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**Hybrid Warfare: Impact of Indian
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During Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's tenure (2014 to the present), Indian films have often exalted the Indian armed forces and portrayed Pakistan as the major adversary, associating the latter with terrorism and espionage. This depiction is considered a form of hybrid warfare, which not only reinforces negative stereotypes but also fosters a persistent sense of threat, influencing public opinion and negative attitudes of the Indian masses towards Pakistan. The extensive outreach and impact of the Indian film industry can potentially affect domestic perceptions, thereby damaging Pakistan's image inside India. In addition, the impact is manifesting itself globally. The narratives created through the film industry have a far-reaching psychological impact, potentially contributing to radicalization and perpetuating border tensions, eroding cultural values, and aggravating mis-

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trust between the two states and societies. This research examines the effects of Indian films on Pakistan's national security, highlighting how these mediums have been used for narrative building, portraying Pakistan as a primary adversary associated with terrorism, which in turn aggravates mistrust between the two states and minimizes space for peace and reconciliation.

Keywords: Indian Film Industry, Hybrid Warfare, Propaganda, Negative Stereotypes, Narrative Building, Public Opinion, Media Influence, National Security.

Introduction

Warfare in the present century has transformed from traditional domains to non-traditional spheres. Modern conflicts involve various tools and strategies covering both military and non-military methods such as the war of narratives, propaganda, misinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks, which are employed simultaneously. The use of these integrated and diverse methods at a time against an adversary is called hybrid warfare.² Hybrid warfare aims to destabilize and undermine opponents without engaging in open conflict.³

Bollywood, India's largest film industry, dominates the

2. Hoffman, Frank G. "Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars." Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007. https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.

3. Uzi Zif, Jan Jakub. "United in Ambiguity? EU and NATO Approaches to Hybrid Warfare and Hybrid Threats." EU Diplomacy Papers, May 2017. https://www.coleurope.eu/sites/default/files/research-paper/edp-5-2017_uzieblo_0.pdf.

global box office with its iconic song-and-dance routines, fuelled by India's vast population and cultural influence. Bollywood's international popularity attracts significant global attention and competition for hosting premieres and film festivals. In today's interconnected world, where hybrid warfare tactics blend traditional military strategies with non-military methods such as propaganda campaigns and cyber warfare, Bollywood serves as a powerful tool for promoting Indian narratives. The Indian film industry not only offers entertainment but also shapes perceptions of Indian society and influences global audiences.⁴

Under Premier, Narendra Modi's government, the media and entertainment industry has been leveraged as tools of hybrid warfare against Pakistan. This strategy has been instrumental in shaping public opinion and promoting the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Hindutva ideology. The BJP's return during the 2014 presidential campaign elevated Modi to the forefront. The BJP has incorporated traditional Hinduism with contemporary statecraft challenges,⁵ thus promoting India as a Hindu nation and emphasizing cultural and religious harmony under Hindutva values. This often leads to a nationalist narrative that positions Pakistan as a primary adversary.⁶

4. "RAW Behind Production of Anti-Pakistan Films in Bollywood." Web Desk, April 2023. <https://www.radio.gov.pk/18-04-2023/raw-provides-all-kind-of-resources-to-bollywood-for-making-anti-pakistan-movies-repots>.

5. Ahmed, Raja Q. "Hindu Nationalism, Modi Factor and the Ideology Matrix in Contemporary India." Margalla Papers, June 2020. <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/36/18>.

6. Khurshid, Asif. "Expansion of Hindutva Ideology Under Modi Regime." Pakistan Today, February 2023. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/02/25/expansion-of-hindutva-ideology-under-modi-regime/>.

Bollywood has played a significant role by producing films that align with the government's narratives and ideologies. For instance, films like "Uri: The Surgical Strike" (2019) and "Mission Mangal" (2019) exemplify how Bollywood promotes the BJP's ideology. "Uri" portrays the Indian military heroically and reinforces the narrative of Pakistan as an adversary, aligning with the BJP's hardliner stance and encouraging nationalistic sentiments. The film, "Mission Mangal" promotes Indian self-reliance and national pride, resonating with the BJP's "Make in India" initiative by highlighting India's scientific and technological capabilities. These films, among others, contribute to promoting BJP's ideology by emphasizing nationalism, valorizing the military, and reinforcing the perception of external threats, particularly from Pakistan. Through such media representations, the BJP effectively uses Bollywood as a means of influencing public opinion and fortifying its political narratives both domestically and internationally.

Against the above backdrop, this study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the focus of the Indian film industry and its alignment with the Indian government's narratives and ideologies. Using an explanatory design and primary data (collected through content analysis of Indian news films), the research assesses how Indian media has influenced and constructed specific perceptions beyond realities against Pakistan. The weaponization of the Indian entertainment industry has generated a hostile environment, undermining Pakistan's security and impeding the prospects for a peace process between the two nations.

Narrative Paradigm Theory

Walter Fisher's theory of narrative communication posits that storytelling is innate to human nature, influencing how we perceive the world. Narratives comprise a story, storyteller, and audience, creating a shared experience.⁷ Coherence and fidelity are crucial for a narrative's effectiveness; coherent and faithful stories are more likely to be accepted and believed by the audience, thereby significantly influencing them.⁸

The Narrative Paradigm Theory offers insights into the use of narratives in India-Pakistan hybrid warfare, where India employs coherent narratives to shape public opinion. This theory also applies to the Indian film industry, known for narrative-driven films that influence public opinion. Some films contribute to negative narratives about Pakistan, thereby fuelling anti-Pakistan sentiments. For example, the film "Uri: The Surgical Strike" (2019) is a prominent instance of this phenomenon. The movie dramatizes the Indian Army's surgical strikes on militant launch pads in "Pakistan-administered Kashmir" in 2016, following a terrorist attack on an Indian army base. The film is highly patriotic, portraying the Indian military in a heroic light and reinforcing the narrative of Pakistan as a primary adversary involved in terrorism. This portrayal encourages nationalistic sentiments, aligns with the BJP's hard-line stance against Pakistan, and promotes a sense of pride and unity under the current government. Furthermore, the film

7. Stache, Lara C. "Fisher Narrative Paradigm." SAGE, December 2018. <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-communication-research-methods/i5726.xml>.

