

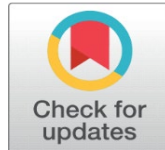
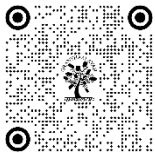


UNDERSTANDING BOLLYWOOD CULT FILMS: EXPLORING THEIR ROLE IN CHANGING CONVENTIONS AND IMPACTING NEW THOUGHTS IN INDIAN YOUTH, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the impact of Bollywood cult films on Indian society and culture, focusing on how they challenge preconceived notions and promote original thought. Cult films often address taboo topics and minority perspectives, encouraging viewers to think critically and explore alternative options. These films reflect social and cultural shifts in India, highlighting the concerns and opinions of younger generations and building passionate fan followings. Despite having a low return on investment, many cult films have a long-lasting influence, sometimes serving as catalysts for social and cultural movements and impacting the careers of performers and filmmakers. The study highlights the importance of filmmakers considering the social impact of their work and using their platform to support ideals that promote peace, justice and social harmony. Researchers and students interested in the film industry, popular culture and society can use this data to examine and compare various cult films and understand their cultural and social values. The results of this research can be used by scholars, students and researchers to better understand the cultural and social significance of Bollywood cult films and their impact on Indian society and culture.

Keywords: Indian Cinema, Cult Film, Bollywood, Society, Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema has been India's most effective public communication tool since its start with the release of "Raja Harish Chandra" in 1913. The movie industry has the capacity to combine entertainment with idea exchange. It has the capacity to draw in the desired audience. Similar to literature, film has produced works that explore the innermost parts of the human spirit. It portrays the events in a way that has an impact on subsequent generations [Balabantaray \(2022\)](#). Cinema portrays the society in which it is produced, as well as the aspirations, objectives, setbacks and

contradictions that are present in any specific social structure. A Numerous practices and traditions in our society are based on ignorance and have prevented social progress. Due to the rigidity of the caste system, untouchability, dowry system and purdah system, our community has suffered greatly [Singh \(2019\)](#). There is a lot that cult films can do to help end these injustices. They can be used to support inter-caste marriages, family planning, eradicating illiteracy, prohibition, national integration and other causes. Such concepts might contribute to the transformation of our society. The cult film helps people get over their obscurantism and points them in the right direction. It can help eradicate ignorance in our society. Additionally, a number of urgently needed social reforms might be offered [Kumar & Sarkar \(2022\)](#).

A cult film is one that has a committed and passionate following, frequently made up of viewers who value the film's distinctive aesthetic, unorthodox subject matter, or quirky mentality. These films frequently have a modest fan base when they first come out, but they develop recognition through word-of-mouth, repeat viewings, showings at film festivals and midnight showings. Any genre can produce cult films, although they frequently have unorthodox, controversial, or subversive themes. Additionally, they could particularly appeal to a certain fandom or subculture [Saxena & Dhrangadharia \(2023\)](#). Cult or popularly known as cult films may also be distinguished by their modest budgets, peculiar production histories, or intriguing behind-the-scenes tales that add to their allure. [Ruchi & Manju \(2013\)](#)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary data was gathered through a questionnaire distributed to selected audiences on social media, asking related questions to the topic which included avid film viewers, film students and film enthusiasts. The questionnaire included:

Open-ended questions which allowed participants to provide their own responses in their own words. Closed-ended questions required participants to choose from a list of pre-determined answers. While rating questions asked participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement on a scale of 1 to 5 and Linkert scale questions asked participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement on a scale of 1 to 7. Around 100 participants responded with their choice of answers. The data for primary research involved developing a questionnaire with concise, explicit questions that were relevant to the research aims. The data was analysed using various statistical approaches and the results were interpreted in line with the research objectives, ensuring the questionnaire and data analysis followed accepted research standards. While secondary data was gathered from summarising various cult films from different genres and era. The study focused on the storylines, aesthetics, themes and other elements that make cult films so beloved. For analysis of secondary data, a thematic analysis was used to evaluate content, identifying recurring themes and patterns in the films and their significance in relation to cult cinema. The research adhered to ethical standards and respects the intellectual property rights of filmmakers and artists who contributed to the selected films. [Ghosal \(2018\)](#)

