

Cinema as Soft Power: A Case Study of Raazi and its Influence on Bilateral Relations

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Abstract

Soft power, or the capacity to exert influence by attraction rather than coercion, has emerged as a crucial idea in the context of contemporary international relations. India can improve its status internationally and foster cooperation by investing in cultural resources and building empathetic bridges with other nations. One prominent example of Indian cinema as a major soft power asset is Bollywood. With a substantial global fan base, Indian films successfully reach audiences in several countries, foster cross-cultural communication, and increase India's soft power impact internationally. Moreover, examining how history is portrayed in movies, how the past is portrayed, and how naturalism or realism evolved in movies concerning neighboring nations is crucial. This paper aims to discover how Hindi cinema helps India grow its bilateral relations with its South Asian neighbors. Besides, the Indo-Pak War movie 'Raazi' from the lens of director Meghna Gulzar is analyzed. It is perceived that everybody acts loyal to their own country. The main character, who is a traitor, kills an innocent family while attempting to preserve her own country. Finally, it is concluded that no character is at fault in the movie; everyone is equally at fault with the protagonist.

Keywords - Bilateral relations, Indo-Pak war, Hindi Cinema, South Asia, Nationalism

Cinema as soft power

In today's world of international relations, soft power-the capacity

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to influence by seduction as opposed to coercion-has taken center stage. A country's influence can go beyond its economic and military might (Nye, 2023). India can conduct cultural diplomacy because of its natural soft power. India can enhance its worldwide reputation and develop collaboration by investing in its cultural assets and creating bridges of understanding with other countries (Khanna, 2024). The idea of "soft power" has expanded in scope throughout time as it has changed. According to Joshua Kurlantzick's (2007, p. 6) expanded definition, soft power encompasses "anything beyond the military and security domain, encompassing not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic instruments, such as aid and investment and involvement in multilateral organizations." This might also apply to development cooperation or foreign aid, which depends on the nation's economic capacity but is frequently employed to foster goodwill and enduring bonds between friendly nations.

Bollywood, in particular, is a notable example of Indian film that is a significant soft power asset. Indian films have a huge worldwide fan base, effectively reaching viewers in many nations, promoting intercultural dialogue, and extending India's soft power influence globally. (Anand, N., Binjola, H., Negi, V., Tyagi, S., Bajaj, S., and Verma, R, 2024) One such effective way is cinema, which creatively promotes bilateral ties between India and its neighboring countries. Films are an impactful medium that can transform the real, and this medium has its language and way of creating an impact (Turner, 1993) Films have a three-way relationship with society. First, the media derives its strength, themes, and inspiration from the socio-historical environment. Secondly, it depends on how the audience perceives the concepts. Thirdly, subtly, and artistically, it can bring change (Jain, 2011).

The United States and the United Kingdom are the two most powerful soft power countries in the world, according to Brand Finance's 2024 Global Soft Power Index. China has surpassed Germany and Japan to take third place. India was ranked 28th in 2023, but now it is ranked 29th.

Bilateral relations

It is a diplomatic relation between two sovereign states. Dialogues are exchanged through ambassadors to foster such ties. Nations under bilateral relationships sign free trade agreements, economic treaties, foreign direct investment, and cultural exchange programs. Economic agreements are signed to give preferential treatment to each other to boost trade with mutual understanding. India also uses multi-track diplomacy to make peaceful relations with its neighbors in the world. The various multi-track diplomacies are shown in Figure 1. Track 1 is the official interaction and communication between government diplomacy of two countries, while Track 2 is the unofficial interaction between government diplomacies. Multi-track is the outcome of inefficient government diplomacy.

Track 1- Government or peacemaking through diplomacy.

Track 2- Nongovernment/Professionals or peacemaking through conflict resolution.

Track 3- Business and commerce play important roles in maintaining relations.

Track 4- Private citizens or personal involvement is also helpful in maintaining relations with neighboring countries.

Track 5- Research, training and educational ties between neighboring countries are helpful as they indirectly involve peacemaking efforts.

Track 6- Activism or peacemaking through advocacy.

Track 7- Religion and peacemaking through faith in action.

Track 8- Providing funds and resources to the community's needs under the different tracks is also a step in peacemaking efforts.

