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Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky FSV UK
Research proposal for MARS M.A. Thesis
Teze MAGISTERSKÉ diplomové práce studijního programu MARS

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY STUDENT:

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| Student's surname and given name: Challapalli Ishita | Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny: |
| Start of studies for MARS (Immatriculation date): October 2022 | |
| Your faculty e-mail: 97924668@fsv.cuni.cz | |
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Thesis title in English:
 Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films

Expected date of submission (semester, academic year – example: *SS 2021/2022*)
 (Thesis can be submitted no sooner than eight months after acceptance of the research proposal)
 Semester 4, 2024

Main research question (max. 250 characters):

- How does mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) represent South India's cultural identity?
- How are South Indian movies representing the South's cultural identity?

Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters):

The South Indian cinema industry, comprising Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam film industries, distinguishes itself from Bollywood on the basis of culture, tradition, linguistic diversity, and narration style. There is a significant gap in understanding how South Indian cinema is active as compared to Bollywood's representation of the South's culture and identity. Existing literature in postcolonial studies, with scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, has primarily focused on concepts of essentialism, internal othering, and subaltern studies. These theories have been extensively applied to Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, as seen in works by S. Kumar (2013), A. Mudambi (2013), C. Chakraborty (2003), and R. Vasudevan (2011). Yet, South Indian cinema's role in this context has received limited attention.

The few studies that do address South Indian cinema often emphasise linguistic diversity, cultural nuances, and regional identities (Chakravarty, 2011). However, a comprehensive analysis of how South Indian cinema engages with, contests, and reshapes its identity in Bollywood and beyond is underrepresented. The research gap is evident in the analysis of South India's representation in Bollywood. While sporadic discussions exist, a systematic examination of discourses and narratives is notably lacking. This representation forms the basis for the proposed critical discourse analysis, aiming to scrutinise portrayals of South India in both Bollywood and South Indian cinema, focusing on language, culture, and identity.

South Indian films provide a distinctive perspective on regional cultural nuances, storytelling traditions, and identity representation, differing from broader portrayals in mainstream Bollywood. Hence, studying them is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of the diverse and rich cultural identities within India.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

The expected theoretical framework will be drawn from foundational concepts of postcolonial studies, namely Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Internal Othering and Subaltern studies, and Homi K. Bhabha's Essentialism.

By applying the Fairclough Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research aims to dissect instances of representation of South India in Bollywood, shedding light on language, cultural tropes, and identity markers. The analysis will align with the theoretical framework to unveil how colonial stereotypes are perpetuated and reinforced through discourse.

The selection of five films from each southern state (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) will serve as case studies to examine how South Indian cinema engages with and challenges these stereotypes.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

Four Bollywood films and five South Indian films will be chosen. The criteria for selecting these films are that one or multiple lead characters in the film represent or portray South Indian individuals.

To examine the chosen films, Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be employed as the analytical framework. Given that films are multimodal texts, this approach facilitates a systematic exploration of narrative, dialogue, visual elements, and underlying ideologies, focusing on their role in shaping cultural and identity discourses.

The analysis encompasses both linguistic and visual elements within the films, revealing how these components contribute to cultural representation and identity formation. Fairclough's CDA provides a structured method for dissecting discourse, revealing power dynamics, ideologies, and social implications.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

The expected Bollywood movies that I will be analysing using CDA are:

- Chennai Express (2013), *dir.* Rohit Shetty, UTV Motion Pictures and Red Chillies Entertainment.
- Ra.One (2011), *dir.* Anubhav Sinha, Red Chillies Entertainment.
- Two States (2014), *dir.* Abhishek Varman, Dharma Productions and Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.
- Meenakshi Sundareshwar (2021), *dir.* Vivek Soni, Dharma Productions.

Similarly, the South Indian movies I have chosen are

- Shatamanam Bhavati (2017), *dir.* Satish Vegesna, Sri Venkateswara Creations
- Kantara (2022), *dir.* Rishab Shetty, Hombale Films.
- Care of Kancharapalem (2018), *dir.* Venkatesh Maha, Paruchuri Vijaya Praveena Arts.
- Peranbu (2018), *dir.* Ram, Shree Rajalakshmi Films
- Kumbalangi Nights (2019) *dir.* Madhu C. Narayanan, Fahadh Faasil and Friends and Working Class Hero

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

I. Introduction

- Introduction to the research topic and its significance.
- Brief overview of the theoretical framework, emphasising Spivak's Internal Othering, Subaltern studies, and Bhabha's Essentialism.
- Statement of the research questions and objectives.

II. Literature Review

- In-depth exploration of key concepts in postcolonial studies, focusing on Spivak's Internal Othering, Subaltern studies, and Bhabha's Essentialism.
- Discussion of existing research on the representation of South India in Indian cinema, with a particular emphasis on Bollywood and South Indian cinema.

III. Theoretical Framework

- Detailed explanation and integration of Spivak's Internal Othering, Subaltern studies, and Bhabha's Essentialism into the analysis of cultural representation in cinema.
- Discussion on how these theoretical concepts will be applied to uncover and analyse colonial stereotypes in the selected films.

IV. Methodology

- Overview of the Fairclough Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its relevance to the research.
- Explanation of the criteria for film selection and the rationale behind choosing four Bollywood films and five South Indian films.
- Description of the multimodal approach to analysis, considering linguistic and visual elements.

V. Case Studies: Bollywood

- Analysis of four Bollywood films, focusing on instances of representing South India and perpetuating colonial stereotypes.
- Application of Fairclough's CDA to dissect language, cultural tropes, and identity markers in these films.

VI. Case Studies: South Indian Cinema

- Analysis of five South Indian films, exploring how they engage with and challenge colonial stereotypes.
- Examination of language, cultural tropes, and identity markers through the lens of Fairclough's CDA.

VII. Discussion and Interpretation

- Comparative examination of the findings from South Indian cinema and Bollywood.

VIII. Conclusion

- Summary of Findings

IX. References/Bibliography

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterised on 2-5 lines):

Ashcroft, B. (2012). Bollywood, Postcolonial Transformation and Modernity. Travels of Bollywood Cinema: From Bombay to LA, 1-18 : Text on how the Indian film industry, particularly Bollywood, has played a significant role in the postcolonial transformation and modernization of India.

Kusuma, K. S. (2020). South Indian Cinema: A Study of Culture, Production, and Consumption. In Handbook of Research on Social and Cultural Dynamics in Indian Cinema (pp. 303-313). IGI Global : The book provides insight on the cultural, production, and consumption aspects of the South Indian film industry shedding light on its historical development, regional influences, and audience reception.

Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2002). Discourse analysis as theory and method. sage : a comprehensive guide to the theoretical foundations and practical methods of discourse analysis. This book provides insights into the application of discourse analysis across various disciplines and emphasises its role in understanding language, power, and social contexts.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2013). Post-colonial studies: The key concepts. routledge . : It is a reference guide that introduces and explores the core concepts and themes within the field of post-colonial studies. This book provides a concise and accessible overview of the key ideas, theorists, and critical approaches that are central to the examination of post-colonial literature, culture, and identity.

Roy, A. G. (Ed.). (2012). The magic of Bollywood: At home and abroad. SAGE Publications India . : Collection of essays that explore how Bollywood movies captivate audiences both in India and abroad, shedding light on their cultural, social, and economic significance within and beyond the Indian subcontinent.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

Asian and Asian American Representation in Selected American Films (Iva Buryšková), University of Pardubice, Faculty of Philosophy, 2023

Gender analysis of the Dev DD series (Nikola Sichlerová) Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2020 (<https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/116735>)

Date / Signature of the student:

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THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

.....
Surname and name of the supervisor: Nicoletta, Gerardo Costabile

Date / Signature of the supervisor: 11 November 2023

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

Kress, G., van Leeuwen, T. (2001). Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication. London: Edward Arnold.

Rose, G. (2016). Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials (4th ed.). Sage.

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry (podatelna) in two copies, before the deadline. This deadline is published in the current academic year schedule.

Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Department of Media Studies secretariat. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF THE MARS STUDY PROGRAM.

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism (ICSJ)

Department of Media Studies

Master's Thesis

2024

Ishita Challapalli

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism (ICSJ)

Department of Media Studies

**Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian
Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films**

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Ishita Challapalli

Study programme: Media and Area Studies (MARS)

Supervisor: Prof. Gerardo Costabile Nicoletta

Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

- 1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.**
- 2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.**
- 3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.**

In Prague on

Ishita Challapalli

29 July 2024

References

CHALLAPALLI, Ishita. *Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films*. Praha, 2024. 97 s. Master's thesis (Mgr). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism and the Institute of International Studies, Department of Social Sciences. Supervisor prof. Gerardo Costabile Nicoletta.

Length of the Thesis: 111844

Abstract

This thesis explores the depiction of Southern Indian cultural identities in mainstream Bollywood and South Indian films, focusing on how these portrayals reflect regional, national, and cultural dynamics. The study intends to answer two research questions: How does mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) represent South India's cultural identity, and how do South Indian movies represent the South's cultural identity? It plans on doing so by investigating how Bollywood, often criticised for presenting a North Indian-centric view, contrasts with South Indian cinema's approach to representing its own culture. By analysing a selection of films from both industries, this research examines how these portrayals have evolved over the past decade in response to changing societal attitudes and cinematic trends. The analysis employs theories from Cultural Studies, including concepts of Othering, Subaltern Studies, and Essentialism, to understand how cultural identities are represented and perceived. The chosen films represent a range of portrayals, from stereotypical to more nuanced, providing insights into how these industries address and sometimes perpetuate cultural stereotypes. This thesis reveals the complexity of Bollywood's portrayal of Southern India and highlights the authentic, often more respectful representations found in South Indian cinema. By comparing these different cinematic approaches, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of cultural representation in Indian cinema.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá zobrazení kulturních identit jižní Indie v mainstreamových filmech Bollywoodu a filmech z jižní Indie, přičemž se zaměřuje na to, jak tato zobrazení odrážejí regionální, národní a kulturní dynamiku. Studie má za cíl odpovědět na dvě výzkumné otázky: Jak mainstreamové indické kino (Bollywood) představuje kulturní identitu jižní Indie a jak filmy z jižní Indie zobrazují kulturní identitu jihu? Plánuje to prověřením toho, jak Bollywood, často kritizovaný za prezentaci pohledu zaměřeného na severní Indii, kontrastuje s přístupem filmů z jižní Indie k zobrazování jejich vlastní kultury. Analýzou výběru filmů z obou průmyslů tato studie zkoumá, jak se tato zobrazení vyvíjela během posledního desetiletí v reakci na měnící se společenské postoje a filmové trendy. Analýza využívá teorie z kulturních studií, včetně konceptů "Othering", subalterních studií a esencialismu, k pochopení toho, jak jsou kulturní identity zobrazovány a vnímány. Vybrané filmy představují škálu zobrazení, od stereotypních po více

nuancovaná, poskytující náhled na to, jak tyto průmysly řeší a někdy i udržují kulturní stereotypy. Tato diplomová práce odhaluje složitost v zobrazení jižní Indie v Bollywoodu a zdůrazňuje autentická, často více respektující zobrazení, která se nacházejí ve filmu z jižní Indie. Porovnáním těchto různých filmových přístupů studie přispívá k hlubšímu pochopení kulturní reprezentace v indickém kinematografu.

