



Representations of Religious Tolerance in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*: A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Religious, cultural, and national differences present significant challenges to fostering harmonious coexistence within multicultural societies. As a form of mass media, film plays an important role in representing social values, including religious tolerance. This study aims to examine the representation of religious tolerance in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, directed by Kabir Khan, through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The study employed a qualitative approach using semiotic analysis. The primary data consisted of the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, while secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, and other relevant literature. The data were analyzed using Barthes' three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings reveal that religious tolerance is represented through the film's characters, dialogues, and narrative, depicting harmonious relationships among individuals from different religious and national backgrounds. The semiotic analysis identified three core values of religious tolerance: mutual respect, mutual appreciation, and acceptance of differences. At the denotative level, these values are reflected in the interactions between the characters. At the connotative level, they signify respect for different religious beliefs and practices. At the mythological level, the film constructs humanity, empathy, and solidarity as universal values that transcend religious, national, and political boundaries. These findings suggest that *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents religious tolerance as a social practice embodied through interpersonal relationships grounded in respect for diversity and shared humanitarian values.

INTRODUCTION

Film is an audiovisual medium that serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a means of communication capable of representing diverse social, cultural, and religious realities (Vitalis et al., 2024). Through the integration of visual imagery, dialogue, narrative, and symbolism, films construct meaning and communicate messages that can shape public perceptions of social issues. From the perspective of mass communication, film is regarded as a medium with the capacity to represent values, ideologies, and social constructions through the dissemination of messages to audiences (Malisi et al., 2023; Zheltukhina et al., 2023).

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One of the social issues frequently represented in films is the relationship between religion and multicultural coexistence. Within the Indian film industry, themes of religious and cultural diversity have been explored in numerous cinematic works depicting the complexities of social life. One notable example is *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), directed by Kabir Khan. The film follows the journey of Pawan, a Hindu man, as he attempts to reunite Munni (Shahida), a mute Pakistani girl, with her family. Through interactions between characters from different religious and national backgrounds, the film represents respect for religious beliefs, acceptance of differences, and humanitarian values that transcend religious and national identities (ÇAKICI & MERİÇ, 2021; Uswatun Hasanah & Sholichah, 2020).

Similar themes have appeared in other Bollywood productions, such as *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008), which portrays the relationship between Islamic and Hindu traditions within the historical context of the Mughal Empire (Zahra, 2022). Unlike *Jodhaa Akbar*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* situates its narrative within the political tensions between India and Pakistan. Issues of national identity, religion, and territorial boundaries constitute the broader context of the story, creating a narrative through which tolerance, humanity, and solidarity are represented amid social and political differences.

Since its release in 2015, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* has attracted considerable attention both in India and internationally. Its success is reflected not only in its commercial performance but also in its widespread public reception, making it one of the most successful Bollywood films of its release period (Aldo et al., 2023; Hanif & Rahmadhani, 2023). Beyond its commercial achievement, the film has also drawn scholarly and public attention for its portrayal of humanitarian concerns, interreligious relations, and peace-building within the context of India–Pakistan relations.

Through its characters, dialogues, visual symbols, and narrative structure, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents values associated with religious tolerance in interactions between individuals from different religious and national backgrounds. These representations are conveyed not only through the actions of the main characters but also through a narrative that emphasizes empathy, respect for religious diversity, and humanitarian solidarity (Wilistia et al., 2026). Consequently, the film can be understood as a cultural text that constructs meanings of religious tolerance through its use of symbols, characterization, and storytelling.

Religious tolerance has become an important topic in studies of interreligious relations, particularly within multicultural societies characterized by religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. In this context, religious tolerance is understood as an attitude of respecting, appreciating, and accepting individuals or groups with different beliefs, religious practices, and identities. These values can be observed through various forms of media, including film, which reflects and represents the social dynamics of multicultural communities (Mohammadzadeh, 2024; Sari, 2020; Setiani & Hermawan, 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, religious tolerance is closely associated with the principles of justice, respect for others, and the prohibition against acting unjustly toward others because of differences in identity. One of the Qur'anic foundations for these principles is found in Surah Al-Mā'idah (5:8):

Meaning: *O you who believe! Stand firmly for Allah as witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people cause you to act unjustly. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is All-Aware of what you do.*" (Qur'an, 5:8)

According to *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, this verse emphasizes the importance of upholding justice consistently, regardless of feelings of hostility or differences in identity. The commentary explains that justice is positioned as a fundamental

principle governing social relationships, including interactions with people of different religions, ethnicities, or nationalities. From this perspective, justice is understood not only as a social obligation but also as an expression of religious values that guide human relations (Qomariyah & Hamid, 2023; Voukkali et al., 2023).

