

**Nation, Nationalism and Indian Hindi Cinema**

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This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in National Identities , DOI:10.1080/14608944.2024.2440753.

The final definitive version is available online:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2024.2440753>

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## Introduction: Nation, Nationalism and Indian Hindi Cinema

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### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest were reported by the authors.

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**Abstract**

In introducing this special issue on 'Nation, Narration and Nationalism in Indian Popular Bollywood Movies' this locates a shifting articulation of Indian national identity within the wider context of domestic social and political issues and the impact of globalisation. The 1980s are identified as a pivotal decade, as highlighted in the opening articles in this collection. These are followed by pieces which map the onset and varied impact of the Hindutva movement on Bollywood. This introduction further discusses the range of cinematic genres in which nationalistic tropes are inscribed and how these convey national identity.

**Keywords**

Bollywood, Nationalism, Film History, India, anti-colonialism

## Introduction: Nation, Nationalism and Indian Hindi Cinema

Where does a nation display its emotional life? Where does it express its anxieties, its personality, its relationship to others? Where does it reflect on (sometimes false) memories? Nations, like individuals, experience catharsis and joy. They also, like individuals, cope with or fail to tackle trauma (Halbwachs, 1950). A principal means to enact all these emotions, as in the individual, is in the imaginary. In the case of a nation, it is the cultural products that tell the stories that process these emotions. One of the most powerful of these, not least in India, is the cinema

Hindi cinema, widely known as Bollywood, has had a marked influence on the imagination of the nation in India. Following India's independence in 1947, the country faced a challenging political and social situation in formulating and establishing a firm sense of national identity. The task of developing and propagating a sense of nationhood was complicated by a perceived lack of historic unity: before the British Raj (1858–1947), India did not exist as a unified state or national community. Instead, the Indian subcontinent, renowned for its rich diversity, had encompassed a multitude of languages, ethnicities, and faiths, making it one of the most pluralistic regions of Asia. Indeed, in many ways this is what it remains beneath the nation-building projects pursued since 1947 by the new state and other actors.

To these challenges was added the traumatic effects of the profound schism of the sub-continent during the 1947 Partition. The leaders who took India to independence and who had resisted the Muslim League's demand for a separate Pakistan, understandably reacted against that schism. A Congress leadership that included Hindus and Muslims prioritised a nation-building process that rested on the concept of a shared culture and a technocratic pursuit of state-led economic development. Conscious of the emotional pull of communalism, they were aware that the abstract concept of the nation needed to be concretized. They aimed to offer a fundamental means of identification, a feeling of cohesion derived from various elements such as the legal system and language enforced by the government, a shared currency, and the creation of a national imagination. This is because nations transcend actual physical formation and are constructed and conveyed through manifold emblems, tales, and discourses, in which individuals often serve as subjects of pedagogy inside the rhetoric of the state (Bhabha, 1990, p. 299). Arguing in the same vein, McClintock argues that 'all nations are gendered and invented' (1997, p. 105). As a result, an essential aspect of nation-building in the early years of independence was to provide both a historical and contemporary context for the diverse population.

Arguably the Films Division adopted by the new state from its inheritance from the British Raj concentrated on the contemporary in its efforts to build a sense of national identity in the early years of independence. In a country with high illiteracy rates, its documentary film output in the late 1940s and 1950s was used to explain the institutions of the new state to its citizens. Some of this work also highlighted India's cultural heritage, such as *Folk Dances of India* (1954). Yet many of these films were paternalistic and othering. As König (2016, p. 186) observes of documentaries

such as *Our Original Inhabitants* (1953), these exoticized and stereotyped India's tribal populations. In others, as one of these filmmakers later commented: 'the concept of national pride was too often portrayed through images of parades against a skyline of flags flying, and seldom in meaningful analysis of India's people and their myriad problems' (Garga, 2007, p. 233).

