

## Cinematic Transnationalism: Migration, Identity, and Cultural Displacement in Dunki

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Vertovec's Transnationalism, illegal Migration, Cultural Displacement, Migrant Identities, Cinematic Representation.</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b> <b>Seemab Jamil Ghouri</b>, Lecturer in English, Department of English and Literary Studies (DELS), University of Management and Technology, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan, Email: <a href="mailto:seemab.jamil@skt.umt.edu.pk">seemab.jamil@skt.umt.edu.pk</a></p>	<p>This study looks at how the modern Bollywood movie Dunki (2023) depicts the cultural, legal, and emotional aspects of illegal migration. The study is based on the theoretical framework of Steven Vertovec's transnationalism and is driven by two main goals: examining how Dunki depicts cultural displacement in transnational contexts and analyzing how it depicts the emotional and identity difficulties of migrants. Emotional geographies of migration, liminal identity, illegality and erasure, cultural resistance, memory as transnational practice, and Dunki as a transnational cinematic tale are the six main themes identified by the study through a qualitative thematic analysis. Close readings of scenes, character arcs, and symbolic motifs were used to develop these topics. Special attention was paid to how language, setting, and visual metaphor in cinema embody international affect. The results show that Dunki emphasizes the psychological consequences of migration rather than romanticizing it. The characters are depicted as managing divided identities, legal precarity, and cultural dissonance while emotionally balancing their home and host country. Dunki transforms into a narrative and a global performance act by transforming Vertovec's abstract ideas into a lived cinematic experience. By showing how South Asian film can bring migration theory to life through a complex depiction of displacement, resiliency, and the never-ending quest for belonging, this work advances multidisciplinary scholarship.</p>

## Introduction

Migration encompasses a complex interaction of memory, displacement, resilience, and cross-border self-reconstruction and goes beyond the simple act of moving. Cinema emerges as a key medium in a world increasingly characterized by socio-cultural dislocation and global movement, not only for narrating individual and collective adventures but also for articulating the fragmentation of identity. *Dunki* takes place in this narrative landscape, where filmmaking serves as a medium for graphically illustrating the existential, legal, and emotional challenges of undocumented migrants rather than merely depicting international experiences. This study examines how migration is portrayed in film as a continuous process of negotiating one's identity, belonging, and cultural adaption rather than only as the act of crossing geographical borders. "Cinematic transnationalism" describes how films reflect the realities of people who live between many cultural and geopolitical locations, transcending national borders in both form and substance. Because *Dunki* dramatizes the social, legal, and emotional problems that characterize undocumented migration, it provides an ideal setting for investigating this subject. The movie bridges personal struggles with societal dislocation by showing how migrants deal with institutional barriers while carrying broken ideas of home and self. This analytical lens enables a deeper comprehension of how film conveys the psychological and political dimensions of international existence. The study explores migration challenges and the development of transnational identity in Rajkumar Hirani's *Dunki*, emphasizing how Bollywood represents illegal migration, displacement, and cultural hybridity through film narratives. Migration is a worldwide occurrence, with people frequently driven to move because of economic uncertainty, political strife, or scarcity of prospects (Castles 36). Nonetheless, legal limitations and bureaucratic obstacles often compel migrants to take irregular routes, resulting in a common occurrence of illegal migration (Mehta 112). The phrase "donkey flights," an approach to illegal border crossing featuring numerous layovers and hazardous travel, is key to *Dunki*, illustrating the urgency of migrants who evade stringent visa regulations in pursuit of economic stability. According to the International Organization for Migration (2021), more than 281 million individuals globally are migrants, with an increasing number forced to move because of political unrest, financial difficulties, and environmental catastrophes. The movie depicts the mental strain and administrative obstacles of unauthorized migration, showing individuals trapped between longing for their native land and feelings of isolation in unfamiliar environments (Sen 54). The thematic significance of *Dunki* echoes the genuine issues surrounding migration, rendering it an essential filmic inquiry into transnational identity and legal vulnerability. Today transnationalism seems to be everywhere, at least in social science. That is, across numerous disciplines there is a widespread interest in economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world. Migration theories have progressed to reflect the dynamic and complex nature of migrant experiences, moving away from conventional assimilation or exclusion models (Portes et al. 224). Undocumented migration arises from structural inequalities, causing those from disadvantaged backgrounds to have no legitimate means to relocate, thereby pushing them into perilous transit routes (Glick Schiller et al. 17). This reality is shown cinematically in *Dunki*, which shows migrants coping with racial profiling, cultural displacement, and survival anxieties in harsh environments. Transnational viewpoints stress the continuous negotiation of identity, as migrants maintain emotional and social ties to several locations, in contrast to studies that concentrate on permanent residency (Basch et al. 7). By showing characters battling language adaptation, diaspora ties, and a sense of broken belonging, the film illustrates these transnational dynamics and shows how migration is still an ongoing and mentally difficult process. The liminal status of undocumented migrants, not completely recognized in their country of origin nor welcomed in another, corresponds with wider migration narratives regarding hybrid identities and transnational movement (Creswell 42). Steven Vertovec's transnationalism theory

offers a scholarly perspective for interpreting *Dunki*'s depiction of migrant hardships, social marginalization, and identity disintegration. Transnationalism questions the limits of nation-states, proposing that migrants navigate dynamic realities, sustaining economic, political, and emotional connections across various spaces instead of experiencing straightforward assimilation (Vertovec, Transnationalism 5). The movie's main characters remain mentally tethered to their homeland, highlighting how diaspora groups maintain cultural connections even after moving (Braun and Clarke 79). *Dunki* depicts migration as a combination of individual turmoil and systemic failure, showcasing legal instability, emotional strength, and socio-political challenges that correspond with Vertovec's model. Bollywood's portrayal of migration acts as a lens for grasping transnational identity, connecting film narratives with scholarly migration research (Kumar 76). This study will employ thematic analysis to systematically break down *Dunki*'s dialogue structures, symbolic imagery, and narrative complexity, ensuring an academic exploration of Bollywood's influence on migration discourse and diaspora representation. As a reflection of larger socio-political contexts and transnational migration challenges, the portrayal of donkey flights a term used to describe irregular transportation through numerous layovers and illicit border crossings has changed in cinematic storylines. Films addressing undocumented migration have traditionally emphasized the emotional and survival-driven aspects of transnational mobility by portraying economic hardship, legal precarity, and identity disintegration (Sharma et al. 12). Bollywood's growing interest in this topic reflects the difficulties faced by migrants in the real world as they negotiate stringent visa restrictions and dangerous travel routes (18). By showing donkey flights as profoundly human events influenced by grief, hope, and social failures rather than just as logistical undertakings, *Dunki* expands on this history and provides a template for global cinematography (22). *Dunki* employs Vertovec's transnationalism theory to illustrate migration as an ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging across several geographic areas, in contrast to previous representations that typically concentrated on criminality or border conflicts. This analytical method highlights Bollywood's influence on public conceptions of undocumented migration and diaspora difficulties, while also deepening our understanding of the connection between transnational migration and cinematic narrative (24).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem:

*Dunki* highlights Bollywood's understudied portrayal of undocumented migration by offering a unique portrayal of migrants navigating social, legal, and economic issues. The lived realities of survival, migration, and the complexity of transnational identity are often overlooked by migration studies, which frequently concentrate on policy and assimilation. Existing research has yet to apply transnationalism theory to Bollywood's migration narratives, leaving a gap in understanding how films construct migrant realities. No studies employ thematic analysis to deconstruct *Dunki*, despite its rich portrayal of cultural displacement, nostalgia, and exclusion. This research systematically analyzes *Dunki* through transnationalism and thematic analysis, offering new insights into Bollywood's role in shaping migration discourse and cinematic representations of diaspora struggles.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

1. To explore the depiction of emotional and identity struggles of migrants in *Dunki*.
2. To analyze cultural displacement in *Dunki* through the lens of transnationalism.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. How does *Dunki* portray the migrant's identity crisis and emotional ties to home?
2. How are language and culture used to reflect displacement in *Dunki*?

