

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema: A Study of the Decade 2010-2020

Surbhi Rishi*

Dr. Amanpreet Randhawa**

Abstract

Hindi cinema is a well-established component of the Bollywood film industry in the twenty-first century. Many Hindi movies are well-received not only in India but also abroad. Cinema plays a significant role in shaping our lives. The key goal of this research paper is to look at the influence of Hindi cinema in fostering patriotism and nationalism. Attempts are made to study and analyze how society views the notions or themes of nationalism in Hindi movies, how successful these movies are in delivering the message to ordinary people, and how they might improve their effectiveness. Besides, this study analyses the Hindi cinema as a source of promoting nationalism and patriotism. Cinema has the potential to inspire people to make positive changes that society needs. Secondary data on movies with social messages accessible on different mass media are extensively examined. The findings show that these movies are commercially effective, raising awareness and motivating people towards nationalism. According to the research findings, Hindi cinema effectively infuses a sense of nationalism and patriotism in every Indian living anywhere in the world through its movies.

Keywords: Bollywood, Hindi cinema, India, Patriotism, Politics, Propaganda, Nationalism

Introduction

Movies are versatile tools that have the potential to change the real world, and they have their own language and way of making an

* Research Scholar, ** Assistant Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication Department, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

impact (Turner, 1993). Movies interact with culture in three ways. First, the media's strength, themes, and inspiration are derived from the socio-historical environment. Second, it is contingent on how the audience perceives the concepts. Finally, it has the potential to bring about progress subtly and imaginatively (Jain, 2011). A movie may also manipulate the public as political propaganda (Bywater & Sobchack, 1989). According to cultural theorist Vijay Mishra (2002), Hindi cinema is a pivotal moment in India's modernization process, and Jyotika Viridi (2003) produces and disseminates ideas about Indian national identity. Politics has always piqued the interest of filmmakers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi picked up Uri's popular dialogue, 'How is the Josh?' during the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign. Such movies show that people want to resurrect India's glorious history of patriotism, which the country has been forced to forget. Movies are social reflections, and these movies have shown that the public now largely accepts a positive picture of India based on patriotism, pride in our glorious past, and confidence in our heroes. (Anand, 2019).

Definition of nationalism

Nationalism is a philosophy founded on the belief that an individual's allegiance and commitment to the nation-state take precedence over all personal or collective interests (Kohn, 2020).

Review of literature

Vasudevan (2015) The researcher attempted to navigate between amorphous and diffuse notions of audience, more calibrated understandings related to a trade discourse of who films would appeal to, and an agenda of social representation and audience address that sought to develop in tandem with a secular nationalist conception of the Muslim community and its transformation.

Patel (2018) discussed the movie, which portrays the story of a female spy who puts her life in danger for her country, India, to accomplish a mission. In an interview with the Indian Express, Meghna Gulzar, the film producer and daughter of veteran director, poet, and lyricist Gulzar, said that Pakistanis are seen as 'Bichhde hue log' in her home.

Anand (2019) highlighted three of the most popular political films of 2019-Uri: The Surgical Strike, Batla House, and Kesari.

According to the writer, these films effectively captured the prevailing mood of patriotism and nationalism in India. Anand emphasized that movies serve as social reflections, and these particular films demonstrated that the public now largely embraces an image of India rooted in positive nationalism, pride in the nation's past, and trust in its heroes. Additionally, these films serve as a wake-up call to "pseudo-liberals" and "pseudo-secular" individuals, urging them to reassess their views on India's identity and nationalism.

Srinivas (2019) discussed how Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy has leveraged India's soft power to engage the Indian diaspora globally in the nation's development strategy since 2014. The researcher argued that India's soft power is not a new concept, as it has long been supported by cultural elements such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and Bollywood. These aspects have laid a foundation that has helped enhance India's global influence and support its diplomatic and developmental goals

Thakur (2019) discussed cinema and politics in his book 'Filming Politics'. He explained how politics and cinema often intertwine to sway people's opinions. Uri- The Surgical Strike (January 2019) is a film based on the 2016 surgical strike in POK and the position of the BJP. Another ex-Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, biopic, 'The Accidental Prime Minister (January 2019), based on Sanjay Baru's novel, has gained popularity in political circles. Again, the timing of these back-to-back politically influenced movies raises questions, as does the motivation behind them.

