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**SONS AND MOTHER-LAND: GENDERED PERFORMANCE OF NATIONALITY
AND ITS CRITICISM IN INDIAN CINEMA-TEXTS**

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As nation is construed as a category of identification, it needs to be continually performed and most of these performances remain gendered in nature, especially with the maternalisation of the nation and territory. Cinema, with its power to impact millions, becomes one of those powerful mediums through which gendered performances of nation takes place. In this article, we look at some of these sites of production of gendered nationalism to study the complex ways in which the idea and discourse of Mother Nation is performed on the celluloid screen. The article also analyses cinema as a participatory space where performances ideologically confront each other as it looks at the films which look critically at the maternal rhetoric of nationalism and question or reject the sacrificial narrative of motherland. Looking at the case of certain films in South India, we also analyse such cine-narratives which come from a culturally and linguistically distinct location from the aspirational territory of Bharat Mata to see how maternal invocations from these sites complicate the gendered representation of nationality and bring a dynamic discourse of identity assertion.

Keywords: Bharat Mata; cinema; gendered nationalism; identity; India; performativity; South India; visual culture

Cinema is one of the most popular and effective means of mass communication in today's time. India is the biggest producer of feature films in the entire world and these cinematic works not only provide much of India's population their source of entertainment, but also add to the informative and the ideological field in which certain notions of history and nationality are construed and disseminated. Visual media has a crucial role in mobilising people to form "collective political opinion" [Coates, Ben-Ari 2022, 1] and cinema continues to be one of the most powerful visual mediums today. Panne Shah, one of the earliest theorists on Indian cinema considers this medium a force which "by the subtlety of its nature moulds the opinion of millions in the course of its apparently superficial business of merely providing entertainment" [Shah 1950, 1]. These collective opinions often manifest themselves in the projection or affirmation of an identity such

as nationality. Luthar and Trdina suggest that popular cultural forms integrate into the everyday, the banal, the habitual, and the routine to supplement the creation and performance of a nation [Luthar, Trdina 2015, 265].

In this paper, we argue that the rhetoric of nation is performed very prominently throughout the Indian cinema using the symbolism of Mother and similar female figures of adoration. In doing so, we take cinema as a “narrative-text” that can be analysed using methods of literary and linguistic analysis. Sadan Jha in his work on analysing the contemporary political culture of visuals in India, takes Ranciere’s tripartite classification of the aesthetic practices in which “neither speech gets differentiated from written words nor written words are distinguished from images” [Jha 2022]. Following from Jha’s and Ranciere’s works, we have considered a cinematic narrative or performance as a combination of images and “floating words”, creating a “visual text”. In this paper, we also argue that while there is a hegemonic side to these performances of nation and nationality, these are questioned and challenged on several occasions through other “cinematic texts”, which make the national performance a dynamic and contested subject in the context of Indian cinema.

Bharat Mata and Bollywood – Performance of a Nation Through the Maternal Icons in Indian Cinema

Territories are often projected in the form of anthropomorphic identities which have devotional but filial appeal to their subjects. Christopher Pinney writes, “Embodiment is indeed crucial to the idea of the nation, embodiment in the form variously of gender, visual symbol, visual style, or sound. Nationalism indeed might be defined as culture materialized and embodied in the service of identity” [Pinney 2004, 103]. In the case of India, Bharat Mata stands as one of such carved-out identities representing the Indian land and state along with the aspirations of its population. These territorial goddesses are usually a product of the patriarchal imaginations of the male population embedded in a masculinist narrative of the nation-state, where nation is embodied as a familial gendered figure allowing an ownership and control over the rhetoric of the nation to the male population [Lewes 2000, 133]. For nation to be a viable category of identification, along with setting its pedagogic history, it needs to be continually performed in the present [Bhabha 1990, 299], which is to generate, articulate and reinforce the nationalist yearning among the population [Breen 2014, 133]. As the nationalist yearnings require nation to become an emotional category, the themes of sacrifice, love and passion need to be continually performed and interwoven in the nationalist rhetoric. The projection of maternal icons as the manifestation of the nation-state does exactly that, as the “sons” of a single mother are to be united by a bond of birth and need to have an utmost devotion to her at the times even sacrificing their lives, for the wellbeing as well as “honour” of the mother. The nation-mother at once demands love, devotion, affection, pity and a sense of duty from her “righteous” sons. Ramaswamy rightly sees these anthropomorphic creations as “bodyscapes” that transform the map of the nation into “an intensely human place, a homeland and a motherland” [Ramaswamy 2001, 109].