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it applies Vertovec's transnationalism theory to analyze *Dunki*, offering new insights into cinematic representations of undocumented migration, emotional displacement, and

identity fragmentation. While migration studies often focus on legislation, socioeconomic frameworks, or diaspora integration, this research emphasizes how Bollywood's storytelling conceptualizes survival migration and cultural hybridity. By examining the *Dunki* route within a transnational context, the study contributes to academic discourse on migrant precociousness and resistance beyond traditional assimilation narratives. It further highlights how cinema functions as a cultural artifact, documenting resilience and negotiating identity across borders. Through structured thematic analysis, this work enriches both film studies and migration theory, reinforcing the interpretive value of cinema in unpacking global movement and identity struggles.

## **Literature Review**

This chapter has a relationship between identity and migration that influences how people travel across international borders. Assuming that migrants either integrate into their native societies or continue to be socially separated, traditional migration studies have concentrated on assimilation and exclusion. Despite being geographically dislocated, migrants retain close political, cultural, and economic links to their homeland, according to recent studies. Migration is changing into a two-way process that entails continuous interaction between the home and host countries as global economic systems and technological advancements advance. The way migrants construct flexible identities and negotiate belonging is altered by this encounter. Vertovec's transnationalism model offers a framework for comprehending the identity formation processes of these intricate migrant societies. The theoretical foundations of transnationalism, its use in Bollywood films, and its applicability as a research methodology when paired with thematic analysis are all examined in this study of the literature. The Bollywood movie *Dunki* is a perfect illustration of transnational identity building in cinematic storytelling since it offers a nuanced examination of migrant struggles, cultural nostalgia, and societal limitations.

### **2.1 Identity Formation and Transnationalism**

Traditional views of migration, which view migrants as either permanently excluded or completely integrated into their host societies, are challenged by transnationalism. According to Vertovec, migrants maintain social, political, and economic ties across several places by participating in active, cross-border exchanges (Vertovec 575). As migrants constantly switch between their host-country experiences and their homeland affiliations, these cross-border interactions have an impact on how identity is constructed and negotiated. Through this process, people develop fluid identities in which they reinterpret who they are in light of geopolitical conditions, cultural heritage, and economic opportunities (Vertovec 455). Transnational communities are further examined by Portes et al., who characterize them as interactive spaces where migrants maintain cultural exchanges, political activism, and economic remittances rather than merely adjusting to a single national framework (Portes et al. 224). The complexities of identity formation in transnational migration are demonstrated by these multi-layered connections, which redefine the migrant experience. These transnational dynamics are demonstrated in *Dunki*, where the characters encounter bureaucratic roadblocks, cultural nostalgia, and economic necessity, all of which support Vertovec's model. In order to demonstrate the ongoing significance of transnational mobility in the context of modern global migration, the movie examines how migrants negotiate their identities across institutional and geographic barriers.

### **2.2 Bollywood Cinema as a Social Critique Medium**

Bollywood has long served as a platform for sociopolitical discourse as well as entertainment, impacting the way that migration narratives are perceived and portrayed. PK and 3 Idiots, two of Hirani's directing projects, are examples of cinematic storytelling that combines comedy and drama with social criticism to further themes of cultural displacement, structural injustices, and the quest for belonging (N 45).

Bollywood's portrayal of migration stories reinforces themes of exclusion, adaptation, and nostalgia while also significantly influencing viewers' perceptions of diaspora identity (45). As an academic framework that adheres to this tradition, *Dunki* provides a narrative structure that examines migrant anxieties, cross-border struggles, and emotional displacement. Through character arcs, thematic symbolism, and visual storytelling, Bollywood has long shaped migration discourse while also functioning as a cultural industry and a medium for sociopolitical narratives. According to academics, films with powerful social messages have the power to shape how the general public views migration, thereby reaffirming diaspora identity, survival challenges, and geopolitical tensions. Bollywood films use a combination of humor, melodrama, and realism to captivate audiences while quietly criticizing socioeconomic disparities and governmental structures, as seen in Hirani's directing projects, such as *PK* and *3 Idiots*. It has been disputed whether these movies are effective at changing the narratives surrounding migration; some academics have emphasized their contribution to discourse, while others have questioned their capacity to bring about real change. Thematic analysis of *Dunki* is required to reveal deeper interpretations of migration struggles beyond surface-level storytelling, as cinema is essential in creating transnational identity and emotional displacement.

### 2.3 The Role of Cinematic Storytelling in Migration Analysis

The movies create narratives that mirror actual diasporic struggles, academics contend that visual storytelling serves as an interpretive framework for comprehending migration. The way symbolism, and narrative structures influence viewers' interaction with migration themes is highlighted by research on cinematic discourse, especially in films that deal with socioeconomic barriers and geopolitical displacement. Although *Dunki* depicts migrant experiences through the use of visual metaphors, dialogue-driven storytelling, and structural symbolism, no previous study has carried out a scene-by-scene, dialogue-based thematic analysis of the movie. Given the growing complexity of international migration, a close look at *Dunki* can show how Bollywood's filmmaking style advances the conversation about identity negotiation, legal precarity, and diaspora survival.

### 2.4 Vertovec's Transnationalism in *Dunki*

The six fundamental dimensions of transnationalism, as defined by Vertovec's framework, influence migrant identity and cross-border interactions. Social morphology emphasizes how migrants uphold transnational networks throughout various locales, strengthening connections that transcend geographic borders (Vertovec 450). In spite of displacement, diaspora communities' capacity to maintain heritage, manage hybrid identities, and adjust to host cultures is reflected in cultural reproduction (451). Furthermore, as people navigate global labor markets in pursuit of financial stability, economic opportunities are a significant factor in transnational migration (453). Additionally, migrants participate in politics by influencing policies across borders and adding to conversations about citizenship and migration governance (455). Rebuilding a place also highlights how identity construction is fluid, as migrants constantly reinterpret their sense of place in ever-changing sociopolitical contexts (457). These aspects of transnationalism are clearly present in *Dunki*, which reinforces Vertovec's theoretical framework through cinematic storytelling by showing migrants battling economic precarity, forced relocation, and cultural fragmentation. *Dunki* is a useful lens for examining transnationalism in Bollywood narratives because of its nuanced portrayal of diaspora struggles, which enables a deeper understanding of migration anxieties, legal obstacle, and identity negotiations.