Instead of this overly didactic approach, feature films have arguably proved a more powerful means of shaping the national imaginary. Serving as a mainstream popular medium of entertainment, Hindi cinema has been influential 'by virtue of its pervasive mass appeal and its ability to deeply push itself into the popular psyche and create a penetrative impact upon people's thinking and imagination' (Kumar, 2019, p. 458). In addition to depicting mythological tales, postcolonial Hindi cinema primarily focused on the agonizing oppression of British rule and on depictions of the valiant struggle of those who fought for independence. Such representations sought to imprint a sense of national aura and belongingness in the minds of viewers.

Hindi cinema has also fostered cultural cohesiveness by highlighting Western and Eastern cultures' contradictory values and reiterating the valour of Indian heroes in freedom struggles, wars, and conflicts. The tendency of Hindi cinema to portray Indian cultural values, the sacrifices made by Indian freedom fighters, and later those of the Indian army, has become a dominant pattern and a subtle yet influential method of passing on nationalist ideals and a perceived essential need to uphold national unity and identity. In the first decade of independence, films such as *Shaheed*, scripted by Wajahat Mirza and directed by Ramesh Saigal, achieved the greatest box office earnings in 1948. This was a powerful romance set against the backdrop of the Quit India movement of the 1940s. Another film, the spy movie *Samadhi*, purportedly based on a real event involving the Azad Hind Fauz of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, was the highest-grossing movie of the year 1950 (Box Office India, 2012). Another high-grossing film of the same year, *Pehla Aadmi*, directed by the renowned filmmaker Bimal Roy, featured a man leaving his wife to go and fight in Bose' Indian Liberation Army against the British during the Second World War. The Hindi cinema of this immediate post-independence period thus played a significant role in framing the anti-colonial struggle. In the process it also invoked a nationalistic spirit and the importance of patriotic sacrifice for the protection of the newly independent nation.

Focus shifted during the crises of the 1960s and 1970s. It became clear that nation-building for India was not just a process of coming to terms with its past and cinematically assuaging, through films like *Mother India* (1957), the trauma of colonialism and Western demonization (Schulze, 2002). Nor were the issues India had to address solely confined within its borders. This period proved tumultuous, with internal crises and external invasions, both of which posed a threat to the territorial integrity of the sovereign nation. The depiction of military valour was the response to the perceived need of the hour. A set of political events that included the Goa Liberation War, the Chinese invasion in 1962, the war with Pakistan in 1965 and the Pakistani intrusions ensuing from the Indo-Pakistani conflict in 1971 made it imperative to instil a sense of bravery, loyalty, and self-sacrifice for the nation among the general population. Hence, patriotism constituted the guiding element in a series of films released during these decades. Some of the prominent ones are

*Haqeeqat* (1964), *Humsaya* (1968), *Prem Pujari* (1970), *Lalkar* (1972), *Hindustan ki Kasam* (1973), *Akraman* (1975) and *Vijeta* (1982).

The 1980s appear as a pivotal moment in this collection. During this decade the expression of patriotism experienced noticeable transformations, as this period was characterized by both internal religious and sectarian divisions, as well as the aspirations of a growing Indian economy increasingly subject to and engaging with processes of globalization. These developments prompted a turning away from Nehruvian state-led socialistic experimentation towards the neoliberalism that India embraced in the 1990s. This facilitated the entry of multinational firms into India and increased the exposure of Indian citizens to global prospects and products. The formation of new migrant waves to other countries following neo-liberalization furthermore led to the expansion of diasporic communities, prompting the development of more impressive means of nationalist bonding that can surpass physical boundaries. Increasingly Hindi cinema thus necessarily addressed a global audience of non-resident Indians.

During the 1990s, India faced numerous threats to its national unity. These crises sparked intense debate about the essence of its nationhood and prompted increased efforts to find alternative historical narratives that could validate different notions of nationalism. While the initial ‘dominant definitions’ of the postcolonial nation-state ‘were drawn from the ideology of the modern liberal-democratic state’ (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 10), certain political and cultural exclusions on the basis of caste and religion persisted in skewed forms. Communal and sectarian politics took a crude turn with the rise of ‘the 1990 Hindu nationalist Ram Janmabhoomi (The Birthplace of Rama) campaign [that] was spearheaded by the Rashtriya SwayamSevak Sangh (National Volunteers’ Association, RSS); Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Organization); and the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People’s Party, BJP)’ (Lichtner and Bandopadhyay, 2008, pp. 431-432). These marked the rise of the Hindutva movement, attempting to consolidate the perception of India as a Hindu state.

