EXAMINING NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN BOLLYWOOD FILMS
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Apoorva Verghese. Examining National Identity and the Role of Religion in Bollywood Films

(Dr. Judith Maxwell, Linguistics)

While Bollywood is the largest media industry in India, there is little research examining how the industry’s norms have changed over the years. In the wake of rising religious nationalism and social conflict, recognizing the relationship between media and society is more important than ever. This research is specifically interested in the interactions between language, media and society, as exemplified through the language of Bollywood. This project examines linguistic representations of religion in four Bollywood movies produced between 1994 and 2018 to understand how this discourse has changed over time. This project uses a discourse analysis methodology to examine the language surrounding religion in historical Bollywood movies. The results of this research show that while media representations of religion vary throughout the decades, there is a distinct pattern of linguistically privileging high caste Hindu ideology above religious minorities in both explicit and implicit manners. This research has significant implications for understanding the way that language works to reinforce and reflect shifting political climates, and to how film can communicate that language.

Keywords: Bollywood, Hindu nationalism, India
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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

As one of the largest film industries in the world, Bollywood is almost unrivaled in its audience reach and influence. Bollywood as an industry does not exist in a vacuum and is undoubtedly influenced by the environment in which it is produced and consumed. It is Bollywood’s susceptibility to influence combined with its extraordinary reach across India and the diaspora that makes it a fascinating subject matter to study in the context of political power. Present-day India has seen a significant rise in right-wing Hindu nationalism, a cultural movement that asserts the social and cultural superiority of Hinduism and Hindus. This movement, the product of several centuries of cultural contact and conflict, has gained tremendous momentum since 2014, when the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party, came into power. As the preeminent media industry in India, Bollywood has changed along with the political shifts in the country (Kumar, 2013).

This project aims to examine how representations of national identity have changed in Bollywood films in the context of the shifting political climate in India, with a specific focus on understanding the changing role of religion in that identity. Using a discourse analysis approach, this research examines four Bollywood films released between 1994 and 2018 to understand the connection between socio-political events and trends, and language in India. The four films that this research will examine are 1942: A Love Story (1994), Lagaan (2001), Jodhaa-Akbar (2008), and Padmaavat (2018). All of these films contain historical films set at key points in Indian history and, importantly, had very successful box office runs. While there are several films that examine socio-
political themes through a historical lens, these films were chosen not only for the eras that they represent but also for the times they were produced in. Socio-political themes encompass a wide range of ideas, but in general, refer to the interaction of social and political issues. In other words, the examination of social conflict and its relationship with changing political environments. This can include issues such as endorsed social persecution, poverty, and security. In examining these representations of Hinduism through time, I anticipate finding that linguistic discourse in Indian media has demonstrably shifted towards the modern Hindu nationalist agenda by (both implicitly and explicitly) propping up Hinduism and derogating other cultures.

**Literature Review**

Language has a complex relationship with the environment in which it is used. In India, language has been a particularly politicized construct starting during the colonial era and continuing into today’s society. The literature analyzing both social relations and media depictions indicates a potential shift away from secularism and towards prioritizing Hindu nationalist ideologies. However, the literature on this topic fails to provide a completely comprehensive view of change over time in language usage within film. My research aims to understand more clearly how linguistic discourse surrounding themes of Hindu nationalism, such as patriotism, has changed over time. This literature review examines current scholars’ work on the history of India’s political and cultural traditions, the relationship between film and political events, and the role of language as a tool.

*Tracing Hindu Nationalism*
Benedict Anderson developed the idea of “imagined communities” as a mechanism to analyze nationalism from the anthropological perspective. Anderson’s theory of imagined communities puts forth the idea that nationalism developed with the emergence of print media, allowing people to gain a national consciousness based on the common values that brought a community together (Anderson, 1983). Though Anderson’s research focused on Western, specifically American cultures, his work provides an important lens through which we can understand the development of nationalism even in non-Western societies such as India.

Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, is a deeply complex ideology that is the consequence of centuries of political and social events. Though rooted in the idea of religious superiority, Hindutva is a political ideology (Sharma, 2021). It is difficult to define it in simple terms. Hindu nationalism is, importantly, distinct from the general idea of nationalism, though the two are often conflated in political rhetoric. Nationalism, as a concept, can be loosely defined as an ideology that holds the interest of the nation-state above other individual and group interests. Hindu nationalism is rooted not only in the belief that Hinduism has a hegemonic right to India, but that foreign influences, including other religious and ethnic groups, pose a threat to the future of India. Thus, while Hindu nationalism falls under the umbrella terms of nationalism, it has distinct features. While nationalistic rhetoric asserts the dominance of a nation-state, Hindu nationalism aims to achieve a cultural hegemony within a nation-state.

There is a decent amount of research done examining the evolution of Hindu nationalism throughout the past few decades, especially following colonization. Recent years have seen a growth in Hindu nationalism like never before, but scholars argue that
Hindutva is a tricky and ever-changing ideology. Edward Anderson and Arkotong Longkumer (2018) argue that modern Hindu nationalism, dubbed ‘neo-Hindutva’, can be split into two categories, soft and hard Hindutva. Hard Hindutva, according to Anderson and Longkumer (2018), involves an explicit endorsement of Hindu nationalist ideologies and organizations while soft Hindutva is a more subtle form of the same ideology that tries to avoid the associations of hard Hindutva. Hard Hindutva is understood as the more militant form of the ideology, expressly associated with the radical views of Hindu nationalist groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Soft Hindutva, on the other hand, is concealed by nature, typically manifesting as expressions of Hindu pride and culture. These dual forms of Hindutva, the authors argue, are what gives the ideology such reach within Indian society, both in the country and the diaspora. It is both explicitly political and casual at the same time. Rebecca de Souza and Syed Ali Hussain (2021) give the example of the 2019 Howdy Modi event in Texas as a prime example of the nature of modern Hindutva. Dressed up as an event to celebrate Indian and Hindu pride, the event was mostly attended by Hindu Americans and was overtly supportive of Modi and the current state of Indian politics. However, Anderson and Longkumer (2018) argue that what makes Hindutva such a successful ideology in India is its framing. The authors claim that Hindu nationalists have constructed a narrative that frames their ideology as ‘secular’ and makes Hindu nationalism synonymous with Indianness. The Indian constitution explicitly expresses the nation as a secular state (Bhargava, 2002). However, this is not to say that religion is entirely separated from the government, as secularism is understood in several Western countries. Rather, Rajeev Bhargava argues that India’s model of secularism enforces the liberty and equality of religions, while also allowing for
government interference and protection when necessary. This secularism in India does not constitute a religion-free state, but a state where religion is integrated into the political landscape as needed.

Hindu nationalism as an ideology can be traced back centuries in Indian history and a comprehensive look into its development would be a huge task unto itself. As such, this chapter will focus on relevant points in Indian history through the lens of the films I analyze, looking at the eras in which the films were set as well as when they were released. While these films are not necessarily objective, accurate historical accounts, understanding the historical contexts which they claim to represent is critical to analyzing them. Broadly, this literature review will look at scholarship on the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, the British Raj, and the political events of the early 1990s.

Of the four films I am looking at, Padmaavat (2018) is set in the earliest time period. While the film’s titular figure, Padmavati, is surrounded by questions of authenticity, the film’s central antagonist, Alauddin Khilji, is firmly rooted in India’s history. Khilji was one of several leaders during the Delhi Sultanate, the first major Islamicate political authority to establish itself in India. Many of the leaders of the Sultanate were of Afghan or Turkish origin and brought with them a rich Islamicate culture (Islam, 2017). It was during the Delhi Sultanate that Persian firmly established itself as a widespread language in the Indian subcontinent (Islam, 2017). In years since, the Delhi Sultanate has gained a reputation as an era rife with art, culture, and the open and liberal spread of ideas and information (Islam, 2017). It is believed that the outward attitude of the Delhi Sultanate is what permitted Islamicate culture to grow such strong roots in India.
In the early 1500s, the Delhi Sultanate was conquered by the Mughal Empire, another Islamicate power, and the backdrop of the film Jodhaa-Akbar (2008). The Mughal empire is believed to have been started by descendants of Mongol leaders and as such, brought with them unique cultural traditions and practices (Asher & Talbot, 2006). Like the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire is remembered for its contribution to the collective culture of India. At its peak, it was an incredibly prosperous empire, with emperors like Jalaluddin Akbar transforming administrative policies (Asher & Talbot, 2006). An important facet of many but not all of the Mughal emperors and their administration was their general tendency towards tolerance of non-Islamic religions (Asher & Talbot, 2006). While certain leaders were explicitly less accepting of religious minorities, especially Sikh communities who were persecuted under the rule of emperors like Jahangir, the empire was largely tolerant of minority groups.

The last two films that this research examines, Lagaan (2001) and 1942: A Love Story (1994), are set in time periods that bookend the colonial era in India. Colonization transformed India drastically, and because there are an infinite number of changes that the British imposed on India, it is impossible to discuss all of them in this chapter. In his 1999 book, The Saffron Wave, Thomas Blom Hansen focuses on the effect of the imposition of a legal structure, specifically on religious communities in India. Blom Hansen argues that the imposition of these legal structures reified the idea that India was separated into discrete, incompatible units or juridical spheres, creating a new matrix of community and identity. Blom Hansen asserts that in their goal to create a governable object, the British Raj deeply furthered identity politics, especially between religious Hindu and Muslim groups. Along with the imposition of Western structures onto an
Indian body, the British Raj contributed to divides between religious groups through mediums such as language, which will be examined later in this literature review.

