

Narrative Strategies of Political Content in the Adithya Dhar Movies ‘Uri: The Surgical Strike’ and ‘Dhurandhar 1’: A Qualitative Analysis with Electoral Context.**Aswathi K B^{1*}, Dr. Shemin B. Nair²**

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Abstract

Cinema in India serves as a potent means of political communication as well as a form of entertainment and especially during the election years the themes of nationalism, security, and identity become prevalent. The paper is qualitative research which analyzes narrative techniques used in Uri: The Surgical Strike (2019) and Dhurandhar 1 (2025) (anticipated/fictional franchise) to create and communicate political messages. The analysis applies textual, thematic and semiotic analysis to understand how the elements of cinematic representation like characterization, emotional framing, realism and symbolism are useful in the means of message ideology. Notably, the paper places these films in the framework of the wider socio-political context of Indian elections, considering the ways in which their plots are consistent with the discourse of elections and popular mood. The results indicate that Uri is more of an overt nationalist document that supports state legitimacy in the 2019 general elections whereas Dhurandhar is a more subtle and strategically crafted document that goes in line with the trends in political communication. The research adds to the knowledge about cinema as a soft power instrument that manipulates the political image and the political mind to vote.

Keywords: Cinema, Politics, Nationalism, Narration tactics, Indian film, Propaganda, Qualitative research...

INTRODUCTION

Cinema and politics in India have a very close related association. Movies are well used as a medium to spread ideologies particularly when there is a political season like elections. The release time and the topics and the way that some films are received imply that they are not simple culture products but simply part of political discourse. The Bollywood Cinema (Hindi Language) Uri: The Surgical Strike, which came out only a few months before the Indian general elections in January 2019, follows the

dramatization of the Indian Army surgical strike against terrorist camps in Pakistan. The film centers on Major Vihaan Singh Shergill, played by Vicky Kaushal, and presents a fictionalized accounts inspired by real events. ‘Uri’ also got noted for the debut directorial of Adithya Dhar. Released shortly before the 2019 Indian general election, the film gained widespread popularity and became part of public discussions around nationalism, national security, and the role of the armed forces. It resonated strongly with many audiences in India, particularly for its portrayal of military strategy, patriotism, and decisive government action following the 2016 surgical strikes.

While the film was widely appreciated for its technical execution, performances, and patriotic theme, it also sparked debate regarding its timing, political context, and representation of real events. Nonetheless, it remains one of the most commercially successful and culturally impactful Hindi films of its time. In contrast to ‘Uri’, Dhurandhar, though a fictional piece, which originated in a larger spy-thriller category, echoes the current fears of geopolitical threats, national security and intelligence. These stories are becoming increasingly applicable in the age where political communication is delicate and nuanced and sometimes it is even hidden in the popular culture.

This paper is based on the following research question:

How do films like *Uri: The Surgical Strike* and *Dhurandhar* employ narrative strategies to construct political meaning?

In what ways are these narratives connected to electoral discourse in India?

Review of the literature

Cinema and politics have been a common subject of study using the frameworks of ideology state apparatus, nationalism, and media impact. The media as conceptualized by Louis Althusser (1971) that incorporated cinema was seen as institutions that replicate dominant ideologies by embedding them in the daily culture. Hudson, Wang, and Moreno-Gill (2010) examined the formation of perceptions and attitudes toward countries through films. In their study, the film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, which features South America, was selected as the stimulus. Participants from various countries were asked to watch the film, after which their perceptions were assessed. The findings indicated that exposure to the film significantly influenced viewers' attitudes, with many respondents expressing a strong intention to travel to South America after viewing it.

This theoretical basis is still at the forefront in the perception of political cinema in the present context.

The more recent scholarship (2024-2026) suggests that the politics of Indian cinema are re-intensified again, specifically around the themes of nationalism and identity formation.