The objective of the study aims to explore the impact of Bollywood cult films on Indian culture and society, focusing on how they challenge conventions and promote alternative perspectives. Further objective is to analyse the long-lasting influence these films have on social and cultural shifts, particularly among younger generations. The research also aims to identify weaknesses in Indian cinema, such

as manipulation for political or religious purposes and promote ideals of peace, justice and social harmony. [Jain et al. \(2015\)](#)

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers from a variety of fields of study, including cinema studies, cultural studies and sociology, are interested in studying Bollywood's cult films. Researchers have looked at a variety of aspects of Bollywood cult films, such as their artistic qualities, societal significance and audience and critic reactions. The study of Bollywood's cult films has improved our understanding of both Indian and world cinemas, as well as how to use cinema to challenge prevailing social and cultural norms. This review of the literature presents a general overview of cult cinema research in Bollywood while highlighting key issues and arguments that have emerged in this area of research. The review will examine the development of cult cinema in Bollywood historically, the aesthetic and thematic elements of cult films, their social importance and the reactions of audiences and critics to cult films. By combining recent studies on Bollywood cult films, this research will aim to provide a thorough understanding of this subgenre of Indian cinema, its cultural significance and its potential as a platform for social and political critique.

The paper "Impact of Indian Cinema: Influence of Films on Students in Modern Times" [Kumar & Sarkar \(2022\)](#) analyses the impact of Indian cinema on students' attitudes and behaviours in India. The authors argue that Indian cinema reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates patriarchal values. The study found that students who consumed more Indian cinema were more likely to hold traditional gender attitudes and accept violence and aggression as normal behaviour. The article also highlights the role of Indian cinema in shaping students' worldviews and perceptions of Indian culture and society. The article emphasizes the need for greater awareness and critical engagement with the messages and values promoted by Indian cinema, particularly in relation to gender roles and norms.

The paper [Balabantaray \(2022\)](#) explores the cultural impact of Indian movies on Indian culture, focusing on the ongoing transformations that have occurred over time, revealing changes in marriage institutions, live-in relationships and the shift from joint families to nuclear families. Cultural practices, such as food habits, clothing, career choices and belief systems, have also evolved. The paper's distinctive contribution lies in its understanding of the impact of movies on Indian culture, particularly on the youth, based on structured and in-depth interviews. The study also aims to document behavioural changes in the youth as a bi-product of films, aiming to view youth from a cultural film theory perspective for India in general and on youths in particular.

Researchers in Indian society have been studying the social drama genre of Hindi cinema to understand the perception of youth, particularly those aged 18 to 23 years, towards this genre. The study [Saxena & Dhrangadharia \(2023\)](#) aims to determine if movies in this genre can effectively address social issues in society. Despite the increasing number of social issues in the country, the pandemic situation has highlighted the importance of empowering Indian society through social drama. The research, conducted using Google forms and data from 200 respondents, primarily from the Western part of India, revealed that the majority of the youth believe social issues are primarily seen in the middle economic class of Indian society. However, the majority does not agree or be neutral with the statement that social drama Hindi films could bring desired change in society. This study holds significance in understanding the impact of social drama on society and its potential to generate awareness.