8. "The Narrative Paradigm." Communication Theory, July 2014. <https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-narrative-paradigm/>.

“Mission Mangal” (2019), while focusing on India’s Mars mission, subtly promotes themes of self-reliance and national pride, resonating with the BJP’s “Make in India” initiative. The portrayal of strong Indian scientists and the emphasis on India’s capabilities reflect the government’s agenda to promote national pride and technological advancement.⁹

This research includes an analysis of specific Indian films that feature dialogues portraying Pakistan negatively on a global scale. The selected movies are as follows:

Movie	Released Year	Director	Starring
Haider	2014	Vishal Bhardwaj	Shahid Kapoor
Phantom	2015	Kabir Khan	Saif Ali Khan
Bangistan	2015	Karan Anshuman	Riteish Deshmukh & Pulkit Samrat
Parmanu: The Story of Pokhran	2018	Abhishek Sharma	John Abraham
Romeo Akbar Walter	2019	Robby Grewal	John Abraham
Sooryavanshi	2021	Rohit Shetty	Akshay Kumar
Mission Majnu	2023	Shantanu Bagchi	Sidharth Malhotra

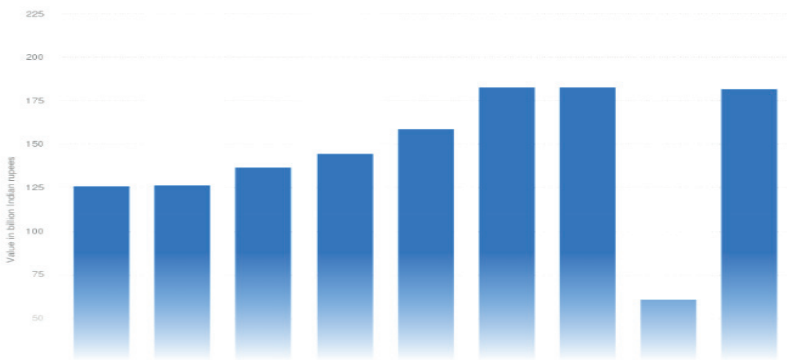
Global Reach of the Indian Film Industry

The Indian film industry has achieved global recognition, particularly within the Indian diaspora residing overseas and at prestigious festivals like Cannes. With widespread theatrical releases in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) and support from streaming platforms like Netflix, Indian films blend local and global influences,

9. Hussain, Tauqeer. “21st Century Warfare and Pakistan’s Military Response.” Pakistan Research Repository, September 2019. <https://pr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/12349/1/Tauqeer%20%20Hussain%20internation%20relations%202019%20iui%20pr.pdf>.

shaping the thought processes of audiences worldwide.

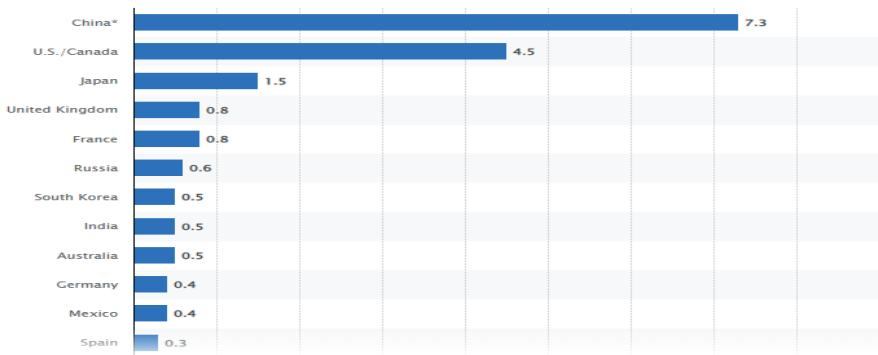
Figure 1: Value of the film industry in India from financial year 2014 to 2019, with forecasts until 2024 (in billion Indian rupees)



India’s film industry faced a significant decline in 2021 due to COVID-19 but rebounded in the fiscal year 2022 with an impressive 196% growth. Despite the setbacks of the pandemic, India has remained the world’s largest film producer since 2007 and continues to lead in ticket sales. Films like “Uri” exemplify high returns, showcasing the industry’s resilience and growth potential in the post-pandemic era.¹⁰

Figure 2: Leading box office markets worldwide in 2021, by revenue (In billion U.S. dollars)

10 . “India: Value of the Film Industry 2022.” Statista, September 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/235837/value-of-the-film-industry-in-india/>.



(Source: Statista Research Department)¹¹

In 2021, China emerged as the leading global box office earner, generating \$7.3 billion, which surpassed the combined earnings of the US, Canada, Japan, and the UK. France and the UK tied for fourth place, each reporting box office revenues of \$800 million. In 2022, India achieved a significant milestone by selling over 981 million movie tickets, exceeding the combined ticket sales of China, the US, Mexico, and Japan. Concurrently, the US and Canada witnessed a 64.4% increase in revenue, contrasting with a decline in China's box office earnings. These trends indicate notable shifts in the global film industry dynamics, highlighting China's rising influence, India's substantial audience engagement, and growth in the North American market.¹²

11. "Top Box Office Markets Worldwide by Revenue 2021." Statista, March 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/243180/leading-box-office-markets-worldwide-by-revenue/>.

12. "Top Film Markets by Number of Tickets Sold 2021." Statista, January 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/252729/leading-film-markets-worldwide-by-number-of-tickets-sold/>.

Indian Film Industry: A Reflection of BJP's Narratives

Bollywood films frequently portray Pakistan as the main antagonist, reflecting the stance of Modi's government. In contrast, there is a noticeable absence of Chinese villains,¹³ despite the ongoing India-China border disputes. This suggests that China is not perceived as a major threat to India, contrary to the narrative often used by New Delhi to garner Western support. Recent Indian films like "Uri: The Surgical Strike" and "Phantom" focus on portraying Pakistan as a primary adversary, while movies such as "Mission Mangal" celebrate Indian achievements without emphasizing "Chinese threats." This selective portrayal aligns with the political narrative of the current Indian administration.

