

## Beyond Entertainment: Impact of Indian Cinema on Youths' Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Indian cinema, renowned for its vibrant storytelling and global reach, transcends its primary role as entertainment to profoundly influence the perspectives, values, and aspirations of the country's youth. This research investigates the multifaceted impact of Indian cinema on young audiences, exploring how its compelling narratives, iconic characters, and recurring themes shape their worldview, social attitudes, and sense of identity. Employing a qualitative approach, the study integrates in-depth interviews with youth across diverse population and a detailed content analysis of popular films covering various genres and eras. The findings illuminate cinema's dual role as both a mirror reflecting societal norms and a mould shaping perceptions of critical issues such as culture, gender roles, romantic relationships, and ethical dilemmas. On one hand, Indian cinema inspires creativity, fosters cultural pride, and heightens social awareness among young viewers, encouraging them to engage with their heritage and contemporary challenges. On the other hand, it presents risks, including the reinforcement of stereotypes, the glamorization of materialism, and the creation of unrealistic expectations that can distort personal and social aspirations. This paper argues that while Indian cinema holds immense potential as a tool for education and societal progress, its influence necessitates a balanced approach. It calls for enhanced media literacy initiatives to empower youth to critically interpret cinematic messages and urges filmmakers to embrace responsible storytelling that prioritizes authenticity and social good. By examining these dynamics, the study positions Indian cinema as a transformative force, capable of cultivating a more informed, empathetic, and socially conscious generation when wielded with intention and care.

**Keywords:** *Indian cinema, Influence on youth, Social attitudes, Media literacy, Youth perspective*

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, goes beyond entertainment, acting as a cultural cornerstone that deeply shapes the perspectives, values, and aspirations of India's youth. With its vibrant mix of drama, music, and dance, Bollywood crafts captivating experiences that resonate both domestically and globally (Chandra & Bhatia, 2019). Films provide escapist joy through action-packed narratives, heartfelt comedies, and emotionally moving melodramas, while iconic songs and stunning cinematography reflect India's rich

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traditions and contemporary dilemmas. Beyond entertainment, cinema subtly educates, tackling complex issues like dyslexia in *Taare Zameen Par* or societal pressures in *Dear Zindagi* (Walia, 2015). These narratives foster emotional connections, spark conversations, and drive social change, encouraging young audiences to engage critically with the world around them (Khattri & Singh, 2021)

The roots of Indian cinema stretch back to the late 19th century, when static photography evolved into the Lumière brothers' cinematograph in 1896. Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), a silent film, marked the birth of Bollywood, followed by the revolutionary *Alam Ara* in 1931, which introduced sound (Gopal, 2015). Iconic films like *Mother India* (1957), starring figures like Raj Kapoor, solidified Bollywood's cultural significance. Technological advancements further transformed the industry, from the vibrant techno-colour of *Sholay* (1975) to Dolby digital sound in the 1990s and the integration of CGI, 4K cameras, and drones in the 2000s (Mitra, 2024). The rise of OTT platforms like Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar has globalized Bollywood, making its stories accessible to diverse audiences and amplifying its cultural reach (Rao & Lingam, 2021).

Bollywood's filmmaking process prioritizes authenticity through extensive research. For example, *Padmaavat* (2018) required historical studies, artefact analysis, and thoroughly researched locations in Rajasthan to create a compelling narrative (Jain, Lal & Raina, 2023). This dedication extends to Bollywood's diverse genres, which cater to varied tastes—action and comedy for the masses, family dramas for intergenerational bonding, and thrillers or socially conscious documentaries for urban niche audiences. This diversity mirrors India's cultural mosaic, addressing both entertainment and pressing social issues like gender equality and systemic injustices, making cinema a powerful tool for reflection and dialogue (Atwal, 2018).

Indian cinema vividly captures the nation's history and culture, weaving narratives that resonate with its diverse populace. Films like *Lagaan* portray colonial resistance, while *Jodhaa Akbar* celebrates Mughal-Rajput harmony. Social movies like *Dangal* focus on gender equality in sports (Ghosal, 2018). Rooted in classical and folk music, Bollywood blends historical and modern themes, preserving cultural identities while offering global audiences a window into India's heritage (Begum & Dasgupta, 2015). This storytelling fosters pride and connection among youth, bridging tradition and modernity in a rapidly evolving society (Balabantaray, 2020).