The early 1990s notes the beginning of the time period that this research is interested in. The 1980s brought in a new wave of Hindu nationalism, especially on the political front, with the BJP endorsing explicitly Hindu nationalist, anti-Muslim politicians (Blom Hansen, 1999). By the early 1990s, Hindu nationalists had successfully mobilized a large following, resulting in several pivotal moments in Indian history. One of these events was the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a mosque built during the Mughal empire that had long been a point of religious dispute. The demolition of the Babri Masjid only fueled the flames of, as Blom Hansen calls it, the “Hindutva wave”, where there was immense pride in Hindu strength and a desire to seek revenge against Muslim communities.

In 1993, in response to the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque, the Bombay riots took place. These riots are largely believed to be the result of escalated religious tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities (Blom Hansen, 2001). Immediately after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Muslims had taken to large-scale protests to voice their outrage while Hindus countered in demonstrations of their outrage at the perceived erasure of their culture. These events were not triggers for modern-day Hindutva, but rather symptoms of a growing movement in India. It is just one year after the 1993 riots that 1942: A Love Story, the first film I am interested in, was released.

The momentum of Hindutva has only been growing since the early 1990s. In the past decade, the BJP has gained significant political power, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi holding office since 2014. There has been a clear evolution in the development of
Hindu nationalist sentiments in India, and understanding the motivations behind particular media representations of these historic time periods provides crucial insights.

**Bollywood and Indian Society at Large**

Bollywood’s sheer scale grants it incredible influence in India, but further understanding the unique relationship that viewers have with Bollywood provides information into why its study is so insightful. Lakshmi Srinivas’s book “House Full” (2009), examines her research on the participatory culture of Indian cinemagoers. Srinivas’s work highlights the impact that cinema has on the audience and specifically its ability to connect with viewers through a screen. Interestingly, Srinivas positions the cinema-going experience not from the vantage point of the narrative or art, but from that of the reception of the audience. Srinivas argues that, given the participatory nature of cinema that she observes, even reception is a sort of performance. The participatory nature of cinema-going in India is distinct to the culture around Bollywood. Rather than being passive consumers, the audience members are active participants in the film experience, frequently singing lyrics, dancing to music and acting out scenes alongside the actors.

Srinivas’s research is a fascinating look into not only the relationship between society and media but the power that the collective media experience can have. Srinivas’s work highlights the culture of cinema-going but also demonstrates how embedded in Indian society film is. In India, film, at both the production and viewing level is deeply intertwined with cultural and social constructs and events. Srinivas notes, for example, how viewers of a film have different expectations of their experiences based on their identities, and how filmmakers explicitly take social change into account in production as
a result of India’s startlingly diverse environment. Ultimately, Srinivas’s research demonstrates the incredible influence that Indian cinema can have on its viewers. In particular, recognizing the unique participatory nature of Indian cinema-going shows how viewers see themselves as a part of the film production and as such, as more susceptible to the messaging of these films.

Because of the incredibly diverse makeup of India, scholars like Madhumita Lahiri (2016) argue that Bollywood has often functioned as a place of harmony that by default, was free of politicization. Srinivas states that one element that differentiates the cinema-going experience in India as opposed to Western culture is the incredible regional and linguistic diversity the industry encompasses. For example, Bollywood is noted for its use of code-mixing, the combining of two language varieties in casual speech, especially with Urdu and English being mixed with Hindi (Sailaja, 2011). However, in recent years, there have been clear shifts in both the phonological and cultural uses of language that signal a shift away from such harmony. For one, research has found that while Urdu is still used in Bollywood, both in codemixing and borrowing, the words lack distinct Arabic sounds, particularly glottal sounds (Ahmad, 2018). Secondly, research has shown a significant increase in derogatory representations of religious and cultural minorities while simultaneously glamorizing Hindu history and culture, in line with core Hindutva discourse.

Despite a history of diverse religious and ethnic representation in Bollywood, the industry of late has demonstrated a trend toward negative depictions of marginalized individuals. This representation of marginalization clashes directly with Lahiri’s (2016) argument that Bollywood acts as a place of harmony. This representation is not always
obvious to the audience. One of the clearest examples of this is the “good Muslim woman” trope. This trope refers to the depiction of Muslim women as “good” in the context of a film, usually collaborating with other heroes of the film or being one themself, but specifically working with Hindu characters in positive ways. Nazia Hussein (2015) argues that the depiction of Muslim women in this light is typically not done simply with the intention of having positive representations of Muslim women, but rather having Hindu men be portrayed as the saviors of these women while Muslim men are portrayed as the villains of the stories.

In recent years, scholars have also noted a ‘saffronization’, referring to Hindu nationalist ideologies, of Bollywood. This shift is especially clear in historical epics, depicting pre-colonial India. Hamideh Molaei and Sahar Hussain Babaei (2020) argue that these films, which claim to paint an image of pre-colonial India, do not tell Indian history, but Hindu history. Using the film Tanhaji as a case study, the authors argue that these historical films further the Hindu nationalist discourse that paints Muslims as violent invaders and Hindus as protectors of their homeland. Regardless of the aims of individual movies, most scholars working on representations of Muslims in Bollywood come to the general consensus that Muslims are typically villainized or at the very least, constructed as ‘other’. Sanjeev Kumar (2013) argues that while religion has always been a source of conflict in Bollywood, since the 1990s, Bollywood’s representation of Muslims has been especially derogatory, aligning closely with Hindu nationalist tendencies.

This scholarship demonstrates two important points about Indian cinema. Firstly, Bollywood has led to the creation of a participatory culture in film-watching, connecting
audience members and films in a powerful relationship. Secondly, research done by the scholars mentioned above and numerous others shows that Bollywood has taken clear steps toward contributing to the marginalization of religious and social minorities in India. With this role of media in mind, it becomes clear that studying Bollywood’s media patterns through time and contextualizing them within the evolving political climate will provide powerful insights into the propagation and normalization of Hindu nationalism.

**Language and Power in India**

Foundational research on the relationship between language and power was set forth by scholars like Norman Fairclough. In his 1989 book *Language and Power*, Fairclough, using Foucault’s theory of discourse, examined the way that language not only intersects with power but the way that language can be used to change and maintain power structures in society. This work provides the critical basis for subsequent work on the role of language in society and provides an important lens through which one can understand the political nature of language in India.

Language has long been a political construct in India, and these politics continue to play a role in modern manifestations of Hindutva. The clearest example of this politicization of language is the identity divide between Hindi and Urdu speakers. In Alok Rai’s 2002 book “Hindi Nationalism”, he examines how language in India adopted its present political nature. Rai traces the use of Hindu and Urdu back to pre-British Raj eras but claims that prior to colonization, these two languages were essentially considered the same. The standard register for many speakers of either of these languages was a pluricentric version called Hindustani, where the two languages were used simultaneously. While Urdu draws a large vocabulary from Persian and Hindi draws its
lexicon from Sanskrit, these two languages were mutually intelligible due to their shared roots in Sanskrit and Prakrit grammar. Rai claims that it was in the early colonial era that, in an attempt to restore Hindustani to its pre-Mughal form, the divide between Hindi and Urdu speakers emerged. Advocates of a supposedly pure form of Hindustani, at the Baneras Hindu University, argued that the language should be rid of its Persian influence and instead become more completely Sanskrit-ized. As these movements continued, language became a distinct identity marker, with Urdu being a marker of Muslim communities and Hindi becoming a marker of Hindu communities.

Rai’s research provides important insights into just how language has been leveraged as a political tool in the Hindutva movement. Rai describes the Hindi language as a register influenced and mingled with the linguistic variety of India, as noted above. However, Hindutva movements have confined and stripped the idea of ‘Hindi’ to serve their agenda. Rai’s argument centers on the immediate post-colonial era, where the question of a national language was one of the most salient issues. This was a difficult issue to resolve, given the linguistic diversity of India. While some suggested English become the national language, others protested its colonial ties. Politicians like Nehru and Gandhi had long been proponents of widespread Hindustani as a tool of unification, but this suggestion received backlash from those who did not accept the validation of any form of Urdu and of course, people in South India who had minimal historical ties to either of the languages. Those who advocated for a Sanskritized version of Hindustani, who Rai dubbed Hindi-wallahs, were insistent on making Hindi the national language of India. Their idea of Hindi, however, was incredibly political. Rai claims that this aggressive push towards Hindi was specifically for a ‘purified’, Sanskritized version of
the language, one that was also largely accessible to highly educated, high-caste Hindus. Ultimately, English, along with several regional languages, were named national languages of India. This list included Urdu, much to the chagrin of the Hindi-wallahs. However, in terms of the language of the federal government, the only two official languages are Hindi in the Devanagari script and English.

   Rai’s work is an important testimony to the power that language wields in India, and when synthesized with the foundational theories of Fairclough, demonstrates how nationalistic ideologies are able to use language as a tool.

**Conclusion**

When examining the scholarship on language, media, and politics in India, an image of the continued use of language as a tool and media as a platform for the propagation of ideologies becomes clear. Understanding how language has been used as a political tool for decades now helps further our understanding of the power that language has in a society. With India’s rich linguistic and religious history, this power becomes even more salient. This scholarship then provides context for the relevance of media in the current political climate of India. My aim is to synthesize these ideas and study the discourse of Bollywood cinema over the past two decades from the intersectional foundation that the current scholarship built.
Chapter 2: Methods

Research Question

This thesis seeks to address the question of how rhetoric surrounding the role of religion in national identity in popular Indian media has evolved in the context of the country’s shifting political environment. To answer this question, this project will center on four Bollywood films released over the past three decades and look at the shifting language around religious discourse in them.

Discourse Analysis as a Methodology

To conduct this research, this thesis takes a discourse analysis approach. Discourse analysis examines the patterns of language across sources while also looking at the sociocultural context in which the language occurs. While there are several elements of linguistic discourse analysis, this project analyzes language for two main ideas: processes of discourse and lexical items.

