



# Narratives of Aspiration: The Shift from Entertainment to Empowerment in Contemporary Indian Cinema and Its Impact on Youth Aspirations

**Dr. Chandrakant Y. Brahmshatri**

Assistant Prof. in English, S & H, Dept., KSET

Drs. Kiran & Pallavi Patel Global University, Varnama, Vadodara.

## How to Cite this Article:

Brahmkshatri, C. Y. (2026). Narratives of Aspiration: The Shift from Entertainment to Empowerment in Contemporary Indian Cinema and Its Impact on Youth Aspirations. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, 2(05).  
<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.252>

## License:

This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

© The Author(s). Published by International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management.



<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.252>

## Abstract:

This study examines the role of contemporary Indian cinema in potentially influencing youth aspirations. Indian cinema has long included narratives of romance, melodrama and escapism, and in recent years it has also featured more films centred on perseverance, ethical responsibility and professional achievement. This shift may reflect broader socio-economic transformations, including globalization, technological advancement and intensified competition in education and employment sectors.

Drawing upon Social Learning Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Cultivation Theory, this study examines how cinematic narratives may influence youth identity formation, motivation and career aspirations. The study uses qualitative textual analysis of selected films, with *12th Fail* as the primary case study and the other films used for comparative illustration.

The analysis suggests that contemporary Indian cinema may both reflect and reinforce themes relevant to youth development. By promoting narratives of resilience, integrity and dedication, cinema may reflect and reinforce broader themes of skill development and employability discussed in the India Skills Report 2025. However, critical media literacy remains essential to contextualize cinematic narratives. The paper considers how such cinema may support value-based education when paired with critical engagement.

**Keywords:** Indian cinema, youth aspirations, motivational films, media influence, nation-building, employability, value-based education, cinematic narratives



## 1. Introduction

India's large youth population represents a key demographic advantage for socio-economic development. Often termed the demographic dividend, this offers opportunities for national growth (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2022). However, realizing this potential depends on youth aspirations, values, and motivations (MoSPI, 2022). In this context, media, particularly cinema, may influence youth consciousness.

Indian cinema has long functioned as a major cultural institution. As Dwyer (2014) notes, Hindi cinema has served as a lens for interpreting social realities and cultural norms. Many mainstream Indian films have long featured romance, melodrama and escapism, alongside more recent examples centred on perseverance, ethical responsibility and professional achievement. While such narratives fulfilled emotional and cultural needs, they often gave less attention to career development and ethical responsibility (Mishra, 2002).

In recent decades, Indian cinema has undergone thematic shifts shaped by globalization, digital distribution and changing audience expectations (EY, 2025; IJPREMS, 2025). At the same time, surveys indicate that young Indians increasingly express interest in autonomy, skill development and career-oriented choices (MoSPI, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2025). As a result, there is greater demand for media content that is not only entertaining but also socially meaningful.

Films such as *12th Fail* present narratives rooted in real-life struggles and achievements. Such films portray relatable characters overcoming adversity through perseverance and discipline. These narratives may resonate with youth navigating educational and professional challenges.

The popularity of motivational cinema suggests audience interest in aspirational content (Motivate Val Morgan, 2024). In India, competitive examinations and stable employment remain important pathways in youth aspirations, especially in relation to social mobility and secure livelihoods (Salovaara, 2026). Government reports also

highlight this trend (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2022).

This paper examines thematic shifts in Indian cinema toward aspirational narratives, reflecting the broader shift from entertainment to empowerment. It explores how such films may relate to youth aspirations and value systems. By integrating theory and case studies, it offers insights into cinema's potential role.

### 1.1 Research Gap

While existing scholarship has extensively examined the influence of media on youth behaviour and identity formation (Arnett, 1995; Bandura, 1977), there remains limited scholarship on how contemporary Indian cinema frames aspiration, self-improvement and social mobility. Previous studies have largely focused on the cultural, aesthetic and commercial aspects of Bollywood (Dwyer, 2014; Mishra, 2002), with limited attention to its evolving role in shaping youth aspirations in the context of contemporary socio-economic challenges.

Moreover, although motivational cinema has gained popularity among youth audiences (Motivate Val Morgan, 2024), there is insufficient integration of these narratives with empirical frameworks such as employability trends and skill development, particularly those highlighted in the India Skills Report 2025. Links between cinematic narratives and national priorities like skill enhancement remain limited.

This study addresses this by analyzing aspirational storytelling in selected films. Theoretical frameworks and case studies together provide a nuanced perspective.

## 2. Literature Review

Media-youth relationships are studied across sociology, psychology and media studies. Cinema may influence youth perceptions, attitudes and behaviors.

Arnett (1995) conceptualizes media as a tool for adolescent self-socialization. Adolescents may use media to explore identity and social positioning. This view sees youth as active media interpreters. Cinema thus serves as a site for identity exploration.



Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) elaborates observational learning in media. Individuals learn by observing role models. Cinematic characters achieving success through effort may model values for youth. This applies to motivational films featuring resilient protagonists.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) focuses on audience motivations. Audiences select content meeting psychological and social needs. In India, some young audiences may seek media content that offers inspiration, guidance and meaning. Motivational films may align with youth aspirations.

Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998) addresses long-term media effects. Prolonged exposure may shape reality perceptions. Repeated success narratives may reinforce effort-based success beliefs, thereby influencing youth aspirations and behavior.

Indian cinema scholarship views it as reflecting societal values. Dwyer (2014) sees Bollywood as reflecting societal aspirations and anxieties. Ganti (2012) notes the industry's socio-economic embedding. Mishra (2002) critiques traditional Bollywood as "temples of desire."

Recent studies suggest that contemporary Indian cinema increasingly addresses education, social inequality and motivational themes (Daftari et al., 2025; Thomas, 2024). Media exposure may also influence career choices among adolescents (Lipscomb, 2015). This is relevant in India, where competitive examinations and stable employment remain important pathways in youth aspirations (Stanford APARC, 2026; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2022). The India Skills Report 2025 highlights changing job market expectations (Wheebox & AICTE, 2025).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The relationship between cinema and youth aspirations can be understood through media and psychological theories. These frameworks help explain how media influences audiences and why certain narratives resonate.

#### 3.1 Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977) posits that human behavior is learned through observation, imitation and

modelling. Adolescents often emulate figures they perceive as successful or admirable. In cinema, protagonists can function as symbolic role models whose actions influence perceptions of success and morality.

Motivational films in contemporary Indian cinema often portray characters who achieve success through perseverance, discipline and ethical conduct. These representations may encourage similar values among youth. When viewers observe characters overcoming structural disadvantages through sustained effort, they may develop a stronger belief in effort-based success.

#### 3.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Katz et al. (1973) argue that audiences are active participants who select media content based on their psychological and social needs. This perspective is relevant in understanding the popularity of motivational cinema among Indian youth.

In a competitive socio-economic environment, young individuals may seek narratives that provide guidance, reassurance and inspiration. Motivational films may offer models of success, emotional encouragement and practical life lessons. Thus, the rise of such narratives can be read as a response to evolving audience demands.

#### 3.3 Cultivation Theory

Gerbner (1998) emphasizes that prolonged exposure to media content gradually shapes perceptions of reality. In contemporary cinema, repeated exposure to narratives of hard work and perseverance may cultivate a worldview in which these values are seen as essential for achievement.

This is significant in the Indian context, where youth are exposed to films depicting success in competitive examinations, entrepreneurship and professional careers. Over time, such narratives may normalize effort-based success and discourage shortcuts or unethical practices.

#### 3.4 Self-Efficacy and Aspirational Identity

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is central to understanding how cinema influences youth



aspirations. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve specific goals. Media representations of success can strengthen this belief by providing relatable examples of achievement.

Contemporary Indian films often depict protagonists from modest socio-economic backgrounds who achieve success through determination. These narratives may help viewers identify with the characters and perceive their own goals as attainable. As a result, cinema can contribute to aspirational identity formation.

#### 4. Evolution of Indian Cinema

Indian cinema has historically functioned as a source of mass entertainment, characterized by elaborate song sequences, romantic plots and melodramatic storytelling (Mishra, 2002). These narratives, while culturally significant, often presented idealized versions of reality that prioritized emotional engagement over practical relevance.

However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed significant socio-economic transformations in India, including liberalization, globalization and technological advancement. These changes have affected audience expectations and cinematic content.

As Dwyer (2014) observes, contemporary Indian cinema increasingly reflects the aspirations and anxieties of a rapidly changing society. The rise of multiplex culture, digital streaming platforms and global exposure has contributed to a demand for more realistic and socially relevant narratives (Chandra, Gaidhane, & Choudhari, 2023).

This shift can be seen in films that focus on educational challenges, academic pressure, competitive examinations, entrepreneurship and social mobility. Such themes resonate strongly with youth navigating complex educational and professional landscapes. Consequently, cinema has increasingly shifted from a medium of escapism toward a platform for aspirational storytelling.

#### 5. Cinema and Youth Aspirations

Cinema may play a role in shaping youth aspirations by influencing perceptions of success, identity and

social mobility. According to Arnett (1995), media serves as a critical tool for self-socialization, enabling young individuals to explore possible life trajectories.

In the Indian context, where traditional career paths often dominate societal expectations, cinema can provide alternative narratives that broaden the scope of aspiration. Films that depict unconventional career paths, entrepreneurial success, or social service can encourage youth to broaden their aspirational frameworks, though their actual influence varies depending on socio-economic realities and individual interpretation (Banerjee, 2022).

