

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the transformative power of art in the public sphere, with a specific focus on the 2006 Indian film *Rang De Basanti* (RDB), a movie that became a movement, nominated for Oscar from India (Hindustan Times 2006; BAFTA 2007). The story follows a British film student traveling to India to document the story of five freedom fighters of the Indian revolutionary movement against Britishers. She befriends and casts a group of friends (University Students) in the film, although the group is largely apolitical, the tragic death of a friend owing to local government corruption awakens their patriotism and later in film which inspires the university students group to fight against the corruption of their own government (Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014; Mehra and Gupta 2021). The movie's ability to incite nationwide protests and promote a culture of revolt among the youth of India is examined in detail, which became known as the "Rang De Basanti effect" also known as "RDB effect" (Dilip 2008; ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst 2014). The paper explores the film's themes, its role in shaping public discourse, and its influence on social and political activism. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this paper highlights the complex relationship between art and societal change.

Keywords: *Art, Catalyst, Sociopolitical, 'Rang De Basanti' movie, Indian Public Sphere*

Art has always been an integral component of human expression and culture, intertwining with socio-political factors to shape societies and influence change. Throughout history, art has served as a powerful tool for conveying social commentary, inciting emotions, and reflecting the prevailing spirit. This paper delves into the historical context of art's relationship with socio-political dimensions, tracing its evolution as a dynamic force that has ignited revolutions, challenged the status quo, and altered public discourse (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002; Gramsci 1971). Understanding this backdrop is essential to grasp the transformative potential of art within the contemporary socio-political landscape.

The primary purpose of this paper is to assess the enduring impact of art on revolutionary movements and its relevance in the present-day socio-political context. We seek to explore the intrinsic connection between art and revolutions, investigating how artistic expressions have historically driven societal change, provoked discussions, and inspired collective action.

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Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

This analysis extends to our current times, where art continues to play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing individuals towards social and political transformations (Habermas 1989).

The scope of this paper encompasses an examination of *Rang De Basanti*, a seminal 2006 Indian film, as a case study to understand the influence of art on revolution and its implications for contemporary society. Additionally, it reflects on broader theoretical perspectives, historical events, and the global context of art's relationship with socio-political means. This multidisciplinary approach allows us to navigate the complex interplay between art and activism (Dilip 2008).

In this paper, we rely on a methodology grounded in the analysis of secondary sources. We draw upon a diverse range of internet, academic articles, books, interviews, and other relevant materials to construct a comprehensive understanding of the impact of art on revolutionary movements. And analyzing the impact of *Rang De Basanti* movie on the Indian Public Sphere (Mehra and Gupta 2021; Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014; Dilip 2008).

The Role of Art in Shaping Public Opinion

Art has long held a prominent role in shaping public opinion, acting as a channel for the distribution of thoughts and emotions. Throughout history, artists have harnessed the power of various media, such as visual arts, literature, cinema, and music, to communicate messages, challenge prevailing norms, and provoke contemplation. Art, as a medium of social expression, is not confined to aesthetic or entertainment purposes; it transcends these boundaries and emerges as a dynamic force in societal discourse (Gramsci 1971; Adorno and Horkheimer 2002).

Art's role in shaping public opinion can be observed in its ability to evoke empathy and concern towards social issues. Visual artworks, for instance, can encapsulate complex societal concerns within a single frame, eliciting emotional responses from viewers and prompting them to consider critical questions. Literary works can serve as allegories or reflections of real-life experiences, providing readers with a lens through which they can empathize with the struggles of others. Similarly, films and music can convey powerful narratives that resonate with a wide audience, leading to heightened awareness and social engagement (Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014).

Moreover, art often has the potential to act as a mirror reflecting the spirit of a particular era. Artists frequently draw inspiration from contemporary events, injustices, and aspirations, channeling these into their creations. This, in turn, mirrors the collective consciousness of a society, encapsulating its hopes, fears, and collective desires.

Therefore, art plays a vital role in not only influencing public opinion but also documenting and preserving the spirit of an age (Gramsci 1971).