These principles are also reflected in the representation presented in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. The film portrays the relationship between Pawan, a Hindu man from India, and Munni (Shahida), a young Muslim girl from Pakistan. Differences in religion, nationality, and cultural background are not depicted as barriers to interpersonal relationships. Instead, the narrative represents respect for religious beliefs, acceptance of differences, and compassion for others as essential elements of human relationships. This representation is evident in Pawan's respect for Munni's religious identity, his willingness to accommodate her religious practices, and his determination to reunite her with her family regardless of their different religious and national backgrounds (Azhari & Kanus, 2025; Zain Yatsir et al., 2024).

Through these representations, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* illustrates that religious symbols, cultural identities, and national affiliations function not only as narrative elements that shape conflict but also as symbolic resources for representing tolerance, empathy, and solidarity. Consequently, the film provides a relevant object of analysis from a semiotic perspective, as meanings of religious tolerance are constructed through visual signs, dialogues, and narrative structures that shape particular understandings of interreligious relations.

Previous studies on *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* have examined the film from various perspectives, including humanitarian values, intercultural communication, nationalism, and the social relations between India and Pakistan. However, studies specifically investigating the representation of religious tolerance through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework remain limited. Most existing research has focused on the film's moral messages or narrative meanings, while relatively little attention has been paid to how signs, symbols, and narrative structures construct representations of religious tolerance across different levels of meaning. This gap indicates the need for further research employing a semiotic perspective to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the film's representation of religious tolerance.

To address this gap, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework as its analytical approach. According to Barthes, signs generate meaning not only at the denotative level, which refers to their literal meaning, but also at the connotative level, where cultural and ideological meanings are produced. Barthes further introduced the concept of *myth*, referring to a second-order system of signification through which cultural values, beliefs, and ideologies are naturalized within society. This three-level framework enables a deeper analysis of how religious tolerance is represented through the film's characters, dialogues, visual symbols, and narrative structure.

A semiotic approach is particularly appropriate because films are composed of multiple sign systems that interact to produce meaning. Examining these signs not only explains what is presented on screen but also reveals how social, cultural, and religious meanings are constructed and communicated to audiences. Accordingly, Roland Barthes' semiotic framework provides a suitable conceptual lens for analyzing the representation of religious tolerance embedded in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (Makarim et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2023). Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the representation of religious tolerance in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of media studies, communication, and religious studies by providing a deeper understanding of how films represent religious tolerance through systems of signs, symbols, and narrative structures.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine the representation of religious tolerance in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, directed by Kabir Khan. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth interpretation of meanings constructed through signs, symbols, dialogues, characters, and the film's narrative structure. The analysis focused on how religious tolerance is represented through various cinematic elements (Lyhne et al., 2025; Nicmanis, 2024; Vears & Gillam, 2022).

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data consisted of the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, while the secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, and other relevant literature on semiotics, media representation, and religious tolerance. Data were collected using documentation techniques by examining selected scenes, dialogues, screenshots, and the film transcript relevant to the research objectives. This technique was employed to identify, classify, and organize data representing the values of religious tolerance portrayed in the film (Makarim et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2023).

The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the analysis focused on the literal meanings conveyed through the film's scenes, dialogues, and visual elements. The connotative level was used to interpret the social, cultural, and religious meanings embedded in these representations. Finally, the mythological level was employed to uncover the broader ideological and cultural meanings constructed through the film's narrative. The findings were interpreted descriptively to explain how *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents religious tolerance through a system of signs that constructs social and humanitarian meanings (Hafizah et al., 2025; Masani & Fabanjo, 2026).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mutual Respect

Religious tolerance in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is represented through acts of mutual respect demonstrated by the characters toward individuals of different religious backgrounds. This value is reflected in interactions that acknowledge the beliefs, religious practices, and identities of others without prejudice or discrimination. Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the representation of mutual respect is examined through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth.

The First Encounter Between Pawan and Munni (Scene 20:58)



Fig 1. Pawan Offers Food and Water to Munni

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Pawan offering a glass of water and a plate of food to Munni, a young girl whom he has just met. Pawan notices that Munni appears exhausted and hungry after becoming separated from her family. Without asking about her religion, nationality, or social background, he immediately responds by providing food and assistance. The scene presents a simple humanitarian

act in which one individual helps another who is in need.

