



By Tim Green Bollywood Carmen/Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)



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India's Hindi cinema, widely known as Bollywood, is one of world's biggest and most prolific film industries. Akin to other film industries, most of the Hindi films are meant to entertain. However, in the last two decades, there have been three films that have stood out for the gravity and substance of the message they communicate and the lyrical manner in which they were able to serenade the hearts of the audience.

The word *lagaan* means tax or tariff in Hindi. In 2001, there was a film called *Lagaan* (लगान). Based on a true story, it is a historical period piece that essentially depicts how an Indian farmer in a small village challenged the officers of the British East India Company during their colonization of India. The plot centers around an unjust tax or *lagaan* that is imposed on the poor village farmers. The village farmers, having never played before, are challenged to a game of cricket. If they win the match, the tax will be repealed. In one of the climactic moments of the film, the whole village comes together, blurring all divisions of caste, class, and profession, to make bats and other cricket gear for their team, by hand. They learn not only how to play the game of cricket but also how to win. When they win, the unjust tax gets repealed and the local British East India Company outpost is forced to shut down and move. As gut-wrenching as the plot is, with the audience experiencing the highs and lows of the characters, the cast, cinematography, dances, and songs are equally enchanting, and powerful, even inspiring. When one hears the song "chale chalo" (चल चलो) in the movie, there is a rare opportunity to interface with not only the historical underpinnings of the Indian heritage, but the raw, sheer energy of this particular group of the Indian culture, who were able to overcome tremendous personal, financial and political odds.

While *Lagaan* is based entirely in history, in 2004, the film *Swades* (स्वदेश), meaning "one's own country" in Hindi, grapples with the current diasporic, hyphenated, bifurcated, identity of Indians who have moved abroad. *Swades* is loosely based on a true story of a non-resident Indian (NRI) couple who make that return to the homeland that many Indians adults who have moved abroad crave, whether wishfully or practically. *Swades* is filmed beautifully and considerately, with tremendous care given both to the spoken word and to the arguments and counter-arguments that are expected in the culture. However, what is alluring about the film is the silent in-between space or stillness communicated with different melodies and empty spaces that are different from the typical Bollywood dance-like songs. In those moments, the film seems to capture that uncomfortable, nostalgic yet remarkable time-space continuum in which the Indian diasporic identity resides.

Lastly, in 2009's film *Three Idiots*, brings the audience face-to-face with the identity of youth living in India today. It encourages the audience, through the journey of three young men studying at an Ivy League equivalent in India, to examine the process of higher education in India. The film depicts the rote memorization, examinations and deadlines that mark the college years, while concurrently exposing the undue fears, pressures and challenges that surround the college students. It invites the audience to ponder the role of a teacher or professor or the purported focus of its educational system and the types of citizens it produces. It successfully posits many essential questions regarding the Indian education system. Is