Keywords

Culture, identity, Bollywood, power, hegemony, othering, essentialism, subaltern.

Klíčová slova

Kultura, identita, Bollywood, moc, hegemonie, othering, esencialismus, subaltern.

Název práce

Reprezentace kulturní identity v mainstreamové indické kinematografii (Bollywood) a jihoindických filmech

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Introduction

In recent years, the representation of cultural identities in cinema has become an increasingly prominent topic in mainstream discourse. The version of Indian culture that Bollywood exports is often a simplified and sanitised one, predominantly reflecting North Indian, Hindu-centric, and urban lifestyles. With movements emphasising cultural diversity and representation gaining traction across various media platforms, the spotlight is on how film industries portray different cultural identities. This heightened awareness shows the importance of investigating how mainstream Indian cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian films depict South Indian cultural identities. This thesis, titled "Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films," aims to critically analyse these portrayals, examining their implications for regionalism, nationalism, and cultural hegemony within the broader framework of Indian cinema.

Cinema plays a vital role in moulding and reflecting societal values and identities by being a powerful vehicle of cultural expression and dissemination. In the context of Indian cinema, the dichotomy between Bollywood and South Indian films offers a rich terrain for exploring cultural identity representations. Bollywood, often regarded as the mainstream face of Indian cinema, exerts considerable influence over both national and global perceptions of Indian culture. However, it frequently portrays a homogenised version of Indian identity, marginalising the diverse regional identities, particularly those from South India.

A significant factor contributing to this cultural homogenisation is the central government's push for Hindi as a unifying national language, which has faced resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states, particularly in the South. In regions like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, there is a strong emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to opposition against policies perceived as imposing Hindi dominance (Schiffman, 1999). This resistance highlights the broader cultural and political dynamics at play, where regional identities strive to maintain their distinctiveness against a backdrop of national integration efforts.

On the other hand, South Indian cinema, encompassing Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam film industries, provides a counter-narrative that celebrates and preserves the unique cultural identities of the South. This thesis, titled "Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films," aims to critically analyse how these two

cinematic domains depict South Indian cultural identities, highlighting the implications for regionalism, nationalism, and cultural hegemony within the broader framework of Indian cinema.

This study draws on several critical theoretical frameworks to comprehensively examine the representation of South Indian cultural identities, including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of Internal Othering, Subaltern studies, and Homi K. Bhabha's theories of Essentialism and hybridity.

Spivak's notion of internal othering is crucial for understanding how Bollywood, as the dominant cultural industry, often marginalises South Indian identities by portraying them as the 'other' within the national narrative. This internal othering process is a form of cultural imperialism where the dominant group's identity is normalised while the subaltern identities are exoticised or stereotyped (Spivak, 1988).

Rooted in postcolonial theory, Subaltern studies aim to recover and amplify the voices of marginalised and oppressed groups. This perspective is instrumental in analysing South Indian films that strive to depict their cultural identities authentically and resist the homogenising tendencies of mainstream Bollywood cinema. By focusing on the subaltern perspectives, this research highlights the resistance against cultural hegemony and the assertion of regional identities (Guha, 1982).

Homi Bhabha's critique of essentialism, which challenges the notion of fixed and monolithic cultural identities, and his concept of hybridity, which explores the creation of new, transcultural identities through colonial and postcolonial encounters, provide valuable insights into the complex identity politics in Indian cinema. Bhabha's theories help in understanding how South Indian films negotiate their cultural identities in the face of Bollywood's dominant narrative (Bhabha, 1994). This thesis seeks to answer the following primary research questions: How does mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) represent South India's cultural identity, and how do South Indian movies represent the South's cultural identity?

Origins and Evolution of Indian Cinema

The history of cinema in India is a rich and complex tapestry that reflects the nation's diverse cultural, linguistic, and social landscape. Indian cinema began its journey in the early 20th

century with the release of the first full-length feature film, "Raja Harishchandra," directed by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913. Phalke, often regarded as the father of Indian cinema, laid the foundation for a burgeoning film industry that would grow to become one of the largest in the world (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, silent films dominated the Indian film landscape, with filmmakers experimenting with various genres and storytelling techniques. The advent of sound in the early 1930s marked a significant turning point, leading to the production of India's first talkie, "Alam Ara," in 1931. This era also saw the rise of regional cinema, as filmmakers began to produce films in languages other than Hindi, catering to the diverse linguistic groups across the country.

The development of regional cinema industries in India can be traced back to the 1930s and 1940s when filmmakers started producing movies in languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. These regional industries grew alongside the mainstream Hindi film industry, often referred to as Bollywood, and developed their unique styles and narratives. Regional cinema, with its roots deeply embedded in local cultures and languages, offered a counter-narrative to the often homogenised portrayal of Indian society seen in Bollywood.

Regional cinema in India is a vital component of the country's film industry, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of its population. Each regional film industry, whether it is Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, or Malayalam, has developed its distinct identity, style, and thematic preoccupations. These industries often focus on local stories, traditions, and social issues, providing a more nuanced and authentic representation of their respective cultures compared to the pan-Indian narratives frequently seen in Bollywood.

Regional cinema, particularly in the states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, has made significant contributions to Indian cinema. These industries have produced films that not only resonate with local audiences but also garner national and international acclaim. The Bengali film industry, for instance, has been known for its intellectual and artistic rigour, with filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak gaining international recognition. Ray's "Pather Panchali" (1955), part of the acclaimed Apu Trilogy, is a landmark in Indian cinema and highlights the potential of regional films to tell profoundly human and universally resonant stories (Chakravarty, 1993).

Similarly, Tamil cinema, often referred to as Kollywood has a rich history dating back to the 1930s. It has been influential in shaping the cultural and social narratives of Tamil Nadu. The industry is known for its diverse range of genres, from intense dramas and social commentaries to commercial blockbusters. Directors like K. Balachander and Mani Ratnam have made significant contributions to Tamil cinema, pushing the boundaries of storytelling and filmmaking (Baskaran, 1996).

Telugu cinema, or Tollywood, has also played a crucial role in the evolution of Indian cinema. Known for its vibrant and high-energy films, the industry has produced a variety of genres, from mythological epics to contemporary social dramas. Telugu cinema has seen the rise of numerous stars and directors who have made a mark on the national stage. The first Telugu talkie, "Bhakta Prahlada," was released in 1932, and since then, the industry has grown exponentially, contributing significantly to the cultural landscape of India (Raghavendra, 2017).

The Language Divide: North vs. South

One of the most significant aspects of Indian cinema's evolution is the language divide between Hindi-speaking regions in the North and the diverse linguistic cultures of the South. This divide can be attributed to several historical, cultural, and political factors.

During British colonial rule, the city of Madras (now Chennai) served as a prominent administrative centre. The British labelled people from the South as "Madrasis," a term that homogenised the diverse cultures, languages, and identities of the Southern states. This label contributed to a perception of South Indians as a monolithic group, distinct from the North (Arnold, 1986). The colonial administration's focus on Hindi as a unifying language further marginalised the Southern languages, creating a linguistic and cultural rift that persists to this day (King, 1994).

After India gained independence in 1947, language became a contentious issue. The Constitution of India recognised Hindi as the official language, with English as an associate official language. However, this decision sparked resistance from the Southern states, where languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam were deeply entrenched in regional identities (Ramaswamy, 1997). The anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu during the 1960s are a notable example of this resistance, highlighting the cultural and linguistic pride of the Southern states (Subramanian, 1999).

Cultural Representation in Cinema

Bollywood, the mainstream Hindi film industry, has often been criticised for its portrayal of South Indians and their cultures. The stereotypical representation of South Indians as "Madrasis," characterised by exaggerated accents and caricatured behaviours, has reinforced the cultural divide. These portrayals have contributed to the marginalisation and Othering of South Indian identities within the national narrative (Chakravarty, 1993).

In response to Bollywood's dominance and its often reductive portrayals, regional cinema industries in the South have flourished, producing films that celebrate and authentically represent their unique cultural identities. These industries have not only provided a platform for regional languages and stories but have also challenged the hegemony of Bollywood by gaining national and international recognition. The success of films like "Baahubali" from the Telugu industry and "Pariyerum Perumal" from the Tamil industry exemplifies this trend, showcasing the rich storytelling and cultural depth of regional cinema (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999).

In contemporary India, the representation of cultural identities in cinema is more significant than ever, given the nation's evolving socio-political landscape. This study is particularly timely and relevant for several reasons. Firstly, the rise of regional political movements advocating for greater recognition and autonomy has heightened the discourse around cultural identity. For instance, the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu and the linguistic pride movements in states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh emphasise the importance of preserving and promoting regional cultures and languages (Pandian, 1992; Ramaswamy, 1997).

Bollywood, often seen as the cultural ambassador of India, tends to project a homogenised vision of Indian identity that aligns with North Indian, particularly Hindi-speaking, norms. This portrayal marginalises the rich cultural diversity of regions like South India, reinforcing a hegemonic cultural narrative (Dwyer, 2014). The portrayal of South Indians in Bollywood films frequently relies on stereotypes and caricatures, which not only perpetuate cultural misunderstandings but also reinforce social hierarchies (Ganti, 2012). This homogenisation process can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, where the dominant culture's values and norms are normalised at the expense of regional identities (Chatterji, 2003).

Recent trends in Indian cinema reflect a growing resistance to this cultural hegemony, implying a pivotal shift from the traditional dominance of Bollywood to a more inclusive recognition of regional cinemas. South Indian films have increasingly gained prominence and critical acclaim on both national and international platforms. The success of South Indian blockbusters like the "Baahubali" series has redefined the Pan-Indian cinematic narrative, a phenomenon referred to as '*Baahubalisation*' (Majumdar, 2022). This shift highlights the democratising effect of regional films, challenging the conventional Bollywood hegemony and bringing cultural authenticity to the forefront of Indian cinema (Ramachandran, 2023). The emergence of streaming platforms further democratises access to regional films, allowing diverse narratives to reach broader audiences, thereby reshaping cultural perceptions both nationally and globally.

Bollywood's global influence cannot be understated. As one of the largest film industries in the world, Bollywood has a significant impact on how Indian culture is perceived internationally. This global reach extends Bollywood's homogenised version of Indian identity far beyond national borders, influencing audiences and shaping perceptions of India and its diverse cultures. Bollywood films have gained immense popularity worldwide, particularly in countries with significant South Asian diasporas, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Gulf countries. The appeal of Bollywood films lies in their vibrant storytelling, colourful visuals, and emotionally charged narratives, which often transcend cultural boundaries (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2013).

The portrayal of South Indian identities within this globalised Bollywood framework often relies on stereotypes and essentialism. Films like "Chennai Express" and "Ra.One" exemplify how Bollywood's representations can reinforce reductive views of South Indian culture. These films, with their exaggerated accents and caricatured behaviours, contribute to a monolithic understanding of South Indian identities, obscuring the region's rich diversity and complexity. When international audiences consume these portrayals, they are likely to form skewed perceptions of South India based on these limited and often inaccurate representations (Dudrah, 2006).

