

SOUNDING THE NATION: MUSIC, RITUAL, AND NATIONAL IMAGINARIES IN HINDI WAR FILMS

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Abstract

The role of cinema, music and nationalism is increasingly receiving scholarly attention within film and cultural studies, but the sonic aspect of nation-building in Hindi war films has not yet been sufficiently studied. Through a secondary qualitative research design, this study examines how the soundtracks and rituals of selected Hindi war films create national imaginaries. Using Benedict Anderson's Imagining Community Theory and Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation as well as Rituals Theory, the paper focuses upon six major Hindi war films made between the years 1997 to 2023 *Border* (1997), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Lakshya* (2004), *Raazi* (2018), *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Shershaah* (2021). By way of thematic content analysis of available scholarly literature, filmic narratives, song sequences, military rituals and symbolic performances, the study unpacks the role of patriotic songs, background scores, ceremonial practices, martyrdom rituals and collective remembrance in generating emotional identification with the nation. Research shows that music serves not just as an adornment but rather a political and cultural tool. Music strengthens collective memory, legitimizes military sacrifice, and driver film from a narrative into a ritual of national belonging. The research additionally states that modern Hindi war cinema is converging a traditional idea of patriotism with the technologically advanced sound-plotting for creating a new sonic nationalism for contemporary politics. The study focusses on the role of sound in producing the modern Indian nation and contributes to the scholarship on film music, nationalism, cultural memory and media representation.

Keywords: Hindi War Cinema; Nationalism; Film Music; Ritual Studies; National Imaginaries.

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1. Introduction

Cinema has played a central role in the formation of collective identities of modern nation-states. When it comes to filmmaking, music is able to do things that no other filmmaking component can do – create emotional attachment, cultural memory, and ideological identification. In India, film music does not simply amuse; it constitutes a site for negotiating political values, cultural traditions, and national identities because cinema is one of the most powerful means of mass communication. For the construction of patriotic and other war films, the Hindi cinema industry makes extensive use of songs, orchestral music, military songs, ceremonial performances, and ritualistic representations.

There has been much discussion of nationalism and cinema across cultural studies, political communication and media scholarship. The well-known scholar Anderson has suggested that communities such as nations are 'imagined' (Anderson, 2006). What does he mean by this? Within this framework, cinema is a powerful cultural institution which creates a common emotional

experience for audiences millions of miles away. Hindi war films serve as exemplars of this process. They invite audiences to imagine military conflicts as collective national memories, thereby strengthening a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation.

In contrast with documentary representations of war, commercial Hindi war films use music to increase emotional impact. Often accompanied by scenes of battlefield sacrifice and family separation, soldiers' patriotic songs are a powerful medium for celebration. Through this musical performance, you're meant to interpret the military action of the film as the heroic act of a patriotic Indian citizen. Thus music passes from entertainment to an affective technology of nationalism.

The importance of sound in film narratives has increasingly drawn the attention of scholars. Many researchers assert that, on the whole, soundtracks can strongly influence audience perception by shaping their emotional responses to the film and by reinforcing the ideological meanings of its visual images. Music is a powerful communicator. It communicates the culture and values of the people through the melody, rhythm, instrumentation and lyrics. Also, it creates a collective emotional experience for the people. This could not have been achieved by the visual images alone. In war films, patriotic music often combines military marches, folk traditions, devotional elements, and orchestral music to music embody national integration and sacrifice.

All throughout history Hindi films have been able to suggest the Political landscape of India After independence movie was based on patriotism, anti-colonial, and nation-building theme. In the late twentieth century, especially after the Kargil War of 1999, war films increasingly presented defence establishments as symbols of national unity. Emotional songs dedicated to the collective sacrifice were seen in offers like *Border* (1997), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Lakshya* (2004). More recent films such as *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Shershaah* (2021) are building on this by embedding advanced sound design in contemporary political narratives, bringing forth renewed forms of cultural nationalism.

In these movies music is rarely free of ritual. Flag-hoisting, oath-taking, battlefield prayers, remembering events and songs, military funeral, etc. taking shape of the cinematic textuality of the nation. Ritual theory posits that repeating symbolic performances can create meaning systems and strengthen identities, and enhance legitimacy. In war films, the inclusion of rituals allows audiences to participate as though they were part of national ceremonies, although they are far removed from the military. Cinematic rituals thus become extensions of the civic rituals performed in everyday national life.

Researchers have noted that patriotic songs often serve to anchor our cultural memory. The song of patriotic films continues to circulate through broadcasts on television, during public celebrations such as Republic Day, in schools, and through social media platforms. Illustrating how the songs like *Border's* "Sandese Aate Hain" and *Kesari's* "Teri Mitti" become part of India's larger commemorative culture, the anthem takes on all-India, national significance beyond the film's story.

