

FROM DEEWAAR TO ANIMAL: THE EVOLUTION OF MALE ANGER AND MASCULINITY IN SELECTED HINDI CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

For years, to express social tensions, generational frustrations, and changing ideals of masculinity, Hindi cinema has historically used male anger as a core narrative and emotional vehicle. From the 'angry young man' of the 1970s to the present-day towering figures of disturbing hyper-masculinity, representations of male anger have changed with India's socio-economic changes. This chapter examines the trajectory of male anger and masculinity in Hindi popular cinema from the 1970s to the present. Starting with the rise of the "angry young man" in Amitabh Bachchan starrers like Deewaar and Zanjeer, this chapter explores how cinematic masculinity has historically indexed and reflected larger socio-political concerns of unemployment, corruption, and institutional failure in post-Emergency India. The chapter will then go on to juxtapose this earlier figure of socially engaged anger with more contemporary depictions of hyper-masculine heroes in films like Kabir Singh and Animal, starring Shahid Kapoor and Ranbir Kapoor. While the anger of the 1970s hero was socially engaged, more contemporary figures are increasingly exemplars of a form of individualized and performative "alpha masculinity." Through a close engagement with the scholarship on masculinity studies and popular cinema, this chapter argues that this shift is symptomatic of larger cultural shifts in India associated with liberalization, consumer culture, and shifting gender politics. Through this examination of the trajectory from Deewaar to Animal, this chapter will show how Hindi cinema continues to engage with male identity, authority, and emotional expression across generations.

Keywords : Masculinity ,Male Anger, Hindi Cinema, ,Gender Representation, Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION: MALE ANGER AS CULTURAL NARRATIVE: MASCULINITY AND POWER IN HINDI CINEMA

Male anger has been a core feature, in the storytelling of Hindi cinema, influencing both the reading of male characters and the exercise of power within the narrative frame. In many Indian films, including Bollywood films, the storylines have often oriented around male protagonists who have expressed anger in response to personal or social injustices. This is not limited to the character study but represents a larger aspect of Indian cultural values related to masculinity and the functioning of power in cinematic narratives. In the discourse of Bollywood cinema, male anger was a hallmark of 1970s films, symbolizing the coming together of the angry male and the "angry young man" character type. The angry young man is a character type in Indian culture that symbolized a response to the prevailing economic and social issues faced by successive generations. For example, in the film Deewar, Amitabh Bachchan stars as Vijay, A character whose anger elevated from social injustice and class inequality. In these narratives, the male anger is an outcry against the corrupted institutions and systems. The hero's anger is always justified in the cinematic context, making him a layered grey character who is flawed but also commiserative because he has the audacity to challenge the systems in place.

Yet change came slow. As money rules bent, world pictures trembled differently across screens. Men once shouted for crowds now mutter through clenched teeth. Their fury curls inward, shaped by who they are, not what society broke. Faces tighten over slights only they feel. Power flexes in private

rooms, not public squares. Hurt minds wear strength like armor. Anger wears a lonelier face these days.

This shift is particularly evident in films such as *Kabir Singh*, starring Shahid Kapoor. The film sparked intense public debate due to its portrayal of an aggressive and emotionally volatile protagonist whose anger is directed toward intimate relationships and personal conflicts. Similarly, the film *Animal*, featuring Ranbir Kapoor, presents an even more extreme depiction of hyper-masculinity where violence, dominance, and emotional excess are central to the character's identity.

These evolving representations illustrate how Hindi cinema participates in constructing cultural narratives about masculinity and power. While earlier films framed male anger as a response to systemic injustice, contemporary narratives often emphasize individualistic expressions of rage and dominance. As a result, male anger continues to function as a significant narrative device through which Bollywood explores changing ideals of masculinity, authority, and emotional expression in modern Indian society.

ANGER AS A RECURRING NARRATIVE AND EMOTIONAL TROPE

Anger exists as a fundamental element which shapes Hindi cinematic narratives. Character development depends on this particular aspect of their personality. Male characters in these films display intense rage when they encounter situations which they consider unjust. They become furious when their trust is broken or when someone inflicts emotional pain on them. The story progresses through this particular anger which drives the plot. The male protagonist gains strength through his passionate display of anger. The filmmakers use anger to create intense emotional responses in viewers who watch their films. The hero in these stories uses his anger as the driving force which leads him to fight back against his enemies. First he becomes enraged. His next step includes pursuing vengeance or preparing for a battle. This particular moment keeps us engaged while we remain uncertain about the upcoming developments. The story reaches its peak excitement through the power of anger. The audience develops emotional investment in the superhero's journey through his present challenges. Anger serves as the main characteristic which defines male characters throughout these films. This particular trait establishes their identity. Hindi cinema constantly presents this phenomenon to audiences. People tend to react to this particular element. Anger exists as a human emotion which every person can understand.

Hindi cinema narrative has always been supportive towards the portrayal of masculine angry young man figures as hero. Hero is that central character who is surrounded by problems, grief and unfortunate events but he wins it all by fighting out. While battling with his own grief and issues he normalizes the raged reactions towards others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from masculinity studies, cultural studies, and feminist film theory to examine the changing representations of male anger and masculinity in *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023). Rather than viewing masculinity as an innate or biologically determined characteristic, the study approaches it as a socially and culturally constructed identity that evolves in response to historical, political, and economic transformations. The selected theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how Hindi cinema constructs, negotiates, and legitimizes different forms of masculine identity and violence across nearly five decades.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The primary theoretical lens of this study is the concept of **hegemonic masculinity**, developed by R. W. Connell (1995). Connell argues that masculinity is not a singular or fixed identity but consists of multiple masculinities organized within hierarchical power relations. Among these, hegemonic masculinity represents the culturally dominant form of manhood that legitimizes male authority over women and marginalizes alternative masculinities.