At the connotative level, the scene represents compassion, empathy, and respect for human dignity regardless of religious or national identity. Pawan's willingness to help Munni demonstrates that humanitarian values transcend social boundaries. His actions are motivated not by shared identity but by concern for another human being facing hardship.

The interaction also signifies that mutual respect begins with recognizing the needs and dignity of others without allowing religious or cultural differences to shape one's response. By prioritizing Munni's well-being over her identity as a Pakistani Muslim, the film portrays tolerance as an active social practice grounded in empathy and kindness.

At the mythological level, the scene challenges the common perception that individuals from India and Pakistan, or from different religious backgrounds, are inevitably separated by conflict and hostility. Instead, the film constructs an alternative cultural narrative in which humanity becomes the primary basis for social relationships. Through Pawan's actions, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* promotes the idea that compassion and mutual respect are universal values capable of transcending religious, political, and national boundaries.

This representation also deconstructs the stereotype that religious differences necessarily lead to social division. Rather than emphasizing conflict, the film constructs a myth that peaceful coexistence is achievable when individuals prioritize shared humanity over exclusive identities.

The findings indicate that this scene represents mutual respect through an act of humanitarian assistance that is independent of religious and national identities. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, Pawan's action functions as a sign whose meaning extends beyond the literal act of offering food and water. At the denotative level, it depicts a person helping a child in need. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, it symbolizes empathy, respect for human dignity, and the possibility of harmonious interreligious relationships (Dwyer, 2017; Fatimah et al., 2025).

The scene further suggests that religious tolerance is expressed not only through respect for religious beliefs but also through everyday acts of compassion toward individuals from different backgrounds. By portraying humanitarian concern as more significant than religious or political differences, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* constructs a representation of tolerance rooted in universal human values rather than shared religious identity.

Consequently, this scene demonstrates how visual signs and narrative elements work together to communicate broader ideological meanings concerning religious tolerance. Through Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, the film presents mutual respect as a fundamental principle for fostering peaceful coexistence within multicultural societies (Azhari & Kanus, 2025; Zain Yatsir et al., 2024).

Pawan Waits Outside the Mosque While Munni Prays (Scene 56:03)



Fig 2. Pawan Waits Outside the Mosque While Munni Performs Her Prayer

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Munni entering a mosque to perform her prayer, while Pawan remains outside until she finishes worshipping. Throughout

the scene, Pawan neither enters the mosque nor interrupts Munni's religious practice. Instead, he quietly waits outside with a calm expression, showing neither discomfort nor objection to Munni's act of worship.

At the connotative level, the scene represents respect for religious freedom and recognition of every individual's right to practice their faith. Pawan's decision to remain outside the mosque reflects his awareness of religious boundaries while acknowledging Munni's right to worship according to her beliefs without interference.

In this context, the mosque functions not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of religious identity. Pawan's position outside the mosque signifies that respecting people of different faiths does not require participating in their religious practices; rather, it involves providing them with the space and freedom to observe their beliefs. The film therefore portrays religious tolerance as the willingness to respect differences while maintaining mutual understanding and coexistence.

At the mythological level, the scene constructs the idea that religious differences do not prevent individuals from establishing harmonious social relationships. Rather than portraying religious identity as a source of separation, the film presents it as an element of diversity that can coexist within a shared humanitarian framework.

Through the relationship between Pawan, a devout Hindu, and Munni, a Muslim child, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* develops an alternative cultural narrative to the dominant discourse surrounding India–Pakistan relations. Instead of emphasizing conflict between religions, the film promotes the myth that mutual respect for religious practices constitutes an essential foundation for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

The findings indicate that this scene represents mutual respect through the recognition of an individual's freedom to practice religion. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, Pawan's decision to wait outside the mosque functions as a sign whose meaning extends beyond the literal act of waiting (Maidugu & Isah, 2024; Mutiah, 2024). At the denotative level, it simply depicts a man waiting for his companion. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, it symbolizes respect for religious identity, freedom of worship, and harmonious interreligious coexistence.

The representation suggests that religious tolerance is not necessarily expressed through participation in another religion's rituals but through acknowledging and respecting every individual's right to practice their faith freely. The film further positions the mosque as a symbolic space whose sanctity is recognized and respected regardless of one's own religious affiliation.