The scholarship on Indian cinema and nationalism is voluminous. But, comparatively lesser scholarship exists on the music, ritual, and national imagination of Hindi war films. Prior research often privilege the visual symbols political narratives, military representation or ideological discourse while overlooking the sonic dimensions through which there is an experience of emotion. Music is often brought up as a secondary cinematic element rather than as a primary creator of collective identities.

This gap is crucial because nationalism is not just expressed in spoken or visual languages. Through sound, it is also heard, remembered, and emotionally felt. The sounds of patriotic songs, military marches, devotional songs, orchestral performances and silence combined create what we

may call the “soundscape of the nation.” These sound practices shape the way audiences read military sacrifice, interpret historical battles and imagine their relationship with the nation-state, among other things.

Moreover, the current political atmosphere in India indicates a revival of public interest in military nationalism, online nationalism and commemorative media. The audiences of patriotic film music are expanding, thanks to a whole plethora of sources. Streaming platforms, social media circulation, and digital music services are only some examples. As a result, media studies and political communication, cultural sociology, and nationalism scholars are increasingly aware of how music shapes national imaginaries.

The research aims at filling these scholarly gaps by analysing the contribution of music and ritual in the construction of national imaginaries in selected Hindi war films. The analysis emphasizes how cinema’s sound and symbolic performance produces affective experience, rather than merely narrative or visual representation. The study claims that the technology of patriotic music produces and sustains three categories: collective memory, emotional solidarity and national identity.

By employing a secondary qualitative research methodology, the article assesses six important Hindi war films that have appeared in the cinema between the years 1997 and 2023. The analysis employs peer-reviewed literature, a theoretical framework on nationalism and ritual, published film criticism, and textual analysis of songs and ceremonial sequences. By using this cross disciplinary approach, the study adds towards the emerging scholarship on sonic nationalism and seeks to show that music is central, and not peripheral, to the cinema the construction of the Indian nation.

Table 1. Corpus of Hindi War Films Selected for Secondary Analysis

Film	Year	Conflict Depicted	Major Patriotic Musical Element	National Rituals Represented
<i>Border</i>	1997	Indo-Pak War (1971)	"Sandese Aate Hain"	Farewell ceremonies, military sacrifice
<i>LOC Kargil</i>	2003	Kargil War	Military orchestral score	Funeral rites, regimental traditions
<i>Lakshya</i>	2004	Kargil War	Motivational background music	Officer commissioning, military discipline
<i>Raazi</i>	2018	Indo-Pak War (1971)	Emotional patriotic motifs	Family duty, national oath
<i>Uri: The Surgical Strike</i>	2019	Surgical Strike (2016)	Military percussion and orchestral score	Salute ceremonies, commemoration
<i>Shershaah</i>	2021	Kargil War	Patriotic orchestral themes	State funeral, martyr remembrance

2. Literature Review

For decades, the connection between cinema and nationalism has been studied intensely, especially in the fields of cultural studies, media studies, political communication, and film studies. Not only is cinema a provider of entertainment but it is also a cultural industry which helps to form public consciousness and national. It is especially the case with war films. They play an important role in staging national history, military glory and national pride through sound and image. Recent scholarship has increasingly noted that whilst earlier scholarship focused on visual symbolism, ideological representation, and history, music, sound, and ritual are just as important to the making

of national attachment. Hindi war cinema makes hidden histories of participation in war through patriotic songs, orchestral music, military parades and memorial ceremonies where filmmakers elicit a shared commitment to our nation. Therefore, the cinema, music and ritual connect to understanding how national identities in contemporary India are constantly imagined, represented and reproduced (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1997 ; Bhattacharya, 2025).

2.1 Cinema and the Construction of National Imaginaries

Cinema is one of the most influential cultural institutions through which countries tell their stories, shape collective memories and create political identities. Instead of merely mirroring social realities, cinema actively contributes to the meaning-making process of the nation through the projection of shared stories, significant historical events, iconic heroes and cultural values. The primary conceptual basis for understanding this relationship is Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Community*. According to Anderson, although we may not know the majority of our fellow citizens, each of us are constituents of a particular nation, something which is socially constructed or a community imagines. The cinema plays a part in this process by allowing audiences to go through the same story, the same myth, and the same feelings in the same way at the same time.

