

Narratives of Nationhood: Imagining Civic Identity through Hindi Cinema and National Discourse

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Abstract

This study explores how Hindi cinema contributes to India's evolving nationhood by shaping citizen consciousness in a rapidly transforming cultural and democratic landscape. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Benedict Anderson's theory of Imagined Communities, it analyzes five thematically significant films *Swades* (2004), *Rang De Basanti* (2006), *3 Idiots* (2009), *Dangal* (2016), and *Raazi* (2018) selected for their basis in real events and emphasis on education, gender empowerment, ethical decision-making, and civic responsibility. These films collectively redefine patriotism as ethical engagement, emotional courage, and participatory citizenship, rather than state-centered nationalism. The unit of analysis includes narrative structure, symbolic visuals, and ideologically charged dialogues. Using Fairclough's CDA model, the study uncovers how cinema operates as a cultural discourse that fosters civic reflection and inclusion. This study indicates that these films construct a symbolic vocabulary through which diverse audiences across region, class, and language can imagine themselves as active agents in shaping the nation. As India moves toward a more equitable and globally visible future, this research underscores cinema's power to shape national values and actively participates in shaping the ethos of an emerging, democratic nation. In doing so, it affirms cinema's enduring role in how India sees itself and how the world may come to understand India anew.

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Key Words

Hindi cinema, nation-building, critical discourse analysis, civic identity, cultural studies

Introduction

Cinema and popular culture are powerful media in the construction of societal values, dissemination of ideologies, and building of collective consciousness. Hindi cinema, popularly known as Bollywood, occupies a vital space not only as a source of entertainment but also as a cultural and ideological force. It plays a crucial role in the construction and diffusion of ideas of national identity, unity, and patriotism across a diverse and multilingual population; thus, it is the reason for cinema's mass penetration among Indian audiences. India is today on a pathway of tradition and modernity, where it is working on two fronts, preserving its heritage and projecting its modernity towards a global power driven by innovation, youth energy, and democratic values. India's growing digital economy, social reform movements, aspirations for gender equality, and a more participative democratic spirit represent its newer face. Hindi cinema, which is a reflective mirror of this transformative shift, functions as a visual repository of societal values and a progressive space that imagines what India could be. Cinema is not merely just a reflection of this newer emerging India but also an active participant in creating its vision. It successfully captures the struggle between age-old systems and evolving social consciousness, which articulates a bold and future-oriented identity of modern India. The idea of nation-building in India holds unique significance owing to the diverse composition of the country and a multitude of languages, religions, and ethnicities. Hindi films hold mass appeal and accessibility, breaking the barriers of communication regional and linguistic challenges to promote unity and a shared sense of belonging. Films like *Mother India* (1957) and *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970) were emblematic of the post-independence era, aligning with the nation's aspirations for self-definition and solidarity.

In contrast, contemporary Hindi cinema explores the deeper complexities of individual rights, civic duties, and global interdependence. This research study analyzes five selected Hindi films.

1. *Swades* (2004),
2. *Rang De Basanti* (2006),
3. *3 Idiots* (2009),
4. *Dangal* (2016),
5. *Raazi* (2018)

The selected film sample reinterprets patriotism not merely as loyalty to the state or acts of military valor, but as moral courage, intellectual integrity, gender equity, and participatory citizenship. The research explores, through a cultural and critical lens, the contribution of these films to the discourse of nation-building and their influence on how civic identity is imagined and enacted in a modern, evolving India.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. The study aims to critically analyze the narrative, dialogues, and visual elements in selected Hindi films (*Swades*, *Rang De Basanti*, *3 Idiots*, *Dangal*, and *Raazi*) to identify representations of patriotism, national identity, and civic engagement.
2. The study aims to investigate how the films reinforce ideological constructs and foster discourses that promote nation-building and citizenship.
3. The aim is to comprehend the role of cinematic narratives as cultural tools that influence social consciousness and collective action.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do the narrative structures, dialogues, and visuals in a few select Hindi films capture and create notions of patriotism and national identity, as well as engagement with the civic world?
2. What are the ideological constructs embedded within these films, and how do they inform and intersect with nation-building and social responsibility?
3. In what ways do cinematic narratives act as cultural tools for shaping social consciousness and prompting collective action?

