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Reinforcing National Identities: The Intersection of Nationalism and Sports in Bollywood Movies

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Abstract

Through blending individual triumphs with belonging as a nation, Bollywood sports films convey nationalist narratives. This study examines how popular Bollywood sports films employ themes of resilience, unity, and social-political struggle to construct nationalism. By focusing on prominent films such as *Lagaan* (2001), *Chak De! India* (2007), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013), *Dangal* (2016), *83* (2021), and *Maidaan* (2024), this study explores the way sports as a metaphor for national pride and social transformation is employed in these films. For conducting this study, this work employs critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis of film assists in the deconstruction of how language, images, and narrative schemes are used in constructing and expressing power relations, ideology, and social forms. It examines the different ways in which films transmit messages, represent society, and influence perceptions among audiences. The focus in this study is on the narrative structure, leading characters and depiction of evil forces. Additionally, this research also evaluates how patriotic speeches, the display of the Indian flag as a symbol and underdog narratives in stories assist in portraying sports as a means of expressing unity. This research demonstrates how film could be a cultural and ideological instrument to consolidate national identity and social cohesion by tracing the evolution of nationalist motifs in Bollywood sports movies.

Keywords: Bollywood, sports films, nationalism, character archetypes, sports and identity.

1. Introduction

While movies project reality, they are also produced for eliciting responses from audience members. The movie-making process has changed substantially since the initial moving image pictures flashed onto screens in the mid-1890s (Crosson, 2013). Well-crafted sports films have evoked strong viewers' emotions. Sports dramas find a resonance with audiences, which is one of the main reasons why filmmakers keep making films in this genre. From the early 20th century, cinema has been a powerful force in shaping social consciousness in India, impacting millions through its visual interpretation of social realities. Together with television, Hindi cinema has profoundly influenced Indians' perceptions of themselves and their country. The medium has traditionally been a vehicle of bourgeois hegemony, constructing narratives that interweave nationalism, communalism, gender, and social identity (Deshpande, 2009).

Bollywood films not only reflect historical and contemporary reality but also construct it, often serving as an instrument of power that influences public mentality and national discourse. While films succeed in arousing profound emotions in the audience, they also provide significant insight into the competitive world of sports. Sports biographies have sporadically appeared in

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Hindi mainstream cinema. Even with India's fervent cricket craze, there have been more prominent biopics about wrestlers and athletes (Setlur, 2024). The concept of sports movies in mainstream Hindi cinema has undergone a major transformation over the last fifteen years, courtesy of *Lagaan* (Gowariker, 2001) and *Chak De! India* (Amin, 2007). The former was likely the earliest of the initial so-called sports films that effectively showcased the hybridity of popular Hindi cinema by integrating a concept such as a cricket match between Englishmen and Indian villagers in the late 19th century with a broader narrative encompassing themes of race, nation, religion, and caste. And unlike *Lagaan*, *Chak De! India* demonstrated that a sports film could transcend genre convention by combining individual stories of redemption with a grander nationalistic concept.

Nationalist histories often feature renowned historical figures and events that are shown to be turning points in the history of the country, usually exaggerated to reinforce national solidarity and pride (Kohn, 2025). Movies such as *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (Mehra, 2013), *Dangal* (Tiwari, 2016), *83* (Khan, 2021), and *Maidaan* (Sharma, 2024) are a quest for the same type of practices. Muscular nationalism is a synthesis of masculinity and nationalism that identifies martial power, physical vigour and tenacity as characterizing features of national identity. Bollywood, as a cultural entity, has contributed substantially towards consolidating this ideology by presenting virile, athletic male heroes (Banerjee, Williams, 2018). *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is a prime example, taking the life of legendary athlete Milkha Singh and adapting it to symbolize India's quest for regional supremacy and national pride through sports. With the success of *Lagaan*, Hindi appeared to have found a formula for making films by fictionalising cricket. Thus, we saw many movies around this theme, including *Iqbal* (2005), *Stumped* (2003), *Say Salaam India* (2007), *Victory* (2009), *Hattrick* (2007). The genre mainly exists in two formats: one is a sports-themed story and another in which the plot at first sight seems to focus on the sporting activity but afterwards incorporates the sporting activity within some social, political or cultural phenomenon. The implications of the sports film are indirect in comparison to the implications of other types of genres due to the fact that it reports broader themes obliquely (Chintamani, 2017).