Cinema is a very powerful medium that represents one of the most significant sites of image production and dissemination. What could be interesting to see is how an image that is already a part of the social and national culture, such as that of Bharat Mata, is projected and disseminated through a medium as powerful as cinema and what dimensions of a nation’s performance are carried out through such a medium. Another important point is to look at how challenging notions of a visual are portrayed through different prisms of cinema and how does it complicate the performativity of the nation-state. Bharat Mata has been portrayed or invoked in numerous films either directly or through some allegorical framework. A very direct case of such a cinematic representation can be found in the movie *Haqeeqat* [Rao 1985], in which Jayaprada dresses as Bharat Mata

telling the difficulties of her current state where she is tied in chains and is suffering due to various socio-political issues, worrying who will come to her rescue. She is joined by some of her citizens/social workers (all male) who promise her to get rid of all social evils and save her from dying. While this particular performance is very apparent and straightforward, leaving nothing for imagination, usually the cinematic performances of nation and national identity are complex and underlying. A more complex narrative of Bharat Mata appeared in Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* which has been analysed and commented upon by numerous scholars in the area of gender and nationality. *Mother India* [Khan 1957] is unique in terms of it parallels with the gendered narration of India and because of its historical significance. Keeping the imagery of a wounded and suffering Mother, the film is based in the nationalist prototype and enacts the rhetoric of honour and sacrifice on several occasions, but more so in its cathartic conclusion. While such portrayals defined the scope of gendered nationalism in the celluloid space of Indian cinema, over a period of time, other films have contributed to the gendered performance of nationality. Here, we try to look at two films from around the twenty-first century to see how they have employed the language and imagery of gendered nationalism in their portrayal of nationalist aspirations. The rationale for choosing these films is that these films do not use the image of Bharat Mata, either directly or allegorically, to convey the nationalist ideals and aspirations. Rather, the narratives use themes of "sacrifice" and "motherly love" to reproduce the nationalist rhetoric and the ideological discourse of mother nation, even in her "physical" absence.

Border [Dutta 1997] is a film with a patriotic theme, where the Battle of Longewala from 1971 Indo-Pak War is at the centre. The nationalist rhetoric, like in any war movies, is an integral part of the *Border*. The character of Bhairav Singh, played by Sunil Shetty, can be seen as crucial to the assertion and performance of land/nation as a mother who is lovable, venerable, and worth dying for. In the very first scene where Bhairav Singh is introduced, he is lying in hot sand in the middle of the day and when asked by a subordinate how he can sleep in the sand so comfortably, he answers that the land is called mother because it has a very soothing heart, and it always cares for its children. In another scene, Bhairav Singh hears another officer Mathura Das complaining about the brazen land, and he gets angry which leads to a fight between them. In the following conversation, Bhairav Singh asserts that he cannot take abuse for his mother (the land) and compares a brazen land to an ugly mother who is nevertheless deserving of her child's unconditional love. The final scene of Bhairav Singh completes the nationalist rhetoric as we see him getting agonised by the presence of Pakistani forces on his motherland ("mother's bosom"). Talking subconsciously to "her", he tells her that he is coming for her protection and walks towards the enemy forces taking an anti-tank mine with him. As enemies open fire on his chest, he asks his "mother" (motherland) to bless him with power and eventually succeeds in blowing away the enemy tank while sacrificing his own life in the process. In contrast with *Mother India*, here is a "righteous" son loving his "mother-land" to the fullest of his passion, worshipping the mother-nation, deriving his power from her, asserting an ownership and a protective domain over the nation, killing her enemies, and eventually sacrificing himself defending the honour of her. Bhairav Singh's character is completely in tune with the nationalist rhetoric of protection, honour and sacrifice, where the mother-nation is at once the familial mother figure, but also divine, something to be loved and worshipped, but also to be owned and personalised, something to die for and something to kill for. Singh's "Dharti Ma" (Mother Earth) thus performs and invokes the ideals of "love-service-sacrifice" that have historically been explicitly linked with the icon of Bharat Mata [see: Ramaswamy 2001, 181–190].