Arguably the most important cultural products in sparking and disseminating this moment were not Hindi-language films but propaganda materials such as the video *God Manifests Himself* produced in a variety of media by the English-medium comic book franchise Amar Chitra Katha (ACK), founded in 1967 (König, 2016, p. 193). ACK and its imitators presented a vision of India’s national imaginary very different from the modernist nation-building discourse of the documentary filmmakers of the Nehruvian era, a geographically restricted one which drew upon and indigenized American superhero tropes to reimagine Hindu imagery (McLain, 2009). This material propagated a resonant but one-sided reading of India’s past that, as Nayar (2006, pp. 116-117) points out, was all the more powerful ‘because stories are perhaps the best mechanism for delivering ideas and notions of identity, history and culture’. A case in point was the broadcast narrativization of the Hindu epics the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* in the late 1980s, not least because they produced hegemonic readings of ‘the meaning of nationhood, belonging and cultural citizenship’ (Mankekar, 1999, p. 6).

Hindi-language films operated in an environment shaped by these developments and either had to respond to or willingly assimilate its tropes such as *Bharat Mata*, the notion of a Mother India that must be defended against its internal and external enemies (König, 2016, p. 100). Such tropes were already embedded in cinematic products primarily in terms of external threats. Yet, there was now more of a focus as well on internal enemies. The outsiders principally identified by the Hindutva movement were Muslims and Dalits. Yet the movement's targets included left-liberal politicians and intellectuals. Some films have responded by embarking on a fresh quest to understand the essence of Indian nationhood, turning to history to critically reassess this concept. Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1998) and Ashutosh Gowariker's 2001 *Lagaan* (Land Tax) are some of the landmark films in this regard in which the filmmakers highlighted respectively the brutalities of the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition and the atrocities of British masters in pre-independent times. The filmmakers intended these cinematic portrayals to provide glimpses of the harsh realities resulting from divisive politics while also attempting to educate the Indian population to uphold the principles of unity. While these films reminded the nation about the pertinent need for embracing the values of unity, mutuality, and humanity, films such as *Pardes* (1997) and *Swadesh* (2004) foregrounded the profound feelings of 'Indianness' and ultimate love for the nation and its value systems in the Indian migrants who live in foreign metropolises. These movies demonstrate how cinema emerged as a platform for the redefinition of Indian nationalist identity, enabling the nation to distinguish itself from its colonial history and progress towards modernity while retaining its distinct Indian essence (Gokulsing & Dissayanke, 1998). The post-1990s witnessed a diverse range of Hindi cinematic offerings which attempted to inculcate compassion for communities, advocate a message of the need for collective bonding for the nation to prosper, and reinforce the significance of preserving Indian cultural ethos as a hallmark of nation-building and nationalism. Besides this, films such as *Prahaar, The Final Attack* (1991), *Border* (1997), *LoC Kargil* (2003), *Tango Charlie* (2005), *Shaurya* (2008), *1971* (2007), *Ghazi Attack* (2017), and *Shershaah* (2021) continued representing the courage and sacrifice of the Indian military for the nation in times of war and terrorism, thereby also illustrating how Hindi cinema has functioned as an important cultural medium to 'produce and reproduce the meaning of the nation' (Hall, 1997, p.3) and to promote the effectiveness of the state to the collective consciousness.

In the last few years, Hindi cinema has experienced a new turn with films that underscore a jingoistic muscular nationalism (Banerjee, 2016) and showcase aggressiveness and belligerence as desired characteristics in responsible citizens of India. Films like *Padmavaat* (2018), *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019), *Tanhaji* (2020) and *Article 370* (2024) consistently emphasize the importance of expressing love for the nation and nationalism through unwavering actions and violent methods. These films exemplify Cynthia Enloe's point that 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope' (1990, p. 44). While these films centralise the notion of masculinised nationalism and avenging attitudes, in contrast movies like *Article 15* (2019) and *Jawan* (2023) strive to promote a more democratised version of nationalism, advocating for egalitarian participation and representation of the Indian masses, regardless of their caste, creed, and religion. At the same time, recent years have witnessed

a surge in espionage films, emphasizing the significant role of ordinary individuals as undercover agents, spies, and informers. These individuals may not fight on the frontiers and may not receive recognition for their heroism, but they are depicted as playing an equally important role in sustaining the nation's sovereignty.