Moreover, the global influence of Bollywood extends to shaping the narratives around national identity and cultural heritage. As Bollywood films circulate internationally, they play a crucial role in constructing and disseminating a particular vision of Indian culture. This vision,

often aligned with North Indian norms, can overshadow the cultural contributions of other regions, including South India. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai have discussed how media and cultural flows contribute to the global imagination of nations and regions (Appadurai, 1996). In the case of Bollywood, this global cultural flow often marginalises regional identities in favour of a homogenised national identity that is more palatable to international audiences.

This phenomenon has implications for the South Asian diaspora as well. Bollywood serves as a cultural touchstone for many in the diaspora, providing a connection to their heritage and identity. However, the limited and stereotypical portrayals of South Indian culture can lead to a disconnection or misrepresentation of their own regional identities. Diasporic audiences may find themselves negotiating between the Bollywood-constructed image of India and their personal and familial experiences of regional cultures (Bhattacharya, 2004). This dynamic emphasises the need for more diverse and authentic representations that reflect the true complexity of Indian cultural identities.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and critique of Bollywood's portrayal of regional cultures. Filmmakers and scholars are increasingly calling for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to cultural representation. The success of regional films on global platforms demonstrates a demand for stories that reflect the diversity of Indian culture. For instance, films like "Baahubali" and "KGF" have achieved international acclaim, showcasing the grandeur and cultural specificity of South Indian cinema (Dudrah, 2018). These films highlight the potential for regional cinemas to offer counter-narratives to Bollywood's homogenising tendencies, providing a richer and more varied representation of Indian culture to global audiences.

As mentioned earlier, the advent of digital streaming platforms has democratised access to regional films, allowing South Indian cinema to reach a wider audience without the mediation of Bollywood (Athique, 2012). This shift has empowered filmmakers to tell stories that are deeply rooted in regional cultures and perspectives, free from the commercial pressures and homogenising tendencies of mainstream cinema. The increasing popularity of regional films on platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar reflects a growing appetite for diverse narratives that represent the multifaceted nature of Indian identity (Kohli-Khandekar, 2018).

The political climate in India also plays a crucial role in the significance of this research. The rise of Hindu nationalism and the associated cultural policies have intensified debates around national identity and regional autonomy (Jaffrelot, 2007). The central government's push for Hindi

as a unifying national language has faced resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states, particularly in the South, where there is a strong emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity (Schiffman, 1999). This linguistic and cultural resistance is often mirrored in the cinema, where regional films serve as a medium of cultural assertion and resistance against the homogenising forces of nationalism (Sridharan, 2019).

Recent controversies in Indian cinema further highlight the urgency of this study. Films like "Padmaavat" and "Article 15" have sparked debates about historical representation, cultural appropriation, and the politics of identity (Bhattacharya, 2019). These controversies highlight the power of cinema in shaping public discourse and the importance of critically analysing how different identities are represented on screen. In this context, examining how Bollywood and South Indian films represent South Indian cultural identities can provide valuable insights into the broader dynamics of cultural representation and identity politics in India.

By focusing on these issues, this thesis not only contributes to the academic discourse on cultural representation in Indian cinema but also provides a critical lens through which to understand the ongoing cultural and political transformations in India. It underlines the need for more inclusive and nuanced portrayals of regional identities, challenging the dominant narratives and promoting a richer, more diverse understanding of Indian culture.

The following outline provides a clear map for this thesis, outlining what will be discussed in each chapter.

The chapter on Literature Review explores the existing literature and research on the representation of South India in Indian cinema. By examining works from various scholars, this section highlights how Bollywood and South Indian films have historically depicted South Indian cultural identities. The review will also discuss the postcolonial approach to Indian movies, identifying critical gaps in the literature and emphasising the importance of this study.

Following this, the Theoretical Framework chapter will lay the groundwork for the analytical lens used in this thesis. It will explore critical theories such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of Othering, Subaltern Studies, and Homi K. Bhabha's critique of Essentialism.

The Methodology chapter will explain the research methods used in this study, including why we selected four Bollywood films and five South Indian films. These films were chosen for their diversity and relevance, ensuring a well-rounded analysis of cultural representations. The chapter will outline the criteria for film selection, focusing on how these choices help assess

whether the film industry has moved towards more respectful and nuanced portrayals or continues to rely on simplistic and stereotypical representations.

In the Representation in Bollywood chapter, the focus will shift to an in-depth analysis of how mainstream Indian cinema portrays South Indian cultural identities. This section will explore the textual, discourse, and social practices dimensions of these representations, drawing on specific examples from the selected films. By doing so, it will highlight the ways in which Bollywood often simplifies and stereotypes South Indian culture. Subsequently, the Representation in South Indian Films chapter will examine how South Indian cinema depicts its own cultural identities. This analysis will look at the exact dimensions of representation, using specific scenes and dialogues to illustrate the authenticity and depth of these portrayals.

Finally, the Discussion chapter will bring together all the findings from the analyses, drawing parallels and highlighting key insights. It will discuss what has been observed and learned from the comparative study of Bollywood and South Indian films. This section will also address the implications of these findings for the broader discourse on cultural representation in Indian cinema, emphasising the need for more nuanced and inclusive portrayals of regional identities.

Literature Review

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has been extensively studied for its portrayal of different cultural identities and regional backgrounds. This literature review examines the theoretical frameworks of Spivak's Internal Othering, Subaltern Studies, and Homi K. Bhabha's Essentialism. It integrates these perspectives with the insights provided by scholars such as Rachel Dwyer, B. Ashcroft, and J. Desai. The primary focus is on how mainstream Indian cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian films depict South India's cultural identity, exploring both the nuances and the stereotypes inherent in these representations.

Postcolonial theory helps us understand the cultural dynamics and power structures in Indian cinema after independence. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), colonialism has influenced cultural production in postcolonial societies. They point out that postcolonial cultural expressions are often shaped by the legacies of colonial power dynamics, where dominant cultural narratives continue to marginalise and silence regional and subaltern voices. This viewpoint is essential for analysing Bollywood, which is often seen as a dominant cultural force, and its representation of regional identities, including those of South India.

Bollywood, aiming to appeal to a pan-Indian audience, frequently adopts a standardised narrative that aligns with North Indian, mainly Hindi-speaking, cultural norms. As Vijay Mishra points out in *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2003), this process of homogenisation often leads to the marginalisation of regional identities, portraying them through a lens of exoticism and difference. Chatterji argues that Bollywood's portrayals frequently simplify and stereotype regional cultures, reducing their complexity to fit into a North-centric cultural framework.

In her book *Postcolonial Contraventions* (2002), Laura Chrisman explores how postcolonial theory helps us understand the representation of marginalised identities in global media. She argues that the stereotypical portrayals in Bollywood films reflect old colonial attitudes that contrast modernity with tradition and rationality with the exotic. This framework often positions North Indian culture as the symbol of modern India, while South Indian culture is seen as traditional and exotic.

Ania Loomba's book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998) also explains how colonialism's effects continue to shape cultural representations. Loomba points out that postcolonial cultural works, including movies, can both reinforce and challenge colonial power dynamics. In Bollywood, this means that while the industry often perpetuates colonial-era stereotypes, there is also potential for films to challenge these narratives and provide more inclusive representations.

Partha Chatterjee's work *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) is crucial for understanding how national identities are constructed and portrayed in postcolonial contexts. He explains that the nation-state often shapes cultural identities, and this is relevant for analysing Bollywood's influence on regional identities. Chatterjee argues that the cultural dominance of the nation-state often sidelines regional identities, which is clearly seen in Bollywood's portrayals of South Indian characters.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, from his 1978 book, discusses how Western discourse portrays the East as the "other." While Said focuses on the West's representation of the East, similar dynamics can be seen within India, where Bollywood portrays South Indian identities as the internal "other." This internal orientalism maintains cultural hierarchies and reinforces the dominance of North Indian cultural norms.

Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the concept of Other in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) helps us understand how Bollywood portrays South Indian identities as the internal "other." Spivak criticises how dominant cultural narratives silence and marginalise subaltern voices, arguing that these voices are often either completely silenced or depicted in ways that reinforce their lower status in society. In Bollywood, this Othering is seen when South Indian characters are shown as comic relief or exotic figures, supporting a North-centric cultural dominance, keeping alive the stereotypes and ignoring the complexity and diversity of South Indian cultures. This concept will be explored in detail in the Methodology chapter.

Rachel Dwyer, in *Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Contemporary India* (2014), explores how Bollywood shapes and spreads cultural identities. She remarks that Bollywood often presents a standardised vision of Indian culture that fits Hindi-speaking norms, marginalising the unique cultural practices of South Indian states by portraying them as exotic and

different. Dwyer's analysis highlights Bollywood's tendency to depict South Indian characters in ways that emphasise their "otherness," reinforcing the dominance of North Indian cultural norms.

Building on Spivak's ideas, scholars like Tejaswini Ganti in *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (2012) argue that Bollywood's focus on commercial success leads to simplistic and stereotypical portrayals of regional identities. Ganti points out that the industry's aim for mass appeal results in familiar stereotypes that are easily recognisable to a broad audience, often depicting South Indians as backward or overly traditional. This commercial strategy reinforces cultural hierarchies, positioning North Indian culture as the standard and South Indian culture as the deviation.

Ashis Nandy's work, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983), provides a historical perspective on the cultural politics in post-colonial India, which can be linked to Bollywood's representation practices. Nandy discusses how colonial attitudes towards Indian diversity have been internalised and continued in post-colonial cultural production, including cinema. Bollywood's portrayal of South Indians often reflects these colonial binaries, depicting South Indian culture as the exotic "other" in contrast to the supposedly more modern and rational North Indian culture.

In *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (2003), Jyotika Viridi examines how Bollywood films construct national identity by excluding and marginalising regional identities. Viridi's analysis shows how these narratives use humour and exoticism to create a cultural divide, positioning South Indians as the internal "other" within the nation. This internal othering not only reinforces cultural stereotypes but also supports a dominant national identity that favours North Indian cultural forms.

Shakuntala Banaji's *South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts* (2010) explores how media representations shape and reflect societal attitudes towards regional identities. Banaji argues that Bollywood's portrayals of South Indians often mirror and reinforce broader social prejudices and power dynamics. For example, the exaggerated accents and mannerisms of South Indian characters in Bollywood films are not just artistic choices but reflect deeper societal tendencies to mock and marginalise regional differences.

The Subaltern Studies group, with scholars like Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, has significantly influenced the understanding of marginalised voices in Indian history and culture. Their work emphasises the importance of reclaiming the narratives of those who have been historically silenced or marginalised. In the context of South Indian cinema, Subaltern Studies provides a lens to explore how regional films reclaim and represent South Indian identities in ways that challenge Bollywood's dominant narratives.

Jigna Desai's *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (2004) extends this analysis to the diasporic context, exploring how regional films and diaspora filmmakers negotiate cultural identity. Desai argues that South Indian films often serve as counter-narratives to Bollywood, offering more nuanced and authentic representations of regional cultures. Films such as "Shatamanam Bhavati," "Kumbalangi Nights," "Peranbu," "C/O Kancharapalem," and "Kantara" are illustrative of this trend, as they foreground local languages, customs, and social issues, providing a more grounded and respectful portrayal of South Indian life.

Essentialism in cultural representation means showing cultures and identities as uniform and unchanging, ignoring how identities are actually fluid and evolving. Media scholars have criticised this approach extensively. For example, Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) explains that media representations shape how we see and think about different groups. Similarly, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994), argue that essentialist portrayals in media reinforce stereotypes and marginalise minority groups.