Rang De Basanti (2006) is an Aamir Khan starrer Hindi movie directed by Rakesh Omprakash Mehra. While the movie revolves around the idea of youth's relationship with

the nation, it delves into the subject of vigilante justice taking its cue from the revolutionaries of the Hindustan Republic Association (Bhagat Singh, Aazad, Bismil, Ashfakullah Khan, etc.). The entire movie is 'iconic' in a very literal sense of the word as the plot of the film is that each of the central characters are playing a character of a revolutionary icon in a movie of a young British lady. However, it is the character of Mrs. Rathod, played by Waheeda Rahman, that is key to the understanding of the nationalist performance carried out in the film. Mrs. Rathod is the mother of a young flight lieutenant Ajay Rathod, who dies in an unfortunate plane accident. Ajay is a dear one to all the other central characters in the film and it is his death that changes both, the tenor of the film from jubilant to more serious one, as well as the characters' understanding of politics, nationalism and their priorities. Soon the cotemporary characters get blurred and merged into the iconic characters from the past, as the film tries to showcase that the revolution and the nationalist passion lie dormant in the younger generation. But the realm of passion needs a figure of utmost affection and unquestionable devotion in the nation's performative space, and while Ajay Rathod and his death do bring the dormant passions to shake up, in the nationalist rhetoric, it remains insufficient. Ajay cannot be the emotional centre to carry out the task of generating national yearning and so Mrs. Rathod, the mother, fills that role. Mrs. Rathod gets badly wounded while holding a candle peace march for her son's death as the police and goons of the minister start attacking the protestors with lathis. It is right after this moment, that the film turns to the cause of vigilantism justice. As the lead characters of the film merge into their "heroic" and "iconic" selves from the past, Mrs. Rathod becomes essentially the Mother Nation who has been under attack from the oppressor and has been subjected to the cruelty of watching her son killed, who is now lying in a coma, waiting for her other "heroic" and "righteous" "sons" to fight for her sake. These "sons" who were at grave differences with each other in the matter of religion or politics have now put that aside and are fighting to avenge the wrong done to their "mother", also with an underlying assumption that they are fighting for the nation and saving it from its culprits. It is in conjunction with the underlying ideals of Bharat Mata who has been projected as the unifying factor across the communal and identity lines [see: Ramaswamy 2011, 153].

Consequently, in line with the rhetoric of national sacrifice for the motherland, these "sons" are killed at the hands of the police forces. In the final scenes of the movie, we see the youth of India getting inspired and passionate by the bravery of these "sons" and we also see the fingers of Mrs. Rathod moving signifying her return to the consciousness. Death for the sake of mother nation is a glorified attribute in the performance of nationality not just because it speaks of the passions, but also because it is projected as a means to bring back the glory of the nation and the wellbeing of the motherland [see: Ramaswamy 2011, 217–230], where she talks about "bleeding for the map and the mother". Thus, Mrs. Rathod's coming back to consciousness is a performative act where the nation is deemed returned to its health owing to the sacrifices of lives of its (male) citizens.

