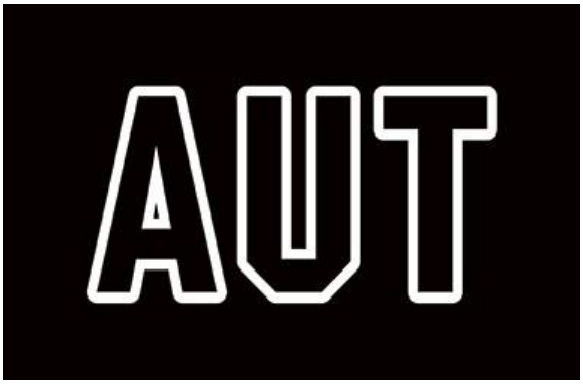

Walking between two worlds: Bollywood cinema and the New Zealand-Indian identity

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Communications Studies (MCS).

2025

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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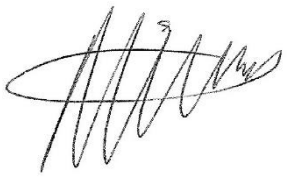
Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



Nilam Hira Bhana Patel 28 March 2025

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to you, Baa.

.

You left behind your life in India and called New Zealand home until your last breath. I wish to pay it forward with my research for my ancestors and those who paved the same path as you.

This thesis has been through my Baa's (grandmother) passing, two pandemic lockdowns, the Auckland Anniversary Floods, heartbreak, and much more. After submission, I will meet the five-year-old me for an iced chocolate and tell her we did it because the thesis is like coming home to myself.

I am forever grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Vijay Devadas, for understanding the complexities surrounding cultural identities, diaspora, and films. Thank you for your patience, guidance, and persistence in seeing me complete this thesis and for not giving up on me. Your work on the Indian diaspora inspires me to delve deeper and explore more.

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To my Masi and Masaji (aunt and uncle), words will never express how grateful I am to you for your sacrifices. Your support, strength, and courage have instilled in me perseverance in the face of adversity. You have always been there with unconditional love.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends and family for their unwavering love and support, especially those who persevered and stayed with me throughout this process, understanding the magnitude of the undertaking, to Hetal, Swathi, Aafia, Aishwarya, Mannan, Kajol, Gaurav, Hazel, Alisha, Natasha, Menaka, Venkat, Oliver, Anjana, Ankush, Gargi and Sinchana.

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"Manzil milegi, bhatak kar hi sahi, gumarah toh wo hain, jo ghar se nikle hi nahi"

"मंज़िल मिलेगी, भटक कर ही सही, गुमराह तो वो है, जो घर से निकले ही नहीं"

– Mirza Ghalib (Indian Poet).

Translation: You will reach your destination, even if by wandering; the lost or misguided ones are those who have never left home.

This poem, for me, encapsulates the essence of perseverance and the courage to venture into the unknown.

Abstract

This qualitative research employs thematic analysis to investigate how Bollywood cinema impacts the cultural identities of Indian diasporic youth in Auckland, New Zealand. It examines Bollywood as both a cultural artifact and a contested space, affecting how members of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora negotiate their cultural identities. Through in-depth interviews with individual participants and a Bollywood-inspired dance group, the study uncovers a range of perspectives on Bollywood's role in shaping hybrid cultural identities.

Some youths express dissonance between Bollywood's portrayal of Indianness and their own lived experiences, while others find comfort and affirmation in Bollywood's celebration of their heritage, primarily through cultural expressions such as dance. The findings also highlight Bollywood's hybrid nature, serving as a source of nostalgia and a platform for critiquing gender bias, sexism, and casteism. Ultimately, this research confirms that Bollywood is a dynamic and influential force that shapes identity discourse, serving as a mediating factor that helps diasporic youth navigate their identities amid the complexities of life away from India.

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Key Terms and Definitions

Some important terms which will be referred to in this study:

South Asian – South Asia consists of the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, with neighbouring territories, such as Afghanistan, sometimes included. A South Asian is a native or inhabitant of South Asia or a descendant of one; this includes double or triple diasporas from nations such as Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, and South Africa. South Asian diasporas are heterogeneous and mixed in terms of languages, religions, castes, cultures, etc. Therefore, the term South Asian encompasses a heterogeneous geographical and ethnic-cultural milieu.

New Zealand-Indian - This term is used interchangeably with Kiwi-Indian. To streamline this research further, I define New Zealand-Indians as individuals who are New Zealand citizens by birth or have permanent residency and or attained citizenship of New Zealand.

Kiwi - The word “Kiwi” became associated with New Zealanders during the First World War. Adorned with kiwis on their regimental badges, New Zealand soldiers received the friendly nickname “Kiwi,” which is now synonymously attributed to all New Zealanders who embrace it as a nickname (New Zealand Tourism, n.d.). Participants in this research study used Kiwi and New Zealander to reference themselves as permanent residents and/or citizens of New Zealand.

Non-resident Indian (NRI) - This includes Indian expatriates, Indian nationals abroad, overseas-born Indians with Indian birth or ancestry, and or overseas citizens of India. *The Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) is a form of permanent residency available to people of Indian origin and their spouses, allowing them to live and work in India indefinitely but does not grant the right to vote in Indian elections or hold public office (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, n.d.).

Indianness - In this research study, Indianness will refer to the assumptions and values expressed by participants in a discussion of their cultural practices, understood as a local discourse and or self-reflexive practice of their cultural identities. Dimitrova and de Bruijn (2017) offer an expanded definition, where Indianness can only be appreciated within the context of India’s diverse languages, myths, religions, and literature. It encompasses the collective linguistic, literary, cultural, and religious history that shapes how Indians conceive their sense of Indianness.

Desi – a word derived from the Sanskrit word “desh”, meaning country or homeland; desi translates to a native of the country. Desi is used to describe the people, culture, and products indigenous to

the Indian subcontinent and or South Asian diaspora, which includes India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Colloquially, it can also refer to people of South Asian descent or those who trace their heritage to the subcontinent and reside overseas. Desi exemplifies itself as a diasporic term formed through the trajectories of movement and places of settlement of the South Asian diaspora rather than concerning a “mythical homeland” (Kim, 2012, p.560).

1. Chapter One: Introduction

"So,
here you are
too foreign for home
too foreign for here.
never enough for both,"
– Diaspora Blues by Ijeoma Umebinyuo (Umebinyuo, 2015, p.156).

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative research provides insights into the lived experiences of seventeen Indian diasporic youth, which includes members of a Bollywood dance group residing in Auckland, focusing on the role of Bollywood cinema in mediating their cultural identities. The Indian diaspora is much more complex than they have been classified in the past, extending to a myriad of regional, linguistic, religious, and generational migrant experiences (Gilbertson, 2007). The Indian community is one of Auckland's largest demographics. In Auckland, the Indian community constitutes a significant portion of the population, which increased by 13 per cent, from 154,824 in 2018 to 175,794 in the last census conducted in 2023 (*Statistics New Zealand-Tatauranga Aotearoa*, 2023). The New Zealand-Indian community remains understudied despite being a growing and prominent demographic encompassing many voices – "the exclusion of Indians, whether physical, institutional, casual or discursive, has been very much part of Aotearoa New Zealand's invisible history" (Leckie, 2021, p.26). Moreover, the role of Bollywood cinema in mediating cultural identities remains absent from published works on Indians in New Zealand, despite Bollywood films containing "identity markers," representing a dialogue between India and the global diaspora (Kaur & Barker, 2002, p.202). Bollywood, as a medium of entertainment and assemblage of cultural products, allows viewers to connect with India and preserve their cultural identities despite the conflicting values of East versus West. As my research reveals, the diaspora has expressed living in 'two worlds' and balancing and negotiating cultural identities, indicating that Bollywood also plays a role in mediating these identities (Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Williams, 2010, as cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

This chapter provides a broad introduction to the research and is divided into four sections: the first provides insights into a personal perspective of the research origins; the second explores the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, the significance of this research, and the rationale for the research question; the third provides definitions for key terms used in this thesis; and the fourth section outlines the order of the chapters to follow.

1.2 A Personal Perspective on the Research

I have a hyphenated cultural identity as a New Zealand-Indian; Aotearoa, New Zealand, is my country of birth, and India is my papakāinga (ancestral home). I acknowledge I am also Tangata Tiriti, a New Zealander of non-Māori origin. I have often questioned the duality of my cultural identity and strived to claim agency within the systems, relationships, and spaces I live in so that I may freely move between different cultures and communities, choosing the values and beliefs that serve me. Negotiating my cultural identity has been a constant source of conflict and gratitude, a balancing act of living in two worlds. This research has been prompted by my experience growing up in New Zealand with Indian ancestry in diverse contexts, interacting with family, friends, social circles, and at work. One vivid memory involves a conversation with a non-English speaking chef employed by my parents, who owned Indian restaurants in Auckland in the 90s. I was able to converse and build meaningful friendships with their employees due to my ability to communicate in Hindi. Despite my mother tongue being Gujarati, I had an appetite for Bollywood films from a very young age and learned to speak Hindi fluently via this medium. My motivations for further exploring the connection between cultural identities and Bollywood cinema comes from a collection of lived experiences, which include performing at the Auckland Diwali Festival on Bollywood music, writing ethnic media stories, and meeting Indians from all different walks of life, choosing to settle in New Zealand.

In more recent years of my career working in media and communication, my interactions with the diaspora, including international students, migrants, and families, have inspired me to explore Bollywood cinema and its relationship with influencing cultural identities. This thesis aims to provide a medium where others such as myself could be a voice to express their cultural identity discord and Bollywood cinema's mediating role. By interviewing New Zealand-born Indians and overseas-born Indians, I wish to unpack their lived experiences and explore their perspectives on this research topic to identify emerging insights on ethnic communities and their sense of identity in a bicultural nation.

I also wish to acknowledge my personal bias in undertaking this research study on the Indian diaspora in New Zealand. I am a member of this ethnic community, and my experiences as a New Zealand-Indian have motivated this research. As aforementioned, I have produced news articles on topical issues affecting this ethnic community and participated actively in the community space. Therefore, I have remained respectful and sustained to be objective in analysing and presenting the themes in Chapters Four and Five while negotiating my subjective position as the researcher. The methodology chapter will further discuss my personal research bias.

1.3 The New Zealand-Indian Diaspora

Early migration from India to New Zealand began in the nineteenth century; the very earliest Indian 'sojourners' to New Zealand were hired as ship labourers known as “lascars” on European vessels of exploration and exploitation. Some of these sojourners were sporadic “ship jumpers”, whereas others remained behind to settle when their ships were anchored offshore (Nachowitz, 2015, p.29). The first record of an Indian in New Zealand was of a Bengali man, who jumped ship in 1809 to marry a local Māori woman; however, the roots of contemporary Indian communities are commonly traced back to Punjab and Gujarat being the epicentres of Indian migration to New Zealand (Leckie, 2010; Friesen & Kearns, 2008; Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Lal, 2006).

Jacqueline Leckie, in her extensive work into the history of the Indian diaspora in New Zealand, examined the local Indian population and how they significantly contributed to the nation's multicultural origins. Many Indians and their forefathers emigrated to New Zealand before World War II, citing economic reasons, ranging from poverty to seeking a better life for their family and future. Indians sailing to the South Pacific departed from Calcutta (now Kolkata) before the post-war years. In the 1920s, a route was established between Bombay (now Mumbai) and Auckland via Sydney. This became a prevailing route for Gujaratis because the train journey from Surat or Navsari station took less than a day to reach Mumbai (Leckie, 1998). Punjab and Gujarat were the two key areas affected by economic transformations occurring within rural colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, resulting in a distinctive migration pattern from these changes (Budhia, 1979; DeSouza, 2011). It is also important to note that land was a common source of livelihood and security for wealth and status in Punjab and Gujarat. Thus, the desire to consolidate more land and security for families became a fundamental migration imperative (Leckie, 1998).

Other earlier occupations for Indian migrants included domestic work in hotels, boarding houses, hawkers selling fruit and vegetables, and farm and road labourers (Leckie, 1998 & Leckie, 2010). Indian labourers were also hired to work in Fiji's sugar industries under British rule; they called themselves Girmitiyas, meaning 'agreement' (Khan,201; Leckie, 1998, p.173). As a result, several early settlers in New Zealand initially sailed to Fiji, either as a principal destination or en route to New Zealand. Later, there would be a mass migration of Fijian Indians to New Zealand and other parts of the world due to political unrest and the 1987 coups in Fiji (Khan, 2011; Voight-Graf, 2004).[1]

[1] Fijian Indians and or Indo-Fijians trace their ancestry to various regions of the Indian subcontinent and are descendants of indentured labourers to Fiji. There have been two significant migrations, the first, from India to Fiji, occurring in colonial times. And a few generations later, families undertook a secondary migration to Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada (Voight-Graf, 2004).

Earlier Indian immigrants also had their status as British subjects circumvented. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1899 excluded Indians from entering, imposing an educational test on any prospective immigrants who were not of British or Irish birth and parentage and could not complete the application form in any European language, which in practice was English (Leckie, 2010; Friesen, 2014). New Zealand later put in place the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act of 1920 - also known as the 'White New Zealand Immigration Policy' to exclude Asians (Leckie, 1998, p.66; Budhia, 1979). The policy was similar to immigration policies implemented in other white settler colonies such as Australia and Canada. These were seen as "racist and exclusionist immigration policies" (Leckie, 1998, p.66; Roche & Venkateswar, 2018). The New Zealand Indian Association was founded in 1926 and formed in response to anti-Asian sentiments that had broken out in South Auckland during this time (Budhia, 1979; Lal, 2006). Later, a permit system was introduced, which allowed exemptions for wives and children of Indians residing in New Zealand before 1921; this remained the basis of Indian immigration to New Zealand until 1987 (Leckie, 1998; Roche & Venkateswar, 2018; Lal, 2006).

Indians living in New Zealand faced discrimination and fear of unfair economic competition due to racism. 'Undesirable immigrants' was a common headline in colonial newspapers between the late 1880s and 1930s; this reflected how racial and religious differences had encoded popular understandings of nationality (Ballantyne, 2010, p.40). Indians campaigned for more liberal immigration policies, and a point system similar to Canada was finally adopted in 1991, which attracted skilled and entrepreneurial migrants to come to New Zealand (Leckie, 2021; Nachowitz, 2018). This policy opened doors for many migrants from India and other outreaches of the Indian diaspora. Immigration from India increased from 1987 to the 1990s, and new Indian migrants involved a more diverse range of occupations and regional origins other than Gujarat and Punjab, to a more heterogenous community (Friesen, 2008; Friesen & Kearns, 2008; Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Studying in New Zealand was also considered a popular pathway to employment and permanent residency (Swarbrick, 2015). By 2001, New Zealand's total Indian-origin population was nearly 62,000; by 2018, it had exceeded 220,000, approaching five percent of the total population (Waters, 2016).

1.4 New Zealand-Indian Identity

To examine the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, the term 'ethnicity' must be defined first because it is used in the national census to collect information on people residing in New Zealand on their cultural identities and nationalities from the choices they declare in the census form. The Office of Ethnic Affairs (2001) defined ethnicity as "people whose culture and traditions distinguish them from the majority of New Zealand" (as cited in Gilbertson, 2007, p.1). Paul Callister (2011), in his work on ethnicity construction and belonging in New Zealand, noted that a growing proportion of New

Zealand youth reported “dual, multiple and hybrid” ethnic identities (p.124). In his earlier works, he noted that ethnicity is a “culturally constructed concept” in New Zealand’s context (Allan, 2001, as cited in Callister, 2004, p.2). People are obliged to identify themselves ethnically in the census. However, the census does not account for the various migration and/or South Asian cultural identities an individual encompasses.
The New Zealand-born generations often think of themselves as ‘Indian New Zealanders’ who maintain separate Indian and New Zealand identities in various contexts (Swarbrick, 2015).

Some previous studies on the diaspora in New Zealand also indicated inherent beliefs, expressed by New Zealand Indians, of living in "two worlds" and having to find a balance between them or marry them in some contexts (Hussain, 2018; Vallabh, 2013; Williams, 2010). These individuals confront the duality of being both Indian and a New Zealander and/or Kiwi daily. At home and in the company of other Indians, they follow traditional customs, observe religious and cultural rituals, speak their mother tongues, and wear Indian attire. However, in public, they adopt the practices of the majority culture (Swarbrick, 2015). Williams observes, "they feel different from other Kiwis, while in other respects, they feel similar. At times, they feel that they are both Indian and New Zealander. At other times, neither term quite captures their identity" (2010, p.113).

A study conducted from 1994 to 1996 as part of the Youth and Family Project in Wellington, which interviewed New Zealand-born Indians tracing their origins back to Gujarat, found that most locally based Indians considered themselves New Zealanders (Williams, 2010). "People do not always act in accordance with Indian culture and are not "really" Indian, merely by virtue of the fact that they are of Indian descent or grew up in Indian households" (Williams, 2010, p.113). The construction of cultural identities is experienced at various levels, including community, family, and individual (Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

Amanda Gilbertson (2007), in her qualitative study on Indianness with New Zealand-born Gujaratis in Wellington, reasoned that ethnicity is an experience rather than a classification determined by origin. Gilbertson found that most participants embraced and personalised their ethnic identities. The questions in the study were used to measure participants' "Indianness," for example, "Are there certain things that you do that make you feel Indian/Gujarati?" (Gilbertson, 2007, p. 105). The study outlined that New Zealand Indians adopted certain practices depending on the context of the situation they found themselves in, personalising their cultural identity.

Yasmin Hussain (2018) conducted a study on the dynamics of identity amongst New Zealand South Asians, interviewing people from Indian and Pakistani ethnicities between 2009-2010 in Auckland. Participants from her study also expressed notions of cultural identities and practices growing up in New Zealand with Indian ancestry and how they navigated this space - "I know my roots are Indian,

but my thinking is Kiwi, and my upbringing is Kiwi" (Hussain, 2018, p.7). In addition, participants acknowledged both cultural identities of being Indian or Pakistani and New Zealand – "I would identify myself as both Kiwi and Pakistani…" showing they assimilated and or accommodated two cultures (Hussain, 2018, p.7).

Malti Vallabh (2013) conducted an ethnographic study interviewing Gujaratis from a broader demographic, Auckland, Rotorua, and Wellington, exploring the concept of identity in terms of "experiences in managing and challenging identities" (p.2). Her study extended Gilbertson's view of cultural identity and ethnicity as more than a classification; instead, she frames cultural identity as an ongoing process that is "fluid, dynamic, and malleable" (Vallabh, 2013, p.10). Vallabh found that regardless of whether participants identified strongly with their Indian roots, they remained conflicted. The research questions also asked whether participants were familiar with Bollywood and Bollywood actors from India. Participants stated they watched Bollywood films, which helped bridge connections with family and the wider Indian community. However, one of her participants noted they would "play down their interest in Bollywood when around their Kiwi friends" (Vallabh, 2013, p.62). The study's discussion on cultural identities and participants mentioning Bollywood films provided research insight for this study to explore further the New Zealand-Indian Diaspora and how Bollywood films mediate cultural identities.

Exploring the cultural identities of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora will also contribute to a wider discussion on New Zealand's evolving national identity discourse and multiculturalism. The complexity of cultural identities for Indians in New Zealand is further shaped by diverse factors like birthplace, region, language, and religion, leading to multiple overlapping identities. "The duality of being both Indian and New Zealander is confronted daily by those of Indian ethnicity, but the multiple identities resulting from different birthplaces, regions of origins, language, and religion are also a feature of Indian identity in diaspora" (Friesen & Kearns, 2008, p.222). Therefore, the New Zealand-Indian diaspora has multiple identities, which have become increasingly visible in many ways.

1.5 Bollywood in New Zealand

An established global presence and technological advancements have aided the proliferation of the Bollywood brand, bringing it to the South Pacific. There has been a surge of interest in New Zealand over the years as a 'dream' filming location (Kaul, 2009, p.196). *Kaho Naa… Pyaar Hai* [Say It... You are In Love], (2000) was filmed in New Zealand. The film showed - "Aotearoa not just as a picturesque stand-in for Kashmir, but as part of the plot," supplementing Bollywood's previous fixation with Switzerland as an exotic filming location (Shingade, 2016, as cited in *The Pantograph Punch*; Friesen, as cited in Dwivedi, 2014, p.128). Video piracy for Bollywood films was also

commonplace in the 2000s in New Zealand, with customs intercepting shipments to Auckland-based video stores (Rotherham, 2010, as cited in *Stuff*). The early 2000s also saw Bollywood films being released in New Zealand; Lagaan*: Once Upon a Time in India* [Land tax] (2001), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, touted as one of the game changers in depicting the conflict between the Western and pre-colonial Indian society, was also released for screening in New Zealand theatres (Dudrah, 2006). Bollywood film screenings in New Zealand demonstrated the extent of the diaspora and Bollywood's dialogue in reaching diasporic audiences in New Zealand, a country mostly considered far removed due to its geographic location. There has been a resounding growth in Indian dance classes in Auckland, with several independently established schools teaching various dance forms – "Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi and Odissi" along with Bollywood dance classes for fitness and leisure (Singh, 2018, cited in *Stuff*).

"Before the 1990s, Indian movies, indeed Indian culture, were of little interest to many New Zealanders," – this has changed exceedingly over the decades, with the cultural presence of Indians in Auckland evident due to public celebrations of Diwali, more complexity to Indian ethnic and religious identities, and the growing popularity of Indian cuisine and cinema (Leckie, 2007, p.168; Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p.9). Henry Johnson (2007) states that Diwali is one of New Zealand's most prominent public festivals is events such as the Auckland Diwali Festival are contact zones for performing cultural identities through music and dance and or displaying diaspora - "where cultures meet, and where identity display is at the nucleus of performance – cultural and social" (Johnson, 2007, p.72). The celebration is significant to New Zealand's contemporary multicultural setting; it reminds the diaspora of their heritage and what it means to be a contemporary New Zealand-Indian and or South Asian (Johnson, 2007). Holi, the festival of colours, is also celebrated as a family affair and public live performances, including bhangra, Bollywood, and Western music. A lot of the events in the Indian community are commercially produced events and centre around Bollywood content, such as music and performances (Booth, 2015). Bollywood is a globalised cultural product that, by consumption and reproduction, "typifies popular Indian culture" (Booth, 2015, p.74).

Additionally, New Zealand is home to many established Indian theatre and comedy companies and active business chambers, and there are members of parliament of Indian origin across different political parties. Auckland and Wellington host specialist Indian community newspapers and radio stations that cover political and economic updates alongside Bollywood gossip and other news – especially immigration (Waters, 2016). The literature review chapter will provide a detailed discussion of Bollywood cinema.

1.6 Significance of Study

The Indian diaspora is a compelling area of inquiry. Being the second largest diaspora globally and locally, the demographic changes have had a discernible impact on New Zealand's arts, culture, politics, economy, and media. As Kaul notes, "New Zealand is fast changing with temples, gurdwaras, mosques, Indian corner shops, and restaurants" (2009, p.190). There is also a shift in New Zealand's national identity, with the emphasis shifting from its bicultural (Māori and Pakeha/European) foundation to a greater recognition of the place of other ethnicities within this 'nation space' (Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p.7). As mentioned, the South Asian diaspora has various ancestry, migration patterns, and linguistic diversity. "The duality of being Indian and New Zealander is one aspect of this consciousness, but the multiple identities of many Indian New Zealanders is also apparent" (Frierson & Kearns, 2008, p.222). This research is significant for understanding and analysing the emerging cultural milieu of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, which has long been a part of the nation's fabric.

Previous studies on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora have typically taken a historical or micro-demographic approach, focusing on migrant communities primarily from Gujarat and Punjab in India, as well as on immigration policies (Vallabh, 2013; Gilbertson, 2007; Hussain, 2018; Leckie, 2007; Friesen, 2014; Budhia, 1979; DeSouza, 2011). There has been minimal research on exploring Bollywood films for the Indian diaspora in New Zealand in mediating their cultural identities. Film watching can also be considered a personal or family practice where individuals might participate to understand and learn about their Indian ancestry and heritage. Bollywood films can be an important way to learn about Indian culture, as they showcase traditions, values, social issues, and everyday life while reflecting regional diversity, festivals, music, and dance. This aligns with Ingrid Therwath's (2010) assertion that "film watching itself is a central practice in the re-enactment of Indianess" (p.12), highlighting how cinema plays a key role in maintaining and expressing Indian identity, particularly within the diaspora. The New Zealand-Indian diaspora remains understudied in examining Bollywood cinema's role in reaffirming or renegotiating their cultural identities through watching Bollywood films.

Given this, the research I have curated is driven and informed by the following key research question:

To what extent do New Zealand-Indians associate Bollywood films with their "Indianness" and in mediating their cultural identity?

A qualitative research design is employed with semi-structured interviews to sample the lived experiences of citizens and permanent residents with Indian ancestry residing in Auckland to answer the research question above. This research explores how cultural identity is constructed through Bollywood films and the cultural signifiers they contain. It examines whether participants relate to these films through themes, character conflicts, and narratives or reject them while reconciling their

cultural identities. Additionally, it examines the relationship between New Zealand-Indians, their sense of cultural identity, and the role of Bollywood cinema in shaping their diasporic sense of self.

1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter set the foundation for understanding the intricate relationship between cultural identity and Bollywood cinema within the context of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora. Through a personal narrative and scholarly exploration, I have highlighted the complexities that arise from navigating a hyphenated identity in a multicultural nation with a bicultural foundation. The lived experiences of Indian diasporic youth in Auckland reveal the rich tapestry of cultural interplay in which they find themselves, simultaneously celebrating their heritage while adapting to their New Zealand environment. Identifying with a particular culture makes people feel they belong and gives them a sense of security. Most importantly, an individual's identity is maintained through social interactions with others and the media.

Moorti (2003) argued that these social interactions play a significant role in constructing and maintaining one's identity, which holds true for diasporic communities. Lee (2006) observed that individuals with minority status, for example, Indian Americans, experience multiple cultures and are trapped by the dynamics of these cultures; they will report conflicting ideas, beliefs, and attitudes toward a particular cultural group. These factors influence shaping the overall cultural identity among minority individuals and make them choose to identify themselves with specific cultures; they often come into contact with cultural "in-groups" and "out-groups" (Tirumala, 2009; Lee, 2006). Bollywood films serve as an essential medium through which members of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora engage with their cultural heritage while adapting to their host culture. The interplay between "in-groups" and "out-groups" further complicates identity construction, establishing a research direction for exploring these dynamics. This multifaceted relationship between culture, identity, social contexts and media remains vital in understanding how diasporic youth negotiate their place within their ancestral and adopted cultures.

This chapter has established the significance of this research, not only in addressing the underrepresentation of New Zealand Indians in academic discourse but also in emphasising the critical role of Bollywood cinema as a tool for cultural mediation. Subsequent chapters will delve deeper into the nuanced understandings of identity construction within the diaspora, illustrating how Bollywood films connect individuals to their roots while allowing for the re-negotiation of cultural identities. This research aims to amplify voices within the South Asian diaspora, inviting a broader conversation about multiculturalism and cultural identity formation in New Zealand.

1.8 Organisation of Thesis

Chapter One: Provides an overview of the study and historical background of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora. It articulates the researcher's insights and outlines the diaspora's context, supported by a review of previous studies.

Chapter Two: This chapter presents a literature review of existing research related to the South Asian diaspora, cultural identity, representation, and the role of cinema in shaping these identities. It critically examines how Bollywood cinema influences identity formation within the diaspora, particularly as it navigates cultural complexities across different contexts. Furthermore, the review explores key themes such as Bollywood's function as a form of soft power and its impact within the broader framework of globalization. By summarising and analysing relevant scholarly works in cultural and film studies, specifically those focused on Bollywood and the diaspora, this chapter evaluates existing research, highlights critical perspectives and identifies gaps in the current body of work.

Chapter Three: This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research design, theoretical framework, and sampling methods. It discusses researcher bias, ethical considerations, and the study's validity. Additionally, the chapter covers data collection and the research question, detailing the interview process and explaining how the data was collected and analysed.

Chapter Four: This chapter will present the findings to examine the dual identity of New Zealand-Indians, exploring themes around expressing Indianness through family, food, and festivals, the challenges of balancing Indian and Kiwi identities, and the impact of racism and multiculturalism. It will also discuss the role of Bollywood in shaping and expressing these identities through performance and visibility. This chapter will be supported by existing literature on cultural identity, Indian culture, multiculturalism and performing identity. In both Chapters Four and Five, I have cited verbatim quotes from the participants of this study. This enabled their voices to be heard and their observations to inform the analysis, thereby retaining their agency.

Chapter Five: This chapter will discuss Bollywood cinema’s role in shaping and affirming Indianness, focusing on its entertainment, nostalgic appeal for Non-Resident Indians, and cultural education. It examines the portrayal of Indian culture through films drawing on findings from participant experiences. The chapter will also provide a critique of Bollywood, addressing problematic representations, such as sexism, the portrayal of women, and issues like casteism and societal hegemony present in Bollywood films. This chapter will critically compare and contrast the findings with existing literature and international studies on Bollywood cinema.

Chapter Six: The conclusion summarises key findings and reflects on the research journey and its implications. It also outlines future research directions, acknowledges the study's limitations, and emphasises its significance.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

> “Cinema does not solely reflect culture; it also participates in shaping culture. When we consider Indian films, we see how they have promoted modernization, westernization, urbanization, new ways of life; a sense of pan-Indianism, secularization” (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004, as cited in Datta, 2008, p.94).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a literature review of academic research and contributions from media professionals who have studied the South Asian diaspora, cultural identity, and Bollywood cinema. The aim is to show how the current state of knowledge discusses the interconnectedness between these topics and where there are gaps in the literature informing this research inquiry. The first section discusses the concept of diaspora and briefly examines the proliferation of the South Asian diaspora. The second discusses cultural identity, embraces hyphenated identities, and sheds light on the 'two worlds' conundrum experienced by the diaspora. Finally, the third section outlines discussions on cinema as a medium of representation and expression of culture and discourse.

The second half of this chapter will focus on Bollywood, presenting the global phenomenon as an assemblage of films, music, and fandom, and discusses the themes of toxic masculinity, gender roles, and patriarchy. The literature review examines Bollywood’s rise as a ‘soft power’ in India and the impact of globalization using Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) notion of scapes to demonstrate shifts in attitudes in film-viewing practices (Swaminathan, 201; Thussu, 2016; Tharoor, 2009). Vijay Mishra (2002) refers to Bollywood cinema as the "temples of modern India," accentuating that films are reflective of society and essential to unpack and explore the relationship evolving between Bollywood and the South Asian diaspora as detailed in his chapter on inventing Bombay cinema (Das Gupta, 1988, as cited in Mishra, 2002, p.1). Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of how identity is reconstructed in Bollywood cinema, outlining its classification and correlation with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). Previously conducted studies will support this discussion (Dudrah, 2002; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Puntambekar, 2005; Tirumala, 2009). This chapter draws from the literature reviewed on the South Asian diaspora, New Zealand-Indian diaspora and Bollywood cinema to inform my prospective research study.

2.2. The South Asian Diaspora

As Cohen (1996) notes, the term diaspora has been variously defined and are now manifold, but its origins lie in the Jewish diaspora. The term ‘diaspora’ refers to the dispersal of people from their original homeland, although its foundational notion suggests a forced displacement or dispersal. Studies on migration and diaspora have explored the concept of ‘home’ with respect to the relationship with one’s own homeland and a sense of belonging, longing, or displacement to it (Fathi, 2020). The term diaspora originated from the Greek word 'diaspeirein' meaning dia "across" and

speirein "scatter" – the "scattering of seeds" (Rosenburg, 2015, p. 2). It was used to describe the dispersion of Jews or Jewish communities in exile from their homeland (Rosenburg, 2015; Grossman, 2018). The term has evolved in academia and applies to almost any population or group living outside its homeland, by force or choice and a post-colonial sense of dislocation (Story & Walker, 2015; Lal, 2006). As Khachig Tololyan, one of the foundational scholars of diaspora studies, notes, “the term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community” (1991, p. 4).

In his research on global diasporas, Robin Cohen outlined some common features of a diaspora, some of which listed below are evident within the South Asian diaspora.

1. Dispersal from an original homeland often traumatically to two or more foreign regions.
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements.
4. An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a return movement which gains collective approbation.
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and a belief in common fate.
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
9. The possibility of a distinct yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (1996, p.515).

This research focuses on the diaspora from the Indian sub-continent, including members from different generations of immigrants, families, and communities. Each of these individuals has their own sense of being Indian and what being an Indian constitutes. This will be explained below using Stephen Vertovec's (1999) definition of diaspora as a 'consciousness.' The participant's self-perception in connection with their Indian ancestry and heritage, and how that constitutes their diasporic identities, is what this study seeks to elucidate. Not all of Cohen's (1996) features are applicable to describe or frame the Indian diaspora However, the characteristics above acknowledge the inherent varieties present in diasporas, which are depicted in storylines for Bollywood films and in mediating Indianness for the diaspora.

Stephen Vertovec (1999) describes diaspora as a social form, a 'consciousness' that is a particular kind of awareness generated among transnational communities; it describes a state of mind and

sense of identity for displaced community members. He explains diaspora as a mode of cultural reproduction, referring to the global flow of shared cultural images and meanings by a community outside their origins (Vertovec, 1999) The Indian diaspora is also about 'communities' or collectives, not limited to individuals because the emphasis is on a shared identity based on an assumed connection to a 'homeland' (region, country, or group) of origin (Fuchs, Linkenbach & Malik, 2010, p.81). In the context of this research, Vertovec' s articulation of diasporas as a form of consciousness is most suited to discuss and unpack the Indian diaspora as a socio-cultural construction formed by shared cultural images constituting an individual's cultural identity.

The Indian diaspora may well be regarded as an international phenomenon; it has a presence in more than a hundred countries and is considered the most diverse and widespread diaspora globally (Raghuram et al., 2008; Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Voight-Graf, 2004; Sarwal, 2017). The Indian diaspora is a microcosm of India and is heterogeneous, encompassing disparate religions, including but not limited to Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Muslims, as well as regionally distinct cultures and ethnicities such as Punjabis, Gujaratis, and Bengalis, to name a few (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Voight-Graf, 2004). The Indian diaspora attributed their early existence to British colonial rule and cheap indentured labour from the Indian subcontinent, which was then dispersed to different parts of the colonial domain (Raghuram et al., 2008, p.23). Since then, there have been a variety of global factors, including economic trends, the liberalisation of the Indian economy, demand for skilled labour, and changes in immigration law and policies globally, which have influenced pathways of migration from India (Hegde & Sahoo, 2018). People also moved due to the social conditions of their home country or as more significant socioeconomic opportunities availed in other countries; the globalisation process and communication technology improvements further provided an impetus for migration (Leckie, 2021; Appadurai, 1990; Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Sarwal, 2017).

Salman Rushdie (1991) explains that the word 'Indian' is a scattered concept and applies to the global dispersion of Indians. As aforementioned, many people migrated for various reasons; however, the diaspora is not limited to the first generation but extends to generations after that. As Rushdie puts it, "Indian writers in England include political exiles, first-generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose residence here is frequently temporary, naturalized Britons, and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent" (1991, p.17). India is seen as a remnant, referred to as the motherland, and the diaspora uses nostalgia and memory to reconstruct their cultural home and homeland as a shared consciousness. A diaspora, Lal observes, "exists precisely because it remembers the 'homeland.' Without this memory, the image of 'their' India (home), these migrants and settlers would be simply people in a new setting, into which they merge, bringing little or nothing to the new 'home'" (2006, p.18).

Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities can also be applied to the Indian diaspora. India is a socially constructed nation, imagined by the diaspora who perceive themselves as part of the community. He asserts that national cultures are 'imagined communities' which provide

a discourse for diasporas to construct and reconstruct identities by producing meanings about the "nation" they identify with (Anderson, as cited in Dimitrova and de Bruijn, 2017, p.5). Importantly, for Anderson (1991), the imagined community is forged through the print media, which fostered a national language, enabled mass cultural distribution of a nation's characteristics, and forged a national consciousness. In effect, for Anderson (1991), the imagined community is not rooted in history but technology. Print technology enabled the national community or the people of the nation to develop "a deep, horizontal comradeship – despite inequality and exploitation that may prevail" (Anderson, 1983, p.7). Brij Lal (2006) also states that homes are constantly re-narrated in migrants' real, imagined, and mythologised stories as cultural reference points. Therefore, diaspora is more concerned with spatial imaginaries and memory of, and nostalgia for, a homeland (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Parekh et al., 2003; Blunt, 2007). And central to the Indian diaspora's sense of an imagined community as I discuss later is Bollywood cinema.

James Clifford (1994) uses 'roots and routes' to emphasise that diaspora can also be defined by dispersion and displacement (as cited in Rosenburg, 2015, p.2). His definition of roots includes the location of origin and the sense of community. The route is about transition and travel, where people freely visit friends and family and study abroad. Moreover, roots and routes can be real or imaginary (Clifford, 1994). As Rosenburg points out, "dispersion is experienced as an uprooting – compelled (forced) or voluntary – from a homeland that is continually remembered and (re) imagined as diasporas route and reroot themselves in a hostland" (2015, p.2). The effects of displacement are networks of communities between home and diasporas, a sense of solidarity based on shared experiences, and an orientation towards a homeland. Displacement is spatial and temporal, the latter becoming increasingly so with succeeding generations and descendants (Rosenburg, 2015).

Rushdie (1991) further builds on the idea that physical alienation from India inevitably invents imagined homelands. To cite him, "we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind," (Rushdie, 1991, p.10). A memorable song from the film *Shree 420* [Mr. 420], (1955) starring Raj Kapoor, has the following lyrics:

Mera joota hai Japani,
yeh patloon Englistani,
sar par lal topi Roosi,
phir bhi dil hai Hindustani,

My shoes are from Japan,
my trousers are English,
the cap on my head is Russian,
yet, my heart is Indian (Hindustani).

(Shailendra, S, K., 1995, mera joota hai japani).

This song was a testament to the Indian diaspora's global outreach and or influences. At the same time, the song reiterates the sentiment of Indianness and patriotism as the protagonist points out that despite his donning clothes and accessories from across the globe or adapting to different cultures, his heart remains Indian. India, at the time (1955), was gaining its status as a sovereign, secular democratic republic, and this song has remained as reminiscent of this period. The Indian government used such depictions to create yearnings for the homeland and for the diaspora to "rekindle long-distance patriotism through the mobilisation of essentialized notions of home, and the imagined purity of India stepped in the past" (Hegde & Sahoo, 2018, p.269). In that regard, Bollywood films help create India's of the mind – connections to roots and routes are construed via a medium of entertainment. More recent examples of Bollywood films mediating patriotism and entrenching cinema with imagined diasporic communities and cultural identities will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Indian diaspora in New Zealand has three distinct origins; the diaspora is defined in terms of Indian ethnicities rather than birthplaces as it "include[s] people born in South Asia, people who identify with ethnicities associated with South Asia but born in other countries, and people of these ethnicities born in New Zealand" (Didham, 2010, p.5). These origin narratives assist in understanding the complexities of the diaspora residing here, echoing the explanation of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora in the previous chapter.

The celebration of Diwali in New Zealand, for example, illustrates the bringing together of different South Asian cultural groups, organisations, societies, clubs, and individuals to showcase the cultural milieu. As Johnson notes, during Diwali "South Asians are collectively put on display in a cultural celebration of difference on a borderland, 'in betweenness' within New Zealand's contemporary multicultural make-up" (2007, p.75). The notion of in-betweenness is significant to discern the Indian diaspora in New Zealand as members of the diaspora engage with this. A further discussion on cultural identities will follow in the next section.