The Connection between Art and Activism:

Art and activism are inextricably intertwined, with artists often taking on the roles of activists and vice versa. Art provides a platform through which activists can articulate their messages in creative and impactful ways. Activism, in turn, lends a sense of purpose and urgency to artistic expressions. This symbiotic relationship between art and activism has led to numerous transformative movements in history (Chatterjee 2011; Sundar 2014).

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

Artistic expressions serve as a means of resistance and dissent, challenging oppressive regimes, social inequalities, and injustices. Whether through satirical cartoons, protest songs, or provocative performance art, artists have used their creative talents to galvanize change. Activists, on the other hand, recognize the reach and resonance of art, incorporating it into their campaigns to connect with a broader audience and ignite passion (Dilip 2008; Mehta 2012).

Notably, art can act as a catalyst for social and political change, fostering dialogue and mobilizing individuals. It can provide a space for marginalized voices to be heard and empower communities to assert their agency. The connection between art and activism extends beyond aesthetics; it is a strategic tool in addressing systemic issues and advocating for reform (Habermas 1989; Srivastava 2009).

Theoretical Framework: Art in the Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere, originally formulated by Jürgen Habermas, sheds light on how art intersects with societal discourse:

- **Art as a Public Discourse:** Habermas' idea of the public sphere as a space for rational-critical debate aligns with the film's portrayal of youth engaging in discourse and activism. Scholars have explored how *Rang De Basanti* exemplifies the potential of art to create a virtual public sphere, where individuals come together to deliberate on social and political issues (Habermas 1989; Papacharissi 2002).
- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Habermas emphasized the importance of an inclusive public sphere, where diverse voices are heard. The film's influence on public discourse and political engagement can be seen as a case study in how art can foster inclusivity, breaking down barriers to participation and giving marginalized voices a platform (Dahlgren 2005; Benkler 2006).

Art in the public sphere, as a theoretical framework, is rooted in the concept of the public sphere first introduced by Habermas. The public sphere is an arena in society where individuals come together to discuss and debate matters of common interest. Art plays a crucial role within this sphere by contributing to the exchange of ideas, opinions, and critiques that shape the public discourse (Habermas 1989).

Art in the public sphere not only challenges the status quo but also nurtures pluralism and diversity of thought. It provides a platform for various voices to be heard, creating an open space for the contestation of ideas. Furthermore, it can act as a mechanism for holding power structures accountable, as it often critiques authority and highlights social injustices (Gramsci 1971).

By operating within the public sphere, art influences public opinion and serves as a force for democratization, broadening the scope of participation in societal matters. It provides a lens through which society can examine its own values and norms, catalyzing conversations that lead to change. This theoretical framework underscores the transformative potential of art within the realm of public discourse, emphasizing its contribution to sociopolitical movements and societal evolution (Papacharissi 2002; Dahlgren 2005).

The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory:

The Frankfurt School, associated with critical theory, offers a lens through which to analyze how art influences social change:

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

- **The Power of Culture Industry:** Scholars influenced by the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, have argued that the culture industry, which includes mainstream media and entertainment, can often serve as a tool for social control and conformity. In this context, *Rang De Basanti* and its impact can be seen as a subversion of the culture industry. The film encouraged critical thinking and political engagement, challenging the status quo (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002).
- **Cultural Hegemony:** The concept of cultural hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci and embraced by critical theorists, emphasizes the role of culture in maintaining the dominance of ruling classes. *Rang De Basanti* disrupts this hegemony by giving a voice to the marginalized and encouraging viewers to question authority. Scholars have examined how the film subverts traditional power structures and empowers the marginalized (Gramsci 1971; Srivastava 2009).

Art as a form of Resistance:

The concept of art as resistance is a key perspective when analyzing the impact of *Rang De Basanti*:

- **Artistic Expression as Protest:** Scholars have examined the film as a form of artistic resistance, illustrating how art can be used to resist oppressive systems. *Rang De Basanti* showcases how art can express dissent and provoke critical thinking, emphasizing the power of visual storytelling as a form of resistance (Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014).
- **Challenging the Status Quo:** Art as resistance challenges established norms and power structures. The film's depiction of young individuals challenging the political establishment resonates with broader discussions of art's capacity to be a force for change (Mehra and Gupta 2021; Sundar 2014).