Theoretical perspective

Movies and journalism both meet the requirement of having an immediate influence on society; hence, this is a criterion that they share. According to Saari (2009), the only thing that can be utilised to evaluate a film is the finished product shown on screen. Saari (2009).

Baudry's apparatus theory suggests that the visuals on a movie screen are not a direct representation of the real world but rather a depiction of reality itself (Baudry & Metz, 2011).

Bollywood has played a significant role in Prime Minister Modi's campaign for a second term. Modi encouraged filmmakers and stars to focus on themes of patriotism, Indian culture, and values in their

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

movies. This was discussed during a meeting organized by film producer Mahaveer Jain in January 2010, as reported by Shilpa and Nivedita (2019).

Propaganda model

Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model highlights how politically and financially powerful elites use media control to silence dissent, leading to conformity and undermining a diverse public sphere essential for democracy.

The propaganda model's key elements, known as news filters, include media conglomerates' size, concentrated ownership, wealth, and profit-driven operations. This aggregation is driven by mergers, joint operations, interlocking directorships, and large investments (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Mosco, 2009).

First filter - ownership

According to Herman and Chomsky (2002), the first filter of the propaganda model explains the media's dependency on the government to create profits. Business corporations are interested in taxation regulations, interest rates, antitrust laws, and government labour policies. Evidence suggests that a small number of influential individuals own production and distribution companies in Bollywood. These individuals make decisions regarding the content and direction of the Indian culture industry as they finance, direct, act in, and distribute the movies in domestic and international markets. (Rasul, 2015).

Second filter - advertising

Advertising is the second filter that determines the flow of material in the media, and it is largely responsible for the growing concentration seen in the media sector (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

Third filter- government as a content source

"Mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interests," according to Herman and Chomsky (2002). While commenting on sensitive issues linked to a nation's foreign policy, the governments always act as a filter through which only officially sanctioned content can pass. Prindle (1993) contends that the film industry looks to Washington for guidance before tackling politically difficult topics in its productions.

Fourth filter- fear of flak

Flak, as defined by Herman and Chomsky (2002), refers to negative reactions from individuals, organizations, or governments to critical media, including verbal attacks, legal actions, fines, and even physical violence (McChesney, 2008). In the early 21st century, films depicting India-Pakistan relations closely aligned with government foreign policy, with patriotism dominating Indian cinema (Kaur & Sinha, 2005).

Fifth filter - ideology

The anti-communism ideology prevalent in the United States is considered the fifth filter that controls the flow of material in Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model. This philosophy was prevalent throughout the McCarthy period and continued to have widespread support throughout the Cold War. On the other hand, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the events of September 11, 2001, the war on terror arose as an ideological filter to cleanse the content of the media of any possible ideological contamination (Herman, 2009).

India's successful anti-terrorist doctrine influenced Bollywood to produce films on terrorism in Kashmir and other regions, as seen in *Maachis* (1996), *Border* (1997), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Lakshya* (2004), and *Main Hoon Na* (2004) (Rasul, 2015).

Cinema critic Rajeev Masand stated that some films are clearly propaganda. The election commission halted the screening of the biography *PM Narendra Modi* on the first day of voting due to election law violations, but a web series on Modi's life is still available online (Shilpa & Nivedita, 2019).

Research objective

The research paper aims to study the impact of Hindi cinema on promoting nationalism, analysing how society perceives nationalism in films, and how effectively these movies convey the message to the public.

Research methodology

The method used for research is Content Analysis. This is a method for the systematic analysis of film content. Content analysis is a systematic, objective, quantitative research method for measuring variables. Dialogues, songs, and frequently used metaphors are taken as parameters for the study. A purposive sampling technique is used

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

to select the movie for each year. Eleven movies were selected for this research from 2010 to 2020. The content of these movies has been studied thoroughly to understand how much effort has been made by the film directors to encourage the viewers toward nationalism and patriotism.

The following are the delimitations of the sample:

1. The decade 2010-2020 was considered for the study, and 11 Hindi films have been investigated for their major function as a tool for nationalism.
2. Only Hindi-language films were selected for the study.
3. One film from each year was selected.