Hegemonic masculinity is historically contingent and changes according to social, political, and cultural contexts. It is sustained not merely through physical strength but through social institutions, media representations, and ideological practices that normalize particular masculine ideals. Characteristics commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity include authority, emotional restraint, competitiveness, heterosexuality, aggression, and the capacity to exercise control over others.

This concept is particularly relevant for analysing the evolution of male protagonists in Hindi cinema. In *Deewaar*, Vijay's masculinity is constructed through labour, sacrifice, and moral responsibility, where violence functions as a response to systemic injustice. Although he operates outside the law, his anger is represented as ethically motivated and socially meaningful. By contrast, Kabir Singh presents a protagonist whose masculinity is rooted in emotional entitlement, possessiveness, and patriarchal control over intimate relationships. In *Animal*, masculinity reaches an extreme form characterized by excessive violence, emotional instability, and obsessive loyalty to paternal authority. The film reflects a contemporary version of hegemonic masculinity in which dominance is expressed through spectacular violence and emotional excess rather than collective social struggle.

Connell's framework therefore enables this study to trace how dominant ideals of masculinity shift across different historical moments while continuing to reinforce patriarchal structures and gender hierarchies.

REPRESENTATION THEORY

The second theoretical perspective employed in this study is Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Hall (1997) argues that media do not simply reflect reality but actively construct meaning through systems of representation. Films participate in this process by selecting particular narratives, symbols, visual codes, and characterizations that shape audiences' understanding of gender, identity, and social relations.

Representation is therefore a cultural practice through which ideologies are produced and circulated. The repeated portrayal of certain masculine behaviours—such as aggression, emotional suppression, revenge, and domination—contributes to their normalization within popular culture. Cinema becomes a site where audiences learn not only what masculinity looks like but also how masculine behaviour is expected to be performed.

Within the selected films, anger functions as a representational strategy rather than merely an emotional response. *Deewaar* represents anger as an expression of class oppression and social injustice, encouraging audience empathy for the protagonist despite his criminal actions. In *Kabir Singh*, aggressive behaviour is embedded within the language of romantic devotion, creating an ambiguous representation that simultaneously critiques and romanticizes toxic masculinity. *Animal* further transforms violence into a visual spectacle in which brutality is stylized and aestheticized, encouraging audiences to interpret hypermasculinity as charismatic and desirable.

Hall's theory therefore enables the study to examine how cinematic language—including dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, costume, sound, and narrative structure—constructs changing meanings of masculinity across different historical periods.

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

The third theoretical perspective informing this study is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler (1990) challenges the notion that gender is a natural or stable identity, arguing instead that it is continuously produced through repeated performances, behaviours, gestures, language, and social practices. Masculinity, therefore, is not something individuals inherently possess but something they repeatedly perform in accordance with cultural expectations.

Within Hindi cinema, male protagonists repeatedly perform socially accepted codes of masculinity through acts of physical violence, emotional suppression, authority, risk-taking, and dominance over women and rival men. These performances become culturally recognizable markers of masculine identity.

The selected films demonstrate changing performances of masculinity across generations. Vijay in *Deewaar* performs masculinity through stoicism, sacrifice, and moral resilience despite his criminal identity. Kabir performs masculinity through emotional volatility, possessiveness, and repeated assertions of dominance over romantic relationships. Ranvijay in *Animal* performs masculinity through exaggerated physical aggression, relentless displays of strength, and obsessive demonstrations of filial devotion. These performances reveal that masculine identity is continually reconstructed according to shifting social values rather than remaining historically constant.

Butler's framework also highlights how these cinematic performances influence audience perceptions by presenting certain masculine behaviours as culturally legitimate or desirable. Consequently, cinema functions not only as a mirror of society but also as a powerful institution that participates in producing dominant gender norms.

INTEGRATING THE FRAMEWORK

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional approach to understanding the evolution of male anger and masculinity in Hindi cinema. Connell's theory explains how dominant forms of masculinity are historically organized and maintained within systems of patriarchal power. Hall's theory demonstrates how cinema constructs and circulates meanings about masculinity through representation. Butler's concept of gender performativity explains how masculine identities are repeatedly enacted and normalized through performative behaviours.

Using these complementary perspectives, the present study argues that the representation of male anger in Hindi cinema has undergone a significant transformation. In *Deewaar*, anger functions as a morally justified response to structural inequality and social injustice. In *Kabir Singh*, anger becomes increasingly individualized, manifesting through possessiveness, emotional instability, and patriarchal entitlement. Finally, in *Animal*, male anger evolves into a spectacular performance of hypermasculinity, where violence, emotional obsession, and domination become central markers of masculine identity. Together, these films illustrate how Hindi cinema has progressively redefined masculine anger in response to changing social realities while continuing to reproduce and negotiate dominant patriarchal ideals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The representation of masculinity in Hindi cinema has attracted growing scholarly attention over the past two decades, reflecting broader concerns regarding gender, power, identity, and cultural transformation in contemporary India. As one of the most influential forms of popular culture, Bollywood functions not merely as entertainment but as a cultural institution that constructs, negotiates, and disseminates dominant ideals of masculinity. These cinematic representations both

reflect prevailing social norms and actively participate in shaping public perceptions of gender roles, authority, violence, and emotional expression (Raj & Goswami, 2020; Lobo, 2018).