### 2.5 Migration Narratives and Policy Discourse

Institutions, media narratives, and political actors all influence migration policies. Sahin investigates the strategic framing of migration discourse by policymakers, who create narratives that further political goals (Sahin 193). Smellie and Boswell demonstrate how geopolitical changes affect migrant reception by contrasting migration responses between the European crisis of 2015 and the

displacement of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 (Smellie and Boswell 9). These talks reinforce how policy frameworks support exclusionary practices, legal vulnerabilities, and transnational survival strategies, and they closely resemble *Dunki*'s depiction of migration struggles.

## 2.6 South Asian Migration and Diaspora Formation

Economic necessity, changing immigration laws, and colonial ties have all influenced South Asian migration throughout history. Peach looks at the post-war labor shortages in Britain, where Commonwealth policies helped to facilitate migration from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India (Peach 134). With a focus on how diaspora communities created ethnic enclaves in British cities, Ali, Kalra, and Sayyid trace South Asian settlement patterns (134). In a similar vein, *Dunki* reinforces the survival strategies of the South Asian diaspora by depicting migrants looking for opportunities, negotiating labor markets, and overcoming socioeconomic divides. For the Indian diaspora and within Indian territory audience, Shah Rukh Khan is seen as a gentle, sensitive and "in touch with emotions," yet he is also self-assured, extraordinarily successful and a natural at winning women over. This in a way is the dichotomy of his stardom. He is a kind of hero with star masculinity, a triumphant and effective emotional persona, loaded with passion. The success of his films show he has revolutionized what it means to be an 'Indian' guy on-screen and a male Bollywood celebrity. He is a consumable item, a national brand, an emotive person and a star who would steal away audience compassion. He embodies feeling and has the ability to elicit reciprocal feelings (Gopinath 310).

## 2.7 Cultural Displacement and Digital Diasporas

Through online communities and generational shifts, the South Asian diaspora in Britain has maintained long-standing migration networks. While Sharma studies second-generation identity transitions among British South Asians, Gidley and McCarthy study immigration changes following Brexit (Peach 140). In line with *Dunki*'s depiction of migrant experiences, Cook's research on cultural hybridity contends that migrants experience self-transformation, reshaping identity through cross-cultural negotiations (235).

## 2.8 Emotional Dimensions of Migration

Loneliness, exclusion, and psychological distress are common side effects of migration. Ratcliffe investigates how social identity is disrupted by isolation, which exacerbates diaspora fragmentation (Ratcliffe 4). Roberts and Krueger emphasize how limited participation by migrants exacerbates their sense of cultural alienation (Roberts and Krueger 186). The emotional toll of displacement is highlighted by *Dunki*'s integration of these themes, which depict migrant isolation, nostalgia, and legal restrictions.

Even though transnational migration and Bollywood's portrayal of diaspora have been the subject of much research, *Dunki* has not been thoroughly examined using Vertovec's framework for transnationalism and micro-level thematic analysis. How its dialogues, visual metaphors, and narrative techniques create transnational identities has not been thoroughly examined in any study. This study fills this void by providing a methodical analysis of *Dunki*, increasing its scholarly significance in the field of cinematic migration studies. The theoretical and analytical groundwork for examining *Dunki* using Vertovec's transnationalism framework is established by this review of the literature. The focus of modern migration studies is moving away from assimilation models and toward diaspora survival, cultural hybridity, and geopolitical mobility themes that are prominently featured in *Dunki*'s film. The following chapter, Methodology, uses thematic analysis to describe how Vertovec's transnationalism will be used as an analytical lens to examine *Dunki*'s migrant narratives, policy critiques, and identity negotiations. Cook (2000) explores the complexities of cultural displacement, arguing that modern technological change has transformed all individuals into "migrant peoples" (227). He draws on Salman Rushdie's concept of the migrant as the defining figure of the postmodern world, emphasizing how experiences of uprooting and metamorphosis serve as metaphors for navigating contemporary uncertainties. Cook highlights the role of hybridizing writers such as Rushdie, Kingston, and Naipaul in

illustrating patterns of cultural adaptation, ritual self-transformation, and identity negotiation. He asserts that these writers provide symbolic strategies for coping with cultural discontinuity, offering narratives of ritual death and rebirth that enable individuals to migrate "from an old self into a new one" (228). The study underscores the importance of embracing paradox and contradiction in identity formation, arguing that transformation occurs in areas of ambiguity where individuals reconcile conflicting cultural influences. A thorough and contextually informed examination of *Dunki* as a film that depicts migration, identity, and international struggle is guaranteed by this methodological approach. The study goes beyond superficial interpretations to reveal the emotional, cultural, and political layers woven throughout the film's story by fusing qualitative research with thematic analysis. A detailed examination of how migrants in *Dunki* deal with the difficulties of legal restrictions, cultural displacement, and fragmented belonging is made possible by the application of the transnationalism paradigm. This method, which links the movie's depiction of undocumented migration with more general scholarly issues about diaspora, resiliency, and identity creation in a globalized world, is essential to the thesis.

## **Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Method**

In order to investigate migration and identity representation in *Dunki* (2023), this study uses a qualitative research methodology and thematic analysis. Qualitative research provides insights into how films frame socio-cultural realities and is appropriate for examining subjective experiences and narrative constructions (Denzin and Lincoln 4). Qualitative research emphasizes contextual meanings, symbolic representation, and thematic depth in contrast to quantitative approaches, which depend on numerical data and statistical interpretations (Creswell 42). Thematic analysis is perfect for examining migration, identity crisis, and cultural displacement in cinematic storytelling because it enables the methodical identification, arrangement, and interpretation of themes (Braun and Clarke 79). Building on this foundation, this further outlines the qualitative research design and thematic analysis method used to systematically examine these representations in the film.

### **3.2 Research Design**

Vertovec's transnationalism theory, which views migration as fluid, multifaceted, and interwoven with cross-border interactions, frames this study's qualitative design (Vertovec, Transnationalism 2). The fundamental ideas of transnationalism interconnected identities and spatial affiliations are reinforced by this design, which enables a close examination of conversations, visual components, and scene compositions (447). This theoretical grounding not only supports a deeper understanding of migrant identity formation in *Dunki*, but also guides the thematic coding process discussed in the following section.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

The Bollywood feature film *Dunki* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2023) serves as the study's main source of data. Selected scenes, dialogues, character interactions, and symbolic imagery that were manually documented for thematic coding are used in the study (Nowell et al. 3). Its profound thematic engagement with the text was chosen for its profound exploration of emotional geographies of migration, identity formation within liminal spaces, the erasure tied to undocumented lives, the tension between dislocated cultures and reimagined belongings, evolving migrant self-awareness, and the framing of *Dunki* as a transnational cinematic narrative.

