

Portrayal of Library and Librarian in the Hindi Film ‘3 Idiots’

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of the Librarian and the role of the library in facilitating student learning in the Bollywood film ‘3 Idiots’ (2009), directed by Rajkumar Hirani and produced by Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Through a qualitative analysis of selected library-related scenes, the research explores how the librarian, the library space, and students interact with information resources.

The study conducted a close viewing of key sequences depicting the library environment, focusing on the ways students access information and the support provided by Librarian Dubey Ji. Although Dubey Ji is a minor character, his depiction underscores the vital contributions of library professionals in higher education. His character highlights the multifaceted identity of librarians as information facilitators, while also revealing the inherent tensions they face, being embedded within large institutional structures yet striving to empower individual learners.

The film’s portrayal offers valuable insights into the challenges and significance of librarianship in academic settings. Ultimately, the study draws lessons from ‘3 Idiots’ to advocate for stronger, more student-centered libraries. By critiquing rote memorization and presenting the library as a space for curiosity, reflection, and deep understanding, the movie reinforces the transformative potential of libraries in fostering genuine learning.

Keywords: *Library Representation, Librarian Dubey Ji, ‘3 Idiots’, Librarian in Hindi Cinema, Academic Libraries, Learning Support, Popular culture*

Introduction:

Libraries occupy a unique and paradoxical position within educational institutions and research institutes. They have a lot of books, journals and other resources that help students learn and do research. Libraries are also spaces where students can study and think. In colleges and universities, libraries are not just places to store information; they are also where students learn how to think and find answers on their own. This helps students do better academically and become smarter. The 2009 film '*3 Idiots*' is a popular Indian film that discusses how educational institutions should be improved (Hirani, 2009). Based loosely on Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone* (2004), became one of the highest-grossing Indian films of its time and a cultural touchstone for discussions about education reform (Bhagat, 2004). The movie says that students should learn because they want to, not just because they are afraid of failing. This message really resonated with students and parents in India who face significant pressure to perform well on tests. The movie is funny. It also makes some serious points about education. Even though the library is not the movie's focus, it still plays a significant role.

There are two things about libraries in the movie that are worth talking about. One is the library at fictional Imperial College of Engineering, where some of the scenes take place. The other is the character of Librarian Dubey Ji, who is played by Akhil Mishra. Even though he is in the movie for only a short period of time, he has become a well-known character because of a funny scene in which he translates an English speech into Hindi and Sanskrit for an introductory speech on Teacher's Day. The movie uses him to show how colleges and libraries are run and how people are expected to behave. At the time, the library is also where the movie reinforces its message about learning.

Literature Review:

This paper critically examines two main things, how the Librarian Dubey Ji character is portrayed in the movie '*3 Idiots*', and how important libraries are for learning. It says that the movie shows libraries as places that help people learn. It also shows that librarians are often portrayed stereotypically in movies and TV shows (Sharma & Naskar, 2026). Libraries like the one in '*3 Idiots*' are really important for learning, and librarians like Librarian Dubey Ji play a role in helping people learn.

Khanna (2022) examines the educational learning ecosystem in India through an analysis of the Bollywood film *3 Idiots*. The study explores the processes of teaching and learning represented in the film, with particular attention to the psychological and emotional conditions experienced by students in higher education institutions. Khanna highlights the academic pressures, competitive environment, and mental health challenges faced by students, including issues related to stress and student suicides. The paper argues that educators and administrators should critically reflect on their pedagogical practices and interactions with students in order to create a more supportive and student-centered learning environment. By portraying the aspirations, struggles, and realities of young learners, *3 Idiots* serves as a medium for understanding the strengths and shortcomings of the Indian higher education ecosystem, ultimately emphasizing the need for educational reform (Khanna, 2022).

Similarly, Kharbanda (2022) identifies the central theme of *3 Idiots* as the tension between rote memorization and conceptual understanding. The study argues that the film challenges traditional educational practices that prioritize repetition and examination performance over genuine learning and knowledge acquisition. This critique is particularly relevant to educational institutions and libraries, which function as spaces for independent inquiry, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Kharbanda highlights the well-known "Chatur speech" sequence as a powerful illustration of the limitations of rote learning. In this scene, the character relies entirely on memorized content without understanding its meaning, resulting in both comic and critical consequences. The episode

underscores the film's broader message that meaningful education requires comprehension, creativity, and intellectual engagement rather than mechanical repetition (Kharbanda, 2022).