2. Materials and methods

The research utilizes qualitative study design, employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how Bollywood sports movies build and disseminate nationalist narratives. Through the analysis of major elements like plot organization, underdog achievers, and symbols of the nation, the study aims to understand the discourse strategies used in successful sports films to evoke a sense of patriotism and national identity. The research is carried out through the analysis of five commercially and critically acclaimed Bollywood sports movies produced in the last two decades, chosen because of their cultural significance, nationalist overtones, and depiction of sports as a metaphor for national pride. The chosen films are *Lagaan*, *Chak De! India*, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, *Dangal* and *Maidaan*. These films are chosen as they exemplify nationalist storytelling through sports, encapsulating themes of struggle, perseverance, and national pride.

The primary dataset consists of the films' screenplays, dialogues, visual imagery, and symbolic elements to discuss the nationalistic undertones of these movies. To systematically analyse how nationalism is constructed within these films, Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA (Fairclough, 2013) is employed, which includes textual analysis in examining dialogues, monologues, and symbols that reinforce nationalist themes, discursive practices in analysing the representation of underdog achievers, sports as a battleground for national pride, and mentor figures as nation-builders and social practice to understand how these narratives align with broader socio-political ideologies. Key themes used for analysis include plot and narrative structure, underdog achiever and nationalist heroism, and use of symbols in promoting nationalism.

3. Discussion

Nissim Manathukkaren examines (Mannathukkaren, 2021) the persistence of nationalist narratives in Indian sports films despite economic liberalization. While some scholars argue that Hindi cinema has moved toward a post-national framework, the author challenges this view, asserting that sports films continue to reinforce a market-driven nationalism (Neube et al., 2023). These films prioritize national triumph over individual struggles, often glossing over internal social and political complexities. However, the author suggests that the genre holds the potential to reimagine nationalism by addressing its inherent contradictions. Many researches have highlighted the political dimensions of sports in the past, analysing their role in shaping global perceptions and

national identity through visual and textual narratives (Descamps, 2023). While, another study highlights how filmmakers often prioritize commercial success over narrative depth in sports films. Research suggests that these films frequently blend multiple elements to create an engaging spectacle but, in doing so, tend to rely on stereotypes, artificial dramatization, and formulaic storytelling (Büyücek, 2024). This approach, while aiming for mass appeal, can sometimes dilute the authenticity of real-life events and social contexts, resulting in a more sensationalized rather than a nuanced portrayal of sports and national identity (Rohman, 2019).

Several scholars have emphasized that cinema serves as an ideal medium for the portrayal of heroic archetypes and influential narratives like nationalism. While films often depict Indigenous athletes heroically in sports like football, lacrosse, and rodeo, a deeper analysis reveals the fragile reality of marginalized communities where sports serve as a means of survival (Bauer et al., 2021). This is primarily due to two factors: first, the use of established tropes enables audiences to easily identify central characters, and second, cinema, as a form of mass entertainment, plays a crucial role in reinforcing societal norms (McClearen, 2023). Through repeated narrative patterns, films contribute to shaping both individual identities and collective cultural consciousness, making them a powerful tool for ideological and psychological influence (McGuire, 2023). Academic discourse on Indian nationalism in cinema has examined patriotism through historical and ideological perspectives. The Bollywood films like *Rang De Basanti* (2006) fit into a larger trend of Bollywood films that glorify martyrdom and violent resistance. According to the study of Srivastava (Srivastava, 2009), combining historical revolutionaries with modern youth movement, the film promotes middle-class nationalism that resonates with modern audiences. The author claims that this recounting of anti-colonial history promotes bourgeois nationalism, making patriotism more accessible to urban, educated viewers. This essay discusses how Bollywood films create national identity, political discourse, and post-liberalization socio-political ideas in India.

