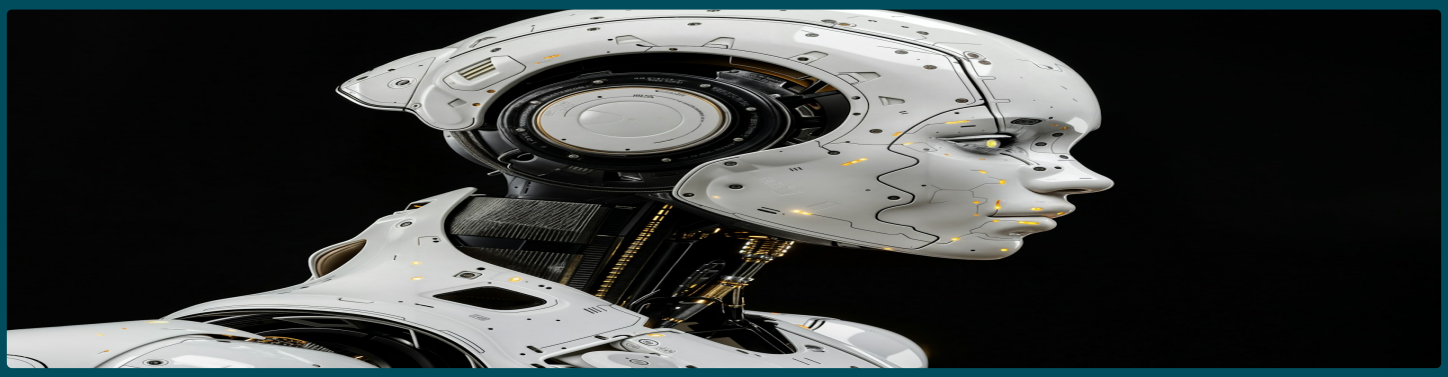
INDIALAW



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

My Face, My Voice: The Constitutional, Commercial, And Enforcement Dimensions Of AI-driven IP

AUTHOR Abha Shah

PUBLISHED 26 December 2025

When AI Clones a Celebrity: The Battle for Digital Identity

The Delhi High Court's interim order in Ranganathan Madhavan v G Filmz Studioz[1] and Others marks a decisive moment in the convergence of personality rights, artificial intelligence and platform liability in India. It is not merely an injunction in favor of a celebrated actor, it is a constitutional restatement of who owns the commercial and moral value of a human face and voice in the age of synthetic media.

The Infringers: From Deepfakes to Unauthorized Merchandise

The suit is a classic modern personality rights action with 21 defendants spanning creators, platforms, domain registrars, ecommerce intermediaries and government departments. The plaintiff a prominent Indian actor, film maker and public figure, with a long filmography and substantial social media following, asserts that his: (a) name 'Ranganathan Madhavan' /'R Madhavan', (b) image, (c) likeness, and (d) voice mannerisms and screen persona have become distinctive identifiers of his personality and a valuable commercial asset internationally.

S. No.	Defendant(s)	Infringing Activities
1	G Filmz Studioz [Defendant 1], Phantom Pictures [Defendant 2], 4uVideos [Defendant 3], NewNWSTamil [Defendant 4], AI Avatar 2.0 [Defendant 5], Ai World [Defendant 6], AI Edit Studios [Defendant 7], AI Mak Studio [Defendant 8]	AI-generated deepfake content (movie trailers/short videos)
2	blogger.googleusercontent.com [Defendant 9], avikeditshere.blogspot.com [Defendant 10]	Pornographic, face-morphed, deepfake content
3	IcePoster [Defendant 11], Media Storehouse [Defendant 14], RedBubble [Proforma Defendant 15], Flipkart [Proforma Defendant 16]	Unauthorized sale of merchandise
4	Meta [Defendant 17], Google LLC [Defendant 18](Proforma Defendants)	Hosting infringing content (photos/videos, deepfakes)
5	MEITY & DoT [Defendant 19 & 20]	Proforma defendants (implementation of orders)
6	John Doe [Defendant 21]	Pornographic, face-morphed, deepfake content (unidentified)

Against this backdrop three clusters of allegedly unlawful activity are pleaded.

1. First, a set of YouTube channels including G Filmz Studioz and others are said to be creating and disseminating artificial intelligence generated deepfake trailers and short videos using the plaintiff's likeness for commercial gain.
2. Second, certain blogspot and related URLs are alleged to host fake vulgar morphed and presumably AI generated pornographic depictions of the plaintiff.
3. Third, online posters and merchandise platforms are accused of selling unauthorized posters images and other goods exploiting the plaintiff's image without license or consent.

