



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION, CULTURAL CONFLICT,  
AND SOCIETAL STRAIN IN *DUNKI*: A POSTCOLONIAL AND  
STRAIN THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

**Dr. Ghulam Ghous**

Department of Political Science, University of Okara

**Dr. Umar ud Din**

Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad

**Maham Nawaz**

Independent Research Scholar

Corresponding Author: [professor.eng.ew@tuf.edu.pk](mailto:professor.eng.ew@tuf.edu.pk)

**Abstract**

This research article examines the emotional and societal challenges depicted in the film *Dunki* from the perspectives of postcolonial theory and strain theory. The film chronicles the journey of several characters, with Manu being notably affected by the pressures of poverty and the aspiration for a better life. Manu ultimately decides to engage in illegal migration. Strain theory is employed to investigate the ways in which societal expectations and the absence of legitimate opportunities result in deviant behaviors, such as illicit immigration, as a strategy for achieving success. The research also investigates the methods through which emotional distress and decision-making are exacerbated by cultural conflict, which occurs when traditional values clash with modern aspirations. Furthermore, postcolonial theory is employed to comprehend the persistent influence of colonial legacies on identity, migration, and societal norms, which influence the characters' self-perception and decisions. The intricate interplay of societal pressure, emotional strain, and the enduring effects of colonialism on migration and identity is revealed in this article by examining *Dunki* through these theoretical frameworks. The results underscore the psychological toll of migration and the catastrophic repercussions that can occur when individuals are entangled between societal expectations and multiple identities.

**Key Words:** *Dunki*, Cinema, Illegal Immigration, Cultural Conflict, Postcolonial Theory, Strain Theory



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

## **Introduction**

The film *Dunki* (Hirani, 2023), which takes its name from a route of immigration that is frequently chosen by immigrants without documents from the states of Punjab, Gujarat, and Haryana in India, is a poignant narrative that analyzes the obstacles, aspirations, and sacrifices of individuals who aspire to escape destitution and establish better futures through migration. “*Dunki's* story is an emotional one-rolling in friendship, romance, heart-wrenching and heartwarming moments all into one. And in trademark Hirani style, there are dollops of comedy which is laced with satire to make it an entertaining ride, along with the strong message the film brings forth” (Sengupta & Times of India, 2023).

The movie is a powerful reminder of how the developing world is compelled to survive in the developed world, even if it means using illegal means, because of economic and cultural disparities. Manu, Hardy, Buggu, and Balli—four individuals from a small village in Punjab—begin a difficult voyage to England through a clandestine route referred to as “dunki route” in search of opportunities that their homeland was unable to offer, endangering their lives in the process. This is the central theme of the narrative. Their lives are characterized by societal pressures, limited resources, and hardships, which are a result of a system that prioritizes prosperity and education. As strain theory divulges, “society puts pressure on individuals to achieve socially accepted goals ... even though they lack the means to do so. This leads to strain, which may lead individuals to commit crimes ... as a means to gain financial security” (Merton, 1938). The film illuminates the broader issues of migration, such as the human cost, systemic inequities, and the profound emotional toll it takes on those involved, through their determination and desperation.

This research investigates the themes of *Dunki* by employing postcolonial theory and strain theory to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations and obstacles encountered by its characters. Strain theory emphasizes that individuals are frequently compelled to pursue unconventional or illegal routes when they are unable to accomplish socially valued objectives through legitimate means (Merton, 1938), which summarizes the path taken by the characters. The characters in the film are compelled to navigate the perilous and unlawful “Dunki route,” an underground network for migration, as a result of the structural



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

obstacles they face, including poverty, a lack of education, and fraudulent systems. Their journey is a representation of the extreme measures that individuals are prepared to take when conventional opportunities are unavailable.

Simultaneously, postcolonial theory demonstrates the persistent influence of colonial legacies on migration patterns and aspirations as Said intricates, “orientalism ... enabled the political, economic, cultural and social domination of the West ... employed as a justifying tactic for [Western] domination... The Orient was created – or ... orientalized – through hegemonic processes that robbed [it] of its true identity, voice, and indigenous culture” (1978). The film depicts characters from a former British colony who aspire to immigrate to England, reflecting the enduring belief in the Global North as a land of prosperity and power. In addition to emphasizing the socioeconomic disparities between the Global North and South, this dynamic also demonstrates the ongoing influence of colonial histories on contemporary human migration.