Existing scholarship largely agrees that masculinity is not an innate biological trait but a socially and historically constructed identity that is continuously redefined through changing political, economic, and cultural contexts. Walia (2025) argues that masculinity in Hindi cinema has evolved alongside Indian society, with the male protagonist serving as a symbolic embodiment of shifting ideals of power, responsibility, and heroism. Similarly, Sushrutha (2017) contends that Bollywood heroes have historically reflected dominant nationalist and patriarchal ideologies while simultaneously responding to changing social realities, thereby producing multiple and often competing masculinities.

Scholars have examined this transformation through diverse analytical perspectives. Lobo (2018) demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity extends beyond film narratives into promotional materials, where dominant masculine ideals are reproduced through visual imagery, nationalism, and consumer culture. Likewise, Raj and Goswami (2020), through a quantitative study of young audiences, found that repeated exposure to Bollywood's representations of aggression, substance abuse, physical dominance, and hypermasculinity significantly influences audience perceptions and behavioural aspirations, suggesting that cinematic masculinity has tangible social consequences.

More recent studies indicate a diversification of masculine identities in Hindi cinema. Roy and Ayalon (2023) observe a transition from Connell's hegemonic masculinity toward "caring masculinities," where emotional vulnerability and caregiving challenge traditional ideals of male dominance. Similarly, Qazi and Pandey (2025) argue that actors such as Pankaj Tripathi represent an emerging model of empathetic masculinity that departs from conventional portrayals of aggression and stoicism. However, parallel scholarship on films such as *Kabir Singh* highlights the persistence of toxic masculinity, emotional entitlement, and the romanticization of violence within contemporary Bollywood narratives (Pawaiya & Tiwari, 2025; Ganguly & Dutta, n.d.).

Despite these important contributions, the existing literature remains fragmented, with most studies focusing on individual films, actors, genres, or specific dimensions of masculinity. Comparative historical analyses that trace the evolution of male anger across different cinematic eras remain limited. This study addresses that gap by comparatively examining *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023) to investigate how representations of male anger and masculinity have evolved from socially grounded resistance to individualized emotional entitlement and hypermasculine violence, thereby contributing to contemporary debates in gender, film, and cultural studies.

MASCULINITY AS A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

Masculinity is increasingly understood within gender studies as a socially and culturally constructed identity rather than a biologically predetermined attribute. Contemporary scholars argue that the qualities associated with manhood are shaped by historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts, making masculinity a fluid and dynamic social construct that varies across time and societies. Rather than existing as a universal or fixed category, masculinity comprises multiple forms that are continuously negotiated through institutions such as the family, education, religion, media, and popular culture. Cinema, in particular, plays a significant role in constructing and legitimizing dominant ideals of masculinity by repeatedly presenting specific behaviours, attitudes, and gender roles as desirable and socially acceptable (Walia, 2025; Lobo, 2018).

The concept of **hegemonic masculinity**, introduced by Connell (1995) and later refined by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), has become one of the most influential frameworks for understanding masculine identities. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that

legitimizes men's authority over women and marginalizes alternative masculinities. It is characterized by authority, physical strength, emotional restraint, heterosexuality, competitiveness, and the ability to exercise power. Importantly, hegemonic masculinity is not static but evolves according to changing social circumstances while continuing to preserve patriarchal power structures. Lobo (2018) argues that the Indian context has adapted Connell's framework to reflect local cultural, religious, and historical experiences, where masculinity has been shaped by colonialism, nationalism, kinship structures, and post-liberalization consumer culture. She further explains that Indian masculine identity differs from Western formulations because it is deeply embedded within family relationships, particularly the mother-son and father-son dynamic, and is influenced by indigenous understandings of honour, duty, and social hierarchy.

Several scholars have highlighted that Indian masculinity has undergone significant transformations across different historical periods. During the colonial era, British representations of Indian men as weak and effeminate encouraged the emergence of hypermasculine nationalist identities that emphasized physical strength, discipline, and martial virtues. These constructions later influenced popular culture, particularly Hindi cinema, where the male hero became a symbolic figure representing national identity, moral authority, and patriarchal power (Sushrutha, 2017; Lobo, 2018). Sushrutha (2017) argues that Bombay cinema has historically produced multiple masculinities corresponding to changing socio-political contexts, moving from nationalist heroes to the contemporary "new man" who negotiates tradition and modernity. Nevertheless, despite these transformations, dominant cinematic representations continue to privilege patriarchal ideals while marginalizing alternative forms of masculine expression.