Sample

Table 1 - Summary of Hindi movies selected for the study based on nationalism and patriotism

S.No.	Movie Title	Year	Worldwide box-office collection (in Cr.)	Director of the movie
1	My name is Khan	2010	223.44	Karan Johar
2	Singham	2011	147.89	Rohit Shetty
3	Ik tha Tiger	2012	334.39	Kabir Khan
4	The attack of 9/11	2013	23	Ram Gopal Verma
5	Holiday	2014	181.44	A.R Murugadoss
6	Bajrangi Bhaijan	2015	918	Kabir Khan
7	Airlift	2016	221.6	Raja Krishnan Menon
8	Tiger Zinda Hai	2017	564.2	Ali Abbas Zafar
9	Raazi	2018	195.75	Meghna Gulzar
10	Uri-The Surgical Strik	2019	343.06	Aditya Dhar
11	Tanhaji - the unsung warrior	2020	367.65	Om Raut

Data analysis

The detailed analysis of the chosen movies is as follows:

My Name is Khan (2010) - My Name Is Khan is a powerful film about Rizwan Khan, an autistic Muslim man from Mumbai, who embarks on a journey across the U.S. to meet the President and declare, "My name is Khan, and I am not a terrorist." The film addresses themes of religious discrimination, bigotry, and the global aftermath of 9/11, particularly the challenges faced by Muslims. Through Rizwan's struggles and resilience, the movie highlights how prejudice can deeply affect innocent lives. Emotional moments, such as the death of Mandira's son due to his Muslim identity, and symbolic elements like the song "Hum Honge Kamyab," reinforce the film's message of unity, humanity, and hope.

Singham (2011) - This film centers on an honest police officer, Singham, who courageously fights against corruption and injustice. It opens with the suicide of Inspector Kadam, falsely accused of corruption by the powerful and criminal politician Jaikant Shikre. Motivated by this tragedy, Singham vows to clear Kadam's name and take down Jaikant. The film powerfully portrays themes of patriotism and justice, showing Singham's unwavering determination. His integrity inspires the entire police force, including the DGP, to unite against corruption. In the end, Singham clears Inspector Kadam's name and prevents Jaikant from taking office, upholding truth and national pride.

Ek tha Tiger (2012) - The film follows Tiger (Salman Khan), an Indian spy on a mission to prevent sensitive nuclear information from reaching Pakistan. While tracking a scientist in Dublin, he falls in love with Zoya (Katrina Kaif), who turns out to be an ISI agent. The story creatively portrays the sacrifices of patriotic spies like Tiger, who hasn't taken a day off in twelve years. As the two spies from rival nations struggle with their duties and feelings, the film explores themes of loyalty, love, and peace. In the end, Tiger and Zoya choose to disappear, vowing to return only when India and Pakistan no longer need RAW and ISI.

The attack of 26/11 - (2013) - This film is based on the November 26, 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and delivers a powerful message of nationalism in the face of terrorism. Though it received a mixed

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

box office response, earning Rs22 crores, it strongly portrays the heroism of the police and civilians. Through the character of Rakesh Maria, Joint Commissioner of Police, the film recounts the tragic events with emotional intensity and realism. A gripping interrogation scene with terrorist Kasab, set among the bodies of other attackers, stands out for its impactful dialogue and screenplay, reinforcing the spirit of courage and national pride.

Holiday (2014) is an official remake of Murugadoss' Tamil film Thuppakki, released in 2012. It follows an Indian Army officer who arrives in Mumbai for vacation and sets out to track down the jihadist leader of a sleeper cell network and deactivate the sleeper cells under his orders. The director successfully shows the message of nationalism and patriotism, that a soldier is always a soldier and never on a holiday.

Bajrangi bhaijan (2015). - The director shows an image of a true Indian who selflessly helps a deaf Muslim girl child to her mother in Pakistan. He does not seem to worry about his life, has had many problems, and has even been accused of espionage by the Pakistani government. The director conveys the message of mankind through a combination of satirical and emotional screenplay and dialogues.

Airlift (2016) - This film tells the story of Ranjit Katiyal, a successful Indian businessman living in Kuwait whose life changes when Iraq invades the country. Risking his safety, he takes the initiative to help evacuate over one lakh stranded Indians. Narrated from Ranjit's perspective, the film highlights his transformation and deepened patriotism. In the end, he expresses pride in his country, vowing never to question it again. The director uses emotional dialogues and powerful imagery, including the Indian flag, to emphasize national pride and unity.