Historical Context: India in the Mid-2000s

Scholars have situated *Rang De Basanti* within the broader historical context of India in the mid-2000s. This period was marked by significant developments and challenges:

- **Economic Liberalization:** The early 1990s had seen economic liberalization in India, leading to rapid urbanization and economic growth. However, this also exacerbated socio-economic disparities and created a sense of alienation among certain segments of the population. Scholars have explored how these disparities influenced the socio-political climate and contributed to the themes of social justice and inequality in the film (Chatterjee 2011; Mehra and Gupta 2021).
- **Globalization:** India was increasingly integrated into the global economy, and this had far-reaching effects on culture and society. Scholars have examined how the film reflected the complex interplay between globalization and traditional Indian values and how it portrayed characters grappling with these changes (Dilip 2008).
- **Political Discontent:** The period was marked by political corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a growing sense of disillusionment with the political establishment. *Rang De Basanti* can be seen as a reflection of this discontent. Scholars have delved into how the film tapped into the prevailing sentiments and acted as a social critique (Mehra and Gupta 2021; Sundar 2014).

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Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

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'Rang De Basanti' and its Sociopolitical Relevance

About the film:

Rang De Basanti is a critically acclaimed Indian film released in 2006, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra. The film is known for its powerful storytelling and significant impact on Indian cinema and society. It's important to understand the context in which the film was made and the themes it addresses (Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Historical and Cultural Context:

India in the Mid-2000s: At the time of the film's release in 2006, India was undergoing significant socio-political changes. Economic liberalization had led to rapid urbanization, but it also exacerbated socio-economic disparities. Corruption and political apathy were widespread, and there was a growing sense of disillusionment, particularly among the youth (Chatterjee 2011; Dilip 2008).

Emerging Youth Culture: The early 2000s marked the emergence of a dynamic youth culture in India. Young Indians, often referred to as "Generation Y" or "millennials," were becoming increasingly aware of the issues facing the country. They were connected, tech-savvy, and eager to engage in societal debates (Sundar 2014; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Film Themes and Plot:

Rang De Basanti weaves a narrative that connects the past and present, focusing on a group of college students who are cast in a documentary film about India's struggle for independence. Film inspired by the poetry of Sahir Ludhyanvi (Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014):

बहुत दिनों से है मसला सियासत का
की जब जवान हो बच्चे तो कल्ल हो जायें

(Habit of Establishment to kill the young guns)

The film explores several themes:

- Youth Activism:** The film portrays how the apolitical college students transform into activists, inspired by the sacrifices and ideals of the freedom fighters they portray in the documentary. This reflects the awakening of a sense of responsibility and activism among young people in India (Mehra and Gupta 2021).
- Political Corruption and Apathy:** *Rang De Basanti* does not shy away from depicting the corruption and political apathy prevalent in Indian society. It critiques the state of the nation and calls for a more engaged and accountable political system (Dilip 2008; Mehta 2012).
- Patriotism and Sacrifice:** The film underscores the importance of patriotism and sacrifice, drawing parallels between the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters of the past and the potential sacrifices needed in the present to bring about change (Srivastava 2009; Mehra, Pandey, and D'Silva 2014).