The processes that this research is interested in including foregrounding, backgrounding, and presuppositions. Foregrounding in discourse analysis refers to the pattern of language that stands out within a text. Foregrounded language is the most salient information of discourse. Conversely, the least salient items of discourse are considered backgrounded language. In the case of scripted discourse, like those found in the films this thesis analyzes, foregrounding and backgrounding are very purposeful mechanisms. Presuppositions refer to an assumption about the environment relating to an utterance that is taken for granted in discourse. Each of these processes provides important insight into the environment of each utterance.
Another element of discourse analysis that this project examines is the use of lexical items. Lexical items refer to the specific word choices used in the relevant discourse. When looking at lexical items, both the connotation, associations that come with the word, and denotation, the precise or literal meaning of the word, are critical to examine. With the Bollywood films that this project looks at, the lexicon is a particularly interesting point of interest. Bollywood films have traditionally employed the colloquial Hindustani (Lahiri, 2016). Over time, however, purer Hindi has been promoted by Hindu nationalists as a crucial part of a national identity (Rai, 1989). Thus, examining the retention of Hindustani and the purposeful use of Hindi and Urdu provides important insight into the shifting nature of film and language.

Discourse analysis was chosen as the methodology for this project primarily because of its incorporation of social and cultural contexts as they pertain to language use. As a methodology, discourse analysis allows for a deeper look into the role of language, beyond the micro-level. Rather than focusing on the isolated features of language, using a discourse analysis provides further insight into language’s relationship with its broader environment.

Data choice and collection

In order to conduct this research, this thesis examines four Bollywood films that were produced and released in the years following the 1993 Bombay Riots, with the earliest being released in 1994 and the most recent being released in 2018. The four films that this project looks at are *1942: A Love Story* (1994), *Lagaan* (2001), *Jodhaa-Akbar* (2008), and *Padmaavat* (2018). Two of these films, *Jodhaa-Akbar* and *Padmaavat*, are,
to some degree, based on historical events. *Jodhaa-Akbar* is based on the lives of Mughal Emperor Akbar and his Rajput wife Jodhaa, while *Padmaavat* is based on an epic poem inspired by the fall of the Gulhala dynasty. *1942: A Love Story* and *Lagaan*, on the other hand, are set at different time points of the colonial era but are works of pure fiction and are not rooted in any historical events.

Bollywood refers specifically to the film industry of Mumbai, where the films are produced in Hindi, and typically employ the colloquial Hindustani. As a result, this project does not include regional films or any film where the predominant language is not Hindi. While regional films certainly have value within the broader conversation of language and politics in India, for the focus of this thesis, Bollywood provided the best source material. Bollywood was chosen for both its cultural impact on India and the diaspora, as well as its particular role in the modern linguistic debate between the use of Hindi, Hindustani, and Urdu. To standardize the data being analyzed, these films were chosen to be included in this study for specific reasons. Firstly, each of these films falls under the historical film genre. They each tell stories of India’s history, both historical fiction and inspired by real events. The historical genre was chosen as the center of the data because it, by nature, encompasses themes of nationalism but also because filmmakers have the ability to use present-day culture to manipulate representations of the past. This makes the genre a prime source for understanding the influence of the current political climate on shifting discourse. These films were each produced while India was under different political leadership. By following the language shifts between these films, I can trace the evolution of language in shifting political climates. In addition to each of these films being the same genre, they each received positive reception from
critics and were box office successes. This would indicate that they had the same resonance with the broader Indian culture.

To study the language of these films, several scenes regarding religion, either implicit or explicit, were transcribed and annotated for linguistic features. Each of these transcripts was annotated using the Jefferson Transcription System, noting for tone, pitch, timing, and stylistic choices (Jefferson, 2004). After being annotated, the discourse of each scene was analyzed for their use of lexical items (including source language), grounding, and presuppositions. Any patterns demonstrated either within a film or across sources were noted.

This study chooses to use films as the primary data for two reasons. The first benefit of using films as a primary source for this research is accessibility. Using films is a reliable way to obtain linguistic data from almost 30 years ago as well as from the present day, and being able to access does not pose significant time or financial restraint. The second reason films are being used in this project is because of their cultural and social significance. Bollywood, specifically, has been demonstrated to have an impact on the idea of a national identity. Scholars like Brigitte Schulze (2002) have argued that Bollywood films, especially in the years immediately following independence, were key in shaping the country’s national identity. Over the years, cinema-going has developed its own culture with a uniquely active audience (Srinivas, 2016). The strong relationship that film has with society establishes it as an important primary source for analysis.
Chapter 3: Findings and Analysis

This project analyzes the language of four historical Bollywood films released between 1994 and 2018. The data examined in each of these films can broadly be categorized under religious discourse, nationalistic discourse, or an interaction between the two. This chapter outlines the relevant data collected from each film and discusses their implications within the broader conversation of Hindu nationalism in India.

Speaking Analysis: Padmaavat

While this language is largely interested in the verbal gestures involved in discourse, body language and any other non-verbal elements of a discourse are important to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relevant interaction. Acknowledging that this project includes an analysis of a film scene using Dell Hyme’s SPEAKING analysis to demonstrate the importance of non-verbal discourse. The following SPEAKING analysis examines a scene from the film Padmaavat (2018). After hearing his flute at night, Alauddin, the Sultan of Delhi, summons Raghav Chetan, a Brahmin priest of the Rajput court who has been exiled, and is in awe of his talent. Raghav Chetan takes the opportunity to try to manipulate Alauddin to aid him in his vengeance against Chittor.

<table>
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<th>Transcription</th>
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<td>Alauddin: Hum duniya ki har naayaab cheez cheen sakate hain sirf tumhaara' hunar nahin chheen sakate. kya naam bataye tumane? Raghav Chetan. Jo bhi ho, jahaan se bhi aaye</td>
<td>Alauddin: <em>I can conquer every precious thing in the world, it is only your talent that I cannot conquer. What did you say your name was?</em> Raghav Chetan. <em>Whoever you are, wherever you came from, from today you will</em></td>
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Alauddin: Voh kya?


Alauddin: Vaisee khubasoorati sirf khwaab mein hoti hai, haqeeqat mein nahin.

Raghav Chetan: Daava hai humara. Ek baar dekh lenge, toh kuch soojhenga nahin usake be the pride of my court. What are you looking at?

Raghav Chetan: Your past. Ostrich feathers, which blood has made red. (A) red stone sitting in a crown. (A) Crown that will rule the whole world. Alexander (the Great). You will become another Alexander. But for this to happen, it needs to be with you.

RC: She is an illusion. The body of sandalwood. There is a shadow of the moon on the face. That veil is the hidden fire.

Written on the sword is the melody of life.

Even if you see the shadow, you want to get

Alauddin: That beauty only happens in dreams, not in reality.

Raghav Chetan: The claim is ours. If you see once, you will not understand anything other

Alauddin: Qismat-e-Alauddin ka naam batao.

Raghav Chetan: Chittor ki maharani Padmaavati.

than that. The key is your fortune. If you got that, So Mewar yours. India is yours, world is yours, heaven is yours. If not that, then nothing. The stone is of Paras. If you touch, then your world will become golden. It is precious, but it is equally impossible to get it.

Alauddin: Tell me the name of the destiny of Alauddin

Raghav Chetan: The queen of Chittor, Padmaavati

Scene and setting

This short scene takes place entirely in one room. It is set in the palace of the Delhi Sultanate, of which Alauddin Khilji is the Sultan. The room in which Alauddin and Raghav Chetan are conversing is dark and dimly lit, matching the attire that Alauddin wears as well. While it is clear that the setting of this scene is in the Delhi Sultanate, there is nothing else distinct about the room. In other words, the room itself does not serve any specific purpose.

Participants
There are only two participants in this interaction: Alauddin Khilji and Raghav Chetan. Raghav Chetan’s character in this scene is meant to highlight his role as a Brahmin priest. At one point, Raghav Chetan pulls a pink lotus (a common symbol in Hinduism and the symbol of the far-right BJP) from the water, and then begins showering Alauddin with that water and presents him with the flower. He claims to see Alauddin’s past, and doing so accurately shocks Alauddin. It gives him an authority that in turn lets him control Alauddin.

Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi, initially sees Raghav Chetan as something precious to collect for his court, but later sees him as a means to finding Padmaavati and taking Chittor.

**Ends**

The ends of the participants at the beginning of the interaction are not the same. Alauddin initially approaches Raghav Chetan because he is enamored with his flute-playing abilities. He intends to make Raghav Chetan a member of his court. However, Alauddin speaks with a certain confidence that makes it clear he believes that Raghav Chetan will be a part of his court, no matter what he believes. In his mind, his goals have already been met.

Raghav Chetan’s actual goals are different from what he articulates to Alauddin. While speaking to Alauddin, he talks of a great treasure that Alauddin is destined to covet, and that Raghav Chetan can help him get. In the greater context of the film, however, viewers understand that Raghav Chetan’s true intentions are to seek revenge on Chittor for his banishment. The opposing nature of his explicit language and actual ends
gives the viewers a better understanding of his manipulative nature which is critical to the progression of the film.

Raghav Chetan is shown as successful in manipulating Alauddin, who eventually views conquering Chittor and Padmavati as his greatest ambition.

**Acts**

Though Alauddin speaks first in this interaction, it is Raghav Chetan who sets the tone for most of the interaction. Alauddin opens the interaction, exuding an air of confidence that reflects his status as a powerful ruler who believes himself entitled to what he wants. Raghav Chetan, however, does not cooperate with this image of Alauddin, which prompts Alauddin to ask “kya dekh rahe ho?” This speech act is largely a mechanism to open the scene and does not carry any real impact in the consequent discourse.