Questioning the Ethos-Critiquing Nationalist Rhetoric

Nation in the age of technology exists more and more as a participatory space and this participation is a crucial component of the nation's everyday performance [Brosius 2005, 5]. And while this participatory space has its hegemonic ideals where the ordinary is not always an equal participant in the discourse of nation [Smith 2014, 23], there is always a negotiation taking place in the national performative discourse to supplement, complement or counter the popular nationalist rhetoric. M. Elaine Combs-Schilling talks about the performative renewal of the nationalist space, where people own certain representations of it, and "revitalise the collective images and experiences" [Combs-Schilling 1996, 2]. She says that while this performative participatory space can channelise renewed systems of domination, it also makes possible to contest the space from within. It is where

we see these “other” cinematic performances which essentially contest the celebration of the nation-state as a maternal deity and question a chest-thumping form of nationalism. Sadan Jha talks about the song “Teeja tera rang tha mai to” from the movie *Chak De! India* to show how icons like flag or Bharat Mata that are usually a site of ideological assertion are sometimes deployed subversively to contest the nationalist rhetoric which in this song is about contesting the marginalisation of a population (Muslim) metamorphosed into a colour (Green) in the national flag [Jha 2022]. Taking the cue from Jha’s analysis, we look at another song from the film *Shanghai*, directed by Dibakar Banerjee. The song plays, “*Sone ki chidiya, Dengue Malaria, gud bhee hai, gohar bhee, Bharat Mata ki jai*” [The bird of gold, infested with dengue and Malaria, the sweet and the dirt, all hail Bharat Mata] [Banerjee 2012]. The song juxtaposes the glamorous rhetoric of nationalism, with a grim, dark and even dystopian reality of the nation to show the absurdity of the former. The image of Bharat Mata here is invoked more to showcase the irony of a triumphant nationalism, than to actually perform the nationalist assertion and glorification. And while it is telling, the way the song is played on the screen is a major component of this “counter-performance” of nationality. The lead character played by Emran Hashmi joins a group of people dancing in a frenzy while mouthing these lyrics. This actual singing and dancing of a population is a recreation of the jubilant and celebratory nationalist performances, while the subversive lyrics of the song try to question these performances as hollow and absurd. Moreover, on a theoretical level, it is the projection of a participatory space where the citizens aware of their current crisis, deny it in the name of glory to the (mother) nation.

Mukkabaaz [Kashyap 2017] and *Bhavesh Joshi Superhero* [Motwane 2018] were released very close to each other. Both the films are produced by Phantom production and directed by Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane respectively who are partners in Phantom Films. While the two films deal with entirely different issues (boxing career and vigilante justice), the two are similar in one particular aspect apart from their production credits. Both films present a critique of the jingoistic performance of nationality while questioning the glorification of the nation in its maternal image. In the film *Mukkabaaz*, Kashyap portrays that the invocation of Bharat Mata at times becomes a refuge for hooliganism and lawlessness. In one of the scenes, a crowd paid by a leader disguise into a mob and try to kill two people in their own house while chanting the glory to the mother India. In a following scene, the protagonist of the film, Shravan Singh, is about to be arrested for assaulting the chief antagonist, Bhagwan Das Mishra, but in front of the inspector, he starts punching into the face of Mishra and is not stopped or penalised by the standing police officer as he keeps chanting “Bharat Mata ki jai” (All glory to the mother India!). Kashyap here uses a dark humourist approach to highlight the fault lines of nationalist performances. Motwane, shows a similar scene in *Bhavesh Joshi*, where some evil people in order to safeguard their secrets instigate a crowd to heckle and thrash Bhavesh Joshi, in the name of mother nation and national honour. The film repeats the criticism of passionate nationalist rhetoric in another scene, by showing the main antagonist in the movie using the invocation of Bharat Mata for authenticating his false words in the public opinion. Motwane thus counters the violent assertion of nationalist discourse while also portraying a lack of rational in the emotional space that follows it. While *Bhavesh Joshi* addresses the similar theme of vigilante justice in the absence of a hope in the system, as does *Rang De Basanti*, the two differ a great deal in the matter of faith in the nationalist performances. Mehra’s choice is to bring the ideals of a nationalist rhetoric to supplement his cause of vigilante justice and national awakening, but Motwane makes absolutely no such attempts and rather presents a cynical side of the performative domain.