1.3 Theoretical Context and Relevance

This study builds upon existing literature in media studies, cultural theory, and nationalism. Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities' is pivotal for understanding the symbolic formation of national identities. In developing nations like India, which are deeply fragmented along linguistic, regional, caste, and religious lines, the idea of an imagined community becomes

especially relevant. National unity often does not stem from physical or geographic cohesion but is instead formed through shared narratives, many of which are disseminated by media and cinema.

Hindi Cinema functions as the binding force for disparate groups through symbolically charged, emotional narratives that represent and portray common struggles, dreams, and responsibilities. The selected films for this study have a common thread in their portrayal of relatable characters. Bridging socio-economic and cultural-regional divides through which the audience re-imagines themselves in a collective space of Indian identity, such as in *Swades* (2004), the return of an NRI to India, is not only a symbolic geographical return but a reimagination of a unified India premised on grassroots participation. Similarly, *3 Idiots* (2009) challenges rigid educational norms and fosters an idea of intellectual freedom and national progress that unites youth from across India. The primary methodology for this paper is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with an additional theoretical lens provided by Benedict Anderson's 'Imagined Community,' which helps in understanding the notion of an abstract entity - Nation. Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, encompassing textual, discursive, and social elements, provides a comprehensive method for analyzing how cinematic texts function as ideological instruments within their cultural contexts.

1.4 Scope and Relevance

This research study holds critical relevance with respect to domains of academia, cultural policy, media studies, and film production. India is developing at a rapid pace and is redefining its national identity and position on the global stage. Hindi cinema plays a transformative role on this pivotal journey. The selected film samples explore various elements of civic life and national engagement: youth-led active participation, community service, gender empowerment through education and sports, intellectual liberty, and ethical patriotism. These films are not limited to their entertainment value, but they are also contributors of reflection and participatory inspiration in the nation's democratic and developmental processes. It is crucial for offering advice to filmmakers on the construction of national discourse, educators seeking to integrate visual media into civic education, and policymakers who recognize cinema's potential in social reform. By decoding the influence of cinematic narratives and their reflection of the public's sense of civic identity, this study contributes and provides scope for a

discussion on culture, democracy, and social cohesion in a rapidly transforming global society.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Nation-Building and the Role of Cinema

Nation-building in the postcolonial Indian context has been deeply intertwined with the role of media. As Benedict Anderson (1983) asserts, nations are 'imagined communities' where people perceive a shared bond not through face-to-face interactions but through mediated symbols, rituals, and stories. India is a land of many cultures and religions; it is a highly heterogeneous society, and in this Hindi cinema has always played a pivotal role in the construction of imagined unity by constructing cinematic narratives that portray cultural coexistence, shared aspirational convergence, and national ideals. Hindi films act as ideological pillars on which a vision of collective identity stands, through depictions of sacrifice, civic duty, and development, which provide a sense of belonging and a space for reimagination for the audiences. Early independent Indian films, such as *Mother India* (1957) and *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), portrayed the ideals of self-sacrifice, moral fortitude, and agrarian struggles in the newborn nation. Screen cinematic spectacles promote narratives of resilience and moderators of state-led visions of unity and progress. Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1999) argue that post-independence cinema was a cultural extension of the state's developmentalist ideology. These films functioned not just as entertainment but as tools of cultural pedagogy, cultivating civic virtues and national pride.