The study [Singh \(2019\)](#) aims to understand the changes in Indian television and cinema watching habits due to new online platforms, particularly OTT services like Disney+ Hotstar, Netflix and Jio. These platforms provide movies and video content through the internet, allowing audiences to watch new movies, web series, documentaries, news and short films at their convenience and reasonable prices. The study uses a survey method to analyse the video content watching habits of youth through online platforms. The major players in the Indian OTT service market are Disney+ Hotstar, Netflix and Jio, with most viewers watching content for up to two hours daily. The most preferred content on these platforms is web series, with Hindi being the preferred language of Indian viewers. Entertainment is the biggest reason behind the use of these applications, with action and comedy being the favourite genres. The future of OTT applications in India is bright, with reasons such as smartphone penetration, international collaborations between media moguls, cost effectiveness and digital quality of the medium. The study highlights the importance of these platforms in enhancing the entertainment experience for Indian youth. [Rajapandian et al. \(2022\)](#).

The study titled "Female body, femininity and authority in Bollywood: the "new" woman in Dangal and queen" [Ahad & Akgül \(2020\)](#) suggests that Bollywood has evolved from portraying women as sex objects and victims of male violence, partly due to global cultural and economic influences in Indian society. The rise of women in Bollywood movies, such as Dangal and Queen, reveals the influence of Hinduism and liberal ideology on contemporary social discourse. The masculine woman in Dangal bears the burden of subordination by a family matriarch and becomes a national symbol, highlighting the influence of the male cultural gaze on Indian femininity. The films can be used to compare different forms of femininity and shed light on the complex dynamics of Indian society. [Majumdar \(2012\)](#)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objectives of the research were to determine the impact of cult films, social media and OTT platforms on cultural preservation in India. Respondents from diverse professions, such as professors, students and filmmakers, were interviewed. The study found that legendary films like "Damini," "3 Idiots," and "Munna Bhai MBBS" had a substantial influence on Indian society and set long-lasting patterns. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have expanded the reach and effect of cult films, while OTT services such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar and Amazon Prime Video have made them more accessible to a worldwide audience. The research also emphasized the importance of unorthodox films in India, which appeal to niche viewers and provide a pleasant break from mainstream cinema.

Below are some of selective table and data of the responses received from the participants.

