CHARLES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

MA THESIS REVIEW

Review type (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor ☑   Review by opponent ☐

Thesis author:

Surname and given name: Challapalli Ishita

Thesis title: Cultural Identity Representations in Mainstream Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and South Indian Films

Reviewer:

Gerardo Costabile Nicoletta, Ph.D.

Affiliation: Charles University

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.2	Methodology	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.3	Thesis structure	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐

COMMENTARY. The thesis conforms to the initial research proposal. The student has welcomed all my suggestions to improve the structure, the methodology, and the final results.

2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT
Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	A
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	B
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	C
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	C
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	B
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	A

COMMENTARY (description of thesis content and the main problems):

The thesis explores an understudied topic in post-colonial discourse theory, namely how Indian cinema contains streotypization and otherness processes within the same Indian context, especially in the southern areas of the region. Given the international readership and scholarship of current postcolonial theory, regional and national contexts are often not adequately inquired from the point of view of differences "from within". The selection and analysis of Bollywood movies contributing to enforcing stereotypes and other processes compared with the Southern Indian productions within the Indian context offers an appreciable effort to give insider insight into a cultural context often taken for granted. The thesis applies postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis to study the construction and negotiation of identities in two sets of cinema productions in India, namely Bollywood and southern Indian productions, such as Tollywood. The work combines selected literature that develops a media discursive analysis of cinema production in the Indian context, offering an overview of the history, development and differences within the Indian cinema. The use of postcolonial theories, mainly developed by Indian scholars, to investigate how othering processes and constructions of identities in the Indian context is remarkable. From this point of view, it is appreciable how the student has applied postcolonial theory to study her context, giving us a precious singular insight into India's internal cultural and media dynamic. Due to the thesis's ambition, it is also remarkable how the student maintains a clear line of argument throughout the work despite minor formal mistakes. Overall, the thesis highlights how Bollywood movies perpetuate a specific

representation of India and its southern areas and culture. Highlighting the linguistic and symbolic, verbal and non-verbal, complexity behind the Indian movie production, the thesis invites a pluralisation of points of view on and within India. The development of the argument shows a grasp of the student themes and theories of Indian post-colonial theories. It represents an invitation for empirical-sounding research to develop further the importance of postcolonial theory in unraveling the work of representation in non-western media production.n.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM
Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	C
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	C
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	B
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	D
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	D
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	B
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	C

(*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):
Following supervisor feedback, the student's successful restructuring of the thesis has significantly improved its readability and argumentative flow. This successful restructuring, coupled with the student's academic writing skills and appropriate language use, instils confidence in the thesis's quality. While minor errors persist in the textual layout and some paragraphs, the thesis can be considered satisfactory. The literature review provides a fundamental and exciting summary of the debate. However, it could have been developed more organically on a formal level and using direct in-text quotations. Despite this, the thesis demonstrates an appropriate use of academic terminology. The theoretical framework and methodology chapters introduce the necessary concepts for the empirical analysis. The organisation of the analysed materials is schematic and guides the reader through the performed analysis, which has been structured in descriptive form instead of quote-by-quote exposition. In the thesis, summaries and descriptive analyses are privileged concerning direct quotations. While the lack of direct quotes might be considered problematic in the discussion of the theoretical framework and the literature reviews, it should be taken into account that in the analysis, the student deals with the Indian linguistics context, stressing also the sub-national difference in language references. Direct quotes would have required extensive translation and philological work from Indian languages beyond an MA thesis's in media studies reach. Indian cinema history overviews, literature reviews and analyses, are therefore shaped in a compilation style. Each section of the discussion answers the research questions proposed by the thesis. The conclusion effectively summarises the entire thesis and reconnects to the introduction and research questions. Overall, the thesis's form can be considered a satisfactory presentation of the proposed argument..

4. OVERAL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):
This thesis aims to make an original contribution to the development of post-colonial discourse analysis in media studies, focusing on a specific sub-national case within the Indian context. Its primary focus is on the representation of cultural identities and internal differences. Above all, the work has the merit of underlining, through the results of the empirical analysis, the need for more inclusive and nuanced portrayals of regional identities in the Indian context. This is indeed a wise and scholarly informed way to challenge the dominant narratives, both Western and Indian, as well as an effort to promote a richer, more diverse understanding of Indian culture and differences "from within". Finally, the thesis effectively employs the postcolonial lexicon to achieve its objectives, demonstrating the student's successful grasp of essential elements throughout her MARS Master's. Despite some formal weaknesses, the thesis can be considered good or satisfactory. It should be appreciated for its effort to offer a valuable perspective on the cultural dynamics of the Indian context, a perspective often overlooked in Western representation.

5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	How Bollywood movies can be seen a production of stereotypical images of southern India?
5.2	How would elabotate the cultural homogenization produced by Bollywood movies?
5.3	In what sense this research gives voices to marginalized and subaltern cultural identities?
5.4	How do South Indian films negotiate their cultural identities in the face of Bollywood's dominant narrative?

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

☐ The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' URKUND score.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	

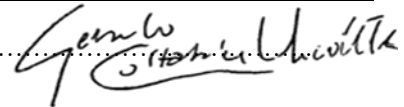**6. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE** (choose one or two)

A	☐	excellent
B	☐	very good (above average but with some weaknesses)
C	☐	good (average with some important weaknesses)
D	☐	satisfactory (below average with significant weaknesses)
E	☐	marginal pass (meeting minimal requirements)
F	☐	not recommended for defence

If the mark is an "F", please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:

Date: 11 September 2024   Signature: ……………………………………

A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer's behalf.

Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.