As India transitioned into the post-liberalization era of the 1990s, challenging the economic struggles, the cinematic representations evolved and shifted. The era of newer cinema began with *Swades* and *Rang de Basanti*, which set out to investigate nationalism rooted in participatory, conscious, and civic engagements for national development. Such films looked at modern patriotism through the lens of civic responsibilities and moral courage, reshaping the discourse. This discussion centers on the meaning of being Indian in the 21st century. Thus, cinema transforms from a unifying mirror to a dialogic space that raises questions about governance, identity, inequality, and democratic participation.

2.2 Ideology, Representation, and Critical Discourse in Cinema

Cinema acts as both a cultural product and an entertainment tool, operating not merely as a reflection of society but as an active participant in shaping and circulating ideological constructs. Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model (1980) provides a framework for comprehending how producers construct cinematic grammar and diverse audiences interpret it. These perspectives are crucial for the discourse-oriented analysis of cinema's role in forming civic consciousness and collective experiences. Althusser's (1971) concept of ideological state apparatuses positions media including cinema as instrumental in the interpellation of subjects into dominant ideologies. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a model of Norman Fairclough (1992, 2001), offers a systematic way of analyzing how language and semiotic resources construct social realities. Fairclough's three-dimensional model focusing on the textual, discursive, and social practices helps examine how media narratives naturalize particular ideologies. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) further extend CDA by situating discourse within late modern social transformations, emphasizing how media texts both reflect and restructure power relations in globalized societies. While CDA has been widely used in analyzing political and media discourse (Van Dijk, 2006), its application in cinema studies remains relatively underutilized, particularly in the Indian context. Although some scholars have tried to bridge this gap, such as when Sarkar (2015) applied CDA to Bengali films to explore postcolonial identity constructions, Mathur (2020) examined the intersection of neoliberalism and masculinity in Bollywood using discourse analysis. These studies underscore cinema's ideological density and its capacity to influence public consciousness by embedding moral and political meanings in visual and narrative forms.

2.3 Nationalism and Imagined Communities in Visual Culture

The nation, as Benedict Anderson (1983) famously argued, is an "imagined political community" constructed not through direct interpersonal contact but via shared symbols, media, and narratives. Media, including print journalism, television, and cinema, play a central role in this imagining process. Anderson's ideas have been widely adapted in media and cultural studies, with scholars such as Schlesinger (2000) and Bhabha (1990) emphasizing the performative and contested nature of national identity. Cinema, especially in postcolonial

societies, serves as a crucial platform for imagining, narrating, visualizing, and emotionally inhabiting the nation. As Shohat and Stam (1994) suggest, national cinemas often articulate a double desire: to resist colonial narratives and to project a cohesive national self. In the Indian context, Vasudevan (2010) argues that Hindi cinema has historically functioned as a 'public culture' that mediates between state discourse and popular sentiment. Rajadhyaksha (2016) notes that Bollywood's global circulation has turned Hindi films into transnational imaginaries, wherein the nation is reconstituted through diasporic longings and cosmopolitan aesthetics. This makes Anderson's framework especially pertinent for analyzing how cinema constructs a civic community that is at once national and transnational, emotional and ideological. Ray (2009) highlights how gendered representations in colonial and postcolonial narratives are central to imagining the nation, reinforcing how cinematic texts frequently position women as symbolic bearers of national identity.

2.4 Cinema and Social Change: Beyond Entertainment

Film theory has long debated the pedagogical function of cinema. As hooks (1996) argues, the visual is a contested terrain where dominant ideologies can be both reinforced and subverted. Hindi cinema, often critiqued for its formulaic storytelling, has nonetheless been a powerful vehicle for social messaging. Scholars like Kabir (2011) have explored how Bollywood films negotiate issues of gender, caste, and secularism through accessible yet emotionally resonant narratives. Studies have also examined cinema's influence on social movements. Punathambekar (2013) highlights how popular films contribute to the venularization of civic ideals, particularly among the youth. The performative nature of cinematic spectatorship where audiences engage emotionally with characters and story arcs renders cinema a potent cultural agent for initiating reflection, debate, and action. Within Indian cinema literature, there has been a shift from examining cinema solely as a mirror of society to understanding it as a discursive apparatus. Dwyer and Patel (2002) note that the Hindi film industry plays a constitutive role in the public sphere, where debates about modernity, tradition, and development are played out. Ganti (2012) scrutinizes the neoliberal restructuring of the film industry and its impact on narrative forms and audience reception. Gopal (2011) argues that contemporary Bollywood narratives often reconfigure social institutions such as marriage, family, and class mobility, thereby contributing to evolving cultural imaginaries of modern India. Dwyer