2.3 Cultural Identities in Two Worlds

Some of the most important contributions to research on "cultural identity" and the concept of "home" have come from the discipline of cultural studies (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Appadurai, 1990; Palmer, 1999). Moreover, identity, like diaspora, emerged from a particular psychological context to become a keyword in social science and the humanities (Story & Walker, 2015). Our cultural identities are constantly in flux in today's global world, marked by movement and cultural hybridity. Therefore, questioning one's cultural identity has become a fundamental and yet significant question in one's life. Prior to defining cultural identity, a definition of culture must be provided. In its simplest explanation, culture is "a learned system of meanings ... [and] consists of a pattern of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols" (Oetzel, 2009, p.4). Individuals can identify with these patterns to

accommodate a given culture to which they belong; culture distinguishes a way of life in one group from another. This definition will be important when analysing what constitutes Indianness and Indian culture for this research participants.

Stuart Hall (1996), a Jamaican-born British sociologist known for his theories on cultural identity and multiculturalism, explains that cultural identities are malleable and dynamic, demonstrated by their characteristics of constantly evolving (Hall, 1992; Hall, 1996). To cite Hall at length,

> "cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power." (1996, 12).

Thus, cultural identities are "unfixed, multi-layered, and ever-changing" (Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017, p.1). Moreover, they arise from our "belonging" to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and national cultures (Hall, 1996, as cited in Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017, p.4). Hall's framing of cultural identity is significant to my research inquiry as it provides a rationale for my hypothesis on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora's experiences of belonging in 'two worlds', constantly negotiating their cultural identities in various contexts and how cultural identities are mediated through cinema because these identities can be constructed through "memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall, 1990, as cited in Balibar, 1995, p.226).

An acute cultural identity dilemma is evident in the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, who have to negotiate their identities through lived experiences of migration, of parents, entrenched family values, and normative cultural expectations. As Friesen observes, "they are commonly described as "living between two worlds": the world of their Indian parents and their heritage, and the 'westernized' New Zealand world" (Friesen, as cited in Dwivedi, 2014, pp. 125-126). An ethnographic study as outlined by Gwyn Williams (2010) in Bandyopadhyay's anthology on Indians residing in New Zealand, found similar notions of living in 'two worlds,' with Indian participants stating that the values their parents taught them often contrasted with values they acquired as members of the wider New Zealand society. At the same time, the participants chose to have agency over the values, activities, and aspects they wanted to incorporate or embrace as part of their cultural identities, despite feeling pressured to perform a balancing act between two conflicting cultures. To a certain degree, as Williams puts it, "identity is contextual. Indian-ness is emphasised over New Zealand-ness in certain contexts and New Zealand-ness over Indian-ness in other contexts" (as cited in Bandyopadhyay 2010, p.109). The two-worlds problem rests not solely on the perceived reality of living in two worlds but on two social contexts that require a person to act in markedly different and contradictory ways. The problem is that there is one individual to deal with these two worlds, and the aspect of acting also raises the question of whether, in doing so, one is being authentic (Williams, 2010, as cited in Bandyopadhyay 2010).

It is also important to note that Indianness is not unique to studies of the diaspora in New Zealand; various scholars have examined it in studies of the Indian diaspora globally (Gilbertson, 2007; Vertovec, 2000; Dubey, 2003; Sarwal, 2017). However, previous studies focused on issues related to integration and the maintenance of culture and social structures; only a few studies have discussed the relationship between Bollywood cinema in mediating Indianness (Therwath, 2010; Punathambekar, 2005; Lahiri-Roy , 2010). In a broader sense, Indianness is a metaphor referring to a specific way of comprehending the world through the lens of Indian culture (Dimitrova & de Bruijn and de Bruijn, 2017; Gilbertson, 2007; Vallabh, 2013; Williams, 2010). At the same time, it is often a debated term because the "very use of the term Indian encapsulates diversity and brings into play various contradictory viewpoints concerning identity and cultural dimensions" (Mukherjee, 1985, as cited in Sarwal, 2017, p.31). Sudeshna Roy (2016) contends the same, stating that Indian culture has also been impacted by years of cultural evolution, political ambitions, and diaspora movements, making it impossible to forget influences on the embodiment of cultural identities. As Roy comments further, "Indian culture is the result of a complex combination of micro- and macro-cultures spanning thousands of years" (2016, p. 88). Therefore, Indianness is not an existing category but a "perceived, fluid, and ideologically coloured discourse that constantly changes over time" (Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017, p.1). In short, Indianness is an ongoing process of constructing, imagining, re-imagining, and narrating a cultural identity (Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017).

Despite showcases of Indian cultural activities aspiring to be homogenous such as the Diwali festival in Auckland (Johnson, 2007) there are diversified identities because Indianness can also be negotiated at an individual level. Indian identities, as Bandyopadhyay remarks, " are also situational, negotiated by individuals on an everyday bases, on local as well as regional and global scales" (Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p.12). Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the term 'bricolage,' an assemblage of diverse cultural elements and or the creation of work from a diverse range of things (Johnson, 2012), and this term applies to our understanding of cultural identities as malleable and negotiated by individuals.

Paul Gilroy (1993) also presents a similar view of identities being unfinished or remade as an infinite process of identity construction. His research on African, American, British, and Caribbean cultures found that ethnicity and national identity are not permanently fixed concepts. He elaborates on the movement of people backward and forward across oceans, creating a dynamic intercultural identity that goes beyond national borders and ethnic classifications (Gilroy, 1993). He refers to this as an innate double consciousness (Gilroy, 1993) between past and present, extending to origin and diaspora, offering another perspective on shifting cultural identities between two worlds for the South Asian diaspora.

Jennifer DeVere Brody (2008), in her work on 'hyphen-nations,' states that the role of hyphens in identities is about constantly shifting spaces, despite the act of hyphenating assumed to be a portmanteau of carrying a combination of things. Hyphens are not neutral; they perform, and an

individual’s identity can be joined and simultaneously separated (DeVere Brody, 2008). She comments, "It is a sign that both compels and repels: it is not a fixed point; but rather, a shifting positionality – a continually collapsing structure" (DeVere Brody, 2008, p.149). Similarly, the diasporic experience is recognised not by heterogeneity and diversity but by a conception of hyphenated identity, which lives with and through hybridity. To recollect Hall’s observation, "diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (1990, p.235).

Lastly, scholar Ien Ang (2001) also reflected on her own experience of having Chinese ancestry, being born in Indonesia, and being raised in the Netherlands. She argues that the question of "where you're from" versus "where you're at" presents itself as a constant conundrum (p.36). This perspective is relatable for New Zealand-Indians, who may have multiple cultural identities.

In this section, I have critically reviewed literature relating to diaspora studies to emphasise the double consciousness or being in two worlds that those in the diaspora experience. For those of the Indian diaspora in New Zealand, notions of home, belonging, and identity and the connection between them can, thus, be complex and problematic. More pertinently, as the review reinforces, embracing the notion that cultural identity is mobile, constantly being refashioned is important as it recognise the heterogeneity with the diaspora and also that Indianness is mediated by various forces: family, society, religion, individual subjectivities, and as I discuss below Bollywood. The following section will introduce theories on cinema as a medium of expression and its role in mediating identities, which will aid in unpacking Bollywood cinema’s contribution towards cultural identities.

2.4 Cinema and Diaspora

Bollywood films are a unique repository of India's public image and society; the films serve as guides to India's past, present, and aspirational future, as well as providing a unique medium to explore the relationship between cinema and the diaspora (Dwyer, 2010; Therwath, 2010; Mukherjee, Pradhan & Barn, 2021). Films have always been a common source of entertainment, education, and information disseminated in society. According to Beard (1994), films are among the most prevalent examples of popular culture artifacts that generate and reflect various cultures and societal norms. As a result, films have become a crucial aspect of contemporary society, allowing people to learn about various cultures around the globe. This aligns well with the consumption of Bollywood films by New Zealand-Indians, and issues around the representations of Indian culture, Indianness, and the connections that participants make with characters, themes, and plots. Basu (2004) states that preserving and maintaining one's culture and identity in this globalized world has become challenging; however, due to technological advancements, diasporic communities can stay connected with their homeland and negotiate cultural identities. For Bhoopaty (2003), cinema plays a crucial role in mediating diasporic lives because "cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the

social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected" (Bhoopaty, 2003, as cited in Therwath, 2010, p.1). And cinema has been instrumental in developing a shared South Asian identity, mediating forms of diasporic discourse across many cultures (Bhoopaty, 2003, as cited in Therwath, 2010, p.1).

Vijay Mishra (1996) labels the idea of a homeland being constructed in Bollywood cinema as a 'fantasy structure' – a scenario where the community perceives themselves to be a homogeneous entity because the narrative around the nation is imaginatively constructed by its subjects (diaspora) (p.423). Referring to Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory on imagined communities again, Mishra argues that Bollywood films are mediums of expression that affirm and perpetuate these imagined communities. Rajinder Dudrah (2002), in his published works on Bollywood cinema and the Indian diaspora in the UK, reinstated similar ideas of an existing diasporic consciousness between a place of origin and places of settlement in the sense that the diaspora lives in an imagination of India derived from films that should be unpacked for meanings. Ranjan Bandyopadhyay (2008) discusses Bollywood films fostering a sense of belonging and a connection to India through nostalgia. He defines nostalgia in two parts, “nostos - return and algia – longing,” to explain that the diaspora longs for a home that no longer exists or has never existed (p.80). Cinematic images then also embody nostalgia between dreams and reality for viewers.

Stuart Hall (1997) asserts that in today's interconnected world, media play a significant role in representing and projecting a society's culture. Hall (1997) noted that electronic media socially constructs cultural meanings through symbolic representations. No matter what the audience perceives about media content, consciously or unconsciously, social ideology is always present in culture, and that is being repackaged and produced (Hall, 1997). This involves using language, signs, and images to represent things and "symbolize" (Hall, 1997, p.16). to produce ‘shared meanings or shared conceptual maps' which individuals may interpret similarly and build a shared culture of meanings, ultimately constructing a social world they inhabit (Hall, 1997, p.17). As a form of visual imagery depicted in films, cinema expresses meaning for audiences; the storylines, characters, and plots are constructed and seek to produce shared meanings.

Ravinder Kaur and Martin Barker (2002) further explain how cinema and identity construction are interconnected to understand how audiences and texts have a deeper connection. Kaur and Barker (2002) state that an implicit contract exists between the reader of the text (audience) and the text (film). The text communicates in a way familiar to the reader, for example, reoccurring themes that are easily distinguishable. Bollywood films for example contain ‘identity markers’ in the form of themes (Kaur, 2002, p.202). Some of these identity markers later established and proliferated the NRI - Non-Resident Indian classification or trope for the South Asian diaspora. Prominent Indian lyricist and poet Javed Akhtar once stated that Hindi cinema has "its own symbols, its own expression, its own language, and those who are familiar with it understand it" (Akhtar, as cited in

Joshi, 2015, p.1). This concurs with Hall's (1997) discussion of how representations produce shared cultural meanings.

Rajinder Dudrah (2002) also supports the argument that studying socio-cultural coding and representations enables us to determine influences on society more insightfully. Studying the phenomenal success of Bollywood among the Indian diaspora is critical to review the role of films in diasporic identity construction (Dudrah, 2006; Uberoi, 1998; Dudrah, 2002; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Puntambekar, 2005; Tirumala, 2009; Therwath, 2010). Studying diasporic communities and cinema reveals how films and their portrayals reflect societal values and social structures. These representations offer insights into the identities and experiences of these communities, revealing broader social dynamics (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). These studies provide an insightful research direction for examining the New Zealand-Indian diaspora's relationship with Bollywood cinema.

Lastly, Robina Mohammad (2006) and Bandyopadhyay (2008) share the same view, that the growth of Bollywood films overseas has facilitated the expansion of a South Asian "diasporic public sphere' (Appadurai, 1996, as cited in Mohammad, 2006, p.1015; Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p.83). It has strengthened transnational networks and connections characterised by the hypermobility of people, capital, goods, and information, made possible by technological advancements such as the internet, cable and satellite television, and films. As Mohammad notes, "the ability to beam the "homeland" directly into diasporic living rooms around the world is made possible by the flow of information, both textual and pictorial (still and moving images)" and alongside the proliferation of Bollywood" (2006, p.1015).

Bollywood appears firmly established as a favourite vernacular in international entertainment circuits and an aesthetic marker of Indianness in public perception (Ganguly, 2010). Further, Mishra states that studying Bollywood is not complete without analysing diasporic aspirations for “cinema is now global in a specifically diasporic sense” (2002, p.269). Bollywood cinema has undoubtedly accomplished the stage of being labelled a global phenomenon; however, it is still vital to trace the gradual development of this phenomenon to understand how concepts of identity construction came to be incorporated and transgressed in films. The following section will introduce Bollywood cinema and its origins and examine its relationship with the Indian diaspora in greater depth.

2.5 Introducing Bollywood Cinema

Bollywood was a term coined in the 1970s by film critics in Bombay, now known as Mumbai; it has become a popular catchphrase for India's largest film industry and Indian cinema worldwide (Dudrah, 2006; Ganti, 2013; Mishra, 2002). Bollywood is multifaceted, an assemblage of films, music, celebrities and fandom, merchandise, ethnic clothing, food and popular culture. Bollywood music and film soundtracks are also India's de facto pop music, as there is only a limited market for songs composed outside of films. Bollywood's cultural significance is tremendous; it also influences

discourses on culture, religion, politics, and globalisation within and outside of India for expatriates and the wider South Asian diaspora (Takhar, Maclaran, & Stevens, 2012; Therwath, 2010; Srivastava, 2006; Dudrah, 2006; Kaur, 2002). Bollywood films have aimed to reflect India's shifting cultural morals and values, evolving alongside India's independence as a nation including plot lines directly relating to Indian traditions and practices (Dudrah, 2006; Ganti, 2013; Mishra, 2002; Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Karmakar & Catterall, 2025). Blockbuster films are released during festivals like Diwali, Holi, Ramadan, and Eid, proving that Bollywood is well integrated into India's cultural sphere. While Indian society greatly influences Bollywood, the opposite is also true. Bollywood stars, songs, and films significantly impact Indian culture; for example, movies showcase fashion trends, and people look to Bollywood for clothing attire inspiration. Songs from Bollywood films are played at weddings, celebrations, cultural performances, and festivals globally, and Bollywood has also benefited India's economy by generating jobs and enhancing India's reputation abroad. Ultimately, Bollywood is often intertwined with being representative of 'Indian culture'.

Bollywood is also seen as an escapist experience for the masses; many audiences see the song and dance sequences in films to escape the mundane and/or stress they encounter daily (Ningthoujam, 2017). A four-part documentary series directed by Smriti Mundhra titled *The Romantics* featuring exclusive interviews with Aditya Chopra, Uday Chopra and an ensemble of mainstream Bollywood actors and creatives was released on Netflix in 2023. The episodes explore Bollywood's beginnings and delve into the legacy left by Yash Chopra, a prominent director who established Yash Raj Films (YRF), one of India's most significant film production and distribution companies, which ultimately established Bollywood as a global powerhouse. Chopra's son, director and producer Aditya Chopra, was interviewed for the series, and he spoke candidly about YRF films and how the films represented aspirations for the ordinary person. As he commented, "I think Indian cinema represents Indians. And Indians as people, are people who constantly aspire to be more than who they are. I think my dad represented that" (Chopra, 2023). Many Indian cinema fans replicate their favourite actors' mannerisms, attire, and body language, showing a distinct Bollywood culture prevalent in India and disseminated among Indians living abroad via digital technologies (Tirumala, 2009). The industry has also evolved alongside global flows of culture, capital and citizens (Alessandrini, 2001).

Film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003) labelled Bollywood separate from Indian cinema because the cultural industry processes went beyond the production and consumption of films. Rajadhyaksha (2003) explained that Indian cinema went through a process of "bollywoodization" to refer to the globalisation and expansion of Bollywood cinema into non-film activities as well as the “synchronous developments of international capital and diasporic nationalism” (2003, p.6). Films that emerged from the late 90s and early 2000s up until the last decade predominantly catered to specific narratives, depicting transnational themes for the Indian diaspora and were not representative of previous Indian film production practices. Films emerged as nationalistic, commodified products with

positive renditions of Indian culture (Rajadhyaksha, as cited in Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008). Henceforth, Bollywood became the "export lager" of Indian cinema (Rajadhyaksha, as cited in Athique, 2011, p.4), resulting in the Indian diaspora becoming one of the largest markets for the consumption of Bollywood films (Mishra, 2006). Tejaswini Ganti (2012) has studied the production of Bollywood cinema in industries and audience practices, and in her analysis, states that Bollywood was previously labelled as an escapist cinema, gained popular cultural legitimacy, and the "gentrification of Hindi cinema" occurred (Ganti, 2012, p. 4).

Indian cinema was not accorded much significance despite being the second-largest industry after India's independence (Ganti, 2013; Mishra, 2002). However, the Indian film industry witnessed significant changes over the last two decades, including liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, which allowed foreign investments or multinationals to finance films. Unlike Hollywood, the film business in India became decentralised and the policy changes ushered in the corporatisation of Bollywood (Kumar, 2014; Miller, 2015; Jones et al., 2005; Srinivas, 2002; Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008). Set against this backdrop, film production companies such as Yash Raj Films (YRF) evolved from a boutique production company to a full-fledged studio with in-house facilities for music recording, VFX and animation and a primary distributor for films categorised under the brand Bollywood at present. "Yash Chopra's films brought in a new wave of emotion, individualism and cultural change to Hindi cinema and helped turn one of the biggest film industries in the world into what it is today" (Shergill, as cited in Deccan Herald, 2023).

2.6 Soft Power, Globalisation and Tourism

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, India was no longer a backward 'third world' post-colonial nation-state but repositioned as an emerging financial superpower (Rajadhyaksha, 2016, p.109). Bollywood became India's prime conduit to soft global power in the 21st century and as Indian author and politician Shashi Tharoor often noted how India could influence and alter people's attitudes by attraction rather than military coercion if it leveraged its great strengths in soft power. He elaborated on India's long history of ideas, its diversity of languages, literature, food and, more importantly – its identity in films (Tharoor, 2008). In his Ted Talk, Tharoor explains the influence of communication technologies in India and abroad in dispersing films. He also states, "Bollywood is now taking a certain aspect of Indian-ness and Indian culture around the globe" (Tharoor, 2009). Soft power is the ability to attain what you want through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion, and it cannot be measured; a country's soft power rests on various resources such as culture, values and policies which support public diplomacy (Nye, 1990). In the case of films, soft power can counteract negative messages, showcase India's moral and political authority, and depict the nation as an emerging power to global audiences. Roopa Swaminathan supported this rendering emphasising that Bollywood not only brings income through trade and tourism but also enhances India's global standing and acts as a cultural ambassador (2017). As Dwyer succinctly puts it, "Hindi

films have been concerned with Indianness since their origin. Raj Kapoor's Nehruvian hero sings 'Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani' [Yet, The Heart is Indian], while the diasporic characters of the 1990s show their Indianness" (Dwyer, as cited in *The Hindustan Times*, 2017).

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990) examined global cultural flows and explained the process of globalisation in five scapes, which aid in understanding how cultures globally influence each other. These scapes provide a useful framework to understand Bollywood as a global cultural phenomenon and its proliferation in influencing the Indian diaspora. The five scapes are labelled ethhnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideascapes (Appadurai, 1996). Firstly, the migration and movement of people across cultures and borders demonstrate ethhnoscapes, such as the Indian diaspora's global migration patterns. Mediascapes is news and information which can be disseminated by various media available for production, distribution and exhibition, for example, films, influencing worldviews for audiences. Bollywood films, as texts themselves, are mediascapes that provide an understanding of India, its culture, and Indianness in mediating identities (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008). Other examples can be seen via film soundtracks mixed with Western pop tunes or Hinglish, a mix of Hindi and English spoken onscreen (Kaur, 2002; Aftab, 2002).

Technoscapes refers to the scope and movement of technology, such as communication technologies being made available globally and the digital revolution bringing the entertainment industry in India into the digital economy, where Bollywood can be mass marketed. Emerging media technologies also transformed existing modes of communication, e.g., mobile phones and social media, and people could then form a "community of sentiment," wherein a group begins to imagine and feel things together (Appadurai, 1996, p.8). Financescapes is the movement of money across borders. For example, when India's film industry was decentralised, it was opened for foreign investments, allowing films to be funded from various sources overseas, such as 20th Century Studios and Viacom. Lastly, ideascapes are the global flow of ideas, symbols, and narratives, evident in Bollywood's narratives that appeal to NRIs and build an affinity with the nation. The five scapes have been applied to examine several sociocultural phenomena, making them an ideal apparatus for this research to outline the relationship between Bollywood cinema, diaspora, and globalisation. Appadurai (1996) further states that the scapes are building blocks for "imagined worlds" (p.33); Bollywood films were a local product, which then became global for the Indian diaspora, creating imagined communities, the scapes help examine how Bollywood films became ubiquitous. Thus, what we can take away from Appadurai’s scapes in framing Bollywood is that Bollywood is a "complex symbiosis between globalism and nationalism" (Dissanayake, 2006, p.26).

The impact of globalisation is also evident in movie-induced tourism; Bollywood films specifically allow Indian audiences to experience “an alternate fantasy world” vicariously (Nayar, 1997, as cited in Josiam et al., 2014, p.17). Yash Chopra, through his iconic films, showing snow-capped mountains, lakes, rivers, and heroines draped in colourful chiffon saris amidst fields of flowers, introduced destinations such as Switzerland and other European countries. The Switzerland

government paid homage to Chopra by commemorating his legacy in locations where Chopra's blockbusters, such as *Chandni* [Moonlight] (1989) and *Darr: A Violent Love Story* [Fear] (1993), and his son Aditya Chopra's DDLJ - *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* [The Brave-Hearted Will Take the Bride] (1995) were filmed. A survey study conducted in 2014 looked at Bollywood movies and their impact on how Indians perceived European destinations. Six hundred seventy participants completed the survey and indicated their movie preferences and travel destinations based on movies viewed. The findings revealed Spain, Switzerland, the UK and Italy as the top destinations influenced by Bollywood films (Josiam et al., 2014, p.12). In New Zealand, there was a surge of interest in filming locations beginning in the early 2000s. The films *Kaho Naa… Pyaar Hai* (2000) and *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon* [I am crazy about Prem] (2003) were both filmed in New Zealand.

As aforementioned in the previous chapter, New Zealand was offered as an alternative filming destination to Switzerland. Between 2004 and 2007, about 120 Bollywood features were filmed in New Zealand (Friesen, as cited in Dwivedi, 2014, p. 128 – 129). Bollywood actor Sidharth Malhotra also visited in 2015 and was appointed a New Zealand tourism ambassador in India as part of a Tourism New Zealand promotional campaign (*New Zealand Herald*, 2015; Waters, 2016). In this section, I have provided a brief and general overview of Bollywood cinema to emphasise its globality; in the following section, I will outline Bollywood's hegemony over regional cinemas of India and present criticisms of themes in Bollywood films, including casteism, toxic masculinity, sexism, gender bias and colourism.

2.7 Critiques of Bollywood Cinema

Bollywood predominantly produces Hindi-language films, which are prevalent throughout India and among the diaspora globally. The Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala also have full-scale local movie industries, with an output of films collectively exceeding Hollywood countries (Booth, 1995; Rajadhyaksha, 2016). While other regional cinemas do produce a significant number of films and has a global appeal, particularly amongst the Tamil, Malayalam, and Telugu diasporas, Bollywood is still seen as largely representative of Indian cinema (Rajadhyaksha, 2016). And this, as several scholars have pointed out, is problematic because Bollywood is hegemonic both within India and globally (Kumar, 2014; Dudrah, 2006; Aftab, 2002; Mishra, 2002; Ganti, 2013; Sen, 2013; Shailo, 2016). Media and film scholars have argued that Bollywood represents only one kind of regional cinema, but its overarching position as Indian cinema pushes regional language cinemas to the margins of the global imagination. As Varia laments, "India has so many cinematic traditions which all deserve to be differentiated, awarded their own legitimacy" (2012, p. 4).

Bollywood movies are prominent due to being distributed and circulated internationally, dominating the discourse of Indian cinema (Dudrah, 2006; Sen, 2013; Ganti, 2013). Another criticism of Bollywood is that the films are often socio-political and portray a sense of nationalism. Filmmakers blend these themes into films to represent the global Indian identity when the Indian diaspora is, in

fact, heterogeneous. This can be contradictory when applied to films depicting NRI stereotypes, which are shown as either corrupted by Western lifestyles and values or represent 'Westernized Indianness', forcing the identity of the NRI into homogenised representations (Wright, 2015). As Wright comments, “Bollywood cinema still works to maintain and preserve a pure sense of Indian national identity and cultural tradition by having these conflict with and prevail over representations of the 'modern' and the 'West' as other" (Wright, 2015, p.190). The NRI is a spatial extension of the nationalism model, familiar to film audiences (Athique, 2011). Therefore, transnational cinema has enabled Bollywood to not only negotiate the Indian cultural identity but also "remystify Indianness" (Wright, 2015, p.39).

As Kaur and Sinha (2005) observe, NRIs are predominantly depicted by Bollywood as North Indians coming from middle-class families, overlooking India's realistic class and ethnic diversities. A content analysis study by Mishra (2002) of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) revealed similar conclusions. The main female protagonist is seen performing Karva Chauth, a predominantly North Indian tradition; audiences may feel displaced if they do not conform to these stereotypical ideologies exemplified. Therwath (2010) also examines DDLJ and states that NRI role models further propagate a 'fetishised' version of cultural traditions, e.g., illegal practices like forced marriages depicted in films such as *Namastey London* [Greetings London] (2007) directed by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, are also normalised. Reshmi Lahiri-Roy (2010), in her comparison study of mainstream Bollywood films, also noted that the family dynamic was shown strongly as "Punjabi diasporic discourse" in the film *Namastey London* (2007). In a recent study, Santosh Chandrashekar (2021) unpacks the film *Chennai Express* (2013) directed by Rohit Shetty, and illustrates that although Bollywood is globally synonymous with Indian culture, it is casteist, promoting selective "north Indian upper-caste Hindu values" as Indian values (p.5-7). In these instances, the globalised Indian, but nationalist at heart, emerges as a problematic signifier (Miller, 2015; Therwath, 2010).

Shakuntala Rao (2007) conducted an ethnographic study in Patiala, Punjab, North India in 2004. The study was conducted over seven months to determine audience responses to contemporary Hindi films. Interviews were conducted with students and family members from lower socio-economic backgrounds belonging to various castes. The study affirmed that Bollywood was not a dominant medium consumed by all Indian audiences; brand 'Bollywood' left behind the "economically and culturally marginalized audiences" (Rao, 2007, p. 73). The majority of India's rural and lower middle class found themselves displaced from Bollywood, making them less likely to consume films in the future (Rao, 2007).

Dudrah (2006) found that Bollywood also promotes conservative and stereotypical male and female gender roles, always adhering to family values and not challenging moral or social ideologies. An earlier study by Vamsee Juluri (1999) unpacked the film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun…!* (1994), directed by Sooraj Barjatya. Her study found that the film depicted hegemonic representations of Indian families in happy domestic settings. The research concluded that Bollywood's direction was flawed

as it still showcased representations of gendered domestic workers, dowry, and strict family values, framing Indian society's progression as repressive (Juluri, 1999). Sathian (2010) and Sherafat (2014) both respectively conducted studies on Bollywood and the representation of women, and their findings similarly adhered to Juluri's (1999). Despite growth in NRI-centred themes, Sathian (2010) found that women were not depicted as modernised or cosmopolitan. Sherafat (2014) analysed trends of Caucasian light-skinned actors in Bollywood films, contrasting with India's pre-existing cultural biases of preferring lighter skin in favour of brown skin. Her study concluded that Bollywood films still upheld patriarchal values perpetuating the idea that one had to be "fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman, a subjugation of her desires" (p.218).

Heroines in Bollywood have primarily been portrayed to maintain notions of women as upholders of traditions, domesticity and patriarchy, depriving them of any sense of power and agency. Mukhopadhyay and Banerjee (2021) analysed sexism portrayed in Bollywood films and affirmed that older movies showed female characters as either romantic or matriarchal leads supporting the male leads in their life endeavours. Women added "beautiful reliefs" in between the real-life struggles and difficulties faced by the male heroes on-screen (Mukhopadhyay & Banerjee, 2021, p.256). On the other hand, women characters depicted as defying societal norms or expressing sexuality were cast in negative roles. Films nowadays also have hypersexualised dance scenes called 'item songs' where a female character is a primary performer. The term 'item' refers to an object derived from the literal Hindi translation of the word "maal" with the same meaning. Unfortunately, both terms – 'item' or 'maal' – are commonly used derogatorily when referring to women, considered disrespectful and indecent in Indian society. It signifies the objectification of women, which is not acceptable. Lahiri-Roy (2010) also found in the analysis of the film *Namastey London* (2007) and *DDLJ* (1995) that women on screen occupied space within patriarchal hegemony, and a women's "physical purity" was valuable in cinematic socio-cultural discourse (Lahiri-Roy, 2010, p.82).

In more recent studies, Mukhopadhyay & Banerjee (2021) reviewed films from the 1990s that normalised stalking, sexual harassment and assault, and specifically the film *Kabir Singh* (2019), directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga. The film received much criticism for the same, depicting and normalising violence, abuse and misogyny under the guise of love. Lastly, another recent study looked at gender bias in Bollywood films made between the 1950s to 2020 (Khadilkar, KhudaBuksh & Mitchell, 2021). The study used NLP – natural language programming methods to analyse movie dialogues for seven hundred films and discovered that commercially successful Bollywood films were riddled with sexist and misogynist dialogues. However, the study noted that gender bias has become less prevalent (Khadilkar et al., 2021).

As an antecedent to the discussion of cinema being representative of society and films mirroring prejudices, Bollywood also reflects views on colourism and gender, long prevalent in Indian society and history. For one, the dominance of Punjabi directors and actors, forming multi-generational families, could have facilitated lighter skin tones becoming a prominent characteristic (Sheth, Jones

& Spencer, 2021). Secondly, skin colour was also the most distinctive marker between Europeans and Indians in the sixteenth century; whiteness came to be associated with power, status, and affluence, owing to India's colonial past society (Sheth et al., 2021). Films are also heavily censored in India in the case of explicit sexual content; song and dance sequences in films were then used as a stand-in for expressing sexual desires. This is precisely why "gesture, silence, tongue and cheek dialogue and other forms of suggestive behaviour became the hallmarks of the Bollywood cinematic genre" (Sheth et al., 2021, p.20). Interviews with participants of this study will be insightful in revealing whether these criticisms and prejudices prevail today and impact notions of their cultural identities. The following section will focus more closely on Bollywood's influence on mediating and influencing identities.

2.8 Bollywood Cinema in Mediating Identities

This section aims to build on the relationship between cinema and the diaspora, explicitly focusing on Bollywood films mediating identities for the South Asian diaspora. Three critical decades will be outlined in relation to India's political, cultural, social, and historical contexts to show the evolution of films that simultaneously mediated identities: the 1950s, late 1970s, and early 2000s. Lastly, some key international studies on the South Asian diaspora and Bollywood cinema will be outlined to discuss the concepts of identity construction through themes, narratives and stereotypes (Punathambekar, 2005; Datta, 2008; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Dudrah, 2006; Tirumala, 2009).

Nation-building was a constant theme in Indian films during the early 1950s, termed the 'Nehruvian' era; nationalist attitudes akin to leaders at the time were prevalent, as India had just gained Independence in 1947 (Ganti, 2013; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Kumar, 2014). Films depicted political subtexts embedded within social and family dramas, and the Nehruvian worldview was seen as an extension of the ideological legacy of the freedom struggle. Indian films further extended to creating tropes, genres and characterisation, including ‘the angry young man' trope, which became common in films from the late 1970s. Amitabh Bachchan, a prominent Indian actor, catapulted to fame after starring in a series of films playing the angry young man in the late 70s and 1980s. In *The Romantics* (2023), Anupama Chopra unpacks ‘the 'angry young man' archetype, crediting Yash Chopra's ingeniousness. As she commented, "You can't speak about Hindi cinema without speaking about [the film] *Deewaar*. … the template of the angry young man" (Chopra, as cited in Mundhra, 2023). Chopra understood the nation's mood then; India entered the Emergency from 1975 to 1977, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency nationwide. It was a draconian era in which press freedom was censored, elections were cancelled, and civil liberties were suspended. The 'angry young man' hero was seen as a backlash and voice of the commoner (Mundhra, 2023) to state repression. A shift happened in the early 2000s after the economic liberalisation, which was a catalyst for change in the Indian film industry in the late 90s; characters were seen as depicting conflicted identities or their "non-resident alter egos" (Therwath, 2010, p.12; Datta, 2008; Dudrah,

2006; Kaur & Sinha, 2005; Vasudevan, 2011). Whereas in the 1970s, Indians living abroad were often depicted as deserters with little or no attachment to their homeland, films in the late 1990s and early 2000s changed this perception (Friesen, as cited in Dwivedi, 2014, p.122).

As aforementioned in this section on Bollywood cinema, the 1990s and 2000s saw Bollywood being established as a brand (Jones et al., 2005; Kumar, 2014; Athique, 2011; Datta, 2008; Mishra, 2006). Bollywood took advantage of the widely dispersed South Asian diaspora and encapsulated themes specifically appealing to overseas Indians, stressing the importance of the homeland and cultural traditions. Indians at home and abroad faced difficulties accepting changing social structures post-liberalisation and newfound consumerism. The themes were to aid diasporic Indians in locating their beliefs and values in a globalised context (Miller, 2015; Punathambekar, 2005; Desai, 2004). Bollywood's popularity grew due to films showcasing foreign locations and the Indian diaspora residing overseas. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia also attracted audiences for these films (Kaur & Sinha, 2005; Tirumala, 2009; Ganguly, 2010). In *The Romantics* (2023), Aditya Chopra reminisces about the mood in the 90s, which was about aspirations and looking westward due to more brands investing in India and increases in foreign investments. Chopra discussed the impact on YRF and his career, stating the consensus at the time was 'What is an Indian?' with urban India's values shifting and exploring new avenues of nationhood and affinity. Actor Saif Ali Khan, interviewed for the same documentary, emphasised that people were looking for an identity: "I think we were looking for ideas, we were looking for an identity". This was when the NRI classification was born (Chopra & Khan, as cited in Mundhra, 2023). Aftab (2002) provides a helpful definition of being a Non-Resident Indian, noting that it is more of a mental state of belonging than a physical one. He explains that diaspora is a "community joined up not so much by geography as by a web of shared cultural influences" (p.92). Films with themes of nationhood, national identity or East versus Western values typically depicted these characters. The films also retained popular cultural idioms representing a more extensive dialogue between India and the diaspora, constructing affinity to nationhood or traditional Indian cultural values (Sen, 2013; Mishra, 2002).

In *The Romantics* (2023), Lily Singh, a Canadian YouTuber, television host and comedian, is interviewed, and she reminiscences growing up watching YRF films as a diasporic Indian, specifically mentioning *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) [DDLJ] directed by Aditya Chopra. She shared, "I know deep down that I really seek my parents' approval. And that's why the ending of DDLJ meant so much to me." She further explained that this approval resonated deeply with diasporic Indians (Mundhra, 2023). The film focused on the love between two NRI protagonists (Simran and Raj). Simran’s father wanted his daughter to return to India and marry his friend’s son (Kuljeet) and does not approve of her relationship with the NRI Raj, whose way of life was too Westernised for him. However, over the course of the film, the father repents, and Simran and Raj receive her father’s approval to marry. The father’s iconic last line, “Go, Simran, go live your life”, marks the end of the

film as the father acquiesces to his daughter's wishes. This is the ending Lilly Singh refers to, where the NRI daughter receives her father's blessing even though she could have pursued her desire without him. This comment is emblematic of the two worlds that NRIs or those in the diaspora negotiate.

Veteran actor Anupam Kher interviewed in the same series, affirmed he viewed Bollywood cinema's growth as an era before *DDLJ* and after *DDLJ* in terms of how a hero treated a heroine (Mundhra, 2023). The film instilled values of parents being important before pursuing a romance, adhering to traditional Indian cultural values over Western values to rebel against your parents. Punathambekar (2005) completed a thematic reading of the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), directed by Karan Johar and interviewed NRIs residing in the United States on the notion of Indianness. The study revealed that regional cinemas could intersect "national narratives," explaining that not all migrant diasporas are dominated by Bollywood and or associated with the NRI classification; the Indian diaspora comes from diverse geographical and linguistic settings (p.166). Pulkit Datta (2008) analysed the film *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), directed by Nikkhil Advani and produced by Karan Johar. He examined issues of diasporic identity in the film depicted through dialogues and the ensemble of characters. For example, the film's main protagonists spoke Hindi, their designated ethnic language, and were often dressed in traditional clothing but effortlessly transitioned into their Western identities. Vijay Mishra (2002), in his analysis of the film *Dilwale Dulhania Leh Jayenge* (1995), uncovered similar issues: Simran, one of the main protagonists, was a British-born citizen but spoke her mother tongue Hindi without an accent and adhered to all Indian cultural practices. The NRI classification is therefore problematic; some diasporic Indians also identified the acronym NRI as being "not really Indian" (Kaur, 2002, p.323) and find themselves in a state of complex identity conundrum with their cultural values. This is a pivotal point for my research, looking at film-viewing practices by New Zealand-Indians as a transnational diaspora and whether their cultural identities were influenced or resonated with issues faced by NRIs outlined above and or depicted in Bollywood films.

A quantitative study completed by Schaefer & Karan (2013) interviewed NRIs in the United States on their responses to products associated with Bollywood; the responses highlighted some critical points examined earlier in this chapter, including labelling Bollywood as India's "soft power" (Schaefer & Karan, 2013, p.50). Furthermore, responses indicated that Bollywood, as a medium, is appreciated for allowing the participants to be connected to India, preserving their ethnic identities despite conflicting themes of East versus West (Schaefer & Karan, 2013, p.160). Rajinder Dudrah (2006) conducted an ethnographic study in Birmingham, UK, exploring the cultural identity of British South Asians depicted in Bollywood cinema. Dudrah also did a content analysis of the film *Pardes* [Foreign land] (1997), which was set in both India and the United States, symbolising the main protagonist's internal identity conflicts of belonging in "two worlds" being separated "geographically and socially" but still adhering to cultural values (Dudrah, 2006, p.72). The responses yielded were similar to

Schaefer & Karan's (2013) study above; participants were optimistic about seeing multifaceted identities on screen despite utopian endings.

Lakshmi Tirumala (2009) conducted a qualitative study in Texas, United States, discussing Bollywood and identity construction with second-generation Indian Americans. Tirumala held focus groups allowing participants to talk openly about their experiences. The results of this study also aligned with research conducted by Dudrah (2006) and Schaefer and Karan (2013). Participants confirmed Bollywood as a medium to learn about Indian cultural practices and played an integral role in cultural identity maintenance. Wright (2015) argues that films also distort reality, and considering this, many studies conducted on Bollywood cinema and the diaspora have limited accountability for those who may reject the medium. Instead, participants readily watched Bollywood films. Future research directions could explore audiences who critique Bollywood and the ideologies represented to determine whether the relationship between cinema and the diaspora is transposed. This research will be inclusive and welcome opinions from those who do not view Bollywood films and associate them with their cultural identity, which always evolves as an ongoing process (Hall, 1990; Ang, 2001; Vallabh, 2013; Gilbertson, 2007).