This trend reflects growing anti-Muslim sentiment, with Muslim characters often depicted negatively and a decline in the positive representation of Urdu. For instance, in the film "Padmaavat," the Muslim ruler Alauddin Khilji is portrayed as a barbaric antagonist, and in "Kesari," the Muslim invaders are depicted as ruthless enemies. The use of Urdu, traditionally associated with Muslim culture in India, is also seen less favourably, with fewer films featuring the language positively. This shift aligns with the broader narrative of the current political climate in India. It has strained relations with Pakistani viewers, prompting calls for a more rational approach to producing high-budget movies.

Many analysts have examined Bollywood's impact on

13. Bhutto, Fatima. "Bollywood is Obsessed with Pakistan. We'd Be Flattered If It Weren't So Nasty." *The Guardian*, February 3, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/feb/03/bollywood-pakistan-muslims-narendra-modi-india>.

public opinion and the Indian government's censorship of critical content. Some have focused on the production of films portraying Pakistan negatively,¹⁴ highlighting the influence of political narratives on cinematic representation. Analysts have also discussed the government's suppression of a BBC documentary¹⁵ that questioned Modi's role in the Gujarat riots, noting the ban on the documentary and the arrest of students attempting to screen it. This suggests a trend of stifling dissent and controlling public discourse.¹⁶ Scholars warn that Bollywood's failure to counter hatred could undermine its historical role in bringing joy to South Asian audiences. By prioritizing narratives that align with the current political climate, Bollywood risks alienating segments of its audience and exacerbating regional tensions.

Rise of Anti-Pakistan Bollywood and BJP's Return

- **Haider (2014)**

"Haider," directed by Vishal Bhardwaj in 2014, is an adaptation of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" that addresses the Kashmir conflict through the character of Haider, portrayed by Shahid Kapoor. The film intricately explores regional complexities, highlighting the tensions among armed forces, militants, and residents.¹⁷ It primarily examines the personal and psychological impact of the Kashmir conflict on individuals, subtly hinting at external involvement, including that of Pakistan, without explicitly detailing specific

14. Bhutto, "Bollywood is obsessed with Pakistan."

15. Cookson, Richard, and Mike Radford. "India: The Modi Question." BBC, January 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dkb144>.

16. Kumar, Sanjay. "Indian Students Defy Ban on Modi Documentary Despite Arrests." Arab News, January 2023. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2240401/media>.

17. Haider. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Released 2014, India. Film.

roles. Several dialogues within the film are directly critical of Pakistan, reflecting broader geopolitical tensions.

For instance, in one scene, an Indian Army officer says: “Dushman ka Dushman hamara dost hai. Is liye koi bhi group ya individual jo Hizbul Mujahideen aur Pakistan ki proxy war ke khilaf hai, koi bhi, surrendered militants, detainees aur undertrials is group ka hissa ban sakte hain.” (41:20) Translation: The enemy’s foes are our friends. Any individual or group, anyone with a grudge against Hizbul Mujahideen or Pakistan’s proxy war, be it surrendered militants, detainees, or undertrials can become part of this group. This dialogue reflects the film’s nuanced depiction of the Kashmir conflict, addressing the complexities of alliances and enmities in the region. In another scene, the film suggests that militants attacking Kashmir receive training in Pakistan. For instance, a character says: “Militants se dostiyaan bana raha hai tu? Aaj pistol laya hai. Kal Kalashnikov layega! Sarhad paar jayega tu. Jayega sarhad paar?” (49:10) Translation: Now you are friends with militants? Today, you are holding a pistol, you will turn to grab a Kalashnikov tomorrow! Are you going for weapons training across the border?

These dialogues highlight the film’s exploration of the external influences and internal strife contributing to the Kashmir conflict, portraying the complex web of regional and cross-border interactions. In another scene, an Indian army officer in the film attributes blame to Pakistan for supplying arms and training militants. The officer states: “Main ap logon ko yaad dilana chata hun k jo mulk aj gumrah kashmiri larkon ko, masoomon ke qatal ke liye arms aur

training de raha hai, usi mulk ke logon ne 1948 main kabailiyon ke bhes main kashmiriyon ko loota tha. Unki auraton ko rape kia tha, bachun ko kata tha.” (59:50) Translation: I would like to remind you that our neighbouring country provides arms and training to misguided Kashmiri youth to kill innocent people. In 1948, they had looted Kashmiris when they arrived here disguised as tribals. They raped women and killed children. This dialogue highlights the film’s portrayal of historical grievances and contemporary accusations concerning Pakistan’s alleged role in perpetuating violence and unrest in Kashmir. The dialogues in the aforementioned film are deplorable, condemnable, and inappropriate, and undoubtedly reflect India’s efforts to tarnish Pakistan’s image through its film industry.

Additionally, the same film further portrays an Indian army officer denying allegations of Indian army involvement in the torture of Kashmiri individuals. In response to a reporter’s question about the legality of torture on detainees, the officer states: “Reporter: Does a law allow you to torture people you have arrested? Army Officer: The Indian army is one of the most disciplined armed forces in the world. We train our officers to interrogate, not torture.” (1:00:00) This dialogue illustrates the film’s portrayal of the Indian army’s official stance on interrogation practices and its attempt to rebut allegations of human rights violations in Kashmir. A character states: “I want you to understand the ground reality. Separatist leaders Hindustan se Azaadi nahi Pakistan se Ghulami maang rahy hain.” (1:00:53) Translation: Separatist leaders are not demanding freedom from India but enslavement to Pakistan. This statement accentuates the film’s narrative concerning the motivations

and allegiances of Kashmiri separatist leaders, emphasizing a perspective aligned with the Indian government's position on the region's political dynamics and effort to deepen bilateral mistrust with Pakistan.

The international acclaim and screening of "Haider" at prestigious events like the Busan International Film Festival have amplified its narrative on a global stage. This increased visibility can shape international perceptions of Pakistan, potentially reinforcing stereotypes of Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism or contributing to regional instability. Such movies can influence public opinion both within India and internationally, shaping how audiences perceive Pakistan's role in the Kashmir conflict and broader regional geopolitics. Irrational and negative depictions in popular media can solidify biases thus hindering any possibility of a peace process and conflict resolution between India and Pakistan.