(2014) argues that Hindi cinema functions as a cultural guide to understanding contemporary India, reinforcing cinema's pedagogical influence in the public sphere.

2.5 Gaps in literature and the Need for Critical Integration

1. Firstly, much of the literature tends to focus on content analysis or star studies without systematically linking cinematic form to ideology using rigorous frameworks such as CDA. While scholars like Mishra (2002) have examined nationalism in Bollywood, there is a lack of research that explicitly integrates CDA with Anderson's theory to interrogate how civic identity is textualized and visualized in film.

2. Secondly, the transnational reception of Hindi films and how it shapes diasporic civic imaginaries remains underexplored in discourse-oriented studies. While Chatterjee (2017) has discussed the diasporic turn in Bollywood, more empirical and discourse-analytic approaches are needed to understand how narratives of nationhood are received and internalized across cultural contexts.

3. Thirdly, there is a gap in longitudinal studies that track the evolution of civic discourses across decades in Hindi cinema. Most studies are either historical or contemporaneous but do not bridge temporal shifts to identify how the vocabulary of nationhood has changed in tandem with socio-political developments, such as economic liberalization or digital media proliferation.

4. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to the reception of these narratives among diverse audiences, especially the Indian diaspora and non-Hindi-speaking populations. Studying how Hindi films construct transnational meanings of Indian civic identity and national imagination is crucial, given their increasing global popularity. This study lays the groundwork for such future inquiries by grounding the analysis in both the domestic and global contexts of cultural consumption.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology grounded in the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and supported by the theoretical framework

of Imagined Communities. The central objective is to examine how Hindi films construct and disseminate discourses of nationalism, civic identity, and social responsibility. The selected films were chosen based on a combination of their thematic engagement with national identity, critical and commercial success, and influence on public discourse within and beyond India. The selected film sample is as follows:

1. *Swades* (2004), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, is a cult classic film that explores the themes of grassroots community development and civic responsibilities, representing the power of individual actions in national development.
2. *Rang De Basanti* (2006), directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, is known for its youth consciousness and serves as a call to civic activism and participatory political apathy.
3. *3 Idiots* (2009), directed by Rajkumar Hirani. The film critiques Indian education systems while promoting the values of skill development, intellectual freedom, and innovation key elements for progressive national identity.
4. *Dangal* (2016), directed by Nitesh Tiwari, is a biographical sports film that has layers of gender equity and national pride while challenging traditional gender roles.
5. *Raazi* (2018), directed by Meghna Gulzar, is a complex narrative of espionage and sacrifice, ethical dimensions of patriotism, and personal dilemmas within the context of national loyalty.

Each of these films has been carefully chosen for the film sample due to their relevance to the study, spreading across two decades (2004-2018), allowing for analysis of evolving nationalism, and also serving as a rich cultural text that encapsulates ideological meanings within its narrative structures, dialogues, and visual compositions. The analysis of cinematic text will help trace how nationalism and national identity are crafted and their interaction with the discourse of the nation. Furthermore, the analysis will be put through the lens of the socio-political context of the films, such as changing gender discourse, youth-led movements, and national identity formation.

The analysis relies on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which examines:

- **Textual Analysis:** A close reading of film scripts, character dialogues, and visual imagery to uncover recurring motifs, symbols, and ideological references.
- **Discursive Practice:** How the films' narrative and cinematic techniques interact with other discourses in society and circulate across media platforms.
- **Social Practice:** How these texts function within broader socio-political and cultural contexts, contributing to or challenging dominant ideologies about the nation, identity, and citizenship.