According to a study conducted by Rishi and Randhawa (2025), Hindi cinema has no longer been a representation of collective anti-colonial activism, but rather an active form of creating modern Indian national identities through the use of emotionally evoking stories and symbolic representation. This change is especially evident in post-2014 cinema, where films

are becoming more and more prospective of military power, cultural pride, and national harmony.

Karmakar and Catterall (2025) state that the modern Indian movie industry has adopted critical discourse strategies that align the narrative of the cinema with the prevailing political ideologies, particularly in the historical and war movies. They provide an analysis showing how the framing of narratives, selective historiography, and characterization can be used to propagate state-centric perspectives.

Similarly, other recent studies on nationalism and identity in film have indicated that films are important in the formation of collective identity since they place the narratives in socio-political contexts. Scholars can demonstrate that cinema is not only a mirror of political realities but also an active part of creating them through qualitative content analysis.

Khan (2026) also helps to underline the point that modern Indian cinema tends to be dependent on stereotypical images of the so-called enemy, especially in films about inter-border wars. These representations strengthen binary opposition and lead to ideological simplification, which is employed in such films as "*Uri: The Surgical Strike*". Hindi cinema has often portrayed psychological distress through dramatic and simplified narrative conventions, with greater emphasis on emotional impact than on the complex mental processes and subjective experiences of individuals (Bhugra, 2008).

Other Research studies of *Uri* suggest that the movie serves as an instrument of romanticized Nationalism strengthens the ideologies of hegemony and offers the success of the military campaigns as a national goal. Scholars suggest that the techniques of narrating the film such as emotional appeal, realism and hero constructions are used to naturalize the politics to seem a political and universally agreeable.

Uri, the subject of politically aligned films during periods of elections, is a recent area of research in film studies, with movies seen as amplifying particular

governmental message and even serving political benefits (i.e. films like *Article 370*, 2024). *Dhurandhar* places greater emphasis on political intrigue, covert operations, and the complexities surrounding national security. This indicates that the role of cinema in serving as an appendage of political communication is growing. Patriotic movies connect with people by telling stories of courage, sacrifice, and love for the nation, making viewers feel emotionally invested in the characters and their journeys. These films often inspire pride, unity, and a deeper appreciation of the country's history and values.

Remarkable facts which are noted by research scholars involve the intersection between the world of cinema and digital media ecosystem whereby the film narratives are enhanced by social media, messaging systems, and political dialogues. Studies on the information

sharing in Indian elections indicate the way the visual media such as the film content spreads and affects the masses regarding the issue at hand. The current research on the topics of cultural and film analysis sheds light on the

importance of emotion, specifically pride and shame, in forming the viewer response to a political story. Bollywood cinema is found to externalize emotional sentiments towards such collective groups as the nation, thus strengthening group identity and social cohesion.

Recent international studies place the Indian political cinema in a wider context of identity-based political communication, in which the narratives of the nationalism, the security and the cultural belonging are selectively used to shape the democratic processes.

There is critical discourse that has become salient through media deconstructions as well as journalistic reports that discuss the timing of politically related movies released during elections is not accidental, but the wider tendency of movies turning into political mobilization instruments. It is reported that movies that have a high ideological message become popular in the election year and help in influencing the discourse of the people as well as their voting pattern.

Methodology

In this study, the preferred research design is qualitative, and it involves:

S.No	Method	Key areas
1	Textual Analysis	Analysis of conversations, development of plot, and story lines.
2	Thematic Analysis	Recursive themes like nationalism, heroism and security were identified.
3	Semiotic Analysis	Analysis of symbols, images, and cinematographic codes.
4	Sampling	Uri: The Surgical Strike (2019) Dhurandhar (anticipated/fictional)

The purposive sampling allowed the selection of these films as they were politically relevant and aligned with the national security discourse in terms of theme.

Analysis and Discussion

Strategic Education and Framing Politics.

Uri uses linear narrative style, which starts with a crisis and ends with a resolution. Such a framework supports an unmistakable moral path, attack, retaliation, victory, which follows the political scripts of decisive leadership.