### **3.4 Data Analysis and Theoretical Application**

Thematic interpretation is used in this study's data analysis, with an emphasis on significant conversations, scene composition, and visual components that represent migration and identity struggles. This method reinforces the film's fundamental theoretical dimensions by revealing the film's alignment

with Vertovec's transnationalism framework through the identification of recurring motifs, narrative structures, and symbolic imagery.

### 3.6 Theoretical Framework

Transnationalism, which was introduced by Steven Vertovec, offers a framework for understanding migration across traditional boundaries. Instead of viewing migrants as individuals who either assimilate into the host society or remain culturally excluded, transnationalism stresses the dynamic and ongoing links that migrants have with their home countries. These emotional, political, cultural, and economic links endure despite geographic relocation. This perspective evolved in response to earlier, more rigid migration models that underestimated the extent to which migrants retain dual or multiple affiliations. The reality of modern migration, however, as it is impacted by globalization, digital communication, and affordable travel, is captured by Vertovec's paradigm.

It highlights the construction of hybrid identities and the negotiation of belonging in situations where nation-states no longer offer a clear definition of identity. Political unrest, economic inequality, and the pursuit of better opportunities have all had a long-standing impact on the complex subject of migration. Traditional migration theories, which framed migrants as either socially excluded outsiders or as complete members of their host societies, commonly employed the dichotomies of assimilation and exclusion. However, neither the psychological impact of displacement nor the enduring bonds that migrants have with their home countries are taken into account by these frameworks. To explain how migrants sustain intricate cross-border contacts on a cultural, emotional, political, and economic level, Steven Vertovec created the transnationalism theory in response (Vertovec, *Transnationalism* 2).

According to transnationalism, migration is not a one-way journey but rather a continuous negotiation of identity shaped by the simultaneity of belonging to several social, spatial, and emotional realms. These theoretical foundations are especially relevant to the cinematic narrative of *Dunki* (2023), which provides an interesting case study for applying transnationalism to cultural elements. The film explores the concept of "donkey flights," a form of illicit travel, to emphasize the physical dangers and mental anguish that migrants encounter when navigating narrow borders and uncertain futures. In the face of administrative and legal constraints, people from disadvantaged backgrounds are depicted risking everything to achieve survival and dignity; this bolsters Castles' argument that systemic inequalities force many people into hazardous, unauthorized migration routes (36).

These conditions are comparable to the worldwide migration problem, as migrants continue to face labor exploitation, social exclusion, and political marginalization (Vertovec 5). Migration has always been a complicated phenomenon, impacted by political upheaval, economic disparity, and the desire for better prospects. *Dunki* (2023), which depicts the psychological and physical toll that migrants endure while navigating tight borders and uncertain futures, provides an example of the challenges associated with illegal migration. By demonstrating how people from underprivileged backgrounds frequently seek to relocate in spite of administrative and legal obstacles, the film emphasizes themes of identity fragmentation, exclusion, and displacement. Scholars claim that systemic inequalities force people to take dangerous paths in search of security, which results in illegal migration (Castles 36).

The worldwide migration crisis reflects these challenges, as immigrants encounter political disenfranchisement, socioeconomic fragility, and labor exploitation in their new nations (Vertovec 5). Because it tells these tales, the film offers a compelling case study for understanding the ways in which migration interacts with identity and belonging. Traditional assimilation models have been supplanted in the study of migration by paradigms that focus an emphasis on mobility, identity negotiation, and cultural hybridity. By emphasizing how people maintain cross-border ties rather than permanently assimilating into host nations, Vertovec's concept of transnationalism contradicts traditional ideas of

migration (Vertovec, Transnationalism 2). Transnational migrants cultivate their cultural, political, and economic ties in a variety of contexts, rather than merely relocating from one nation to another (Portes et al. 224).

According to academics, the diasporic condition entails emotional and psychological struggles as migrants continuously reinterpret who they are and where they fit in the world. There are other factors to take into account besides moving (Glick Schiller et al. 17). By examining *Dunki* from the perspective of transnationalism, this study shows how migrants maintain connections to their homeland whilst still being marginalized, illustrating how identity is malleable and interconnected. The use of transnationalism in cinematic narrative is made possible by *Dunki*. The video tells a gripping story of cultural exile and language adjustment, showing how migrants fight to strike a balance between their native identities and the constraints placed on them by unfamiliar environments.

The main characters face structural difficulties in their new surroundings in addition to yearning for their native country. This study methodically investigates discourses, symbolic representations, and narrative structures that highlight the complexity of migration through the use of thematic analysis. The movie contributes to scholarly discussions on identity negotiation and adaptation by emphasizing the loss of emotional ties to the homeland as well as social and cultural belonging. This is consistent with the larger global conversation. This study demonstrates how Bollywood creates migration stories that go beyond representations in the mainstream media by manually coding movie transcripts and creating scenes. By examining how migrants maintain cultural and emotional bonds across borders in spite of political and economic marginalization, Vertovec's transnationalism paradigm offers a prism through which to engage with *Dunki* critically (Vertovec).

The movie depicts the difficulties faced by migrants as they fight against cultural alienation and legal precarity while also adopting new survival skills. A detailed analysis of *Dunki*'s film's depiction of migration is made possible by the usage of transnationalism, which shows how Bollywood deftly handles the difficulties of displacement and adaptation. By showing how films may be used as a platform for examining diaspora narratives, resilience, and socio-political battles, this work adds to academic discussions on migration studies (Glick Schiller et al. 21). This method places *Dunki* within the larger context of transnational cinema while also providing insights into the ongoing problems that migrants have while trying to live and find a place in the world.

## Analysis

### 4.1 Emotional Geographies of Migration

In addition to physical changes, migration is an emotional upheaval that alters the migrant's inner world. Steven Vertovec's theory of transnationalism emphasizes this affective dimension by pointing out that migrants often experience emotional simultaneity, a situation in which individuals are physically in one location while still feeling emotionally attached to another. This dual anchoring, according to Vertovec (Transnationalism, 2009), leads to what he calls fractured subjectivities, in which identity is not unified but rather split across locations, memories, and objectives. In *Dunki*'s depiction of this emotional breakdown, the character arcs of Sukhi, Hardy, and Manu whose psychological landscapes are shaped by longing, grief, and the unfulfilled promise of migration are particularly moving.

One of the most tragic instances of emotional breakdown in the film is the tale of Sukhi, whose repeated failings on the English proficiency test keep him from reuniting with his girlfriend Jassi in the UK. After months of preparation and self-work, Sukhi discovers his name is absent from the list of applicants who were accepted. His professor points to Sukhi's head and then his heart in a resentful remark while clutching a sandal:

“Tune chappal mari ay edr lekin lagi hai edar” (1:11:21), (“You aimed the blow here [head], but it landed here [heart].”)

The existential and intellectual/emotional toll that failure takes is encapsulated in this line. Sukhi interprets this embarrassment as a betrayal of his romantic commitment, friends, and family. He says these heartbreakingly loving last words in Hardy's arms just before he commits suicide: *"Papa ji ko bolna mera visa lag gaya, ja raha hun Jassi se milne"* (1:14:05), ("Tell Papa my visa has been approved.)

