evoke the divine energy and moral conflicts rooted in Indian mythology. Through this synthesis, the film's movement becomes a fluid extension of Varma's divine narratives, reinterpreted within a modern cinematic context.

G. Visual Synthesis: Colour, Light and Symbolism as a Dialogue Between Art and Life

- Bulbbul creates a profound visual synthesis where colour, light and symbolism engage in a dynamic dialogue between art and life inspired by Raja Ravi Varma's painterly language. The film channels Varma's fusion of Indian mythology with European realism, using these visual elements to build a world that feels both timeless and intimately human, devotional yet emotionally charged.
- The film's palette dominated by crimson and gold symbolises divine energy (Shakti), sanctity, inner strength and moral tension. These colours are not decorative but deeply symbolic, reflecting the characters' psychological and spiritual states. The use of red and gold traces continuity from Varma's paintings, where colour conveys sacredness and emotional intensity as part of cultural identity.
- Soft, diffuse lighting replicates the glow found in Varma's canvases, creating a sacred aura around characters and spaces. This painterly light turns scenes into acts of Darshan, inviting viewers to see beyond the narrative and into a spiritual experience. Shadows and contrast, meanwhile, intensify the film's moral undertones, visually representing the battle between purity and corruption.
- Symbolic visual motifs such as the red moon, fire and flowing saris animate themes of transformation, divinity and moral conflict. These motifs metamorphose mythological imagery into cinematic language, where art and life converge to express timeless human experiences. The film's deliberate composition and mise-en-scène create a continuous interplay between Indian classical art traditions and contemporary storytelling.
- Bulbbul's cinematography, set design and colour grading transform the film into a moving painting, blurring the boundaries between artistic representation and lived reality. The film reinterprets Raja Ravi Varma's aesthetic not as imitation but as a living, evolving dialogue that reintroduces Indian mystic imagery into modern cultural expression. This synthesis showcases cinema's ability to embody cultural memory and emotional depth through visual poetry.

5. Findings/Interpretation

The analysis of Bulbbul reveals that Anvita Dutt's visual language consciously draws from the painterly traditions pioneered by Raja Ravi Varma, not through imitation, but emotional translation. The film transforms Varma's static pictorial grace into cinematic rhythm, maintaining the same equilibrium between divinity, emotion and realism that defined the artist's work.

Lighting, colour and composition emerged as three primary tools of this translation. The golden and crimson hues so characteristic of Varma's palette are used in Bulbbul to express sacred energy (Shakti), inner strength and spiritual tension. Soft diffuse lighting replicates the glow of Varma's canvases, giving the film a sacred, timeless aura. The symmetrical framing and minimal camera movement reproduce the stillness of painted portraits, turning each scene into a meditative visual experience. Emotionally, both Varma and Dutt share a deep sensitivity to the inner life of women. While Varma's heroines gaze inward with quiet dignity, Dutt's Bulbbul mirrors that same poise—her silence carrying spiritual resonance

rather than victimhood. The psychological depth of Varma's figures finds new dimension in Dutt's cinema, where performance, light and space fuse into expressive form.

Symbolically, the film expands Varma's mythological imagination into a cinematic narrative. Motifs of transformation such as the red moon, fire and the flowing sari reinterpret the mythic language of Varma's goddesses. These elements situate *Bulbbul* within India's larger visual culture, where divinity and humanity merge.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that *Bulbbul* is not only influenced by Raja Ravi Varma but also extends his aesthetic philosophy into motion pictures. The film demonstrates how cinema can inherit and evolve the painter's language, translating emotion, morality and spirituality into dynamic form. Through this synthesis, Anvita Dutt bridges nineteenth-century pictorial realism and twenty-first-century visual storytelling, reaffirming the continuity of Indian artistic vision.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how *Bulbbul* (2020), directed by Anvita Dutt, visually echoes the aesthetic language of Raja Ravi Varma through its use of lighting, colour and composition. The analysis revealed that the film is not merely inspired by Varma's style but reimagines his painterly vision within a cinematic framework. Through measured pacing, symbolic use of colour and balanced framing, Dutt transforms the still serenity of Varma's canvases into a living, breathing cinematic world.

The findings reaffirm that the visual grammar of Raja Ravi Varma his interplay of divine luminosity, emotional restraint and spiritual symbolism continues to shape modern Indian visual culture. *Bulbbul* extends his artistic legacy by adapting his sensibility to a narrative of psychological complexity and emotional transformation. What Varma achieved through pigment and brushstroke, Dutt achieves through light, motion and sound proving that cinema can serve as a natural continuation of classical art forms.

In broader terms, the paper highlights how Indian cinema, particularly films like *Bulbbul*, acts as a bridge between tradition and innovation. The study contributes to understanding how painterly aesthetics can enrich cinematic storytelling, allowing mythological and emotional imagery to coexist within modern visual narratives.

By translating the painter's devotional vision into a cinematic language of empathy, divinity and beauty, *Bulbbul* not only celebrates Raja Ravi Varma's influence but also reaffirms the enduring power of Indian art to evolve while staying rooted in its cultural soul.

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