Benedict Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' will be used to explore the film's contribution to the construction of national identity by the formation of shared collective experiences and a sense of belonging across the Indian masses. The study will explore the recurring themes of moral integrity, socio-political environment, and civic participation, which enable the audiences to imagine themselves as a part of the collective Indian nation.

3.3 Data Collection and Thematic Interpretations

1. **Primary Data:** We will examine the selected film sample of five films through multiple viewings to conduct a comprehensive thematic and discourse analysis.
2. **Secondary Data:** Academic articles, film reviews, director interviews, and promotional and media content will be used to contextualize the film's societal impact.

Primary data will be coded thematically using MAXQDA software for identifying patterns and discourse elements. Codes will be hybrid in nature, both inductive and deductive, developed around core themes of gender, education, nationalism, civic identity, and social reform. These codes will be used to draw conclusions in reference to the objectives of the study.

3.4 Limitations

1. The selected film sample consists of five critically acclaimed films, but it is needed to acknowledge the methodological boundaries of the study. The film sample is diverse in nature and time span, yet it is still limited and may not encompass the full ideological spectrum of Hindi cinema.
2. The study used the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on textual and visual analysis and emphasizing the construction of meaning

within the film narrative. As a result, the reception dynamics and meaning-making processes by various social groups based on class, region, language, or generational identity—remain underexplored.

3. The study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, and its findings are interpretive rather than broad generalizations, with its focus on ideological constructs in select cinematic texts.

While acknowledging the limitations, the specifically chosen methodological approach provides a crucial and critical lens of examination as to what part cinema plays in shaping, reflecting, and portraying the ideological notions of nation building in contemporary India.

4. Analysis and Implications

4.1 *Swades* (2004): Reclaiming the Village, Reimagining Citizenship

Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades* (2004) offers a poignant reimagining of patriotism rooted not in spectacle but in participatory civic engagement. The film tells the story of Mohan Bhargav (Shahrukh Khan), an NRI and NASA scientist, who returns to India in search of his childhood nanny while craving a family connection; during this journey, he discovers his deeper responsibilities towards his homeland, which initially feels alien to him, but over time, his understanding and bond with it grow. Rather than presenting rural India as a space of helplessness, the narrative builds it as a site of ethical action and democratic renewal. Through quiet realism, authentic dialogues, and symbolic visuals such as hand-pulled water pumps and flickering lightbulbs the film constructs a discourse on nation-building that is based on local empowerment. The film explores a Gandhian narrative of self-sufficiency and ethical service, putting the idea of development not necessarily as a state-led narrative but rather as a participatory citizen-led act of transformation. Drawing on Fairclough (1992), the film exemplifies the socially conditioned and constructive notion of discourse through Mohan his transformation from a fence sitter to an active catalyst of grassroots participation reconfigures the meaning of national belonging. The film disrupts dominant neoliberal narratives that valorize brain drain, instead proposing a model of civic nationalism where returning to serve is an act of courage and progress. *Swades* resonates strongly with the ethos of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), grounding abstract

developmental goals in lived realities. Ultimately, the film intends to inspire a deep vision of national commitment and participation, instead of promoting easy heroism—with a message that change can begin with responsibility and development.