The expansion of globalization and economic liberalization has further complicated masculine identities in contemporary India. Rather than replacing traditional masculinity, neoliberal culture has combined consumerism, individualism, and celebrity culture with conventional patriarchal values. Lobo (2018) observes that Bollywood increasingly commodifies masculinity by associating male identity with muscular bodies, luxury lifestyles, fashion, and consumer brands, transforming masculinity into a marketable cultural product. Similarly, Raj and Goswami (2020) found that young audiences often associate cinematic masculinity with physical attractiveness, muscularity, dominance, and substance use, demonstrating the considerable influence of film on the construction of masculine aspirations. Their quantitative study indicates that repeated exposure to Bollywood's hypermasculine heroes encourages imitation of behavioural patterns, including aggression, risky behaviour, and substance consumption, particularly among younger viewers.

However, recent scholarship suggests that hegemonic masculinity is increasingly being questioned within contemporary Hindi cinema. Roy and Ayalon (2023) argue that newer cinematic narratives have begun to explore **caring masculinities**, characterized by emotional openness, caregiving, vulnerability, and interdependence. Through their analysis of *Piku* (2015) and *102 Not Out* (2018), they demonstrate that male protagonists can embody nurturing roles without relinquishing masculine identity, thereby challenging the long-standing association between masculinity and dominance. Likewise, Qazi and Pandey (2025) contend that actors such as Pankaj Tripathi represent an alternative masculine ideal based on empathy, emotional intelligence, and respect rather than aggression and authority. These emerging representations indicate that masculinity in Hindi cinema is becoming increasingly pluralistic, reflecting broader social debates surrounding gender equality and changing family structures.

Despite these progressive developments, studies focusing on films such as *Kabir Singh* and *Animal* reveal that hypermasculinity and toxic masculinity continue to dominate mainstream commercial cinema. Ganguly and Dutta argue that Bollywood frequently reinforces patriarchal ideology by

glorifying male aggression, possessiveness, and the subordination of women, thereby contributing to the normalization of toxic gender relations within society. Similarly, Pawaiya and Tiwari (2025) observe that Kabir Singh romanticizes emotional instability, violence, and male entitlement while presenting these traits as authentic expressions of passionate love. These contrasting scholarly perspectives suggest that contemporary Hindi cinema remains a contested cultural space where hegemonic, caring, hybrid, and toxic masculinities coexist, compete, and evolve. Understanding this plurality provides the conceptual foundation for examining how male anger and masculine identity are represented across different historical moments in *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023).

THE EVOLUTION OF MASCULINITY IN HINDI CINEMA

The representation of masculinity in Hindi cinema has undergone a profound transformation over the past five decades, reflecting India's changing socio-political realities, economic transitions, and evolving gender relations. Rather than remaining a static construct, cinematic masculinity has continuously adapted to shifts in public consciousness, moving from the socially conscious hero of the 1970s to the romantic lover of the 1990s and eventually to the psychologically conflicted and hypermasculine anti-hero of contemporary Bollywood. Scholars argue that these changing representations are closely linked to broader historical developments, including post-independence nation-building, economic liberalization, globalization, consumer capitalism, and the rise of digital media (Sushrutha, 2017; Walia, 2025).

The emergence of the "**Angry Young Man**" during the 1970s marked one of the most significant turning points in the representation of masculinity in Hindi cinema. This period coincided with widespread unemployment, political instability, corruption, labour unrest, and public dissatisfaction with state institutions. Against this backdrop, actors such as Amitabh Bachchan embodied a new masculine ideal that differed significantly from the romantic heroes of earlier decades. Rather than portraying emotionally expressive lovers, these protagonists represented ordinary men confronting systemic injustice through rebellion and moral resistance. Lobo (2018), drawing upon Dwyer (2015) and Gopinath (2017), argues that Amitabh Bachchan's cinematic persona was characterized by "**controlled anger**," where violence functioned as a morally justified response to corruption and social inequality rather than as an expression of personal frustration. This representation established masculinity as synonymous with sacrifice, resilience, responsibility, and the protection of marginalized communities.

As Indian society entered the era of **economic liberalization during the 1990s**, the dominant image of masculinity gradually shifted. Liberalization transformed India's economy, expanded consumer culture, and encouraged globalization, resulting in significant changes in family structures, urban lifestyles, and aspirations. Correspondingly, Hindi cinema moved away from narratives of collective political struggle toward stories centred on romance, personal ambition, and middle-class success. Lobo (2018) observes that the emergence of Shah Rukh Khan redefined Bollywood masculinity by replacing Bachchan's anger with emotional vulnerability, romantic sensitivity, and cosmopolitan sophistication. Unlike the Angry Young Man, Shah Rukh Khan's characters frequently expressed affection, fear, grief, and emotional dependence, thereby introducing a softer, neoliberal masculine identity. However, this apparent emotional openness did not necessarily dismantle patriarchal structures; rather, it reframed masculine authority within narratives of romance, family, and consumer success.

This transition also reflected broader changes in India's socio-economic landscape. Sushrutha (2017) argues that post-liberalization Bollywood witnessed the emergence of the "**New Man**," whose

masculinity was negotiated through education, career aspirations, nationalism, and personal relationships instead of purely physical dominance. Nevertheless, this transformation remained selective. While male protagonists became more emotionally expressive and aesthetically conscious, they continued to occupy positions of narrative authority, and women's roles largely remained secondary to male self-discovery. The study further suggests that Bollywood increasingly produced multiple masculinities, yet hegemonic masculinity continued to dominate mainstream narratives through new forms rather than disappearing altogether.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century witnessed another significant transformation with the emergence of **hypermasculine and psychologically fragmented protagonists**. Global media expansion, social media platforms, celebrity culture, and intensified consumerism contributed to increasingly individualized representations of masculinity. According to Raj and Goswami (2020), contemporary Bollywood heroes increasingly emphasize physical fitness, muscular bodies, stylish appearance, aggression, and substance use as markers of masculine identity. Their empirical study demonstrates that young audiences often associate masculinity with physical power, dominance, violence, and risk-taking, indicating the strong influence of cinematic representation on gender socialization. The authors further report that many respondents acknowledged feeling motivated to imitate behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and aggressive body language after watching popular Bollywood heroes, highlighting the persuasive power of contemporary masculine imagery.

