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From Mythological Epics to Futuristic Narratives: Indian Cinema's Role in Bridging Traditional Knowledge Systems and NEP 2020 Vision for a Viksit Bharat

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Abstract

Indian cinema, from its inception, has been deeply rooted in traditional knowledge systems (IKS), drawing inspiration from mythological and historical epics. Over time, the cinematic landscape has evolved, reflecting India's aspirations for a technologically advanced future. This paper examines how Indian cinema bridges the gap between its traditional roots and the futuristic vision laid out in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which envisions a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. By analyzing films such as Mahabharat (1965), Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992), Bajirao Mastani (2015), and Tanhaji (2020), alongside futuristic narratives like Robot (Enthiran) (2010), Ra. One (2011), PK (2014), and 2.0 (2018), this study explores how Indian filmmakers weave traditional narratives with modern technological advancements.

The research employs content and thematic analysis to investigate how these films reflect and promote traditional values, while simultaneously engaging with futuristic discourses of technology, societal progress, and national development. Theoretically, the study is grounded in cultural nationalism, which posits that cinema is a crucial tool in promoting national identity and values (Rajadhyaksha, 2009). Additionally, the concept of Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1956)



is applied to explore how modern filmmakers adapt traditional mythologies to resonate with contemporary audiences, aligning their narratives with the broader goals of NEP 2020.

The analysis reveals that while mythological and historical films re establish cultural pride and identity, futuristic films offer a vision of technological and social advancement in line with NEP 2020's focus on holistic education and innovation. By engaging with both tradition and futurism, Indian cinema plays a significant role in shaping the socio cultural and educational landscape of India, preparing for its development goals by 2047. This study contributes to the understanding of cinema as a medium that not only reflects societal changes but also acts as an agent of cultural continuity and futuristic vision.

Keywords Indian cinema, Traditional knowledge systems, NEP 2020, Cultural nationalism, Mythological epics

Introduction

Indian cinema has long been a powerful medium for narrating stories that reflect the nation's rich cultural heritage, social transformations, and evolving identity. From mythological epics that have been passed down through generations to futuristic narratives that project India's technological aspirations, Indian films serve as a bridge between the country's historical roots and its contemporary vision for a modern, progressive society. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which seeks to transform India's educational landscape and align it with the goal of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, provides an ideal framework to explore how cinema can contribute to national development by integrating traditional knowledge systems (IKS) with future focused narratives.

Tradition: Indian Cinema and Mythological Epics

Indian cinema's connection to Traditional Knowledge Systems (IKS) has been established through its frequent adaptation of mythological epics, historical narratives, and cultural folklore. Films such as Mahabharat (1965) and Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992) exemplify how mythological epics have been a major part of India's cinematic history, reinforcing cultural values and national identity (Chakravarty, 2011). These epics, deeply



rooted in Indian traditions, are not just stories of gods and kings but also embody moral and ethical lessons relevant to society. The retelling of such stories on the big screen revives ancient knowledge and ensures its continuity, allowing Indian audiences to reconnect with their cultural past. This aligns with IKS, which refers to the wisdom, beliefs, and knowledge systems inherited through generations within a specific cultural framework (Sen, 2016).

Futuristic Narratives: Cinema and Technology

While Indian cinema has traditionally focused on its historical and cultural roots, it has also embraced futuristic narratives that mirror the country's technological advancements and global aspirations. Films such as *Robot (Enthiran)* (2010), *Ra.One* (2011), and *2.0* (2018) reflect India's growing interest in science fiction and technological innovation. These films explore the relationship between humans and technology, offering a vision of an India that is not only technologically advanced but also grappling with the ethical and societal challenges brought about by modernization. This shift in cinematic focus resonates with the futuristic goals outlined in NEP 2020, which emphasizes the integration of technology and innovation in education and societal development (NEP, 2020).

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Viksit Bharat 2047

The NEP 2020 sets a clear vision for India's educational reforms, aiming to develop a skilled, creative, and future ready workforce by 2047, the centenary year of India's independence. The policy promotes a multidisciplinary approach to education, fostering an environment where students learn not just from textbooks but also from their cultural heritage, local knowledge, and global advancements. Cinema, as an educational and cultural tool, plays a critical role in this transformation by presenting narratives that merge tradition with innovation. This convergence mirrors the aspirations of NEP 2020, which seeks to cultivate a balance between cultural preservation and technological progress to build a "Viksit Bharat"—a developed India by 2047 (Jain, 2021).