More and more academics studying Bollywood's influence on national identity have looked at how movies serve as ideological instruments in creating the country's self-concept. The nationalist rhetoric in Bollywood films is examined in this study using a transnational feminist lens, with a focus on citizenship, identity, and the impact of ideology. In both domestic and global contexts, Bollywood reinforces cultural and political narratives that define Indian identity by promoting particular imagined groups (Rajgopal, 2011).

Research on nationalism has increasingly highlighted concerns over the rise of extreme nationalist ideologies, often propagated by influential political leaders at both national and international levels (Iordache et al., 2023). Another Research on sportive nationalism suggests that national pride linked to sports success is relatively weak and temporary. While individuals engaged in or following sports online exhibited higher levels of sportive nationalism, these sentiments fluctuated with athlete and team performances as nationalistic sentiments in sports may decline over time due to perceived failures or diminishing enthusiasm (Shibli et al., 2021). Scholars argue that while political figures promote hostile and exclusionary nationalism, popular culture, particularly cinema, often presents alternative nationalist discourses that emphasize individual freedom, equality, and social progress. This study by Felani et al. (Felani et al., 2020) employs the discourse historical technique created by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl to examine the portrayal of nationalism in American and Indonesian cinema, juxtaposing these narratives with the nationalism advocated by political leaders.

An examination of 10 American and 10 Indonesian films uncovers divergent patterns in the depiction of nationalism within each nation's cinematic framework. Research on sports films highlights their role in reflecting collective social imaginaries, though certain sports, while many others have been overlooked. However, an analysis of 29 international films reveals that filmmakers use other in-famous sports as a metaphor for broader social themes, including love, historical narratives, education, and cultural diversity, demonstrating its deeper symbolic significance in cinematic storytelling (Bauer, Lin, 2022).

Bollywood sports dramas have increasingly engaged with the intersection of gender, motherhood, and national identity. The study of Routray and Gaur (Gaur, Routray, 2025) examines postcolonial feminist narratives in Indian sports films, which reveals that how women's choices are shaped by larger social hierarchies and power structures, rather than mere individual agency (Free et al., 2024). Further research suggests Bollywood's portrayal of sportswomen highlights both progressive and regressive narratives, where some films challenge societal norms while others reinforce gendered stereotypes. By critically examining these representations, scholars argue that

sports films have the potential to transcend traditional prejudices and offer a reimagined role for women in Indian sports and society. Cultural industries mirror capitalist inequalities, like Bollywood and slums have become parallel symbols of "authentic India" in the global market, with the promise of authenticity driving their appeal as major tourist destinations (Clini, Valančiūnas, 2023).

Research on national identity in Bollywood films highlights how Indian cinema reflects evolving socio-political dynamics and the influence of globalization. A study by Clelia Clini (Clini, 2020) explores how martial arts were integrated into Indian films within the socio-cultural and political context of postcolonial India. Drawing on Yvonne Tasker's concept of the 'anticolonial narrative,' the study argues that martial arts in Hindi cinema challenged colonial stereotypes of Asian masculinity as effeminate and weak. Another study examines the portrayal of masculinity in post-2010 Turkish action films. It highlights that male characters are depicted as either heroic figures who sacrifice for family and nation or as socially unapproved negative figures. The study discusses how these representations reflect broader societal perceptions of masculinity in a particular geographical location (Ege, Gürkan, 2023). The 1980s emerge as a crucial period in this transformation, marking significant shifts in the articulation of nationalism in popular films. Scholars have traced how Bollywood employs varied genres to inscribe nationalistic themes, shaping perceptions of national identity through storytelling.