RDB EFFECT: "A Movie that became A Movement"

As long as the State remains the enemy of the nation and politics keep killing its young, RDB will remain relevant (Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

Rang De Basanti left a lasting impact on Indian society. An analysis of bloggers' online behavior during the film's first month of release showed a significant increase in public dissatisfaction with the government and politicians, primarily due to perceived corruption, bureaucracy, and their inability to deliver basic services (Dilip 2008). The film sparked intense political debates, leading writer D'Silva to observe that it had deeply resonated with the audience. Beyond these political discussions, the movie also ignited a sense of social consciousness among many viewers. Conversations ranged from discussing how citizens should support and contribute to non-governmental organizations to emphasizing essential civic duties like paying taxes and participating in the voting process. Additionally, discussions revolved around how individuals could be more responsible towards their country. Unlike other Indian films with a strong nationalist tone, *Rang De Basanti* found a strong connection with young Indians who could relate to the characters in the story (Sundar 2014; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Nationwide Protests and Social Movements:

The release of *Rang De Basanti* (RDB) had a profound impact on Indian society. Online reactions were evident, and they prompted a surge in youth activism taking to the streets to protest on matters of public interest. One direct consequence was seen in the 1999 Jessica Lal Murder Case, a high-profile murder case in India. A month after the film's release, the main accused was acquitted due to inefficient prosecution and hostile witnesses. This triggered widespread civil protests and media campaigns demanding his re-arrest. Inspired by a scene in the movie where the protagonists hold a silent candlelight vigil at India Gate in New Delhi, in real life demonstrators also organized a similar rally to voice their protest. The students had got RDB tattoos and were wearing RDB T-shirts, using dialogues from the film. The media had coined a term called the *Rang De Basanti effect*, and it did not die there. Hence, the film served as a catalyst to civic justice in the horrific Jessica Lal case. Candle-lit protests inspired by RDB continued to become a symbolic method to express public outcry (Times of India 2006; Mehta 2012).

A survey conducted shortly afterward revealed that 18% of respondents believed that films like *Rang De Basanti* were a key factor driving this sudden surge in social engagement (Times of India 2006). Another significant wave of youth activism was observed in the Priyadarshini Mattoo rape and murder case, with rallies taking place in India, the United States, and around the world (Mehta 2012).

Even in neighboring Pakistan, where the film was not released, similar reactions were observed. Inspired by the movie, Pakistan's national newspaper, Jang, launched a television channel dedicated to addressing citizens' issues and promoting public awakening (DNA India 2006). In response to these strong societal reactions, actor Kunal Kapoor suggested that the film served as a catalyst, presenting patriotism in a way that resonated with and was understood by young audiences (Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Five years later, in April 2011, there was a significant event when Anna Hazare went on a fast, which greatly alarmed the government. This event eventually led to the formation of a new political party called the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). This situation echoed the kind of awakening that was initially inspired by *Rang De Basanti*. In fact, an NDTV report during that time noted similarities and referred to the Mumbai protests as “*Echoes of Rang De Basanti at Mumbai's Azad Maidan.*” The protesters chanted patriotic slogans like “*Vande Mataram*” and “*Inquilab Zindabad,*” and they also sang songs like *Yeh Desh Hai Veer*

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

Jawaanon Ka and *Rang De Basanti* in their protest against Anna Hazare's arrest (NDTV 2011a; NDTV 2011b).

The Influence on Youth Culture:

Rang De Basanti played a significant role in shaping youth culture in India during the mid-2000s. Its influence extended beyond the screen, affecting the lifestyle, attitudes, and aspirations of the younger generation. Scholarly input on this aspect might include:

Scholars have examined how the film contributed to the emergence of a more politically conscious and socially engaged youth culture in India. It fostered a sense of empowerment and a belief that young people could be agents of change. The film's characters, who initially seem apolitical, evolve into activists, mirroring the transformation that the audience itself experienced (Sundar 2014).

This transformation in youth culture was marked by a growing desire to engage with social and political issues. *Rang De Basanti* had a profound impact on fashioning new role models who weren't just film stars but also real-life activists and social reformers. Scholarly discussions often focus on how the film ignited a sense of agency and idealism among the youth (Srivastava 2009; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Public Discourse and Political Engagement:

The film's release was accompanied by heightened public discourse and political engagement in India. Scholarly analysis of this aspect would encompass:

Scholars have noted that *Rang De Basanti* served as a conversation starter, encouraging people to engage in discussions about the issues it raised. It became a reference point in public discourse, with its themes and characters frequently invoked in debates about politics, corruption, and the role of the youth in nation-building (Dilip 2008; Sundar 2014).

