

# **INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES**



**ISSN 2277 – 9809 (online)**

**ISSN 2348 - 9359 (Print)**

*An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal*

[www.IRJMSH.com](http://www.IRJMSH.com)  
[www.isarasolutions.com](http://www.isarasolutions.com)

Published by iSaRa Solutions

## Exploring Nationalistic Themes in Indian Popular Films and North Korean Propaganda under Divergent Political Systems

*By Maitreyee Bhowmick*

### Abstract

In 20th century Russia, the Soviet Union was the first country to officially endorse the use of film as a means for promoting an ideology. According to the statement made by Lenin, “Cinema, all types of the other arts is the most significant,” set off a systematic use of film for state use. This is an example of the use of authoritarian governments throughout time and how that legacy is still present in film today with the use of films for comparison between these two films, Days and Nights of Confrontation (대결의 낮과 밤), North Korea, and URI: The Surgical Strike. (India, 2019). While North Korea is governed by a totalitarian “Juche” philosophy that demonstrates unyielding state control over every kind of media and entertainment, India is a democratic republic with a superficially free film industry. However, both North Korea and India produce motion pictures that extol the virtue of the military, that build an external adversary, and that unify national identity around one single, state-sanctioned narrative. This dissertation asserts that movies that depict nationalism and propagate nationalist ideology can be produced regardless of whether or not there is an authoritarian regime in place. In contemporary India, state-sponsored films promoting Hindutva nationalism, like The Kashmir Files (2022), The Kerala Story (2023), etc., are sponsored by the Indian government, while films espousing progressive or dissenting views are often censored, face boycotts and are also commercially suppressed. The net effect is a marketplace of propaganda that operates not by force, but instead, through the more subtle means of popular culture, making it less visible than would otherwise be possible within a democratic political system. This dissertation therefore contends that, to date, the Indian government has created a well-defined bubble of nationalist media content which mimics the intent, if not the exact method, of North Korean propaganda.

### Introduction

The close connection between political authority and film production was displayed none more so than in 1978 when state agents from North Korea took control of South Korean director Shin Sang-ok on the orders of Kim Jong-il himself. The motive behind Shin's kidnapping had nothing to do with diplomacy or military goals. Rather, it stemmed from an obsession with film on Kim's part as well as an interest in building a successful domestic filmmaking industry in North Korea through the artistic skills of a respected filmmaker like Shin. After his abduction and subsequent years of captivity, Shin produced numerous films under the regime's orders, before eventually escaping while in 1986 for an international filming trip to Vienna. This incident serves as one of the rare examples in recorded history where the power of the state has viewed cinema (and other forms of media) as a significant issue related to national identity, status and economic contribution, rather than simply an outlet for shared enjoyment among consumers.

The relationship North Korea has with movies would typically be considered extreme in nature; however, there are a number of countries across the globe that operate within a similar type of extreme politically driven environment. All throughout the history of cinema, all different kinds of political systems have employed the cinema for shaping public perception of both national identity and of conceptions pertaining to one's enemies along with how they see themselves. Interestingly, and unlike many authoritarian states, this phenomenon is currently becoming increasingly more prevalent in democratic states as well. For example, in India, which is both the world's largest democracy and the world's largest film producing country, an extremely obvious and disturbing pattern has developed over the past few years where the mainstream film industry (Bollywood) has increasingly found its creative output aligned with the Indian Nationalistic ideology of the currently ruling political party, resulting in an increase in the production of films that focus on celebrating Indian Nationalism through glorifying the majority religion as well as depicting and demonising minority religions, promoting militarism and military action as a source of greatness for the nation, while at the same time utilising the country's censorship mechanisms to censor films that promote dissent or progressive ideologies.

The study will utilize a comparative methodology to analyze the two films: *Days and Nights of Confrontation* (대결의 낮과 밤, North Korea, 2025) and *URI: The Surgical Strike*. Despite their disparate characteristics—one being a creation of a closed off totalitarian regime where every frame is subject to ideological review, and the other being an Indian popular entertainment film with a strong commercial base and cultural impact—they share similar strategies in their presentation of a heroic national identity, an external enemy, and military might as the highest form of national identity.