The advent of OTT platforms, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has revolutionized Bollywood. Films like *Gulabo Sitabo* (2020) premiered directly online, bypassing theatres, and by 2025, India's OTT market is expected to see significant growth (Mitra & Singh, 2025). Platforms like Amazon Prime Video provide convenience, on-demand viewing, and diverse content, democratizing access for rural and global audiences. Subtitles and algorithms enhance personalization, while niche films like *Masaan* thrive alongside blockbusters (Rao & Lingam, 2021). OTT platforms amplify small-budget films, promote new talent, and enable faster investment recovery through digital rights sales. However, challenges include the decline of theatrical experiences, risks of reduced content diversity, binge-watching causing disruptive sleep cycle, and privacy concerns. (Itoo & Nagar, 2017).

Indian cinema has evolved from silent films to a global force, transitioning from pure entertainment to a medium for cultural preservation and social commentary. Using advancements like sound and VFX (visual effects), Bollywood delivers dynamic storytelling

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(Gopal, 2015). Its global reach, amplified by OTT platforms, showcases India's adaptability, blending tradition with innovation. Yet, challenges like piracy and the erosion of theatrical experiences require careful navigation to maintain Bollywood's influence as a storytelling platform that resonates with audiences worldwide (Mitra, 2024).

India's youth, aged 15–25, are a diverse group shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and geographical factors. Urban youth embrace modernity, driven by education and global media, while rural youth uphold traditional values due to limited resources (Khan, 2015). Despite this divide, young Indians blend tradition with ambition, valuing education, financial independence, and self-expression while respecting family and heritage. The youth face challenges like unemployment and social inequalities but uses technology and social media to drive change and navigate India's rapid evolution with resilience and determination (Acharya, 2015).

Cinema serves as a cultural force for India's youth, with the industry producing over 1,000 films annually across Bollywood, regional cinemas, and independent sectors. Through compelling narratives and relatable characters, films evoke emotions, challenge norms, and inspire change (Jinadasa, 2016). The content that the youth watches in theatres, television, and digital platforms, cinema's vast reach creates a feedback loop that mirrors and shapes societal values. Youth actively influence cinema through social media engagement on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), driving demand for socially conscious narratives and experimental storytelling, ensuring cinema remains relevant and reflective of their evolving culture (Dattatreyan, 2018).

Cinema profoundly shapes youth perspectives by addressing social issues and fostering cultural and moral understanding. Movies instil a strong sense of social change with the help of films like *Laapataa Ladies*, which showcases different aspects of women empowerment, and *Pad Man*, which challenges menstruation taboos (Khattri & Singh, 2021). Movies like *Dil Chahta Hai* show modern, global dreams. On the other hand, films like *Sanju* shows the effect of substance abuse, and *Thappad* portrays the patriarchal norms, prompting youth to redefine their worldview (Kaur, 2017). Biographical films like *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* inspire perseverance, resonating with urban and rural youth and encouraging personal growth and social reflection (Ghosal, 2018).

Emotionally and psychologically, Indian cinema resonates deeply with youth. *Taare Zameen Par* inspires hope, while *The Kashmir Files* evokes patriotism and historical awareness (Ahad, 2022). Stories of triumph, like *Lagaan*, motivate youth to overcome challenges.

However, escapist romances like *Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein* can foster unrealistic expectations, potentially straining relationships and self-esteem, particularly among rural youth with limited exposure to alternative perspectives (Tripathy & Maharana, 2015). Cinema's dual role—uplifting yet potentially taxing—emphasizes its significant impact, urging youth to engage critically to harness its progressive potential for personal and societal transformation (Linds, Sjollema, et.al, 2020).