Most of the studies on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora have been historical in nature, focusing on migration, settlement, employability, and immigration experiences; some of these significant studies were discussed in Chapter One. The limitation of Vallabh's (2013) and Gilbertson's (2007) studies was that they examined particular Indian ethnic communities, e.g., Gujaratis. This research expands the focus and seeks to examine Indians born in New Zealand, various regions of India, or elsewhere. While previous studies on Indian migrants in New Zealand consider the diaspora's identity conundrum, they mostly centred on migrants from specific regions in India. They thus cannot claim to represent the widely dispersed Indian diaspora in New Zealand. Further, these studies have not looked at the role of Bollywood films in mediating diasporic identities; international studies discussed above prove a research direction exists, all participate in exploring their cultural roots via Bollywood, despite growing up in liberal societies (Dudrah, 2006; Tirumala, 2009; Punathambekar, 2005; Schaefer & Karan, 2013).

2.9 Conclusion

This literature review chapter aimed to build on the main concepts that establish the context of this research, the Indian diaspora, cultural identities, the relationship between cinema and diaspora, Bollywood's soft power and global influence, key criticisms of Bollywood cinema, and its role in mediating identities. The chapter concludes that the Indian diaspora constitutes a significant and unique force spread globally, contributing to economic and cultural development in India and host countries. Film scholars have also studied Bollywood films internationally, indicating an existing relationship between films and mediating cultural identities for the Indian diaspora. Bollywood has

had a significant influence on cultural production outside of India. However, it is a dual-edged implication, both gratifying and sometimes problematic. It is still an ideal assemblage to explore cultural identities shaped by films, music, clothing, food, fandom and popular culture.

Dudrah (2006) and Rajadhyaksha (2003) label Bollywood as a social, cultural and media phenomenon because it is a globally recognised brand, with films distributed internationally; it also dominates the discourse around India's many regional cinemas. "Bollywood occupies a space analogous to the film industry but can be viewed as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities" (Rajadhyaksha, 2003, p. 27). In addition, Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004) affirm that cinema is not limited to being reflective of society. Cinema also participates in the fabrication of it too, making it an ideological apparatus for social inquiry. Furthermore, interest in Bollywood has not been restricted solely to earlier migrants but extends to the second and third-generation Indian diasporas (Kaur, 2002; Shailo, 2016; Dudrah, 2006; Tirumala, 2009).

This justifies a research direction focused on exploring the relationship between cinema and the signifiers of cultural identity construction via Bollywood for New Zealand-Indians. My research provides an opportunity to research further a younger generation of New Zealand-Indians born in New Zealand and overseas because ethnic boundaries have also continued to be reshaped alongside a changing society, as well as societal attitudes and prejudices. As Appadurai (2006) states, "young people are faced with questions that transcend their own local experiences and are permeated by global forces and factors" (p. 176). Bollywood has demonstrated that it is a global phenomenon beyond local factors. Current literature on contemporary New Zealand-Indians mainly comes from university research studies, journals and books. Through an interpretive phenomenological approach, this research will examine individual experiences and the complex ways in which New Zealand-Indians mediate their cultural identities. The following chapter will present the methodology and methods applied in this research.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology & Method

> “The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand” – (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methodology and methods used in this study to examine the experiences of New Zealand-Indians, their sense of cultural identity and the role of Bollywood cinema in mediating their diasporic sense of self. This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which diasporic cultural identities are negotiated in everyday lives and the influences of Bollywood films in shaping notions of Indianness. Qualitative methods, including a focus group and semi-structured interviews, were employed to understand the role of social institutions, family, friends, work, and social activities and particularly film-watching — in shaping cultural identity. The practice of watching Bollywood films explored themes such as prejudice, stereotypes, toxic masculinity, gender bias, racism, expectations, and conformity, and their influence on the construction of a contemporary New Zealand-Indian identity for the study's participants. This chapter begins with an overview of the research design, describing the type of qualitative method used and its appropriateness for the aims of this particular study and a justification of researcher bias. Following this, the sampling methods are discussed, including a description of the participants used in the study. A brief section on ethical considerations is presented, followed by a description of data collection and a discussion of the data analysis process.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to gain insight into the experiences of how New Zealand-Indians negotiate their cultural identity. Qualitative research is advantageous because it allows researchers to observe and specify a phenomenon to significantly contribute to the broader state of knowledge (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). Moreover, analysing diasporic communities and cinema shows that social actors, representations, and films reflect and communicate aspects of society because films "tell about society" (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 7). This research takes up a cultural studies approach to understanding how people make sense of the world they live in by placing prominence on the subjectivity and specificity of their spoken and observed discussions and activities while situating them within the sociocultural context in which they operate – witnessing the diverse perspectives people hold due to their unique environments, backgrounds and or how their cultural upbringing influences behaviours. Hall (1980) emphasised the importance of this approach

for researchers to aim to understand experience in terms of how people define and respond to various situations, such as how individuals and or groups interact with and challenge dominant norms and values. According to Hall (1980), cultural studies are essential for understanding the relationship between culture and society. He emphasises that cultural practices are not merely individual or isolated events but deeply intertwined with power, identity, ideology, and social structures. By examining the role of media, such as films, through a cultural studies lens, valuable insights are gained into how societies function and the dynamics of culture and power.

The current form of cultural studies we witness first developed as British cultural studies at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. The Center's work focussed on how gender, class, race, nationality, and ethnicity were represented in media and cultural texts. Douglas Kellner (1997) argues that the British cultural studies provided useful resources to critique current forms of culture and produce social theories to bring about political transformation and emancipation. Cultural studies begin with a strong Marxist tradition focusing on how capitalist domination and consumerism were perpetuated by popular culture (Kellner, 1997). Since then, cultural studies has transformed, leading Kellner (1997), Rodman (2017) and Miller (2001) to note that defining cultural studies is not a straightforward task.

Cultural studies is an academic project rather than a specific discipline or methodology and has no fixed object of study or a single political agenda covering a wide range of theoretical approaches and practices (Rodman, 2017). This is why Rodman (2017) claims that cultural studies is similar in nature to postcolonial and feminist projects rather than traditional disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. Nelson and, Treichler, and Grossberg (1991) point out that cultural studies is an "interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and a narrowly humanistic conception of culture" (p. 4). This is why they note that the different forms of culture experienced by various social groups are important to cultural studies scholars, especially in understanding notions of power and subjectivity under specific conditions of time and space play out (Grossberg et al., 1991).

Cultural studies seeks to understand the articulations between power and everyday formations in specific contexts. Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler (1991) focus on a context-focused approach, examining how social realities are shaped through language and discourse rather than simply analysing the meaning of texts or how people understand them. Further, cultural studies also seeks to understand how meanings are etched into cultural products, such as films, which are also influenced by the socio-cultural, political, and historical landscapes in which they are produced. A cultural studies approach to Bollywood cinema and diaspora can examine how films construct meaning within socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts.

This perspective enables an analysis of Bollywood's portrayal of the diasporic experience, encompassing cultural identity, belonging, and expression. It also explores the influence of globalisation on Bollywood's narratives and appeal. Analysing the political and historical context of certain films reveals their impact on migration, nationhood, and cultural negotiation (Ganti, 2013; Srivastava, 2006; Dudrah, 2006; Mishra, 2002). Films, as cultural products, are a viable medium for the dissemination of knowledge, communication, and information that motivates social change. Viewers use their personal and cultural capital to ascribe meanings to texts. This approach supports an insightful research direction for this study, examining the New Zealand-Indian diaspora's relationship with Bollywood and exploring how Bollywood films shape their cultural identity, sense of belonging, and connection to both India and New Zealand (Vallabh, 2013; Gilbertson, 2007). My motivation for exploring the New Zealand-Indian diaspora and how its members perform and negotiate their dual cultural identities comes from observing youth at Auckland's Diwali Mela, where they performed on Bollywood music. Additionally, my personal interactions within the Indian community in Auckland have significantly influenced my research. My goal is to understand the perspectives and experiences of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, capturing how they navigate and express their cultural identities from their own viewpoints.

Qualitative research seeks to understand the world through the perspectives and experiences of the people being studied, focusing on how individuals see, interpret, and make sense of their own realities. It aims to "document the world from the point of view of the people studied" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 45). And examining individuals' experiences and exploring personal feelings, beliefs, and experiences are all critical elements of ethnography (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography is a qualitative research method central to knowing the world from the standpoint of its social relations, more specifically, exploring the cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subjects of the study to understand the interaction of individuals with others within the culture or society in which they live (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodology also situates itself in the natural world, providing research with a framework that focuses on the context and meanings relevant to the research question. The research paradigm interconnects a variety of methods, terms, concepts, and assumptions. It also reflects methodically on who the researcher is in the inquiry, their holistic view of social phenomena and complex reasoning relevant to the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The philosophical approach underpinning this research is in the constructivist paradigm, whereby the researcher's understanding is co-constructed by interacting with participants through methods such as interviews for mutual learning and information sharing. This collaboration helps researchers gain a better understanding of the subject matter. Previous studies conducted on Bollywood and diasporas have used quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Dudrah, 2006; Punathambekar, 2005; Datta, 2008; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Tirumala, 2009). However, qualitative methods using interviews and observations are better suited to reveal participant responses and provide sufficient material for researchers to analyse and compare. Another advantage of using qualitative methods

in exploratory research is open-ended questions, which create an atmosphere of openness between researchers and participants (Pope & Mays, 2000). Researchers and participants can engage in conversations and discussions to better understand significant issues that play a role in everyday life. This approach varies from the more structured, quantitative studies that often utilise close-ended questions, assuming all participants have a mutual understanding and interpretation of questions and experiences, omitting opportunities to seek further clarification. Silverman (2014) also notes that qualitative research is best suited to work with smaller groups of people. When the data collection process is undertaken, in this case, through interviewing, these smaller groups of people will unveil information and data defined by their past and present situations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Qualitative research emphasises on experience and interpretation (Bryman, 2001) and this approach suits the aim of this study which focuses on how the participants understood the world around them and negotiated their identities. The methodology of this approach focuses on how people understand and attach meaning to subjective realities. As Merriam notes, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (2009, p. 13).The interview questions posed in this study attempt to decipher beyond the meaning of lived experiences. This research examined real-world scenarios where participants understood and unpacked their experiences of negotiating their cultural identities. Identities were influenced implicitly rather than explicitly by various non-textual factors, such as interactions with others and Bollywood films. The concept of cultural identities emerged as dynamic and not fluid, as outlined in the literature review chapter. Diasporas continue negotiating identities to accept host, home and or ancestral cultures; participants were constantly in flux, with their cultural identities being shaped by their various personal experiences. Braun & Clarke (2013) emphasise that "multiple versions of reality, even for the same person," exist in various contexts (p. 5). In other words, many different "social worlds" exist side by side and are entwined, often overlapping (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p.8).

What this means is that an individual's social reality is continually constructed and reconstructed based on the meanings and interpretations derived from their experiences. Constructivism also asserts that social actors continually accomplish social phenomena and their meanings in a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2001, cited in Grix, 2002). As Merriam & Tisdell point out, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6).

Other characteristics of qualitative studies are that study designs are often novel and flexible, data is often collected in natural settings, multiple forms of data may be collected, and the sample selection is usually purposeful and small (Merriam, 2009). Alder & Clark (2008) recommend that less structured interviews give researchers more opportunities to examine people's backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, expectations and perceptions of themselves in detail. Alder & Clarke (2008)

additionally state that a disadvantage of structured interviews is that they assume participants understand and interpret questions similarly and assume experiences are shared, limiting further exploration. The decision not to ground this study in quantitative methods was also due to its mathematical approach to measuring data using numerical scores, which would exclude describing the complex interplay between participants' internal and external experiences in their everyday lives and interactions. The cultural studies approach, coupled with qualitative research methods, empowers participants to have a substantial role in the research by allowing them to share their experiences with the researcher. Therefore, for all the reasons outlined, qualitative research methods prevailed over more quantitative approaches for data collection.

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method combining a predetermined set of open-ended questions and discussion-provoking questions with an opportunity for the researcher to explore a particular topic or answers further; the interview still retains an indicative line of questions from the literature review to coincide with research themes. Rubin & Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing method is based on a conversational partnership between the researcher and participant. This method allows the researcher to empathise with the personal experiences of the participants' words and stories to create meanings. The interview becomes a conversation, and the researcher can pose unscripted questions or provide an opinion. The inherent view is that the interviewer is both researcher and participant and can promote insight and reflection by contributing to the conversation. The researcher can also further examine the participant's histories, lifestyles and views about the social groups and institutions they consider themselves a part of. This research's objective is to gather an in-depth understanding of the relationship between New Zealand-Indians in exploring their sense of cultural identity, which is constantly evolving and, at times, shaped by Bollywood's role in mediating 'Indianness' on-screen. This qualitative method of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their reasoning and responses in detail with the researcher's encouragement to elaborate further. Instead of guiding and directing the knowledge with close-ended questions, power is given to the participants to have their voices heard (Bryman, 2001). The benefits of hosting a focus group, a group of people who knew each other, also facilitated a more natural conversation among participants, being at ease to challenge and agree with each other when they were already acquainted outside the focus group. In addition, the focus group chosen for this study was a dance group that emersed themselves in their cultural identities through performance, a form of reproducing culture. Therefore, the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method for individual interviews and the focus group for this study is justified, allowing for discussions to take place and points to be further elaborated.

3.3 Researcher Bias

As discussed above, qualitative research aims to produce contextual real-world knowledge about a specific group of people's behaviours, social structures and shared beliefs. Interpretive research is

also a less controlled methodology, as it requires me to reflect on my position as a researcher to consider my participation and perception in influencing the results. The research also reflects my cultural affiliations, as I aspire to make sense of my own cultural identity of being a New Zealand-born Indian and bring my own subjective worldviews, experiences and passion (Silverman, 2014). As Grix reminds, "for all research necessarily starts from a person's view of the world, which itself is shaped by the experiences one brings to the research process" (2002, p.179).

In this case, I am an 'insider', sharing a cultural identity, language and cultural context with the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The catalyst for this research comes from personal perceptions of growing up as a first-generation New Zealand-Indian in Auckland and consuming Bollywood films. I have witnessed or been exposed to social situations where Indianness is negotiated or rejected by peers, as well as films dictating my sense of belonging and self. I was cognizant of the participant's experiences and understood the cultural context to an extent. I shared a cultural identity, languages and experiences as an insider, building a rapport with the participants and making them more comfortable to divulge their personal experiences. Merriam (2009) asserts that researchers are key data collection and analysis instruments in qualitative studies.

Adler and Adler (1987) identified three' membership roles' for researchers in qualitative research and unpacked the "existential dual role" researchers struggle with (p.73). In the context of this research, I am a peripheral member, wanting an insider perspective from the participants to understand their shared values, beliefs, and experiences to understand better the phenomena being studied. Although I could resonate, I did not exert my opinions during the interviews; instead, I remained perceptive and observant - "interviewer and interviewee are always actively engaged in constructing meaning" (Silverman, 2014, p. 173).

Being an 'insider' gives the researcher legitimacy and stigma (Adler & Adler, 1987); on the one hand, the insider status helped with access, in knowing the ethnic community and gaining acceptance by the participants. Consequently, having an insider researcher facilitates a detailed understanding of a specific group of people. An insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding of a population that may not be readily accessible (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Author Salman Rushdie (2010) further emphasises that 'Indian' writers are both insiders and outsiders in society, despite their migration journeys away from India, and can write from a dual perspective. Adler & Adler (1987) further state that the distinction between researcher and participants have "traditionally existed more strongly in theory than in practice" and "objectification of the self has occurred in the analysis rather than the fieldwork" (p.85).

As aforementioned in Chapter One, I remained respectful and objective in analysing and presenting the themes, removing my subjective position and bias as the researcher. The data collection ensured to include participants from a range of ages, gender, occupation, educational background and origins of Indian ancestry. And various classifications of New Zealand residency, permanent residents,

citizens, overseas-born residents and citizens were included. Further, the data analysis was conducted with complete transparency and in ongoing discussions with my supervisor. During the interviews, I also adhered to the values of trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness. Lastly, with respect to privacy and confidentiality, ethics approval was sought and gained by the university - AUT Ethics Committee.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to analyse, synthesise and discuss the findings will be thematic analysis, often used across social science and cinema studies. I intend to use this framework with an inductive approach, seeking the validity of participants' responses (data) and measuring them against existing theories and research on diasporas, cultural identity and Bollywood. As Patton notes, "an inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves" (Patton, 1990, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83). Inductive analysis also entails reading and re-reading the data for themes without fitting the data into a pre-existing framework or themes discovered from previous studies.

Thematic analysis is ideal for research questions related to individual experiences and perceptions, as it is more than just counting words and phrases; it draws on themes or specific patterns found in the data to describe a particular phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes capture something significant about the data relating to the research question and represent a patterned response or meaning within the data set. Themes are "considered a thread of underlying meaning implicitly discovered at the interpretative level and elements of subjective understandings of participants" (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, Snelgrove, 2016, p.101). A stronger theme is developed when something is said repeatedly or with intensity or strong emphasis for a disagreement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research used Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis to code, organize and publish the findings:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data
2. Generalizing initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86-93)

Thematic analysis has been used in qualitative research as a data analysis method for detecting codes and identifying themes (Dapkus, 1985). Although thematic analysis has been discussed for

decades, it was only in the 1990s that it was developed as a method (Aronson, 1995). This is why Braun and Clarke (2006) described it as an underestimated method and explicate the process of how thematic analysis is to be conducted. Clark and Braun (2013) argue that thematic analysis is a flexible tool that need not be bound within a theoretical templates thus making it a method more than a methodology. Braun and Clarke argue that "thematic analysis means researchers need not subscribe to the implicit theoretical commitments" (2006, p.8). They posit that thematic analysis supports methodical techniques for identifying "codes and themes from qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.297), focusing on identifying patterned meanings across a dataset. Further, they point out that thematic analysis is not a summary of data collected but rather an interpretation of the data based on the themes that has evolved. As they explicate:

A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set … This is a question of prevalence both in terms of space within each data item, and prevalence across the entire data set. Ideally there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.10).

Thematic analysis "can be used … to capture both manifest (explicit) and latent (underlying) meaning" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.298). It can have either a semantic approach in which the analysis is based on articulations of participants or it could be latent where the researcher identifies the underlying ideologies that inform the statement from the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, the researcher thus plays an important role in identifying what qualifies as a theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that researchers embrace a degree of flexibility when identifying themes but should remain within the analysis. As Clarke and Braun (2006) comment, "For instance, you might wish to provide a rich thematic description of your entire data set, so that the reader gets a sense of the predominant or important themes. In this case, the themes you identify, code, and analyse would need to be an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set. In such an analysis, some depth and complexity is necessarily lost … This might be a particularly useful method when you are investigating an under-researched area, or with participants whose views on the topic are not known" (2006, p.11).

The thematic analysis approach I have employed is a mixture of both semantic and latent: the findings report on what is said or shared by participants (semantic) and also focuses on identifying the implicit ideologies that shape the participants point of view (latent approach). I collated the data and identified themes that are consistent across the data set, not just those that resonated with my experiences. For the thematic analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to analyse the interview data. I first familiarised myself with the data gathered. The data familiarisation was a rigorous process that entailed listening and relistening to the interviews a number of times. I then started to generate initial codes (Phase Two) that were manifesting in the

dataset. I used open coding which meant I developed and modified codes as I progressed through the coding process as I did not have pre-set codes. I discussed this with my supervisor and through our discussions amended the codes accordingly. From the codes identified, I then moved to Phase Three, identifying themes that manifested across the dataset. Through this I identified patterns and compared and contrasted them and identified themes. Following this, I reviewed the themes (Phase Four) to ensure that the themes were coherent across the datasets. This involved discussion with my supervisor across several meetings to ensure that I did not miss out on themes, that themes did not overlap and that the coding was objective. Phase 5 involved defining and naming themes. Phases Three to Five was rigorous as all interviews were transcribed verbatim, after which I listened to the interviews several more times to ensure that the transcription was precise and then each interview was analysed and coded with a colour label based on the theme participants spoke about. The semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to elaborate on certain issues, and the duration of each interview averaged approximately two hours. Transcribing the interviews was time-consuming but necessary as it enabled me to think through the narratives shared, identify key themes, and, most importantly, ensure that I did not leave out their points of view. The final phase, Phase Six, involved producing the report which in this research refers to the findings. Phase Six entailed re-listening to the interviews one more time to ensure that the themes identified were consistent across the data sets and, most importantly, to identify if more themes emerged. The key themes that manifested across the interviews included cultural identity negotiation and formation, Indianness expressed through cultural practices and values, and multiculturism and racism. The themes that emerged from discussing Bollywood's role in mediating cultural identities included nostalgia, belonging, entertainment, patriotism, fandom, sexism, hegemony and casteism.

Summarily, from the data gathered, I could develop themes, look at patterns in agreement and disagreements and identify distinct responses. Transcripts were analysed; patterns discovered in the transcripts became themes for further analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ultimately, the findings will discuss commonalities, relationships and differences across the data. Holloway and Todres (2003, p.347) identify "thematizing meanings" as one of the few common skills in qualitative analysis (cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Therefore, thematic analysis supports this inquiry into concepts of cultural identity communicated through narratives, characters and themes in Bollywood films, which participants may resonate with.

3.5 Sampling Method and Recruitment

Snowball and purposive sampling were used to gather a sample of seventeen participants for twelve individual interviews and a focus group of five. Purposive sampling established the criteria for participants with specific attributes based on the study's aims and purpose. The selection criteria specified that participants were required to be New Zealand permanent residents or citizens with

Indian ancestry, residing in Auckland and between 18 to 35 years old. The focus group selection criteria was kept the same, with an additional requirement to be a performance or community-based group. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample participants strategically so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Snowball sampling was used to approach research networks, ethnic community groups, social networking sites and custom emails for participants identified as relevant to the study. I also employed personal networking, providing my contact information to friends active in community theatre and dance groups. Flyers were also distributed around the university's common areas. The sample recruited an equal split of males and females, with varied ages and ancestry, from different regions of India. And an interest in Bollywood films was welcomed but not mandatory.

The rationale for selecting New Zealand Indians residing in Auckland for analysis was due to the Indian diaspora being the second largest worldwide, according to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme in 2010 (UNDP, as cited in Schaefer & Karan, 2013, p.150). Official results from the 2023 Census confirmed that New Zealand's Indian population had overtaken the Chinese community to become the third-largest ethnic group in the country (Statistics New Zealand - Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2023). The Indian population in Auckland alone has grown by thirteen per cent, rising from 154,824 in 2018 to 175,794 in 2023 (Statistics New Zealand - Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2023). Additionally, the sample on a micro level also encompasses diverse "regional, linguistic and religious" groups from all different migration experiences of the Indian diaspora and various countries such as Fiji, South Africa, and The Middle East (Gilbertson, 2007, p. 4). Auckland is home to people from many places, cultures, and traditions, and around one-third of New Zealand's population (34 percent) lives in Auckland, making it a significant region to examine in the context of multiculturalism in New Zealand (Auckland Council, 2023).

The justification for examining the experiences of youth aligned with Appadurai's (2006) observations on conducting research; he found that youth are more likely to respond to external influences or experience the dilemmas of identity crisis and or culture often. Additionally, the previous literature review on studies related to Bollywood cinema and cultural identity in Chapter Two showed films are cultural products and media texts that play a key role in self-actualisation and greatly influence young audiences, who also use media for self-expression and cultural identity negotiation (Levy, 2008; Dudrah, 2006; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Tirumala, 2009).

Lastly, Bollywood was chosen as the subject matter because it is hegemonic and internationally distributed and dominates the discourse of Indian cinema internationally (Dudrah, 2006; Sen, 2013; Ganti, 2013). The literature review demonstrated that Bollywood films aid diasporic Indians in locating their beliefs and values in a globalised context (Punathambekar, 2005; Desai, 2004). Mishra (2002) also stated that studying Bollywood is only complete with analysing diasporic aspirations.

Overseas market figures have consistently shown that Bollywood films are top grossers, and NRIs account for up to 40 percent of production profits (Aftab, 2002, p. 92).

Participants who indicated interest were sent information sheets (see Appendices) outlining the research objectives, selection criteria, data collection method, risks and costs. Contact details for the researcher and academic supervisor were also available for any concerns. An explanation was also given on data and privacy, how their information will be protected, emphasising that no third-party access would be given, and only the researcher and academic supervisor will see the raw data collected and collated. Participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they could withdraw their responses at any point during the interview process and before the findings were published. Those who agreed then received a phone call, email or message via social media platform to confirm a suitable time and place for an interview. At the time of this contact, participants were given a further opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

Table 1 below presents an overview of the individual participants recruited for this study.

Table 1

Participant Details – Individual Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Residency	Origins in India
Raj	30	M	NZ Citizen	New Delhi
Nitin	31	M	NZ Resident	Mumbai
Harsh	32	M	NZ Citizen	Bhopal
Rohan	33	M	NZ Citizen	Goa
Uday	34	M	NZ Citizen	Surat
Vijay	29	M	NZ Resident	Kerala
Anjali	30	F	NZ Resident	Mumbai
Jessica	26	F	NZ Citizen	Bhavnagar
Zara	27	F	NZ Citizen	Mumbai
Shilpa	35	F	NZ Citizen	Pune
Jennifer	29	F	NZ Citizen	Kerala
Maya	27	F	NZ Citizen	Pune

Table 2 below presents an overview of the participants of the focus group.

Table 2

Participant Details – Focus Group Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Residency	Origins in India
Aditi	33	F	NZ Citizen	Fiji & Gujarat
Ahana	26	F	NZ Citizen	Fiji & Gujarat
Kriti	20	F	NZ Citizen	Gujarat
Veena	20	F	NZ Citizen by birth	Fiji & Gujarat
Jia	23	F	NZ Citizen by birth	Gujarat

The age range of participants varied from 20 years old to 35 years old, including the focus group participants. Out of the individual participants interviewed, two were New Zealand citizens by birth and 10 were born overseas, having emigrated under the age of 10 with their families and/or as international students. These participants have New Zealand permanent residency and/or chose to pursue New Zealand citizenship.

Those who emigrated for studies spoke of choosing between Australia, Canada and New Zealand, looking at opportunities in these countries regarding safety, education, job prospects and livelihood. Overall, the individual interview participants came from various regions in India, primarily Central India, Mumbai, Pune, and West India, Gujarat. Two participants were also from Kerala, South India. One participant was from Southwest India, Goa, and others were from North India, Bhopal, and New Delhi. Some participants had also been raised outside of India and had overseas experience before moving to New Zealand from Kuwait, Oman, and the United States. Participants' mother tongues included Gujarati, Marathi, Parsi, Konkani, Punjabi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and Fiji-Hindi.

The focus group session for this study consisted of members of a Bollywood dance-based performance group in Auckland. The performance group has been around for almost fifteen years, active in the community space, performing for Auckland Diwali Mela, regional Diwali festivals, Christmas in the Park, and charities. The group also produces large-scale drama, story and dance-based productions involving choreography, music, scripting, and costume design. The focus group participants were all female because the performing group members were available to be interviewed at the time. However, the group consists of various age ranges, children and adults, and is inclusive of all genders. The group also runs a Bollywood dance school, and students aged five to fifty-plus attend. Further, the focus group participants all had familial ties to the region of Gujarat in India, and

a few had origins in Fiji as well, mirroring the earlier migration patterns of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora discussed in Chapter One. Most of the focus group participants were also New Zealand citizens by birth.

3.6 Validity and Limitations

Drawing overarching conclusions from qualitative research can be challenging, which often provides diverse and intricate information about how specific audiences interact with particular texts within specific settings (Lim, 2024). A limitation of qualitative research is that it usually focuses on smaller, specific groups, which may not provide a true representation of larger populations. “Qualitative research often involves smaller, specific samples, which may not represent broader populations,” (Lim, 2024, p. 3-4). The interpretive approach allows for the presence of subjective factors, including but not limited to the beliefs and values of the researcher influencing the interpretation (Lim, 2024). While this research yields rich and valuable data, applying these findings and translating them to generalised observations can be complex. The research cannot make generalisations for the Indian diasporic community present in New Zealand and or the larger population of Indians born in New Zealand and residents with Indian ancestry. The selection criteria specified an age group, geographical location, residency, or citizenship status. The Indian diaspora is not homogenous, coming from various immigration journeys, and is diverse in language, culture and religion. It was essential to have a sample that reflected the diversity of New Zealand-Indians; the sample of data, despite being small, strived to be inclusive and mindful of this. Auckland also has a predominantly considered urban population in New Zealand. This study excluded rural areas outside Auckland and other regions and populous cities.

Another practical limitation includes this being a small-scale study with only one researcher available to conduct ethnographic interviews and analyse the data. The sample size was factored into the research design. It justified using in-depth interviews to gather a wealth of data from each participant, validating the results and conclusions drawn for this study.

Focus groups represent a naturally occurring social situation in this study, where participants had all performed with one another or belonged to the same community; a limitation of focus groups was that participants might sway the discussion to either consensus or extreme views. For example, some participants may feel pressure to conform to the perspectives of more dominant group members; however, such effects were diminished by asking the same question to each participant in turn. Providing each participant with the opportunity to reflect, elaborate, or clarify their responses enabled them to share their individual points of view.

Lastly, the research design concerning the Indian diaspora was informed by previously conducted migration, immigration and historical studies as discussed in Chapters One and Two. Academic

research and scholarship available were limited to the subject areas on the relationship between the Indian diaspora and cinema, more specifically, Bollywood in New Zealand.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

When working with qualitative data, researchers generally disguise or remove information that might directly or indirectly lead to identifying the participants and other people, organisations, or third parties. Participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms as they were discussing personal experiences. All electronic material, including signed consent forms and audio from interviews, and transcripts, were stored on an encrypted hard drive and within secure cloud storage, only accessible by username and password. Concerns related to privacy and confidentiality and reducing discomfort to participants were addressed by following the ethical principles outlined in the ethics approval sought and gained by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 2 August 2018. Participants were fully informed of the purpose and scope of the research and the process of interviews to take place. A researcher risk management protocol was also in place, given that interviews were conducted in private and public residences. A safety protocol notified the academic supervisor of the interview location, estimated start and finish time, and confirmation of when the interview was complete.

3.8 Data Collection

Before the semi-structured interviews commenced, participants were required to sign consent forms (see Appendices), which informed participants that the interviews would be audio recorded using a voice recorder. The consent forms notified that their responses would be anonymously published, using pseudonyms. The information sheet also outlined that the findings from the study would be published in the form of a thesis and possible journal articles. This was to ensure participants were aware that their responses, albeit anonymous, would be made public if selected. During the interviews, participants were informed they could interject at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

Moreover, any third parties referenced and or mentioned will also remain anonymous. They were also informed that the researcher would transcribe the audio interview notes verbatim. The minimum data retention period of six years and measures taken to dispose of the data afterwards were also communicated to participants as required by the university's ethics approval for this study.

The interviews were conducted where the participants were familiar and comfortable; these locations included their homes, cafés or eateries, and the university - AUT's city campus. All interviews were conducted in English and ranged from approximately half an hour to ninety minutes long. Socio-demographics, including age, occupation, highest educational background, and family origins in India, were noted first.

All individual interviews were guided by indicative questions (Appendix Six) predetermined by the researcher. The focus group session followed the same protocol, using a guide of indicative questions (Appendix Seven), and participants were each asked to answer individually by turn. The general interview guide approach involves drawing up a template of core topics and interview questions, which ensures the interview will cover the critical research areas but allow flexibility during the interview process itself (Patton, 2015). The semi-structured interviews also followed a focused but conversational approach with the flexibility to expand on ideas shared and or diverge if necessary. The indicative questions set out to capture various aspects of the study's research question below:

3.9 Research Question

This research is motivated by a desire to make sense of and understand how Indian youths in New Zealand negotiate their identities and the role of Bollywood cinema in mediating their sense of Indianness. To unravel the complex interplay between individuals, the social and cultural contexts within which they live, their negotiation of identity and the role of Bollywood cinema, I formulated one overarching research question to drive this research:

To what extent do New Zealand-Indians associate Bollywood films with their "Indianness" and in mediating their cultural identity?

Participants were allowed to speak freely and asked if they wished to add any further comments towards the end of the interviews, allowing for progressive digression from the indicative questions if participants wished to share any comments outside the parameters. A month after all interviews were completed, the interview audio was transcribed from a digital voice recorder into a word-processing document, along with any written notes from context, and pseudonyms were added before organising transcription notes for participants in the order of interviews conducted. Transcribing the data verbatim allowed me to ensure accuracy and refamiliarise myself with the data set.

3.10 Data Analysis

Once transcribing was completed, a thematic analysis was employed to analyse and look for themes and patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview transcripts were first read and annotated for interest and thematic potential. This process was repeated to ensure familiarity with the material. Responses in the transcripts were then highlighted according to indicative questions to

allow for comparisons and contrasts between participant responses. My research question is centred around concepts of cultural identity construction, “Indianness”, and Bollywood; mining the responses for keywords and phrases allowed me to see similarities, outliers and emergent themes. Aronson (1995) explains that researchers can identify themes in participants’ direct quotes or paraphrasing of shared ideas after coding the data. These created smaller thematic units for analysis, varying in size but generally consisting of a few sentences expressing an idea or a single event. These smaller units were revised and classified into emergent themes.

The titles of themes used in the indicative question templates for interviews were not necessarily used as theme headers in the findings section of this study but as a means to code and manage the data. The overarching themes were organised into an Excel spreadsheet, with columns for themes in different colours horizontally, and participant quotes were copied into cells under relevant themes. Any quotes related to sub-themes were coloured separately. Quotes were rechecked from transcripts and indicative questions to ensure their meanings were not taken out of context. Once themes were narrowed down, they were organised into broader themes, which was an iterative process. The themes were informed by, but not dependent on, the related literature. This qualitative data analysis process was informed by making sense of patterns and meanings and will follow the structure of describing, understanding and interpreting to illustrate the findings (Grix, 2002).

3.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodological approach and methods used in this this study. Since methods are often more flexible and subjective in qualitative research, reflecting on the approach and explaining the choices is significant. As Appadurai (2006) states, research is not just the production of original ideas in new knowledge, as generally defined in academia, but it is something “simpler and deeper” (p.176). Qualitative research involves an interpretive approach to the world to see and make sense of a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people associate with it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Further, qualitative research sets out to locate the researcher “in the world” - turning the world into a series of representations, which includes interviews and conversations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Semi-structured interviews and in-depth focus group discussions with participants provided insights into their lived experiences in cultural identity negotiation and film-watching practices. Thematic analysis of this data provides important insights to make sense of social phenomena between diaspora and cinema. The findings from the data analysis, which identified common themes, patterns, and shared meanings, are discussed in depth in the subsequent chapters.

4. Chapter Four: Identities in Two Worlds

> "New Zealand's Indian communities are important 'cultural navigators'. They provide a platform to build New Zealanders' capability to engage with India" – (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Manatū Aorere, New Zealand Government, 2025, p.7).

4.1 Introduction

This research aims to understand and explain the complex ways cultural identity is negotiated and the notion of Indianness among the New Zealand-Indians diaspora. This was explored through semi-structured interviews where participants discussed their beliefs and experiences in identifying, managing and maintaining their cultural identities in different personal and social contexts. Participants reflected on their current and past accounts, sharing experiences on evolving cultural identities through societal changes and emigration journeys. These changes felt by the participants created changes in the values and norms instilled in them. It is also important to note that these findings are not intended to be representative of the wider New Zealand-Indian diaspora; instead, they represent the seventeen youths interviewed for this research.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, the individual interviews and the focus group session were transcribed and read multiple times to identify common themes and patterns in the data. All interview quotes have been indented, and some repetitive words and interjections have been removed for clarity. This chapter will present the findings and discuss two main themes, identities in two worlds and performing identity. The first part will highlight insights from individual participants, while the second section will focus solely on findings from the Bollywood-inspired dance production group. Additionally, this chapter will engage with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, concentrating on the Indian diaspora, cultural identity, Indianness, and multiculturalism.

Identity is a fluid and multifaceted concept shaped by personal experiences, cultural heritage, and societal perceptions (Hall, 1996; Hall, 1992; Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017; Balibar, 1995; Bandyopadhyay, 2010). For members of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, identity is defined by a complex interplay between their ancestral roots and their lived realities in New Zealand's society (Gilbertson, 2007; Vallabh, 2013; Williams, 2010; Leckie, 1998). As the field research found, census classifications, cultural identities, and national affiliations contribute to this sense of belonging and influence how individuals navigate their hyphenated cultural identities.

Being Indian is expressed through (family) traditions, friendships, food, and festivals, which reinforce Indianness and cultural connections to their homeland. However, questions of authenticity did arise as some people embrace the label of Non-Resident Indian (NRI), while others struggle with being perceived as "not really Indian." At the same time, integrating into New Zealand society presents its

own challenges and opportunities, identifying as a New Zealander or Kiwi and the conflict of retaining their Indianness.

Participants conveyed that the experiences of being a New Zealand-Indian are shaped by both inclusion and exclusion, as individuals encounter racism while also benefiting from the acceptance of multiculturalism. This creates a contrast between their public and private identities; one is influenced by societal expectations and the other by personal and cultural realities. Ultimately, for the participants living in two worlds requires ongoing negotiation, balance, and adaptation in a multicultural society.

4.1.1 Census, Cultural Identities and Nationalities

All participants who were individually interviewed stated they had ticked the 'Indian' category in the New Zealand census form, and those who had not had a chance to participate in the national census also confirmed they would select 'Indian' as their ethnic category or 'Other' if 'Indian' was unavailable. All research participants self-identified as either Indian, New Zealand-Indian and or Kiwi-Indian. This observation suggested that participants who migrated here as children or as adults for further studies still chose to identify with their roots and include "Indianness" as part of their cultural identities. A participant who migrated to New Zealand with his family as an adolescent said he selected the 'Indian' category because the census form did not provide an option for 'Kiwi-Indian'. As he elaborated:

> "Just tick Indian, because they don't have it, any other Kiwi-Indian options. I don't tick 'other' because I just feel that's like for refugees or something, I don't know what the other option is, so just leave it" (Raj).

Several participants made clear distinctions between their nationalities and cultural identities, selecting New Zealand as their nationality if they were citizens by birth and New Zealand passport holders; however, the majority still selected Indian as their cultural identity, especially if they were born in India and remained affiliated to their place of birth, family and ancestry. A number of reasons were cited for this including:

> "I'm Indian, my ethnicity is Indian, but I would say my nationality is Kiwi" (Jessica).
>
> "I'm not bothered…Passport is New Zealand, so technically, I am a New Zealand-Indian, I suppose…" (Shilpa).
>
> "I definitely call myself an Indian because I still haven't got the actual citizenship; maybe after that, I might change my thinking" (Nitin).

A key aspect of identity formation within diasporic communities is the relationship between citizenship and national belonging. For instance, Nitin's observation above highlights how legal citizenship status can shape one's sense of identity. This aligns with Szabolcs Pogonyi's (2018) study on naturalized Hungarians living outside Hungary, which found that passports serve as more than just legal documents; they function as tools for managing national identity. Pogonyi's research challenges the idea that citizenship is purely a practical asset, showing instead that it influences individuals' perceptions of national belonging and ethnic boundaries.