This dissertation's main thesis includes two points. First, democracy and authoritarianism use cinema as an ideological tool to further their respective nationalist goals, although the two types of regimes accomplish this through various means. Second, the existing mainstream Indian media represents soft propaganda that some argue is more effective than the hard-core system of propaganda in North Korea due to its ability to substitute "mainstream" entertainment formats as the medium for transmitting such propaganda below the radar of the consuming audience; a significant portion of Indian viewers "enjoy" these propaganda narratives, especially without necessarily being conscious of the "ideological construction" nature of the narrative. In a democratic society, this characteristic of the propaganda function defines the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism; propaganda in a democratic society does not require coercion to promote its message; it only needs to entertain. The dissertation contains the following sections: Introduction (this section); Literature Review (key theoretical constructs related to nationalism, cinema, and ideology); Methodology (method of analysis); Key Discussions and Findings (issues addressed include narrative framing, film technique, state involvement, the effect of censorship on both films, as well as the similarities and differences between the two films); Conclusion (the examination of the comparison between the two films

offers an insight into the relationship between democracy, authoritarianism, and the narratives used to describe a nation).

### **Literature Review**

The theory of cinema and nationalism, as established in today's scholarship, is what will inform my comparative analysis of the films, "Days and Nights of Confrontation" and "URI: The Surgical Strike." This is not intended as a broad survey within the field of Cinema and Nationalism. Rather, I will focus specifically on those theoretical constructs that are pertinent to a comparative analysis of these two films, while taking into account the sociopolitical environment that gave rise to each film.

### ***Nationalism, Imagined Communities and Cinema***

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) is a seminal text for examining the relationship between cinema and national identity. Anderson argues that nations exist as a result of people imagining themselves to be part of a nation through shared cultural practices. This idea applies particularly well to cinema, which is an immersive and collective medium that can create a sense of community amongst people who may never meet one another. (Anderson, 1983). The ongoing animosity between India and Pakistan has provided the backdrop for many genres of popular cinema, including Bollywood, since the time of Partition. URI is one of the most commercially successful expressions of this tradition and uses the real-life events of the 2016 surgical strike as a basis for creating a powerful emotional and nationalistic narrative. In North Korea, the cinematic representation of national identity has been more systematic. Since the country's split, films are used as instruments through which state ideology is instilled in the citizenry. The film *Days and Nights of Confrontation* is produced by the April 25 Film Studio, which produces some of North Korea's most ideologically significant films. (Ripley, 2026).

The philosophical ideas of Louis Althusser, in his approach to what he referred to as the ideological state apparatus, which he articulated in his 1970 essay provide the basis for a complementary perspective to understanding URI. Althusser explained that institutions such as the media or cinema do not enforce their authority through violence or coercion; rather, they gain consent by conditioning their audiences to accept the dominant values of their society as though they were the natural order of things. (Althusser, 1970).

This is a useful framework for understanding URI because, within the context of the film, a narrative containing militaristic assertiveness bespeaking of national pride in a manner that reflects the current political climate of the time is presented. URI is perceived by the majority of its potential audience as entertainment rather than propaganda, and it is this very quality that renders URI an effective ideological apparatus according to Althusser. Antonio Gramsci added to Althusser's theorizing through his description of cultural hegemony; at such a time that popular cultural representations of nationalist narrative travel sufficiently through the intersubjectivity of consumers without any critical thought on the part of consumers, they are

made to feel like they are hegemonic. (Gramsci, 1971). URI accomplished this with significant efficiency, through the use of the film's tagline, "How's the josh?" as applied by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, during a public event, creating a direct relationship between the film's content and the political message related to the content of the film (IndianExpress, 2019).

### ***Propaganda Cinema and the Role of the State***

The state's ideological guidance was responsible for this film, which reflects all of the ways it departs from traditional North Korean film-making, as done prior to 2013, when the April 25 Film Studio had long produced films using strict formulas traditionally seen in developing countries where most films are still based on nationalism and revolutionary drama regardless of how global cinema has evolved since the end of the Cold War.(Jong-il, 1973).

During this time in North Korea, Kim Jong-un's regime directed the cultural sector to modernize their presentations of ideological themes while they remained true to their own ideologies. Days and Nights of Confrontation built upon this directive of adding to the effectiveness of their ideological theme by adopting the visual language of Hollywood action films. (Ripley, 2026).

URI falls into a somewhat ambiguous characterisation, since it is produced by a private studio (a commercial venture), marketed as a form of entertainment, and was positively received by a general audience (mainstream critics) — yet the manner in which the surgical strikes were depicted in URI, by producing stylised jingoistic representations of the violence used in the surgical strikes, through aestheticising and rationalising violence (Cromley, 2018) Also, because it wasn't made with the formal markers of a state producer, it doesn't typically get classified as propaganda. The lack of any distinction between media types, and the assumptions underpinning democratic media culture, is primarily responsible for the absence of the propaganda label being applied to URI.