Using the movie as a case study, this paper appraises immigration and relevant laws that incite dangerous methods to cross borders (i.e., Dunki), describes the embedded racism in immigration laws and policies, and examines how they construct a misleading dichotomy. *Dunki's* portrayal of migration is not merely a physical voyage; it is also a profoundly emotional and social experience. It is a symbol of optimism, escape, and ambition, but it also entails significant risks, such as exploitation, violence, and alienation. The film underscores the systemic inequities and global inequalities that compel individuals to pursue such perilous paths by concentrating on these contrasting aspects. As Aitchison illustrates, “The historical origin of immigration policy in Western democratic societies is bound up with popular prejudice and pseudo-scientific notions of racial hierarchy... Today, immigration policy is rarely so explicit in its racism... [but] certain laws are, as a matter of fact, racially disrespectful” (Aitchison, 2023, p. XX). *Dunki* is a powerful investigation of migration as a defining issue of our time, as it offers a poignant critique of the barriers—both physical and social—that divide humanity through its compelling narrative.



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

## **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the themes of migration and cultural conflict in *Dunki*, using the strain and post-colonial theories.
2. To investigate how strain and postcolonial theory explain the emotional and societal challenges faced by the characters in *Dunki*.

## **Research Questions**

1. In the film *Dunki*, how do the emotional struggles of characters reflect the themes of migration and cultural conflict as explained by strain theory?
2. How does postcolonial theory account for the influence of colonial legacies on migration and identity in *Dunki*?

## **Review of Literature**

Literature and cinema have exhaustively examined the theme of migration, demonstrating its enduring relevance in global socio-political and cultural contexts. Scholars have frequently examined migration through sociological, historical, and postcolonial perspectives, emphasizing its complicated relationship with human resilience, systemic inequality, and identity. *Dunki* is a film that delves into the rich tradition of migration narratives, providing an opportunity to analyze its portrayal of migration through established theoretical frameworks, such as postcolonial theory and strain theory.

Strain theory, which was developed by Robert K. Merton, offers a sociological framework for comprehending the deviant behaviors that arise when individuals encounter structural obstacles to attaining socially accepted objectives. This theory has been extensively employed in research that investigates economic migration, particularly in developing countries where the disparity between aspirations and available opportunities is severe. Merton's research has been further developed by researchers such as Agnew (1992) and Passas (1995), who have emphasized the role of societal pressures and blocked opportunities in compelling individuals to pursue alternative, frequently illegal, methods of attaining success. This perspective is supported by migration studies, including those conducted by Massey et al. (1993), which emphasize that irregular migration is significantly influenced by systemic poverty and social exclusion. The



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

strain induced by structural inequality is exemplified by the characters in Dunki, who are compelled to navigate the perilous Dunki route. Consequently, strain theory is a pertinent lens for analysis.

Postcolonial theory, as articulated by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, offers an additional critical perspective with respect to migration analysis. This framework emphasizes the enduring influence of colonialism on the contemporary migration patterns, with a particular emphasis on the movement from the Global South to the Global North. The film Dunki is in alignment with postcolonial discourse, as it illustrates how individuals from India, a former British colony, regard England as a symbol of economic prosperity and opportunity. Bhambra (2007) and other scholars have underscored the fact that migration is profoundly rooted in historical relationships between colonizers and the colonized, which perpetuate socioeconomic disparities and reinforce power dynamics. The film's narrative is consistent with these insights, illustrating the ongoing influence of colonial legacies on migration flows and aspirations.

Cinematic literature has also investigated the theme of migration, with films such as *The Immigrant* (2013) and *The Kite Runner* (2007) delving into the human cost of displacement and the pursuit of improved lives. The representation of marginalized communities, systemic oppression, and the psychological toll of migration are frequently the focus of studies on migration in cinema. For example, Naficy (2001) investigates the concept of "accented cinema," which emphasizes cultural negotiation and displacement in the narratives of migrants and exiles. In the same vein, Desai (2014) examines the intersection of migration and identity in Bollywood cinema, underscoring the extent to which films mirror broader socio-political trends. Dunki's narrative is centered on the intersection of individual aspirations and structural inequalities, providing a poignant commentary on migration. The duality of migration as a source of hope and struggle is a recurring theme in both academic and cinematic discourse. Dunki contributes to this tradition. While acknowledging the systemic exploitation and risks that migrants encounter, studies like those conducted by Castles and Miller (2009) underscore the transformative potential of migration. This dichotomy is exemplified by films such as Dunki, which simultaneously emphasize the systemic injustices



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

that motivate the characters' actions and demonstrate their resilience in the face of insurmountable challenges.

