

GI – QUARTER FINALS

PREPARED BY INDUS LAW

V RGNUL SEMC
31ST MARCH - 2ND APRIL 2023

Organised by
CADR, RGNUL

BACKGROUND

1.Rani Devi grew up in a small village in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. She was part of the 'Mhona' tribe, a community classified as a 'scheduled tribe' under the Indian Constitution. The 'Mhona' tribe preferred to live in forests and had intentionally secluded themselves from the rest of the world over the years. Rani Devi enjoyed her early years with her community, but she did not have a great relationship with her family. She was allegedly subject to violence and sexual assault and was married off at the age of 11. At the age of 13, she abandoned her family and went on to join a dacoit group, of which she soon became the leader.

2.The dacoit group went by different names in different parts of the country but was popularly referred to as the 'Robin Hood' group – who had the agenda of acting as vigilantes to punish rapists and bullies and the like. The 'Robin Hood' group managed to evade police and law enforcement agencies for several years. Rani Devi finally surrendered in the year 2010, in what was a carefully negotiated settlement and thereafter went to spend 7 (seven) years in prison. Post her surrender, her life story was known far and wide, and she was lauded for her acts of revenge on those who abused her, as well as her benevolence towards the lower castes. She was popularly known as the 'Queen of Dacoits'.

3.True Film's Group Pvt. Ltd. ("TFG") is a production company that primarily seeks to create content based on real life stories of individuals or highlight the complexities of society. In doing so, TFG aims to spread awareness on myriad challenges faced by different sections of the society and educate the masses towards a better and more equitable world.

THE DISPUTE

4. TFG had heard about Rani Devi and the obstacles she overcame to avenge herself and her community. Finding her story empowering, and knowing that it would resonate with the masses, TFG approached Rani Devi and offered to produce a biopic titled 'The Queen of Dacoits', capturing her life's story. On Rani Devi's confirmation, TFG and Rani Devi entered into an agreement dated 4th August 2020 ("Agreement") which set out the following:

a. That TFG is granted the right to produce a film ("the Film") relating to the life of Rani Devi for exploitation in all forms of media throughout the world.

b. That Rani Devi shall share certain material she has written capturing her life (collectively, called the "Writings"), and that TFG had the sole and exclusive license to use the Writings for the Film.

c. That Rani Devi shall receive a certain mutually accepted consideration for the license she is granting with respect to the Film and the Writings..

d. That TFG has artistic freedom to cut or alter and adapt the Writings and use them alone or with other material and/or accompanied by narration and/or editorial comment, as may be required in the successful production of the Film.

e. That the modifications made by TFG to the Writings, if any, in producing the Film, should be to only such an extent as is necessary for converting the Writings into the Film, and shall not distort to the Writing's true intent.

5. On signing the Agreement, TFG commenced with the production of the Film. After 2 (two) years of researching, taking interviews of the people of Mhona, shooting the Film and editing, the first cut of the Film was released as part of the Cannes Film Festival, and plans to do a public release of the Film on 3 April 2023.

6. After watching the Film, Rani Devi was shocked. The Film contained graphic images of violence, rape and sexual assault of the protagonist playing Rani Devi, showing her and her community in a negative light. According to Rani Devi, the Film's story line was not apt, and had factual errors on multiple counts She believed that her story was misrepresented, and that if the Film is released to the public in its current form, it would not only mar her image in society, but also show her community in a bad light.

7. By way of a legal notice sent to TFG ("Notice"), Rani Devi communicated her disappointment regarding the Film. Expecting the Film to be made in the light of true facts that were mentioned in the Writings, she stated that Film, being in contravention of the true facts of her life's story, went against the spirit of the Agreement.

8. Additionally, the Notice also pointed out that while the Agreement between TFG and Rani Devi allowed TFG the right to cut, alter or adapt the Writings, it did not give them the right to distort or virtually depict on screen any content which was not present in the Writings . The Notice specified several instances in the Film that were not factually accurate, including the scene on the 'Benamai Massacre' in which Rani Devi admits she was not present at the place of occurrence, and the sexual assault scene of 'Balu Jugar', which Rani Devi never admitted occurring with her.

9. In the Notice, Rani Devi captured all the discrepancies in the Film which did not align with her life's story, and effectively had the potential to defame her and distort her image in the public eye. The Notice called on TFG to alter the Film before it is released to the public at large, and to remove all the contentious portions mentioned by Rani Devi in the Notice, failing which Rani Devi would exercise her right to terminate the Agreement and rescind the TFG's rights to the Writings as captured in the Agreement.

10. On receipt of the Notice, TFG was taken aback. They did not want to go against the wishes of Rani Devi, but had produced the Film in a manner which tried to depict the atrocities Rani Devi overcame throughout her life, in an attempt to spread awareness about the evils of violence, rape and sexual assault. TFG had mined all of its creative freedom and produced a film, that it knew would not only appease the audience, but also educate them.

11. TFG wanted to preserve the Film and ensure its publication to the world at large, but at the same time did not want to offend Rani Devi or the Mhona community. TFG has therefore approached Rani Devi to address and possibly alleviate her concerns.