### ***Censorship: Explicit Control and Soft Suppression***

The censorship phenomena existing in, and shaping the current contexts of, North Korea and South Korea, respectively, provide important perspective for understanding how each film was created in its current form. Censorship in North Korea is total/institutional, meaning that no film will reach its audience without perfect government approval, as cinema is used by the Workers Party as one of their dominant means of creating the consciousness of the population (Jong-il, 1973). There is an example of the official endorsement of the film entitled *Días Noches de Confrontación* (Days and Nights of Confrontation), which was shown at the Pyeongyang International Film Festival and then subsequently shown on Korean Central Television after both of these venues had provided their official endorsement of the film (Ripley, 2026).

In India, the picture is more complex. A wave of right wing, pro government sentiment has reshaped the country's film industry, particularly Bollywood, since 2014. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), a government appointed body, has become an increasingly political

instrument. Films that challenge dominant nationalist narratives face delays, extensive cuts, or rejection, while films aligned with ultra-nationalist narratives receive state endorsement. On the same day that Santosh, the UK's 2024 Oscar submission — was refused certification, Parliament hosted a special screening of Chhaava (Sabrangindia, 2025). Meanwhile, URI received tax exemptions in multiple BJP governed states following its release, blurring the line between commercial cinema and state endorsed content (Firstpost, 2019).

Taken together, this body of literature positions the two films not as opposites but as points on a spectrum — one in which the mechanisms of nationalist cinema differ significantly, but the underlying ideological function remains consistent.

### **Methodology**

This dissertation continues with a qualitative research methodology that is based on textual analysis and comparative film studies. Days and Nights of Confrontation and URI: The Surgical Strike are the two texts for the research

### ***Close Textual Analysis***

Each of the films will be examined, looking at the visual language, the narrative, the dialogue, the sound, the editing, etc., to try to get a sense of how nationalist ideology is encoded in the formal properties of the films. Here, the medium of cinema is not seen as a mere reflection of politics, but as a force that creates meaning and influences the viewer's understanding of the world (Althusser, 1970).

In the case of URI, the focus is on the crucial scenes, such as the opening scene, the repetition of the phrase 'How's the josh?' and the character of the Indian soldier and his association with the Indian nation. The timing of the movie's release, five months before the general elections of 2019, and the exemptions granted in BJP-ruled states.(Firstpost, 2019). These are not random details. These are all part of the political function of the film, and textual analysis alone cannot help us understand them without the context surrounding them.

In the case of the Days and Nights of Confrontation, the emphasis is on the way the film uses the genre of the "Hollywood thriller" to convey an ideologically orthodox message, a modernisation of the form without any change in the content.(Ripley, 2026) This film takes a very different approach than previous North Korean films, which avoided showing betrayal and violence. The rationale for this analysis is to see what the shift in the portrayal of violence and betrayal in this film tells about how North Korea perceives its audience, and also what level of attention is needed to keep them engaged.

### ***Comparative Framework***

The placement of both films side-by-side does not suggest that either political system is equal in nature; it is merely an opportunity to question whether both films serve the same function functionally through the use of cinematic imagery. The framework draws on comparative

national cinema studies, which has shown that films from very different political environments can share underlying narrative and aesthetic strategies even when their surface differences are significant (Anderson, 1983). We need to look for the context. This comparison will be based on three areas that cover the Key Discussions and Findings section. These three areas will be narrative/ideological framing, aesthetics/cinematic language, and similarities/differences between the two films. These three areas are designed to challenge the fundamental premise of the dissertation, which is that the mechanisms of nationalist cinema are similar in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, regardless of how dissimilar they might be.

### ***Secondary Sources***

Academic sources establish the theoretical ground, drawing on Anderson (1983), Althusser (1970), Gramsci (1971), and Kim Jong-il (1973). Journalism and film criticism are used to place both films in their political contexts — including coverage of the CBFC's refusal to certify Santosh alongside Parliament's screening of Chhaava on the same day (Sabrangindia, 2025), and the tax exemptions granted to URI across BJP governed states (Firstpost, 2019). Where academic sources are unavailable, particularly in relation to North Korean cinema, verified journalism from outlets including CNN and NK News is used in their place.

### ***Limitations***

Writing about Indian cinema comes with an abundance of sources; academic, critical, journalistic. North Korean film studies presents challenges; there is little independent perspective from within North Korea itself and very limited reporting from the outside. (Ripley, 2026) The presentation of this asymmetry presents an additional element to support my overarching thesis rather than a gap in the current literature. Studying North Korean cinema from outside North Korea has been made more difficult as a result of the total institutional control that this discussion is attempting to articulate. The lack of availability of sources in and of itself is also indicative.