Dhurandhar, in his turn, resorts to non-linear narration, which is associated with disorientation and non-linearity of intelligence work. This enables the political ideas to come out with a gradual effect instead of being clearly expressed.

Characterization and Ideological Representation:

Uri is seen as the ideal citizen-soldier who is full of discipline, sacrifice and patriotism. His personal sorrow mingles in with national obligation forming a potent emotional ideological bondage. The protagonist in Dhurandhar, works in grey moral zones, which is a transition to more sophisticated images of the state power and the individual agency.

Appealing to Emotions and listener involvement:

Uri employs high emotional appeals, including loss, revenge, pride to produce a gut-level response of the audience. Dialogues like "How's the josh?" serve as mobilizing slogans, taking the effects of the film out of the screen. Dhurandhar is much more of a suspense and psychological thriller to the mind and not the raw emotion.

Representation of the Enemy:

Uri creates a very distinct outer opponent, which supports a dichotomous world-image. Dhurandhar provides a less clear threat picture, one comprising internal and secret adversaries, as per the contemporary geopolitics.



Durandhar movie poster and 2. hit dialogue (transcription) from the movie : If you guys are done with your firecrackers, shall I start with my explosives now

Electoral Situation and Political Influence:

Uri: The Surgical Strike was released during one of the most important periods of 2019 and it was received as it came at the time of the Indian general elections. The plot of the film was quite consistent with the political situation, in which national safety and military power were the key campaign messages. Theatricalization of the surgical strikes strengthened the memory of the actual events in society and led to the increased feeling of nationalism.

Cinema may be viewed as a form of electoral discourse:

When it comes to elections, political communication moves out of speeches and manifestos and into popular culture. Movies such as Uri end up in what can be called informal political campaigning where:

The sense of national pride is upheld.

The actions of the government are justified.



Iden².

tification with the state is enhanced on an emotional level



Above are scenes from the movie 'Uri-A surgical strike' with the popular dialogues which uphold the spirit of nationalism and patriotism.

Most repeated slogan to motivate the soldiers by Vihaan.

Time has arrived for us to take the revenge for the bloody act of Pakistan.

We didn't start the war, but we will bloody hell to finish it.

Uri movie got well accepted among the cinephiles for its dialogues, images, and themes permeated the conversation of ordinary people. The film was mentioned in speeches and social media by political leaders and other speakers, and the distinction between cinema and political messages was even more obscured.

Agenda setting and Public Perception:

Uri helped in setting the national security on the agenda in terms of priorities in the minds of the people. The process of dramatizing military success made the film more focused on the topics which were favourable electorally

This repetition of major messages strength, retaliation, patriotism served to influence the way people think, as these concepts became more vivid at the time of the elections.

Emotional Mobilization

Elections are not only logical processes but also emotive. Uri helped foster emotional mobilization which produced a feeling of pride and unity.

The plot of the film helped its viewers to:

Identify with the nation

Support strong leadership

See military intervention as warranted and required.

This emotional alignment may cause a change in voting behavior by indirectly affecting the attitude towards political actors and the political policies.

The Case of Dhurandhar

Dhurandhar is not associated with a particular event in the election, but it is indicative of a larger tendency where entertainment conceals political stories in less obvious means.

Spy thrillers contribute to:

Habitualization of surveillance and intelligence activities.

Strengthening the need of national security.

Shaping an impression of imminent danger.

These stories might not necessarily affect the election directly but build up to an overall ideological environment that the electorate holds.

Realism and Fiction and Political Legitimacy. Uri employs realism to justify its story and Dhurandhar employs fiction to go through possibilities. The two methods have a political purpose:

Realism - believability and credibility. Fiction - versatility and delicacy.

The Convergence of Spectacle and Media:

Uri is a movie that is enriched with the emotional and political effects of the cinematic spectacle. It is not only limited to theaters because it spreads through social media, memes, and politics.

Dhurandhar is stylized and therefore appeals to the globalized viewer but with national themes interwoven.

