

Heroes, Villains, and the Divine: Shifting Portrayals of Myth in Contemporary Indian Films

Piyush Kumar,[†] Milan Chauhan,^{†*} Ajeet Singh,[†] and Swasti Mishra[†]

Abstract

Action films have received immense popularity, both critically and commercially. They have reshaped the portrayal of heroes in contemporary times. This epic narrative often elevates the classic action hero to a mythological figure. Such transformations reflect not only creative innovation but also deeper archetypal patterns that shape the mythic foundations of these stories. This study argues that the heroes evolve from traditional mythic ideals to a “Devilish” archetype, drawing on Joseph Campbell’s (2004) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Moreover, this shift embodies changing storytelling conventions and societal beliefs. The concept of “mythic” production creates a unique connection between the film and the audience, fostering deeper engagement. Focusing on five films—K.G.F. (2018), Lucifer (2019), Kantara (2022), Jawan (2023), and Salaar (2023)—this analysis identifies three key “contact zones”: Godly, Societal, and Individual. These intersections underscore each film’s primary themes, often perpetuating discussions on masculinity, violence, and regional identity, sometimes at the expense of feminist perspectives. This paper sheds light on how mythic portrayals of action heroes reflect societal values and tensions, especially around gender and cultural identity in a global context.

Keywords: Devilish Hero; Mythmaking; Contact Zone; Pan-Indian Cinema; Action Films; India

[†] Department of Humanistic Studies, Indian Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

* Corresponding Author Email: milan Chauhan.rs.hss19@itbhu.ac.in

©2026 by Kumar et al. is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Introduction

Indian Cinema generally entails the traditionally well-known Bollywood (films in the 'Hindi' language) and other 'woods' in different local languages. 'Raja Harishchandra' (1913) was the first Indian film focusing on the mythological tale of the King. Between 1913 and 1969, Indian cinema saw a flourishing of films centred on mythological themes. However, in the post-independence era, the popularity of mythological films declined significantly in the Hindi film industry (Dwyer, 2015). Linda Hemphill (2009) attributes this decline to several factors, including creative exhaustion of mythological content, a shift in the political climate driven by modernisation, and changing public perceptions regarding the suitability of actors for such roles. Nonetheless, there has been a resurgence of interest in mythological narratives in the past two decades. Contemporary filmmakers have sought to reimagine these tales, not only through grand epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata but also by exploring regional myths and legends in films such as *Naksha* (2007), *Drona* (2008), *Raavan* (2010), *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015), *Tumbbad* (2018), *Kantara* (2022), *Brahmastra* (2022) and the recently released *Kalki 2898 AD* (2024). Alongside this, the history of Pan-Indian cinema is generally conceived to start with S.S. Rajamouli's commercially successful 2015 film '*Baahubali: The Beginning*' (Bhaskar, 2022; Srinivas, 2022). While *Enthiran* (dubbed in Hindi as '*Robot*') in 2010 set the stage for the South Indian film industry to enter the Hindi-speaking regions in the 21st Century, it was the release of *K.G.F.* (Kannada, 2018), *Lucifer* (Malayalam, 2019), and *Pushpa* (Telugu, 2021) that truly advanced the industry's integration into the broader Indian cinematic landscape.

"Film appeals because of its central subject (man narcissistically showing man to man-loving man) and the world is viewed from his position" (Bacon, 1972, p. 67). Action films often portray a man's benevolence in constructing heroic identities. In contemporary media, real and fictional figures, such as Pablo Escobar, are

mythologised as righteous criminals who fight corrupt systems and earn the admiration of oppressed communities (Pobutsky, 2013). This mythification reflects a form of 'Cultural Renaissance' in which criminals are deified. Using the concept of the 'contact zone' (Kim, 2024, p. 157), this paper examines the tension between the 'devilish' hero and the system. Joseph Campbell's framework from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* informs the analysis of myth-making and narrative strategies in select Indian films. His psychoanalytic and archetypal model offers insights into how these heroes evolve and gain financial and cultural success (Butchart, 2019). Further, we can also understand the journey of a protagonist in a tale from a nobody to a Hero. While Otto Rank's (2015) *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* illuminates the formative conditions of the hero before his journey begins, particularly familial relationships, parental absence, and questions of legitimacy, Campbell's (2004) framework of the Hero's journey analyses the hero's transformative quest. These theories offer a comprehensive account of both the hero's origins and subsequent development. However, the contemporary South Asian Devilish Hero departs from these classical models in significant ways. Rather than progressing from an extraordinary birth toward moral fulfilment, this figure emerges from fractured familial structures and unresolved parental conflicts that continue to shape his actions throughout the narrative. Consequently, the Devilish Hero simultaneously draws upon and mutates Rank's (2015) emphasis on heroic origins and Campbell's (2004) model of heroic transformation. They produce a protagonist whose journey is marked not by ethical transcendence but by moral ambiguity, vengeance, and contested forms of justice.

The protagonists embody 'Glocal' identities, rooted in local contexts but shaped by global influences, and justify their authority through religious or moral legitimacy. Their mythic journeys exceed rational logic, returning instead to 'mythos' (Fowler, 2011, p. 45). This glorified myth-making often rationalises violence enacted

by the hero, especially during 'peak oppression', depicted through the suffering of vulnerable bodies like women, children, and the elderly. These narratives suggest that defeating evil may require becoming it. This study thus interrogates how mythification transforms the traditional benevolent hero into a 'devilish hero' and which socio-political and cinematic mechanisms enable audiences to accept the heroes' morally ambiguous means of administering justice. This study adopts a qualitative approach, combining narrative analysis and visual semiotics. While narrative analysis examines plot structures and characterisation, visual semiotics interpret symbolic imagery and cinematic elements to understand how meanings of heroism are constructed.

The study of myths and cinema has grown substantially, with increasing scholarly attention to the evolving nature of hero-making and heroic figures. J.C. Lyden (2003), in *Film as Religion*, argues that films function as contemporary mythmakers, constructing narratives that mirror traditional religious myths by elevating film stars to quasi-divine status. These cinematic texts entertain and shape moral frameworks, akin to religious doctrines. Rachel Dwyer (2006), in her work on mythological cinema, contends that the direct embodiment of divine figures in human form marks the genre. Unlike devotional cinema, which centres on human devotees in historical contexts, mythological films portray miraculous events directly, thereby removing them from the social realm and placing them in the realm of myth. In her dissertation, Maria Marques (2016) charts the shift in the hero archetype, observing the increasingly blurred boundaries between heroes, anti-heroes, and villains. Her analysis of Walter White from *Breaking Bad* exemplifies how such complex characters reflect contemporary anxieties and moral ambiguity. Kinsella et al. (2015) have categorised hero and villain schemas, yet Eden et al. (2017) suggest that scholarship must pay more attention to the grey areas between these poles. Moreover, traditional mythic narratives often gloss over the darker aspects of heroic figures. As Nickerson (1998) points out, audiences frequently seek confirmation of existing beliefs, resisting

narratives that challenge conventional moral binaries.