Indian cinema is a dynamic, far-reaching industry that captures the hearts of millions. By tuning into what young people love about films and how these stories shape their views, filmmakers can create movies that truly connect with their audience while considering their broader societal influence. These insights can also guide educators, policymakers, and filmmakers in shaping narratives that inspire positive, inclusive, and forward-looking

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mindsets among youth. Therefore, the present study was planned to investigate the impact of Indian cinemas on youth perspective.

### ***Aim of the Study***

To study how Indian cinema influences the perspectives, attitudes, and social perceptions of youth beyond mere entertainment.

### ***Research Questions***

1. How frequently do you watch Indian movies, and what genres do you typically enjoy?
2. How do you think Indian films have shaped your awareness of social issues like poverty, gender equality, or education?
3. Can you recall a specific movie that made you more curious or informed about a topic you didn't know much about before?
4. In what ways do you feel Indian cinema influences your opinions or decisions in everyday life?
5. How do you think the characters or stories in movies affect the way you and your peers think or behave?
6. Can you describe a particular Indian movie that left a lasting impression on you and why?
7. How did watching a specific film change your perspective on a personal or societal issue?
8. How do you feel about the way Indian cinema portrays controversial topics like religion, politics, or caste?
9. What are your thoughts on how these portrayals influence the way young people view such sensitive issues?
10. How do you think Indian cinema's impact on you differs from other forms of media, like social media or television?
11. In your opinion, how do movies have stronger or weaker influence on youth compared to other forms of entertainment?
12. How have Indian films helped you understand or connect with historical events or cultural traditions?
13. Can you share an example of a movie that made you feel more connected to India's past?
14. How do you think the portrayal of actors and actresses in Indian cinema affects the way you view your own body or appearance?
15. Have you ever felt your self-esteem change—positively or negatively—after watching certain films? If so, how

### ***Sample and Sampling Technique***

Sample for the present study consisted of youth aged 15-25 years. This age range was selected to capture the perspectives of individuals in a developmental stage, (spanning late adolescence to early adulthood) where media, such as Indian cinema, significantly influences attitudes, aspirations, and identity formation. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect the information from the participants based on their regular engagement with Indian films, ensuring relevance to the research focus.

### ***Inclusion Criteria:***

Participants should meet the following criteria to participate in the present study-

1. Indian youth aged 15–25 years who engage with Indian cinema at least once a month.
2. Participants must ensure deep familiarity with the content they watch on the big screen or on OTT.
3. The participants must reside in India to have a background with respect to findings within the socio-cultural framework.
4. Participants must be able to express their thoughts clearly in any language (English/Hindi).
5. They should represent diverse regions, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds, with exposure to varied film genres (e.g., drama, action, romance).

### ***Exclusion Criteria:***

1. Participants who are unable to connect films to personal experiences.
2. Participants employed in the film industry (e.g., actors, directors) to prevent professional bias.

### ***Research Approach***

Phenomenology and Narrative Research Approaches were employed in the present study. Phenomenology explores the lived experiences and essence of participants' perspectives, while Narrative Research approach examines personal stories to understand meaning-making. Both approaches are elaborated subsequently, detailing their methodologies, applications, and contributions to investigating the topic comprehensively and with depth.

### ***Procedure***

In the present study, one-on-one interviews were conducted in a setting comfortable for participants (e.g., their homes, community spaces, or online via video calls), lasting 30–60 minutes each. The researcher adopted a conversational tone to build rapport, fostering an environment where youth felt safe sharing personal reflections and stories. Interviews began with broad questions to ease participants into the discussion, progressing to more specific prompts. Audio recordings were made with consent to ensure accuracy, supplemented by brief field notes on non-verbal cues (e.g., tone, pauses) that enriched narrative context. Participants were encouraged to speak in their preferred language, with translation arranged if needed.

### ***Data Analysis***

To analyse the qualitative information, the researcher used the thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006). The analysis was conducted in six main phases. In the first phase of the thematic analysis, the researcher listened to the audio recordings repeatedly to familiarize herself with the nature of the data. This process helped the researcher develop an initial understanding of the patterns of issues and meanings in the data. Afterwards, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and thoroughly checked the transcripts for accuracy. The researcher then read the transcripts multiple times to further enhance her understanding of the data.