Stuart Hall describes cultural identities as parts of who we are that come from "belonging" to specific ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and national cultures (2000, p. 596). The participants discussed above introspected on their cultural identity and citizenship, deciding how to identify their ethnicity on census forms and whether to call themselves New Zealanders based on their citizenship. Hall (1992) and Fenton (1999) say that identity involves "intellectual self-reflection" and is also a "social process of moving boundaries," which can happen collectively or individually, influenced by social settings (Hall, 1992, p.11 & Fenton, 1999, p.10).

This also affirmed their diasporic experience, wherein identities are not recognised by heterogeneity but by a conception of identity, which lives with and through hybridity (Hall, 1999). Diasporic identities are dynamic and constantly redefine themselves through transformation and difference (p. 23). The concept of 'hyphen-nations' by Jennifer DeVere Brody (2008) also emerged as some participants faced complex cultural identities that were consistently shifting or evolving. As Raj puts it,

> "I say I'm a New Zealand-raised Indian….Kiwi-Indian; we use that terminology. I think an important part of my identity is Kiwi because we grew up here, we speak the language, and our thoughts are shaped by what happens in New Zealand...But at the same time, our culture is quite Indian, so it's definitely a bit of both. I don't think it can just say one or the other."

Hall's (1990) and Dimitrova & de Bruijn's (2017) definitions of cultural identity as unfixed, multi-layered, and ever-changing can be applied to the experiences of those interviewed. Moreover, Gilroy's (1993) research on African, American, British, and Caribbean diasporas showed that ethnicity and national identity evolved over time. Similar to the views expressed by the participants above, some individuals feel a connection to both their past and present, as well as to their homeland and diaspora. As Dimitrova and de Bruijn (2017) state, diasporas are imagined and shaped through ideological perspectives, "constantly being created and re-created" (p. 2)In an unconventional example, one participant described herself as a third-culture kid.[2] She was born to a Hindu mother and a Parsi father in India and moved to New Zealand as a child. This presents her with an ongoing

[2] Third-culture kids or third-culture individuals were raised in a culture other than their parents or the culture of their country of nationality but have also lived in a different environment during a significant part of their childhood and or development years.

cultural identity dilemma as her identity is multifaceted; her parents raised her with two different religious faiths, and she emigrated from her place of birth to New Zealand. The participant refused to tie her cultural identity to a single place of belonging, and as she elaborated:

> "When I think of myself, my parents being from two different ethnicities within India, then coming to New Zealand…growing up with extended family from the USA and stuff, I would call myself a third culture kid. What I mean … is that I came from two cultures and was submerged into a third culture … If people were to ask me, where are you from, I would say New Zealand. If people had to ask my Indian ethnicity, I would just say I'm Indian and leave it there" (Zara).

Etienne Balibar (1995) stated that cultural identities included personal traits shaped by an individual's experiences and awareness. This is evident in the participant's expression of residing in various places, which impacted her evolving cultural identity. Clifford's (1994) 'roots and routes' concept can also be used to describe this participant's journey, as diasporic individuals form networks of solidarity based on shared experiences and retain a continued connection to their homeland. Her 'roots' refer to her place of origin and the sense of community in India. At the same time, 'routes' represent the movement or travel between places, with family or a partner, impacting her sense of belonging (as cited in Rosenburg, 2015, p.2).

Further, Statistics New Zealand conducts a census every five years, and data for the 2023 census was categorised in the following groups: European, Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian, Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA), and Other (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2024). This presents a problem for the South Asian diaspora residing in New Zealand, as some participants expressed views of complex Indian identities, specifying where they came from regionally in India and defining their cultural identity in more nuanced ways.

> "I mean, if an Indian person asks me the question culturally, I would say I am from Kerala. I'm a Malayali. But a non-Indian person? Yeah, of course, I would say Indian" (Vijay).

> "If I have to identify myself culturally, then I would say that I am not just an Indian. Because India itself has different cultures, every state has got a different name, different language, different food. So, I won't restrict myself…. Indian itself is a very broad term" (Harsh).

In his work, Bandyopadhyay (2010) examined the Indian diaspora in New Zealand, highlighting the challenges presented by census classifications. He argued that these classifications tend to create homogeneous identities within the diaspora, which can obscure the diverse experiences and backgrounds of individuals' cultural identities. "Indians are still classified as one ethnic group in census returns and, in the governments, multicultural policy declarations" (Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p.12).

Paul Callister's (2011) research on ethnicity and belonging in New Zealand also noted that many youths reported dual or hybrid ethnicities. Similarly, Frierson (2014), in his work on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, found the same; cultural identities were visible as multi-layered, diverse and represented in many different ways. Individuals are required to identify their ethnicity in the census.

However, the census fails to capture the diverse migration journeys and cultural identities an individual of South Asian descent may hold. Lastly, Rushdie (1991) stated that the term ‘Indian’ is a broad concept, reflecting the global dispersion of the Indian diaspora, but it is not limited to it.

4.1.2 Indianness Through Family, Friends, Food and Festivities

Firstly, "Indianness" is difficult to conceive because it is not a set or scientific category. Instead, it is a changing idea that evolves and is influenced by beliefs, assumptions, and values expressed by members of the Indian diaspora (Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017). Participants in this research affirmed their Indianness through interactions with family and friends, participation in festivities, religious activities, and the consumption of ethnic food. Indianness was understood as a reflection of the aforementioned activities to affirm their Indian identities, as Indianness denotes a cultural identity inherent to India.

Participants discussed their families and friends as foundations for a sense of belonging and their important role in cementing their ongoing cultural identities. The role of parents and extended family members largely shaped characteristics and or behaviours associated with their Indianness. Therefore, the family is a critical dimension of community formation and belonging (Castles & Davidson, 2000). As three participants summed it:

> “A lot of my family and friends provide direct insight to what it means to do or perform certain things while embracing who we are. There is enough information and knowledge I am privileged to gain through direct interaction with those close to me, such as family, we communicate, wish each other during important celebrations and festivals or religious holidays” (Maya).

> “My mum is a bit strict on following all the cultures and traditions, especially when it is festival. She’ll keep reminding me what we do, what we don’t do for example during Ganpati[3] we don’t eat non-veg, so she’ll keep reminding me. She plays a very important role when it comes to following cultures and traditions from back home” (Nitin).

> “[Parents] it was them that influenced me and made me proud of my cultural identity, because most of my friends were not indian [growing up in New Zealand]. Extended family helped in this. They were the people who kept me in line with the indian cultures and traditions” (Jennifer).

Numerous studies previously mentioned in the literature review have drawn attention to the centrality of family as an important characteristic of being Indian and contributing to Indianness (Williams, cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Vallabh, 2013; Gilbertson, 2007). Cultural and social practices such as insider jokes, language, shared experiences of outsiders in New Zealand society, and moments shared with their wider family and community were all important determinants of their cultural identities. As Jessica, Rohan and Anjali noted,

[3] Ganapati, or Ganesha, is a Hindu god known for wisdom and removing obstacles. Ganesh Chaturthi is a ten-day festival celebrating Ganesha's birth, particularly popular in Maharashtra and Western India.

> “My Indian friends and family, we have this like shared thing, shared jokes and cultural references and stuff like that. That definitely plays a role. My family definitely contribute to my cultural identity in that for a long time they were the only Indians I knew here”(Jessica).
>
> “It's easier for me to make friends who are Indians, as compared to people, people of other races, and it is not because I don’t want to, there is an ease of connection because you can relate to so many things” (Anjali).
>
> “A lot of jokes that you grew up with and those television ads and Bollywood. The movie jokes and things like that. Which you can only share with your Indian mates. Because they have seen that as well, the humor and the jokes is the part where I stay connected to the roots with friends,” (Rohan).

The views expressed here reinforce Robert Cohen’s (1996) outline of the features of a diaspora: the practice of retaining cultural values and traditions, being family and community oriented, with parents and elders passing this on to the next generation are common traits of the Indian diaspora. A strong sense of group consciousness is a fundamental aspect of cultural identity for this diaspora, particularly when it is sustained over long periods. This “consciousness” is rooted in various factors, including a distinct cultural identity, a shared historical narrative, and a collective belief in a common fate that binds individuals together (p. 515).

This solidarity also creates a supportive environment where members feel empathy and a sense of connection that transcends borders, allowing members of the group to maintain strong ties with one another, regardless of geographical separation (Cohen, 1996, p. 515). This collective consciousness fosters cultural continuity and a network of support that helps maintain traditional values and practices, ensuring that the diaspora remains tied to its roots even as they adapt to new contexts. In this way, the interplay between identity, community, and cultural heritage plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of individuals within the diaspora. Stephen Vertovec (1999) expands on this concept, stating that diasporas are also a mode of cultural reproduction. He highlights how the South Asian diaspora involves the fluid exchange of cultural images, symbols, and meanings shared among communities outside their regions of origin. These would be the participants' insider jokes and references to specific cultural texts. Hofstede (1987) explained that the working definition of culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (p. 391). In this case, the category would be the participant's cultural identities.

A participant shared that he felt more comfortable with his Indian friends than his Western social circle due to their shared understanding of experiences. He also felt peer pressure in some instances when integrating into New Zealand.

> “I just feel a lot more comfortable with Indian friends than I do with any of the gora[4] friends. Because there’s a lot more in common with them…To laugh at things I don’t understand, but I still have to laugh at them. I hate that. Just to fit in with non-Indians…I was not making any friends, I tried hanging out with different kids, but I just couldn’t identify myself with what they did or what they were saying or talking about” (Uday).

[4] Gora is a derogatory term for a European or fair-skinned male in informal Hindi.

Oetzel (2009) states that culture shapes our sense of identity, which often remains unrecognised by its members until that identity is questioned or challenged. Culture shock is also natural when people encounter an unfamiliar culture or lifestyle, finding themselves in an unfamiliar setting (Lustig & Koester, 2006). Language is an important indicator – a "key sign" of cultural identity and individual comfort (Oetzel, 2009, p. 65). Additionally, the Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), explains how individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups through the concept of in-groups and out-groups. People tend to identify with their group (the in-group) and see those not part of their group (the out-group) as different.

A sense of belonging among the participants fosters connection and unity, offering comfort in knowing they are not alone in their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, being part of a group provides a framework for understanding their cultural identity as members of a larger community or diaspora based on shared attributes, values, or goals. Building on this, for some individuals, practicing religion and respecting and serving elder community members was also an essential aspect of their Indian identity. They feel that the values instilled through their religious beliefs strengthened their connection to their culture.

> "Make sure that all senior citizens get support. And that is the upbringing we have been taught over in our Indian culture, you always respect your family, and you always respect your elders" (Harsh).
> "Going back to one of your questions around Indianness, I think I can ever see myself not living with my parents then. That would mean being respectful to elders" (Uday).

Traditional Indian values firmly emphasise the importance of family honor and duty. They advocate for clearly defined gender roles, respect for elders, and the heeding of their advice, particularly concerning decisions like marriage. Collectivist values are values deeply entrenched in Indian culture; parents teach their children to have a reciprocal obligation to respect those who provide for them and make sacrifices. Some participants highlighted contexts where their family dynamics were counterproductive or toxic in engaging with their cultural identities. As the following comments suggest, some interactions reinforced patriarchal norms, such as sexism and gender bias.

> "For a long time, I struggled with challenging people older than me, only because you come from a thing about respecting your elders… Even today I think some instances where that patriarchy is so ingrained in us, that sometimes you have to consciously kind of make yourself aware of how you respond to it" (Shilpa).

> "Indian culture to me is or can be very extreme. You can have extremely traditional and conservative, you can have extremely rebellious, you can have extremely celebrated, and they all tend to co-exist just perfectly in India. If I had to describe somewhat what Indian culture is, it would just be calm, chaos and religion, all in one" (Zara).

> "My cousin she's four years younger than me, she got her masters, did real well for herself but pretty much as soon as she turned like 24/25. Her worth was reduced down to when are you getting married?" (Jessica).

> “Me and my grandmother, we clash a lot. We’ll be having a frank conversation, and she will say oh it was the girl’s fault, and I am like why is it always the girl’s fault. A bit of sexism, a bit of fascism and more than it being external, I think most of the conflicts happen with the parents and at home” (Jennifer).

Female participants specifically shared experiencing sexism when visiting India and at home in New Zealand too, where their parents reinforced traditional patriarchal values. Patil (2021) researched the social status of women in modern and historical contexts of India’s patriarchal norms and how they affected women's roles across various domains such as family, religion, law, politics and media. The research findings validated that in Indian societies, men traditionally dominate, while women are considered inferior, both in terms of their roles and their contributions to society. The status of women in India has historically been secondary, and this has led to a long-standing tradition of women's oppression in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Therefore, despite advancements in science and technology, gender inequality persists in India. Women continue to face discrimination in various aspects of life, including marriage laws, wage disparity, education and employment (Bhatnagar, 2024). Raghuram et al. (2008), in their study of diasporic Indians, also observed that extended families and well-defined roles rooted in traditional structures such as patriarchy, along with older generations holding greater authority, were common features within the diaspora. These roles and contexts are often shaped by "patriarchy, gerontocracy, and the subordination of the individual to the family's interests," though these characteristics are continuously evolving (p. 25).[5]

Finally, food was cited as a significant aspect of Indian culture, which participants strongly identified with, and which they labelled as an essential facet of their Indianness. All participants, excluding those born in India, had visited India at least once and learned about Indian traditions and culture and participated in religious festivities such as Diwali, Navratri[6] and Ganesh Chaturthi. In addition to citing family and friends as salient aspects of Indian culture, they connected with food, which actively reaffirmed their cultural identities. There was an emphasis on homemade snacks and dishes often reserved for specific festivals.

> “I think when you say Indian culture to me, to me it means all the food that I eat that home and food I grew up eating, the food I love to eat. I like to go for garba, and eat food from different parts of the country, I like to learn how food is made in different parts of the country and their origin stories” (Anjali).

> “I define it personally on the basis of food…a very vital part of Indian culture. Most of the celebrations are with food. Food we like to cook, we like to share.” (Harsh).

> “What kept me connected is the family and the influence they had celebrating the festivals at home. Family wise we are Christians, but despite that we celebrate Onam[7] (Vijay).

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[5] The impact of patriarchal values, toxicity, sexism and gender politics in Indian culture will be unpacked in Chapter Five when I discuss the representations of women in Bollywood and the mediation of identities.

[6] Navratri is a Hindu festival that lasts nine nights and celebrates the goddess, Maa Durga.

[7] Onam is a Hindu festival and harvest celebration that takes place annually in Kerala, India.

> “We celebrate everything at home. If its Diwali mum would make snacks and sweets and stuff, and we would all eat”(Jennifer)

> “Our culture demonstrates so much vibrancy, not just in external aspects such as colour but also in the spoken language, the food we consume, the influence of different flavours in the foods” (Maya).

Food is social and occupies a significant place in Indian culture, serving not just as sustenance but as a fundamental aspect of social interactions, preservation of traditions, community building, and celebration. Anthropologist Theodore Bestor notes, “food in India is an identity marker of caste, class, family, kinship, tribe affiliation, lineage, religiosity, ethnicity, and increasingly, of secular group identification” (as cited in Kapoor, 2021, p. 206). Writer Ritu Agarwal (2016) agreed that food and family are key indicators of India’s cultural landscape. For instance, sharing a meal with family members during the day is important. “Food and family are possibly India's two biggest obsessions. The two define our identity and our personality…” (Agarwal, as cited in *BBC News*, 2016, para,1). Participants observations also highlighted the connections between food, festivities, and family in maintaining their Indianness. For them, understanding Indianness and what it means to be Indian involves exploring the role that food plays in building and maintaining relationships. Fuchs, Linkenbach, and Malik's (2010) study on the meaning of Indian identity in Christchurch similarly found that food is a key conduit of Indian culture and marking Indianness. The study found that Indian families often prepared and ate Indian food, so the children would become accustomed to it whilst growing up in New Zealand. And as one participant eloquently puts it,

> “I cook, and I eat traditional food. But it's only because I a) grew up with these kinds of food and b) you do not get them in New Zealand. I can't find them in restaurants, factual thing to do, because I grew up eating these things” (Zara).

Moreover, other studies of diasporas worldwide found that Western countries also feature neighbourhoods with shops, markets, restaurants, and people, reminding the diaspora of home. Sandringham, named after a British royal estate, is a suburb in Auckland synonymous with Indian spice shopping, goods and Indian restaurants became an ethnoburb having experienced ethnic diversification. Friesen, Murphy, and Kearns (2010) examined how the neighbourhood of Sandringham transformed with an influx of Indian businesses, cultural centres, and religious institutions nearby, reshaping the suburb's social and physical landscape. Their study highlighted how transnational ties and cultural practices of the Indian diaspora have redefined suburban spaces in Auckland, contributing to the city's multicultural identity (Friesen, Murphy & Kearns, 2010). “Every restaurant, food truck and grocery store in the area is South Asian… and if you look north, you’ll spot the chunky, ridged dome of the Bharatiya Mandir, a Hindu temple, on Balmoral Road” (Mathias, cited in *The Spinoff*, 2024, para. 3).

Lastly, a participant in this study described her cultural identity using a food analogy, comparing Indian culture to biryani. Culture, she notes, contains various ingredients, each with its own unique

flavours. She relies on the aforementioned flavours and/or parts, such as friends, family, and festivities, as spices added to the main dish, which is her cultural identity. In her view, the richness of culture comes from the various elements that contribute to it.

> "It's like got so many ingredients in it, but when it comes together, forms a beautiful dish. But each ingredient on its own, has its own flavour, has its own um identity. So, I guess that's kind of, when I think about culture in India. Moreover, that's what I think that whole biryani[8] analogy means to me. I mean, if you take the spices out of the biryani, it's not gonna be a biryani. If you take the chicken or whatever, flavour you know, meat or non-meat whatever type of biryani, it's not really gonna be the same, if you take the meat out its basically a pulao, it's not a biryani anymore" (Shilpa).

Similarly, another participant discussed how complex Indian culture is. He noted that it consists of many different traditions, making it challenging to define a single "Indian culture." He suggested looking at Indian culture through various elements, such as religious festivals, Bollywood, traditional clothing, and food. Like Shilpa's statement, for him these diverse aspects come together to create an identity. A simplified view may not capture the true essence of what it means to be Indian. Overall, both participants emphasise that Indian culture and Indianness are multifaceted, with many layers.

> "It's actually difficult to explain. Indian culture is generally looked up as like a mix of religious festivals, Bollywood, the attire we wear and the food we eat generally… I would think its general impression of the mix" (Raj).

The approach to 'Indianness' is unique not only to studies on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora but also to studies of diasporic Indians globally. The literature on the Indian diaspora is extensive (e.g. Rushdie, 1991; Cohen, 1996; Vertovec, 2000; Dubey, 2003; Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Rawat & Sarwal, 2017) and has focused on unpacking 'Indian culture' and 'Indian' social structures. This section examined the participants' responses to their experiences managing and challenging the notions of Indianness. Their practices involving family values, tradition, festivities, religious practices, food sharing, ethnic attire, and the viewing of Bollywood films constituted, for them, a sense of Indianness.

However, Indianness is constantly changing; there is no fixed definition. Instead, it is viewed as an amalgamation of parts, allowing participants to express their cultural identities. Williams (2010), in her study of New Zealand-born Indians, noted that "Indian-ness is almost a hobby. People talk as though Indian culture is separate from them and something they can choose to participate in," giving participants the freedom to choose which aspects they want to engage with (as cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p. 120).

4.1.3 Non-Resident Indian or 'Not Really Indian'

[8] Biryani is a dish popular in South Asia, made with rice, meat or seafood and spices.

This section will analyse the participants' responses regarding their familiarity with the term NRI (Non-Resident Indian) and whether it holds significance for them. The term encompasses Indian citizens living abroad, Indian nationals residing overseas, individuals of Indian ancestry born outside India, and OCI[9] holders. A comprehensive definition of the term NRI was provided in the glossary, sourced from the Government of India. Participant responses reflected a complex relationship with the term NRI; many expressed ambivalences about being labelled an NRI, conveying they felt a sense of detachment and stating that the term did not truly reflect their cultural identity. They believed the term suggested a disconnect from Indian culture, not reflective of their experiences of connecting with their roots. This is how Anjali, Zara and Jennifer frame it:

> "I don't really think the term applies to me and somewhere, it also goes back to how NRIs sounded like such a ponsy term, when I lived in India, and it was equated with people who are rich and who even though they are Indian, don't necessarily wanna associate themselves as being part of India or the Indian culture. And because of that, I don't think that tag suits me at all" (Anjali).

> "I feel like it doesn't apply to me, because I haven't assimilated myself from Indian culture in that sense, like if I go to India, so firstly I can speak the languages, so I'll get by, I go to India, I can wear a salwar, I can take a rickshaw, and I can haggle with whatever shopkeeper, and that to me is the innate sense of someone not being able to differentiate… What it [NRI] means to me, is just someone whose either gone overseas and come back to kind of have a disconnect with the place of residence, my residence was the place I was born, am I never going to be disconnected from it" (Zara).

> "I think that's a term more used in India, I don't think anyone here would use the term NRI, I feel like that's a term used by banks and stuff in India" (Jennifer).

Other participants acknowledged that their geographical location away from India allowed the term to be applied to them loosely. Despite acknowledging their status as non-residents since moving to New Zealand, they felt strongly connected to India. They still missed aspects of their upbringing, leading to a sense of being "lost" when referred to as NRIs. One participant noted that he only learned the term when he was labelled as an NRI after departing India. Before that, he had only come across the term in films or during family gatherings when referring to relatives living abroad.

> "To me, if I have to consider myself an NRI, I feel a bit lost. Because I still am very attached to my country. I do miss a lot of things because that's how I have grown up in India… If somebody says I'm an NRI, it gives me kind of a lost feeling and out of place" (Harsh).

> "Personally, I don't relate with that term anymore. My elder sister, she always calls me NRI now whenever I go back home, when we are at family functions or something. She either calls me NRI or always calls me foreigner now… It was my first time ever I was out of India, and then that's what I've been seeing in movies or heard from my cousins or whatever as NRI; when I first came to NZ for a couple of years, I thought I was an NRI – I don't feel that anymore" (Nitin).

[9] An OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) represents a form of permanent residency available to people of Indian origin, allowing them to live and work in India indefinitely.

Similarly, others also noted that the term is predominantly used in India and often invoked humorously by family members, but they find it largely absent in their personal contexts. Overall, participants articulated a strong sense of identity that bridges their Indian heritage with their current life in New Zealand, emphasising that NRI does not define who they are. This is also because residing in New Zealand is becoming more permanent rather than temporary. Friesen (2014) explains the NRI benefits from residing and functioning in the individualistic and capitalist West while simultaneously upholding 'traditional spiritual values of India' (Friesen cited in Dwivedi, 2014, p.122). This alludes to the conundrum participants face in constantly negotiating their cultural identities and living between two worlds – a more detailed discussion on this, illustrated by participant responses, will follow in the next section.

Sareeta Amrute (2010), in her research on the term NRI and its influence on India's economy, investment and Bollywood films catering to audiences abroad, defines the term as commonly used among communities that speak Indian languages, both in India and internationally. It refers to the group of Indian citizens and their descendants residing in countries such as the United States, Europe, Australia, and various regions of Asia. The participants of this study presently reside in New Zealand and expressed feeling "lost" and disconnected to the term; however, they still embody the essence of being an NRI – residing outside of India and maintaining a connection to their place of birth and ancestral homeland. Amrute further explains that NRIs represent a bridge for India to connect beyond its borders; they contribute to India's modern development by broadening geographical membership, fostering relationships, and raising awareness within India and the Indian diaspora dispersed globally. "In many ways, the NRI is a term that encapsulates globalization in India and its ambivalence to Indian citizens" (Amrute, 2010, p.127).

Additionally, Shashi Tharoor, an Indian politician, writer, and former diplomat, states in his writings on India and its global trajectory that it is the only nation with an official acronym for its expatriates: NRIs - Non-Resident Indians. He shares a similar view of understanding the term NRI to stand for "Not Really Indian or Never Relinquished India" (Tharoor, 2013, cited in Project Syndicate, para. 1). Aftab (2002) and Athique (2011), in their analysis of Bollywood films depicting NRIs on screen, offer another definition of being Non-Resident Indians, highlighting that it pertains more to a psychological sense of belonging rather than a physical presence. This is evident in the participants' still retaining their connections to India but choosing agency to execute them in specific contexts. The participants affirm that despite not associating with being NRIs, they accept their circumstances in living abroad and still practising their Indianness. The NRI stereotype seen in films is also a way to expand on ideas of nationalism, which audiences can resonate with (Athique, 2011). However, Bollywood films often portray NRI stereotypes as either tainted by Western lifestyles and values or embodying 'Westernized Indianness', compelling the identity of the NRI into uniform representations (Wright,

2015). The depiction of NRIs in Bollywood films will be examined more thoroughly in next chapter which will specifically discuss Bollywood films mediating cultural identities.

4.1.4 Being a New Zealander or Kiwi

This examination of identity negotiation among South Asians in New Zealand, specifically focusing on the cultural identity of youth participants residing in Auckland, found that a central theme is the two-world dilemma participants face as they continuously navigate their cultural identities. This section will first analyse the attributes of being a New Zealander and then explore how identities have evolved to become hyphenated as New Zealand-Indians and the participants' perspectives on this.

Participants noted that moving to and living in New Zealand facilitated their personal growth and gave them independence from the collectivism typical of decision-making and family dynamics in India. Those born in India emphasised that societal expectations felt normative and that they were uncomfortable expressing their autonomy. In contrast, residing in New Zealand enabled them to prioritise their mental health over social obligations, and empowered them to make decisions based on personal preferences rather than external pressures. Exposure to a different lifestyle broadened their perspectives and worldviews and offered them more agency in their personal and professional choices. As the following responses put it:

> “It means having a great deal of freedom from cultural norms. From that I mean, my lifestyle, career choices and personal choices have a lot of freedom” (Maya).

> “I don't really connect when I go back. Here, you can just be yourself without the society or people coming in your way or bothering you or just being nosy about what you're doing… In India I would not have the courage to stand up and say that I'm not religious, I just wouldn't go... But when you are here [New Zealand], and you're basically independent, I just have the courage to say, this is my decision and that's what I'm following” (Rohan).

> “I feel like it’s easy for me, to me my mental health and wellbeing is much more important, than spending my time and effort over there [India]”(Zara).

> “Some behavioural stuff like you get more aware of things like privacy, and boundaries and stuff living in New Zealand, and when people in India don’t have boundaries. think moving to NZ for the first time, might think I was in a space where I had to actually start thinking for myself…I think moving to NZ just broadened that” (Shilpa).

Attributes associated with being a New Zealander, or Kiwi, include having independent and liberal views, and embracing an individualistic culture, meaning that people tend to focus on their own goals and independence. This stands in contrast to collectivist cultures, where the emphasis is on collective goals. Bandyopadhyay (2010), in his research on Indians in New Zealand, noted that families put emphasis on the Indian notion of identity, which is defined by the moral and ethical codes

of the community, collectively shaped, while a Western upbringing encouraged them to ‘prize’ individualism (p. 13). Participants mentioned that the workplace culture here emitted the same experience of prioritising the individual over opportunities for collaboration. Group goals were more common in India’s work culture, with fewer avenues for personal growth. As Harsh and Jessica note,

> “In India, no matter what you always have you colleagues to step in for you and cover it up for you, more collective definitely a plus point over there [India]. Over here, what I have seen is people do their own responsibilities and tend not to work in a team” (Harsh).

> “I don’t think I could live and work in India anymore, just because it’s like the pace of life and everything is very different. The freedoms I enjoy here, I don’t think I could enjoy in India” (Jessica).

Geert Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions theory is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries. Hofstede’s initial six key dimensions include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and short vs. long-term orientation. Applied to New Zealand’s context, the framework suggests that in individualistic societies, people prioritise being unique individuals rather than identifying primarily as members of a family, tribe, or group. In these cultures, there is a strong emphasis on independence and personal responsibility for one’s decisions and actions (Hofstede, 2001). This echoed the sentiments shared by the participants of being more self-reflective, independent and feeling less pressured to follow cultural or religious norms. Further, New Zealand also instilled values of equality, fairness, tolerance and humility for some participants.

> “As a Kiwi we’re always brought up with values of like fairness and equality and like staying humble at the same and all of that. I guess I got all of that sort of passed down to me through being in New Zealand, going to school here” (Jessica).

> **“**It could be tolerance, it could be acceptance, you're encouraged to do what you do. There are temples here, there are mosques here, there are festivals here, there is food here, everything. New Zealand is a very amazing country in terms of opportunities and respect and the quality of life” (Raj).

Fairness stands as a fundamental value in New Zealand’s culture, consistently recognised across the political, social, and cultural spectrum throughout our history and in contemporary society. Fairness is embedded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the granting of the rights and privileges of British subjects to Māori, the nation’s indigenous population, in article three (Quince, cited in *Stuff*, 2021). “Kiwis frequently exclaim things are fair enough when assessing the merits of a situation” (Quince, cited in *Stuff*, 2021, para. 2). Some participants equated being a New Zealander, or Kiwi, with the opportunities and privilege to have hobbies allowing them to socialise and partake in contributing to New Zealand’s society and still retain their Indian values and beliefs. Raj further stated being able to vote, as an activity of civic engagement and having a vested interest in New Zealand’s political landscape also equated to feeling a sense of belonging.

> “Same way that you are interested in what’s happening politically, economically in New Zealand, because that affects you know, you as well. You contribute to society, community, and you follow and take part in whatever happens in New Zealand like you know voting” (Raj).

Humpage and Greaves (2017), in their analysis of the New Zealand identity, found that boundaries around being a New Zealander were flexible, and other ‘civic aspects’ were rated more important to feel a sense of genuine belonging, such as participation in political and community or social injustice engagement (p.259). In individualist cultures, voting could be viewed through the lens of personal choice, individual rights, and equal participation. In collectivist cultures, group harmony and collective well-being are emphasised as a duty to the community. People might vote based on what benefits their family, ethnic group, or social network rather than solely on personal preference.

New Zealand’s evolving national identity has also been in contest, whether it is a “bicultural or multicultural nation” given the influx of migrants and growing ethnic groups revealed to be Indian and Chinese in the 2023 census (*Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, n.d., para. 6 & *Statistics New Zealand-Tatauranga Aotearoa*, 2023). The following section will review participants’ contributions and views on New Zealand being a multicultural society.

4.1.5 Multiculturalism and Racism

The Indian population is the third-largest ethnic group in New Zealand. In the 2023 census, 292,092 people in the country identified as members of the Indian community, representing a 22 percent increase since 2018 (Statistics New Zealand-Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2023). In Auckland, 41.6 percent of the population reported being born overseas, highlighting Auckland's diverse and multicultural makeup (Statistics New Zealand Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2023). Indicating that a significant portion of the city's residents come from various countries and cultures contributing to the city's cultural richness. Auckland is known to be one of the most diverse cities globally, with its neighbourhoods a mosaic of people from hundreds of ethnicities. Migration has also been an important driver of population growth in Auckland, more so than in some other cities in New Zealand. The participants in this study are all based in Auckland, as students and working professionals; their views reflect the city's reputation as the most ethnically diverse region in New Zealand. Their experiences of assimilation, racism and understanding of multiculturalism provided insights into factors that describe a multicultural society in New Zealand for the Indian diaspora.

Some participants also felt that New Zealand hasn't fully embraced multiculturalism at its core, explaining that despite the coexistence of various ethnicities, there was still a lack of integration and acceptance. Their response also alluded to instances of discrimination. Other participants voiced similar views of celebrating many cultural festivities; however, multiculturalism as a concept was still not integral or embedded into New Zealand’s legal frameworks.

> "I think they only thing they mean by that is people of different ethnicities live here. I don't think the sole of NZ is multicultural yet. It's just people living, I think its NZ's still a long way away from being multicultural. Multicultural means different ethnicities living in one place, but it's also accepting the fact that they live here and as part of the country as much as everyone else" (Anjali).

> "A considerable percentage of our population is non-European, non-European NZnder or pakeha and that means we do celebrate a lot of things, like Diwali and um, Chinese New Year and all of that, but um I don't think multiculturalism is enshrined in policy or institutions here, it's more like a cultural idea type thing." (Jessica).

> "I don't think in terms of accepting all the cultures, they're [New Zealand society] multicultural. They tick boxes to show they are multicultural. There's more cultural appropriation here than actually truly trying to understand culture" (Shilpa).

Referring back to the food analogy in the section on discussing Indianness, a participant mentioned that sharing food and learning to cook traditional Gujarati meals was a way for her to assimilate, educate her friends on Indian culture, and simultaneously enact her Indianness. She often cooked Indian meals and shared them with her non-Indian friends at school in New Zealand to be inclusive and introduce them to her culture

> "I do eat traditional food just because that's like what I grew up with, and so I can make dhal baat, saak rotli [lentils, rice, curry and roti] and all of that…Food was one way of being inclusive too" (Jessica).

Most participants described Auckland as multicultural, with a greater visibility of other ethnicities compared to regional locations, as some had lived in or visited areas outside Auckland. Historically, since the immigration reforms in the late 1980s, Auckland has welcomed migrants from various backgrounds, including birthplaces, ethnicities, and religions which has included members of the Indian diaspora adding to the city's cultural makeup (Leckie, 2010; Friesen & Kearns, 2008; Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Lal,2006).

"I would say Auckland is really multicultural. In Auckland, you can see different people, like Asians, Indians, or South Africans, many kinds of different races and types of people…one of my friends, he's living in Nelson, and was saying like maybe 4-5 people are non-kiwis, that's it. I would say Auckland is really multicultural, but I wouldn't say other places are" (Vijay).

> "You see a lot more people of colour in Auckland, than anywhere else. That's a given thing. A lot more events happen in Auckland than anywhere else" (Uday).

Other participants agreed that Auckland hosts more cultural and community events than the rest of the country.

> “Auckland has events to bring people and communities together. I mean, the only one I could think of in Gisborne is the Santa parade and the Diwali festival; theres a multicultural council, but there’s no meetings there – it’s dead” (Jennifer).

> “I grew up in Gisborne, and when I went to school, until my sister got to the same school as me, I was the only indian person in my school. I did the whitest extracurricular activities like I played flute, I was in orchestra” (Jessica).

Auckland showcases its multiculturalism through cultural events, media, and community spaces. Community newspapers and radio stations cover diverse topics, including Bollywood, politics, and economics, reflecting the city's cultural inclusivity (Friesen, Murphy, & Kearns, 2010; Auckland Council, 2024). Cultural hubs like Sandringham and Papatoetoe foster Indian identity (Friesen, Murphy & Kearns, 2010), while the annual Diwali Festival demonstrates Auckland’s commitment to cultural celebration (Auckland Council, 2024). The city also supports Indian arts through classical dance schools and screenings of Bollywood and regional films (Singh, 2018; Radio New Zealand, 2024). The establishment of an Indian consulate in Auckland’s CBD further acknowledges the presence of the Indian community (Radio New Zealand, 2025). These factors support the participant's observations regarding Auckland’s commitment to promoting cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

A participant also described her experience of traveling outside of Auckland, noticing a specific type of stare from locals in smaller regions. Whilst she was labelled a "Jafa" – a slang term specific to people residing in Auckland, it made her feel like an outsider. Also, a few participants shared instances of casual racism in the form of microaggressions, recalling the times they were called a derogatory term, "curry muncher" or being labelled as migrants instead of expats made them feel excluded.

> “I’ll tell you the first thing I noticed when I travelled out of Auckland was there’s a particular kind of look or stare that other Kiwis will give you. And I feel like I get that more from, like red-neck towns that are not like a generic Hamilton. the stare – it’s supposed to me feel out of place, because I realise I’ve come outside of Auckland” (Zara).

> “The first time I got called curry muncher was one”. & “that what was when I first moved here and it made me very upset but I just laughed it off and later on I did call the person on it” (Jennifer).

> “Well, there are things that exist here [New Zealand], like casual, casual racism” (Zara).

Leckie (2021), in her book researching New Zealand's history of excluding Kiwi-Indians, also mentions that historically, casual racism was deeply embedded in New Zealand society and impacted the livelihood of the Indian community in employment, housing, education, and social life. While legal discrimination decreased, everyday covert racism continued in social interactions and media portrayals. Racial microaggressions such as microinsults, subtle insults based on race, were experienced by the diaspora (Leckie, 2021). Being called a “curry muncher”, an ethnic slur denoting

a person of Indian, Pakistani or Asian origin, is a microaggression. Leckie (2021) references the term “curry munchers” and how it was used to stereotype Indians in a hostile way. It was commonly applied in a derogatory manner to label and mock New Zealand-Indians based on their cultural association with Indian cuisine. Leckie’s (2021) research also reflected on casual racism that was historically normalised in everyday language, reinforcing exclusion and marginalisation of the Indian community.

New Zealand-born soul singer Aaradhna Jayantilal Patel, known by the mononym Aaradhna, has Indian ancestry on her father’s side, who migrated from Navsari, Gujarat. The singer’s album *Brown Girl*, released in 2016, was about experiencing racism in New Zealand. She affirmed experiencing the same label: “I've been called a curry muncher, a dumb coconut” (Aaradhna, cited in *The New Zealand Herald*, 2016, para. 4). In a survey conducted by news site *Stuff*,74% of Auckland respondents agreed that being able to partake in various cultural and religious celebrations was a great thing, higher than in any other region across the country (Ruru, cited in *Stuff*, 2022, para.5). However, the same survey revealed that despite Auckland’s claims to be a multicultural city, a sentiment shared by some participants, it also scored higher for discrimination with 48% respondents stating they have experienced racism in comparison to 40% across the rest of the country (Ruru cited in *Stuff,* 2022, para.3).

A participant shared his experiences regarding people's misconceptions about his identity based on his appearance. He was frequently asked if he was from Fiji or Sri Lanka due to his darker complexion, which frustrated him because he felt these assumptions were racially insensitive. He highlighted how both non-Indians and Indians living in New Zealand often demonstrate bias by failing to recognise the diversity within India, and instead labelling individuals solely based on skin colour and ignorance. The participant migrated from Kerala in South India and has often encountered misunderstandings surrounding language and regional connections in India.

> “People used to misjudge me… first thing they will be asking is Fiji or Sri Lanka? Because as I said it’s a big country [India] most people doesn’t know which state or what the language is. If I’m saying like I’m a Malayali[10] – they’ll start saying like oh Madras[11] or Chennai. In South India, theres Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Everyone speaks a different language” (Vijay).

The North and South regions of the Indian subcontinent are very different, each with unique characteristics in food, language, cultural attire, customs, etc. A section on casteism and hegemony, as depicted in Bollywood films, will be unpacked in more detail in Chapter Five.

[10] The Malayalis are a group of people of mixed ethnic heritage who speak Malayalam, a Dravidian language; they constitute the majority of Kerala's population.
[11] Madras refers to the former name for the present-day city of Chennai in India.

The Auckland Council's 2025 Plan defines the city (and country) as a multicultural society and acknowledges that various cultural and ethnic groups do reside but do not interact. The council promotes intercultural approaches, allowing cultures to exchange and interact more emphatically and fostering universal respect through organisation of festivals and events (Auckland Council, 2024). This could set the stage for more meaningful engagements across various cultural and ethnic groups and combat racism and stereotyping in the region for Auckland to truly become a multicultural city.

4.1.6 Being a New Zealand-Indian

The term "New Zealand-Indian" in this research refers to individuals who are New Zealand citizens by birth or have permanent residency and/or have attained citizenship of New Zealand. All the participants expressed that they possess a dual cultural identity as New Zealand-Indians. They shared experiences of feeling a sense of belonging in New Zealand while simultaneously embracing their Indian heritage. This resulted in a continuous negotiation of their cultural identity, often leading to internal conflicts.

