



Identity in Post-Colonial Indian Cinema – A Comparative Analysis of Lagaan, Rang De Basanti, and Swades

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ABSTRACT

The colonialism legacy in India did not only present political and economic issues but also a psychological and cultural scar that has remained to be a part of the Indian society. With India becoming an independent country, the cinema was a strong form of expression, interrogation and re-construction of the national identity. This project focuses on the way in which three popular Indian movies, *Lagaan* (2001), *Rang De Basanti* (2006) and *Swades* (2004) address various aspects of post-colonial Indian identity. *Lagaan* is about resisting and fighting together in colonial times, *Rang De Basanti* is about the political awakening of the contemporary young generation and *Swades* is about the contribution of the diaspora in nation building. The paper relies on post-colonial theories Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, and it raises the themes of hybridity, mimicry, and revolutionary consciousness. These movies using lush narratives and filmic processes demonstrate that Indian identity is not fixed but is formed by history, feeling and mass action. They are cultural texts that show the path of India towards self-discovery and sense of nationhood in a post-colonial, globalized world.

Introduction

How Indian movies Show How India is after British Rule

India was ruled by British for a very long time and left a very immense mark on everything: people way of living, their belief, their culture. This period was called colonialism; it created a complex situation that India is still facing today. For showing these changes through stories, movie became a powerful way. Movies have helped India to understand its past, and figure out who it is as a nation. A new kind of cinema emerged in 1947 after the British left and India became independent. This “post-colonial” Indian cinema became a crucial space -almost like a stage- where films became an important way to ask and explore big question. These questions included: what “nationalism” really mean for a free country? How do old Indian traditions fit alongside modern ideas? What are the differences between life in cities and villages and how those shape the India? Most importantly, how can India define its own identity in a fast-changing world.

Among many films made in India, three movies – **Lagaan**, **rang de Basanti**, and **Swades** are truly special. Each of them tells a unique story of India after colonialism. They deal with the country search for identity- the struggle to understand who India is-and how the country has tried to bring change and move the country forward.

- **Lagaan** takes us back to the time of British rule in India. Even though the story is fictional, but it strongly reflects us of the colonial past and shows the power of unity when common people in the movie came together and stood up to the British.
- **Rang de Basanti** is set in a more modern India. It captures the frustration and anger of young people who feel disconnected from system, as the story unfolds young character become more aware of their responsibilities and decide to take action to bring change.
- **Swades** is a calm and more thoughtful film, it's about an Indian scientist living in a foreign land but then return home to India. The film explores the theme of belonging, social responsibility and identity through his experiences. And contributing to the country's progress.

This in depth look at these three powerful films will explore how each one shows the idea of being Indian in world shaped by colonialism history. We will draw some ideas from scholars who study colonialism, culture and films to help us understand them better.

Chapter 1: Lagaan – Fighting the Past Finding the Unity

Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001) takes us back to the late 19 century, time when India was ruled by British. The story takes place in a small village that is being crushed under a heavy tax imposed by the British. The main plot begins when villagers make a bold decision by challenging British officer to play a cricket match. It was no longer just a game but became a powerful symbol of their fight and resistance against the powerful British rulers.

Old times and hidden meanings:

Although *Lagaan* feels very real it's important to know that it has no direct historical account that happened in real. Instead, it's what we call an "allegory" as it cleverly represents more complicated power struggles between the British ruler and the Indian people through the story of cricket match (Chakraborty, 2003). Cricket is a sport that the British brought to India, it was seen as a symbol of British power and their way of life and even as a tool to impose their culture. But in *Lagaan* poor villagers who were oppressed, took up cricket not as a game, but as a means of resistance against the colonizer (Farred, 2009). This act strongly illustrates an idea from a famous postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, particularly his concept of mimicry and hybridity. This means colonized people adopt certain way of colonizers culture -not to imitate like them but to reshape and subvert for their own purpose (Bhabha, 1994). Similarly in movie villagers cleverly turn the oppressor's own game against them. In doing so, they expose the cracks in colonial system, even the ordinary people can achieve success when they stand together.

Representation of unity and rural identity:

Another powerful theme in *Lagaan* is its strong emphasis on unity in diversity. The film shows how people from different cast, religion and communities come together and stand against the common enemy- the British tax collector.

The unity does something very important: it challenges the conservative and old-fashioned idea that rural India is stuck in the past. Instead *Lagaan* shows it as a space of possibilities, strength and transformation. The character of Bhuvan, an ordinary farmer, becomes a symbol of national pride and someone who embodies the idea of "post-colonial empowerment". He represents the inherent strength that belong with the common people of India (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004).