When the future they had envisioned over the border is rejected, all that remains is a dream buried beneath rejection. This is the silent agony of an immigrant who is optimistic about the future. Even saying goodbye seems like the only way to go at that point.

This imagined achievement is a last act of emotional closure rather than a hallucination. Sukhi clings to the hope of reunion and belonging overseas even after passing away, reflecting what Vertovec refers to as the symbolic persistence of transnational links. Here, the emotional simultaneity is lethal: his heart has already moved, but his body is still in Punjab.

Although the group is still affected by Sukhi's passing, Hardy's funeral monologue is what turns the group's sorrow into a political critique. Hardy says as he stands in front of Sukhi's body:

*"100 saal raaj kar ke gaye Angrez hum pe." Jab yeh yahan aaye the, humne to inse nahi pucha tha ke bhai.... Hindi aati hai, kya? (1:15:00)* ("We were ruled by the British for a century." Did we ask them if they knew Hindi when they arrived here?)

Linguistic gatekeeping and the colonial legacies still present in modern immigration processes are directly criticized in this line. We might interpret this event using Vertovec's theory as a reflection of the structural inequalities that characterize transnational movement as well as a critique of language-based exclusion. Systemic obstacles that diminish a migrant's value based on subjective standards like language proficiency create and exacerbate the emotional toll of migrating.

Manu (Randhawa), whose psychic disintegration is depicted through quiet, retreat, and obvious exhaustion, carries on the subject of emotional dislocation. Her collapse culminates when Hardy begs the judge during his asylum hearing:

*"Koi majboori hoti hai tabhi insaan apna ghar chhodta hai. Warna koi apna sheher, apna parivaar, apne doston ko chhod kar kyun jaayega sarhaddon pe goli khaane?"* (1:56:10) "Only desperation makes a person leave their home. Otherwise, who would abandon their city, their family, their friends, to take bullets at the border?"

The emotional pressure underpinning migration the notion that leaving is a necessity resulting from systemic hopelessness rather than a choice is encapsulated in this testimony. This exemplifies Vertovec's concept of transnational affect: the migrant's emotional environment is influenced by geopolitical circumstances that make home both lovable and unlivable in addition to personal longing. The judge's response

*"The order of the court is that Mr. Hardayal Singh Dhillon will be deported back to India."* (1:57:19)

This signifies the formal termination of Hardy's international connections, but Manu's farewell speech best captures the emotional split:

*"Bohat yaad aayegi teri. Apna khayal rakhio."* (2:00:15) ("I'll miss you terribly. Take care of yourself.")

This is not just a farewell; it is a symbolic exile in which legal power breaks emotional bonds. Beyond Hardy, Manu's sorrow encompasses the betrayed promise of a common identity. When taken as a whole, these pieces create an emotional map of migration as a disturbing and rupturing trip. *Dunki*'s portrayal of migrants caught between recollection and uncertainty through Vertovec's viewpoint highlights the hidden cost of cross-border longing.

## 4.2 Negotiating Identity in Liminal Spaces

Transnationalism, as proposed by Steven Vertovec, questions the idea that identity is culturally or geographically unique. (Vertovec, Transnationalism, 2009) Rather, he suggests that migrants live in overlapping social spheres where identity is continuously negotiated across emotional, cultural, and legal barriers. He refers to this situation as "simultaneous embeddedness," when migrants are neither totally alienated from their home country nor completely assimilated into the host society. Identity becomes liminal in this context, formed by the pull of origin and the pressures of adaptation, hovering between "here" and "there." *Dunki* depicts its characters as socially and emotionally lost in strange places, capturing this liminality with remarkable realism.

The film's most literal and symbolic depiction of this in-betweenness is the group's unauthorized container ship arrival in the UK. At 1:34:10, Ethiopian refugees are shown with Hardy, Manu, Buggu, and Balli jammed into a corroded, stench-filled container. The gang spends 27 days in this demeaning environment, where the air is heavy with filth and hopelessness. Not just a means of transportation, this container is a non-place, a line separating legality from illegality, visibility from invisibility. It signifies their entry into a liminal state, in which they are physically present in the UK but are not acknowledged by society or the law. Here, Vertovec's idea of transnational social formations is realized: the migrants are ensnared in a territory that is not theirs.

Through the group's unsuccessful attempts to assimilate into British society, the movie continues to examine this instability. Balli's employment interview turns into a tragic yet humorous miscommunication in a scenario that is especially telling. When he is told to sit by the interviewer "Pull the chair." (58:48)

Unaware of the idiom, Balli pulls the chair to the wall rather than perching on it. His literal reading of the statement illustrates both his cultural disorientation and his inadequate command of English. The ramifications of the scene undermine its humor: Balli is excluded by a system that presumes fluency in its standards, not out of malice.

In a similar vein, the emotional and linguistic collapse of identity is revealed in Hardy's interview.

*“Can you tell me about your family for two minutes?” (1:02:50) he responds with a haunting repetition: “My father dead... my mother... mother dead... my mother ki mother dead... my father ki mother deaaadd... all dead dead dead dead dead dead dead dead dead.” (1:03:50)*

This is a terrible and ridiculous moment. In addition to being a language error, the use of "dead" repeatedly undermines the narrative's coherence and indicates that Hardy lacks the vocabulary necessary to express his identity, his grief, or his past. The erasure of self that happens when migrants are compelled to perform belonging in terms they are unfamiliar with is reflected in his incapacity to formulate a meaningful answer. These excerpts show how *Dunki* presents the migrant as a character in flux, always moving, never truly present, and shaped by the contradictions of living elsewhere. From Vertovec's point of view, these challenges are not the product of personal failings but rather systemic outcomes of unequal mobility. By summarizing this, *Dunki* offers a moving analysis of how identity becomes fragile and profoundly human when it is extended across national boundaries.

### 4.3 Undocumented Lives: Erasure and Illegality

Steven Vertovec's transnationalism thesis highlights the complex and often contradictory realities of migrants who navigate exclusionary structures in host cultures while maintaining links across boundaries. Under these circumstances, undocumented migrants are especially at risk. Their legal invisibility not only denies those rights and protections but also disrupts identity formation, resulting in their emotional and social marginalization. Vertovec claims that because illegality pushes migrants into unofficial networks, where they often rely on dishonest middlemen and face systemic erasure in both legal and cultural registers, it worsens marginalization (Vertovec, Transnationalism, 2009). With

unwavering clarity, *Dunki* dramatizes this situation, showing the undocumented migrant as a person caught between survival and deceit rather than as a criminal.

The donkey route a perilous overland trek via Afghanistan and Iran that ends in smuggling by container ship is the most graphic representation of this scenario in the movie. Buggu's voiceover describes their experience at 1:24:30.

*“Gadiyan badalti rahi, safar chalta raha. Kabhi goliyān chalne ki awaaz sunai deti thi, to kabhi bomb phatne ki.”* (“Vehicles kept changing, the journey continued. Sometimes we heard gunfire, sometimes the sound of bombs.)

