

# “Portraying patriotism: Studying the role of three actors in shaping the ever changing theme of patriotism in Hindi Cinema.”

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## Abstract

Central to the production and success of any film is its directors and actors. Hindi film industry is no exception. Even in the genre of patriotic films, this trend is visible. Since 1947, certain individuals with their sheer talent and charisma have popularized the theme of patriotism which was not the reigning theme in Hindi Cinema. Films with a focus on patriotism have been produced even in times when romantic comedies, musicals, gangster movies and the likes have ruled over the celluloid screen.

## Introduction

Patriotism and Hindi cinema have a deep-rooted connection. Since its inception, Hindi cinema has been a vehicle of patriotism, valour, universal peace, aesthetics and grandeur. From *Kismet* to *Anandmath*, from *Naya Daur* to *Saheed*, from *Upkar* to *Haqeqat* from *Tirangaa* to *Krantiveer*, from *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* to *Manikarnika*, from *Border* to *LOC Kargil*, from *Gadar* to *Diljale*, from *Namaste London* to *Patiala House*, from *Lagaan* to *Swades*, from *Baby* to *Airlift*, from *Raazi* to *Lakshya*, from *Paramanu* to *Mission Mangal*, what we see is how patriotism manifests itself in the praise of the martyrs, anti-colonial attitude, ultra-patriotic jingoism, diasporic pain and neo-patriotism.

This research article is an attempt to catalogue and analyze the role and contribution of actors in popularizing the theme of patriotism in Hindi cinema. Manoj Kumar, Sunny Deol and Aamir Khan have been selected as case studies as they represent different facets of patriotism.

## Patriotism and Nationalism

Patriotism and Nationalism are two frequently confused terms which are believed to mean the same thing. As the research paper deals with the theme of patriotism, it becomes critical to distinguish between these two terms.

George Orwell in his essay entitled 'Notes on Nationalism' defines patriotism as "...devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people".

([http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e\\_nat](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat)).

In the same essay he opines that "... Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his individuality".

([http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e\\_nat](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat)). In order to avoid any intellectual entanglements the researcher chooses patriotism as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary. The Oxford English Dictionary defines patriotism as "...love for one's country or homeland." (

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/patriotism>)

### **Outline of patriotism in Hindi Cinema**

Patriotism in Hindi cinema has come a long way since the 1940's and 50's. With the changing time, the depiction of the theme of patriotism in Hindi cinema has shown a stylistic change. There is a visible change in the codes of patriotism as portrayed in Hindi cinema, thanks to the socio-cultural and economic changes the country has undergone, "with the myriad changes that India has seen in the years post-independence, Hindi cinema's depiction of patriotism has not remained static either...". (Mahadevan:2008).

Films like *Anandmath* and *Naya Daur* made during the newly independent India carried the message of patriotism with the aspirations, dreams and hopes of building a new India. Though nation building was the mission, freedom struggle provided the backdrop. In course of time, the socialist principles coloured the patriotic theme. The idealistic depiction of village pitted against the urban space became the breeding ground for socio-cultural and economic conflicts. In 1960's the son of the soil Manoj Kumar established himself as the patriotic face of Indian cinema with films like *Shaheed*, *Upkar* and *Purab Aur Paschim*. The 1962 war with China inspired Chetan Anand to make India's first war film *Haqeeqat*. This marked the entry of war films into the celluloid zone. *Kranti* depicted the plight of Indians being exploited at the hands of the British. During the

80s the demonic dictators unsuccessfully tried capturing India in movies like *Mr.India* and *Karma*. In the 90s *Bombay* and *Roja* depicted the religious riots and the menacing militancy in India this was also the time when the enemy across the border became a unifying force and patriotism paved way for jingoistic tirade with movies like *Gadar- Ek Prem Katha*, *Border*, *Ma Tujhe Salam* and *Indian*.

The arrival of new millennium brought with it a plethora of changes in the world order. The socio-economic fabric of India underwent a sea change. This was also the time when the Indian diaspora grew leaps and bounds all over the world and India got recognized by the world as a potential super power. This paved way for the portrayal of diasporic pain on the silver screen with the help of movies like *Swades*, *Yaadein*, *Namaste London* and *Swades*.

The new millennium also marked the arrival of neo-patriotism on the silver screen. Movies like *Lagaan* introduced viewers to the new patriotic hero who was more down to earth and rooted than his predecessors. During the time of inner turmoil filmmakers tried making Gandhi relevant to our times with the help of the movie *Lage Raho Munnabhai* which became successful in shaking the conscience of the country. *Rang De Basanti* "... is 'patriotic', as much as of mainstream cinema tended to be around 2005, although it is also a youth film as most other 'patriotic/nationalistic' films were not". (Raghavendra:306:2009)

### **Manoj Kumar: From Harikrishna Goswami to Bharat Kumar**

Manoj Kumar was born as Harikrishna Giri Goswami. At a very young age he and his family had to move to Delhi due to partition. As a youth, he admired Bollywood superstar Dilip Kumar, and decided to name himself Manoj Kumar after Dilip Kumar's character in *Shabnam*.