In the second phase, the researcher generated initial codes (i.e. reducing the data into small chunks) by organizing data in a meaningful and systematic way. This was done manually by using the highlighter pens.

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In the third phase, the researcher searched for themes. In this phase, the codes were sorted and grouped together in order to identify higher-level patterns and broader themes.

In the fourth phase, the researcher reviewed themes. In the fifth phase, the researcher defined the themes.

In the sixth and last phase, the researcher described the themes using verbatim.

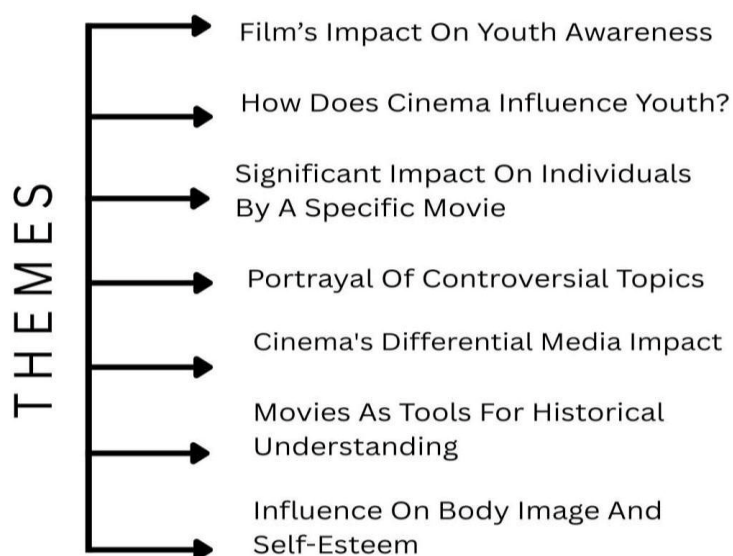
### ***Ethical Issues***

Before the commencement of the present study, researcher took written informed consent from each participant. Also, parental consent was taken from those whose age was under 18. Participants were ensured that their participation was voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study anytime. Invasive questions were avoided in order to respect the participant's cultural backgrounds. Before the collection of information related to the present study, participants were briefed about the nature of the study and it was ensured that all data remained confidential.

### ***Findings***

The data obtained from the interviews were analysed according to the guidelines for Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for “*identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identified themes in the data represent meaningful responses that provide important insights regarding the research questions. The researcher collected data using a semi-structured interview. During the interviews, a total of 15 open-ended questions were asked. The data collection took place in a confidential, comfortable, and safe environment. All the participants were briefed about the nature of the study and written informed consent was obtained from them. The identified themes or patterns in the data represent meaningful responses that provide important insights regarding the research questions.

## **EMERGED THEMES**



### **THEME 1: FILM'S IMPACT ON YOUTH AWARENESS**

Films are a powerful tool for raising awareness, connecting with wide audiences through theatres and streaming platforms like OTT services. They bring attention to social issues, spark conversations, and push for change by tackling topics often ignored or considered

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taboo. For example, therapy, though vital for personal growth and emotional health, is rarely discussed openly in many cultures. Movies like *English Vinglish* show how learning new skills, like learning a new language (English – in this context), can empower individuals, particularly women, by building confidence and independence in an inspiring way. Similarly, *Pad Man* boldly addresses menstruation and female hygiene, breaking the silence around these critical issues. *Participant N (20 year old, female)* stated that “*I was happy to watch Pad Man movie because it led to force people especially in schools to talk and educate about menstruation to both boys and girls.*”