Hindi cinema plays an especially central role in this process due to the immense cultural penetration and impact it has in varied linguistic, regional and social segments of India. The way popular films reduce actual wars and military event to a captivating story goes on to become part of memory. Hindi war films are significant because they dramatize battles in such a way that it shows that the personal is less important than the national. The soldiers are the representatives of a nation and sacrifice is termed as a moral duty with patriotism, honour and citizenship. We should encourage audiences to view military service not only as a job but as a form of national service. Recent scholarship suggests that representations of nationalism in Hindi cinema have gone through a great deal of change in the last twenty years. Initially, it was territory defence, a soldier's military valour, and sacrifice that were the predominant themes of films. However, with time, our films are increasingly showcasing intelligence operations, transnational security, diaspora identity, humanitarian intervention and tech nationalism (Bhattacharya 2025; Karmakar and Catterall 2025). These stories change over time as a result of the political, socio-cultural, and other transformations taking place in India today, and to the world and digital media. Scholars argue that Hindi cinema does not simply repeat the nationalist discourse in existence only. It shapes the political imagination by selecting which historical events will be remembered, which interpretations will be privileged and strengthens or creates a primary attachment to national symbols and institutions. In this regard, it can be seen that cinema is at once entertainment, history, an educator of culture and an ideological communicator. Thus cinema is an important instrument to construct a national imaginary.

2.2 Music as an Instrument of National Identity

Music is unique in the field of nationalism because it conveys feelings that often exceed the limits of language, region, and culture. In contrast to the spoken word, which primarily conveys meaning through language, music generates affective experiences that allow audiences to internalize political meaning and form emotional attachments to the nation. Songs characterized by patriotic spirit, orchestral music, military marches, and instrumental motifs provide emotional sense to the abstraction of patriotism, sacrifice and citizenship. Revill (2000) says that sound has special spatial and political qualities that shape how collective identities are organized by turning ideas ideology into shared sensory experience. In addition to serving as art, music is very much involved in the building of national space, cultural memory, and public identity as it can obtain emotional impact.

In the context of cinema studies, it is accepted that soundtracks influence how viewers interpret the story. Music plays a key role in directing the audiences' emotional responses, creating suspense, reinforcing ideological differences as well as providing continuity. Music can have political meanings even when there are no lyrics. By using tempo, orchestration, rhythm, and harmonic progression, an instrumental composition can shape the audience's perception of conflict, sacrifice, and victory. As Gorbman, (1987) and Kassabian et al. (2022) demonstrate, film music plays a salient role in imagery, contributing in a major way to the representation of nationalism, military identity, and historical memory.

Hindi war films employ these musical strategies continuously throughout their films. Patriotic songs are sung during military preparation, soldiers' parting with their families, sacrifice on the battlefield, and celebration of victory, evoking emotions like courage, sorrow, pride, hope, and collective memory. Repetition adds to the symbolic strength of these artworks. Songs like Sandese Aate Hain of Border keep on playing on TV, celebrations of Independence day, schools, army functions, social media, etc. decades after its release. Through their ongoing public performance, these acts of fraternity prolong cinematic nationalism beyond the walls of the cinema theatre embedding the sound of the nation within our cultural memory and forging emotional identification with the nation, and with successive generations in India.

2.3 Ritual, Performance, and National Belonging

Cinema and Nationalism can also be examined through the lens of Ritual because Ritual transforms everyday behaviours into symbolic acts that enhance a group's identity and cultural codes. Rituals constitute structured performances through which social groups reaffirm their beliefs, moral values, and social suffering. In Hindi war movies, army oath-taking, flag-hoisting, regimental custom, battlefield prayer, ceremonial salute, military funeral, martyr commemoration, remembrance service – all work as devices that communicate the meanings of discipline, loyalty, sacrifice and national unity. The ceremonial displays represent key changes in the lives of soldiers as well as a general message of patriotism and citizenship.

Recent researchers observed that recent stocks of overtly nationalist performance, practice and ordinary acceptance are being made through symbolic, emotional participation. Public rituals allow individuals to partake morally in the collective acts of commemorations and symbolic gestures of remembering. Films Hindi ke war also invite karte hain darsak ko military ritual ka part bawan banane k liye cinematic representation ka infkadi. Darsak yahaan aik tarha ka national community ka member ban jata hai. The military funeral sequences are particularly fine examples of this. The image of a soldier's coffin wrapped in a national flag, sound of the bugle, the military salute, and orchestral music make it a great sacrifice by the nation rather than a personal loss. Through such rituals, the audiences are encouraged to lament not just the characters but the imagined nation, thus enhancing the patriotic consciousness through such affecting ceremonial acts.

2.4 Hindi War Films and Sonic Nationalism

In the past few years, there has been enormous expansion of scholarship on Hindi war cinema, which reflects the growing interest in cinema, nationalism, and cultural politics. Earlier research focused mostly on cultural nationalism, historical representation, military masculinity and ideological discourse. Recent studies are more and more recognizing the importance of sound, music and auditory design in constructing the emotional experience of nationalism (Bhattacharya, 2025; Karmakar & Catterall, 2025). Contemporary Hindi war films utilize a soundscape of orchestral music, battle sounds, radio communication, electronic sound design and calculated

silences to create a filmic experience that creates a strong sense of identification between the soldiers and the nation.