Nation-states continue to be the predominant political and cultural institutions of this digital era, and the internet increasingly functions as a virtual realm wherein conflicts between states regarding their borders, autonomy, and national identities are unfolding. Due to its technological attributes and numerous participants, the web-based domain has evolved into an innovative arena for the articulation of nationalist sentiments that are increasingly fluid, diverse, and intricate, facilitating the construction and reconstruction of national identities (Lamensch, 2021). In the process, it also serves as a vehicle for the global dissemination of the products of Hindi cinema. This makes understanding the construction of tropes within that cinema and the resulting influence exercised on audiences increasingly spread around the world of growing significance far beyond India's borders. A key aspect of Hindi cinema has always been the role it plays in nation-building. Indeed, in India, nationalism is arguably the most frequently assessed issue in the understanding, teaching, and scholarship of Hindi cinema, as it is seen as functioning primarily to reinforce popular ideological validation of the Indian nation. Cinema in India is a crucial medium due to visual narrative power and its closeness to other popular cultural forms such as Parsi theatre, folk theatrical traditions, epic oral narratives, and mythological and theological stories. By emphasising Indianness, Hindi films have been shown as embodying nationalism: nonetheless, through reflecting various articulations of this within their storylines they have also presented alternative, more inclusive, and liberal conceptions of national belonging (Anjaria, 2021, p. 142).

It is the aim of the collection of articles in this Special Issue to explore these various aspects of the construction, dissemination, and reception of Indian nationalism in Hindi cinema. This issue's primary goal is to reveal how Hindi cinema, as a discursive and popular medium, not only embodies various forms of nationalism, but also shapes the politics of cinema production through nation-building discourses and the power dynamics of the Bollywood industry. Thus, Hindi cinema and its representations have served as mouthpieces for those in power, showcasing both majoritarian and critical modes of hegemonic thinking. To map the trajectories of nationalism as evidenced in and influenced by Hindi cinema, this issue has included articles that cover films made between the 1980s and 2020s across a range of genres. These span from films which use war and sport to portray what have been identified as the tropes of muscular nationalism (Banerjee, 2016), to biopics, comedy-dramas and spy movies. We kept the timeline wide to encompass a diverse range of mainstream Hindi cinema and offer a nuanced overview of the complexities and underpinnings of nationalist messages conveyed through films during various stages of socio-economic development and political leadership. Each of these articles has explored the entrenched politics of nationalism and narratives of identity formation, examining Hindi films as text and tool.

The collection opens with Shah al Mamun Sarkar's '**Invisible Reformation: Understanding the Construction of Nation in Select Bollywood Films**'. This historicizes Shekhar Kapur's *Mr India*

(1987) and Rajkumar Hirani's *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), positing that they can be seen as markers of a shift in the encoding of the nation within Hindi cinema. These movies explore the challenges of tackling hitherto unnoticed or undiagnosed problems. In emphasizing patriotism, empathy and economic development they reference back to Nehruvian forms of nation-building. Additionally, it is argued that the portrayal of women in the films reflects a Gandhian sense of female agency, rather than the chaste woman trope that has become a feature of twenty-first century Indian muscular nationalism.