The humiliating circumstances of illegal migration and the ongoing fear of violence are both depicted in this monologue. They become stateless bodies in motion, devoid of security and recognition, as a result of traveling across mountains, deserts, and war-torn areas. Here, Vertovec's idea of transnational social fields is reversed: rather than fostering connections, these fields become into places of peril and displacement. Decades later, almost after 25 years, the party must retrace the same trip in reverse to return to India, highlighting the cyclical nature of this precarity. The trip passes through several countries and jurisdictions, starting in Dubai and continuing to Jeddah, Gujarat, and Bhuj. At (2:10:38), Manu makes a sour comment:

*“Leh... tu to bara jahaz mein le jaane wala tha hain... dunki marwa raha hum se phir se.”* (“Weren't you supposed to take us back in a grand plane? And here we are, doing dunki again.”)

Irony and tiredness abound in this line. The unavoidability of undocumented status is demonstrated by the recurrence of the illegal path once to escape, now to return. Even after 25 years, the characters remain unrecognized by the state, forced to navigate the same informal networks that once promised liberation. The abuse by immigration agents, who act as gatekeepers of false hope, is also revealed in the movie. An Indian agent requests ₹5 lakh per person in the first scene to process visas, which is an amount that the poor group cannot afford. Their denial is a reflection of structural exclusion, where legality is commodified and sold to the highest bidder, rather than a rejection of the dream.

In the last act of the movie, this exploitation gets more intense. The gang is tricked by a Dubai-based agent around (2:14:00), who first assists them in leaving Jeddah before locking them in a container and calling the police. The group is brought out, questioned, and treated like criminals in the resulting scene, which is one of public humiliation. This betrayal highlights the violence of erasure that undocumented migrants face, not just from the state but also from individuals who take advantage of their desperate situation, as well as the brittleness of trust in transnational migration networks. By pretending to be a successful immigrant and sending phony pictures home, Balli further explores the idea of invisibility.

At (1:39:36), Hardy confronts him:

*“Pata hai aisi photos dekh dekh ke Punjab ke ladke ladkiyan nikal padte hain Dunki marne. Mar jaate hain sarhaddon par. Asli photo kyun nahi bhejta?”* (“Do you know that it's these kinds of photos that push boys and girls from Punjab to take the Dunki route? They die at the borders. Why don't you send the actual photos?”)

The moral and emotional costs of performative achievement are brought to light by this dilemma. Balli, who has a fake student visa and subsists on street begging, is a real-life illustration of the fear of erasure and banishment. His well-maintained persona keeps the appearance of wealth even if his reality is one of social shame and legal obscurity. This is a form of symbolic violence, according to Vertovec's paradigm, where migrants must establish a sense of belonging in order to maintain their dignity while being denied official legitimacy. Further proof of the group's vulnerability comes from their confrontations with police enforcement. At 1:42:10, police raid their rental property, which is occupied by a number of undocumented migrants.

*“Ab itni jaan laga ke yahan par aaye hain, wapas lautne ke liye to nahi na.”* (“We didn’t come just to go back after working so hard to get here.”)

The existential stakes and emotional investment of illegal migration are captured in this statement. The cemetery turns into a terrifying representation of their state: present but unacknowledged; living but unseen. According to *Dunki*, being unlawful means being erased not just from the law, but from recognition altogether. According to Vertovec, these conflicts are structural rather than individual. The movie forces audiences to consider how identity is changed by informal movement into something that is invisible, undocumented, and consistently denied.

#### 4.4 Dislocated Cultures, Reimagined Belongings

According to Steven Vertovec's theory of transnationalism, migrants do not give up their cultural identities when they cross international borders; rather, they participate in a process of cultural negotiation in which customs are modified to fit new contexts. This leads to cultural hybridity, a state in which migrants, frequently in the face of pressure and opposition, combine customs from their ancestry with imposed standards (Vertovec, Transnationalism, 2009). Therefore, cultural displacement is more than just losing customs; it also involves redefining one's sense of place in strange places. Through sequences that show both the loss and the maintenance of cultural identity, *Dunki* effectively conveys this tension and shows how migrants negotiate the symbolic and emotional landscape of life abroad.

The group's return trip from Saudi Arabia to India features one of the film's most moving depictions of cultural displacement when the air hostess serves them gulab jamun and greets them with a muted *“Happy Diwali”* (2:21:00).

The moment is tinged with melancholy, but the gesture is kind. Despite their slight smiles, the characters' eyes reveal a deeper desire. This sequence, a celebration of culture that feels remote, displaced, and unfinished, perfectly captures the emotional fallout of displacement. The gulab jamun, a representation of home, is eaten in silent remembrance rather than with excitement. The migrants bring their culture with them, but it is filtered via the prism of exile and return, demonstrating Vertovec's concept of transnational impact.

Linguistic displacement as a sign of cultural disorientation is also examined in the movie. When the group eventually arrives in the UK, they come upon a couple out for a dog walk. Not knowing the location, Hardy stammers:

*“This... wha... wha... this what country this? This what country?”* (1:35:40)

This poor English is a sign of cultural vulnerability more than just a communication obstacle. The marginalization of migrants is strengthened by their incapacity to express themselves in the language of the majority. According to Vertovec's framework, language acts as a gatekeeper of belonging in this instance of symbolic exclusion. Despite their physical presence in the UK, the migrants are still considered outsiders in terms of language and culture. The scene where Manu is forced to wed a British guy in order to receive a spouse visa is arguably the most stunning illustration of cultural opposition. She declines when requested to kiss him during the ceremony, claiming that Punjabi traditions forbid such actions during marriage (1:47:00).

Her resistance is a political act of cultural preservation, not just a personal one. Hardy reacts instantly and instinctively. He approaches the man:

*“Haath kaise lagaya tune?”* (1:47:30) (“How dare you touch her?”)

As Hardy hits the man, then the lawyer, and then tries to face the priest, who locks himself in a room, the altercation gets more intense (1:48:25). The attorney's explanation:

*“Arrey riwaj hai yahan angrezon ka, galat hai lekin main kya karun, padre ne bola kiss karo.”* (“It’s a custom here among the British. It may be wrong, but what can I do? The priest said to kiss.”)

This draws attention to the cultural pressure migrants must endure in order to obtain legal status.

Hardy’s violent reaction, while extreme, symbolizes the emotional rupture caused by forced. This picture opposes the commercialization of culture, which reduces personal customs to immigration requirements. The characters challenge Vertovec’s conception of hybridity by asserting their cultural borders rather than assimilating. According to *Dunki*, finding one’s place is a difficult yet tenacious negotiation. It reveals how cultural identity, under pressure, is not lost but reshaped with meaning.