Figure 1

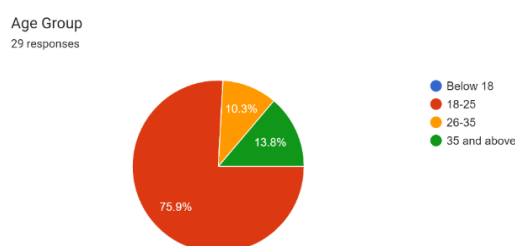


Figure 1 Respondence Age Group

Figure 2

Town/City
29 responses

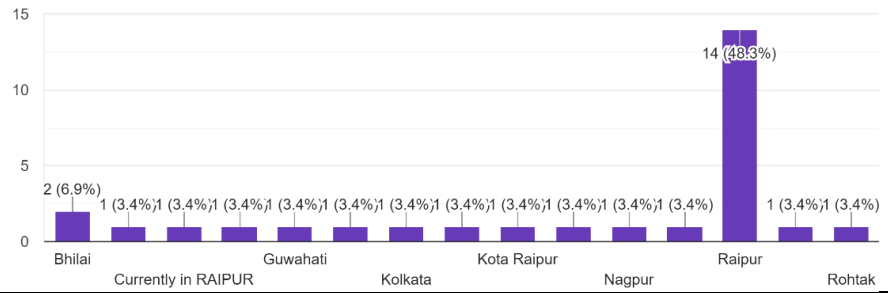


Figure 2 Respondent's City

Figure 3

Can iconic films influence an individual?
29 responses

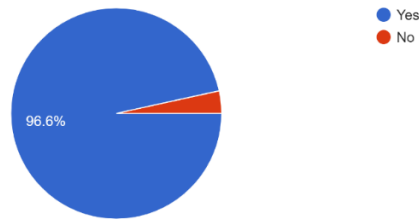


Figure 3 Response 1

Figure 4

Do you think iconic films create awareness?
29 responses

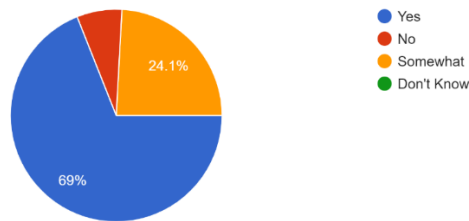


Figure 4 Response 2

Figure 5

Do iconic films can influence society as a whole?
29 responses

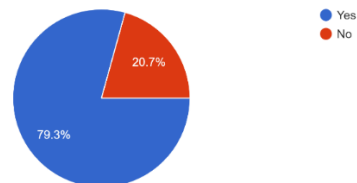


Figure 5 Response 3

Figure 6

Which iconic film has influenced you the most?

29 responses

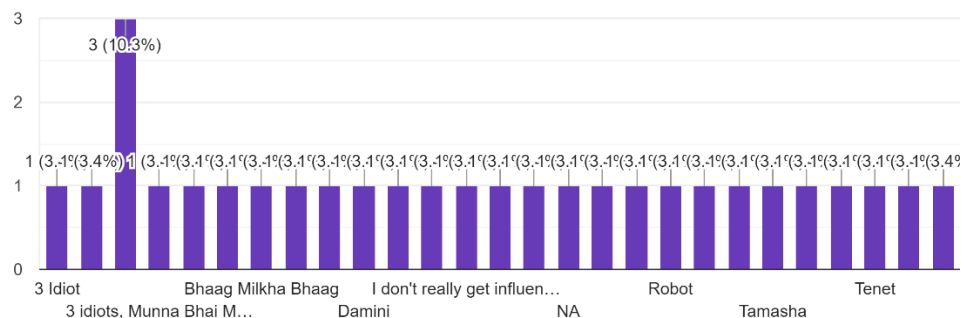


Figure 6 Response 4

Figure 7

How has OTT platforms helped the popularity of iconic films?

29 responses

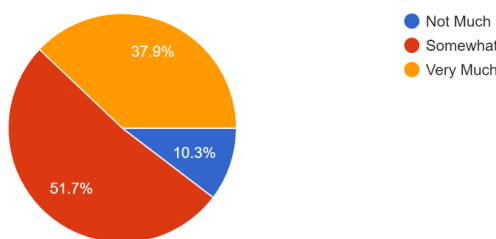


Figure 7 Response 5

Based on the above presented and the whole responded data, the result can be categorised into the following findings:

Cultural studies lens: Through a Cultural Studies lens, films can be understood as powerful tools for socialization, transmitting cultural norms and values to audiences. They can act as mirrors reflecting societal concerns and aspirations, while also potentially challenging existing power structures and dominant ideologies. This research investigated how classic and cult films contribute to this dynamic in the Indian context.

Enduring impact and social awareness: Respondents overwhelmingly recognized the ability of classic films to raise awareness about social issues, spark dialogue and create lasting impressions. This aligns with existing Cultural Studies scholarships that highlight the potential of films to act as agents of social change. The wide range of films mentioned, from "Damini" tackling social justice to "Mother India" exploring traditional values, showcases the breadth of social issues addressed by these influential movies.

Cult films and social trends: The study also explored the concept of cult films and their impact on Indian culture. Films like "Sholay" and "Gangs of Wasseyapur" were identified as creating lasting trends and resonating with audiences beyond their initial release. Within a Cultural Studies framework, these cult films can be seen as capturing specific cultural moments or anxieties, offering viewers a shared

experience and potentially sparking conversations about social issues or changing cultural norms.

Social media and the rise of OTT platforms: The research acknowledges the significant role of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook in amplifying the reach and influence of cult films. These platforms facilitate discussions, trends, and recommendations, fostering a sense of community around these films. Similarly, the rise of OTT platforms like Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar and Amazon Prime Video has made cult films more accessible to a global audience, further contributing to their cultural impact.