The 1980s as a transitional decade is also explored in the article by Dibyakusum Ray and Pooja Radhakrishnan titled '**From Domestic Guardian to the National Militia: The Familial, the National and the Middle Class in 1980s Popular Hindi Films.**' This examines two specific genres of popular Hindi films of the 1980s – family dramas and action adventures – and the responses they encoded to the crises and anxieties of that period. The article analyses the middle-class problematization of the familial as well as the national in films such as *Arth* (Bhatt, 1982), *Agar Tum Na Hote* (Tandon, 1983), *Souten* (Tak, 1983), *Shaan* (Sippy, 1980) and *Mr. India* (Kapur, 1987). The main crux of this article is to locate the ideological conflicts experienced by the Indian middle class of the 1980s within the onset of neoliberal economic transformations. Just before the 1990s push for neoliberalism in the Indian economy, this class, which had previously been conservative and isolated, was disturbed by the influence of a global culture that seemed to intrude upon their lives. The interventions of global culture brought with it permissiveness and political discussions about representation, rights, and reform. The juxtaposition between the domestic and the national is shown to be reflected in a shift towards depictions of successful conflict against racialized others who threaten the peace and security of both home and the nation. It concludes by arguing that this indicates that 'the current national identity of India started to be structured by the middle class of the 1980s'.

Vikas Pathe's article titled '**Historicising the Colonial Past of India and Hindi cinema**' considers a significant moment in this transition: the production and reception of *Lagaan* (2001). Pathe situates this within a discussion of how the concept of India as a nation originated with its political leadership during the struggle for independence in late colonial history. Focusing on the social and cultural aspects of Indian society, this article highlights how Hindi cinema has documented the visual depiction and portrayal of political conflicts that have shaped, dismantled, and reconstructed the concept of India. *Lagaan*, as with early post-independence Indian cinema, mines the colonial past to evoke the construction of national identity. Yet it does so in a different register, using deliberately anachronistic approaches, not least by reading the contemporary enthusiasm for cricket in India back into the national past and fictively employing it in conflict with the colonisers. *Lagaan* has been criticized for occluding the subaltern status of the landless peasants it notionally depicts (Mannathukkaren, 2007). Yet Pathe's paper shows *Lagaan* as a more nuanced reading of the past. In trying to express unity among the diverse elements of Indian society it reflects Nehruvian nation-building aspirations while foregrounding a nationalist narrative as it deftly moves from the macro to the micro in the depiction of the relationship between the resistance

of village peasants to an unjust imposition of a colonial tax and the overall national struggle for liberation.

The changing approaches towards nationalism in Hindi cinema around the end of the twentieth century are also explored in **‘Bollywood in the neoliberal era: changing discourses on multiculturalism, terrorism, and nationalism in ‘Dil Se ...’ (1998) and ‘Fanaa’ (2006)’** by Rajarshi Roy and Manojit Mandal. This notes that the question of how far Hindi films can be regarded as representative of Indian national cinema has sparked contentious debates among scholars. Nonetheless, Bollywood’s official recognition as an industry in 1998 enabled it to access new sources of finance and new overseas markets among the Indian diaspora and thereby reap the advantages of economic liberalisation. The paper explores the impact of these changes in the context of a growing – and transnational – moral panic about terrorism, in India catalysed particularly by the attack on the country’s parliament of 13 December 2001. It contends that Kunal Kohli’s *Fanaa* (2006) should be read as a cinematic response to that event and that an analysis of the two films focused on in this article indicates that a shift towards a centring of the Hindutva approach to communal identity formation was marked in Hindi cinema earlier than has hitherto been acknowledged.

These developments changed the encoding of the Indian nation. A corollary was the handling of marginalised groups, and particularly of Muslims. Sagar Ali’s **‘Racist Profiling and Othering of Muslims in Select Bollywood Hindi Films’** assesses the changing depiction of Muslims in Hindi cinema. In the 1950s Bollywood has been portrayed as tolerantly multicultural: for example, both the director and star of the iconic *Mother India* were Muslims (Chatterjee, 2020: pp. 20, 85). After the Ayodhya Mosque destruction on 6 December 1992 and the Mumbai terror attacks of 1993, Muslims came to be generally stereotyped and othered. Ali’s article uses John Matthew Matthan’s *Sarfarosh* (1999) and Kabir Khan’s *New York* (2009) to examine this shift and the equation of Muslims with the terrorist threat presented in these films.