Track 9- Media, films, and public opinion are considered the most important and effective track under the Multi-Track system for peacemaking. It covers print, radio, electronic media, cinema, and art forms. Under this system, cinema is the most effective way that has the power to shape public opinion.

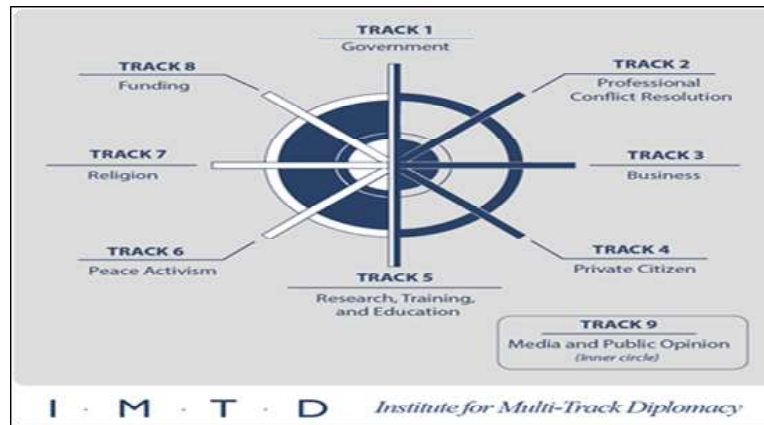


Fig. 1 Various types of Multi-Track diplomacies

Review of literature

Patel (2018) writes in his research paper 'India-Pakistan relations and spy movies: A socio-strategic analysis', about the movie which portrays the story of a female spy who puts her life in danger for her country 'India' to accomplish a mission. The film 'Raazi' is based on the real story of a female spy. The researcher also mentions the India-Pakistan partition based on the Two-Nation theory that still affects the masses psychologically in both countries. Hindu-Muslim stereotyped perceptions between both communities still affect their lives at every step.

Srinivas (2019) discussed in his article 'Cultural Diplomacy and Role of Indian Diaspora', how the Soft Power strategy of Modi's foreign policy has played a prominent role in mobilizing the Indian Diaspora around the world to be part of its development strategy since 2014. Researchers emphasize Modi's foreign policy, which focused mostly on neighboring countries. He also mentioned this as evidence that during PM Modi's oath-taking ceremony, he invited all the South Asian leaders. Researchers said that India's soft power is not a recent phenomenon as Yoga, Ayurveda, and Bollywood have laid the foundation for promoting the soft power of Indian foreign policy today.

Tripathi and Raghuvanshi (2019) in an article portraying the "Other" in textbooks and movies 'The Mental Borders and Their Implications for India-Pakistan Relations', discussed the mental

borders that exist between India and Pakistan. They also mention that 'national identities have been created after borders are more or less in place'. The researcher elaborates on the various aspects of the India-Pakistan border in the movies and analyzes how they cultivate mental blocks. Two Bollywood movies (LOC Kargil, Sarfros) and two Lollywood movies (Pakistani movies- Ramchand Pakistani and Waar) have been selected for the study. Researchers conclude that these blockbuster movies from two neighboring countries portray each other as rivals. Researchers said that movies are the medium of entertainment, but such jingoistic presentations make it political and create mental blocks and hate. But there are also excellent movies on Indo-Pak themes that spread the message of peace and friendship, like Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Filmistan, and Total Siyappa.

According to Nyle (2021), soft power is pull, whereas hard power is push. To use a more often used analogy, soft power is more like a magnet, whereas hard power is like waving sticks or carrots. A few resources that are often linked to hard power in the majority of soft power may also be generated in other settings. For instance, surveys indicated that interest in the US increased in Indonesia after US Navy vessels helped the country recover from the 2004 tsunami. Certain resources can concurrently generate both soft and hard power: observe China's Belt and Road Initiative assistance initiative now or the Marshall Plan in 1948.