5. CONCLUSION

This study, carried through the lens of Socialisation Theory, illustrates the profound influence that cult films have on Indian culture. Films, by exposing viewers to a variety of experiences and societal challenges, can help to transmit cultural norms and values. The findings demonstrate how cult films, with their long-lasting appeal, may impact social change and challenge traditional prejudices. The emergence of social media and OTT platforms has exacerbated this influence. Understanding the characteristics of 'cult' films and their impact on viewers is critical for stakeholders seeking to produce meaningful cinematic experiences. This study adds to the area by providing insights into how films function as socialisation agents in Indian society. The study's findings provide insight into several topics pertaining to renowned movies, such as their effect, influence, market demand and genres. The results emphasise how important legendary films are in forming society, dispelling myths, conserving culture and starting long-lasting trends. The power and reach of classic films have been further amplified by the rise of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms.

These films changed the way Indians viewed themselves and their place in the world by introducing fresh genres, styles and subjects to the country's cinema. The growth of Indian cinema has been aided by cult films, which have had a considerable influence on Indian culture by influencing cultural standards and advancing social justice. This thesis explores the ways in which a few cult films and the way in which they were received helped to form Indian culture and the social and cultural milieu there. The study gives a short insight into the world of relationships between cinema and society.

Many cult films document the social and cultural transformations taking place in India and represent the concerns and viewpoints of younger generations. Beginning from the early era of the Indian film industry, some notable films that impacted society in some way or another are: In the 1936 film *Achhut Kanya*, director Franz Osten explored the social problem of caste discrimination and the challenges that inter-caste marriages face. Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's 2016 film *Pink* tackled the issue of consent and the culture of rape in Indian society. Given the profound impact and imprint that Indian films have on the young generation, it is essential that an appropriate policy be put in place to safeguard that impression and ensure that the types of films shown do not contain any content that can have a long-lasting detrimental impact on the developing brains. They give voice to the concerns and perspectives of the younger generations. Some cult films have contributed to the education and raising of awareness about a variety of social issues. Films have contributed to the promotion of diversity and cultural representation in Indian society. In order to foster a feeling of cultural pride and identity among Indian immigrants and their descendants, the films "*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*" and "*My Name is Khan*" have examined issues relating to the Indian diaspora. Indian cult

films have significantly influenced Indian society's economy, resulting in the development of jobs and economic expansion. The popularity of Indian cult films has contributed to the growth of one of the largest film industries in the world, bringing in money and supporting the creation of jobs in a variety of sectors, including marketing, distribution and film production. The tale of India's White Revolution, a campaign intended to boost milk production and enhance the lives of dairy farmers, is presented in the film.

Indian cult films have contributed to the advancement of sustainability and environmental consciousness. Indian cult films have also influenced the nation's cultural and fashion trends. Indian cult films have also contributed to the promotion of technological developments in the nation. The film delves into issues such as artificial intelligence, ethics and the role of technology in society. Indian cult films have contributed to the country's changing language and dialects. The popularity of Indian cult films has also aided in the growth of Hindi as a national language and raised Hindi's position in Indian culture. The film's success sparked discussion on the need to preserve India's cultural heritage and promote Hindi as a language. Some cult films have contributed to the cause of gender equality and the dismantling of gender norms. On the one hand, these films have helped to raise awareness of the hardships and prejudices that India's LGBT minority suffers.

The research has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field and help future researchers and those in the film business who are interested in studying the dynamics of classic films and their audience relationships, the discussion section offers insightful information in several ways. Firstly, by conducting thorough and comprehensive research, it can likely uncover new insights and knowledge that can be built upon by future researchers to deepen their understanding of the topic. Additionally, the research may identify gaps in existing knowledge that can be addressed by future studies. By sharing the findings through academic publications and presentations, it can also help to disseminate this new knowledge and inspire others to pursue research in this area. Finally, the research has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the field and inspire further research and discoveries.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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