The relationship between the national and the marginalised is also centred in the article **‘Reframing Nationalism and National Identity in *Anek*’** by Nishat Haider. This brings to the foreground the themes of separatist insurgency, violence, and militarisation in Northeast India through the prism of the film *Anek* (2022), directed by Anubhav Sinha. Importantly, it challenges the state-centric bias of many filmmakers and film critics, while exploring the role of sport and gender in countering the ethnic sub-nationalism of the region and reconfiguring the pan-Indian nationalist project. *Anek* thus tries to find tropes which can bridge the historic othering that the Northeast has endured and instead incorporate the region into the nation.

Nationalism can come in many guises. It has always been a feature of the biopic genre in India going back to postcolonial documentary films (König, 2016, p. 184). In the twenty-first century such films have become significant vectors of muscular nationalism (Banerjee, 2018). Swapna Gopinath’s article on the **‘Politics of Apoliticality and the Indian Citizen in Popular Hindi Cinema’** shows that nationalism can also be covertly encoded in supposedly apolitical forms. She

examines the biopic film genre through three recent examples: *Manjhi – The Mountain Man* (2015), *Super 30* (2019), and *Pad Man* (2018). These feature ostensibly apolitical subjects centred on supposedly ordinary (male) figures, with the apparent authenticity of the narrative being reinforced by showing pictures of the people on whom the stories are based in the closing credits. Yet the editing of those stories is shown as serving a neoliberal and nationalist purpose. So, in *Manjhi – The Mountain Man* structural inequalities are pushed to the side to foreground the singular hero and celebrate his achievements. In *Super 30*, education is reduced to monetary value, whilst *Pad Man* focuses on male entrepreneurial skills rather than its ostensible subject of female period poverty. The assumed apoliticality is shown as obscuring the ideological framing of these films and the ways in which they reappropriate masculine tropes of the ideal citizen for a neoliberal era.

The creation of a national rather than a neoliberal imaginary is more foregrounded in Debajyoti Biswas's article '**Beyond Good and Evil: Imagined Nation in Hindi Films**'. This article studies three Hindi films, *Panipat* (2019), *Tanhaji* (2020), and *Samrat Prithviraj* (2022), and argues that Hindi films often utilize the patterns of public emotions observed during times of crisis as narrative devices. Yet, a simplistic portrayal of past events suppresses the complex framework of political foundations and potentially rebellious ideological options that intertwine with personal experiences. Emphasis is placed on the role of these films in promoting the concept of *Dharma* and *Ramrajya* in the establishment of a nation that caters to the promotion of the idea a secure and stable nation under Hindu governance. This is shown as a deliberate one-dimensional distortion of history to serve contemporary political ends that simultaneously whitewashes the Hindu past whilst othering Muslims.

Focusing on the lives of those who have no record in dominant historical accounts of nationalist history, Sreejata Paul analyses the period film *Begum Jaan* (2017) and its depiction of the impact of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent through the lens of gender-based and sexual violence. Her article titled '**No country for sex workers, then or now: Srijit Mukherji's *Begum Jaan* (2017) and its many imagi-nations,**' delves into the biopolitics of sex labour at the end of the colonial era. In this instance, the birth of a new nation is juxtaposed with the devaluation of women's lives and their loss of bodily autonomy from sexual assault, reflecting the precarious position of women within the institutional structures and narratives of the developing nation. Both territory and women's bodies – as sources of national renewal – are shown as possessions to be gained and conquered. This profoundly gendered experience and the continuing risks of sexual assault in India are conveyed by the cross-references to the present with which the movie opens and ends. The setting on a bus of these contemporary references cinematically evokes the psychic impact across India of the horrific Nirbhaya rape and murder of 2012. The movie's conclusion uses both the past and the vulnerability of a woman's naked body to address historic and contemporary male sexual brutality. As Paul points out, an animated sequence also historicizes this gendered violence through the lives of Jhansi ki Rani, Razia Sultana, Meerabai, and

Padmavati, raising questions about how power and sexuality are read and utilized in contemporary nationalist projects.