Significance of the study

Bollywood, the well-established film business, includes Hindi cinema. Numerous Hindi movies are successful, both domestically and internationally. The cinema greatly frames our perceptions. India and its South Asian neighbors strive for comparable progress, growth, and well-being for their respective populations. Similar issues, including poverty, unemployment, brain drain, wars, unrest, and corruption, are also being faced by them. Peace is the most essential prerequisite for achieving these objectives and overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way. Strong bilateral ties foster mutual understanding, collaboration, confidence-building, and socioeconomic success. India has implemented multi-track diplomacy as one of its diplomatic strategies to improve ties with other nations. The researcher intends to investigate how Hindi films contribute to developing bilateral ties

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between India and its South Asian neighbors. It is critical to analyze how history is portrayed in movies, how the past is recreated, and how naturalism or realism is developed in movies depicting neighboring nations.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the challenges for Hindi films in promoting bilateral relations between India and its neighbors in South Asia.
2. To analyze the formulation of public opinion about political and diplomatic affairs through an entertainment medium.
3. To compare the cinematic portrayal or adaptation of real incidents with political overture and the incident itself.

Research design

The research design used is descriptive as well as interpretative in nature. The researcher will describe the selected movie in detail and interpret this movie about political incidents. The film will be viewed several times for analysis based on various parameters. The analyzed data will be compiled and interpretations will be made according to the framed objectives of the study. The method used for research would be 'Content Analysis'. This is a method for systematic analysis of film content. It is used for systematic, objective, and quantitative research. The texts of films will be broken down, and the meaning will be made in the context of political incidents and documents available. For this study, film will be considered primary data sources, and books, magazines, newspapers, and interviews will be considered secondary data sources.

Sample

Raazi (2018)-This film is based on Sehmat Khan, an undercover RAW agent, who is married by her father to a Pakistani family so she can get some valuable pieces of enemy information. This film, directed by Meghna Gulzar and Alia Bhatt, is in the leading role.

Theoretical perspective

Auteur Theory: The most significant cinematic theory is the auteur hypothesis. It probably impacts how you perceive movie filmmaking and how much attention is placed on the filmmaker as the movie's "auteur". Since the 1950s, the "auteur theory" has been

used to analyze cinema. Famous director and critic Francois Truffaut was the driving force behind the development of this theory. The French New Wave and the cinema reviewers who wrote for the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* were largely responsible for disseminating this ideology. The works of Andrew Sarris, a critic for *The Village Voice*, are credited with an impetus for developing the "auteur theory" in the United States (Chaudhari, 2013, p. 4). Directors like Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and Jean Renoir are considered auteurs because of their enormous personal effect on the films they directed. Alexandre Astruc coined the word "camera-stylo," meaning "camera-pen." This term was a French addition to the auteur theory, indicating that filmmakers were required to utilize the camera like an author would use a pen to produce unorthodox means of narrative (Arya, 2017, p. 50). According to the Auteur Theory, the director is a movie's main auteur or auteurist, and the movie reflects the filmmaker's field of vision. Style, plot, and subject matter combine to form the voice of a distinctive director. Some filmmakers immediately identify additional similarities among the works of Anderson, Spielberg, Hitchcock, and John Ford. It is clear from their films that they intend to convey a cinematic voice. A writer using a pen is similar to a filmmaker using a camera (Rudra & Tamilarasan, 2022). Filmmakers are magicians because they work marvels with their particular form of expression. Through its evolution in the pages of the French film journal *Cahiers Du Cinema* and the astounding developments, the Auteur hypothesis advances in this manner (Aneek, 2013). The dynamics of this volatile area can be played particularly successfully in the movie as a text. The text of a film is frequently recognized by its environment and story as a marker of the liminal regions it seeks to explore, embodying its constraints and potential. Additionally, it discusses how no normative sexualities have always held a liminal position in socio-political structures (Bose, 2011).

Indian cinema has produced strong auteurs such as Dadasaheb Phalke, Himanshu Roy, P.C. Barua, Bimal Roy, Satyajit Ray, Guru Dutt, Adoor Gopal Krishnan, Govind Nihalani, Girish Kasarvalli, and Mani Ratnam. These filmmakers have created distinct cinematic worlds even though many of their films are considered to be examples

of so-called mainstream cinema. Today, Ram Gopal Verma is recognized as having a distinctive style characterized by powerful performances and presentations with a documentary-like quality. The comedic incidents are not the result of any physical or psychological impairments on his part; rather, he handles them rationally and sensibly (Vemireddy, 2011, p,5).