Cinema also sheds light on struggles like homophobia and the fight for LGBTQ+ acceptance, offering viewers a glimpse into the lives of marginalized communities. These stories foster empathy and understanding, encouraging audiences to rethink biases. Additionally, films play a key role in promoting women's empowerment, especially in rural areas where traditional gender roles often limit opportunities. *Lapata Ladies*, for instance, portrays rural life authentically, prompting discussions about cultural practices and societal expectations. In urban settings, films highlight that empowerment means freedom to choose one's path—whether as a homemaker or pursuing education—without external pressure. *Participant C (25 year old, male)* stated that “*I watched Lapata Ladies in theatre with friends and asked my sister to watch the movie with me again, she is 12 years old. She had so many questions like – why do the women have their faces covered with a chunni (pallu), why is their style of cooking different than ours, etc. what I mean to say is – seeing my sister have so many questions made me realise that children of her age group have never seen rural lifestyle of India and the movie Lapata Ladies helped them educate about it*”

### **THEME 2: HOW DOES CINEMA INFLUENCE YOUTH?**

Movies and OTT platforms significantly shape the behavior and perspectives of young individuals during their influential years. These platforms influence how youths perceive critical issues such as fraud, substance abuse, violence, sexual orientation, gender interactions, smoking, drinking, and gender roles. The narratives they engage with often mould their attitudes, encouraging them to adopt behaviors and mind-sets reflected on screen. For instance, films portraying sensitivity can inspire kinder, more inclusive attitudes, while those portraying reckless behavior may subtly prompt similar choices.

A key aspect of this influence is the admiration young individuals develop for their favourite actors. They often identify with these celebrities, emulating both their on-screen characters and off-screen personas. This identification impacts their thought processes, as they consciously or unconsciously mirror the behaviors and attitudes of these figures. The characters and stories they follow serve as templates, guiding their choices and interactions. *Participant E (17 year old, male)* stated that “*The biographical film Sanju left a lasting impression on me, because; although I knew that drugs are bad in general but I never really gave a thought about it but the film demonstrated the destructive consequences of drug addiction—not only for individual's own future but also for their family, career, and health.*”

Beyond entertainment, movies and OTT platforms act as powerful lenses through which young people view the world. The moral, emotional, and social lessons embedded in these narratives leave lasting imprints on their developing minds. This phenomenon highlights the role of media as subtle architects of youth behavior, shaping their attitudes and decisions during a critical phase of personal development. As such, the content young people consume on these platforms plays a pivotal role in their growth, influencing how they navigate

relationships, societal norms, and their own identities. *Participant H* (19 years old, male) "I started going to the gym regularly after watching Hrithik Roshan in *War*. His fitness level really inspired me to take care of my health and look more confident."

### **THEME 3: SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS BY A SPECIFIC MOVIE**

Indian cinema significantly influences youth by addressing critical social issues, shaping their perspectives, and sparking meaningful discussions. *Chhichhore* explores college life, friendship, and academic pressure, urging youth to value effort over outcomes. For young Indian men, it promotes resilience, emotional vulnerability, and supportive bonds, challenging failure stigma. *Participant P* (16 years old, female) "After watching *Chhichhore*, I realised that I had been putting too much pressure on myself to succeed in everything. The film made me understand the importance of enjoying the journey, not just the result. It actually helped me deal with my anxiety before board exams." It encourages young adults to normalize conversations about periods, recognizing the need to break the silence surrounding this issue. Similarly, *The Kashmir Files* sheds light on the unspoken history of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus, with its powerful phrase "Raliv, Tsaliv ya Galiv" highlighting the genocide's harsh realities. This film resonates deeply, stirring controversy and prompting youth to reflect on historical injustices.

*Thappad* confronts domestic violence and emotional abuse, emphasizing that even minor acts are unacceptable. Its impactful dialogue sparks open discussions, urging youth to actively oppose such behaviors and acknowledge their seriousness. *Participant A* (22 year old, female) stated that "When I saw the movie it left a deep impact on me because I had never thought of domestic violence in such a way that even such small acts of violence can be considered as disrespect. The line " 'Just a slap' – par nahi maar sakta" lingered in my mind forcing me to think about it on a deeper level. It might also have made me motivated me to pursue law"

*Guzaarish* introduces euthanasia, presenting it as a dignified personal choice within legal and medical frameworks. This prompts young viewers to reflect on respecting individual autonomy and the ethical implications of such decisions. *Participant D* (24 year old, male) stated that "I watched the movie – *Guzaarish*, because I am a huge fan of Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Hrithik Roshan is my favourite actor but the one thing which was unexpected was that I got to learn about something very new to me that is the existence and the concept of euthanasia and to be honest I was angry as to why is it not legal in India – for patients to end their life with respect with proper medical process"