4.2 *Rang De Basanti* (2006): Youth, Martyrdom, and Democratic Dissent

Rang De Basanti (2006), directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, emerges as a generational manifesto that redefines patriotism through the lens of youthful dissent and emotional awakening. The film revolves around a young group of college-going friends, who engage with a documentary being made on the lives of Indian revolutionaries and their contribution to the freedom struggle, and this process gradually transforms into a powerful confrontation with contemporary political corruption. Initially it all began as an enactment of historical events, slowly evolving into lived resistance and complex choices in contemporary times, smudging the lines between past and present. Through interwoven narratives and parallel storytelling, the film reclaims martyrdom not as a blind sacrifice, but as a conscious and ethical stance against systemic failure. The aesthetic choices of documentary-style montages, handheld camerawork, and a pulsating rock soundtrack mirror the restless energy of a youth torn between cynicism and responsibility. Fairclough (2001) CDA proves to be critically valuable here, as the film acts as a discursive tool that showcases how young minds position themselves in opposition to the revolutionaries of that time, transitioning from spectators to active agents in the sociopolitical domain. The dialogues in the film, such as “No country is perfect; it has to be made perfect,” reflect civic action and responsibility as a duty for nation building. The film challenges the transitional notion of nationalism by exploring and positioning protest and social accountability as a necessity for a democratic citizenship framework. Thematically, the film resonates with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), particularly through its critique of patriarchal governance and moral complacency. The film is not just a cinematic masterpiece but also a cinematic call to arms featuring a layered narrative of thought-provoking introspection, shedding light on the role of youth in democracy and their need for accountability. By historicizing activism within a modern context, it extends the freedom struggle into everyday acts of courage, positioning rebellion not as radicalism but as civic virtue.

4.3 3 Idiots (2009): Education and the Rewriting of National Purpose

Rajkumar Hirani's *3 Idiots* (2009) uses the familiar terrain of the Indian education system to interrogate more profound questions about national progress, intellectual freedom, and the emotional cost of conformity. On the surface the film is a satirical comedy, and slowly it transforms into a critical commentary on the institutionalized pressure, rote learning, and the narrow metrics by which success is defined in modern India, and it is also applicable on the global level. The film revolves around the character of Rancho (Aamir Khan), a counter-hegemonic voice who disrupts existing hierarchies through inquiry, compassion, and innovation. His defiance is put forth as an ideological clash rooted in the belief of knowledge and that true education aims to nurture skills and creativity rather than cramming up information without passive thinking fueled by competition and fear. The film's repeated use of symbolic motifs like the phrase "All is well" or the mechanical engineering lab where students memorize rather than understand lays bare the limitations of a rigid academic structure. Here, Fairclough (1992) textual dimension comes to life: dialogues function as ideological arenas, challenging dominant meritocratic discourses with humanistic alternatives. *3 Idiots* presents a national narrative that equally emphasizes emotional intelligence and creativity as essential components of civic development. The film has embedded the ethos of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), reinforcing a broader civic vision on screen. Rather than glorifying rebellion, the film advocates a nuanced, values-based transformation one that redefines patriotism as the courage to question, imagine, and build anew.

4.4 Dangal (2016): Gender, Sports, and the Politics of Representation

Dangal (2016), directed by Nitesh Tiwari, is a powerful reworking of the nation-building narrative through the intertwined lenses of gender empowerment, athletic excellence, and rural aspiration. Based on the real-life story of wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat and his daughters Geeta and Babita, the film uses the wrestling ring as both a literal and metaphorical space to challenge patriarchal conventions and reimagine national pride. The film has the backdrop of rural Haryana, showcasing the deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes, while also This text situates the female body as a site of strength, agency, and symbolic resistance. Mahavir's character undergoes a transformation as he trains his

daughters to become world-class athletes thus shifting the narrative from patriarchal control to enabling empowerment. In Fairclough (2001) CDA terms, *Dangal* functions as a social text that constructs gender equity through embodied action and symbolic triumph. It engages with discourses of nationalism, fatherhood, merit, and modernity redefining success beyond male-centric, urban frames. Thematically, the film aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), reinforcing the idea that social justice is central to national progress. Through the metaphor of wrestling, the film asserts that every fight for recognition, dignity, and inclusion is a fight for the nation itself.