Despite these challenges, the participants noted that having hyphenated identities allowed them to enjoy the "best of both worlds." However, they also struggled to find a balance, describing instances where they needed to navigate between their New Zealand and Indian identities, depending on the situations they encountered. Jennifer and Raj framed their identity-navigation in this way:

> "You get the better and worst of both worlds. It's what you choose to take on board … I would never identify myself as fully Kiwi. I want to acknowledge my roots … I've got my own views that are influenced by both India and New Zealand" (Jennifer).

> "I belong in two places, who says you have to only belong in one … I think you sort of uphold values, and for both sort of cultures, you are able to represent yourself in both" (Raj).

In his 2011 study on the formation of ethnicity and a sense of belonging in New Zealand, Paul Callister observed that an increasing number of young people in New Zealand identified with dual and hybrid ethnic identities. Previous ethnographic studies conducted on the Indian diaspora here also found that individuals had malleable cultural identities, which they married in some contexts or chose to act with agency (Vallabh, 2013; Gilbertson, 2007 & Hussain, 2018). The participants of both these studies had revealed how they navigate the complexity of living as both Indian and New Zealander or Kiwi on a daily basis. Within their homes and among fellow Indians, they adhere to traditional customs, participate in religious and cultural ceremonies, communicate in their native languages, and wear Indian clothing. However, in public spaces, they embraced the practices of the predominant culture. They experienced conflicts between their Indian and Kiwi identities, describing

a process whereby they defined Indian values as anything that they saw as separating them from other New Zealanders.

> "I identify towards more Indian culture, but having said that, more and more, I'm losing my touch with a lot of Indian things that I used to do at the time. So, I would say I'm in between somewhere, Indian and New Zealander culturally…I believe I was eighteen and born and raised until I was an adult in India so that Indianness will never go completely out of me" (Uday).

> "It means I carry the best of both worlds, but I also carry certain situations that each culture can't relate to… I have really strong Kiwi values, I really respect the land, I really understand multiculturalism, but at the same time, it also comes with, sometimes, a more than necessary deep-rooted sense of tradition, which can kind of conflict with values that you might have growing just purely as a Kiwi, versus a Kiwi-Indian… Sometimes, I find myself battling between the two" (Zara).

> "I feel privileged. This is because I get to participate in conversations, ideas and analogies with two different perspectives in mind. I get to empathise, become better at diplomacy and embrace two different cultural identities" (Maya).

Participants selected values and attributes from both cultures, showcasing their ability to switch identities based on the context. These experiences illuminate the complex emotions associated with having a dual identity. Their expressions resonate with the findings of Gilbertson (2007) and Williams (2010), who researched the Indian diaspora in New Zealand. For these individuals, identifying as a New Zealander, or Kiwi, signifies socialising and personal freedom. This contrasts with their Indian identity, which involves adhering to certain expectations, often leading to conflicts with the traditional cultural values upheld by their parents or grandparents. As a result, they experience a dual identity, feeling both Indian and New Zealander at various times, yet often finding that neither label fully encapsulates their "true" identity. Williams (2010) further states that in some circumstances, aspects of being Indian are emphasised more than those of being from New Zealand, and in other situations, the opposite is true – "identity is contextual" (as cited in Bandyopadhyay, p.109).

According to Roger Ballard, "cultures, like languages, are codes, which actors use to express themselves in a given context; and as the context changes, so those with the requisite competence simply switch code" (Ballard, 1994, cited in Song, 2003, p.107). Code-switching is a process of moving between particular 'scripts' of behaviour, which both explicitly and implicitly stipulate adherence to particular values or certain forms of behaviour. My participants described their code-switching abilities as those of skilled cultural navigators adept at moving between various social and cultural worlds. They also expressed a sense of privilege in possessing multiple cultural identities.

Hussain (2018) studied the identity dynamics of New Zealand South Asians, focusing on Indian and Pakistani ethnicities through interviews conducted in Auckland between 2009 and 2010. Findings showed participants highlighted the coexistence of dual identities, expressing they identified with

both their Indian or Pakistani roots and their Kiwi upbringing. Stuart Hall's perspective on cultural identities highlights that they are dynamic and vary based on context. Individuals have the ability to choose and navigate different cultural identities depending on their circumstances, exercising agency in how they express their identity.

> "I mean, you kind of pick up on the cultural nuances … Kiwi people and stuff, you're not 100% fresh off the boat when you first came in. So, it's a mixture of both. But at the same time, I choose to hold on to a lot of the things that I used to do back home, like cultural stuff … I guess there are parts of it that I have taken on board. But there are parts of it that I haven't" (Shilpa).

Some participants challenged the boundaries of these two worlds, stating they also felt isolated or estranged in certain situations.

> "It can get really confusing because there's just so much…It can be really alienating and really lonely in the sense that I feel I'm the only one who could explain it to myself and understand it myself. I couldn't potentially do that with anyone else… It can be a privilege, and it can also be really alienating." (Zara).

Author Salman Rushdie (1991) addresses this dilemma in his writings on the Indian diaspora, stating that cultural identities are simultaneously diverse and incomplete. Individuals can sense they are navigating two cultures and, in some moments, feel trapped between the two. However, despite how uncertain and fluctuating those spaces and situations might be, individuals still choose to exist in them. Rushdie is an Indian-born British writer. He speaks from his own experiences of having a hybrid cultural identity as a British-Indian: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (Rushdie, 1991, p. 15).

The participant who felt alienated also recognised and embraced the duality of her identity, affirming that she could navigate between two cultures. Her bilingual skills enabled her to switch seamlessly between her proficiency in Indian languages and the behaviors and norms of the dominant culture in New Zealand contexts.

> "My parents are different ethnicities, a Hindu mum and Parsi dad. They never stopped me from learning about one or the other, in my household I would attend my dad's side of prayers, my mums side of prayers, I had to learn to speak their languages to be able to converse… And at the same time, kind of immerse myself into [two] cultures simultaneously… Because I think coming from Two Worlds, you can kind of you, develop a sense of Understanding, and opinion. A lot earlier on, then maybe what some other people are exposed to. So that played a big part of my life seeing this duality within my identity" (Zara).

Ang (2001), in her scholarly works on cultural studies, reflecting on her own Chinese heritage born in Indonesia and brought up in the Netherlands, examines the identity challenges encountered by those who feel disconnected from their roots. She sheds light on the tension between where you

originate from and where you presently reside. Ang underlines that identities are redefined according to personal situations: as she puts it, “I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent” (Ang, 2001, p. 36). Her work presents a positive perspective on the challenges of identity, suggesting that individuals should embrace their complex and dynamic identities that exist between their host country and their homelands on their own terms. The participants in this study acknowledged their privilege and gained a deeper understanding, which enabled them to navigate and negotiate their values and behaviors as integral aspects of both of their cultural identities.

4.1.7 Living in Two Worlds: Public versus Private Identities

This section builds on the dilemma of living in two worlds, providing examples of participants further negotiating their sense of belonging and the paradox of a disconnect between the two cultures. The two cultures can represent different identities; for example, their public identity may be that of a New Zealander or Kiwi, while their private identity reflects their Indian cultural background. However, conflicts arise when these identities come into play, particularly in the context of being at home or with the in-group versus being at school, work, or social engagements with the out-group.

While participants discussed their connections to both India and New Zealand, visiting India evoked mixed emotions and feelings of otherness. Some participants found it challenging to confront India's collectivist culture firsthand. In their view, New Zealand carries a certain moral weight associated with individualism and freedom. In contrast, Indian culture is perceived by the youth as being restrictive. This sentiment aligns with earlier statements made by participants about the attributes and values of being a New Zealander or Kiwi, which emphasise individualism, while being Indian is often associated with a more collectivist perspective.

> **“**Yes, I was born in India and have only spent three years of my childhood life there. Every time I go back, there’s a feeling of belonging and, at the same time, an intense need to come back home to New Zealand. Even though I want to belong, I don’t feel like I do” (Maya).
>
> “I do feel a bit out of place. I think it’s the way people you know, speak and approach you and talk to you, it doesn’t like, I haven’t lived in India much so when I go back, people different people react differently to you. People make out that you're not from there and they treat you differently” (Jennifer).

Prea Persaud (2015) examined the nuances of the terms Indian, East Indian and West Indian used by Indo-Caribbean, Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese communities. The research found that Indo-Caribbeans find themselves engaging in two contexts, the first in doubting their Indianness and the second in proving to outsiders that they are not the same as Indians who migrated from India. There’s a desire to be Indian and, at the same time, not be labelled the same. In some cases, for

the participants of this study, being labelled Indian is seen as adhering to collectivist and patriarchal norms which are detrimental.

A hyphenated identity, common in diasporas, places migrants to navigate and balance their loyalty between their history and present. It is not a fixed state but an ongoing process where individuals continuously merge their past with their current identity. Persaud (2015) states:

> "A hyphenated identity is a characteristic of the diaspora which forces migrants to choose their loyalties. It is not a state but a process in which the migrant continually tries to bring together his or her history with his or her present" (as, cited in Kumar, 2015, p.8).

The view shared by Maya above expresses a sense of dual identity and conflict she feels between two places. Despite being born in India, she as lived most of her life in New Zealand. However, when visiting India, Maya experiences a feeling of belonging and simultaneously feels a strong desire to return to New Zealand. Despite wanting to belong to India, some participants don't fully feel that they do, highlighting the complexity of their identity and the sense of being torn between two cultures.

Amba Pande's (2018) research on women in the Indian diaspora found that many of the challenges faced by women arise from patriarchal frameworks and experiences of sexism and gender bias. Women often find themselves caught between two different worlds. In their home country (India), they face unequal gender power dynamics, while in the host country, they deal with stereotypes. This leads to mixed feelings about freedom and control. Pande (2018) further states that women's roles, and identities in India are shaped by centuries of cultural traditions, religious stories, and patriarchal structures. These influences create expectations and limitations that still impact gender equality, as women are seen as "bearers of Indian tradition'" (Pande, 2018, p. 1). A female participant shared her experience with the importance of reputation and how societal expectations influenced behaviours in the community. Expectations placed on women to become homemakers and facing backlash for voicing her opinions made her feel excluded in India. This is what Jessica said:

> "The log kya kahenge[12] ["What will people say?"] kind of drama. Quit your job so you could be a homemaker and I spoke up and basically I got in trouble not because of what I said, but because I spoke up when the adult males of the family, were giving their hot takes … And when we had guests I'd just sit there and not go off to the kitchen to bring drinks and snacks with the rest of the ladies" (Jessica).

A male participant shared his experience of cultural conflict, feeling that in India, he is perceived as Indian, yet he struggles to fit the "local" image of a New Zealander. He also discusses how he confronts people who challenge him about this perception. Another participant contributed to the

[12] Translation: "What will people say?" is a Hindi colloquialism used in India to indicate fear of societal judgment on one's personal life choices.

conversation by highlighting that her Pākehā friends did not need to assimilate or put in extra effort to fit into society, as their heritage aligned with the dominant culture. This is how Raj and Jessica outline their perspectives:

> "I think there can be conflicts. I don't know like your colour and background is Indian, but then your thoughts are you know Kiwi. Especially when you go back to India, they definitely know you're not from India. But in New Zealand, they could say the same thing, well, you don't look like a local, but I always challenge people: What do locals look like? Who is a New Zealander, really?" (Raj).

> "She [the friend] never tried to assimilate or integrate herself like I spent all of my childhood doing" (Jessica).

Some participants shared their experiences of exclusion when attempting to assimilate or fit in under peer and social pressure. These moments often led to internal cultural conflicts, highlighting the struggle between personal identity and societal expectations. One participant shared that he felt exhausted by the pressure to conform and the need to pretend in order to feel accepted. This struggle affected his social interactions, professional opportunities, and personal well-being, leading to a blurred distinction between his public and private life. As a result, he found himself constantly reflecting on his identity, which turned into a source of exhaustion.

> "I would say that if I'm in a group where there are non-Indians, then I find myself a lot more trying. This is a fear of not being accepted. Sitting with a bunch of Indian friends and sitting with a bunch of gora[13] friends, there'll be a huge difference in my personality" (Uday).

Vertovec (1999) emphasises that the diaspora experience is a social form marked by a distinctive awareness or 'consciousness' present within globally dispersed communities. Uday's experience demonstrates his self-awareness in the transformations of his personality in specific surroundings. Uday acknowledges that his personality shifts depending on whether he is with Indian friends or non-Indians (gora friends). This aligns with Vertovec's idea that diasporic individuals are highly conscious of their cultural identity and how it is perceived by others. They navigate various cultural spaces by developing a heightened sense of self-awareness.

The two worlds problem arises further from how these youth experience living in two different social and cultural contexts, requiring them to act in different and sometimes contradictory ways. This raises the question of whether a person can authentically be themselves while navigating two worlds. This dilemma involves issues of identity and morality, especially for these participants who often see themselves as unique and distinct from the worlds in which they exist. Drawing from Paul Gilroy's work (1991) on origins and orientation, the metaphors "roots" and "routes" illustrate ethnic experiences (roots) and the expectations that come with them (routes). This concept resonates with

[13] Gora is a derogatory term for a White or fair-skinned male in informal Hindi.

the processes of adjustment and negotiation often confronted by participants of this study (Gilroy, as cited in Sarwal, 2017, p. 2).

Upholding Indian values in private, at home, and around family is an extremely important aspect of participants cultural identity. However, some also feel that Indian culture can restrict their personal identity and freedoms; it is challenging at times. Interactions with both in-group and out-group members play a significant role in the process of negotiating intercultural identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). “The values that their parents attempt to impart to them within the indian home contrast with those they acquire as members of the wider society” (Williams, as cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p.113). These interactions are especially important for youth as first or second-generation members of the diaspora.

For a majority of participants , New Zealand is their home, and they identify as New Zealand-Indians. They embrace hyphenated identities, giving them an advantage over those who have a monocultural identity. This multifaceted identity allows them the agency to choose how they want to identify, whether as South Asians, Indian, Kiwis, New Zealanders, Kiwi-Indians or New Zealand-Indians. The narratives shared highlight both the global and regional realities of the Indian diaspora.

This section explored the cultural identities and nationalities of the participants in this study, highlighting the rich diversity within the Indian diaspora. Factors such as geographical dispersion, personal and political affiliations, cultural values and social environments have significantly shaped their strong sense of belonging in New Zealand. Their sense of Indianness and its expression was evident in the cultural, religious, and national discourses tied to their Indian heritage. Their specific festivities, foods, and activities reflect their families' connections to India. Dimitrova & de Bruijn (2017) notes that Indianness is a “dynamic, ever-changing” concept that will continue to evolve (p. 9). Being Indian is described as a multicultural identity that is both fragmented and cohesive, encompassing regional cultural practices. Their New Zealand-Indian identity provides them with agency and consists of a blend of traditional collectivist values, individualism, and introspection. Social Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) suggests both identity and culture should not be viewed as fixed but complex, consistently evolving entities.

Gabriela Coronado’s (2003) study on migration, culture, and multiculturalism revealed that the South Asian diaspora actively asserts and redefines its identity outside of the subcontinent (India). This is achieved by embracing both aspects of Indian subcontinental culture and those of their host countries. As a result, a new identity emerges: “these immigrants are now ‘experts in crossing borders and performing identities, using transforming and inventing new identities’” (Coronado, 2003, p. 51, as cited in Sarwal, 2017, p. 94). This is evident in the responses of participants' in this study, where they refer to their hyphenated cultural identities as a privilege that allows them to

navigate between different cultural values, languages, and behaviors, accommodating double perspectives.

Lastly, unpacking the challenges in navigating their Indian heritage and Western surroundings also provided local insights into the complexities faced by the wider South Asian diaspora. While Auckland is celebrated for its diversity, instances of discrimination were revealed, alongside the recognition of cultural festivities, indicating a divide between the existing multicultural landscape and its legal and social integration within New Zealand society.

The New Zealand-Indian diaspora is key to strengthening New Zealand's cultural, social, political, and economic foundations by understanding their experiences of multiculturalism and racism, transmitting the values of India, as their ancestral homeland, and participating in shaping New Zealand's national identity, as reflected in the discussions on negotiating cultural identity . As Ballantyne affirms, ethnic groups in New Zealand maintain links to their homelands while also engaging in "discussions about race and nationality" within New Zealand (cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010, p. 21). The following section will present findings from the interview with participants in a New Zealand-based performance group focusing on their views relating to performing their cultural identities.

4.2 Performing Identity

Cultural identity can be expressed, negotiated, and reaffirmed through various artistic forms. This section explores how the performance of Indianness, primarily through dance, serves as a medium for teaching, shaping, and reinforcing cultural identities in New Zealand. It focuses on the experiences of participants from a Bollywood-inspired dance production group based in Auckland, which has been active for nearly two decades. This group operates both as a dance school and as a producer of theatrical Bollywood dance productions.

The dance group is one of several within Auckland's Indian diaspora. Weekly classes are open to students aged five to thirty plus and aim to help students learn about Indian culture and connect with other members of the Indian community in Auckland. Members of the group have performed at various showcases, festivals, and large-scale events, including Auckland's annual Diwali Festival. All aspects of their theatrical productions, such as scriptwriting, costume design, and choreography, are collaboratively developed in-house by the members.

By analysing how these participants actively express their Indianness through dance and drama, we can gain insights into the role that Bollywood, as a global phenomenon, plays in shaping cultural identities and representation through performance as an expressive art form. Furthermore, the group

is pivotal to discussing visibility in New Zealand's multicultural landscape, emphasising how public performances create spaces for cultural exchange and recognition. As aforementioned, the original motivations for this research study came from wanting to explore the New Zealand-Indian diaspora and understanding how cultural identity manifests, which stemmed from observing youth performing at Auckland's Diwali Mela to Bollywood music. This analysis aims to understand the New Zealand-Indian diaspora's relationship with Bollywood films and the broader implications of performance in maintaining dual cultural identities and fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

4.2.1 New Zealand as Home

Many members of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora discussed in the previous section expressed that they see New Zealand as their home and India as their Papakāinga, their ancestral homeland. Those born in India acknowledged their roots, recognising India as their birthplace. However, having been granted citizenship and permanent residency, they now consider New Zealand their home. For some, visiting India also left them with a longing to return home to New Zealand. In the same way, focus group participants expressed feelings of not belonging in India, viewing their visits as temporary and intending to return, emphasising that New Zealand is their home. As Jia expresses it:

> "I don't belong in India in a way… Because whenever I go to India, I'm like, I'm going for a holiday. I'm not going back home or anything. I'm just going for a break, and then I'm going to come back home here [New Zealand]" (Jia).

Other participants shared their experiences with "Othering" in India, expressing feelings of being out of place and stereotyped for their foreign appearance and behaviour. They talked about attending weddings, visiting family and friends, and visiting the local marketplaces to be charged more compared to locals as experiences where they felt excluded and labelled explicitly as foreigners. "Othering" is based on the concept of "us" versus "them" (Christian & Johnsen, 2010). It enables the mistreatment or discrimination of marginalised groups by a dominant culture. Discrimination can also manifest through failing to fit into prevailing cultural norms. In its most basic form, othering is stereotyping a person and thinking they do not belong. This often occurs subconsciously and, as such, becomes a powerful vehicle for reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices in society. Ultimately, the focus group participants mirrored the views of the individual participants of feeling excluded in India, being stared at or being treated differently.

> "It's just that sense, that you feel out of place. Like you don't quite fit in, even if you are dressed like everyone else, it's kind of like you still know people are looking at you, they know you are not from here" (Jia).

> "They kind of say it to your face [calling her an NRI]. I know my dad. He dresses like he's from there, he'll like change his outfit just so he doesn't get like recognised or something. They just

> know automatically, like oh you're an NRI, you know give us more money or something. You know stories like that …"(Veena).

Othering is a form of in-group bias, where individuals favour those who belong to their own social group. In this context, locals developed negative attitudes toward outsiders. Participants recognised that they were treated differently; others labelled their status as NRIs, despite a participant's father adjusting his appearance to avoid being stereotyped as one. These occurrences highlight the experiences of these participants in India, as they find themselves categorised as part of the out-group in this context. In these instances, the diaspora upon returning to their homelands (India) find that they do not belong (Mishra, 2002).

Lustig and Koester (2006) identified the concept of ethnocentrism, which occurs when those of a dominant group challenge the values, beliefs, and ideas of one cultural group. As a result, individuals often develop a firm conviction that their own cultural values are "natural and correct" (Martin & Nakayama, 2004, p. 75). This signals a cultural divide. Those who voice differing perspectives will likely feel alienated and othered when ignorance prevails.

> "You do always feel like you don't really belong there. Because they do think of you differently, they treat you differently, which is fair enough because we have grown up a different way. We are different…I'm different to you because I haven't grown up like you" (Aditi).

Aditi recognises that she is treated differently, reflecting how members of a dominant cultural group, such as friends and family may challenge or fail to accept the values and experiences of those from different backgrounds and or lived experiences. Her statement, particularly the phrase *"fair enough,"* suggests a degree of acceptance and internalisation of her outsider status. This aligns with Martin and Nakayama's (2004) assertion that when ignorance about cultural differences prevails, individuals with differing perspectives often feel excluded and othered.

4.2.2 The NRI Stereotype

Bollywood films have often portrayed Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) as individuals facing identity struggles, caught between Indian traditions and Western lifestyles, exemplifying the classic debate of 'East versus West' values where traditional Indian values are seen as ideal (Sen, 2013; Mishra, 2002; Kaur & Barker, 2002). And although Yashraj and Karan Johar's films have presented a very romanticised version of NRIs and their seamless integration into Indian society, the NRI classification and or trope also has a stigma attached for the Indian diaspora.

A participant described an NRI depicted in Bollywood films and affirmed the characters are often complex, misunderstood, and more occidental as opposed to being in touch with their roots.

> "Their Hindi is really bad, their pronunciation of Hindi words is terrible. They're always made a mockery of generally, how they talk, and they are" (Aditi).

Scholar Neelam Wright reviewed the depictions of NRIs in films and found they were often shown to be corrupt and represent ‘Westernized Indianness’, forcing the NRI's identity into homogenised representations (2015, p.190). The participant’s description highlights the negative stereotypes associated with NRIs and explains why members of the diaspora may be reluctant to adopt this identity. In the film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), for example, directed by Aditya Chopra, the male lead character, Raj, faces rejection from his Indian peers during his visit to India. His Westernized way of life and thinking set him apart from those around him. However, by embracing his roots and traditional Indian values, he ultimately wins over the female lead, Simran and gains approval from her family (Chopra, 1995 & Mundhra, 2023).

When probed further about their views on the term NRI, including whether they understood its implications and if it resonated with them as members of the Indian diaspora living abroad, they felt a dissonance. The term "NRI" created a sense of disconnect or detachment for many participants. They strongly affirmed that New Zealand is their home country and noted that they have never been labelled as NRIs outside of India. The term only became familiar to them during visits to India. They recalled their first encounters with the term NRI, seeing it written on signs at the airport or during interactions with people in India. They were more curious as to how the term applied to them and how people stereotyped them as NRIs despite their efforts to assimilate.

> “I think they use it at the airport; I can’t remember; that may be where I saw it first. Mainly when you go shopping, or you’re in the market and stuff, you kind of feel it. It's correct, right? Like you're an Indian, but you don't reside there, so it's like, oh okay, technically, yes, that's what we are” (Aditi).

> “The first time I heard the term NRI, was when I was in India, sort of like, I remember walking in and I saw a sign. That was when I was young, so I didn’t think too much of it. Even though you dress like in an Indian outfit even for a wedding, they just look at you and they're like she's from overseas.” (Ahana).

> “The first I heard it was in India. Just being called NRI, I wanna figure out how they know we’re not from India. I wanna know... if we dress the same” (Kriti).

One participant reflected on her experiences in India and expressed a desire to understand the meaning of the term "NRI" (Non-Resident Indian). She shared that her visits to India are driven by a desire to immerse herself in the culture and learn about her parents' upbringing. While being labelled as an NRI does not negatively impact her, she acknowledges a feeling of not fully belonging.

Similarly, another participant accepted the term, noting that people perceive and treat her differently due to her upbringing abroad. Although she understands the reasons for this distinction, she still feels out of place, which is more rooted in cultural differences than in the term "NRI" itself. These cultural differences include the Indian values and traditions she learned in New Zealand, which were passed down from her family.

> “I go there with a different mindset, I go there to experience culture and learn more about the way my parents were raised and how they are, who they are and so even though they might call me NRI, it doesn’t impact me at all” (Ahana).

> “We are different. Even we feel like this, when we're with them [locals]. I’m different to you because I haven't grown up like you. I don’t think it bothers me because I can see that we are different, but you do feel out of place… Not because of that term but because we have grown up differently even though we’re all Indian” (Aditi).

Unlike the individual participants discussed in the previous section, who expressed and experienced a two-world dilemma between their cultural identities, the focus group participants did not explicitly share similar views. Instead, they recounted their experiences of navigating their dual identities through subtle nuances, such as being confronted by locals or family while visiting India. Their affirmation of New Zealand supports their acceptance of these situations as their home and India as either a temporary place of residence or as a place which they are culturally associated but not a home. They also rejected the term NRI - (Non-Resident Indian), feeling a disconnect between Bollywood's portrayal of Indianness and their actual lived experiences. The stereotypical narratives and depictions of NRIs in films, along with the connotations associated with the term, did not align with their perspectives.

Instead, the group primarily uses Bollywood as a bridge connecting them to their heritage while living in New Zealand. Their involvement with Bollywood is more professional, as performers, and celebratory, allowing them to embrace dance as a cultural art form without being weighed down by cultural tensions or doubting their dual cultural identities. The subsequent sections will highlight how the group leverages Bollywood as a social connector, actively preserving Indian culture in confidently expressing their New Zealand-Indian identities through performance and teaching culture in New Zealand’s multicultural landscape.

4.2.3 The Role of Bollywood

Bollywood movies are a repository, reflecting India's cultural identity and social fabric. These films act as a lens through which one can view India's history, current state, and hopes for the future while also offering a distinct platform to examine the connection between cinema and the diaspora (Dudrah, 2006; Dwyer, 2010; Therwath, 2010; Mukherjee, Pradhan & Barn, 2021). The group participants confirmed that their consumption of Bollywood films and the connections they made with characters and themes helped them explore their Indianness and learn about India. They stated that films were both introductory tools for them to learn about cultural celebrations and their parents’ upbringing in India, and at the same time, films opened dialogue to learn more about the various cultural practices in different regions of India. This is how Veena, Jia and Kriti expressed their association with Bollywood:

> “I guess it's kind of like a foundation or introduction tool, or basis to be more inquisitive and just learn more about your own culture and your own [cultural] identity” (Veena).

> “It’s like a stepping stone to find where parents came from and what they grew up in. The challenges they had to overcome to come here. I always feel as a first-generation Kiwi, we’re always very grateful for the sacrifices our parents have made and the hard work. So, being able to I guess learn more of that, by just seeing movies” (Jia).

> “I learned watching Bollywood at a young age with like family, even the bunch of old school movies like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and stuff, just about togetherness and family. And it’s like the time that you spend watching movies with your family. It's a very family thing” (Kriti).

As discussed in the literature review chapter, cinema, and particularly films, are powerful vehicles for entertainment, education, and information sharing in society. Beard (1994) asserts that films significantly represent modern popular culture and actively reflect and shape diverse cultures and societal values. This evolution has positioned films as essential components of contemporary life, enriching individuals' understanding of various cultures across the globe. For the participants, learning family values and togetherness built upon their understanding of Indianness and reinforcing it through the practice of watching films as a family or social activity. Therwath, in her exploration of the Indian diaspora and Bollywood, asserts that “film watching itself is a central practice in the re-enactment of Indianess” (2010, p.12). Bhoopaty (2003) also emphasises that films play a critical role in shaping the experiences of diasporic individuals as they mirror the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of a nation. Films also serve as platforms for challenging meanings, establishing and transforming traditions, and presenting identities, which can either be accepted or dismissed (Bhoopaty, 2003, as cited in Therwath, 2010).

Bollywood films may serve as a starting point for conversations about cultural celebrations, though they may not accurately represent the diversity of practices within India. The focus group predominantly consisted of individuals with ancestral ties to Gujarat in West India. They noted that the films depicted Diwali celebrations differently from how they are traditionally celebrated in Gujarat. Some also highlighted a common theme of viewing India as an imagined homeland, shaped primarily by their parents' experiences and Bollywood films. Participants expressed a strong desire to visit and explore India for themselves. They acknowledged the limitations of relying on films or dramatised portrayals to truly understand Indian culture and underscored the importance of firsthand experiences. Additionally, they wanted to explore their cultural identity by comparing their experiences growing up in New Zealand with the narratives presented in films and their parents' upbringing in India. Here is how Ahana, Aditi and Jia framed it:

> “I feel like I learn more when I go to India, and I go to the place I live, and I see things with my own eyes” (Ahana).

> “We’re not just relying on movies to kind of give an idea what it is like, but for us, that's all we had. But I think after we went there, then we were like, okay, this is what it's like. There was no FaceTime back in the day, to see how life is like. And if It’s something like a Yash Raj. You're just gonna be like, this is a fairytale, dramatised kind of stuff. This is the richest of the rich, a different class of people” (Aditi).

> “I don't quite know what India was like until I actually went there. So before, then I would be seeing, the differences or the contrasts between what's shown in the movies and here, and I guess start a conversation with my parents about that. Like oh this is what you grew up in? I'm going [to India] to build more of a I guess an accurate sense of cultural identity from what my parents would say” (Jia).

Electronic media has significantly transformed traditional forms of communication. For example, innovations like internet video calling, including applications like FaceTime, have changed how we interact. According to Appadurai (1996), this shift altered our everyday communication, stating that "electronic mediation transforms pre-existing worlds" (p. 3). Participants noted that FaceTime did not exist in the past, which meant they had limited knowledge about the lives of their extended families in India. Consequently, they often turned to Bollywood to envision what life in India was like, demonstrating that the films played a role in shaping perceptions or an imagination of India.

Brij Lal (2006) explains that homes are continuously re-narrated through the authentic, imagined, and mythologised stories of migrants, serving as a cultural reference point for the Indian diaspora. This notion resonates with Hall's (1990) concept of cultural identities, which are constructed through fantasy, narrative, and myth — highlighting a dynamic and evolving process. The participants in this context express a compelling desire to visit India, which aligns with the experiences described by Lal (2006) and Hall (1990). Their yearning reflects the negotiation of their cultural identities, especially as they engage with and consume Bollywood films, which further shape their diasporic experiences.

Additionally, Benedict Anderson’s (1983) idea of imagined communities is particularly relevant in understanding these participants’ experiences. By identifying themselves as members of the Indian diaspora, they actively generate meanings about India, the nation they aspire to connect with. This process involves redefining their cultural identities through personal and communal narratives, focusing on second-hand memories from their parents and film depictions. This nostalgic construction of India as a homeland depicts a complex interplay between cultural identity, memory, and belonging (Anderson, as cited in Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017, p. 5). Together, these perspectives presented insights on how the participants navigate their identities amid the influences of Bollywood films, ultimately fostering a deep and personal connection to their cultural roots.

Fuchs, Linkenbach, and Malik (2010) found that New Zealand-born Indians in Christchurch identified with India through family, region, and religion rather than the concept of a singular homeland. Participants of their study had reported positive experiences visiting India, which strengthened their roots, allowed them to relearn the language, and helped them re-establish a sense of belonging. Those who travelled expressed a strong desire to return to their ancestral villages.

Overall, the group conveyed that Bollywood plays a key role in mediating their sense of Indianness by prompting connections between films and reflecting on family togetherness and the importance

of family bonds. This led to further discussions with family members about personal experiences related to cultural identity exploration and discovery. Watching Bollywood movies sparked conversations about their parents' experiences in India and helped the participants shape their own understanding of Indian culture, values, beliefs, and traditions. Punathambekar (2005) states that Indian immigrants watch Indian movies to express a form of cultural citizenship with their home countries. This theory supports the motivations of parents and families to enforce film watching as a family activity.

The participants were inspired to make personal visits to India to gain a deeper understanding of their heritage beyond what films portray. The group also realised that Bollywood films often provide a simplified or dramatised version of reality. While they might be a starting point for conversations about cultural celebrations, they may not accurately represent India's regional diversity or practices.

4.2.4 Performing Indianness Through Dance

The dance group's primary activity involves teaching weekly Bollywood dance classes for both children and adults. In addition, they have won competitions in Auckland for their cultural dance performances and have participated in charity events and community initiatives. As one group member Aditi shared, “we’ve performed at all the all the different Diwali functions that happen around Auckland, and there's even things like Christmas in the Park. We do like dancing in retirement homes, lots of weddings and receptions, a dance masala TV show and music videos”. The group has also performed at various regional Diwali festivals around Auckland. Their most significant performances have been at Auckland’s annual Diwali Mela in the central city, sponsored by the local government and key businesses. The first Auckland Diwali festival was staged in 2002 and a decade later has now grown to be ‘New Zealand’s premier Indian cultural festival’ (Friesen & Kearns, 2008; Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, 2023).

The participants confirmed that Bollywood is central in expressing their Indian cultural identity. It allows them to adapt the dance choreography and music to their unique style in both stage performances and storytelling narratives. Bollywood dance is distinct from other dance forms because it effectively conveys stories through movement (Chatterjee, 2016; Kao & Do Rozario, 2008; Shresthova, 2011). The songs featured in films express various emotions, including love, anger, sadness, and fantasy, showcased through expressive choreography and vibrant costumes; this ability to convey deep emotions has contributed to the global popularity of Bollywood (Shresthova, 2011).

The participants related to Bollywood music because it is also a hybrid of various dance and music forms encompassing the regional cultures of India. The style and form of dance and music are malleable for them to adapt, similar to the way they navigate their hyphenated identities. As Veena and Aditi elaborated:

> “I just like the style because it's a mixture of everything which is like, I guess what we are as well, because it's not Indian classical. It's not like it's still Indian, but it's not classical” (Veena).
>
> “It’s kind of in between, which is kind of like what we are, so maybe that’s why we are attracted to it” (Aditi).

Chacko and Menon (2013) explored the identity of Indian American youth, focusing on cultural competition as a space for the formation of multiple identities on college campuses. They found that folk music, particularly Bhangra[14], has evolved and blended with other multicultural music and dance forms, creating a “poly-cultural” form (cited in Purkayastha, Adur, and Khan, 2017, p. 286). These blended folk and classical musical styles are then adapted into Bollywood, creating hybrid music tracks and dance forms. Chacko and Menon (2013) emphasise that these dances and music traditionally from rural landscapes and villages in India transition into becoming meditations for the diasporic experience, as cultural identities being enacted in public spaces go on to reflect hybridity.

Jennifer DeVere Brody’s (2008) work on "hyphen-nations", previously referred to in the literature review chapter, highlights the significance of hyphens in shaping identities that are constantly evolving. While hyphenation may imply a combination of elements, it also represents shifting identity spaces. For the participants in this study, Bollywood music and dance have allowed them to create a fusion of styles that reflect their experiences. They use these forms to express their New Zealand-Indian identities in public spaces, drawing upon contemporary influences as they see fit. Their diasporic experiences in performance spaces are characterised not by simple diversity but by a more complex understanding of hyphenated identity that embraces hybridity. As Stuart Hall observed, diasporic identities are those that are constantly “producing and reproducing” (1990, p. 235). In this case, the group's unique Bollywood-inspired dance performances allow them to reproduce meanings of their Indianness.

Inês Lourenço (2017) studied Bollywood watching and dancing practices as processes of cultural identity construction in Portugal. Bollywood dance in Portugal has grown, often marketed through Orientalist rhetoric, e.g., associating it with exoticism and Indian flavors. However, Bollywood dance is also cultural appropriation tied to identity-building and cosmopolitanism. The study found similar results, with Bollywood consumption creating diverse cultural practices among new social groups such as performers and dance groups through cultural borrowing, engaging in experiences of pleasure and desire, which are connected to their identification with the films and in their expression through dance (Lourenço, 2017).

[14] Bhangra is a type of traditional folk dance from the Punjab area of the Indian subcontinent.

The participants also added that their comfort derived from performing and belonging to a group or community that shared their cultural identity experiences. Performing within a group alleviates their fears and reinforces their sense of Indianness through shared experiences among members, allowing them to relate to one another and create a supportive environment.

> "It's like you can believe in the same thing" (Kriti).
>
> "When you go in there, you just switch off, and you just accept this world for a little while. If I was a solo dancer, I'm like oh my god I'm going in front of all these non-Indians and doing a dance. It's way less scary when you are in a group. Just having a group of people that you can identify with. Because in a group, you are always going to feel stronger" (Aditi).
>
> "You've grown up in a similar way, being an Indian in NZ, kind of relate with each other. I like to think it gives people an identity, that they can identify with something" (Jia).

Sangita Shresthova, in her ethnographic research, traced Bollywood dances and how they were interpreted, created, and produced in three locations: Mumbai (India), Kathmandu (Nepal), and Los Angeles (USA) in 2011. She found that Bollywood dance has experienced rapid growth globally due to the Indian diaspora communities abroad, film themes catering specifically to an NRI audience, foreign film locations and united people and cultures and dance classes became synonymous with Indian culture, with students showcasing their desi side (Shresthova, 2011). While Bollywood dances may not represent traditional Indian dance forms, they remain a defining element of Bollywood cinema and continue to shape dance trends worldwide.

Bollywood dance classes that double as exercise also became increasingly popular in Auckland (*The New Zealand Herald*, 2012). Participants in these classes find that they can experience a taste of Indian culture while enjoying the comfort of a suburban environment. As Grunwell noted in *The New Zealand Herald* (2012, para. 7), "I look like I could step out of 'Jai Ho,' the song-and-dance scene from 'Slumdog Millionaire.' Except I'm not at a train station like in the movie but in the hall of Mt. Roskill Grammar School."

A participant also wanted to highlight the group's achievements in competitions and at Auckland's Diwali mela[15] expressing a sense of pride. Their dance productions are also a testament to the group's collective unique identity.

> "We've won lots of competitions, Diwali mela ones, whole bunch of trophies. our productions, that's probably like our biggest accomplishments. Purely hundred per cent done by us, including the story, the choreography, the costumes, everything, lighting sound, totally original" (Aditi).

Henry Johnson's (2007) examination of multicultural performances in New Zealand, focused specifically on public perceptions of Diwali celebrations in Wellington and their significance within

[15] Mela refers to a public event that is organised to celebrate a special occasion or an event where goods can be bought and sold.

New Zealand's multicultural landscape. These celebrations are centered around performances, music, dance, and food, making them highly visible events. They promote multicultural engagement, attracting not only the South Asian diaspora but also individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. Johnson's study concludes that Diwali serves as a platform for identity formation, allowing the South Asian diaspora to negotiate its cultural heritage. However, the festival also highlights the paradox of multiculturalism: while it brings people together, it can simultaneously reinforce cultural differences. The study found that the Diwali festival "occupies a space of dual ambivalence"- both a religious celebration and an event that can evoke mixed feelings due to its increasing commercialisation (2007, p. 76). Although staging Diwali as a public event intertwines identity construction with political discourse, the festival still reflects transnational cultural flows, connecting the Indian diaspora to their homeland and new environment.

The celebration of Diwali in Auckland brings together various cultural groups, organisations, societies, clubs, and individuals, showcasing the rich cultural tapestry of the South Asian diaspora in the region. These events act as 'contact zones' where different cultures converge, featuring diverse music and dance styles. They celebrate the festival and highlight what it means to be a contemporary Indian or South Asian New Zealander (Johnson, 2007, p. 74).