Researchers have explored the emotional structure of inspirational media also, using computational and quantitative content analysis. Findings reveal that inspirational films follow an emotional arc marked by a final positive shift in sentiment, with alternating peaks and valleys throughout the narrative. The study provides insights into how emotional dynamics shape the audience's experience of inspirational content (Dale et al., 2023). Prior studies have examined how films embed nationalism within different cinematic formats, reinforcing or reinterpreting dominant political ideologies. This body of work contributes to a broader understanding of how popular Indian cinema functions as a tool of national narration, reflecting cultural and ideological shifts over time (Catterall, Karmakar, 2025).

One of the study by Krueger (Krueger, 2021) explores the psychological distinction between nationalism and patriotism, emphasizing their different social and psychological underpinnings. The research demonstrates how cultural products perpetuate nationalist sentiments. The study underscores that nationalism, despite historical shifts, remains deeply embedded in cultural representations and continues to shape collective identities. This study by Kumar and Raghuvanshi (Kumar, Raghuvanshi, 2023) also explores how many Bollywood films plays a role in shaping popular imagination through cinematic narratives. It highlights how selected films reinforce a nationalist perspective, thereby contributing to cartographic fundamentalism and shaping public perceptions. Another research publication examines the intersection of football, fascism, and national identity in Spain, focusing on how sports films propagated nationalistic ideologies. Through a multi-layered analysis the research highlights how cinema has historically functioned as a tool of cultural assimilation and national identity reinforcement.

It further links the legacy of these nationalist narratives to Spain's contemporary football culture, notably during the 2010 World Cup victory, suggesting that sports and cinema continue to shape national consciousness, emphasizing themes of unity, class mobility, and cultural supremacy (Crosson, 2021).

In the study of Radhakrishnan and Ray (Radhakrishnan, Ray, 2023) says that the sportsman in Hindi sports films has evolved from a symbol of national unity to a culturally conservative patriarch. It shows how pre-globalization sports films portrayed athletes as agents of social emancipation representing composite nationalism, but post-2010 films equated athleticism with tradition-backed masculinity. The study shows how modern sports cinema quietly promotes cultural dominance over national diversity in India's polity. The sports hero goes from a symbol of national inclusivity to a guardian of patriarchal ideals, affecting how sports films represent nationalism. Emphasizes gender equality and Indian women's potential to shine, thereby evoking nationalism.

4. Results

The plot or the historic event chosen for making such sports films itself speaks about the intention of the makers towards promoting and evoking nationalist narratives. As nationalist narratives frequently portray significant historical personalities and occurrences as pivotal moments in the nation's progress and development, often glorifying them to reinforce national unity and pride (Garner, 2022). If we will examine the films like *lagaan* and *Chak de India*, we can

clearly separate that the plot of these movies sometimes directly and often indirectly presents the matter of national pride through their plot. Be it the moment in the film *lagaan* where the poor villagers were challenged to play the game of cricket with British officers to get redemption from the tax for three years. Although the film is a work of fiction set in British colonial India and centred around a cricket match, it portrays the victory against the British as a national triumph, as cricket was one of the few platforms where Indians could challenge the English on equal terms. Additionally, the manner in which the team unites towards the overarching objective of defeating the British in the game underlines the notion of unity in diversity, a fundamental tenet of nationalism. Cricket as a sport in the film was utilized as a means for India to establish its identity, and it served as a breeding ground for nationalism merging it with a much bigger theme that includes issues of race, religion, and caste in its narrative. These films influence public opinion by emphasizing heroism, sacrifice, and the vilification of perceived adversaries, thereby strengthening the audience's emotional connection with the nation-state.

Chak De! India demonstrated that a sports film can go beyond mere genre classification, embracing the larger message of nationalism alongside individual narratives of redemption, unlike *Lagaan*. The film, set in the fields of hockey, through its plot and character development constructs an impacting nationalist narrative, although it seems intertwining the themes gender bias and empowerment as well. Unlike this, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is a biographical sports drama that tells the inspiring story of Milkha Singh (Indian track and field sprinter). Protagonist's achievements as an athlete are presented not merely as his personal victories but national milestones. The film highlights his participation in international competitions and Olympics, emphasizing how his performance symbolized India's presence on the global stage. The film dramatizes his failures and triumphs as moments of national pride and collective aspiration, reinforcing the idea that individual success contributes to India's global reputation.