Consequently, this scene demonstrates how ordinary actions can communicate broader ideological meanings concerning religious tolerance. Through Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* constructs mutual respect as a fundamental value that enables peaceful coexistence within religiously and culturally diverse societies.

The analysis of the two scenes demonstrates that mutual respect is represented through acts of empathy, recognition of human dignity, and respect for religious freedom. In the first scene, mutual respect is expressed through Pawan's willingness to help Munni without considering her religious or national identity. In the second scene, it is represented through his decision to allow Munni to perform her prayer without interference while respectfully waiting outside the mosque.

From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, these scenes illustrate how visual signs and narrative elements generate meaning across the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the film portrays simple acts of helping and waiting. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, these

actions construct the broader representation that religious tolerance is realized through respect for diversity rather than through the elimination of religious differences.

Overall, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents mutual respect as the fundamental basis for harmonious relationships among people from different religious and national backgrounds. The film emphasizes that respect for others is not determined by shared identity but by the recognition of universal human dignity and the willingness to coexist peacefully within a multicultural society.

Acceptance of Differences

In addition to mutual respect, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* also represents the value of acceptance of differences. This value is reflected in the interactions between characters who acknowledge and accept differences in religion, culture, and nationality without attempting to change one another's identities. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, this representation is constructed through visual signs, dialogue, and narrative elements that generate meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth.

Pawan Accepts Munni's Religious Identity (Scene 57:41)



Fig 3. Pawan Accepts Munni's Religious Identity

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Pawan discovering that Munni is a Muslim. After learning her religious identity, he shows neither rejection nor hesitation in continuing to care for her. Instead, he remains committed to protecting and accompanying Munni throughout his journey to reunite her with her family in Pakistan. The scene clearly demonstrates that Pawan's relationship with Munni remains unchanged despite their different religious backgrounds.

At the connotative level, the scene represents the acceptance of religious diversity as an essential aspect of human relationships. Pawan's response indicates that religious differences are not portrayed as barriers to social interaction but rather as elements of diversity that deserve recognition and respect. The film constructs acceptance not merely as acknowledging the existence of another religion but also as embracing the individual's identity without judgment or attempts to alter their beliefs. This representation further suggests that religious tolerance extends beyond respecting religious practices to accepting individuals as they are. By safeguarding Munni and ensuring that she can return safely to her family, Pawan demonstrates that genuine acceptance is expressed through concrete actions rather than symbolic statements alone (Fatimah et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2020).

At the mythological level, the scene constructs the idea that differences in religious identity do not prevent the development of trust, compassion, and meaningful interpersonal relationships. Rather than portraying religious identity as a source of division, the film presents it as one dimension of human diversity that can coexist within a shared humanitarian framework. Through the relationship between Pawan and Munni, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* challenges the assumption that people from different religions cannot establish close social bonds. Instead, the film develops an alternative cultural narrative in which accepting diversity becomes a prerequisite for harmonious coexistence in multicultural societies (Siddiqui, 2020).

The findings indicate that this scene represents the acceptance of differences through the recognition of religious identity without any attempt to eliminate or

transform that identity. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, Munni's religious identity functions as a sign that generates broader meanings concerning respect for diversity and the acknowledgment of individual dignity. At the denotative level, the scene simply portrays Pawan continuing to accompany Munni after learning that she is a Muslim. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, it communicates the broader idea that social harmony is achieved through accepting diversity rather than erasing differences.

The scene also demonstrates that religious tolerance involves recognizing individuals as complete human beings whose identities deserve equal respect. By portraying Pawan's unwavering commitment to Munni despite their religious differences, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* constructs acceptance as an active social practice grounded in empathy, trust, and shared humanity rather than religious similarity.

Pawan and Munni's Cross-Border Journey (Scene 1:06:35)



Fig 4. Pawan Accompanies Munni Across the India–Pakistan Border

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Pawan accompanying Munni on a journey from India to Pakistan in an effort to reunite her with her family in Azad Kashmir. Throughout the journey, they encounter numerous obstacles, including border inspections, restricted access, and public suspicion arising from the long-standing political tensions between the two countries. Despite these challenges, Pawan remains committed to accompanying Munni until she is safely reunited with her family.