From Raghav Chetan’s first speech act, he is given a certain power in the interchange. He directly ignores the foundation of the interaction that Alauddin had established, and instead easily twists the interaction to serve his purposes. While he follows the convention of turn-taking, speaking when prompted by Alauddin’s questions, he shifts the topic entirely which grants him authority within the interaction. In Raghav Chetan’s first speech act, his language takes on the appearance of Antakshari, a spoken word game in India where the goal is to begin the next line with the last word of the last spoken line (“Shuturmurg ke pankh jisamen khoon laga hai laal. laal patthar jo chadha hai taaj mein. taaj jo saaree duniya par raaj karega”).

The following speech acts show Alauddin accepting this dramatic shift in the subject without issue, which is out of character with the ruthless representation of
Alauddin that the film adopts. He continues to ask questions, hardly doubting the words of Raghav Chetan.

Raghav Chetan also concludes the interaction, by finally revealing to Alauddin that the treasure he speaks of is Padmavati. Alauddin is shown to be extremely engaged in what Raghav Chetan is proposing to him, which again, positions Raghav Chetan in a socially powerful role.

**Key**

The tone in which Alauddin first speaks is dramatically different from the rest of the interaction. In the first speech act of this interaction, Alauddin speaks reverently of Raghav Chetan, but above all, he speaks confidently in the assumption that Raghav Chetan will join him. When speaking of Padmavati, or what is initially presented as a precious thing to possess, both Alauddin and Raghav Chetan speak in very reverent tones; it reinforces the worth Padmavati is seen to have, but also says something to Raghav Chetan’s ability to persuade Alauddin so quickly into desiring her.

**Instruments**

The participants are speaking in person; there are no physical barriers between them except for a pool of water that they are able to walk through. The water becomes a prop in some way.

**Norms**

The norms of conversation for both of the participants are different; they are shown as coming from clearly different cultures. However, the way they address each other, in terms of “you” provides insight into the dynamic. In interactions with the Rajputs earlier in the movie, Raghav Chetan was highly respected, this was reflected in
the way people spoke/interacted with him with people using the more formal “Aap”; Alauddin, however, uses the less formal “tum” that is typically used in closer relationships. This demonstrates that Alauddin does not regard Raghav Chetan with the same respect, he sees him more as someone to add to his collection (“Jo bhi ho, jahaan se bhi aaye ho, aaj se tum humare darbaar ki shaan ho.”) Alauddin demands things of him (“Qismat-e-Alauddin ka naam batao”) in a way that shows that Alauddin believes he has power over Raghav Chetan. His body language at the start of the interaction, reclining on a divan, also indicates this.

Raghav Chetan on the other hand uses the formal “Aap” and seemingly speaks to Alauddin in high regard. However, his disregard of Alauddin’s proposition to join his court would appear disrespectful, but the manipulation of his spiritual position overlooks this.

**Genre**

The interaction depicted here, though framed as a conversation, is more of a proposition from Raghav Chetan to Alauddin. Again, Raghav Chetan’s true intentions, which are only transparent when understood in the context of the full film, are different from what he presents to Alauddin. Nevertheless, the genre of the interaction is, at its core, a proposition.

**Data and Results**

**1942: A Love Story**

*1942: A Love Story* depicts the love story between Naren, the son of a British official, and Rajeshwari, the daughter of an Indian revolutionary, towards the end of the
colonial era in India. The film was released in 1994, just a year after the Bombay Riots, which this project establishes as a defining moment in modern Hindu nationalism.

Despite being released during a heightened period of religious tensions, the film notably lacks discourse surrounding religion of any sort. Viewers knowledgeable about the caste designations of certain families, or the Arabic roots of certain names could form their own conclusions about the religious affiliations of these characters, but the script itself steers clear of this conversation. Thus, though religion is not entirely absent from the language of the film, it is largely backgrounded.

In the film, religion is explicitly made mentioned in only a handful of instances. The clearest is when the film’s sole Muslim character bids people goodbye by saying “Khuda hafiz”, a traditional Islamic greeting. None of the characters that he says this to are Muslim, likely resulting in the particular use of “Khuda” instead of “Allah”. Another instance comes from a song in the film titled “Ek ladki ko dekh a”, where the main protagonist of the film sings about seeing a girl, the film's heroine, and how he feels. One of the lines from the song is “Jaise mandir mein ho ek jalta diya” which translates to “[It feels like] a candle burning in a [Hindu] temple”. This particular metaphor draws its relevance from religious imagery. The few other instances of religious representation come in the form of traditions, like funeral rites, and small language uses.

Due to the backgrounding of religion, the creation of a national identity in 1942 is done linguistically through other sorts of discourse. The most interesting nationalistic discourse in the film comes through language used to talk about Indian revolutionaries or freedom fighters. There are two distinct perceptions of Indian freedom fighters that are determined by each character’s personal allegiances. In other words, those loyal to the
British see freedom fighters negatively while those who oppose British rule support their actions. Throughout the film, those who are loyal to the British Raj are referred, by both freedom fighters and the average Indian, as ‘gaddaro’, which translates to ‘traitor’. The freedom fighters on the other hand are referred to as ‘desh bhakt’, which translates to ‘patriot’, or ‘kraantikare’ which translates to ‘revolutionaries’. The language used to refer to the freedom fights connotes an innate claim to India that is not contained within the word ‘gaddaro’.

1942’s presentation of national identity largely sees Indians as a collective, with the sole criterion of belonging being loyal to Indian independence. It is important to note that there is little visual or articulated representation of Muslims, Christians, Dalits, or any other religious or ethnic minorities in the film. Nevertheless, it views the collective Indian identity as an incredibly inclusive label. Given the film’s patriotic nature, this fits the supposed intention of the film, to spread a message of unity across the Indian population.

Lagaan

Released seven years after 1942: A Love Story, Lagaan tells another colonial-era story about a group of Indians who challenge British officials to a high-stakes cricket match. The story centers on protagonist Bhuvan, who rallies his fellow villagers to form a team and challenge the British. If they succeed, the British officials will agree to cancel their taxes for three years, but if they lose, they will have to pay triple tax for three years. Upon its release, Lagaan was highly lauded, becoming the third and most recent Indian film to be nominated at the Academy Awards.
Throughout the film, religion is largely backgrounded. There are certain instances where individual characters praise a certain deity or dress in specific religious attire, but these isolated instances do not drive the plot forward or contribute anything but an individual identity marker. There are, throughout the whole film, only two instances where religious discourse is integral to advancing the narrative. The first is an interaction involving a low-caste villager, and the second a song.

In the first scene of interest, a conflict about caste arises among the Hindu, assumedly high-caste, villagers. In the scene, Bhuvan attempts to recruit a Dalit man, Kachara, who lives on the outskirts of the village to join their cricket team. While Bhuvan is overtly enthusiastic about Kachara joining their team, the other Hindu villagers refuse to play with him.

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<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lakha: Ye sasura achoot! Humare saath…nah, nah. Ye humare saath nahin khel sakat.</td>
<td>Lakha: This dim-witted untouchable! With us…no, no. He cannot play with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iswar: Pakkee baat hai, humo ek achhoot ke saath kandha nahin milayenge.</td>
<td>Iswar: Absolutely, we cannot play with an untouchable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of the word ‘achoot’, meaning untouchable, is also an impactful lexical choice that presupposes the existence and enforcement of the caste system. Today, the term is a derogatory form of addressing members of the Dalit caste. However, prior to the 1880s,
the term Dalit did not exist, and ‘untouchable’ was the only label that existed to describe the community (Robinson, 2003). *Lagaan* is set in 1893, only years after the term Dalit originated, so the usage is not out of place. Nevertheless, it highlights that religion in this society does play a part in defining power dynamics and most importantly, in determining belonging.

As more people express their disdain of Kachara, Bhuvan, angered by their reaction, expresses solidarity with Kachara by touching his shoulder. He then delivers an impassioned speech about the caste system, not caste designations, polluting the social environment. His speech seems to appeal to all the disgruntled players, who agree to play with Kachara afterward, as seen in the following interchange.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iswar:</strong> Bhuvan beta, jo aankhe poori tarah se khul gaeen ho, unmen to saram bhi nahin aa sakat.</td>
<td><strong>Iswar:</strong> Bhuvan, you have completely opened our eyes. You have shown us the shame of our ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arjun:</strong> Main Isar bhai se sahmath hoon. Bhuvan, tu theeka hi kahat hai.</td>
<td><strong>Arjun:</strong> I agree with Isar. Bhuvan, what you’re saying is right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mukhiya:</strong> Kachara humare saath khelega!</td>
<td><strong>Mukhiya:</strong> Kachara will play with us!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the apparent resolution of caste oppression that takes place in this scene, with all the players eventually agreeing to play with Kachara, his position within the group is not on equal footing with other players. Even later, however, after the villagers agree to have
Kachara join the team, there is a foregrounded ‘us versus them’ dynamic in the language. In the above interchange, Mukhiya says “Kachara humare saath khelega!” The framing of this language still foregrounds Kachara as someone separate from the rest of the team.

Another point to observe is that the only villagers who are active participants within this conversation are Hindus, assumedly high-caste Hindus. Kachara, despite being the topic of discourse, does not say a word and is never prompted to do so either. The Muslim and Sikh members of the team also do not say anything and are not even visible visually during the scene. The active participation within this interchange highlights the power dynamics within the village, suggesting that ultimately it is high-caste Hindus who have the final say. It is also important to note that the name “Kachara” literally translates to ‘dirty’, or ‘trash’ in Hindi with origins in Tamil. His name is never acknowledged, but that alone demonstrates how deeply ingrained the caste system is portrayed to be in this society.