- **Phantom (2015)**

"Phantom," a 2015 film directed by Kabir Khan, centers on Indian soldier Daniyal Khan's mission to eliminate perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The film portrays Pakistan as the originating source of the terrorist group responsible for the attacks, framing Indian covert operations within Pakistan as a pursuit of justice.¹⁸ Some dialogues in the film explicitly depict Pakistan as a hub for terrorist activities, potentially undermining the country's reputation on a global stage. For example, an Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) intelligence officer states: "Sajid Mir, Lashkar's top military trainer, also known as Sajid

18. Phantom. Directed by Kabir Khan. Released 2015, India. Film.

Majeed, Sajid Bill, Uncle Bill, Abu Bara—these are all his aliases. He trained all the terrorists involved in the 26/11 attacks, planned all the operations, and that night, from Karachi, he gave instructions to the terrorists while watching our news channels.” (24:42)

In the film, Nawaz (played by Katrina Kaif) delivers dialogues portraying Pakistan as a safe haven for terrorists: “Mumbai attack ke peeche jo sab se baray terrorist Pakistan main araam se bethe hain unhe saza nae milegi?” (57:54) Translation: Will the biggest terrorists behind the Mumbai attack, comfortably sitting in Pakistan, not face any punishment? “Lashkar-e-Taiba ka supreme leader Haris Saeed, Dunya ki har most wanted terrorist list mein iska naam hai, lekin khule aam ghoomta hai. Ek taraf Kalashnikov liye Lashkar ke aadmi isey protection detay hain aur doosri taraf police aur beshak Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) bhi.” (1:05:40) Translation: Haris Saeed, the supreme leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba, is on the world’s most wanted terrorist list, yet he roams freely. On one hand, Lashkar’s men protect him with Kalashnikovs, and on the other hand, the police and of course the ISI.

“Phantom” generated controversy due to its portrayal of Pakistan as a center for terrorism, prompting criticism for perpetuating negative stereotypes.¹⁹ While the film received mixed reviews for its narrative and action depicting real-world events, it faced backlash for oversimplifying intricate geopolitical issues. Banned in Pakistan for its offensive and inaccurate portrayal, the movie revolves around a

19. Tsering, Lisa. “Phantom’: Film Review.” *Hollywood Reporter*, August 2015. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/phantom-film-review-3-818583/>.

fictional mission set after the 2008 Mumbai attacks to eradicate masterminds in Pakistan. The representation of Indian stereotypes in this film underpins negative attitudes and misconceptions about Pakistan. India's efforts to depict Pakistan negatively through its films make it harder to rebuild trust and confidence between the two countries.

- **Bangistan (2015)**

"Bangistan" is a satirical comedy film that chronicles the misadventures of two aspiring terrorists—one Muslim and one Hindu—who find themselves unintentionally assigned to the same mission: bombing a peace conference in Poland. The film employs humour to delve into themes of religious extremism and terrorism, offering a satirical take on religious stereotypes and fanaticism. Pakistani characters are portrayed in a satirical light, contributing to the film's critique of extremism and societal divisions.²⁰

In the beginning, the film features a dialogue that overtly labels a Muslim character as a terrorist. When Harold reveals his real name, Hafiz Bin Ali, to an Englishman, the exchange unfolds as follows: "Tell me your real name? Hafiz Bin Ali. Hafiz Bin Ali? You are flirting with a terrorist." (08:56), "Shut up and listen to me, I'll personally send a drone to Afghanistan to blow you up." (09:08), "Remember what we did to Osama Bin Laden? Remember? I am going to ask Mossad to do the same to you. I'll have them cut your head off and I need your eyeballs straight off the BBQ...Terrorist!" (09:20).

20. *Bangistan*. Directed by Karan Anshuman. Released 2015, India. Film.

These dialogues exemplify the film's satirical approach to addressing and critiquing religious extremism and stereotypes by using exaggerated and provocative language to highlight the absurdity of associating individuals' names or backgrounds with terrorism. Through humour and hyperbole, the film aims to challenge and ridicule the simplistic and prejudiced views that often underpin religious and cultural intolerance. By presenting such exchanges, "Bangistan" seeks to provoke thought and encourage viewers to question and reflect on the harmful effects of stereotyping and fanaticism.

- **Parmanu: The Story of Pokhran (2018)**

"Parmanu: The Story of Pokhran" is a historical drama that depicts India's covert nuclear tests conducted in 1998. The film follows Officer Ashwat Raina, portrayed by John Abraham, who leads a team to execute the mission in Pokhran. The film illustrates the competitive nuclear environment in South Asia, where India's decision to conduct nuclear tests was influenced by regional security concerns, particularly the perceived threats from China and Pakistan. It is depicted that India's nuclear tests were a response to Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. The film underscores the urgency and secrecy surrounding the tests to avoid detection by global powers and prevent Pakistan from pre-emptively responding.

The movie also portrays the efforts of a Pakistani ISI spy collaborating with a CIA agent to thwart India's nuclear test. This narrative element underscores the international stakes and opposition India faced during the mission. A notable dialogue captures this dynamic: "Hamari Paki-

stan ki ISI bhi kuch kam nahi parhti apki CIA se” (1:11:30) Translation: Our Pakistani ISI is no less than your CIA. Another critical moment occurs when the main character says: “Sir, hamein test is waqt karna hoga. Sir, woh Pakistani spy tha mera phone uske paas hai. Apko pata hai us mein kitni vital information hai?” (1:41:18) Translation: We have to conduct the test right away. He was a Pakistani spy and my phone was with him. Do you have any clue that the phone carries very vital information?