In the contemporary Indian cinematic landscape, a new wave of pan-Indian films, released in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu, has emerged. Earlier confined to regional circuits or dubbed releases, these films now target broader national audiences. Typically action-driven, these stories centre on a righteous male protagonist who transforms society. Female characters, however, are frequently reduced to emotional supports or aesthetic figures, serving as eye candy rather than agents of change, and viewed from "the eyes of the main male protagonist" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 349). Indian cinema has been used synonymously with Bollywood, and other cinemas were seen as a minor addition to its oeuvre. The rise of Pan-Indian success, especially in Northern India, is a phenomenon that is worth analysing. Kusuma and Kumar (2024) correlate this success with the rise of digital platforms, Over-The-Top (OTT) services, and increased investments in these industries. Further, the nationalistic upsurge in these movies is conflated with the 'national' appeal to the audience (Kusuma & Kumar, 2024, p. 23). However, these strategies are evident in hindsight, and what was done during the upsurge of these films is an interesting arena that cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of this paper. The central aspect of this paper deals with their archetypal and mythic associations and the worldview the characters engage with. Do they enforce a violent view of the world, while also keeping women in the background? Or do they present a just means of revenge against evildoers (while also engaging in evil acts)?

These films convey a powerful message urging the public to challenge and correct a failing system, often framed within a strong patriotic narrative. Across the selected films, a similar structure emerges: the call for societal change is only heeded when the protagonist performs extraordinary, often violent feats, marking the beginning of their myth-making journey. The creation of such heroes reflects cultural values, fears, and desires, offering insight into collective

worldviews. Though cinematic heroes may seem distant from real life, they mirror deep social undercurrents. Studies have linked violent media to aggressive behaviour (Dahl & DellaVigna, 2009), with some suggesting these effects stem from either catharsis or short-term emotional responses (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). Following Aristotle's model of catharsis, these films depict injustice and offer violent resolutions through mythic heroes, thereby rendering their actions morally justified. The selected films, drawn from diverse regional industries, are unified by key characteristics such as mythological allusions, morally ambiguous protagonists, and female characters, as well as by the mapping of their journeys, which together constitute the criteria for their inclusion in this study.

Rationale for Selecting Movies

These films span multiple linguistic and regional industries yet share a pan-Indian appeal and a thematic convergence on heroism born from trauma, betrayal, and systemic failure. The protagonists in these narratives do not simply restore justice; they subvert institutional authority, challenge the law, and emerge as mythic redeemers shaped by ritual, myth, and violence. This turn in Indian cinema reflects post-liberalisation anxieties, in which disenchantment with state structures fuels a longing for a heroic masculinity rooted in force and moral ambiguity. The selected films draw on diverse cultural registers: *Kantara* evokes local ritual traditions, *Lucifer* blends Biblical allegory with political corruption, *Salaar* and *K.G.F.* romanticise outlaw justice within class conflicts, and *Jawan* presents a vigilante figure addressing social injustice through spectacle and duplicity. Another rationale is the recurrent motif of gender asymmetries. Women are largely relegated to symbolic or ornamental roles, as moral anchors, lovers, or sacrificial figures, while their agency is muted or erased. The study addresses this by extending feminist critique to analyse how the rise of the devilish hero depends on the subordination or absence of powerful female characters. The chosen films, therefore, serve as

critical texts for theorising this evolving hero type while interrogating the patriarchal structures that sustain him, making them ideal for a dual-layered analysis of masculinity and gender politics in Indian popular cinema.

Jawan (2023) is a Hindi-language action-thriller that intertwines a father-son revenge saga with the stories of six women, whose personal traumas motivate the protagonists' vigilantism. Framed against the backdrop of national corruption and systemic failures, the film blends emotional narrative with political commentary. *K.G.F. (2018)*, a Kannada-language film, depicts the story of Rocky, a man who rises from poverty to rule the criminal underworld of the Kolar Gold Fields. The film portrays his ruthless ascent to power, underscoring themes of ambition, violence, and rebellion against systemic oppression. *Lucifer* (2019), in Malayalam, revolves around Stephen Nedumbally, a charismatic figure entangled in political conspiracies following the death of a prominent leader. The narrative examines loyalty, manipulation, and the interplay of politics and crime, with undertones of messianic heroism. *Kantara* (2022) fuses folklore and mysticism, portraying the tension between indigenous beliefs and modern state power. The protagonist, caught between tradition and rebellion, channels ritual energy to protect his community, highlighting themes of cultural identity and ecological conflict. *Salaar* (2023), a Telugu-language action film, features Prabhas in a brooding role that explores themes of vengeance, loyalty, and violent justice. Though plot specifics remain sparse, the film, like *K.G.F.*, builds a mythic narrative around a solitary, morally ambiguous warrior navigating a brutal socio-political landscape.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first part outlines the notion of myth and its use in Indian film. This section explores how certain films bring the tension between global and local storytelling to life. It shows how regional stories are gaining prominence, how the local setting becomes a powerful backdrop for struggles over authority and identity, and how these narratives shape our understanding of who belongs and

who is seen as the outsider. The following section looks at how a turbulent world plagued by evil and corrupt forces is portrayed in a contact zone characterised by unequal power distribution, marginalised populations being oppressed, and societal stratification based on class and caste. This environment encourages the rise of omnipotent, ethically dubious heroes whose use of force to exact revenge and impart justice is legitimised in both popular culture and film discourse. The last section explores the women's representation as visual objects in the cinematic universe.

Cinema and Myth-Making Agents

In the evolution of human culture, stories and myths about divine figures and superhuman beings have shaped our understanding of reality and fostered a sense of unity. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien introduced the concept of "mythopoeia," or mythmaking, which he saw as an essential human activity stemming from our creativity and imagination. He argued that myths are more than mere entertainment; they encapsulate universal ideas and truths that resonate across different ages and backgrounds, offering insights into life's moral and spiritual dimensions (Tolkien et al., 2008). Myth-building can be seen as creating a fictionalised aura around the characters, elevating them from average humans to demigods, to nourish human perceptions of reality through symbols. In Indian cinema, myth-making entails developing storylines that incorporate folklore, cultural narratives, and ancient mythology to create contemporary cinematic experiences.