*Piku* explores the aging process of parents, highlighting the importance of emotional, physical, and social support beyond financial help. *Participant N* (22 years old, female) stated that "After watching *Piku*, I started seeing my parents differently—it made me more patient and caring, especially toward their health issues and everyday struggles. It really touched me and changed the way I think about family responsibilities." It encourages youth to foster open communication with their parents, valuing mutual understanding. Collectively, these films act as catalysts for change, raising awareness, challenging norms, and inspiring youth to engage with societal issues. By addressing menstruation, historical events, domestic violence, euthanasia, and familial responsibilities, Indian cinema shapes young minds, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and a commitment to social progress.

#### **THEME 4: PORTRAYAL OF CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS**

Films significantly influence society, particularly young audiences, by sparking awareness and dialogue on critical issues. Movies like *Badhai Ho* challenge societal norms by addressing old-age pregnancy, encouraging discussions on topics often ignored. Similarly, *The Kashmir Files* evokes strong emotions and patriotism but raises concerns about its one-sided narrative, prompting youth to seek balanced perspectives. Documentaries such as *House of Secrets* and *Indian Predator: Raja Kolander Cannibalism Case*, confront viewers with ugly realities, fostering honest conversations about difficult Participants.

*Participant I (21 years old, female) stated that "Before watching the documentary on the Burari incident. I had only heard the name of the incident, but the documentary covered so many deep rooted reasons and theories regarding the same". The series Leila shows a future where a strict government controls people's lives, separates religions, and punishes anyone who breaks the rules. The controversy started because some people felt it showed Hindus in a bad light and was unfair to Indian culture, in technical language - Participant F (23 year old, female) stated that "When I watched Leila, I felt deeply uncomfortable. It painted a dark, oppressive future, but what really upset me was how some parts seemed to target Hindu traditions in a very negative light. It felt like my faith was being portrayed as something extreme or dangerous, and that didn't sit right with me. I understand it's fiction, but there should be a line between creative freedom and hurting religious sentiments."*

The government plays a crucial role in this dynamic, regulating film accessibility to balance creative freedom with social stability, especially when controversial narratives risk public backlash (Raj, 2024). *Participant L (22 years old, male) stated that "When Tandav released, I was shocked by how the government stepped in—summoning Amazon officials, demanding edits, and even prompting FIRs—because a few scenes were seen as disrespecting Hindu gods. It felt like creative freedom was under pressure."* By shaping which stories reach audiences, it influences the scope of these discussions. For youth, these films are more than entertainment—they are catalysts for critical thinking and social consciousness. Cinema inspires young people to think about their part in solving social problems, sparking hope and ideas for change.

#### **THEME 5: CINEMA'S DIFFERENTIAL MEDIA IMPACT**

Indian cinema, including Bollywood and vibrant regional industries, has long been a foundation of storytelling with unmatched reach across India. Its influence, amplified by the rise of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, surpasses traditional media like print, radio, and television, due to its huge visual and emotional appeal. Unlike print media, which requires literacy, or radio, limited by its audio-only format, cinema transcends linguistic and geographical barriers, engaging diverse audiences through spectacle-driven narratives, star power, and cultural resonance.

*Participant E (19 year old, female) stated that "Although I have read about topics like mental health, caste discrimination and even unreality in the field of sports, watching movies like Dear Zindagi, Article 15 or Dangal, captivated my attention to watch these topics more seriously"* The advent of OTT platforms has revolutionized accessibility, offering on-demand content that caters to rural and global audiences through multilingual subtitles and dubbing, unlike television's rigid schedules. This change has made cinema more open, letting unique and independent filmmakers succeed alongside big theatre movies, challenging the control that mainstream films used to have.