## **Key Discussions and Findings**

### ***1. Narrative and Ideological Framing***

Both URI and Days and Nights establish an overarching story of a nation being threatened. The enemy is present, the stakes are existential and the outcome is entirely based on the loyalty, discipline and sacrifice of those that serve the country. This narrative structure is not by coincidence.

URI is rooted in the cross-border military operation carried out by the Indian army in 2016 in retaliation against the attack on the army base in Uri, Kashmir, where nineteen soldiers were killed. The film begins with the attack on the army base in Uri, the chaos and the bloodshed, before moving on to the planning and execution of the retaliatory attack. The story is guided by a simple and unambiguous moral philosophy: India was wronged, and so India struck back. And the striking back was righteous. There is no ambiguity in the enemy, no exploration of the

intricacies of the India-Pakistan conflict, and no room given to a viewpoint that does not conform to the dominant philosophy. The surgical strike is not portrayed as a complex event in international politics and military conflict but as a symbol of the new India under new leadership, which will no longer be a victim without a cause

The phrase "How's the josh?" is the film's shorthand for its ideologies. Repeating the phrase throughout the movie, the film presents it as a question and answer between the commanding officers and the soldier, a form of communal affirmation. When the phrase was used by the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Modi, at a public event shortly after the release of the film, the line between the film and the political speech became completely blurred (IndianExpress, 2019). The film had produced a piece of nationalist vocabulary that moved directly into real political discourse, and the ease with which this happened suggests that the film was always operating on two levels simultaneously: as entertainment and as ideological preparation.

The concept of imagined communities as proposed by Benedict Anderson is relevant here. URI creates a very particular view of India constructing who belongs in it and establishing that the soldiers at the centre of the film are completely disciplined, selfless and defined only by how they serve (or served) the country. The civilians that occupy the film serve mainly to illustrate the excessive emotional burden put upon the soldier through this service. The enemy being Pakistani militants and their state backers are given almost no interiority. They function as a threat, not as people. Anderson had stated that the formation of nationalist identity occurred through the repetition of symbols and stories, and the URI film is the epitome of that statement (Anderson, 1983). The film does not simply mirror the nationalism of the Indians but creates it, providing the viewer with a collective emotion of national pride .

"Days and Nights of Confrontation" is similar in terms of its general template, although it is clearly informed by different politics. The film is loosely based on an explosion that happened at Ryongchon Station in 2004, just hours after Kim Jong-il's train had passed through it, which was clearly an assassination attempt. However, in this film, the threat is clearly an insider, someone who is working against the nation from within, rather than an external threat. The villain is a prosecutor, a husband, an ordinary citizen. The fact that he is a traitor is what makes him so evil, and the film is constructed so that each act of violence that he perpetrates is an affront not only to the rule of law but also to the very moral fabric of the nation itself.

This has a particular ideological effect. In placing the threat from within society rather than from outside, the film encourages the viewer to be vigilant; to understand that the enemy is not necessarily the soldier from another nation, but the neighbour, the colleague, the family member who has succumbed to the influence of capitalism/other nations and has lost all sense of loyalty to the nation. The notion of the ideological state apparatus, as outlined by Althusser, is pertinent here; there is no need (Althusser, 1970). The narrative structure makes it for them. The audience is

encouraged to subscribe to a worldview in which loyalty to the state is the only guarantee of safety, and deviation from that loyalty, however that loyalty is expressed and in whatever way that deviation manifests, always results in destruction. What is striking about both of these films, placed side by side as they are, is that despite their very different political contexts, this narrative structure is so similar. Both of these films present a threat, both of them present a hero whose identity cannot be separated from their loyalty to their country, and both of them resolve their narrative with an act of state-sanctioned violence that is justified and necessary. Both of these films ask their audiences to feel proud of their country and to fear their enemies. While the means are quite different, with URI using the language of the Bollywood action film and Days and Nights of Confrontation using the thriller, the ideological content of both of these films is quite similar. Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony helps to explain why that is so (Gramsci, 1971).

Hegemony is not enacted through force, but through the gradual normalisation of a given worldview so that it does not feel like ideology at all – it feels like common sense.

It presents itself as entertainment, as a true story, as a tribute to the army. The ideological content is presented in a form that the viewer has been conditioned to enjoy, and this makes it much harder to resist, and even to identify. Days and Nights of Confrontation is more obvious in its goals, and the modernisation of its form, its pace, its complex moral characters, its thriller form, suggests that North Korean cinema is going in the same direction, making its propaganda feel less like propaganda and more like story (Ripley, 2026).