Dunki's academic discourse is further complicated by its critical reception. The film is characterized as a "heartwarming portrayal of the impoverished illegal immigrants from Punjab who embark on perilous journeys in a desperate pursuit of greener pastures" in a review published in *The Hindu*. However, the review also criticizes the film for its overly simplistic and unnuanced portrayal of the challenges associated with illegal migration. The review recognizes Dunki's endeavor to illuminate the dangers of the "donkeys," a term used to describe individuals who begin unlawful migration routes. However, it also notes that the narrative can be monotonous and unremarkable, particularly in its humor regarding English and Englishmen. The film's socio-political statement is provided by its reliance on tropes, such as a courtroom sequence that elicits nationalist sentiment. However, it is unable to achieve a balance between the complexity of the migration issue and emotional depth. This critique emphasizes the necessity of a more thorough examination of migration narratives in cinema, as emphasized by scholars such as Naficy (2001) in his analysis of accented cinema. In the domain of Bollywood cinema, migration and the cultural conflicts it generates are recurring themes that have been examined in numerous films, each contributing a distinctive perspective to the narrative. The emotional and psychological challenges that individuals encounter when they are torn between the expectations of a modern, frequently foreign world and their ancestral origins are depicted in films like *Swades*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, and *The Namesake*. These films serve as valuable references for the examination of *Dunki* through theoretical lenses such as postcolonial theory and strain theory, as they display the intricacy of identity, belonging, and the tension between the traditional and the modern.

Mohan Bhargava, a NASA scientist, returns to his rural community in India in *Swades* (2004), a film directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. The protagonist's internal conflict is underscored by the film, as he is divided between the modern, developed world he has come to know in the U.S. and the traditional world of his village, which is plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. This tension highlights the emotional strain that results from being between two identities—one that is influenced by Western notions of progress and the other that is anchored in the cultural and societal values of rural India. Mohan's voyage is a profound



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

exploration of the concept of belonging, as his migration to the United States and his return to India are indicative of the broader themes of postcolonial identity and the psychological burden of bridging cultural divides. The film critiques the enduring legacies of colonialism on India's development and the imposition of foreign solutions.

The theme of migration is presented in a more familial and emotive context in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), directed by Kabir Khan. Pavan, the protagonist, undertakes a voyage to reunite a Pakistani girl who is mute and lost with her family in Pakistan. This cross-border voyage is a reflection of the cultural and emotional navigation between two hostile nations, India and Pakistan, which have a fraught history due to colonial partition. It also reflects the physical migration. The film subtly addresses the social and political divisions that persist between these two countries, while also exploring the human values of empathy, compassion, and understanding against the backdrop of migration. The film also explores the themes of identity and the tension between the universal human experience and one's nationality, thereby enriching the discourse on migration in postcolonial contexts.

*The Namesake* (2006), a Bollywood film directed by Mira Nair, is another noteworthy work that explores the obstacles of migration and the subsequent identity conflict. The film is a film adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, which follows Gogol Ganguli, the son of Indian immigrants in the United States, as he struggles with the dualism of his identity. Gogol is confronted with the challenge of reconciling the expectations of his traditional upbringing with his aspiration to assimilate into American society, as he was raised in a Bengali household in a foreign land. The film explores the emotional turmoil of first-generation immigrants and the influence of cultural assimilation on personal identity. *The Namesake* explores the overarching themes of migration, cultural assimilation, and the pursuit of a personal and national identity in the context of a postcolonial world through Gogol's narrative.

Despite the fact that these Bollywood films take a diverse approach to migration, they all emphasize the emotional and cultural intricacies that individuals encounter when they are bound between conflicting worlds. The examination of these themes in films such as *Swades*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, and *The Namesake* offers a comparative framework for the analysis of *Dunki*, allowing for the examination of migration, identity, and cultural conflict in relation to Strain Theory and Postcolonial Theory. The universal challenges of migration and the enduring



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

impact of colonial legacies on individual lives and national identities are reflected in the characters' struggles to reconcile their traditional and contemporary selves, their deep-rooted connections to home, and their quest for belonging.