When we apply this criticism to Bollywood, it becomes clear that the film industry's reliance on essentialist portrayals of South Indians not only perpetuates stereotypes but also oversimplifies and marginalises these identities. For instance, in movies like *Chennai Express* and *Ra.One*, South Indian characters are often shown with exaggerated accents, traditional clothes, and over-the-top mannerisms. These portrayals flatten the rich diversity and vibrancy of South Indian cultures into a single, clichéd image.

These essentialist portrayals affect how audiences perceive South Indian culture. By showing South Indians narrowly and stereotypically, these films reinforce a cultural hierarchy where North Indian culture is seen as the norm and South Indian culture as exotic and different.

Consistent essentialist portrayals influence how these identities are understood and valued within the broader cultural context.

Cultural identities must be depicted in their full complexity and diversity to resist essentialism. In Bollywood, this means moving beyond simple and static stereotypes to show the true richness and variety of South Indian cultures.

The political impact of these essentialist representations is significant. In Bollywood, portraying South Indian characters simplistically and stereotypically reinforces existing power dynamics and cultural hierarchies. As discussed earlier, mainstream films repeatedly use humour and exaggeration to depict South Indian culture as inferior or backward compared to North Indian culture, which plays a role in maintaining and legitimising the dominance of certain cultural groups over others.

Even though there's been much research (e.g., Dwyer, 2014; Mishra, 2013; Ganti, 2012) on how cultural identities are shown in Indian cinema, there's still a significant gap in understanding how Bollywood's portrayals specifically impact how South Indian identities are seen and understood. Most studies talk about stereotypes and basic portrayals, but they don't fully explore how these images influence cultural power dynamics and social hierarchies in India. Also, there's not much focus on how South Indian films push back against these stereotypes and present their narratives that challenge the dominant cultural views.

This study is important because it looks at how internal cultural differences within India are represented, considering the country's rich diversity. By examining how South Indian identities are portrayed in both Bollywood and South Indian films, this research aims to fill the gap in understanding how these portrayals affect cultural power structures and societal views. It highlights the need for more accurate and respectful representations that go beyond stereotypes and reflect the true diversity of Indian culture.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the representation of South Indian culture and identity in Bollywood and South Indian cinema. The concepts and theories discussed include Spivak's Othering, Subaltern Studies, and Bhabha's idea of Essentialism.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced the concept of Othering to describe the processes by which marginalised groups within a society are constructed as the 'Other' by dominant cultural narratives. This division reinforces social hierarchies and perpetuates the dominance of hegemonic groups. Spivak's work often focuses on the subaltern, a term she uses to describe those populations that are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure. Othering creates a clear distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' and involves the marginalisation and exoticisation of the 'other' within the same cultural and national space.

Spivak developed the concept of Othering as part of her broader critique of colonial and postcolonial power structures. Her work is deeply influenced by deconstruction, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida. She uses deconstruction to challenge and dismantle the binary oppositions that underpin colonial and postcolonial discourses. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak explores how colonial power structures silenced the voices of the subaltern (those marginalised by colonialism), preventing them from having agency and representation. Othering extends this idea by examining how similar processes occur within postcolonial societies, where dominant groups construct internal 'Others' to maintain their hegemony (Spivak, 1988).

When comparing the representation of South Indian cultural identities in Bollywood and South Indian films, the concept of Othering becomes particularly salient. Bollywood's portrayals often emphasise difference and inferiority, reinforcing existing power dynamics and cultural hierarchies. Bollywood frequently constructs South Indian characters and settings as the 'Other' by using stereotypes and caricatures that highlight their perceived cultural differences and inferiority relative to North Indian norms. This process serves to maintain the cultural hegemony of the North over the South, marginalising South Indian identities within the national narrative.

Spivak's engagement with Subaltern Studies further informs her concept of Othering. Subaltern Studies is an academic field that seeks to retrieve and amplify the voices of those excluded from mainstream historical and cultural narratives. Founded by historians such as Ranajit

Guha, Subaltern Studies focuses on the perspectives and experiences of marginalised groups in postcolonial societies.

In the context of cinema, Subaltern Studies emphasises the importance of representing the voices and experiences of the often overlooked marginalised communities that are frequently misrepresented in mainstream media. Spivak's concept of Othering within Subaltern Studies involves the erasure and silencing of subaltern voices by dominant postcolonial nationalisms that replicate colonial structures of exclusion (Guha, 1982). This framework is crucial for analysing South Indian films that strive to depict their cultural identities authentically and resist the homogenising tendencies of mainstream Bollywood cinema.

South Indian films, by contrast, often seek to reclaim and rearticulate cultural identity in ways that resist the Othering processes of Bollywood. These films provide more nuanced and authentic representations of regional cultures, highlighting the diversity and richness of South Indian identities. By focusing on the subaltern perspectives, this research highlights the resistance against cultural hegemony and the assertion of regional identities.

Homi K. Bhabha provides a robust critique of essentialism, addressing the reduction of complex identities to a set of fixed characteristics. Essentialism in cultural representation often involves portraying cultures and identities as homogeneous and unchanging, ignoring the fluid and dynamic nature of identity formation. Bhabha argues for a more nuanced understanding of identity, emphasising hybridity and the constant negotiation of cultural boundaries.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is central to his critique of essentialism. Hybridity refers to the process by which cultures interact, blend, and create new, mixed identities. This process challenges the idea of fixed, monolithic cultural identities and highlights the fluid, dynamic nature of cultural interactions. In cinema, this translates to recognising that cultural identities are not static but are constantly evolving through interactions with other cultures. Bollywood's essentialist portrayals often fail to acknowledge this hybridity, instead depicting South Indian characters in a way that reinforces cultural stereotypes (Bhabha, 1994).

Essentialism is evident in Bollywood's portrayal of South Indian characters through a set of recognisable but reductive stereotypes. Characters are often depicted with exaggerated accents, traditional attire, and behaviours that mark them as distinctly different from their North Indian counterparts. These portrayals reduce the rich diversity and complexity of South Indian cultures

to simplistic, static images that serve to reinforce cultural hierarchies and maintain the dominance of North Indian cultural norms.

Bhabha's critique of essentialism encourages filmmakers to move beyond stereotypes and embrace the complexity of cultural identities. South Indian cinema often rises to this challenge by presenting more authentic and nuanced depictions of regional cultures. Films like "Kumbalangi Nights" and "Peranbu" illustrate the fluidity and dynamism of South Indian cultural identities, challenging the monolithic portrayals often seen in Bollywood.

In Bollywood, challenging essentialism would involve portraying South Indian characters in a way that recognises their cultural richness and individuality rather than reducing them to a set of clichés. This approach would acknowledge the hybridity of cultural identities and the constant negotiation of cultural boundaries, providing a more realistic and respectful representation of South Indian culture.

Connecting these theories to discourse theory provides a more comprehensive analysis of how cultural identities are portrayed. Discourse theory, particularly through Michel Foucault's work, focuses on how power relations and knowledge are constructed and maintained through language and societal practices. Postcolonial theory addresses the lingering impacts of colonialism on cultures and identities, highlighting how these influences continue to shape representations and power dynamics in postcolonial societies.

In analysing Bollywood's portrayal of South Indian identities, discourse theory helps uncover how language and narrative structures perpetuate cultural hegemony and reinforce social hierarchies. By examining the discourse surrounding South Indian characters and settings in Bollywood films, we can see how these representations are crafted to maintain the dominance of North Indian cultural norms. The stereotypes and caricatures used in Bollywood films serve as discursive tools that marginalise South Indian identities and construct them as the 'Other.'

Postcolonial theory complements this analysis by providing a framework to understand the historical and cultural context in which these discourses are produced. It reveals how the colonial legacy of viewing the South as exotic and inferior continues to influence contemporary representations. This intersection of discourse theory and postcolonial theory allows for a comprehensive analysis of how South Indian identities are constructed, maintained, and challenged in Indian cinema.

Methodology

In this section, I will introduce and explain the primary method used in this thesis: Fairclough's 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). I will also discuss why this method was chosen for the study.

Fairclough's 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly well-suited for this analysis of cultural identity representations in South Indian films due to its all-around approach that integrates textual, discursive, and social analysis. Firstly, the textual dimension of Fairclough's model enables a detailed examination of the specific linguistic choices, syntax, and grammar used in the films to depict South Indian culture. This micro-level analysis is crucial for understanding how language constructs and conveys cultural meanings and stereotypes. By focusing on the text, we can identify the fine details of how South Indian identities are linguistically represented and how these representations might support or challenge existing cultural perceptions.

The second dimension, discursive practice, examines how the discourse about South Indian culture is produced and consumed. This part of Fairclough's model is essential for analysing the directorial choices that shape the portrayal of South Indian characters and settings. It allows us to investigate the production processes behind these films, including casting decisions, narrative structures, and visual aesthetics, as well as the intended audience reception. By exploring how different audience groups interpret these representations, we gain insights into the broader societal implications of these cultural depictions and how they influence public perceptions of South Indian identity.

Finally, the social practice dimension connects the textual and discursive analyses to broader social and cultural contexts. This macro-level perspective is vital for contextualising the films within the historical relationship between North and South India and understanding the political and social factors that influence cultural representation. By applying this dimension, we can examine how the films engage with contemporary issues of regional identity and cultural politics, such as regional pride, cultural nationalism, and modernisation. Fairclough's 3D model thus provides a robust framework for a holistic analysis that not only dissects the linguistic and

discursive elements of the films but also situates them within their broader social and cultural contexts, offering a comprehensive understanding of how South Indian cultural identity is constructed and represented in cinema.

Fairclough's model is a valuable tool for postcolonial studies because it highlights how discourse shapes and is shaped by social and cultural power dynamics. Postcolonial theory focuses on the ways in which colonial histories and power relations continue to influence contemporary cultural and social practices (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002). Discourse analysis, therefore, becomes central to understanding how these power dynamics are maintained and challenged through language and representation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002).

Selection of Films

This section explains the rationale behind choosing four Bollywood films and five South Indian films.

The Bollywood films selected for this study are "Chennai Express" (2013), "Ra.One" (2011), "2 States" (2014), and "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" (2021). These films were chosen for several reasons, each contributing uniquely to the analysis of South Indian cultural representation in mainstream Indian cinema. These movies help us see how the portrayal of the Southern Indian culture in Bollywood has changed over the last ten years. By picking films released in different years, we can observe the evolution of the portrayals along with the changing trends in the film industry.

"Ra.One" (2011) and "Chennai Express" (2013) give us a look at the early 2010s, a time when Bollywood was seeing big changes with new technology and expanding its global reach. These films show how Southern Indian culture was represented during this transitional period in Bollywood's storytelling and production. "2 States" (2014) is included to show what was happening in the middle of the decade. By then, Bollywood had started to tell more diverse stories and address current social issues, so this film helps us understand how the depiction of Southern India was evolving. Finally, "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" (2021) gives us a peek into the most

recent trends in Bollywood. As the newest film in our selection, it reflects today's trends and societal shifts, showing how the portrayal of Southern Indian culture has adjusted to modern tastes and recent changes in filmmaking.