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While books demand intellectual effort and news prioritizes factual brevity, cinema intertwines entertainment with subtle education, embedding cultural narratives rooted in mythology and family values. Iconic stars like Shah Rukh Khan and Rajinikanth amplify this influence, embodying aspirational figures that resonate beyond the subtler authority of authors or news anchors. *Participant C (17 year old, male)* stated that “*They’re not just actors; they’re legends we want to follow.*” The linguistic diversity of regional cinemas (Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali) further enhances its reach, addressing India’s cultural mosaic in ways standardized media cannot. *Participant C (23 year old, female)* stated that “*A film in my language hits differently— it’s personal.*” With its feature-length format and escapist allure, Indian cinema remains a dynamic force in shaping perceptions, aspirations, and social discourse.

### **THEME 6: MOVIES AS TOOLS FOR HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Movies are powerful tools for understanding India’s historical events, offering both advantages and challenges in shaping youth perceptions. They play a significant role in preserving historical awareness and promoting national identity through compelling visuals and narratives.

Historical films, such as *LOC - Kargil* and *Gunjan Saxena*, introduce audiences to events like the Kargil War and real-life figures like Gunjan Saxena, an Indian Air Force officer. Historical films make history accessible and engaging for those who may not study it through traditional academic sources. *Participant K (20 year old, female)* stated that “*I want to learn about history but I don’t like to read books. I prefer audio books but since movies have started picking historic topics it has helped me learn so much because they portray it with the help of eye catching visuals.*” By presenting history in an emotionally engaging format, cinema bridges the gap for individuals who lack enthusiasm for conventional historical texts, imparting knowledge in an approachable way.

However, filmmakers must balance authenticity, representation, and emotional engagement while avoiding over-simplification. Historical films can sometimes prioritize dramatic appeal over factual accuracy, which risks misrepresenting events. Despite this, films remain vital in educating audiences about the nation’s values and historical fabric, serving as cautionary stories to prevent past mistakes. Movies generate awareness about various historic events with the help of eye catching visuals, *Participant M (24 year old, male)* stated that “*My friend lacked knowledge about the Gandhar Riots which was quite unfortunate but the movie *The Sabarmati Report* shed light on the topic Gandhar Riots, an event that was previously unfamiliar to many. So, in my opinion historic films serve as powerful conduits for historical knowledge, ensuring that significant past events reach a wider audience.*” To maximize their educational value, viewers should approach historical films critically, cross-referencing them with academic sources for a comprehensive understanding. Indian cinema’s ability to blend accessibility with historical narratives makes it a significant medium for fostering awareness, but its limitations highlight the need for careful consumption to ensure a balanced and accurate grasp of the past.

### **THEME 7: INFLUENCE ON BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM**

Movies significantly influence societal views on body image and self-esteem, shaping perceptions of beauty and self-worth, particularly among young audiences. Historically, films have often promoted narrow beauty standards, emphasizing thin, skinny bodies as the ideal body type, which has led some individuals to adopt unhealthy behaviors like extreme dieting and unrealistic fitness regimens/goals - to meet these expectations. Such portrayals

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have contributed to issues like eating disorders, unhealthy eating habits and, starving themselves. Individuals, especially youth, feels pressured to meet their idealized body images as seen on the big screen.

*Participant E (25 year old, female) stated that “Bollywood and OTT platforms have long portrayed unrealistic beauty standards, promoting the idea of size-zero figures and flawless skin which in my opinion have had a negative impact on individual’s self-esteem and not even loving their bodies in some cases. However, in recent years, I have seen a shift toward body positivity and self-acceptance in cinema. Films like Dum Laga Ke Haisha challenged social norms of a plus-sized female lead which was quite empowering, while Chhapaak a real life story of acid attack survivor Laxmi Agawal broke the stereotype of flawless skin, bringing attention to the deeper aspects of self-worth.”*

However, recent shifts in cinema have begun to challenge these norms, promoting body positivity and self-acceptance. Films like *Chhapaak* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* showcase characters with diverse body types and natural imperfections, emphasizing confidence and inner worth over physical appearance. This evolution encourages audiences to embrace their unique identities, fostering greater self-esteem and empowerment. By moving away from unattainable beauty standards, Bollywood is helping redefine societal ideals, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in body representation.