Theoretical Framework: Cultural Nationalism and Sanskritization

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Cultural Nationalism, which posits that the nation's cultural expressions such as cinema are vital in fostering a unified national identity (Rajadhyaksha, 2009). Indian films have historically been a medium for reinforcing cultural pride, especially through the retelling of mythological epics and historical narratives. This cultural nationalism is not static, but dynamic, evolving with the times to incorporate modern values while maintaining traditional roots.

The concept of Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1956) is also relevant in understanding how Indian cinema adapts traditional myths and epics to suit contemporary sensibilities. Sanskritization refers to the process by which lower status groups in India adopt the rituals, practices, and values of higher status groups, often with the intent of social mobility. In cinema, this manifests in the modernization of mythological narratives, where filmmakers recontextualize ancient stories to make them relevant to contemporary audiences. For example, films like *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Tanhaji* (2020) reflect the valorisation of historical figures but through a cinematic lens that aligns with modern nationalistic ideals.

Bridging Tradition and Future: The Role of Cinema

Indian cinema stands at a unique crossroads, where it is tasked with preserving traditional values and knowledge while also projecting a future that embraces innovation, technological advancement, and societal progress. This paper seeks to explore how films that are rooted in traditional epics as well as those that look to the future contribute to the cultural and educational goals laid out by NEP 2020. By doing so, it highlights how cinema can be a significant tool for shaping the cultural, educational, and technological aspirations of India as it moves towards its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Research Objectives

The central aim of this study is to examine how Indian cinema serves as a medium for bridging the traditional knowledge systems of the past with the futuristic aspirations outlined in the NEP 2020, contributing to the vision of a developed India by 2047. This study will focus on



analysing select films that either draw from Indian mythological and historical narratives or project technological and societal advancements in the future. The objectives are designed to explore both the cultural and educational functions of cinema in promoting a blend of tradition and innovation.

1. To explore the representation of Traditional Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Indian mythological and historical films

This objective seeks to understand how Indian cinema continues to preserve and promote traditional values, ethics, and knowledge systems by re-telling epics like Mahabharat and Ramayana. It will analyse how these films embed cultural wisdom that aligns with the concept of IKS and maintain relevance in modern society.

2. To analyse futuristic narratives in Indian films and their alignment with the NEP 2020 vision

The second objective focuses on films like Robot and 2.0 that engage with futuristic technology and societal issues. The goal is to assess how these films reflect NEP 2020's focus on innovation, multidisciplinary education, and societal transformation in line with India's aspirations for 2047.

3. To evaluate how Indian cinema bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, contributing to national development goals

The third objective aims to assess how cinema integrates both traditional values and modern narratives to contribute to the broader goals of NEP 2020. It will explore the role of cinema as a cultural and educational tool in building a holistic vision for a "Viksit Bharat."

Research Questions

The study is guided by research questions that delve into the intersection of Indian cinema, tradition, and modernity. These questions are designed to critically explore how cinema not only reflects but also shapes the cultural and educational discourse in India, particularly considering NEP 2020.



1. How do Indian mythological and historical films represent Traditional Knowledge Systems (IKS), and what role do they play in preserving cultural values?

This question investigates the role of mythological and historical films in conveying traditional knowledge and ethics. It will explore how these films act as cultural repositories and maintain their relevance in a rapidly modernizing society.

2. In what ways do futuristic narratives in Indian films reflect the key aspirations of the NEP 2020, particularly in terms of technology, education, and social development?

Here, the focus is on futuristic films, examining how they resonate with NEP 2020's vision for India's educational and technological progress. The question will explore how cinema portrays a technologically advanced society while addressing challenges such as ethics, education, and social equity.

3. How effectively does Indian cinema integrate traditional narratives with futuristic themes to contribute to the cultural and educational goals of a developed India by 2047?

This question aims to understand how cinema bridges tradition and modernity. It will analyse how effectively films manage to combine ancient wisdom with modern technological advancements, contributing to India's cultural and developmental goals for 2047.

These research objectives and questions allow for a comprehensive analysis of how Indian cinema is not only a mirror of society but also a dynamic force in shaping the nation's cultural, educational, and technological future.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the intricate ways in which Indian cinema bridges traditional knowledge systems (IKS) with futuristic aspirations, as outlined in the NEP 2020 and the broader goal of a Viksit Bharat by 2047. Through content and thematic analysis of selected Indian films, the study will delve into how these cinematic works portray traditional values, ethics, and knowledge, while also projecting a vision of technological advancement and societal development. The methodology integrates well-



established frameworks from film studies and cultural analysis to offer a nuanced understanding of how cinema operates as both a cultural artifact and an agent of societal change.