The critical examination of India's education system is further explored by TNN, Times of India (2016) argues that *3 Idiots* presents a strong critique of excessive competition, examination-oriented learning, and societal expectations imposed on students. Through the characters of Rancho, Farhan, and Raju, the film explores themes of individualism, creativity, self-discovery, and personal fulfillment. Rajkumar Hirani employs humor, satire, and emotional storytelling to advocate for excellence rather than conventional measures of success, while simultaneously encouraging innovation over conformity. The study suggests that the film challenges dominant educational paradigms and promotes a more holistic understanding of learning and achievement (India, 2016).

The critical reception of *3 Idiots* has also attracted considerable scholarly and popular attention. The film, directed by Rajkumar Hirani and loosely adapted from Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone*, has been widely praised for its incisive critique of India's rote-learning education system and its emphasis on friendship, creativity, and passion-driven success. On Rotten Tomatoes, the film maintains a 100% approval rating based on professional reviews, reflecting its broad critical acclaim (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). Elley (2009), writing for *Variety*, observed that although the narrative develops gradually, it delivers a strong emotional impact in its latter half. Similarly, Abele (2010) praised the film's vitality and optimism, noting that Rancho's recurring phrase, "All is well," symbolizes the film's uplifting spirit.

Indian film critics have also responded positively to the film. Sinanan (2015) awarded *3 Idiots* four out of five stars, arguing that the film demonstrates the enduring strength of commercial Hindi cinema. Joshi (2015) acknowledged Hirani's tendency toward moral commentary while appreciating the film's engagement with educational and social issues. Gupta (2015) similarly praised the film's strengths despite identifying certain narrative limitations. Beyond mainstream criticism, scholarly analyses have highlighted the film's significance as a pedagogical and sociocultural text. Hussain and Ahmad (2016) argue that *3 Idiots* influences attitudes toward education by encouraging critical reflection on examination pressure, student motivation, and educational inequality. Likewise, Tahir and Syed's multimodal discourse analysis demonstrates how the film challenges established social norms and promotes inclusive, learner-centered educational practices. Although some reviewers have noted shortcomings such as exaggerated humor and occasional narrative inconsistencies (Hollywood Reporter, 2009), the film continues to be regarded as a transformative cultural text that offers valuable insights into educational reform, particularly within the context of developing societies.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that *3 Idiots* functions as both a cinematic critique and a pedagogical resource. Scholars consistently identify its challenge to rote learning, competitive educational cultures, and restrictive social expectations, while emphasizing its advocacy of creativity, critical thinking, and student well-being. Consequently, the film remains an important reference point in discussions of educational reform, learner-centered pedagogy, and the broader educational experiences of students in contemporary India (Khanna, 2022; Kharbanda, 2022; Hussain & Ahmad, 2016).

Methodology

This study uses qualitative and textual analysis as well as content analysis of the Hindi film '3 Idiots'. The film is treated as a cultural text, and selected scenes involving the library and Librarian are examined for their visual, narrative, and symbolic meanings. The analysis focuses on dialogue, character behaviour, institutional setting, and the broader educational message of the film. The film was watched in full multiple times, and scenes involving the library or the librarian were time stamped and transcribed. The method is interpretive. It draws on close reading of the film's scenes

and relates them to established ideas about libraries, librarianship, and learning. The study also considers how the film reflects stereotypes and social expectations surrounding librarians in educational institutions.

Objectives of the Study:

This study aims to critically examine the portrayal of Librarian Dubey Ji and the academic library in Rajkumar Hirani's '*3 Idiots*' (2009) from a Library and Information Science (LIS) perspective, analysing how the film reflects both the marginalised social status of librarians and the transformative potential of libraries in higher education.

1. To analyse the character of Librarian Dubey Ji (Akhil Mishra) as a representation of library professionals in Indian higher educational institutions, with particular focus on the extreme humiliation depicted in the prank scene and his assertion of professional dignity.
2. To explore the institutional and social dynamics revealed in the film, including the tensions between librarians' "permanent" status and their professional insignificance, as well as the lack of recognition from principals, administrators, and students.
3. To examine how the film portrays the academic library as a space that promotes curiosity, critical thinking, reflection, creativity, and self-directed learning, in contrast to the dominant culture of rote memorization.
4. To investigate the ways in which '*3 Idiots*' mirrors real-world challenges faced by librarians, such as invisibility within hierarchical structures, clerical stereotyping, and limited integration into academic decision-making, while highlighting their essential role as knowledge facilitators.
5. To assess the broader cultural and perceptual impact of the film on public understanding of librarianship and to derive implications for enhancing the status, recognition, and integration of library professionals in Indian higher education.