This shift reflects a broader societal movement toward accepting varied body types and valuing self-worth beyond physical looks. As films continue to portray realistic and diverse characters, they play a vital role in building a more inclusive society. However, viewers should critically engage with media to avoid internalizing outdated ideals. Bollywood’s growing focus on body positivity is reshaping perceptions, encouraging individuals to develop confidence and fostering a culture of self-acceptance.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored how Indian cinema influences the perspectives of youth aged 15–25, revealing its significant role beyond entertainment. Using thematic analysis, seven key themes were developed from interviews with 15 participants, showing cinema’s impact on awareness, behavior, and identity. For instance, films like *Dear Zindagi* encouraged youth to seek therapy, breaking mental health taboos, while *Pad Man* sparked conversations about menstruation, promoting gender awareness. Participants also shared how movies like *Sanju* shaped their views on substance abuse, highlighting cinema’s ability to influence behavior through relatable narratives. Additionally, *The Kashmir Files* connected youth to historical events, but its one-sided portrayal raised concerns about unity among different communities, showing the need for balanced storytelling.

Cinema also redefined self-esteem, with films like *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* promoting body positivity, helping youth embrace diverse beauty standards. The shift to OTT platforms further amplified this influence, offering accessible, diverse content that resonates across urban and rural contexts. However, the study noted challenges, such as the risk of reinforcing stereotypes or creating unrealistic expectations, as seen in romanticized portrayals affecting relationships. Participants like Participant G (25 years old, male) highlighted how admiration for actors like Ranbir Kapoor sometimes led to justifying problematic behaviors, underscoring the need for critical media literacy.

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These findings align with prior research, such as (Balabantaray 2020), which noted cinema's role in cultural shifts, and (Khattri & Singh., 2021), which emphasized its power to raise social awareness. The study suggests that while Indian cinema inspires and educates, its influence must be guided responsibly. Filmmakers should prioritize authentic narratives, and educators should promote media literacy to help youth engage critically. This research highlights cinema's transformative potential, offering insights for future studies.

### *Limitations of the Present Study*

1. The study only included a small group, so its findings might not reflect the diverse perspectives of all Indian youth.
2. It's tough to isolate cinema's influence on youth since social media, friends, and family also shape their views.
3. Some young people were shy, culturally reserved, or uninterested, making it hard to get open and honest responses.

## CONCLUSION

Indian cinema transcends entertainment, acting as a powerful force in shaping the perspectives, beliefs, and aspirations of youth aged 15 to 25. According to the study "Beyond Entertainment: The Impact of Indian Cinema on Youth's Perspective," films serve as both a mirror reflecting societal realities and a gateway to new ideas, influencing how young people view themselves, their society, and their future. By showing strong narratives, cinema sparks awareness, challenges taboos, and fosters empathy, encouraging youth to question outdated norms and embrace progressive values. For instance, films addressing menstruation and LGBTQ+ acceptance have prompted discussions on stigmatized topics, inspiring viewers to advocate for change and social justice.

Stories highlighting personal growth and creatively motivate youth to pursue careers of their interests and make healthier life choices, while stories exploring complex ethical issues like Euthanasia spark critical thinking. Cultural, films strengthen identity and pride by connecting youth to their heritage, while also challenging traditional gender roles, empowering young women to accomplish their ambitions fearlessly. Historical and social justice-focused movies, develop understanding of India's past and present, while balancing cinematic portrayals and reality.

The onset of OTT platforms like Netflix and Prime Video has amplified cinema's reach, making diverse stories accessible to both urban and rural youth and also globally. This accessibility enhances its influence, prompting reflection on issues like rural life and gender dynamics. Additionally, cinema promotes self-worth and mental health by showcasing body positivity and reducing therapy stigma. Ultimately, Indian cinema empowers youth by fostering critical thinking, emotional growth, and cultural awareness, serving as a catalyst for awareness in the society, ability to educate, inspire, and reflect societal dynamics ensures its profound impact on shaping India's youth.

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