Secondly, each of these films explores different cultural themes and narrative techniques. "Chennai Express" uses a comedic approach to highlight cultural differences through a journey narrative. At the same time, "Ra.One" integrates cultural elements within a sci-fi framework, illustrating the blend of traditional and modern elements. "2 States" focuses on the inter-regional marriage trope, exploring the challenges and negotiations of cultural identity within a romantic comedy-drama. "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" examines the dynamics of a long-distance marriage within a culturally rich Tamil setting, providing a more contemporary and nuanced exploration of cultural identity.

The third reason is the cultural stereotypes represented in the films. These films are known for depicting South Indian characters and settings, often employing stereotypes and cultural markers. This selection enables a critical examination of how Bollywood constructs and perpetuates these stereotypes over time. By analysing these films, the study can assess whether there has been any progression towards more nuanced and respectful portrayals or if the industry continues to rely on reductive and caricatured representations.

The South Indian films chosen for this study are "Shatamanam Bhavati" (2017), "Kumbalangi Nights" (2019), "Peranbu" (2018), "C/O Kancharapalem" (2018), and "Kantara" (2022). The selection criteria for these films were designed to ensure representation from each South Indian state and to maintain consistency in genre overlap with the selected Bollywood films.

One film from each of the five South Indian states has been selected to provide a comprehensive view of the region's cinematic landscape. "Shatamanam Bhavati" represents Andhra Pradesh, "Kumbalangi Nights" showcases Kerala, "Peranbu" highlights Tamil Nadu, and "C/O Kancharapalem," although set in a village in Andhra Pradesh, closely represents the cultural fabric of Telangana, portraying multiple narratives that reflect the region's socio-cultural landscape. "Kantara" represents Karnataka, ensuring that the cultural diversity of South India is well-represented.

These films were chosen for their authentic representation of regional cultures, languages, and societal issues. Each film offers a unique narrative that reflects the lived experiences and cultural nuances of its respective region. This authenticity is crucial for understanding how South Indian filmmakers negotiate cultural identity and resist the homogenising tendencies of mainstream Indian cinema. These films have also garnered critical acclaim and have been influential in shaping contemporary South Indian cinema. Their recognition and success at various film festivals and award ceremonies highlight their impact and significance, making them exemplary case studies for this research.

Representations in Bollywood Films

In this chapter, we'll examine how Bollywood films depict South Indian culture and identity. By closely analysing selected movies, we aim to uncover how these films portray the traditions, values, and lifestyles unique to the South. This exploration will help us understand whether Bollywood provides an accurate and respectful representation of South Indian cultural identity.

Movie Synopsis

Released as a Diwali blockbuster in November 2013, "Chennai Express" is a film directed by Rohit Shetty, a famous Bollywood director. Shah Rukh Khan produced and heavily promoted it, contributing to its significant success. The plot follows Rahul, a 40-year-old sweet seller from Mumbai played by Shah Rukh Khan, who plans a trip to Goa but agrees to his grandmother's request to immerse his grandfather's ashes in the Ganges and Rameswaram. Boarding the Chennai Express with the urn, he misses his stop while helping a young woman, Meena, and four South Indian men board the train. Meena, short for Meenalochni Azhagusundaram and played by Deepika Padukone, fleeing an unwanted marriage arranged by her father, a local don, convinces Rahul to pretend to be her fiancé. Amidst their adventures, Rahul and Meena fall in love. The film's climax is a fight between Rahul and Tangaballi, Meena's intended husband, leading to the don's blessing of Rahul and Meena's union.

"2 States," released in 2014, is based on Indian author Chetan Bhagat's novel of the same name. It depicts a love story between Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil girl. They meet at IIM Ahmedabad, where they become friends and eventually fall in love. Their relationship faces a significant hurdle due to cultural differences and family opposition. The couple decides to gain their families' approval before marriage. Krish's loud Punjabi family and Ananya's conservative Tamil family clash, leading to comedic and emotional situations. Through persistent efforts, misunderstandings, and emotional confrontations, the families eventually accept their relationship. The film concludes with the couple's marriage, symbolising the union of two culturally diverse families.

"Meenakshi Sundareshwar," released in 2021, is a romantic comedy about a newly married couple, Meenakshi and Sundareshwar, who must navigate a long-distance relationship. Shortly after their arranged marriage, Sundareshwar gets a job in Bangalore, far from their home in Madurai. The film explores their struggles to maintain their relationship through phone calls, video chats, and occasional visits. Meenakshi, passionate about her interests and managing her new life, and Sundareshwar, dealing with his demanding job, face various challenges that test their bond. Despite misunderstandings and emotional turmoil, their love and commitment to each other help them overcome the distance. The film concludes with their reunion, celebrating the strength and resilience of their relationship.

"Ra.One," released in 2011, is a science fiction superhero film starring Shah Rukh Khan. The story follows Shekhar Subramaniam, a game developer who creates a highly advanced video game in which the villain, Ra.One is stronger than the hero, G. One. Shekhar's son, Prateek, inadvertently brings Ra.One to life, leading to chaos and destruction. Ra.One, now in the real world, seeks to eliminate Prateek. To combat Ra.One, Shekhar's virtual hero, G.One, is also brought to life. The film features high-octane action sequences, advanced special effects, and a climactic battle between G.One and Ra.One. In the end, G.One defeats Ra.One, restoring peace and saving Prateek.

Textual Analysis

Verbal

Syntactic choices help convey cultural differences and similarities but often simplify and essentialise South Indian identity, aligning with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of essentialism. The linguistic features used to differentiate between North and South Indian characters are exaggerated for dramatic or comedic effect, adding cultural authenticity but also perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing simplistic views of regional identities.

In the "2 States," "Chennai Express," "Meenakshi Sundareshwar," and "Ra.One," basic Tamil words and phrases like *Amma* (mother) and *Appa* (father) are frequently employed to depict

South Indian culture. Such terms reflect the respect and affection inherent in Tamil familial relationships and are used across these films to denote South Indian characters. For instance, in "2 States," Ananya frequently uses *Amma* and *Appa* when addressing her parents, which immediately situates her within a culturally specific familial context. In *Chennai Express*, Meena repeatedly uses *Appa* in her desperate attempts to escape her arranged marriage, which, while emphasising her filial loyalty, also highlights the patriarchal structure within her family.

Similarly, the exclamation *Aiyyo* is often used to express surprise or frustration, adding a layer of cultural specificity. While it is a common expression in South India, its exaggerated use, particularly in "Chennai Express" by Meena (Deepika Padukone) and in "Ra.One" by Shekhar (Shah Rukh Khan), reiterates the stereotypical view of South Indians as overly dramatic and expressive. Meena's frequent *Aiyyo* exclamations in reaction to Rahul's antics are played for laughs, but they also reduce her character to a caricature of South Indian emotionalism. This portrayal, while humorous to some audiences, risks trivialising and caricaturing South Indian emotional expression.

Furthermore, in "Meenakshi Sundareshwar", to show that the movie is set in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, the characters mix poorly pronounced Tamil words into their Hindi dialogue. This is meant to add a regional touch, but it doesn't really reflect the actual language of the city, where most people speak Tamil. The random Tamil words in Hindi make the dialogue seem forced and fake, missing the natural flow of conversations that would typically happen in a Tamil-speaking area.

The way Tamil is spoken in Meenakshi Sundareshwar raises questions about its authenticity. Similar to the character Shekhar Subramaniam in Ra.One, the Tamil spoken by the actors in this film often sounds unnatural and forced. The actors seem to struggle with pronunciation, making their attempts to speak Tamil come across as awkward and unconvincing. Additionally, background characters are portrayed as fluent in Hindi, which doesn't align with the setting of Madurai, a Tamil-speaking city.

A significant issue is the consistent mispronunciation of the name "Meenakshi." In Tamil, it is pronounced "Meen-akshi," but in the film, it is incorrectly pronounced as "Min-aakshi." This mistake highlights a lack of attention to cultural and linguistic details. Correct pronunciation of names is important because names hold cultural significance. The constant mispronunciation of "Meenakshi" shows a broader problem of cultural insensitivity and a failure to respect the nuances

of the Tamil language and practices. In "Chennai Express," the dialogues of Meena, played by Deepika Padukone, are portrayed with an exaggerated Tamil accent. This portrayal includes stereotypical errors in Hindi grammar and syntax, such as mixing up masculine and feminine terms, which reinforce negative stereotypes about South Indian Hindi speakers. For example, Shah Rukh Khan's character, Rahul, often expresses confusion and amusement at the Tamil language, as seen in his dialogues.

Non-Verbal

In postcolonial discourse, the use of symbols can be critiqued through the lens of essentialism, where complex identities are distilled into a few culturally specific markers. These films, while celebrating South Indian culture, simultaneously partake in this recontextualisation, balancing between authentic representation and catering to broader, sometimes reductive, audience expectations.

Common metaphors and symbols representing South Indian culture across these films include temples, traditional attire, and festivals. Temples, as seen in "Chennai Express" and "2 States," are not just architectural structures but are imbued with deep spiritual significance and cultural heritage. For instance, in "Chennai Express," the temple scenes are crucial to the narrative, depicting the protagonist Rahul's journey through Tamil Nadu and his growing understanding of Meena's cultural background. Similarly, in "2 States," traditional South Indian temples serve as pivotal locations for family discussions and rituals, highlighting the intersection of personal and cultural identities. These settings reinforce the image of South India as deeply religious and traditional, creating a backdrop that emphasises the characters' connections to their cultural roots. The frequent depiction of temples as serene and sacred places contrasts with the often chaotic and bustling urban environments of North India, further emphasising the distinct spiritual landscape of the South.

Traditional attire, such as sarees, veshtis, and lungis, is another powerful symbol used to signify cultural pride and heritage. In "Meenakshi Sundareswar," these garments are more than just clothing; they are visual metaphors for the characters' connection to their cultural roots. Meenakshi's frequent wearing of the saree not only showcases her identity but also her adherence to traditional values and customs. This is further emphasised during important rituals and ceremonies, where traditional attire becomes a marker of cultural continuity and respect.

Conversely, in "Ra.One," the sexualisation of traditional attire in the "Chammak Challo" song transforms these cultural symbols into exotic commodities. Kareena Kapoor's portrayal in a red saree, while visually appealing, is stylised in a way that caters to a pan-Indian audience's sensibilities, often prioritising sensual appeal over cultural authenticity. This not only commodifies the saree but also strips it of its cultural and traditional significance, reducing it to a mere costume for entertainment purposes.

Another symbol prominent in Bollywood movies that portray southern cultures is cuisine. It is often used to signify cultural identity, create humour, and highlight cultural differences. This practice of using food to emphasise cultural identities can both reinforce stereotypes and offer a glimpse into the culinary richness of South Indian culture.

In "Ra.One," the character of Barron, played by Dalip Tahil, uses cuisine as a means to belittle and stereotype the protagonist, Shekhar Subramaniam, played by Shah Rukh Khan. In a scene where the group of game developers is discussing their project, Barron rebukes them by saying that if their game fails, he will open a restaurant and appoint Shekhar as the head cook, "making idli, vada, sambhar, dosa." This remark is intended to be humorous but also highlights the tendency to reduce South Indian culture to a few well-known dishes. By using these specific foods, the film reinforces a limited and stereotypical view of South Indian identity, reducing a complex cultural heritage to easily recognisable culinary items.