Parallel to this evolution, scholars have identified the persistence—and, in some cases, intensification—of **hegemonic and toxic masculinity** within mainstream Hindi cinema. Ganguly and Dutta argue that despite changing social attitudes towards gender equality, commercial Bollywood frequently reproduces patriarchal values by glorifying male aggression, emotional repression, and the objectification of women. They contend that toxic masculinity remains deeply embedded within mainstream cinematic narratives, where violence is often presented as an acceptable expression of masculine authority and emotional suffering. Similarly, Pawaiya and Tiwari's (2025) analysis of Kabir Singh demonstrates how contemporary cinema romanticizes possessiveness, obsessive love, alcoholism, and emotional instability while framing these behaviours as authentic demonstrations of masculine passion. Rather than critically interrogating such conduct, the film often normalizes and legitimizes it through its narrative resolution, reflecting broader tensions within contemporary Indian society regarding gender relations and consent.

At the same time, recent scholarship suggests that Hindi cinema has also begun exploring **alternative masculinities** that challenge traditional patriarchal ideals. Roy and Ayalon (2023), through their analysis of Piku (2015) and 102 Not Out (2018), argue that Bollywood has gradually introduced the concept of **caring masculinity**, emphasizing caregiving, emotional vulnerability, and intergenerational responsibility. Likewise, Qazi and Pandey (2025) identify actors such as Pankaj Tripathi as representatives of a redefined masculinity rooted in empathy, humility, and emotional intelligence rather than dominance and violence. These studies suggest that contemporary Hindi cinema no longer presents a singular model of manhood but rather accommodates multiple, often competing, masculinities that reflect India's changing cultural landscape.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into different phases of masculine representation, they largely examine specific actors, genres, or individual films. There remains limited scholarship tracing the **historical evolution of male anger as a defining characteristic of cinematic masculinity** across different eras of Hindi cinema. The transition from the morally justified, socially rooted anger of Deewaar (1975), to the possessive emotional entitlement portrayed in Kabir Singh (2019), and finally to the spectacular hypermasculinity of Animal (2023), has not yet been systematically

examined within a single comparative framework. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how the meaning, function, and cultural significance of male anger have transformed across nearly five decades of Hindi cinema, revealing broader shifts in the construction of masculinity within Indian popular culture.

HEGEMONIC AND TOXIC MASCULINITY IN CONTEMPORARY BOLLYWOOD

The discourse on masculinity in contemporary Bollywood has increasingly shifted from celebrating the traditional heroic male to critically examining the persistence of hegemonic and toxic masculinities within popular cinema. While earlier Hindi films often portrayed masculinity through ideals of social responsibility, sacrifice, and moral justice, recent commercial films have increasingly associated masculine identity with emotional dominance, physical aggression, possessiveness, and the performance of power. Scholars argue that these changing portrayals reflect broader transformations in Indian society shaped by globalization, neoliberal consumer culture, and shifting gender relations. Rather than replacing patriarchal ideals, contemporary cinema has reconfigured hegemonic masculinity into more individualized and psychologically complex forms that continue to reinforce male dominance while presenting it through narratives of personal trauma, romantic obsession, and familial loyalty (Lobo, 2018; Walia, 2025).

Connell's concept of **hegemonic masculinity** provides a significant theoretical framework for understanding these contemporary representations. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant model of manhood that legitimizes patriarchal authority and normalizes male dominance over women and subordinate masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Lobo (2018) argues that Bollywood continues to reproduce hegemonic masculine ideals by privileging male protagonists who embody authority, courage, aggression, and control, even when these characters display emotional vulnerability or moral ambiguity. Her analysis of Raees demonstrates that contemporary masculinity is increasingly hybrid, combining physical strength with emotional appeal and consumerist aesthetics. This hybridization allows hegemonic masculinity to adapt to changing cultural expectations without fundamentally challenging patriarchal power structures.

One of the defining characteristics of contemporary Bollywood masculinity is the emergence of **hypermasculinity**, where exaggerated displays of violence, muscularity, emotional intensity, and dominance become central markers of male identity. Raj and Goswami (2020) found that young audiences frequently associate masculinity with physical fitness, muscular bodies, fearlessness, aggression, and substance use because these characteristics are repeatedly glorified by Bollywood heroes. Their quantitative study further revealed that many respondents expressed admiration for cinematic representations of violence and acknowledged being influenced by portrayals of smoking, alcohol consumption, and aggressive behaviour as symbols of masculine identity. These findings suggest that Bollywood not only reflects existing masculine ideals but also actively participates in constructing and legitimizing them among younger audiences.