Nevertheless, cinema, with its capacity to weave powerful visuals with emotionally dense narratives, can render the complex politics of historical reality manageable by transmuting them into myths that can be easily and effectively circulated within the economy of political discourse (Kulkarni, 2023). This method frequently combines epic conflicts between good and evil, advocating moral lessons and larger-than-life characters with dramatic narration and striking imagery. The public believes that the misconduct portrayed in movies reflects the problems they encounter in

real life. These stories frequently include a backdrop of themes, including medical dishonesty, corruption, farmer suicides, teenage drug issues, and a spiritual crisis. At first, these issues are widespread, and strong powers impose a collective muteness that keeps everyone silent. These films revolve around militarised zones where hypermasculine individuals communicate with one another through violence. In this context, mythification refers to the fusion of the historical past with the turbulent and corrupt present.

'Glocal' and global themes are contrasted in contemporary Indian cinema, where global narratives often feature superhuman heroes who protect the universe from evil and corrupt forces. For example, characters from Marvel and DC comics reinforce Eurocentric and White supremacist ideologies. In contrast, 'glocal' stories centre on heroes who possess attributes of a deity but are situated in a particular area or country. This strategy emphasises the value of regional and smaller-scale tales, contrasting the universal and established global storylines. Here, Raja Rao's concept of *Sthala-Purana*, or legendary history, became significant, in which local narratives are presented as folklore (Rao, 1967). These narratives intertwine the past with the present by linking gods or godlike figures to specific locations or regions, reflecting the contemporary socio-political landscape of the area or country. These narratives/stories are internalised and transmitted from one generation to another through oral narratives, shaping contemporary reality. These tales present a hero in a setting that is essentially 'Glocal,' and the place's fate is intertwined with the protagonist's. Understanding legendary heroes in the context of a particular place provides a clearer perspective on the locations presented in the text. Selected movies situate these narratives in localised settings. *Kantara* is set in Keradi, a coastal region in Karnataka, and is about a ritual called *Bhoota Kola* (a ritual dance held in honour of local deities in the Tulu Adivasi tradition). *K.G.F.* and *Salaar* featured fictional yet localised settings, such as Kolar and Khansaar. The creation of fictionalised places establishes the relevance of the modern re-

making of the Hero and his importance in that setting, like regional deities in the form of protectors/saviours such as Guliga, Kateramma, and Kaali Maa (deities presented in the respective films). Within a few of these narratives, there is a separation between the Hellish landscape of abundance and the other influential regions (usually Mumbai/Bombay in *K.G.F.*, *Jawan*, and *Lucifer*).

Power is exerted through a central position in a specific place called a 'place of power' (Gaiman, 2011, p. 129). Borrowing this terminology from the novel *American gods* by Neil Gaiman provides insight into the description and functioning of these spaces. Kolar in *K.G.F.*, Nedumpally in *Lucifer*, Khansaar in *Salaar*, Keradi jungle in *Kantara*, and the entirety of India in *Jawan* are conceptualised as places of power. They function as the point of diffusion where abundance and peak oppression coincide. Alongside these spaces, Mumbai (Bombay) serves as an anachronistic site where modernity is infused with crime. Underworld activities were historically rampant in Mumbai in the latter half of the 20th Century. Thus, Mumbai is conceptualised as a space that could ensure rapid financial advancement. The shoreline and shores of the city function as a trade route from where an unlimited supply of illegal goods can be procured and distributed. Despite this, on a hierarchical scale, Mumbai is presented only as a stepping stone and as a secondary site to the central 'place of power' in the narrative. In *K.G.F.* and *Lucifer*, Mumbai, especially *Dharavi* (a place in Mumbai whose association with various crime lords still defines it), is depicted as a clustered, unregulated, and despotism-ridden place where the protagonist eventually returns to assert his dominance at the end of the film. Moreover, "Cliticization" (Fromkin, 2000, p. 70), such as 'a' and 'the' can be utilised to understand the hero's place. In the end, is he 'a hero' and a common man? Or is his identity that of 'the' mythic hero?

Through oral storytelling, an image is inculcated in the psyche of the masses. Folk stories are embedded in a community's psyche and reinforce a hope for a better tomorrow. In these movies, the storyteller (the narrative voice and a

character who narrates the hero's glorious past) is tasked with reviving the mythic environment and heroic figures through his powerful voice and knowledge, associating these characters with saviours or local mythic figures. 'Truth-value' is ingrained through the usage of eye-witness testimony. Understanding the language used by a narrator can imply the 'reliability' present in a narrative. Its legitimacy is enshrined through the acceptance by the general populace. The antagonist establishes his rule through force and erects an emblem or an effigy, as shown in *Bahubali* and *K.G.F.* In contrast, the mythic hero's legitimacy is symbolised through folk narratives. In *Jawan*, the opening sequence shows the Chinese troops infiltrating into North-Eastern Indian territory. Here, the troops carry out an annihilation sequence on the villagers, and the village priest prays to the deity to protect them. The village priest prays to God, '*Dikhana hoga ki aap ek murti nahi ho*' (You have to show that you are not a mere idol), and at his behest, the hero, Vikram Rathore, emerges to defend them, and they hail him as a 'Messiah.' Similar instances reverberate throughout the other films, but their tone may differ. On the contrary, in *K.G.F.*, an oral folktale is created out of the actual actions of 'Rocky,' and it inspires awe and reverence in the children who hear these tales. The narrator pits the people's helplessness in the face of tyranny against the revolution, whose seeds are sown by the hero. His prowess is determined by his unwavering fortitude to endure in spaces conventionally perceived as perilous or beyond ordinary engagement.

A destitute present is visualised to envision this, where the society is divided into two groups: the oppressed or marginalised and the controlling group, further highlighting the class and caste divides. *K.G.F.* and *Jawan* focus on the class divide, whereas *Kantara* focuses on the caste divide. *Lucifer*, on the other hand, focuses on the divide based on political ideology. In *K.G.F.*, the working (plebeian) people work without a sound and walk with their heads turned down. In *Kantara*, *Bhoota Kola* is a ritual outside the Hindu tradition that highlights the caste/class divide in society. The tribal/lower-class

population is not allowed to enter the house of the king and other higher-class people. They are asked to remain outside the door and speak in an honorary language, highlighting the oppression and dominance by elite groups. They are conceived of as masses whose individuality has been lost due to the control and power exerted upon them. An assertion of their individuality arises through their association with the hero. A folk tale works in much the same way. A novel reconceptualisation occurs, infusing listeners with a courageous outlook. Mystiques around the hero are built into these narratives. A confluence of repressive forces aligns together to suppress the people's individuality. Perceiving them as mere numbers or as misfits who possess a delinquent constitution forms a significant aspect of appropriation.