Movie as a message:

In a brilliant way and skilfully, Ashutosh Gowariker used cinematic techniques to enhance *Lagaan* messages and make it deeply memorable. The films widescreen visuals are stunning, they beautifully captured the landscape of rural India, the wide view gives you the experience of village life.

The soundtrack by famous composer A.R. Rahman is deeply rooted by Indian classical and folk traditions. The feeling of hope, struggle, and eventual triumph blends seamlessly into the story through music. Costume and set design also contribute to the film's realism, the authentic village clothing and earthy clothes bring the era to life, grounding the story in a specific cultural and historical context.

More than just a film meant to entertain it gives a strong message of nationalism, the cricket match in the movie is not just a game it defines India's long fight for freedom and becomes a small version of the much larger battle for independence and dignity that India experienced. The film powerfully reminds us the immense sacrifices of the past and celebrates the collective spirit that helped build the nation (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004).

Chapter 2: Nationalism, Youth, and Awakening in Rang De Basanti and Swades
Ran De Basanti: Young Anger and New Beginnings

Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, *Rang De Basanti* (2006) is a sharp and vibrant movie that shows what's going on in India currently. Its smart in how it places two different worlds side-by-side: modern India's university students, the lives of carefree, lost sometimes, and the sad, strong and fearless stories of India's freedom fighters from previous time. How does it work? By making a documentary film within the story itself. As the students help create this documentary, they gradually start to sense a deep relation to India's colonial past (Raghavan, 2011). Something inside them sparked after this new understanding, leading them to be active in protesting and creating changes in modern-day India.

Feeling Let Down and Reborn (Post- Colonial Disillusionment and Rebirth):

This movie doesn't hesitate to criticize the current situation of India. It displays the nation as being pressed down by having many corruptions and a common feeling of people not thoughtful enough. This idea reflects the thought of a famous writer named Frantz Fanon, who believed that, for people who were ruled once, a kind of "violence" (not physical but a strong and forceful breaking from the past) might be needed to change their way of thinking (Fanon, 1963). It suggests that society needs a dramatic, even symbolic shaking to get rid of its deep-rooted problems.

In the movie the amazing makeover of the students, from being lazy and not caring to becoming passionate, active rebels, reflects a powerful return of the nationalist spirit. This is not the old form of nationalism, however, it is redefined and rationalized to the demands of the modern India (Raghavan, 2011). They are not waking up to learn historical facts out of books but rather an emotional, gut-level and deep connection that drives them into action. It demonstrates that patriotism may nowadays take different forms, not necessarily in the form of a conventional military conflict. It is about the struggle of justice and change in a new era.

Mixed Identity and Today's World (Hybrid Identity and Modernity):

As opposed to *Lagaan*, which largely reflects upon the past village traditions and a simpler, more united era, *Rang De Basanti* is highly specific in its attention to the complex life in the large cities of India. In this case, youths have difficulties trying to understand themselves. The Western culture and a consumer society where everybody is concentrated on purchasing something pulls them in opposite directions. Such a combination of international and local Indian culture forms a complicated hybrid identity or a fusion of cultures (Nayar, 2007).

Nevertheless, the ultimate awakening of the students implies that the discovery of your identity in the countries that used to be colonies is not something definite, something that cannot be altered, like an image, which never changes (Raghavan, 2011). Rather, it is a process, usually a painful one, of reconciling the voices of the past and the exigencies of the present. The film makes a strong point that an identity is not discovered through total rejection of your heritage or through total surrender to external influences. Rather, it is discovered through developing a balanced, even though difficult, blend of the two. It is about discovering your individual way in the world where a lot of cultures come together.

Movie Style and Stirring Emotions (Cinematic Style and Mobilizing Emotion):

The cinematic style of the film has been characterized by its vibrant use of jump cuts. These are unexpected edits which make the story urgent and contemporary. Symbolic color palettes have also been employed very well in the movie, particularly the heavy use of saffron. This color is closely linked to patriotism and sacrifice in India, and this fact visually reinforces the main ideas of the movie.

A genius of a "dual narrative format" is that the movie presents two stories simultaneously, one of the past and one of the presents, and it mixes them harmoniously. This enables the present to be informed and even inspired by the past. Besides, the intelligent application of music, especially patriotic songs that are provided with modern rock fusion sound, is instrumental in evoking powerful feelings and making the audience feel and act. The music turns into an effective call to action, which spans across generations and brings a new sense of common cause to viewers.