## ***2. Aesthetics and Cinematic Language***

Common to both URI: The Surgical Strike and Days and Nights of Confrontation is the theme of a nation in peril. There is an enemy to fight, the threat is existential in nature, and the only thing that will save the nation is the allegiance of those who have chosen to serve the nation. This is no accident. It is the central means by which both films are able to do their ideological work, and how each film does so says a great deal about the political context in which it was made. URI is a technically polished film by any standard. Modern Hollywood war films heavily inspire the cinematographic style of the film. The very beginning consists of an assault on a military location. This sequence showcases dramatised, close-up handheld filming to give the viewer the feeling of confusion and terror while taking place. After the successful realisation of the surgical strike plan, the look of the film changes radically. The video footage that was captured is a steady and exact recording illustrating the way soldiers move in synchronised motions through green tinted night vision images; the editing rhythmically produces an orderly sequence of motion from one image to the next. The visual confusion that is present prior to the strike and the orderly presentation of the images that occur subsequent to their strike purposefully foreshadow the conceptual shift in how the military uses violence against its enemies and demonstrates new political decisions being made by the government of India to instil hope toward providing an environment in which there would be the possibility of establishing a long-term peace for one region in which there is currently perceived to be little opportunity to do so. At every point in time during this portion of the film, sound design reinforces the concept of creating an ordered and

rhythmic sequence of motion as a method of providing a sense of calmness and anticipation through moving images. The attack sequence is loud, fragmented, and overwhelming. The strike sequences are scored with a driving orchestral soundtrack that builds toward release. The audience is guided through a carefully constructed emotional arc; from grief and anger to pride and satisfaction — and the formal properties of the film are the instruments through which that arc is delivered. The music does not accompany the emotion; it produces it. The film's use of technology is also worth examining. Drones, satellite imagery, and digital interfaces appear throughout, framing the Indian military as modern, capable, and forward looking. The soldiers in URI are not the weathered patriots of older Bollywood war films. The Indian Army is composed of young men and women, who are fit and well-equipped with the tools that belong to an army of the 21st Century. This choice of aesthetic also has an ideological function; to communicate to a global audience that India has arrived as a nation, no longer on the defensive, with the capacity to project its military power both precisely and with restraint. By using an aesthetic of competence and control to represent the surgical strike as a clean and morally justified act, violence has been made acceptable (Cromley, 2018).

Days and Nights of Confrontation, although certainly using a different aesthetic, does appear to be evolving towards a new use of cinema. North Korean cinema prior to the production of Days and Nights of Confrontation would have been defined by a lack of movement within the frame, with long, slow takes and little or no use of camera movement, and compositions that focused on the collective rather than any individual. Days and Nights of Confrontation departs from that traditional mode of filmmaking in many obvious ways. The editing is faster. The camera moves. Sequences are constructed around tension and release rather than ideological declaration. Chase scenes, a ticking time bomb, and true suspenseful moments all appear in today's North Korean films, which could never have been present in a North Korean film from two decades ago. The reason for this shift has not happened by mere chance. Kim Jong Il similarly to his father understood that propaganda will only work if it is viewed by people (Jong-il, 1973). The changes to North Korean cinema that Kim Jong Un has made are a clear reflection of the same logic applied to a new generation of people who are being exposed, albeit illegally, to South Korean dramas, Hollywood films, and global streaming content on USB drives and illegal devices (Ripley, 2026). The North Korean state cannot compete with these forms of entertainment ideologically, and so it has decided to compete aesthetically. The film Days and Nights of Confrontation clearly shows the state competing against these forms of entertainment by being as modern, both visually and in the feel of the film, as all the other contemporary entertainment, while still having the same ideological message as the revolutionary epics of the past. One of the clearest examples of this continuing theme is how both films treat violence. In URI, the use of violence is depicted in very beautiful visual imagery and resembles a dance performance. The visual style of the action scenes in Surgical Strike are the same as a typical action movie, using quick cuts, exaggerated camera movement, and powerful music. Enemy combatants are not shown to die in a gratuitous manner; they are simply eliminated with efficiency and professionalism. The Indian army soldiers

portrayed in this film do not appear to take pleasure in the acts of violence, thus portraying them as reluctant but able to defend themselves instead of as aggressors, which is integral to the moral logic of the movie. The overall portrayal of the use of the Indian military is shown as being measured and proportionate, despite presenting the visual excitement of the destruction in a manner not typically used by filmmakers when depicting violence.