Distinguishing the 'Other' from the 'Self' can provide a latent hatred that is easily justified. Commonality is associated with poverty, powerlessness, a superstitious frame of mind, and a servile nature. A strong hand and an absolute evil nature are provided to the antagonist to bring them under control. The division between the antagonist and the protagonist is not absolute. They both can embody violence, but the antagonist's violence is for suppression, whereas the hero's violence paves the way for a successful revolution and the liberation of oppressed people. Further, the hero also enacts the role of the new 'Emperor.' According to Joseph Campbell (2004), the 'Hero' (mythic 'Hero' and movie 'hero'), while working as a King, can enforce his will, but still, it is conceived in a positive light. In this light, his violence is justified, and even his enslavement is seen with particular religious fervour. So, a mythic 'Hero' is being created on-screen. However, when we conceive the Hero as a King, an undercurrent of a demigod status and his 'devilish' aspect is also established.

Classificatory Model for Various Contact Zones

A classificatory model of contact zones is proposed to examine the conflictual relationships and power dynamics in physical spaces that drive the emergence of the Devilish

Hero. Mary Louise Pratt considers 'contact zone' a "term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 2007, p. 36). It is a space where two disparate cultures meet in a highly hegemonic manner, with one culture's worldview imposed on the other. Mary Louise Pratt (2007) borrows this theme from the concept of language contact in sociolinguistics. This concept forms the central tool for analysis in this paper. The contact zone here serves to understand the different conflict zones presented in the movie. Thus, this concept guides the analysis in this paper. In contrast to Mary Pratt, the contact zone here functions as a physical space where identities and power relations come into contact and contrast. The protagonist starts out in a wayward way and finds his subaltern identity in prominent spaces. The space primarily serves as a place where your identity must be 'asserted.' An inner belief in their righteousness is associated with these interlinkages in these 'contact zones.' He is destined to be great, and nothing else. 'Arētē' is a Greek conception that means distinction or fame, which can be discerned through the narrative's righteous call for violence (Nehamas, 2015, p. 278).

A 'contact zone' usually comprises various cultural groups, but the films chosen here to present an alternative 'worldview' that offers an interesting spin on mismatched power dynamics. The idea of contact zones is applied to investigate different discourses of power in the same physical and psychological area. The uneven power distribution is evident between the powerful and the powerless, and the protagonist bridges this gulf. We have structured these contact zones in a classificatory model with three distinct yet overlapping domains, but one perspective dominates and serves as the primary 'contact zone.' Godly, Societal, and Individual contact zones are reified in these films. To understand the narrative space, it is important to conceptualise the 'contact zone' as a mental landscape in which the Godly zone

deifies identity, the Societal zone asserts identity, and, thus, the Individual identity is cemented.

In the Godly framework, especially enacted in the movie *'Kantara,'* God's blissful world is contrasted with the greedy world of man. Godly bliss is the feeling that resonates with the aspect of 'Panjurli.' Panjurli is the benevolent side of the deity, visualised as a being whose touch "felt like a mother's love and a father's blessing." Guliga, on the other hand, is portrayed as a fierce and violent protector who upholds justice by punishing wrongdoers. Different facets of the divine image are introduced at the outset of the movie. The movie's main conflict arises from the King's descendants' attempts to retake their land, which contrasts with their earlier gift of the land to the people of *Kantara* as a gesture of devotion. Giving away your material possessions for Godly bliss is a prominent trope in films worldwide. However, here in *Kantara*, the act includes a clause that even future generations will follow suit. However, here is where the trouble arises. In the Godly framework, the protagonist is engaged in conflicts over caste and class with the King's family, who wish to assert dominance. Further, the government officers are enforcing modernisation on the primitive but God's tribe. The fear of losing the physical land and, in turn, of losing identity as God's people necessitates God's intervention for both the protagonist and his people. In the Godly matrix, morality brings prosperity, whereas greed and the desire for others' possessions bring forth the wrath of God. On a similar note, the character's fate depends on his actions and, further, on his devotion. For a believer, everything is cleared by God's visitation through the tool of epiphany. In a mythic tale, the antagonist sometimes appears as a friend, and an enemy could become your best helper. For example, *Murali* falls under the latter category, and this shift in perspective is necessary for understanding the Godly matrix. As in the godly realm, repentance begets forgiveness, which leads to change. The King's lineage just wishes to assert their claim on the land; thus, Guliga, the protector, cannot forgive Devendra (the King's descendant).

In *Jawan*, the struggle with the societal matrix unfolds. Both male and female protagonists from various arenas present their fight against different strands of the corrupt Indian system. Corruption and its permeation in an Individual's life are narrated through these protagonists. Sickness permeates and circumvents the justice system until the protagonist/s arrive. Various vignettes of the antagonist's actions are shown to capture the infiltration of corruption. They present *'Kalee'* as a capitalist demon who wishes for the uncontrolled growth of his empire without accounting for the lives lost in this process. Daniel Bell (1976) states that Puritan ethics and Protestant values tempered the verve of capitalism before the modernist period. He argues that the unhinged growth of capitalism stems from a perspective that denies a society's past and constantly presses forward in pursuit of growth. In *Lucifer*, we see the permeation of drugs and black money in Kerala (also known as 'God's Own Country'). Unlike *Jawan*, which has one antagonist, *Lucifer* has multiple antagonists. In this contact zone, the vices of society reverberate with the real world. The real villain here can be seen as both modernisation and capitalism. A strained existence in this societal matrix is further deployed in most of the films chosen for this study. However, the societal matrix can be distinguished from the other two matrices by understanding the tale's resolution. In both *Lucifer* and *Jawan*, the tales end with the protagonists' exile. They do not return as heroes but work in the shadows to help their society. Alongside the Godly and Societal framework, another salient and prominent framework that relies on the Individual's self-reliance and existence is created to further the narrative.

In the Individual zone, the plot's preeminent function is to intermingle heroic action with the nefarious schemes of brutal, corrupt villains. Moreover, the societal structures curb the possibility of change and prepare an ordered world. Here, the mythic hero's journey reaches the potential that was ingrained within them. Ordering creates a system based on corruption, but here the hero's resistance begins. Their illustrious origins, initially revealed through brief scenes, are magnificently showcased through

their subsequent victories. Slowly but surely, he gains dominion, and he now creates his own order. The idea of the contact zone entangles the heroic individual with the antagonist's worldview (for those whom he rules), and through this, his fate unfolds, and his rule begins. In *K.G.F.*, Rocky stops to pick up a piece of bread for a woman and her child in the middle of the road and says, "*Bhook ka ehsaas mujhse behtar kaun jaan sakta hai... mein tumhari bebasi samajh sakta hu*" (I have felt the pangs of hunger...I can understand your helplessness). Here, the central focus is on the hero's empathy; he stops the car in the middle of the street and displays his gun to protect a single piece of bread. He radiates the idea of ideal masculinity, a protector of the weak and a destroyer of the oppressors.