There is another important element to this countering of nationalist performances and ideals in both Kashyap’s and Motwane’s narrations. Jha and Nivedita Menon talk about the majoritarian desire in the visual vocabulary associated with the icon of Bharat Mata

while discussing the marginalisation of Muslim minorities through a championing of such desires [Jha 2016; 2017; 2022; Menon 2017]. But Kashyap and Motwane, in their criticism of the nationalist invocation of Bharat Mata, do not directly associate it with such communal marginalisation. None of the affected parties or characters either in *Mukka-baaz* or *Bhavesh Joshi* belong to the religious minority. In their performative space, these films rather project that the invocation of nation as a mother can be used to reject or suppress any form of dissentious actions, causes or motifs.

Thus, while the performative space of cinema and the gender iconography of nation combine to revitalise the nationalist discourse, the same may question and challenge the nationalist imagery, ideals and aspirations; thus, bringing a possibility of contesting the space from within.

Other Women- Co-Opting “Performances”-

So far, we have discussed how the nation is performed in Indian cinema through the image of a shared, eulogised mother at the centre, while also looking at certain productions that have questioned these very nationalist performances by showing them as either absurd, hegemonic or flawed. However, most of the discussion which we had above is related to the Hindi cinema and associated with a region where Bharat Mata enjoys an almost unchallenged status as the territorial mother. It is not so much of the case in the southern part of India, where there is a history of other female figures sharing and contesting this privileged status with Bharat Mata. It is for this reason, in this section, we look into the films from this cultural and political space which use a gendered performance of nationality as a key feature in their narration. The films, S S Rajamouli's *Bahubali* (part 1&2) [Rajamouli 2015; 2017] and *RRR* [Rajamouli 2022], that we will be looking into, are originally made into Telugu language, but are a part of what are nowadays commonly called “pan-India” films. While this categorisation of pan-India is crucial to understand the nationalist narration of the film, we would first be looking into some history of Bharat Mata and other related figures of “belonging” to understand certain aspects of this dynamics. Prasenjit Duara talks about nationalism as the site of contestation and negotiation between various representation of nationalities [Duara 1995]. The contestation and negotiation are an important feature of India's nationalism if we look at the iconographic space of territorial representations. The idea of Bharat Mata was constituted in Bengal, and it was a particular linguistic and cultural aspiration, i.e. of Bengal, that gave birth to Bharat Mata [McKean 1996, 253]. Hence, it is no surprise that we see several other maternal figures across India representing different territories and their associated cultural and linguistic essence. Tamilttay (Mother Tamil), Telugu Talli (Mother Telugu), Tiravitattay (Mother Dravid), Kerala Mattavu (Mother Kerala), Kannada Maate (Mother Karnataka) and Telangana Talli (Mother Telangana) are a few of such maternal embodiments. These figures represent a linguistic identity superimposed by a cultural identity and marked by a specific territory. Similar as Bharat Mata, these maternal deities too, in their narrative, seek unquestionable devotion from their population claiming their superiority as the true guardian of their people's spirits, bringing the issue of allegiances to the front. These territorial maternal figures confront and co-opt with each other in the manner of how they demand allegiance from their population [see: Ramaswamy 1997; Mitchell 2009; Pathania 2021]. These figures together thus represent contesting and negotiating aspect of India's representational framework and of the emotional appeal that constitutes India's nationalism. These negotiations play an important role in the gendered performance of nationality/territoriality in the “pan-Indian” films as well. In these performances, “Motherland” itself becomes an ambiguous negotiating category carrying the essence of the “regional mothers” as well as the “national mother”.