This movie portrays Pakistan as an active adversary attempting to sabotage India’s nuclear ambitions. Through its dialogues and plot, the film emphasizes Pakistan’s role in hindering India’s progress, depicting it as a nation intent on obstructing India’s scientific and strategic achievements. This portrayal reinforces negative stereotypes about Pakistan, presenting it as a persistent threat to India’s national security. By projecting the untrue narrative of the espionage efforts of Pakistani agents, the film accentuates the geopolitical rivalry and animosity between the two countries, framing Pakistan as an antagonist in India’s narrative of becoming a nuclear power. This negative depiction contributes to the broader political discourse, reflecting and potentially amplifying existing tensions and hostilities between India and Pakistan.²¹

- **Romeo Akbar Walter (2019)**

“Romeo Akbar Walter” is a 2019 Indian espionage thriller that centers on the character of Romeo Ali. Ali is recruited by RAW, The Indian foreign intelligence agency, and

21 . Parmanu: The Story of Pokhran. Directed by Abhishek Sharma. Released 2018, India. Film.

adopts the identity of Akbar Malik to infiltrate Pakistan's ISI. Throughout the film, Ali navigates high-stakes espionage and perilous situations to gather crucial intelligence for India. The narrative portrays Pakistan's military as an extremist force, allegedly involved in acts of brutality towards the population of East Pakistan. This depiction reflects the historical tensions and complex geopolitical dynamics between India and Pakistan, particularly during the period leading up to the East Pakistan War in 1971.

In one scene, Shrikant Rai, an intelligence officer, says, "Pakistani hukumat ke zulm se East Pakistan ki awaam behad na khush thi." Translation: The people of East Pakistan were upset with the brutality of their government. (02:30). Moreover, in another scene, he states: "Isi hotel main kaam ke silsale main, Karachi se aik bohat hi important guest rehne ke liye aana wala hai. Isaq Afridi. Apnay watan se behad mohabbat krne wala Pakistani. Top Arms supplier. Pakistani Army Chief ka khass aur tumhare taale ki chabi." (25:26) Translation: An important guest is arriving for work purposes from Karachi to stay at the hotel. A Pakistani who loves his country more than himself. He is very close to the Chief of the Pakistan Army and a key for your lock.

Additionally, another character, discussing the relationship between Isaq Afridi and the Pakistani Army, said: "It-nay be human contracts Afridi ko itni asaani se kese mil jaate hain? Itna mushkil kya hai, sahib. Pakistani Army Chief General Jahangir Alam, unki jaib main Isaq Afridi ke har deal ka bohat barra hissa jata hai. Janab, inki sath ganth se sabse zayada do logon ko nuksaan hai. Aik tu, Isaq Af-

ridi ke khud ke bete Nawab Afridi ko, aur dosra woh Pakistan Army main jo do number ki beyran pe bethe hain na. ISI Chief, Lieutenant General Ghazi Ali Hayat. Dono main gehri dosti hai, Janab. Aur dono is muqay ki talash main hain ke kab Isaq Afridi aur Army Chief ki jagah le lein.” (42:50) Translation: How does Afridi get such contracts? It is not that tough, sir. The Chief of Army, General Jahangir Alam gets a hefty percentage of every deal. Their tie-up is dangerous for two people. Isaq Afridi’s son, Nawab Afridi, and the one in the Pakistan Army, ISI Chief, Lieutenant General Ghazi Ali Hayat. They are best friends. They are just waiting for an opportunity to replace the Chief of Army, Isaq Afridi. The film accused Pakistan’s soldiers of killing scholars and students in Dhaka, projecting a narrative that holds Pakistan responsible for these atrocities. This depiction contributes to the broader strategy of using media as a tool to construct and reinforce negative perceptions of Pakistan, further straining relations between the two countries and influencing international viewpoints on historical events.

In another scene, a character says: “Teen din pehle Dhaka University main jo massacre hua tha. Jahan pe 22 scholars aur students Pakistani soldiers ke haaton mare gaye thay.” (52:25) Translation: Three days ago, the Dhaka University was attacked. The Pakistani soldiers slaughtered 22 scholars and students. Moreover, it is shown in the film, that during his mission, Akbar is captured and tortured by the ISI in a detention cell in Karachi, Pakistan. (1:53:00) The film depicts the harsh treatment and interrogation methods employed allegedly by Pakistan’s ISI to extract information from him. The untrue portrayal of ISI’s actions in

the film showcases India's hatred towards Pakistan and the adversarial relationship between the intelligence agencies of India and Pakistan.²²

In this movie, Indian RAW agents are depicted as infiltrating the Pakistan Army with remarkable ease, emphasizing the strategic and tactical prowess of Indian intelligence. The protagonist, Akbar Malik, skilfully adopts multiple identities to penetrate Pakistani military and intelligence circles, illustrating the meticulous planning and high-risk nature of espionage. This portrayal underscores the importance of intelligence operations in maintaining national security, as reflected in the dialogue highlighting India's advantage over Pakistan due to effective espionage. Additionally, the film brings to light the ethical complexities and human costs associated with such covert operations, particularly through the depiction of Akbar's capture and torture by ISI. While dramatized for cinematic effect, the narrative reinforces public perceptions of the superiority of Indian intelligence and the ongoing adversarial relationship with Pakistan, shaping nationalistic sentiments and providing insight into the intricate world of intelligence warfare.

- **Sooryavanshi (2021)**

"Sooryavanshi" is an action thriller film centered around DCP Veer Sooryavanshi, the head of Mumbai's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS). The narrative follows a series of bomb blasts that strike the city, unveiling a plot masterminded by individuals with connections to Pakistan. The film portrays several characters from Pakistan as being involved

22. Romeo Akbar Walter. Directed by Robbie Grewal. Released 2019, India. Film.

in orchestrating terrorist attacks in Mumbai.²³ Additionally, it shows Muslims linked to the 12 March 1993 Bombay bombings, highlighting that these individuals fled to Pakistan after the attacks. The storyline, therefore, focuses on themes of terrorism and cross-border conspiracies, emphasizing the efforts of the ATS in countering these threats and maintaining the city's security.

In this movie, the narrative incorporates a critical scene where a character reveals significant information about the masterminds behind the bomb blasts. The dialogue states, "Magar sir sunane main aaraha hai ke is blast ke peeche mastermind Bilal Ahmed aur Tiger India chor ke ja chuke hain. Tiger Iran chala gaya aur Bilal Ahmed POK, Omar Hafeez ke paas. Omar Hafeez ISI ke saary gair qanooni kaam krta tha. Aur 93 blast ke bombers ko explosives banana ki training bhi Omar ke zarye hi di gayi thi." (02:00) Translation: We heard the masterminds behind these attacks, Bilal Ahmed and Tiger have fled from India. Tiger went to Iran; Bilal went to POK, to join Omar Hafeez. Omar Hafeez used to do all of ISI's illegal work. Omar was also instrumental in training the 93's bombers in making explosives. This dialogue highlights the connections between the bombers and their support networks, pointing to the involvement of Pakistan-based individuals and the ISI in facilitating and training the terrorists responsible for the attacks. The character's revelation underscores the cross-border implications of terrorism and the extensive network that supports such activities. This scene, among others in the film, portrays the complexities and challenges faced by the Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad in combating

23. Sooryavanshi. Directed by Rohit Shetty. Released 2021, India. Film.

terrorism and safeguarding the city. “1999 main Omar ne ISI ki madad se terrorist organization Lashkar ki shuru-vat ki. Aur badle main ISI ne unhein Kargil ki jang main Istemal kiya.” (03:03) Translation: In 1999, ISI helped Omar start a terrorist organization called Lashkar. In turn, ISI used them in the Kargil war.

