International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

How Anger Lost Its Direction and Found the Box Office

Ms. Anisha Madan

Researcher And Film Critique

Abstract

This article examines the evolving relationship between Indian cinema and contemporary social aggression, arguing that mainstream films increasingly commodify anger rather than interrogate its causes. Through an analysis of three dominant emotional drivers: toxic masculinity, destructive romantic obsession, and hyper-nationalism, the piece critiques how popular films normalise violence, erode accountability, and reduce complex social realities into spectacles of rage. Ultimately, it contends that this cycle benefits filmmakers and power structures by converting collective frustration into profit while neutralising dissent, raising urgent questions about the cultural consequences of celebrating unchecked aggression as entertainment.

Keywords: Aggression, Toxic masculinity, Destructive love, Hyper-nationalism, Violence, rage, cinema, society.

Introduction

Cinema is more than just entertainment. It is a powerful blend of art and technology that shapes culture, reflects society, and influences how we see the world. Films don't just tell stories, they leave impressions. When *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) released, it transformed Goa into the ultimate dream destination for young friends. Years later, *Dear Zindagi* (2016) helped normalise conversations around therapy and mental health.

Some argue that society shapes cinema, not the other way around. Maybe that's true. But in today's time, the relationship between the two has become unsettling. And that's where the real problem begins. Let me break it down.

Lately, there's been a noticeable shift in the kinds of films being made, especially in the ones raking in the most money and attention. Filmmakers tend to focus on three broad emotions, and almost every successful movie builds its core around at least one of them. These emotions act like a secret formula, shaping the story, the characters, the music, and even the spectacle. Understanding this formula is key to seeing why today's cinema feels the way it does.

Toxic Masculinity - The Alpha Flex Problem

Starting in 2019, *Kabir Singh* emerged as the blockbuster of the year, its music album securing a permanent spot in almost everyone's Spotify playlist. Beyond being a massive commercial success and revitalising *Shahid Kapoor*'s career, the film did something far more significant for cinema and society. It opened the floodgates, releasing an aggression that had long been searching for an outlet: anger, finally uncontained.

The film presents *Shahid Kapoor* as *Kabir*, an extraordinarily talented surgeon, while *Kiara Advani* as his girlfriend, precisely, because she has no other job in the film apart from being *Kabir's Bandi* (girlfriend). The film shows you that *Kabir* is perpetually angry that too without any meaningful justification. If this was not enough, his anger is normalised and romanticised through a girlfriend who unquestioningly tolerates his controlling behaviour: dictating what she wears, what she eats, and who she is allowed to befriend. The most unsettling part is not just that she accepts all of this with a smile, but that even this compliance does not spare her. He slaps her, and thus begins the film's idea of a tragic, passionate love story, one built on violence, and emotional ruin.

The audacity of the director lies in his attempt to extract sympathy out of the audience for this supposedly repenting man who is in a slump because of his own actions. This manufactured sympathy is ultimately rewarded with a happy ending with a beautiful song playing in the background.

There is no inherent problem in portraying flawed characters on screen. Cinema has long thrived on imperfection. The issue arises when an overtly abusive character like *Kabir* is granted a triumphant ending, one in which he gets the girl back without any consequence or accountability. This kind of storytelling subtly suggests that toxic behaviour is not only forgivable but somehow romantic, even *passionate*, in the name of love.

This lack of accountability emboldens viewers to emulate *Kabir*, validating their own anger and frustration as expressions of authenticity. When granted this false legitimacy, these emotions often manifest as verbal aggression and, at times, even physical abuse because the film reassures them that reason, restraint, or self-reflection are unnecessary.

What *Kabir Singh* ultimately accomplishes is the stylisation of toxic behaviour, dressing abuse in the language of love and rebellion, glimpses of which are further seen in other films too.

From the same director comes *Animal* (2023), a film that takes this idea even further and shows just how destructive toxic masculinity can be. *Ranbir Kapoor* plays a volatile, spoiled man whose violent behaviour is blamed almost entirely on the fact that his father did not give him enough time or attention while he was growing up. What the film conveniently ignores is that his mother was always present and supportive.

Despite this, the story pushes the idea that an absent father is reason enough for his uncontrollable rage. This logic becomes absurd when the film goes on to justify extreme violence, suggesting that he is allowed to kill hundreds of people without facing any real consequences.

There is no reasonable way to explain how childhood neglect turns into unchecked mass violence. Yet the film tries to make the audience sympathise with him instead of holding him accountable. In doing so, *Animal* repeats the same dangerous message: that male anger deserves understanding, no matter how much harm it causes.

Another glaring issue with the film is its complete failure of the Bechdel Test. The female characters are reduced to narrow, regressive roles, either treated as baby-producing machines or used as pawns in the conflict between two brothers. Their individuality, intelligence, and agency are largely erased.

Bloodshed, gore, and misogyny have increasingly become the new definition of a "strong" man in mainstream cinema today. The film doesn't even attempt subtlety. There is literally a song titled *"Duniya Jalaa Denge"*, and unsurprisingly, that is exactly what the characters go on to do. This kind of rage is not questioned; it is glorified. Violence becomes personality, and destruction becomes proof of masculinity.

Animal went on to earn close to ₹1000 crores at the box office. This overwhelming approval sends a

clear message: audiences are not just watching this portrayal of toxic masculinity, they are rewarding it.

Incomplete, Lost Love

Another intense emotion driving modern cinema is love, but not the kind we see in real life: the love between understanding partners, close friends, or family (like in *Homebound*). This is destructive, all-consuming love. If a man doesn't get the girl, he destroys everything around him and sometimes even himself. Heartbreak is now fuel for alcohol, drugs, and self-destruction.