Bahubali and *RRR* are “pan-Indian” films in Telugu made primarily for Telugu audience, but also looking for a wider audience all over India, and thus getting dub released

in several languages all over India. During a talk at the Harvard India Conference, the maker of the film, Rajamouli insisted on considering the film as pan-Indian citing the nature of its story [RRR is a pan-Indian film... 2019]. *Bahubali* presents a case of two mothers who represent the ideals of justice, freedom, sacrifice and honour. These are some of the ideals that are often repeated in the nationalist rhetoric of the mother goddess. The first of the two mothers is Raja Mata Sivagami Devi, who is shown as an exceptional queen, an able administrator, a fierce warrior and a benevolent mother, identical to the narrative of the “territorial-mothers”, which is of a goddess to be worshipped, a warrior to be respected and a mother to be loved. In the first part of the movie, Sivagami stands as a representative and binding figure for the state of Mahishmati. Sivagami Devi loves and protects her son and her nephew without any bias and imparts justice as a mother and as a queen. Her own son is Bhallaldeva, while his nephew is Amarendra Bahubali. Despite being a nephew, Amarendra Bahubali portrays the “good son”, who always honours his mother’s wishes, until at a time when he is unable to do so due to his promise of marriage to Devasena. He then happily decides to sacrifice his right to the throne of the kingdom to honour his mother’s words. This ultimately leads to him getting killed by the other son, Bhallaldeva, making it an act of sacrifice of life for the love and adoration of the mother. At the time of his death, he tells his killer to take care of his mother. Sivagami then sacrifices her own life to protect Amarendra Bahubali’s son. In the characterisation of Sivagami we see the nationalist ideals of love, protection and sacrifice built around a maternal identity.

In one of the scenes, where Mahishmati is in danger of an attack from a ferocious enemy, Sivagami tells her “sons” that it is the time to pay off the debt of Motherland. During this war, when there is a moment of crisis, Amarendra Bahubali inspires his soldiers using an oratorical speech about how the mother and motherland are more significant than our own lives, and it is an act of greatest honour to die while offering the head of the enemy at the mothers’ feet. While this speech is made, the image of Sivagami figures on the screen, which is then juxtaposed with the figure of Ma Mahishmati, suggesting a sort of metamorphosis between the two. Sivagami fits clearly into the narrative of the national/territorial mothers; an all-powerful mother who loves her children without any bias, is just and honourable, and seeks complete devotion from her children. Amarendra Bahubali’s love for Sivagami is representative of the love for the “motherland”, abstracted from both Telugu’s regional “nationality” as well as India’s national discourse. The other mother, Devasena, complements Sivagami in the gendered performance of “nationality”, and completes the performative space where nation is enacted patriarchally. Devasena is the wife of Amarendra Bahubali and mother of Mahendra Bahubali, the two male protagonists of the film. She is an exceptional warrior and princess of another kingdom before getting married to Amarendra. It is her later days which are crucial to the manifestation of gendered nationalism on the celluloid screen. While Amarendra Bahubali is killed in a conspiracy battle on the orders of his brother Bhallaldeva, Devasena survives handing over her new-born to Sivagami for his protection. Devasena then is chained outside the palace of kingdom Mahishmati as a reminder of the consequence of betrayal to the throne. In the nationalist performative space, the chaining of a mother figure is a reminder of the colonised mother suffering at the hands of the outsider in the absence of her son(s). Devasena in her portrayal is closer to the suffering Bharat Mata as she is chained by the intruder and is continuously tortured and insulted. Her liberation forms the central motif of the plot, while other narratives seem to be corollary to this central narrative. She gracefully waits for her liberation by her son only who was to grow from weak to strong. In the very first scene, where she is introduced, we see a group of warriors planning to rescue her referring to her as the mother whose freedom is their only goal and to risk their lives for that is a matter of glory for them. While there are certain female members in this group and a young girl Avantika is offered the task to rescue her,

soon we see Devasena's own son heading for her freedom and protection. Devasena has herself denied the chance of freedom several times before because of her strong belief that her son would come to rescue her. This exclusivity between the mother and the son is an essential feature of the nationalist performances, where sons own the right to protect and serve their motherland. While Mahendra Bahubali has rescued Devasena once, she is again taken prisoner by Bhallaldeva.