The platforms Meta and Google are arrayed as proforma defendants not as primary infringers, but as necessary actors for enforcement of any blocking or takedown directions together with domain name registrars and government ministries, to enable domain suspension and subscriber disclosure.

Judicial recognition of personality as property and dignity

At the heart of the order, lies a clear doctrinal move the court treats the plaintiff's persona as both a proprietary and dignitary interest. Building upon earlier Delhi precedents including the decisions concerning a leading music impresario a senior film actor and another prominent film personality, the court reiterates that the celebrity status of the plaintiff inherently grants proprietary rights over personality attributes such as name, image, likeness and voice.

The plaintiff's case is explicitly framed in constitutional and statutory terms. The order records that his rights arise from personality and publicity rights grounded in Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution, moral rights recognized for performers under the Copyright Act and common law actions in passing off, misappropriation and unfair competition. Personality is therefore positioned at the intersection of freedom of expression, privacy, integrity of creative performance and commercial goodwill.

The court accepts at the interlocutory stage that the plaintiff's traits including his names Ranganathan Madhavan and R Madhavan, his likeness, his image and his voice are protectable elements and that unauthorized exploitation especially for commercial gain amounts to prima facie violation of personality rights. In addition, the court is prepared to recognize personality-based claims to restrain obscene morphed and deepfake content as an affront to commercial interests and to the plaintiffs right to live with dignity.

Artificial intelligence deepfakes and the limits of fair use

The most significant doctrinal development is the courts treatment of artificial intelligence generated content. The infringing works are not merely traditional counterfeits, they are synthetic media, in which the plaintiff's image and persona are algorithmically manipulated for allegedly commercial accounts on social media and video platforms.

The court draws a sharp line between such AI generated commercial exploitation and legitimate expressive uses. It holds that this content would not be protected by principles analogous to fair dealing or free speech which had previously been invoked to justify certain forms of parody or far-reaching expression in earlier publicity rights litigation. The order emphasizes the commercial character of the channels the absence of fan activity markers and the use of AI as a tool of misappropriation rather than creativity.

This approach is notable for two reasons. First, it treats the use of AI not as inherently suspect but as a factor that can exacerbate the wrong when deployed to generate deepfakes and morphed material that create false suggestion of endorsement or association. Second, it signals an emerging Indian standard that regards AI enabled personality cloning particularly in pornographic or deceptive advertising contexts as falling squarely outside the protective zone of fair dealing or free speech.

The Legal Arsenal: CPC, Commercial Courts Act, and Copyright Law

Ms. Swathi Sukumar, learned senior counsel for the Plaintiff, sought urgent interim relief under Order XXXIX Rules 1 and 2, Section 151, and Section 80(2) of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, as well as Section 12A of the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, for ex-parte ad-interim injunctions against unauthorized use of Ranganathan Madhavan's name, image, likeness, and voice in AI-generated deepfake trailers, morphed pornographic content, and unauthorized merchandise sales. She argued that such exploitation violated his personality and publicity rights under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution, moral rights under Sections 38, 38A, and 38B of the Copyright Act, 1957, and common law rights against passing off and unfair competition, citing precedents such as D.M. Entertainment v. Baby Gift House[2], Anil Kapoor v. Simply Life India[3], and Jaikishan Kaku Bhai Sarf v. The Peppy Store[4]. The counsel requested the court to restrain defendants from further infringement, order takedown of infringing content, and direct disclosure of information for identifying infringers.

The Court's Orders: A Multi-Layered Enforcement Strategy

The court granted interim relief which is expansive and architecturally sophisticated revealing how courts operationalize personality rights in a platform mediated environment. The order issues a broad restraint against identified infringing defendants and unknown John Doe actors from using the plaintiffs name image likeness or voice for any commercial or personal gain through any technology including artificial intelligence, machine learning, deepfakes and face morphing across all media formats.

The court does not stop at end user injunctions. It constructs a layered enforcement mechanism engaging multiple categories of intermediaries. Video platforms are directed to require infringing channel owners to remove content within a fixed time failing which the platform must itself take down the content and furnish basic subscriber and IP login information to the plaintiff. Websites hosting pornographic morphs are similarly ordered to remove URLs failing which their domain name registrars must suspend or lock domain names and disclose registrant details. Merchandising platforms are required to delist infringing products and provide information about sellers while social media platforms must both notify account holders and effect takedowns if users do not comply.