Plot of the film *Dangal* also showcases the same trait of transforming personal victory into national glory. Mahavir Singh Phogat's (Amir Khan) unfulfilled dream of winning gold for India introduces the nationalistic desire for international recognition. His dream of winning gold for India is not presented in the film as personal but a nationalistic mission. Choosing the winning moment as the climax, symbolizes the victory of both the girls and the nation. These films serve as prime examples of how Bollywood constructs nationalism by promoting a sense of collective loyalty and prioritization of national interests over individual ethics. A significant aspect of such kind of films is their ability to blur the line between historical representation and ideological propaganda, making nationalism a central theme in their storytelling. By highlighting nation-first narratives, they create a sense of unity while also contributing to polarized political discourse. This aligns with broader patterns in Bollywood, where not only sports films but war films, and historical dramas frequently promote nationalist sentiments (Das, Iyer, 2024).

Field hockey, being historically tied to India's international sports success, has played a pivotal role in shaping national, ethnic, and community identities, particularly in India. Moreover, the sport has significantly contributed to the development of women's sports (Watson et al., 2024). Hockey along with football in the recent time had become an emblem of national identity through cinema as well. Films like *Chak De! India* (2007) and *Maidaan* (2024) exemplify how sports narratives foster nationalism as a medium of historical pride, cultural unity, and gender empowerment. Both the film demonstrates how the representation of heroic figures, national symbols, and emotionally charged narratives in sports films cultivates patriotism.

Indian cinema often utilizes dramatic narratives to unify diverse sociocultural audiences by portraying culturally significant themes, including sports as a symbol of national pride. Film exemplify how sports narratives foster nationalism as a medium of historical pride, cultural unity, and gender empowerment (Raj, Suresh, 2024). Both movies use interesting historical events and well-thought-out plots to show how heroic characters, national symbols, and emotionally charged stories in sports movies can make people more patriotic. The film *83* begins with India's underdog status during the 1983 Cricket World Cup, and the team was undervalued and mocked. But when the film progresses, showing incidents of internal and external scepticism, and climaxes with the victory of the Indian cricket team in the world cup, claiming global recognition, it tries to rewrite India's global sporting identity. The plot aligns with India's struggle for global recognition, metaphorically framing the World Cup victory as a national breakthrough. Similarly in *Maidaan*, the story begins in post-independence India, where coach Syed Abdul Rahim (Ajay Devgan) fights to establish football and the rise of Indian football parallels India's post-colonial resurgence. Rahim

unites players from diverse religious backgrounds, showcasing India's cultural diversity and subtly reflecting India's unity in diversity. The climax shows India winning the Asian Games and the plot implicitly positions football victory as a national victory.

Modern Bollywood films often centre on narratives of the Indian underdog achieving victory after confronting adversity or an external threat. The success of the charismatic male protagonist who fulfils his obligations, rescues the nation, and restores Country's lost pride through the sport adds salt of nationalism in the whole narrative. Film *Chak de India* is majorly focused on the journey of former captain of the Indian men's hockey team, who is falsely accused of being a traitor after India's loss to Pakistan in a crucial hockey match. His ostracization from society and further labelling as a 'gaddar' (anti-national) makes him an ideal underdog achiever when he returns as the coach of women hockey team and makes it a winning team out of all odds, becomes a symbolic act of redemption of an underdog hero. The phenomenon is presented in such a manner in the film that it not only reclaims his dignity but also reasserts his national identity. Protagonists struggle and then the success mirrors the idea of proving one's loyalty to the nation, which is a core element of nationalism.