Tiger Zinda Hai (2017) - This movie is a sequel to 'Ik tha Tiger'. Tiger (Khan) and Zoya (Kaif) are forced to escape and hide to rescue a group of hostages captured by a jihadist terrorist group in Iraq. Film inspired by the 2014 abduction of Indian nurses by ISIL. The director captures the true spirit of a spy who stays away from his country but never forgets his loyalty to his country. The director also shows the joint operation by RAW and ISI from India and Pakistan, respectively, to rescue nurses from India and Pakistan. The film's

script and dialogue beautifully depict the spirit of humanity, nationality, and patriotism

Raazi (2018) - This film is about Sehmat Khan, an undercover RAW agent married to a Pakistani family by her father to obtain useful enemy information. It is the story of a Muslim woman spy from Kashmir who is a patriot. This film altered the public's view of Muslims and Kashmiris. The film demonstrates that Kashmiri Muslims are not separated from their Indian identity; they are real Indians willing to fight for their homeland.

Uri - The Surgical Strike is a 2019 Hindi-language military action film starring Vicky Kaushal and directed by Ronnie Screwvala. Based on a real Indian Army operation, the film highlights the courage and sacrifice of Indian soldiers. A particularly emotional scene features a daughter saluting her martyred father, powerfully conveying the spirit of patriotism. The film's iconic dialogue, "How is the Josh? High, Sir!" became widely popular and was even referenced by Prime Minister Modi during election campaigns.

Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior (2020) is a historic, patriotic action film based on the Maratha and Mughal wars. The director skillfully captures the courage of Maratha soldiers and the real spirit of their patriotism for their homeland. Indian history is littered with untold tales of brave warriors. After watching this movie, the audience is reminded of our true and courageous heroes.

Findings and conclusion

Indian cinema has played a powerful role in promoting nationalism and patriotism, effectively influencing public sentiment and inspiring societal change. Through the content analysis of eleven films, it is evident that these movies have portrayed stories of bravery, sacrifice, and national pride. Films like *My Name is Khan*, *Singham*, *Ek Tha Tiger*, *The Attack of 9/11*, *Holiday*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, *Airlift*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *Raazi*, *Uri - The Surgical Strike*, and *Tanhaji* depict various aspects of patriotism—from soldiers' sacrifices to acts of unity and humanity. These movies often use symbols like the national flag, military uniforms, and religious imagery to evoke patriotic feelings and connect emotionally with the audience, thereby reinforcing a sense of national identity and duty.

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

Table 2 List and count of other popular movies that are based on nationalism and patriotism

Year	Name of Movies	Number of movies based on 'Nationalism'
2010	My Name is Khaan; Lahore; Sadiyaan; Rajneeti; Lamha; Tere bin Laden	6
2011	Singham; Patiala House; Aarakshan; Force	4
2012	Ek tha Tiger; Agent Vinod	2
2013	The attack of 26/11; Commando: A one-man Army; Madras Café; Satyagraha; War chod na Yaar; Shahid	6
2014	Singham Return; Jai Ho; Holiday: A soldier is never off duty; Youngistan; Children of war; Haider	6
2015	Bajrangi Bhaijaan; Gabbar is Back	2
2016	Airlift; Rustom; Tere bin Laden; Dead or alive; Jai Gangajal; Sarabjit	6
2017	The Ghazi attack; Tubelight; Indu Sarkar; Naam Shabana	4
2018	Gold; Parmanu ; Aiyary ; Manto	4
2019	Kesari; Article 15; Mission Mangal; Thackerey; Batla house; The Tashkent files; Accidental Prime Minister; Narendra Modi	8
2020	Shakuntla Devi; Shikara ; Gunjan Sexsena; Khuda Haafiz; Tahna ji-The unsung warrior	5
2021	Bhuj; Sardar Udham; Bell Bottom; Sooryavanshi; Thalaivii; 83; State of siege: Temple Attack; Shershaah; Mumbai Saga; Dial 100; Satyameva Jayate 2; Lahore confidential; Mera Fauji calling	13
2022	The Kashmir Files; Dhaakad; Anek; Major; Rocketry: The Nambi effect; Shamsheera; Code Name Tiranga; Ram Setu	8
2023	Pathan; Gadar 2; Adipurush; The Kereral Story; Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway; IB 71; 72 Hoorein; Jawan	8