The use of music in this film, like in most Bollywood films, is critical to driving the plot forward and usually includes expository or character information. This particular song is used to highlight the desperation that the villagers are feeling. The song is framed as the singers, two primary voices, asking God for strength and guidance. It is for all intents and purposes, a prayer. The speaker, however, is not asking for strength just for Hindus, but for all the villagers. The lexical choices in the song are of particular interest. The refrain of the song refers to ‘paalanhaare’.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>O Paalanhaare, nirgun aur nyare</em></td>
<td><em>Oh loving god you are the greatest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We have no one but you</em></td>
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</table>
‘Paalanhaare’ is used in this context as a religious term, but the word itself does not innately denote anything religious. The term can be loosely translated to ‘protector’, with the root ‘paalan’ meaning ‘to take care of’. It is also important to note that this song takes place with all the villagers, regardless of religion, gathered by the temple of Krishna in the village. Thus, in this context, it is reasonable to believe that ‘Paalanhaare’ refers to some abstraction of ‘God’. Throughout the rest of the song, however, the song uses further religious language. Words like “Bhagwan” meaning “God”, “Prabhuji” meaning “Lord” in Sanskrit, and “Bhakti” meaning “devotee” are used several times. These words, again, do not explicitly refer to any specific deity. However, they are all rooted in Hindu tradition and are typically used when talking about Hinduism.

Interestingly, the song uses a mix of standard Hindi and Bhojpuri as lyrics, reflective of the language use in the rest of the film. Bhojpuri is not given the political or social recognition of more standard language dialects across India. It not regarded as a language used by elite communities and in media, is often used by average, rural Indian characters. The use of Bhojpuri as the language of all Indian characters in this film, and in this song meant to appeal to all Indians, speaks to the supposed language of the average Indian. Lagaan aims to create a group of Indian cricketers that is representative

| tumare bin hamara kaunon nahee | Solve our difficulties, oh god |
| Hamaree uljhan suljhao bhagwan, | We have no one but you |
| tumare bin hamara kaunon nahee | You are the only one who takes care of us |
| Tumhe hamaka ho sambhale, | you are our protector |
| tumhe hamare rakhwale | We have no one but you |
| Tumare bin hamara kaunon nahee | |
of all Indians, and as such, viewers are expected to root for them. This song in particular is meant to represent the desperation of all Indians. By utilizing Bhojpuri and Hindi, the film ties these languages to the core of the national Indian identity.

*Lagaan*’s representation of both religion and their ideas of who belongs in the national collective is unique. Despite being a superficially secular film, by including religious minorities and even rejecting religious institutions to some degree, the film remains Hindu-centric. Hindus are the only ones in the film to have their religion highlighted, both verbally and non-verbally, and they are also the driving force behind every major plot point of the film.

**Jodha-Akbar**

*Jodha-Akbar* is a 2008 historical romance film that follows the relationship between Mughal emperor Jalaluddin Akbar and his Hindu, Rajput wife, Jodha. Upon its release, the film faced backlash from existing Rajput communities who believed that the depiction of historical Rajput kingdoms was inaccurate and negative. Nevertheless, the film went on to be both a critical and commercial success in the market.

*Jodha-Akbar*’s central themes and conflicts involve religion. In the film, Jodha and Akbar’s marriage is a political one arranged by Jodha’s father, who was seeking protection from neighboring Rajput kingdoms. A devout Hindu, Jodha’s main apprehension in marrying Akbar is their different religious beliefs; Akbar, being a Muslim.

One of the clearest ways that this is seen is through the use of presuppositions. Prominently in the first half of the film, Jodha expresses serious concerns about marrying
a Mughal, and in doing so, engages in discourse that highlights general assumptions about the Mughals and Muslims. The following scene is from Jodha and Akbar’s first interaction, where Jodha puts forth a set of conditions before she agrees to the marriage.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> Humari do maangein hain. Jinko sveekarane ke baad hi hum aap se vivah kar payenge.</td>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> I have two conditions. Only after those are met will I marry you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akbar:</strong> Aur woh kya hain?</td>
<td><strong>Akbar:</strong> And what are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> Humari pehli maang hai ki hume apna dharm, apni aastha aur rahan sahan banaye rakhne ki puri swatantatra di jayegi. Kisi haalat mein apna dharm badalne ko vivash nahi kiya jayega. Aap maante hai?</td>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> My first condition is that I will be able to keep my religion, my faith, and my traditions. Under no circumstances will I be made to convert my religion. Do you agree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akbar:</strong> Aur?</td>
<td><strong>Akbar:</strong> And?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> Hume apne prabhu ke moorat saath laane di jayegi. Isse baithane ko mahal ki humari kaksh mein ek mandir ki sthaapna karayi jayegi. Yeh hain humari do maangein.</td>
<td><strong>Jodha:</strong> I will bring a statue of my God with me. For it to sit, in my room at the mahal, a temple will be built. These are my two conditions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In this interchange, the conditions that Jodha sets forth presupposes certain characteristics of Mughals and Muslims. By asking that she be allowed to keep her religion and traditions, she presupposes that this was not going to be allowed by the Mughals otherwise. Similarly, by asking for a Hindu temple to be built at the Mughal fort, she presupposes that there is no place for Hindus to pray at the fort. Together, these presuppositions show that Jodha views the Mughals as intolerant and oppressive.

The stereotypes activated by the presuppositions in Jodha’s language are, necessarily, redeemable and stem from a fear of the erasure of her identity. Her perspective of the Mughals is never malicious. In several instances, presuppositions made by Jodha are even proven correct by either the larger Mughal population or Akbar, but they are only ever truly challenged by Akbar. For example, other Mughals in the court do object to the religious freedom Jodha is permitted and do knowingly oppress Hindus. The ideological differences between Akbar and the other Mughals will be discussed later in this section. Between Jodha and Akbar, however, there are still instances where Akbar’s language confirms the presuppositions that Jodha presents.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akbar: Is berukhi ki wajah? Kya is nikah se aap khush nahi hain? Islam aurat ko bhi rishta todne ka mukammal haq deta hai. Agar humara qareeb hona aap ko gawara nahi toh khula ka rasta khula hai. Yeh aap ka haq hai. Ke rishte ki ye gaanth todh kar aap azad ho sakti hain.</td>
<td>Akbar: Why are you being stern? Does this marriage not make you happy? Islam gives women the full right to end a marriage. If you are unhappy, take the path of Khula and end it. This is your right.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jodha: Khula aapke yahaan hota hai, humare yahaan to yeh saat janmon ka bandhan hai. Hum aap ke abhaari hain ki aapne hamari maangon ka maan rakha. Par na jaane kyun, man mein shankaayein si uthti hain; is vivah se, hum apna man nahi jod sake. Shayad iss karaan bhi ke humara dharm, humari sanskriti alag hain.


In this interchange, the most important presupposition is one made by Akbar when he suggests to Jodha that, if she is unhappy with their marriage, she can take the path of khula and dissolve it. Khula refers to the process of a Muslim woman ending her marriage, as is their right in Islam. By bringing this suggestion to Jodha, Akbar presupposes that Jodha would be able to access the right to Khula, a right available only to Muslim women. In turn, this also presupposes that Jodha is Muslim, which is false in this narrative. This language shows an innate difference in the way that Jodha and Akbar view religion, which confirms the presuppositions that Jodha had about their different ways of life.
Other Hindu characters reveal preconceived notions about the Mughals that align with the assumptions Jodha had. For example, one Hindu ruler who leads an attack on the Mughals is defeated and shown mercy by Akbar. Upon this act of grace, the fallen king says to Akbar “Hume aapko galat samjhawan.” This statement, which translates to “I have misunderstood you”, presupposes that the King’s initial assumption about Akbar was incorrect and that his initial assumption did not match the more merciful behavior Akbar showed him. Like Jodha, his assumptions were challenged specifically by Akbar.

Within the film, there are also several lexical items that provide further insight into the dynamic that the film intends to portray. As mentioned earlier in this section, the driving conflict in this film is religious tensions between Muslims and Hindus. As such, religious language of any sort plays a vital part in defining character motivations and relationship dynamics, with simple word choices having significant impacts.

One of the most important lexical choices comes during Jodha and Akbar’s wedding night, in the interchange cited directly above. The use of Khuda appears to be intentional. Though it is debated, “Khuda” in Urdu typically denotes a neutral god as opposed to “Allah”, which is used in reference to Islamic discourse; while “Khuda” can be used specifically in the Islamic tradition, in the rest of the film, Akbar and other Mughals tend to use “Allah”. The only other time “Khuda” is used to refer to God by the Mughals is following an attack on Akbar. While speaking in the presence of Jodha who had spent days praying for his health, Akbar’s mother praises “Khuda” for his recovery. The specific contexts in which “Khuda” and “Allah” are used in this film suggests there were intentional lexical choices that highlight the tolerance of Akbar and his mother, who is one of the few others in the Mughal court that has a close relationship with Jodha.
Thus, the usage of the more neutral language when speaking to Jodha, who is of a different faith, demonstrates a certain respect for Jodha’s beliefs and an express attempt to avoid imposing Islam on her.

Another important example of lexical choice comes from the music in the film. In the song “Inn Lamhon Ke Daaman Mein”, which translates to “In the Lap of these Moments”, for example, the lyrics seem to contain intentional language use that reflects a melding of these two cultures. This song is framed as a dialogue between Akbar and Jodha, and is depicted as a turning point in their relationship, where they develop genuine affection for each other. Some intentional language choices include for example, samay instead of waqt, which is used in an earlier love song, “Jashn-e-Bahara”, which translates to “Season of Spring”. The two have slightly different technical meanings but are both used generally to mean ‘time’. Rather than having the characters use the same language, or use both, there appears to have been an intentional choice to have Jodha singing in Hindi and Akbar singing in Urdu. The coming together of these two languages, in a rather pivotal moment for their relationship, suggests that unity between the two groups the languages represent does not come at the cost of either.