This review emphasizes the importance of Strain Theory and Postcolonial Theory in comprehending migration narratives such as *Dunki*. This research endeavors to enhance the broader comprehension of migration as a multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by historical legacies, systemic inequalities, and individual aspirations by integrating the film into the existing academic discourse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The sociological framework known as 'strain theory' describes how social pressures or stressors, which frequently result from a misalignment between societal objectives and the resources available to attain them, can cause people to act in ways that are deviant or illegal. The theory gained traction in the 1950s after being initially formulated in the 1930s by American sociologist Robert K. Merton. Merton maintained that when social injustices prevent people from pursuing culturally acceptable goals (such as the "American Dream") through legal channels, they feel pressured to turn to crime or deviance as a means of achieving those goals (Strain Theory, 2016; Cherry, 2023; Strain Theory, n.d.).

Later research broadened the scope of strain theory. The concept was expanded by Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST), which encompassed a broader range of social pressures beyond economic objectives, such as the loss of valuable possessions, unfavorable treatment from others, and failure to meet personal objectives. Additionally, GST highlights the part that negative emotions—such as rage and frustration—play as mediators that can result in criminal activity. It distinguishes between experienced, vicarious, and anticipated strains, as well as objective strains, which are felt by the majority of people, and subjective strains, which are felt by the individual ("Strain Theory," 2016; Cherry, 2023; "Strain Theory," n.d.).

As demonstrated by Jie Zhang and colleagues' research, socio-psychological strains like value conflicts, relative deprivation, or coping difficulties can raise risk in areas like suicide, where strain theory has also been applied outside of crime ("Strain Theory," 2024).



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

According to strain theory, deviance and criminality are reactions to the pressures resulting from the disparity between societal objectives and the resources available to attain them. Depending on whether people accept or reject these objectives and resources, these adaptations can take many forms. It continues to be a fundamental viewpoint in criminology and sociology for comprehending the social causes of crime and deviance ("Strain Theory," 2016; "Strain Theory," 2024; "Sociological Theories of Crime: Strain Theories," 2024; "Strain Theory," 2024;)

With an emphasis on the power relationships, cultural representations, and social structures influenced by colonial rule and its aftermath, postcolonial theory is a critical framework that investigates the long-term effects of colonialism on both colonizers and the colonized. It aims to elevate the voices and viewpoints of historically underrepresented peoples who endured colonial dominance and challenge prevailing Western narratives. The theory examines ideas like hybridity—the blending of cultures brought about by colonial encounters—the subaltern—those left out of dominant discourses—Orientalism—the West's stereotypical representation of the East—and the agency and resistance of colonized peoples.

## **Analysis**

### ***A Postcolonial Theory Perspective***

A potent framework for comprehending the influence of colonial legacies on identity and migration in Dunki is provided by postcolonial theory, which investigates the enduring consequences of colonialism on individuals, societies, and cultures. As Stuart Hall (1990) describes, "Cultural identities ... undergo constant transformation... subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power." The theory emphasizes the impact of colonial histories on the psychological, cultural, and social realities of both the colonizers and the colonized, frequently resulting in intricate identities and conflicts. Dunki provides a vivid depiction of the ways in which the colonial past continues to influence the migrant experience, the search for identity, and the cultural conflicts encountered by the protagonist through the lens of postcolonial theory.

Manu, the protagonist of Dunki, embodies the postcolonial experience as he struggles with his identity during his migration from India to a foreign nation. The legacy of colonialism



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

continues to influence his self-perception and his interactions with both his homeland and the foreign country in which he aspires to establish a permanent residence. The tension between Manu's traditional Indian roots and the pressures to assimilate into a Westernized world is a defining feature of his voyage. Manu's perspective is heavily influenced by the colonial history of India, which has had a profound impact on the country's political, social, and cultural systems. This postcolonial context complicates his identity, as he is entangled between two worlds: one that is profoundly rooted in colonial history and tradition, and another that embodies the ideals of modernity and progress associated with the West.