In *Salaar*, Deva (the titular '*Salaar*') is a friend of Vardha Raja Mannar of the Mannar tribe. In the Individual framework, the hero stands alone against society and the transgressions of Individuals. Here, Deva kills a powerful Lord's son because the character hunts young girls. Even his friend Vardha and his peers stay silent during the enactment of this violence. The powerful use of shadow is evident here, as Vardha watches Deva free his crossed hands. From the time he opens his hands, Vardha closes his eyes. We then see a powerful intermixture of music and violence in this scene. Here, the violence appears justified by the music's overpowering nature and the lack of dialogue. Thus, power resonates through his being, and people revere his authority as their own self-concept and identity are framed regarding him. 'The Hero as an Emperor' then demarcates the line where the individual contact zone is realised.

The contact zone theory details the conflicts between worldviews and colonial tensions. When divergent viewpoints come together, they frequently need to be resolved, represented by a purification ritual. Through the use of ritual sacrifice and other aspects, the "Devilish Hero," who stands for both the struggle and its conclusion, emerges. The Devilish Hero, unlike traditional heroes, embodies the complex

dynamics of the contact zone and is marked by moral ambiguity. This model demonstrates how multiple problems converge, necessitating the existence of a legendary character whose job is to negotiate and resolve these complex issues.

Devilish Hero

The "*devilish hero*" figure in Indian cinema transcends narrative convention to emerge as a culturally embedded, symbolic construct shaped by socio-political discontent and cinematic evolution. Unlike the classical hero of early Indian films, rooted in nationalist idealism, moral clarity, and dharmic duty, the devilish hero blurs the line between virtue and vice, embracing traits historically aligned with villainy: moral ambiguity, transgressive violence, and emotional excess (Viridi, 2003). This transformation signals a shift in cinematic aesthetics and a deeper societal response to systemic breakdowns in justice and governance (Prasad, 1998). Moreover, the devilish hero functions as a liminal archetype between heroism and villainy, legality and outlawry. Victor Turner's (1969) notion of *liminality* offers a useful framework for understanding such figures: they inhabit the in-between space of social structures, where norms are suspended, and transgression becomes a mode of truth-telling. These characters often emerge from trauma or institutional betrayal and, through their defiance of moral and legal codes, expose the contradictions of those very systems.

This figure is not a simple iteration of the Western anti-hero but a product of South Asian mythological and narrative traditions. Figures such as Ravan and Karn, who operate within morally complex terrains, provide mythic precedents for this hybrid figure. Unlike binary moral frameworks, Indian epics often accommodate ambiguity, allowing virtue to coexist with transgression. The devilish hero in post-liberalisation cinema inherits this mythic ambivalence as he absorbs contemporary crises around masculinity, class, and social mobility. The result is a figure who embodies both desire and disenchantment, navigating the fault lines of modern Indian identity.

A 'Devilish Hero' supplements the concept of an anti-hero. Similarly, the hero's transformation in Indian cinema, from virtuous protector to morally ambiguous or devilish figure, can be critically understood through the recurring motifs of mother-father archetypes, mythic births, and the ritualised use of violence. Here, the hero's image is projected as a violent individual who curbs his potential for violence until the oppressive phase has reached its zenith. This construction of devilish heroes is characterised by the oppressive forces of powerful group members and the importance of a mother figure in the development of such characters. Moreover, the symbolic presence of idols in the background of the heroes perpetuates fierce traits. The opening scene of *Jawan* features a figure of *Kaal Bhairava*, the fierce form of Lord Shiva in Hinduism. He is also known as *Dandapani* (one who holds a 'danda' or rod to punish sinners), highlighting the god's and hero's fierce, violent nature. An analysis of this opening scene, along with the visual aspects, provides insights into the saviour figure. The camera focuses on a crying woman whose tears fall on the blade of the soldier. Tears and blood are in complete contrast to the surroundings. Where the surroundings are dark, the tears are prominently visible, and the blood, though red, is dark. An effect of chiaroscuro is presented here with this contrast. Furthermore, there is no background score during this sequence. An upbeat sound only returns when the hero awakes. Another quality that needs to be explained is the movements of the shadow of the protagonist. He jumps to protect the people, and as the camera and the shadow traverse the battlefield, his shadow stops on the effigy of *Kaal Bhairava*. This accentuates his identification with the deity, creating a demigod-like figure whose role is to exact revenge on wrongdoers.

In mythic traditions, the miraculous birth of a hero signals divine purpose and foreshadows extraordinary deeds. Contemporary Indian cinema strategically reworks these tropes, not to idealise the righteous, but to sanctify morally ambiguous figures. This shift marks a transition from divine clarity to mythic ambiguity, where heroes are not necessarily virtuous, but are still

coded as inevitable saviours. Drawing on Otto Rank's (2015) *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, such birth myths frame the hero as a force of cultural disruption, whose very arrival foretells transformation. In *K.G.F.*, Rocky's birth coincides with the discovery of gold, signifying his fated bond with power and exploitation. Likewise, *Jawan's* Azad, born in a prison, evokes Lord Krishna's mythic origin, reframing incarceration as prophetic rather than tragic. These births are less about literal miracles and more about mythic legitimation: the world is chaotic, and these figures appear as violent correctives. However, their godlike status rests on the construction of collective identity; they are not just heroes for themselves, but symbolic vessels through which the masses redeem their suffering. The crowd's individual selves are absorbed into the hero's journey, erasing personal agency in favour of messianic unity. This fusion of hero and people allows cinematic narratives to repackage caste and class rage, religious symbolism, and revolutionary justice into spectacles of ritualised violence. Thus, heroic birth in modern cinema does not guarantee moral clarity; it inaugurates a spectacle in which violence is redemptive yet ethically unresolved.