Another Muslim terrorist Riyaz Hafeez, son of Omar Hafeez, was captured by Indian ATS in the movie and portrayed as he came from Pakistan to India for attacks. He says, “2007 main India-Pakistan cricket match dekhne tum Pakistan se Mumbai, Mohali tourist visa pr aaye thay, magar wapis nahi gaye.” (17:20) Translation: In 2007 you came from Pakistan on a tourist visa to watch the India-Pakistan cricket match in Mohali, but never left. Moreover, “Central Agency ke report main tumhara involvement 2011 Mumbai train blast, uske baad Pune bakery, Bangalore bus stand, Srinagar military base.” (17:47) Translation: In Central Agency report, you were involved in the 2011 Mumbai train blast, then in Pune bakery, Bangalore bus stand, and Srinagar military base.

In the movie, several elements contribute to its controversial portrayal of Muslims and Pakistan. The film includes a scene where a Muslim leader, Kader Usmani, is depicted as brainwashing young Indian Muslims into becoming terrorists. In a scene, a character accuses him: “Ap bharkao bhashan dete hain, Ap dharma ke naam pe masoom bachon ko gumrah bhi krte hain.” (45:26) Translation: You give inciting speeches and mislead innocent children in the name of religion.

The narrative also suggests that Pakistan serves as a base for terrorism and is depicted as an undesirable destination due to its association with terrorism. This is highlighted in a dialogue where Ranveer Singh's character questions the desirability of Pakistan as a tourist destination: "Lekin kabhi bhi bahar wala sochta hai chalo family ko le ke udhr ja ke chutti manane ka? Nahi, Kyun? Maloom? Apki wajah se. Terrorism zayada tu tourism kam. Abhi dekho apna cricketer logon ki feeling ap logon ko bhi samjhna chahiye, jese apna Wasim, Misbah, Shoaib. Abhi aphi key eh jihad vihad ke chakar main unka tu pora IPL se wicket hi chote gaya. Terrorism zayada tu income kam. Jese apna artist log hai Fawad Khan, Ali Zafar, Atif Aslam...lekin abhi apke chakar main un logon ka bhi hogaya na dukaan bnd. Terrorism zayada tu entertainment kam. Aur aese hi chalta raha na Riyaaz baho, tu apni idhr ki public tu tiyar bethi hi hai, par who din dur nahi hai, jab Pakistan kea am log bhi aap ko dhoond dhoond ke jootay chapel se maarne ko dekhe ge." (2:03:35) Translation: But does anyone plan a family vacation there? No, they don't. Do you know why? It is because of you. Terrorism is bad for tourism. You should think about cricketers as well. Like Wasim, Misbah, Shoaib. Because of your Jihad they are unable to play in the Indian Premier League (IPL). There are artists like Fawad Khan, Ali Zafar, Atif Aslam. Because of you, they are unable to work now. Terrorism is bad for entertainment. Remember, if that continues, the people of this country are already against you, but one day, the people of Pakistan will also come after you with stones and sticks.

The release of "Sooryavanshi" sparked significant controversy due to its perceived anti-Muslim content. Arif Alvi,

the former President of Pakistan has objected to the contents of the film. A famous Pakistani actress, Mehwish Hayat, who has been honored with the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz for her contributions to the film industry has also publicly criticized the film for its Islamophobic nature. The portrayal of the villain as Muslim raised concerns about stereotyping and negative representation. Director Rohit Shetty defended the film, arguing that it highlights the association of terrorism with specific individuals rather than a blanket condemnation of religion. Despite these claims, the film is seen by many as part of a broader trend in Indian cinema to negatively depict Pakistan and Muslims.²⁴ This has drawn substantial criticism and sparked ongoing discussions about the impact of such portrayals on public perception and interfaith relations.

- **Mission Majnu (2023)**

“Mission Majnu” is a Bollywood film depicting a RAW agent’s covert mission in the 1970s to infiltrate Pakistan and gather crucial information. The narrative focuses on the agent’s mission to extract classified information about Pakistan’s activities posing a threat to national security.²⁵ At the start of the movie, it is portrayed that Pakistan after losing the war with India, is making nuclear bombs for revenge purposes. In a scene, the agent says, “1971: Pakistan India se teesri baar jang har chukka tha. They wanted revenge at all costs. India par dhaak jatane ka ab unke pass aik hi tareeka tha: to make a nuclear bomb.” (1:45) Translation: in 1971, Pakistan lost the war to India for the third

24. Salamat, Sajid. “‘Sooryavanshi’ Faces Backlash on Social Media.” Daily Times, last modified November 21, 2021. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/844459/sooryavanshi-faces-backlash-on-social-media/>.

25. Mission Majnu. Directed by Shantanu Bagchi. Released 2023, India. Film.

time. They had only one way left to defeat India: to make a nuclear bomb. The movie shows that Indian RAW agents are spread all over Pakistan. The agent further says, “Ham-re RAW agents Peshawar se Karachi tak infiltrate kr chuke thay.” (02:06) Translation: Our RAW agents infiltrated Pakistan from Peshawar to Karachi.

The movie depicts that Pakistan, to make nuclear weapons, will go to any extent. For instance, the main character says “Pakistan nuclear bomb banana ke liye kisi bhi hadh tak ja skta tha. Aur unke is irade ko anjaam dene wala tha A. Q. Khan, Dunya ka sabse khatarnak scientist.” (14:08) Translation: Pakistan was ready to go to any extent to make a nuclear bomb and to make it happen, they brought in A. Q. Khan. The most dangerous scientist in the world.