This is not a new phenomenon to Indian film makers. Bollywood's strategy of endorsing nationalist discourse through the exaltation of historical figures or events may be traced back to the beginning of 21st century only. But in the past two decades and the half has seen it occurring more often. Bollywood effectively utilizes cinema as a form of soft power to evoke nationalist sentiments, shaping public perceptions and reinforcing a collective sense of identity. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power refers to a nation's ability to influence others through cultural appeal rather than coercion. Bollywood, as a cultural force, plays a crucial role in fostering nationalism (Dwyer, 2021). In this row, film *Bhag Milkha Bhag*, the story of an Indian sprinter who overcame personal trauma to achieve national glory. The film not only showcases Milkha's journey but also uses various cinematic techniques to promote nationalism and patriotism. This historical backdrop of the film which includes traumatic childhood during the Partition of India in 1947 easily establishes the nationalistic undercurrent of the film, portraying Milkha's struggle as a reflection of India's own pain and resilience post-Partition. His transformation from a refugee (sufferer) to a national hero mirrors India's own journey towards self-reliance and global recognition.

Sports function as distinct genres, each with its own narratives, rules, and ideological underpinnings, evolving through rule changes, demographic shifts, and socio-cultural transformations. This fluidity influences how sports films construct meaning. Milkha's coach, Guruji played by actor Pavan Malhotra, plays a significant role in shaping Milkha's journey, constantly reminding him that his success is not just for himself but for the country. The recurring theme of national duty over personal ambition aligns with the larger discourse of nationalism in Indian cinema, where athletes are depicted as warriors and fighters, fighting for the honour of their nation. Lead characters of the film *Dangal*, the Phogat sisters, represent ordinary rural girls, initially forced and eventually motivated to break societal norms to achieve international glory not only to them, their native but also to the nation. Their struggle symbolizes India's fight for global recognition in sports. Despite all the odds of being women wrestlers, their victory story in the film metaphorically link India's rise in international sports to national pride. Sports documentary that sheds light on female athletic experiences while prompting audiences to reflect on gender issues in sports. As sports documentaries are often perceived as historical reflections of reality, they play a crucial role in authenticating particular viewpoints. While the film challenges traditional gender ideologies and highlights barriers to female athletic success (Heinecken, 2021).

By employing reverse engineering, biopics reconstruct historical narratives to align with contemporary political and cultural agendas, embedding themes of national pride, patriotism, and cultural exceptionalism. Historical characters are deliberately crafted to appeal to modern audiences, fostering a hyper-politicized nationalist sentiment (Győri, 2024). Same goes with the character archetypes built in the sports biopics like *83* and *Maidaan*. Kapil Dev (Ranveer Singh) is portrayed as an ordinary man leading a less experienced team, The British media and commentators repeatedly undermine India's potential. Their disbelief symbolizes colonial underestimation. But Kapil Dev's success as an underdog cricket captain and the victory of an underestimated cricket team parallels India's rise as a global power and as a post-colonial triumph. Whereas, coach Rahim represents India's indomitable spirit and His obstacles to leadership mirrors India's political struggle, but the way in which film presents and build both the characters as underdog achievers and later develops them as representations of India's global potential establishes the fact that Bollywood sports films are

using certain types of character archetypes in Glorifying sporting successes as a metaphor for national pride. While sports films often reinforce dominant ideologies, they also critique and modify them, highlighting the tension between reality and its cinematic construction (Ewers, 2023). This duality makes sports films simultaneously celebratory and unsettling, strengthening their role in both perpetuating and interrogating cultural narratives.

Symbols: to subtly voice-up nationalist narratives

Sports films, while primarily focused on athletic triumphs, serve as potent mediums for fostering national pride by embedding subtle yet evocative nationalist symbols. While sports films do not directly inspire people to participate in sports, they serve as powerful sources of motivation by fostering emotional connection. These films employ elements such as the tricolour flag, salutes, emotional climaxes, and patriotic dialogues to reinforce the connection between individual victories and national identity. Sports films contribute to social and cultural discourse by promoting values like perseverance, teamwork, and national pride (Padmanabhan et al., 2024). It is like Indian filmmakers have taken a page from *lagaan* on how to pitch nationalistic narrative in the right way, even when the title, trailer and first look of the film don't show it prominently.