This reimprisonment is a testament to the intertwining of mother figure with the territory in the film's performative space. The freedom of a territory is linked with the emancipation of the maternal icon in the nationalist as well cultural-linguistic discourses in heterogenous nation-states. Fitting to such discourses, Mahendra Bahubali needs to win the kingdom of Mahishmati alongside the freedom of Devasena. The two acts cannot be separated in the performance; neither can the two sites of gendered performance, the national and the sub-national. As a summation to this performance of maternal rhetoric, we see a barefooted Devasena, carrying the pot of fire that Sivagami, in the capacity of Rajamata, was carrying in the beginning for burning the effigy of the demon by the would be king. As Bhallaldeva is burnt alive by the son of Devasena, a parallel is projected in the performative space where the end of Bhallaldeva signifies an end of a demon, a villain and a coloniser at the hands of the saviour son.

RRR (Rise, Roar, Revolt) is a story of a little girl taken prisoner by a British officer and the efforts of two warriors to bring her back to her village and her mother. The film fictionally portrays two real life freedom fighters, Alluri Sitarama Raju and Komaram Bheema, as the two protagonists of the film. The real story of the two has no account of the rescue or protection of a girl. Thus, the addition of a female figure as an anchor point, for the call to rise, roar and revolt, can be seen as the construction of a performative space where the gendered nationalist rhetoric can be played. *RRR* however presents a slightly different case as its narrative lacks a central mother figure. While here, the one that requires saving by the "sons of the soil" is a young girl, it is the girl's mother that is wounded badly by the Britishers during the capturing of the child and the film is as much of a story of returning something precious to the mother that has been taken from her. It is thus both the girl and her mother that together form the emotional centre around which the nationalism is invoked in the film. The girl herself serves to be a prototype of mother who bears honour and respect of the community. No one in the community can sleep peacefully until she is unchained. It is this young girl's narrative that makes these two revolutionaries familiar with each other, and eventually the liberation of this young girl converges to the liberation of Bharat Mata from the shackles of the colonisers. In the narrative of Bharat Mata during colonial times, we find the figures of an imprisoned mother and a lamenting woman as the constants. The two female figures, the imprisoned girl and the lamenting mother repeat these themes of national performance, symbolising a nation in suffering.

What is more significant is that Rajamouli clearly portrays the cause of helping the girl and the mother as a national cause, while also attaching regional and community sentiments to it. The two protagonists fight the battle against British for their personal causes, but the background of their problems bring this complementary aspect of nationalism. Rama Raju wants to avenge his dead family while fulfilling his promise to his dying father which includes getting a lot of ammunition for the locals to support the cause of freedom against the British. For Bheema, it is about honouring the rights of his community by rescuing an abducted girl and taking her back to her mother. In their very first meeting, the two save a boy from a fire accident, in which they take help of a flag of anti-colonial resistance, with the slogan of "Vande Mataram" (I bow to you, mother) printed over it. This is symbolic of the affirmation of the national cause and is an indirect invocation of Bharat Mata who is connected historically with the use of this slogan [Dasgupta

2019, 17–19]. We also encounter this slogan at the very end of the movie signifying the accomplishment of the cause. Regarding the communitarian principles embedded in the narrative, Rajamouli uses local songs and tribal culture to add a subtext to the nationalist narrative. After the girl is captured, we see Nizam telling British officials about the importance of staying together in the Gond tribe to which the girl and Bheema belong. As the movie reaches its conclusion, we see another slogan on a flag saying “Jal, Jangal, Jameen” (Water, Forest, Land) appear on the screen before the flags of “Vande Mataram” fill the screen. “Jal, Jameen” has been an important theme of assertion in the indigenous and tribal rebellions. In a significant moment in the narrative of the film, Raju realises that anticolonial resistance cannot be completed without the inclusion of Bheema, and in another, Bheema understands that his struggle is only a small part of the battle Raju is fighting. Thus, the nationalist ideals combine with regional affirmations in the film to perform the anticolonial resistance and to achieve the task of generating, articulating and reinforcing the nationalist yearning. The use of Devanagiri script, associated with Hindi language, on the flags, in a movie that is predominantly in Telugu, again highlights a negotiation between the regional and the supra-regional in the performance of nationalism.