The increasing prevalence of **toxic masculinity** has become a major focus of recent scholarship on Hindi cinema. Toxic masculinity refers to cultural norms that equate manhood with aggression, emotional repression, dominance, misogyny, and the use of violence as a legitimate means of asserting masculine authority. Ganguly and Dutta argue that mainstream Bollywood frequently normalizes these behaviours by portraying controlling and abusive male protagonists as heroic, thereby reinforcing patriarchal values within popular culture. According to the authors, contemporary films often romanticize possessiveness, objectify women, and present male aggression as an acceptable response to emotional pain or threats to masculine identity. Such portrayals risk legitimizing gender inequality

by framing violent behaviour as an expression of authentic love, honour, or personal suffering rather than as problematic conduct.

Among recent films, **Kabir Singh (2019)** has become one of the most debated examples of toxic masculinity in Indian cinema. Pawaiya and Tiwari (2025) contend that the film constructs its protagonist as a brilliant yet emotionally unstable surgeon whose possessiveness, alcoholism, physical violence, and verbal abuse are repeatedly justified through the narrative of romantic heartbreak. Rather than critically interrogating Kabir's behaviour, the film presents his aggression as evidence of emotional authenticity and passionate love. Feminist criticism has therefore argued that the narrative romanticizes emotional abuse, reinforces patriarchal entitlement over women's autonomy, and blurs the boundaries between love and control. The study further observes that public reactions to the film were sharply divided: while critics condemned its representation of consent and gender relations, many audiences interpreted Kabir's behaviour as an intense expression of romance, illustrating the contested nature of masculine representation in contemporary Indian society.

The recent success of **Animal (2023)** extends this trajectory of hypermasculinity even further. Although scholarly work on the film is still emerging, existing literature on contemporary masculinity provides a useful framework for understanding its cultural significance. Walia (2025) notes that recent Hindi films increasingly celebrate male protagonists who combine emotional vulnerability with spectacular violence, producing a masculine identity that is simultaneously wounded and omnipotent. Such characters derive legitimacy not from moral responsibility, as in earlier cinematic heroes, but from their ability to dominate opponents through extreme physical force and unwavering emotional obsession. This shift reflects broader changes in contemporary masculinity, where psychological trauma often functions as a narrative justification for excessive violence and patriarchal authority.

Nevertheless, contemporary Bollywood does not present a singular or uncontested model of masculinity. Alongside hegemonic and toxic representations, recent scholarship identifies emerging alternatives that challenge traditional patriarchal ideals. Roy and Ayalon (2023) introduce the concept of **caring masculinity**, arguing that films such as *Piku* (2015) and *102 Not Out* (2018) portray male characters who express vulnerability, caregiving, affection, and emotional dependence without compromising their masculine identities. Similarly, Qazi and Pandey (2025) argue that actors such as Pankaj Tripathi have contributed to redefining masculinity by portraying empathetic, emotionally intelligent, and respectful male characters who resist conventional stereotypes of dominance and aggression. These alternative representations demonstrate that Bollywood has begun to accommodate more diverse forms of masculinity, although they remain less commercially dominant than hypermasculine narratives.

Collectively, the literature suggests that contemporary Hindi cinema represents a site of ideological negotiation where hegemonic, toxic, hybrid, and caring masculinities coexist. While neoliberal consumer culture has diversified masculine identities, it has also intensified the spectacle of male violence and emotional excess within mainstream commercial cinema. Existing studies, however, primarily examine individual films or specific dimensions of masculinity and seldom investigate how **male anger itself evolves as the central mechanism through which hegemonic masculinity is performed**. This limitation is particularly significant when considering the historical trajectory from the socially legitimized anger of Deewaar (1975) to the emotionally possessive masculinity of Kabir Singh (2019) and the hyperviolent paternal obsession depicted in *Animal* (2023). By comparatively analysing these films, the present study seeks to demonstrate how male anger has become the principal performative expression of hegemonic masculinity across different socio-historical moments in Hindi cinema, while simultaneously revealing the changing cultural meanings attached to masculine power, violence, and identity.

MALE ANGER, VIOLENCE, AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Male anger has remained one of the defining characteristics of Hindi cinema, although its meaning and narrative function have evolved considerably over time. Earlier films portrayed anger as a justified response to social inequality, corruption, and systemic injustice, whereas contemporary cinema increasingly frames male anger as a manifestation of personal trauma, romantic obsession, and psychological conflict. Consequently, violence has shifted from being a moral instrument of justice to becoming an individual performance of masculine identity. Scholars argue that this transformation reflects changing social realities while simultaneously reinforcing hegemonic notions of masculinity through the glorification of aggression and emotional dominance (Lobo, 2018; Walia, 2025).

Audience reception studies further demonstrate that these representations have significant social implications. Raj and Goswami (2020), in a survey of 300 young Bollywood viewers, found that repeated exposure to hypermasculine heroes influenced perceptions of ideal manhood, encouraging admiration for physical dominance, aggression, substance abuse, and violent behaviour as symbols of masculinity. Similarly, debates surrounding *Kabir Singh* revealed a polarized audience response: while many viewers perceived Kabir's aggression as a realistic expression of passionate love, critics condemned the film for normalizing toxic masculinity, emotional abuse, and problematic notions of consent (Pawaiya & Tiwari, 2025).