In "Meenakshi Sundareshwar," the emphasis on Tamil cuisine is exaggerated to iterate the film's cultural setting. Two popular South Indian beverages, Jigarthanda and filter coffee, are repeatedly highlighted, serving as cultural symbols of Tamil Nadu. The film revolves around Tamil culture, and these culinary elements are used to create an authentic atmosphere. However, the exaggerated focus on these items can also be seen as a way to simplify and caricature the Tamil identity for a broader audience.

In "2 States," cuisine plays a significant role in highlighting the cultural differences between the North and South Indian protagonists. Ananya, played by Alia Bhatt, points out that she is a Tamil Brahmin, emphasising that Tamil Brahmins traditionally do not eat non-vegetarian food. However, she subverts this stereotype by ordering chicken in a restaurant, thereby challenging and negotiating her cultural identity. This scene is not just about personal preference. Still, it serves to highlight the broader theme of cultural integration and the breaking of traditional norms in the context of a modern, inter-regional relationship. A similar scene is portrayed in

"Meenakshi Sundareshwar", where Meenakshi and her young sister-in-law go to a restaurant together and hesitantly hint that either of them can order non-vegetarian food. The traditional family back home would be none the wiser.

Festivals and rituals are central symbols in these films, serving to highlight the vibrant cultural practices and communal life in South India. In "Chennai Express," local festivals are depicted with vibrancy and colour, encapsulating the collective spirit and cultural richness of South India. These festivals are portrayed with a great deal of detail, from the traditional music and dance to the communal celebrations that bring people together, providing a rich cultural backdrop that enriches the story. Similarly, the depiction of Tamil festivals like Pongal in "2 States" and "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" shows the importance of tradition and community in Tamil culture. Pongal, a harvest festival, is shown as a time of joy and communal bonding, emphasising agricultural roots and cultural heritage. However, these representations often reduce a complex and diverse culture to a set of easily recognisable elements, which can contribute to internal othering, as described by Spivak. By focusing on the most visible and colourful aspects of culture, these films risk simplifying and homogenising the rich diversity within South Indian communities, presenting a monolithic view that overlooks regional and sub-cultural differences.

Discourse Practice

The film discourse about South Indian culture is meticulously produced through a combination of directorial choices that shape the portrayal of South Indian characters and settings. Directors in these films carefully craft their narratives to highlight the cultural distinctions between North and South India, making these differences a central theme.

In "Chennai Express," Rohit Shetty uses the journey of Rahul, a North Indian, through Tamil Nadu to highlight cultural contrasts. The casting of Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone helps bridge cultural gaps, making the depiction of South Indian culture more accessible and relatable to a broader audience. Shetty emphasises the visual and auditory markers of South Indian culture, such as traditional attire and language. However, the film often resorts to exaggeration for comedic effect.

"Lungi Dance", the famous song from this movie, can be seen as a prime example of how Bollywood commodifies and simplifies South Indian culture for entertainment, reinforcing

stereotypes and perpetuating cultural hierarchies. The song, intended as a tribute to South Indian superstar Rajinikanth, distils South Indian culture into easily recognisable symbols such as the lungi, exaggerated dance moves, and references to Rajinikanth's larger-than-life persona. A prime example from the song is the lyrics "*Coconut mei lassi milaake*" ("Mixing coconut with lassi"). Coconut is a staple ingredient in South Indian cuisine, used extensively in various forms such as grated coconut, coconut milk, and coconut oil. Lassi, a yoghurt-based drink, is a quintessential part of North Indian cuisine, particularly in Punjab. By merging these culturally significant items, the song reduces them to mere props for entertainment.

Scholars like Anjali Gera Roy in *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (2010) discuss how dance and music in Indian cinema often serve as sites of cultural negotiation and representation. Roy's analysis can be extended to "Lungi Dance," where the performance of cultural identity is watered down for broader consumption. Similarly, Tejaswini Ganti's work on Bollywood highlights how the industry's commercial imperatives drive the use of familiar and easily recognisable cultural symbols, often at the expense of depth and authenticity.

Vivek Soni's portrayal of South Indian culture in "Meenakshi Sundareswar" uses vibrant and traditional South Indian settings, including iconic temples and rural landscapes. The film employs several cultural symbols, such as the traditional saree style (madisar), local cuisines, and religious practices, to convey the richness of South Indian heritage. However, from a Subaltern Studies perspective, these symbols might also be seen as reducing a complex and diverse culture to a set of recognisable stereotypes. For instance, the film's focus on traditional rituals and attire, while visually appealing, can contribute to a monolithic representation of South Indian culture, neglecting its diversity and contemporary realities.

In "Ra.One," director Anubhav Sinha uses the characters of Shekhar Subramaniam and Jenny Nair to incorporate South Indian elements into a science fiction narrative. While the film attempts to celebrate Tamil culture through language, traditional attire, and cultural practices, certain scenes, such as Shekhar eating noodles with yoghurt, highlight the challenges of balancing cultural representation with entertainment. The reliance on exaggerated portrayals, crafted to entertain and engage a diverse audience, often hinges on cultural stereotypes and inadvertently propagates simplistic and negative views of a particular culture. The song "Chammak Challo" in "Ra.One," featuring Kareena Kapoor in a South Indian-inspired outfit, further complicates the

portrayal. The song and its choreography blend traditional and modern elements but also sexualise the traditional attire, contributing to the exoticisation of South Indian culture.

Directorial choices in these films often involve a delicate balance between authenticity and entertainment. In "Chennai Express," the journey through Tamil Nadu is filled with vibrant depictions of local festivals and traditions. However, the comedic treatment of these elements can overshadow their cultural significance. Similarly, in "Meenakshi Sundareshwar," the picturesque portrayal of rural Tamil Nadu highlights its beauty but risks romanticising and simplifying the complexities of rural life.

In "2 States," the clash of cultures between Krish's Punjabi family and Ananya's Tamil family is depicted with both humour and sensitivity. The director's attention to detail in representing Tamil customs during the wedding scenes adds authenticity. Nevertheless, the narrative often falls back on familiar tropes of cultural differences and conflict to drive the plot.

With the exception of "Chennai Express", all the movies had North Indian actors cast for the role of a South Indian lead.

Socio-cultural Practice

Bollywood films often perpetuate cultural hegemony by privileging the Hindi-speaking population of the North, cultural norms and marginalising South Indian identities. This dominance is evident in the stereotypical and essentialist portrayals of South Indian characters. The depiction of South Indians in the selected Bollywood films frequently relies on exaggerated accents, traditional attire, and behaviours that reinforce stereotypes. In Chennai Express, the character Meenamma's exaggerated Tamil accent and behaviours serve to otherise her, positioning North Indian characters and cultural norms as superior and more relatable. Rahul, the only North Indian, is depicted as the helpless, innocent man amidst the barbaric South Indian men. This portrayal aligns with Spivak's concept of Othering, where the South is constructed as the exotic and inferior internal 'other'.

Historically, Bollywood's economic base in Mumbai, Maharashtra, has contributed to the dominance of North Indian cultural norms. The centralisation of the film industry in a Hindi-speaking region has influenced the portrayal of regional identities, often simplifying and commodifying them for broader appeal. This trend reflects colonial legacies, where the British

administration's focus on Hindi as a unifying language marginalised Southern languages and cultures, creating a linguistic and cultural rift that persists today.

Bollywood's portrayal of South Indian characters often reflects and reinforces existing social structures and hierarchies within Indian society. In "Ra.One", Shah Rukh Khan's portrayal of Shekhar Subramaniam involves the mechanical use of Tamil and exaggerated Southern behaviours that reduce the character to a caricature, much like Meenamma from "Chennai Express". This depiction reflects a broader trend in Bollywood to use regional identities for comedic effect, perpetuating cultural stereotypes. Additionally, the inconsistency in cultural practices, such as Shekhar being given a Christian burial despite being a Hindu Tamil, highlights a superficial understanding and representation of South Indian culture.

These representations serve to maintain and legitimise the dominance of North Indian cultural norms over South Indian identities. By presenting South Indian characters narrowly and stereotypically, these films contribute to the reinforcement of cultural hierarchies where North Indian culture is positioned as the norm. This dynamic is reflective of the broader socio-political context in India, where regional identities are often subsumed under a homogenised national identity.

The intersection of modernity and tradition is a recurring theme in Bollywood films, reflecting broader societal changes and tensions. For example, in *2 States*, the relationship between Krish and Ananya highlights the cultural negotiation required in inter-regional marriages, even in present times. Ananya's subversion of traditional norms by ordering chicken in a restaurant, despite being a Tamil Brahmin, underlines the evolving nature of cultural identities in contemporary India. This scene, similar to what we see in "Meenakshi Sundareshwar", illustrates the broader theme of cultural integration and the breaking of traditional norms in the context of modern, inter-regional relationships.

Bollywood films often use cultural symbols to signify regional identities, but these representations can be superficial and stereotypical. Temples and religious practices are frequently used as symbols to signify South Indian culture. However, these representations often lack nuance and depth. For example, in *Chennai Express* and *2 States*, temples are depicted as serene and sacred places, reinforcing the image of South India as deeply religious and traditional. However, these portrayals often simplify the complex and diverse religious practices of South Indian communities.

Cuisine is another prominent symbol used to signify cultural identity. In Ra.One, the character Barron's remark about Shekhar making "idli, vada, sambhar, dosa" reduces South Indian identity to a few well-known dishes, reinforcing a limited and stereotypical view of the culture. Similarly, in Meenakshi Sundareshwar, the exaggerated focus on Jigarthanda and filter coffee simplifies and caricatures Tamil identity.

Representations in South Indian Films

In this chapter, we will explore how South Indian films represent South Indian culture and identity. By looking closely at selected movies, we aim to understand how these films portray the unique traditions, values, and lifestyles of the region. This analysis will help us see whether South Indian cinema offers a more authentic and respectful depiction of its own cultural identity compared to Bollywood.

Movie Synopsis

"Shatamanam Bhavati" (2017) explores the generational divide in an idyllic village in Andhra Pradesh. The film centres on Raghavaraju and Janakamma, an elderly couple who long for their children and grandchildren to visit them more frequently. To bring the family together, Raghavaraju devises a plan to announce their separation, prompting their children to return home to resolve the issue. This reunion rekindles familial bonds and portrays the importance of tradition, respect, and love within the family unit, culminating in a joyous celebration of Sankranti.

Set in the backwaters of Kerala, "Kumbalangi Nights" (2019) paints a vivid portrait of a dysfunctional yet endearing family. The film follows four brothers—Saji, Bonny, Bobby, and Frankie—each struggling with their issues and the strained relationships among them. Their lives take a turn when a series of events forces them to confront their past and come together as a family. With its naturalistic storytelling and deep exploration of themes like mental health and toxic masculinity, "Kumbalangi Nights" offers a poignant look at the complexities of familial and social dynamics.

"Peranbu" (2018) is a profoundly moving drama that delves into the life of Amudhavan, a father who must navigate the challenges of raising his differently-abled daughter, Paapa, after his wife abandons them. Set against the backdrop of Tamil Nadu's serene landscapes, the film portrays Amudhavan's journey from frustration and despair to acceptance and unconditional love. Through its sensitive depiction of disability, societal exclusion, and personal growth, "Peranbu" invites viewers to reflect on the deeper aspects of humanity and compassion.