The film's impact on political engagement was twofold. On the one hand, it motivated individuals to participate in activism and social movements. On the other hand, it influenced political discourse and election campaigns. Politicians recognized the film's popularity and began to align their messages with its themes of change and reform (Mehra and Gupta 2021).

In conclusion, *Rang De Basanti* had a profound and enduring impact on Indian society by spurring protests, influencing youth culture, and shaping public discourse and political engagement. Scholarly analysis of these aspects highlights the film's role as a catalyst for social and political change, and as a reflection of the evolving socio-political landscape in India during the mid-2000s (Mehta 2012; Sundar 2014).

Political Movements and Activism

The mid-2000s in India witnessed several political movements and activism that can be linked to the themes explored in *Rang De Basanti*:

- **Anti-Corruption Movement:** The film's themes of political corruption resonated with the anti-corruption movement led by activists like Anna Hazare in the early 2010s. Scholars have examined the connections between the film's narrative and the goals of the anti-corruption movement, including demands for transparency and accountability in government (Mehta 2012; NDTV 2011a).
- **Youth Activism:** The film's portrayal of young people taking up social and political causes influenced real-world youth activism. Scholars have discussed how the film inspired a new generation of politically engaged young activists who sought to bring

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

about change in various domains, from environmental issues to women's rights (Bakshi 2017; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

From 'Rang De Basanti' to Contemporary Youth Movements:

Scholarly discussions often draw parallels between the influence of *Rang De Basanti* and contemporary youth movements, examining how the film's legacy lives on:

- **Youth-Led Protests:** The film's emphasis on youth activism and idealism can be connected to subsequent youth-led protests in India, such as the "Nirbhaya" protests and the "Jallikattu" protests. Scholars have analyzed the role of young people in these movements and their use of social media, often drawing connections to the film's portrayal of young activists (Bakshi 2017; Prince 2023).
- **Art as a Tool for Change:** *Rang De Basanti* demonstrated the power of art to mobilize and inspire. Scholars have explored how contemporary youth movements have harnessed art, music, and film to convey their messages, echoing the film's themes of art as a catalyst for social and political change (Sundar 2014; Srivastava 2009).

The Digital Age, Role of Social Media in Protests and Its Impact on Activism:

The theoretical analysis of the relationship between the Internet and the public sphere is valuable in this project because it is public dialogue and rational debate (inspired by RDB) that encouraged political engagement and fueled blogging as citizenship on the Internet. New media technologies like the Internet are credited by many scholars, the optimists as they are called, for having the capacity to empower citizens and revive democracy (Toffler and Toffler 1995; Negroponte 1995; Papacharissi 2002; Dahlgren 2005; Benkler 2006). These scholars are of the opinion that the Internet aids the creation of an interactive public space, one in which people can forge new social relationships and communities. The optimists argue that deliberation and rational discussion on the Internet through discussion boards, blogs and other forums can help people form and represent public opinion on various issues of common interest. Additionally, access to information on issues of public interest can empower citizens to become politically aware and provide them with an opportunity to participate in public life. In addition to protesting in real life, Indian youngsters also used the power of the Internet to help educate the public about the case. Bloggers played a big role in this process by publicizing the injustice in cases Jessica Lall and Priyadarshini Mattoo on the Internet, organizing protest activities and last but not the least, convincing young people to participate in public life and in demonstrations and marches. Bloggers, who could not be a part of these protests blogged about the Jessica Lall case and provided information about what people could do to help her cause. Many of these bloggers were inspired by RDB's message to make a difference and they prominently quoted RDB's message in their posts (Dilip 2008; Mehta 2012).