Research Design

The research is designed as a two-pronged qualitative study. The first prong will analyse mythological and historical films, while the second prong will focus on futuristic narratives in Indian cinema. The selected films are purposefully chosen for their alignment with the dual themes of tradition and modernity, creating a comprehensive analysis that spans several decades of Indian cinematic history. The methodology is broken down into two primary research techniques: content analysis and thematic analysis.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a vital methodological tool for this study, as it allows for a detailed, systematic examination of films to identify recurring themes, visual motifs, narrative structures, and character representations. This technique is particularly suitable for analysing films that draw from Indian mythology and history, as well as those that project futuristic narratives.

1. Sample Selection

The films selected for content analysis are divided into two categories:

Traditional Knowledge Systems Films: Mahabharat (1965), Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992), Bajirao Mastani (2015), and Tanhaji (2020). These films were chosen for their strong connection to Indian mythology and history, offering rich depictions of cultural values and ethical lessons rooted in IKS.

Futuristic Films: Robot (Enthiran) (2010), Ra.One (2011), PK (2014), and 2.0 (2018). These films were selected for their forward-looking portrayal of technology, innovation, and societal transformation, which align with the futuristic vision of NEP 2020.



2. Film Deconstruction

Each film will be broken down into key cinematic elements, including plot, dialogue, visual symbolism, character arcs, and setting. This allows for a deeper understanding of how filmmakers embed traditional or futuristic ideas within their narratives. For example, in Bajirao Mastani (2015), content analysis will focus on how the film reconstructs historical events to align with modern ideals of national pride and cultural resurgence. Similarly, in Robot (2010), the analysis will focus on how the film envisions technological advancements and their implications for society.

3. Cultural Codes and Symbolism

Through content analysis, cultural symbols, and references to traditional or futuristic ideologies embedded in the films will be identified. For instance, the use of yagna (sacred fire rituals) in mythological films like Mahabharat symbolizes the deep-rooted traditional ethos, while the portrayal of artificial intelligence and robotics in 2.0 represents India's drive towards technological innovation.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will complement content analysis by identifying overarching themes that transcend individual films and explore the broader cultural, educational, and social implications of cinema. This technique is crucial for interpreting how filmmakers merge traditional narratives with futuristic visions and contribute to national development goals as laid out in the NEP 2020.

1. Identifying Key Themes

Thematic analysis will focus on identifying and interpreting recurring themes, such as:

Cultural Nationalism: This theme will be explored in mythological and historical films that foster national pride and cultural identity. Films like Tanhaji and Bajirao Mastani will be examined for their portrayal of national heroes and historical events that resonate with modern political and cultural sentiments.



Technological Futurism: This theme will be studied in films like Robot and 2.0, where technological advancements are not only presented as marvels but also as tools for social reform and national progress.

Ethical Dilemmas and Modernization: Themes related to the ethical challenges of modernity, as shown in Ra.One and PK, will be analysed. These films often present technology and progress in a critical light, raising questions about the balance between tradition and modernization.

2. Contextualizing within NEP 2020

A key focus of the thematic analysis is to contextualize the selected films within the framework of NEP 2020. The analysis will examine how these films reflect or critique the policy's emphasis on multidisciplinary education, innovation, and cultural preservation. For example, the futuristic aspirations of Ra.One can be viewed as a narrative that aligns with NEP's vision of integrating technology into education, while the mythological retellings in Mahabharat provide a cultural grounding for understanding how IKS can be incorporated into the curriculum.

3. Sociocultural Impact

Thematic analysis will also explore how cinema influences social attitudes and behaviours. For instance, the depiction of scientific advancements in PK and Robot may shape public perceptions of technology's role in India's future, while the celebration of cultural heritage in Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama promotes a sense of national pride and continuity with India's historical past.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs two primary theoretical frameworks: Cultural Nationalism and Sanskritization.



1. Cultural Nationalism: This framework will be used to interpret how Indian cinema reinforces national identity and pride through mythological and historical films (Rajadhyaksha, 2009). It explores how filmmakers use cinema to foster a unified national culture, rooted in India's rich traditions while advancing a vision of a modern, technologically advanced India.

2. Sanskritization: This concept (Srinivas, 1956) helps explain the adaptation of traditional cultural elements into modern cinematic narratives. It will be used to explore how filmmakers modify mythological stories to make them relevant to contemporary audiences, thereby contributing to the cultural goals of the NEP 2020.

Data Analysis

The data collected from content and thematic analysis will be systematically organized to identify patterns, recurring motifs, and deviations in the portrayal of tradition and modernity.