In contrast to *Surgical Strike* is *Days and Nights of Confrontation* that represents violence in a completely different manner than has been typically done in previous North Korean films. A character is choked; another is stabbed by her husband and a suicide bomb vest is on screen unaltered and exposed. These are depictions of the actual deaths of revolutionary heroes, and thus their deaths are not shown in a heroic, noble manner but rather they represent the sad reality of domestic violence and the violence of betrayal. (Ripley, 2026). This creates an emotional reaction to betrayal by producing a visceral fear of the consequences of disloyalty to the state in the viewer. The violence is not aestheticized into spectacle as it is in *URI*. It is used to disturb, to warn, to reinforce the idea that deviation from the moral order of the nation has consequences that are immediate and bodily.

Despite these differences, both films are using their formal properties to produce the same fundamental response in their audiences: emotional investment in the nation and its survival. *URI* achieves this through excitement, pride, and the pleasures of a well-executed action film. *Days and Nights of Confrontation* achieves it through anxiety, moral clarity, and the relief of seeing the traitor finally destroyed. The emotional textures are different, but the destination is the same; an audience that leaves the cinema feeling more attached to their nation and more certain of the threats it faces.

### ***3. Convergences and Divergences***

There is no suggestion that North Korea and India are similar in their political systems from comparing the films *URI: The Surgical Strike* and *Days and Nights of Confrontation*. Their production methods vary widely, as well as the experiences of the films' audiences in each country; thus, making them totally non-comparable. The two films do, however, demonstrate that nationalist cinema has a distinct logic from country to country regardless of their politics and that the distinction between them is one of method and degree as opposed to their original goals.

#### ***Where the Films Converge***

The most obvious point of convergence is the construction of the enemy. Both films depend on a clearly defined threat to give the nation something to rally against. While the enemy in *URI* is seen as an external force, specifically Pakistani militants being funded by a hostile country, the film creates uncertainty around any specific individual, as they are faceless and interchangeable. The film gives no attributes that might generate empathy toward each individual Pakistani soldier or civilian but merely presents them as plot devices and not real human beings. In *Days and Nights of Confrontation*, the enemy begins as an insider but is ultimately revealed to be a traitor in the

service of foreign interests — which amounts to the same thing. In both cases, the nation is defined not only by what it is but by what it is threatened by, and the threat is constructed in ways that make it impossible to engage with critically or sympathetically.

Both films also construct the state as the ultimate guarantor of safety and justice. In *URI*, the surgical strike is authorised at the highest levels of government and executed with military precision. The state is competent, decisive, and righteous. In *Days and Nights of Confrontation*, the apparatus of the Workers' Party ultimately identifies and destroys the traitor. The individual villain may have caused chaos, but the state prevails. The concept of an "imagined community" in Anderson applies to both films with respect to how they both portray the nation as a thing to be fought for and the state as the only entity in the world capable of defending that. The audience is encouraged to have trust in and respect for the systems of governance in which they reside. (Anderson, 1983).

The emotional architecture of both films is also strikingly similar. Both move through a recognisable arc: threat, mobilisation, resolution. Through the formal properties of cinema (music, editing, performance, cinematography), the audience is led through a transition from a state of vulnerability or outrage to a state of pride or relief. According to Althusser, ideological apparatuses have their effect because they operate without declaring themselves to be an ideology (Althusser, 1970). Neither film asks its audience to accept a political argument. Both ask their audiences to feel something, and the feelings they produce are entirely compatible with the political interests of the states that sanctioned them.

### ***Where the Films Diverge***

The most significant divergence is transparency. The state studio that made *Days and Nights of Confrontation* produced and funded the film in consultation with state institutions at every stage of its production, had its première at a state film festival, and had its broadcast on state television (Ripley, 2026). Viewers were not under any illusion as to who made the film or why they did so, as the propaganda was evident; thus, there was less difficulty for an audience who may take a critical view of the government to see and resist it. *URI*, by contrast, was produced by a private company, financed through commercial channels, and marketed as a patriotic entertainment film based on a true story. The state's involvement was indirect; tax exemptions, political endorsements, parliamentary screenings of similar films (Firstpost, 2019). The film's commercial success gave it a reach and a legitimacy that no openly state produced film could have achieved. This is where the dissertation's central argument becomes most visible. In India, the political environment allows for nationalist propaganda to be made and distributed freely, using a variety of forms. *URI* was created for the market, not as a product of government studios, so it did not have the level of suspicion that openly political films do. Thus, commercial cinemas drew people into the cinema with little or no expectation of what they would see and therefore did not provide the critical distance that the viewer might have had to a film announcing its political/intellectual

intent. The idea of "hegemony," as articulated by Gramsci, captures this dynamic exactly, in that the most effective ideological work is the work that does not appear to be ideology at all. (Gramsci, 1971).