Movies like Uri: The Surgical Strike and Raazi show us how today's filmmakers use sound to order history and emotions. Instead of purporting to objectively document military history, these films distill national events through carefully crafted combinations of music, dialogue, silence, and other symbols. Research that compares films from South Asian nations made during war and conflict epochs reveal that the repeat usage of patriotic motifs such as the national flag, military uniforms, ceremonial activities and emotionally-driven sounds helps reinforce Anderson's 'imagined community'. Through the films, an imagined community lives and their member invests in these audiovisuals which enhances their shared national identity. Despite the above, much existing literature continues to favour the visual and the narrative while treating music as a side element of cinema. It does not view music as an independent cultural system that can create a national identity. The main reason for this study is, this paper investigates how music, ritual and sound combine to produce national imaginaries in Hindi war cinema.

Table 2. Major Themes Identified in Existing Literature

Author(s)	Primary Focus	Key Findings	Research Limitation
Anderson (2006)	Imagined communities	Nations are socially constructed through shared narratives	Limited discussion of cinema and sound
Revill (2000)	Politics of sound	Music shapes national and political space	Does not examine Indian cinema
Bhattacharya (2025)	Contemporary Hindi nationalism	Shift from territorial to transnational nationalism	Limited focus on film music
Karmakar & Catterall (2025)	Hindi cinema and nationalism	Cinema shapes evolving national identity	Sonic dimensions remain underdeveloped
Chadha (2021)	South Asian war films	War films construct imagined communities	Focus on visual representation
Kumar (2024)	Ritualized nationalism	Rituals create nationalist subjectivities	Digital context rather than cinema

2.5 Research Gap

The current study is justified because of existing gaps in the literature. Although nationalism is one of the most studied themes of Hindi cinema, relatively few studies on music as an independent means of constructing national identity, are available. Most studies of Hindi cinema focus on visual symbolism, narrative structure, political discourse or historical representation. Music is considered as a supplemental element. Likewise, research on film music has mainly investigated its aesthetic, emotional and narrative effects, having comparatively less attention to how patriotic songs, orchestral scores, and soundscapes create collective memory and national consciousness in war films. The lack of attention to sound is also visible in film music studies, which are hardly integrated with ritual theory. Military ceremonies, funerals, flag-hoisting rituals, and commemorative performances are generally analysed visually or performatively without due attention to the sound enhancing their semantics and emotive symbolism. In addition, while some recent studies mention changing representations of nationalism in post-2014 Hindi cinema, not much research has been conducted on the changes in musical practices, digital sound technologies and sonic aesthetics due to these ideological shifts. In the end, the existing scholarship exists within

the disciplines of film studies, musicology, nationalism studies, political communication and ritual theory, indicating the need for an interdisciplinary lens that looks at how music, ritual and cinematic sound jointly produce national imaginaries. The present study aims to address these gaps by using theories of nationalism, representation, ritual and film music to analyse the acoustic nationalism present in contemporary Hindi war cinema.

Table 3. Identified Research Gaps

Existing Research	Gap Identified	Contribution of Present Study
Focus on visual nationalism	Limited analysis of sound	Examines patriotic music as national discourse
Film music studies	Weak engagement with nationalism	Integrates musicology with nationalism theory
Ritual studies	Minimal application to Hindi war cinema	Analyses cinematic rituals and sonic performance together
Hindi war film scholarship	Limited interdisciplinary approach	Combines film studies, cultural studies, ritual theory, and media studies
National identity research	Lack of emphasis on affect and sound	Develops the concept of sonic nationalism in Hindi war films

This review shows that while there is a decent amount of work on nationalism in Hindi cinema, there is a lack of theorization on music, ritual and the nation. The current research fills this gap by examining how Hindi war films construct a sonic imagination of the Indian nation through a combination of patriotic songs, background scores, ceremonial performances, and ritual practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research study incorporates Benedict Anderson's Theory of Imagined Communities, Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, Victor Turner's Theory of Ritual Process and Film Music Theory on Hindi war films to study how music and ritual construct national imaginaries. As nationalism is simultaneously a political ideology, cultural practice, emotional experience, and mediated representation, no one theoretical perspective can adequately explain its cinematic construction. The synthesis of complementary theories enables a holistic analysis of how music, ritual, symbol and audiovisual co-construct patriotic consciousness and collective memory.

3.1 Benedict Anderson's Theory of Imagined Communities

The theoretical foundation for the research is Benedict Anderson's (2006) idea of Imagined Community. According to Anderson, members of a nation are connected by common ties and despite not having met each other, they picture themselves belonging to this nation. The process that the War Films help contribute to is that it makes a military conflict more interesting. Patriotic songs, like Sandese Aate Hain and Ae Watan, do the same though even beyond the cinema towards national celebrations, schools, television, and online platforms, audiences living this imagined community could relate with the sentiments these songs convey.