1. Coding: Thematic elements and content from the films will be coded into categories such as "cultural pride," "technological innovation," "ethical dilemmas," and "national development." This process will facilitate the identification of patterns across different films.

2. Comparative Analysis: The findings from the mythological films and futuristic films will be compared to assess how filmmakers balance traditional values with modern aspirations. This comparison will also explore the evolving role of cinema in shaping national identity and educational discourses.

Limitations

The study is limited to a qualitative analysis of select films, which may not fully represent the diversity of Indian cinema. Additionally, the study focuses on mainstream films, potentially overlooking regional cinema's contribution to the discourse on tradition and modernity.

By employing content and thematic analysis, this methodology offers a robust framework for understanding how Indian cinema serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity. It aims to contribute valuable insights into how films reflect and shape India's cultural and educational landscape considering the NEP 2020 and the vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.



Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study follows a structured approach to evaluate the representation of Traditional Knowledge Systems (IKS) and futuristic narratives in selected Indian films. The goal is to systematically decode how these films contribute to bridging tradition and modernity, in line with the vision of NEP 2020 and India's aspirations for 2047. The analysis involves two key techniques: content analysis and thematic analysis. Each technique focuses on examining both the visual and narrative components of the films, as well as their sociocultural significance.

Content Analysis: Decoding Cinematic Elements

The content analysis process involved an in-depth review of each film's key cinematic elements, including plot, dialogue, visual symbolism, character arcs, and narrative structure. Each film was deconstructed to identify how it reflects either traditional values or futuristic aspirations.

1. Traditional Knowledge Systems Films

Films such as Mahabharat (1965) and Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992) were analysed for their explicit representation of IKS.

For instance, in Mahabharat, the portrayal of characters like Bhishma and Arjuna was closely examined, focusing on their adherence to the values of dharma (righteous duty) and karma (action). Through dialogue and actions, these characters embody moral and ethical lessons that reflect the core principles of IKS.

Visual elements, such as the use of traditional symbols like the chakras (discs) and yagna (sacred fire), were identified as reinforcing cultural teachings. The recurrence of these symbols aligns with India's ancient wisdom and conveys cultural values that continue to hold relevance in modern times.



Preliminary Findings:

The content analysis revealed that these mythological films act as repositories of traditional knowledge and ethics. The symbolic use of ancient rituals and character-driven narratives functions as a medium for preserving India's cultural heritage. Films like Bajirao Mastani (2015) and Tanhaji (2020) similarly represent historical figures whose heroic deeds are aligned with the values of loyalty, sacrifice, and national pride, thus preserving traditional ethos through cinema.

2. Futuristic Films

Films such as Robot (2010) and 2.0 (2018) were analysed for their representation of futuristic narratives and how they align with NEP 2020's vision for technological advancement.

In Robot and its sequel 2.0, the central figure of Chitti, an advanced robot, was examined as a symbol of India's aspiration toward technological leadership. The thematic focus on artificial intelligence, human-machine interaction, and technological ethics mirrors the real-world concerns of integrating technology into education, research, and daily life.

The analysis also focused on dialogues discussing the role of technology in transforming society, such as Dr. Vaseegaran's character advocating for responsible innovation. The portrayal of scientific advancements in these films not only reflects futuristic possibilities but also engages with the ethical dilemmas that come with progress.

Preliminary Findings:

These films project India's technological aspirations by visualizing an advanced future, resonating with NEP 2020's emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and innovation. The films also raise ethical concerns about unchecked technological growth, promoting balanced discourse on modernization.



Thematic Analysis: Identifying Cultural and Educational Patterns

The thematic analysis aimed to capture the overarching cultural and educational themes embedded in the films. By coding recurring themes such as cultural nationalism, technological advancement, and ethical dilemmas, the analysis sought to provide deeper insights into how Indian cinema reconciles tradition and modernity.

1. Cultural Nationalism and Preservation of IKS

Thematic analysis highlighted a strong current of cultural nationalism in mythological and historical films. For example, *Tanhaji* (2020) vividly portrayed historical events with a focus on valour, patriotism, and loyalty, resonating with the rising tide of cultural pride in contemporary India.

The films explored how cinema can actively preserve IKS by invoking ancient traditions, philosophies, and customs. The repeated focus on Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1956) was evident in the way films like *Bajirao Mastani* reframe history for modern audiences, adapting traditional values to current nationalistic discourses.

Preliminary Findings:

Through thematic analysis, it became clear that films steeped in mythology and history not only serve as a reflection of India's past but actively shape contemporary views on tradition and national identity. These films function as both educational tools and cultural vehicles, transmitting values that resonate with modern-day audiences.