Interpretation

The meticulous analysis of the Hindi movie Raazi is done in terms of theme, plot, narrative, storyline, characters, dialogues, music, sound, shots, and metaphors and the description for the same is as follows:

1. **Theme** - Meghna Gulzar is the director of the spy thriller Raazi. This movie is based on the novel 'Sehmat Calling' by Harinder Sikka.
2. **Plot** - Hidayat Khan is an Indian intelligence operative who worked as an informant for the Pakistani military before the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence. Claiming to be an Indian traitor who is selling information to Pakistan, he becomes friends with Pakistan Army Brigadier Parvez Syed and learns about an operation that is being prepared against India. Afraid that his lung cancer will not allow him to live long enough to discover more, he asks his twenty-year-old daughter Sehmat, a student at Delhi University, to marry Major Iqbal, a Pakistani military officer, through an arranged marriage for her to become an undercover agent of the Research and Analysis Wing, India's external intelligence agency, in Pakistan. After joining the RAW, Sehmat receives training from Nikhil Bakshi, the senior RAW officer, and senior RAW officer Khalid Mir. Through his connection to Brigadier Syed of the Pakistan Army, her father marries Sehmat to Iqbal Syed, a military man. As soon as Sehmat settles into her married life, she develops an attachment to Iqbal. Still, things become more complicated.
3. **Storyline** - The father of Hidayat Khan is an Indian independence fighter and agent who works for the Pakistani government as an informant. He wants to carry on the family legacy of serving the nation by appointing his 20-year-old daughter Sehmat as

an agent. Sehmat graduates from college. Khalid Mir, a top RAW officer, quickly trains her. Her father marries Sehmat to Iqbal Syed, a military officer, through his acquaintance with Brigadier Syed of the Pakistan Army. Sehmat becomes attached to Iqbal as soon as she becomes settled in her married life. However, things get increasingly complex. Iqbal discovers Sehmat's secret when he discovers her communication devices hidden in Abdul's room along with a fragment of the anklet he had given her as a wedding gift. He goes up to Sehmat, who is distraught and tells him that her duty is to her nation while holding him at gunpoint. Sehmat, traumatized by the loss of her husband and Mir's instructions to murder her, goes back to her village with the RAW team. Soon after coming, she passes out, and when she finds out she is pregnant, she decides to keep Iqbal's kid. Using Sehmat's findings as a guide, newsreel video shows how the Indian Navy sank the Pakistani submarine PNS Ghazi before it could launch its intended attack on INS Vikrant.

4. **Characters and dialogues** - The costumes and dialogues of the main characters of the movie Raazi are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Description of costumes and makeup of main characters of Raazi movie.

Characters	Sehmat (Alia Bhatt)	Hidayat Khan (Ranjit Kapoor)	Iqbal Sayad (Vicky Kaushal)	Brigadier Sayad(Shishir Sharma)	Khalid Mir (Jaideep Ahlawat)	Teji Khan (Soni Razdan)
Costume	Salwar Kameez with dupatta, sari in some shots	Kurta pajama with Shawl and Kashmiri Topi	Pent Shirt, Pakistani Army Uniform	Suit, Pakistani Army Uniform)	Pent Shirt	Salwar Kameez with dupatta, sari in some shots
Makeup	Simple make-up look	No makeup look	Mustache, no makeup look	No make-up look	Specks, no make- up look	Simple make-up look

Dialogue 1- Khalid Mir - Mai kya kahu Hidayat ajeeb bat kardi tumne. India ke liye surag lagana alag bat hai uske liye Pakistan me contacts banake rakhna or bat hai lekin ik masum ladki jise jasusi ka ilam bhi nahi..... beti hai tumhari Hidayat.

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(I don't know what to say, Hidayat. I can't fathom what you have just said. Spying for India... ..and maintaining contacts in Pakistan is one thing. But an innocent girl, who knows nothing about spying... She's your daughter, Hidayat.)

Hidayat - Ik Hindustani pehle hai. Ap nahi janty ye waqt Hindustan ke liye kitna ahem hai, or kitna khatarnak bhi ho sakta hai. Bangal me Hindustan ki madakalak ki bhanak pad chuki hai unhe, or vo ise bardasht nahi karege. Pakistan ko tutne nahi denge. Hamare khilaf vo koi badi sceem tyar kar rahy hai.

(She is an Indian first. You don't know how crucial this time is for India. And how dangerous it can get. They have got a whiff of India's involvement in Bengal. And they will not tolerate it. They will never let Pakistan break apart. They are hatching a big scheme against us.)