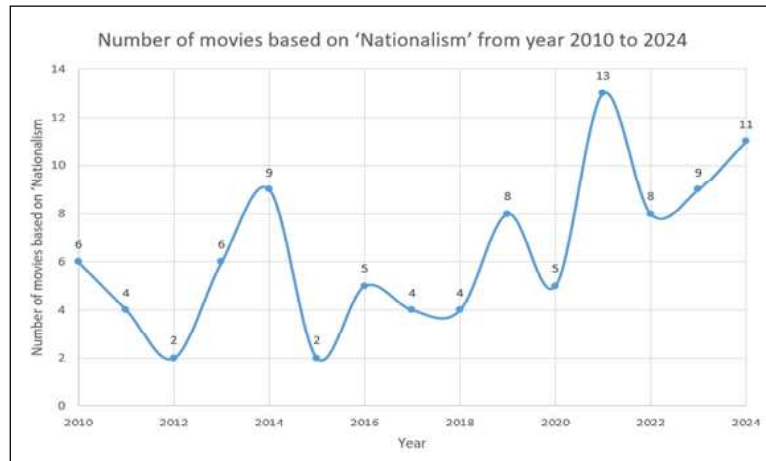


Figure 1. Graph showing a rise in the number of Hindi movies from the year 2010 to 2024

The study reveals a noticeable rise in the number of films centered on nationalism and patriotism from 2010 to 2023. While such themes were less common at the start of the decade, their frequency has steadily increased and continues to grow. Table 2 in the study lists the titles and counts of these films produced during this period.

References

- Bagdikian, B. H. (2004). *The new media monopoly: A completely revised and updated edition with seven new chapters*. Beacon Press.
- Baudry J.L. & Metz, C. (2011). *Apparatus Theory*. Rushton & tinson, G., *What is Film Theory? An Introduction to Contemporary Debates*. (p. 38). New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Bywater, T. & Sobchack, T. (1989). *Introduction to film criticism*. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley Pvt. Ltd. pp. 166, 107, 112
- Greame, T. (1993). *Film as Social Practise*. London: Routledge Publishers. pp. 68
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). edition 2. *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*. New York. Pantheon.
- Jain, J. (2011). *Muslim Culture in Indian Cinema*. Rawat Publications
- McChesney, R. W. (2008). *The political economy of media: Enduring issues, emerging dilemmas*. NYU Press.

Nationalism as Propaganda in Hindi Cinema

- Mishra, V. (2002), *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, New York: Routledge.
- Mosco, V. (2009). *The Political Economy of Communication*, pp. 1-280.
- Kaur, R., & Sinha, A. J. (Eds.). (2005). *Bollyworld: Popular Indian cinema through a transnational lens*. SAGE Publications India.
- Rasul, A. (2015). Filtered violence: Propaganda model and political economy of the Indian film industry. *Journal of Media Critiques*, 1(2), 75-92.
- Patel, R (June, 2018). India- Pakistan relations and spy movies: A socio-strategic analysis. *South Asia Journal*
- Prindle, D. F. (1993). *Risky business: The political economy of Hollywood*.
- Saari, A. (2009). *Hindi Cinema: An Insider's View*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 165.
- Srinivas, J. (2019). Modi's Cultural Diplomacy and Role of Indian Diaspora. *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies*, 13(2).
- Thakur, M.(2019). *Filming Politics*. New Delhi: Anyaye Publications
- Kohn, H. (2020). Nationalism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>
- Vasudevan, R. S. (2015). Film Genres, the Muslim Social, and Discourses of Identity c. 1935-1945. *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 6(1), 27-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974927615586930>
- Virdi, J. (2003), *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Movies as Social History*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Newspaper Articles & Webpages

- Choudhury.S article, "Bollywood's propaganda wheels have been set in motion", Accessed on 9 April, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/bollywoods-propaganda-wheels-have-been-set-motion>
- Anand, A, article, "Which are India's 3 best political movies in 2019?", Accessed on 9 April 2022, Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/talk-point/which-are-the-3-best-political-movies-of-2019/342664/>
- Article by Shilpa Jamkhandikar, Nivedita Bhattacharjee, 2019, Accessed on 23 June 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-election-modi-bollywood-idINKCN1RM0K>