At the connotative level, the journey symbolizes the acceptance of differences in religion, nationality, and social identity as the foundation of human relationships. Pawan's determination to escort Munni to Pakistan demonstrates that differences in identity are not portrayed as barriers to helping others. Instead, the film suggests that empathy, trust, and compassion enable individuals to overcome political, cultural, and social divisions. The cross-border journey also functions as a symbol of transcending boundaries that have historically separated the people of India and Pakistan. Rather than emphasizing conflict, the film portrays acceptance of differences as an active commitment expressed through concrete actions, personal sacrifice, and humanitarian responsibility.

At the mythological level, the scene constructs the idea that political conflict and national boundaries do not inevitably determine human relationships. Through Pawan and Munni's journey, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* develops an alternative cultural narrative in which empathy, solidarity, and mutual trust are presented as values capable of bridging historical and political divisions. The journey further challenges the myth that national borders permanently separate people from different backgrounds. Instead, the film proposes a new cultural narrative in which humanitarian values transcend geographical boundaries, religious affiliations, and national identities, thereby making peaceful coexistence both possible and desirable.

The findings indicate that the cross-border journey represents the acceptance of differences through concrete humanitarian actions. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, the journey functions not merely as a geographical movement but also as a symbolic sign that generates broader meanings concerning acceptance, solidarity, and intercultural understanding. At the connotative level, the journey represents the willingness to maintain human relationships despite social, political, and cultural

differences. At the mythological level, the film constructs the idea that diversity should not be viewed as a source of conflict but rather as an opportunity to foster cooperation, empathy, and mutual understanding. These findings suggest that *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* portrays the acceptance of differences as an active social practice requiring commitment, sacrifice, and humanitarian concern. Religious tolerance is therefore represented not as passive recognition of diversity but as meaningful action that transcends religious, national, and political boundaries (Hanif & Rahmadhani, 2023).

The analysis of the two scenes demonstrates that acceptance of differences is represented through the recognition of religious identity, national background, and cultural diversity without any attempt to alter those identities. In the first scene, acceptance is expressed through Pawan's continued protection and care for Munni after learning that she is a Muslim from Pakistan. In the second scene, acceptance is demonstrated by Pawan's determination to accompany Munni across national borders despite the political tensions between India and Pakistan.

From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, both scenes illustrate how visual signs and narrative elements produce meaning across the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the film portrays actions such as accompanying Munni and crossing national borders. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, these actions construct the broader representation that accepting diversity is a fundamental condition for building harmonious social relationships (Sari, 2020; Setiani & Hermawan, 2021).

Overall, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents acceptance of differences as a form of religious tolerance that extends beyond acknowledging diversity to embracing it through concrete humanitarian actions. The film emphasizes that empathy, responsibility, and solidarity enable individuals from different religious, cultural, and national backgrounds to establish meaningful relationships based on shared human values rather than exclusive identities.

Mutual Appreciation

In addition to mutual respect and acceptance of differences, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* also represents the value of mutual appreciation. This value is reflected in the characters' recognition of one another's sincerity, sacrifice, and humanitarian commitment regardless of differences in religion or nationality. In the film, appreciation is expressed not only through words but also through actions that demonstrate trust, solidarity, and concern for others. Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this representation is examined through the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth.

Pawan's Sacrifice and Chand Nawab's Assistance (Scene 2:13:12)



Fig 5. Pawan Entrusts Munni to Chand Nawab While Remaining in Police Custody

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Pawan asking Chand Nawab to take Munni to her family while he remains in police custody after being accused of espionage. Despite being detained and subjected to physical abuse, Pawan continues to insist that his sole purpose in entering Pakistan is to reunite Munni with her mother. Meanwhile, Chand Nawab uses his role as a journalist to publicize Pawan's

story through the media, attracting widespread public attention and support.

At the connotative level, the scene represents appreciation for sincerity, honesty, and self-sacrifice. Pawan's decision to prioritize Munni's safety over his own freedom reflects an appreciation for humanity expressed through selfless action. Likewise, Chand Nawab's decision to share Pawan's story through the media symbolizes recognition of humanitarian values by ensuring that the truth reaches the public. The public support that emerges after the story is broadcast further represents collective appreciation for acts of compassion and integrity. The film suggests that appreciation is not confined to interpersonal relationships but can also emerge as a collective social response to humanitarian actions that transcend religious and national identities.