Alison Booth's (2014) research on performance networks also examined Indian cultural production in New Zealand, looking at event production in terms of their practical and cultural dimensions. The ethnographic study highlighted how local production practices intersect with global network formations. It identified that networks, often tailored to specific events, are formed through formal and informal relationships. These interactions contribute to the shaping and marketing of Indian cultural performances, affecting the broader perception of India among New Zealand audiences. The research demonstrated that cultural events are not just commercial productions but are key to the visibility and representation of Indian communities in New Zealand. The way the events are produced influences how Indian culture is perceived. Further, Booth (2014) also states that with the influx of migrants in Auckland, cultural events have become more diverse, and community producers have more influence in the production. As a result, Indianness in these events has become more dynamic and complex, evolving with the community's diversity and global influences.

The participants emphasised that Diwali is a significant platform for them to express and celebrate their cultural identities and acknowledge their sense of belonging. The success of these events in preserving "the culture of their original homelands" within the Auckland Indian communities reflects a desire shared by the dance group participants to affirm cultural practices and solidify a sense of belonging (Booth, 2014, p. 16). Their in-house practices managing end-to-end dance productions also reinforce their influence as cultural community producers performing Indianness. Lastly, Bandyopadhyay (2010) explains large public celebrations not only create a sense of belonging within a community, but expressions of culture also motivate individuals to adapt a uniform 'community'

identity as their own. This group's participants have already accepted their identity as New-Zealand-Indian performing in public spaces. "These massive public festivals not only provide an experience of belonging to a community, but such extravagant displays of their culture also encourage them to internalise this publicly constructed homogenous 'community' identity as their own" (p.15).

4.2.5 Visibility of Indianness

The group participants felt a strong sense of responsibility to educate their dance class students about Indian culture and to embrace their heritage. They made sure that their dance performances incorporated cultural values, celebrations, and characters from Indian mythology and epics, essential aspects of reinforcing a sense of Indianness. They emphasised that the dance classes serve as the only connection some of their students have to their culture. This prompts the dance teachers to explain the significance behind traditional dances and stories, helping students understand the cultural contexts. By doing this, they promote pride in being Indian and strengthen cultural ties within the community. As Askhita commented:

> "A lot of these kids, this is their once a week, touch with culture. Sometimes, this is all they get. In our shows, we've got Indian characters; we've got like Indian festivals and that; we've got Indian terms, terminology and just like cultural things, like respect and things like that and how you speak to people" (Aditi).

> "I think it makes them feel like it's okay to be Indian. Hopefully, like, I want them to feel that way when they come here that they don't have to feel like this is my once-a-week secret life that I have here, that go too. They feel like they are part of or in touch with their culture" (Aditi).

Purkayastha, Adur, and Khan (2017) examined how Indian Americans have carved out a visible presence by performing their ethnic identities in mainstream spaces. Their study focused on the social dynamics that drive these performances, primarily involving the children of migrants who trace their roots back to India. They found that these performances also target audiences beyond local ethnic communities. The multiculturalism promoted in schools and colleges provided unique opportunities for the post-migrant generation to express certain aspects of their cultures within multicultural America publicly. The research further developed the idea of claiming public spaces to showcase Indianness, supporting the emergence of dance and music as prominent forms of cultural expression for the South Asian diaspora. For the participants of this group, cultural education through dance is a part of their role in being visible within the Indian community.

The participants further reflected upon their own journeys from joining the dance group to later becoming dance teachers themselves, passing on cultural education and embodying it. They view dance as intergenerational cultural knowledge for youth. This is what Aditi and Ahana shared:

> "All these guys [other participants] started of quite young with us and they've now, grown up to be now teaching and taking classes but also just seeing them grow in their own dance abilities. I see a lot of the kids going on to school and they're becoming cultural leaders in teaching,

> dances in their schools, which is really cool. Now they've taught at least fifteen to twenty kids there, something about our culture" (Aditi).
>
> "It [interacting with students] creates like more awareness about our culture through our dance" (Ahana).

In Auckland, some public schools have had their students perform Bollywood dances in various competitions, music videos, and cultural showcases. A dance teacher from Mount Roskill, a suburb of Auckland, filmed a music video to educate younger generations about the culture of arranged marriages in India. This project also sought to empower her students by raising awareness of stereotypes within the community (Parminter, 2016, cited in *Stuff New Zealand*). Performances by high school students around Auckland have included various styles of Bollywood dance, such as bhangra, Bharatanatyam, Garba and hip-hop (Macleans College, 2025). There are also Bollywood dance competitions that involve prize money held for high school students in Auckland. Established in 2023, Bollywood Showdown is run by prominent Indian community members. The website for the competition states, "Bollywood Showdown is a labour of love, organized by performers who share a deep passion for the art of dance. It's a celebration of community and creativity…" (Bollywood Showdown, 2025).

In 2007, Ann David examined the influence of Bollywood dance on South Asian dance practices in the UK, highlighting its rise as a popular culture among British Asian youth. Fieldwork in Leicester and London highlighted themes of identity, authenticity, tradition, and the evolution of dance transmission to Bollywood. The study concluded that there is a growing culture of creating a "global identity" for the youth, and Bollywood dance is a multifaceted tool for negotiating cultural and ethnic identity (David, 2007, p. 17-18).

Henry Johnson (2015) further analysed contemporary Asian festivals in New Zealand using Appadurai's (1996) framework of "scapes", previously discussed in the literature review chapter. He concluded that these festivals are shaped by a complex mix of global and local influences, resulting in hybrid cultural expressions. These events serve as platforms for showcasing cultural identity within New Zealand. Their existence is driven by the increasing exchange of cultural elements on both local and global scales, making them a product of the nation and the communities involved in organising them.

Festivals, such as Auckland's Diwali Festival, where participants often perform, embody cultural expression and creation. They act as spaces where New Zealanders can engage with and celebrate the nation's evolving multicultural identity. Therefore, the dance group in this study contribute to creating a global identity for New Zealand-Indian youth. Through the transmission of their cultural knowledge and or education, they play an active role in shaping New Zealand's multicultural landscape. Their dance classes, charitable activities, community work, and large-scale productions and performances facilitate intergenerational cultural transmission and enrich New Zealand's

multicultural environment. They contribute to national identity and the globalised experience of the South Asian diaspora in New Zealand.

The participants in this group have established a positive relationship with Bollywood, fuelled by their active engagement in Bollywood-inspired performances that they regard as both cultural and professional. Compared to the views of individuals discussed in the previous section, this group felt less conflicted about living between two worlds. They also adopted a less critical view of Bollywood films, choosing not to focus on patriarchal or gender issues. Instead, they embrace Bollywood as a source of entertainment and cultural pride. The participants almost mirror song and dance sequences in Bollywood films depicting emotions and journeys, except they perform theirs publicly - “Bollywood films make full, explicit use of song and dance to describe the actual journey into diasporic space” (Kao & Do Rozario, 2008, p.317).

Their experiences with Bollywood dance allow them to celebrate their Indian and New Zealand identities without experiencing significant cultural dissonance. They perceive Bollywood not as an outdated or inaccurate representation of the diaspora but as a vibrant means of cultural expression, social engagement, and a connection to their Indian traditions through dance and music. Their performances at both private and public events highlight the integral role of Bollywood in their lives.

They narrate a story of dance, diaspora, and hyphenated cultural identities, with Bollywood serving as a vital conduit for expressing their Indianness and contributing to New Zealand’s multicultural milieu.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complexities of cultural identity negotiation among New Zealand-Indian youth, highlighting how their experiences shape and redefine their sense of Indianness. Key themes discussed include the challenges of living between two cultural worlds, the role of census data in defining identity, and the importance of family, friends, food, and festivities in maintaining cultural connections. Participants expressed varying perspectives on being a Non-Resident Indian versus feeling "not Indian," identifying as New Zealanders or Kiwis, and encountering multiculturalism and racism in their lives. The chapter also examined how public and private identities are navigated, how New Zealand is perceived as home, and the role of Bollywood in reinforcing cultural identity through dance and visibility. Through these insights, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how diasporic youth actively negotiate their evolving identities within a multicultural society. The next chapter will expand on the discussion of Bollywood cinema’s influence in shaping cultural identities for the participants, exploring both its affirmations and critiques.

5. Chapter Five: Bollywood Cinema Mediates Identity

> “Hindi cinema also has its own culture… Hindi cinema’s culture is quite different from Indian culture, but it’s not alien to us; we understand it.. As a matter of fact, Hindi cinema is our closest neighbour. It has its own world, its own traditions, its own symbols, its own expression, its own language, and those who are familiar with it understand it,” – Javed Akhtar (as cited in Joshi, 2015, p.1).

5.1 Introduction

Film is one of the most popular and significant cultural forms and commodities within South Asia's transitional cultural and political economy. Notably, the identificatory processes of South Asian diasporas are primarily shaped and contested through the “cinematic apparatus” (Desai, 2004, pp. 35-40). Rajinder Dudrah (2002) emphasises the importance of examining Bollywood’s socio-cultural coding to understand its impact on identity formation. This observation was supported by scholars in Indian cinema studies, demonstrating how film representations reflect broader social structures and values, particularly through analysing Bollywood's success among diasporic audiences. (Dudrah, 2006; Punathambekar, 2005; Schaefer & Karan, 2013; Tirumala, 2009; Mishra, 2002).

Bollywood can be seen as a mediascape, a 'global warehouse' filled with a diverse and intricate repertoire of images and narratives. The concept of "brand Bollywood" identifies it as a culture industry, highlighting the various media formats it employs (Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Appadurai, 1996, as cited in Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008, p. 180). Stuart Hall (1997), previously discussed in the literature review chapter, also asserts that media plays a significant role in representing and projecting a society's culture in today's interconnected world. Hall (1997) noted that electronic media socially constructs cultural meanings through symbolic representations. In analysing Bollywood films, Ravinder Kaur and Martin Barker (2002) also found that Bollywood films establish an implicit contract with their audience, using familiar themes and identity markers to create a shared understanding. Bollywood films, in particular, have been instrumental in mediating and reflecting the complexities of the South Asian Diaspora. As Indian screenwriter and lyricist Javed Akhtar notes, Hindi cinema has developed its own language of symbols and expressions, making it a powerful medium for cultural communication. Therefore, understanding Bollywood's role in mediating cultural identity is essential for comprehending how diasporic communities navigate their cultural heritage and lived experiences in a globalised world.

In this study, participants in both individual and group interviews shared their perspectives on Bollywood's role in shaping their identities. They recalled specific film scenes, engaging dialogues, and memorable song lyrics, underscoring their deep connection to Bollywood films. These films significantly shape their cultural identities by offering a mix of escapist entertainment, education and

fandom concerning Bollywood actors. Moreover, Bollywood narratives cultivate a sense of "Indianness" while evoking the nostalgia of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora.

This chapter's discussion of the findings has been enriched by interlacing the focus group participants' voices with those of the individual participants to present a more diverse and inclusive conversation; more importantly, the insights gained from this approach were invaluable in explaining the overarching themes related to Bollywood and in critically assessing the role of Bollywood cinema in mediating cultural identities.

The first section of this chapter will focus on celebrating Bollywood by exploring themes such as Indianness, fandom, cultural education, and tourism. It will also examine how Bollywood influences perceptions of India both globally and locally. However, despite these positive affirmations, the representation of identity in Bollywood is complex. While it is often celebrated, it also faces criticism for its portrayals of tradition, modernity, and social realities.

The second part of this chapter will delve into critiques of Bollywood films, addressing issues such as the representation of women and sexism, problematic notions of Indianness, hegemony, and casteism.

5.1.1 Masala, Entertainment and Escapism

Masala (spice) refers to a kind of film that uses a formulaic plot, a stipulated number of song and dance sequences, action, melodrama, and all other staples of commercial Hindi cinema that work exceptionally well at the box office (Roy & Chua, 2012, p.28). Participants referred to some Bollywood films as ‘masala’ films, watched for entertainment purposes only without requiring much effort to reflect on story plots, characters or themes.

> “I mean, they’re all good entertainment. But see, Bollywood was originally an escape for people too; it was an escape for normal people from their daily lives. It was where you could just go and enjoy themselves, not think about their daily struggles and stuff. I’ve got friends who go in there, like every time you know they’ll go [to the cinema] in there for some mindless entertainment, where they don’t have to use their brain too much. Just watch something” (Shilpa).

> “Personally, I watch Bollywood films as pure entertainment. I do like watching movies, and I think I watch a lot of movies every month or every year, but my main purpose of watching all Hindi movies is purely entertainment.” (Nitin).

These participants affirm Bollywood as an escapist experience, watching films for ‘mindless’ entertainment or comedy, as the films also bring a sense of comfort. Natalia Ningthoujam (2017) states that Bollywood audiences often use song and dance sequences in films as an escape from the mundane and or stress they encounter in their daily lives – “Indian cinema [Bollywood] has been an escapist experience for masses” (Ningthoujam, 2017, cited in *The Peninsula*, para. 4). These films also employ a set of easily recognisable conventions, targeted at an insider group and or

knowledgeable viewers (Roy & Chua, 2012). Sen (2013) encapsulates the core of Bollywood's masala films as being “an ecology of representation, desire and address, while simultaneously retaining the basics of the popular idiom” (p. 159). Tejaswini Ganti (2012) also studied the production of Bollywood cinema, focusing on industry practices and audience behaviors. In her analysis, she states that Bollywood was previously labelled as escapist cinema.

A participant described his intimate connection with Bollywood films, considering them an important part of his life. They allow him to stay connected to his cultural roots, and he acknowledges that few films might lack logic or depth. However, he still enjoys them by momentarily suspending critical judgment. His engagement is also driven by a strong sense of loyalty and support for his favourite actors, indicating that fandom plays a significant role in film-watching choices. This is how Uday frames his relationship to Bollywood:

> “It’s a big part of my life watching Bollywood movies, watching… it definitely keeps me connected with my roots for sure. Um, no matter how senseless some of the movies are, I can still turn off some of my switches, and I can still watch that, just because I like the actor. Supporting the actors you like is a big element of it” (Uday).

The above participant's experience watching Bollywood films was primarily influenced by emotional connection, star power, and personal resonance rather than the quality of the narrative. Their approach to watching films, mainly to support their favourite actors, highlights the star-driven nature of the Bollywood industry. This suggests that, for this participant, fandom and admiration for actors may be just as important, if not more so, than the storyline or the overall execution of the film.

The same participant later spoke about Bollywood as an ideal apparatus for perpetuating escapism, where audiences from lower socio-economic can view films for aspirational livelihoods to escape their mundane everyday lives, causing him to believe Bollywood films are misleading and still reserve critical judgment. Again, here is Uday:

> “The way India is, there is so much poverty, there are so many people who don’t have that life that they want, Bollywood is that means of having that life. Watching it is, is in a way giving them a satisfaction of what they need, through the medium of films. Which I believe is the reason why Bollywood films are also not realistic” (Uday).

Some prominent Bollywood actors slot their films for an Eid, Christmas or Diwali release to attract crowds in more significant numbers. Actors such as Salman Khan began releasing his blockbuster films on Eid. [16]A blockbuster film in Bollywood is known to break box office records and earn significant profits. Despite the film's substantial storyline or plot, the ensemble of popular actors

[16] Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting for Muslims.

draws crowds in. Bollywood is “infamous for churning out crowd-pleasing, escapist drama that is often mindless” (*Hindustan Times*, 2016, para. 2).

By aligning major film releases with cultural festivals, films help reinforce a sense of Indianness by uniting viewers in shared celebrations, emotions, and experiences. They also subtly promote the idea that, despite differences in religion and customs, entertainment and storytelling can bring the nation together, and NRIs may feel more connected to their roots through festival releases. Shilpa earlier shared that Bollywood films are ‘good entertainment’ however, she also states they do capture genuine cultural experiences too.

> “I mean to some extent yes, but then the real culture stuff, I mean when you think about festivals, when you think about the spirit of the culture its there…” (Shilpa).

One participant acknowledges that some films lack cultural relevance or a meaningful message. Re-emphasising big budgets and star-studded casts, along with an avid fan following, still ensures that films generate revenue.

> “Some movies are pathetic or [don’t] have any message or anything related to Indian culture or whatever. They just want to spend money, or it’s just a big star cast, and because of the big fan following in India, they know somehow, it’s a money-making industry. People will just go and watch their favourite fan or favourite actors' movie even though the movie doesn’t have any sense, story or background” (Nitin).

Nitin’s observation critiques the film industry by arguing that many movies lack meaningful content, cultural relevance, or strong storytelling. He suggests that filmmakers and producers often prioritise commercial gain, knowing that audiences will watch their favourite actors regardless of the film's quality. This observation connects to a case study by Bhadange, Raju, and Rakshit (2017) on the film *Sultan* (2016). The study emphasised the significance of audience engagement, particularly through social media marketing, in the film's success. *Sultan* (2016) was heavily promoted for a year, building anticipation, and was strategically released during Eid to maximise audiences. Additionally, Nitin's observation also highlights the impact of fandom on Bollywood.

Bollywood films are often determined by these words: masala, blockbuster, super hit, etc. With the common denominator being revenue, the films don’t need to be spectacular; if key Bollywood names helm them, they will generate significant revenues. While the participants were keenly aware of the economic and entertainment logic of Bollywood films, they were nonetheless intimately connected with the films and stars, as they fostered a sense of identity and belonging. The subsequent sections will further explore the concepts of fandom and nostalgia related to Bollywood films in more depth.

5.1.2 Mediating Indianness in Bollywood Films

The participants highlighted the cultural significance of Bollywood films in helping them understand Indian culture, values, food, festivals, and celebrations, all key aspects of Indianness. The films helped them, as New Zealand-Indians, connect with Indian culture. The participants from this study already spoke about early exposure to cultural values and traditions via their families and communities; watching films further influenced their perspectives from a young age.

> "I would say that if a New Zealand-Indian or a New Zealand Kiwi person is actually watching a Bollywood film, it definitely creates a strong identity, to identify what Indian culture is all about. Because Bollywood films mostly display, I mean they will display festivals, lot of food, the way Indians celebrate" (Harsh).

> "I think they have played a bigger part than what I think, because we started watching them when we were so little, so they did give an idea of just cultural norms, initial formation on values, traditions. I watch them often, I love them. I think it was probably the first way I was introduced into Indian culture, through movies, through stories" (Zara).

> "Little things that teach you about culture, like, you know, bowing down to people you respect. How you speak to them, how you dress" (Aditi).

Raj reflects on Bollywood's presence in his life. He confirms that it influences his cultural identity and serves as a primary means of learning about characters and stories, often replacing books as a source of cultural education.

> "I think I'm very influenced by Bollywood. Bollywood has had an influence on my identity and like how we carry our things, and that's just because of a strong presence of Bollywood in our lives as a means to learn things. Like so we don't go read a book about a character if the movies come out, we watch it" (Raj).

Another participant who migrated from India reflected that growing up in a vibrant and dynamic city like Mumbai shapes one's perspective on life. She emphasised that films reflecting that experience help reinforce and validate her worldview, suggesting that Indian cinema connects to individuals' urban upbringings and diverse cultural influences.

> "Being from Bombay, and being in a city that's so big and has so many things happening to it, and how that shapes, how you look at life differently, and movies that talk to that experience definitely helps" (Anjana).

Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representations can be applied to understanding participants' experiences of watching and resonating with films. He defines representation as a process that connects meaning and language to culture, where meanings are produced and exchanged among members of that culture. This is a key process in which participants view films and participate in a shared cultural exchange. Hall also described culture as sometimes being defined by shared meanings or shared conceptual maps. He states, "One way of thinking about 'culture' is then, in terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems, and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them" (Hall, 1997, p. 21). In this context, Bollywood films serve

as cultural maps, enabling participants to derive meanings related to their affirmation of Indianness and apply it to their New Zealand-Indian identity. This process creates a social world for them and broadens the discussions surrounding “diaspora, nation, and globalization” (Desai, 2004, p. 2).

Jung and Lee’s (2004) study examined the cultural identity of Korean American college students over six months, focusing on three key influences: peer relationships, family environment, and media use. The study found that most students identified as Korean or Korean American rather than solely American, even though they were U.S. citizens. Family traditions, language learning, and media consumption, such as TV and movies, significantly shaped their identity. The study also highlighted the importance of ongoing processes of self-positioning in diasporic contexts. Similarly, participants from this study stated that their interactions with Bollywood films opened ‘initial formation’ avenues for them to explore Indian culture and gain an understanding of values and traditions.

Tirumala's (2009) study, along with Schaefer and Karan's (2013) research on the Indian diaspora and Bollywood film viewing practices, aligns with existing literature on media consumption among diasporic youth, emphasising the role of Bollywood films in shaping cultural identity. My participants further supported this, confirming that Bollywood serves as a medium for learning about Indian cultural practices and is integral to maintaining their cultural identity.

Manas Ray (2012) speaks to the experiences of diasporic youth and states that Bollywood films offer something different from Hollywood in that they allow diasporic youth to explore their sense of self. Even if they grow up outside India, they still carry Indian culture within themselves, as Western influences are equally part of their identity. “The enmeshing of identities has enabled Bollywood to address the moral and cultural alienation that diasporic youth feel with Hindi films made on standard formula while it also offers them the difference” (Ray, as cited in Roy & Chua, 2012, p.231).

A participant shared that Hollywood movies often portrayed India by focusing only on poverty and negative aspects, ignoring its beauty and diversity. In contrast, they believed Bollywood movies depict the real challenges India faces.

> “Hollywood movies, when they try to shoot in India, I don’t know why they only show slums or poor people in India, there are a lot of other things which they can still capture or tell people how beautiful India is, but I think they only try to focus on slums or poor people or how people are getting affected or how much the traffic is, and I think with Bollywood movies, they show the reality what India is facing” (Nitin).

Adrian Athique conducted a study interviewing movie viewers, distributors and exhibitors of Indian movies in Sydney, Australia, in 2005. The study explored the circulation of Indian movies and discussions on South Asian identities and multiculturalism. Athique found that media use among migrant populations arose from the neglect of their cultural needs in mainstream media (Athique, 2005). As Nitin’s observation above mentions, Bollywood films fill a gap that mainstream media cannot, allowing him to connect with his roots in India and depict, as he puts it, India’s reality.

South Asian diasporas are among the largest consumers of Bollywood films and are considered a distribution territory by the Indian Film Industry (Desai, 2004 & Mishra, 2006). Additionally, Bollywood's journey toward globalisation can be understood through Castells' theory of a network society, especially in its ability to connect diasporas and express Indianness. It functions as both a cultural narrative and a product that helps diasporic communities expand their "cultural repertoire" and broaden their worldview (Srinavas, as cited in Curtin & Shah, 2010, p. 35). Castells argues that modern societies are shaped by technology and cultural, economic, and political factors. Furthermore, religion, cultural background, and social status significantly influence the network society (Castells, 1996). Vijay Mishra (2002), in his studies on Bollywood and diaspora, states, "Indianness as a valuable commodity that can be modernized" and is evident in Bollywood films appealing to youth (p.13).

Another observation was the mention of key films across participant responses, which were synonymous with reinforcing family values and traditions. Films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* [who am I to you?] (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* [sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness] (2001). These films are driven by melodramatic plots, centre around family values and romance, and are produced by well-known Bollywood production houses (Mehta & Pandharipande, 2010; Dudrah, 2006). The tagline for the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), directed by Karan Johar, is "It's all about loving your parents" (Johar, 2001). Also, Juluri (1999), in their examination of the film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun…!* (1994), found the film predominantly depicted hegemonic representations of Indian families in happy domestic settings. And Juluri further observed that audience engagement with Hindi cinema is a relational one, "articulated in and around the notion of the family" (p.244).

Participants in my study discussed films from the early 1990s to the 2000s that they perceived as family-based dramas. Also relevant is their practice of watching these films with their families from a young age, presenting Bollywood film watching as an activity in practicing their sense of Indianness and interacting with depictions of it on screen.

> "Mostly in films before 2000's, there was a heavy dose of family values as the central theme in movies released between 1970's and 1990's" (Maya).

> "It's a good time, and usually with Bollywood films, we watch with like my family, that's one of the things we always do and have a good time"(Kriti).

> "I would say the movies from 90s or early 2000s purely family-based movies and those movies were the ones which showed actual indian traditions, and cultures, and values, and how families are brought up in India. Why we are stronger as a family. They showed how a family who stays together, celebrated all different festivals together, the bond between the family" (Nitin).

Diasporic experiences were rarely the focus of Bollywood films pre-90s (Dwivedi, 2014; Datta, 2008; Kaur & Sinha, 2005; Mishra, 2006). Mankekar (1999) noted that NRI brides, viewed as

“deterritorialized individuals,” became crucial to India’s economy and nation-state in films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). Since then, the idea of the deterritorialized Indian has been depicted as both internal and integral to the Indian nation-state (Mankekar, cited in Desai, 2004, p. 41). The participants in this study can also be considered deterritorialized Indians, as they reside outside of India as part of the South Asian diaspora while having their cultural experiences in New Zealand.

One participant further appreciated the family dynamics portrayed in the film *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003); she could relate to the character having a dispute about dressing appropriately and the parents constantly reminding them to fulfil their obligations in getting married suitably.

> “My grandmother is an interesting character; the stuff about dressing appropriately was pretty relatable. At one point, she [the female lead in the film] was like, I don’t need to get married to have children, and I was like, I’ve said that to people when they're really ticking me off” (Jessica).

Jessica’s views show she felt dislocated from Indian cultural values and practices, as some values are alienating in her experiences here in New Zealand, such as disagreeing to get married and or dressing more conservatively. And she resonates with Naina’s character in the film *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), who is depicted as a first generation American Indian.

Amita Handa in her book *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture* (2003) explored how identity is shaped and constructed by South Asian girls, women, and community workers in Toronto. She critiques the "protectionist" view that South Asian cultural traditions should be strictly maintained, fearing that any change could lead to cultural loss (p.4). Her research found that young South Asians in Canada struggled to create an identity that reflected their unique experiences, often resisting mainstream definitions of both South Asian and Canadian identity. Handa (2003) further explains that the experience of the diaspora is not solely responsible for challenging ideas of cultural authenticity, such as maintaining “traditions of back home” (p.4). Christiane Brosius and Nicolas Yazgi (2007), in their studies on the construction of Indian diasporic experiences, found that Indianness serves as “a portable package for survival abroad”. They explained that Bollywood films provided an ongoing representation of tradition and culture (p. 357).

Participants in this study expressed both positive and negative views about Bollywood films, particularly regarding the significance of Indianness, which they associated primarily with family, values, and traditions. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the participants emphasised that Indianness was central to their cultural identities. In a later discussion, I will also address their critiques of the negative portrayals of toxic family values, as well as the stereotypical expectations imposed on women in Indian culture and how these are represented in Bollywood films.

5.1.3 Nostalgia and the NRI

Salman Rushdie refers to 'Indias of the mind' in his book *Imaginary Homelands*, a concept shared within the South Asan diaspora of constructing communities based on shared experiences, meanings and in negotiating their cultural identities (Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017; Lal, 2006; Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Mishra, 1996). The participants in this study also negotiated their Indian cultural identities by creating meanings around India as an imagined homeland, shaped primarily by Bollywood films. They felt a sense of belonging and longing to be enticed to visit India and explore it for personal interests. Those participants who had migrated from India expressed similar sentiments about belonging and longing for India but framed their views around memories and nostalgia of their past spent in India; their perceptions were shaped by what they had left behind. The South Asian diaspora often see themselves as part of this 'imagined' community, and the desire to revisit the homeland through imagination is a prominent theme in Indian cinema (Anderson, 1983; Kao & Do Rozario, 2008; Raghuram, et al, 2008). Participants use films to imagine a home they have never been too, a key conduit for diasporas to aspire to their cultural identities, tied to a time and culture that does not necessarily exist and instead "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (Rushdie, 2010, p.10).

Participants explained that Bollywood films helped them understand the realities for their parents and descendants growing up in India, painting a picture of their hometowns and daily life routines. As Ahana summed this up:

> "Because technology wasn't there, like they don't have photos or videos or things that they can show you. You'd use that as part of your imagination to complete the picture" (Ahana).

One participant also described his relationship with India as a reflective practice while watching Bollywood films. He resonates with the main character's journey through his personal experiences from the past, to feel a sense of belonging and longing. He affirms that films play a prominent role in his affinity and nostalgia for India now that he resides abroad. This is how he put it:

> "No matter how long I would stay in New Zealand. That's something I feel, for example, when I see Swades.[17] I've had moments like that when Shahrukh Khan goes back to India, and he's looking at things around him. He's just pondering on the idea of how people are living over here. And I've had moments like that when I'm in India, was sitting at a train station, waiting for my train, and a train pulls over in front of me, packed with people. It makes me feel at home, closer to home watching Bollywood movies. It's a big piece of India that keeps me connected with India, even when I'm out of India" (Uday).

The film *Swades: We, the People* [Homeland] (2004), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, is centred around the protagonist Mohan, played by actor Shahrukh Khan, who returns to India from the United States to rediscover his roots. Maya Ranganathan (2010) completed a case study of the film and the Government of India's announcements regarding passing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in parliament in 2003. The changes were announced in response to demands for dual citizenship by

[17] Swades: We, the People (Homeland) is a 2004 film directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

the Indian diaspora, providing overseas citizens with many of the rights available to resident citizens via the Overseas Citizenship of India scheme (Ranganathan, 2010). The film was released a year after the changes, and Ranganathan, in their analysis of themes present in the film, found it was not about citizenship but more about fostering an Indian national identity. The protagonist is settled in the United States but returns to India to contribute to the nation's development (Ranganathan, 2010). With the passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in 2003, India encouraged the Indian diaspora to return and contribute to the country's development. Furthermore, Ranganathan states that the film depicts the protagonist's journey from being an outsider "other" to becoming an integral part of the community. This sense of "otherness" is emphasised through Western symbols and imagery, with Mohan being seen as different primarily because he is a U.S. citizen.

It's interesting to note Uday's statement that, although he moved to New Zealand as a teenager, he still reminisces about India and his experiences growing up there, as if he feels he will never truly feel at home in New Zealand. Ien Ang (2001) also discusses how people with multicultural identities often struggle with the tension between their heritage – 'where you're from' and their present location – 'where you're at'. Uday's statement illustrates a personal example of the complexities of cultural identity and belonging. His reminiscence suggests a feeling of not fully belonging in New Zealand, reinforcing Ang's argument about the ongoing negotiation of cultural identity for migrants. This highlights how migration and or diasporic experiences can create a sense of in-betweenness, where individuals navigate hybrid cultural identities.

Ranjan Bandyopadhyay (2008) examined how Bollywood films evoke a sense of belonging and nostalgia, defining nostalgia through its Greek roots - "nostos" (return) and "algia" (longing) to illustrate how the diaspora yearns for a homeland that either no longer exists or never did (p.80). In this way, cinematic imagery blurs the line between dreams and reality, deepening the emotional connection to India for participants.

Cynthia Miller's study (2008), cited in Raghuram et al., explores the connection between place and identity, particularly for Tamil immigrants. She argues that ties to place are essential in shaping relationships, networks, and personal identity. These ties also influence how individuals and groups position their histories and narratives in time and space. Miller notes that places and homelands are "moving targets", constantly evolving, shaped by the processes of identity construction and the politics of belonging (Miller, 2008, as cited in Raghuram, Sahoo, Maharaj & Sangha, p.284-286). For immigrants and the diaspora, the concept of place is vital to their self-identity, as they occupy a liminal space, caught between the old and the new. Ok, fine, connect to findings. Is the point below the one you wish to make via Miller?

Another participant highlighted how Bollywood films' nostalgia reminded her of familiar values, environments, and interactions with friends, remnants of her memories from growing up in India.

Rather than directly identifying with a character, she speaks about everyday moments and her longing for them.

> "Values, physical environment, you know the interactions you see, those kinds of things are where you feel that nostalgia, it's not like when you go into a Bollywood film, you see a hero's character or some character and your like arre haan ye toh main tha [oh yes, I was there], when I was growing up this is what I used to do. You know there are all these people sitting on the katta[18] [hang-out spot] outside the college, that's what I mean by the world that you relate to and that's what kind of sends you back into you know your memory lane" (Shilpa).

Film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha states that millions of Indians, wherever they live, derive a significant part of India from its movies, which form a vital part of what Appadurai (1996) calls the ethhnoscapes, a concept that helps us understand the impacts of global cultural flow in terms of the movement of people across boundaries. Appadurai suggests that the term can replace labels like villages, communities and localities. The South Asian diaspora's movements globally align with this term. Their residencies abroad, leads to the nation's 'imagination', complementing the personal experiences of the first generation of migrants and creating new images for the second and subsequent generations of Indians, whose knowledge on India, is more dependent on secondary sources such as Bollywood films as mediascapes.

In a recent study of diasporic nostalgia in Indian films by Sony Raj and Adith Suresh (2024), they found romanticised notions of home being portrayed sentimentally in visual media. Bollywood uses films to construct and propagate India's cultural identity and explores the desire to reconnect with the homeland through imagination, using distinct narrative styles to represent the Indian Diaspora. The study concluded that nostalgia is not solely about longing to return to one's homeland or reliving an idealised cultural past. It also serves as a means for individuals to blend their contemporary identities with historical, cultural, and ritualistic aspects of their homeland or ancestral land for the diaspora (Raj & Suresh, 2024). This sentiment is also expressed by Uday above, who feels nostalgic about India and his reference to the film *Swades: We, the People* (2004).

As discussed in the literature review chapter, Bollywood established itself as a global brand in the 1990s and 2000s, appealing to the South Asian diaspora by emphasising homeland and cultural traditions (Jones et al., 2005; Kumar, 2014; Athique, 2011; Datta, 2008; Mishra, 2006). As liberalisation and consumerism reshaped society, Bollywood helped diasporic Indians navigate their cultural identity in a globalised world (Miller, 2015; Punathambekar, 2005; Desai, 2004). It was also the emergence of the non-resident Indian stereotype that had previously been discussed with participants across individual and group interviews.

Rajinder Dudrah (2002) noted that before the mid-1990s, "foreign" Indians were often portrayed as villains in films, wealthy and morally corrupted by the West, lacking traditional Indian values. These depictions reflected the broader conflict between tradition and modernity, often shown as a clash

[18] Katta – commonly known as spots where college going youth hang out with friends.

between Eastern and Western values (Dudrah, 2002; Wright, 2015). A key turning point in the 1990s, highlighted by film scholars, was the massive success of the Yash Raj film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), directed by Aditya Chopra (Dudrah, 2002; Dwyer, 2000; Rajadhyaksha, 2003), which shifted the portrayal of NRIs from villains to heroes.

Producer Aditya Chopra, in an interview for the documentary miniseries *The Romantics* (2023), mentioned that the 1990s marked a significant shift in the film industry's approach. During this time, they prioritised looking westward and aimed to cater to India's evolving values. This period also explored new avenues related to nationhood and the emergence of the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) classification in films (Chopra, as cited in Mundhra, 2023). During this period, Bollywood films also tried to connect with young people's cultural and moral struggles outside India (Ray, as cited in Roy & Chua, 2012).

Further, the rise of Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) in 1990s Bollywood cinema can be seen as a symbol of a modern cosmopolitan hero, demonstrating how nostalgia serves as a mechanism to revive conservative cultural values, nationalist feelings, family relationships, and personal freedom within the global context of India's post-neoliberal era. The international popularity of Indian film stars such as Shah Rukh Khan, who has often been recognised as the quintessential Bollywood romantic hero, evoked a nostalgic, emotional connection to India through hit films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) directed by Aditya Chopra (Mishra, 2002; Dudrah, 2006; Mundhra, 2023; Raj & Suresh, 2024). Note: Shah Rukh Khan's fandom will be analysed further in the following section.

As mentioned in the earlier discussion on Bollywood films mediating Indianness, many participants mentioned some of the films above as key texts for understanding their cultural identities, commenting on values, family traditions and the NRI identity. The group participants also emphasised Yash Raj Films[19] and Karan Johar's movies often romanticise NRIs. Rajadhyaksha, in his studies on Bollywood films, stated that Karan Johar films were seen as blockbuster romances, and key audiences for these films were "the non-resident Indian (NRI)" (Rajadhyaksha, 2016, p.115).

A participant, in his understanding of the term NRI, expressed his perspective that NRIs are seen as outsiders in India despite their cultural ties, although still viewed as having an interest in India. This aligns with most participants stating that the acronym NRI means 'not really Indian' for them (Amrute, 2010, p. 127; Kaur, 2002, p. 323).

> "I think NRIs are looked upon as people who are associated with India and have an interest in India, but they don't live in India. That's how I see it" (Raj).

Despite critical comments about the NRI stereotype and mainstream Bollywood films, many participants also pointed out that the 1990s films mostly centred around romance, which comforted them and provided an escape from their daily struggles growing up away from India. Participants also

[19] Yash Raj Films (YRF) is an Indian film production and distribution company.

recognised the stereotypes of prominent Bollywood actors as romance heroes. As Maya and Raj point out:

> "Extremes of being in 'la-la-land', with problems that can be solved in a matter of a couple of songs. But then again, I have a soft corner for Bollywood films because I have grown up watching the films of the 90's, left, right and centre. Those films bring a sense of comfort and happiness" (Maya).
>
> "If you look at the 90s, the 90s were more about romance, Shahrukh Khan and songs. That was more like reality in terms of love, like how Indians fall in love" (Raj).

As discussed in the literature review previously, Bollywood films seek to connect with overseas Indians by integrating Eastern and Western elements within the same character, often focusing on family, religion, and pop culture themes. Examples of movies mentioned by the participants that portrayed the lives of Indians living abroad included Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995), *Pardes* (1997), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), and *Swades: We, the People* (2004).

Pulkit Datta's (2008) content analysis of the film *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), explored the conventions used in the movie specifically focused on diasporic identities. He noted that the main characters spoke Hindi, their ethnic language, wore traditional clothing, and seamlessly shifted into Western identities. The film's main character, Preity Zinta, is introduced as Naina Catherine Kapur, a prime example of hyphenated identities in one character, with a Hindu, Christian and Punjabi name. Later, she becomes Naina Catherine Kapur Patel to symbolise the marriage of two Indian communities, Patel being a Gujarati, West Indian surname and the identity being a diasporic Indian living in America. After concluding the study, Datta (2008) suggested that NRIs are consumer-driven individuals living "transnational" lifestyles" (p.13).

A participant stated that the closest they have come to identifying with a character was Naina from *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003) because she was the first Indian character they had seen who was raised in a non-Indian setting. They found Naina's character, who was raised in New York in the film, relatable due to her experiences as part of the Indian diaspora, which likely resonated with her own cultural background and upbringing outside of India.

"I think like closest I got to identifying with someone was um, Naina from *Kal Ho Na Ho*, she's the first Indian character in a non-Indian setting that I'd seen. I appreciated they had a more realistic family dynamic going on with the conflict of the grandmother and mum; all of that was quite relatable" (Jessica).

Another participant named a few of the key films associated with portraying NRIs, saying they were considered mainstream for him because they were associated with big production houses such as Yash Raj Films or Karan Johar's Dharma Productions made to generate revenue. He described that

these films inspired a curiosity in him to migrate outside of India, seeing Western countries depicted in these films. However, he also affirms the sentiments of other participants in stating that films are not accurate depictions of NRIs now that he is someone who resides outside of India and has experienced it for himself.