Khalid Mir - kesi scheme?

(What kind of scheme?)

Hidayat - Mir sahib agar ye pata hota to apni beti ki jaan dau pe kyu lagata. Or un logo ko jo muje pe yakeen hai vo sirf mere badh meri beti pe ho sakta hai.

(Mir Sahab, if I knew that... ..would I risk my daughter's life? They have a lot of faith in me... ..which they can only have in my daughter, after me.)

Interpretation - This dialogue depicts that Hidayat is a true Indian and always ready to sacrifice everything for his country.

Dialogue 2 - Sehmat - Abu ap mulk ke liye apni jaan khatre me kyu dalty hai?

(Why do you risk your own life for the country, Abbu?)

Hidayat - Vo mere abu ki rivayat thi.... Humse jo kaha gaya jo sikhaya gaya vahi kiya. Par tumse bhi vahi karana galati hai, isiliye....

(That is my father's legacy. I did... as I was told. But to make you do the same... ..is a mistake. So...)

Sehmat - Tik hai abu, ap kehty hai to mai collage vapis chali jati hu.... Lekin mere abu ne bhi vahi talim muje di hai ke watan ke age kuch nahi.... Khud bhi nahi or agar vo galti hai to phir desh ki hifasat ke liye beto ko fauj me dalna bhi galti hai.

(Alright, Abbu. I'll go back to college, as you say. But my father too, has raised me with the same belief. That nothing comes before the country. Not even yourself. And if that is a mistake.....then enrolling your sons in the army to protect the nation.....is also a mistake.)

Interpretation - It shows that Sehmat is also like his father and has the same belief that nothing comes before the country, not even yourself.

Dialogue 3 - Sehmat - Ik bat fir se puchu apse? Apko kya lagta hai mai ye kar paugi?

(May I ask you a question again? Do you think I will be able to do this?)

Khalid Mir - Yakeen hai.

Ik sawal mai puchu? Kyu raazi hui ye karne ke liye. Collage me padh rahi thi Kuch to socha hoga kya karna hai, tumhare koi kwab honge zindagi me.

(I am certain of it. Can I ask you a question?)

Why did you agree to do this? You were studying in college. You must have had some plans for your future your dreams...)

Sehmat - Mere abu or unke abu jo azadi ki jung me lade the... pucha tha maine unse, kyu lathi khaty hai.... Mahino jail kat ke ate hai. Has ke bole, mulk ke samne muje apna ap nazar nahi ata, mai hi to mulk hu, Hindustan hu..... unhi ka khoon meri rago me bhi hai na.

(My father and his father...who fought in our freedom struggle...I had asked him once...Why did you take those beatings? Spend all those months in jail? He replied with a smile...There is no ME before the nation. I am the nation. I am India. His blood runs through my veins too...)

Interpretation - This dialogue depicts that Sehmat wants to make his father proud.

Shots and metaphors: The interpretation of various movie shots and metaphors with different camera settings and lighting are presented in Table 3.

Table 2 Interpretation of various movie shots and metaphors with diverse camera settings and lighting

Shot	Metaphors	Camera settings	Lighting	Interpretation
	Squirrel	Camera Placement- Front side; Camera Angles- Eye Level; Camera Shots- Close-up; Camera Movements- close-up to extreme close-up	Natural light	Shows the soft heart of Sehmat
	Hands	Camera Placement- left side; Camera Angles- High Level; Camera Shots- Close-up; Camera Movements – panning upside	Natural Light	Shows a father-daughter relationship that builds on trust
	Written lines	Camera Placement- Upside; Camera Angles- Low level; Camera Shots- closeup; Camera Movements- Zoom in	Lamp Light	It depicts the Spying technique.
	Poster	Camera Placement- Left side; Camera Angles-High level; Camera Shots- Close-up; Camera Movements- Panning toward the right side	Natural Light	It depicts the hatred and bitterness of Pakistan.