The construction of mythic, demigod-like heroes in contemporary Indian cinema reflects a global narrative trend in superhero genres, in which divine attributes are mapped onto mortal figures (Pardy, 2019). Much like Marvel and DC characters, Indian cinematic heroes are increasingly portrayed as "larger-than-life," positioned at the intersection of myth, politics, and popular culture. This elevation often hinges on the symbolic absence or failure of the father figure, a trope historically linked to patriarchal authority and moral order in Indian cinema (Dwyer, 2006). In *Kantara*, *Lucifer*, and *Salaar*, the hero's emergence is catalysed by the death or absence of the father or father-figure, be it Guruva, P.K. Ramdas, or Raja Mannar, respectively. These figures are not merely biological fathers but symbolic, cosmic and social order linchpins. Their removal destabilises the narrative world, necessitating a mythic saviour. The hero thus synthesises both natural and

supernatural domains, enacting justice that is both spiritual and corporeal. In *Jawan* and *K.G.F.*, the “Real” father is notably absent, allowing the protagonist to reconstruct legitimacy through action rather than lineage. Even divinity is framed as a father figure; *Kantara*’s Panjurli/Guliga guides the protagonist like a metaphysical patriarch. These films don’t just reflect fatherlessness; they mythologise it as the necessary condition for heroic, redemptive violence. In *Lucifer*, Stephen Nedumpally is called the ‘Crown Prince,’ and the reporter says that P.K. Ramdas (the adoptive father) asked him to stand as a candidate from the Nedumpally region. Stephen’s origins and past remain largely unknown, enhancing the enigmatic aura surrounding his character. At a key moment in the film, he recounts a story about God in Kerala to the children at the orphanage under his care. He says that because the realm of God was immense, several demons disguised as angels slowly crept into his realm and then killed him. It is because of this that the land is called ‘God’s own country.’ This narration runs in parallel to Bobby Nair taking over the party, and it keeps shifting between the fable and the real. Further, the symbolism of this scene reinforces the idea that the son must now take up the role of the father. Here, *Lucifer* now has to clear the land of the demons with violence. Even the camera is looking down on Stephen, whereas it focuses on the eyes of other characters. This camera angle reveals that we can see the schemes of others, but Stephen’s intentions are now veiled.

Fathers serve as rulers of an ordered society, which can be governed either with a harsh or a compassionate approach. Whether the ruler is a despot or a benevolent king, the outcomes often converge. A tyrannical father (antagonist) is typically overthrown, whereas a benevolent but martyred father is revered and emulated to restore society to its former state. The justification for authoritarian rule often rests on the assumption that the populace is predisposed to be dominated and controlled with an iron fist. If the father presents the vision of an ordered universe, the antagonists conjure up a crime-filled, apathetic world. Garuda, the primary antagonist of *K.G.F.*, is visualised as a being

whose potential for violence knows no boundaries. Similar antagonists who justify violence and have an amoral attitude are also present in other movies. In *Lucifer*, Bobby, the principal antagonist, desires the permeation of drugs in Kerala. Antagonists perform the role of demonic characters; their motivations are greed, exerting power, and control over others.

In the selected films, the hero’s violent awakening is not immediate but carefully mediated through maternal influence, establishing a psychologically rich dynamic wherein aggression is both contained and catalysed by the mother figure. Far from being passive, these women play a foundational role in shaping the protagonist’s moral and emotional trajectory. Initially, the hero appears subdued, a silent witness to systemic violence. His restrained potential is guarded by maternal presence, which serves as both a moral compass and an emotional anchor. Here, the father serves as a man to be emulated (if good) or rejected (if bad); the mother, by contrast, imparts her worldview to the hero. It is only when maternal suffering becomes unbearable or when the mother is lost that the hero’s suppressed rage erupts, transforming him from passive observer to active redeemer. The mother’s influence is not merely sentimental; it is functional, guiding the protagonist’s transformation while reinforcing the patriarchal mythos. As Irigaray (1993) suggests, the mother acts as a ‘container’, physically during birth and symbolically in containing the hero’s latent violence. In *Jawan* and *K.G.F.*, birth in extreme conditions metaphorically links the mother and the revolution. In *Kantara* and *Salaar*, maternal figures embody ethical restraint until the hero, shaped by loss, embodies their deferred resistance. This dual role, of containment and release, reflects the mother’s centrality in mythic traditions, where she is both origin and moral compass. Yet this function is problematic: the mother exists primarily to initiate the hero’s journey, raising questions about whether her narrative significance is genuinely autonomous or merely in service of male subjectivity. The mother unleashes and directs the hero towards becoming a ‘devil,’ but only in the service of

others and to protect. Where the father's absence starts the journey, and he is to be emulated, the mother serves as the primary motivator, and her worldview is to be reciprocated. When Amma (name not given) in *Salaar* unleashes the hero, the camera shows her turning back, and Deva walks towards the villain. Symbolically, this explains the mother trope in these films: her role ends when it's time for the hero to enter the world and deliver justice.

These films reframe the hero as a villain whose motivations are gradually revealed, casting moral ambiguity as a narrative strategy. Their violence becomes an acceptable, even necessary, response to the brutality around them. As Stephen says, "The fight in politics is not between good and evil but between evil and lesser evil." Similarly, in *K.G.F.*, Rocky's rise is steeped in vengeance and raw survivalism, articulated through his taunt, "If you think you are bad, I am your dad." His transformation from an apathetic outsider to messiah is catalysed by the death of a man who dies to protect him. In Klapp's (1949) terms, he became a "defender/messiah figure." "*Police ne jisko jail mein bitha ke mujrim banaya, public ne usko badshah bana diya... ab usko sab Maalik bulate hai*" (Police made this man sit in jail as a criminal, but the public made him a king... Now everyone calls him boss). This deification happens when Rocky goes to jail and is asked for his driver's license. Towards the end of the scene, criminals in jail start to chant "*Malik, Malik, Malik.*" This shows that his legitimacy is now established, and he becomes the new ruler. This movement from messiah to the emperor is present in other films selected here, too.

These films champion revolutionary violence as a path to justice, aligning more closely with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan does not negotiate with divine authority but seeks to overturn it entirely. Moreover, there is an overt defiance against the father, but the devilish hero will never reject the worldview of the mother. He might deny and postpone the mother's worldview and live as a hedonist, but eventually he returns to it. Moreover, the maternal figure in

these films serves a dual function: as a psychological anchor and moral gatekeeper. Drawing from Otto Rank's (2015) *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, the mother's role acts as a protective mechanism, not merely to humanise the hero but to legitimise his aggression as socially redemptive. This tension between nurture and destruction becomes the ground on which cinematic legitimacy is built.

Women as Visual Objects

The emergence of the "devilish hero" in contemporary Indian cinema is frequently celebrated for disrupting traditional moral binaries and offering complex masculine subjectivities. However, these films often do so by reinforcing a familiar and troubling pattern: the marginalisation, objectification, or outright erasure of women. While male protagonists are allowed narrative complexity, ambiguity, and transformation, female characters are routinely relegated to symbolic roles, either as passive recipients of violence, bearers of honour, or romantic accessories, thus reproducing patriarchal cinematic conventions under the guise of innovation.