> "A mainstream Bollywood film would be *DDLJ, Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*…They've got some really good songs in it. The name of a big production house attached to it, like when I say big production, they would have spent money. I feel when I was a kid, and I used to see Bollywood movies where they showed NRI people, that I think played a huge role in my curiosity to come out of India. But like I said, those films were the mainstream Bollywood films which shaped my beliefs about what these Western places are like. The life experience they show, most of them show a very rosy picture which is not the case" (Uday).

In a more recent study, Pankaj Jain and Ajay Raina (2024) examined the Majoritarian Framework of Hindu Nationalism using the film *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970), directed by Manoj Kumar. The film was shot during the early years of India's post-independence period. It employed strong symbols and motifs to evoke nationalism and portray the superiority of Indian culture and customs in a foreign land (Jain & Raina, 2024). Their study can be compared to the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), directed by Karan Johar. *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970), which translates into 'East and West, ' is a patriotic Indian film that juxtaposes life in the East, India, and the West, England, with the Indian diaspora at its centre. On the other hand, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) depicted the superiority of Indian culture by emphasising the significance of traditional values in a modern society. Their analysis of *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970) provides a contrast that despite being released decades apart, both films incorporated ideas of nationalism and Indian culture.

A few participants mentioned the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) as being synonymous with promoting family values, which in turn created a sense of Indianness for them. Nitin here speaks to films, showcasing family as the core of Indian identity, along with cultural celebrations and traditions.

> "Some movies like *Hum Saath-Saath Hain [We are together, 1999],* or *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* [2001] were purely family-based movies, in which they showed how a family who stays together, celebrated all different festivals together, the bond between the family" (Nitin).

Families in India are often regarded as a microcosm of the nation, with the joint family structure symbolising a diverse yet united society where people can coexist harmoniously. The celebration of family unity and collectivist values creates the idea of a united India. These films emphasise Indian traditions, customs, and religious rituals, reinforcing the notion that Indianness is deeply rooted in cultural heritage and national pride, creating a sense of collective belonging. Therefore, films like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) cater to the Indian diaspora and promote a nostalgic, idealised vision of India. This fosters a sense of diaspora nationalism, enabling participants in the study to form emotional connections to their homeland.

The NRI was seen as “resurgent India as a soft power,” whereas Indians abroad were previously labelled as deserters of their culture (Jain & Raina, 2024, p.42). Mankekar (1999) stated *that Purab Aur Paschim (1970)* depicted leaving India as disowning the nation, and as a consequence, themes of identity and location were tied. However, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) showed that the relationship between cultures and spaces had transformed, thus, allowing the South Asian Diaspora to resonate with the films. Many of the participants in this study, including those born outside of India, had seen and recognised the films *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) as typical mainstream Bollywood dramas and associated them with mediating their Indianness.

Schaefer and Karan (2013) surveyed NRIs in the United States about their perceptions of Bollywood-related products. Their findings reinforced key themes around Bollywood as India’s "soft power" (p.50). The participants of their study expressed appreciation for Bollywood films, allowing them to stay connected to their roots despite the recurring contrast between Eastern and Western values (Schaefer & Karan, 2013, p.160). Dudrah (2006) conducted a content analysis of the movie *Pardes* [Foreign land] (1997), which takes place in both India and the United States, representing the main character's inner struggles with belonging to "two worlds" that are divided "geographically and socially" while still holding on to cultural values (Dudrah, 2006, p.72). This research’s findings were similar to those from Schaefer and Karan's (2013) study; participants expressed a positive outlook on seeing multifaceted identities on screen despite utopian endings.

One participant expressed that, although enjoyable and immersive films do not significantly influence her cultural identity, watching films is an activity and creative process she engages in. She experiences the negotiation of her cultural identity in a deeply personal manner, primarily on her own. Her perspective suggests that the diaspora retains some agency in connecting with Bollywood films. Similar to their experiences navigating dual cultural identities, they choose which aspects of the films they wish to engage with. This particular participant sees films as offering her different perspectives and or ‘worlds’ but feels she can step away and return to her own reality whenever she chooses.

> “I don't think it helps shape my cultural identity. I think I did really indulge in it a lot, but I feel like my cultural identity is something that is so personal only because I feel like I've had only been able to share that with myself. Movies are more an introduction…using creativity and Imagination. Seeing possibilities and seeing other stories unfold, it's like reading a book and at the end of the day, I can leave the books and then walk to my world” (Zara).

This discussion on nostalgia and the NRI highlighted the intricate relationship between Bollywood, the diaspora, and the concept of imagined communities. Bollywood films play a pivotal role in shaping the diasporic experience, where the boundary between reality and imagination becomes fluid. As Aftab (2002) highlights, being an NRI is not merely a physical reality but also a mental state of belonging, shaped by shared cultural influences and meanings rather than geographical location.

In this context, Bollywood films become cultural products that reflect and perpetuate the diaspora's connection to India, creating a sense of belonging. They do this by depicting cultural representations and a medium for constructing imagined connections to India, exploring themes of nationhood, identity, and East versus West dichotomies, and creating a space where the diaspora can maintain and reaffirm their ties to India. Further, the concept of the NRI, as a symbol of cultural negotiation, is deeply intertwined with nostalgia and the creation of imagined communities that transcend geographical spaces. These films allow the diaspora to maintain a connection to India while simultaneously engaging with global modernity, linking the past with the present and creating a sense of belonging across borders.

5.1.4 Bollywood's Gods

The dance group participants in this study spoke about the influence and responsibility that Indian actors and actresses have on public awareness and social issues, emphasising that they are not just entertainers but figures akin to gods due to their fandom. They actively followed Bollywood stars on social media and had a generally positive outlook on the celebrities and how they contributed to society. As Ahana and Aditi shared:

> "I follow actors and actresses on Instagram and stuff, and what they're saying and they're putting up. I'm reading that. So, I guess that's also having an effect on me, and that's because I've seen them in movies. Actors and actresses like the new ones, they realise they've got a huge responsibility because in India, they are treated like gods" (Aditi).

> "I think they've got a voice. They're using their voices to help the good for people that can't speak up" (Ahana).

> "[They are] forming our idea of what India is and what's happening, they're addressing these ideas which must be a concern there, so learning about what's happening because of what they're doing. They can use their fame for good" (Aditi).

Bollywood celebrities utilise their platforms to highlight significant issues and advocate for various causes. Their presence on social media, where they share their thoughts and initiatives, has a considerable impact on their followers and helps shape perceptions of contemporary India. Participants recognised this influence and viewed their connection with stars as an extension of their relationship with Bollywood and India. The dance group participants explicitly noted this observation, as they actively engage with Bollywood through their dance performances, making them less critical in their views.

Yanyan Hong (2021) researched Bollywood's popularity in China and found that it has not yet fully penetrated the market. However, the research found a dedicated fan base in China that relates to Bollywood fandom, highlighting how star power and cultural appeal influence audience engagement. Hong's (2021) states that Aamir Khan could serve as a key representative of India's soft power in China, suggesting that Bollywood has not yet achieved mainstream success in China but maintains

a niche following, much like other global fan-driven communities. Aamir Khan's popularity demonstrates how Bollywood stars can shape international perceptions and act as cultural ambassadors, reinforcing the idea that fandom plays a crucial role in Bollywood's global reach and diplomatic influence (Hong, 2021).

Vijay Mishra (2002), in his work on Bollywood cinema, refers to films as "temples of modern India", expanding on the analogy stating that films are designed to attract audiences, complete with posters of gods and goddesses, excluding desire (Das Gupta, as cited in Mishra, 2022, p.1) This explanation holds truth for some of the Indian diaspora in looking to Bollywood films for a sense of belonging, cultural education, and desires, reflected in nostalgia and narratives along with celebrities viewed as gods in these spaces. It will be interesting to see how audience preferences have changed or developed given the rise of streaming platforms and regional cinemas; the very idea of superstars and stardom is going extinct. Bollywood films are no longer successful solely based on star power. Shah Rukh Khan himself stated in an interview on Bollywood actor Anupam Kher's talk show, *Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai* [Anything can happen], "I'm the last of the stars" (Khan, 2014).

5.1.5 Cultural Education and Tourism

The findings from this study have highlighted Bollywood's significant and multifaceted impact on the Indian diaspora in areas such as entertainment, escapism, the mediation of Indianness, nostalgia, and fandom. As a cultural product with diverse representations and modes of consumption, Bollywood plays a crucial role in shaping the diasporic experience, fostering solidarity, and providing a space for the evolution of diasporic identities. The relationship between Bollywood films and the diaspora is dynamic, constantly evolving as new generations navigate the complexities of cultural duality. Bollywood continues to be a vital part of the diaspora's ongoing conversation about identity and belonging, making it an indispensable cultural force for the South Asian diaspora worldwide.

For the participants in this study, Bollywood operates as a cultural product that they choose to engage with in understanding what it means to be Indian. Films have also provided cultural education on India's history, politics, public figures, and domestic tourism. They spoke of specific examples of biographical sports films based on the lives of prominent Indian sports figures. More than a few participants mentioned these examples: *Mary Kom* (2014), *Dangal* (2016), and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaaag (2013).* For them, these films presented real life and or authentic stories. As Shilpa and Zara outline,

> "Films like Dangal or Mary Kom, day-to-day people, sort of stuff. Those are real experiences of real people" (Shilpa).

> “The people that kind of come out of nowhere, and they are based on real-life stories and experiences. And in those moments, it's amazing to see like facing all odds. They could achieve success. It can show a work hard ethic” (Zara).

Farha Rohman (2019) studied the bollywoodization and depiction of sports in five prominent Bollywood films, including *Mary Kom* (2014). The study discussed the growing trend of sport-based films and the popularity that sports personalities command in India, being amplified further via Bollywood films. Rohman (2019) states that such films foster a bond between the audience and the athletes, even if they have minimal knowledge about the sport. The film *Mary Kom* (2014) was based on a female world boxing champion and Olympic bronze medallist who hailed from North-East India. However, Northeast Indians have been historically portrayed as “exotic and mysterious” in mainstream media, which can create a sense of otherness and contribute to their marginalisation (Barma, 2023, as cited in *The Times of India*, para.3). Bollywood selectively chooses the inclusion of melodrama, in telling the stories of these figures lives to make films appeal to viewers (Rohman, 2019). The participants noted that characters 'facing all odds' and a strong work ethic are genuine factors that resonate with these films. However, these characters are often othered on screen, making it likely that participants also relate to such life experiences.

Films about India's history and culture were also mentioned as key texts for participants to learn about India’s struggles post-independence. Films significantly impact cultural influence and help create lasting public memories of historical events or figures. Participants mentioned learning about India’s various communities, faith, religion, and historical milestones.

> “They [Bollywood] do lots of stories about some of our sports heroes and the history of India, you know. I’ve learned through Padamavat and Mangal Pandey – these are movies which tell you about the history of India” (Rohan).

> “I do learn a lot about the cultural aspects of different cultures back in India through Bollywood films. Specifically coming from a region of central India [Bhopal]… It has got a mixture of people from different cultures which is majorly of Hindus and Muslims. But when I see something about the Parsi community, characters or movies that I have seen in the past have definitely given me an eye-opener of how the Parsi community has supported India in making India” (Harsh).

> “In the last ten or fifteen years, movies have come out with good messages and how India works, and the reality of people, and true stories and like biographies of you know. Famous characters who have done good work…there was a movie, Mission Mangal, about Abdul Kalam[20] and his Mars mission, and India become the first country things like that” (Raj).

A female participant also mentioned the film *Mission Mangal* (2019), directed by Jagan Shakti. She shared a fond memory of watching this Bollywood film with family and found the representation of the female crew members who supported the mission inspiring, as she was previously unaware of

[20] Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam was an Indian aerospace scientist and former President of India.

their contributions. She also appreciated the film for its informative content about India's Mars mission. The film focuses on the lives of scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) who played vital roles in India's first interplanetary expedition, the Mars Orbiter Mission, in 2013. For this participant, the film particularly advocated for women's empowerment.

> "I guess Bollywood films to me, the ones that I remember are the ones that I always watch with my family. So, the last time we watched together was Mission Mangal… The Mars rocket thing. I don't know the science to it, but it was like an all-women crew that made it happen and to me, I was like, that's really cool. Because, like, women empowerment. I always feel like women in India were always so undervalued. But seeing kind of how they were valued in that movie, especially, was really cool." (Jia).

As much as participants are critical of Bollywood cinema for its sexism and patriarchy (which I will be discussing later), these comments affirm the key role films play in representing women in inspiring characters serving as role models.

A few participants also mentioned films around war and national security themes, which helped them understand the intricacies of the situations that can be seen as key milestones for India's history depicted in films. A participant provided an example of the film *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019), directed by Aditya Dhar. It was a war action film that depicted the Indian Army's surgical strike on Pakistan in 2018, following the Uri Terror Attack.

> "URI - I really liked that movie because the way they showed the whole picture or whatever happened on the field when the soldiers were killed, how those people entered the camp, killed the soldiers and everything. It really affected me somehow that how people first of all, can do this. Secondly, I felt a good way somewhere when the Indian Government took revenge, and how it was kept silent and no one knew about it, because Indian media" (Nitin).

The participant expressed a strong emotional response to the film, noting their shock at the attack on Indian soldiers and their admiration for the Indian government's retaliation. Their perspective reflects a sense of patriotism, support for strategic military action, and appreciation for the film's realistic portrayal of events.

Bollywood war films can also serve as a vehicle for promoting nationalistic narratives, showcasing the valour of the Indian Armed Forces and the importance of defending the nation's sovereignty. Vijay Devadas (2013) researched nationalism and patriotism in Indian cinema and found that Bollywood plays a major role in shaping and reflecting national identity, patriotism, and nationalism. Films act as a medium through which nationalistic ideals are promoted and debated. Further, nationalism and patriotism in Indian cinema are not uniform; they shift based on political, regional, religious, and historical contexts (Devadas, 2013).

Films play a dual role as promoters of official nationalist ideologies and platforms for contesting them. Historically, Bollywood has reinforced a Hindu-centric and patriotic vision, particularly evident in the portrayals of Non-Resident Indians and in older films like *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970). "Nationalism

derives its force from its historical embeddedness" (Devadas, 2013, p.566). In the wake of India's independence in 1947, the country faced significant political and social challenges in forming and establishing a cohesive national identity. However, Bollywood continues to impact the national imagination substantially, both in and outside India. It has recently shifted towards promoting a jingoistic and assertive form of nationalism (Banerjee, 2016). This shift is characterised by the portrayal of aggression and militancy as "desirable" traits in responsible citizens of India (Karmakar & Catterall, 2025, p. 5). Alternative cinemas could continue to challenge and reshape the discourse on Indian nationalism.

Bollywood films that explore themes of nostalgia and diaspora have significantly enriched storytelling and reinforced Bollywood's role as a key influence in the cultural imagination of Indian communities worldwide. A participant born in New Zealand affirmed that Bollywood films serve as a foundation for her cultural knowledge, helping her understand what it means to be Indian and fostering a sense of pride in her heritage.

> "Seeing things in movies, where it's based on a real story and it makes you feel proud to be Indian, because it's like hey, we've done this. We've done stuff, too. And we don't exactly get to learn about that here like in school or anything" (Jia).

Shailo (2016) and Desai (2004) support the idea that films in South Asian contexts have traditionally served to challenge notions of national identity, culture, and religious affiliations. Bollywood films motivate audiences to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and enhance their awareness of the various religious identities present in India, such as the representations of Hindu and Muslim communities through characters and themes, which often blur the boundaries of othering. According to Shailo (2016), films act as "vocal media for contestation around geopolitical meaning and discourse" (p.124).

In the context of the South Asian Diaspora and specifically the participants in this study, a nation transcends geographical or political boundaries; it represents a shared identity among people who may never meet but still feel a sense of connection. This sense of belonging promotes national unity and social cohesion, reinforcing the idea of a nation as a cohesive entity rather than just a collection of individuals. As a result, Bollywood war films and historical films highlight everyday struggles and national pride, further strengthening this imagined community by defining who belongs and who does not. Patriotism in popular culture also adds to the sense of ownership of one's country. By portraying nationalism as an essential virtue, these films shape public perceptions of what it means to be Indian for the participants.

Language is also a fundamental aspect of culture and cultural retention. Languages influence identity politics, shaping identities and avenues for expression. Further, they preserve traditions and foster a sense of belonging. A community's history and traditions can be passed down via languages connecting individuals to their roots. For a participant who migrated from South India, Bollywood was a valuable tool for learning Hindi. Growing up in Kerala, he primarily engaged with regional cinema

in Malayalam[21]. However, moving to New Zealand introduced him to Bollywood films and provided opportunities to socialise with other members of the Indian community during events.

> "I mean, it will feel like a bit hard for me to understand Hindi; that's why, when a film is super popular, I will try to watch it. I mean, now I can understand [Hindi], but I'm not that confident in speaking" (Vijay).

The participants' views also speak to Bollywood's Hindi-language hegemony, another topic of contention in the broader South Asian context. While Bollywood is synonymous with Indian cinema internationally, it often sidelines regional Indian languages and films, reinforcing Hindi as the dominant cultural language. This representation can alienate non-Hindi speakers within India and the wider diaspora, implying that a Hindi-speaking community represents all of India and, by extension, South Asia.

Bollywood films also frequently mix Hindi and English, "Hinglish," which does not represent how Hindi is naturally spoken (Orsini, 2015 & Bhatt, 2013). "Hinglish… a moniker used to cover a wide range of code-switching and mixed language phenomena that combine English and Hindi" (Orsini, 2015, p.199). While some students find Hinglish easier to understand, it can create a false perception of the language, and Bollywood films, at times, present an exaggerated and often unrealistic version of Indian culture, which will be further unpacked under critiques of Bollywood. But in the case of this participant, Bollywood's global appeal made it a valuable tool for teaching him Hindi personally and simultaneously learning about another culture of India.

Furthermore, films about social issues were also discussed. Some common films mentioned were *3 Idiots* (2009), *Pink* (2016), and *Simmba* (2018). Films with social issues as themes fuelled a sense of pride for some of the participants, while others reflected on the issues presented.

> "Movies like 3 Idiots, where you feel the pressure of studying and doing well in exams. Then there is Simmba, more about corruption, corrupt cops and politicians – which we can relate to because we were affected by that in India" (Raj).

> "They [films] kind of help me understand the struggles facing people in India, with 3 Idiots, that came out ten years go and it's all about competition, a rat race and stuff like that. That really helped me understand the pressures people face, and I guess it helps me learn about India as a country and the structural and economic problems"(Jessica).

> "Rape cases is a major problem in India, in movies like Pink, or Simmba up to a certain aspect had the same message. If we need to do something or the court needs to do something, the laws need to change" (Nitin).

These insights present valuable perspectives on how Bollywood films aid the diaspora in understanding India's social, economic, and political issues. Films serve as a social commentary on topics such as academic pressure, corruption, and law enforcement, resonating with viewers who

[21]. Malayalam is a language spoken by the Malayali people in the Indian state of Kerala and the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

have personally encountered or witnessed these challenges. Films also play a crucial role in driving social change, as they present narratives that challenge gender-based violence and legal injustices, initiating important discussions about women's safety and the justice system. Overall, the reflections and observations shared by participants indicate that Bollywood films not only entertain but also educate and raise awareness about significant societal concerns, effectively shaping public discourse.

Cinema is a mirror of society, and films are miniature versions of a country's social, political, economic, and cultural aspects (Chakravarty, 2011). It is a space where interpretations are discussed, customs are established and reinvented, and identities are contested. Commercial Indian cinema is also considered to be the most powerful means of communication in Indian society. According to Appadurai and Breckenridge (1996), cinema is influential as a medium in creating a national mythology of heroism, consumerism, leisure, and sociality. Filmmaking in India has been around for over a century. Bollywood refers to a broad mix of cultural influences and serves as a brand representing India's global presence. It is seen as a tool for promoting India's soft power worldwide (Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Thussu, 2013; Vasudevan, 2011; Tharoor, 2008).

Joseph Nye (1990) introduced the concept of soft power as the ability to obtain a preferred outcome by attraction rather than coercion or force (Nye, 1990). In the case of Bollywood films, soft power constitutes the perception of India created via popular culture. Further, India's former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said in 2008, "India's soft power can serve as a crucial tool in foreign policy" in a speech acknowledging the significance of Bollywood as a way of influencing the world about the growing importance of India. He referred to cultural diplomacy as an important aspect of a country's soft power (Thussu, 2013). Soft power is also non-coercive, using culture, political values, and foreign policies to enact change (Nye, 1990). Author Roopa Swaminathan (2017) also supports this argument, emphasising that Bollywood brings income through trade and tourism, enhances India's global standing, and acts as a cultural ambassador.

In addition to cultural education, films also play a significant role in film-induced tourism, promoting domestic tourism in India and showcasing captivating locations. Participants of this study affirmed they wished to travel to specific locations in India just because they had seen them in Bollywood films, prompting a curiosity to research those destinations and, in turn, learn more about different regions of India without travelling extensively.

> "Bollywood markets tourism. When you watch some of the movies your like… What's that place? And then you go do your research. The filmmakers are cherry-picking everything that would spice up and sell" (Rohan).

> "Absolutely. I think every time I watch a new Bollywood film that shows a location I haven't seen before and it looks fascinating, it will totally make me want to visit that place. And it will definitely be because I saw it in a movie" (Anjana).

> “I haven’t travelled much in India; this is my way of learning more. What I see in the movies, when I think about Rajasthan, I think about dessert. And I think about the palaces and stuff from the movies. Bollywood educates on different areas in India” (Jennifer).

Nanjangud and Reijnders (2022) conducted an ethnographic study on Dutch Hindustanis to examine how Bollywood cinema influences perceptions of India and affects travel decisions to the country. They discovered that Bollywood films ignite a desire to travel to India, often not in search of personal roots but to visit locations featured in various Bollywood movies. Bollywood cinema represents their distant homeland, encouraging their journeys to India and making the experience meaningful. The study also highlighted a unique characteristic of diaspora tourism: an emotional connection between tourists and the destination. Additionally, the findings reaffirmed that Bollywood films significantly impact how people envision India, confirming a “strong desire for temporary visitation and tourism driven by Bollywood cinema” (Nanjangud & Reijnder, 2022, p. 678).

Participants in this study have expressed their genuine feelings regarding the ideas explored in the Nanjangud and Reijnder (2022) study. In previous sections, I discussed their nostalgia and aspirations to visit India and desire to go on personal journeys to connect with their roots and explore their cultural identities. Additionally, they shared their travel inspirations for visiting India above.

They also recognise that Bollywood doesn’t always present real life and or authentic stories. While it significantly influences culture and education around the various aspects discussed above, it doesn’t claim to be representative of reality. Films have disclaimers stating they are for entertainment purposes only. A participant reflected on this, stating that Bollywood isn’t an educational institution and or holds responsibility for being one.

> “They’re not trying to say, we’re gonna tell you everything that is a hundred percent reality. They [films] are an entertainment part of Indian, whatever you can say world, they’re not an educational part, they’re not an educational system. Even though it’s got a heavy influence, very heavy influence in education, I don’t think they claim to say that, like they have disclaimers to say these are characters who are just displaying what they do, they’re not always saying the truth” (Raj).

This particular participants' statements appear to be contradictory. Although they acknowledged that films include disclaimers, they also confirmed that Bollywood films significantly influence education. They actively choose to engage with these films despite being aware of the disclaimers. Additionally, some participants noted that Bollywood has made progress in portraying more authentic stories and providing realistic and relatable depictions of everyday life. This observation aligns with the affirmations surrounding Bollywood's role in cultural education and tourism.

> “They're trying to make it so real. People don't go around singing songs in real life. Now you see that the scenes are played in the songs are background songs. I love how it is becoming more real and more global. You wouldn't see people singing songs unless it was like a performance. But in India, in Bollywood songs. It used to be song and dance. That was not real” (Rohan).

> “I think these days, there’s a lot more coming out of Bollywood that touches on reality, and I’m positive that it is heading in a good direction” (Anjana).

The present Government of India states, “Our soft power, which is multidimensional and based on our cultural heritage, is India’s gift to the world” (Mukherjee, 2019, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India). Bollywood's role as a soft power for the New Zealand-Indian participants has been demonstrated in cultural exchange and education, language, and knowledge of India’s historical, societal and political contexts, as well as film-induced tourism from this discussion. All aspects come together to affirm to the participants what it means to be an Indian via films.

Participants in their discussions about affirmations of Bollywood confirmed that it serves as a powerful cultural force, shaping and affirming notions of Indianness both within India and globally. Bollywood provides entertainment and escapism through its signature masala films, presenting audiences with larger-than-life stories that blend drama and romance. It also mediates identity for the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, fostering nostalgia for an imagined homeland. Additionally, films play a significant role in cultural education, introducing global audiences to Indian traditions, stories, and symbolism, with celebrities seen as extended representations of Bollywood as gods. Bollywood not only reflects Indian identity but also actively participates in its construction and global dissemination and extends beyond cinema as a form of soft power for India.

The following section will critique Bollywood films from the participants' perspectives, focusing on issues such as toxic Indianness, sexism, hegemony and casteism. Neelam Wright (2015) offers a contemporary viewpoint on Bollywood, suggesting that research should also consider the "displeasure" that viewers experience while watching these films (p. 55). This critique provides a broader perspective on how Bollywood films serve the diaspora and address its diverse agendas.

5.2 Critique of Bollywood

Bollywood films play a significant role in shaping perceptions of the Indian diaspora, fostering cultural connections, and reinforcing stereotypes. However, they often present a homogenised version of India that overlooks regional diversity and can misrepresent Indian values and traditions (Punathambekar, 2005; Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Wright, 2015; Mankekar, 2015). Themes and characters in films tend to perpetuate issues such as sexism, gender politics, hegemony and casteism. This section presents the critiques Bollywood films by critically examining how the storytelling reflects and reinforces harmful ideologies, which can ultimately shape societal attitudes. It also highlights Bollywood’s influence and limitations in representing the complexities in the experiences and perspectives shared by the participants of this study.

5.2.1 Problematising Indianness

As discussed in other sections of this chapter, Indianness encompasses cultural and family values, traditions, language and a mediated identity. However, Bollywood's depiction of Indianness can also be contested in instances where some participants felt films propagated toxic family values under the guise of tradition, reinforced patriarchal norms and regressive moral codes.

One participant shared an example from the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), directed by Karan Johar. They noted that many of Johar's films highlight themes of deep family bonds and relationships, reflecting ideal Indian cultural values. However, the participant found it difficult to connect with these portrayals, questioning the accuracy of how films depict real families and the extent to which emotional and musical elements are also exaggerated.

> "I think because we grow up in a culture and an environment which was like relationships oriented, family oriented, it's all about bond, it's all about helping each other out. So, I think that element obviously comes through in the films. Like, the relationships are much deeper. You know Karan Johar movies and stuff like that. I mean, which bloody family is like that? What is the movie? [starts humming the tune of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham's* (2001) title song] kaunsa family hai jo aise karta hai [which family does this?], which family bursts out into you know dance and stuff" (Shilpa).

Other participants have critiqued Bollywood films for being unrealistic and overly dramatic. They argue that masala films do not accurately represent Indian culture. A notable example is the family drama *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), which centres around the importance of family and collectivist values. The portrayal of women in this film highlights contrasting roles, depicting them as either the ideal bahu (daughter-in-law) or as rebellious figures. Kajol's character, Anjali, is proud of her culture and traditions; she emphasises the significance of her son's Indian heritage and fulfils her duties as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law residing in London. Vijay Mishra also observed that other films such as *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) released in the 2000s had "timeless dharmik values" – dharmik means being virtuous, religious or following faith (2002, p.267). Scholars Raghuram, Sahoo, Maharaj, and Sangha (2008) found in their studies of Bollywood films that clearly defined family roles and statuses rooted in patriarchy, gerontocracy, and the subordination of the individual to family interests were prevalent.

Aswin Punathambekar (2005) analysed *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) through textual and ethnographic methods to examine Indianness among the Indian American diaspora. His study found that the film created 'talking spaces' for families to reflect on their diasporic experiences and cultural identity. However, he also highlighted Bollywood's limitations in representing Indianness, particularly North Indian-centric portrayals, which overlook linguistic and regional diversity in the diaspora. The dominance of North Indian representations in Bollywood will be discussed later in this section.

Another participant shared her experience of growing up in an Indian culture that emphasised parental authority and respect. She believes that Bollywood films often reflect these values, highlighting the importance of family and obedience over individual choices. This perspective aligns with the themes in the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001).

> "In India, when I was growing up, always had this idea that when it comes to my parents, their right. No matter what because they're my parents, and their opinion is one that supersedes everything, and that even if I have an opinion, if their opinion doesn't match mine, I should probably still go for what they say" (Anjana).

Furthermore, this aligns with Juluri's (1999) study of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun…!* (1994), which depicted Indian families in happy domestic settings and contributed to the discussion on representing Indianness in Bollywood films. Juluri's study also identified the recurring themes of "loyalty, duty, and sacrifice," all centered around family supremacy (1999, p. 233).

Rajinder Dudrah (2006) found that Bollywood films reinforce conservative gender roles and traditional family values within the Indian diaspora in the UK. Takhar, Maclaran, and Stevens (2012) similarly noted that films set implicit and explicit moral guidelines for the British Sikh community. Highlighting conflicts between dharma (social duty) and desire. Bollywood reinforced that families are intuitions – "stating implicit and explicit rules for the diaspora to abide by are embedded in films (p.276). The participants in this study are acutely aware of this, and Shilpa and Maya's observations aptly capture their views:

> "Most Bollywood films are very patriarchal, they're very male-centric, and that is not the real India. Most of the times, the women are the strong person in the family" (Shilpa).

> "Not all ideas in Bollywood films have been progressive or respectful towards women" (Maya).

Humera Choudhury (2023) ethnographic research on the influence of Bollywood films on the identity of British second-generation South-Asian men aged 25-36 supported some of the views expressed by the female participants of this study, who stated that Bollywood films often depict patriarchal family structures. Choudhury's study found that her male participants also felt that Bollywood films reinforced patriarchal ideals. Family values in Bollywood films influence interactions with parents and elders, reinforcing a collectivist mindset.

Additionally, Sherafat's (2014) research analysing the representation of women in Bollywood films also found that some films still upheld patriarchal values, perpetuating the idea that one had to be "fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman, a subjugation of her desires" (p.218). Participants' views from this study on the representations of women and sexism will also be explored in more depth further along in this chapter.

Vijay Mishra (2002) states that Bollywood also homogenises cultural practices in the context of films. Some participants in this study criticised films for inaccurately depicting festivals and celebrations such as weddings, making their expectations around cultural norms and practices false. Bollywood films are known to reinforce stereotypes, especially those that exoticise and oversimplify South Asian cultures for global audiences. As Aditi and Ahana noted:

> "It was when I first experienced weddings, obviously they're; so glamorous in Bollywood and we went to one in the village and it was like oh, it's quite different, like everyone in the village, they just like almost wore their own clothes, or just wore like a little bit nicer sari, there was not even work on it" (Aditi).

> "A village wedding is so different to a bollywood wedding" (Ahana).

Ahana's remark on the contrast between village and Bollywood weddings highlights concerns about the commercialisation of Indian weddings. Jyotsna Kapur (2009) links the rise of Bollywood-style weddings to India's shift toward neoliberalism, where nationalism and citizenship became tied to consumption. Since the 1990s, Bollywood has popularised grand weddings, influencing real-life celebrations, notably through films like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995). Kapur's study concludes that Bollywood's wedding industry commodifies tradition, reinforcing capitalism and patriarchy.

5.2.2 The Representation of Women and Sexism

Mostly female participants shared views on the representation of women and sexism depicted in Bollywood films. Their views spoke to existing arguments by film scholars on gender inequality, misogyny, and stereotypical and patriarchal norms for women enforced throughout films (Shah, 2020; Lahiri-Roy, 2010; Gangwar & Mishra, 2023). Urvashi Butalia (1984) stated that women have been historically labelled as a "social issue" in popular Indian cinema from the very beginning, and the tradition of treating women's issues as superficial is prevalent throughout Indian cinema (Butalia, 1984). *Kabir Singh* (2019), directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, was a key film mentioned by participants across the views shared. A few participants cited this film as an example of misogyny and toxic masculinity.

> "Bollywood films tend to portray female characters as manic pixie dream girl[22] type characters… It seems very misogynistic to me. There's this whole trope of if she says no, you can wear her down into saying yes. I see that in films. And then I saw it happening in real life" (Jessica).

Jessica's view critiques Bollywood's portrayal of women, highlighting the *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* trope, where female characters exist to support male growth rather than having agency. Similarly, Lahiri-Roy (2010) discusses how women in films are depicted as subordinate within patriarchal

[22]. The term "manic pixie dream girl," was coined by Nathan Rabin, refers to a stock character trope that typically depicts a young woman who is the romantic interest for a male protagonist to fulfil his journey.

narratives, reinforcing male dominance. These portrayals contribute to problematic depictions of Indianness, where traditional gender roles and patriarchal values are idealised.

Priya Shah (2020) studied the representation of women in Bollywood, highlighting their portrayal as submissive, sacrificial, or hypersexualised figures struggling for autonomy. One of Shah's key films for analysis was *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), a key text mentioned by participants. Mukhopadhyay and Banerjee (2021) also found that older films depicted women as romantic interests or matriarchs supporting male protagonists.

Sheth, Jones, and Spencer (2021) in their study on sexism in Bollywood, also analysed testimonies by Bollywood actors and actress Shabana Azmi noted in her testomy that women were often cast in stereotypical roles as mothers, wives, or sisters in the 1970s. She cited the film *Main Chup Rahoongi* [I will remain silent] (1960s) as an example, where a female's silence was portrayed as a virtue (Azmi, as cited in Sheth, Jones & Spencer, 2021, p.22).

Rachana Gangwar and Princi Mishra did a qualitative analysis of the portrayal of women in the top-grossing films of 2022. Their results mirrored the same: Women in this decade are still predominantly portrayed as submissive, dependent, and subservient, such as mothers, wives, or objects of desire (Gangwar & Mishra, 2023).

Another female participant commented on films normalising eve-teasing, which is considered stalking and harassment of women. The participant speaks about consent as the broader issue and how films have deeply ingrained the idea that a woman's "no" is not absolute but a test of a man's persistence.

> "This whole idea of men chasing women even after she says 'no' is just awful. When I was younger, I believed that women would always say no, and it was up to the men to convince them…The problem with Bollywood films is that the audience then responds to the events of the film by mirroring what is showcased on screen. The whole idea of eve-teasing, to the lyrics of the songs, to the actions the male character in Bollywood films take in order to 'get the girl', even if she has refused his proposal, has been dragged into an aspirational light" (Maya).

This participant's observations highlight issues related to toxic masculinity and a lack of respect for consent. Such portrayals normalise behaviors that, in reality, can lead to harassment and even violence towards women. Saurabh Samraat (2021) researched toxic masculinity in Bollywood films over various decades. The research found films have historically depicted men to have agency over women, reinforcing institutionalised and established patriarchy from Indian culture. Women are consistently shown in nurturing roles or juxtaposed within the "hypermasculinity of men and the damsel in distress" syndrome, contributing to problematic themes in Bollywood (Samraat, 2021, p.425).

The participant above, reflecting on growing up in India during her earlier years and seeing the eve-teasing as being considered normal, speaks to the misogyny existing in India's society. Despite her

stating that audiences may mirror the actions seen in films, films also mirror prevalent attitudes and behaviours in society. Humera Choudhury's (2023) study of British South-Asian males revealed that Bollywood films significantly influence their perceptions of values, masculinity, and self-identity. Additionally, these films reinforce patriarchal ideals and create unrealistic romantic expectations.

Kabir Singh (2019) is a film about a surgeon who descends into addiction and rage after his relationship ends. A female participant reflects on the film and shares her views on the audience's passive consumption of such portrayals. She points out that the film romanticises toxic and abusive relationships. The male protagonist, Kabir, played by Shahid Kapoor, exhibits possessive and abusive behaviour throughout the story. The characters' actions are often interpreted as passion rather than abuse. This portrayal can reinforce misogyny, making such behaviour seem acceptable or even desirable in a relationship. The participant also contrasts this film with *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), where Shahrukh Khan's character pursues the female lead.

> "Kabir Singh romanticises, and it can again perpetuate misogyny and toxic and abusive relationships. And if you were meant to compare that with *DDLJ* that was made back in the nineties, where Shahrukh Khan was doing a similar thing. They accentuate the stereotype - What is it? Angry young man. What are all of these things that contribute to society in unhealthy ways? Bollywood perpetuates on a lot of levels. A lot of people say, I just go there to leave my brain at home and see something nice and then come back home. But you're still entrenching in passive content" (Zara).

Zara criticises Bollywood for perpetuating misogyny and toxic relationship dynamics, using Kabir Singh as a prime example. She suggests that Bollywood has consistently reinforced stereotypes such as the "angry young man" trope, which contributes to unhealthy societal norms. Additionally, she challenges the common defence that movies are just entertainment and don't need to be taken seriously. Zara argues that even passive consumption of such content influences culture and societal attitudes, reinforcing problematic societal behaviours. Romantic pursuit after rejection exemplifies Bollywood films in shaping cultures and perpetuating those ideas in society. Bollywood doesn't just reflect society; it actively influences it.

Aysha Viswamohan and Sanchari Chaudhuri (2020) studied 'angromance' in films, looking at toxic masculinity and male angst in the films *Tere Naam* (2003) and *Kabir Singh* (2019). They coin the term 'angromance', merging angry and romance as a concept used by Hindi cinema to portray toxic masculinity (p.146). Their study found that both films used typical Bollywood themes of obsessive love but with problematic depictions of misogyny and sexism. Additionally, Samraat (2021) also stated that the film *Kabir Singh* (2019) feeds toxic masculinity and normalises misogyny. However, the findings of this study also revealed that there has been growing criticism of misogyny and sexism in popular culture, especially with rising crimes against women (Viswamohan & Chaudhuri, 2020).

A male participant also mentioned the same film, acknowledging that *Kabir Singh* (2019) is a well-made film but misrepresents modern India's gender dynamics, as women today are less likely to tolerate toxic relationships, in his opinion.

> "A lot of people are liking it, hating it; I think it's a really good piece of art, the way it is made. But it doesn't represent India like I don't know in the last twenty years; I haven't come across any girls who are my friends who would take so much from a guy. If you show that to a person who doesn't know India, it may come across, like oh, so it is a male-dominated country. This happens with girls; they just have to follow the guy, but I don't think that is right anymore" (Rohan).

The participant acknowledges the polarising opinions surrounding the film and its themes. However, based on their personal experiences and those of their inner circle, they question whether the film accurately represents India. They argue that the romance depicted in the film no longer reflects contemporary India. This observation suggests an awareness of evolving gender norms and implies that Bollywood films may not adequately represent the progressive changes occurring in Indian society.

Finally, a female participant also provided a positive outlook, pointing to the fact that women are directing more films, which brings hope for Bollywood in representing women, gender politics, and sexism in films.

> "Like *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga,* one of them was directed by a woman… it is becoming more inclusive, like beyond the realm of men writing everything" (Jessica).

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga [How I felt when I saw that girl] (2019) is a film directed by Shelly Chopra Dhar. The story revolves around a young woman who is pressured to marry by her conservative family but is actually a closeted lesbian. Samraat (2021) also found that the lack of women's involvement in the film industry has led to movies primarily reflecting male dominance and films centred around the perspective of "the male gaze" (Samraat, 2021, p.428).