At the mythological level, the scene constructs the idea that genuine humanitarian actions deserve recognition regardless of religious affiliation, nationality, or political conflict. The film develops a cultural narrative in which self-sacrifice motivated by compassion ultimately earns public respect and moral legitimacy, even in an environment shaped by suspicion and political tension. Through the characters of Chand Nawab and the supportive public, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* also promotes the idea that the media and civil society can function as bridges that strengthen solidarity across religious and national boundaries. Consequently, appreciation is represented as a social value capable of reducing prejudice and fostering trust among diverse communities (Hidayat et al., 2020).

The findings indicate that this scene represents mutual appreciation through the recognition of sacrifice, integrity, and humanitarian commitment. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, Pawan's decision to entrust Munni to Chand Nawab, together with Chand Nawab's efforts to publicize the story, functions as a sign whose meaning extends beyond the literal events depicted in the film. At the denotative level, the scene portrays an act of trust and assistance. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, it symbolizes solidarity, social recognition, and appreciation for humanitarian values.

The scene further demonstrates that appreciation is not limited to verbal acknowledgment but is expressed through concrete actions that support individuals facing injustice and adversity. At the mythological level, the film constructs the idea that sincerity and compassion possess the power to inspire collective support and strengthen social solidarity across religious, cultural, and national differences. Overall, this scene illustrates how *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents mutual appreciation as a value rooted in trust, empathy, and humanitarian responsibility (Aldo et al., 2023; Fatimah et al., 2025). Through Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, the film conveys the message that recognizing and valuing the sacrifices of others constitutes an essential foundation for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

The Reunion of Pawan and Munni at the India–Pakistan Border (Scene 2:32:30)



Fig 6. The Reunion of Pawan and Munni at the India–Pakistan Border

At the denotative level, the scene depicts Pawan returning to India after being released from detention in Pakistan. At the border, Munni reunites with Pawan in the presence of her family and a large crowd gathered on both sides of the India–

Pakistan border. During this emotional moment, Munni, who had previously been unable to speak, finally calls out to Pawan, marking the end of their journey together.

At the connotative level, the reunion symbolizes appreciation for sacrifice, compassion, and the humanitarian bond that has developed between Pawan and Munni throughout their journey. Munni's first spoken words represent recognition of Pawan's sincerity, courage, and unwavering commitment to helping her return safely to her family. The presence of people from both India and Pakistan further signifies collective appreciation for humanitarian actions that transcend religious and national identities. Their emotional reactions, applause, and expressions of joy indicate that genuine acts of kindness can inspire social recognition regardless of political or cultural differences. The film therefore portrays appreciation as a value that strengthens interpersonal relationships while encouraging solidarity among diverse communities.

At the mythological level, the scene constructs the idea that humanity possesses the power to overcome political divisions and historical conflicts. The reunion at the border transforms what is traditionally perceived as a symbol of separation into a symbolic space of reconciliation, hope, and shared humanity. Through this closing sequence, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* challenges the dominant narrative that the India–Pakistan border represents an insurmountable divide between two nations. Instead, the film develops an alternative cultural narrative in which compassion, mutual appreciation, and humanitarian values become the foundations for peaceful coexistence despite religious, cultural, and political differences.

The findings indicate that the final scene represents mutual appreciation through public recognition of sincerity, sacrifice, and humanitarian commitment. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, the reunion between Pawan and Munni functions as a sign whose meaning extends beyond a simple farewell. At the denotative level, the scene depicts the reunion of two characters after a difficult journey. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, it symbolizes reconciliation, collective recognition, and the triumph of humanitarian values over political and religious divisions.

The scene further illustrates that appreciation is not limited to personal gratitude but may also evolve into collective social recognition. Munni's emotional response and the support expressed by the surrounding crowd demonstrate that acts of compassion are capable of fostering solidarity across religious and national boundaries (Ajuba et al., 2025; Neri-Castracane, 2015). Overall, this scene reinforces the representation of mutual appreciation as a value grounded in empathy, sacrifice, and respect for human dignity. Through Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* presents appreciation as an essential element in promoting peaceful coexistence within multicultural and multireligious societies.

The analysis of the two scenes demonstrates that mutual appreciation is represented through the recognition of sincerity, sacrifice, and humanitarian commitment demonstrated by the characters. In the first scene, appreciation is expressed through Pawan's trust in Chand Nawab to continue his mission of reuniting Munni with her family, as well as through the public support generated after Chand Nawab shares Pawan's story. In the second scene, appreciation is represented through the emotional reunion between Pawan and Munni, which receives recognition and support from the people gathered on both sides of the India–Pakistan border.