Synopsis and story line Context:

The movie '*3 Idiots*' follows three engineering students. These students are Rancho, played by Aamir Khan; Farhan, played by R. Madhavan; and Raju, played by Sharman Joshi. They are all attending the fictional Imperial College of Engineering in New Delhi ("*IIM-B Alumnus Shares Pictures of Real Locations From the Movie '3 Idiots'*," 2022).

The story of '*3 Idiots*' is told by Farhan and Raju as they try to find their friend Rancho. Rancho has been missing from their lives since they graduated from college. The main person opposed to them is the college's director, Professor Viru Sahastrabuddhe. People call him 'Virus'. He is played by Boman Irani. Professor Viru Sahastrabuddhe believes in a type of education that is based on fear and competition. This is very different from Rancho's approach to education. Rancho believes that learning should be fun and that people should be curious (Ramachandran, 2010).

The movie '*3 Idiots*' examines problems with the Indian education system. It does this by showing serious scenes. These scenes include exams, classroom arguments, and moments when students work together. (Khanna, 2022) Libraries are shown in parts of the movie '*3 Idiots*'. They are shown as places where students study, but they also have a deeper meaning. The librarian, Dubey Ji, appears in a few scenes and is mentioned in others. He is shown as a man of his age, wearing the typical attire of an institution employee.

Librarian Dubey Ji:

Librarian Dubey Ji is a minor character, but his impact is strong because the film uses him to create a memorable contrast between discipline and disorder. He is presented as an authority figure in the college library, representing institutional control. His manner, speech, and presence fit the conventional image of a strict librarian in a highly regulated educational environment. The character

becomes especially important in the famous speech scene involving Chatur Ramalingam. In that sequence, the library serves as the setting for a preparation strategy based on memorisation rather than understanding. This is significant because Chatur embodies the kind of student the film criticises: someone who can reproduce language mechanically but lacks genuine comprehension. Librarian Dubey Ji is drawn into this scene as part of the institutional background that makes the moment believable.

Dubey Ji also reflects a broader cultural stereotype. In many Indian educational narratives, librarians are shown as guardians of silence, order, and rules. While this image recognises the librarian's role in maintaining a productive learning environment, it can also reduce the profession to mere discipline enforcement. '3 Idiots' uses this familiar image for comic effect, but the result is more complex than simple mockery. The librarian is both respected as an authority figure and used as a vehicle for satire. His character should also be understood within the film's emotional economy. '3 Idiots' relies on memorable supporting roles to create a vivid educational world. Dubey Ji contributes to that world by grounding the library scene in real institutional culture. Even though he appears briefly, he helps define the college's atmosphere and the rules governing student behaviour.

The Library Scene as Narrative Device:

The library scenes in '3 Idiots' do some things in the movie. The library is a place that looks very different from the classroom and the examination hall. It is quiet and peaceful. It has many books and other resources that students can learn from. This shows that the movie thinks learning should be fun, not just something people do because they have to. The library in the movie is also well-organised and offers many facilities, like other institutions. The library in the movie is also a place where students can learn on their own. They do not just sit in class and listen to the teacher; they also have to read books and talk to their friends about what they're learning. This is important because the movie does not think that people should just memorise things to be successful. It thinks people should be curious and work hard to learn. The library is a place where students can do this.

Libraries are also helpful because they give students a peaceful place to study. They have tools and resources that students can use to learn new things. This is especially helpful in a competitive environment. The library in '3 Idiots' is a place where students can think, study, ask questions, and prepare for their exams.

The movie's message is the same as the value of libraries in life. Students who use libraries frequently tend to read more, conduct research, and feel more confident in school. In general, the movie shows that libraries help people understand what they are learning. Libraries help turn information into knowledge. The library in '3 Idiots' and libraries in life are very important for students. The library scenes in '3 Idiots' show how important libraries are for learning.

Key Findings of the Study:

1. **Marginalized Portrayal and Humiliation of Librarians:** The film '3 Idiots' presents Librarian Dubey Ji (Akhil Mishra) as a minor yet symbolically powerful character who endures extreme humiliation. The prank scene, where Dubey Ji desperately asserts his right to be called "sir" and highlights his "permanent" status, exposes the profound identity crisis and lack of professional dignity faced by librarians in Indian higher education. This comedic moment subtly critiques how librarians are treated as peripheral, exploitable figures rather than respected academic partners.
2. **Low Social and Institutional Status :** Despite being diligent and knowledgeable (e.g., assisting with Chatur's speech), Dubey Ji embodies the poor social status of librarians. The movie illustrates how principals, administrators, and students rarely accord librarians the respect given to teaching faculty. Librarians are viewed as performing non-substantial, clerical roles within rigid hierarchical structures, leading to their systematic invisibility and marginalization in decision-making, budgets, and policy matters.