Findings

Uri is a political narrative that works effectively in line with electoral discourse.

The time of release of the film exaggerated its political value.

Affective and narrational methods helped form a sentiment in the populace.

Dhurandhar is a move to the less dramatic long-term ideological narrative.

The two movies reveal the functionality of cinema as a soft power communication instrument in politics.

Themes and Indicators

The coding scheme presented below was created to analyze the narrative strategies applied in Uri: The Surgical Strike and Dhurandhar in a systematic manner. The codes are obtained using the thematic and semiotic analysis based on the political communication theories.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Indicators (What to Look For in the Film)	Examples from Films
Nationalism and Ideology	Patriotic expression	Dialogues emphasizing nation, sacrifice, duty	“How’s the Josh?” in Uri
	State legitimacy	Representation of government/military as justified	Surgical strike portrayed as necessary
	Collective identity	Scenes evoking unity, national pride	Flag visuals, army brotherhood
2. Narrative Structure	Linear narrative	Chronological storytelling (event → response)	Attack → retaliation in <i>Uri</i>
	Non-linear narrative	Flashbacks, parallel plots	Spy backstory in <i>Dhurandhar</i>
	Conflict-resolution pattern	Clear problem and solution arc	Mission success endings

3. Characterization	Hero archetype	Idealized protagonist (brave, moral)	Army officer in <i>Uri</i>
	Moral ambiguity	Characters with ethical dilemmas	Spy roles in <i>Dhurandhar</i>
	Emotional motivation	Personal loss driving action	Family loss in <i>Uri</i>
4. Emotional Framing	Patriotism	Scenes evoking pride and belonging	War cries, victory scenes
	Grief and sacrifice	Death, mourning, martyrdom	Funeral sequences
	Anger/vengeance	Calls for retaliation	Post-attack response scenes
5. Representation of the Enemy	External enemy	Clearly defined opposing nation/group	Terrorists in <i>Uri</i>
	Stereotyping	Simplified portrayal of “other”	Lack of depth in enemy roles
	Invisible/internal threat	Hidden or ambiguous enemy	Espionage elements in <i>Dhurandhar</i>
6. Realism and Authenticity	Documentary realism	Based on real events, factual references	Surgical strike depiction
	Technical authenticity	Use of military language, strategy	Operation planning scenes
	Fictional realism	Plausible but imagined scenarios	Spy missions in <i>Dhurandhar</i>
7. Symbolism and Semiotics	National symbols	Flags, uniforms, military icons	Indian flag visuals

	Dialogue as symbol	Catchphrases, slogans	“How’s the Josh?”
	Visual metaphors	Light/dark, borders, maps	Night-vision war scenes
8. Spectacle and Cinematic Techniques	Action sequences	War scenes, combat visuals	Surgical strike execution
	Sound design	Background score enhancing emotion	Patriotic music
	Camera techniques	Close-ups, slow motion	Emotional intensity shots
9. Electoral and Political Context	Timing of release	Proximity to elections	<i>Uri</i> release before 2019 elections
	Political alignment	Narrative reflecting dominant discourse	National security emphasis
	Public discourse integration	Film references in speeches/media	Dialogue used in campaigns
10. Ideological Messaging	Explicit messaging	Direct political statements	Nationalist rhetoric
	Implicit messaging	Subtle ideological cues	Spy narratives in <i>Dhurandhar</i>
	Agenda setting	Highlighting specific issues	Focus on terrorism/security

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of narrative strategies in shaping political content in Indian cinema. *Uri: The Surgical Strike* exemplifies how films can intersect with electoral politics, reinforcing dominant narratives and influencing public sentiment during critical periods.

By contrast, *Dhurandhar* illustrates the evolution of political storytelling toward more complex and subtle forms. Together, these films underscore the growing importance of cinema as a medium of political communication in India.

The findings suggest that future research should further explore the relationship between media, emotion, and electoral behavior, particularly in the context of digital media convergence.

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