This design achieves three structural goals that resonate with broader intellectual property enforcement debates. It internalizes the cost of monitoring and compliance within commercial intermediaries that profit from user activity. It uses subscriber information to pierce online anonymity and identify actual infringers. And it preserves a pathway for non-infringing websites to approach the court if unintentionally affected by blocking measures thereby attenuating collateral censorship risks.

Defendant No.	Defendant Name/Entity	Court Order/Directions

1-3	G Filmz Studioz, Phantom Pictures, 4uVideos	Directed to take down infringing AI-generated deepfake movie trailer links within 72 hours; if not, Google (D-18) to take down and provide BSI(Basic Subscriber Information)/IP details.
4-8	Various YouTube channels	Already took down infringing links; no summons issued at this stage, but liberty reserved for plaintiff to seek summons if needed.
9-10	blogger.googleusercontent.com, avikeditshere.blogspot.com	Directed to take down infringing pornographic/deepfake content links within 72 hours; if not, MarkMonitor (D-13) to take down domain and provide BSI/IP details.
11	IcePoster	Directed to take down infringing merchandise links within 1 week; if not, Key-Systems GMBH (D-12) to lock/suspend domain and provide BSI/IP details.
12	Key-Systems GMBH (DNR for D-11)	If D-11 fails, to lock/suspend domain and provide BSI/IP details within 3 weeks.
13	MarkMonitor Inc (DNR for D-9,10)	If D-9 and D-10 fail, to take down domain and provide BSI/IP details within 3 weeks.
14 and 16	Media Storehouse, Flipkart	Directed to delist infringing merchandise and provide BSI details of users within 1 week; if not, provide BSI details within 3 weeks.
15	RedBubble	Already took down infringing URLs; proforma defendant, no summons issued.
17	Meta (Instagram/Facebook)	Directed to inform user of infringing content and take down if user fails within 72 hours; provide BSI/IP details of account owner within 3 weeks.
18	Google LLC (YouTube)	If infringing parties (D-1 to D-3) fail to take down, to take down content and provide BSI/IP details within 3 weeks.
19-20	MEITY, DoT	Proforma defendants for implementation of court orders; no summons issued.
21	John Doe (unidentified)	Restrained from violating personality rights; plaintiff granted liberty to amend parties after receiving BSI details.

The Big Picture: Identity, Ethics, and the Future of IP

Substantively the order pushes Indian law toward a more integrated conception of personality rights within the intellectual property ecosystem. Personality is not treated as a fragile adjunct of privacy but as a strong economic interest akin to a trademark or neighboring right, grounded in the celebrities' ability to act as a source identifier and endorsement vehicle. The plaintiff's reputation and social media following are expressly cited as evidence of goodwill and commercial brand value making the persona itself a quasi-mark that signals origin sponsorship or affiliation to consumers.

At the same time, the intellectual property framing is carefully tethered to constitutional dignity. The court is particularly concerned with vulgar morphed pornographic imagery and deepfake pornography and recognizes that such depictions inflict irreparable injury distinct from the loss of endorsement fees. This dual lens raises personality rights from a purely commercial doctrine into a hybrid of property privacy and anti-defamation norms well suited to the harms of AI-enabled impersonation.

Doctrinally, this raises the prospect of a more unified personality rights regime in India one that could eventually crystallize through legislation drawing upon the court's current reliance on Articles 19 and 21 performer moral rights and common law passing off. Such a regime would need to grapple with the outer boundaries of permissible far-reaching uses by artists satirists and documentarians as well as with the compatibility of strong publicity rights with the constitutional guarantee of free expression.

Conclusion: A new script for the digital self

The Madhavan order writes an important new chapter in the law of personality and intellectual property. In granting strong ex-parte protection against AI-generated deepfakes, pornographic morphs and unauthorized merchandising, while simultaneously conscripting platforms registrars and state authorities into a coordinated enforcement network, the Delhi High Court signals judicial willingness to treat the digital persona as both a valuable asset and a facet of human dignity.

As artificial intelligence rapidly lowers the cost of fabricating convincing human likenesses, the central question for global legal systems is whether a person retains sovereign control over the commercial and moral value of their own face and voice. This decision answers in the affirmative and in doing so offers an emerging Indian model of personality rights that is technologically aware commercially grounded and constitutionally infused.

For more details, write to us at: contact@indialaw.in

Related Practice Areas

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) | Media And Entertainment