These films often include displays of the national flag, salutes, and tears to show national pride. One of the most poignant moments in the film occurs when Milkha Singh stands on the podium, draped in the Indian flag, as the national anthem plays. In addition to this in Indo-Pak athletic competition held in Lahore, when Milkha wins the race and is honored with the title "The Flying Sikh" by Pakistan's President. These scenes serve as a direct appeal to the audience's patriotic sentiments, framed as a moment of Indian triumph over its past adversary, reinforcing a nationalistic narrative of resilience and victory. Thus, illustrating how sports can be a vehicle for national unity and identity.

Similarly in the film 83 when Kapil Dev plays an extraordinary inning in the cricket world cup and India makes to semi-finals, one of the team mate call him freedom fighter and salute him which shows Indian flag flurrying in the background. The film uses the presence of an Indian child as a cricket fan and the Indian flag in his hand. These scenes are featured in such a way that these incidents are evoking patriotic emotions in the players, which eventually turns to wins and thus amplifying the audience's nationalistic emotions.

These movies celebrate a moment of shared solidarity produced by sporting triumph that is typically nationalistic, drawing on feelings that might not be entirely rational. The iconic dialogue of film *Danga* "Mhari chhoriya chhoron se kam hai ke?" (Are my daughters any less than sons?), clearly emphasizes gender equality while subtly invoking sentiments of nationalism by highlighting the capacity of Indian women to elevate the nation's prestige. Sub-textually, it also conveys that true patriotism lies in empowering women to represent the nation. Another dialogue of the film similar emotion "Gold to gold hota hai... chhora laave ya chhori" (Gold is gold, whether a boy wins it or a girl) strongly dismantles traditional gender roles and aligns success with national honour, evidently reinforcing the importance of national pride through sports achievements, irrespective of gender.

Films, as a powerful form of mass media, possess a complex nature that enables them to act as vehicles for social discourse, often reflecting and shaping societal values. Movies commonly convey messages that resonate with on-going social phenomena, subtly embedding cultural and nationalistic themes (Widodo, 2023). Apart from the dialogues, cinematographical techniques of showing tri-colour and use of India's national anthem as a background score during Geeta phogat's (Fatima Sana Shaikh) victory amplifies the nationalistic emotion of the audience. In the final scene, when Geeta wins gold in the wrestling match and the camera captures a clear, elevated shot of the tricolor flag being raised. The slow-motion capture of the flag-raising moment and emotional close-ups of Mahavir Singh Phogat, screening tears of pride in his eyes as the national anthem plays, fortify pride in India's global representation at Commonwealth Wrestling Championship.

The cinematography captures the connection between personal victory and national pride, subtly and symbolically embedding nationalism in the viewers' consciousness. In the film 83, World Cup (1983) finals at Lord's (London), being the Mecca of Cricket, represents colonial dominance but the winning moment of Indian cricket team in the same stadium, symbolizes India's break from colonial subjugation. Throughout the tournament, the tricolour flag repeatedly appears. The climactic moment when India wins the World Cup shows the flag hoisting as well. Additionally, the iconic dialogues in the film like "We here to win!" and "Pehli baar world cup mein humara tiranga sabse upar lehrayega" (For the first time, our tricolour will fly the highest in the World Cup) not only amplify patriotic sentiments but also position sports as a metaphor for India's

social progress and resilience. By aligning sporting victories with national honour, these films construct a collective emotional experience that transcends rational discourse, subtly embedding nationalism into the viewers' consciousness. Ultimately, through the interplay of visuals, dialogues, and character arcs, Indian sports films perpetuate a unifying nationalistic spirit, celebrating the power of sports as a symbol of India's identity, progress, and triumph on the global stage.