The historical and psychological consequences of colonial domination are the explanation for this tension in postcolonial theory. The colonial encounter not only alters the material aspects of society, such as economic and political structures, but also affects the psyche of the people, fostering a sense of inferiority and dislocation. Manu's emotional struggles in *Dunki* are indicative of the colonial legacy of cultural subjugation and the difficulties associated with establishing a postcolonial identity. As Fanon (1952) affirms, "the colonized is an individual who is always 'in the process of becoming.' He is never fully himself but always in a state of transition." His migration can be interpreted as an effort to evade the colonial remnants in India, which include poverty, underdevelopment, and the persistent social hierarchies that were exacerbated during the colonial era. Nevertheless, Manu's perception of self-worth and prosperity is still influenced by the colonial legacies, despite his physical migration.

Additionally, the film investigates the ways in which migration is frequently a result of the unequal power dynamics that were established during the colonial era. Postcolonial theory posits that the migration from former colonies to former colonial powers is not solely a personal decision but also a consequence of the structural inequalities that were deep-seated during colonial rule. Manu's migration in *Dunki* is not solely an economic decision; it is also a symbolic journey of liberation from the constraints of the colonial past. The enduring influence of colonialism on the socio-economic realities of postcolonial societies is reflected in the migration experience. In contrast, the homeland is associated with destitution, a lack of opportunities, and the scars of colonial exploitation, whereas the West is perceived as a place



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

of opportunity and success. This dynamic illustrates the ongoing influence of colonial legacies on the identities and aspirations of individuals in the postcolonial world.

Additionally, the film's depiction of migration and cultural conflict mirrors the concept of "hybridity," a critical motif in postcolonial theory. The colonial encounter leads to the fusion of cultures, identities, and languages, which is referred to as hybridity. In *Dunki*, Manu's conflict with his identity is a representation of this hybrid condition, as he is entangled between his Indian heritage and the Western ideals he encounters abroad. The protagonist experiences emotional and psychological distress as a result of this cultural hybridity, as he struggles to reconcile his two identities. As Bhabha (1994) illustrates, "by introducing hybridity ... he emphasizes the agency of [the] colonized over Western hegemony. Hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures." The hybrid condition is a result of colonialism, in which colonized individuals frequently adopt aspects of the colonizer's culture while concurrently striving to preserve their own. Manu's identity crisis in *Dunki* is a direct consequence of this postcolonial hybridity, as he endeavors to negotiate the boundaries between tradition and modernity, the local and the global.

The migrant's relationship to the nation-state is also influenced by the colonial legacy. In the film, the concept of home is confounded by the colonial history. Manu's aspiration to reestablish a connection with his homeland and return to his ancestral origins is indicative of the influence of the past, despite his endeavor to establish a new identity in a foreign land. In postcolonial theory, the concept of "home" is frequently beset by contradictions. Although it signifies security and familiarity, it can also represent the oppressive history of colonization and the inequalities that result from it. Manu's duality is evident in his pursuit of a sense of belonging in both his homeland and the foreign land, as neither completely satisfies his need for identity and acceptance.

The emotional impact of migration in *Dunki* is also illuminated by postcolonial theory, which investigates the role of "othering." In the colonizing countries, migrants from former colonies are frequently marginalized and excluded, which compounds their sense of being outsiders or "others." This marginalization in the foreign land adds an additional layer of psychological strain to the migrant experience. Not only does Manu's journey involve escaping the socio-economic constraints of India, but it also involves confronting the new forms of



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

alienation and cultural conflict that arise when he is regarded as an outsider in the foreign land. The film depicts this alienation as a direct consequence of the postcolonial dynamic, in which expatriates from former colonies are perpetually identified by their cultural distinctions.

In summary, postcolonial theory offers a framework for comprehending the emotive and cultural challenges of migration in Dunki, which are influenced by the colonial legacy. The film emphasizes the psychological effects of colonial narratives on the migrant experience, demonstrating the ongoing influence of colonialism on cultural conflict, societal expectations, and identity. Manu's voyage is not merely a physical migration; it is also a psychological and emotional struggle to navigate the intricate legacies of hybridity, identity, and colonialism. The film ultimately emphasizes the impact of the colonial past on the current realities of migration and the difficulties associated with reconciling multiple identities in a postcolonial world.