The film also demonstrates that Pakistan is making nuclear weapons using illegal means and banned nuclear components. The narrator says “Aik taraf PM Bhutto India par ilzam laga rahay thay. Aur dosri taraf unka illegal nuclear program zoron shoron se chal raha tha. Enter Colonel Gadhafi of Libya, Dunya k liye terrorist lekin Pakistan ka qareebi dost. Gadhafi ne Pakistan ko 500 million dollars ki funding di. European black market banned nuclear components smuggle kiye gaye aur nuclear bomb main istemal hone wala uranium ki daskat Africa se hue.” (14: 50) Translation: On one hand, PM Bhutto was pointing fingers at India. On the other hand, his illegal nuclear program was in full swing. He’s a terrorist to the world, but for Pakistan, he’s a close ally. Gadhafi provided 500 million dollars in funding to Pakistan. Banned nuclear components were smuggled in from the European black market and the ura-

mium used in the nuclear bomb was smuggled from Africa.

The character of the RAW chief says “Who aik kattar desh hai. India pe nuclear attack krne se pehle, you know they won’t think twice.” (18:50) Translation: It’s a radical country. Before launching a nuclear attack on India, you know they won’t think twice. The military of Pakistan is also negatively portrayed in the film. A RAW agent says “Rawalpindi Pakistan Army ka headquarter hai. Aur Aman acchi tarhan janta hai ke Pakistan ko government nahi uski army chalati hai.” (25:05) Translation: Pakistan’s Army headquarters are in Rawalpindi. Aman knows that Pakistan is not run by the government but by its army.

The film portrays Pakistan as a terrorist state that will provide nuclear weapons to Islamic dictators and terrorist groups, so the film negatively projects that nuclear weapons are not safe with Pakistan. A RAW officer says “Pakistan ne Gadhafi ke sath deal ki hai. Funding ke badle woh unko nuclear bombs supply kar rahy hain. Aur woh din dur nahi jab har Islami dictator aur terrorist group ke paas nuclear bomb hoga.” (39:30) Translation: Pakistan has made a deal with Gadhafi. They will provide nuclear bombs in exchange for funding and soon, every Islamic dictator and terrorist group will have this bomb!

The military is running the country under government and all decisions are made by the military in Pakistan. The RAW chief says “Kehne ke liye tu Pakistan aik democracy hai. Lekin asal main, wahan military raj krti hai. Wahan kisi bhi waqt PM ka takhta palat skta hai. General Zia-ul-Haq behad shatir aur kattar wali soch wala dictator tha.”

(52:25) Translation: in theory, Pakistan is a democracy but in reality, the military runs the country. The PM's chair could be toppled. General Zia-ul-Haq was a very cunning and radical dictator.

India is trying to portray in this film that Pakistan's nuclear program is not safe. The RAW agent says "Pakistan jesi unstable country ke pass nuclear bomb hona India ke liye tabahi hai sir." (1:15:30) Translation: A nuclear bomb in an unstable country like Pakistan means the destruction of India. It is also shown in the movie that Pakistan is unaware of Indian RAW agents within its borders and is complacent, indicating that nuclear weapons should not be in the hands of such a country. The narrator says "Indian Agents ke sacrifice ki waja se, Kahuta ke secret nuclear facility dunya ke samne expose hogae. Phir bhi Zia is sach se inkaar krta raha." (2:04:10) Translation: Because of the sacrifice of Indian agents, the secret nuclear facility in Kahuta was exposed to the world. Yet, Zia kept denying this truth.

The release of *Mission Majnu* sparked controversy over its portrayal of Pakistan and Muslims in Indian cinema. While criticized by Pakistani netizens as propaganda, the film unexpectedly became a top trending movie in Pakistan after its Netflix premiere. This led to confusion among Pakistani Twitter users, with some watching it to verify its content and others criticizing its alleged distortion of facts.²⁶

Through films like "*Mission Majnu*," Indian cinema crafts compelling stories that shape public opinion, promote na-

26. "Pakistanis May Be Watching Bollywood's *Mission Majnu* but It's Not Because It's Good." Dawn, January 2023. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1191426>.

tionalistic sentiments, and justify India's actions against Pakistan. By portraying Pakistan as a radical and unstable state pursuing nuclear weapons through illegal means, the film reinforces negative stereotypes and legitimizes India's intelligence operations. While this narrative construction promotes a sense of pride and vigilance among Indian audiences, it also perpetuates a climate of mistrust and enmity between the two nations. The film's impact extends beyond national borders, influencing international perceptions of Pakistan and potentially straining its diplomatic relations. Additionally, such portrayals can provoke anti-Indian sentiments within Pakistan, leading to a media war and further complicating efforts toward peace and mutual understanding.

Implications for Pakistan's National Security

The Indian media, influenced by Prime Minister Modi's administration, engages in hybrid warfare against Pakistan by disseminating misinformation and portraying the country in a negative light. This strategy fosters Islamophobia and undermines peace initiatives, significantly affecting bilateral relations, diplomatic efforts, and both global and domestic perceptions of Pakistan.²⁷ The Modi government's sway over the media incites anti-Pakistan sentiments, which in turn jeopardizes Pakistan's national security. The media frequently associates Pakistan with terrorism, thereby tarnishing its international reputation. Furthermore, India has actively lobbied for Pakistan's inclusion on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list," and has advocated for its continued presence on the

27. Goel, Vindu, and Jeffrey Gettleman. "Under Modi, India's Press Is Not So Free Anymore." *The New York Times*, April 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/asia/modi-india-press-media.html>.

list, citing Pakistan's purported failures in combating terrorism.²⁸

Under Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, India's assertive foreign policy and support for Baloch independence have exacerbated tensions in South Asia. A notable instance of this occurred when Modi referenced Balochistan in his 2016 Independence Day speech,²⁹ signaling India's endorsement of the Baloch separatist movement. Pakistan perceived this as interference in its internal affairs, further deteriorating India-Pakistan relations and contributing to regional instability. Research indicates a shift in government policy towards Hindutva under Modi's leadership, with the BJP integrating Hindu nationalism into state governance.³⁰ This ideological shift is reflected in increased border tensions and incidents such as surgical strikes and the controversial Balakot airstrikes, which Pakistan claims were fictitious.³¹ Additionally, the alignment of Bollywood's narratives with the BJP's ideology has reinforced this nationalist agenda, portraying India predominantly as a Hindu nation.³² This cultural representation supports the broader political narrative espoused by the BJP, further embedding Hindu nationalism within the fabric of Indian statecraft and society.