Media Literacy and National Identity in Hindi Sports Films

Hindi sports movies seem to be all about athletic success. The narrative in the film functions on a much more profound level. They are interwoven into larger national narratives. These movies employ the rhetoric of sports to convey stories not only of individual or team success, but of national pride, unity and identity. A media-literacy approach discloses how this narrative is anything but coincidental. It entails a sensitivity to how cinematic devices—character trajectories, visual motifs, and narrative form—are employed consciously to equate individual victory with the notion of a revived, cohesive nation. Movies such as *Lagaan* (2001), *Chak De! India* (2007), and *Dangal* (2016) do more than trace athletes through their setbacks and triumphs. They design symbolic victories. For instance, in *Lagaan*, a cricket match is used as a metaphor for anti-colonial struggle. Similarly, in *Chak De! India*, the coach is a national redeemer who defies communal stereotypes. In *Dangal*, wrestling, which is often a ignored sport, becomes a narrative of empowerment, connecting the nation's progress with gender progress. In all these instances, the personal is deployed to reflect the political.

The close observation also reveals the highlighting of the underdog, the outsider redeemed, the outsider who is assimilated into the national fold. These are strong points because they access mass sentiment. They are also simplification devices. They take the complexity – gender, religion, class, regional difference—and simplify it into something everyone can understand. For instance, victory tales and a unifying narrative. Emotional manipulation is at the core of this process. Music swells at the right moment, flags wave in slow motion and words are an invitation to patriotism. In films like *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* and *Maidaan*, the coordination between the visual and sound signals results in a shared national celebration around individual achievements. But media literacy is not so much about recognizing how films make us feel. Rather, it is asking what is missing. Which of the nation's selves are idealized as icons, and who remains excluded? Do female competitors have finished stories, or they just serve as symbols of empowerment? And how are religious and regional minorities represented? Films like *Dangal* and *83* give nationalist cheerleading that frequently precludes space for institutional criticism or problematizing history. Hindi sports films, therefore, are more than a spectacle. They are cultural texts that normalize how the nation envisions itself. To read them critically means to pay attention to not only what they depict but also to what they choose not to show.

5. Conclusion

Bollywood sports movies have become a powerful platform for the development of nationalist narratives through the integration of sports with issues of national pride, determination, and communal identity. Using critical discourse analysis, this research has illustrated how movies like *Lagaan*, *Chak De! India*, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, *Dangal*, *83*, and *Maidaan* purposefully developed nationalist emotions through narrative structures, underdog success stories, and symbolic icons. These movies not only commemorate sporting achievements but also as ideological tools affirm hegemonic narratives of patriotism and national unity. The deployment of nationalist narratives in Indian cinema imperceptibly frames the audience's understanding of national identity, patriotism, and history.

Bollywood films through their narrative structure, emotional appeal, and key historical references encourage the notion that personal struggle and national pride are deeply intertwined. The selected films place the career trajectory of persons in the featured position as a symbol of India's own emergence, employing sports as a tool to encourage nationalism and generate collective pride among the public. The depiction of underdog heroes overcoming adversity – whether colonial oppression, gender bias, or societal scepticism – transforms sports into a stage for national redemption. Through the dramatization of sports history and personal struggle on the part of athletes, selected films appeared to convert individual triumphs into moments of shared national pride. Additionally, the frequent application of nationalist icons, including the Indian flag, the national anthem and melodramatic speeches, further consolidates their place in fostering patriotic enthusiasm among spectators. Nevertheless, although these movies promote national unity, they also pose significant issues regarding selective representation of history and ideological reinforcement.

The celebration of national triumphs tends to oversimplify the intricacies of socio-political realities, effacing the differences between historical truth and cinematic mythology. In conclusion, notwithstanding this, Bollywood sports films remain cultural artefacts that entertain as well as influence public consciousness about sports, identity, and nationalism. Future studies can further investigate the impact of such films on audience perceptions of nationalism and whether or not they add to a more inclusive or exclusionary vision of national pride. Through the analysis of how Indian sports films adapt to shifting political and cultural realities, researchers can learn more about the convergence of cinema, sports, and national identity in India.

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