#### *A Strain Theory Perspective*

The emotional struggles of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Manu, are reflected in the central themes of migration and cultural conflict in Dunki. The film investigates the ways in which these themes result in emotional distress, frustration, and strain, which can be analyzed using strain theory. Strain Theory, which was developed by sociologist Robert K. Merton, posits that individuals undergo emotional distress and stress when they are unable to achieve societal objectives through legitimate means. This frequently leads to deviant behavior, emotional distress, or even catastrophic outcomes. In the case of Manu, these strains have a profound impact on her cultural struggles and migration, compelling her to take drastic measures in order to achieve a better existence.

Following her brother's passing, Manu, a young woman from an impoverished family, is burdened with the significant responsibility of providing for her family. She experiences emotional distress as a result of this familial burden, as she is under immense pressure to succeed and provide for those she cherishes. This strain is the primary cause of Manu's aspiration to enhance her quality of life and transcend the constraints imposed by her socio-economic status. She begins operating a hotel in order to provide for her family and herself, as she is unable to make ends meet. Nevertheless, her frustration is further exacerbated by the hotel owner's persistent maltreatment and exploitation of her, which contributes to her



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

emotional distress. Manu begins to fantasize about an existence that is superior to her present circumstances, as she is unable to escape her oppressive situation.

She contemplates migration as a means of evading poverty and social injustice as a result of her aspirations. Manu, driven by a desire for financial stability, begins to entertain the notion of relocating to England, where she is convinced she can establish a livelihood and forge a more promising future. Nevertheless, she is compelled to pursue an illegal immigration route by the societal pressures to flourish and escape her impoverished environment. This decision, which is influenced by the pressure of her circumstances, is indicative of the psychological impact that societal expectations and a lack of opportunity can have on individuals. Strain Theory posits that individuals may pursue their aspirations through illegitimate means, such as irregular immigration, when legitimate opportunities for success are unavailable or closed.

Illegal immigration has been a source of difficulty and adversity for Manu. The act of illegally crossing borders is characterized by exploitation, uncertainty, and danger; however, she is compelled to persist by the desire to flee her challenging circumstances. The emotional strain she experiences during this period is severe, as she encounters the cultural and legal barriers that impede her progress and navigates a series of obstacles. The dread of being apprehended and the realization that her decision has endangered her life have exacerbated her emotional distress. In spite of these obstacles, she persists in her pursuit of success and the realization of her aspirations for a more fulfilling existence, motivated by the societal pressure to succeed.

In addition to Manu's emotional journey, her peers, who also come from impoverished families, share comparable aspirations and challenges. They are also influenced by the same societal pressures and decide to accompany her on the journey of illicit immigration. The emotional impact of migration on the individual and the community is underscored by the collective strain they endure as they endeavor to escape their impoverished circumstances. Nevertheless, the lamentable repercussions of illegal immigration are the ultimate result. Manu's friend commits suicide due to the emotional strain of the voyage and the obstacles of migration. This suicide serves as a potent illustration of the profound emotional impact that strain can have on individuals who are entangled in the cycle of poverty, societal expectations, and migration.



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

The devastating consequences of strain theory are starkly illustrated by the lamentable outcome of Manu's friend's suicide. The inability to accomplish societal objectives, such as financial success or upward mobility, through legitimate means results in feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and, in certain instances, fatal outcomes. Manu and her companions are compelled to engage in dangerous behaviors and take risks as a result of the societal pressures they encounter, which ultimately lead to devastating emotional consequences. The film vividly illustrates the emotional toll that migration, particularly through illicit means, can inflict on individuals as they attempt to navigate the intricate web of societal expectations, cultural conflict, and personal aspirations.

Dunki demonstrates how the emotional challenges associated with migration and cultural conflict can result in deviant behavior, such as illegal immigration, and catastrophic outcomes, such as suicide, using strain theory. The characters are motivated to take drastic measures by their aspiration for a better life, which is influenced by the pressures of destitution and societal expectations. The emotional distress and extreme toll of their circumstances serve as a potent commentary on the psychological impact of migration and the strain of navigating multiple identities in a foreign land. Dunki ultimately demonstrates how the societal pressures to flourish and escape poverty can influence individuals to make life-altering decisions, which may have severe emotional and social repercussions.