This sort of youth activism from citizens and citizen-bloggers inspired by RDB had a huge impact on the social fabric of the Indian society, especially in terms of an increase in political activism and participation in public life. Additionally, keeping in mind Canclini's argument that globalization and the disintegration of cities has in many instances led to the abandonment of public spaces as sites of collective participation and citizenship; in the case of RDB, consumption of media images resulted in citizens using public places as sites of collective participation (Canclini 2001). This sort of activism by everyday citizens not only brought forth political participation but also helped in the creation of a socially responsible netizen. Thus, citizenship in this case was not only exercised on the Internet but also in real

Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

life. Additionally, RDB not only inspired audience members into forming interest groups (to lobby officials) and starting national/local petition campaigns but also forced them to change their personal habits in the quest to change the system. It was a combination of all these factors that caused an expansion of the public sphere in India. Furthermore, it was because of factors like these that a newspaper in India declared that RDB had become a part of “public consciousness” (Times of India 2006). All this attention to a commercial film may seem rather bizarre but as a student protesting against the reservation system put it: “*we look up to Bhagat Singh, and to movies like Rang De Basanti. This is just a small way of repaying our debt to our country.*” In sum, the Indian youth for whom RDB was made thus felt that the film was “a trendsetter” as it was “a reflection of the power of the youth going to sweep the nation” (Sundar 2014; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

The Revival of Political Consciousness:

Scholars have noted a revival of political consciousness among Indian youth, and this resurgence can be linked to the film's impact:

- **Civic Responsibility:** *Rang De Basanti* emphasized the importance of civic responsibility, and scholars have explored how this notion has regained prominence in recent years. Young people are increasingly engaging in civic and political activities, recognizing the need for active participation in shaping the nation's future (Mehra and Gupta 2021; Dilip 2008).
- **Political Engagement:** The film's call for political engagement has resonated with a new generation of politically aware citizens. Scholars have examined how the film's narrative has contributed to a broader shift in Indian society, where political discourse and activism are now seen as essential elements of citizenship (Sundar 2014; Srivastava 2009).

In sum, the intersection of art, history, and politics in the context of "Rang De Basanti" has had a lasting impact on Indian society, contributing to a revival of political consciousness, youth activism, and a more engaged citizenry. The film continues to serve as a touchstone for discussions on the relationship between art and political change in India.

International Reception and Impact

Cross-Cultural Appeal: *Rang De Basanti* received attention and acclaim not only in India but also in various parts of the world. Scholars have examined its cross-cultural appeal and how it resonated with audiences from different backgrounds. The film's themes of youth activism, political engagement, and idealism have universal significance, sparking international conversations about social and political change (BAFTA 2007; Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Diaspora Communities: The Indian diaspora played a crucial role in disseminating the film's message globally. Scholars have explored how *Rang De Basanti* became a focal point for discussions within Indian communities abroad, as well as for individuals interested in Indian culture and politics (Mehra and Gupta 2021).

Regional Echoes: Even in Pakistan, where the film was not officially released, its influence was felt. *Jang* launched a television channel dedicated to addressing civic issues and awakening the public, inspired directly by the energy surrounding the film (DNA India 2006).

DISCUSSION

The case of *Rang De Basanti* (RDB) highlights the deep interconnections between cultural production, political consciousness, and collective action. By drawing on theoretical frameworks of the public sphere, cultural hegemony, and the culture industry, it becomes clear that the film is not only a popular cultural artifact but also a political intervention that transformed the contours of Indian civil society.

From a Habermasian perspective, the film functioned as a catalyst for the expansion of the public sphere. It encouraged citizens to engage in rational-critical debates about corruption, justice, and accountability in both physical and digital spaces. The candlelight vigils at India Gate, the proliferation of blogs after the Jessica Lal case, and subsequent protests reflected the creation of new deliberative spaces where diverse groups of people could voice their concerns. What is notable here is that these spaces emerged not through institutional channels but through cultural inspiration, showing how art can directly produce civic engagement.

Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony is equally relevant in understanding RDB's role. Indian cinema has often been critiqued for reproducing nationalist or commercial ideologies that maintain the status quo. Yet *Rang De Basanti* disrupted this hegemony by valorizing dissent and youth resistance. Instead of glorifying passive patriotism, the film reframed patriotism as active responsibility, encouraging citizens to confront injustice even when it meant opposing the state. By aligning popular culture with counter-hegemonic ideals, the film challenged dominant narratives and redefined citizenship for a new generation.