Set in the small town of Kancharapalem in Andhra Pradesh, "C/O Kancharapalem" (2018) follows the lives of ordinary people, each grappling with their own unique challenges and societal

norms. From a middle-aged man's unconventional romance to a schoolgirl's forbidden love, the film explores themes of caste, religion, and social hierarchy. Its hyper-realistic style and attention to local details provide an authentic glimpse into the socio-cultural fabric of Telangana, making it a standout representation of regional cinema.

The film "Kantara" (2022) centres on the life of Shiva, a young man deeply connected to his village's cultural and spiritual heritage. As modernity encroaches upon their way of life, Shiva finds himself at the crossroads of tradition and change. The narrative delves into the community's struggle to preserve their cultural identity and protect their environment. Through its evocative storytelling and rich cultural symbolism, "Kantara" highlights the timeless battle between progress and preservation, celebrating the resilience of local traditions.

Textual Analysis

Verbal

The South Indian films "Shatamanam Bhavati", "Kumbalangi Nights", "Peranbu", "C/O Kancharapalem", and "Kantara" depict distinct linguistic features and dialects that are integral to their narratives and cultural representation. Each film employs the native languages of its settings—Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, and Tulu—reflecting the linguistic diversity of South India.

In "Kumbalangi Nights", the characters' dialogues incorporate contemporary slang, such as "mass" and "killer", to describe something impressive or amazing, reflecting the youthful vernacular of the region. The film also uses regional metaphors, such as "Oft-smelled jasmine loses its fragrance", to convey deeper meanings and cultural understanding.

"Shatamanam Bhavati" employs Telugu idioms and phrases that encapsulate the rural ethos and traditional values of Andhra Pradesh. The character Bangarraju is nicknamed *Kangarraju*, a clever wordplay that implies he worries a lot. This use of nicknames and cultural references shows the close-knit community and familial bonds characteristic of Telugu culture.

Similar wordplay can be found in the film "C/O Kancharapalem", where the townsfolk refer to one character as *Geddamm* due to his noticeable characteristic: his beard. The movie also utilises a mix of formal and colloquial Telugu, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of its cast.

The film's dialogue captures the everyday speech of people from different strata of society, enhancing its realism. The film also showcases not-so-fluent Hindi, with characters speaking broken yet understandable Hindi, demonstrating the bilingual nature of the small settlement and adding to the authenticity of the narrative.

"Kantara" features dialogues in both Kannada and Tulu, reflecting the linguistic diversity of Karnataka's coastal region. The use of local dialects is integral to the film's narrative, providing depth to the cultural and spiritual themes explored. A notable dialogue from the film is, "Is it the Demigod or the performer? Let it be decided today. If it indeed is the performer, may you find me again. However, if it is the Demigod..." This line, delivered in the local dialect, captures the mystical and spiritual essence of the film. The actor's loud yells while in Demigod attire emphasise the supernatural presence, enhancing the cultural authenticity of the portrayal.

In "Peranbu", the dialogues are poignant and introspective (e.g. "*Only nature knows man and woman, not love*"), reflecting the film's intensely emotional and philosophical themes. Amudhavan, played by Mammooty, uses simple yet profound Tamil to navigate the complexities of raising his differently-abled daughter. One notable dialogue is "*Anbu tanmaiyyin suvaikkum*" ("Love is the essence of motherhood"), which encapsulates the film's exploration of parental love and societal acceptance. This dialogue adds depth to his character and highlights the film's exploration of societal acceptance and personal transformation. The use of Tamil in these dialogues enhances the lyrical and raw nature of the film, mirroring the complex emotions and social issues addressed.

"C/O Kancharapalem" incorporates folk songs that are integral to the local culture, enhancing the film's authenticity and cultural resonance. The use of folk songs reflects the traditions and everyday life of the small-town setting. This cultural feature can be seen in "Kantara" as well where Religious Sanskrit hymns, mantras, and Tulu folk songs are also included.

Non-Verbal

These films employ various non-verbal texts, including metaphors and symbols, to represent South Indian culture, such as in "Shatamanam Bhavati," the village serves as a powerful metaphor for tradition and communal harmony, embodying the essence of rural life in Andhra Pradesh. The ancestral home stands as a symbol of the continuity of cultural heritage, where

generations come together to celebrate their shared history and values. Festivals such as Sankranti, depicted with vibrant and detailed ceremonies, emphasise the importance of cultural practices in maintaining familial bonds. Agricultural practices shown in the film focus on the region's rural roots and the symbiotic relationship between the land and its people. These elements collectively highlight how rural traditions and family unity are interwoven into the fabric of South Indian culture.

Using the backwaters of Kerala as a backdrop, "Kumbalangi Nights" captures both serenity and the complexities of life. The tranquil waters reflect the surface calmness, while the undercurrents symbolise the hidden emotional struggles of the characters. The dilapidated house where the brothers reside is a poignant representation of their fractured relationships, needing repair just as the house does. This setting becomes a canvas for exploring themes of reconciliation and healing as the brothers navigate their conflicts and come together to rebuild their lives. The natural beauty of the backwaters serves as a contrast to the turmoil within the family, eventually highlighting the need for emotional unity and understanding.

"Peranbu" utilises the forest and the sea as metaphors for the protagonist's internal journey, mirroring his emotions and struggles. The dense forest represents isolation and the labyrinthine challenges he faces in raising his differently-abled daughter. The sea, with its vastness and unpredictability, reflects the themes of struggle and the tumultuous waves of emotions he experiences. As the protagonist moves through these natural landscapes, he encounters both obstacles and moments of profound beauty, symbolising the ebb and flow of his path toward acceptance. Nature, in this film, is not just a backdrop but a living entity that interacts with and influences the protagonist's journey, highlighting themes of resilience and transformation.

The setting of "C/O Kancharapalem" becomes a character in itself, symbolising the interconnectedness of the community. Everyday objects and settings—such as schools, temples, and markets—are intricately woven into the narrative to reflect the cultural and social tapestry of small-town life. Each location and object holds significance, representing the lives and stories of the people who inhabit them. The film's detailed portrayal of these elements illustrates the sense of community and the collective identity of the town's residents. By focusing on the mundane yet meaningful aspects of daily life, the film paints a vibrant picture of communal harmony and the intricate web of relationships that define the town.

In "Kantara," traditional rituals, folklore, and the forest play crucial symbolic roles, encapsulating the region's cultural richness and spiritual connection to nature. Local festivals are depicted with meticulous attention to detail, showcasing traditional dance forms and mythological elements that highlight the community's cultural heritage. The forest is portrayed as a sacred space, integral to the community's spiritual beliefs and practices. It serves as a symbol of the natural world's sanctity and the deep-rooted connection between the people and their environment. The interplay between folklore and the natural landscape in the film emphasises the enduring spiritual and cultural bonds that define the community's identity.

Discourse Practice

The discourse about South Indian culture in these films is meticulously produced through directorial choices that prioritise authenticity and cultural depth. To begin with, in "Shatamanam Bhavati," director Satish Vegesna highlights the cultural richness of Andhra Pradesh through the meticulous use of rural settings and traditional practices. The film centres on familial love, respect for elders, and community importance, embodying traditional Telugu values. The village setting is depicted with lush green fields and ancestral homes, creating an authentic backdrop for the narrative. The plot revolves around the protagonist, Raju, who strives to bring his extended family together, emphasising the significance of familial bonds and collective celebrations, such as the Sankranti festival. The portrayal of everyday rural life, including agricultural practices and local customs, provides a window into the cultural fabric of Andhra Pradesh.

Employing a naturalistic style, "Kumbalangi Nights" by Madhu C. Narayanan offers a nuanced portrayal of regional identity through the lens of a dysfunctional family living in the backwaters of Kerala. The film captures the raw and intimate moments of the brothers' lives, juxtaposed against the serene yet complex ecosystem of the Kerala backwaters. The narrative explores themes of mental health, toxic masculinity, and redemption, weaving them into the cultural tapestry of the region. The director uses the physical setting—the house in disrepair, the lush greenery, and the waterways—to symbolise the characters' internal struggles and their journey towards reconciliation and unity. The film's authenticity is further enhanced by its use of local dialects and regional music, which ground the story firmly in its cultural context.

In "Peranbu," Ram delves into deep emotional and social themes through the story of a father and his differently-abled daughter. The Tamil setting, characterised by its lush natural environment, serves as both a physical and symbolic landscape for the characters' journey. The film tackles issues of societal acceptance, stigma, and personal transformation with a delicate and empathetic touch. Scenes set in the forest and by the sea are imbued with symbolic meaning, reflecting the isolation and resilience of the characters. The director's choice to use minimal dialogue and focus on the characters' interactions with their environment enhances the film's reflective and contemplative tone, offering a profound reflection on human resilience and compassion amidst societal challenges.

Venkatesh Maha's "C/O Kancharapalem" employs a hyper-realistic style to authentically depict the lives of ordinary people in a small town in Andhra Pradesh. The film's multi-narrative structure intricately weaves together the stories of various characters, each highlighting different facets of the local culture and social life. Maha's directorial choice to cast non-professional actors from the town of Kancharapalem itself adds a layer of visual and spoken authenticity, ensuring that the dialogues and interactions resonate with genuine local dialects and mannerisms.

The film meticulously captures local details, from the architecture of schools and temples to the vibrancy of markets and streets, creating a rich and immersive portrayal of rural Andhra Pradesh. This attention to detail extends to the exploration of significant themes such as love, caste, religion, and social hierarchy. We have the character Raju, for instance, who navigates through different religious beliefs and practices, ultimately arriving at a humanistic perspective that highlights one of the film's messages: the inherent goodness of humanity transcends religious and caste divisions.

Rishab Shetty's "Kantara" focuses on the traditional and spiritual aspects of Karnataka's coastal region, using folklore, rituals, and the natural landscape to highlight the community's deep cultural roots and spiritual beliefs. The representation of culture on a grassroots level is relatively uncommon in Indian cinema, shamanism even more so. The film, however, delves into local myths and legends, presenting them as an integral part of the narrative. Traditional rituals, such as the Bhoota Kola dance, are depicted with authenticity and reverence, showcasing their significance in the community's cultural life. The lush forests and rugged coastline serve as a majestic backdrop, symbolising the characters' connection to their land and heritage. The film's emphasis on

environmental conservation and community rights reflects contemporary issues while rooting them in cultural traditions, offering a compelling narrative that bridges the past and present.

Socio-cultural Practice

South Indian films often serve as a medium for cultural assertion, providing a platform for authentic representation of regional identities and traditions. These films resist Bollywood's homogenising tendencies by highlighting the unique cultural practices, dialects, and social issues of the South. "Shatamanam Bhavati"'s emphasis on rural settings and traditional practices highlights the cultural richness of Andhra Pradesh. The film's portrayal of familial love and respect for elders serves as a counternarrative to Bollywood's often caricatured representations. By depicting local festivals, agricultural practices, and everyday rural life, the film asserts the importance of regional identities and resists cultural homogenisation.

"Kumbalangi Nights" challenges existing social structures and hierarchies by presenting a nuanced portrayal of a dysfunctional family in Kerala. The film addresses themes of mental health, toxic masculinity, and redemption, reflecting broader societal issues and encouraging conversations about these topics. The use of local dialects and regional music further grounds the film in its cultural context, providing an authentic representation of the region's social fabric.