5.2.3 Hegemony and Casteism

Bollywood films have tackled social issues like mental health, caste discrimination, gender bias, misogyny, India's rape and violence culture and other sociopolitical issues, opening dialogue for societal reforms. However, in portraying these themes, films have also been superficial or overly dramatic, reducing complex issues to simplistic narratives. This has led to reinforcing stereotypes and exoticizing and homogenising Indian culture, neglecting regional diversity. Bollywood overlooks Indian culture and Indianness in portraying the cultural diversity within India and across South Asia, which includes languages, traditions, and religion, but his becomes problematic due to Bollywood's hegemonic presence within India and internationally as the face of Indian cinema (Mishra, 2002;

Rajadhyaksha, 2016; Kumar, 2014; Dudrah, 2006; Aftab, 2002; Ganti, 2013; Sen, 2013 & Shailo, 2016).

Participants shared their views on the presence of regional cinemas, noting that Bollywood's dominance is problematic as it overshadows the entertainment industry in India, with its influence surpassing education to some extent. They also commented on films being more North Indian centric in depicting culture, festivities and values, especially in their appeal for diaspora.

> "Bollywood is more popular in India than education could be in some parts; they have the power to reach out to that many people and to influence them. I think it's only dominant because it takes up so much shelf space that, other movies, other genres, other languages, the other kind of cinemas that exist, might not be given enough of a platform because bollywood takes up to much space" (Zara).

Additionally, participants also spoke about the complexity and diversity of Indian culture, particularly in the context of explaining it to others while living in New Zealand. They emphasised Indian culture shown in films is often generalised, but also India does not have a single, unified culture because of its vast diversity and that could be difficult to capture in films, as people may have different perspectives based on their own regional backgrounds.

> "Living in New Zealand. We come across some version of this question every now and then. I always tell them India doesn't have like one culture because it is such a diverse country. You go from one city to the other, and the culture, totally changes. It is a culturally rich country. I explain how it changes from all the way to North and South, and West towards East" (Rohan).

> "It's more about generalising, that's what I felt. Bollywood films will be representing values, and Indian traditions, but I think Bollywood films are only representing North Indian traditions. It's really hard to define Indian culture, Its really big thing. It varies from North to South, so if someone asked me about Indian culture, like the culture I know is based on South India, so that's what I would definitely explain to them. And all the others would be like a Google search" (Vijay).

Kaur and Sinha (2005), in their studies on Bollywood films, found that Bollywood predominantly depicts NRIs as North Indians coming from middle-class families, overlooking India's realistic class and ethnic diversities. Mishra (2002) also found the same in his content analysis of the film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). He discusses the film's main female protagonist, who is seen performing a ritual for Karva Chauth[23], a predominantly North Indian tradition. Further, Mankekar (2015) in her analysis of the same film and how it appeals to diasporic audiences also found it to be casteist, due to it being problematic conflating the lived experiences of other members of the Indian

[23] Karva Chauth is a festival where women observe a fast for the safety and longevity of their husbands lives, the festival is predominantly celebrated in Northern parts of India.

diaspora, such as the working class, undocumented migrants, refugees, to the privilege of being NRIs.

Conversations around *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) have surfaced among the participants' views across this research, both in appreciating the film and being a core text for depicting the struggles of the diaspora and education on the culture of India. One participant noted that cultural exposure within India can be regionally limited. This aligns with earlier views about India's vast culture. He mentioned that films have helped him understand festivals like Lohri[24] and Karva Chauth, as he grew up in central India in Mumbai and was previously unaware of these traditions.

> "To be honest, didn't know anything about Lohri[25] or Karva Chauth till I watched movies in which they showed us. All different kinds of other festivals which are not celebrated in Mumbai or Maharashtra" (Nitin).

Another participant expressed that films tend to focus on North Indian and Punjabi cultural traditions, which they personally could not relate to because they are from Gujarat, West India. This affirmed that Bollywood films often portray a specific cultural perspective, which may not be fully representative of India's diverse regional traditions.

> "Bollywood films, in terms of cultural traditions, they're definitely very North Indian centric and Punjabi-centric, which I don't necessarily relate to, given that I'm from Gujarat" (Jessica).

Reshmi Lahiri-Roy (2009) also confirmed in her analysis of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) that it framed a strong North Indian cultural background, and themes were centred around a Punjabi cultural discourse. Also, Sheth, Jones and Spencer (2021) speak to the dominance of Punjabi directors and actors, which could add to the discourse around North-Indian centric values. Yash Chopra was a director and the founder of Yash Raj Films with ancestry from the Punjab province of India pre-independence. Chopra also produced the film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995).

Other academics in the field support the views shared above of North Indians and middle-class families, overlooking India's wider realistic class and ethnic positioning (Ganti, 2013; Rao, 2007; Therwath, 2010). Furthermore. Bollywood films also depict casteism, marginalising lower-caste identities and perpetuating deeply entrenched social hierarchies.

A participant reflected on the portrayal of middle-class and lower-class societies in films, noting a lack of understanding regarding their realities. This creates dissonance, as these films do not accurately reflect lived experiences and could cause audiences to feel displaced.

[25] The festival of Lohri is a Punjabi festival that celebrates the end of winter solstice.

> “I feel like the people who make these Bollywood films, most of them tend to be from the upper class of society in India, and they don’t have any sort of basis with what the middle class or even the lower class looks like. And I belong to a middle-class family in India, and I don’t think they have any idea what our lives look like” (Anjali).

Shakuntala Rao’s (2007) ethnographic study carried out in Patiala, Punjab, North India in 2004, explored how audiences responded to modern Hindi films. The study interviewed students and family members from lower socio-economic groups across diverse castes. The findings revealed that Bollywood was not the primary entertainment medium for the viewers and that Bollywood neglected economically and culturally marginalised audiences (Rao, 2007).

Santosh Chandrashekar (2021) analysed the film *Chennai Express* (2013) and stated that despite Bollywood’s global association with Indian culture, there is a hegemony prevalent in films of North India and upper-caste Hindu values, provincializing lower castes and the South of India, making films casteist and promoting selective values. An example from this analysis was the film stereotyping Tamil speakers as misfits and out of touch with India due to their inability to converse in Hindi, as depicted in the film. The lack of Hindi fluency highlights not only racial differences but also caste-based issues, placing them in a weak and submissive role (Chandrashekar, 2021).

A participant who has seen other regional films emphasised that Hindi cinema is the dominant film industry, followed by regional South Indian cinemas, but asserts that nothing matches the scale and influence of Hindi language films.

> “Hindi cinema is the biggest, one thousand percent. And then after that its Tamil and Telegu which is big. I know that I’ve seen a couple of movies, which are in Tamil and Telegu; there are Punjabi cinemas that are big. I’ve seen some Punjabi movies, but nothing compares to Hindi cinema” (Raj).

Another participant contrasted this view by stating she has a mixed opinion on Bollywood. She acknowledged that films are improving in storytelling and cultural portrayal but still have a long way to go in accurately representing India. They compared Bollywood with Marathi films, suggesting that Marathi cinema is more grounded in reality and resonates better, depicting life more realistically than an idealised version.

> “Yes. I do watch a lot of Marathi films. I do feel compared to Bollywood, Marathi films have more of a sense of the reality of things as they are and they speak to an audience, that is, like they speak to audiences’ perception of reality and not just a made of reality that’s very exclusive to some people in India” (Anjali).

It has been established through conversations with the participants and in the studies presented in the literature review that Bollywood films largely dominate the conversation around Indian cinema, primarily because they are distributed and circulated on an international scale (Dudrah, 2006; Sen, 2013; Ganti, 2013). Punathambekar (2005) further states that while Bollywood speaks for and about Indianness, it is still essential to recognise the limited comprehension of how various linguistic

communities within the diverse Indian diaspora, such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and others, engage with regional film industries. “The politics and pleasures in these contexts often intersect with Bollywood’s ‘national’ narratives” (p. 166).

The Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala possess their own vibrant movie industries, collectively producing more films than Hollywood (Booth, 1995; Rajadhyaksha, 2016). And regional cinemas also generate a considerable amount of global popularity, especially among the Tamil, Malayalam, and Telugu diasporas. Scholars in media and film have suggested that Bollywood is merely one form of regional cinema, but its dominant status as Indian cinema often relegates regional language films to the periphery of global recognition.

As an antecedent to this discussion, Selvaraj Velayutham’s research (2008) examines the global circulation of Tamil cinema and the diaspora, providing both a critique and affirmation of Bollywood’s dominance in Indian cinema. Velayutham notes that Bollywood films effectively integrated the diaspora into their storytelling and marketing strategies, capitalising on the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) market since the 1990s. This approach reinforces the notion of a prosperous, nostalgic, and culturally rooted India, characterised by "an Indian identity that exalts the notion of a Hindi-speaking, Hindu, middle-class Indian" (Velayutham, 2008, p. 179). In contrast, Tamil cinema is closely linked to Tamil identity and nationalism, often resisting broader global influences. Economic and class differences also play a significant role, as many Tamil migrants historically worked in lower-income sectors, which limited their financial influence as an audience. Moreover, Bollywood’s global cultural power transcends international film festivals; Bollywood is an assemblage, with elements such as music, dance and other cultural repertoires. While Bollywood films have a broad cross-cultural appeal, Tamil films seldom engage with non-Tamil audiences. For Tamil cinema to compete on a global scale, it needs to adapt its storytelling, marketing, and distribution strategies in a manner similar to Bollywood (Velayutham, 2008).

Lastly, one participant shared a thought-provoking perspective on how Bollywood films have influenced his perception of racial dynamics in encounters with people of European descent. He expressed confusion about why he felt a sense of reverence and inferiority toward Europeans. He also referenced the film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

> “Every time I feel that I’m trying to fit in, or I feel every time a white person says something and there is this need to say yes or need to laugh at it and I wonder why that is, and when I see movies like Lagaan and all, it sort of reminds me of those days and I feel somehow that I think genetically it’s kind of embedded in most of us maybe someone who is white is kind of superior. I even remember when I was kid, and if you see any white tourist back in India, you would get excited about it and start saying Namaste. Lagaan or when I see movies like Lagaan, it sort of reminds me of these experiences that I’ve had” (Uday).

The film’s plot centres on Indian farmers and villagers who compete against an English colonial officer in a cricket match to save their land during India’s British colonial rule. The participants' perspectives invite a broader discussion about the impact of colonialism and racial dynamics on Indian identity and perception. Referencing such films symbolizes a historical context and demonstrates how these experiences continue to resonate in their feelings and memories. This highlights themes of race, colonial legacy, and personal identity.

Both caste and race systems create a hierarchical social structure where certain groups are considered superior to others based on their ascribed identity, and race can also include skin colour. Sheth, Jones and Spencer (2021) examined skin colour and sexism in films and their role in emboldening and contesting these stereotypes in India post-independence. Their research found that skin colour was the most distinctive marker between Europeans and Indians in the sixteenth century. Hence, due to India's colonial past society, whiteness came to be associated with power, status, and affluence (Sheth et al., 2021).

In a recent study, Vikas Pathe (2024) examined the relationship between India’s colonial past and Hindi cinema, focusing on the film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001), the same film mentioned by the participant above. His study found that the film addresses caste, religion, and gender hierarchies and moments of unity shown in forming the cricket team. His broader discussions around how the film unpacks India’s colonial past, narrating a collective struggle of villagers against the British, also lends to the discourse of whiteness as a symbol of power, mainly through the British characters portrayed as the ruling elite. Their European descent visually signifies their dominance. Pathe's (2024) observations critically examine British rule and still point out that the film largely avoided deeper discussions on racial hierarchies within Indian society, such as colourism, which remain a significant issue in post-colonial India.

5.3 Conclusion

One of Bollywood’s strengths and arguably weaknesses is its ability to shape perceptions. Especially among the younger generations of the Indian Diaspora, these perceptions can also be problematic in the areas of patriarchy, sexism, casteism and hegemony, as outlined in the critique of Bollywood. Despite films helping bridge the gap between their parents’ heritage and the new cultures they grew up in, the participants viewed Bollywood films both as an affirmation and critique in mediating their Indianness. The conventions in films, such as themes, characters and music, allow them to stay connected to India and feel a little more Indian and/or reinforce their Indianness. Participants previously labelled Bollywood films as masala films, blockbusters generating revenue and acknowledged narratives may not be accurate representations but still cater to their desires and dreams. They all readily watched Bollywood films.

> “The reality is never really visible on the big screen because, at the end of the day, it is a big business. Bollywood films are a fragment of imagination most Indians fantasise about; the filmmakers sell you the dream!” (Maya).

One participant clearly distinguished between her feelings for India and Bollywood, viewing them as two separate entities. She acknowledges that Bollywood films serve as a global medium that transcends borders without needing to be directly affiliated with India. Additionally, this participant reflects a dual perspective that is both critical and reaffirming, similar to negotiating cultural identities and exercising agency and autonomy. Thus Bollywood functions as a site of affirmation and critique.

> “In my head, my feelings towards India and my feelings towards Bollywood films are two separate things. Film is such a borderless medium now, you know it doesn’t necessarily have to be confined to one place. And I don’t know if I’d expect Bollywood or any film to represent reality, because I guess part of why we watch a film is to escape reality” (Jessica).

Neelam Wright (2015) argues that films distort reality, while Rajadhyaksha (2016) suggests that Bollywood films are often contentious. In this context, studies on Bollywood films and the New Zealand-Indian diaspora are scarce and fail to account adequately for those who may reject this medium. Participants in this study are perceptive enough to recognise the reductive ways in which Bollywood portrays Indianness. They understand that their cultural identity is forged both on and off the screen, shaped by a complex interplay of connection and disconnection, which highlights the heterogeneity within Indianness and the New Zealand-Indian diaspora.

This chapter examined participants' perspectives in conjunction with international studies on Bollywood cinema, focusing on how it mediates the concept of Indianness among the New Zealand-Indian diaspora as they navigate their cultural identities. Bollywood films continue to provide insight into India, its culture, and the evolving definition of Indianness (Appadurai, as cited in Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008). The participants' views in this study demonstrate that Bollywood films serve as both a unifying cultural force and a contested space for affirmation and critique. Despite this, participants remained actively engaged with and continued to watch Bollywood films. The final chapter will summarise the key findings and limitations while suggesting directions for future research.

6. Chapter Six: Conclusion

> “Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective; because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society” (Rushdie, 1991, p.19).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion of the study’s key insights and implications. It begins with a personal reflection, offering a researcher’s perspective on the themes explored. Following this, a summary of findings highlights the themes regarding Bollywood’s role in shaping the cultural identities of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora in Auckland. The chapter then discusses the significance of this research, emphasising its contribution to cultural, media and social studies.

Additionally, it acknowledges the study's limitations. To further understand this phenomenon, the chapter suggests future research directions, proposing potential avenues for deeper inquiry. Finally, the conclusion ties together the research’s insights, reinforcing Bollywood cinema's enduring relevance in the negotiation of cultural identity for the Indian diaspora.

6.2 A Personal Reflection

I described my experience as walking between two worlds at the beginning of this research. However, as I completed this journey, I realised that I should reframe this perspective to mean that I am of two worlds. This reflection stems from meeting participants from diverse backgrounds who share a cultural identity with me. By understanding and making sense of my experiences, worldviews, and relationship with Bollywood films, I began to further embrace my cultural identity as a New Zealand-Indian. Instead of merely walking between cultures, I recognised that I am of two cultures - I am of two worlds. This new perspective has allowed me to explore my reservations about Indianness, which were challenged and affirmed throughout this process. There is also a sense of belonging in resonating with the experiences shared, such as performing at Auckland’s Diwali Festival to crowds of thousands, seeking comfort in 90s Bollywood romances, and navigating spaces in both New Zealand and India.

Similar to Rushdie’s (1991) observations of having a double perspective, my own double perspective enables me, as a writer and researcher, to navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and longing and critically examine my two homes without restricting myself to belonging to only one. The sense of being 'at one and the same time insiders and outsiders’ speaks to the nature of my hyphenated cultural identity; I bring a nuanced perspective as a cultural advocate (p. 19).

Lastly, I am grateful to honor my ancestors and their stories from India for setting me on this path to embrace my Indianness with agency. We are inherently intersectional, and our people can occupy more than one space simultaneously if we choose to. I prefer this richness of experience over simply checking a box for ethnicity on a census form.

6.3 Summary of Findings

This study examined the role of Bollywood films in shaping the cultural identity of Indian diasporic youth in Auckland, New Zealand. Using thematic analysis, this qualitative research unpacked the influence and relevance of Bollywood cinema, considered both a brand, a cultural artefact, and a complex industry in shaping the cultural identities of the New Zealand-Indian diaspora. The findings of this study align with the cultural studies perspective, which defines cultural identity as a product of both interpersonal and mediated interactions.

This research study aimed to answer the question: *To what extent do New Zealand Indians associate Bollywood films with their Indianness and in mediating their cultural identity?* The findings revealed that the participants actively watched Bollywood films and brought their critical lens, shaped by their worldview and experiences, to make sense of the films and embedded meanings. This process was further informed by their experiences residing in New Zealand as part of the South Asian diaspora.

Rajadhyaksha (2016) describes Bollywood as India's "export lager," a cultural force that shapes modernity at home and abroad. Appadurai (1996) emphasises the enduring power of collective imagination, arguing that while fantasies may fade, imagination fuels action and helps construct ideas of both "neighbourhood and nationhood" (p. 7). Bollywood plays a pivotal role in shaping this imagination as a cultural product, reflecting Indian identity and Indianness while also projecting an image of India that captivates global audiences.

Bollywood cinema, analysed through the Circuit of Culture Framework developed by Stuart Hall and other theorists in the 1990s, reveals how films reflect and shape India's social, political, and economic landscape, influencing identities and global cultural exchanges. The framework encompasses production, representation, consumption, regulation, and identity (Hall, as cited in Arvind, 2019, pp. 38-40). Bollywood films are shaped by social, economic, and technological factors, with themes such as love, family, gender bias, and caste often reflecting societal values. Consumed globally, especially by the South Asian diaspora, these films impact personal and collective identities. Industry regulations, like censorship, shape narratives, while Bollywood also provides a space for diasporic identities to be represented and connected to their roots. This framework enables a critical examination of Bollywood cinema's role in global cultural exchanges.

As mediating artefacts, Bollywood films offered connection and concatenation, navigating the complexities of their hyphenated identities through daily experiences away from India. Indianness,

as mediated through Bollywood films, helped them to understand, question, and affirm their cultural identities. Further, findings revealed that Bollywood is both a cultural anchor and a contested space. Some participants found Bollywood to be a source of nostalgia and connection to their Indian heritage, while others expressed dissonance between its portrayal of Indianness and their lived realities. As Sahoo (2017) states, “The nation is promoted as a new experience, as a dream that will be lived, experienced and also created by the diaspora” (as cited in Hegde & Sahoo, 2018, p.279). India was viewed as a socially constructed nation, shaped by the diaspora who saw themselves as part of this ‘imagined’ community (Anderson, 1983, as cited in Dimitrova & de Bruijn, 2017, p. 5). However, when confronted with reality, they renegotiated attributes of belonging.

Intergenerational differences emerged, with younger participants often questioning the relevance of Bollywood, particularly its reinforcement of traditional cultural and gender norms. However, those actively engaged in Bollywood dance performances offered a different perspective, viewing Bollywood as a comforting and celebratory expression of their Indianness.

This research affirms that despite varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives, Bollywood cinema remains a vibrant and influential force among the New Zealand-Indian diaspora in Auckland, shaping cultural discourse and identity formation in complex and evolving ways. While simultaneously allowing the diaspora to intertwine values gained from their experiences and the influence of Eastern and Western ways of thinking (Sarwal, 2017).

6.4 Significance of this Research

This study explored participants' personal experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Qualitative research provided rich, detailed data that can reveal complex nuances of how Bollywood films mediate identity negotiation, which quantitative methods may miss.

The research focused on youth development, specifically cultural identity formation, and examined how Bollywood shapes cultural self-perception among youth in the diaspora. As New Zealand becomes more multicultural, ethnic boundaries and national identity are continuously reshaped. This study investigated how Indian youth, particularly New Zealand-Indian youth, navigate, advocate, and perform their cultural identities and the extent of Bollywood's influence on these aspects.

The findings contribute to an understanding of the identities of Indian migrants and those born in New Zealand. They also offer valuable insights for Indian community groups in New Zealand focused on cultural preservation. By highlighting Bollywood's role in shaping cultural identity, the study fills a gap in the literature and enhances the understanding of how Indian culture integrates into a New Zealand context. As Nachowitz (2015) notes, “Indians are not ‘recently arrived migrants’ but full participants in the nation-building project” (p. 55).

The study's focus on Bollywood in the diaspora further illuminates how cultural elements are retained, adapted, or transformed in new environments, contributing to broader and global discussions on transnational identities and cultural preservation in the diaspora.

Importantly, this research makes a significant contribution because research on South Asians in New Zealand is relatively small and emerging. Much of the research in this field tends to come from Australia, the UK, and the USA. It is to this body of emerging research that this thesis contributes.

6.5 Limitations

Following my discussion and exploration of the themes from my findings, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations of this research. First, the sample size was limited to twelve interviews and one focus group comprising five members of a dance production group based in Auckland. The experiences of the Indian diaspora can vary significantly by location, meaning that the findings may not fully represent the experiences of the New Zealand-Indian youth population residing in other cities or rural areas.

Second, the participants' age range was limited to 18 to 35 years old, which excludes older generations who may have different perspectives and experiences with Bollywood films. Furthermore, including Bollywood dance performers in the study could introduce bias as they have a vested interest in Bollywood. Lastly, the research was focused solely on the influence of Bollywood without considering other cultural or Western media influences. Another drawback is that the participants were active viewers of Bollywood films; the results might have differed if the study had included New Zealand-Indians who watch films less frequently.

Lastly, my prior knowledge of Bollywood films and the specific terminology used by the participants influenced my ability to ask further probing questions. A researcher without this insider knowledge might have engaged more deeply. While my study was conducted in English with English-speaking participants, it focused on Bollywood films from the Hindi-language film industry. As a result, some examples and nuances were inevitably lost, especially since some participants occasionally referenced specific film titles and interjected in Hindi during the interviews. I documented these instances and provided translations; however, some words do not have direct equivalents in English, which can lead to a slight loss of meaning. Nevertheless, I believed that conducting the study in English was more authentic.

6.6 Future Research Directions

The landscape of Indian cinema is experiencing a dynamic transformation. Regional films are gaining remarkable international acclaim, and digital platforms are creating opportunities for alternative

narratives. Viewers now have access to a wider array of diverse and authentic stories that capture the complexities of contemporary South Asia.

Research studies could focus on audience engagement with web series and OTT platforms, particularly their influence on the New Zealand-Indian diaspora and other ethnic communities. Additionally, it is essential to explore regional cinemas from India, considering the cultural and regional diversity within the Indian diaspora. This includes examining perspectives from individuals across various Indian states, such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra.

New Zealand's Indian diaspora is not only linguistically diverse but is also shaped by a multitude of migration histories. Understanding how regional cultures influence their ties to cinema can shed light on how these dynamics shape cultural identities within the diaspora.

Furthermore, Bollywood films may play a crucial role in positioning New Zealand as a tourist destination. Investigating Bollywood movies filmed in New Zealand can help understand their impact on international audience perceptions. Lastly, exploring the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of a new generation of Indians born in New Zealand will provide deeper insights into cultural exchange. New Zealand is also regarded as one of the most recently settled places by humans, with a shorter human history compared to other nations (Nachowitz, 2015). Thus, this research direction can highlight how Indian communities in New Zealand enhance engagement between New Zealanders and India by sharing knowledge, traditions, and experiences, ultimately fostering greater cultural exchange and recognition of the Indian diaspora's contributions to New Zealand.

6.7 Conclusion

Cinema holds up a mirror to society, and over time, Bollywood films have become a reflection of India’s cultural diversity, featuring meaningful songs, storylines, and themes. However, Stuart Hall (1993) states that cinema does not solely mirror reality; films actively mediate identities and ways of seeing oneself.

> “We have been trying to theorise identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak” (Hall, 1993, p.402).

Bollywood, as a medium of entertainment and assemblage of cultural products, allows viewers to connect with India and preserve their cultural identities despite the conflicting values of East versus West. It also demonstrates itself as a global phenomenon to observe further, deconstruct, and delve deeper with interconnectedness to diasporic studies. Film watching itself is a practice that explores cultural roots despite participants and/or the diaspora residing in Western or liberal societies.

The New Zealand-Indian community has evolved significantly from being sojourners to becoming settlers. It started with only a handful of individuals, with just six Indians registered in the 1881 census (*Radio New Zealand*, 2024). Now, fewer Indians in New Zealand are self-employed compared to previous decades, and more are employed in management, professional, and technical roles (Leckie, 2010; Leckie, 2021) This shift reflects increased tertiary education among second and third-generation New Zealand-Indians and the global migration of skilled workers of Indian descent (Leckie, 2010, p. 59).

New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's report on India-New Zealand Relations 2025: Investing in the Relationship states, "New Zealand's Indian communities are important 'cultural navigators' who can provide a platform to form New Zealanders' capability to engage with India" (p.7). This research study supports the idea that the New Zealand-Indian diaspora is, in fact, a cultural advocate for two cultures with the potential to represent and engage in the dialogue between New Zealand, India, and the wider South Asian diaspora. New Zealand-Indians can serve as a vital bridge for cultural diplomacy and the promotion of multiculturalism. New Zealand-Indians could serve as cultural ambassadors, advocating for multiculturalism and strengthening bilateral cultural ties. As representatives of both Indian heritage and New Zealand's diverse society, they can promote cross-cultural understanding, celebrating India's rich traditions while contributing to New Zealand's multicultural identity. The Indian government recognises India's cultural heritage as a key element of soft power, positioning it as a valuable global contribution (Mukherjee, 2019; Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India). In this context, the New Zealand-Indian community can play a crucial role in fostering cultural diplomacy, showcasing India's traditions, and enhancing New Zealand's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

As spoken by Shahrukh Khan's character Raj in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) - "Bade bade deshon mein, aisi choti choti baatein hoti rehti hai [in big countries, such small talks do happen]" (Chopra, 1995, 0:50:46). In this case, New Zealand, being the smaller nation, has a larger discourse to address regarding recognising the New Zealand Indian diaspora and acknowledging their contributions. Similar to the Indian government mobilising soft power, New Zealand can also potentially mobilise the New Zealand-Indian diaspora, their values, heritage, and cross-cultural understanding.

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Appendices

Appendix One: AUT Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

2 August 2018

Vijay Devadas
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Vijay

Ethics Application: 18/308 **Walking between two worlds: Bollywood cinema and the New Zealand-Indian identity**

I wish to advise you that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has **approved** your ethics application.

This approval is for three years, expiring 2 August 2021.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Removal of the offer of counselling from the Information Sheets;
2. Inclusion of the confidentiality statement in the Focus Group consent forms;
3. Inclusion of the AUT logo on adverts/flyers.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: neeli@hotmail.co.nz

Appendix Two: Participant Information Sheet – Individual Interviews

Participant Information Sheet

Individual Participants

Date Information Sheet Produced

7th May 2018

Project Title

Walking Between Two Worlds: Bollywood Cinema and the New Zealand-Indian Identity

An Invitation

My name is Nilam Patel and I am a master's in communications student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Under the supervision of Dr. Vijay Devadas, I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I have designed to understand the role of Bollywood cinema in cultural identity construction. We are interested in your opinions on Bollywood films and any influences they have had in maintaining Indian culture and traditions, as well as the impact on the New Zealand-Indian identity. The findings from this study will assist in understanding the interconnectedness between the Indian Diaspora and their ancestral and cultural origins depicted in Bollywood films. It will also provide wider sociological research on South Asian Diasporas in New Zealand. This research will also contribute to my master's in communication studies qualification. In order to take part in the study, you will need to participate in an interview session that would last no more than two hours. The interview will be conducted in English. You will also be compensated with a movie voucher for your time in participating in the study.

What is the purpose of this research?

This study provides an opportunity to further research on a younger generation of New Zealand-Indians, as ethnic boundaries continue to evolve. Indian's are now the second largest ethnic minority group in New Zealand. And Auckland has had the biggest population growth for this minority group, with 106.329, people residing here, and Indian's make up 8 per cent of the city's population (Stats NZ, 2014 & Auckland Council, 2017).

This research has also been prompted by my own experiences of conflicting identities growing up as a New Zealand born Indian in diverse contexts, including interactions with family, friends and others. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex ways cultural identity is negotiated through depictions in Bollywood films. To explore the conceptions of ethnic and national identity, the study will be reflective for participants wanting to make sense of both their cultural identities; New Zealand and Indian.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified through public Facebook posts and or your contact details have been obtained by your response to a research invitation. You also meet the selection criteria, being a permanent resident and or citizen of New Zealand with Indian ancestry. And you have met the age criteria of 18-35 years of age and have indicated that you participate in watching Bollywood films.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

In order to participate in this research, you would be required to complete a Consent Form that will be provided before participating in the research. By agreeing to participate in this research, it is solely voluntary and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the research at any time. At any point that you choose to withdraw from the research, you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings of the research have been produced, removal of your data will not be allowed.

What will happen in this research?

If you are selected to participate in an interview session, you will be given an opportunity to discuss your experiences, feelings and beliefs on your New Zealand-Indian identity. I will be asking some broad questions to get you started. Participation is voluntary. This session will also be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. You may have your responses withdrawn at any time during or before the data collection period. Should you wish to withdraw from the study after the data collection period, your contributions to the research will be removed and respective data deleted. There will be no negative implications for participants should they choose to withdraw.

What are the discomforts and risks?

I believe there will not be any discomforts or risk associated with the interview session.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In the event that you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not need to answer them. You are able to end the interview session at any time you wish. Your participation is voluntary, and you will in no way be disadvantaged should you choose to withdraw at any time.

What are the benefits?

Participants will benefit by being able to contribute to social and cultural research on a diasporic community that they can identify with through their personal experiences. This will include reflecting on their cultural roots, traditions, values and conduct, in relation to Bollywood cinema. Participants as co-creators with their responses enable the researcher to observe and specify the phenomenon of negotiating cultural identities.

The researcher may gain a master's in communication studies and expand her knowledge on social and cultural studies on ethnic communities present in New Zealand. The researcher will also seek to produce a journal article to raise awareness of the findings for the wider scholarly and ethnic community.

Themes and findings from this research will contribute to the wider state of knowledge on the relationship between cinematic and cultural studies. And establish future research directions for academics to analyse the New Zealand-Indian diasporic community and contribute to the growing discussions on South Asian Diasporas globally.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your contact details will only be accessible by the researcher and their primary supervisor. All information you provide in the interview session will remain confidential, and your individual names will not be disclosed in the study. Data recorded and published in the research findings will use pseudonyms. Any third parties referenced and or mentioned will also remain anonymous. Privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study, other than your time. The interview session will take approximately 1 - 2 hours of your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Participants will have two weeks for considering their participation from the time of invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, after completion of the research, you will be offered a URL link to the thesis and a summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Vijay Devadas, vijay.devadas@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 x 6075

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Nilam Patel, neeli@hotmail.co.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Vijay Devadas, vijay.devadas@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2nd of August 2018, AUTEC Reference number 18/308

Appendix Three: Participant Information Sheet – Focus Group Interview

Participant Information Sheet

Focus Group Participants

Date Information Sheet Produced

7th May 2018

Project Title

Walking Between Two Worlds: Bollywood Cinema and the New Zealand-Indian Identity

An Invitation

My name is Nilam Patel and I am a master's in communications student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Under the supervision of Dr. Vijay Devadas, I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I have designed to understand the role of Bollywood cinema in cultural identity construction. We are interested in your opinions on Bollywood films and any influences they have had in maintaining Indian culture and traditions, as well as the impact on the New Zealand-Indian identity. The findings from this study will assist in understanding the interconnectedness between the Indian Diaspora and their ancestral and cultural origins depicted in Bollywood films. It will also provide wider sociological research on South Asian Diasporas in New Zealand. This research will also contribute to my master's in communication studies qualification. In order to take part in the study, you will need to participate in one focus group session that would last no more than two hours. The interview will be conducted in English. You will also be compensated with a movie voucher for your time in participating in the study.

What is the purpose of this research?

This study provides an opportunity to further research on a younger generation of New Zealand-Indians, as ethnic boundaries continue to evolve. Indian's are now the second largest ethnic minority group in New Zealand. And Auckland has had the biggest population growth for this minority group, with 106.329, people residing here, and Indian's make up 8 per cent of the city's population (Stats NZ, 2014 & Auckland Council, 2017).

This research has also been prompted by my own experiences of conflicting identities growing up as a New Zealand born Indian in diverse contexts, including interactions with family, friends and others. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex ways cultural identity is negotiated through depictions in Bollywood films. To explore the conceptions of ethnic and national identity, the study will be reflective for participants wanting to make sense of both their cultural identities; New Zealand and Indian.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified through public Facebook posts and or your contact details have been obtained by your response to a research invitation. You also meet the selection criteria, being a permanent resident and or citizen of New Zealand with Indian ancestry. And you have met the age criteria of 18-35 years of age and have indicated that you participate in watching Bollywood films as well as being part of a community or performance group.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

In order to participate in this research, you would be required to complete a Consent Form that will be provided before participating in the research. By agreeing to participate in this research, it is solely voluntary and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the research at any time. At any point that you choose to withdraw from the research, you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings of the research have been produced, removal of your data will not be allowed.

What will happen in this research?

If you are selected to participate in the focus group session, you will be given an opportunity to discuss your experiences, feelings and beliefs on your New Zealand-Indian identity. I will be asking some broad questions to get you started. Participation is voluntary. This session will also be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. You may have your responses withdrawn at any time during or before the data collection period. Should you wish to withdraw from the study after the data collection period, your contributions to the research will be removed and respective data deleted. There will be no negative implications for participants should they choose to withdraw.

What are the discomforts and risks?

I believe there will not be any discomforts or risk associated with the focus group session.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In the event that you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not need to answer them. You are able to exit the focus group session at any time you wish. Your participation is voluntary, and you will in no way be disadvantaged should you choose to withdraw at any time.

What are the benefits?

Participants will benefit by being able to contribute to social and cultural research on a diasporic community that they can identify with through their personal experiences. This will include reflecting on their cultural roots, traditions, values and conduct, in relation to Bollywood cinema. Participants as co-creators with their responses enable the researcher to observe and specify the phenomenon of negotiating cultural identities.

The researcher may gain a master's in communication studies and expand her knowledge on social and cultural studies on ethnic communities present in New Zealand. The researcher will also seek to produce a journal article to raise awareness of the findings for the wider scholarly and ethnic community.

Themes and findings from this research will contribute to the wider state of knowledge on the relationship between cinematic and cultural studies. And establish future research directions for academics to analyse the New Zealand-Indian diasporic community and contribute to the growing discussions on South Asian Diasporas globally.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your contact details will only be accessible by the researcher and their primary supervisor. All information you provide in the focus group session will remain confidential, and your individual names will not be disclosed in the study. Data recorded and published in the research findings will use pseudonyms. Any third parties referenced and or mentioned will also remain anonymous. Privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study, other than your time. The focus group session will take approximately 1 - 2 hours of your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Participants will have two weeks for considering their participation from the time of invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, after completion of the research, you will be offered a URL link to the thesis and a summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Vijay Devadas, vijay.devadas@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 x 6075

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Nilam Patel, neeli@hotmail.co.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Vijay Devadas, vijay.devadas@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2nd of August 2018, AUTEC Reference number 18/308

Appendix Four: Consent Form Individual Interviews

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved for individuals:

*Project title: **Walking Between Two Worlds: Bollywood Cinema and The New Zealand-Indian Identity***

Project Supervisor: ***Dr. Vijay Devadas***

Researcher: ***Nilam Patel***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 7th May 2018
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that during the interview session, I will need to withhold from making references to third parties e.g. family members, friends and or information which can be used to identify someone.
- ○ I understand that during the interview session, I will need to be respectful and use appropriate language when disclosing information and or discussing my views.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2nd of August 2018 AUTEC

Reference number 18/308

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix Five: Consent Form Focus Group Session

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved for the focus group session:

Project title: ***Walking Between Two Worlds: Bollywood Cinema and The New Zealand-Indian Identity***

Project Supervisor: ***Dr. Vijay Devadas***

Researcher: ***Nilam Patel***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 7th May 2018
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ○ I understand that during the focus group session I will need to withhold from making references to third parties e.g. family members, friends and or information which can be used to identify someone.
- ○ I understand that during the focus group session I will need to be respectful and use appropriate language when disclosing information and or discussing my views.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2nd of August 2018 AUTEC

Reference number 18/308

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix Six: Interview Questions – Individual Interviews

Section A: Demographics

- Date of Birth
- Sex
- Occupation
- Highest Qualification
- Area of family origins (in India)

Section B: Immigration History

- Could you please tell me about how your family came to be in New Zealand?

Section C: Identity Construction

- How do you culturally identify yourself?
- What do you tick in the ethnicity section of the Census form?
- What does being a New Zealand-Indian mean to you?
- Have you heard of the term NRI (Non-Resident Indian)? Do you feel that term applies to you? Or what does it mean to you?
- What are your general impressions on Indian culture?
- Could you name any activities that influence you in learning about Indian culture? E.g. do you belong to any cultural or religious groups? Wear ethnic attire, eat traditional food etc.
- Have you ever been to India? Did you feel like you belonged?
- What role do family and friends play in your life with respect to your cultural identity?

Section D: Identity Negotiation

- How do you feel about having a mixed cultural background and or having more than one cultural identity?
- Do you ever experience conflicts between the two ethnicities/identities? Give me an example of any situations or memories.

Section E: Multiculturalism

- What do you think people mean when they say New Zealand is multicultural?

Section F: Bollywood

What role do Bollywood films play in the process of identity construction among New Zealand-Indians?

- What is your general impression of Bollywood films?
- Do you find yourself identifying with the movie characters and plots? How?
- Would you say that Bollywood films represent Indian traditions and values?
- Do they help you understand your cultural identity? How does that make you feel?
- What cultural aspects did you learn from Bollywood films? Any examples that you can think of?
- What is your opinion on the culture portrayed in Bollywood films?
- Do they entice you to visit India? And or do you think they represent reality?

Appendix Seven: Interview Questions – Focus Group Session

Section A: Group Demographics

- Classification – dance/performance group?
- Age range of participants
- Occupations
- Area of family origins (in India)

Section B: Background

- Could you please tell me about how your group came to be and why was it formed?
- What are the group's main activities and how often do you all get together?
- What are some of your accomplishments as a group?
- Have you participated in any major events in Auckland?
- Do the activities you all partake in, help you connect with your Indian culture? If yes, why?
- How have audience or the community responded to your performances? Any feedback?

Section C: Multiculturalism

- Have you heard of the term NRI (Non-Resident Indian)? Do you feel that term applies to you? Or what does it mean to you?
- How do you feel your group contributes to New Zealand's multicultural society?
- How do you define your group's role in New Zealand's multicultural society?

Section D: Bollywood

What role do Bollywood films play in the process of identity construction among New Zealand-Indians?

- What are your general impressions of Bollywood films?
- Do you find yourselves identifying with the movie characters and plots? How?
- Do you use Bollywood films and or music for your performances? Why?
- Do they help you understand your cultural identity and or connect? How does that make you feel?
- What cultural aspects did you learn from Bollywood films? Any examples that you can think of?
- Would you say that Bollywood films represent Indian traditions and values?
- Do they entice you to visit India? And or do you think they represent reality?