Language in this film is an important and seemingly intentional marker of identity. Though the difference in language never constitutes a barrier between characters, they are rarely used interchangeably. It is also clear through the script that the identity demonstrated through language is not simply for viewers, but also indicative of the filmmaker’s view of that society. For example, in one interchange between Akbar and a Hindi-speaking (and assumedly Hindu) vendor in Agra, this clash of cultures is highlighted.
Repeating Akbar, the vendor speaks with a rising pitch, suggesting a mocking, incredulous tone. This interchange suggests that it is Akbar’s language that draws this reaction out of the vendor. More broadly, it suggests that the use of Urdu contains and activates certain stereotypes about speakers that, in this case, the vendor applies to Akbar.

Understanding the discourse surrounding conflict within the Mughal court is critical to understanding the film’s representation of them. Unlike the use of presuppositions to demonstrate stereotypes about Mughals, and consequently, of Muslims, the discourse surrounding the Mughal’s distaste of Hindus does not contain such stereotyping.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akbar: Badtameez! Jaante ho tum kisse mukhatib ho?</td>
<td>Akbar: Insolent! Do you know who you are conversing with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadir Adasi: Magar Sharifuddin ki baat ke tah mein kuch hai zaroor Mohtaram Maham Anga.</td>
<td>Saadir Adasi: But Sharifuddin has a point, Madam Maham Anga. Your majesty, was this the only way you saw to unite the empire? Forgive me for saying this. It appears that your heart has taken...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aalam-pannah, huqumat ka paye mazboot karne ki yahi tajweez hai aap ke zahan mein? Yeh bandah gustakhi ki maaafi chahta hai. Aur arz karna</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
When Jodha speaks of her apprehension about marrying Akbar, she presupposes that the marriage will be oppressive to her in some way. When the Mughals express their distaste of Akbar’s marriage to Jodha, such presuppositions do not exist. The sole characteristic about Jodha that the Mughal court does not approve of is her religion and specifically, her desire to practice that religion within the confines of the Mughal capital. In this particular speech act, Saadir Adaasi presupposes that Akbar only married Jodha because of his affections for her. This suggests that to him, the only reason Akbar would bring a Hindu into the Mughal empire would be due to personal reasons. He asks, specifically, what the need was to marry a Hindu princess. This suggests that his main issue is that she is Hindu, and that alone makes her lifestyle incompatible with the Mughals. The Mughal’s automatic dislike of Jodha because of her Hinduism speaks to the film’s representation of Mughals as largely intolerant of non-Muslims.

There is no point in this film where Hindus, as a group, are stereotyped the way that the Mughals are. Despite being a film that ultimately does, in a very explicit manner, promote religious tolerance, it still contains a multitude of negative representations of Muslims that are especially abundant in language.

*Padmaavat*

The final film that this project examines is *Padmaavat*, 2018 adaptation of the epic poem of the same name by Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi. The film tells the story of Rajput royals Ratan Singh and Padmavati, a Sri Lankan princess who Ratan
Singh marries, who are antagonized by Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi who becomes obsessed with Padmavati. While Alauddin Khilji was in fact a famed Sultan of Delhi who led the conquest of several Indian territories, Padmavati, along with the rest of the story, is believed to be a work of fiction created by Jayasi.

*Padmaavat*’s representation of religion in the film is not as overt as the language in Jodha-Akbar. Nevertheless, the film’s discourse highlights significant stereotypes in their representations of high-caste Hindus and Muslims. Not only does the source poem establish the character’s religions, the film demonstrates them too. Visually, viewers of the film can observe the separation of the Rajput community and the Khiljis in Delhi. Through clothing, architecture, and traditions, the film establishes the Rajputs as the de facto Hindu representation of the film and the Khiljis as the Muslim representation. Though limited, the film contains various, impactful examples of religious discourse that this research examines.

One of the film’s turning points comes with a discussion of caste. The interaction between King Ratan Singh and the Royal priest, Raghav Chetan, is extremely telling of the intended representation of caste. In this scene and the rest of the film, Raghav Chetan’s identity as a Brahmin plays a critical role. The following dialogue comes from a scene where Ratan Singh punishes Raghav Chetan for spying on him and Padmavati.

<table>
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<th>Transcription</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratan Singh: Yeh ghaav humari kataar ka</td>
<td>Ratan Singh: This wound is from my knife and the evidence is given by your own blood. Pardon me, Rajguru, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hai aur pramaanAAPAKA khoon khud de raha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hai. Kshama keejiye, raajaguru, hamane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
aapako guru samajha, vishwas kiya.
chandan samajhakar maathe par lagaaya
par aap to chandan se lipata saanp nikale.
Agar hum chaahen to isee vaqt aapaka sir
kuchal sakate hain par... brahmahatya
humaare usoolon ke khilaf hai. Le jaiye
inhen kaaraavaas mein. Kaalakotharee ka
andhera inkee aankhon ko sharam seekha
dega.

thought of you as my mentor, I trusted you. Thinking it was sandalwood, I put it on my forehead, but you turned out to be a snake wrapped in sandalwood. If I wanted to, I could crush you but killing a Brahmin is against my principles. Take him to the jail. Perhaps the darkness of the jails will teach his eye shame.

There are some key presuppositions that exist within this language. By claiming that Brahmahatya is against his beliefs, Ratan Singh presupposes that Raghav Chetan is in fact a Brahmin. These presuppositions demonstrate an unconditional elevation of Brahmans in Rajput society, which in turn demonstrates the centrality of caste. It reasserts the idea that caste is a wholly unmovable, and innate identity construct. In this particular scene, the rigidity of caste only has implications for a Brahmin. In the context of the film, and the history that the filmmaker aims to represent, it has deep implications for the power of the caste system beyond the Royal community and particularly for low-caste individuals.

*Padmaavat’s* representation of Muslims is dubious, with several intentional production choices framing the Khiljis as villains, not just in Padmavati’s story but in all of India’s. They are frequently shown in lower lights, Islamicate architecture in the film is dark and dull, and the primary exposition of the Khiljis is based around their
supposedly violent conquest of India, starting with the Delhi Sultanate. While the language of the film does not explicitly refer to them as invaders or foreigners, the framing of the discourse identifies them as such. Specifically, invaders who are hyper-obsessed with taking what rightfully belongs to a presupposedly non-Muslim India. The following interchange is between Raghav Chetan, the banished Rajput priest, and Alauddin Khilji.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RC</strong>: Daava hai humara. ek baar dekh lenge, toh kuch soojhenga nahin usake siva. kunjee hai aapake bhaagy ki. Voh agar aapko mil gayi...to Mewar aapaka. Hind aapka, duniya aapaki, svarg aapaka. Voh nahin, to kuch bhi nahin. patthar hai paaras ka. chhoo liya, to duniya sunaharee ho jaeege aapakee. Nayab hai, par use paana utana hi naamumakin.</td>
<td><strong>Raghav Chetan</strong>: The claim is ours. If you see once, you will not understand anything other than that. The key is your fortune. If you got that, So Mewar is yours. India is yours, the world is yours, heaven is yours. If not that, then nothing. The stone is of Paras. If you touch it, then your world will become golden. It is precious, but it is equally impossible to get it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alauddin</strong>: Qismat-e-alauddin ka naam batao.</td>
<td><strong>Aluaddin</strong>: Tell me the name of the destiny of Alauddin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RC</strong>: Chittor ki maharani Padmaavati.</td>
<td><strong>Raghav Chetan</strong>: Chittor’s queen, Padmavati.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also important to note that Raghav Chetan, in this scene, is attempting to manipulate Alauddin into conquering Chittor as revenge. Thus, his language is tailored to his
understanding of Alauddin and what would make him most likely to align with Raghav Chetan. When he tells Alauddin “vo agar aapko mil gayi...to Mewar aapaka. Hind aapka,” there are some key presuppositions to note. By telling him that getting Padmavati will also win him Mewar and all of India, he presupposes that these are things that Alauddin covets. This also interestingly presupposes that India, as it stands, is not Alauddin’s, but conquering Padmavati will help him lay claim to India. Alauddin’s responses show no hesitation in accepting that obtaining what Raghav Chetan tells him about will lead him to incredible success. It demonstrates an innate trust in what Raghav Chetan says, despite this scene being the first interaction between the two of them.

Towards the climax of the film, where the conflict between the Khiljis and the Rajputs is at its peak, religious language and traditions are most prominent. More specifically, Islamic traditions and language rooted in Islam are more prominent. Several scenes include Muslim members of the Khilji court praising Allah through phrases like “Subhanallah” and “Inshallah”. It is at this point that we see strong visual representations of the Rajputs and the Khiljis warring; there are several battle and negotiation scenes. Thus, the sudden increase in Islamic tradition and language that complements these scenes strengthens the apparent relationship between Islam and violence.

The discourse used to discuss both the Rajputs and the Khiljis also grants the Rajputs a certain claim to India that the Khiljis are not afforded. The language used to refer to each group also presupposes certain characteristics of the group. “Khilji” refers to the dynastic family that the antagonist, Alauddin, comes from. Though Ratan Singh also comes from a dynastic line, his community at large is referred to as the Rajputs, despite Mewar, the kingdom that Ratan Singh rules, being only one of several Rajput kingdoms.
The names by which each group is referred to presuppose that they belong to the Rajput
group and also that being a part of that group is an identifying factor.