South Indian films often explore the intersection of tradition and modernity, reflecting the evolving cultural landscape and the tensions between preserving traditions and embracing change.

In "Peranbu," the story of a father and his differently-abled daughter highlights the challenges of societal acceptance and personal transformation within the Tamil cultural context. The film's focus on themes of disability and social exclusion shows the need for greater inclusivity and compassion in contemporary society. The portrayal of natural landscapes and minimal dialogue emphasises the characters' internal struggles and their journey towards acceptance and resilience.

C/O Kancharapalem uses a hyper-realistic style to depict the lives of ordinary people in a small town in Andhra Pradesh, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of the region. The film's multi-narrative structure weaves together stories of love, caste, religion, and social hierarchy, presenting a microcosm of Indian society. The realistic portrayal of characters from different walks

of life and their interwoven stories highlight the complexities of small-town life and the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity.

South Indian films often emphasise the deep connection between the community and the natural environment, reflecting broader themes of environmental conservation and spiritual beliefs.

Kantara delves into the traditional and spiritual aspects of Karnataka's coastal region, using local folklore, rituals, and the natural landscape to highlight the community's deep cultural roots and spiritual beliefs. The film's depiction of traditional rituals, such as the Bhoota Kola dance, showcases their significance in the community's cultural life. The lush forests and rugged coastline serve as a majestic backdrop, symbolising the characters' connection to their land and heritage. The film's emphasis on environmental conservation and community rights reflects contemporary issues while rooting them in cultural traditions, offering a compelling narrative that bridges the past and present.

South Indian films play a crucial role in shaping regional and national identities, often challenging the dominant cultural narratives perpetuated by Bollywood. By providing authentic representations of South Indian culture, these films contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of India's diverse cultural heritage.

The success and critical acclaim of films like *Kumbalangi Nights*, *Peranbu*, and *C/O Kancharapalem* highlight the growing recognition of regional cinema as a vital component of India's national identity. These films assert the importance of regional cultures and challenge the dominance of North Indian cultural norms, promoting a more inclusive and diverse representation of Indian culture.

By addressing contemporary social issues and reflecting the lived experiences of their characters, South Indian films contribute to broader conversations about social change and cultural representation. The nuanced portrayals of cultural identities, social hierarchies, and environmental connections provide a richer and more complex understanding of South Indian society, challenging stereotypes and encouraging greater empathy and understanding.

Discussion

The analysis of Bollywood and South Indian films reveals significant insights into how South Indian cultural identities are represented in Indian cinema. This discussion synthesises these findings, highlighting key themes, patterns, and implications.

One of the most striking observations is the stark difference in linguistic representation between Bollywood and South Indian films. Bollywood films often employ exaggerated accents and incorrect grammar to portray South Indian characters, reducing them to caricatures. For instance, in "Chennai Express", Meenamma's dialogues are delivered with an exaggerated Tamil accent. Similarly, in "Ra.One", Shekhar Subramaniam's use of Tamil words like *aiyyo* and *rascal* is forced and mechanical. These portrayals not only reinforce stereotypes but also suggest a lack of respect for the linguistic diversity of South India.

In contrast, South Indian films like "Kumbalangi Nights" and "Kantara" use regional dialects and slang authentically, reflecting the true linguistic landscape of their settings. The use of contemporary slang in "Kumbalangi Nights," such as *mass* and *killer*, captures the youthful vernacular of Kerala, while "Kantara" incorporates Kannada and Tulu dialects, enhancing cultural authenticity.

Bollywood films often simplify and commodify South Indian cultural symbols and practices. Temples, traditional attire, and cuisine are frequently used to signify South Indian identity but are often depicted superficially. For example, in "2 States", temples serve as mere backdrops for family discussions and rituals, and in "Meenakshi Sundareshwar", traditional Tamil attire and cuisine are exaggerated to portray the film's cultural setting.

South Indian films, on the other hand, depict these symbols with depth and respect. In "Shatamanam Bhavati", the village setting and traditional practices reflect the rural ethos and cultural richness of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, "Peranbu" uses natural landscapes and minimal dialogue to explore themes of societal acceptance and personal transformation within the Tamil cultural context.

Bollywood films often rely on stereotypes and humour to portray South Indian characters, which can perpetuate cultural hierarchies and misunderstandings. The use of exaggerated accents and behaviours in films like "Chennai Express" and "Ra.One" reinforces the notion of South

Indians as the internal 'other' within the national narrative, as discussed in Spivak's concept of Othering.

In contrast, South Indian films tackle complex social matters and examine the intersection of tradition and modernity. "Kumbalangi Nights" addresses mental health and toxic masculinity, while "C/O Kancharapalem" examines caste, religion, and social hierarchy in a hyper-realistic style. These films provide nuanced portrayals of regional identities, challenging Bollywood's homogenising tendencies.

The analysis of Bollywood films reveals underlying power relations and ideological assumptions that shape their portrayals of South Indian culture. Bollywood's centralisation in Mumbai and its focus on Hindi-speaking audiences often marginalised South Indian identities. This dominance reflects colonial legacies and perpetuates cultural hegemony as Bollywood continues to project a homogenised vision of Indian identity aligned with North Indian norms.

South Indian films resist this hegemony by celebrating regional identities and providing authentic representations of local cultures. The success of films like Baahubali (2015) and KGF (2018) demonstrates the growing prominence and recognition of South Indian cinema, both nationally and internationally. These films challenge Bollywood's cultural dominance and highlight the rich storytelling and cultural depth of regional cinema.

Both Bollywood and South Indian films highlight India's linguistic diversity, but they do so in markedly different ways. Bollywood often portrays South Indian characters struggling with Hindi, emphasising linguistic barriers. In "Chennai Express," for instance, Rahul's confusion over Tamil phrases and Meenamma's broken Hindi serve as comedic elements. This portrayal implies that Hindi is not widely spoken in the South, yet in reality, many South Indians speak Hindi, even if not fluently.

South Indian films, however, depict bilingualism more realistically. "C/O Kancharapalem" showcases characters speaking both Telugu and broken Hindi, reflecting the linguistic reality of small settlements in Andhra Pradesh. This bilingualism adds to the film's authenticity and highlights the adaptability of South Indian characters in a multilingual society.

Bollywood's use of cultural symbols often borders on exoticism and simplification. In "Ra.One," traditional Tamil attire is sexualised in the "Chammak Challo" song, reducing cultural symbols to exotic commodities. Similarly, in "2 States," South Indian cuisine is used to highlight cultural differences but often in a stereotypical manner.

South Indian films, on the other hand, use cultural symbols to enrich their narratives and reflect the true essence of their settings. In "Kantara," traditional rituals like the Bhoota Kola dance are depicted with authenticity and reverence, highlighting their significance in the community's cultural life. This detailed portrayal contrasts with Bollywood's often superficial use of cultural elements.

Both Bollywood and South Indian films explore the themes of tradition and modernity but with different focal points. Bollywood films like "2 States" and "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" depict the challenges of inter-regional marriages and the negotiation of cultural identities in a modern context. These narratives often rely on familiar tropes of cultural conflict and integration.

South Indian films, however, delve deeper into the tensions between preserving traditions and embracing change. "Peranbu" and "Kumbalangi Nights" explore themes of societal acceptance, personal transformation, and the negotiation of cultural boundaries within a regional context. These films provide a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of the evolving cultural landscape in South India.

The representation of South Indian cultural identities in Bollywood and South Indian films has significant implications for cultural hegemony, regionalism, and national identity.

Bollywood's dominance in Indian cinema often marginalises regional identities. The use of stereotypes and caricatures in Bollywood films reinforces cultural hierarchies and perpetuates the dominance of North Indian norms. This cultural hegemony can lead to a homogenised national identity that overlooks the rich diversity of regional cultures.

The rise of South Indian cinema challenges Bollywood's cultural dominance and highlights the importance of regional identities. By providing authentic representations of local cultures, South Indian films resist the homogenising tendencies of mainstream Indian cinema and celebrate the diversity of Indian society. The success of regional films on national and international platforms symbolises the growing recognition and appreciation of regional cinema.

The portrayal of South Indian cultural identities in both Bollywood and South Indian films contributes to the broader discourse on national identity in India. Bollywood's representations often reflect a North-centric perspective, while South Indian films offer a counter-narrative that emphasises regional pride and cultural specificity. This dynamic interplay between regional and national identities highlights the complexities of cultural representation in a diverse and multilingual society.

Conclusion

How Does Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) Represent South India's Cultural Identity?

Bollywood's approach to depicting South Indian culture often relies on essentialism and stereotyping, driven by commercial imperatives aimed at mass appeal and entertainment value. Films like "Chennai Express," "Ra.One," "2 States," and "Meenakshi Sundareshwar" frequently employ exaggerated accents, traditional attire, and simplified behaviours to create a recognisable and marketable portrayal of South Indian characters. This approach aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's critique of cultural essentialism, where complex identities are reduced to static and simplistic categories. The reliance on stereotypes not only reinforces cultural hierarchies but also marginalises the rich diversity of South Indian cultures, positioning them as the 'other' within the national narrative.

These films often use humour and exoticism to highlight cultural contrasts between North and South India. However, this method tends to trivialise and exoticise South Indian culture, presenting it through a lens of difference that perpetuates social prejudices and reinforces the dominance of North Indian cultural norms. The generic narratives and exaggerated portrayals in Bollywood can lead to skewed perceptions of South Indian culture among both national and international audiences, contributing to cultural misunderstandings and social divisions.

How Are South Indian Movies Representing the South's Cultural Identity?

In contrast, South Indian films such as "Shatamanam Bhavati," "Kumbalangi Nights," "Peranbu," "C/O Kancharapalem," and "Kantara" strive for authenticity and complexity in their representations of regional culture. These films employ local dialects, traditional practices, and cultural symbols integral to their narratives, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of South India. They provide nuanced and realistic portrayals that resonate deeply with regional audiences, fostering a sense of pride and cultural identity.

South Indian cinema engages with social issues and cultural dynamics in a way that reflects the lived experiences of its audience. By addressing themes such as mental health, social exclusion, generational conflict, and environmental conservation, these films offer a more layered and respectful portrayal of South Indian culture. This approach challenges Bollywood's dominant narratives and provides a counter-narrative that emphasises the richness and diversity of regional identities.

The theoretical frameworks of Gayatri Spivak's *Internal Othering*, Subaltern Studies, and Homi K. Bhabha's *Essentialism and Hybridity* provide valuable insights into the cultural politics of representation in Indian cinema. Spivak's concept of internal othering helps us understand how Bollywood marginalises South Indian identities by portraying them as the 'other' within the national narrative. Subaltern Studies emphasise the importance of reclaiming and amplifying marginalised voices, which is evident in the more authentic and nuanced portrayals in South Indian films. Bhabha's critique of essentialism and his concept of hybridity highlight the need for more dynamic and fluid representations of cultural identities.

The findings of this thesis underline the need for more inclusive and respectful representations of regional identities in Indian cinema. By moving beyond stereotypes and embracing the complexity and diversity of cultural identities, filmmakers can contribute to a richer and more nuanced portrayal of Indian culture. This shift requires a conscious effort from both the film industry and policymakers to support and promote diverse narratives that reflect the authentic cultural tapestry of India.

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