***Analysis of the Emotional Struggles***

The emotional struggles of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Manu, are reflected in the central themes of migration and cultural conflict in Dunki. The film investigates the ways in which these themes result in emotional distress, frustration, and strain, which can be analyzed using strain theory. Strain Theory, which was developed by sociologist Robert K. Merton, posits that individuals undergo emotional distress and stress when they are unable to achieve societal objectives through legitimate means. This frequently leads to deviant behavior, emotional distress, or even catastrophic outcomes. In Dunki, the characters are compelled to take desperate measures to flee their challenging circumstances as a result of the significant strain caused by migration and cultural conflict.



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

Following her brother's passing, Manu, a young woman from an impoverished family, is burdened with the significant responsibility of providing for her family. She experiences emotional distress as a result of this familial burden, as she is under immense pressure to succeed and provide for those she cherishes. Manu experiences feelings of helplessness as a result of his inability to attain financial stability through conventional methods. She establishes a hotel to provide for her family, but the hotel owner's maltreatment only serves to compound her emotional distress and frustration. Manu, who is unable to escape this oppressive environment, aspires to a better existence. She is convinced that she can achieve this by emigrating to England to work and earn a living.

In strain theory, when legitimate opportunities for achievement are obstructed, individuals frequently pursue alternative, occasionally deviant, methods to accomplish their objectives. In Manu's case, the absence of opportunities and the societal pressure to flee poverty motivate her to engage in illegal immigration. The strain caused by her circumstances is reflected in her decision to pursue this risky and perilous route. Manu is resolute in her determination to pursue this course of action, despite the numerous obstacles and hazards that accompany illegal immigration. She is convinced that it will offer her the financial security and sense of accomplishment that she so urgently desires. The strain she endures is particularly acute due to the dread of failure, the uncertainty of her journey, and the pressure of societal expectations, which exacerbate her emotional struggle.

Manu's circumstances are indicative of the stress that numerous individuals in comparable socioeconomic circumstances endure. Her peers, who are also from impoverished backgrounds, harbor comparable aspirations to escape destitution. The emotional duress that results from their mutual desire to escape their circumstances compels them to make the same decision—illegal immigration. The broader societal pressures that many migrants encounter are reflected in the group's collective decision. These pressures, which are derived from the aspiration to enhance one's quality of life, can induce individuals to engage in illicit or hazardous activities as a means of circumventing the constraints of their socioeconomic status.

Nevertheless, the process of clandestine immigration is characterized by peril and adversity. The emotive impact of this experience is depicted in the film, which demonstrates the catastrophic repercussions of migration. Tragically, one of Manu's companions takes his



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

own life due to the overwhelming stress of illegal immigration. His suicide is a potent illustration of the emotional toll that the characters must bear. He is driven to despair by the trauma and frustration of their voyage, as well as the inability to achieve their objectives through legitimate means. The extreme psychological effects that strain can have on individuals who are trapped in the cycle of poverty, societal expectations, and migration are underscored by this act of suicide.

In general, the film *Dunki* offers a compelling representation of the application of strain theory to comprehend the emotional challenges faced by migrants. The characters, particularly Manu, encounter substantial strain as they endeavor to attain societal objectives—including financial success and a better life—through illegitimate means as a result of the scarcity of opportunities. The essence of Strain Theory is reflected in the emotional distress caused by their migration, the tension between traditional cultural values and modern aspirations, and the societal pressures they encounter. The devastating psychological effects of strain and the potential for deviant behavior and severe emotional distress are underscored by the tragic outcomes, such as the suicide of Manu's comrade.

*Dunki* emphasizes the emotional turmoil and despair that may result when individuals are unable to satisfy societal expectations through conventional methods, as seen through the prism of strain theory. The film illustrates that the pursuit of success, which is motivated by internal desires and external pressures, can result in hazardous and destructive decisions when the legitimate pathways to success are obstructed. In the end, *Dunki* emphasizes the intricate relationship between migration, cultural conflict, and emotional strain, demonstrating the psychological impact that these forces can have on individuals who are between two cultures.

## **Conclusion**

Migration is depicted in *Dunki* as a reaction to societal duress, particularly when individuals feel entrapped by their socio-economic circumstances, according to the research findings. Manu's decision to pursue illegal immigration is indicative of the fact that individuals who are unable to accomplish societal objectives through legitimate means may turn to alternative methods, such as illegal immigration, to satisfy their aspirations for a better life. Strain theory posits that when traditional routes to success, such as stable employment or



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

education, are obstructed by poverty or a lack of opportunity, individuals may resort to deviant behavior, such as illicit migration, in an effort to achieve their objectives.