Music in Padmaavat, like the other films, is a critical part of the movie and
provides important insights into the underlying motivations of the film. The song Ek dil
ek jaan is the only instance where Urdu is used to represent the Hindu Rajput
protagonists. The lexical choices of the song are incongruent with the film's otherwise
deep separation between the Hindu Rajputs and the Muslim Khiljis. Not only does the
song use Urdu, it uses language explicitly rooted in Islam. One such word is “qurbaan”, a
Persian word that means literally “to sacrifice”. Traditionally, it is used in the context of a
religious sacrifice to God in Islam. Its use in a song intended to demonstrate Ratan
Singh’s devotion to Padmavati, then, is odd.

The second song of interest is another love song, of sorts, from the perspective of
Alauddin who is singing about Padmavati. The song, titled “Khalibali” which loosely
translates to ‘crazed’, depicts Alauddin with several members of his court singing about
his love. In contrast to “Ek dil, ek jaan”, which employs a melodic almost devotional
tone, “Khalibali” is fast, upbeat, and aggressive in nature. The refrain repeats the line
“Khalibali qais wallah”, which translates to “Crazed lover, wallah”, “wallah” being an
Islamic term that loosely translates to “I swear to God/Allah”. This line is repeated
several times in the song, along with the Arabic word, “Habibi”, loosely translated to
‘Beloved’. Of all the songs in this movie, this song contains the most Islamic and Arabic-
rooted language. This is complemented by the aggressive staging of the scene. in turn ties
this somewhat hostile expression of love with Arabic and Islamicate tradition.
The two songs, in sequence, are close together, and seemingly intended to be contrasted directly with each other. Both of these songs also employ both Persian inspired and Rajasthani inspired music, being the only songs in the soundtrack to do so. Because of the two songs’ proximity to each other and their extreme contrast in tone and picturization, I would argue that the use of Urdu and Islamic-rooted language in “Ek dil ek jaan” is permitted because it directly clashes with the far more aggressive representation of established Muslims in “Khalibali”.

*Padmaavat* is distinct from *Jodha-Akbar*, which also depicts India under Islamic rule, in that it does not identify religion as a defining conflict between the two groups. Nevertheless, the film does not shy away from depicting religion not perpetuating stereotypes about Muslims in the film.

**Discussion and Analysis**

*Language as an Identity Marker*

In each of these films, the language that characters speak constitutes an important identity marker. There are three main languages used across all four of these films: Hindi, Urdu, and English. All of them contain significant historical and social importance in South Asia, and their uses in these films demonstrate that.

In *1942: A Love Story*, one of the main antagonists of the film is a white, British official named General Douglas. Despite being one of the main antagonists, he is only present in the film in a few scenes, where he speaks only a few lines. General Douglas speaks exclusively in English and is explicitly shown as unable to speak Hindu or Urdu. In fact, in every scene he appears in, he says the line “What did he say?”. This in turn
prompts a nearby Indian government official to translate for him. The depiction of General Douglas is in stark contrast to the language used by white, British officials in *Lagaan*. Similar to *1942*, the main antagonist in *Lagaan* is a white, British official, Captain Russell. Unlike General Douglas, however, Russell speaks Hindi well enough to communicate with Hindi speakers. His Hindi, however, is highly accented. He speaks haltingly and lacks fluidity. Nevertheless, the monolingual Hindi-speaking villagers are able to understand him without issue. There are only two Indian characters who are shown on-screen as capable of speaking in both Hindi and English. *Lagaan*’s representation of British officials who speak Hindi is interesting, as it shows that colonial rule was a deeply invasive process that did require British officials to learn certain parts of Indian culture, but by representing Russell as someone who cannot speak as well as native Hindi speakers, he is markedly separated from the villagers.

Similarly, *Padmavaat* and *Jodha-Akbar* also distinguish between groups through their language use. These distinctions however are largely backgrounded. In both cases, Hindi and Urdu are seemingly mutually intelligible languages, with the language differences never causing communication issues between characters. Interaction between the Hindi-speaking group and the Urdu-speaking group is much greater in *Jodha-Akbar*. In both cases, the language spoken demonstrates, more than anything, religious beliefs, with Urdu correlating with Islam and Hindi with Hinduism.

One of the most interesting uses of language as a marker of identity or allegiance comes from *1942*. In the film, Major Bisht begins the film as a British official of Indian descent. He is depicted as proud of his position within the British Raj and demonstrates a relative distaste for Indian freedom fighters. Critically, during most of the film, he speaks
in a mix of English and Hindustani with everyone, except his daughter. Later in the film, after his daughter is killed when British soldiers open fire at a protest, Bisht joins the revolutionaries. After this point, he does not speak in English again, conversing solely in the colloquial Hindi and Urdu mix, Hindustani.

Each of these instances suggests that the language of discourse plays just as much of a role in establishing nationality and belonging as the content of the discourse.

**Religious Foregrounding and Backgrounding**

The trend of foregrounded religious discourse takes an interesting trajectory with these four movies. From the almost total absence of religious discourse in *1942*, the following two films show more attention to specifically religious conflict, with *Padmaavat* returning to a lack of explicit religious discourse. That does not mean, however, that *Padmaavat* does not include religion at all. Opposed to *1942*, *Padmaavat* features religious traditions, clothing, and language.

Of these four films, *Lagaan* and *Jodha-Akbar* are the only ones that explicitly call out religion as a source of conflict between the represented communities. By refusing to explicitly identify religion as a problematic factor in the film’s world, there also exists no avenue by which to resolve it. In *Lagaan*, this conflict exists only for one scene. *Lagaan*’s representation of religious conflict is isolated and resolved with incredible ease. In contrast, religious conflict is at the heart of *Jodha-Akbar*’s narrative and to even begin resolving the conflicts between these religious groups takes the full film.

*Padmaavat*, though rife in depictions of religion, avoids framing religion as a primary source of conflict between the two warring groups of the film. Hypothetically, one could remove any mention of religious language or religious imagery and the story
would remain largely unchanged. Yet, the filmmakers made an explicit choice to depict religion and in turn draw certain associations with those religions. In the film, religion is not foregrounded in the same way as *Lagaan* and *Jodha-Akbar*, in that religion and religious discourse alone do not drive the conversations or plot forward. However, religion is present at relevant plot points, and it is used as a prominent visual marker with characters. The Rajputs and the Khiljis act as thinly veiled metaphors for Hindus and Muslims, and conversations about them in turn reveal hidden assumptions about the religious groups.

Overall, there is a significant increase from *1942* to *Padmaavat* in religious foregrounding. Even though *Padmaavat* does not discuss religion in the same way as *Lagaan* and *Jodha-Akbar*, they represent religion significantly more than in *1942*.

**Religious Stereotypes with Presuppositions**

Each of these four films, with the exception of *1942*, constructs stereotypes in both religious and non-religious discourse, often through the process of presuppositioning. The only films where these stereotypes are either challenged or overcome are in *Jodha-Akbar* and *Lagaan*, which are the ones with the most foregrounded religious conflict too. In *Padmaavat*, on the other hand, these stereotypes about Alauddin, and Muslims in the film broadly, are largely confirmed and never challenged.

With *Jodha-Akbar* and *Lagaan*, foregrounding religious conflict also, to some degree, requires a path to resolving it as well. Both of these films choose to explicitly identify religion as a problematic factor in their society, but in order to do so, there is a certain need to perpetuate stereotypes. Interestingly, however, in both films, the
stereotypes are only constructed around the Muslims and Dalits, not high-caste Hindus who in both cases make up part of the conflict.

*Padmaavat*'s stereotyping of the Khiljis is largely based on their alleged reputation as invaders. Alauddin is shown as a person with no remorse and absolutely no path to redemption. He, along with most of the other Muslims in the film, is shown as a collectively brutal and ambitious group. Unlike the other two films, these assumptions about religious minorities are confirmed.

From *1942* to *Padmaavat*, there was an increase in the amount of stereotyping of religious minorities, but between *Jodha-Akbar* and *Padmaavat*, there was less of an effort to overcome the negative representations of them.

**The ‘Good’ Muslim Discourse**

The representation of Muslims in both *Padmaavat* and *Jodha-Akbar* is interesting due to the way certain characters are depicted as ‘ethical’ or ‘just’ in contrast to the rest of their community.

As articulated in previous sections, the majority of the Mughal court is depicted as religiously intolerant, specifically shown through their dislike of Jodha simply because she is Hindu. They are also shown to be more knowledgeable about the Mughal’s active oppression of Hindus. Akbar on the other hand, is shown to be deliberately inclusive of Jodha’s faith. This is shown by his behavior when she insists on keeping her faith and his more inclusive language when speaking to her. Importantly, Akbar is also shown to be ignorant of certain oppressive policies. Akbar stands out in the Mughal court as someone who actually makes the effort to be tolerant of other religions and actively seeks out opportunities to speak with average Indians, namely Hindus. Akbar’s status as a hero is
dependent on the intolerance of other Muslims. Jodha’s status as a heroine, however, is contingent on nothing except her acceptance of Akbar.

Similar to the representation of Akbar as an ethical Muslim, *Padmaavat* frames Alauddin’s wife, Mehrunisa, and his foil in the film. Towards the climax of the film, Alauddin imprisons Ratan Singh to lure Padmavati to the palace. When she gets there, Mehrunisa helps both of them escape.

<table>
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<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Mehrunisa: hum apane sultaan ko is gunaah-e-azeem se bacha rahe hain</em></td>
<td><em>Mehrunisa: I am doing this to save my Sultan</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In saying this, Mehrunisa presupposes that what Alauddin did was a mistake and should not have been done. This sets her apart from the other members of the Khilji court who have expressed unconditional support for Alauddin. As Padmavati leaves Khilji’s fort, she folds her hand in respect and gratitude to Mehrunisa. In retaliation for freeing Ratan Singh, Alauddin imprisons Mehrunisa, thus proving her correct in her assumption that Alauddin was willing and capable of inflicting great harm in his quest for Padmavati.