From the perspective of the Frankfurt School, RDB presents a paradox. Adorno and Horkheimer famously warned that the culture industry pacifies the masses, turning art into a tool of conformity and distraction. RDB, however, complicates this critique by demonstrating that even within commercial cinema, subversive texts can emerge that provoke rather than pacify. Far from serving as passive entertainment, the film mobilized its audience into tangible activism, whether through street protests, online mobilizations, or civic participation. In this sense, RDB represents a moment when the culture industry temporarily broke its own logic, allowing mainstream cinema to act as a revolutionary force.

Another significant dimension is the digital amplification of RDB's message. Blogging and online forums extended the film's influence beyond theaters, creating a "virtual public sphere" (Papacharissi 2002) where debates about justice and governance flourished. The case illustrates how traditional media (cinema) and new media (blogs, social networks) can combine to produce powerful waves of activism, laying the groundwork for subsequent digitally-driven protests such as the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement and the Nirbhaya protests. In this sense, the RDB effect can be seen as an early precursor to India's networked social movements.

Finally, the discussion must recognize the film's symbolic and transnational impact. For many Indian youth, RDB became a generational marker of political awakening—a film that allowed them to imagine themselves not as passive consumers but as active agents of history. For the diaspora and even audiences in neighboring countries like Pakistan, it symbolized the universal struggle of youth against corruption, apathy, and injustice. The enduring relevance of the RDB effect underscores the ability of art not only to reflect social realities but to intervene in them, blurring the line between fiction and activism, entertainment and revolution.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine how art functions as a catalyst for sociopolitical change, with *Rang De Basanti* (RDB) as a case study of cinema's power to transform India's public sphere. The findings highlight the enduring and far-reaching impact of the film: rooted in an Indian context yet transcending borders, it inspired dialogue, activism, and a new political consciousness among youth. The "RDB effect" illustrates how art can move from screen to street, turning cultural production into civic participation.

The implications for art and activism are profound. Cinema, as this study shows, is not merely entertainment but a force capable of mobilizing citizens around pressing social and political issues. *Rang De Basanti* stands as a testament to the power of narrative and storytelling to awaken collective responsibility and reframe patriotism as an active struggle against corruption and injustice. In doing so, it disrupts cultural hegemony and broadens the scope of India's democratic participation.

At the same time, this analysis is not without limits. By relying primarily on secondary sources and focusing on a single case study, it offers only a partial view of the wider relationship between cinema and activism. Future research should therefore explore comparative cases—such as *Article 15*, *Uda Punjab*, or *Newton*—to understand whether the *RDB effect* was unique or part of a broader cultural trend. Ethnographic studies of audience reception, especially among youth and diaspora communities, would also deepen our understanding of how such films shape long-term civic practices rather than momentary protests.

Looking ahead, the role of digital media demands further attention. If RDB demonstrated the potential of cinema to spark physical protests and online mobilizations in the mid-2000s, today's networked social movements—from the Nirbhaya protests to climate strikes—reveal an even more complex interplay between cultural texts, social media, and activism. Future work must therefore investigate how art and digital technologies together can nurture not just political awareness but also political maturity: a deeper form of engagement rooted in critical thinking, reasoned debate, and sustained democratic participation.

Ultimately, the *Rang De Basanti* effect reminds us that art does not merely reflect society—it can remake it. By bridging art, activism, and revolution, the film demonstrates the capacity of creative expression to expand the public sphere, empower marginalized voices, and reinvigorate citizenship. In moments of democratic crisis, this lesson is vital: cultural texts like *RDB* show that revolutions need not begin in parliaments or battlefields—they can also begin in stories, songs, and images that inspire citizens to act.

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Art as a Catalyst for Sociopolitical Change: Analyzing the Impact of 'Rang De Basanti' movie on the Indian Public Sphere

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Conflict of Interest

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