2. Technological Futurism and Modernization

The futuristic films were rich in themes surrounding technological innovation and its impact on society. *2.0*, for instance, delved into the consequences of excessive technological dependency, sparking debates on the ethics of innovation.



The thematic analysis of these films revealed their alignment with the NEP 2020 goals of fostering technological advancement while maintaining ethical considerations. Issues such as environmental sustainability (as seen in 2.0) and the role of technology in education (as portrayed in PK and Robot) reflected key NEP aspirations for a developed India.

Preliminary Findings:

Films like Ra.One and PK engage with broader societal concerns around modernization and globalization. By thematically examining these films, the analysis uncovered a narrative that mirrors NEP 2020's focus on multidisciplinary education and innovation while preserving societal harmony.

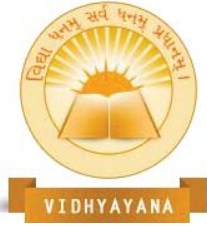
Coding and Categorization

The coding process involved the creation of categories such as "cultural preservation," "technological ethics," and "nationalism." Each of these codes was assigned to specific scenes, dialogues, or visual elements within the films. For example, scenes depicting ancient rituals in Mahabharat were coded under "cultural preservation," while sequences from Robot discussing AI were categorized under "technological ethics."

Through this coding process, patterns emerged that showed a clear demarcation between films emphasizing tradition and those promoting modernization, with some films bridging both realms.

Comparative Analysis

Comparing the data from mythological and futuristic films revealed both continuities and contrasts. While mythological films reinforced the preservation of cultural and traditional knowledge, futuristic films focused on India's technological progress and societal advancement. However, both categories showed a thematic overlap in their focus on ethical dilemmas and national development.



Continuities: Both mythological and futuristic films presented strong ethical concerns. The mythological films dealt with moral choices rooted in tradition, while futuristic films explored the ethics of innovation and technological control.

Contrasts: The key contrast was in the portrayal of the future—while mythological films idealized the past as a source of eternal wisdom, futuristic films questioned the cost of technological advancement on human values.

The data analysis provided a rich understanding of how Indian cinema reflects both the cultural preservation of IKS and the futuristic aspirations of NEP 2020. By systematically analysing content and themes, this study demonstrates that Indian cinema is not merely a reflection of society but a potent medium for shaping national identity, values, and educational goals in the journey toward a Viksit Bharat by 2047. The findings from both the mythological and futuristic films revealed that cinema plays a pivotal role in balancing the dual forces of tradition and modernity, contributing to India's socio-cultural evolution.

Conclusion

This research paper sought to explore the dynamic role of Indian cinema in bridging the gap between Traditional Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the futuristic aspirations outlined in India's NEP 2020, particularly in the context of achieving a Viksit Bharat by 2047. Through the analysis of select films, it is evident that cinema not only reflects the sociocultural fabric of India but also actively participates in shaping it by invoking traditional values while envisioning a technologically advanced future.

The mythological and historical films like Mahabharat (1965), Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992), Bajirao Mastani (2015), and Tanhaji (2020) demonstrate cinema's ability to preserve IKS, ensuring that traditional ethics, values, and cultural heritage continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. These films, by portraying characters steeped in dharma and heroism, ensure the continuity of India's ancient wisdom while fostering a strong sense of national identity and pride.



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On the other hand, futuristic films such as Robot (2010), 2.0 (2018), Ra.One (2011), and PK (2014) bring forth India's technological ambitions and its readiness to tackle modern-day challenges. These films illustrate the importance of innovation, science, and technology, all of which are central to NEP 2020's vision. However, they also engage with the ethical dilemmas associated with rapid technological advancements, emphasizing the need for responsible innovation, aligning with the policy's holistic approach to development.

This study reveals that Indian cinema acts as a mirror to the nation's dual goals: preserving its rich heritage while fostering a forward-looking vision of modernization. By blending these two realms, cinema offers a narrative that is integral to India's journey toward becoming a developed nation by 2047. The films analysed in this study not only reflect cultural and societal values but also act as catalysts for promoting the principles outlined in NEP 2020—specifically, multidisciplinary learning, technological advancement, and cultural preservation.

In conclusion, Indian cinema serves as both a custodian of ancient knowledge and a visionary for future progress. It plays an instrumental role in fostering a balanced development model for the country, where tradition and modernity coexist, ensuring India's cultural and educational evolution as it strides toward a brighter and more sustainable future.



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