Long gone are the days of *Shaadi Mein Zaroor Aana*, where rejection pushes a man to grow, find purpose, and prove his worth. Today, we have deranged "roadside Romeos," lost souls who no longer know right from wrong. It has almost become its own genre: the impractical, ruined love.

Films like *Love Aaj Kal* (2020), *Haseen Dilruba* (2021), *Ek Deewaane Ki Deewaniyat* (2025), and *Tere Ishq Mein* (2025) follow this trend. In the last one, a pregnant woman drinks and smokes endlessly because she regrets not marrying the man she loved, despite already having a child with her husband. Does that make any sense? The director thought it did, so who are we to judge!

The tenderness of love; the understanding, warmth, mutual admiration and quiet sacrifices, is no longer celebrated. I'm not suggesting that love requires grand gestures like sitting in jail for 20 years without telling her (yes, a *Veer-Zaara* reference). Those days are gone, but there should still be honesty, kindness, and respect to preserve the beauty of love.

Today, the line between romanticism and delusion hasn't just blurred, it has vanished entirely. Even the gentlest emotions are now tainted with obsession, dominance, territorialism, revenge, and violence; all shades of red, ironically.

Hyper-nationalism

Nationalism, at its core, is a feeling of love and pride for one's country. Since the 1990s, Indian cinema has explored this in many ways, from anti-colonial struggles and border conflicts to modern stories of civic responsibility. Films like *Lagaan*, *Border*, *Swades*, *Rang De Basanti*, and *Raazi* are prime examples of thoughtful, inspiring storytelling.

In recent years, however, a new form has emerged: "muscular" or hyper-nationalism. These films follow a predictable pattern: a violent act is shown, highlighting the suffering of one group, with the sole purpose of stoking anger against the "enemy" and justifying bloodshed. At the center are testosterone-fueled "alpha" men, ready to deliver justice the hard way, all under the banner of nationalism.

The Kashmir Files, when it was released, shocked audiences as the first of its kind. It depicts the atrocities faced by Kashmiri Hindus during the early 1990s, leading to mass killings and the displacement of thousands. Stories like these deserve to be told, without question. But the film presents these events in a way that removes responsibility from the authorities, conveniently blaming a single community. Failures of law and order, as well as lack of efforts in restoration of the victims, are ignored. Rather than exploring reforms, solutions, or the complexities of the situation, the film channels audience anger in a very specific direction, exactly where the makers intended. Other recent examples following a similar template include *Satyamev Jayate 2*, *Article 370*, *Chhava*, and *Dhurandar*. Across these three sources, destructive love, toxic masculinity, and hyper-nationalism, the ultimate outcome is the same: Aggression.

Discussion

Have you ever wondered why films that glorify bloodlust, gore, and mindless violence are thriving in our country today?

Perhaps it's because, lately, this is one of the few ways people can feel and release the aggression simmering inside. Smart minds in the film industry have noticed this and they are cashing in. It works remarkably well: almost all the problematic films we've discussed have crossed the ₹100-crore mark, proving that rage, violence, and bloodshed sell.

As *Aamir Khan* once told *Rajeev Masand* in an interview, "*certain emotions are particularly easy to provoke in audiences and violence is one of the most potent"*.

The concept of the "angry young man" is not new in Indian cinema, it has always existed, taking different shapes over the decades. Let's go back to when it first emerged. The 1970s were turbulent: people were frustrated, unstable, and suffering. The anger shown on screen had a reason and a purpose, it was directed against the establishment. Frustration with the government became a powerful theme, depicted brilliantly in films like *Zanjeer*.

Today, however, anger has lost its direction. The problems today's youth are facing; unemployment, lack of opportunities, corruption, exam paper leaks, rising inflation, remain, yet frustration is often displaced. Religious tensions or societal subjugation have left many feeling trapped, unable to voice their frustrations. The target of that anger has become confused or misdirected.

Unlike the purposeful rage of the 70s, today's anger is scattered, unresolved, and often turns inward or explodes in ways that serve no constructive purpose. Popular culture today reinforces this displacement by offering emotionally charged but politically empty expressions of rage that feels cathartic but ultimately changes nothing. In this way, anger loses its direction: it is felt intensely, expressed loudly, but rarely aimed at the systems actually responsible for the distress.

Ultimately, the only beneficiaries of this cycle are filmmakers, producers, and, more indirectly, the state itself. By packaging rage as entertainment, the film industry successfully converts collective frustration into commercial profit, drawing audiences into theatres with narratives that mirror their anger while carefully diverting it away from its real causes.

This commodification of discontent serves a dual purpose: it generates revenue for those in power within the cultural economy, and it simultaneously neutralises dissent by offering emotional release without political consequence. In this way, the very aggression born of systemic failure is repurposed as spectacle, allowing those responsible for the conditions that produce such anger to profit from it rather than be held accountable.

You know what's worse than suffering in poverty? Suffering in poverty despite having education, talent, and energy and still being powerless to speak out against those who oppress you. Today, you can see it in people's eyes, a storm quietly brewing beneath the surface.

Unchecked anger doesn't stay human for long, it becomes *Animal*.

Conclusion

Cinema mirrors the world we live in, and today, that reflection is disturbingly colored by rage, violence, and unchecked aggression. What once explored purpose and justice now glorifies destruction, toxic love, and dominance as entertainment. Films like these do more than tell stories: they normalise anger, reward cruelty, and shape a culture that mistakes fury for strength. If this is what we celebrate on screen, what does it say about the society we are becoming?