Emotional duress in *Dunki* is further exacerbated by cultural conflict. The characters, particularly Manu, experience internal conflict as a result of the tension between traditional cultural values and modern aspirations of prosperity. Her aspiration to relocate to England is motivated by a yearning to escape her challenging environment and conform to a more prosperous future. However, it also involves the challenge of reconciling her cultural identity with her aspirations. The emotional distress of the characters is exacerbated by this cultural conflict, which compels them to make extreme decisions such as illegal immigration.

The emotional toll of migration is starkly illustrated by the tragic suicide of Manu's comrade. The devastating consequences of emotional distress are underscored by his inability to manage the pressures of illegal immigration and the strain of societal expectations. The suicide serves as a reminder of the severe psychological consequences that strain can have on individuals who are unable to accomplish their objectives through conventional methods. This tragic event serves as an example of the severe repercussions that migration can have on mental health when it is undertaken in response to societal pressure.

The characters' actions are significantly influenced by the pressure to succeed and societal expectations. The film illustrates the desire of the characters, particularly those from impoverished origins, to transcend poverty and enhance their quality of life. Strain Theory posits that when individuals are unable to access legitimate pathways to success, they resort to alternative, frequently hazardous methods to accomplish their objectives. The societal pressure to conform to an idealized vision of success is a direct influence on Manu and her friends' decision to embark on illicit migration, which frequently results in decisions that are fraught with emotional strain and dangerous consequences.

*Dunki* demonstrates the psychological consequences of strain as the characters grapple with the emotional burden of their circumstances. The emotional resilience of individuals is put to the test during the migration process, as demonstrated in the film. Emotional breakdowns are the result of the accumulation of adversities, including destitution, exploitation, and the difficulty of adapting to new cultural environments. In particular, Manu's voyage is



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

characterized by substantial psychological distress as she attempts to navigate her migration in the face of overwhelming pressures.

## References

Agnew, R. (1992). *Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency*. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47–87.

Aitchison, G. (2023). *Border-Crossing: Immigration Law, Racism and Justified Resistance*. *Journal of Political Studies*, xx(x), xxx–xxx. [actual volume/issue/page numbers pending]

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Bhabra, G. K. (2007). *Rethinking modernity: Postcolonialism and the sociological imagination*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2009). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Desai, J. (2014). *Beyond Bollywood: The cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film*. Routledge.

Gray, J. (Director). (2013). *The immigrant* [Film]. The Weinstein Company.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.

Hirani, R. (Director). (2023). *Dunki* [Film]. Jio Studios; Red Chillies Entertainment; Rajkumar Hirani Films.

Khan, K. (Director & Co-producer). (2015, July 17). *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* [Film]. Salman Khan Films; Rockline Entertainments; Kabir Khan Films; Eros International.

Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.

Forster, M. (Director). (2007). *The kite runner* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/sociology-strain-theory>

<https://www.ebsco.com/strain-theory-sociology/research-starters/sociology>



ISSN Online: 2709-9180  
ISSN Print: 2709-9172

INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

*Vol. 7 No.4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 56-74*

Published by: Research Syndicate

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993). *Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431–466.

Merton, R. K. (1938). *Social Structure and Anomie*. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672–682.

Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press.

Nair, M. (Director). (2006). *The Namesake* [Film]. Fox Searchlight Pictures; UTV Motion Pictures; Cine Mosaic; Entertainment Farm.

Passas, N. (1995). *Explaining international crimes: A criminological approach*. In I. Tallgren & S. I. Reichel (Eds.), *Theories of International Migration*. United Nations Publications.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Gowariker, A. (Director & Producer). (2004, December 17). *Swades* [Film]. UTV Motion Pictures; Ashutosh Gowariker Productions.

Sengupta, S., & Times of India. (2023). Dunki Movie Review : Shah Rukh Khan's Dunki is dunked with love and longing [Review of Dunki Movie Review : Shah Rukh Khan's Dunki is dunked with love and longing, by R. Hirani]. Times of India.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/movie-> Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Unireviews/dunki/moviereview/106173480.cms

(sociology) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strain\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strain_theory) versity of Illinois Press.

The following chapter discusses sociological theories and stress theories: <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/criminology-criminal-justice>

The URL is <https://www.simplypsychology.org/mertons-strain-theory-deviance.html>.