From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, both scenes illustrate how visual signs and narrative elements produce meaning across the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the film portrays events such as detention, release, public support, and reunion. At the connotative and mythological levels, however, these events construct the broader representation that appreciation

for humanitarian actions emerges through honesty, self-sacrifice, solidarity, and compassion. Overall, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents mutual appreciation as a fundamental dimension of religious tolerance that reinforces social relationships across religious, cultural, and national boundaries. Together with mutual respect and acceptance of differences, this value contributes to a broader discourse in which tolerance is portrayed not as an abstract ideal but as a lived social practice expressed through concrete humanitarian actions, interpersonal relationships, and recognition of human dignity.

The findings demonstrate that *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents religious tolerance through three interconnected dimensions: mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and mutual appreciation. These dimensions are consistently constructed through character interactions, visual symbols, dialogue, and narrative development, indicating that religious tolerance is portrayed as a lived social practice rather than merely an abstract moral principle.

From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, the meanings embedded in the film operate across three interconnected levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the film depicts everyday actions, such as sharing food, respecting another person's religious practices, accompanying someone across national borders, and acknowledging acts of sacrifice. These actions function as ordinary narrative events within the storyline.

At the connotative level, however, these visual signs convey broader meanings associated with empathy, solidarity, humanitarian concern, and respect for religious diversity. The relationship between Pawan, a Hindu from India, and Munni, a Muslim child from Pakistan, illustrates that differences in religion and nationality are not represented as barriers to interpersonal relationships. Instead, the film portrays religious tolerance through concrete social practices that recognize the dignity, identity, and rights of others.

At the mythological level, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* challenges dominant narratives that frequently associate religious and national differences with hostility, prejudice, and conflict. Rather than reinforcing ideological divisions between India and Pakistan, the film constructs an alternative cultural narrative in which humanity, compassion, and mutual trust serve as the primary foundations of social relationships. Religious identity is therefore represented not as a source of conflict but as one dimension of cultural diversity that can coexist within a shared humanitarian framework.

These findings are consistent with Barthes' (1977) argument that signs function not only as carriers of literal meaning but also as mechanisms through which broader cultural ideologies are constructed. Throughout the film, repeated representations of humanitarian actions transform ordinary social interactions into symbolic expressions of religious tolerance. Consequently, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* extends beyond the story of returning a lost child to her family by communicating broader ideological messages concerning peaceful coexistence, intercultural understanding, and interreligious harmony.

The findings also support previous studies that identify film as a cultural text capable of shaping public perceptions of religious diversity and social coexistence. As an audiovisual medium, film communicates social values not only through dialogue but also through visual composition, characterization, narrative structure, and symbolic representation (Abduldayev et al., 2026; Harun et al., 2026). In this regard, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* illustrates how cinematic narratives can contribute to public discourse on religious tolerance by emphasizing humanitarian values that transcend religious, political, and national boundaries.

A major contribution of this study lies in the application of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine how religious tolerance is represented through different levels of meaning. Rather than focusing solely on the explicit moral

messages conveyed by the characters, this study demonstrates that meanings of tolerance are systematically constructed through visual signs, narrative structures, and symbolic interactions. This analytical perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how films communicate social values and ideological meanings within multicultural societies.

Overall, the findings indicate that *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represents religious tolerance as a multidimensional concept encompassing mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and mutual appreciation. These three dimensions collectively construct a broader discourse emphasizing that harmonious interreligious relationships are fostered through empathy, solidarity, recognition of human dignity, and appreciation of diversity rather than through the elimination of religious or cultural differences. Accordingly, the film positions humanitarian values as the primary foundation for peaceful coexistence within culturally and religiously diverse societies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* constructs religious tolerance as a socially and culturally embedded practice rather than merely an abstract moral value. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the film reveals how visual signs, character interactions, and narrative structures generate layered meanings that position mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and mutual appreciation as interconnected expressions of humanitarian values across religious and national boundaries. These findings extend the application of Barthes' semiotics in the analysis of religious representation in film by showing that meanings of tolerance are produced not only through explicit dialogue but also through symbolic and ideological constructions embedded within cinematic narratives. The study therefore highlights the potential of film as a cultural text that contributes to broader public discourse on interreligious coexistence and multicultural understanding, while providing a foundation for future comparative studies on representations of religious tolerance across different cinematic and cultural contexts.

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