4.5 *Raazi* (2018): Ethical Patriotism and the Personal Cost of Duty

Meghna Gulzar's *Raazi* (2018) offers a nuanced exploration of patriotism through the emotional and moral complexities of espionage, where national duty collides with personal sacrifice. Based on the real-life story of a young Indian woman recruited by the Intelligence Bureau during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, the film reframes the narrative of nationalism from grand declarations to quiet, internalized resolve. Sehmat, the protagonist, is neither a typical soldier nor an overtly heroic figure. Instead, she represents a form of civic commitment that is deeply intimate and often invisible. The film's subdued color palette, close-up shots, and minimalistic score reflect the inner turmoil of a character whose loyalty is unwavering, yet fraught with emotional cost. Looking at the film from CDA, the dominant discourse of masculine patriotism is disrupted by a fragile and innocent young female in a male-dominated field by foregrounding vulnerability, doubt, and moral ambiguity. Fairclough (1992) social practice dimension is particularly relevant here Sehmat's actions are situated within a broader cultural discourse of duty, honor, and state loyalty but are continuously negotiated through her personal ethics and emotional fragility. The film invites viewers to question the binaries of heroism and betrayal and loyalty and loss and compels a reconsideration of what it means to serve the nation. The film's themes strongly intersect with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), particularly through its interrogation of military secrecy, surveillance, and ethical governance. Thus, *Raazi* challenges the conventions of patriotic cinema by implying that national allegiance need not always be loud, visible, or glorious but can also be silent, conflicted, and deeply *human*. In its portrayal of a woman whose sense of

nationhood is costing her inner peace, *Raazi* elevates patriotism from ideology to lived, intimate experience.

4.6 Synthesis of Thematic Constructs: Comparative Matrix and Visual Analysis

4.6.1 Discursive Terrain of Nationhood in Hindi Cinema

Across the studied film sample of the five selected films, there is a complex and transformative discursive layer of nationhood, which reveals the effect of Hindi cinema functioning as a reflection of society and an active agent in the construction of civic consciousness. The films break the notion of a singular narrative of nationalism rooted in state, territory, or military might; these films collectively articulate a civic vision of India one shaped by ethical engagement, emotional intelligence, participatory citizenship, and moral introspection. In each film, a distinct layer is introduced of an interconnected perspective on the meaning of nation and, more importantly, how that belonging is enacted through everyday decisions, responsibilities, and forms of resistance.

1. *Swades* is central to grassroots development in nationhood, representing the village as a microcosm of national transformation. It portrays patriotism through acts of infrastructural reform and civic service, recentering the narrative in active citizenship.

2. *Rang de Basanti* presents a confrontational model, looking at national identity being realized through resistance and civic accountability, projecting the notion of questioning authority as a form of deeper allegiance rather than an act of betrayal.

3. *3 Idiots* adds to this discourse by focusing on education as the cornerstone of national progress, offering a critique of meritocracy while promoting intellectual liberation as a patriotic act.

4. *Dangal* extends the boundaries by elevating women to the forefront of national pride, establishing a connection between gender equity, personal empowerment, and the concept of national success.

5. *Raazi* provides a quietly powerful take on national duty, one that is introspective, morally complex, and profoundly personal, redefining heroism through emotional endurance rather than visible valor.

The CDA framework of Fairclough helps uncover how these texts construct and circulate ideologies that challenge traditional frameworks of patriotism, offering instead a more humanized, ethically grounded understanding of nationhood. The concept of imagined communities becomes critically resonant, as each of the films invites and ponders the audience to feel themselves as part of a collective consciousness not by birth or blood, but rather through collective shared values, actions, and aspirations.