Moreover, motivational cinema may contribute to intrinsic motivation. Unlike extrinsic motivators such as financial rewards or social recognition, intrinsic motivation is driven by personal satisfaction and a sense of purpose. Films that emphasize passion, dedication and ethical conduct reinforce the importance of intrinsic motivation in achieving long-term success.

The influence of cinema is further amplified by its emotional impact. Unlike textual or theoretical content, films engage viewers through visual storytelling, music and character development. This emotional engagement can enhance message retention and increase impact on attitudes and behavior.

#### 6. Case Study Analysis

##### 6.1 12th Fail

This film offers a recent example of a success narrative that begins with failure and emphasizes resilience, discipline and ethical integrity (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2023). The protagonist's journey highlights the value of sustained effort.

From a theoretical perspective, the film illustrates Social Learning Theory by presenting a relatable role model whose success is achieved through sustained effort. It also reinforces self-efficacy by showing that failure is not permanent but part of the process of achievement.

##### 6.2 Super 30



This film emphasizes the transformative power of education in achieving social mobility (Anand Kumar, real-life inspiration; Hrithik Roshan film, 2019). It highlights structural inequalities in access to education while also showing the potential for overcoming these barriers through dedication and mentorship.

The narrative aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory, as it fulfils the audience's need for inspiration and social relevance. It also contributes to the discourse on inclusive education and equal opportunity.

### 6.3 3 Idiots

This film critically examines the Indian education system, challenging its emphasis on rote learning and conformity (Rajkumar Hirani, 2009). It can be interpreted as encouraging creativity, innovation and career choices driven by personal interest.

From a theoretical standpoint, the film reshapes aspirational frameworks by encouraging youth to pursue careers aligned with their interests rather than societal expectations. It also promotes intrinsic motivation as a key driver of success.

### 6.4 Taare Zameen Par

This film addresses the issue of learning disabilities and highlights the importance of inclusive education (Khan, 2007; NCERT Journal of Inclusive Education, 2022). It challenges traditional notions of intelligence and success, emphasizing the need to recognize diverse abilities. The film contributes to empathy and social awareness, aligning with the broader goals of value-based education.

## 7. Cinema and Employability

The India Skills Report 2025 provides insights into the evolving demands of the job market. The report highlights competencies such as critical thinking, adaptability, communication and problem-solving as important for employability.

Elements of these competencies are reflected in some contemporary cinematic narratives, particularly in films that emphasize perseverance, innovation and ethical conduct, which echo the focus on critical thinking, adaptability,

communication and problem-solving highlighted in the India Skills Report 2025 (Wheebox & AICTE, 2025). Such films may align with the skills required in modern professional environments.

Furthermore, the report highlights the growing aspirations of Indian youth to achieve professional success and financial stability. Motivational cinema may reinforce these aspirations by providing relatable narratives that highlight hard work and continuous learning, though simplified success stories may risk creating unrealistic expectations if not critically engaged with (Rao, 2023; Buckingham, 2003).

Thus, cinema and employability frameworks are interconnected, with each influencing and reinforcing the other.

## 8. Cinema as a Tool for Nation-Building

Cinema may contribute to nation-building by shaping values, attitudes and public imagination. By promoting narratives of responsibility, integrity and social contribution, films can encourage youth to consider active participation in national development, though their impact depends on broader educational and social structures (Buckingham, 2003).

According to Buckingham (2003), media education plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking and responsible citizenship. When integrated into educational contexts, cinema can enhance students' understanding of social issues and encourage ethical decision-making.

Moreover, films that highlight real-life challenges and success stories can foster a sense of shared identity and purpose, contributing to discourses on national development (Buckingham, 2003).

## 9. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its positive potential, cinema is not without limitations. One of the primary concerns is the oversimplification of success narratives. Films often compress complex journeys into simplified storylines, which can inspire audiences but may also create unrealistic expectations if viewers interpret them uncritically (Buckingham, 2003).



Additionally, the commercialization of motivational cinema can dilute its impact. When success narratives are shaped primarily by commercial goals, their educational or reflective value may be reduced.

Another challenge is the coexistence of contradictory narratives within the film industry. While some films promote ethical values and responsibility, others emphasize materialism or idealized lifestyles, which may dilute the impact of aspirational narratives (Chandra, Gaidhane, & Choudhari, 2023).

These challenges highlight the importance of critical media literacy, enabling audiences to engage with cinematic content in an informed and reflective manner.

## 10. Discussion

The shift from entertainment to empowerment in Indian cinema reflects broader socio-cultural transformations. As India continues to evolve as a knowledge-based economy, the aspirations of its youth are increasingly aligned with professional success, innovation and social responsibility.

