

Indian firm to re-release film with alternative AI ending

Hannah Abraham

An Indian film company is re-releasing a 2013 romantic drama with an alternative AI ending without the involvement of its director, in what could be the first instance of its kind in global cinema.

Raanjhanaa, a Hindi-language film that followed the doomed romance between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman, will return to cinemas on 1 August under its Tamil-language title Ambikapathy. The film's original tragic ending will be replaced by a "happy" one.

Pradeep Dwivedi, the CEO of Eros Media World Group, defended the company's decision, saying that technological innovation was part of its long-term creative and commercial vision. He said the alteration was an "exploratory baby step" and confirmed that Eros was "significantly evaluating" its library of more than 3,000 releases for similar AI treatments.

He said: "If the technology allows us to do something and we can do something good with it, why not? There has to be a symbiotic understanding of what the technology allows, what

the creative process can foster, and what the audience accepts."

The re-release has drawn strong criticism from the film's director, Aanand L Rai, who said he learned of the move through media reports.

"I'm heartbroken that this is the future we're heading toward, where intent and authorship are disposable," Rai told the Press Trust of India. "All I can do is dissociate myself from such a reckless and dystopian experiment." He said his team had contacted the Indian Film and Television Directors' Association and were exploring legal options. Neither he nor the guild had responded to the Guardian's request for comment at the time of publication.

The film starred the Tamil actor Dhanush and the Bollywood actor Sonam Kapoor as the star-crossed interfaith couple, one of whom dies in the original ending.

Eros's catalogue includes Indian classics such as Sholay, Mother India, Om Shanti Om and Bajirao Mastani. Its streaming service, Eros Now, hosts more than 11,000 digital titles.

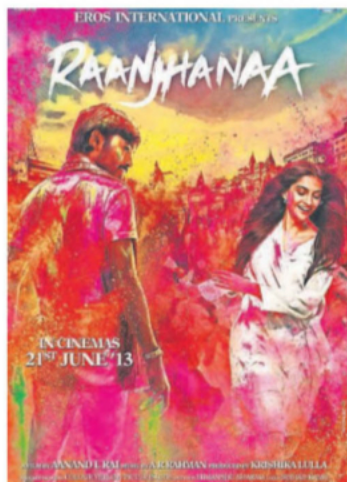
Dwivedi said Ambikapathy was produced entirely in-house with human supervision, and was being presented as an optional alternative to the original film. Posters for the re-release describe the ending as AI-powered, although Eros declined to confirm whether similar disclaimers will appear within the film itself.

Dwivedi said the director's criticisms were "emotional" and omitted relevant legal context. He pointed to an ongoing dispute between Eros and Colour Yellow Productions, the studio co-founded by Rai.

In an email to the Guardian, Colour Yellow's chief operating officer, Harini Lakshminarayan, said the company's partnership with Eros ended "some time ago" owing to operational challenges. "To call this a 'respectful creative reinterpretation' while excluding the very people who made the film over a decade ago is deeply contradictory," she wrote.

She said the incident underscored "the urgent need for fair, transparent protocols" on the use of AI, especially with archival material. "If a finished film can be altered and re-released without the director's knowledge, it sends out a clear and very troubling message - that the film-maker's voice is dispensable."

The film critic Sucharita Tyagi said: "Most directors in India don't even own the rights to their films," referencing examples such as Vasan Bala's Peddlers, which Eros International has still not released to the public after acquiring Indian distribution rights in 2012. "If they decide to AI alter Peddlers and then release it, then it's a different film altogether."



▲ The 2013 film *Raanjhanaa* is being re-released with a 'happy ending'