As Laura Mulvey (2006) famously argued, women in mainstream cinema are often the objects of a male gaze, positioned as visual pleasures for male spectators and male characters, yet denied narrative agency. This critique remains pertinent in the context of devilish-hero narratives, where the camera frequently lingers on the heroine's body, stylising her appearance without granting her an inner world. Even when women are presented as strong or independent, their strength is often measured by their proximity to men, typically in terms of loyalty, moral support, or sacrificial endurance. In *K.G.F.*, Rocky's mythic ascent is driven by violence and rebellion, yet Reena, his love interest, is narratively vacant. Her desires are muted, and her inner life is undeveloped. Women here are not characters with agency, but symbolic triggers in the male protagonist's psychological arc. *Lucifer* feigns female empowerment through Priyadarshini, but her loyalty to the hero eclipses her political role. Her

identity is tethered to familial roles, not autonomous ideology.

The lack of female agency is further exacerbated by the narrative logic of the devilish hero's world. These protagonists often rise from personal trauma or social marginalisation, enacting violent justice in response to institutional failures. However, the very violence that positions them as righteous or cathartic agents is gendered: women are rarely subjects of this transformative violence. However, they are instead its collateral victims to be avenged or symbols to be protected. Their role is to provoke male action, not to act themselves. In these films, women frequently serve to humanise the hero, to soften his brutality or justify his rage. The woman becomes a hinge in the narrative, not a voice, not a force.

This dynamic also resonates with Luce Irigaray's (1985) insight that women are often positioned as mirrors reflecting male desire and self-conception, rather than subjects with autonomous desires or voices. Moreover, the spectacle of masculinity is built not only on the silencing of women but also on their symbolic absorption into the hero's moral universe. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) argues in her critique of white men saving brown women from brown men, the trope of the female victim functions ideologically to consolidate male agency. In the Indian cinematic context, the devilish hero's capacity to protect or avenge women paradoxically confirms his own power while reaffirming the woman's passivity. Her suffering becomes instrumental rather than autonomous. Even when collectives of women appear, such as in stylised vigilante groups or as part of the hero's entourage, their individuality is often collapsed into the hero's redemptive arc. Their speech, resistance, or trauma is filtered through his lens, further illustrating the symbolic erasure of female subjectivity. As Yvonne Tasker (2002) notes, even strong women in action genres are often rendered masculine, their femininity stripped or redefined in service to male power.

Thus, any critical engagement with the devilish hero must interrogate the gendered implications of his emergence. Without a sustained feminist

critique, these narratives risk becoming alibis for re-entrenching patriarchal authority, cloaked in the rhetoric of cinematic complexity. The symbolic complexity afforded to men must be matched by equally rigorous attention to women's voices, bodies, and silences, lest the devilish hero become yet another avatar of masculine dominance, displacing women from the moral and political centre of cinematic discourse. Therefore, the devilish hero should be seen not merely as an anti-hero or a villain in disguise, but as a culturally situated symbolic agent who negotiates between dharma and desire, legality and justice, sacred duty and personal revenge. This figure critiques institutional failures not through redemption, but through spectacular rupture. By theorising the devilish hero as a dynamic product of India's mythic past and neoliberal present, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how cinema mirrors the complexities of contemporary Indian society.

Luce Irigaray's critique of the symbolic order applies: women mirror male transcendence rather than disrupting it. *Kantara* similarly opens with a rational female officer but dissolves her trajectory into the male protagonist's spiritual transformation; her reactions affirm his journey rather than her own. Similarly, *Jawan* foregrounds a collective of wronged women and markets itself as a women-led narrative; the film ultimately centres the agency, moral authority, and redemptive power of its male protagonist. The woman's trauma provides the emotional and political justification for the hero's actions, while justice is achieved primarily through his intervention. As a result, the film's feminist imagery coexists with a patriarchal messianic structure that positions the male hero as the indispensable saviour. Further, Lakshmi (one of the six women) sacrifices herself to protect others, but even her sacrifice comes across as a way to extend the hero's journey. Intrinsicly, their stories are relevant to the times, yet they come across as mere helpers, and although important, they are marginalised.

Salaar reproduces this erasure through Aadhya, whose vulnerability reinforces the protagonist's

emotional depth without deepening her own narrative. Aadhya acts as a chronicler who listens to the hero's tale while understanding his actions. When he fights to protect her, she watches in awe, then gives him her hand after he successfully defeats everyone. The love cycle begins because she wants to be protected. That protection comes from Deva, and thus she devotes herself to him. Slowly, the film expresses an effacement of the self and replacement into the hero's image and into his heroine. Moreover, the mother functions as both a moral anchor and the primary catalyst for Deva's actions. Her teachings, sacrifices, and unwavering faith shape his sense of duty and loyalty. Yet, the film presents a striking irony: the very values instilled by the mother become the justification for Deva's extra-legal and extreme violence. Rather than restraining his destructive potential, maternal morality legitimises it in the name of protection, honour, and obligation. This tension underscores the Devilish Hero archetype, in which the mother's ethical influence is transformed into a rationale for hyper-violent acts, blurring the boundary between righteous devotion and hellish retribution. This act further undermines the feminist purpose and undermines the female righteousness. Across these films, we see not just marginalisation but a consistent erasure of female subjectivity. These films silence women to give voice to heroic masculinity, raising critical questions about whose stories cinema continues to legitimise, and at whose expense.

Conclusion

The analysis of the select movies advances an understanding of contemporary Indian popular cinema as a site where myth is not merely adapted but strategically reconstituted to negotiate mass affect, legitimacy, and authority. Rather than treating mythological references as residual cultural motifs, the study demonstrates how their selective reactivation produces a trans-regional symbolic vocabulary that enables films to traverse linguistic and cultural boundaries while retaining local specificity. In this process, the "hero" emerges less as a stable archetype and more as a fluid construct shaped

by competing imperatives of market viability, cultural memory, and political resonance. A key insight lies in the instrumentalisation of mythic and religious semiotics to recalibrate the ethical framework of heroism. Violence, when embedded within ritualistic or quasi-divine narratives, is reframed as necessary, even redemptive, thereby normalising forms of authority that operate outside institutional legality. This suggests a shift from normative moral binaries toward a more ambivalent ethical terrain, where legitimacy is derived not from adherence to law but from the capacity to embody collective anxieties and aspirations. Such representations signal an emergent cultural logic in which spectators are invited to reconcile with, rather than resist, authoritarian or extra-legal modes of justice.