3. Institutional Permanence vs. Professional Insignificance: Dubey Ji's emphasis on his permanent position ironically highlights the entrapment of library professionals in low-prestige roles. While they provide continuity in educational institutions as students and faculty come and go, this longevity does not translate into power, recognition, or integration into the academic mainstream.
4. Positive Role of the Library as a Learning Space: Amid its critique of rote memorization and exam-centric education, the film portrays the academic library as a vital space that encourages curiosity, critical thinking, reflection, creativity, and self-directed learning. It aligns library values with the movie's advocacy for deep understanding over superficial fact-repetition.
5. Librarians as Knowledge Facilitators : Even in a minor role, Dubey Ji represents the essential contributions of library professionals in helping students access and engage with information, reinforcing that librarians are integral to the educational ecosystem despite their undervalued status.
6. Cultural and Perceptual Impact : Popular cinema like *3 Idiots* serves as a mirror to societal attitudes toward librarianship while shaping public perceptions. The film's layered depiction calls for greater recognition, respect, and integration of librarians and libraries as the intellectual heart of higher education institutions, promoting innovation and lifelong learning.

These findings underscore the dual nature of the film's message: it critiques systemic flaws in education while offering valuable LIS insights into the challenges and untapped potential of library professionals in contemporary Indian society. The study positions *3 Idiots* as a significant cultural text for advancing discussions on professional identity, stereotypes, and the decolonization of knowledge practices in Library and Information Science.

Discussion:

The portrayal of Librarian Dubey Ji and the academic library in the film '3 Idiots' provides important insights into the role of libraries and librarians within higher education. Even though the movie is mostly about the harms of rote learning and excessive academic pressure, it also shows how important libraries are. Libraries help people get knowledge, learn on their own and grow intellectually. Libraries are an important part of education. It helps students learn and grow. It supports the teachers (Khanna, 2022).

The Humiliation of Librarian Dubey Ji and the Marginalized Social Status of Librarians in '3 Idiots':

One of the most telling scenes in Rajkumar Hirani's *3 Idiots* (2009) occurs during the prank orchestrated by Rancho (Aamir Khan) involving Librarian Dubey Ji (Akhil Mishra). In this sequence, Rancho jokingly informs Dubey Ji, "Librarian Dubey Ji, the director sir is calling, so Dubey Jimeet, the director of the school." Dubey Ji, eager for recognition, responds assertively: "You call me sir." When confronted by the director, who asks, "Who are you?", Dubey Ji replies, "I am Dubey Librarian, sir. I am sir." The director's sarcastic "Congratulations" delivers the final blow. Dubey Ji further emphasizes his "permanent" status in the institution.

On the surface, this moment serves as light-hearted comedy typical of the film's style. However, a deeper critical reading reveals it as a poignant and unflinching portrayal of the **extreme humiliation** faced by library professionals in Indian higher education institutions. The scene masterfully exposes the precarious and undervalued social position of librarians, who are often treated as insignificant cogs in a large bureaucratic machine rather than vital knowledge facilitators.

Humiliation and the Assertion of Dignity:

Dubey Ji's desperate insistence on being addressed as "sir" is not mere comic exaggeration; it underscores a profound identity crisis. In Indian academic culture, titles like "sir" or "ma'am" carry significant weight, symbolizing respect and authority. Students routinely use them for professors and administrators, yet librarians are rarely afforded the same courtesy. By having Dubey Ji repeatedly

demand this basic recognition, the film highlights how librarians must constantly fight for the professional dignity that is automatically granted to others. The director's mocking "Congratulations" upon learning his identity brutally dismisses this claim, reducing Dubey Ji's lifelong service to a punchline.

This humiliation is compounded by the prank's context. Rancho uses Dubey Ji as a mere tool to sabotage Chatur's speech, revealing how even well-intentioned protagonists (and by extension, the student body) view the librarian as peripheral and exploitable. The librarian is not a respected colleague but a convenient minor character in someone else's scheme.

Institutional Permanence vs. Professional Insignificance:

Dubey Ji's proud declaration of being "permanent" staff is particularly tragic. While it signals job security in a contractual-heavy academic ecosystem, it also ironically underscores his entrapment in a low-status role. He remains a fixture in the institution long after batches of students and even many faculty move on, yet this longevity brings neither power nor prestige. The film subtly critiques how librarians, despite their essential role in organizing knowledge and supporting learning, are rendered invisible within hierarchical structures dominated by principals, deans, and teaching faculty.