These studies indicate that audience interpretations are neither uniform nor passive. Instead, they actively negotiate cinematic meanings based on cultural values and lived experiences. However, limited research has comparatively examined how audience perceptions of male anger have evolved across different generations of Hindi cinema, a gap this study seeks to address through an analysis of *Deewaar*, *Kabir Singh*, and *Animal*.

RESEARCH GAP

Although existing scholarship has extensively examined masculinity, patriarchy, and gender representation in Hindi cinema, most studies focus on individual films, actors, or specific aspects such as promotional content, audience reception, or toxic masculinity (Lobo, 2018; Raj & Goswami, 2020; Roy & Ayalon, 2023). There is limited research tracing the historical evolution of **male anger** as a defining feature of cinematic masculinity across different eras. This study addresses that gap by comparatively analysing *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023), demonstrating how male anger has evolved from collective resistance to individualized emotional entitlement and hypermasculine violence in contemporary Hindi cinema.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **comparative qualitative approach** to examine the evolution of male anger and masculinity in selected Hindi films. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring meanings, representations, and cultural narratives because it allows the researcher to interpret films as socio-cultural texts rather than merely entertainment products. Since cinema is a medium that reflects and simultaneously shapes societal perceptions of gender, a qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how masculine identities are constructed, negotiated, and transformed across different historical periods. Enabling a historical examination of masculinity across nearly five decades of Hindi cinema. By comparing three films from different periods—*Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023)—the study investigates the transformation of male anger from a socially justified response to structural injustice to an individualized expression of emotional entitlement and hypermasculinity.

The study is interpretivist in nature, assuming that meanings are socially constructed and embedded within cinematic narratives, visual symbolism, dialogue, character development, and audience interpretation. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, the research seeks to analyse how representations of masculinity are produced and communicated through film language and how these representations correspond with changing socio-political contexts.

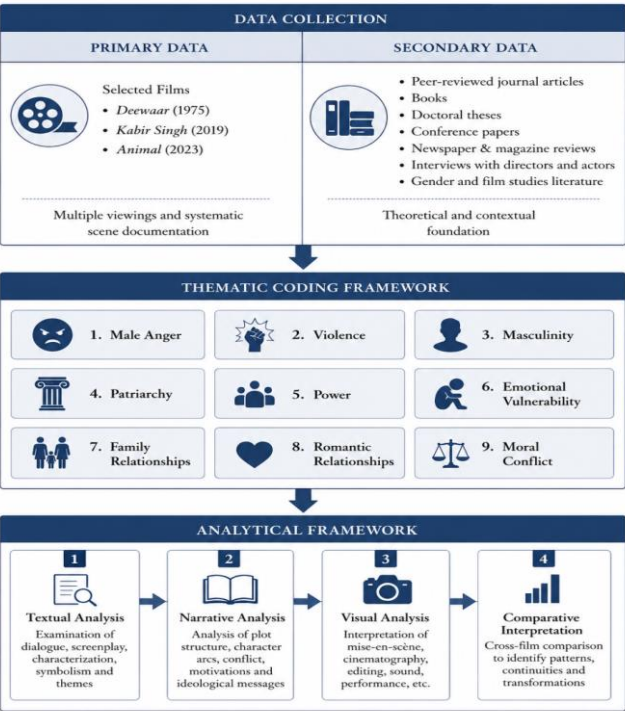
The present study employs an integrated framework of **textual, narrative, and visual analysis** to examine the representation of male anger and masculinity in *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023). Textual analysis interprets films as cultural texts that both reflect and shape societal ideologies concerning masculinity, patriarchy, violence, and gender relations. It focuses on the examination of dialogue, screenplay, characterization, symbolism, and thematic development to understand how masculine identities are constructed and legitimized. Particular attention is paid to the portrayal of male identity, expressions of anger and violence, relationships with women, father–son dynamics, and the moral positioning of the protagonists. Complementing this, narrative analysis investigates how the storyline, character arcs, conflicts, and resolutions contribute to the construction of masculine identity. It explores whether male anger is represented as a response to social injustice, personal revenge, romantic entitlement, psychological trauma, or familial obligation, while also identifying the ideological meanings embedded within these narratives. Since cinema is a visual medium, visual analysis is equally significant in understanding the performance of masculinity. The study examines cinematic elements such as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, costume, lighting, camera angles, editing, colour palette, background score, action choreography, body language, and facial expressions. Together, these analytical methods enable a comprehensive understanding of how cinematic language constructs authority, vulnerability, dominance, emotional repression, and violence as integral aspects of masculine identity across different historical periods of Hindi cinema.

SELECTION OF FILMS

This study employs **purposive sampling**, a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research to select information-rich cases that are directly relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The three films—*Deewaar* (1975), directed by Yash Chopra, *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023), both directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga—were deliberately selected because they represent significant milestones in the evolution of masculine identities in Hindi cinema. Rather than constituting a representative sample of Bollywood films, these texts were chosen for their ability to illustrate changing constructions of male anger and masculinity across distinct socio-historical contexts.

All three films achieved considerable commercial success and generated substantial cultural impact, influencing both public discourse and popular understandings of masculinity. Each film presents a distinctive model of masculine identity corresponding to a particular historical moment: the socially conscious "Angry Young Man" in *Deewaar*, the emotionally volatile and possessive lover in *Kabir Singh*, and the psychologically driven hypermasculine anti-hero in *Animal*. Here, male anger serves as the principal narrative and ideological force in each film, making them particularly suitable for examining the relationship between masculinity, violence, and power. Finally, the selected films have attracted significant academic, critical, and public attention concerning their representations of gender, patriarchy, and violence, thereby providing a robust corpus for comparative analysis. Collectively, these films facilitate an examination of the historical transformation of masculine identity in Hindi cinema from the 1970s to the contemporary period, revealing how changing socio-cultural contexts have reshaped the meanings and performances of male anger.