28. "India Admits It 'ensured' Pakistan Remains on Grey List." *The Express Tribune*, July 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311285/india-admits-it-ensured-pakistan-remains-on-grey-list>.

29. Shams, Shamil. "Modi's Balochistan Comments Upset Pakistan." *Deutsche Welle*, August 2016. <https://www.dw.com/en/indian-pm-modis-balochistan-comments-upset-pakistan/a-19475682>.

30. Ahmed. "Hindu Nationalism."

31. Raina, Badri. "Citizenship Amendment Bill: A Warning Bell for the Republic." *The Wire*, December 2019. <https://thewire.in/religion/citizenship-amendment-bill-hindu-rashtra>.

32. Zafar, Salman. "Pakistan and Bollywood: A Broken Bond." *Al Jazeera*, January 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/1/19/pakistan-and-bollywood-a-broken-bond>.

The Pulwama attack resulted in the Indian media attributing the incident to Pakistan-based groups, thereby escalating tensions despite a lack of conclusive evidence. The subsequent Balakot airstrike, although minimally impactful in terms of actual damage, was heavily sensationalized by the media. This sensationalism involved the dissemination of false claims and propaganda, which aimed to diplomatically isolate Pakistan on the international stage. Such media practices have contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations and have further complicated efforts toward regional stability.³³

A Brussels-based non-governmental organization uncovered a network, supported by the Indian Srivastava Group and the video news agency ANI, that has been disseminating fake news to tarnish Pakistan's international reputation for over 15 years. This extensive operation involved 265 websites across 65 countries, systematically spreading false information to portray Pakistan in a negative light.³⁴ The revelation of this network underscores the sophisticated and long-term efforts to influence global perceptions and undermine Pakistan's standing on the international stage.

The Modi government in India promotes nationalist films that emphasize patriotism and military valor, supporting these productions with various incentives. It exerts control over film certification and content regulation to ensure alignment with its ideological stance, potentially restrict-

33. Wasif, Afnan. "Impact of India's Hybrid Warfare on Pakistan's National Security." *Pakistan Today*, June 2022. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/06/12/impact-of-indias-hybrid-warfare-on-pakistans-national-security/>.

34. Wasif. "Impact of India's Hybrid Warfare."

ing filmmakers' creative freedom.³⁵ This influence on the film industry not only shapes public perception in favor of nationalist narratives but also limits the diversity of artistic expression within Indian cinema.

The impact of Indian films on Pakistan's national security is significant, as these films can have psychological effects and a potential for radicalization.³⁶ Indian films often portray Pakistanis negatively, as seen in movies like "Phantom" and "Baby," which foster anti-Pakistan sentiments and contribute to radicalization. Films such as "Uri: The Surgical Strike" and "Raazi" reinforce border tensions by presenting Pakistan as a persistent threat, thereby undermining cultural understanding and peace efforts. This negative depiction in popular media exacerbates existing hostilities and hampers diplomatic and peace-building initiatives between the two nations.

Bollywood's glorification of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has overshadowed even the Indian Army, as exemplified by an anti-Pakistan movie that distorts reality to depict a fabricated surgical strike as a victory. This film aims to enhance Modi's image and promote the ruling government's agenda, presenting a skewed narrative that aligns with political objectives rather than factual events.³⁷

35. Mukherjee, Tatsam. "'Setback for Artistic Freedom' As India Scraps Film Tribunal." Al Jazeera, April 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/9/bollywood-anxious-as-india-abolishes-film-certification-tribunal>.

36. Asif, Fariha, and Jagmohan Sangha. "Film as a Significant Factor in Fostering Peace and Justice in Society." Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs, July 2022. <file:///C:/Users/Apple%20computer/Downloads/film-as-a-significant-factor-in-fostering-peace-and-justice-in-society.pdf>.

37. "RAW Behind Production of Anti-Pakistan Films in Bollywood: Report." Radio Pakistan, April 2023. <https://www.radio.gov.pk/18-04-2023/raw-provides->

This portrayal not only serves to elevate Modi's status but also propagates the government's ideological stance, further influencing public perception and nationalistic sentiments.

Conclusion

The Modi government's influence on the Indian media has significant implications for Pakistan's national security. The exploitation of cinema for propaganda purposes, the cultural invasion by Indian films, and the weaponization of entertainment have collectively contributed to a climate of hostility that undermines Pakistan's security. Indian films, used as tools of hybrid warfare, exert a profound psychological impact, perpetuating border tensions and eroding social and cultural values. This deliberate use of media to shape perceptions and foster animosity poses considerable challenges to Pakistan's security landscape, complicating efforts to achieve regional stability and peace.

Indian films and media coverage extend beyond national borders, significantly influencing international perceptions and regional stability while straining bilateral relations. These portrayals often lack objectivity, distorting Pakistan's role in regional security dynamics. Events such as the FATF's grey listing of Pakistan in the recent past and the Pulwama or Uri terrorist attacks exemplify how Indian media propagates negative stereotypes, fostering anti-Pakistan sentiments on a global scale. This biased coverage not only exacerbates diplomatic tensions but also undermines efforts toward regional peace and cooperation by perpetuating a one-sided narrative that impacts global per-

ceptions of Pakistan.

In the context of hybrid warfare, India has effectively employed coherent and persuasive narratives to shape public opinion to gain a strategic advantage. Through compelling storytelling, Indian media has influenced and constructed specific perceptions beyond realities against Pakistan. By utilizing emotional appeals, persuasive rhetoric, and cinematic techniques, Indian media portrays India's perspective as righteous and justified, while depicting Pakistan as the aggressor or a source of instability. This strategic use of media shapes both domestic and international perceptions, bolstering India's geopolitical position and reinforcing negative stereotypes about Pakistan.