The study also foregrounds the role of cinema as a "contact zone" in which heterogeneous mythic traditions—regional, religious, and popular—are brought into dynamic interaction. This convergence does not produce a homogenised narrative but instead generates a layered mythic consciousness that accommodates plurality while sustaining a coherent affective appeal. Consequently, these films function as mediatory texts that both reflect and shape contemporary socio-political imaginaries, particularly in contexts marked by scepticism toward institutional efficacy and a heightened desire for decisive, charismatic leadership. By situating these developments within a broader cultural and industrial framework, the article opens up new avenues for examining how myth, media, and market forces coalesce in the production of modern heroic subjectivities. It thus invites further inquiry into the ideological work performed by popular cinema, especially in relation to the reconfiguration of ethics, authority, and collective identity in an increasingly fragmented yet interconnected cultural landscape.

References

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2001). Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal, and prosocial behavior: A

- meta-analytic review of the scientific literature. *Psychological Science*, 12(5), 353–359. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40063648>
- Anderson, C. A., Berkowitz, L., Donnerstein, E., Huesmann, L. R., Johnson, J. D., Linz, D., Malamuth, N. M., & Wartella, E. (2003). The influence of media violence on youth. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(3), 81–110. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059680>
- Bacon, R. (1972). Why movies move us. *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 26(2), 65–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346504>
- Bell, D. (1976). *The cultural contradictions of capitalism*. Basic Books.
- Bhaskar, A. (2022, July 22). The phenomenon of "pan-Indian" films, their spread and success. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-the-phenomenon-of-pan-indian-films-their-spread-and-success-8043343/>
- Butchart, L. (2019). "What man am I?" The hero's journey, the beginning of individuation, and Taran Wanderer. *Mythlore*, 38(1), 199–218. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26809400>
- Campbell, J. (2004). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton University Press.
- Dahl, G., & DellaVigna, S. (2009). Does movie violence increase violent crime? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124(2), 677–734. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40506241>
- Dwyer, R. (2006). *Filming the gods: Religion and Indian cinema*. Routledge.
- Dwyer, R. (2015). Vighnaharta Shree Siddhivinayak: Ganesh, remover of obstacles, Lord of beginnings in Mumbai. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 35(2), 263–276. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-3139014>
- Eden, A., Daalmans, S., & Johnson, B. K. (2017). Morality predicts enjoyment but not appreciation of morally ambiguous characters. *Media Psychology*, 20(3), 349–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1182030>
- Fowler, R. L. (2011). Mythos and logos. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 131, 45–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41722132>
- Fromkin, V. (2000). *Linguistics: An introduction to linguistic theory*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Gaiman, N. (2011). *American gods*. Headline Review.
- Hemphill, L. (2009). *The Bollywood mythological: Rise and decline*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Irigaray, L. (1985). *This sex which is not one*. Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1993). *An ethics of sexual difference*. Cornell University Press.
- Johnson, J. G., Cohen, P., Smailes, E. M., Kasen, S., & Brook, J. S. (2002). Television viewing and aggressive behavior during adolescence and adulthood. *Science*, 295(5564), 2468–2471. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3076178>
- Kim, J. E. (2024). Rethinking the "Arts of the Contact Zone" after thirty years: Korea between the Cold War and decolonization. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 25(2), 157–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2024.2311524>
- Kinsella, E. L., Ritchie, T. D., & Igou, E. R. (2015). Zeroing in on heroes: A prototype analysis of hero features. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(1), 114–123. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038463>
- Klapp, O. E. (1949). The folk hero. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 62(243), 17–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/536852>
- Kulkarni, D. (2023). History into myth: Popular Hindi cinema and the politics of "true stories." In *Historicizing myths in contemporary India* (pp. 132–147). Routledge India.
- Kusuma, K. S., & Kumar, S. (2024). Pan-Indian cinema: Dominance and the industrial evolution of creative cultures. *International Journal of Politics and Media*, 3(1), 22–26.
- Lyden, J. C. (2003). *Film as religion: Myths, morals, and rituals*. NYU Press.

Marques, M. J. B. (2016). *The one who knocks: The hero as villain in contemporary televised narratives* (Master's thesis, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Mulvey, L. (2006). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keywords* (pp. 342–352). Blackwell Publishing.

Nehamas, A. (2015). Nietzsche and the evil hero. *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 64, 277–294.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24523470>

Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(2), 175–220.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175>

Pardy, B. (2019). The militarization of Marvel's Avengers. *Studies in Popular Culture*, 42(1), 103–122.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26926334>

Pobutsky, A. B. (2013). Peddling Pablo: Escobar's cultural renaissance. *Hispania*, 96(4), 684–699.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23608519>

Prasad, M. M. (1998). *Ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*. Oxford University Press.

Pratt, M. L. (2007). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932933>

Rank, O. (2015). *The myth of the birth of the hero: A psychological exploration of myth*. JHU Press.

Rao, R. (1967). *Kanthapura: Indian novel* (Vol. 224). New Directions Publishing.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

Srinivas, S. (2022, June 14). Rise of the regional blockbuster. *The India Forum*.

<https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/rise-regional-blockbuster>

Tasker, Y. (2002). Action heroines in the 1980s. In D. Morley (Ed.), *Spectacular bodies* (pp. 132–152). Routledge.

Tolkien, J. R. R., Flieger, V., & Anderson, D. A. (2008). *Tolkien on fairy stories* (Expanded ed.). HarperCollins.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine Transaction.

Viridi, J. (2003). *The cinematic imagiNation[sic]: Indian popular films as social history*. Rutgers University Press.

Ethical Approval

This research did not involve any human participants, personal data, or animal subjects. As such, ethical approval from an institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee was not required. All materials, data, and methods used in the study adhere to standard academic and professional guidelines. Proper care has been taken to ensure the integrity, transparency, and reproducibility of the research. Any secondary data, literature, or previously published works have been appropriately cited to acknowledge original sources and avoid plagiarism.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)–Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that this study has not been executed using AI-assisted technologies.

Author Contribution Statement

Author 1 (PK): Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft.

Author 2 (MC): Literature Review, Data Curation (Film Selection and Archival Material), Writing – Review & Editing.

Author 3 (AS): Visualisation, Theoretical Framework Development, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

Author 4 (SM): Supervision, Final Review, and Approval of the Manuscript.

Informed Consent

This study is based solely on the analysis of publicly available films and does not involve any interaction with human participants. As such, informed consent was not applicable. All materials analysed are part of the public domain or commercially available content, and their use falls within the scope of academic fair use for research and critique purposes.

Funding Details

The authors received no external grants or financial support that were utilised to execute this research project.

Data Availability Statement

This study is based on publicly available films and related materials, which are cited within the article. As these sources are accessible through legal platforms or archives, no additional data are available for sharing.