The treatment of individual characters also diverges in ways that reflect each country's political priorities. URI centres on a named protagonist; Major Vihan Singh Shergill whose personal grief over his mother's condition runs alongside the military plot. The film gives its hero an interior life, a family, and a private emotional world. Bollywood takes this as a motif of production; in addition, it serves an ideological purpose via how it conveys the argument for nationalism as shown in the film, which also makes the argument for the film's use of cinema as an act of nationalism more personal than abstract. In other words, the audience does not perceive their participation in a military campaign as an abstract concept. They are being asked to support a man they have come to care about. Days and Nights of Confrontation is less interested in individual interiority. Its characters are defined primarily by their relationship to the state; to be loyal or disloyal, useful or dangerous. The shift toward more individualised characters in recent North Korean cinema, visible in Days and Nights of Confrontation relative to earlier productions, suggests a recognition that audiences connect more readily with personal stories than with collective declarations (Ripley, 2026).

The censorship environments that surround each film are also fundamentally different in form, even if their effect is similar in practice. In North Korea, censorship is explicit and total. Nothing reaches an audience without state approval, and the boundaries of acceptable content are enforced institutionally (Jong-il, 1973). In India, censorship operates through a combination of formal mechanisms; the CBFC, which refused certification to Santosh on the same day Parliament screened Chhaava (Sabrangindia, 2025). There is an informal pressure that encourage filmmakers to self-censor long before a film reaches the certification stage. The result in both countries is a mainstream cinema that broadly reflects and reinforces the ideological priorities of those in power. Although there are different paths to the same outcome.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

One of the findings of this dissertation is that, while some countries have democratic political systems and others have totalitarian political systems, the ultimate purpose of their use of cinematic expression to further promote nationalistic ideals will not differ according to the political nature of each country, but will differ as a function of the way each government utilizes cinema to encourage nationalistic activity and how visible it is to the general society. North Korea's approach is total and transparent. Every part of film production (from writing the screenplay through the actual screen) is regulated by a central power. As such, the ideological function of cinema is immediately evident when examining what the film Days and Nights of Confrontation is trying to do: enact a form of ideological propaganda; thus, all members within the audience are aware that they are being subjected to the propaganda of the state—even if the aesthetic nature of this film is modified compared to previous films, making it more attractive to view. The state's fingerprints are visible throughout, and the film's meaning is not available for

negotiation. Loyalty to the nation is the only acceptable conclusion an audience can draw from it.

India's approach is more complex, and in many ways more troubling. URI was made by a private studio, released into a commercial market, and embraced by audiences who experienced it as entertainment rather than as political instruction. The state's involvement was real but indirect through tax exemptions in BJP governed states, political endorsements from the Prime Minister himself, a broader cultural environment in which films that challenge the ruling ideology face censorship while films that reinforce it are celebrated. The Central Board of Film Certification denied Santosh (a film that presented a critical examination of how police operate in India) a Certificate on the same date that Parliament screened the film Chhaava. (Sabrangindia, 2025). While there exists a clear example of the asymmetry between these two events, one can still deny that such an asymmetry exists (for Western media, it is often difficult to deny the existence of such a disparity).

The nationalist cinema of India is insidious in nature compared to North Korea's because of India being a democracy. The democratic framework<sup>11</sup> provides a cover for Nationalists to produce propaganda while the market distance the majority of the population from understanding that they are subject to it. There is no reason for the nationalists to announce that they are producing propaganda since it is inherent in the infrastructure of the cultural industry itself. Because of the conditioning of the audience, they do not feel manipulated. Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony accurately captures the process: The most effective ideological work is work which has been rendered invisible (Gramsci, 1971).

The theoretical constructs that have been used to examine both films: imagined communities (Anderson), ideological state apparatuses (Althusser) and cultural hegemony (Gramsci), have yielded similar results in both cases. (Anderson, 1983) (Althusser, 1970). These frameworks were not developed to describe authoritarian cinema alone. They describe the relationship between culture and power in any society where dominant groups use shared narratives to naturalise their authority. The fact that they apply with equal force to URI and to Days and Nights of Confrontation is the clearest evidence this dissertation can offer that nationalist cinema is not a product of political repression alone. It is a product of political power, wherever that power is located and however it chooses to express itself.

What this comparison cannot do is resolve the ethical question it raises. Should we compare an action film made in Bollywood to one made in North Korea? They are produced within completely dissimilar political contexts, and therefore the implications of the comparisons will gloss over those distinctions fundamental to the lives of those who reside within them. This dissertation has therefore tried to maintain the tensions present in both situations through an acknowledgment that they have very different methods and processes by which they produce films, the imaginations of both groups of people are not comparable, and the amounts of state control within each location differs. The argument is not that India is North Korea. The argument is that nationalist cinema follows a recognisable logic across both contexts, and that recognising that

logic in democratic settings is at least as important as recognising it in authoritarian ones, precisely because it is so much harder to see.