Figure 1. Data Collection and Analytical Framework



Note. The figure illustrates the sources of data and the step-by-step analytical process employed in this study.

DATA INTERPRETATION

The interpreted data were analysed using an **interpretivist approach**, guided by the theoretical frameworks of **hegemonic masculinity** (Connell, 1995), **representation theory** (Hall, 1997), and **gender performativity** (Butler, 1990). Following textual, narrative, and visual analyses, the coded themes were compared across Deewaar (1975), Kabir Singh (2019), and Animal (2023) to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in the representation of male anger and masculinity. The findings were interpreted within their respective socio-cultural and historical contexts to examine how masculine identities have evolved from socially justified resistance to individualized emotional entitlement and hypermasculine violence. This comparative interpretation enabled the study to understand the changing ideological constructions of masculinity in Hindi cinema.

FINDINGS

The comparative analysis of Deewaar (1975), Kabir Singh (2019), and Animal (2023) reveals a significant transformation in the representation of male anger and masculinity in Hindi cinema. Although male anger remains a defining characteristic of the protagonists across all three films, its motivation, moral justification, and cultural significance have undergone substantial changes.

The findings indicate that **male anger has shifted from a collective response to structural injustice toward an individualized expression of psychological and emotional conflict**. In Deewaar, Vijay's anger is rooted in class inequality, social marginalization, and institutional corruption. His violence is portrayed as morally justified and directed against oppressive social structures. By contrast, Kabir Singh presents anger as a manifestation of romantic possessiveness and emotional entitlement, where aggression is normalized within intimate relationships. In Animal, anger is detached from broader social concerns and becomes deeply personal, driven by paternal validation, unresolved trauma, and the performance of hypermasculinity.

The analysis further demonstrates a transformation in the **construction of masculine identity**. The protagonist of Deewaar embodies responsibility, sacrifice, and moral conflict despite his criminality. Conversely, Kabir Singh and Animal increasingly associate masculinity with emotional dominance, physical aggression, and the assertion of patriarchal authority. Contemporary masculine identities are portrayed less as protectors of society and more as individuals seeking personal validation through violence and control.

Another significant finding concerns the **changing function of violence**. While violence in Deewaar serves as an instrument of resistance against systemic injustice, it becomes a means of asserting ownership and emotional dominance in Kabir Singh. In Animal, violence is highly stylized and spectacular, functioning as a performative display of masculine power rather than a response to ethical or social conflict. This evolution reflects the growing influence of neoliberal individualism and the aestheticization of violence in contemporary Bollywood.

The study also identifies a gradual **marginalization of female characters**. In Deewaar, women, particularly the mother, play a significant moral and emotional role in shaping the protagonist's identity. In contrast, female characters in Kabir Singh and Animal primarily function as narrative catalysts for male emotional development, possessing comparatively limited agency and autonomy.

Finally, the findings suggest that while Hindi cinema has diversified its representations of masculinity, **hegemonic masculinity continues to dominate mainstream narratives**. The transition from the "Angry Young Man" to the contemporary hypermasculine anti-hero illustrates how patriarchal ideals have adapted rather than diminished, shifting from socially legitimized resistance to individualized emotional entitlement and spectacular violence. This evolution reflects broader socio-cultural changes in India while reaffirming cinema's role in constructing and disseminating dominant masculine ideals.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant transformation in the representation of male anger and masculinity in Hindi cinema. While Deewaar (1975) presents anger as a morally justified response to social injustice, class inequality, and institutional corruption, Kabir Singh (2019) and Animal (2023) reposition male anger within the realms of personal relationships, emotional trauma, and psychological conflict. This transition reflects broader socio-cultural changes in India, including globalization, neoliberal individualism, and changing gender dynamics. Although the contexts differ, all three films continue to privilege hegemonic masculinity, reinforcing authority, aggression, and emotional restraint as defining characteristics of male identity. The analysis further reveals that violence evolves from an instrument of social resistance in Deewaar to a means of emotional control in Kabir Singh and ultimately to a spectacle of hypermasculine power in Animal. Simultaneously, female characters become increasingly marginalized, serving primarily as catalysts for the emotional development of male protagonists rather than independent narrative agents.

These findings suggest that Hindi cinema not only reflects but also actively shapes dominant cultural understandings of masculinity. By tracing this evolution across five decades, the study contributes to existing scholarship on gender representation and highlights the changing ideological functions of male anger in popular cinema.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited to three Hindi films and therefore does not claim to represent the diversity of Indian cinema. Future research may extend this comparative framework by incorporating regional cinemas, OTT content, or a larger corpus of films to explore evolving masculinities across different cultural contexts. Audience reception studies employing interviews or surveys could further examine how viewers interpret cinematic representations of anger and violence.

Additionally, intersectional analyses considering caste, class, sexuality, religion, and digital fan cultures would provide a more nuanced understanding of contemporary masculine identities and their negotiation within India's rapidly evolving media landscape.

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