I would argue that both of these depictions of a stand-out ‘Good’ Muslim are an extension of the trope set forward by Nazia Hussain (2015). Hussain notes that a common Islamophobic trope that can be found in Bollywood is the Muslim woman who is saved by a Hindu man from her supposedly oppressive community. These examples do not fit that trope entirely, but they are certainly related in their intention. Both films feature a stand-out Muslim character whose path to redemption is paved, to some degree, by a Hindu. Their Muslim community is expressly harmful to others, and, in some cases, even
to themselves, and it is the Hindu characters who trigger their understanding of this harm and encourage them to combat it.

Conversely, these films quickly highlight Hindu characters as the heroes of religious minorities and the oppressed. In fact, each of these films portrays a high-caste Hindu as the arbitrator of equality and justice in India. In these films typically, few, if any, Hindus stray from the general mission of equality and prosperity. In Padmaavat, for example, Raghav Chetan stands out as a Hindu Brahman whose villainous arc is solidified by his alliance with Alauddin.

The ‘Good’ Muslim trope, perpetuated through language and complementary non-verbal gestures is ultimately a highly Islamophobic trope. It considers that the majority of Muslims default to beliefs of bigotry, as though these are the values that Islam ingrains in them, while simultaneously asserting that Hindus are largely decent and ethical people.

Creating a National Identity

Synthesizing this data provides a fascinating insight into who and what is included in the national identity of an Indian. More specifically, it provides insight into the evolving role of religion in that national identity.

1942 establishes the national identity in very simple terms. Those who fight alongside the revolutionaries are true Indians, “desh bhakts” as the film calls them, while those who refuse to align themselves with the British oppressors and are labeled traitor, ‘gaddaro’. To call someone ‘gaddaro’ implies a betrayal of loyalty towards a certain institution, in this case, the state of India. The general lack of addressing freedom fighters as ‘gaadaro’ demonstrates that their actions, though represented as radical and violent, are
done so in the best interest of India. On the other hand, Indians who support the British Raj are frequently called out as ‘gaadaro’, demonstrating that the characteristic excluding them from the Indian national identity is their support of the British Raj. There is no other language in the film that explicitly excludes any member of society from being a part of that identity. Conflict in the film is largely dichotomous, with revolutionaries pitted against British supporters.

*Lagaan*, similarly, refers to most of the Indian villagers as a collective. The only time there is a conflict over the permitted belonging of an individual in a group is with Kachara, the low-caste villager. The introduction of caste tension is quickly defused, however, with Bhuvan effectively convincing the other villagers to drop their prejudices for the sake of the greater good. As noted above, despite there being a clear resolution with Kachara being allowed to join, he is still talked about as a separate individual as opposed to the collective team. His belonging, additionally, is conditional on the verbal and explicit permission of the high-caste Hindus in the village. As shown in that interaction, it is high-caste Hindus who drive the entire conversation about whether or not a Dalit should be allowed to participate.

*Jodha-Akbar*, despite being a film dedicated to the importance of religious harmony, still portrays Muslims as outsiders; invaders who must earn their keep in India. As articulated above, Akbar’s guiding force in the film is Jodha, who despite also being part of a powerful, royal family, is shown as knowledgeable about the plight of the average Indian.

In a much more negative portrayal, Muslims in *Padmaavat* are explicitly depicted as violent, shallow invaders solely interested in taking what belongs to the Hindus.
Throughout the film, Alauddin is depicted as an incredibly ambitious conqueror who has no qualms about harming whomever gets what he wants. Focusing his depiction on his conquests also highlights the fact that the Khiljis were not from India, the family originally being from Afghanistan. On the other hand, Padmavati, who is actually Sri Lankan, is not depicted as a foreigner as much. Aside from the initial scenes that are set in Sri Lanka, her heritage is hardly noted and in discourse she is referred to as Rajput. She quickly transforms from the Sinhalese princess to the queen of Chittor without issue.

One language choice in these films to note is the distinct representations of older Urdu and Hindi, particularly in Jodha-Akbar and Padmaavat. These two films are set in the oldest time periods of these four movies, and both make significant use of Urdu and Hindi as identity markers. Because both of these movies are set several centuries in the past, they actively use older forms of Hindi and Urdu, with Hindi more Sanskrit-ized and Urdu more Persian-ized. However, while the older representation of Hindi largely resembles modern Hindi and poses no significant comprehension challenge to Hindi speakers, the representation of older Urdu is incredibly Persian-ized and does not resemble modern Urdu. It is closer to Persian than what a modern Urdu speaker would know. This further reinforces the idea that Urdu, and Islamicate culture in general, is foreign to India and assimilated to the environment it came into, while Hindi is seen as something rooted in centuries of Indian culture that has withstood change. In other words, Hindi is seen as indigenous.

The critical trend to note here is not necessarily what creates a national identity, but who creates it and how. In 1942, it is high-caste Hindus who ignite a revolution against British occupation and doled out the label of ‘gaddaro’ on British supporters. In
*Lagaan*, it is a high-caste Hindu who shows other high-caste Hindus about their ignorance regarding caste. Kachara is not prompted to speak, simply to be grateful. In *Jodha-Akbar*, the Mughals are explicitly shown as invaders unjustly conquering Hindu land. While that alone is not an entirely inaccurate representation, the Hindus subtle stereotyping of Mughals as at best, ignorant, and at worst, active participants in Hindu erasure, delegitimizes their claim to India. Importantly, by classifying almost all Mughals as Muslims means that the invalidation the of Mughal claim to the India is invalidation of Muslim claim to India. Despite the Delhi Sultanate ranging across a huge portion of India, *Padmaavat* portrays the Khiljis as power-hungry people who feel the need to continue conquering existing kingdoms, and that to control India, they must take control of specifically Hindu communities.

The language that these high-caste Hindus use acts as a powerful tool in this trend. Nevertheless, examining the way that these conversations are led by high-caste Hindus and the way their language either legitimizes or delegitimizes the belonging of certain social groups in the collective identity of Indians in the film demonstrates fascinating insights about social power, both in the films and the environment in which they were created. Based on the analysis of these four movies, we see that the pattern of high-caste Hindus being the leaders of social change and arbitrators of justice is not new. However, as we examine more recent films, there is a significant increase in the way that high-caste Hindus talk about modern-day religious minorities, namely Dalits and Muslims, and specifically in how they determine what communities are deserving of being a part of India. Specifically, there is an increase in language that excludes these minorities from the national identity.
Conclusion

Examination of data collected from these four films shows both a consistent pattern of Hindu-centric media as well as a significant growth in exclusionary rhetoric and production choices. Focusing on the language used to talk about both groups and individuals in the films demonstrates how, even when religion is not explicitly identified in media, it can still be a dominating theme.
Conclusion

Summary of Results

Analysis of the data collected in this project demonstrates three critical trends. The first is that, over the four films examined, there is a significant increase in the use of presuppositions to create religious stereotypes, specifically about religious minorities. Secondly, the data demonstrates that with depictions of Muslims, more recent films lean heavily into the practice of linguistically marking ‘good’ Muslims as outliers in their communities. The third trend to note is that in all of these films, language plays a critical role in developing a national identity, and determining whether religion is a part of that identity or not.

The trends that emerge from this data present important support to the idea that recent Bollywood films have been influenced by the rise in Hindu nationalism in India, and that this influence has largely manifested in the othering of religious minorities. My research question asked how the idea of national identity has developed in Bollywood, and specifically how religion is included in that identity. The results of this project demonstrate that there is a significant privilege given to high-caste Hindu characters, typically at the expense of religious minorities who are in several instances portrayed as outsiders and foreigners.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this project is its limited data source. Because of the length and diversity of language in these films, collecting transcripts and working through the data of these sources takes a significant amount of time. As such, this project, which was constrained by time, had to pick only a few, manageable sources to work with. Ideally, a
project like this would select a much larger data set in order to establish strong trends across several media examples. Because of the limited number of films analyzed in this project, the established trends within these media sources are not as strong as they would be with a larger data set. Though the results of my analysis have strong implications for the media’s relationship with politics, it is undeniable that the results would be more impactful with a larger data set.

Another limitation, that also relates to the data sources used in this project, is a potential personal bias. The films analyzed in this project were not randomly selected, but rather chosen for specific reasons. These films were chosen for several reasons, including their shared genre, connecting themes, popularity, and language of production. The decision to focus on these four movies came after significant research into Bollywood media. However, it is undeniable that there was personal bias involved in the choice of data sources, as I also relied on my personal knowledge of Bollywood to find potential data sources. While my personal knowledge of Bollywood, as a consumer of media, assisted me in researching this project and developing the idea, that experience also biased me.

Future research should focus on applying the research question proposed in this project to a larger subject matter. This project chose to focus on Bollywood films, which are predominantly filmed in Hindustani, Hindi, and Urdu. However, India is an incredibly linguistically diverse region, and examining the linguistic patterns of various regions provides further comprehensive insight into the influence of Hindu nationalism in the country. If, for example, certain languages frame the discussion of national identity and
religion in different ways than Hindi, Urdu, or Hindustani media, this would provide an insight into that specific region’s view of Hindu nationalism.

Another potential future area of research is examining uniquely politicized regions, such as Kashmir, and understanding how media produced in and centered on their history either deviates or follows general trends. This project deliberately excluded media that centered on areas like Kashmir, which has a political history, unlike any other region in India. This was in order to create a set of standardized data sources that could be generalized to a greater part of India. However, uniquely politicized regions in India are equally impacted by the shifting political climate of the state, and those effects are compounded by the region’s specific political and social background. Recognizing the way that Hindu nationalism manifests in representations of these regions is just as important as recognizing the general effects of the phenomenon.
Works Cited