In reality, this mirrors the lived experiences of many librarians in Indian colleges and universities. Principals and administrators often fail to recognize librarians as academic partners, viewing the library merely as a support service rather than the intellectual heart of the institution. Budgets, decision-making, and policy roles rarely include librarians meaningfully, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization.

Broader Social Commentary on Librarianship:

Through Dubey Ji's portrayal, '*3 Idiots*' beautifully albeit painfully illustrates the **poor social status** of librarians. He is depicted as diligent and knowledgeable (e.g., helping craft Chatur's speech), yet the narrative consistently frames him as a figure of ridicule rather than respect. This is not overt villainy but a systemic devaluation: the job is seen as non-substantial, clerical, and lacking the intellectual glamour associated with teaching or research.

The movie thus serves as a mirror to society's attitudes. In an era when the film powerfully critiques rote learning and champions curiosity-driven education, it simultaneously exposes how the very infrastructure enabling such learning the library and its staff is undervalued. Dubey Ji embodies the quiet frustration of professionals who safeguard knowledge but receive little acknowledgment for it. His character, though minor, becomes a powerful symbol of the invisibility and disrespect faced by library and information science professionals in higher education.

This layered depiction adds depth to the film's educational critique. While '*3 Idiots*' inspires viewers to rethink learning, it also implicitly calls for a reevaluation of the support systems and the people behind them that make meaningful education possible. The humiliation of Dubey Ji is not just comedic fodder; it is a subtle yet devastating commentary on the need for greater recognition, respect, and integration of librarians into the academic mainstream.

Ultimately, the movie '*3 Idiots*' enlightens us on how important libraries and librarians are. The funny conversation between Dubey Ji and the director is not just funny; it also shows that librarians are important and deserve respect just as other teachers do. The movie shows that libraries are part of learning, innovation, and educational success.

Conclusion:

This study explores the portrayal of Librarian Dubey Ji and the academic library in Rajkumar Hirani's '*3 Idiots*' (2009) through a Library and Information Science lens. While the film primarily critiques rote memorization, exam pressure, and the flaws of traditional education systems, it simultaneously offers nuanced insights into the role of libraries as vital spaces for genuine learning.

Yet, beneath the surface comedy lies a deeper, more poignant commentary on the **extreme humiliation** and marginalized social status of librarians in Indian higher education institutions.

The character of Librarian Dubey Ji (Akhil Mishra), though appearing only briefly, emerges as a significant figure. He embodies the dedicated professional who safeguards knowledge, assists students in finding information, and remains a permanent fixture in the educational ecosystem. However, the film masterfully exposes the harsh realities of his position. In the memorable prank scene, Rancho tricks Dubey Ji by announcing that the director is calling him, prompting the librarian's eager assertion: "You call me sir." When questioned by the director, Dubey Ji declares, "I am Dubey Librarian, sir. I am sir," only to receive a sarcastic "Congratulations." His proud emphasis on being "permanent" staff further intensifies the tragedy. What appears as light-hearted humor reveals a profound identity crisis: librarians must constantly fight for basic professional dignity such as being addressed as "sir", that is automatically granted to teaching faculty and administrators.

This scene brilliantly illustrates the **poor social status** of librarians. Dubey Ji is portrayed as diligent and knowledgeable (even helping craft Chatur's speech), yet he is consistently reduced to a peripheral, exploitable figure a convenient tool in the students' schemes rather than a respected academic partner. The film subtly critiques how principals and institutional hierarchies view librarians as insignificant cogs in a bureaucratic machine, rarely involving them in meaningful decision-making, budgets, or policy roles. Students, too, seldom extend the respect afforded to professors, reflecting broader societal attitudes that frame librarianship as non-substantial, clerical work lacking intellectual prestige.

Despite these systemic challenges, the film presents the library as an empowering educational space that fosters curiosity, critical thinking, creativity, and self-directed learning. By contrasting deep understanding with mere memorization, '*3 Idiots*' aligns with the core values of librarianship and underscores the library's transformative potential in enabling meaningful engagement with knowledge.

From a broader perspective, this cinematic portrayal serves as a powerful cultural text that both mirrors and shapes public perceptions of libraries and librarians. The humiliation of Dubey Ji is not mere comedic fodder; it delivers a subtle yet devastating commentary on the invisibility and disrespect faced by library professionals. It calls for greater recognition, respect, and integration of librarians into the academic mainstream as essential partners in fostering innovation and lifelong learning.

Ultimately, '*3 Idiots*' reinforces that while librarians like Dubey Ji may occupy minor roles on screen and in institutional hierarchies, their contributions remain central to authentic education. This study highlights the need for libraries and library professionals to be valued not as peripheral support services, but as the intellectual heart of higher education institutions in contemporary Indian society.

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