	Tears	Camera Placement- Front side; Camera Angles- Eye Level; Camera Shots- Close-up; Camera Movements- Close-up to extreme close-up	Dim Light	Tears depict that Sehmat is still an innocent girl.
	Gun	Camera Placement- Back side of Sehmat; Camera Angles- Eye Level; Camera Shots- Over the shoulder; Camera Movements – Zoom in	Room Light	Gun depicts that Sehmat's only Identity is 'Indian'
	Empty room	Camera Placement- Backside; Camera Angles- Eye Level; Camera Shots- Long shot; Camera Movements- Panning left-hand side to right-hand side	Natural Light inside the Room coming through the window	Emptiness depicts that she sacrificed her whole life for her country

Editing: The tale does not contain any flashbacks or flash-forwards; hence, there are no temporal jump cuts in the linear editing. No character in this movie is in negative light; even all Pakistani characters are shown positively.

Conclusion

Examining the challenges for Hindi films in promoting bilateral relations between India and its neighbors in South Asia is the first objective of the study, and banning most of the films is the main challenge for Hindi films in South Asian countries. "Raazi" delves into a fascinating political era preceding the conflict of 1971. The narrative was worthwhile to share because it depicts the connection between Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, three nations that were experiencing instability at the time.

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The second objective of the study is to analyze the formulation of public opinion about political and diplomatic affairs through an entertainment medium is supported by a report that appeared in the Times of India, where the director of the film, Meghna stated: "Initially, Pakistanis residing outside were reluctant to see the movie because they believed it would disparage Pakistan. However, they were taken aback when they saw it. They have come to discuss that on social media. They have discussed it with me. I find this discourse to be overwhelming; it is my reward. I wanted to convey the idea that loving your nation does not equate to hating another." Meghna stated that it is important for them to understand that we see them as fellow human beings.

The third objective is to compare the cinematic portrayal or adaptation of real incidents with political overture and the incident itself. Alia Bhatt portrays a young Sehmat in the first scene of the film. Someone goes through intense training to become a spy. She suppressed any doubts about her ability that her mentor at RAW might have had, wanting to please her sick father. She departs on her covert assignment as the attractive bride of a Pakistani officer who happens to be a Brigadier's son. Her quick wit and deft manoeuvres are impressive, and she continues to solidify her control on all the important players in enemy territory as she makes connections. Yet, as Sehmat continues with her espionage missions, it becomes evident how devoted her new family is. A glimpse into her new life with a loving sister-in-law, a devoted husband, and a venerable father-in-law is provided to the audience. The depiction of a Pakistani military family is novel and incredibly realistic. One comes to see that they are just like the rest of us. Their ambitions, worries, and goals are similar to those of a typical Indian family. Demonizing the opponent, as is done in past Indo-Pak war films, would have been simple. That is not what director Meghna Gulzar decides to do. It also raises her movie's profile.

In the film, no character is at fault. Instead, everyone shares equal blame with the main character. Everyone behaves with loyalty to their nation. The protagonist is a double-crosser who murders an innocent family that takes her in her attempt to save her nation. The schoolchildren chant "ae watan mere watan, aabbad rahy tu" with the same passion that Sehmat had for her India and Pakistan.

The one raising the red flags is Abdul, the obedient housekeeper who has long suspected the new wife. One gets shivers at the part where Sehmat follows him after finding out her secret. In the first scene, the same girl who couldn't stand to watch a squirrel suffer pain prepares to carry out her first murder. After she runs him over, she is inconsolable and sobs in the shower. She feels alone, terrified, guilty, and agonized. When she has to murder her brother-in-law next, it crushes her heart. On the day of the crime, Sehmat is unable to behave normally in front of her devoted sister-in-law back home.

The scene where Sehmat's spouse is blasted to bits after the film hurts. With the gullible, devoted spouse, Sehmat has no reason to get attached. However, she does. One may sense her intense hatred towards her mentor- Mir, for Iqbal's death. The realization dawned on her that Mir had also planned to kill her. With firmness, Mir explains to her the perils of war, saying, "Jung me asa hi hota hai, kayi bekaasoor mare jatay hai." Even so, jung me sivaye jung ke ho kuch mayane nahi rakhta. Sehmat's admission of her incapacity to understand Mir's perspective, her hatred of the idea of becoming like him, and her plea for him to take her home all serve to emphasize the point. Here, the hero is neither unbeatable nor confident. She was defenseless. Unlike other Bollywood directors, Meghna has a very different perspective on how to depict Pakistan. An examination of the film reveals that the looks, speech, and expressions of Pakistani characters are identical to those of Indian ones.

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