3.2 Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation

Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation states that media texts do not reflect reality but construct meaning. Symbolism involves the use of certain images and signs that suggest or evoke ideas. In Hindi cinema, the use of the national flag, army uniform, patriotic songs, funeral rites, orchestral music in the sound-scape, etc are war film conventions which have come to communicate or evoke the ideas of patriotism, sacrifice and courage, and collective memory. The combination of melody,

rhythm, tempo, and silence in music serves a similar function to any representational system in that it reinforces the emotional and ideological inflection of sounds, which assists in shaping the audience's perception of being a soldier and belonging to a nation.

3.3 Victor Turner's Theory of Ritual

Victor Turner's Theory of Ritual was that rituals are symbolic performances which through repetition strengthens our collective identity. Hindi war films depict military oath-taking, flag-hoisting ceremony, prayer at battlefield, military funeral, and martyr tribute as national ritual of loyalty and discipline. The inclusion of patriotic songs, bugle calls and orchestral music powerfully heightens the impact of these ceremonies, enabling audiences to emotionally participate in military sacrifice and enhancing national belonging.

3.4 Film Music Theory

Sound plays a crucial role in determining how the audience interprets and engages with imagery. In Hindi War Films, the music acts as a story form through melodies in creating an atmosphere of patriotism adding to emotional responses, thereby military discipline, identification of heroes and enemies but also through positive dialogues historical memory is motivated. Through orchestral compositions, patriotic songs, and ambient soundscapes, music plays a crucial role in constructing nationalist narratives beyond the visual realm of cinema.

3.5 Conceptual Integration

Integrating these four theoretical perspectives will help understand sonic nationalism in Hindi war cinema very well. Anderson notes how audiences conceive of national communities, Hall demonstrates how films convey meaning through representations, Turner illustrates how rituals create collective identities, and film music theory shows how sound creates attachments. As a result, these theories bring together an interdisciplinary understanding of the interaction of music, ritual, representation and collective memory in the making of contemporary Hindi war films' national imaginings.

4. Research Objectives

The research has the following objectives:

1. To study how music contributes to the formation of national identity in certain Hindi war films.
2. To analyse how ritual performances work in creating war related patriotism in cinema.
3. To study the connection between patriotic songs, military events and collective memory.
4. To discover in what way sound helps in the formation of imagined national communities.
5. To cultivate a varied perception of sonic nationalism in modern-day Hindi cinema.

5. Research Questions

The research questions in consideration are:

- 1: How do Hindi war films use music to construct national imaginaries?
- 2: What kind of rituals are recurrently represented in selected Hindi war films?
3. How do the music and the ritual together influence audience perceptions of patriotism?
- 4: What is the evolution of sonic nationalism in the years 1997 to 2023?

6. Methodology

The integrated theories of Anderson, Hall, Turner, and film music studies constitute the analytical framework to carry out dissecting sound, ritual and nationalism in an interdisciplinary way. The research utilizes secondary data sources, which include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, film reviews, soundtrack analyses, government publications, and the films chosen. This

interpretive thematic analysis was chosen as it allows for the identification and interpretation of recurring themes relating to patriotic music, military rituals, commemorative practices, soundscapes, and national symbolism.

Between 1997 and 2021, a total of six significant Hindi war films were released which are *Border* (1997), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Lakshya* (2004), *Raazi* (2018), *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Shershaah* (2021). The selection of these films was a deliberate undertaking as they portray different wars and have been commercially and critically successful. Further, all these movies have a large amount of patriotic music and military rituals in it. Besides, they have also contributed to a lot of public discourse on nationalism. To guarantee the credibility and relevance of the secondary data, only scholarly publications in English published between 1990 and 2025 by recognized academic publishers or peer-reviewed journals were included.

The analysis of the study proceeded in a systematic way, involving identifying relevant literature, repeated viewings of the selected films, coding of musical and ritual sequences, categorising the coded sequences into themes, and interpreting these themes through the proposed theoretical framework. Coding emphasized the recurring themes of patriotic music, militaristic rituals, national symbols, collective memory, soundscapes, and sonic identity. The themes were then synthesized to assess how music and ritual jointly construct patriotic narratives and national belonging in Hindi war cinema.

Table 4. Coding Framework

Code	Description
PM	Patriotic Music
MR	Military Ritual
FS	Funeral Sequence
FM	Family Memory
NS	National Symbol
CM	Collective Memory
SS	Soundscape
SI	Sonic Identity

Table 5. Analytical Matrix

Theme	Musical Element	Ritual Element	National Meaning
Sacrifice	Slow orchestral score	Military funeral	Martyrdom
Patriotism	Patriotic song	Flag ceremony	National unity
Memory	Soft melody	Remembrance service	Collective identity
Victory	Military band	Celebration	National pride
Duty	March rhythm	Military oath	Citizenship

7. Findings and Analysis

The study showcases that the six Hindi war films (*Border*, *LOC Kargil*, *Lakshya*, *Raazi*, *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, and *Shershaah*) function as a thematic analysis of music and ritual. Music and orchestral soundscapes from military and ceremonial performances evoke feelings of patriotism, sacrifice and shared memory. Five major themes emerged from this analysis: music as the sonic construction of the nation; patriotic songs as the repository of collective memory; ritual performances and military nationalism; soundscape and emotional heroism; and the evolution of sonic nationalism in contemporary Hindi cinema.