#### 4.5 Recollection and Migrant Awareness

According to Steven Vertovec’s idea of transnationalism, migrants have strong emotional and symbolic bonds with their native country despite being physically separated. These connections are not only sentimental; they are an integral part of who we are. Migrants create a “mental homeland,” a place of memory and imagination that supports emotional survival and cultural continuity beyond borders, through what Vertovec refers to as transnational affective fields (Transnationalism, 2009). Memory serves as both a haven and a barrier in *Dunki*, keeping the protagonists rooted in their roots while they traverse unfamiliar landscapes.

The flashback to the group’s departure from Punjab, where a train coach full of optimistic migrants is ready to cross the border, beautifully captures this. At 1:17:50, Chameli stops the group and says:

*“1 Minute, let me glance back once who knows whether we’ll ever return.”* As “*1 Minute, aik wari wekh len do, pata nai wapis lautty na lautty.*”

Then, turning the earth into memory, she scoops a handful of Indian soil into a tiny box. In order to maintain identity in exile, migrants carry pieces of their home with them, encapsulating the ritual of departure as a symbolic cutting.

The act of Hardy carrying Sukhi’s ashes furthers the remembrance concept. When the judge inquires about the pot Hardy is holding in the courtroom scene, Hardy responds:

*“Yeh asti hai jee, mere dost Sukhi ki.”* (1:52:20) “These are the ashes of my friend Sukhi.”

Hardy’s vessel of Sukhi’s ashes becomes a living archive of grief and loyalty. His memories of death, journey, and loss anchor identity within the migrant group. *Dunki* frames memory as a transnational practice: not left behind, but carried forward in objects and stories. For Vertovec, this is emotional continuity where remembering sustains belonging across displacement.

#### 4.6 Displacement Storytelling: *Dunki* as a Transnational Cinematic Narrative

Beyond the actual experiences of migrants, Steven Vertovec’s idea of transnationalism also takes into account the cultural representations of such experiences. He highlights that the creation of hybrid cultural texts that represent the simultaneity of different identities, languages, and geographies is another aspect of transnationalism, in addition to cross-border actions (Transnationalism, 2009). Under these circumstances, film becomes a powerful vehicle for expressing the aesthetic and affective aspects of dislocation. Through its narrative framework, visual juxtapositions, multilingual conversation, and symbolic references, *Dunki* performs transnationalism rather than just portraying migration, so becoming a transnational artifact in and of itself.

The film’s international breadth is established right away with a startling juxtaposition of cosmopolitan London and rural Punjab. The sequence, which features muted tones and clinical lighting, shows Mannu being admitted to Grace Mary Hospital in London at 2:07. At 6:47, a lively race event with earthy hues, thronging fans, and regional music takes place in Laltu, Punjab. A group of characters conversing outside a London tailor shop at 10:50 is another example of the film’s ongoing back-and-forth movement

between geographies. These changes are not coincidental; rather, they are bridges in the film that blur the lines of space and highlight the dual sense of belonging that is essential to transnational identity. Balli's speech at 12:02, in which he records the streets of London, expresses this contradiction clearly: “*Yeh woh sheher hai jahan main life ke 25 saal guzare. Yahan maine kiya kaam, yahan hasa... roya... doston ko banaya. Ab in sab ko alvida kehne ka waqt aa gaya hai.*” (“*This is the city where I spent 25 years of my life. I worked here, laughed here, cried here, made friends. Now it's time to say goodbye.*”) The emotional geography of relocation is encapsulated in this instant; London is now a lived environment of memory and identity rather than merely a destination. Later, while returning to Dubai by plane, Balli muses:

“*Life ne poora U-turn maara tha. Aaj jitna bechain hum Hindustan jaane ke liye hain, 25 saal pehle utne hi bechain hum London aane ke liye the.*” (13:57) “*Life has taken a full U-turn. Today we're as restless to return to India as we once were to reach London.*”

The circularity of movement, where longing is never satisfied but instead diverted, is captured in these lines. The migrant is constantly coming and going, always connected to several emotional and physical coordinates, embodying Vertovec's concept of transnational simultaneity. Through Hardy's courtroom statement, the movie also criticizes immigration policies, turning the story into a platform for advocacy. The bureaucratic violence that characterizes legal migration is challenged by his testimony, which was given with moral clarity and restrained rage. This scene transforms *Dunki* from a narrative of personal adversity into a cinematic commentary on the topic of international migration.

The international nature of the movie is further supported by linguistic hybridity. Mannu is asked, “What did you eat for breakfast this morning?”

During her IELTS interview at 59:30. She responds:

“*Aaj I ate parathas.*”

She fumbles through a code-mixed explanation that combines broken English and Hindi when asked to explain the preparation. Her identity is anchored in a culinary heritage that defies translation, and the word “paratha” itself takes on a cultural meaning.

Similarly, at 1:01:20, Balli is asked to correct the sentence:

“*Yesterday my father and mother was in the bar.*”

He responds, seems uncomfortable:

“*O nai nai nai... no no jee... no my mother phater no go bar.*”

The cultural dissonance that migrants feel when they encounter Western conventions that conflict with their own ideals is reflected in this amusing yet illuminating scene. This complicates Vertovec's concept of cultural syncretism: instead of mixing harmoniously, cultures clash, leading to moments of misunderstanding, defiance, and redefinition.

The movie also portrays international aspiration through visual symbolism. Balli narrates at 16:30:

“*Un dino jinke bachche vilayat mein the, apni chhaton pe tashan se cement ke jahaz lagwate the. Us din hum bhi nikal pade apni chhaton pe jahaz lagwane.*” (“*Back then, those whose children were abroad would proudly place cement airplanes on their rooftops. That day, we too set out to earn our own airplane.*”)

These cement airplanes are more than just ornaments; they are memorials to migration, representations of social status and projected mobility. They show how, even before the travel starts, international yearning manifests itself in daily life. The film's international aesthetics are further reinforced by the sequences set in the IELTS classroom. Each session starts at 39:10 with the professor saying something like,

“*Birmingham, here I come!*” and “*What a lovely weather today!*”

The performance of Westernness that migrants are required to perfect is parodied by these prepared sentences, which are spoken with exaggerated accents. Hardy says,

*“England jaane ka sabse mazboot tareeqa hai Ishtudent visa.”* (“The strongest way to go to England is through a student visa.”)

This sentence highlights the scheduled, practiced, and commercialized nature of legal migration. Identity is not only taught but also acted in the classroom, which transforms into a theatrical setting. Last but not least, the Laltu poster with the words:

*“MAKE ENGLAND YOUR HOME”*

This acts as a visual anchor for the international plot of the movie. It foreshadows the ensuing emotional and legal complications while simultaneously capturing the aspirational allure of the West. Through these scenes, *Dunki* builds a cinematic borderscape fluidly moving across places, languages, and cultures. It doesn't just depict migration; it enacts transnationalism, becoming a hybrid text that reflects and critiques the layered realities of displacement through Vertovec's lens. As a composite book that reflects and examines the complex realities of displacement through Vertovec's prism, it does more than only portray migration; it enacts transnationalism.