4.6.2 Comparative Thematic Visualization

1. The films form a rich thematic constellation that redefines the vocabulary of Indian nationhood, and there emerge common threads of education, ethical governance, gender equity, and civic engagement, presenting cinema's unique capability to distill abstract democratic values into emotionally rich storytelling.
2. These films are distinguished from their traditional counterparts in their commitment to portraying nationalism as a series of moral choices embedded in daily life. Whether it is Mohan's return to his roots (*Swades*), the student-activists' protest (*Rang De Basanti*), Rancho's reimagination of learning (*3 Idiots*), the Phogat sisters' rise in a male-dominated arena (*Dangal*), or Sehmata's silent sacrifice (*Raazi*), each protagonist embodies a mode of civic action shaped by internal conviction rather than external command.
3. These stories shared the collective consciousness of a shared ethical core; that to be patriotic is to care to care for one's fellow citizens, for systems of justice, for knowledge, for equality, and for truth.
4. Thematically, these films intersect with multiple SDGs, including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), reinforcing how contemporary Hindi cinema aligns with global discourses of inclusive development.
5. These films adopt different registers both narratively and visually: satire, realism, biopic, thriller yet all converge on the collective idea of reimagination of nation through relationships, responsibilities, and reform. These narratives help construct a civic imagination that cuts across region, class, gender, and language, offering the audience possibilities for what the nation could become.

In doing so, Hindi cinema contributes to an evolving, pluralistic discourse of nationalism, one that is more participatory, more critical, and ultimately, more humane.

Comparative Thematic Matrix of Nationhood in select Hindi Films

Film	Civic Mode of Patriotism	Discursive Register	SDG Alignment	Imagined Community Constructed
Swades (2004)	Grassroots service, participatory development	Realist social drama	SDG 4 (Education), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 16 (Institutions)	Village as a microcosm of the nation
Rang De Basanti (2006)	Protest, dissent, civic accountability	Youth satire + docu-drama hybrid	SDG 16 (Justice), SDG 5 (Gender Equality)	Youth collective forged through activism
3 Idiots (2009)	Education reform, intellectual freedom	Satirical comedy-drama	SDG 4 (Education), SDG 9 (Innovation), SDG 3 (Well-being)	Learners' network; youth as reformers
Dangal (2016)	Gender empowerment via sports	Biographical sports drama	SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 3 (Health), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	Gendered nationhood: pride in women's achievements
Raazi (2018)	Ethical sacrifice, intimate duty	Spy thriller / psychological drama	SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	Introspective, emotional belonging beyond borders

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that contemporary Hindi cinema plays a constitutive role in shaping civic imagination and redefining the vocabulary of Indian nationhood. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of *Swades*, *Rang De Basanti*, *3 Idiots*, *Dangal*, and *Raazi*, the research reveals that patriotism in contemporary cinematic narratives is articulated less through state-centered spectacle and more through ethical action, participatory citizenship, gender inclusion, and moral introspection.

By integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse with Anderson's concept of imagined communities, the study shows how cinematic texts operate simultaneously at textual, discursive, and social levels to naturalize particular visions of national belonging. These films construct civic identity not as inherited loyalty but as performed responsibility—manifested through education reform, grassroots development, dissent, gender equity, and personal sacrifice.

The findings indicate a significant shift in the discursive terrain of Hindi cinema. National identity is no longer represented solely through territorial or militaristic symbolism; instead, it is embedded in everyday acts of ethical engagement. In doing so, these films invite audiences to imagine the nation as an evolving moral community shaped by dialogue, accountability, and inclusion.

At a broader level, this research contributes to media and cultural studies literature by demonstrating how popular cinema in a multilingual democracy functions as a site of ideological negotiation and civic pedagogy. It affirms that cinema does not merely mirror socio-political realities but actively participates in constructing the symbolic frameworks through which citizens understand their place within the nation.

In this sense, Hindi cinema emerges not merely as cultural expression but as a discursive arena where competing visions of India are negotiated and stabilized. By foregrounding ethical agency, inclusive citizenship, and dialogic nationalism, these films collectively reposition the nation as a lived moral project rather than a fixed political entity. The study therefore underscores the continuing relevance of cinematic narratives in shaping how democratic societies imagine belonging, responsibility, and collective futures.

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