Film will still serve as a medium for nationalistic messaging, both now and into the future. Rather than considering whether or not this process is taking place, we must begin to understand the manner in which it is occurring; to identify the audience members who are benefiting from film's use as a nationalistic vehicle; and finally, to determine what level of critical literacy (i.e., knowledge) we must have, in order to be able to interact with films critically as the creators intended. The purpose of this dissertation is to aid in the ongoing conversation around these issues.

#### Works Cited

Althusser, L. (1970). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New Left Books.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.

Cromley, C. D. (2018). Intimacy in Non-Western Discourses of Terrorism: An Analysis of Three Bollywood Films.

Firstpost. (2019). *Uri: The Surgical Strike — Yogi Adityanath announces tax exemption for Vicky Kaushal's film in Uttar Pradesh*. Retrieved from Firstpost.in: [https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/uri-the-surgical-strike-yogi-](https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/uri-the-surgical-strike-yogi-adityanath-announces-tax-exemption-for-vicky-kaushals-film-in-uttar-pradesh-5985081.html)

[adityanath-announces-tax-exemption-for-vicky-kaushals-film-in-uttar-pradesh-5985081.html](https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/uri-the-surgical-strike-yogi-adityanath-announces-tax-exemption-for-vicky-kaushals-film-in-uttar-pradesh-5985081.html)

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebook*. Lawrence and Wishart.

IndianExpress. (2019). *Watch: PM Modi asks film fraternity 'How's the Josh?'* Retrieved from The Indian Express: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/watch-video-hows-the-josh-pm-modi-uri-dialogue-museum-of-indian-cinema-inauguration-mumbai-5546397/>

Jong-il, K. (1973). *On the art of the cinema*. Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Ripley, W. (2026, Jan 20). *Sex, death and betrayal: This North Korean movie shows things audiences have never seen before* . Retrieved from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/20/style/north-korea-film-taboo-intl-hnk-dst>

Sabrangindia. (2025). *India's Censorship Hypocrisy: Ban on Santosh and promotion of Chhaava*. Retrieved from sabrangindia: <https://sabrangindia.in/indias-censorship-hypocrisy-ban-on-santosh-and-promotion-of-chhaava/>



# EARN YOUR MBA

WWW.IIMPS.IN



Accreditation & Ranking



UGC / NCTE Approved.

INFO@IIMPS.IN

☎ 011-41005174

R  
S  
E  
A  
R  
C  
H  
G  
A  
T  
E  
W  
A  
Y

## STOP PLAGIARISM



**Arogyam Ayurveda**  
Holistic Healing through herbs



A  
R  
O  
G  
Y  
A  
M  
O  
N  
L  
I  
N  
E

## PARIVARTAN PSYCHOLOGY CENTER



### COLOR PSYCHOLOGY : HOW COLOR AFFECT YOUR CHILD



- BLUE** Calms your Child's Mind & Body
- YELLOW** Promotes Concentration, Stimulates the Memory
- PINK** Evokes Empathy, makes your Child Calm
- RED** Excites and energizes your Child's body
- GREEN** Improves Reading speed and Comprehension

www.parivartan4u.com



Confuse about your children's future?

**भारतीय भाषा, शिक्षा, साहित्य एवं शोध**

ISSN 2321 – 9726

[WWW.BHARTIYASHODH.COM](http://WWW.BHARTIYASHODH.COM)



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF  
MANAGEMENT SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN – 2250 – 1959 (O) 2348 – 9367 (P)

[WWW.IRJMS.T.COM](http://WWW.IRJMS.T.COM)



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF  
COMMERCE, ARTS AND SCIENCE**

ISSN 2319 – 9202

[WWW.CASIRJ.COM](http://WWW.CASIRJ.COM)



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF  
MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES**

ISSN 2277 – 9809 (O) 2348 - 9359 (P)

[WWW.IRJMSH.COM](http://WWW.IRJMSH.COM)



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF SCIENCE  
ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN 2454-3195 (online)

[WWW.RJSET.COM](http://WWW.RJSET.COM)



**INTEGRATED RESEARCH JOURNAL OF  
MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**

ISSN 2582-5445

[WWW.IRJMSI.COM](http://WWW.IRJMSI.COM)



**JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES, POLITICS  
AND ECONOMICS RESEARCH**

[WWW.JLPER.COM](http://WWW.JLPER.COM)

**JLPE**