Jyotsna B. Iyer and Saurabh Das' **'Leveraging history to invoke nationalism: from the annals of history to social engineering of present and future in Hindi cinema'** considers conflict much more directly in terms of its protagonists, rather than its victims. This uses critical discourse analysis to examine two recent war movies, Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and Aditya Dhar's *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019). Framing their discussion within the development of nationalist cinema in India and beyond, the rise of populist discourse and the emotional impact of films upon their audiences, they relate these themes to the box office success these militaristic movies achieved. Although purportedly based on actual events and endorsed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as true representations of these recent clashes in Kashmir, their one-sided and distorted narratives serve explicitly political purposes. Indeed, *Uri: The Surgical Strike* was used by Modi's party as a campaigning tool in the 2019 elections.

A different kind of conflict with Pakistan is examined in Goutam Karmakar and Pippa Catterall's article, **'Nation, Family and Trauma: Techno-Nationalism and conflicts of loyalty in the Indian Hindi-language espionage thriller *Mission Majnu*'**. This explores the distinctive role of Indian spy movies as vectors of national identity through the prism of this 2023 movie. First, this is achieved through the othering of Pakistan, both at the banal level of stereotyping of clothing and customs and at the state level of international conflict. Second, a key aspect of this international conflict in this film is the role of espionage, with *Mission Majnu* shown to be an exemplar of the trope that Indian intelligence agencies are depicted as selflessly patriotic. Third, instead of the flawed anti-hero spy portrayed in other national cinemas, *Mission Majnu* foregrounds a conflict over loyalty to family and nation, with an explicit message of the primacy of the latter. Fourth, this foregrounding of state agencies provides a twist on the muscular nationalism that is so noticeable in some of the other movies discussed in this special issue. Fifth, the prominence of nuclear weaponry and both low and high-technological devices in this film enables it to celebrate a triumphal Indian techno-nationalism while also making its messaging meaningful and authentic to the audience by referencing the daily and familiar.

This collection closes with Rima Bhattacharya's article **'The Changing Dynamics of Indian Nationalism in Contemporary Hindi Movies.'** This considers how Hindi cinema has adapted to the growing Indian diaspora and the effects this has had on its encoding of nationalism through an examination of Meghna Gulzar's *Raazi* (2018) and Raja Krishna Menon's *Airlift* (2016). By substituting the exaggerated, narrow-minded, and exclusive portrayals of hyper-nationalism found in early Hindi war films with what Benedict Anderson (1998) refers to as 'long-distance nationalism,' these films can be seen as seeking to broaden the concept of the nation beyond its geographical boundaries. Both films feature protagonists who challenge the traditional framing of national identity by engaging in transnational activities. These films are shown as evoking positive forms of patriotic identification, while challenging oppositional approaches to identity based upon inclusion or exclusion. The setting of *Airlift* during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991 is also

used to point to a redefining of a more expansive form of nationalism which goes beyond a simplistic presentation of an imagined homogenous society that somehow offers greater ontological security, a trope which is so characteristic of populist discourse in India and elsewhere (Steele and Homolar, 2019). Instead, it shows that patriotism can be successfully combined with a wider sense of humanity.

The films considered in this special issue are drawn from a variety of genres. They also use a range of tropes and techniques to encode national identity. As is shown here, these movies can serve as gauges of the shifting experiences and anxieties of their audiences. The direct influence of these cultural products can, of course, be exaggerated. Only a small proportion of the Indian population regularly see Hindi language films in movie theatres (Ormax, 2024). Yet the reach of these cultural products goes well beyond that. Not least, they additionally shape the national conversation through reviews across the public sphere. They provide the main form of imaginative exposure to the historical dramas re-enacted in films celebrating Indian muscular nationalism. They allow audiences to identify with ordinary heroes or, by entering the clandestine world of espionage, vicariously experience the lives of operatives of the intelligence agencies of the Indian state. Many of them draw upon readings of a past that is mined for examples that can speak to contemporary anxieties, tackle national trauma or extol national virtues and achievements. By drawing upon a national past and its myths, they continue to operate as means of understanding and shaping national belonging, even in a diversifying media market. As this collection shows, Hindi cinema represents the nation and its history to itself through varied and sometimes nuanced means which seek both to speak to and influence India's national identity and its contemporary politics.

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