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

#### **5.1 Discussion**

*Dunki* argues that migration is not a simple path between two locations, but rather a labyrinth of desire, compromise, and disturbance. The study's goals of analyzing how *Dunki* portrays identity, displacement, and transnational affect are strongly related to the film's cinematic story, which animates the psychological and emotional terrain of undocumented migration. Visceral, shattered, and deeply human, the six components covered in the previous chapter form a complicated constellation that gives Vertovec's concept of transnationalism life rather than existing alone.

Sukhi's final remarks, *“Papa ji ko bolna mera visa lag gaya,”* highlight the emotional effects of migration and are both melancholy and indicative of the emotional simultaneity Vertovec portrays. As he dies in another country, Sukhi regrets the future that bureaucratic systems denied him. Instead of being hallucinations, his imagined reunion and visa are survival stories that symbolize a mental homeland that migrants often construct as a safe haven. *Dunki* transforms these experiences into emotional mapping, producing a map of delayed arrivals and internal exiles.

The lives of the characters in London also expose the psychological cost of liminality. The phrase "We left home, but we didn't arrive anywhere" by Hardy sums up the state of being between locations, identities, and systems quite well. The migrants live in overlapping realms where language, legality, and culture shatter their sense of self; they are neither totally accepted nor entirely cut off. The video illustrates how identity collapses when language fails in moments like Balli pushing the chair rather than sitting on it or Hardy repeating *“dead, dead, dead...”* in an attempt to answer a question. These are what Vertovec would refer to as structural symptoms the results of a society in which social capital is unequally distributed and performance is sacrificed in order to feel like you belong rather than instances of personal failure.

In *Dunki*, illegality is erasure legal, social, and emotional rather than just a lack of evidence. The group's physical presence runs counter to their legal invisibility when they hide in a graveyard to evade police raids or when Balli begs on the street using a phony student visa. Specifically, the cemetery turns into a spooky scene: *“alive yet invisible.”* *“Ab itni jaan laga ke yahaan aaye hain, wapas lautne ke liye toh nahi na,”* as one character declares as he runs from arrest, is not merely a proclamation of defiance but also of emotional investment in a place that rejects him.

Culture also turns into a space for resistance and reconfiguration. Manu's violent outburst, which followed her refusal to kiss her British fiancé, is a protest against the way that migration processes

monetize intimacy. This example challenges Vertovec's idea of hybridity by showing that migrants don't always blend in and can occasionally revolt. Setting boundaries to preserve one's uniqueness is often more important than merging traditions. However, more subdued actions, such as putting cement airplanes on rooftops, using the word "*paratha*" during an IELTS interview, or saying "*Happy Diwali*" while flying, also demonstrate how resilient culture can be. These symbols are strong despite their small size. They infuse unfamiliar settings with cultural memories.

Through it all, memory persists, kept in soil, ashes, and stories. Hardy's carrying of Sukhi's ashes in court ("*Yeh asti hai jee, mere dost Sukhi ki*") is a gesture of identity as well as loss.

Migrants are able to emotionally occupy numerous areas simultaneously as memory turns into a transnational act. The homeland continues to exist, reframed in customs and artifacts that will not go away. Lastly, *Dunki* embodies this fragmentation rather than just depicting it. Its identity as an international film is further supported by its multilingual dialogue, its cinematic movement between Laltu and London, and its symbolic layering of songs, slogans, and posters.

The irony, longing, and contradiction at the core of the migrant ideal are captured in the sentence, "*Make England Your Home*," which is set in a dusty Punjabi alleyway. Even the movie medium transforms into a borderscape, claiming simultaneity and erasing distances. When combined, these results support the study's goal, which was to investigate how *Dunki* reframes Vertovec's theory through a profoundly human perspective while capturing the emotional and cultural negotiations of migration. The rough terrain on which identity is rebuilt is depicted in the film, rather than romanticizing movement. By doing this, it not only addresses but also goes beyond the study's research goals, providing a cinematic language for what it means to be uprooted but resilient, erased while surviving.

By providing a targeted, theory-driven examination of *Dunki* as a transnational tale, this work adds to the expanding corpus of research on migration and film. It illustrates how Bollywood, which is sometimes written off as escapist, can be a crucial platform for examining the cultural, legal, and emotional aspects of undocumented migration. The study provides a paradigm for interdisciplinary analysis by bridging the gap between sociological theory and cultural representation through the application of Vertovec's framework to cinematic narrative.

## 5.1 Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides a thorough thematic analysis of *Dunki*, it is constrained by the fact that it only looks at one movie and one theoretical framework Vertovec's transnationalism. This limits the research's interpretive scope because it ignores other viewpoints on migration and identity, such as those provided by postcolonial or cultural studies.

## 5.2 Future Research

Comparative theoretical frameworks, particularly those from postcolonial studies, should be used in future research to improve this study. Using Bhabha's ideas of mimicry, hybridity, and the "Third Space" to analyze *Dunki* may reveal further subtleties in the performance and disruption of cultural identity. Thematic parallels or variations in the representation of diaspora and belonging may also be brought to light by broadening the analysis to include additional South Asian migration-themed films, such as *Pardes*, *Namastey London*, or *Swades*. Scholars may also examine audience response, examining how viewers from different backgrounds interpret the film's portrayal of legality, identity, and emotional exile. This would add a valuable new dimension to the way that cinematic transnationalism affects imagination and discourse in the real world.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Through scenes of longing, failure, sadness, and resistance, the film offers voice to the liminal wanderer. Significant disclosures were made regarding the film's depiction of undocumented life as identity erasure as opposed to merely a legal absence. The graveyard hideouts, phony success performances, and

predatory migration agents all allude to a society in which silence and performance must coexist in order to survive. Hardy's symbolic act of carrying Sukhi's ashes, Chameli's action of collecting soil, and Balli's statements in London all serve as emotional anchor rituals that transform remembrance into resistance. These narrative and visual choices extend Vertovec's concepts of emotional continuity and overlapping social domains into the individual textures of loss and belonging.

Cultural hybridity, which is often lauded in international discourse, is handled gingerly in *Dunki*. The film demonstrates that hybridity isn't always a positive thing. Hardy's retention of Punjabi rituals, Manu's resistance to conform to Western norms, and the discomfort of performances in English all challenge the notion that migrants must blend in. The fact that cultural negotiation can just as often be an act of rejection emphasizes a crucial component of identity preservation. By structuring itself as a transnational cinematic tale, switching between Punjab and London, combining Hindi and English, and including diasporic aesthetics throughout, *Dunki* transforms into an expressive borderland in and of itself. The film exemplifies transnationalism in both form and content by removing barriers of geography and culture.

When combined, these results support the study's main goals, which were to investigate how *Dunki* uses the grammar of film to create migrant identities, emotional geographies, and cultural negotiation. In addition to providing answers to these queries, the study shows how film may convert abstract sociological theory into lived experience by depicting global inequality through faces, narratives, and silence rather than statistics. To sum up, *Dunki* is a moving example of the human cost of migration and the silent fortitude of those who must suffer it. According to Vertovec, this study shows that cinematic tales are both reflecting and generative, influencing our thoughts, emotions, and imaginations about the boundaries we traverse and the identities we bear.

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