Swadesh: Coming Home to Help

The other well-known movie of Ashutosh Gowariker, *Swades* (2004) presents another type of story. It is more considerate and just as powerful. It traces the life of Mohan Bhargava who is a highly successful scientist employed in NASA in America. He makes the decision to go back to India not to serve himself but with a strong will of making a real change in a rural Indian village. His trip to home turns out to be a strong metaphor of an Indian in a foreign land who is rediscovering himself and gaining a new meaning in life through serving his motherland.

Indians Abroad and Finding Roots (Diaspora and Cultural Reconnection):

Swades gets us pondering over a huge problem known as brain drain- when well-educated and skilled individuals move out of their home countries to work elsewhere in other countries, which are usually wealthier. Another critical thing that the film examines is the moral duty of educated Indians who reside abroad (Uberoi, 2006). The process of transformation that Mohan undergoes can be likened to a profound sense of post-colonial longing, the strong feeling that comes after being dominated by others, to contribute towards the construction and support of the nation (Banerjee, 2012). This usually translates to utilization of the knowledge, skills and resources acquired in places that used to be the focal point of colonial authority. His homecoming is not merely the homecoming to a physical location; it is a homecoming to a cultural and emotional identity that perhaps he has lost touch with due to his globalized existence. This theme is closely related to the general post-colonial urge that nations should be self-sufficient and that nations should utilize their own talented individuals to build their country.

New Technology and Villages (Technological Modernity and Rural India):

The film is an ingenious way of demonstrating the contrast between the scientific modernity of which Mohan is a symbol (with his high-tech NASA background) and what can appear to be the moribund traditionalism of the village. His tireless attempts to establish a functional hydroelectric system, a method of producing electricity using water in the village, turns out to be a strong metaphor of enlightenment and empowerment. This act is not only about introducing new technology, but a basic move towards self-sustainability and dignity of the villagers. It demonstrates how the contemporary knowledge, applied with compassion and genuine intention to serve, can uplift the communities and fill the gap between old traditions and new progress. It opens the path of a more sustainable and independent future of the village.

Movie Language (Film Language and Narrative Pace):

In contrast to the emotions and the pace of *Rang De Basanti* that are often intense, *Swades* is a much slower and reflective film. This intentional rhythm of the storytelling gives the viewers an opportunity to immerse themselves into the inner journey of Mohan, to observe the nuances in his realization and his sense of belonging that he starts to feel. The way the camera tends to set up shots, with Mohan standing isolated against beautiful and expansive backgrounds, is a subtle indication of his sense of isolation in the beginning, and the gradual way in which he becomes a part of the community and feels at home in it. The music of the film, and the song in particular, the extremely emotional and well-known song "Yeh Jo Des Hai Tera" ("This is Your Country") serves as a potent support to the patriotic essence of the film. It is not a boisterous, blatant anthem, but a touching song of love to the land, which adds to the core of the movie about responsibility and the attachment to the roots.

Conclusion: Movies show India growing Up

The three powerful films *Lagaan*, *Rang de Basanti* and *Swades* have contributed towards the way we think about being an Indian after being governed by others. Although each of these films, set in different time, with different characters and even telling different story, contributes to telling a bigger story about the journey of India, which is characterized by its troubled past under colonial rule and a continuous hope of finding a transformative change.

These movies do not provide an easy solution to the problem of identity. Rather re-establish the meaning of what it actually means to be Indian in complicated time after freedom. The concept of identity is not something carved in stone. Rather it is something that evolves- informed by history, an uncompromising spirit of defiance and profound sense of responsibility to look after others. In this form of expressing identity, it recognizes who you are, influenced by the past and the world we live in today.

When we compare and look at these cinematic movies we realize that cinema is like a big mirror. It is a mirror of the society and its new perception of itself and what it desires (Prasad, 1998). Be it the uplifting communal victory of the villagers in Lagaan that is the best demonstration of how unity can fight against the unjust rule; or the activism awakening of the youth in Rang de Basanti that demonstrates how quickly can inspire change today; or the life changing homecoming in Swades that shows how deep is the love and the responsibility towards the country, each film makes a tremendous impact to discuss the post-colonial identity, the sense of belonging, and the process of nation-building that is not an easy one. These films do not only entertain us but they also make us think, they inspire us and they make us take action and they are an essential part of the knowledge of the present India.

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