Manoj Kumar made his debut with *Fashion* (1957) which went unnoticed. *Hariyali aur Rasta* (1962) established him as an actor. This trend was followed in *Himalay Ki Godh Mein* (1965). "A film made in 1965, flagged off the nationalist career of Manoj Kumar, the undisputed pitr of cinematic patriotism. The film was *Saheed*, a black and white retelling of the Bhagat Singh story". (Kesavan: 2007). *Saheed* (1965) is a biopic made on the life of Bhagat Singh. The film depicts the story of how Bhagat Singh joined the freedom movement and why he and his friends killed assistant commissioner Saunders. The film successfully documents the

transition in the life of Bhagat Singh, from a young Sikh boy of Punjab to a national rage and a national hero. This is followed by Bhagat and his friends exploding a bomb in the Central Assembly of the British Parliament as an act of protest. The film poignantly captures the way Bhagat and his friends were constantly tortured while under imprisonment. The film is remembered for its ultra-patriotic dialogues and songs. The film successfully brought out Punjabi inflection of the new patriotism which validates itself in the song “Pagdi sambhal jatta” Apart from being one of the earliest bio-pics made on the life and times of a freedom fighter; it can be termed as an anti-colonial film. *Shaheed* invokes patriotic fervor through its anti-colonial (British) stand throughout the film.

### **Sunny Deol: The macho face of Patriotism**

Sunny Deol was born as Ajay Singh Deol on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1956 in New Delhi. After learning acting from England he debuted in *Betab* (1983). After the success of his first film he went through a lean phase in his career. *Arjun* (1985) cemented his position as a serious actor and later he continued giving power packed performances.

Sunny Deol throughout his career has remained an embodiment of aggressive masculinity. Be it a college student in *Arjun*, an angry lawyer in *Damini*, an army officer in *Border* or a jat in *Gadar- ek prem katha*, most of the patriotic films in which he has acted have one common thing in them, usage of jingoism and ultra patriotic dialogues. They have been embroidered in the films to enhance the patriotic fervor of the mass.

*Gadar-ek prem katha* (2001) opens during the pre-partition time. Tara Singh, a Jat truck driver and Sakina, an educated Muslim girl belonging to an aristocratic family get caught in the whirlpool of riots after the India-Pakistan partition. In order to save Sakina from getting killed by fellow Jats, Tara Singh marries her and declares her as a Sikhni. Sakina comes to know that her father whom she had thought to be dead, is alive and lives in Pakistan. She requests Tara Singh to allow her to go and visit her father once. Tara and his son also decide to go along with her to Pakistan. At the last moment they are informed that only Sakina will be allowed to go to Pakistan as they have been denied the visa. After waiting for a long time for Sakina, Tara Singh decides to visit Pakistan by illegal means. While trying to establish contact with Sakina they are caught. Ashraf Ali, Sakina's father puts forward two demands in front of Tara Singh to prove that he truly loves his daughter. The

first being residing in Pakistan and second being accepting Islam. To everybody's surprise Tara Singh aggress to both the demands. The deal breaker for Tara Singh was not accepting Islam or his saying 'Pakistan Zindabad'. It was the demand that he should shout 'Hindustan Murdabad' which was an insult to his patriotic honour. After he declines to shout slogans against India Ashraf Ali's goons attack him. He manages to overpower them and escapes from that place. They surpass many hurdles before finally catching a goods train carrying cotton. They are chased by the goons and the Pakistani police on the train. Tara Singh disconnects the engine of the train in which they were hiding from the rest part of the train. On the other hand Ashraf Ali shooting at Tara Singh misses his target and shoots his own daughter, Sakina. The film ends with Ashraf Ali accepting Tara Singh as his son-in-law and Sakina recovering from the bullet injury.

The film became one of the biggest grosser of all times. Sunny Deol's acting and rendering of jingoistic dialogues gave the film a much needed success. "...The film is loud and jingoistic, replete with anti-Pakistan dialogues". (Gupta:3:2001)

### **Aamir Khan: The Neo-Patriot**

The late 1990's saw a major Bollywood star taking to the path of patriotism in the form of Aamir Khan through the film *Sarfarosh* (1999). The film was inspired by the increasing internal terrorism sponsored by anti-India forces. The film starts with illegal sale of arms and ammunition happening in certain parts of India. This activity starts at the Indo-Pak border in Rajasthan and slowly makes its way to the interiors of India with the help of several middlemen involved in this business. Veeran, a gangster with his private army frequently loots vehicles which pass by a jungle. Late on a special investigative team has been formed to trace the roots of the attack and the attackers. ACP Ajay Singh, whose father was attacked by a group of terrorists which left him handicapped forever, is the officer in charge starts getting to the heart of the problem. Ajay Singh narrows down to one Mirchi Seth, an astrologer and an illegal arms dealer who with the help of his indigenous way brings the weapons from across the border. ACP Ajay befriends Gulfam Hassan, a famed ghazal singer from Pakistan not knowing about his motives. Very soon ACP Ajay Singh confronts Gulfam Hassan with evidence of his being a Pakistani agent and commits suicide. The character of Aamir Khan evolves during the course of the film. In the beginning we see him being a timid lover who hesitates to confess to a girl whom he loves the most. Later on

we see him as a son who takes care of his family which is shattered after his brother's death and his father's prolonged illness. In the second half of the film we see him being the brave and morally upright police official who doesn't mind risking his life in order to save India from the evil designs of anti-Indian forces.

## Conclusion

The three actors belonging to three different generation / time period represent three different shades patriotism. The validation of the claim is evident in the films they have done and the mode / way in which the theme of patriotism is being portrayed.

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