

Cinematic Shifts: Indian Films and the Changing Cultural Identity of the Youth

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Abstract: *Indian films portray changing lifestyles, relationships and cultural expectations. This study examined how adults aged 45–55 years in Southern India perceive Western cultural representation in contemporary Indian cinema and its influence on younger generations. A descriptive and exploratory survey collected questionnaire responses from 200 purposively selected adults. Frequencies and percentages summarized structured responses, while open-ended answers were grouped by theme. All respondents noticed changes in film themes over the preceding 10–20 years; all agreed or strongly agreed that contemporary cinema shows more Western cultural elements and influences younger generations in areas including fashion, speech and dating. For the statement that younger generations adopt portrayed behaviors, 94.5% agreed or strongly agreed. By contrast, only 1.5% agreed or strongly agreed that their own perspective or lifestyle had been influenced by Indian films, while 94.5% were neutral about the influence of films on their own lifestyles. All respondents believed cinema has a responsibility to preserve traditional values, and 92.5% described its contribution to cultural change as neutral or mixed. These findings describe respondents' perceptions rather than measured changes in young people's behavior or causal effects of cinema.*

Keywords: Indian cinema; Cultural identity; Western cultural influence; Youth cultural practices; Perceived media influence

1. Introduction

Cinema can reflect cultural change while also making particular lifestyles and relationships more visible. Indian films increasingly represent Western-influenced fashion, language, dating, leisure and individual choice alongside continuing family and community values (Dwyer, 2006; Mehta & Pandharipande, 2010). Audience interpretation is shaped by social context rather than by films alone (Banaji, 2006). This study addresses a specific perspective: how adults aged 45–55 interpret changes in Indian cinema and perceive their implications for younger generations.

The objectives were to examine perceptions of Western cultural practices in contemporary films; explore perceived influence on younger generations' cultural practices and behaviors; and understand the perceived relationship between Western representation and traditional Indian values.

2. Review of Literature

Scholarship situates Indian popular cinema within negotiations among tradition, modernity, globalization and identity (Mishra, 2002; Dwyer, 2006; Mehta & Pandharipande, 2010). Banaji (2006) emphasizes the importance of audience interpretation and social setting. Research also addresses cinema's relationship with cultural identity and young audiences (Balabantaray, 2022; Sarkar & Choudry, 2025). The present study contributes a generational-observer perspective rather than directly measuring the behavior of younger viewers.

3. Research Methodology

A descriptive and exploratory quantitative survey was conducted with 200 purposively selected respondents aged 45–55 years from Southern India. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire. Items 10–17 used a five-point agreement scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the closed-ended responses; responses to question 21 were grouped thematically. Questions 5 and 7 were excluded from the main results analysis. Question 18 permitted multiple selections and its category counts are interpreted descriptively. No inferential tests were conducted. The questionnaire also recorded demographic characteristics, film-viewing habits, perceptions of cultural influence, and personal reflections. Respondents were not directly assessed for behavioral change; the study instead documented observations from an older adult group about younger generations.

4. Results

The sample included 108 men (54%) and 92 women (46%). The age distribution was 45–47 years: 90 (45%); 48–50: 6 (3%); 51–53: 61 (30.5%); and 54–55: 43 (21.5%). A total of 200 respondents (100%) reported noticing changes in the themes and values of Indian films during the previous 10–20 years. Educational qualifications were high school (28; 14%), undergraduate (74; 37%), postgraduate (37; 18.5%), doctorate (2; 1%) and other (59; 29.5%). Film-viewing frequency was daily (45; 22.5%), weekly (52; 26%), occasionally (6; 3%), rarely (90; 45%) and never (7; 3.5%).

Survey statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral
More Western elements in films (Q10)	167 (83.5%)	33 (16.5%)	0
Current generation influenced (Q11)	166 (83%)	34 (17%)	0
Fewer traditional values (Q12)	165 (82.5%)	33 (16.5%)	2 (1%)
Western lifestyle and youth attitudes (Q13)	154 (77%)	43 (21.5%)	3 (1.5%)
Younger generations adopt portrayals (Q14)	26 (13%)	163 (81.5%)	11 (5.5%)
Disconnect from cultural roots (Q15)	18 (9%)	160 (80%)	22 (11%)

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For respondents' own lifestyle influence (Q16), 189 (94.5%) selected neutral, 3 (1.5%) agreed and 8 (4%) disagreed. For cultural blending as enriching rather than harmful (Q17), 176 (88%) were neutral, 1 (0.5%) agreed and 23 (11.5%) disagreed. No strongly disagree responses were recorded for Q10–Q17.

The recorded categories for prominent Western elements (Q18) were fashion 109 (54.5%), party culture 31 (15.5%), language/accents 26 (13%), dating culture 23 (11.5%) and live-in relationships 11 (5.5%). Because multiple selections were possible, these figures should not be treated as a strictly exclusive distribution. All 200 respondents answered yes to whether cinema should preserve traditional values (Q19). For its perceived contribution to cultural change (Q20), 185 (92.5%) selected neutral/mixed and 15 (7.5%) mostly negative; none selected mostly positive.

Open-ended responses (Q21) emphasized Indian culture (70; 35%), Indian values (42; 21%), Indian tradition, values and family bonding (37; 18.5%), nationality/patriotism (22; 11%), art (14; 7%), Vedic culture (7; 3.5%), spirituality (4; 2%) and sportsmanship (4; 2%).

5. Discussion

Respondents consistently perceived a stronger Western presence in contemporary films and an influence on younger generations. Yet their responses about their own lifestyles were predominantly neutral, suggesting a difference between perceived social influence and personally reported. This difference may be attributed to the respondents' age and maturity, as individuals aged 45–55 are likely to have developed more established cultural values, lifestyle preferences, and a stronger sense of identity through their upbringing and life experiences. Consequently, they may be less inclined than younger generations to adopt cinematic influences relating to fashion, language, and everyday behavior.

The strong endorsement of cultural preservation, alongside largely mixed evaluations of cinema's effects, indicates that participants did not simply reject all cultural change. The interpretation is consistent with work treating cinema as a space where cultural meanings are negotiated (Banaji, 2006; Mehta & Pandharipande, 2010). Agreement with Q12 (99%) and Q13 (98.5%) indicates that the perceived shift concerned both the representation of traditional values and attitudes associated with Western-influenced lifestyles. Q15 produced 89% agreement about a perceived disconnect from cultural roots. These are reports of perceptions and should not be interpreted as independently verified trends.

6. Implications, Limitations and Conclusion

The findings suggest the value of media-literacy conversations among educators, parents and young audiences about the distinction between cinematic representation and everyday social practices. They also highlight the importance of examining cultural continuity alongside changing representations, without assuming that traditional values have disappeared.

The purposive sample was restricted to 200 adults aged 45–55 from Southern India. The study records self-reported perceptions, not direct observations of young audiences or a systematic analysis of film content. Other influences, including family, peers and education, were not separately measured. There was no urban–rural comparison or inferential testing; Q18 also allowed multiple responses. Findings therefore cannot be generalized to all Indian audiences or interpreted causally. The absence of inferential testing limits conclusions to descriptive patterns in this sample. Because question 18 allowed multiple selections, its recorded categories should not be treated as a mutually exclusive population distribution. The findings cannot establish whether cinema, rather than family, peers, education or other media, caused the perceived changes.

The study identifies a strong perception that Indian cinema increasingly represents Western-influenced lifestyles and may contribute to cultural change among younger generations. At the same time, respondents continued to value traditional Indian culture and generally characterized cinema's contribution as mixed. Future research could compare generations directly and combine audience surveys with systematic film-content analysis.

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