7.1 Music as the Sonic Construction of the Nation

The results of the analysis suggest that music serves as the sonic architecture of nationalism, connecting audiences to the nation. Military subjects in patriotic songs and orchestral works are represented with sacrifice, duty and national belonging. The song *Sandese Aate Hain* in *Border* (1997) connects the separation of soldiers from their families to their commitment to patriotism, encouraging spectators to relate the personal sacrifice with a national one. Similarly, *Lakshya* (2004) uses orchestral progression to fit in with the protagonist's character arc from a misguided youth to a disciplined soldier who is the epitome of responsible citizenship. Today's films like *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) to push further this idea of sound, by creating a better soundscape. The use of orchestral music, military communication, sounds of the battlefield, and strategic silence helps create that authenticity. The findings support Anderson's imagined community, a concept by which emotional identification with the nation can be enhanced by music.

Table 6. Musical Construction of National Identity in Selected Hindi War Films

Film	Dominant Musical Style	National Meaning
<i>Border</i>	Patriotic songs	Sacrifice and belonging
<i>LOC Kargil</i>	Military orchestration	Institutional patriotism
<i>Lakshya</i>	Motivational orchestration	Responsible citizenship
<i>Raazi</i>	Soft patriotic motifs	Moral nationalism
<i>Uri</i>	Electronic soundscape	Technological nationalism
<i>Shershaah</i>	Emotional orchestration	National gratitude

7.2 Patriotic Songs as Repositories of Collective Memory

Another critical finding is that patriotic songs serve as a reservoir of collective memory, preserving and transmitting narratives of military sacrifice across generations. The songs in the chosen films offer their services away from the cinema also for national celebrations, educational programmes, and social media, reinforcing remembrance. The song “*Sandese Aate Hain*” from the film *Border* has become the hallmark of the sentiments of soldiers' families and continues to be performed during national celebrations. An analysis of these songs reveals that they repeatedly trigger memories of sacrifice, martyrdom and national unity, which helps the listeners identify with major events like the 1971 Indo-Pak War and the 1999 Kargil War. In earlier times, films used to rely on a full-length patriotic song entirely. In recent years, the tendency has been to create a musical theme and background score. Nonetheless, both options can strengthen collective memory. It can also strengthen patriotic consciousness through sound that is infused with emotion.

Table 7. Functions of Patriotic Songs in Constructing Collective Memory

Function	Representative Example	National Contribution
Remembering sacrifice	<i>Sandese Aate Hain (Border)</i>	Reinforces military service
Honouring martyrs	<i>Shershaah</i> funeral scenes	Glorifies sacrifice
Celebrating unity	<i>LOC Kargil</i> flag ceremony	Strengthens national identity
Inspiring courage	<i>Lakshya</i> training sequence	Promotes disciplined citizenship
Reinforcing resilience	<i>Uri</i> mission sequences	Projects national strength

To sum up, it is concluded that music is a primary cultural mechanism through which Hindi war films generate emotional nationalism. The use of national songs, orchestral scores, and changing

sounds enhances the movie viewing experience. It is also a way to maintain the collective memory of the audience. In addition, the music of the films helps to create an imagined nation through sound.

7.3 Ritual Performances and Military Nationalism

The study shows how the ritual makes military service a national identity in Hindi war films. It is a central mechanism in the films. Military oath-taking and other recurring rituals, such as flag-hoisting ceremonies, battlefield prayers, salutes and military funerals, mark discipline, sacrifice, and togetherness. According to Turner's Theory of Ritual, such actions help to turn the soldier into a member of the nation. On the other hand, the music makes it more emotional. The patriotic compositions, their bugle calls and background scores, rise over the milieu of military ceremonials, and invite the audience to equate military sacrifice with patriotism and togetherness. The films show these ceremonies repeatedly in order to reinforce collective memory and normalize military nationalism in popular culture.

Table 8. Ritual Patterns in Selected Hindi War Films

Ritual Category	Border	LOC Kargil	Lakshya	Raazi	Uri	Shershaah	National Function
Military Oath	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	Institutional commitment
Flag Ceremony	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	National sovereignty
Funeral Honour	✓	✓	–	–	✓	✓	Martyr remembrance
Battlefield Prayer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Collective solidarity
Saluting Ceremony	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Military discipline
Victory Celebration	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	National pride

7.4 Soundscape, Silence, and the Emotional Construction of Heroism

According to the findings of the study, the soundscape is important beyond patriotic songs to shape hero nationalism. With the use of ambient sounds, military communications, environmental sounds and silence, Contemporary Hindi war films creates immersive and emotional effects. The audience engagement is further heightened by the use of silence before the fight scenes. Further, the restrained use of orchestral music after death scenes makes the film realistic and engaging. Sounds from the environment footsteps, radio chatter, helicopters and explosions heighten perceptions of military professionalism and authenticity. All these sound elements redefine the mighty action on the battlefield into meaningful expressions of heroism, valor, and national duty.