The film performs in conjunction with the national and regional motifs, visuals and figures targeting a “community of sentiments” [Appadurai 1990] that is pan-Indian. Even in the absence of a central mother figure in the film, its performance has an underlying nationalist rhetoric of male saviours willing to sacrifice themselves to safeguard and protect their motherland. The “invisible” motherland is played in the negotiating space of the national and regional, where the invoked mother simultaneously works as the mother nation as well as stands for local aspirations and identity.

Recapitulation

Nation continues as a viable category of identification through the performances of its ideals, motifs and narratives. These performances attempt at an emotional negotiation with the citizens to reinforce the nationalist yearnings, usually with a gendered narrative around a mother figure signifying the nation. Cinema with a power of affecting millions becomes an ideal site for these performances. This article has tried to look at certain films and see the diverse ways in which nation’s maternal narrative has been projected, questioned and negotiated in the celluloid space. Taking films as a “visual-text”, we look at the narratives where the figure of mother and the associated theme of sacrifice and honour is used to perform the nationalist ideals. The mother figure or their invocations in these narratives act as the site where the passions grow- for love, war and sacrifice. In the next section, the article talks about the films that looked critically at these nationalist invocations of motherland. These films question the imagery, ideals and aspirations of nationalist performances, making cinema into a participatory space where different ideas are always in negotiation. Representing the subversive side of cinematic space, these films contest the hegemony of nationalist performances from within. In the final section, the article looks at the non-Hindi films which are popularly identified as “pan-Indian” films. We see that while such films do invoke mother figures and project nationalist ideals and themes, these mother figures do not directly represent Mother Nation as do the Hindi films that we discussed earlier. The national aspirations in such films are always in a conjunction with regional aspirations and the maternal invocation is an ambivalent figure that belongs both to the national mother as well to the pantheon of regional or sub-national mothers.

The three sections together represent the field of political communication within the cinematic space that deals with the representation of nationalist ideals in their gendered narrative. The discussion underlines the complexity and the multilinear progression of the gendered representation of nationality in the performative space of Indian cinema. It

also concludes that cinema provides a major space for the performance and assertion of identity and the multiple identities that are a part of a multilingual-multicultural-multireligious nation do surface in the gendered performances on celluloid screen.

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Сини і Батьківщина-Мати: гендеризовані відтворення національності та їхня критика в індійських кінотекстах

Націю розглядають як категорію ідентифікації, яку потрібно постійно відтворювати, і більшість із цих відтворень залишаються гендерними за своєю природою, особливо якщо націю та територію уявляють як матір. Завдяки своїй здатності впливати на мільйони кіно стає одним із потужних медіумів, через який відбуваються гендерні репрезентації нації. У цій статті ми розглядаємо деякі з цих майданчиків продукування гендеризованого націоналізму, щоб дослідити ті комплексні способи, у які ідея та дискурс Матері-Нації втілюються на екрані. У статті також аналізується кіно як простір участі, де відбувається ідеологічне зіткнення репрезентацій, оскільки розглядаються фільми, що критично осмислюють матерналістську риторіку націоналізму та ставлять під сумнів або відкидають жертвний наратив Батьківщини. Розглядаючи приклад окремих фільмів з Південної Індії, ми також аналізуємо кінематографічні наративи, що походять з культурно та лінгвістично відмінного простору, віддаленого від уявного простору Бгарат Мата, аби з’ясувати, як інвокації Матері з цих регіонів ускладнюють гендеризовану репрезентацію національності та формують динамічний дискурс утвердження ідентичності.

Ключові слова: Бгарат Мата; візуальна культура; гендеризований націоналізм; ідентичність; Індія; кіно; перформативність; Південна Індія

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