Cinema often responds to these changing aspirations by presenting narratives that aim to be both realistic and inspiring. However, the impact of these narratives depends on the extent to which they are critically engaged with by audiences.

Educational institutions, policymakers and media creators can work collaboratively to help ensure that cinematic content contributes positively to youth development.

## 11. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in multiple academic and practical contexts. First, it contributes to the field of media studies by highlighting the evolving role of cinema as a tool for empowerment rather than mere entertainment. By focusing on contemporary Indian cinema, the research adds to the growing body of literature that examines media as an agent of social change.

Second, the study holds relevance for education by demonstrating how cinematic narratives can support value-based learning and motivate students

to pursue meaningful careers. In an era marked by intense academic competition and career uncertainty, such insights are particularly valuable for educators and policymakers.

Third, the integration of findings from the India Skills Report 2025 enhances the practical relevance of the study by linking media narratives with employability and skill development. This connection underscores the potential of cinema to complement formal education in preparing youth for the demands of the modern workforce.

Finally, the study contributes to the discourse on nation-building by emphasizing the role of media in fostering responsible citizenship, ethical values and social awareness among youth.

## 12. Conclusion

The transformation of Indian cinema from entertainment to empowerment represents a significant cultural shift with implications for youth development. Contemporary films may influence aspirations, values and identities by presenting narratives of perseverance, integrity and success.

By aligning with broader socio-economic trends and employability frameworks, cinema may contribute indirectly by reinforcing themes relevant to motivation, learning and employability when critically engaged with by audiences. However, its impact must be complemented by critical engagement and media literacy.

Ultimately, purpose-driven cinema may support value-based education and broader youth development, though its effectiveness depends on critical media literacy and complementary educational initiatives.

## References:



Arnett, J. J. (1995). Adolescents' uses of media for self-socialization. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 24(5), 519–533.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01537054>

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.

Banerjee, S. (2022). Aspirational narratives in contemporary Indian cinema. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 20(3), 215–230.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2022.2045678>

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Polity Press.

Chandra, V., Gaidhane, A., & Choudhari, S. G. (2023). Digital dilemmas: A comprehensive review of the psychosocial and sleep effects of web streaming on the Indian youth. *Cureus*, 15(12), e51096.

Daftari, A., Arora, S., & Lamba, A. (2025). Beyond entertainment: Impact of Indian cinema on youths' perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(4), 1726–1737.

Dwyer, R. (2014). *Bollywood's India: Hindi cinema as a guide to contemporary India*. Reaktion Books.

EY. (2025). *Indian media and entertainment is scripting a new story*.  
[https://www.ey.com/en\\_in/media-entertainment/indian-media-entertainment-sector](https://www.ey.com/en_in/media-entertainment/indian-media-entertainment-sector)

FICCI-EY. (2025). *Shape the future: Indian media & entertainment sector*. EY India.

Ganti, T. (2012). *Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry*. Duke University Press.

Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1(3–4), 175–194.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.1998.9677855>

International Journal of Progressive Research in Engineering Management and Science. (2025). Impact of globalization on Indian cinema.  
<http://www.ijprems.com>

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2022). *Youth in India 2022*. Government of India. <https://mospi.gov.in>

Mishra, V. (2002). *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire*. Routledge.

Motivate Val Morgan. (2024). *Research on cinema-going audiences in India*.

Rao, K. (2023). Cinema and youth motivation in India. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 78–92.

Salovaara, I. (2026). *Insights into the social life of India's government recruitment examinations coaching industry*. Stanford APARC.  
<https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/insights-social-life-indias-government-recruitment-examinations-coaching-industry>

Wheebox, AICTE, & CII. (2025). *India skills report 2025*. Wheebox.  
[https://wheebox.com/assets/pdf/ISR\\_Report\\_2025.pdf](https://wheebox.com/assets/pdf/ISR_Report_2025.pdf)

World Economic Forum. (2025). *Here's what young Indians really want from life*.  
<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2018/10/here-s-what-young-indians-really-want-from-life/>

## Film References

Chopra, V. V. (Director). (2023). *12th Fail* [Film]. Vinod Chopra Films.

Bahl, V. (Director). (2019). *Super 30* [Film]. Reliance Entertainment; Phantom Films; Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment; HRX Films.

Hirani, R. K. (Director). (2009). *3 Idiots* [Film]. Vinod Chopra Films.

Khan, A. (Director). (2007). *Taare Zameen Par* [Film]. Aamir Khan Productions.

Khattari, S., & Singh, [Initials]. (2025). Impact of Indian cinema on youths' perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 18\*(1).



<https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/18.01.158.20251304.pdf>  
[web:59]

Thomas, S. (2024). Films as emergent educational resources in Indian upper primary classrooms. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 10, Article 100944.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100944>