Table 9. Functions of Soundscape in Hindi War Films

Sonic Element	Narrative Purpose	National Meaning
Silence	Emotional anticipation	Sacrifice
Military Bugle	Ceremonial honour	Respect
Radio Communication	Tactical realism	Professionalism
Battlefield Sound	Authenticity	National defence

Orchestral Crescendo	Heroic climax	Victory
Patriotic Song	Collective remembrance	National identity

7.5 Evolution of Sonic Nationalism in Hindi War Films (1997–2023)

The examination of the three phases shows varied use of music and sound to represent nationalism. Earlier films of the genre, such as *Border*, *LOC Kargil* and *Lakshya* contained primarily lyrical patriotic and orchestral music to convey sacrifice and national pride. In comparison, the recent films, targeted to youth and popular in theatres, are ramping the soundscape a notch higher, with diegetic effects (both ambient battlefield sounds, and in the case of *Uri*, electronic orchestration but it appears more authentic) and silence in *Raazi* and *Shershaah*. Despite the enduring ideological themes of patriotism and military honour, contemporary cinema moves away from a musical nationalism to a more broadly conceived sonic nationalism, whereby various layers of sounds amplify emotional attachment to the nation as a whole. Shifts have been made in Indian cinema through key filmmakers leveraging advances in digital filmmaking and immersive storytelling.

Table 10. Evolution of Sonic Nationalism in Hindi War Films

Dimension	1997–2004	2018–2023
Dominant Music	Patriotic songs	Hybrid soundscape
Heroism	Collective patriotism	Professional military realism
Rituals	Public ceremonies	Personal commemorative rituals
Sound Design	Orchestral scores	Digital immersive sound
Emotional Strategy	Direct patriotic expression	Emotional immersion
Audience Experience	National celebration	Participatory nationalism

7.6. Synthesis of Findings

The comparative analysis indicates that while the ideological underpinnings of Hindi War Cinema have remained remarkably stable, the sound strategies that are deployed to express nationalism have undergone substantial shift. Previously, films depended on one or two ceremonial orchestral pieces and lyrical patriotic songs. Now, genre films have multilayered soundscapes that combine music with silence, ambient sounds, and background sounds through digital sound technology. The patriotic expression has not diminished but rather multiplied the ways the audiences experience national belonging.

The analysis showcase that in present day Hindi war films, unlike earlier ones, nationalism is increasingly performed through sound rather than described through song. Despite the continued importance of patriotic music, this ‘music of the battle’ operates in conjunction with immersively captivating sound environments intended to engage the viewer’s emotional and sensory experience of military conflict. Through this process, Hindi war films keep on creating what he is termed as imagined communities of Anderson, however, this study expands that to imagined sonic communities. Through the repeated experience of patriotic songs, ritual performances, orchestral compositions, military soundscapes, and silence, audiences participate in a shared collective auditory imagination of the Indian nation.

8. Discussion

The study indicates that music and ritual in Hindi War Films do more than operate as filmic. In other words, they build a national imaginary through the dialectic of foreignness and belonging as an essential aspect. According to Benedict Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’, the

selected films show that using patriotic songs, orchestral scores, military bugle calls and ceremonial soundscapes to create a common emotional experience allows the audience to ‘imagine a community’. Movies like *Border*, *Lakshya*, *Uri: The Surgical Strike* and *Shershaah* do not only represent military conflicts in history. Rather, they convert narratives of individual courage and sacrifice into collective national narratives. The all-use of patriotic music has helped in strengthening ties with it. Patria has created collective memories by using it repeatedly at army departures, battle victories, and martyrs’ rituals. It extends beyond the cinema to public ceremonies, social media.

According to Stuart Hall’s Theory of Representation, music is an important symbolic system through which meanings of patriotism, sacrifice and citizenship are constructed, the study shows. Patriotic songs and background music plus visual symbols like the flag, the uniform, ceremonial practices contribute to the shaping of audience interpreters about military service. Additionally, Victor Turner’s Theory of Ritual helps understand how the cinema shows events like oath-taking ceremonies, military funerals, flag hoisting, and remembrance services reinforce collective solidarity. The findings reveal that music elevates the sentiments provoked by these rituals. Consequently, the institutional act of war becomes a cultural act, which incites emotional involvement in the symbolic life of the nation. Consequently, sound, ritual, and visual presence work together to convey nationalism in Hindi war films, rather than dialogue or visual presence alone.

Another important discovery shows how patriotic expression has changed from lyrical songs in earlier war films to soundscapes in more recent productions. Movies from the late 1990s and early 2000s employed loud patriotic songs to signal nationalism. More recent films make greater use of orchestral music, sounds from the battlefield, electronic sound design, and silence to create an effect of emotional realism. The move towards the use of digital technology reflects both economic necessity and audience expectations for more authentic military realism. As a result, contemporary films create what the study refers to as sonic nationalism, whereby the national identity experience takes place not just through songs, but through the overall sound environment that incorporates music, environment sound, military speech and ritual performance. These soundscapes enhance engagement and the emotional identification of audiences with the soldiers and the nation.

Ultimately, the research has implications for nationalism and film studies, musicology and cultural studies, as it underscores how sound shapes national consciousness. Prior research on Hindi war cinema has focused mostly on their visual symbolism, political commentary and historical representation. This study however demonstrates that music and ritual too play a major role in the construction of patriotic meaning. Incorporating the theories of imagined communities, representation, ritual and film music, the study proposes that Hindi war films produce imagined sonic communities through which audiences share experiences of remembrance, sacrifice and national belonging. By taking this interdisciplinary stance, it not only pushes cinematic nationalism forward in the Indian context, but also offers a useful framework for future studies of sound, media, emotion, and nation elsewhere along multicultural and geopolitical lines.

9. Conclusion

Using qualitative analysis, this research explored how music and ritual were utilized to construct a national imaginary in selected Hindi war films made between 1997 and 2023. The research reveals that music in film is not only an artistic element it is directly linked to culture and ideology aspects of patriotism and military service, as well as universally accepted sacrifices and identity of nations. The patriotic songs, orchestral music, military bugle calls, ambient soundscapes, and

performances all create emotional experiences that allow audiences to imagine the nation as a community. The study combines Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities with Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Victor Turner's theory of ritual to show how sound and ritual together reinforce collective memory and national belonging.

The comparative assessment also demonstrates one more significant change in Hindi War Cinema. In earlier movies, most of the messages of the nationalist idea and spirit were communicated through lyrical patriotic songs. However, in more recent films, it seems, we are witnessing a trend of the use of sound design, environmental sounds, and silence to achieve emotional realism through the sonic environment of the scene. Both technological improvement and more democratic forms of patriotism has seen this shift. Considering these findings, the study proposes the idea of "sonic nationalism", which refers to the contemporary national identity constructed not only through sight and words but also through specifically created sound that links historical memory and emotional participation.

The study is a useful addition to existing literature that looks at the film in an interdisciplinary way by drawing on film studies, nationalism studies, ritual theory, and musicology. This film responds to a gap in scholarship which indicates that aural dimensions should have equal concern for the visual and narrative ones. The selected corpus of the Hindi war film and the secondary literature provides a strong basis for future empirical research on audience reception, comparative studies of regional Indian cinemas of war and cross-cultural war films research. According to research, use of music and ritual has become an indispensable component of Hindi war cinema, through which contemporarily in India national identity, collective memory and patriotic consciousness is imagined, experienced and reproduced.

10. Limitations of the Study

The research is completely based on secondary data, including published literature, film texts, and literature, and does not include any primary data collected from audiences, filmmakers, music composers, or the Military. The results are interpretative rather than a reflection of audiences or empirical validation. In addition, the research selects six Hindi war films that released between 1997 and 2023 the findings of which may not be applicable for all Indian war films or regional cinema. Furthermore, the analysis focuses only on music, ritual, and national imaginaries. It discusses sounds, while other cinematic elements such as cinematography, editing, dialogues, and visual metaphors have focused only on sound. Ultimately, the findings are contextualized in the Indian socio-cultural setting, which limits their direct applicability to other national cinemas or geopolitical contexts, with distinct historical and cultural experiences of war and nationalism.

11. Future Scope of the Study

In addition, future research may extend the current study by utilizing mixed-method or quantitative approaches in order to determine audience perceptions regarding patriotic music and how it might instill a sense of national identity among the society belonging to different demographics. Studies involving regional Indian cinemas like Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, or Marathi war films could offer richer perspectives on the diversity of sonic nationalism within India. Music and ritual often play an important role in how nations imagine themselves. A comparative analysis of Indian war films with American, Chinese, South Korean, or Israeli war films may further examine this question. Moreover, we may see future research that focuses on the influence of digital streaming platforms, social media, and AI in the production, circulation, and reception of patriotic film songs. Discovery that consists of interviews or surveys with filmmakers, composers, military experts, and

audience members would also provide useful empirical support for the interpretation of this study. By engaging in such inquiries, we can further enrich interdisciplinary understanding of the correlation of sound, cinema, collective memory, and nationalism.

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